

## REVIEW ARTICLE

### COMPARATIVE MILTON AND POETICS

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- 282** TESKEY, GORDON. *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2006.

TESKEY, GORDON. "Introduction." *Milton's Latin Poems*. Trans. David R. Slavitt. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins UP, 2011. vii-xxx.

TESKEY, GORDON. *The Poetry of John Milton*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2015.

John Milton (1608-74) was a comparatist and a classical scholar and poet, so to limit him to being an English poet would be to typecast him into just one of his important roles. He was also an essayist of the highest order on many topics from politics through education to theology. Milton was deeply biblical and was unconsciously, as William Blake said of him, but what could also be applied to Blake, of the devil's party: "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it" (Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" 35). The paradox is that the poet of liberty is also one who works in fetters, but this is one Milton, and not everyone agrees with Blake about his predecessor. Milton is an artist of the highest achievement, a European poet, and now, with the spread of English, a world poet.

## I

Harris Francis Fletcher wanted to study Milton's education and intellectual development the way T.W. Baldwin had for Shakespeare (Fletcher "Preface" vol. 1; see Baldwin). Fletcher looked at Milton's petty school, tutoring, and grammar school,

and his time at Christ's College, Cambridge. For Fletcher, Milton's two prose epistles and Elegy IV, written in Latin, show how literary he was in this language as well as in English (Fletcher 1: 115-16). Milton, according to Fletcher, followed the scheme for the study of Latin as set out by Erasmus in *De ratione studii*, that grammar arises from good authors and not the other way round, something Fletcher sees in Milton's *Elegy IV*, *Grammar*, and *Of Education* (Fletcher 1: 129-30). Fletcher also attributes to one of Milton's tutors, Thomas Young, a love for Hebrew, Greek, and Latin literatures (Fletcher 1: 137). Milton was at St. Paul's School, founded by John Colet, a friend to other humanists like Erasmus and William Lily (Fletcher 1: 161; see Clark). In England and Western Europe, grammar schools sought to teach the reading, writing, and speaking of Latin, including a familiarity with prose and verse (Fletcher 1: 199). Greek flourished in Italy in the fourteenth century, when Greek scholars moved there from Constantinople, and the humanists in England came to view Greek as a fine language to learn letters. William Camden was one of the schoolmasters who was successful in teaching Greek, in his case at Westminster (Fletcher 1: 241, 247).

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Translation and grammar were also important in Milton's learning of Greek, which he learned as he did other languages: the young Milton "took his grammar to the Gospel of John in Greek, construed it, translated it, retranslated his Latin into English, took the English and translated it back into Latin, the Latin back into Greek, and finally he compared his Greek with the text from which he had started" (Fletcher 1: 254). Here is the multilingual and comparative Milton. With ease, Milton could read Greek literature from Homer onward, and he could write Greek prose and verse, although his letters to Charles Diodati, his fellow student at St. Paul's, in Greek do not survive (Fletcher 1: 257, see 258-63). Diodati and Milton exchanged letters in Greek, Latin, Italian, and English, and seem to have replied not in the language of the original received, which was the tradition, but whatever they chose was in a spirit of play with language (C. Brown 37; see Tillyard, *Milton* 1949: 101). Milton also wrote letters (some verse elegiacs) to Thomas Young, his one-time tutor, and others (including a Greek rendition of Psalm 114) to Alexander Gill the Younger, a fine neo-Latin poet and whose father was the headmaster at St. Paul's. Some of Milton's letters were to Italian poets and humanists (C. Brown 37, see 38-43).

In addition to writing verse in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, and English, Milton had a composite sense of versification that allowed him to understand metre in all these languages, not to mention an understanding of their grammar, syntax, vocabulary and literature. Milton was also trained in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac (Fletcher 1: 283, 290). Furthermore, he knew his mythology and Bible, which is no surprise given the range of his learning in language and literature. Ben Jonson and Percy Shelley were also fine linguists and learned in classical languages, but Milton's range might well be the greatest of the major poets in English. I once spoke of William Shakespeare, European, but this designation as a European writer might apply even more to Milton. Milton's education could not but make him write, read, interpret and think comparatively.

In regard to Italian, Milton's *canzone* have received praise for their elegance, and he wrote sonnets in Italian as well as in English (Fletcher 1: 294; Paterson 5). We do not have any of Milton's French writing (Fletcher 1: 307). Besides languages, Milton studied music and mathematics, as well as the Bible in English, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, and Spanish (Fletcher 1: 337, 355, 384; 2: 89-114). Milton's *Ad Patrem* (1631-32) thanks his father for the education he has provided and defends poetry, an art related to music, which Milton's father so loved (C. Brown 41-42). Milton did a tour of the Continent, which he describes retrospectively in his *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Secundo*, and he met one of the great early figures, along with Francisco Vitoria, in international law: Hugo Grotius. His work in Latin was well known, and he wrote a pastoral elegy in that language for his friend, Charles Diodati, who had died in August 1638 (Paterson 6). Besides considering Arthur as the topic of his epic before settling on biblical themes, Milton read Raphael Holinshed about English history and wrote about English politics and the history of Muscovy, so that he balances

**284** classical antiquity with modern subjects, England with Continental Europe. In his poetry and prose, Milton works with typologies of then and now, history and religion, England and Israel, England and the Continent.

The various genres in which Milton works also reflect ancient and modern, English and other traditions and influences. Greek tragedy and Restoration drama influence Milton's *Comus* (1634) and *Samson Agonistes* (1671). He also agreed to John Dryden's request to make from *Paradise Lost* an opera in rhymed couplets, *The State of Innocence* (Coiro 58, 66). Milton's attempts to rival Homer and Virgil in the epic, often in a Christian rather than a pagan framework, were part of a wider European agon, including Petrarch's unfinished neo-Latin *Africa*, Ludovico Aristo's *Orlando Furioso* (1516, 1532), Marco Girolamo Vida's *Christiad* (1535), Guillaume du Bartas's *Semaines* (1578, 1584), Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581), Erasmo di Valvasone's *Angeleida* (1590), Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596), Giles Fletcher's *Christ's Victory and Triumph* (1610), Diego de Hojeda's *La Christiada* (1611), Odorico Valmarana's *Daemonomachiae* (1623), Giambattista Marino's *Adone* (1623), Nicolas Frénicle's *Jésus Crucifié* (1636), William Davenant's unfinished *Gondibert* (1651), Antoine Girard de Saint Amant's *Moyse Sauvé* (1653), Jean Chapelain's *La Pucelle* (1656), Pierre Le Moyne's *Saint Louis* (1656), Joost van den Vondel's *Joannes de Boetgezant* (1662), Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1663, 1678), Jacques de Coras's *Josué* (1665), and Lucy Hutchinson's *Order and Disorder* (1679) (Welsh 68-76). In pastoral, Milton builds on the sources of Theocritus's *Idyls* and Virgil's *Eclogues* and *Georgics* and is part of a Renaissance or early modern production of pastorals, such as Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) and Michael Drayton's *Idea* (1593) (Lewalski 78-80). Milton was familiar with Dante and owed much to Italian literature, especially epic poetry and theory (Martin, "Italy" 318-26). His experience in Italy is something Milton also valued (Tillyard, *Milton* 1949: 86). Milton's prose is often scriptural and typological, something that one finds in Europe as well as in England (Lim 94-95).

Milton's poems were also translated into many languages, and I discuss a few instances here. Through a Latin translation of *Paradise Lost* (1690), William Hog made Milton more international. The French have made at least fifteen translations of *Paradise Lost*, beginning with that of Nicolas-François Dupré de Saint-Maur in 1729-30. Chateaubriand's translation may be the most renowned in French. From Saint-Maur's French translation, A.G. Stroganov created the first Russian translation in 1745, but it was incomplete and unpublished. At least fourteen other Russian translations of *Paradise Lost* have been done. There have been, after Paolo Roli's version of 1758, more than eighteen translations of *Paradise Lost* in Italian. In Dutch, a language into which Milton's prose was translated in the seventeenth century, the first verse translations of this poem were by Jacob van Zanten in 1728 and Lambert van Broek in 1730, and the first in prose was by Jan Reisig in 1790. The first German translations of this epic were by J.H. Bodmer in prose in 1732 and by Friedrich Zachariä in poetry in 1762. In Denmark, Johan Heinrich Schønheyder translated *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* from 1790 to 1792. The poet, Johan Gabriel Oxenstierna, produced a verse translation of *Paradise Lost* in Swedish in 1815. There are other languages into which Milton's poetry has been translated: for instance, Finnish, Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Slovenian, Serbian, Hebrew, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Turkish, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Urdu (Tournu 169-78).

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There are many Miltons. He is postcolonial, politically engaged, classical, an allegorist, a master of words and silences, a transformer of the epic and its myths of beginnings and endings. For instance, a handful of Milton's similes regarding India prompted a postcolonial reading (Rajan 87-88, see 71-92). Milton has a poetry and prose of engagement (Turner 257-75). The author of *Paradise Lost* shows the power and scope of rhetoric in his poem, not simply in this epic but as a refraction of the theory and practice of rhetoric in the Renaissance (Pallister 11-12). Milton is the poet who has fascinated others, for instance, because he so admired Ovid as a poet but had a very different ethic and aesthetic (Kilgour 1). *Paradise Lost* might be an allegory of uncertain certainty, being its own ruin and beyond (Martin, *Ruins of Allegory* 1-3, 340-42). Milton may be a poet of the ineffable, but his ineffability would differ from that of a later secular reader not working in a logocentric and transcendental Christian framework or tradition (Reisner 3). *Paradise Lost* reaches back before the epic as if to invent or begin it, and tries to end the genre by condemning and superseding its traditional subjects of war and empire (Quint 1).

Milton works with the biblical, classical, and British past. Here I concentrate on the antecedents of the classics. Like the King James or Authorized Bible, Milton's poetry, most notably *Paradise Lost*—as Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson, T.S. Eliot, Charles Martindale, and others have observed—has used Hebraisms, Grecisms, and Latinisms to extend the capacities of English and create a distinctive style so influential that it became part of the practice of English (Martindale 41-47). Unlike John Dryden, who employed metaphrase to define a literal encounter with the literal and

detailed translation of an ancient text like Ovid's *Epistles*, as something lesser than paraphrase and freer translation, Martindale, who discusses Milton's translation of Horace's Pyrrha Ode (I.5), sees metaphor as a key to Milton's technique and something worthy and respectful of the alien text, because the metaphrast attempts to reproduce in detail the texture of the original. Martindale contrasts favourably Milton's metaphrasing translation of Horace's Pyrrha Ode with the freer version of the poem by Sir Richard Fanshawe (Martindale 42, see 43-47). It seems that Homer was first in Milton's heart as a classical poet, followed by Ovid and Euripides (Martindale 53). Milton is creative in his use of Greek tragedy and makes it his own in creating *Samson Agonistes* (Parker 245-50). For William M. Porter, who discusses Milton's use of allusion, thought, design and language from the point of view of a classicist, *Paradise Lost* "is the grand foyer of the classical tradition in English" (Porter 41).

286 Milton has been read in many contexts, two of which are nineteenth-century France and twentieth-century Canada. Rémy de Gourmont said, near the end of the nineteenth century, that "Milton, vu par Chateaubriand, est si grand qu'il touche le ciel et qu'il lutte avec Dieu" (Redman 48).<sup>1</sup> On Milton's death, Chateaubriand wrote: "Il rendit à Dieu un des souffles les plus puissants qui animèrent jamais l'argile humaine (Chateaubriand, *Essai sur la littérature anglaise* 676, qtd. in Redman 76).<sup>2</sup> Philarète Chasles, who taught a course on Foreign and Comparative Literature in Paris in 1835, was impressed with Milton as a Latin, Italian and English poet: "Il écrit dans ces trois langues et il les imprègne toutes trois de la même suavité harmonieuse; il mêle et confond les eaux et ces trois fleuves dans le lit que leur ouvre une poésie nouveau [*sic*; nouvelle?]" (*Journal des Débats*, 21 October 1836: 3; qtd. in Redman 79).<sup>3</sup> Alphonse de Lamartine, a poet, politician, and critic, saw the modern epic as one of feeling rather than actions, Tasso being more of an epic poet than Milton (Lamartine, *Vies de quelques hommes illustres* 3: 32-33, qtd. in Redman 169). Like William Blake, Hippolyte Taine found Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost* to be fascinating: "Dans cette histoire de Dieu, le premier rôle est au diable" ("Milton," *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* 2: 420-21, qtd. in Redman 250).<sup>4</sup> Three Canadian Miltonists can give one sense of that vast web of contexts. Douglas Bush defends Milton against modern critics of *Paradise Lost* as a monument to dead ideas, and asserts that Milton tries to make one self better (Bush 21). Milton's concern with liberty and equality is, as A.S.P. Woodhouse observes, in the framework of the order of grace and the order of nature, something fundamental to Puritanism (Woodhouse 43-45). Northrop Frye discusses the classical pastoral of Theocritus and Virgil and that of Psalm 23 in the Bible as sources for Milton's *Lycidas* and says that the connection between these traditions was the Fourth Eclogue of Virgil, which was taken to be messianic in Milton's time (Frye 51). The historical context of Milton and of his critics helps to shape their interest in poetics and ideas in this poet's oeuvre.

More generally, Milton evokes many different responses. For instance, John Dryden said that Milton acknowledged to him that Edmund Spenser "was his original" (Dryden II: 247, qtd. in Quilligan 19). Milton, like Spenser, is given to allegory

and so needs to be approached through the rhetoric of reading, but, as Maureen Quilligan has noted, Milton's debt to Spenser can be examined in connection to how the reader is positioned rhetorically in relation to the text and in terms of allegory as well as the gender of the reader. Spenser and Milton were politically engaged artists who wrote epics that treated sexuality as one of the major concerns, so the gender of the characters and readers mattered (Quilligan 21, 175-79). African-American writers have their own ambivalent response to Milton as they have forged their own epic tradition, as can be seen, for instance, in Carolivia Herron's discussion of this response in Phillis Wheatley, John Boyd, Charles W. Chesnutt, and Ishmael Reed (Herron 278-79). *Milton* is a multivocal poet who uses multiple genres and narrators (Sauer 161). *Paradise Lost* represents heresy, a "heresy machine," as Nigel Smith calls it, heterodox views articulated in human terms, as in characters, like Adam, Eve, and Satan, something the reader internalizes in the lived representation of "the teaching of free will theology and free will epic" (Smith 524, see 510).

Milton, the person, poet, and scholar, has many dimensions, some of which I am touching on here. E.M.W. Tillyard praises Milton for being given the gift of "that ultimate simplicity of mind which Thucydides in his history and Mencius in his aphorisms called the mark of the truly great man" and also concludes that even if modern readers will not have the patience for *Paradise Lost* and the Miltonic canon, Milton will survive "as a major poet of surpassing power and variety" (Tillyard, *Milton* 1959: 5, 42). In an edition of Milton's Latin poems, Walter MacKellar places him in the tradition of neo-Latin poets, including Petrarch's seminal role, quoting a letter of Petrarch to Boccaccio that talks about how Petrarch has read the works of Virgil, Horace, Livy and Cicero, so that if Petrarch never read them again "they would yet remain firmly rooted in the depths of my soul" (Petrarch, *Epistulae de rebus familiaribus* [22.2], ed. Fracaseeti, 1859, 3. 123, qtd. in MacKellar 1). There were a long line of neo-Latin poets, some of whom were remarkable, including Pontano, Politian, and George Buchanan (MacKellar 2-14). As Kenneth Muir notes, poets as disparate as Dryden, Pope, Samuel Johnson, Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, and Gerard Manley Hopkins, whatever their views of Milton's ideas, regarded John Milton as a great poet, before the counterclaims against him by Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and others (Muir 1-3). For Christopher Kendrick, *Areopagitica* and *Paradise Lost* need to be considered in terms of the cultural revolution through which Milton lived and the ethical framework of thought, something expressed in Milton's language and in his epic, in which freedom and necessity contend (Kendrick 1-2, 218). In a discussion of Milton, authorship and the book trade, Stephen B. Dobranski considers him "a social writer who depended on others—especially printers and booksellers—to construct the perception of his autonomy" (Dobranski 2). Milton, too, was a great reader and wrote to Emeric Bigot, on 24 March 1656, of his love of books and how he did not feel anger at books depriving him of sight or mauling him, and Jackson Campbell Boswell has catalogued Milton's library and shown the range, multilingualism and multinationalism that it possessed (Boswell 5). Concerning censorship

and why *Paradise Lost* was spared prohibition or alteration, Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns maintain that authors of poetry that was not satirical, even if the authors were anti-government, were left alone, and say that the government was less concerned with a small cultural elite than with open sedition and with managing the news (Campbell and Corns 336; see Diekhoff for Milton's own words about himself).

## II

Three works by Gordon Teskey, ranging from 2006 to 2015, provide us with ready ways into John Milton, comparative poet and writer, an English and European author who has spoken to the world beyond (*Delirious Milton*, "Introduction," *Poetry of John Milton*). Although I am concentrating most on Teskey's most recent study of John Milton's poetry, I would like to say a little first about an earlier book on Milton as a traditional but also ground-breaking modern poet and his introduction to David R. Slavitt's English translation of Milton's Latin poems. Teskey brings out theory, translation, modernity, poetics and close reading in these important interpretations of Milton and his texts as a way into poetry and language as well as context.

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Teskey's *Delirious Milton* explores how Milton's double perspective on divine creation in the past and human creativity in the future is a fulcrum in the history of Western art. Teskey's Milton is the last major poet in Europe to centre the act of creation in God while locating it in the human, looking back to the classical and biblical but also ahead to the modern. Poetics are also social, for, as Teskey observes, "the world is a poem, a thing made" (*Delirious Milton* 49). In Teskey's analysis, Milton's "delirious insight" is between angels and humans moving from Creation to creation, God and poet (*Delirious Milton* 178). It is fitting that Teskey ends his analysis of *Samson Agonistes* and his book with poetry as uncertainty, in metaphor drifts and is ungrounded (*Delirious Milton* 199). Delirium, according to Teskey, is metaphor as it effaces the literal sense, which is the ground of doctrine (*Delirious Milton* 200). The ethical and the aesthetic are intertwined as poets represent ideas but are makers. Milton creates the well made not, and Teskey himself has an aesthetic sense and crafts his sentences with elegance, so that we, the readers, make our way, ready but not easy, from the fallen past into the promised end of language and life.

Milton, as we have seen, was a multilingual poet. In introducing a volume of Milton's Latin poetry, Teskey recounts how Milton was taught to write imitations of Greek and Latin poetry, particularly Virgil, Horace, and Ovid, whose uneven couplets were Milton's favourite metrical form in Latin and something he used in his elegies ("Introduction" viii). Teskey sees that Milton's Latin poetry was vital to the development of the style of his English poems in their elegance, wit and moral seriousness as well as testaments to his youth and his singing school ("Introduction" viii-ix). Until his first great poem, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," Milton had written few poems in English but had composed a poem in Greek and nine-



teen in Latin, so this is a fulcrum in Milton's career as a poet, a shift to English ("Introduction" xi). Teskey praises the "droll exaggerations" in the Latin poems and their interest in the pleasures of the art and theatre ("Introduction" xiv, xvii). Some of Milton's Latin poems also represent the decay of nature and how Aristotle understood the Platonic idea ("Introduction" xviii-xx). Milton's "Manso" is about a patron who cared for Tasso and Marino, old and impoverished poets, just as Maecenas and Gallus had been patrons of poets in ancient Rome ("Introduction" xxiv). As a Latin poet, Milton has, as Teskey suggests, many interesting qualities, something that gives him a comparative dimension in his theory and practice of poetry.

Milton has a reach in various languages and traditions in England and on the Continent. His poetry and prose draw on other key writers and thinkers in antiquity and after. The translations of his work extend Milton's range during his life and after. The English-speaking world also becomes a forum for Milton's work.

### III

John Milton is central to the English tradition but also holds a special place in New England, and, by extension, North America. Having a family given to the arts and study and, on one side, with the residue of a Puritan or non-conformist past, I came to Milton early and saw within him the Puritan imagination wrestling with his senses and the full fruits of the world. He was the poet of Puritan England and New England, the people who were some of my mother's descendants, those who, within and without the Anglican Church, came to Plymouth, Salem, Boston, Cambridge, Watertown and other places and fanned out, those who settled with and unsettled the Natives of the land. Milton was their poet. Shakespeare came later. In 1664, Increase Mather had some of Milton's prose works in his library, and in 1698, the City of New York acquired some of Milton's prose works as well as the 1669 edition of *Paradise Lost*. By 1714, Yale, which was founded in 1701, already had Milton's complete works of prose and poetry, and Harvard, through the generosity of Thomas Hollis the Elder, received the core of what was to be, for a long time, the leading collection of Milton in the Americas (Sensabaugh 34-35).

Milton, like Shakespeare, is a European, and someone of such prodigious talents that he became a poet for different cultures near and far. It was my good fortune to have a professor in first year, appropriately named Milton Wilson, and another some years later, Northrop Frye, who concentrated more on the prose than the poetry of Milton because he assumed we knew the poems. Frye and Jay Macpherson, a poet, taught a course of the Bible and mythology, partly to prepare students in a post-biblical and post-classical age for the reading of poets like Shakespeare and Milton. Milton and Bunyan are central to the English Protestant imagination, something that developed from the Reformation and the rise and fall of the English, then British, Empire.



These poets of Protestantism were for the progress of the soul from the Fall to redemption and atonement, and this spiritual poetics could be opposed to the actual politics of monarchy or empire. For Milton, it is vital to explore his poetics. Although a fine writer of prose and a political and social thinker, Milton is one of the great poets of English and of Europe. His dramatic and epic poetry speak to the temptation and falling away of humans and their hope for a happier end, the story of liberty, which the Greeks prized, a narrative he told in a Christian and, particularly, Protestant context. John Stuart Mill, the author of *On Liberty*, as Anthony Pagden reminds us, thought that the Greek victory at the Battle of Marathon was more important to England than the Battle of Hastings during the Norman invasion of 1066 (Pagden 25-26). The Dutch and the English developed the language of liberty, something the Anglo-American colonists, the French, and others would take up in the discourse of rights and freedoms.

290 But Milton did not just write of liberty in pamphlets and essays; he wrote about this in his poetry. The logic, argument, and dialectic of prose seeking liberty in beauty and truth did so in image, voice, metaphor, and narrative in Milton's poetry. He helped in his own performative way to create what I have called elsewhere the drama of meaning. As Gordon Teskey and others have noted, Milton has a sense of drama and performance, something I remember as in the autumn of my first year at university, the college put on a production of *Comus*, which underscored the movement of Milton's language and the theatrical spectacle, all in a college hall and not at Ludlow castle, still brilliant centuries later and many miles away. Quite rightly, Teskey stresses liberty and performance and keys to Milton's poetry. The story of human liberty thrives in the *muthos* of poetry just as the representation of the English past gathers particular strength in Shakespeare's history plays. Some political theorists and historians might think, with poetic Plato, that the very poetic representation vitiates political ideas or the craft and truth of history, but readers and audiences find this poetry of liberty and this political theatre fascinating.

The pleasurable drama of meaning in Shakespeare and Milton endures no matter what reservations specialists have in the rain-shadow of the German research university, something that poets and others in the Enlightenment and before did not have to worry as much about. Voltaire, for instance, could write plays, poetry, history, philosophy, and much else without choosing. He was a *savant* and the research university and specialization of labour have created the anxiety of amateurism, the burden of dilettantism. Poets wanted to be gentlemen and amateurs and passed their poetry about in manuscript until poetry became part of an emerging profession of writing in the late seventeenth century and in the eighteenth century. The rise of science and capitalism, with its attendant and growing middle class, moved the world more to prose and to the instrumental. John Stuart Mill and his father James may have been utilitarians, but they had their classical languages, and might have been horrified to see how profit and use had been taken to such extremes. Poets can now be asked why they write because there is no money in it. Lest I appeal to a golden age, I note that

before Milton was born, Sir Philip Sidney was lamenting the fact that poetry, “from almost the highest estimation,” had “fallen to be the laughing stock of children” in England (Sidney 81-82). And so there is the ebb and flow of the arts and of much else. Milton wanted to be a poet and not the kind of professional that his well-off father, the scrivener and composer, John Milton the Elder, wanted him to be. Being a poet is a precarious business, and Milton faced that precariousness bravely and with a patient dignity. He sought out controversy and did not back down, even in the face of blindness or execution, for his role in the English Revolution and his advocacy against the Restoration. Poetry became a performative act of liberty, truth, beauty, and courage for Milton. Reading Teskey reminds us of all this and makes us want to read more of this fine critic and this poet of poets, who, like Edmund Spenser, creates a poetry that poets can admire for the subtlety and power of its theme and craft.

## IV

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Some great poets and critics have found inspiration in Milton, and they have commented on him and interpreted his work. Gordon Teskey makes a major contribution to our understanding of Milton, poetry, literature, and culture, in English and other languages. Like Milton, Teskey understands English poetry and Comparative Literature to such a degree that his interpretation of Milton’s poetic world or worlds moves us to experience the greatness and centrality of poetry itself. Poetry may be marginal and not, but it is a key to human expression, as are mathematics, music, and painting. Poetry is a marginal centre or a central margin that moves back and forth between these poles but is always vital to literature, culture, and people. Milton’s poetry and Teskey’s criticism remind us of that paradox. Drive poetry to the margins and it will haunt the centre. Bring it to the centre and it will speak of the margins. It does much else, but this is a function of poetry in an instrumental age. Perhaps all ages have been instrumental or measured with instruments, and poetry endures to obscure that fact in the ages it has survived.

It takes quite a reader to read great poets, and Gordon Teskey has been a leading interpreter of Spenser and Milton partly because of his wide-ranging education and partly because of his excellence as a reader and writer. Teskey combines a technical knowledge of poetry and poetics with a sensitivity to metre, rhythm, diction, genre, tradition, and innovation. He reads Milton comparatively and looks forward even as he provides context for the biblical and classical, English and European interests Milton explores in his poetry. What is especially appealing is Teskey’s ability to discuss Milton’s poetry in all its multiplicity and multilingualism. Like Aristotle, Teskey sees that poetry is ethical and aesthetic, and it is not a matter of either/or. There need not be a split between text and context, aesthetics and history, and in fact it may well be the very desire to split form and context that leads to historical reduction or textual isolationism.

Teskey focuses on Milton's poetry and shows how elegant, wise, and sound it is. He begins with the framework of his view of poetry, and then proceeds to the young Milton who wrote poems in Greek, Latin, Italian, and English. Northrop Frye used to say that literature is made of other literature, and to some extent this is the case, so that Milton drew on Dante, who drew on Virgil, who drew on Homer beside much else. If English literature is made up of Germanic roots, French and Italian literature, classical literature, and echoes and displacements of the Bible, then it does make sense that Milton, especially as a Christian and Renaissance poet, would have these elements in his poetry. English poets, if they had access to grammar schools, public schools, or their equivalents, would have studied Greek and Latin and would not have been unilingual, so that English Studies, which came late to the university curriculum, and English poetry are an amalgam, are in theory and practice comparative.

292 English culture was based on translation, for instance, as in Richard Hakluyt the Younger's work as an editor of voyages and travel texts. He commissioned translations of texts from other languages to provide information to the government about the colonization of other lands, partly in response to the examples of Portugal and Spain. English was not a major language as it is now, so it expanded its horizon through the translation of foreign languages and influences. Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, and Milton depended on Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Horace, and others, so to build a wall around English Literature, while understandable, is not desirable. English poetry echoes English poetry, but it also is made up of so much else. Homer and Virgil are the epic models at least as much as the Beowulf poet. Later, T.S. Eliot drew on Sanskrit and Ezra Pound on the Tang poets. Translation, adaptation, and cultural transformation all make up culture and poetry. Poetry matters in and of itself, for its truth and beauty, and because of its place in language and culture. Poetry matters so much it deserves close reading and an understanding of the history and theory and practice of poetics.

Poetry has a sociology, anthropology, politics, and much else, but that can also be intrinsic as well as extrinsic. The form of the content is also the content of the form. The formal properties of art need not be arid. The story Teskey tells of Milton through his poetry is fascinating in its ethical and aesthetic reach. The reader of Teskey, like the reader of Milton, experiences instruction and delight, as Horace said of poetry. A view of the sociological aspects of Milton is important, but Teskey's study of Milton's poetry is wonderful in its salient details and its general observations, seeing the world through a grain of sand, like Blake, and observing the general principles like Samuel Johnson. Once more the analysis Teskey brings is like Aristotle's, and Teskey's knowledge of different traditions, poets, and languages is capacious, just what Milton and poetry needs. Teskey gives us the gift of poetry and poetics through his reading of Milton's poetry in English and other languages, ancient and modern. In what follows, I will discuss these and related matters in more detail in relation to Teskey's most recent book and mainly in terms of comparison.

## V

History is central to Milton. Teskey discusses the whole sweep of Milton's poetry, which meditates on history, from his adaptations of the psalms when he was fifteen to *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. Teskey is elegant in taking the intricate and showing its simple outlines without reduction, so he sees that for Milton, the problem of history "is how to win liberty and keep it" (*Poetry of John Milton* 1). What one notices, despite his classical training, is that Milton is a comparative poet in Europe because his themes are biblical, from the Old and New Testaments. He is a European poet and a world poet partly because of the large number of people who are Christian or have a Christian inheritance. He takes up the radically democratic element in Christianity that humans are equal in the eyes of God and can be saved through Christ's redemption of them and their fallen nature. Milton combines the prophetic and the liberty through Christ, not the restrictive Greek sense of being Greek and not a barbarian or the Roman one based on citizenship, to free humans from their own fallenness or slavery through history and its redemption, through incarnation and grace (*Poetry of John Milton* 2). Teskey points out that this anthropic Christianity with its anthropophany, that is, its revelation to the human, takes, through Christ's incarnation, into itself the authority of God transcendent, and restores or lifts up the decline of the human Adam since the Fall. Christ redeems Israel. For Teskey, the argument becomes even more provocative: "By founding the work of restoration on a different, nonsacrificial event, on Jesus's ethical and intellectual victory over Satan in the wilderness, Milton goes so far in identifying Jesus with humanity—ideal humanity—that it is not unreasonable to conclude that toward the end of his life Milton had moved out of Christianity as it had existed in Europe for a millennium and a half, even if he still believed in the divine origin of Jesus as the Son" (*Poetry of John Milton* 3). This statement is contentious and hard to prove in life, but Milton's poetry might support such a claim, and so the poet as person and the poet as author or maker come into play in that ever-complex dance.

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Christianity had changed a great deal since its inception, as one can see in the work of Peter Brown on the early church, and continued to change, never perhaps more so than with the Reformation, of which Milton was a part a century after Martin Luther's thesis nailed to that door in Wittenberg (see P. Brown). Christianity is both heterodox and orthodox, so Milton, and William Blake after him, were on that great scale, shifting along it over time, with their great mythmaking. Oliver Cromwell had faith in Milton, and after Cromwell's death, there was the Restoration of Charles II that would have seemed like a parody to Milton's view of Christ's restoration. Teskey, despite admitting the conventional theory of salvation or soteriology in book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, thinks Milton's idea of history was close to Walter Benjamin's; that is, a series of moments in which freedom can be seized, like *kairos*, in which the ranks of the enemy open and the archer can find his prime target (*Poetry of John Milton* 3). Benjamin saw revolution as the Messiah, and Milton saw the English Revolution

as a promise of the Second Coming: Blake, as Teskey says, viewed Milton as risen Albion (*Poetry of John Milton* 3). Politics and religion mix in the promise of salvation. Milton's Christianity, like Blake's, involves a spiritual and mental fight for liberty, although, in my view, Blake might be less enamoured of obedience as a paradoxical way to liberty, even if that obedience were to heavenly powers and not earthly powers (*Poetry of John Milton* 4). Milton returns to origins in the Bible—Adam and Eve—to find principles of history and liberty (*Poetry of John Milton* 4). The Bible spoke truth to power, corruption, and tyranny, as Milton and Blake both saw and made in their myth-making, their literary supplement and displacement of the Bible. Poets, as Teskey implies and as I maintain, make their ideas in the matter of poetry and their myths or stories; their images and metaphors keep those ideas from being linear or from being ideas in the conventional sense of argument or dialectic. Perhaps that is why Teskey sees Milton, as his ages, as straying beyond the boundaries of received Christianity.

- 294** Milton was a Protestant revolutionary, of the Reformation and of the English Revolution, which, along with the Dutch Revolt, helped to bring in the world of Protestantism, commerce, capitalism, and northern European power. The Bible was Milton's Big Black Book, as revolutionary as Mao's Little Red Book, and, as Teskey notes, it was the prophetic power of the Bible that appealed to Milton because of the opposition of the prophets to priest and king (*Poetry of John Milton* 5). Teskey appeals to "Lycidas" as an example—before *Paradise Lost*—of Milton turning to the Bible as a source of the energy of revolution, in which Saint Peter enters into a pagan pastoral elegy to chastise the bishops for abusing power and Charles I for ruling without parliament (*Poetry of John Milton* 5). Teskey ranges through early, middle, and late Milton and does so more in terms of thought than life, breaking them down into transcendence, engagement, and transcendental engagement, a scheme that is like Northrop Frye's view of Blake from innocence through experience to a higher innocence (*Poetry of John Milton* 5-6). Transcendence involves the problem of history as a means of getting out of this world into the next, as in Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" (*Poetry of John Milton* 6). Engagement in the middle period often involves works in prose in which Milton sets out to use action and argument to change the world and sees revolution as a means to improvement, what he called revolutionary *kairos* for historical change (*Poetry of John Milton* 6). Transcendental engagement, which begins with *Paradise Lost*, seeks beyond present events the underlying conditions and moral dimension of history (*Poetry of John Milton* 6). Teskey emphasizes that Milton stresses humanity, Adam and Eve, who enter history just prior to history and in an ideal state (*Poetry of John Milton* 6-7). This humanity Milton chooses over Christ's incarnation, his entering into history, as the centre of his great epic, and this allows Milton to focus on human nature as it is and ought to be. So, for Teskey, Milton's view of human nature is idealistic and not historical, and truth lies behind historical events, and here Teskey turns to the language of Walter Benjamin and that of catastrophe, the pile of the dead at the end of *Samson*

*Agonistes*, and, I might add, of any tragedy by Seneca or Senecan tragedy, including Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* or William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet* (*Poetry of John Milton* 7).

And so Teskey shapes Milton's poetics and thought in a fascinating way, a return to Eden with a difference. Teskey argues that the hope of undoing the catastrophe lies not in transcendence, in the nativity, passion, or apocalypse, or in the Commonwealth of England, but in the nobility of human nature and history as the depravity of that nature (*Poetry of John Milton* 7). The hinge of Teskey's argument, his own *muthos*, is that Milton moves from transcendence to the transcendental, that transcendental engagement is an act of separation, of *diaerisis*, and that movement allows him to see human nature from creation and human history from the Fall (*Poetry of John Milton* 7). To live in history to subvert its illusion. In truth Jesus rejects the power that Satan shows him in *Paradise Regained* (*Poetry of John Milton* 7). It is a key to Teskey's Milton to understand that transcendence is a going to heaven and points ahead to the apocalypse and transcendental engagement is philosophical abstractions employed in a struggle for good and looks back to Eden and creation (*Poetry of John Milton* 7-8). Both transcendence and the transcendental take us from world and history, but the one turns away from them and the other towards them. Transcendence moves from earth to heaven, whereas the transcendental is a dialectic from history to myth to history, and its progress shows that history acts a power acting through individuals, as can be seen in *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* (*Poetry of John Milton* 8).

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History is central to Milton, but he sees history as something in which we must regain the liberty that made us human and that we have lost, so that, as Teskey says, history "defines what we have become and what we must overcome" rather than what we are (*Poetry of John Milton* 9; see 8). Milton follows Horace and others in seeing poets as *sacer*, sacred or set apart, sometimes a dangerous separation or setting apart (*Poetry of John Milton* 10-11). Being a poet, for Milton, is a prophetic calling and spiritual discipline (*Poetry of John Milton* 12). While saying that no poet, not even Shakespeare, can exceed other poets in all things, Teskey sees Milton's greatest trait as a talent for intensity, sublimity, and philosophical seriousness, just above that of William Wordsworth (*Poetry of John Milton* 12). Like Matthew Arnold, Teskey takes a further comparative stance in exploring Milton's style, because Milton has a sustained elevation and grandeur that is not typical of English poetry, not the familiar, worldly, and earthy style, but more like the ancient Greeks: "There is also in Milton's verse an emotional compactness, as in Greek lyric poetry and tragedy, and with that compactness an intense concentration of thought such as the English language, because it is uninflected, scarcely allows" (*Poetry of John Milton* 13; see 12). Greek helps to give Milton his periodic syntax, which Teskey takes to be part of the pleasure of *Paradise Lost*, and his ethos and aesthetic: Milton is essential, pure, intellectual, exalted, serious, noble, clear. Paradoxically, Milton, like the ancient Greeks, creates a delightful aesthetic because the poet seeks something higher. Milton inspires heart and soul with "an exuberant joy" (*Poetry of John Milton* 13). H.D.F. Kitto's view of

Greek art as reconciling at once control, clarity, and seriousness with passion, imagination, and brilliance appeals to Teskey in describing Milton's art. Teskey glosses each quality with examples from *Paradise Lost* and shows Milton's concern, pity, and sensuousness, among other things (*Poetry of John Milton* 13-14). For Teskey, Milton is a poet of the ear, one that has a sense of music, acoustics, and tempo, and Milton is sensitive in his uses of the *microtonal* and *atmospherics*. This last term Teskey finds helpful, from the middle voice in ancient Greek, in describing Milton's creation as a blend of active and passive (*Poetry of John Milton* 15). Teskey illustrates his view with an analysis of God's first reply to Adam's request for a mate in *Paradise Lost*, showing the shifting and subtle verbal *atmospherics* and how the passage moves forward with a powerful logic (*PL* 8.398-411; *Poetry of John Milton* 15-16). Like Dr. Johnson, Teskey sees the dramatic and performative nature of *Paradise Lost*, but maintains that its movement comes from Greek tragedy and considers the dynamism or active energy to derive from the Greek language and Latin poetry. Milton's English gathers grandeur because it is estranged from itself through its debt to Greek and Latin (*Poetry of John Milton* 16-17). Of *Paradise Lost*, Teskey says: "How can a poet who believes in the literal truth of the Bible, in the fable of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, say anything true by means of that fable?" (*Poetry of John Milton* 17). In framing this question, Teskey considers critics of Milton like C.S. Lewis and William Empson, and the nature of his God and his commitment to the sacred truth and the literal truth of the Bible (*Poetry of John Milton* 17-18). For Teskey, as for H.R. MacCallum, Milton is not literal in a customary sense but that he believes that God inspired each letter of the Bible to enlighten our understanding. Teskey sees Milton's use of the story of Adam and Eve in Eden as a myth or transcendental fiction, something true as "the only form in which to transmit back into history the moral truth of freedom" (*Poetry of John Milton* 19). Teskey's study is an amplification of these important points about Milton's poetics, which take into English the classical past in a European context, myth and poetry in search of the ethics of liberty.

## VI

Milton wrote fifty-two poems in four languages between 1624 and 1637 (*Poetry of John Milton* 23). For Teskey, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" is Milton's first work of genius that will always be part of the English poetic canon and that deserves close examination, including what prepared the way for this achievement (*Poetry of John Milton* 24). Teskey sees Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" as building on Elegy 6, "Ad Carolum Diodatum," combining the active life and the reflective life, yoking opposites as William Blake and William Butler Yeats later do in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* and in "Dialogue of Self and Soul," respectively (*Poetry of John Milton* 76, 98). A *Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle, 1634*, also known as *Comus*, was dense in mythological allusion like the Latin poems but much longer,



for Milton would not write anything longer until *Paradise Lost* (*Poetry of John Milton* 101). Once more, Teskey contrasts Milton with Shakespeare, seeing the former as morally serious, making direct political and ethical demands on his audience and readers as Shakespeare does not. Milton, according to Teskey, is playful in his contemplation of venality as in the figures of Belial in *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* and of Comus in this masque (*Poetry of John Milton* 101-02). Comus owes a debt to Greek tragedy and not simply the masque of Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline England (*Poetry of John Milton* 103). Teskey's Milton is acoustical, musical, and spiritual, and not primarily textual and visual (*Poetry of John Milton* 133). *Comus* shows Milton's turn from transcendence to engagement, a movement from reflection to action, as well as the redemption of pleasure and the theme of temptation (*Poetry of John Milton* 134-35, 165). Teskey reminds us that "Lycidas," a funeral poem, has been held in high regard and praises its scope, its sources leading us to Graeco-Roman antiquity and then Renaissance Italy and England, and he calls "Lycidas" "the poem of Europe" in space and time (*Poetry of John Milton* 166-67). Theocritus, Virgil, and the Arcadian and Sicilian shepherds of pastoral are a source for Milton's poem (*Poetry of John Milton* 178-88). In an "acoustic composite," the poem finds resonance in echoing lines from poetry in Greek, Latin, Italian, French, and English (*Poetry of John Milton* 189-90). For Milton, the essentially human is ethical; it is liberty, that is "the righteousness truly existing in Adam and Eve before the fall into history" (*Poetry of John Milton* 198). And so Milton moves from transcendence to engagement.

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The engaged Milton is a dynamic Milton. After "Lycidas," Milton was in Italy and wrote more Latin poems (*Poetry of John Milton* 203). For Teskey, for instance, in the Latin ode to John Rouse, the librarian of the Bodleian Library at Oxford, culture is an engaged preservation, fight and creation of good, making the world better than the one in which we live (*Poetry of John Milton* 215-19). Milton, like William Blake and William Wordsworth after him, could write political, revolutionary, satirical and prophetic poems, none more concentrated, in Teskey's view, than Sonnet 18, "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont" (1655), which was about a slaughter in the Alps of the Waldensians on 24 April 1655 and a call for the overthrow of the Roman Catholic Church (*Poetry of John Milton* 220-24). The Romantics admired Milton, who strove to continue to develop the tradition of English poetry; yet, they did not seek to absorb the ancients then transcend them through Christianity, as Milton did, but, instead, they sought a new visionary poetics beyond his (*Poetry of John Milton* 266-67). Teskey sees discontinuities between the Romantics and the Milton they lauded, and he thinks that writers like Goethe and Victor Hugo clarify the differences between Romanticism and the Renaissance, the Miltonic (*Poetry of John Milton* 298-99).

From transcendence and engagement, Teskey moves to transcendental engagement in Milton. Here, Teskey begins with history in *Paradise Lost* in which history is implied (*Poetry of John Milton* 303). According to Teskey, this poem, more than the Book of Revelation and Dante's *Commedia*, delivers a metaphysically and morally coherent view of history. To sum up, "*Paradise Lost* is the only successful classical

epic composed in the modern world, in a modern language, on a Hebraic theme altogether foreign to the values and outlook of the classical world” (*Poetry of John Milton* 338). Moreover, Teskey continues: “It is a grand, moving, morally serious, spiritually sublime, spectacularly cosmic and visionary poem, in which the forces of evil contend against good for command of prophetic-historical time” (*Poetry of John Milton* 338). The tragedy of Adam and Eve is the start of history, and Milton shows a transcendental engagement, a courage, honesty, and toughness with his inspiring act of hope as expressed in his epic (*Poetry of John Milton* 338-39). Teskey came to be interested more in origins than in originality in discussing *Paradise Lost*, less in its originality or divergence into the first chapters of the Bible—as opposed to the experience of other epics as in war in *Iliad*, return and recovery in *Odyssey* and conquest and founding in *Aeneid*—and more in the origin that is God (*Poetry of John Milton* 345, 369). A poet, according to Teskey, makes and says in a manner that is ethical, technical and prophetic, and he or she notes, remembers and reports, and, for Philip

**298** Sidney and Milton, the prophetic element of poetry counts for most. *Paradise Lost* unites the poet and his saying, the ethical and the prophetic, and is about the turning of verse and the turning of Satan against God as well as the dramatic expression of Satan, the Father, the Son, the angels, Adam and Eve (*Poetry of John Milton* 370-76, 407-08). Like Samuel Johnson, who speaks about Milton’s “sublimity,” greatness and “gigantic loftiness” in *Paradise Lost*, Teskey examines the sublime in Milton’s epic poem (Johnson, “Life of Milton” 2010: 189-90, qtd. in Teskey, *Poetry of John Milton* 409). Teskey sees Longinus’s *On the Sublime* [*Peri Hypsous*], which views literary genius as being heroic, as something important to Milton in *Paradise Lost* (*Poetry of John Milton* 410-16, 434-35). The subject of the poem is from the third chapter of Genesis and involves the temptation by Satan of Adam and Eve, which is the cause of their disobedience to God, all of which can be summarized as the main action of “the temptation, transgression, judgment, and exile” (*Poetry of John Milton* 436). The temptation of Adam and Eve is a test, and I would add, mythological history that lies at the base of the human story or history (*Poetry of John Milton* 465). Teskey appeals to Aristotle’s theory of tragedy, and he sees a *peripeteia* in the reversal of the circumstances at the end of Book 9 of *Paradise Lost*: “But that false fruit / Far other operation first displayed” (PL 9.1011-12, qtd. in Teskey, *Poetry of John Milton* 467). After much preparation, the catastrophe of “Man’s first disobedience” from the first line of the poem has occurred, and Teskey sees two modes of reading in *Paradise Lost*: interpretive and dramatic, hermeneutic and mimetic (*Poetry of John Milton* 475-76, 488). This epic ends with drama where myth and history flow into each other (*Poetry of John Milton* 498). Milton’s *Paradise Regained*, which is spare in style, challenging in ideas, and allusive to the Bible, is in and of itself but is also a commentary on *Paradise Lost* because it completes the earlier epic “as a transcendental engagement with the problem of history” (*Poetry of John Milton* 508, 511). Milton intended *Samson Agonistes* as a Greek tragedy, and Teskey views this work in conjunction with *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, despite their individuality, as being “a single

poetic statement” (*Poetry of John Milton* 515, 548). Finally, in Milton, Teskey takes into account recent editing and scholarship and the chronology of the poems (*Poetry of John Milton* 553-57, 559-68).

## VII

By discussing Milton and his poetics in a comparative context, taking into account classical antiquity and Continental theory and practice, I have tried to decentre Milton as an English poet. The Englishness of Milton and of English Literature is centripetal and the European context is centrifugal. But Milton is both English and European, and the dichotomy between them is in some ways false, as we have seen. If we dig into the English identity of English literature, we see that it has sources and influences in the Bible, classical antiquity (Greece and Rome), and Italian and French literature, as well as those in the British and English traditions. Milton, being multilingual, and being able to read theory and practice in many languages ancient and modern, could also write in a number of languages in verse and prose. Many English poets were multilingual, for instance, Chaucer, Spenser, Sidney, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Shelley, and others, but perhaps not to the extent of Milton. The tutorial system and the educational system in public schools, grammar schools, and universities were such that it meant that the students, including these poets, were exposed to translation, different literatures, rhetoric, and ancient learning. These English writers were part of a comparative western European literary and educational system with overlaps and shared inheritance. Milton, then, was a great and individual talent as a poet, but his poetics is also a European and a comparative poetics. By examining the context of scholarship, criticism, and theory in the field of Milton Studies and by concentrating on some of the work of Gordon Teskey, an outstanding scholar and close reader with a sense of theory and practice, literature, and adjacent fields, with his own understanding of languages and comparative methods, I have stressed comparative Milton and poetics. Milton is a great Renaissance poet and, although some were surprised I would write about Milton as a comparative artist, for those who have paused to think about humanism, the Renaissance and Reformation, and English education and poetics, it is hardly astonishing to find that Milton and Comparative Literature go together. The one reminder is just how accomplished Milton is in his multiliterary performance, something important in the meeting of the aesthetic and the ethical.

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## NOTES

1. “Milton, seen by Chateaubriand, is so grand that he touches the heavens and that he wrestles with God.” All translations here and below are mine.

2. "He rendered to God one of the most puissant breaths that ever animated human clay."
3. "He writes in these three languages and he impregnates all three with the same harmonious suavity; he mixes and confounds the waters and the three rivers in the bed that opens to them a new poetry."
4. "In this story of God, the first role goes to the devil."

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