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**‘Austin also must be remembered’.
The Augustinian legacy in Milton's work**

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The genesis of the project

Twenty years ago, I started working on my first doctoral thesis (“In the name of the Past, of the Present and of the Future: Victorian Utopias 1870-1890). While dealing with the meaning of utopianism, and its relation with eschatology and Millenarianism, I had to come to terms with Milton’s haunting presence throughout the 19th century: sometimes half-hidden between the lines, as in Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan”, other times foregrounded, as in Shelley’s fragment “Milton’s spirit.” At the same time, as part of the coursework, I had the fortune to attend a seminar on John Milton. That was my first, fruitful occasion to familiarize with his poetry. A very cursory reference to Augustine has stayed with me since that seminar. Having had the unexpected chance of a school leave for a second doctorate, I decided to resume the reference (the “felix culpa” concept) and to undertake a research on the presence of Augustine in Milton’s work. I had never read a line of Augustine’s and, as a start, I read *Confessiones*, which opened up a world of possibilities, as I saw how much of Milton’s work might have sprung out of this extraordinary book. The more I read of Augustine’s work, the more I started reading or rereading Milton’s in that light. What follows is the provisional synthesis of a work, by its nature still in progress.

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1. Milton's Augustine. The state of the art.

1.1 'informis materia [...] in ipso exordio' (Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*)

To advocate the presence of Augustine's work in and between Milton's lines is to advocate a truism; however, admittedly, to bring out Milton's Augustine is no easy task. All but clear-cut, the extant picture is in fact blurred and with several gaps, and the gaps can only be filled with more open questions. There are many reasons for this. In the first place, the full extent of the direct quotations, let alone less explicit references, has never been assessed and cannot be. The data are not easily retrievable also because Milton often refers to Augustine (or Austin) in oblique ways, hardly mentioning the latter's name.

In a pioneer essay on the subject,¹ J. P. Pritchard reports the figures of Milton's references to the Fathers, who are summoned to back the poet's claims on freedom, divorce and just war. But the reader is reminded that quotations from the Fathers were ubiquitous in Milton's times,² and did not imply, *per se*, first-hand knowledge of the source. As a matter of fact, as A. Williams and A. Fowler among others claim, a seventeenth-century reader would recognize allusions to works such as *De Civitate Dei* and *Confessiones*, then available both in Latin and in English.

Of the same opinion was D. Saurat, who provided a blueprint for later inquiries into this controversial relationship. Milton, he claims, 'était de son siècle, pendant lequel *La Cité de Dieu* fut un des livres les plus populaires en Angleterre, comme dans le reste de l'Europe.'³ But, unlike

¹ J. P. Pritchard, "The Fathers of the Church in the works of John Milton", *Classical Journal*, XXXIII, 1937-38, pp. 79-87.

² The Protestant coinage of 'Patrology' and 'Patristics' bears witness to a rekindled interest in the Fathers. As A. Hamilton points out, 'under the impact of Humanism the Fathers, both Greek and Latin, had begun to be appreciated [...] not only as masters of rhetoric but also as the suppliers of an exegesis essential for understanding the scriptures.' Alastair Hamilton, "Humanists and the Bible", in Peter Mack (ed.), *Renaissance Rhetoric*, London-New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994, p. 102. See also William P. Haaugaard, "Renaissance Patristic Scholarship and Theology in Sixteenth-Century England", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 10, 3, Autumn 1979, pp. 37-60. cursory notes on the Fathers also appear in B. K. Lewalski, *Protestant Poetics and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Lyric*, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1979.

³ Denis Saurat, *La pensée de Milton*, Paris: Librairie F. Alcan, 1920, p. 264.

Prichard, Saurat insists on Milton's first-hand knowledge of patristic sources. After outlining Milton's Pauline legacy⁴, Saurat traces the development of the poet's attitude towards the Fathers. Initially regarded as the shield behind which his adversaries hid themselves, they became increasingly familiar and even his own allies, whenever they were 'pour lui.' Within this frame, Augustine stands out as 'le plus considéré, le plus étudié, le plus souvent invoqué, celui qui a le plus de poids lorsqu'il est favorable aux idées miltoniennes, celui qui est combattu avec le plus de labour et énergie quand c'est nécessaire.'⁵

The practice of adorning one's writing with the feathers of the early Christian writers had a notable precedent in Calvin himself. Calvin's use of the Fathers, Augustine in the first place, is paradigmatic.⁶ And it is well known that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Augustine was laid on Procrustes' bed and pulled by 'papists' and reformers of any denomination towards their respective ends.⁷ A fixed point in this tentative research is the central position that the Christian philosopher held in the post-Reformation scenario. But the context within which Milton looks at Augustine presents a multi-faceted 'Augustinianism' which still needs to be mapped.⁸

1.2 Milton's Augustine in context

The 16th and 17th centuries saw different editions of the complete works of Augustine, as well as translations into English of parts of his works. The beginning of the sixteenth century saw the

⁴ In his prose, from *Areopagitica* to *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton often speaks *in persona Pauli*. And the poem of *Paradise Lost* is based on Romans 5 ff - the text that has finalized, through Augustine's extensive commentaries, the Christian doctrine of fall and redemption. Also in his recourse to the *auctoritas* of Paul, the poet follows Augustine, who constantly refers to 'the Apostle' as the ultimate source for interpretation of the Scriptures. For a discussion of Pauline issues that were handed down to Augustine and have a bearing on Milton's work, see Basil Studer, "Augustine and the Pauline Theme of Hope", pp. 201-221 and Paula Fredriksen, "Beyond the Body/Soul Dichotomy: Augustine's answer to Mani, Plotinus, and Julian", pp. 227-251 in William S. Babcock (ed.), *Paul and the Legacies of Paul*, Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1990.

⁵ Saurat, *cit.*, p. 260.

⁶ Johannes van Oort, "John Calvin and the Church Fathers", in Irina Backus (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, E. J. Brill: Leiden 1997, pp.661-700; Luchsius Smits, *Saint Augustin dans l'Oeuvre de Jean Calvin*, Editions Nauwelaerts, Louvain, 1957; Heiko Augustinus Oberman, *The Dawn of the Reformation*, Edinburgh : T. and T. Clark, 1986.

⁷ For a summary account of the appropriation see Mario Bendiscioli, "L'Agostinismo dei riformatori protestanti", *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes*, 1, 3, 1955, pp. 203-224.

⁸ The 'After Augustine' project, based at the University of St Andrews, is heading in this direction.

completion of the first edition of Augustine's work: *Opera Omnia*, printed by Johannes Amerbach in Basel in 1506. The enterprise signified at the same time a break and a new beginning in the history of Augustine's reception. The availability of the *Opera Omnia* marks the end, according to E. L. Saak, of the 'late medieval Augustinian Renaissance.'⁹ Luther and Andreas Karlstadt, an *ante litteram* Puritan, relied on this text in their appropriation of Augustine as the father of the Reformation. The early modern age saw the attempt to trace in Augustine's work the origin of Reformation tenets, like *sola fide* justification – an attempt, strongly opposed by Melanchthon, that Luther carried out overstressing Augustine's antipelagianism. On his part Erasmus, whose edition of Augustine was printed in 1529, downplayed the role of Augustine as just one of the church fathers, upholding the superiority of Jerome. What edition – or editions – of Augustine's work Milton had currently at hand has not been ascertained, although the Louvain edition, based on Erasmus', is an eligible one.

But together with Augustine's canonical and spurious works, the literature produced in response to Augustine's commentaries has also proved influential, as W. Poole has demonstrated in *Milton and the Idea of the Fall*.¹⁰ With a different aim and from a perspective at odds with Marrou's orthodox Augustinianism, Poole's book nevertheless confirms Marrou's seminal statement that the seventeenth century was the Augustinian century *par excellence*.¹¹ Among Poole's acknowledged sources, A. Williams must be singled out for his early investigations of Milton's use of the Fathers in the context of Renaissance patrology.¹² Milton scholarship is showing an increasing interest in the Fathers (not without the intention to dismantle the received notion of Milton as a Christian poet), but one has to turn to patristic scholarship for the initial coordinates.

⁹ Eric Lelend Saak, "The Reception of Augustine in the Later Middle Ages", in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, pp. 367-404.

¹⁰ William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

¹¹ Henri Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et l'Augustinisme*, Paris: Seuil, 1956, p. 168.

¹² Arnold Williams, "Renaissance commentaries on Genesis and some elements of the theology of Paradise Lost", *PMLA*, 56, 1, Mar 1941, pp. 151-164; Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor. An account of the commentaries on Genesis 1527-1633*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1948.

Mark Vessey is among the few scholars who have bridged two fields of investigation, exploring the role of patristic education in Renaissance England, surveying English translations of the Fathers, and making a strong case for the impact of patristic education on poetics.¹³ The sixteenth century also saw controversies on the need to make not only the Bible but its most influential commentators speak in the vernacular, to make the Fathers ‘speake in English.’¹⁴ W. P. Haugaard reports the figures, based on the STC, of patristic texts issued before 1600: 36 editions of Augustine, accounting for two fifths of the total, 11 of Chrysostom, 6 of Jerome and 5 of Cyprian¹⁵— these including, however, spurious works. Scholars investigating the reception of Augustine, although limiting their research to ‘authentic’ works of the Latin Father, should not disregard the fact that loosely labelled Augustinian treatises were no less popular and influential.

Despite his claim to the contrary (e. g. in *De Doctrina Christiana*), Milton’s recourse to numberless intermediaries between himself and the Scriptures, and between himself and the Fathers, was all too frequent. There are also different but intricate branches of Augustinianism, such as a specifically English heritage and the Geneva Calvinist line, which Milton seems to make recourse to in his works. A milestone of the first brand is Anselm of Canterbury, who considered his *Monologion* a restatement of the view of the Trinity set forth by Augustine in *De Trinitate*, and whose *De Casu Diaboli* has contributed to the depiction of the fallen angel in *Paradise Lost*. The second group enlists authors such as Beza and Rivet, which Milton openly pointed to.

Data concerning Milton’s readings of Augustine’s works are simply not to be found in his biographers and in the author’s own statements, except for the entry ‘Augustine, De Civitate Dei’ in the *Commonplace Book*.¹⁶ Notably, Milton’s biographers have not uniformly stressed the poet’s

¹³ Mark Vessey, “John Donne (1572-1631) in the Company of Augustine: Patristic Culture and literary Profession in the English Renaissance”, *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes*, 39, 1993, pp. 173-201.

¹⁴ Mark Vessey, “English Translations of the Latin Fathers, 1517-1611”, in *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West*, pp. 775-838, p. 775.

¹⁵ Quoted in M. Vessey, “English Translations of the Latin Fathers, 1517-1611”, p. 777.

¹⁶ J. H. Hanford comments that ‘the isolated reference to St. Augustine’s *de Civitate (sic) Dei* (No. 104), which was probably set down circa 1658, is interesting in view of the very remarkable agreement of the interpretation of the fall of man set forth in this work with Milton’s treatment of the theme in *Paradise Lost*.’

religious education, but not even the most religious-oriented among them, David Masson,¹⁷ whose aim was to establish the intellectual portrait of Calvinist Milton,¹⁸ could offer any detail as to his encounter with the Fathers. Neither early nor recent biographies have shed light on the matter. The available information concerning Milton's study of the Fathers is so far insufficient.

Poole has provided a tentative reconstruction of Milton's exposure to the Fathers' writings: 'Richard Stock, the minister of the local church All Hallows [...] liked citing church fathers, particularly Augustine [...]. Milton's private tutor Thomas Young taught him the classics and perhaps some patristics; at St Paul's, John Colet's statutes emphasised Christian learning, encouraging the study of such authors as Lactantius and Prudentius, though how far such statutes were implemented is uncertain.'¹⁹ Again, to fill the gap, Milton's reader has to search outside the boundaries of Milton scholarship. Perry Miller, in his delineation of the Augustinian turn of the Puritan mind, makes a cursory reference to William Chappel, Milton's teacher at Cambridge, as a follower of Thomas Hooker, the most Augustinian of the Puritan theologians. The reverence that Augustine enjoyed among the Puritans is indicated, Miller suggests, also by the fact that Hooker kept calling him 'saint', although the use of this word was generally banished as indicative of popish corruption.²⁰ Milton retained this practice – especially when endorsing the saint.

1.3 Occurrences

Although Milton's writings are permeated with Augustinian issues, and Augustine's presence lurks between the lines of his poetry, explicit references to the early Christian philosopher are

James Holly Hanford, "The Chronology of Milton's Private Studies", *PMLA*, 36, 2, Jun., 1921, pp. 251-314, p. 304.

¹⁷ David Masson, *The Life of John Milton : narrated in connexion with the political, ecclesiastical, and literary history of his time*, New York: Smith, 1946.

¹⁸ For a fresh assessment of the biographies, see Gordon Campbell and Tom Corns, 'Milton and his Biographers', in Blair Worden and Paul Hammond (eds.), *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*, Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2010.

¹⁹ William Poole, p. 125.

²⁰ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind*, Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard U.P. 1954, p. 22.

scanty. The entry in the standard *Milton Encyclopedia*²¹, while making the poet an unswerving follower of Augustine, suggests as many as 45 entries, but without further specifications. *A Milton Dictionary*,²² based on the Columbia edition, and the Yale Prose Works muster but a handful of references, between explicit quotations and allusions. *A Milton Dictionary* lists one reference in *Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings*, one in *De Doctrina Christiana*, and some in the divorce tracts; but not all references have the same relevance.

In the *Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings* Milton only makes a cursory reference to the saint, in fact citing Prosper, ‘the disciple of St. Augustine’, on the clergymen who have means of their own and ‘might not without sin partake of church-maintenance.’ In the divorce tracts Augustine is the acknowledged, and in *De Doctrina Christiana* the unacknowledged interlocutor. Likewise, while in *The Tenure* Milton never explicitly refers to Augustine, Merritt Y. Hughes²³ has recognised the Augustinian question that lies at the root of the book – the relationship between theology and politics. If we consider a number of unattributed allusions, the total number of Augustinian references will increase far beyond the *Milton Encyclopedia* figure.

The entries show the ambivalence towards Augustine that accompanied Milton’s career and that has attracted the most diverse responses from the commentators. In the divorce tracts,²⁴ Milton cites Augustine pro et contra his arguments. In *De Doctrina Christiana* Augustine is mentioned but once, though crucially as the originator of the concept of original sin, but, as M. Kelley²⁵ and T. N. Corns and G. Campbell²⁶ have pointed out, the framework of the discussion is Augustinian.

²¹ William B. Hunter, John T. Shawcross, John M. Steadman, and Purvis E. Boyette (eds.), *A Milton Encyclopedia*, 9 vols. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Press, 1978-1983.

²² Edward Semple Le Comte, *A Milton Dictionary*, London: P. Owen, 1961.

²³ Merritt Y. Hughes, Introduction to *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, Vol. 3, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962, pp. 110 ff.

²⁴ See next chapter.

²⁵ Maurice Kelley, Introduction to *Christian Doctrine*, in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, Vol. 6, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973, pp. 64 ff

²⁶ Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie, *Milton and the Manuscript of De Doctrina Christiana*, Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2007. The authors sum up the main points of Milton’s theology, with reference to the Augustinian tradition, in his antitrinitarianism, and consequently his christology and pneumatology, in the timing of creation, the creation of the soul and the doctrine of grace.

An intriguing aspect of this legacy is Milton's use of Augustinian titles. For *De Doctrina Christiana* it has been argued that the title may be posthumous, but this cannot be said for *Of True Religion*, the translation of Augustine's *De vera Religione* (a fact that has incredibly escaped the commentators) or for *Samson Agonistes*, which echoes Augustine's *De Agone Christiano*. *Samson Agonistes*, a work that has received limited attention with regard to Augustine's works, presents in fact a number of Augustinian *topoi*, from Samson's misled passion for Delilah, to the trope of light and vision.

Finally, in *Of True Religion*, Milton, I suggest, appropriates the categories 'catholic' and 'heretic' in the Augustinian acceptance, and uses them in reverse.

1.4 Augustine among the Miltonists

While a limited amount of critical literature deals primarily with Milton's Augustinian legacy, references to Augustine are frequent among Miltonists. The presence of the Church Father looms large in *Paradise Lost* studies, especially when the 'first disobedience' is at stake, also surfacing when the matter of the pre- and post-lapsarian relationship between Adam and Eve is discussed. As to the premises and the consequences of the Fall, it cannot be underestimated that the theological stumbling blocks of the poem, ultimately originating in Augustine, were the object of speculation in Milton's time, and have not ceased being debated in present-day criticism.

1.4.i Against Augustine?

Milton's approach to Augustine is keyed to the broader question of the poet's religious stance. The matter has fuelled critical controversy. The discussion has intensified around the origin and nature of Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana*. W. B. Hunter's claim in favour of Milton's

Milton's position is that the Son 'is consubstantial with the Father, but not co-essential.' (p. 101) Likewise, the Spirit 'is made of the *substantia* of God but does not share the *essentia* (or *hypostasis*) of the Father.' (p.107). For Milton, time pre-existed the creation of the world, which for Augustine was created '*cum tempore*.' After Augustine, Milton believed in the transmission of the original sin and in prevenient and sufficient grace. (pp. 113-116)

ortodoxy has been countered by J. Mueller, S. B. Dobranski and J. P. Rumrich.²⁷ In the *querelle* originated by Milton's attempt at systematic theology, Augustine is hardly mentioned, but Augustinian questions are implied. The appendix to the recent stylometric analysis²⁸ does not add significantly to Kelley's painstaking source hunting in the introduction to the Yale edition of the work, but Campbell and Corns, while acknowledging William Ames and John Wolleb as Milton's most immediate influence, are even more explicit in indicating in Augustine's writings a foil against which to place Milton's theological peculiarities – a term I prefer to Kelley's 'errancies' (or to Lewis' 'whimsies').

While it is now fashionable to overemphasize Milton's conflicting heterodox doctrines,²⁹ Gnosticism³⁰ gaining ground over Arianism or even Arminianism, critical reactions to Milton's treatment of Augustine have in time ranged from belief in his absolute adherence to the church Father and the claim that Milton wrote against him, albeit in a veiled way, given the dangerous context. According to Kelley, Milton's anti-trinitarian³¹ arguments in *De Doctrina* are directed against *De Trinitate*, a text that elicited a closely woven debate during and after the Reformation,

²⁷ William B. Hunter, "The Provenance of the Christian Doctrine", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 32, 1, Winter 1992, pp. 129-142, and, in the same volume: Barbara K. Lewalski, John T. Shawcross, W. B. Hunter, "Forum: Milton's Christian Doctrine", pp. 143-66.

²⁸ Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie, *cit.* See the chapter "The Theology of the Manuscript", pp. 89-120.

²⁹ A milestone in this critical path is S. B. Dobranski and J. P. Rumrich (eds.), *Milton and Heresy*, Cambridge: Cambridge U. P. 1998. The debate over *De Doctrina Christiana* is the starting point for the authors' reassessment of Milton's consistency with 'conventional beliefs', i. e. 'standard dogmas of seventeenth-century theologians, or common assumptions of recent Milton scholars.' The latter comprise W. B. Hunter, Dennis Danielson and Stanley Fish among others.

³⁰ The proposition of a gnostic Milton, however not new, has gained momentum since the studies of N. Forsyth, A. D. Nuttall (*The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton and Blake*) and his disciple W. Poole. The common denominator among the three works is the belief that, in *Paradise Lost*, a Gnostic hypotext undermines the Christian one. Nuttall's claim is that an alternative gnostic trinity is superimposed on Milton's description of the relation of the Father with the Son, which accounts for the features of the Father, that have disturbed generations of readers and critics. In the Gnostic trinity, the merciful son rebels against the tyrant father.

³¹ The use of such terms as 'Arian', 'antitrinitarian' and 'subordinationist' is discussed in John Rumrich, "Milton's Arianism: why it matters", in S. B. Dobranski and J. P. Rumrich, pp. 75-92. A seminal study of Milton's response to Augustine's Trinitarian terminology is C. A. Patrides, *Milton and the Christian Tradition*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966. Milton's treatment of the Trinity is also the object of W. B. Hunter, C. A. Patrides and J. H. Adamson, *Bright Essence*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1973. Patrides' claim that Milton's subordinationist approach does not explicitly deny the Trinity is countered by Rumrich. Following with Rumrich's argument, Milton's antitrinitarian view is discussed in Kent R. Lehnhof, "Deity and Creation in The Christian Doctrine", *Milton Quarterly*; Dec. 2001, 35 4, p. 232.

although the claims from the Protestant side were often understated for censorship reasons. Campbell and Corns restate Milton's antitrinitarianism. Commenting on the birth of Death and Sin in Book II of *Paradise Lost*, and placing them within 'a long tradition of satanic trinities', they suggest that it 'is possible that the arrow is aimed at *De Trinitate* of Augustine, who had articulated the idea (apparently of his own invention) that the Holy Spirit was the embodiment of the mutual love of the Father and the Son.'(p. 100) In this Milton was not alone, but followed the steps of Anabaptists, Socinians and followers of Servetus among others. Augustine is also evoked in relation to the creation of the soul and in the hexhaemeral account of the Creation. While Milton endorsed Augustine's traducianism, he departs from the philosopher's view of the beginning of time: both in *De Doctrina* and in *Paradise Lost* time pre-exists the coming into being of the world.

Where Milton appears to follow Augustine without a polemical intent is in the doctrine of grace. Campbell and Corns suggest that the line 'sufficient to have stood but free to fall' (PL III, 99) echoes Augustine on sufficient grace and point out Milton's confutation of Calvin's predestinationism. The claim is not new. In *Ideas in Milton*,³² Grace places *Paradise Lost* at the center of the Protestant debate on the nature of man in relation with the original sin. He stresses Augustine's influence on the matter and quotes (in translation) *The City of God* (XIII,2; XIV,1 and XXII,22). Outlining the debate on 'essential' *versus* 'accidental', the author concludes that 'late augustinians' considered the original sin an essential mutation of human nature (p. 4), a belief that resulted in Luther and Calvin's insistence on salvation *sola gratia*. Grace points out that Protestant readings of Augustine erased what he calls the 'eulogy of fallen nature' (p. 29). Milton, the author maintains, has Michael speak (PL XII, 285ff) 'as a straightforward calvinist' (p. 5) as concerns men's corrupted nature and the way 'they may find / Justification'; however, he concludes, different characters in *Paradise Lost* (especially in Book X) voice different doctrines, and God himself (II, 111-119) provides an Arminian corrective to Calvinist stress on predestination.

³² William J. Grace, *Ideas in Milton*, Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968.

In a more recent study of Milton's Arminianism, B. Myers argues, once more, that the Augustinian concept of prevenient grace is at the core of *Paradise Lost*. The conversion of Adam and Eve, he claims, should be considered against the backdrop of post-Reformation theological controversies on the individual response to the action of prevenient grace, as the great divide between Calvin and Arminius lay in the latter's belief in 'freedom of the will, and a capability of resisting the Holy Spirit, of rejecting the proffered grace of God.'³³

1.4.ii Fortunate Fall?

While there is general consent on Milton's use of Augustine's notion of the original sin, its origin and transmission, there is less agreement on what the poet did with the latter's narrative of the redemption of mankind. Whenever the *felix culpa* motif in *Paradise Lost* is discussed (as in the Norton edition of the poem) Augustine is credited as the originator of the concept – regardless of the fact that the attribution of the phrase to him is uncertain. (Aquinas attributes it to Augustine, and the concept is Augustinian; however, the phrase does not appear in Augustine's works) Whatever the source of the lines from the paschal praeconium, 'o felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere redemptorem', Milton's derivative lines in PL XII, 463-65, have given rise to a heated controversy, where Augustine appears alternately as the culprit of Milton's nonsense, the warrant of Milton's orthodoxy and the hidden presence against whose influence Milton would strive to free himself. The controversy on the 'fortunate fall' shows the interweaving of different threads of the extant debate on Milton's Augustinian legacy, to the point that it is difficult to single out separate headings.

³³ Benjamin Myers, "Prevenient Grace and Conversion in *Paradise Lost*", *Milton Quarterly*, Vol. 40, 1, Mar. 2006, pp. 20-36, p. 28.

The debate on Milton's handling of the concept was triggered by Lovejoy's seminal essay 'Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall.'³⁴ The essay traces the story of the idea, starting from the uncertain origin of the Paschal praeconium. Although there is no evidence that, as some would have it, Augustine himself was the author of this liturgical prayer, the paradox of the positive outcome of sin is a central notion in Augustine's theology. Lovejoy cites Wycliff, John Donne's (Augustinian) sermons and Pereira's expositions on Genesis³⁵ among Milton's precedents in the treatment of the theme, and argues that Adam's speech voices Milton's faltering between two irreducible opposites: that the Fall was a disaster and that the Fall was good.

Later positions range from the claim that Milton is everywhere Augustinian (whatever that means in the mind of the proponents) and the counterclaim that, by Milton's time, belief in a providential order, with evil and everything falling into place, was no longer tenable and Milton never subscribed to it. Of this opinion is Grossman, who illustrates the rupture, by the end of the sixteenth century, of 'the chiasmic juncture of history and providence that Augustine's rhetoric sustained [...] subverted by the spectre of an irreversible history answerable to second causes, radically contingent and accidental.'³⁶

According to Bear, the critical focus on the Fall has obscured the importance of 'the obedient moment' as the core concept of *Paradise Lost*: the obedience to the divine voice that is made possible through the bestowing of grace, which enables the trespasser to repent. This is, she argues, the unifying principle underlying *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. Bear laments the dismissal of a Puritan paradigm that, if brought back into focus, would overcome the reading disability that – if 'good for a number of careers' – blurs the vision of 'the

³⁴ Arthur O. Lovejoy, "Milton and the Paradox of the Fortunate Fall", *The Journal of English Literary History*, 4, 3, Sept. 1937, pp. 161-169. For a discussion of the fortune of Lovejoy's essay see John C. Ulreich, "The Fortunate Fall in *Paradise Lost*", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 32, 3, Jul.-Sep. 1971, pp. 351-366. Milton's ambiguity toward the idea is discussed in Virginia Mollenkoff, "Milton's Rejection of the Fortunate Fall", *Milton Quarterly*, 6, 1, March 1972, pp. 1-5.

³⁵ On Pereira as a divulgator of Augustine see Williams, *passim*.

³⁶ Marshall Grossman, "Augustine, Spenser, Milton and the Christian Ego", *The New Orleans Review*, 11, 1984, pp. 9-17, p. 15.

paradigms that made [Milton's] world comprehensible to his contemporaries.³⁷ But the paradigm seems to have fallen out of favour, superseded by other, self-referential constructions.

1.5 C. S. Lewis vs D. Saurat

Two groundbreaking monographic studies concentrate on Milton's theology with reference to *De Civitate Dei*: Saurat's *La Pensée de Milton* and C. S. Lewis' *Preface to Paradise Lost*.³⁸ In what is still regarded as an authoritative source,³⁹ Saurat laid the foundations for later discussion on Milton's borrowings from the Father. Focusing on *Paradise Lost*, he lists the motifs that Milton derived from Augustine, handing down to Lewis, and Fiore⁴⁰ after him, the indication of textual correspondence between *Paradise Lost* and *De Civitate Dei* on specific issues: the fall of the angels before the fall of man, pride at the origin of the double fall, the identification between the tempting serpent and Satan, and concupiscence as the first consequence of the Fall.

The author stands out as an unbiased reader of Augustine when he describes 'la révolte de la concupiscence' as 'le déchirement, et la lutte au sein de l'homme même.' (p. 267) However, when he deals with Milton's response to Augustine on this point, he falls into common approximations and also misquotes Milton. He contends that Milton regarded the Father's suppositions on prelapsarian sexuality as 'crabbed opinions', whereas with that phrase Milton stigmatized Augustine's controversial suggestion that, if marriage did not have a procreative end, God would have given Adam another man for a companion. From different premises and with different purposes, however, Milton appears to be more akin to Augustine on marriage than often

³⁷ Risa S. Bear, "Eden Rais'd in the Waste Wilderness: Milton and the Obedient Moment" XXX, 1992, *Britannica Online*, www.luminarium.org/renascence.../milton.html

³⁸ For a brief review of the origin and development of Milton studies see Roy Flannagan, "'The world all before [us]': More than Three Hundred Years of Criticism" in Angelica Duran (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Milton*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007, pp. 43-57.

³⁹ Saurat was one of the first to discuss Milton's use of Gnostic texts. Milton's access to Gnostic sources, besides the second-hand references in patristic literature, is the object of Arnold Williams' enquiry in "Milton and the Book of Enoch: An Alternative Hypothesis", *The Harvard Theological Review*, 33, 4, Oct. 1940, pp. 291-299.

⁴⁰ Peter Amadeus Fiore, *Milton and Augustine: Patterns of Augustinian Thought in Paradise Lost* University Park: Pennsylvania State U. P., 1981.

credited, as both believed that there is more to marriage than physical union. This belief underpins Milton's divorce tracts and has misled a host of Miltonists.⁴¹

Saurat is one of the few to acknowledge Augustine's statement that 'la chair est bonne en son genre' (*De Civitate* XIV, 5) and that 'la chair [...] est devenue corrompue.' (p. 269) As a matter of fact, Augustine insisted that a corruptible *soul* marred the the body, and not the contrary, as often reported: 'Nam corruptio corporis, quae aggravat animam, non peccati primi est causa, sed poena; nec caro corruptibilis animam peccatricem, sed anima peccatrix fecit esse corruptibilem carnem.' (*De Civitate*, XIV, 3.2) In order to reconsider Milton's treatment of the body in the frame of his Augustinian references, it is necessary to return to the Augustinian texts, which have been obscured by misquotations and misunderstanding. For Milton, Saurat continues, 'la matière et la chair sont toujours emplies des forces divines.' (Ibid.) The spiritualization of the body, that Raphael indicates to Adam as the progressive refinement of the human being (PL V, 497), is singled out by Saurat as the poet's rendering of Augustine's words 'le corps de l'homme devait devenir spirituel' (*De Civitate* XIV, 13) and is read as 'un germe du monisme de Milton.' (p. 269) Christ, the 'greater man', the epitome of the body spiritualized, is central in both systems.

Like Augustine, Saurat claims, Milton believed in free will and in the place of the fall within the providential order. Finally, he sees a fundamental agreement between Milton and Augustine as concerns the consequences of their theology on their politics, in that the fall caused man's subjugation of man (*De Civitate*, XIX 15), but the fruit of Christ's ransom is freedom. And the recovered freedom of the regenerated man is at the root of Milton's republicanism.

Saurat illustrated Milton's indebtedness to Augustine, but also asserted the poet's departure from Augustine's theology on issues such as the creation of the soul and the Trinity. C. S. Lewis

⁴¹ According to Ludovici, even Augustinian scholars have misread the saint on this point, producing what he calls 'il genere della farneticazione brillante.' E. S. Ludovici, "Sessualità, matrimonio e concupiscenza in sant'Agostino", in Raniero Cantalamessa (a cura di), *Etica sessuale e matrimonio nel cristianesimo delle origini*, Studia Patristica Mediolanensia 5, Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1976, pp. 212-272, p. 212. See also Pedro Langa, *San Agustín y el progreso de la teología matrimonial*, Toledo: Estudio Teológico de San Idelfonso, 1984, and Richard John Neuhaus (ed.), *Augustine Today*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993.

stressed Milton's orthodoxy, establishing a critical line that was to have more detractors than followers.⁴² Having averred that 'Milton's version of the fall story is substantially that of St Augustine, which is that of the church as a whole' (p. 66)⁴³, Lewis summarises the correspondences between *Paradise Lost* and *De Civitate* as follows: all things are created good and nothing in nature is bad (p. 66); God's foreknowledge does not imply predestination (p. 67); terrestrial bodies will 'turn to spirit' and 'wing'd ascend' (PL V, 493 ff); 'Satan attacked Eve [as] more credulous' (DCD XIV, II); 'the fall consisted in disobedience', as a result of pride (DCD XIV, 13) (p. 68); reason has consequently lost control over passions.

Among the analogies pointed out by Lewis, two issues have become critical battleground ever since. The creation of all things 'without exception good', which negates the ontological reality of evil, is now a favourite Miltonic *crux*. But Lewis also sparked a fire with his reference to Adam and Eve's unfallen sexuality: 'Milton and Augustine agree in contrasting the fallen sexuality which we now know, and which is conditioned by the disobedience of our members, with an unfallen sexuality. But for St. Augustine the unfallen sexuality is purely hypothetical: when he describes it he is describing what the act of generation would have been before the fall, but he does not think it ever took place. Milton asserts that it did.' (p. 122)

Lewis conforms to Augustine's invitation to restraint and takes his distance from the poet: 'this warning he defied. [...] I cannot make up my mind whether he was wise.'⁴⁴ Not only does Lewis cancel Augustine's graphic description of the insubordination of the body and gives his

⁴² C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost: being the Ballard Matthews Lectures, delivered at University College, North Wales, 1941, revised and enlarged*, London: Oxford University Press, 1952. Lewis is quoted almost *verbatim* in Lois Potter, *A Preface to Milton*, Longman: London 1971. Potter stresses the Augustinian origin of Milton's ideas: 'His distinction between foreknowledge and predestination [...] goes back to St. Augustine', p. 65; 'it was Augustine who, in his City of God, fixed the orthodox Christian interpretation of the biblical event with which Milton deals in his epic, starting with the superimposition between Satan and the serpent that was to become a shared notion when referring to the book of Genesis, although the book does not explicitly state this identification. It is also Augustine who expanded on the fallen angels.' p. 68.

⁴³ Again, Lewis' words are duplicated, without acknowledgement, in *A Milton Encyclopedia*, p. 115.

⁴⁴ The same timid attitude characterizes the treatment of the subject in Mary Irma Corcoran, *Milton's Paradise with Reference to the Hexameral Background*, Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press Inc., 1945.

readers a bowdlerized version of the story, but he tries to minimize the erotic details in the poem as far as he can. Lewis' Eve is far less carnal than Milton's angels.

1.6 'calm region once [...] now tossed and turbulent': sex in Eden

An Augustinian *topos* is the sense of loss and disorder that characterizes post-lapsarian sexuality. The loss of 'the paradisaic state of 'one flesh' promised to Adam and Eve'⁴⁵ returns as a leitmotif in critical literature. Northrop Frye has given an unashful explanation of the question. He comments on the alienation from nature that follows the Fall in *Paradise Lost* and describes the shame first experienced by Adam and Eve. He speaks as Augustine's mouthpiece: 'Man becomes ashamed of his body and performs his sexual acts in secret.' Then he echoes Lewis, but without the former's prudery: 'What man acquires from the fall is evidently sexual experience as we know it [...] In sex as we know it there is no complete union of bodies, and therefore sex, even with synchronized orgasms, has a residual frustration built into it.'⁴⁶

Physical and emotional turmoil, ending in residual frustration and a sense of weariness, as part and parcel of fallen sexuality is a recurrent theme in Augustine's writings, together with his (retracted) suppositions of what prelapsarian intercourse might have been like: 'sine ullo inquieto ardore libidinis' (*De Genesi ad litteram* IX, 3.6). Empson believed that 'the sexual condition that [Augustine] considers holy is that of an acrobatic prostitute,⁴⁷ while like-minded D. Renaker writes that it is as cold and detached as artificial insemination.⁴⁸ Critical response to Milton's appropriation of the Augustinian question has been likewise fanciful, when not verging on animadversion.

⁴⁵ James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: paradisaic marriage and sexual relations in the age of Milton*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987, p. 41.

⁴⁶ Northrop Frye, *The Great Code. The Bible into Literature*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, p. 109-110. On Augustine as the initiator, among other things, of the notion of post-coital weariness, see Robert J. O'Connell, *Soundings in St. Augustine's Imagination*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1994, pp. 281 ff.

⁴⁷ W. Empson, *Milton's God*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1965, p. 169.

⁴⁸ David, Renaker, "Pudenda Nota: Stigmatized Sexual Organs in Genesis, Calvin and Rochester", *The Atheist Seventeenth Century Webside*, userwww.sfsu.edu/~draker/.../PudendaNota.html.

Starting from the assumption that the temptation was sexual⁴⁹ and from Augustine's repeated remark that after the fall the first humans became aware of their 'pudenda', Rudat has produced astounding interpretations of Milton's picture of the original sex. His argument runs as follows: the serpent provokes Eve with a 'phallic dance or phallic demonstration', that is, Milton's poetic rendering of the 'controlled agility that the prelapsarian phallus had possessed' according to Augustine in *De Civitate* XIV 24 (!)⁵⁰ (p. 111); Eve, aroused by the sight of the serpent, discovers her erectile organ ('the fruit'), realizes the disproportion between Adam's and hers, and develops the penis envy that will be handed down to her daughters until the end of time.⁵¹ No less heated is the imagination of K. R. Lehnhof.⁵² However, he concedes that the reader (?) is prone to amplify the erotic connotations of the text. The reader that Lehnhof has in mind is clearly a sort of voyeur, like the cormorant in Book IV or the narrator of the passage in question. As a matter of fact, after looking for textual evidence of Eve's sexual arousal, and for details of the first couple's lovemaking, Lehnhof observes that the description is preceded by the narrator's hesitant 'I weene.'

⁴⁹ The idea had precedents in the rabbinical tradition, but also in the Fathers. Cfr. Harris F. Fletcher, *Milton's Rabbinical Readings*, Hamden CT: Archon Books, 1967, p. 186.

⁵⁰ Rudat refers to the following passage: 'Seminaret igitur prolem vir, susciperet femina genitalibus membris, quando id opus esset et quantum opus esset, voluntate motis, non libidine concitatis. Neque enim ea sola membra movemus ad nutum, quae compactis articulata sunt ossibus, sicut manus et pedes et digitos, verum etiam illa, quae mollibus remissa sunt nervis, cum volumus, movemus agitando et porrigendo producimus et torquendo flectimus et constringendo duramus, sicut ea sunt, quae in ore ac facie, quantum potest, voluntas movet. [...] Sic ergo et ipse homo potuit oboedientiam etiam inferiorum habere membrorum, quam sua inoboedientia perdidit. Neque enim Deo difficile fuit sic illum condere, ut in eius carne etiam illud non nisi eius voluntate moveretur, quod nunc nisi libidine non movetur.' (DCD, XIV, 24)

⁵¹ Wolfgang E. H. Rudat, "Milton, Freud, St. Augustine: Paradise Lost and the History of Human Sexuality", *Mosaic: a journal for the interdisciplinary study of literature*, 15, 2, June 1982, pp. 109-121. Rudat repeats the point, with greater emphasis on Eve's sexual phases, in "Milton's Paradise Lost: Augustinian Theology and Fantasy", *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture*, 42, 3, Fall 1985, pp. 297-313 and "Augustinian Theology and Milton's 'manhood' in Paradise Lost", *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology*, Mar. 1985. In "Ovid's Art of Love and Augustinian Theology in Paradise Lost", *Milton Quarterly*, 21, 2, May 1987, pp. 62-65, Rudat discusses the implications of Milton's blending the two sources. Rudat's work is endorsed in the much less erratic study of John Savoie, "Justifying the Ways of God and Man: Theodicy in Augustine and Milton", in Robert P. Kennedy, Kim Paffenroth and John Doody (eds.), *Augustine and Literature*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006, pp. 139-154.

⁵² Kent R. Lehnhof, "Nor turn'd I weene": Paradise Lost and Pre-Lapsarian Sexuality', *Milton Quarterly*, 34.3, 2000, pp. 67-83.

The subject has also become an occasion for invectives against Augustine. His famous statement that the insubordination of sexual desire to rational control is a distinctive trait of our human, wounded (i.e. fallen) nature, his opposition between *voluntas* and *voluptas*, *caritas* and *concupiscentia*, has provoked sarcastic reactions rather than plain admission of the fact that Milton referred to Augustine's view of sexual intercourse in his prose and in his poetry. A less biased approach underlies Turner's study. The author introduces Augustine's 'theology of the flesh', as 'far beyond any platonic apotheosis of the soul alone' and characterized, instead, by the 'self-centred' *versus* 'God-centred' antithesis.⁵³ Placing Milton's treatment of love in the track of Luther's conception of pre-lapsarian sexuality, and against prevailing (e. g. Hagstrum's) visions of Augustine's Paradise as 'austere and largely sexless.'⁵⁴ Turner argues that Milton's picture is more in keeping with Augustine's 'joyful', however not lustful, attitude than previously acknowledged.

Questions concerning sex in Eden may seem specious *per se*, but impinge on the reading of Milton's view of the ideal marriage, a question especially relevant to his divorce tracts. The debate on the creation of Eve and her relation to Adam before and after the fall is tightly interwoven with the question of Milton's position towards women and marriage. His alliance with Augustine in this respect has been matter of contention, as Augustine has been held notoriously responsible for a tradition of disparagement and subordination of women.⁵⁵

Comparing the description of Eve in *Paradise Lost* to the treatment of women in the divorce tracts, critics have concluded that Milton is a profeminist – or that he is a mysoginist. In between, there are scholars who claim that, while Eve is rescued from the burden of misogyny inherited from tradition, 'remnants' of misogyny survive in the engendering of Sin and Death, and

⁵³ James Grantham Turner, p. 42.

⁵⁴ James Grantham Turner, pp. 58-59.

⁵⁵ Cfr. Hans Küng and John Stephen Bowden, *Women in Christianity*, London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2005, pp. 30-31 or the more virulent *Women and evil*, by Nel Noddings, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989. For a reconsideration of Augustine's sexual rigorism see the pioneering study by Kari Elisabeth Borresen, *Subordination et equivalence: nature et role de la femme d'après Augustin et Thomas D'Aquin*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1968. Judith Chelius Stark (ed.), *Feminist interpretations of Augustine*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007, shows the attempt to reconcile feminist scholarship and the Augustinian canon.

in other minor figures like the daughters of man who copulate with devils.⁵⁶ Considered a milestone in the rehabilitation of Milton in women's studies, McColley's work reports the discussion and rejection, on the part of Renaissance commentators, of the allegorization of Eve as the body and Adam as the mind, an allegorization established by Philo Judaeus and cautioned by Augustine who, however, seems to have internalized it when he writes that 'our flesh is Eve within us.'⁵⁷ The empowerment of Eve's emerges, McColley contends, in Milton's depiction of her gardening activities: an image that brings together literal interpretation of *Genesis*, as expounded in Augustine's *De Genesi ad Litteram*, and the practical preoccupations with work sharing as part of the Puritan approach to mutuality in marriage.⁵⁸

The attempts to rescue Milton from the charge of misogyny, which originated from undue confusion among the narrator of *Paradise Lost*, the poet, the polemicist and the husband, and was built on sources that invite to question the proponents' ethics of scholarship,⁵⁹ have the most recent expression in the convincing reading, by Rosanna Cox,⁶⁰ of the final image of *Paradise Lost*, where, within a changing religious and social scenario, with related changes in the view of marriage and family ties, Milton celebrates the mutuality, however marred by the fallen condition, that he described and defended in the divorce tracts.

1.7 Augustinian aesthetics

A less controversial matter is the impact of Augustine's writing on the language and form of Milton's works. Empson's acrimonious *Milton's God*, a book that voices the author's opposition to Christianity, to the God of Augustine and Milton, 'the wickedest thing yet invented by the black

⁵⁶ Anna K. Juhnke, "Remnants of Misogyny in *Paradise Lost*", *Milton Quarterly*, 22, 2, May 1988, pp. 50-58.

⁵⁷ Diane Kelsey McColley, *Milton's Eve*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁸ Diane Kelsey McColley, p. 149.

⁵⁹ I agree with the view set forth in William Shullenberger, "Wrestling with the Angels. *Paradise Lost* and Feminist Criticism", *Milton Quarterly*, 20, 3, Oct. 1986, pp. 69-85.

⁶⁰ Rosanna Cox, 'Milton, Marriage and the Politics of Gender,' in Blair Worden and Paul Hammond, *John Milton: Life, Writing*, Oxford:OUP, 2010.

heart of man',⁶¹ and to the Christian line of Milton criticism, is a milestone in a critical approach that not only denies Milton's providential view of history, but claims that Milton wrote against his Judeo-Christian heritage. The book triggered Danielson's response in *Milton's Good God*, where, from a different perspective, the author considers theodicy the main theological question of *Paradise Lost*: how can evil and God's goodness coexist? Referring to the Danielson-Empson controversy, Joel Slotkin enters the arena arguing that 'Milton's solution to the problem of justifying evil in *Paradise Lost* – and Milton's religiosity itself – integrates the aesthetic and the theological at a fundamental level, in a tradition derived from Augustine.'⁶² In Slotkin's view, Milton 'develops the poetic power of evil while revealing the ultimate origin of that power in God, thus creating a poetic universe that encourages approval of and pleasure in God's punishments, not merely reluctant acceptance of them.' Slotkin evidently presupposes a reader of the kind described by Stanley Fish, but with markedly masochistic inclinations. The source of the pleasurable punishment that such reader would enjoy is identified in the 'Augustinian chiaroscuro, the fusion of light and dark elements' (p. 101). Slotkin singles out Augustine's 'chiaroscuro' as the distinctive feature of the aesthetics of *Paradise Lost*. Its definition is to be found in *De Civitate*: 'for just as a picture is enhanced by the proper placing within it of dark colours, so, to those able to discern it, the beauty of the universe is enhanced even by sinners, though, considered in themselves, theirs is a sorry deformity.' (XI, 23) (p. 104) Slotkin believes he has been the first to consider the aesthetic, beside the theological implications, of Milton's Augustinian legacy; actually, the influence of *De Civitate* as a literary model had been considered from different angles, by several authors. The conflict between self-love and godly love has been singled out as a leit motif for both Spencer and Milton, 'the ultimate foundation of their respective theologies.'⁶³ As A. Ficher remarked, Augustine's work fed Renaissance epic, to which it suggested the

⁶¹ W. Empson, p. 251.

⁶² Joel Slotkin, "Poetic Justice: Divine Punishment and Augustinian Chiaroscuro in *Paradise Lost*", *Milton Quarterly*, 38, 2, May 2004, pp. 100-127.

⁶³ C. A. Patrides, "Spencer: the Contours of Allegorical Theology", *Centennial Review* 26, 1, Winter 1982, pp. 17-32, p. 27.

opposition between heavenly and earthly cities: ‘the respective provinces of Agramante and Charlemagne, in Solimano and Armida and Goffredo.’⁶⁴ The recognition of the two-cities motif in Milton’s epic is also at the basis of Ake Bergvall’s⁶⁵ and T. R. Watson’s studies. According to Watson, the Augustinian juxtaposition of the two cities is the ‘scheme that forms the warp and woof of Milton’s entire epic.’⁶⁶ A. Das Gupta focuses on the influence, first pointed out by S. Kliger, F. Kermode and W. Mackellar’s, of *The City of God* on *Paradise Regained*.⁶⁷ He sees both works ‘equally rooted in social and political history’⁶⁸ and in Augustine’s and Milton’s respective attitude towards the classics, in the broader prospect of the relationship between faith and knowledge.

In *Building in the text*, Eriksen illustrates ‘the impact of architecture on the shapes of Renaissance texts and vice versa.’ (p. 147) He locates the Augustinian beginnings of this intersection in *De Ordine* and *De Civitate*, two texts that developed the comparison of the universe to a beautiful poem and ‘came to play [...] a decisive role in the cultivation of classical ideals of order and harmony in the Renaissance.’ The author suggests that the type of harmonious poem that Augustine had in mind is the paraclausithyron (e. g. Propertius’), but, in Augustine’s appropriation of pagan poetry, the lover waiting at the door is translated into the soul, longing to enter into God’s presence.⁶⁹ The Christian appropriation of the pagan literary heritage, part of Augustine’s legacy in the Renaissance, was explored by Milton to its fullest potential.

⁶⁴ Andrew Ficher, *Poets Historical*, New Haven: Yale U. P., 1982, p. 11.

⁶⁵ Ake Bergvall, “The Theology of the Sign: St. Augustine and Spencer’s Legend of Holiness”, *Studies in English Literature*, 33, 1, Winter 1993, pp. 21-24.

⁶⁶ Thomas Ramey Watson, “Milton’s Pyramids”, *AN&Q*, May-June 1986, pp. 132-134, p. 132.

⁶⁷ S. Kliger, “The Urbs Aeterna in *Paradise Regained*”, *P.M.L.A.*, 61, 1946, pp. 485-90; F. Kermode, “Milton’s Hero”, *R.E.S.* 4, 1953, pp. 327-8; *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, Vol. 4, London, 1975.

⁶⁸ Amlan Das Gupta, “The Debate on Learning in *Paradise Regained*”, *Journal of the Department of English*, Calcutta, 21, 1-2, 1986-1987, pp. 86-107.

⁶⁹ Roy Eriksen, *The Building in the Text: Alberti to Shakespeare and Milton*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 2001.

1.7. i Fallen Language

The search for Augustinian patterns in Milton's epic has brought into focus Augustine's theory of language. There is consensus among the commentators on the relevance to Milton's works of his writings on language, hugely influential for the development of medieval and Renaissance semiology.⁷⁰ Human language, or fallen language, is conventional, whereas for unfallen Adam words and things coincided. To Augustine, it is Christ as Logos who enables man to discern among deceptive voices and receive what God communicates 'voce forti in aurem interiorem.'

God is to be heeded and enjoyed ('frui'), but cannot be properly spoken about. This assumption is at the root of Reisner's recent work *Milton and the Ineffable*.⁷¹ The critic's starting point is that 'the struggle with ineffability in many ways defines Milton's triumph as a poet'— a triumph that is described via Said's *Beginnings*: to read *Paradise Lost* 'is to be convinced [...] of the idea of power: by its sheer duration and presence, and by its capacity for making sense despite the absence [of a lost paradise] at its center.' Reisner shares Said's belief that 'Milton's verse seems to have overpowered the void within his epic', not 'the shifting void of deconstruction'; but, he proclaims, 'the void left behind when fallen logocentric man is divorced from the infinite beatitudes of divine ontology and is left only with its remote dream.' Reisner locates in the early Fathers and in the Plotinian roots of Augustine's language theory the beginning of the apophatic tradition, 'silently present in all the intellectual traditions which shaped Milton's poetics.' (p. 8)

The impact of Augustine's theory of language has been explored with reference to Milton's poetic and political concerns. In the treatment of the relationship between things and signs in *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine expounded his 'uti' versus 'frui' theory: there are things to be used and things to be enjoyed. The latter are means to the ultimate end; they are a proper object of love,

⁷⁰ The impact of Augustine's theory of language and modern linguistics has been discussed, among others, by Emmanuel Bermon in his introduction to *De Magistro: Signification et l'enseignement: Texte latin, traduction français et commentaire du De magistro de saint Augustin*; Gerard Watson, St. Augustine's Theory of Language *The Maynooth Review / Revieú Mhá Nuad*, 6, 2, May, 1982, pp. 4-20; Thomas Ramey Watson, *Perversions, originals, and redemptions in Paradise lost: the typological scheme and sign theory that unify Milton's epic*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007.

⁷¹ Noam Reisner, *Milton and the Ineffable*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

as they pave the way towards the ultimate end, the final enjoyment of man's soul. According to Willis, Augustine's differentiation between things to be used and things to be enjoyed constitutes the theological basis of Milton's political agenda. Whatever infringes on man's liberty, mortifying his soul and reducing his fruition of God, from mismatch in marriage to a tyrannical king or a corrupt clergy is to be removed. This belief, according to Willis, lies at the basis not only of Milton's divorce tracts, but of his mature poetry. Thus, Samson's story exemplifies the error of choosing an object of worship other than God.⁷²

Hoerner argues that Milton's Augustinian emphasis on 'charity' and 'use' informs *Paradise Lost*.⁷³ His own and Willis' respective arguments rest on the proximity of 'charity' and godly 'use' in view of the final enjoyment. A negative embodiment of the notion is Satan, who deliberately engenders confusion between use and abuse, and between self-will and free will, while charity is embodied in the figure of Christ. It is difficult, however, to agree with Hoerner's claim that Augustine's theory of 'use' led him to political quiescence. Throughout his essay, in fact, Hoerner relies on secondary sources, which may account for repeated approximations, if not misinterpretations of Augustine's texts. One of such misconceptions is not inconsequential for the student of Milton's Augustinian legacy: Augustine's alleged dismissal of temporal reality. No more tenable is Hoerner's view that 'Augustine's anti-carnal and anti-temporal dualism remain orthodoxly spiritual and politically quiescent', unless the aforementioned antithesis is interpreted in Augustinian terms, as within the metaphor of the world as a poem, to which antithesis gives beauty. 'Temporalia' are subsumed in Augustine's eschatological view (e.g. in *De Trinitate*):⁷⁴ it is

⁷² Gladys J. Willis, *The Penalty of Eve: John Milton and Divorce*, New York: Lang; 1984. A. Potts counters that Milton's view of *caritas* differs from Augustine's 'in that Milton's charity was concerned with man's temporal good.' James B. Potts, "Milton and Augustine", *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, 16, 1990, pp.101.-110, p. 108.

⁷³ Fred Hoerner, ' "Fire to Use": A Practice-Theory Approach to Paradise Lost', *Representation*, 51, Summer 1995, pp. 94-117, p. 94 Hoerner sees in Augustine's definition of use the root of contemporary practice theory, as an act of volition that seeks to break through the limits of habit. He cites Milton: 'to be still searching what we know not by what we know. (p. 94)

⁷⁴ On Augustine's view of time see R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in The Theology of St. Augustine* (Cambridge, 1990); Giacomo Tantardini, *Il tempo Della Chiesa secondo Agostino. Seguire e rimanere in attesa. La felicità in speranza*, Roma: Città Nuova, 2010. For Augustine's view of time in his

the tension towards the eternal that must inform and transform the action in the temporal reality. Since his early writings, Milton moved from the same stance. Although his repeated statements on the relation between the temporal and the spiritual realms have become a critical crux, his Augustinian premises cannot be denied.

Augustine's warnings on the use of eloquence have also become a commonplace in Milton criticism, after the influential study of the performative quality of Milton's language by Stanley Fish,⁷⁵ who argues that the (desired?) effect of the poem on us readers is to provoke our awareness of the sameness of our own predicament and the situation of our biblical forefathers. Focusing on the dynamics of the various voices within Milton's text, Fish contrasts God's voice, which hosts of commentators have deemed flat and unpoetical, with Satan's, the most alluring voice in the poem. Eve is enthralled by Satan's rhetorical skills, which shift the victim's attention from content to form. In this, Fish suggests, Milton's echoes Augustine's distinction between rhetoric and plain speaking – a distinctive trait of Augustine's preoccupation with the use of language after his conversion.

Discussing the devils' council scene in the context of seventeenth-century preaching, B. A. Hampton⁷⁶ indicates Book IV of *De Doctrina Christiana* as the basis for many early divines' constructions of their sermons. Arguing that Milton shares Augustine's 'theology of participation', whereby 'all creation, including human language, participates and finds its proper telos in the being of God' (p. 93), Hampton focuses on Augustine's refusal to disseminate the rules of eloquence lest they should be used 'in the employ of evil and propagation of falsity.' While Fish simply stressed Augustine's refusal of eloquence, Hampton inscribes Augustine's view of eloquence within his

cultural context see Annapaola Zaccaria Ruggiu, *Le forme del tempo: Aion, Chronos, Kairos*, Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2006.

⁷⁵ Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: the reader in Paradise Lost*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.

⁷⁶ Brian Adams Hampton, "Infernal Preaching: Participation, God's Name, and the Great Prophesying Movement in the Demonic Council Scene of Paradise Lost", in Charles W. Durham and Kristin A. Pruitt (eds.), *Uncircumscribed Mind. Reading Milton Deeply*, Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2008, pp. 91-112.

theory of language, derived from the Incarnation. From the word of God made flesh descends the use of human words; consequently, as Christ's aim is to make the Father known, likewise the use of human words is to 'point to the beauty, truth, and goodness of the God who is their source', while, Hampton continues, 'to use language improperly, denies on a fundamental level the incarnation and all that follows according to Christian theology: healing, hope, unity and charity.' (p. 94) This view of language, Hampton argues, 'is of crucial importance to Milton', who not only fustigated the false pastors in *Lycidas* and in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, but gave definite poetic form to this indictment in the infernal synod in *Paradise Lost*.

Satan's manipulation of language, his engendering confusion between things that are to be used and things to be enjoyed, that is, his attempt to distract from the ultimate signification,⁷⁷ is widely recognized, but recent attempts to redefine the history and the theological and aesthetic implications of this character have led to more controversy on Milton's use of his Augustinian sources. N. Forsyth's *Satanic Epic*⁷⁸ focuses on the literary fascination of this character. After Blake, and with generations of Blake's followers, Forsyth believes that Satan is the real protagonist of Milton's epic, he also states that the sympathy for the devil that *Paradise Lost* elicits stems from the author's heterodoxy, to which Satan, he argues, lends his voice. A crucial heterodoxy that Forsyth's study addresses is the 'problem of evil.' Against the Manicheans, Augustine argued that evil is not an ontological reality but mere negation of good. While Lewis and his followers see Milton at ease with this Augustinian concept,⁷⁹ Forsyth and others, looking at Satan through Ricoeur's lens, address what they believe to be an inner contradiction in Augustine's argument. One of such proponents is Patterson, who has repeatedly claimed that the unsolved

⁷⁷ Victoria Kahn, "Allegory and the Sublime in *Paradise Lost*", in Annabel Patterson (ed.), *John Milton*, London and New York: Longman, 1992, pp. 185- 201.

⁷⁸ Neil Forsyth, *The Satanic Epic*, Princeton: Princeton U. P. , 2003.

⁷⁹ This seems to have been a common trait of the commentators of the first half of the twentieth century. In his assessment of contemporary criticism on Milton's Satan, Howard argues that Satan's total depravity is perfectly compatible with Augustine's view of evil as mere deprivation of good. He writes that 'in the degeneration of Satan's being, the impulses of goodness are never mitigated. Far from that, they remain, ineradicably a part of his being, to torment him.' Donald Howard, 'Milton's Satan and the Augustinian Tradition', *Renaissance Papers*, 1954, pp. 11-23, p. 18.

questions in Augustine's answer to the problem of evil result in Milton's 'undecidability.'⁸⁰ After outlining the history of evil, and exposing the problems that Augustine tried to solve, Patterson contends that Milton has given the most effective poetical representation of the Manichean belief that Augustine tried to argue out of existence⁸¹ ever since his conversion. After Forsyth, H. A. Kelly purports to confute the biblical basis of Milton's Satan, to prove the Fathers' demonology wrong⁸² and to prove Milton wrong.

A related area where Augustine has been indicated as a source, is Milton's angelology. In the most recent study on the subject, Raymond,⁸³ while showing that Milton's angels owe more to Renaissance occult writings and practice than to the patristic treatment of the subject, indicates the legacy of Augustine's treatment of the angels' free will. His references to Augustine's angelology are however limited to two passages in *De Civitate*, while other works of the Father are more relevant not only to a discussion of Milton's angels, but to the many questions raised in Raymond's book.

1.8 The *Confessions*

This overview has shown that the one work by Augustine that is most frequently cited in Milton studies is *De Civitate Dei*, in particular Book XIV – not seldom quoted from second-hand sources, or even by hearsay. Besides *De Trinitate* and *De Doctrina Christiana*, few other works have been taken into consideration and references are limited to cursory notes. It is surprising that, for all their popularity in Milton's times, *Confessiones* have received remarkably limited attention. While several studies deal with this work as a landmark in the construction of the Christian ego, only occasional remarks have been devoted to Milton's use of it. While there is widespread agreement on the influence of this work on Puritan autobiography, and on the fact that 'self-conscious writers

⁸⁰ Annabel Patterson, "Milton and the Problems of Evil: A Preemptive Modernism?", in Charles W. Durham, Kristin A. Pruitt (eds.), pp. 25-43.

⁸¹ Patterson, p. 31.

⁸² Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Satan: A Biography*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

⁸³ Joad Raymond, *Milton's Angels*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

whom the seventeenth-century men most consciously chose as models were, as might have expected, St. Augustine and St. Paul',⁸⁴ works that explore the making of the 'puritan self', like Webber's *The Eloquent I*, only mentions Milton in passing.

In *Milton's Peculiar Grace*, a study of Milton's self-representation, S. Fallon remarks the differences between Augustine's rhetoric in *The Confessions* and the poet's uncertainty about his own 'peculiar grace', i. e. his own personal call. Milton's use of oppositions between darkness and light, low and high are linked to *topoi* of spiritual autobiography, as handed down by Augustine, by M. Lifson. Focusing on the proem and the opening of Book VII of *Paradise Lost*, she suggests that, like Augustine, Milton establishes a parallel between creation and the recreation of the self, from chaos to form and from darkness to light.⁸⁵

In his attempt to identify a specifically 'Augustinian' epic, J. C. Warner⁸⁶ places *Paradise Lost* within a tradition initiated by Petrarch, who regarded Augustine as a model of spiritual self-scrutiny. He indicates the conflict between literary fame and ministerial call as the core of this epic genre, exemplified by works like the *Christiads* by Marco Girolamo Vida and Alexander Ross, and the Neo-latin epic of the Renaissance. These works, which were at least mentioned in Lewalski's *Milton's Brief Epic* and are resuscitated in Warner's study, need to be reassessed in conjunction with early Christian epic and its Augustinian basis. While Milton's scholarship has not ventured into this area, classicists have often referred to *Paradise Lost* as the crowning achievement of this genre.

A reference that has gone unnoticed is Milton's echo, in *Defensio Secunda*, of the Augustinian reference to Monica's death – as if the poet were reading his own life through an

⁸⁴ Joan Webber, *The eloquent "I". Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century Prose*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968, p. 260.

⁸⁵ Martha R. Lifson, "Creation and the Self in *Paradise Lost* and the *Confessions*", *Centennial Review*, 19, 3, 1975, pp. 187-97. By the same author see also 'The Mediating Muse of "Paradise Lost": Guide to Spiritual Transformation', *Notre Dame English Journal*, 13, 2, Spring, 1981, pp. 45-60. Lifson's belief that 'Augustine's and Milton's insistent use of light has its source in the Bible' has implied the disregard for other sources, like Plotinus, a common source for both Augustine and Milton. For a discussion of Milton's use of light, it is profitable to return to Merritt Y. Hughes, "Milton and the Symbol of Light", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 4, 1, Winter 1964, pp. 1-33.

⁸⁶ J. Christopher Warner, *The Augustinian Epic*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.

Augustinian pattern. Moreover, Milton seems to develop, in *Paradise Lost*, the explicit of *The Confessions*. Who will justify the ways of God to man? Man to man? Angel to angel? Angel to man? ('Et hoc intellegere quis hominum dabit homini? Quis angelus angelo? Quis angelus homini?') The dialogical structure of the theological dissertations in *Paradise Lost*, with Adam, Raphael and Michael as interlocutors seems to stem for Augustine's questions.

Initial conclusions

Despite the limited number of Milton's open references to Augustine (Austin), the presence of the latter looms large in the whole of Milton's work. Likewise, while only a few studies have focused on Milton's handling of his Augustinian sources, references to Augustine are scattered in the critical literature on the poet, and many of the cursory allusions indicate paths of research no less relevant than the more trodden ones. Much has been written on Milton's response to the philosopher on the theological side, but while the critical debate has centered on related issues like the original sin and marriage, as only in postlapsarian reality the relationship between man and woman has become an issue, and the providential view of history, less investigated is the presence of Augustine's writings in other areas of Milton's interests. Even less attention has received the strictly literary legacy.

No student of Milton's Augustinian legacy can avoid the Scylla of the attempts to reduce Milton's antinomies into some forms of Christian orthodoxy and the Carybdis of the less tenable attempts to deny the Christian core of Milton's work. The terms of the diatribe are often outrageous. A case in point is Renaker's attack against the upholders of a Christian Milton;⁸⁷ his proscription list includes Lewis, Lewalski, Fish and Patrides, a favourite target of his virulence. Unlike many commentators, Patrides had the merit to have recognized that Augustinian questions

⁸⁷ I was addressed to David Renaker's *The Atheist Seventeenth Century Webside* by Elizabeth Kantor, *A politically incorrect guide to English Literature*, Washington: Regnery Publishing Inc., 2006. While the latter argues that all the liberties that Milton invokes have their origin in Christianity, the purpose of Renaker's website is to prove that 'the poetry and prose of 17th-Century England were great in spite of, and not because of, the influence of Christianity.'

are to be considered in the context of the genre of each work, and bearing in mind the occasion that originated it. But unbiased readings of Augustine have often met with the relentless opposition of Empson's followers and copyists, and those who wish to deny the evidence of Milton's however troubled Christianity.

On the other hand, as Gaetano Lettieri,⁸⁸ underlines, 'Agostino è un cristiano tragico. E non è un caso che si sono rifatti ad Agostino, nel senso più fedele e radicale, tutti i personaggi più tragici, complessi e travagliati della storia del cristianesimo.' Milton, who unswervingly proclaimed himself a Christian author, is one of them.

⁸⁸ From a lecture delivered by Gaetano Lettieri, the author of *L'altro Agostino. Ermeneutica e retorica della grazia dalla crisi alla metamorfosi del De Doctrina Christiana*, Brescia: Morcelliana, 2001.

2. Fornication of the mind: Milton reads Augustine on marriage and divorce

Nam si propter fornicationem carnis permittitur homo a coniuge separari, quanto magis in coniuge mentis fornicatio detestanda est. (Augustine, *De Coniugiis Adulterinis* 17.19)

2.1 'A Subject so new to this age'

In *Colasterion* (1645), the vitriolic reply to a nameless pamphlet against *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton admitted that the subject was new to his age. As a matter of fact, his was a voice crying out in the desert: even for the most radical puritans, Milton's claims were ahead of the times.⁸⁹ In fact, although Milton had pieced together suggestions from first- and second-generation Reformers, the completeness of the argumentation and the energy that he put into it were unprecedented.

In 1643, shortly after his first marriage, he had experienced separation 'a mensa et thoro' (from bed and board) on the part of his first wife, Mary Powell. Of course, the recognition of either spouse's desertion would entail legal separation but did not entitle the other to remarry. As Stone points out, 'private deeds of separation developed in the mid- to late seventeenth century to meet a growing need of incompatible but non-adulterous couples somehow to break free from an

⁸⁹ Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987*, Oxford & New York: Oxford U. P., 1992, p. 348. See also David L. Snuth, "Divorce and Remarriage from the Early Church To John Wesley", *Trinity Journal* 11, 2, Fall 1990, pp. 131-142: 'The dissenting denominations tended to follow the views of the Reformers. Some, like Milton, were very flexible as to cause, but most followed the Westminster divines in pronounced restraint', p. 142. For the context of Milton's ideas on divorce see William Riley Parker, *Milton's Contemporary Reputation*, Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1940. The book includes a reprint of the pamphlet to which *Colasterion* replies.

insupportable cohabitation'⁹⁰. However, public claims in favour of divorce were isolated, and Milton remained for a long time an eccentric proponent.⁹¹

How far Milton's own predicament triggered his determination towards the pro-divorce cause has been widely speculated and is hard, ultimately pointless, to determine.⁹² Whatever the weight of personal circumstances, his expositions of the scriptural passages on marriage and divorce are to be read in the broader context of the theological premises of his civil commitments.⁹³

The claim that 'when it comes to divorce and remarriage, everyone appeals to Scripture but no one agrees on what it says'⁹⁴ is the story that Milton's treatises, especially *Tetrachordon*, somehow recapitulate. Protestant theologians, in their attempts to counter the Roman Catholic canon on divorce, returned to the original texts of the Scriptures, also citing the early Fathers,

⁹⁰ L. Stone, p. 406 ff.

⁹¹ Ibid. Stone adds (pp.406-7) that a bill introduced into the House of Commons in 1669 bore the marks of the claim 'first enunciated back in the 1640s by John Milton, that the only just ground for a divorce was as relief from the irremediable breakdown of a marital relationship.'

⁹² Annabel Patterson has kindled the debate with her emphasis on the 'structure of personality' that Milton's attempt to 'turn private embarrassment into public polemic' would give out. A. Patterson, "No mere amatorious novel?" in David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner, *Politics, Poetics and Hermeneutics in Milton's Prose*, Cambridge: Cambridge U. P. 1990, pp. 85-101, p. 85. Without overestimating the impact of Mary Powell's elopement on the divorce tracts, Stephen Fallon states that self-representation is however fundamental both in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and in *Tetrachordon*, where Milton takes up the dual voice of innocent God-sent agent and a vulnerable (fallen) everyman of sorts – as such likely to choose the wrong wife. S. Fallon, "The Spur of self-concernment: Milton in his divorce tracts" *Milton Studies* 38, 2000, pp. 220-42, p. 227. Milton's reference to children, a neglected aspect of the works in question, are discussed by Sara van den Berg in "Women, Children, and the Rhetoric of Milton's Divorce Tracts", *Early Modern Literary Studies* 10.1, May 2004. Electronic version at <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/10-1/bergmilt.htm>. The author maintains that both *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and *Tetrachordon*, besides voicing Milton's concerns with children of broken marriages, also suggest Milton's fear of remaining childless. But, as Amy Mccready had sanely and judiciously warned, 'the distinction between private and public selves and concerns for Milton is an artificial and misleading one' "Milton's casuistry: the case of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*", *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 22, 3, Fall 1992, pp. 393-428, p. 394.

⁹³ A seminal study on the theology of the divorce tracts is Arthur Barker, "Christian Liberty in Milton's Divorce Pamphlets", *MLA*, 35, 1940, pp. 153-161. According to Baker, the emphasis on personal liberty in the divorce pamphlets has anti-arminian overtones. For Elizabeth Hodgson, Milton swerves between Arminianism and Calvinism, which accounts for 'curiously contradictory positions on theology and on women' ("When God proposes: Theology and Gender in *Tetrachordon*", *Milton Studies* 31, 1995, pp. 133-154, pp.138-9). Recent studies have focused on the impact of religious texts on the rhetoric of Milton's works, e. g. James Egan, "Rhetoric, Polemic, Mimetic: The Dialectic of Genres in *Tetrachordon* and *Colasterion*", *Milton Studies* 41, 2002, pp. 117-138. The author has developed the subject in "Implicit Aesthetics: Rhetorical formulae and poetic shaping in Milton's tracts on divorce and education", *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism*, 29, 2, 2007, pp. 178-203.

⁹⁴ On conflicting interpretations see H. Wayne House (ed.), *Divorce & Remarriage: Four Christian Views*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990.

together with contemporary and medieval Jewish authorities. In his pleas for divorce, Milton too referred to both the Fathers and their commentators. Augustine, a basis of the Roman canon⁹⁵, is very selectively endorsed by the author, as was common practice among ‘recusants.’ *Tetrachordon* is paradigmatic in this respect. In Milton’s discussion of the origin of marriage, Augustine is first stigmatized for his ‘crabbed’ opinion; then his *auctoritas* is invoked in support of the author’s unorthodox interpretation of ‘fornicatio’ in Matthew 19.9.

It is my purpose to suggest that, well beyond the few, but fundamental, explicit references, Augustine’s writings on marriage appear behind the lines of the divorce tracts. In his attempt to (re)define the nature and purpose of the marriage bond, Milton places himself in a dynamic relation, rather than in opposition, to Augustine’s picture of the primeval form of human society: ‘Prima naturalis humanae societatis copula vir et uxor est.’ (*De Bono Coniugali* I.1)

2.1.i Marriage and divorce before Augustine

In *Tetrachordon*, Milton expatiates on the patristic precedents of his ideas on divorce. His underlying claim is that, although the fathers did not defend divorce in theory, in their pastoral practice they never excommunicated the members of their church who remarried. Also, he points out that early Christian emperors never repealed the Roman laws that allowed divorce.

As a matter of fact, marriage in early Christianity was regulated by the existing civil legislation; later, it came to be increasingly regulated by the Church, but only about the 11th century it became an entirely ecclesiastic affair. The ‘Romish’ canon law, on marriage as on nearly everything else, was put into question during the Reformation, and in response to Protestant

⁹⁵ The entry ‘De tribus bonis coniugii’ in the *Decretalium Gregorii Noni*, the first official collection of canons, incorporated in the 1582 *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, reports Augustine’s ‘tria bona’, i. e. ‘fides, proles, & sacramentum’, and refers to *De Genesi ad Litteram* and to Peter Lombard’s *Sententiae*, largely based on Augustine as far as marriage is concerned. UCLA Digital Library Program. *Corpus Iuris Canonici* (1582) <http://digital.library.ucla.edu/canonlaw>, accessed 14/1/11. For a discussion of Augustine’s ‘bona coniugii’ in Canon Law see John J. Coughlin, O.F.M., ‘The Goods of Marriage in Canon Law’, *Notre Dame Legal Studies Paper* No. 07-28, May 1, 2007.

pressure the Council of Trent set very strict regulations for the validity or nullity of a marriage and pronounced definite anathema against divorce.⁹⁶

In the early Christian communities, the compliance with new precepts was at odds with the existing civil laws. This appears, by way of example, in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, a letter on which Milton returns in all his writings on divorce and one of the four pillars of his fourfold argumentation in *Tetrachordon*. In his advice to the Corinthians, Paul faces the situation of mixed marriages. Apparently, many Christians were marrying or were married to non-Christians and the two spouses responded therefore to two different codes. Notably, Paul's advice is to keep the non-Christian spouse, although the partnership could be dissolved by the law in force.

The Roman law on divorce, whereby only the husband was granted the right to abandon the adulterous wife, while under no circumstances the same provision was made for the wife, was perceived as unequal by the Christian emperors. They tried to restrict the permission to divorce in compliance with the Scriptures but also felt that the double standard could no longer survive along with the equalitarian Christian attitude. That husband and wife should have the same rights is made clear also by such relentless opponents to divorce as were Jerome and Augustine.

P. L. Reynolds remarks that, taken at face value, neither Mt. 19.9 nor 1 Cor. 7.10 deny remarriage altogether; what can be safely said is that Paul explicitly denies remarriage for the wife. The position held by Jerome and Augustine, that the passages were binding for both women and men, implying for both the same rights and the same obligations, i.e. possible (though not advisable) separation in case of either spouse's adultery, but no second marriage, became the norm.

In the early church there were different views as to how to interpret the '*porneia* exception' that, according to the Scriptures (Matthew 19.9), would allow a husband to dismiss his wife.⁹⁷ The

⁹⁶ *Historia del Concilio tridentino* di Pietro Soave Polano (Paolo Sarpi). Seconda edizione, riveduta e corretta dall'autore, 1629. The chronology of the marriage debates is accessible at http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/ddd/book_1/chronology.html; The canons and decrees of the XXIV session of the Council of Trent are accessible at <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct24.html>

⁹⁷ Henry Crouzel, *L'Eglise Primitive face au Divorce*, Paris: Beauchesnes 1971; Elizabeth Ann Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity*, Princeton: Princeton U. P., (§ "The exegesis of divorce") pp. 233 ff.

translation of *porneia* as *fornicatio* posed a further question, namely, how to interpret the transgression implied: *adulterium* in the strict sense, that is sexual intercourse with a married woman of the same rank,⁹⁸ other than one's own wife, or *stuprum*, i. e. extramarital sex with a virgin or a widow,⁹⁹ or, as Jerome explains, other sorts of sexual transgression. No matter what the reason for repudiation, Ambrose and Augustine made it clear that neither spouse could remarry as long as the other was alive, as the marriage bond survived the separation.

Augustine does not linger on translation problems, nor is he interested in what type of sexual transgression the word comprehends. Rather, he maintains that the range of meaning of 'fornicatio' is not limited to the sexual sphere and refers to John 1.3: 'perdidisti omnem qui fornicatur abs te.' (*De Coniugiis Adulterinis* 17.19). Also, he insists, even where the Scriptures allow to dismiss a spouse, as 'ob causam fornicationis', or either spouse remains non-Christian, it is still advisable not to do it: 'Potest aliquid licere et non expedire' (15.16). The reason is that, left alone, either party is put at risk of adultery: 'moechari minime dubitetur.' (11.12).

The Father also questions the gentiles' law by which a sterile wife could be repudiated:

[N]ec sterilem coniugem fas sit relinquere, ut alia fecunda ducatur. Quod si quisquam fecerit, non lege huius saeculi, ubi interveniente repudio sine crimine conceditur cum aliis alia copulare connubia (quod etiam sanctum Moysen Dominus propter duritiam cordis illorum Israelitis permisisse testatur) sed lege Evangelii reus est adulterii, sicut etiam illa, si alteri nupserit.' *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia Libri Duo*, I, 10.11.

In no case is second marriage admitted as long as the other spouse lives.

2.1.ii Augustine's 'nullum divortium'

Augustine's strict position on divorce was not innovative. The council of Elvira (ca. 306) had decreed that a woman who married again after leaving an adulterous husband or a woman who married a divorced man were liable for excommunication (Canons 8-10)¹⁰⁰. Although originally it was not so for the man, the position that all second marriages after divorce were invalid eventually

⁹⁸Sex with a prostitute or a slave did not qualify as adultery (Ibid).

⁹⁹ Philip Lyndon Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church. The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994, p.125.

¹⁰⁰ Reynold, p. 145.

prevailed.¹⁰¹ The Council of Carthage, 407, ‘not only forbade divorce and remarriage on pain of excommunication, but also expressed the wish that this rule should be adopted as secular law’¹⁰², a wish that came true under Charlemagne.

When Augustine referred to marriage as ‘sacramentum’, he implied, after Ephesians 5.32, a bond analogous to that between Christ and the Church. Commentators agree that he did not use the word in the sense that scholastic theologians would later give to it, a fact that Erasmus was one of the first to remark, but, in Augustine’s view, it is precisely its sacramental nature that makes marriage indissoluble. In *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia*, his antipelagian defence of matrimony, Augustine relates the indissolubility of marriage to the three ‘bona coniugii’ and points to the marriage of Joseph and Mary as exemplary: ‘Omne itaque nuptiarum bonum impletum est in illis parentibus Christi, proles, fides, sacramentum. Prolem cognoscimus ipsum Dominum Iesum, fidem, quia nullum adulterium, sacramentum, quia nullum divortium (11. 13).’¹⁰³

Of the various works where Augustine comments on the origin (Gen. 2, 18-24) and consequent nature of marriage, *De Coniugiis Adulterinis* is specifically devoted to the question of divorce and remarriage: it is in fact the only treatise of the first five centuries entirely on this topic.¹⁰⁴ Here Augustine answers the question, put by a Pollentius, ‘licetne coniugi e coniuge discedere.’ The treatise refers to Mathew 19.9 as containing the only reason why a wife can be dismissed: ‘id est causa fornicationis (3.3).’ Nor can a woman leave her husband for a life of sexual continence, unless the choice is unanimous within the couple. Continence is however required of both man and woman as the law, Augustine insists, is the same for either partner who has left, or has been left by, their fornicating spouse.

Also where separation is allowed, as in the case above, Paul’s ‘non nubat’ (though Augustine extends the prohibition to men) is peremptory. In no case is remarriage deemed possible

¹⁰¹ Giovanni Cereti, *Divorzio, nuove nozze e penitenza nella chiesa primitiva*, Bologna: EDB, 1977,

¹⁰² Reynold, p. 151 ff.

¹⁰³ Augustine’s peremptory ‘quia nullum divortium’ is echoed in ‘quia nullum debet esse divortium’ in the Corpus Juris Canonici.

¹⁰⁴ Allan D. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages. An Encyclopedia*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999, p. 9.

as, Augustine insists, the bond survives the separation and can only be severed by the death of either spouse. Augustine had incorporated Paul's recommendation in 1 Cor. 7.39 in his remarks on divorce:

Non est igitur, ad quod exhortemur eos qui reconciliari timent coniugibus adulteris paenitendo sanatis nisi ad custodiendam continentiam, quoniam mulier alligata, quamdiu sive moechus sive castus vir eius vivit, moechatur, si alteri nupserit, et vir alligatus, quamdiu sive moecha sive casta uxor eius vivit, moechatur, si alteram duxerit.' (*De Coniugiis Adulterinis* II, 13.13)

Reformation theologians questioned not only Aquinas' doctrine of the seven sacraments, finalized through his commentary of Peter Lombard's reading of Augustine, but also the Augustinian notion that the marriage bond can only be dissolved by the death of either spouse.

2.2.i Lost in translation: reformed theologians on divorce

After Martin Bucer and reformed theologians like Peter Martyr and Fagius, Milton purports to confute the belief that there is a scriptural ground for the indissolubility of marriage.

In the first place, he rejects the canonical translation of scriptural passages related to divorce. Significantly, he quotes the King James Bible, rather than the Geneva, so as to imply that Church of England and 'Papists' were equally misled. Milton posits that two main errors have prevented a correct understanding of the passages in question. Besides bringing grist to his own mill, the author exposes the lexical difficulties that the various translations have not helped to clarify.

The first *crux* is Deut. 24, 1-2, the passage dealing with the 'bill of divorce.' AV reads: 'When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give [it] in her hand, and send her out of his house..' It must be remembered that Augustine read this passage as a statement *against* divorce. He denied that Moses, referred to in Mt 19.7, ever made allowances for divorce. His argument is that the bill of divorce was a device meant to

postpone the husband's decision, so that he might change his mind.¹⁰⁵ For Milton, it provided evidence that there was no prejudice against divorce in the Bible. But the problem was on what ground divorce could be granted.

Milton questions the correctness of the translation of the Hebrew word with 'uncleanliness.' In actual fact, the complexity of the word resists translation. The concordances help understand its various connotations: nakedness, shame, but also incompleteness, falling short of words and deeds.¹⁰⁶ Rabbinical commentaries have provided divergent explanations. Whatever the interpretation, Milton could claim that his idea, that the wife could be rejected if the husband found in her something wrong or missing, came from the Scriptures.

Likewise, starting from the Greek text, Milton addresses the problem in Mt 19.9: assuming that 'fornication' is a suitable translation of *porneia*, what did the Fathers, Augustine *in primis*, mean by it?

The problem of how to interpret *porneia* in the passage in question had been brought to the fore by Erasmus. When used in reference to Deuteronomy 24.1, the word has a narrower meaning than the corresponding Hebrew, but still a much broader meaning than 'adultery', which had been the common interpretation since the early patristic period¹⁰⁷. It must be borne in mind, however,

¹⁰⁵ Cfr. *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* IX, 26, 'De uxore non dimittenda': 'Nam et illud de uxore non dimittenda quod Dominus praecepit; cum antiquis dictum sit: Quicumque dimiserit uxorem suam, det illi libellum repudii; si diligenter intueamur, videbimus non esse contrarium. Exposuit enim Dominus quid Lex voluerit: cum passim dimittenti uxorem iusserit libellum repudii dare. Neque enim ait: Qui voluerit, dimittat uxorem suam; cui esset contrarium non dimittere: sed utique nolebat dimitti uxorem a viro, qui hanc interposuit moram, ut in discidium animus praeceps, libelli conscriptione refractus absisteret, et quid mali esset uxorem dimittere cogitaret: praesertim quia, ut perhibent, apud Hebraeos scribere litteras Hebraeas nulli fas erat, nisi Scribis solis, cum et excellentiorem profiterentur sapientiam, et si qui eorum essent aequitate ac pietate praediti, non tantum profiterentur sapientiam, verum etiam sectarentur. Ad hos igitur, quos oporteret esse prudentes Legis interpretes et iustos discidii dissuasores, Lex mittere voluit eum, quem iussit libellum repudii dare, si dimisisset uxorem. Non enim ei poterat scribi libellus, nisi ab ipsis, qui per hanc occasionem ex necessitate venientem quodam modo in manus suas bono consilio regerent, atque inter ipsum et uxorem pacifice agendo dilectionem concordiamque suaderent.'

The same interpretation of the bill of divorce is given in *De Sermone Domini in Monte* I, 14: 'Non enim qui praecepit dari libellum repudii hoc praecepit, ut uxor dimittatur; sed: Qui dimiserit, inquit, det ei libellum repudii, ut iracundiam temerariam proicientis uxorem libelli cogitatio temperaret.'

¹⁰⁶ I thank Rabbi Josef Levi and Davide Astori for elucidation of this passage. Rabbi Levi has also drawn my attention to the writings of Rabbi Leone da Modena as a source invoked by 17th-century English Protestants in their arguments against Roman Catholic claims.

¹⁰⁷ Reynolds, p. 174.

that only in the Renaissance the translation of biblical terms related to marriage and divorce became an issue. Consequently, canonical interpretations of the above passages and related teachings came to be questioned.

In the divorce tracts Milton endeavoured to demonstrate that the canonical reading of the so-called ‘exception clause’, which admitted separation (if not remarriage), in the Scripture was based on the arbitrary reduction of the range of meaning of the scriptural word into ‘adultery.’ Milton’s insistence on mistranslation as the source of misunderstanding of the Gospel comes at the end of a line of reasoning that had been started by Erasmus, who first questioned the translation of *mysterion*, applied to marriage, as *sacramentum*. Erasmus’ comments and his own translation provide the basis for the translations of Luther, Olivetan, and in turn for the Geneva Bible, Tyndale and the Authorized Version.¹⁰⁸

When Erasmus raised the question of the correct translation of the New Testament passages concerning divorce, including the ‘exception clause’ in Mt. 19, he paved the way for a major controversy not only between Protestants and Roman Catholics (‘Erasmus laid the Eggs, and Luther hatched them’), but also within the Roman Catholic church. It wasn’t his intention, he stated, to oppose received church teachings, but he meant to help clarify unclear passages through a return to the original texts.¹⁰⁹ After all, Augustine himself had admitted the difficult interpretation of Matthew’s verse: ‘verba vero [...] obscure quidem posita sunt (*De Coniugiis Adulterinis* 11.12).’

Erasmus’ work on divorce progressed from his *Annotations*, especially those on 1 Cor.7 (1519) to *Christiani Matrimonii Institutio* (1520). His most influential suggestion was that the proposition that marriage is a sacrament came from a mistranslation of *mysterion*. He proposed to dismiss ‘sacramentum’ and recover the original definition as ‘mysterium’ – an alternative which

¹⁰⁸ N. Norskov Olsen, *The New Testament Logia on Divorce. A Study of their Interpretation from Erasmus to Milton*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1971, p. 8-9. A forum on Erasmus’ translation of Mathew 19.9 can be accessed at morechristlike.com/except-for-fornication-clause-of-matthew-19-9

¹⁰⁹ Olsen, p. 17 ff.

became the *lectio recepta* among the Reformers. I believe that Milton echoed, beside Paul, Erasmus' translation when he defined marriage 'Mystery of joy and union.'

The question whether or not matrimony was to be or not to be considered a sacrament had a bearing on the related issue of divorce, as the claim of indissolubility was based on the acceptance of its sacramental nature. The controversy that ensued provoked the promulgation, by Charles V, of the Declaration of Religion (1548) which restated that 'the bond of Marriage, once formed between two, is no more dissolved by any divorce, but only by the death of either.'¹¹⁰

This had been the canonical approach to the Fathers on this issue, but Erasmus had pointed out that there was disagreement even in the early Church as concerned it. Origen's belief that marriage was founded on intention, and therefore could be dissolved¹¹¹, was eventually accepted by the Oriental church and was to be one of the controversial issues at the Council of Trent.

Whatever the differences, which are still matter of speculation, Erasmus and his followers, Martin Bucer in the forefront, insisted on the fact that not all the Fathers maintained that divorce was deemed impossible by divine law, and that even those who did were never harsh on Christians who remarried. Bucer attributes the practice of denying remarriage to a misreading of the Fathers, who in turn, he claims, had misread the Gospel: 'Possunt quidem Antichristi huius suae tyrannidis aliquem ex autoritate partum aetatis posterioris pretextum obtendere: D. Augustini maxime, & quorundam aliorum, apud quos iam praepostera illa coelibatus admiration inualuerat.'¹¹²

Milton declared that only after writing *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* did he find out that he held the same opinions as Bucer. If we are to take his words at face value, the fact that his first divorce tract seems to echo Bucer extensively can be accounted for if we consider that Milton knew (and cited) the works of theologians whose views had been shaped by Bucer, among others. Once again, Milton's reader is faced with the complex issue of Milton's indirect sources. In turn, Bucer's work may have come to Milton through a number of mediators – including the ones

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Olsen, p. 37.

¹¹¹ Olsen, p. 180.

¹¹² Martin Bucer, *De Regno Christi*, Basileae, 1557, E- lib.ch Elektronische Bibliothek Schweiz at <http://dx.doi.org/10.3931/e-rara-1629>, p. 136.

that Milton lists in the long preface to *The Judgement of Martin Bucer*. Among them are to be singled out Theodore Beza, Peter Martyr and Paulus Fagius ‘who held the same Opinion with Martin Bucer, concerning Divorce’ – as Milton remarks in his prefatory ‘Testimonies of the high Approbation which Learned Men have given of Martin Bucer.’

Some images common to Bucer’s and to Milton’s texts, like that of marriage regarded as a fountain of life, appear frequently in Puritan writings on the subject, which proves at once Bucer’s influence on Puritan theologians and preachers¹¹³ and of the latter on Milton’s work, as *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* shows.

2.3 *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*: ‘the prime reason of matrimony’ and Augustine’s ‘bona coniugii’

In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* Augustine is never mentioned, while in the subsequent tracts he is (with 9 occurrences in *Tetrachordon*). In the Yale edition of Milton’s prose Arno Williams suggests three possible, unrelated, Augustinian echoes. A reader who projects this treatise against the backdrop of Augustine’s treatment of the same topic, cannot fail to recognize an Augustinian subtext throughout. In Milton’s commentary on Gen. 2.18, for instance, especially the line ‘I will make him a help meet for him’, contending that ‘in matrimony there must be first a mutuall help to piety, next to civill fellowship of love and amity, then to generation, so to household

¹¹³ On Bucer’s influence see: Constantin Hopf, *Martin Bucer and the English Reformation*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1946; Howard Dellar, “The Influence of Martin Bucer on the English Reformation”, *Churchman* 106, 4, 1992 Available at www.churchsociety.org/churchman/.../Cman_106_4_Dellar.pdf ; Herman J. Selderhuis, *Marriage and Divorce in the thought of Martin Bucer*, translated from the Dutch by John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma, Kirksville, Mo.: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1999. The following unpublished papers, available online, deal with specific aspects of Bucer’s influence: Timothy M. McAlhaney, “The Influence of Bucer upon Calvin: An Analysis of Calvin’s Strasbourg Writings”, accessible at <http://www.mcalhaney.com/tim's%20desk/Documents/Other%20Papers/The%20Influence%20of%20Bucer%20upon%20Calvin.htm>; Timothy M. McAlhaney, “Bucer and Reformed Influences on Cranmer”, accessible at www.mcalhaney.com/.../Bucer%20Cranmer.htm; <http://www.mcalhaney.com/tim's%20desk/Documents/Other%20Papers/Bucer%20Cranmer.htm>;

affairs, lastly the remedy of incontinence' (p. 88), Milton evokes Augustine's discussions of the ends of marriage – and the debates that they fed.¹¹⁴

The working hypothesis here is that the questions that Milton tackles in his first work on divorce are systematically grounded in Augustine's endeavour to define and defend the nature and purpose of marriage in his anti-Manichaean and anti-Pelagian argumentation¹¹⁵ and in his pastoral work. Milton's insistence on the priority of companionship over parenthood stems from the reading and reassessment of his Augustinian sources. Within this framework, Milton's preposition that marriage should be regulated by 'the rule of charity' resonates with Augustine's *ordo caritatis* as indicated in *De Bono Coniugali*, where Augustine explains why marriage is good – 'Cur coniugium bonum sit':

Bonum ergo coniugii, quod etiam Dominus in Evangelio confirmavit, non solum quia prohibuit dimittere uxorem nisi ex causa fornicationis, sed etiam quia venit invitatus ad nuptias, cur sit bonum, merito quaeritur. Quod mihi non videtur propter solam filiorum procreationem, sed propter ipsam etiam naturalem in diverso sexu societatem. Alioquin non iam diceretur coniugium in senibus, praesertim si vel amisissent filios vel minime genuissent. Nunc vero in bono licet annoso coniugio, etsi emarcuit ardor aetatis inter masculum et feminam, viget tamen ordo caritatis inter maritum et uxorem. (*De Bono Coniugali* 3. 3)

The passage, from Augustine's definition of his idea of matrimony against Jovinian,¹¹⁶ foregrounds the love between husband and wife, *caritas coniugalis*,¹¹⁷ rather than the generation of

¹¹⁴ Especially relevant to understand the Augustinian backdrop to Milton's divorce tracts are *De bono coniugali*, *De Genesi ad litteram*, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*, *Contra Julianum*, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, *De coniugiis adulterinis*, *De Sermone Domini in Monte*. For an introduction to Augustine's view of marriage see E. Schmitt, *Le mariage chrétien dans l'Oeuvre de saint Augustin. Une théologie baptismale de la vie conjugale*, Paris: Etudes augustiniennes, 1983; Pedro Langa, *San Agustín y el progreso de la teología matrimonial*, Toledo: Estudio Teológico de San Ildefonso, 1984. On the question of the "tria bona" see L. E. Samek, "Sessualità, matrimonio e concupiscenza in sant'Agostino", in Raniero Cantalamessa (a cura di), *Etica sessuale e matrimonio nel cristianesimo delle origini*, *Studia Patristica Mediolanensia* 5, Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1976, pp. 212-72.

¹¹⁵ Manichaeans believed that sparkles of divine spirit were entrapped in human bodies at the birth. Therefore, they preached abstinence from sexual activity or, in case of non-abstinence, birth control. Pelagians, instead, rejected the doctrine of the original sin and Augustine's view of its transmission; they did not accept the idea that the human condition was marred at the birth, let alone the proposition that the sexual act itself had lost its original innocence with the Fall. Exponents of the movement accused Augustine of Manicheism. The latter replied to the allegations in *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia*. There followed a controversy that resulted in Augustine's *Contra Julianum*, *Contra Duas Epistolas Pelagianorum* and *Contra Julianum Opus Imperfectum*.

¹¹⁶ Jovinian equated marriage and virginal ascetic life. Augustine, however considering the latter condition superior, established the specific merits of both in *De Bono Coniugali*, and *De Sancta Virginitate*. For a background to the two works see David G. Hunter, *Marriage, celibacy, and heresy in ancient Christianity*:

offspring, as the chief good of marriage and celebrates the bond of love that unites the spouses beyond the procreative phase of marriage:

Si ergo servatur fides honoris et obsequiorum invicem debitorum ab alterutro sexu, etiamsi languescitibus et prope cadaverinis utrisque membris, animorum tamen rite coniugatorum tanto sincerior, quanto probatior, et tanto securior, quanto placidior castitas perseverat. Habent etiam id bonum coniugia, quod carnalis vel iuvenilis incontinentia, etiamsi vitiosa est, ad propagandae prolis redigitur honestatem, ut ex malo libidinis aliquid boni faciat copulatio coniugalis. (3.3)

The passage summarizes Augustine's view that the concupiscence which characterizes the sexual act after the Fall, powerfully rendered by Milton in *Paradise Lost* IX, is redeemed by its procreative nature: 'quandoquidem ipsam coniugum operationem, quae fit gignendorum gratia filiorum, non dico malam, sed potius bonam: quia bene utitur libidinis malo' (*Contra Julianum*, III, 7.15). However, the goodness of the primeval 'societas' transcends its procreative end.¹¹⁸

This (arguably implied) text serves Milton well as concerns the first strong claim of his first treatise, that is, that marriage is not, primarily, a physical affair. Milton's claim is addressed against the Canon Law provision that a marriage can be deemed null for *impotentia coeundi* and not for mental impotence (by which Milton means what today would be defined as mutual incompatibility). Canon Law, he protests, places 'impenetrable bodies' above 'impenetrable minds' and, while 'providing for the right of the body,' does 'nothing for the wrongs and greivances of the mind.' Such wrong perspective, Milton continues, is evident in the treatment of marriage as 'remedium concupiscentiae.'¹¹⁹

the Jovinianist Controversy, Oxford: Oxford U.P. 2007, p. 269 ff. Hunter argues that *De Bono Coniugali* was also addressed to Jerome, who considered marriage 'a lesser evil.' Augustine never swerved from his belief in the goodness of marriage.

¹¹⁷ On the interpretation of Milton's 'rule of charity' as 'charity applied to exegesis' see Theodore L. Huguélet, "The rule of Charity in Milton's Divorce Tracts", *Milton Studies*, VI, 1975, pp. 199-214. Huguélet maintains that for Milton "the end of all Scripture being charity, every precept must be interpreted in the way that promotes charity" (p. 202). This is, he suggests, Milton's hermeneutical principle, the roots of which are to be found in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, especially in the conclusion to Book I. To the question 'Qualem lectorem Scriptura postulet', Augustine answers 'quisque cognoverit finem praecepti esse caritatem de corde puro et conscientia bona et fide non ficta (I, 40. 44).' So Milton describes himself in the proem to *Paradise Lost*.

¹¹⁸ "Sant'Agostino e la Sessualita Coniugale", *Annales Theologici* 5, 1991, pp. 185-206; Giulia Sfameni Gasparro, *La coppia nei Padri*, Milano: Edizioni Paoline 1991.

¹¹⁹ This view of marriage, based on 1 Cor. 7, 1-2 and 7, 9, was incorporated in Canon Law until the 1983 revision.

Milton contests this view of marriage appropriating the imagery and rhetoric of Augustine's *Contra Julianum*. Julian of Eclanum had contested Augustine's view of the transmission of the original sin from generation to generation at conception, that is, through the sexual intercourse of the parents. Julian defended the innocence of the sex act and accused Augustine of Manichaeism. Augustine replied clarifying his view of marriage and defining the 'bona coniugii.' Julian, Augustine argues, misinterpreted his words. First, the dignity of marriage is not compromised by the fact that the offspring is tinged with the original sin; secondly, the sex act is not intrinsically evil, it is concupiscence (the first consequence of the Fall) that is evil. Julian maintained that concupiscence was not in itself evil and that it was up to human will to maintain it within right measure: 'appetitus non in genere suo, non in specie, non in modo culpa est, sed in excessu: quia genus eius et species ad conditoris operam pertinent, modus eius ad arbitrium honestatis, excessus ad vitium voluntatis.' (III, 13.7) Augustine responds to Julian's idea that sexual appetite originates 'in igne vitali' with his distinctive notion that the consequence of concupiscence is disorder ('inordinatis et turpibus motibus' III 13, 26).

Verbal echoes in evoking the motion of overheated bodies, similar images of excess and disease suggest the presence of Augustine's text(s) between the lines of Milton's description of what marriage becomes when thought of in terms of 'remedium concupiscentiae': 'What is this', Milton wonders, 'but secretly to instruct us, that however many grave reasons are pretended to the married life, yet that nothing indeed is thought worth regard therein, but the prescrib'd satisfaction of an irrational heat.' Milton replicates the graphic descriptions in Augustine's controversial replies to Julian.

Against his opponent, Augustine argues that any justification of concupiscence leads inevitably to an admission of its disruptive force.¹²⁰ With little attention paid to its context, the passage has often been misread as indicative of Augustine's vituperation of the body. The same

¹²⁰ On Augustine's response to Julian see also Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Vitiating Seeds and Holy Vessels: Augustine's Manichean Past', in Karen L. King (ed.), *Images of the feminine in Gnosticism*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988, pp. 367 ff

allegation is found in the critical literature on the divorce tracts. Milton's logic has escaped most commentators: he is not disparaging the body, but exposing the *de facto* vituperation of the body of those who, providing for the body at detriment of the soul, reduce it to an empty vessel and, instead of honouring, 'defile' it. His argument is similar to Augustine's, in that both are defending the essence of marriage against what they consider a reductive view of it. The echoes of Augustine's words and images make his stance especially authoritative. It is Julian, Augustine claims, that denigrates marriage with his inability to set clear limits between what is good and what is not; likewise, it is the canonist, in Milton's view, who, having detached the body from the soul in the legislation, as a result denigrates God-ordained marriage at its core. Milton's attitude towards the legislator is well described in Augustine's reproach to Julian: 'Tunc melius nuptias honoras, in quibus libidini licentiosissimum spatium praeuisti (*Contra Julianum*, II, 7.20).' The canonist, in Milton's claim, does not honour marriage any better, since he gives lust so much space in his treatment of the question. Later on, in *Tetrachordon*, Milton will also subscribe, via Martin Bucer, to the view (which had been matter of disputation among medieval canonists) that marriage is no less valid if not consummated, as in the case of Mary and Joseph (cited by Augustine as exemplary *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia*, *Contra Julianum* and *Contra Faustum*) and when old age prevents physical intercourse.

Augustine states that, if Julian accepts that marriage is a remedy to concupiscence, he must also concede that concupiscence is a disease. (III, 15-29) Chapters III and IV of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* are largely dominated by the image of bodily heat associated with generation, which was the bone of contention between Augustine and Julian (IV 2.7 and IV 2.8): a disease for the former, a natural disposition for the latter. Milton tackles Paul's advice to the Corinthians, 'better marry than burn', a passage on which Augustine commented extensively. Relying on the medical knowledge of his time, and possibly referring in particular to Levinus Lemnius,¹²¹ Milton

¹²¹ Milton's description of man's seed as 'excrement', which has scandalized several commentators and provoked allegations of all sorts, is perhaps simply an echo of Lemnius' 'excrementall seed.'

argues that a healthy diet is more advisable to quench the fire, if that is the purpose, than marriage. But he also remarks that, should marriage be conceived as remedy to burning, the nature of such 'burning' must be defined and concludes that it is not 'mere motion of carnal lust, not the mere goad of sensitive desire', but a burning of a different order. God, Milton points out, gave Eve to Adam before he knew lust and incontinence.

The reference to Augustine is evident. Here Milton is following Augustine's view of concupiscence as the first consequence of the Fall, manifested in a disorderly bodily motions that escape rational control. The fact that combined echoes from *Contra Julianum* appear in Milton's first tract on divorce indicate a more than occasional connection between the two texts. Milton's refusal to reduce marriage to remedy for 'motion of carnal lust' recalls not only Augustine insistence on the subject in his first invective against Julian,¹²² but also the subsequent explanation of the true nature of marriage. Also in this work Augustine illustrates the three goods of marriage, which precede and survive the onset of concupiscence and its motion:

ideo bonum quia fidem thori servant, quia prolis suscipiendae causa sexum utrumque commiscent, quia impietatem separationis exhorrent. Haec sunt bona nuptialia, quibus nuptiae bonum sunt: quae saepissime diximus esse potuisse, etiamsi nemo peccasset' (III, 16.30). And again: 'Neque enim concupiscentiae malum nuptiae fecerunt; sed quo bene uterentur, paratum invenerunt.' (III 23.53).

To Milton, the unquenchable desire at the basis of marriage is not physical burning, but the desire for a like-minded companion: not concupiscence, then, but a 'pure and more inbred desire of joining [...] [in] conjugall fellowship a fit conversing soul.'¹²³ 'Which desire', Milton continues, is

¹²² In Book III alone 'motus' has 19 occurrences, e.g. 'Motus concupiscentiae semper turpes', III 20.38; 'bestialis iste motus, contra quem videris in tua carne conflagrare.' III 21.47

¹²³ Bruce Thomas Boehrer discusses Milton's notion of 'desire' in "*Paradise Lost* and the General Epistle of James: Milton, Augustine, Lacan", *Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 4, 2, Fall 1992; pp. 295-316 and in "Female for Race": Euhemerism and the Augustinian Doctrine of Marriage in *Paradise Lost*, *South Atlantic Review*, VII, 1996, pp. 23-27. Although Boehrer refers to *Paradise Lost*, his observation can be applied as well to the divorce tracts. In his 1992 essay Boehrer claims that, from an 'apparently strict adherence to Augustinian doctrine, Milton has severely undercut Augustine's insistence upon the dominion of reason over desire', placing at the heart of his view of marriage desire, distinguished from physical desire 'by degree rather than by kind.' In "Female for Race", he writes that Milton appropriates Augustine selectively: endorsing Augustine's belief that the unfallen Adam and Eve were capable of sexual intercourse, but rejecting his post-lapsarian view of sexual intercourse. In actual fact, when he concludes that

properly called love' and is 'is stronger than death, as the spouse of Christ thought , many waters cannot quench it , neither can the floods drown it.' But if marriage should fall below the standard set by the *Song of Songs*, it should be dissolved by the 'rule of charity', 'lest an over-toast faith endanger to shipwrack.'

In *The Penalty of Eve*, Gladys Willis discusses the implications of Augustine's *caritas* in Milton's works. Her argument rests on the proximity of *caritas* to right 'use', in view of the final enjoyment. According to Willis, Augustine's differentiation between things to be used and things to be enjoyed informs Milton's prose and poetry and constitutes the theological basis of his political agenda. Whatever impinges on man's liberty, mortifying his soul and reducing his fruition of God, starting from mismatch in marriage, is to be removed.

In this perspective, Milton broadens the concept of an 'idolatrous match' well beyond Paul's provision. By 'idolatrous wife', then, he does not, or not only intend an impious, unreligious wife, but one that, mortifying her husband's soul, undermines his exercise of charity, his spiritual life, his enjoyment of God. Such a marriage, or non-marriage, should be dissolved without hesitation, by the 'rule of charity.' Milton insists that he who denies the 'rule of charity', 'let him professe Papist, or Protestant, or what he will, he is no better then a Pharisee.'

The meaning of charity , it must be noticed, shifts within the text, implying alternately the love between husband and wife, the enjoyment of God (according Augustine's formulation in *De Doctrina Christiana*) and, last but not least, the mercy that legislators should have towards the oppressed husband.¹²⁴

In the course of his argumentation that 'adultery is not the greatest breach of matrimony', and that occasional adultery is a minor impediment compared to (a wife's) numbness of mind, Milton refers to 'the three chief ends of marriage agreed on by Christian writers: 'Godly society,

for Milton 'marriage becomes first and foremost a vehicle for spiritual development', he does not depart from Augustine's idea on the ultimate end of marriage.

¹²⁴ No need here to linger on the *vexata quaestio* of Milton's sexism, nor to subscribe to Forsyth's epigrammatic remark that for Milton 'not all women are bad, only those to whom one is married.'

next civill, and thirdly, that of the marriage-bed', evoking Augustine's *bona – fides, proles* and *sacramentum*' – incorporated in Canon Law. The redefinition of the ends of marriage and, in relation to Augustine's 'bona coniugii', the foregrounding of companionship characterizes the Puritan approach to matrimony.

In 'English Puritan Thought on the Ends of Marriage', James T. Johnson argues that much Puritan writing on marriage was meant to counter the view of marriage embedded in Edward VI's Second Prayer Book and that the changes in the liturgy demonstrate that the Puritans incorporated their view of marriage into it. Edward VI's Second Prayer Book lists the reasons for marriage in the following order: procreation of children, remedy against sin, and mutual aid. 'No small portion of Puritan writings on marriage', says Johnson, is devoted to qualifying and rearranging the ends of marriage as stated above so as to assert the primacy of mutual help in marriage over procreation.' In *Marriage Duties* (1620), Charles Gataker argues that marriage is important chiefly because 'this society is the first that ever was in the world' and 'secondly, because this is the fountaine from which the rest flow.' And in *A Wife in Deed* he lists the marriage goods as, first, 'societie'; 'secondly for assistance'; 'thirdly, for Comfort and Solace'; 'fourthly, for Issue'; 'fiftly, for Remidie against Incontinencie' – remedy of incontinence coming last as marriage was in the mind of God well before the 'first disobedience.' This reordering of the canonical *bona* of marriage eventually found its expression in Richard Baxter's reformed liturgical prayer: 'Most merciful Father, who hast ordained marriage for mutual help, and for the increase of mankind with a legitimate issue, and of the church with a holy seed, and for the prevention of uncleanness.'¹²⁵

Milton follows Gataker when he describes the marriage bond as 'Solace and peace', 'solace and satisfaction of the mind, provided for before the sensitive pleasing of the body.' These, and 'not properly the remedy of lust', constitute for Milton the *raison d'être* of marriage. The definition of

¹²⁵ James T. Johnson, "English Puritan Thought on the Ends of Marriage", *Church History* 38, 4, Dec., 1969, pp. 429-436.

‘the prime reason of matrimony’ is the motive of Milton’s initial invective against Augustine in *Tetrachordon*.

2.2.ii *De Regno Christi* and Augustinian omissis in *The Judgement of Martin Bucer*

Milton’s second tract, *The Judgement of Martin Bucer*, is an ‘English’d’ version of Martin Bucer’s *De Regno Christi*. Milton recognized in Martin Bucer a kindred spirit and drew the Parliament’s attention to the 16th-century Reformer. The elaborate title of Milton’s work is worth quoting in full:

The Judgment of Martin Bucer, Who claimed that, although he held Augustine in high regard, it would be better to abandon Augustine than to abandon Jesus Christ. Concerning Divorce: written to Edward the Sixth, in his Second Book of the Kingdom of Christ. And now English'd. Wherein a late Book, restoring the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, is here confirm'd and justify'd by the Authority of Martin Bucer’

In his Postscript Milton admits that he has taken liberties with Bucer’s text:

Thus far Martin Bucer: Whom, where I might without injury to either part of the cause, I deny not to have epitomiz'd; in the rest observing a well-warranted rule, not to give an Inventory of so many words, but to weigh their force. I could have added that eloquent and right Christian discourse, written by Erasmus on this Argument, not disagreeing in effect from Bucer. But this, I hope, will be enough to excuse me with the mere Englishman, to be no forger of new and loose opinions.

The liberties that Milton took with Bucer’s text throw light on controversial issues in Milton studies, such as the question of monism or dualism between body and spirit in his works. That Milton did not think in terms of disjunction of the body from the spirit is well expressed in his translation of the passage from Bucer on the nature of Marriage as preached by Christ: Bucer’s passage ‘docuit, uxorem esse ab ibitio ita viro a se coniunctam, ut eam summa ille, atque perpetua benevolentia & beneficentia susciperet, & unam se cum illa carnem praestaret: id est, unum hominem, & hominem Dei’ (p. 149), is rendered by Milton as follows:

HE [...] taught that the Woman in the beginning was so join'd to the Man, that there should be a perpetual union both in body and spirit: where this is not, the Matrimony is already broke, before there be yet any divorce made, or second Marriage.

Milton's adaptation of Bucer also concerns the latter's references to Augustine. Bucer mentions Augustine in several passages of his book on divorce. *De Civitate* XV.16 is quoted as concerns *consanguineity* and marriage, a problem that Milton overlooks as not having an immediate bearing on his arguments. Again, dealing with marriage 'post vota celibatus', Bucer quotes the Fathers, including Augustine (*De Bono Viduitatis*, 10), on marriage after widowhood, and refers to Paul's words in 1 Cor. 7 as legitimating at once marriage after widowhood, breach of vows of celibacy, as in the case of priests, and marriage after divorce (pp. 141-2): 'S. Patres coniugia toleraverunt inita post vota facta Deo, ergo et inita post divortium. [...N]on permiserunt sibi coniugia post vota inita dirimere: nec eos qui eiusmodi coniugia contraxissent, consortio Ecclesiaem ericere.' The Fathers, Bucer concludes, treated with the same benevolence widows and those who had entered into a second marriage, considering their needs a sort of *infirmitas*: 'Nec enim minus infirmim atque urentes, & inter hos reperiuntur.' Bucer backs his claims referring to authors that Milton would quote in *Tetrachordon*.

Having traced concessions to divorce in the works of the Fathers, Bucer however concludes, via Paul, that neither their words, nor the words of Angels are to be placed above the Scriptures. And he highlights verses from the New Testament (Mat. 5.3-32; Mat. 19.7; Mark 10; Luke 16; Rom. VII 1,2,3, 1 Cor. VII, 10, 11) to confute the interpretation of those, including Augustine, who believe that Christ prohibited marriage after any divorce.

This and other references to Augustine are omitted by Milton. There may be various reasons for Milton's omissions. Either the passages fall out of the focus of Milton's interest or he gives their contents for granted. But one more reason can be suggested here: for the sake of his argument, Milton was interested in enlisting Augustine among his authorities rather than quarrel, as it were, with him – as is especially evident in *Tetrachordon*. Bucer's argument against Augustine¹²⁶

¹²⁶ It has been noted that Bucer's rejection of Augustine's opposition to divorce is rooted precisely in Augustine's warning in *De Spiritu et Littera*. The work, together with Luther's emphasis on individual conscience enlightened by the Holy Spirit, provided Bucer with the guiding principle of his biblical hermeneutics. Selderhuis, p.

(summed up as it is in Milton's subtitle to his own translation, i. e., that 'it is better to betray Augustine than to betray Jesus Christ') is hardly mentioned in the translated version of the tract.

An interesting instance of Milton's Augustinian *omissis* in *The Judgement* is his dismissal of chapter XXXI of *De Regno Christi*, which is replaced with a concise synopsis:

'CHAP. XXXI. This Chapter disputes against Austin and the Papists, who deny second Marriage even to them who divorce in case of Adultery; which because it is not controverted among true Protestants, but that the innocent person is easily allow'd to marry, I spare the translating.'

The object of the chapter, as announced in its foreword, is to ascertain whether Christ, in his words as reported by Matthew, Marc and Luke, 'concesserit divortium ob causam fornicationis.' Commenting on Deut. XXIV, 1 and Mal. II, 15, Bucer insists that the Scriptures do not contradict themselves (a pillar in Augustine's system): what was proclaimed *sub lege* cannot be denied *sub gratia*. There follows that the provisions in the Old Testament cannot be denied. Milton was to base his arguments on the same premises.

In the second part of *De Regno Christi* Bucer focuses on the nature of marriage. Milton's distinctive stress on marriage of minds appears in his translation of Bucer's passage 'non corporum tantum, verum es quoque animorum coniunctione' as 'united not only in body but in mind also.' (XXXVIII) In the same chapter Bucer refers to the marriage of Joseph and Mary, the paradigmatic union that Augustine indicates as a model. Milton will resort to the same example in *Tetrachordon*, to replicate that carnal union is not the chief end of matrimony: 'For one flesh is not the formal essence of Wedloc, but one end, or one effect of a meet help: The end oft-times being the effect and fruit of the form, as Logic teaches: Else many aged and holy Matrimonies, and more eminently that of Joseph and Mary, would be no true Marriage.'

2.5 Tetrachordon: 'And this opinion is also St Austin's...'

Tetrachordon, Milton's exposition of Genesis 1.27 and 2.18, Deuteronomy 24.1-2, Matthew 5. 31-32 and 19. 2-9, and I Corinthians 7.10-16, has more explicit references to Augustine than any

other divorce tract. The tract presents a collation of Milton's readings on the subject.. The author downplays the novelty of his proposal in favour of its authoritativeness.

The presence of the Fathers is announced in the title page:

Tetrachordon: expositions upon the foure chief places in scripture, which treat of mariage, or nullities in mariage [...] wherein the doctrine and discipline of divorce, as was lately publish'd, is confirm'd by explanation of scripture, by testimony of ancient fathers, of civill lawes in the primitive church, of famousest reformed divines....

The tract is also paradigmatic of Milton's attitude towards Augustine even within a single work. Milton first rejects the latter's notorious statement that Eve was given Adam as an 'adiutorium' primarily 'generandi causa', or a man would have been a perfectly fit companion for our 'general Sire': 'Non itaque video ad quod aliud adiutorium mulier facta sit viro, si generandi causa subtrahitur.' The remark has given rise to numberless protests, and not only among Milton's critics, regardless of the context where it appear, that is Augustine's defence of the goodness of sexual reproduction, against the claims of the Manichaeans.

In his comment on Gen. 2.18, Milton rejects this opinion as 'crabbed', while at the same time giving his own interpretation of Augustine's words: 'Austin contests that manly friendship in all other regards had bin a more becoming solace for Adam, then to spend so many secret years in an empty world with one woman.' (p. 85) He then restates that 'there is a peculiar comfort in the married state besides the genial bed, which no other society affords.' The same objection will be repeated in *Colasterion*.

Indeed, Milton also insists that 'one flesh is not the formal essence of wedlock [...] els many aged and holy matrimonies, and more eminently that of Joseph and Mary, would be no true marriage' – a claim that duplicates Augustine's remark in *De Nuptiis et concupiscentia* I, 11. 12:

In coniugio Mariae et Joseph tria bona nuptiarum fuerunt. Quibus vero placuit ex consensu ab usu carnalis concupiscentiae in perpetuum continere, absit ut vinculum inter illos coniugale rumpatur; immo firmitus erit, quo magis ea pacta secum inierunt, quae carius concordiusque servanda sunt, non voluptariis corporum nexibus sed voluntariis affectibus animorum.

Also to back his interpretation of the exception clause in Mt. 19.9, Milton has recourse to Augustine. 'Austin' is the first father to be cited on the meaning of the word 'fornication.' Refusing

the identification between ‘fornicatio’ and adultery, Milton adopts an ecumenical stance towards the word, in his opinion after Augustine: ‘for the language of the scripture signifies by fornication (and others beside St. Austin so expounded it) not only the trespass of body nor perhaps that between married persons, [...] but signifies also any notable disobedience, or intractable carriage of the wife to the husband, as in Judg. 19.2.’ The definition of fornication as ‘constant alienation and disaffection of mind, continual practice of disobedience and crossnes from the duties of love and peace’, and incapability ‘to be a tolerable wife’(p. 179), is attributed, with dubious foundation, to the Saint: ‘and this Opinion also is St. Austin's, lest it should hap to be suspected of novelty.’

Milton is however right when he says that for Augustine ‘fornication’, indicated in Matthew 19.9 as the one cause of dismissal of one’s spouse, is to be intended as encompassing more than simple adultery. He returns on the issue in the section on 1 Corinthians, the only place where the Augustinian sources are specified: ‘Pollentius’ (i. e. *De coniugis adulterinis*), ‘Sermon in the mount’ and ‘Retractions.’

Milton thus summarizes Augustine’s thought:

Austin also must be remeber'd among those who hold that this instance of fornication gives equal inference to other faults equally hateful, for which to divorce: & therefore in his books to Pollentius he disputes that infidelity, as being a greater sin then adultery, ought so much the rather cause a divorce. And on the Sermon in the Mount, under the name of fornication will have idolatry, or any harmfull superstition contain'd, which are not thought to disturb matrimony so directly as som other obstinacies and dissaffections, more against the daily duties of that cov'nant, & in the eastern tongues not unfrequently call'd fornication, as hath bin shew'n. Hence is understood, saith he, that not only for bodily fornication, but for that which draws the mind from Gods law, and foully corrupts it, a man may without fault put away his wife, and a wife her husband, because the Lord excepts the cause of fornication, which fornication we are constrain'd to interpret in a general sense.

And here are Augustine’s words:

Porro si infidelitas fornicatio est et idolatria infidelitas et avaritia idolatria, non est dubitandum et avaritiam fornicationem esse. Quis ergo iam quamlibet illicitam concupiscentiam potest recte a fornicationis genere separare, si avaritia fornicatio est? Ex quo intellegitur propter illicitas concupiscentias, non tantum quae in stupris cum alienis viris aut feminis committuntur, sed omnino quaslibet quae animam corpore male utentem a lege Dei aberrare faciunt et perniciose turpiterque corrumpunt, possit sine crimine et vir uxorem dimittere et uxor virum, quia exceptam facit Dominus causam fornicationis. Quam fornicationem, sicut supra consideratum est, generalem et universalem intellegere cogimur. (*De Sermone Domini in Monte I. 16. 46.*)

2.6 'Though Austin spake it.' Final remarks

Colasterion is characterized by unprecedented verbal violence against the opponent to Milton's earlier plea. The vehemence of the argumentation led Milton to downplay even more the physical in contrast to the spiritual, which has occasioned recurrent misreadings. In the following passage, easily misled, Milton is not disparaging sexual love, but once more describing his ideal marriage as a 'marriage of true minds.' This entails a critique of Augustine's statement:

Nor was it half so wisely spokn as some deem, though Austin spake it, that if God had intended other then copulation in Mariage, he would for Adam have created a Freind, rather then a wife, to convers with; and our own writers blame him for this opinion; for which and the like passages, concerning mariage, hee might bee justly taxed of rusticity in these affairs. For this cannot but bee with ease conceav'd, that there is one society of grave freindship, and another amiable and attractive society of conjugal love, besides the deed of procreation, which of itself soon cloies, and is despis'd, unless it be cherisht and re-incited with a pleasing conversation.

'Solace and peace'; 'pleasing conversation', 'solace and satisfaction of the mind, provided for before the sensitive pleasing of the body' constitute for Milton the *raison d'être* of marriage, and 'not properly the remedy of lust'. Milton's leitmotif that mental and spiritual violation of the marriage bond is more disruptive than 'the accident of adultery' or his claim that frigidity of the body is nothing compared to 'numbness of mind' are to be inscribed in his view, advocated since the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, that there is more to marriage than physical union.

This position has proved especially controversial in Milton criticism. The poet's words on marriage and divorce have lent themselves to the most diverse reactions, where Milton has been alternatively exposed as too prudish, too libertine, too little heterosexual, too much heterosexual in turn. The reception of the tracts even includes their improbable depiction as an ante-litteram vindication of gay marriages. 'For Milton', writes the proponent, 'carnality and its natural product, procreation, are of little concern. Marriage is for the married and the cultivation of their souls and intellect.' And he continues: 'What Milton doesn't seem to grasp is just what his argument implies.'¹²⁷ The author forgets that Milton energetically refused Augustine 'crabbed' opinion, also

¹²⁷ Matt Zeitlin, "The Miltonian Case for Gay Marriage", *Wunderkammer Magazine*, 18 Feb 2010, <http://www.wunderkammermag.com> ¹²⁸ Patterson, p.

‘taxed of rusticity’, that Adam could have been happy in Eden with a male companion. It is true that Milton questions the idea that Eve was created ‘generandi causa’, disregarding (in this case) the rest of the Saint’s argument on the point, but the prospect of male companionship is explicitly confined to ‘one society of grave friendship.’

On the other hand, Milton’s position is not better represented in the highly influential essay by A. Patterson, who claims that Milton’s attitude towards sex is epitomized in the well-known piece of advice ‘close your eyes and think of England.’¹²⁸ Without the prejudicial attitude that affects much scholarship, S. Fallon discusses Milton’s belief in the unity of body and mind.¹²⁹ Even little biased critics, however, have failed to consider the pragmatic context of Milton’s divorce tracts: argumentative texts whose purpose was to counter specific provisions for nullity of a marriage in Canon Law. L. Cable’s contention that Milton is not devaluing the physical but rather showing the natural dependence in humans of physical powers on spiritual will¹³⁰ can easily be agreed upon.

Milton’s and Augustine’s texts have often been misunderstood by commentators who have underestimated the specific occasion for which they were written. There follows a ‘vitiating’ approach to the relation between Milton’s and Augustine’s texts. This also happens in serious and authoritative studies on the subject. J. G. Turner, for example, repeats the trite notion that Augustine hates sex, but then rescues Milton from the effects of the former’s influence, maintaining that ‘while the common expositors [after Augustine] located the prelapsarian marriage in a utopian dimension’, Milton ‘insists in establishing it in the present.’. Turner also recognizes that ‘the context for this attack on Augustine shows how vulnerable and defensive Milton was in this area.’¹³¹ However, he repeats the commonplace of many readers and commentators of Augustine. In Milton studies Augustine is often represented as an impenitent misogynist, and a source of Milton’s

¹²⁸ Patterson, p.

¹²⁹ Fallon, p.

¹³⁰ Lana Cable, “Coupling Logic and Milton’s doctrine of divorce”, *Milton Studies* 15, 1981, pp. 143-59, , p. 151.

¹³¹ Turner, p. 79.

own misogyny. His defence of a woman's dignity, not a common notion in the Roman world, is easily ignored. As Borresen maintains in her seminal work,¹³² Augustine went as far the times allowed him, starting from the strong claim, against the vagaries of an influential Father like Tertullian, that Eve, no less than Adam, was created in the image of God. As to his alleged hate of sex, he was all too human and thoroughly honest in recognizing the urgency of sexual attraction, which is a central issue in many of his works, from *Confessiones* to his polemical and pastoral works – that is, when he gave reason of a major change in his life, when he responded to the Manichaeic and Pelagian views of sex, and when he indicated to his followers the very thin edge between love and possession, between *caritas* and *concupiscentia*.

The divorce tracts bear witness to Milton's distinctive manner of treating his first- or second-hand Augustinian sources: he selects and endorses suitable passages or concepts, while disparaging others, also using Augustine's text to draw opposite conclusions. Milton's mixed feelings towards Augustine reflect the attitude of his predecessors. Often quoted against himself, Augustine appears however as the implied or explicit interlocutor in Milton's own vindication of the goods of marriage. Milton, distancing himself from the idea of marriage as 'the Popist Sacramente' or the 'protestant idoll', rewrites Augustine's *bona coniugii*, objecting to the priority of Augustine's 'causa generandi', questioning the proposition of marriage as 'remedium cupiditatis', but defending the 'amicalis societas', as powerfully and as passionately as Augustine had done against Pelagians and Manicheans.

¹³² See above, note 55.

3. Theatre for the soul: *Samson Agonistes* as a Christian spectacle

Haec sunt spectacula christiana, haec videt desuper Deus, ad haec hortatur, ad haec adiuvat; his certaminibus praemia proponit et donat.
(Augustine, *In Psalmum 39 Enarratio*)

Of he seems to hide his face,
But unexpectedly returns
And to his faithful Champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously
(*Samson Agonistes*, 1748-52)

3.1.i A metatheatrical ‘Dramatic Poem’

Samson Agonistes is Milton’s belated defence of drama against the puritan anti-theatrical claims that had resulted in the suppression of stage plays by Parliament ordinance. Arguably written before 1660,¹³³ but published in 1671 together with *Paradise Regained* as Milton’s last (and final) poetical work, it is introduced by the author’s note ‘Of that sort of Dramatic Poem which is call’d Tragedy’ – an anticipation of which, in the form of a quotation from Aristotle, appears in the title-page.

The note has provided the starting point for a tightly woven debate on the nature of *this* ‘tragedy’, if a tragedy at all, and of its ‘hero’, if such Samson is to be considered. For the questions that it poses, and from its very title, *Samson Agonistes* presents itself as a markedly metatheatrical work. My contention, in this respect, is that not only does Milton address the issues of the dramatic genre, its sources, strategies and effect, but he focuses on the very core of any spectacle: the relationship between the audience and the actor, between the viewer and the object

¹³³ Before the 1950s it was assumed that *Samson Agonistes* was Milton’s last written work. In 1937 William Riley Parker timidly suggested an earlier date of composition; but only in the 60s did he strongly make a case. See W. R. Parker, “The date of *Samson Agonistes* again”, in J. Wittreich (ed.), *Calm of mind: Tercentenary Essays on Paradise Regained and Samson Agonistes in Honor of John S. Diekhoff*, Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1971, pp. 163-174. Ever since, the date of composition has been a matter of speculation, as Milton did not leave any definite evidence.

observed, in a complex interplay of projections and expectations. *Samson Agonistes* is about such vision, as it is about blindness.

When Elizabeth Sauer writes that Milton casts his tragic hero ‘as performer in the ‘carnavalesque’ setting of the Philistine theatre’,¹³⁴ she characterizes Samson as an actor, and foregrounds Samson’s uneasy role as expected entertainer of his persecutors, in what presents itself as a play within a play. The very title, while pointing at once at Samson’s former heroic deeds and at his final performance, has an evident meta-theatrical connotation. Beside referring to all sorts of competitions, *agon* also refers to the action and verbal interaction within a theatrical performance - with a protagonistés, a deuteragonistés and one or more antagonists, and a chorus acting as a jury.

The connection between Milton’s play and Greek theatre has been the object of several studies; also, *Samson Agonistes* has been deemed suitable for the Athenian, though not for the Restoration stage.¹³⁵ Less investigated is an aspect of its genre, closet Biblical drama: its fruition as a vehicle for meditation, as a foil against which a reader can evaluate his own predicaments, his own performance as a protagonist in the ongoing spiritual agon, for which ‘spectaculum facti sumus mundo et angelis et hominibus’ (1 Cor. IV, 9). These words of Paul’s return as a refrain¹³⁶ among

¹³⁴ Elizabeth Sauer, “The Politics of Performance in the Inner Theater: *Samson Agonistes* as Closet Drama”, in Stephen Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (eds.), *Milton and Heresy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 199-215, p. 199. After the initial reference to closet drama, the essay focuses on the political dimension of the character of Samson. I agree with Sauer’s premises, though not with her conclusions that Milton focuses solely on Samson’s inner drama. I believe that Samson is a performer to the very end: in front of his enemies, the chorus and the various characters with whom he becomes engaged. Moreover, in the theatre of the mind he acts before the readers and the ‘celestial spectators’. Vanita Neelakanta has explored this concept in *Under Heaven’s Eye: Milton and Theatrum Mundi, proQuest Information and Learning Company, 2007*. I agree with Neelakanta that spectacle is a structuring principle of Milton’s poetry, but our reading of Samson’s predicament takes two opposite directions, as Neelakanta maintains that Milton stages a Godless universe. The effect of the play on the reader is the subject of two essays that, from different angles, describe *Samson Agonistes* as aimed at teaching virtue and decorum: Dennis Kezar, “Samson's Death by Theater and Milton's Art of Dying”, *ELH*, Vol. 66, Number 2, Summer 1999, pp. 295-336, and Michael Spiller, “Directing the Audience in *Samson Agonistes*”, in P. G. Stanwood, *On Poetry and Poetics. New Essays on Milton and his World*, Binghamton, N. Y, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, 1995, pp. 131-151. While the former places the controversies around Samson in the context of “the Renaissance theater of death”, in the latter, despite the title, the theatrical nature of the work is downplayed.

¹³⁵ Lyndon Harries, “Closet Drama”, in Alex Preminger (ed.), *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Princeton: Princeton U.P. , 1974, p. 142.

¹³⁶ *Sermo 51; Sermo 356; De Scriptura Sacra Speculum; In Psalmum 39 Enarratio; In Psalmum 38 Enarratio; In Psalmum 84 Enarratio.*

Augustine's numerous references to theatre¹³⁷ and indicate what, according to Augustine, constitutes the nature of *spectacula christiana*, as, in the Father's perspective, theatre and spectacles are discriminating elements between the two ways of living, at odds with each other, that he describes as two cities: 'secundum hominem' and 'secundum Deum' (*De Civitate Dei*, XV, I.1)¹³⁸

'All the contest' says Samson 'is now twixt God and Dagon' (SA 461-2). This is a clear exemplification of the two cities motif. The setting of *Samson Agonistes*, introduced in the Argument, is an integral part of the tragedy that is consummated in it. It is a festival day, 'proclaim'd by the Philistins as a day of Thanksgiving for thir deliverance from the hands of Samson.' Samson is required to join the feast and 'play or shew his strength in thir presence.'

In ll. 434-471 Milton delineates the features of the pagan festival, which Samson originally declined to participate in. The place of the final confrontation is a 'spacious theatre' where an amazing spectacle is going to take place: quite literally, Samson 'with amaze shall strike all who behold.' (1645)

3.1.ii The patristic basis of Milton's defence of drama

Closet drama, Sauer underlines, got by with the 'antitheatricalists, including Stephen Gosson, Philip Stubbes, John Rainolds, William Perkins, and William Prynne.'¹³⁹ The theological premises that led to the closing of the theatres are rooted in a long-lived anti-theatrical attitude that

¹³⁷In "Spectacula Christiana: a Roman Christian Template for Medieval Drama", *Medieval English Theatre*, 9 (1987), pp.125-52, Nick Davis points out that Augustine's writings on the theatre show a progressive shift from a literal to a metaphorical treatment of the subject.

¹³⁸On this dichotomy, with reference to theatre, see Robert A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 and "Signs, Communications and Communities in Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*", in Duane W. H. Arnold and Pamela Bright (eds.), *De Doctrina Christiana. A Classic of Western Culture*, Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995, pp. 97-108. Markus focuses on the idea that the theatre, for Augustine, is the expression of a community built on the shared interpretation of given signs. In this respect, it is the kind of spectacle that it fosters that defines a community. The relationship between signs and spectacles in Augustine's writings is surveyed in Donnalee Dox, *The Idea of the Theatre in Latin Christian Thought: Augustine to the Fourteenth Century*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004, pp. 22-29. Markus's studies are the basis of Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboullic, "El teatro en san Agustín: comunidad de signos, comunidad de amor", *Augustinus: Revista Trimestral Publicada por los Padres Agustinos Recoletos*, 2007 Jan-Dec;52 , (204-207), pp. 35-41. This chapter stems from my recent " 'Signis withoute dede'. Augustinian echoes in *A Tretise of Miraclis Pleyinge*" in *Medievaria. Un liber amicorum per Giuseppe Brunetti*, a cura di A. Petrina, Padova: Unipress, 2012, pp. 135 -147.

¹³⁹Sauer, p. 203.

ascribes to the Fathers its claims; but the antitheatrical attitude did not originate within early Christianity.¹⁴⁰ Plato condemned mimesis and in particular drama.¹⁴¹ In *The Republic* he maintained that theatre slandered the gods, a charge against theatre that would be passed on to Christian apologists. Plato's arguments are discussed by Augustine in the first two books of *De Civitate Dei*.

As Nick Davis remarks, 'for a good thousand years after the dissolution of the western Roman empire [...] the normative Christian attitude to what could be styled 'theatre' remained substantially unaltered.' Isidore, essentially 'tertullianite', and Augustine 'could be read virtually without a sense of historical distance.'¹⁴² Puritan anti-theatricalism fed on this tradition.

Milton's foreword 'Of that sort of Dramatic Poem which is call'd Tragedy' has been mostly read as an introduction to the dramatic genre, given the emphasis on Aristotle's view of tragedy, and this has led a host of commentators to look for correspondences between *Samson Agonistes* and specific plays, *Oedipus at Colonus* being the most frequently cited because of the thematic link provided by a blind protagonist in both, besides similarities found in the respective opening lines.

One cannot disagree with the evidence indicated by Steadman, that Milton gives more space to Aristotle than to any other authority cited in the preface. Not only was Aristotle an unmatched authority on theatre, but he was also the only philosopher who could be quoted against antitheatrical Plato.¹⁴³ Insufficient attention, however, has received the reaction to old and

¹⁴⁰See Jonas Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981; Leonardo Lugaresi, "Ambivalenze della rappresentazione: riflessioni patristiche su riti e spettacoli", *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*, 7, 2003, pp. 281-309; Debra Bruch, "The Prejudice Against Theatre", *The Journal of Religion and Theatre*, 3 (2004), http://www.rjournal.org/vol_3/no_1/bruch.html. For a thorough discussion of the Fathers' view of theatre see Leonardo Lugaresi, *Il Teatro di Dio*, Brescia: Morcelliana 2008. The author also provides a corrective to a long-standing simplified reception of the Father's positions. See also Donatella Pallotti and Paola Pugliatti, *La guerra dei teatri. Le controversie sul teatro in Europa dal secolo XVI alla fine dell'ancien regime*, Firenze: ETS, 2008.

¹⁴¹ J. Tate, "'Imitation' in Plato's Republic", *The Classical Quarterly*, 22 (1928), pp.16-23.

¹⁴² Davis, p. 138.

¹⁴³ John M. Steadman, "'Passion well imitated': Rhetoric and Poetics in the preface to *Samson Agonistes*", in J. A. Wittreich (ed.), *Calm of Mind*, The Press of Case Western Reserve University: Cleveland & London, 1971, pp. 175-207, p. 178-9.

contemporary prejudice against tragedy that Milton articulates with the support of Christian sources.

Almost ignored in the critical literature is Milton's appeal, once more, to a Father of the Church to back his own claim: 'Gregory Nazianzen a Father of the Church, thought it not unbeseeming the sanctity of his person to write a Tragedy, which he entitl'd, *Christ suffering*. This is mention'd to vindicate Tragedy from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day with other common Interludes.'

The reference to Nazianzen cannot be underestimated, as, together with the references to the Scriptures, it voices Milton's aim: to reconcile drama with Christianity. 'The Apostle *Paul* himself' he writes 'thought it not unworthy to insert a verse of *Euripides* into the Text of Holy Scripture, I *Cor.* 15.33, and Paræus commenting on the *Revelation*, divides the whole Book as a Tragedy, into Acts distinguish'd each by a Chorus of Heavenly Harpings and Song b'tween. Heretofore Men in highest dignity have labour'd not a little to be thought able to compose a Tragedy.'

'Christ suffering' is Milton's *translation* of the title Χριστός Πάσχων, a tragedy composed in the tradition of the Cento. The appropriation of the textual procedure, amounting to the acknowledgement of the canonicity of the poetic authorities pillaged, on the part of Christian authors, like Proba, proved suitable, for its appeal to the reader, to spread new ideas, to legitimate a new literary content, based on the Christian teaching. New wine into old wineskins. The rise of the Christian Cento is part of the wider process of literary marriage between Christianity and classical modes of expression that started as early as in the 1st century, flourished in the 3rd and reached its peak in the 4th century. Eudocia, Empress of Byzantium, transplanted the form to the Greek-speaking world in the middle of the 5th century – the momentous time of the shift from paganism to

Christianity. The Cento, for its very nature, favoured the confluence of the Greek Roman world into the Christian Ecumene.¹⁴⁴

The publication of Χριστός Πάσχων (as *Tragoedia Christus Patiens*) by A. Bladus in 1542, and its controversial attribution¹⁴⁵ to Gregory of Nazianzus, rekindled the debate on the possibility of a Christian theatre, with Christ as protagonist. Russell M. Hillier suggests that in Milton's foreword there is a veiled reference to Grotius's *Christus Patiens*, composed in 1608 and made popular by George Sandys's English translation in 1647. To justify a tragedy of Biblical subject, Grotius had also prefaced his plays with a note to the reader where Gregory Nazianzen ('Cappadox') appears as the legitimating authority. The reference to Grotius, Hillier claims, would encourage a literary sympathy between Samson and Jesus.¹⁴⁶ Without underestimating Grotius's influence, it can be safely stated that the reference to Nazianzen is in itself essential both to justify Milton's purpose, and to orient the reader's interpretation of Samson as *Figura Christi*, as the protagonist of a spiritual drama that has its centre in the Passion and the Crucifixion, its prefiguration in Old Testament incidents and is re-enacted by the Christian martyrs.

The connection between Passion and spectacle has a patristic root. The idea that the Passion had a theatrical element in it was common among the writings of the Fathers¹⁴⁷ and is the basis of the Christian spectacle, as Augustine would define it. Augustine himself describes the Crucifixion as a grand spectacle: 'Grande spectaculum: sed si spectet impietas, grande ludibrium; si pietas, grande mysterium: si spectet impietas, grande ignominiae documentum; si pietas, grande fidei munimentum.' (*In evangelium Ioannis Tractatus 117*)

¹⁴⁴ Gregorio Nazianzeno, *La Passione di Cristo*. Traduzione e note a cura di Francesco Trisoglio, Roma: Città Nuova, 1979, p. 12.

¹⁴⁵ Francesco Trisoglio, "Il *Christus Patiens*: rassegna delle attribuzioni", *Rivista di Studi Classici*, XXII 1974, pp. 351-423, p. 15.

¹⁴⁶ Russell M. Hillier, "Grotius's *Christus Patiens* and Milton's *Samson Agonistes*", *The Explicator*, 65, 1, 9-13. aramintae.webs.com/miltongrotius.html. On Milton's reference to Nazianzen see also Joseph Wittreich, "Still Nearly Anonymous: *Christos Paschon*", *Milton Quarterly*, Vol. 36, Issue 3, October 2002, pp. 193-198.

¹⁴⁷ Lugaresi, pp. 803 ff.

3.2 Spectacula Christiana

In the Reformation and Post-Reformation scenario, where reductionist readings of Augustine served conflicting purposes, his antitheatrical claims were simplified and foregrounded, together with his (widely alleged) iconoclasm. Augustine was fully aware of the power and fascination of theatre; even while castigating its pagan origin and its excesses, he never fully cast off the charm that theatre had exercised on him prior to his conversion. Because it originated in the worship of false gods, theatre for Augustine is part of the ‘consortium falsitatis’ which includes all sorts of pagan rites. However not moved by ‘appetitus fallendi’ the intention to deceive, theatre creates illusions: in this it is *mendax*. Much more sophisticated than his predecessors in tackling the question, Augustine focuses on different sides of the matter, depending on his audience.

In actual fact, Augustine repeats some of the anti-theatrical statements that had become commonplace even before theatre became a Christian issue with authors like Tatian and Tertullian. But, while he stigmatizes all forms of pagan spectacles,¹⁴⁸ he constantly refers to features of such spectacles in order to recontextualize them within a Christian frame. So, he contrasts the bloodshed of the fights of the gladiators with the slaughter of the martyrs, and the audience’s identification with a mime or an actor, who in turn struggles to imitate mythological characters, with the imitation of Christ (e.g. *Sermo 198 Augm*). After Paul, to the enjoyment of vane spectacles, and the craving for the glory of the arena, he juxtaposes the spiritual fight. As a corrective to the *concupiscentia* oculorum, which affects those who attend spectacles, he points at the inner vision, as truth, he repeats, cannot be perceived through the senses, of which sight is the most deceitful (*De Diversis Quaestionibus*). The Bible presents several characters who are physically blind, but whose spiritual eyes are open. One of such is Tobias, of which Augustine writes: ‘Erat ergo in isto Tobia caecitas carnis, sed magna lux cordis.’ (*Sermo 125/a*)

¹⁴⁸ *De Civitate Dei* presents Augustine’s conclusive statements on the subject.

In *De Vera religione*, a work of which Milton duplicates the title in his *Of True*

Religion, Augustine writes:

O animae pervicaces, date mihi qui videat sine ulla imaginatione visorum carnalium. Date mihi qui videat omnis unius principium non esse, nisi unum solum a quo sit omne unum, sive id impleat, sive non impleat. Qui videat date, non qui litiget, non qui videri velit se videre quod non videt. Date qui resistat sensibus carnis, et plagis quibus per illos in anima vapulavit: qui resistat consuetudini hominum, resistat laudibus hominum, qui compungatur in cubili suo, qui resculpat suum spiritum, qui non foris diligat vanitates, et quaerat mendacia.

Samson Agonistes presents many Augustinian *topoi*, and I propose a reading of the tragedy in this light. The title echoes Augustine's *De Agone Christiano* and the Chorus bestow on Samson the crown of justice and glory that Paul indicates as the perfect accomplishment of Christian life in 1 Thess. 2.19 and 2 Tim. 4.8, two passages on which Augustine indulges in several works. The incipit of *De Agone Christiano* gestures towards Paul's celebrated image: 'Corona vincentibus promissa.' While recalling this work of Augustine's, Milton's work foregrounds a theme dear to the Father: outer vs inner vision.

III.3.i The Christian Agon

Within the ongoing agon over the interpretation of Milton's 'dramatic poem' there is a no less engaging agon over the meaning of its title. And there is more in it than a 'lovely semantic excursion', as M. Hughes' dismissal suggests.¹⁴⁹ *Agon* signifies both drama and contest, and the epithet 'agonistes' is polysemous: Samson is protagonist and interlocutor, fighter and actor, player and entertainer in spite of himself.

Of the early commentator of the tragedy, Bishop Newton, editor and biographer, was the first to point out the theatrical implication of the word and translated 'Agonistes' as actor.¹⁵⁰D.

¹⁴⁹John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes, Prentice Hall, 1957, p. 541.

¹⁵⁰The Poetical works of John Milton, with notes of various authors, principally from the editions of Thomas Newton, D.D. Charles Dunster, M.A. and Thomas Warton, B.D. to which is prefixed Newton's life of Milton. By Edward Hawkins, Oxford : printed by W. Baxter for J. Parker and G.B. Whittaker, London, 1824. For a story of the interpretations see also Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, Elibron classics, 2006, facsimile of the edition published in 1912 by Cambridge U.P.; Paul R. Sellin, Milton's Epithet Agonistes", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 4, No. 1, The English Renaissance (Winter, 1964), pp. 137-162;

Dunster, instead, interpreted ‘agonistes’ as athlete or wrestler. W. R. Parker added ‘agonizing’ to the plurality of meanings in the critical agenda: ‘an advocate, an actor, and a champion.’¹⁵¹ Krouse has confirmed that, in *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and in *De Doctrina Christiana*, ‘agony’ and ‘strife’ are used synonymously.¹⁵²

In his survey of the interpretation of the epithet, Krouse credits M. Hughes as the first who referred to *agon* as ‘(1) a gathering or assembly to see games, (2) the arena itself where the games were held, or (3) the contest for a prize at public games.’ Krouse adds that *agon*, along with *athleta*, came to be applied not only to a physical, but to a moral and spiritual trial and combat.

Although the metaphor of moral life conceived as an *agon* did not originate with Christianity, it had precedents in Plato¹⁵³ and Cicero, the occurrence of the word in the New Testament and the *agon* image applied to Christ and to the saints in Christian literature, helped to consolidate a trope that inspired a host of works in Milton’s times.

Philo Judeus had employed the word ‘agon’ constantly in his commentary of the Old Testament; Clemens of Alexandria speaks of Christ as *gnésios agonistés*, the protagonist of the drama of redemption; Ireneus called St Paul ‘bonus agonista’ and Theodoret of Cyrus applied the epithet to martyr or saints, to mention just a few.¹⁵⁴

In the Vulgate translation of the Old Testament, *agon* occurs in 2 Machabees 4.18 and 3.21, in both verses indicating public games. The setting is similar to the Dagonalia, where Samson is expected to perform. In the New Testament the word is used by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9.25 (‘omnis autem qui in agone contendit ab omnibus se abstinere et illi quidem ut corruptibilem

Galbraith M. Crump (ed.), *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Samson Agonistes. A Collection of Critical Essays*, Englewood Cliffs : Prentice Hall, 1968; Samuel S. Stollman, “Milton's Understanding of the "Hebraic" in "Samson Agonistes", *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (Jul., 1972), pp. 334-347.

¹⁵¹William Riley Parker, *Milton's debt to Greek Tragedy in Samson Agonistes*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1937, p.60.

¹⁵²F. Michael Krouse, *Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition*, Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1949, p. 118.

¹⁵³Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon motif: traditional athletic imagery in the Pauline literature*, Leiden : Brill, 1967, p. 27.

¹⁵⁴Krouse, p.116-17; Lugaesi, pp. 417 ff.

coronam accipiant nos autem incorruptam’) and 2 Timothy 2.5 ‘(nam et qui certat in agone non coronatur nisi legitime certaverit’).

Paul’s image dominates Augustine’s *De Agone Christiano*. In the first part of the treatise, Augustine comments on the image, dear to Paul, of Christian life as a race, a contest, a battle to be won in order to gain the crown of righteousness, the token of everlasting glory (‘perfecti, cursum consummavi, fidem servavi; iam superest mihi corona iustitiae’ 2 Timothy 4: 7-8)-The crown is for those who fight: ‘Corona victoriae non promittitur nisi certantibus’.

Summing up, *Samson Agonistes* echoes the Augustinian text, not only in the title.

3.3.ii *Samson Agonistes* and Augustine’s *De Agone Christiano*

The victory in the life-long agon is described by Augustine, again quoting Paul (Eph. 5,8), as a passage from darkness to light: ‘Fuistis enim aliquando tenebrae; nunc autem lux in Domino.’ This light can only be perceived through a process of purification: ‘Si enim non appareret oculis peccatorum, lumen eius aeternum utique, quod per interiores oculos videtur, inquinatis mentibus videre non possent.’

The crown of glory, writes Augustine, is for the righteous who ‘multa gravia and aspera tolerant.’ Milton’s drama, an amplification of the final verses of the biblical story in the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Judges, focuses on the last day of Samson’s life, and on the very last act of his *agon*. Samson’s past, both his glory and his errors, are evoked in retrospect, in his monologues or in the exchanges with the characters that purport to meet him. The Chorus juxtaposes the days of Samson’s earthly fame, (‘Universally crown'd with highest praises’[175]) with the present situation, indicating in his patience the condition of a ransom:

But patience is more oft the exercise
Of Saints, the trial of thir fortitude,
Making them each his own Deliverer,
And Victor over all [1290]
That tyrannie or fortune can inflict,

Either of these is in thy lot,
Samson, with might endu'd
Above the Sons of men; but sight bereav'd
May chance to number thee with those [1295]
Whom Patience finally must crown.

Here Milton brings together two concepts at the core of *De Agone Christiano*: the final crown and the patience (with its original double meaning of suffering and resilience) that leads to its attainment. The lines are closely remindful of Augustine's passage:

Nihil enim mali patiuntur, qui iam possunt dicere quod ille vir spiritalis exsultat et praedicat Apostolus, dicens: Gloriamur in tribulationibus; scientes quoniam tribulatio patientiam operatur, patientia probationem, probatio vero spem, spes autem non confundit: quia caritas Dei diffusa est in cordibus nostris per Spiritum sanctum qui datus est nobis. Si ergo in hac vita, ubi tanta tormenta sunt, possunt boni et iusti viri, cum talia patiuntur, non solum aequo animo tolerare, sed etiam in Dei caritate gloriari; quid cogitandum est de illa vita, quae nobis promittitur, ubi nullam de corpore molestiam sentiemus? 7.8

The redeeming value of physical suffering is a theme dear to Paul, and Patience, the strength to withstand suffering, for some critics a key concept in *Samson Agonistes*,¹⁵⁵ is a virtue that Augustine associates with martyrs. My proposition is that Milton's Samson, who rises from utter dejection to hope, and whose physical blindness is eventually compensated with a spiritual gaze, has the quality of the combatant described by Augustine in *De Agone Christiano*. From this perspective, I intend to tackle two interrelated critical questions: Is Samson a (or a prefiguration of) a Christian hero? Can he be aligned with the martyrs of Christianity?

3.4 Augustine's Samson

Critics who hold opposite views of Milton's work agree nevertheless that the drama is obscure, mysterious. The stumbling block in the critical *agon*¹⁵⁶ over *Samson Agonistes* is how far it can be considered a 'regerationist' drama, built on the central figure of a hero who undergoes the

¹⁵⁵ For a focus on this concept in Milton's work/s, see William O. Harris, "Despair and 'Patience as the Truest Fortitude' in *Samson Agonistes*, *ELH*, 30, 2, Jun. 1963, pp. 107-120.

Harris quotes Augustine's *De Diversis Quaestionibus*. In fact, the concept occurs times in the Father's works., and is ubiquitous when he writes about martyrs and saints.

²³ Alan Rudrum, 'Milton Scholarship and the "Agon" over "Samson Agonistes"' *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 65, 3/4, 2002, pp. 465-488.

process of regeneration, as described by Milton in *De Doctrina Christiana*: recognition of one's mistakes, contrition, acceptance of and surrender to the action of divine grace.¹⁵⁷

The traditional 'regenerationist' reading has been questioned by readers such as J. Carey, I. Samuel, J. Wittreich, and D. Wood¹⁵⁸, according to whom there is too little in the poem that complies with Christian orthodoxy. In fact, it has become fashionable to assume that 'there is little or nothing of Christian doctrine to be found in SA'¹⁵⁹. Several open questions have come to the fore: can an Old-Testament character (for Irene Samuel, a brute) be turned into a Christian hero? What kind of hero is Samson, and does this matter?¹⁶⁰

Revisionist readers find Samson's final act abhorrent, the manifestation of a fanatic attitude that has its present-day counterparts in self-sacrificing bombers¹⁶¹, and consider Samson a villain to be contrasted with Christ in *Paradise Regained*. They wonder how Samson's suicide can be justified within a Christian frame and question the very possibility of joining together Christianity and tragedy. The fallacy of judging Milton's works by present-day paradigms has been

¹⁵⁷ George Muldrow, *Milton and the drama of the soul*, The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1970

¹⁵⁸ Wittreich (ed.), *Calm of mind*. As a sequel to the debate see J. A. Wittreich, *Interpreting Samson Agonistes*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, c1986; and J. A. Wittreich, *Shifting Contexts: Reinterpreting Samson Agonistes*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2002.

¹⁵⁹ Andrew Milner, *John Milton and the English Revolution: a study in the sociology of literature*, London: Macmillan, 1981, p. 193.

¹⁶⁰ Brendan Quigley, "The Distant Hero of 'Samson Agonistes' ", *ELH*, 72, 3, Fall, 2005, pp. 529-551. Out of the chorus, Quigley believes that 'the question of tragedy and heroism simply must precede the question of religious identity', p. 529. 'Only if we suspend our desire to know just where Samson finally stands in relation to his God, and what kind of hero he finally is - whether proto-Christian, regenerate servant of providence or all too human, licentious warrior - can we attend to what the poem has to tell us just about heroism as such'. Ibid. For Quigley., the readers' uncertainty derives precisely by a constitutive character of a hero: his remoteness, aloofness, which manifests itself in the hero's silence.

¹⁶¹ An influential essay, in this direction, is Irene Samuel, 'Samson Agonistes as Tragedy' in J. Wittreich, *Calm of Mind*, pp. 235-257. "In the light of the phenomenon of religious suicide-bombing" to a cohesive group of commentators Samson appears as "a hubristic antitype to a revolutionary, pacifistic Christ." Dennis Brown, "Moral dilemma and tragic affect in Samson Agonistes" *Literature and Theology* 20 no 2, Je 2006, pp. 91-106. This seems to be a widely encouraged college reading. See, from a teacher's perspective, Louis Schwartz, "the Nightmare of Hystory: *Samson Agonistes*", in Angelica Duran (ed.), *A Concise Companion to Milton*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, pp. 197-216. See also Tessa Daley, "Milton's Samson as a Terrorist", www.english.sbc.edu/Journal/.../05.../Daley.ht. See also Loewenstein, David. "Samson Agonistes and the Culture of Religious Terror" in Michael Lieb and Albert C. Labriola (eds.), *Milton in the Age of Fish*, Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2006, and Neil Forsyth, "Suicidal Revenge and Milton", litencyc.com/theliterarymagazine/milton.php The latest discussions of this issue can be found in Feisal Mohamed, *Milton and the Post-Secular Present: Ethics, Politics, Terrorism*, Stanford U.P., 2011.

stigmatized by Rudrum, who maintains that the regenerationist interpretation of Samson cannot be easily dismissed.

I suggest that apparent contradictions in the text, even the *vexata quaestio*, in critical literature, of Samson's suicide, can be recomposed if we read *Samson Agonistes* with an eye at Augustine's references to this character. In the *De Civitate Dei*, discussing God's law against suicide, Augustine singles out exceptions:

Samson [...] excusatur, quod se ipsum cum hostibus ruina domus oppressit, nisi quia Spiritus latenter hoc iusserat, qui per illum miracula faciebat. His igitur exceptis, quos vel lex iusta generaliter vel ipse fons iustitiae Deus specialiter occidi iubet, quisquis hominem vel se ipsum vel quemlibet occiderit, homicidii crimine innectitur. Animi magnitudo non excusat qui se occiderit. (*De Civitate Dei*, I, 21)

Also the question whether Samson is to be read as *Figura Christi* can be answered following Augustine's influential exegesis on this character. Augustine hints at Samson in several works, but one text is especially relevant for the present discussion, *Sermo 364*, entirely devoted to this biblical figure. Having anticipated that in the account of Samson's life 'multa et nimium obscura divina mysteria continentur', Augustine focuses on three main points. First, he states that grace, not nature, is the source of Samson's strength: 'Samson fortitudinem habuit de gratia, non de natura. Nam si fortis esset natura, cum ei capillus demeretur, fortitudo non adimeretur.' For his special call, Samson is considered 'vas electionis', as Paul is defined in Acts 9.15: 'In Samson vas erat, in Spiritu plenitudo erat. Vas impleri et exinaniri potest. Omne autem vas aliunde habet complementum; ideo in Paulo ipsa gratia commendata est, quando dictus est vas electionis'.

Finally, Augustine sets out to elucidate the biblical passage:

Requiramus ergo quid significaverit victus, quid significaverit victor, quid significaverit cedens blanditiis muliebribus, quid significaverit prodens secretum parabolae, quid significaverit intrans ad meretricem, quid significaverit vulpes capiens, et per caudas vulpium, quibus ignem alligavit, inimicorum fructus incendens. Quos quidem fructus de compendio incendere potuit, si non in vulpibus mysterium cogitaret. Numquid stipula arida ardere non potuit, nisi ignem per eam vulpes traxissent?

A preliminary answer is that ‘Samson Christum totum figuravit.’ Having indicated a key to the comprehension of otherwise obscure details, Augustine explains how to interpret the relationship between Christ and his Old-Testament type:

Si dicam, Christum significabat, verum mihi dicere videor; sed continuo occurrit cogitantibus: Et Christus vincitur blanditiis muliebribus? et Christus quomodo intellegitur ad meretricem intrare potuisse? deinde et Christus quando capite nudatur, capillo raditur, virtute spoliatur, alligatur, excaecatur, illuditur? Evigila, fides, attende quid sit Christus: non solum quid fecerit, sed etiam quid passus sit Christus. Quid fecit? Operatus est ut fortis, passus est ut infirmus. In uno intellego utrumque: video fortitudinem Filii Dei, video infirmitatem Filii hominis.

For Augustine, then, Samson’s vulnerable nature is a constitutive element of his being.

Figura Christi. If Samson is (a prefiguration of) a Christian hero, he is indeed one in the Pauline sense of strength in weakness.¹⁶²

3. 5 Is Samson a Christian hero?

The *querelle* on the status of Milton’s Samson as Christian hero is in essence a response to Krouse’s seminal work *Milton’s Samson and the Christian Tradition* (1949). Krouse’s research moves along two separate but eventually intertwining tracks: the meaning of the epithet ‘Agonistes’ and the evolution of the interpretations of Samson from the early Christian authors to the Renaissance. Krouse traces back the origin of the Christianization of Samson in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. The reference to Samson as an emblem of the power of faith in Hebrews 11, 32-4 had paved the way for the Christian appropriation of the Jewish hero. In their attempt to establish the continuity between the Old and the New Testament, early Christian readers of the Samson story wrought interpretations beyond its literal level.

Samson’s misfortune, his fall from his original glory, was read as the consequences of his meddling with Delilah. Clement of Rome used the story of Samson and Delilah to preach chastity, while Ambrose referred to it as a warning against unwise marriage and in general against the consequences of being overridden by lust. Prudentius provided an allegorical reading of

¹⁶²Timothy J. O’Keeffe, *Milton and the Pauline Tradition: a study of theme and symbolism*, Lanham: University Press of America, c1982.

incidents in the life of Samson, like the honey found in the carcass of a lion, suggesting a link between sweetness (honey) and virtue (the lion). Athanasius is credited with being the first Father who considered Samson a Saint; Chrysostom and Augustine would align Samson with the Old-Testament fighters of idolatry. Samson was increasingly conceived as a saint, who had undergone a process of repentance and redemption, and, even further, he was elevated to the point of being considered a figure of Christ.

Ambrose first developed a consistent typological reading of Samson. In his introduction to *De Spiritu Sanctu*, Ambrose states that Samson worked under the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the protection of the Holy spirit being signified in his hair. The cutting of his hair accompanies Samson's spiritual downfall. Augustine developed Ambrose's allegorical and typological interpretation, repeating Ambrose's comparisons almost *verbatim* and providing more analogies. Krouse is the first author who recognizes how far Augustine has shaped the reception of this character.

The belief that Samson was a figure of Christ and the merging of the Hebrew hero with Greek Hercules.¹⁶³ were the two pillars on which the fame of Samson rested in Milton's time. Thomas Hayne's *General View of the Holy Scripture* (1640) is the most complete account of what that figure had come to represent for Milton's contemporaries. No reader of Hayne's 'Tabular representation of Allegorical parallels between Christ and Samson' can fail to recognize the persistence of Augustine's Christological reading of this character.

Krouse highlights the popularity of this figure in the Renaissance, and refers to glosses, sermons and commentaries, in order to provide incontrovertible evidence of the Christian interpretation of Samson, in Milton's times.¹⁶⁴ Other authors have followed the same path, either confirming Krouse's argument or getting to radically different conclusions. The latter is the notable

¹⁶³ Since the 4th century, the myth of Hercules was interpreted in Christian terms. For his soteric role, he was considered a type of Christ and his labours were juxtaposed to biblical incidents. Caterina Tonini, "Meccanismi di trasmissione: deduzione iconografica e reinterpretazione", in Monica Centanni (ed.), *L'originale assente. Introduzione allo studio della tradizione classica*, Torino: Bruno Mondadori, 2005, pp. 109-138, p. 130. Also Bacon, in *De Sapientia Veterum* reads Hercules in this light.

¹⁶⁴ Krouse, *Milton's Samson*, chapter V, "The Samson Tradition in the Renaissance", pp. 63-79.

case of Wittreich,¹⁶⁵ who maintains that by the time Milton published *Samson*, the biblical hero had undergone a process of de-christianization. This, in turn, is questionable, in that it raises a double question of principle: can one overlook the long tradition which Augustine established? And besides, can Milton be credited with being prone to the suggestions of latter-day opinions, fashions or fads?

Krouse offers a synthetic account of the context of Milton's *Samson*: 'When Milton wrote *Samson Agonistes*, he might have expected his readers to have all, or most, of these conceptions in their mind. For during Milton's own lifetime *Samson* was remembered by many as a tragic lover; as a man of prodigious strength; as a ruler and liberator of Israel; as a great historical personage whose downfall was caused by the treachery of a woman, and therefore as an example of the perils of passion; as a sinner who repented and was restored to grace; as the original of Hercules; as a consecrated Nazarite; as a saint resplendent in unflinching faith; as an agent of god sustained by the Holy spirit; and as a figure of Christ.'¹⁶⁶

I agree with Krouse that, given the 'cloud of tradition between any seventeenth-century reader and the skeletal story told in those brief chapters of the Old Testament' and the 'immense mass of *Samson* literature', it is impossible to identify any main source. My aim here is to relate *Samson Agonistes* to Augustine's writings not in terms of source hunting, but to show how different threads of Augustine's thought are interwoven in Milton's poem.

3.6 A Type of Christ?

Two controversial issues are whether *Samson* can be read as *figura Christi*, and whether he can be considered a martyr. Within the frame of reference that I am proposing, the two questions are related, as they concern *Samson's* performance. In Augustine's perspective, the

¹⁶⁵ Wittreich, *Interpreting Samson*, p. 40.

¹⁶⁶ Krouse, pp. 78-99.

Passion of Christ and the scenes of martyrdom are spectacles of one nature. The two questions are also related in the mind of the proponents of the theory that there is no coherent biblical, let alone Christian, content in Milton's tragedy.

That Samson epitomized a parable of fall and redemption was a received notion in Milton's times. More controversial had been, since the speculations of the early exegetes, the recognition of his status as a martyr. Milton does not make any explicit reference to Samson as a type of Christ, whereas references to Samson as a martyr occur explicitly in the words of the chorus, but also in the way the protagonist is presented to the reader/audience, from his first appearance to his (reported) end.

In his influential though outmoded study, W. G. Madsen maintains that 'typological interpretation of the Old Testament was universally practiced by both Protestants and Catholics in Milton's day.' Also, he recalls that 'a type is fully known only when fulfilled in his antitype.'¹⁶⁷ So, continues Madsen, it is possible to read between the lines the passion and resurrection of Christ. I suggest that one of the hints occurs in lines 365ff., where the description of Samson, 'ensnared assaulted, overcome, led bound', echo the passage in Isaiah 53, traditionally read as a pre-figuration of the Passion. Moreover, *Samson Agonistes* presents more than occasional allusions to the two Passion plays that Milton evokes in his foreword, i. e. his programmatic manifesto: Nazianzen's *Chistos Paschon* and Grotius's *Christus Patiens*.

Even Wittreich recognizes that many of Milton's contemporaries saw an analogy between Christ and Samson. The analogy that he foregrounds is however questionable: 'both' he writes 'slew God's enemies and thereby opened the gates into paradise'. Where would Christ slay God's enemies is left wisely unsaid. More sound is the second half of his argument, although he

¹⁶⁷William G. Madsen, "From Shadowy Types to Truth", in Galbraith M Crump (ed.), *Twentieth century Interpretations of Samson Agonistes. A Collection of Critical Essays*, Prentice Hall, Inc.: Englewood Cliffs, N. J. ,1968, pp. 84-95, p. 85.

distances himself from it: ‘Their deaths [...] were constructed as births, with each of these heavenly champions being a resplendent image of earth’s bright Glory’.¹⁶⁸ In actual fact, in the literature that Milton had at hand, Samson was treated as type of Christ – with Augustine’s typological reading between the lines. Wittreich, however, repeatedly claims that *Samson Agonistes* is not about Milton’s protagonist’s being restored to divine favour’,¹⁶⁹ nor is it as a martyr play. While I do not subscribe to W. Furman’s statement, amplified by Samuel, Wittreich and Wood, that Milton’s Samson presents ‘a system of values clearly at odds with the Bible’,¹⁷⁰ I suggest that Milton qualifies his protagonist as a saint and a martyr, in accordance with the definition set forth in *De Doctrina Christiana*. I also agree with G. Muldrow that Samson’s peculiar victory is of the kind described as ‘The victorious agonies of martyrs and saints’¹⁷¹ in *The Reason of Church Government*.

3.7 Is Samson a martyr?

Wittreich and Samuel share most authoritatively the opinion that not only Samson should not be interpreted as *figura Christi*, but that the Christian core of *Samson Agonistes* is questionable. Likewise, they both insist that the work is not a martyr play; rather, they contend that Samson is a single-minded avenger. Addressing what she deems ‘the common misreading of *Samson* as a martyr play’, Samuel writes: ‘A martyr loses himself wholly in a purpose beyond himself, and neither desires, nor relishes his death. Samson does all three.’¹⁷² The controversial passage is

with head a while enclin'd,
And eyes fast fixt he stood, as one who pray'd,
Or some great matter in his mind revolv'd’ (lines 1636-8).

¹⁶⁸ Joseph Wittreich, *Interpreting Samson Agonistes*, Princeton: Princeton U. P., 1986, p. 247.

¹⁶⁹ Wittreich, *Interpreting Samson Agonistes*, p. 10.

¹⁷⁰ Wendy Furman, “Samson Agonistes as Christian Tragedy. A corrective view”, *Philological Quarterly*, 60, 1981, pp. 169-181, p.171.

¹⁷¹ George Muldrow, *Milton and the drama of the soul*, The Hague: Mouton, 1970, p. 216.

¹⁷² Irene Samuel, “Samson Agonistes as Tragedy”, In J. Wittreich (ed.), *Calm of Mind*, p. 245.

As Luxon remarks, ‘The suicidal implications of this speech have long been an obstacle to those who would regard Samson as a saint.’¹⁷³ In fact, Milton does not make the content of the prayer explicit, which makes the motion of his hero’s action uncertain, according to a line of interpretation. Moreover, as pointed out by A. Gossman, he ‘omits the revenge motive for Samson’s destruction of the temple and the prayer ‘let me die with the Philistines.’’¹⁷⁴

Nevertheless, the critics who incriminate Milton’s Samson, do so on the basis of the prayer in the Book of Judges: ‘²⁸And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.’²⁹ And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left.’³⁰ And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines’ (Judges 16, 28-30).

Neither the demand to be avenged nor the prayer for one’s own death is *per se* unbiblical. The idea that God may avenge his faithful is common in the Psalms (and in Milton, cf. the sonnet on the massacre of the Waldensians), and occurs in other biblical passages, e. g. Deut. 32:35, where it is stated that punishment pertains to God alone – a statement that is confirmed the New Testament, e. g. Romans 12.19 (‘Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God’) and Hebrews 10:30.

Milton’s Samson’s does not pray for his own death, as Samuel maintains, but manifests his weariness for his present condition of death-in-life:

To live a life half dead, a living death,
And buried; but O yet more miserable!
My self, my Sepulcher, a moving Grave,
Buried, yet not exempt
By priviledge of death and burial
From worst of other evils, pains and wrongs (100-106)

¹⁷³ Thomas Luxon’s note to Samson Agonistes in his website *The Milton Reading Room. A Web Edition of Milton's Poetry and Selected Prose.* www.dartmouth.edu/~milton

¹⁷⁴ Ann Gossman, “Samson, Job, and ‘the exercise of Saints’ “, *English Studies*, Volume 45, Issue 3, 1964, pp. 212-224, p.212.

This utterance is not at odds with his status as a coherently built biblical figure. Job, in the middle of his trials, wishes he were dead. Samson and Job, whom Augustine indicates as another example of spiritual agon,¹⁷⁵ are both icons of the suffering righteous, who fall from a former position of glory and privilege to a state of total deprivation but recover from their loss through submission to God's will. Man's loneliness in this confrontation with God, and the crux of the right discernment, are spiritual dilemmas well known to Puritan Milton.

The dark night of the soul¹⁷⁶ is part of this process. It is at once the realization of one's powerlessness and the condition of the mind at the moment of utter despondency, when the believer surrenders to God's will, much like Christ on the Mount of Olives¹⁷⁷. I read Samson's acceptance of an outcome out of his grasp ('ends above my reach to know', l. 62). His dark night is not to be regarded simply in negative terms. The surrender of his own will is essential for the recovery of his strength.

Unlike the protagonist of the Book of Judges, Milton's Samson does not pray for his death; despite his feeling 'bereaved' of light and strength. Contrary to what Samuel and others maintain, this does not disqualify him as a martyr, as a spiritual fighter who in the end accepts the sacrifice of his own life.

A turning point in Samson's attitude is visible, I argue, in the Messenger's report, in ll 1636-9, that is, right in the problem passage, of which I propose an alternative reading. The

¹⁷⁵ In sermo 343, Augustine points at Job as a model, inviting the faithful to imitate him: 'Si amamus, imitemur. Ut imitemur, laboremus. Et si in labore subdeficimus, adiutorium imploremus.

Adiuvat certantem, qui certamen indixit. Non enim sic te Deus spectat certantem, ut populus aurigam; clamare noluit, adiuuare non novit. Non sic te Deus spectat certantem, ut agonetheta spectat atletam; coronam feneam parat, vires subministrare laboranti non novit, nec enim potest; homo enim est, non Deus. Et forte dum spectat, plus laborat sedendo, quam ille luctando. Nam Deus, quando spectat certatores suos, adiuuat eos invocatus. Nam eius atletae vox est in Psalmo: Si dicebam: Motus est pes meus, *misericordia tua, Domine, adiuuabat me.*'

¹⁷⁶This image is discussed in Nicholas Jose, *Ideas of the Restoration in English Literature 1660-71*, London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1984, § 6 "Samson Agonistes: The Play Turned Upside Down", pp. 142-163.

indeterminacy of the Messenger's words (line 1637), does not, per se, undermine or impair Samson's prayer. Little attention has been paid to a movement that is at once physical and spiritual:

with *head* a while *enclin'd*,

And *eyes fast fixt* he stood, as one who pray'd,

Or some great matter in his mind revolvd.

At last with *head erect* thus cryed aloud.

Here Samson turns his inner gaze upward, with a movement that is often described in the Psalms, e.g. 24, 'levavi animam meam', and 120, 'levavi oculos meos'¹⁷⁸. These are verses that are recurrent in Augustine's writings. In his *Homily 23 on the Gospel of John*, a fundamental text in the Christian theology of light, Augustine draws together two concepts: the strength that comes from lifting the spiritual eye to the source of the ever-shining light, and a result of the invocation for help: the enemies will be confounded. Augustine lists Moses and the Prophets, as 'lucernas', imperfect manifestations of the light of Christ.

Also, the controversy on the status of Samson as a martyr is based on the fact that, strictly speaking, he should not be considered one, as the story of his feats predates the Christian era. An answer to such dyscrasia can be found in Augustine's writings. However, if we read *Samson Agonistes* in the light of Augustine's treatment of martyrdom, we can see how diverse elements contribute to align Samson with the Christian martyrs.

Can someone who was born before Christ be properly considered a martyr? Augustine elucidates the point in his exegetic works and homilies, especially in his homilies on martyrs. In *In*

¹⁷⁸“Levavi oculos meos in montes: unde veniet auxilium mihi.

Auxilium meum a Domino: qui fecit caelum et terram.

Non det in commotionem pedem tuum: neque dormitet, qui custodit te.

Ecce non dormitabit: neque dormiet, qui custodit Israel.”

Augustine, in his repeated references to this psalm, also indicates it as the invocation of the spiritual combatant, e. g. in *Psalmum 35 enarratio* (§6 “De pugna spirituali”). The psalm is also part of the Office of the Dead, in Catholic, Anglican and in Protestant liturgy. Augustine also lingers on the meaning of “montes”, saying that they represent the obstacles to be met in the spiritual fight. A reference to the strength that shakes the mountains occurs in *Samson Agonistes*, l. 1648: “When Mountains tremble”. The images in these lines are thoroughly coherent with the images of the psalmist.

Psalmum 148 Enarratio, he writes that though in a strict sense we cannot speak of Christians before Christ, the Scriptures offer prefigurations of Christ and the martyrs. The Macchabees are a case in point: Christian in fact, if not in the denomination. *Sermo 300*, ‘In solemnitate martyrum machabaeorum’ provides the explanation: ‘non appellatione, sed re ipsa Christiani. Christiani fuerunt: sed nomen Christianorum postea divulgatum factis antecesserunt.[...] patiebantur pro lege Moysi. Isti pro nomine Christi, illi pro lege Moysi. (2)

The memory of the Machabees is for Augustine the occasion to return on the theme of pre-figuration:

Machabaeorum passio merito celebratur in Ecclesia. Christi mysterium in Vetere Testamento velatum. Clavis Testamenti Veteris, crux.’ He anticipates possible objections: ‘Existit aliquis Iudaeus, et dicit nobis: Quomodo istos nostros, vestros martyres computatis? Qua imprudentia eorum memoriam celebratis? Legite confessiones eorum: attendite si confessi sunt Christum.[...] Non confitebantur illi aperte Christum, quia adhuc velabatur Christi mysterium. Testamentum enim vetus velatio est novi Testamenti, et Testamentum novum revelatio est veteris Testamenti.

Whether Jewish or Christian, the martyrs are those who have accepted the ultimate sacrifice. Christian heroes by definition,¹⁷⁹ they are indicated by Augustine as emblems, like Christ, of the ultimate victory over death: ‘Et martyres enim passos dicimus et mortuos propter regna coelorum; nec tamen in ea passione et morte animae eorum occisae sunt. Dicit enim Dominus: Nolite timere eos qui corpus occidunt, animae autem nihil possunt facere’ (Mt.10, 28) The martyrs are the ideal protagonists of the Christian *agon*, *are* those who have acted well, and deserve the applause of the celestial spectators (1 Cor. 4,9).

¹⁷⁹ For the sake of the present discussion, I refer to Augustine’s passages on the martyrs of the first centuries, well aware that to focus on martyrdom in Milton’s works would mean take Protestant martyrs into account. John Foxe, while pointing out the analogy between protestant martyrs and those of the early church, indicates, after Augustine, how they should be regarded: “Our heart conceiued not a vaine and fruitles sight (as it were in beholding of lamentable tragedies) but a great sight & marueilous, certainly, and there with singulare pleasure receiued it, when the painefull passion of Victoriuss Vincentius was read vnto vs. Is there any so heauye harted, that will not be mooued in the contemplation of this immoouable Martyr so manly, or rather so godly fighting against the craft and subtilty of that Serpent, against the tyranny of Dacianus, against the horrors of death, & by the mightie spirite of his God conquering all” *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online*. Available at <http://www.johnfoxe.org>

3.8 Martyrdom as Christian Spectacle: a matter of gaze.

The description of martyrdom as a spectacle for a multiple audience is a *topos* in patristic literature¹⁸⁰ that Augustine developed and amplified. The author has often recourse to images of theatre and performances as metaphors to describe the quality of relationships, even the essence of Christian life. In *In Psalmum 147 Enarratio* he asks a topical question: ‘Hoc ergo, fratres mei, quale spectaculum erit in visione Dei?’

In his homilies in honour of the martyrs (*In natale martyrum*), Augustine often evokes the aforementioned image of the celestial spectators, praising the spectacle that the martyrs offer to the angels and to those who would watch them with the eyes of the angels. Augustine invites the faithful to turn the eyes of their hearts towards the martyrs, judging them not according to the human, but the celestial jury. The following passage is paradigmatic because in it Augustine not only brings together the motif of the different gaze of the carnal and of the spiritual spectator, but also contrasts two gatherings that represent the two cities: the pagan gathering in the arena and the liturgical assembly. The audience in the arena and the faithful in the church look at the same spectacle with different eyes:

Sed duo genera hominum talia spectacula spectant; unum carnalium, alterum spiritalium. Carnales spectant, miseros putantes eos martyres, qui bestiis subiecti sunt, qui capite caesi, qui ignibus concremati, detestantes eos et exhorrentes. Alii vero sicut et sancti Angeli spectant, non attendentes corporum laniatus, sed mirantes fidei integritatem. Magnum spectaculum praebet oculis cordis integer animus, corpore dissipato. Haec vos cum in ecclesia leguntur, libenter spectatis oculis cordis. Si enim nihil spectaretis, nihil audiretis. Videtis ergo quod hodie spectacula non contempsistis, sed elegistis

Definitely, it is a matter of gaze. Little inclined to accept Augustine’s reprimands on theatre, theatre historian L. Allegri however reckons that Augustine’s understanding of the various

¹⁸⁰ Lugaresi, *Il Teatro di Dio*, §3.

components of a spectacle is without precedent in the early Christian world.¹⁸¹ As Lugaresi has pointed out, no ancient author has had a deeper insight into the relevance and power of the gaze.

In *Confessiones*, Augustine recalls the shame attached to the feeling of being exposed to the judging gaze of his teacher or of his peer. The *topos* is developed by Augustine in the contrast between the pitiless gaze of men and the merciful gaze of God. This is what Samson experiences when he first appears on the stage of the mind: he is exposed, even more so being in the blazing sun, to the inquisitive, curious and scornful gaze of his persecutors – a gaze that is even more humiliating as Samson, being blind, cannot respond. The asymmetrical relationship between Samson and his viewers is stressed over and over again. Only when he shifts his focus from the physical to the spiritual realm, does Samson regain his strength and gets the upper hand on his viewers, perplexed in the extreme.

The exposure to the scorn of the bystanders characterizes Augustine's descriptions of scenes of martyrdom. But this scorn, says Augustine, will be avenged. *Sermo 280, In natali martyrum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, adds to the recurrent image of the double gaze, the theme of *God's irrisio* (as in Psalm 2.14):

Quid hoc spectaculo suavius? quid hoc certamine fortius? quid hac victoria gloriosius? Tunc cum bestiis sancta obicerentur corpora, toto amphitheatro fremebant gentes, et populi meditabantur inania. Sed qui habitat in coelis, irridebat eos, et Dominus subsannabat eos. [...] Nos autem et quod fecerunt impii, miseramur, et quod pii passi sunt, veneramur. Illi viderunt oculis carnis, quod cordis immanitati refunderent: nos aspicimus oculis cordis, quod illis ereptum est, ne viderent. Illi mortua laetati sunt corpora martyrum, nos mentes mortuas dolemus illorum. Illi sine lumine fidei martyres putaverunt extinctos, nos fidelissimo intuitu cernimus coronatos.

The true essence of the Christian spectacle is hidden from the carnal eye. And its glorious ending is not visible to all: 'Martyrum gloria insipientibus abscondita'. In *natali martyrum massae candidae*, quoting from the Book of Wisdom, Augustine returns on a topical statement:

Pretiosa est mors sanctorum Domini, sed in conspectu eius 1, non in conspectu insipientium. [...] Visi sunt oculis insipientium mori, et aestimata est poena exitus illorum: illi autem sunt in pace. Et si coram hominibus tormenta passi sunt, haec est malitia: spes eorum, inquit, immortalitate plena est; et in paucis vexati, in multis bene disponentur 3. Non enim condignae sunt passionis huius temporis ad futuram gloriam, quae revelabitur in nobis 4. Sed donec reveletur abscondita est.

¹⁸¹ Luigi Allegri, *Teatro e Spettacolo nel Medioevo*, Roma: Laterza, 1988, pp. 26-29.

Et quoniam abscondita est, ideo visi sunt oculis insipientium mori. Sed numquid quia abscondita est, etiam Deo abscondita est, apud quem pretiosa est? Ideo pretiosa est in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum eius. Huic igitur abscondito sacramento oculos fidei debemus, ut quod non videmus, credamus, et mala iniuste perpersi fortiter.’

3.9 ‘Lumen oculi nostri Deus’ (In Psalmum 37 Enarratio)

Two interconnected binary opposites in *Samson Agonistes* are light and darkness, and sight and blindness. Milton lingers on ‘the interplay of visual fascination and its continual denial.’¹⁸² Blind Samson has been read as Milton’s alter ego. Max Beerbohm gave the epigrammatic definition of *Samson Agonistes* as ‘a piece of autobiography set forth in magnificent verse.’¹⁸³ The impact of Milton’s blindness on his works cannot be disregarded,¹⁸⁴ but this drama cannot be downplayed to a mere dramatization of the author’s own predicament. Equally reductive is Wittreich’s statement that ‘whereas Samson’s blindness emblemizes his past failings and failures of vision, Milton’s is the badge of his prophetic office. [...] Samson’s blindness is a curse, evident in his own spiritual blindness, whereas Milton’s is a blessing’.¹⁸⁵ The semantic field light and vision is a topical one in the poetry of Milton, who is fully aware of its rich classical and Judeo-Christian heritage.

Blindness is a recurrent theme in the Bible. According to the Midrash, nothing is more painful than blindness. According to midrashic sources, when Isaac was born all the blind recovered their sight, and when Moses received the commandments on Mount Sinai, there were no

¹⁸² Francesca Frascaroli, “Denied (de)light”, unpublished paper. The paper provides the following occurrences: DARK/DARKNESS: Sam 2, Sam 75, Sam 80, Sam 81, Sam 86, Sam 99, Chor 154, Chor 159, Sam 591, Sam 593

BLIND/BLINDNESS: Man 366, Sam 418, Man 438, Sam 563, Sam 941, Har 1106, Sam 1221, Sam 1328, Chor 1474, Semichor 1686, Semichor 1687

EYE: Sam 33, Sam 41, Sam 94, Chor 124, Sam 459, Man 585, Sam 637, Chor 690, Chor 726, Har 1103, Har 1160, Sam 1172, Man 1490, Mess 1543, Mess 1625, Mess 1637, Semichor 1689, Man 1744

SIGHT: Sam 24, Sam 67, Sam 93, Chor 152, Chor 157, Sam 196, Sam 645, Dal 914, Sam 1117, Chor 1294, Sam 1415, Mess 1542, Mess 1620, Semichor 1687.

¹⁸³ M B, “Samson Agonistes and Zaza”, Saturday review of Literature, LXXXIX (1900), p. 489.

¹⁸⁴ Milton’s other texts on blindness are sonnet 19, 22 and 23. References occur in the invocation in Books I and III of *Paradise Lost* and in the prose. For an assessment of Milton’s treatment of blindness, also in the context of theories of vision, see Sara Van Den Berg, “Full Sight, Fancied Sight, and Touch: Milton’s Sonnet 23 and Molyneux’s Question”,

Ben Jonson Journal, May 2009, Volume 16, Page 16-32.

¹⁸⁵ Wittreich, *Interpreting Samson*, p. 280.

blind among the people. Blindness lends itself to dense metaphorical use: it can indicate a lapse of reason, as in Exodus 23,8 or dumbness, as in Isaiah 29,10, or it signifies a form of oppression, as in Deut. 28,29, or disorientation, as in Isaiah 59,9¹⁸⁶. Blindness is a condition that God pities, as is proclaimed in Job 29, 15: 'I was the eye of the blind'. In the story of the Patriarchs, blindness is a token of old age for Jacob and Isaac; so it is for Eli, the guardian Ark of the Covenant (1 Sam.3, 1-21). Ahijah, old and blind, prophesizes the end of the dynasty of unfaithful Jeroboam. Sedecias, who neglected Jeremiah's warnings, was blinded by his enemies, in a sort of self-inflicted punishment. Physical blindness is often associated with spiritual stagnation, impaired discernment, inability to follow 'the paths of righteousness' (Psalm 23,3). However, in apparent contradiction, it often seems to represent a precondition for spiritual insight. In all cases, blindness is related to the spiritual realm.

The healing of blindness promised in the Old Testament, as in Psalm 146.8 ('The Lord giveth sight to the blind: the Lord raiseth up the crooked: the Lord loveth the righteous.'), and in Isaiah, has its compliment in Christ, 'the light of the world' (John, 8.12). In Genesis, the separation of Light from darkness is the first act of creation and light, lightning, lamps indicate the presence of God. The very word of God is indicated in Psalm 118 as a lamp set before man's feet, so that it may illuminate his way. The field of vision lends itself to rich symbolism. Part of this symbolic frame is the antithesis of light and darkness in the Gospels, especially John's, in the Acts, in Paul's writings and in the Book of Revelation, where the full picture of the final vision of the Blessed is built through anaphoric 'I saw.'¹⁸⁷

The ability to see is strictly connected to the presence of light, for both the physical and the spiritual vision. This is a typically Augustinian motif. Augustine points to the need to restrain the vision of the physical eye in favour of spiritual sight. *Visio* and *delectatio* are closely connected in his treatment of the *topos*. Against the pleasures of the flesh, to which the eye is

¹⁸⁶ Irene Gentile Abbattista, *Il Volto della cecità nella Bibbia*, Torino: Elena Morea Editore, 2006, pp. 74-76.

¹⁸⁷ Abbattista, p. 66.

instrumental, the Father heralds the pleasure of the spiritual delight in truth ('Delectatio de lumine veritatis' *Sermo 179*)

A passage from *In Epistula Joannis* is emblematic. Augustine contrasts the spiritual and the bodily sight, starting with the familiar reference to the spectacle of martyrdom and pointing to righteousness as the proper attraction.

Quid desideratis, rogo vos? Videri potest oculis? tangi potest? pulchritudo aliqua est quae oculos delectat? Nonne martyres amati sunt vehementer; et quando eos commemoramus, inardescimus amore? Quid in illis amamus, fratres? Membra laniata a feris? Quid foedius, si oculos carnis interrogas? quid pulchrius, si oculos cordis interrogas? Quid tibi videtur adolescens pulcherrimus fur? Quomodo horrent oculi tui? Numquid oculi carnis horrent? Si ipsos interrogas, nihil illo corpore compositius, nihil ordinatius; et parilitas membrorum, et coloris delectatio illicit oculos: et tamen cum audis quia fur est, fugis hominem animo. Vides ex alia parte senem curvum, baculo innitentem, vix se moventem, rugis undique exaratum: quid vides quod oculos delectet? Audis quia iustus est; amas, amplecteris. *In Evangelium Ioannis tractatus centum viginti quatuor* 3.21

This is the attitude that Milton's Samson invites. Samson's initial soliloquy recalls Psalm 37. 11: 'Cor meum conturbatum est, Et deseruit me fortitudo mea.. Et lumen oculorum meorum non est mecum'. Commenting on these verses of Psalm 37, one of the many that present the trope of darkness and light (and also quoted in Milton's sonnet 'On his blindness'), Augustine explains the image with reference to Genesis, pointing to Adam's descent into shadow as a consequence of his transgression:

Latuerat ergo Adam lumen oculorum ipsius. Nam lumen oculorum ipsius ipse Deus erat: quem cum offendisset, fugit ad umbram, et abscondit se inter ligna paradisi. Pavebat a facie Dei, et quaesivi umbram arborum. Iam inter arbores lumen oculorum non habebat, ad quod gaudere consueverat.

The return to light is made possible through the new Adam – 'Novissimus Adam' (1 Cor 15, 45).

It is the promise made to Adam in *Paradise Lost* and the progress of mankind traced in *Paradise Regained*: 'From Hell's deep-vaulted Den to dwell in light.' (PR, I, 116) Commenting on the ascent from darkness to light as the structuring principle of Milton's major works, D. C.

Allen quotes Augustine's *Sermo CCXCVII; Confessiones IV,12; De Civitate VII, 33*. Without humility, there is no light: 'Sine hac nec Spiritus Sancti gratia, nec veritatis lux.'¹⁸⁸

Allen outlines the sources of 'the Christian Doctrine of the light in darkness': 'Philo, accounting for the experience of Moses, and Plotinus, elaborating on the light metaphysic of Plato, offered to western an esoteric explanation of divine light: it hides itself in the dark and one must enter the cloud to find it.'¹⁸⁹ Milton, he concludes 'joins himself in the procession [...] of those who acted in the great allegory of faith, who descended to ascend, who entered the darkness to see the light.'¹⁹⁰ The Movement announced in *Lycidas*, who 'sunk low but mounted high' is, on a grand scale, the major movement in Milton's works, made especially poignant in the character of Samson.

3.10 A Christian Tragedy?

A final controversy concerns the status of *Samson Agonistes* as a tragedy. The question is whether this genre is consistent with an overall Christian interpretation of the work. It is again Irene Samuel who claims that Samson cannot be regarded as a saint because of the alleged inconsistency between the genre, tragedy, and the life of a martyr saint. A return to Krouse proves once more fruitful. He recalls that in the seventeenth century, 'hardly less than throughout the Middle Ages, saints' lives and the stories of martyrs were still popular, and they were all necessarily tragic in structure.'¹⁹¹

The question whether a Christian tragedy is really possible was also tackled by Woodhouse, who responded that 'Christianity never denies the power of sin and suffering, though it envisages a final escape from them'¹⁹² In this light, also questionable is the suggestion that in

¹⁸⁸D. C. Allen, "Milton and the Descent to Light", pp177-195, in Arthur E. Barker (ed.), *Milton. Modern Essays in Criticism*, new York, Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1965, p. 184.

¹⁸⁹Allen, p. 188.

¹⁹⁰Allen, ", p. 192.

¹⁹¹Krouse, cit., p.85. The author provides a full list of the works in question.

¹⁹²A. S. P. Woodhouse, "Tragic Effect in Sanson Agonistes", in Arthur E. Barker (ed.), *Milton. Modern Essays in Criticism*, new York, Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1965, pp 447-466. p.463.

Samson's destruction of the theatre Milton wanted to destroy drama as a genre, in favour of 'another mode, 'legend' and Lyric song.'¹⁹³

Rather, the theatre destroyed by Samson, 'the spacious Theatre / Half round on two main Pillars vaulted high' (1605-6), recalls 'the spacious hall' of Pandemonium, 'Built like a Temple, where *Pilasters* round/Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid/With Golden Architrave.' The place recalls at once Milton's infernal palace and the roman Pantheon, with the emblems of the religions of the Roman empire, among which, Augustine laments, 'Deum Israel solum reiecerunt.'¹⁹⁴ Within the Augustinian framework that I have proposed, it represent the destruction of the place of idolatrous performance described in *De Consensu Evangelistarum* and in *De Civitate Dei*, as part of Augustine's evaluation of the earthly institutions that Rome represents. In *De Consensu Evangelistarum* 33.51, Augustine comments on the decay of the Roman theatre: 'cadunt theatra, caveae turpitudinum et publicae professiones flagitiorum, cadunt et fora vel moenia, in quibus demonia colebantur.' Milton may have had this passage in mind.

CONCLUSIONS

In his attempt to counter a Christian reading of Samson, Wittreich quotes Daniel Dyke's argument that the Word of God leads to the temple and not to the theatre.¹⁹⁵ This is the typical, and topical, Augustinian dichotomy, that is at the core of *Samson Agonistes*, but not at the detriment of its consistency with a Christian perspective, as, I argue, the temple and the theatre are represented by Samson and the Philistines' Dagonalia respectively. The statement that 'the contest is now betwixt God and Samson' reduces God to 'the philistine scale of a tribal deity'¹⁹⁶ does not

¹⁹³Nicholas Jose, *Ideas of the restoration in English literature 1660-71*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1984, p. 158

¹⁹⁴*De Consensu Evangelistarum* 17. 25. Cur eum colendum non receperunt sicut aliarum gentium deos, quas Romanum subegit imperium, praesertim cum eorum sententia sit omnes deos colendos esse sapienti? Cur ergo a numero ceterorum iste reiectus est? Si plurimum valet, cur ab eis solus non colitur? Si parum aut nihil valet, cur contritis eorum simulacris ab omnibus gentibus solus pene iam colitur?

¹⁹⁵ Wittreich, *Interpreting Samson*, p. 19.

¹⁹⁶ Samuel, p. 254.

take into serious account a structural dichotomy in the poem, which I considered linked to the two cities motif.

Brought to the Philistines' festival in spite of himself, Samson is expected 'to make them sport', to perform something extraordinary but, with a coup de th[^]atre, the spectacle turns into an apocalyptic event, where Samson is avenged but at the same time meets a martyr-like death. This may not be acceptable to readers who have erased the concept of God's vengeance from the Christian horizon¹⁹⁷ but is perfectly in keeping with Milton's Christian outlook. Augustine has explained this controversial issue to his assembly on diverse occasions.

Samson., an Old-Testament hero, was considered by Augustine a pre-figuration of Christ. Stories of Samson as a Christianized hero were popular in Milton's times, as was its interpretation as *figura Christi*. Milton does not openly define Samson as such, but hints in the play, starting from the introductory reference to *Christus Patiens*, lead the reader to view the protagonist also in this perspective. *Samson Agonistes* can be read in the light of Augustine's concept of 'spectaculum Christianum', that is, the spectacle that saints and martyrs have interpreted to the end. As the chorus announces, Samson enacts the Christian spectacle of those who, having fought a *spiritual agone*, are eligible for the crown of glory (cfr. *Eph.* 6, 12), taken up by Augustine in *De Agone Christiano*.

The *Christian agone*, in the polysemous acceptation of *strife*, *contest* and *spectacle*, is a lifelong concern for Augustine. It constitutes the ultimate performance, to be judged by the celestial jury. In his expansion of the biblical episode, Milton presents Samson as an initially unwilling player, torn between the nostalgia for mundane glory, which manifests itself in the memory of his heroic enterprise, and the perspective, underlined by the Chorus, of his final victory – in a strife of a different order. In this respect, Samson's death is not to be regarded as a defeat. It

¹⁹⁷ Derek N. C. Wood, ' "Exiled From Light": Divine Law, Morality, and Violence in Milton's Samson Agonistes', *Milton Quarterly* 37.1 (March 2003): 43-46. As D. Urban has asserted in his response to recent criticism on Milton's drama, "all this can be disturbing to modern mindset, but to suggest that Milton had the same mindset is highly problematic.

is the kind of victory that pertains to the martyrs, whose sacrifice is regarded in different ways by different viewers. To the crowd cherishing their death in the arena they are the designated victims, to the Christian spectators they are an exemplum, as their immolation recalls the passion of Christ, the quintessence of the *spectaculum christianum*.

Augustine repeatedly invites his listeners and readers to look at this spectacle with spiritual eyes and to imitate it: 'Spectare vis, esto spectaculum. Ne deficias, vide praecedentem et dicentem: Spectaculum facti sumus huic mundo, et Angelis, et hominibus.' I agree with Cirillo's proposition that *Samson Agonistes* is about an inner struggle which is not a particular struggle, but all moral struggles; its dimension is spiritual and it therefore transcends time and space

In her introduction to the *theatrum mundi* metaphor, J. N. Bailey writes:

Describing humans as actors on the stage of life was as prevalent and persistent as the presence of theater in the Greco-Roman world. Especially in philosophy, but also in history, biography, fiction, and poetry, authors referred to life as a drama in which humans each play a part. As long as the dramatic arts were a vital force in Greco-Roman society, the metaphor was accessible to all. But a change in attitudes toward drama and the theater began in the 2nd century CE.¹⁹⁸

The metaphor was in fact readily appropriated by early Christian writers; Augustine made it a central one in his imagery. In his closet drama, addressed to a readership with mixed feelings about the theatre, Milton, makes Samson act in front the Philistines, the celestial spectators and the multiple audience of his readers.

¹⁹⁸ Jon Nelson Bailey *Actors on the Stage of Life: A Recurring Metaphor from Socrates to Shakespeare* jonnelsonbailey.hubpages.com/.../Actors-on-th...

4. 'safe to eternal Paradise of rest': Augustinian notions of time in Milton's epics

'Quid faciebat Deus, antequam faceret caelum et terram?'
Respondeo non illud, quod quidam respondisse perhibetur
ioculariter eludens quaestionis violentiam: 'Alta, inquit,
scrutantibus gehennas parabat'. Aliud est videre, aliud est ridere.
Haec non respondeo. Libentius enim responderim: 'Nescio, quod
nescio' (Augustine, *Confessiones* XI, 12.14)

Sed ante mundum conditum quid egerit Deus, insipiens nimis sit
qui quaerat; nec qui respondeat multo sapientior (J. Milton, *De
Doctrina Christiana*, I. VII. 2-5)

4.1 Line of Vision

Milton's major poems are linked by a 'line of vision', in Wittreich's felicitous words.¹⁹⁹ It is the vision of the poet/prophet, which encompasses past, present and future in a unifying perspective; it is the line of vision that Milton handed down to the Romantic poet who, like Lycidas, wears the mantle of the prophet/seer, whose standpoint is eternity and for whom the division between past, present and future has lost its meaning. This vision is described in Augustine's comment on Daniel in Book XX of *De Civitate Dei*: 'Non enim ait: 'ducetur', sed pro eo, quod futurum erat, praeteriti temporis verbum posuit. Et assidue prophetia sic loquitur.'(XX.30.1)

The book, the epitome of Augustine's exercise in eschatology,²⁰⁰ brings to completion the meditation on time that informs Augustine's work. Conversion meant for Augustine to come to terms with a different approach to time, and to investigate the relationship between temporality and God's timeless dimension. The problem of time and the theme of creation are closely linked in Augustine's research; the enquiry into the nature and perception of time, in Book

¹⁹⁹ J. Wittreich, *Milton and the line of vision*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975; and *Visionary poetics: Milton's tradition and his legacy*, San Marin, CA: Huntington Library, 1979. Both works are milestones in the story of the literary reception of the Book of Revelation.

²⁰⁰ Marco Rizzi, "Il libro XX del *De Civitate Dei*: Cronologia ed Escatologia", in *Lettura del De Civitate Dei Libri XVII-XXII*, *Studia Ephemeridis Augustinianum* 126, 2012, pp. 85-103.

XI of *Confessiones*, one of the most influential texts of western literature, follows a preliminary question on the mystery of creation.

In *Confessiones*, Augustine repeats the questions that he had asked seven years before in his first work on Genesis, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*. how time relates to the creation of the universe and what can be said about the end of time.

Milton repeats Augustine's question *verbatim* in Book VII of *De Doctrina Christiana*, a book entirely devoted to the biblical account of creation, Fall and redemption through the intermediation of Christ. The teleology that Milton presents in his 'summa theologica' has its poetic counterpart in his epic poetry – a genre consubstantial with Biblical prophecy, according to David Paraeus' influential statement, which Milton quotes in *The Reason of Church Government*.

Paradise Lost ends on the reassuring 'assertion', announced in the proem, of 'Eternal providence' presiding over human affairs, from the Fall to the Second coming, from the corruptible bliss of Eden to the incorruptible heavenly Jerusalem. Time vs timelessness, present vs future, and loss vs hope find a re-composition within the broader frame of reference of Kairos,²⁰¹ the right moment for conversion, for action, in view of the final fulfilment towards which human history tends, regardless of individual and epochal downfalls. The ongoing attempt to de-Christianise Milton and his work has not spared Milton's view of providential history. However, despite the impossibility for us to locate him within the boundaries of any one denomination, Milton's view appears to be essentially Christian,²⁰² arguably with a strong leaning towards Arminianism and its emphasis on the Holy Spirit who 'will guide [...] onto all truth' (John 16,13).

Paradise Lost and *Paradise Regained* end on a similar note. In PL XI Michael takes Adam 'to a high hill' and shows him the course of history ('what shall happ'n till the Flood'), and in

²⁰¹ Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*. London: Kegan Paul, 1894; Monique Trédé, *Kairos: l'à-propos et l'occasion. Le mot et la notion, d'Homère à la fin du 4e siècle avant J.-C.* Paris: Klincksieck, 1992. On Milton's reference to the concept, see Laurie Zwicky, "Kairos in Paradise Regained: The Divine Plan", *ELH*, 31, 3, Sep., 1964, pp. 271-277; Edward W. Tayler, *Milton's Poetry. Its development in time*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne U.P., 1979; Ken Hiltner, *Milton and Ecology*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003.

²⁰² Gordon Campbell, Thomas N. Corns, John K. Hale, and Fiona J. Tweedie, *Milton and the Manuscript of De Doctrina Christiana*, Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2007. See above, Ch. 1 note 26.

Book XII the vision stretches to the end of time, with mankind headed ‘safe to eternal Paradise of rest.’

Likewise, in *Paradise Regained*, Satan takes Christ to a high mountain, and from there he shows him Rome, ‘Queen of the earth’ – in Augustinian terms the ‘city of the carnal man’, engaged in a time-long struggle with the city of God, the dwelling of the spiritual men, ‘Where they shall dwell secure, when time shall be / Of Tempter and Temptation without fear.’ (PR IV 617-8)

Ascent and descent have a moral meaning in Milton’s epics. The ascent to an elevated place also leads to a privileged vantage point, from which, in both works, the unfolding of history is made visible. The spectacle entails the vision of the failed attempts of the city of man to hinder the final triumph of the city of God. *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* form a continuum picture with Augustine’s meditation on time at its core, and the incarnation as the watershed ‘betwixt the world destroyed and world restored’ (PL XII; 3).

In both works the poet outlines the phases through which the providential plan develops. To consider time in a providential perspective also means to consider its origin and the inscription of such origin within man’s conscience. And no author has fixed this process in the western conscience more powerfully than Augustine. Our understanding of time, our perception of time and the connection between individual time and the time of the creation is the object of Augustine’s inquiry in *Confessiones*. How does our mind link past and future? How does our memory work?

Si enim sunt futura et praeterita, volo scire, ubi sint. Quod si nondum valeo, scio tamen, ubicumque sunt, non ibi ea futura esse aut praeterita, sed praesentia. Nam si et ibi futura sunt, nondum ibi sunt, si et ibi praeterita sunt, iam non ibi sunt. Ubicumque ergo sunt, quaecumque sunt, non sunt nisi praesentia. Quamquam praeterita cum vera narrantur, ex memoria proferuntur non res ipsae, quae praeterierunt, sed verba concepta ex imaginibus earum, quae in animo velut vestigia per sensus praetereundo fixerunt. Pueritia quippe mea, quae iam non est, in tempore praeterito est, quod iam non est; imaginem vero eius, cum eam recolo et narro, in praesenti tempore intueor, quia est adhuc in memoria mea. (CO XI. 18.23)

As Oscar Cullmann has pointed out, a fundamental novelty of early Christianity was precisely the new perception of time, from a circular to a linear one.²⁰³ Zwicky gives a synthetic account: ‘Early Christian writers tried to stamp out cyclicism: Irenaeus gave impetus to the linear concept, as did Basil and Gregory, but not until the fifth century did Augustine give the official refutation.’²⁰⁴ The dismissal of the classical notion of circular time and its replacement with the paradigm of directional linear time favoured a reconsideration of the role of memory in the intellectual representation of time. Augustine maintains that the continuum of time resides in individual memory. Memory is also the site of the recollection of the original unfallen state, the loss of which projects man’s desire towards the final restitution, the state of bliss that is promised in the Scriptures. In Augustine’s mind, it is not possible to separate personal memory and the history of mankind, which proceeds from the creation of the world to the revelation of the glory of God.²⁰⁵

4.2 Michael’s Augustinian notion of time

As Augustine maintains in *Confessiones*, the common longing for happiness originates from the recollection of a remote happiness, ‘vitae beatae recordation.’ Milton revives the concept almost *verbatim*, in the dialogue between Michael and Adam.

Adam realizes the extent of his loss:

This most afflicts me, that departing hence,
As from his face I shall be hid, deprived

²⁰³ Oscar Cullmann, *Christus and die Zeit*. Zurich: EVZ Verlag, 1946 (Italian edition: *Cristo e il Tempo*. Bologna: EDB, 1980).

²⁰⁴ Zwicky, p. 272.

²⁰⁵ For an introduction to Augustine’s notion of time see Henri-Irénée Marrou, *L’ambivalence du temps de l’histoire chez saint Augustin*, Montreal: Institut d’études médiévales Albert le Grand; Paris: Librairie J. Vrin, 1950; Jules Chaix-Ruy, *Saint Augustin : temps et histoire*, Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1956. From a sceptical point of view, with the intention to expose Augustine’s “entrenched beliefs” as evidence of “intellectual dishonesty” (!), G. L. Keyes provides a clear introduction to Augustine’s notion of time in *Christian Faith and the Interpretation of History: A Study of St. Augustine’s Philosophy of History*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1966 A classic on the relationship between the two “civitates” is R. A. Markus: *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St. Augustine*. Cambridge: University Press, 1970. Lettieri responds in *Il senso della storia in Agostino d’Ippona. Il «Saeculum» e la gloria nel De Civitate Dei*, Roma: Borla, 1988.

His blessed count'nance; here I could frequent,
 With worship, place by place where he voutsaf'd
 Presence Divine, and to my Sons relate;
 On this Mount he appeard, under this Tree
 Stood visible, among these Pines his voice
 I heard, here with him at this Fountain talk'd:
 So many grateful Altars I would reare
 Of grassie Terfe, and pile up every Stone
 Of lustre from the brook, in memorie (PL XI, 315-325)

He accepts the fact that the nostalgia of that presence will haunt him all his life:

In yonder nether World where shall I seek
 His bright appearances, or foot-step trace?
 For though I fled him angrie, yet recall'd
 To life prolongd and promis'd Race, I now
 Gladly behold though but his utmost skirts
 Of glory, and farr off his steps adore. (PL XI, 328-333)

Michael confirms that Adam's state of original bliss will be denied to his 'vitiating seed', gives him counsel on how to bear the loss, and leads him uphill. There follows Michael's account of *historia salutis*, in accordance with the periodization established by the Fathers and finalized by Augustine. By the time Augustine responded to Millenarian claims in *De Civitate Dei*, XX, 7, 1, the belief in the six ages of the world was an established one. The foundation of this division of the human time lay in the proposition that there must be a correspondence between the time of God, i. e. the six days of the creation, and the time of the creatures. Augustine subscribed to this analogical interpretation of the human time in his *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, 1, 23, 35:

Vide enim per totum textum divinarum Scripturarum sex quasdam aetates operosas, certis quasi limitibus suis esse distinctas, ut in septima speretur requies; et easdem sex aetates habere similitudinem istorum sex dierum, in quibus ea facta sunt quae Deum fecisse Scriptura commemorat. Primordia enim generis humani, in quibus ista luce frui coepit, bene comparantur primo diei quo fecit Deus lucem. Haec aetas tamquam infantia deputanda est ipsius universi saeculi, quod tamquam unum hominem proportionem magnitudinis suae cogitare debemus; quia unusquisque homo cum primo nascitur, et exit ad lucem, primam aetatem agit infantiam. Haec tenditur ab Adam usque ad Noe generationibus decem. Quasi vespera huius diei fit diluvium; quia et infantia nostra tamquam oblivionis diluvio deletur.

To emphasize the subsequent historical phases meant to strengthen the notion of linear time

He then outlines the subsequent ages:

Secunda aetas, similis pueritiae: a Noe ad Abraham. [...]3.a AETAS. Mane ergo fit ab Abraham et succedit aetas tertia similis adolescentiae. [...]Quarta aetas, similis iuventuti: a Davidis regno ad Babylonicam transmigrationem. [...]Quinta aetas, similis aetati mediae: a babylonica captivitate ad Christum. [...]Sexta aetas, similis senectuti: in ea nascitur homo novus, spiritalis. [...]

The final stage is sealed by the Second Coming: ‘Vespera sextae aetatis reditus est Filii hominis super terram. ‘

To the partition of history into six ages Augustine adds a vision of the rest of mankind in Christ, again similar to God’s rest on the seventh day: ‘tunc requiescent cum Christo ab omnibus operibus suis in quibus dictum est: Estote perfecti, sicut Pater vester qui in coelis est Tales enim faciunt opera bona valde. Post enim talia opera speranda est requies in die septimo, qui vesperam non habet. (1, 23,41)

The original synthesis of separate elements manifests itself in the connection between the ages of history and the ages of man. The novelty also lies in the treatment of mankind as one man, as made clear in *De Diversis Quaestionibus* 58,2 , *De Vera Religione*, 27,50 and in the homilies. In *De vera religione*, Augustine articulates the earthly ages of man and the ages of the spiritual man. In this work, we can also read an early outline of the theme of the *duae civitates*, which will be fully explored in *De Civitate Dei*. In *Contra Faustum manichaeum*, 12,8, the pattern is restated: the six days of the creation are the model of the six ages of the earth. Individual life and the life of the whole mankind tend to the timeless rest of the seventh day.²⁰⁶ I

The definite statement occurs in *De Civitate Dei* XXII, 30, 5. The passage foregrounds interwoven threads of Augustine’s reasoning on time: its unfolding through six phases, until the final rest; the time of which is unknown to man; God’s ‘potestas’ over time; the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, man’s place in God’s project.

Septima erit aetas in sabbato sine fine.

²⁰⁶ “Paolo Siniscalco, Un modulo storiografico fortunato: le età del mondo dall’epoca patristica al Medioevo”, in Giorgio Schianchi (ed.), *Il Battistero di Parma. Iconografia Iconologia Fonti letterarie*, , Milano: Vita e pensiero, 1999, pp. 321-350, p. 340.

Ipsa etiam numerus aetatum, veluti dierum, si secundum eos articulos temporis computetur, qui Scripturis videntur expressi, iste sabbatismus evidentius apparebit, quoniam septimus invenitur; ut prima aetas tamquam primus dies sit ab Adam usque ad diluvium, secunda inde usque ad Abraham, non aequalitate temporum, sed numero generationum; denas quippe habere reperiuntur. Hinc iam, sicut Matthaeus evangelista determinat, tres aetates usque ad Christi subsequuntur adventum, quae singulae denis et quaternis generationibus explicantur: ab Abraham usque ad David una, altera inde usque ad transmigrationem in Babyloniam, tertia inde usque ad Christi carnalem nativitatem. Fiunt itaque omnes quinque. Sexta nunc agitur nullo generationum numero metienda propter id quod dictum est: Non est vestrum scire tempora, quae Pater posuit in sua potestate. Post hanc tamquam in die septimo requiescet Deus, cum eundem diem septimum, quod nos erimus, in se ipso Deo faciet requiescere. De istis porro aetatibus singulis nunc diligenter longum est disputare; haec tamen septima erit sabbatum nostrum, cuius finis non erit vespera, sed dominicus dies velut octavus aeternus, qui Christi resurrectione sacratus est, aeternam non solum spiritus, verum etiam corporis requiem praefigurans. Ibi vacabimus et videbimus, videbimus et amabimus, amabimus et laudabimus. Ecce quod erit in fine sine fine. Nam quis alius noster est finis nisi pervenire ad regnum, cuius nullus est finis?

It has been suggested that the six-step pattern would also inform the structure of Milton's epics. Although the superimposition of a strict numerological pattern on *Paradise Lost* may be questionable, it is a fact that both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are based on the Augustinian subdivision of time, which had become an accepted notion.²⁰⁷ Michael's prophecy in *Paradise Lost* is evidence of Milton's compliance with the tradition that Augustine established; also, his insistence on the final rest, whose scriptural basis is Isaiah,²⁰⁸ seems supported by Augustine's comments on the final age of rest in the final books of *De Civitate Dei*.

4.2 The hexahemeral tradition

The story of the creation that Raphael tells Adam, and Michael's anticipation of the stages of history, follow an Augustinian pattern. While the poet rejects Augustine's theory of

²⁰⁷ On Augustine's and Isidore's contribution to establish this tradition and its 16th-century reception see George W. Whiting, *Milton and This Pendant World*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958, pp. 175-179. Whiting is one of the proponents of a six-fold pattern in *Paradise Lost*: 'The symmetry, a heritage of the Middle Ages, is perfect. The scriptural division of time was adopted. The orthodox chronological divisions of scriptural history provided the basis for Milton's selection and organization of the material. This was the basis of his structure.' (p. 191)

²⁰⁸ Youngwon Park, *Milton and Isaiah: A Journey through the Drama of Salvation in Paradise Lost*, New York: Peter Lang, 2000.

creation *ex nihilo*,²⁰⁹ he deploys the latter's narrative of the course of human history from the Fall, through the Incarnation, to the final rest, past 'the last syllable of recorded time' – to borrow Shakesperare's most Augustinian phrase. The correspondence between the ages of history and the days of creation were clearly marked out by Augustine in his first extensive work on Genesis, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, the first of his systematic comments.

The book was followed by a second, which remained unaccomplished and by a third, *Genesis ad Litteram*. References to Genesis are scattered in Augustine's writings. He comments extensively on the Fall and its consequences also in *De Civitate Dei*, the best known of his works. However, the literary influence of his early study should not be underestimated.

Genesis Contra Manichaeos is a milestone in the hexhaemeral literature that proliferated in the first centuries of Christianity.²¹⁰ Early Christian exegetes met the common challenge to clarify the differences between the Judeo-Christian view of the origin of the world and the Greek and Roman ones. The tradition, established by Philo, reached its apex with the hexhaemeral writings of the Cappadocian Fathers. Basil's *Hexaemeron*²¹¹ became by far the most influential. His influence is especially evident in the hexhaemeral writing of Ambrose – but also Augustine recognizes his authority. The commentaries of the Fathers on the six days of the Creation oriented the reception of the Scriptures to the point that their interpretation clouded the original text.

²⁰⁹ Sant'Agostino, *La Genesi*. Testo latino dell'edizione maurina confrontato con il corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum. Vol I *De Genesi contra Manichaeos; Imperfectus Liber*; Vol. II *De Genesi ad Litteram*, Roma: Città Nuova Editrice, 1989. On Augustine's treatment of the concept see Natale Joseph Torchia, *Creatio ex nihilo and the theology of St. Augustine: the anti-Manichaean polemic and beyond*, New York: P. Lang, 1999. On Milton's selective response to Augustine on creation see Gordon Campbell, Milton's theological and literary treatments of the Creation, *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 30, 1979, pp. 128-137.

²¹⁰ Antonio Stoppani, *L'Esameron. Nuovo saggio di un'esegesi della storia della creazione*, Torino: Unione Tipografica Editrice, 1893; Frank Egleston Robbins, *The Hexameral literature: a study of the Greek and Latin commentaries on Genesis*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1912; Mary Irma Corcoran, *Milton's Paradise with Reference to the Hexameral Background*, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press Inc., 1945; Yves. M. Congar, "Le Thème de 'Dieu Createur' et les explications de l'Hexaméron dans la tradition chrétienne, in *L'Homme devant Dieu*, Melanges P. Henri de Lubac, Paris: Aubier, 1963.

²¹¹ Basilio di Cesarea, *Sulla Genesi (Omelia sull'Esamerone)*. A cura di Mario Naldini, Roma: Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori editore, 1990; Sant'Ambrogio, *L'Esamerone ossia dell'origine e natura delle cose*, Corona Patrum Salesiana, Serie Latina Vol IV, Torino: Società editrice Internazionale, 1937; Louis J. Swift, "Basil and Ambrose on the Six Days of Creation", *Augustinianum* 21, 1981, pp. 317-28

Cases in point are the identification between Satan and the serpent of the temptation, or the transformation of the unidentified forbidden fruit into an apple – as the Latin ‘malum’ provided a suitable double meaning of the word.²¹² It is in the hexhaemeral tradition that the scanty Biblical picture of the creation becomes an occasion for a display of the encyclopaedic knowledge of time. Also, the life of the first couple in Eden is enriched with paradisiacal details.

Augustine’s works on Genesis, as well as early hexhaemeral sources, were all arguably known to Milton²¹³, as were Reformation commentaries.²¹⁴ The Reformation had brought about an unprecedented scrutiny of the first book of the Old Testament²¹⁵ and the ‘flood of commentaries poured from the presses’ included ‘nearly everything that had gone before.’²¹⁶ The hexhaemeral literature of the 4th and 5th centuries, published and translated, flowed into the new commentaries. In this amalgam, citations from Augustine, are ubiquitous, however spurious.

For the making of Milton’s epic, two works need be singled out: *La Sepmaine; ou, Creation du monde* (1578), by Du Bartas, an extremely well known work, both in the original and in Sylvester’s translation, and Tasso’s *Mondo Creato* (1592-94). Together they were among the most successful poetical transcodings of hexhaemeral material in the late Renaissance²¹⁷ and both were declaredly based on Augustine’s writing on the origin of the world.

²¹² Arnold Williams, ‘Renaissance commentaries on “Genesis” and some elements of the theology of Paradise Lost’, *PMLA*, 56, 1, Mar 1941, pp. 151-164; Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor. An account of the commentaries on Genesis 1527-1633*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, c1948.

²¹³ Jackson Campbell Boswell, *Milton’s library: a catalogue of the remains of John Milton’s library and an annotated reconstruction of Milton’s library and ancillary readings*. New York: Garland Pub., 1975.

²¹⁴ His early biographers have pointed out the wide range of his reading, and his being conversant with ancient and modern divines. Helen Darbishire (ed.), *The Early Lives of Milton*. London: Constable & Co. Ltd, I 932. Among Milton’s hexhaemeral sources, Corcoran lists references to John Diodati, Hugus Grotius, Paulus Fagius, Martin Bucer, Andreus Rivetus, David Pareus, Wolfgang Musculus, Pietro Martire Vermigli and Heronymus Zanchius.

²¹⁵ For diverging interpretations of the Fall see George Musacchio, *Milton’s Adam and Eve: Fallible Perfection*, New York Peter Lang, 1991; Philip C. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-century thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

²¹⁶ Corcoran, p. 11.

²¹⁷ J. Martin Evans, *Paradise Lost and the Genesis tradition*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968. *La Semaine* has been alternatively defined as a highly imaginative poem or a replica of Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Ambrose, ‘augmented by the addition of a special discussion on the seventh day.’ S. O. Dickerman, “Du Bartas and St. Ambrose”, *Modern Philology*, 15, 7, Nov., 1917, pp. 419-434, p. 421.

A common denominator between the two poems is the connection between the days of the creation and the eternal day of rest. Tasso contrasts ‘le cose al variar dei tempi/ quaggiù soggette e/le promesse antiche dei tesori celesti, e dell’eterno Regno divino.’²¹⁸ Du Barts lingers on the correspondence between God’s rest on the seventh day and the eternal Sabbath:

[...] Il Veut que nous prenons
 Son Christ pour sauvegarde: & qu’avecassurance
 Par lui nous implorons sa divine Cclemence
 [...]
 Il veut que ce Sabat nous sopit un efigure
 Du bien-heureus Sabat de la vie future.
 [...]
 L’un ne dure qu’un iour: de l’autre l’heur extrême
 N’est point moins eternel, que l’Eternité même.
 L’un consiste en ombrage:& l’autre en verité.
 L’un en pedagogie: & l’autre en liberté.²¹⁹

Milton’s debt to Du Bartas was first pointed out by William Lauder, who reduced the author of *Paradise Lost* to a plagiarist of the French author.²²⁰ While the claim cannot be subscribed, it is evident that Milton inscribed his epics within a tradition of poetic deployment of Augustine’s hexhaemeral vision.

4.3’[W]hen time shall be’: *kairos in Paradise Regained*

The expectation of the eternal Sabbath that informs both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* is based on Augustine’s belief, after Paul, that the Creation tends to the final rest in God. The hexhaemeral authors describe human history as a prolongation of the Creation, with fallen mankind, redeemed through the Incarnation, headed toward the promised end. In this frame, Christ has bridged the timeless dimension of eternity and the linear time of everyday action. The paradox of

²¹⁸ Torquato Tasso, *Il mondo creato*. Edizione critica con introduzione e note di Giorgio Petrocchi, Firenze: Le Monnier, 1951.

²¹⁹ G. Du Barts, *La Sepmaine, ou Création du monde*. Paris: J. Février, 1578.

²²⁰ William Lauder, *An Essay on Milton’s Use and Imitation of the Moderns in His Paradise Lost*, 1750. Lauder shows that Milton repeatedly quotes Du Bartas, starting from the invocation. The image of the spirit “brooding on the vast Abyss” is in fact taken from Sylvester’s translation of Du Bartas. It should be pointed out that the action described comes straight out of Augustine’s image of the Holy Spirit at the Creation in *De Genesi ad Litteram*. On Milton’s debt to Du Bartas see also George Coffin Taylor, *Milton’s use of Du Bartas*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U. P., 1934. On the English fortune of Du Bartas, see Anne Lake Prescott, “The Reception of Du Bartas in England”, *Studies in the Renaissance*, 15, 1968, pp. 144-173.

time is that it tends towards its cancellation, towards the everlasting present that is prefigured, in Augustine's formulation, in our perception of the threefold present, where the past no longer exists and the future is already present as anticipation. It is the divine time that is at the core of *Paradise Regained*.

A critical *crux* in *Paradise Regained* is the status of Christ:²²¹ the contention is whether Milton considered him divine, i. e. of the same substance of the Father, as the Nicean Creed proclaims. The theological argumentation of *De Doctrina Christiana* leaves the place in the poem to a characterization of the Son carried out through his language and the narrating voice. I suggest that Milton characterizes him as divine precisely through the references to time in his speech.

A discriminating factor between Satan and Christ is their respective relationship with time. Trapped in circular time, Satan misreads the *kairoi* of the *historia salutis*. In *Paradise Regained* his temptation is directed precisely against the divine order of the events.

Against the commentators who claim that Christ's lack of awareness mars his divine nature, I suggest that Christ manifests his divine essence in the steadfastness that is a manifestation of his partaking of divine time. The human dimension is characterized by a continuous flux, whereas eternity, *stans aeternitas*, is characterized by permanence. The words related to Christ are static words. Emblematic is the temptation on the temple of Jerusalem: whereas Satan falls, Christ stands:

To whom thus Jesus: also it is written, [560]
Tempt not the Lord thy God; he said and stood.
But Satan smitten with amazement fell

Christ debunks Satan's temptation exposing Satan's ignorance of the 'due time':

All things are best fulfil'd in their due time,
And time there is for all things, Truth hath said:
If of my raign Prophetic Writ hath told,

²²¹ For a discussion of Milton's position on the relationship between God father and the Son, against the backdrop of Augustine's *De Trinitate*, see Kent R. Lehnhof, "Deity and Creation in the Christian Doctrine", *Quarterly*, 35, 4, Dec. 2001, p. 232.

That it shall never end, so when begin [185]
The Father in his purpose hath decreed,
He in whose hand all times and seasons roul.

And again:

To whom our Saviour answer'd thus unmov'd
[...].
My time I told thee (and that time for thee
Were better farthest off) is not yet come[397]

The lines are based on Luke: Καὶ συντελέσας πάντα πειρασμὸν ὁ διάβολος ἀπέστη ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἄχρι καιροῦ: 'and having ended all the trials, the devil went away from Him until the time (my translation). It is worth noticing that 'in the King James Bible ἄχρι καιροῦ is translated 'for a season', while the Vulgate more correctly has 'ad tempus'. Luke is the only synoptic evangelist who makes this temporal reference. Augustine cites this Gospel in *De Consensu Evangelistarum* II. 18.42: 'consummata omni tentatione diabolus recessit ab illo usque ad tempus. Although this is not the main objective of the book, Augustine in his comparison among the Gospels brings out two interrelated themes: the *kairoi* are unknown to man, therefore it is essential to be prepared (Mathew 24.16-25). Augustine focuses on the same image, from Mathew 24, in order to clarify the meaning of Kairos in letters 197 and 199 to Bishop Esichius. Letter 197 is the reply to the Bishop's questions on Daniel's prophecy. Against the interpretation of those who pretended to calculate the timing of Daniel's weeks, Augustine replies that the *kairoi* are unknown and that they require an attitude of vigilant wake. He translates *kairoi* as 'tempora.', complaining that the Latin translation does not offer a distinction between *chronos* and *kairos*.

While the KJV translation 'for a season', stressing the interval between Satan's departure and his return, the Vulgate more aptly translates 'ad tempus', indicating at once the interval and the deadline. Augustine's plural is a more literal rendering of the Greek original, where the plural indicates the special moments, epochal events, but also the right times. To fail to recognize the *kairoi*, as Satan does, is to be out of phase with the personal story of salvation.

Zwicky has pointed out that in *Paradise Regained* Milton mentions ‘ a special kind of time more than twice as often as in *Paradise Lost*. The text, she maintains, resumes the thematic reference of ‘the better fortitude / Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom’ of *Paradise Lost* IX, 31-32, or the ‘model of Christian hero’ of *The Reason of Church Government*: the climax of the action is the epiphanic moment when Christ, on the pinnacle of the temple and in a gesture that prefigures the Crucifixion (that is how we can picture him, at least) raises his arms and seals the fall of Satan into the abyss.’

Samson Agonistes, also published in 1671, has been read in two opposite ways as concerns Milton’s view of history and the ‘due time’. Augustine defines the difference between circular time and linear time in Book XII of *De Civitate Dei*. The difference that the two time structures entail is that nothing returns the same and it is up to man to follow the given opportunities. The most decisive event of all will be the second coming of the Lord in glory (Dan. 7:22).

In response to the question on Christ’s Second Coming, Augustine insists that ‘nemo potest cognoscere tempora, quae Pater posuit in sua potestate’ (cfr. Acts 1,7), and elucidates the meaning of ‘tempora’:

Non enim dixit: ‘Diem’, vel, ‘Horam’, sed, *tempora*; quae in brevi spatio non solent diei, sicut dies vel hora, maxime si graecum intueamur eloquium, ex qua lingua in nostram eundem librum, ubi hoc scriptum est, scimus esse translatum; quamvis latine satis exprimi non potuerit. Ibi enim graece legitur, **χρόνου ἢ καιροῦς**. Nostri autem utrumque hoc verbum tempora appellant, sive **χρόνους**, sive **καιροῦς**, cum habeant haec duo inter se non neglegendam differentiam. **καιροῦς** quippe appellant Graeci tempora quidem, non tamen quae in spatiorum voluminibus transeunt, sed quae in rebus ad aliquid opportunis vel importunis sentiuntur; sicut messis, vindemia, calor, frigus, pax, bellum, et si qua similia: **χρόνους** autem ipsa spatia temporum vocant.³ Et hoc certe ipsi Apostoli non ita quaesierunt, quasi unum novissimum diem vel horam, id est exiguum diei partem scire voluissent; sed utrum iam esset opportunum tempus quo regnum repraesentaretur Israel. Tunc audierunt: *Nemo potest cognoscere tempora, quae Pater posuit in sua potestate*, id est **χρόνους ἢ καιροῦς**: quod si latine diceretur, *tempora aut opportunitates*, nec sic quod dictum est, esset expressum; quia sive opportuna, sive importuna sint tempora, **καιροί** dicuntur. Tempora ergo computare, hoc est, **καιροῦς**, ut sciamus quando sit finis huius saeculi vel adventus Domini, nihil mihi aliud videtur, quam scire velle quod ipse ait scire neminem posse.

The interim is a time of vigilant wake and hope. This may be regarded as political quiescence, but the time for action must also be inscribed within this divine time. It may be the time

of silent suspension of activity, as in Milton's sonnet 'On his blindness' ('They also serve who only stand and wait'), or the silence that may lead to the unexpected action of deliverance – as such Samson's action can be intended, *pace* a pacifist approach to Milton's politics.

In this light I believe that *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* develop the same paradigm: they are not in mutual opposition but complementary, in as much as Christ establishes the principle, the theory of time, and Samson exemplifies the typos of the unexpected moment.

Augustine stressed with unprecedented attention the link between the time of the Creation and the time of Revelation in one continuous line, highlighting the Pauline concept of Christ as the Second Adam and reading the time of man in this perspective.

As the ripeness of time is not known, Augustine exhorts the Faithful to stay alert, like the wise virgins of the parable. According to P. Grant, *Paradise Regained* focuses on the achievement of men in time: 'Such achievements are presented by Satan in the series of historical panoramas depicting Parthian might, Roman justice, Greek learning, Hebrew prophecy and kingship. Christ, by interpreting history 'redeems the time' (Eph. 5: 15-17), and endows it with meaning. Christ is the person (as Satan learns) before whom you most fully discover, when time is ripe, who you are.'²²² This is a sound Augustinian principle, and one in keeping with what Milton wrote, about personal commitment and hope.

²²² Patrick Grant, *Images and Ideas in Literature of the English Renaissance*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979, p. 151.

Conclusions

When I started working on this project, with a limited knowledge of Augustine, but determined to locate his presence in Milton's poetry, I was little aware of the intricacy of the relationship between the two authors. At this stage of my research, I do subscribe to Savoye's opinion, that this relationship is pervasive.²²³ However, one could safely add, it is as pervasive as it is hidden, primarily because of changed cultural paradigms, so that Milton's references are no longer familiar to the reader.

As I have pointed out in my presentation of the state of the art, these articulations are hardly made explicit in Milton's *Oeuvre* and also in critical literature they are hardly brought to the surface. My objective has been to make them a little more visible.

I have started my own process of discovery from the works where Milton more openly (but not completely) acknowledges his Augustinian sources, although arguably mediated. As concerns *Samson Agonistes*, I have presented a reading through Augustinian lenses. I am by no means claiming that mine is the best of all possible readings, but through those lenses I have been able to see a coherence, in Milton's dramatic poem, that is not generally recognized.

On the other hand, I thoroughly agree that 'one cannot simply take any English poet and turn the post-structuralist critical machine loose on him or her in good faith.'²²⁴

²²³ John Savoie, "Justifying the Ways of God: Theodicy in Augustine and Milton," in Robert P. Kennedy, Kim Paffenroth, and John Doody (eds.), *Augustine and Literature*, Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2006.

²²⁴ Quoted in William E. Engel. *Mapping Mortality: The Persistence of Memory and Melancholy in Early Modern England*. Massachusetts Studies in Early Modern Culture. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.

In particular, I am aware that I have read Milton's works against the current critical grain which, with a powerful turn impressed by Empson's *Milton's God*, is continually surfacing Milton's idiosyncrasies in order to cancel the received picture of a Christian author. Rather, I agree with Cirillo that Milton's perspective is that of 'a professed Christian poet whose Christian consciousness, no matter how heterodox, colored virtually everything he wrote.'²²⁵ We may ask, echoing Febvre on Rabelais, "Mais de quel christianisme?"²²⁶ In accordance with very traditional, if not traditionalist Milton Criticism, I think it can safely be stated that Milton is a post-Reformation religious author, and one whose endeavour to "justify the ways of God to men" had to come to terms with the difficult task to find signs of providential history in the aftermath of a civil war and in the adverse context of the Restoration. His last published poems deal with this problem in different terms. As readers, we can come to different conclusions as to the texts. Behind them there is the man, 'est abyssus humanae conscientiae,' in front of which, after Augustine, I can only say: 'nescio.'

²²⁵ Albert R. Cirillo, "Time, Light, and the phoenix: The Design of Samson Agonistes", *Calm of Mind*, p. 209-233, p. 209.

²²⁶ Lucien Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècle. La religion de Rabelais*, Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1947, p. 12.

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