Milton and the Politics of Orphic Enchantment

Martin Dawes

Department of English,

McGill University,

Montreal.

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Abstract

While Milton's ambivalence towards myth has been attributed to pagan-Christian tension or to pressure from a utilitarian culture, I argue that his poetical struggle with Orpheus the enchanting bard is equally political. His attraction to the divinely gifted singer, evident in his juvenilia, was tempered by the need to take account of the myth's royalist currency as a figure for the ordering power of monarchy. The court masque epitomized an art of Orphic enchantment designed to spellbind the audience – an art antithetical to Milton's quest for a collaborative readership empowered to choose citizenship over subjection. Growing dissident under Charles I, he rejected this royalist art of mastery along with the traditional union of bard and king. Milton used Ovidian irony to reposition Orpheus within a dialogical poetics of engagement that might inspire readers to realize their god-given freedom.

I trace the development of Milton's poetics to show that, in search of a mutually beneficial relation between artists and audiences, governors and peoples, his poetry weighs Orphic enchantment against more dialogical models. I demonstrate how the more secular poems link the pursuit of Orphic art to escapism and question the passivity of the enchanted audience, implying that we open ourselves all too readily to political subjection. Milton takes on royalist art by gesturing towards a poetics that awakens others to social action. I further argue that the sacred poems harness the Christian concept of trial to such an anti-authoritarian poetics, delving more deeply into the temptations of Orphic power and the problem at their heart: why do we so often prefer enchantment to engagement, too often deserve subjection for failing to

earn citizenship? While the poems affirm that art can serve engagement, they warn that Orphic temptations such as nostalgia and melancholy may arrest development and encourage disengagement. Milton builds his epic and his God alike on the levelling model of dialogue. The freedom fostered by that model is fragile, but engaging in debate gives us a taste for the choosing that it requires, stimulating the desire to exercise our free will further. The dialogue through which we flourish as reasoners and choosers demands both chutzpah and humility. The "skilfull and laborious gatherer[s]" expected in Milton's prose become the engaged and collaborative readers for whom his poetry calls by refusing merely to enchant us.

Tandis que l'ambivalence de Milton envers le mythe a été attribuée ou à la tension entre les traditions païenne et chrétienne ou à la pression d'une culture utilitaire, je soutiens que sa lutte poétique contre Orphée le barde enchanteur est également politique. Son admiration pour le chanteur divinement doué, évidente dans ses œuvres de jeunesse, était tempérée par le besoin de tenir compte du crédit dans le milieu royaliste du mythe comme symbole du pouvoir ordinateur de la monarchie. Le masque de la cour a exemplifié un art d'enchantement orphique destiné à envoûter le public – un art antithétique à la quête de Milton d'un lectorat participant prêt à choisir la citoyenneté plutôt que la subjugation. En devenant dissident sous Charles I^{er}, il a rejeté cet art royaliste de la domination ainsi que l'union traditionnelle du poète et du roi. Milton a employé l'ironie ovidienne pour replacer Orphée dans une poétique dialogique d'engagement qui pourrait inspirer ses lecteurs à réaliser leur liberté, donnée par Dieu.

Je suis le développement de la poétique de Milton pour montrer comment, à la recherche d'une relation mutuellement bénéfique entre les artistes et les publics, les gouverneurs et les peuples, sa poésie évalue l'enchantement orphique par rapport à des modèles plus dialogiques. Je démontre que les poèmes plus séculiers lient la poursuite de l'art orphique à l'évasion et mettent en question la passivité des enchantés, en suggérant que nous nous exposons bien trop volontiers à la subjugation politique. Milton affronte l'art royaliste en signalant une poétique qui incite les autres à l'action sociale. Je soutiens en plus que les poèmes sacrés exploitent le concept chrétien de l'épreuve pour cette poétique antiautoritaire, en fouillant plus profondément les tentations du pouvoir orphique et le problème à leur base: pourquoi préférons-nous si souvent l'enchantement à l'engagement, pourquoi méritons-nous trop souvent la subjugation en ne réussissant pas à gagner la citoyenneté? Alors que les poèmes affirment que l'art peut servir l'engagement, ils avertissent que les tentations orphiques telles que la nostalgie et la mélancolie risquent d'arrêter le développement et de favoriser le désengagement. Milton construit son épopée et son Dieu d'après le modèle égalisateur du dialogue. La liberté favorisée par ce modèle est fragile, mais nous lancer dans le débat nous donne le goût de faire les choix que le débat nécessite, en stimulant notre désir d'exercer encore notre libre arbitre. Le dialogue qui nourrit nos capacités de raisonner et de choisir exige du culot ainsi que de l'humilité. Les « skilfull and laborious gatherer[s] » attendus dans la prose de Milton deviennent les lecteurs engagés et participants que sa poésie réclame en refusant simplement de nous enchanter.

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Introduction

In Milton's fairytale *Mask*, the Attendant Spirit calls up the river goddess Sabrina to save the Lady from the magic clutches of Comus the "inchanter vile" (l. 907):

> Sabrina fair
> Listen where thou art sitting
> Under the glassie, cool, translucent wave,
> In twisted braids of Lillies knitting
> The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair,
> Listen for dear honours sake,
> Goddess of the silver lake,
> Listen and save.
> (ll. 859-66)

The song is both enchanting and engaging, a thing of beauty that is also a call to action. We hear the water lapping in the L- and S-sounds of "glassie, cool, translucent," as if the poetry were taking on the qualities of Sabrina's realm. But the song and chant of the Spirit do not spellbind or ravish so much as they hail and awaken the goddess: "Gentle swain at thy request/ I am here" (ll. 900-1).[1]

So too does the best of Milton's poetry harness enchantment to engagement, inviting readers still to response and responsibility. Yet his verse gains dramatic depth by confronting the ways in which such a call or challenge to make choices can resemble the song of an "inchanter vile" who would spellbind others into submission. As *A Mask* suggests, artistic enchantment – the poet's "chanting into" the audience from the page or stage – is an exchange fraught with all sorts of perils and potentials. The musical word that enlightens and inspires may equally lull or compel us. For

[1] I quote Milton from Riverside with the occasional exception of the Yale edition of the prose (CPW).

Milton as for many classically educated poets, the keynote figure for this dubious act dates back as far as the literary tradition that harps on its ambivalence: Orpheus, the Argonauts' bard, whose power Apollonios Rhodius and other writers barely distinguish from that of the Sirens. That the archetypal bard appears frequently in Milton's poetry has long been remarked. In Sonnet 2 ("*Donna leggiadra*"), the speaker looks to Heaven to defend him against erotic bewitchment in the form of his lady's Orphic singing. "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" draw on aspects of Orpheus to dramatize contrasting ways of life and art that turn out to be equally stunted. In lamenting the loss at sea of a young poet and pastor, "Lycidas" recalls the helplessness of the Muse Calliope to save "her inchanting son" Orpheus from a death more violent (l. 59). The narrator of *Paradise Lost* takes care to assure us that he sings "With other notes then to th' *Orphean* Lyre" (3.17). Evidently, the mythic enchanter is not just a presence but also a problem in Milton's poems. What I will be suggesting is that Orpheus is a problem for Milton mainly because enchantment is a problem for the dialogical poetics that he develops – a liberating and yet demanding poetics of engagement with readers and traditions that goes hand in hand with his anti-authoritarian politics.

By the 1640s with their civil strife, Milton had come to realize that enchantment was not just a poetical matter, something between artists and their audiences, but also a political issue between monarchs and their subjects. Milton's prose adds Charles I to the poetry's list of enchanters that already included Comus and Orpheus. Answering the late king's (in fact ghost-written) memoir *Eikon Basilike* (1649) and its image of Charles as a saintly martyr, Milton excoriates a portion of the English people as an "Image-doting rabble" who, "begott'n to servility, and inchanted

with these popular institutes of Tyranny, subscrib'd with a new device of the Kings Picture at his praiers, hold out both thir eares with such delight and ravishment to be stigmatiz'd and board through in witness of thir own voluntary and beloved baseness" (*Eikonoklastes* 1095). The royal memoir's runaway success was to bear out Milton's fears that monarchical power and mystique were being disseminated through the arts of word and image. Such media "inchanted" people not so much against their will as by subtly exploiting the "voluntary and beloved" servility to which, in his view, they were habituated as Stuart subjects. For Milton, to take on the problem of Orphic enchantment with his own rhetorical arts was thus to confront the monster of complacency in readers as in subjects, or in other words to confront our human weakness for self-enchantment.

Critics have tended to underestimate Milton's wariness of Orpheus and his enchanting song, especially in the earlier poems, while explaining in other ways the more obvious distance between the two poets in the later verse. Some assume that, as Milton matures, such classical or pagan figures must conflict with his religious convictions. Michael Lieb remarks of Calliope and Orpheus in "Lycidas" that "the pagan world . . . has proven itself insufficient" (*Milton* 49). For Roy Flannagan, the line just quoted from *Paradise Lost* likewise asserts the supremacy of the author's Christianity; the rejected "*Orphean* Lyre" represents "the classical sources of inspiration" (416, n14). But Milton had little need to make this point to Christian readers who even in the late Renaissance took syncretism in art for granted along with the superiority of their own religion. More pertinent is Lieb's argument (made also by John Leonard and other commentators) that "Lycidas" (1637) and *Paradise Lost* (1667) hold the Orphic figure at a distance both to express and to contain Milton's fear

of sharing the bard's violent fate, a fear well justified for any critic of the establishment in the 1630s or '60s. Other scholars look to broad cultural trends to account for Milton's disinclination to idealize Orpheus in these poems. John Hollander and Kenneth Gros Louis suggest that the growth in seventeenth-century England of utilitarian movements such as Puritanism and science, coupled with the marginalizing and "de-mythologizing" of the arts, resulted in fewer celebrations of the bard's power and more laments for his defenselessness. Again, this seems but part of the story for Milton. Here is a poet so taken with his vocation that he swims against more than one cultural tide in offering Restoration readers, accustomed to comedy and rhyme, a full-scale tragic epic in blank verse.

What I chiefly dispute, however, is the critical commonplace that Milton always identified with Orpheus to the extent of seeking his spellbinding power. While juvenilia such as the Latin elegies toy with such a goal, we have overlooked some of the irony and other means by which Milton calls Orphic enchantment into question as early as the Italian sonnets and "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." As a result, we have missed much of the nascent radicalism in their problematizing of mastery, idolatry, passivity, and other aspects of the lopsided symbiosis of enchanter and enchanted – a symbiosis that Milton begins to locate also within individuals such as self-enchanted poets. I am indebted to Rachel Falconer's *Orpheus Dis(re)membered* for its many insights into Milton's preoccupation with the myth of Orpheus. But to claim that Milton covets the Orphic power to "ravish" readers is to turn him into just the sort of authoritarian control freak that he came to abhor in his politics: "Milton claims for the Orphic singer alone this power of ravishing an audience. It is a rhetorical power that he himself quite evidently seeks, . . . the skill to render an audience mute and

powerless before the will of the divine prophet" (Falconer 44). As I will argue, the poems' development of a far-ranging critique of Orphic enchantment confirms that, to the contrary, this is a rhetorical power that Milton refuses to pursue. What his poetry seeks from readers is not submission but collaboration.

To mount such a far-ranging critique was not so much to quarrel with myth or the ancients as to take on what and whom Orpheus represented for Milton's readers. The seventeenth-century mythographer Pierre Gautruche synthesizes the myth's various versions, of which the most influential was that of Virgil in book four of the *Georgics*:

> *Orpheus* . . . was born of . . . *Apollo*, and the Muse *Calliope*: . . . he did cause his voice to agree so well with his Lute, that the Rivers did stop to listen to him, that the Storms and Tempests did cease, that the most Savage Animals did come to him in companies to recreate themselves with his excellent harmony; and that the Trees and Rocks were seen to move at the sound. He performed something more than this; for when he lost by death his Wife *Eurydice*, who flying from the amorous embraces of *Aristaeus*, King of *Arcadia*, died suddenly of a Wound received by a Serpent. He went after her to the Gates of Hell, where he played with such dexterity upon his Instruments of Musick, that *Pluto*, *Proserpina*, and all the Infernal Inhabitants, were ravisht in admiration. He prevailed by that means so much upon them, that they granted unto him . . . his Wife back again , . . . upon condition, that in his return he would not look back upon her, . . . which condition his impatient love for her caused him to break, by casting his eyes behind him: . . . they dragged her back into Hell, and left him in such a trouble of mind, that he resolved for her sake to never entertain any affection for a Woman; . . . [which] did scandalize and displease so much the Dames of *Thracia*, that in their furious transports at the Feastival of *Bacchus*, they tore him in pieces. But afterwards he was metamorphosed into a Swan, and his Harp was placed amongst the Stars. (156-7)

The "excellent harmony" of Orphic song and its uncanny power, possibly connected to the stars, to render others "ravisht in admiration"; the ordering and controlling influence over nature, especially over water; the passion that harrows Hell only to cause the fatal backward glance and unquenchable melancholy; the bloody dismemberment at the hands of the crazed Bacchantes – these, along with Virgil's

fantastic touch of the severed head that sings on ("Eurydice!"), are the principal motifs that fascinated the Renaissance. The deathless voice of the bard spoke volumes to all those poets dreaming of artistic immortality. The compelling images of ordering power, however, selectively mediated by the allegory of a civilizing Orpheus in Horace's *Art of Poetry*, naturally held particular appeal for artists and rulers in need of symbolic authority and union. As I will demonstrate in chapter one, the Renaissance Orpheus most often represented the power of the one to enchant the many to order and civility.

While the myth carried a range of meanings in English literature, this politically loaded Renaissance Orpheus proved as useful to the English courts and their poets as to their continental counterparts. We shall see in chapter two that the mythic bringer of order not only appears in major works by Spenser and Shakespeare, among other Elizabethans, but also figures largely in Jacobean and Caroline masques and verses by court poets such as Thomas Campion and William Davenant. Though court masques were often published, the genre epitomizes a poetics of enchantment that relies more on spectacle than on drama. In the same pamphlet that exposes Charles I as an "inchanter vile" like Comus, Milton derides such courtly arts as traps "sett . . . to catch fools and silly gazers" (*Eikonoklastes* 1080). The singing and dancing masquers need but show up to quell tempests and to rout villains – lowly types who appear only to be mocked and dismissed. If dissent enjoys a voice, it is made to sound ridiculous in a genre too formulaic to leave much room for debate. In these dazzlingly elaborate entertainments, Orpheus and other fabled figures for the artist, along with images of cosmic order such as the Music of the Spheres, make the poet seem the natural companion of a quasi-divine king at the centre of political power. This involvement

with monarchical power helps to explain why the Orphic figure would tempt and trouble a poet like Milton, who from early in his career appears to aim both above and below the court in serving his maker and his public.

The more I study Milton alongside this English Renaissance Orpheus, this favourite of kings and cavaliers, the less I can believe in Falconer's Orphic Milton. The poems characteristically produce more dissonance than harmony or order, dissonance between traditions, voices, politics, eras, genres, realms, readers, and so on. Neither does the dissonance derive from Orphic passion or furor. It seems rather the work of a poet who learns to "*build* the lofty rhyme" ("Lycidas" l. 11) on dialogical foundations, as we might expect of a rhetorician as well-trained in argument and counterargument as this Cambridge graduate. Indeed, in his preface to the second edition of *Paradise Lost*, Milton dismisses the facile closure of rhyme as a form of "modern bondage." Even more alien to my experience of Milton is the Orphic notion of ravishment, of seizing readers and bringing them to order through the well-nigh irresistible rhythms of verse. The poems' demanding ideas and indeterminate allusions, the revisions of forms and genres such as sonnet and masque, and hence the interplay with readers' expectations, the refusals to answer clearly the questions raised (is Satan some sort of hero?), the political implications that await fulfillment – all of these open-ended features and qualities engage us in the willful work of making choices. While reading Milton can be delightful, it leaves me anything but "mute and powerless before the will of the divine prophet"; nor do I see signs of any attempt to render me so. On the contrary, part of the delight lies in the feeling that, unlike, say, Ben Jonson, Milton never insults one by trying to charm one into an anticipated consensus. Still, in light of the Orphic Milton and related authoritarian versions such

as Stanley Fish's corrector and Harold Bloom's intimidator (from *Surprised by Sin* and *The Anxiety of Influence* respectively), my discussions of the poems in chapters three and four will consider continually this question: does Milton reject political oppression only to pursue poetical oppression himself as an Orphic enchanter?

That the poems in fact critique the arts and politics of enchantment while accommodating the archetypal enchanter, as I will show, bears out the reader-friendly dialogism that I claim for Milton's poetics. In the words of *Areopagitica*, his celebrated argument against the licensing of books before publication, Milton's is no "fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary" (1006). Milton realized that Orpheus and his song had crucial parts to play in helping him to work out an alternative, anti-authoritarian poetics of mutual benefit to artist and audience. The poet, his characters, and the engaged reader all grapple with the various temptations in Orphic song – from submission and domination to melancholy and the backward glance of nostalgia – along with the deeper question of what makes these so tempting in the first place. If God created us free-willed creatures, as Milton everywhere insists, whence the complacency through which we surrender willingly to the potent voices of enchanters? Rejecting the monological voice of leaders like Charles I (who ruled without parliament for a decade), Milton both animates his verse and challenges his readers by exploring other models and traditions rather than attempting to silence them.

My thesis that Milton learns to contain and to critique Orphic enchantment and its politics of mastery within a dialogical poetics of engagement builds on a range of recent criticism. Students of Ovid such as W. S. Anderson have helped me to realize that, in developing such an alternative model, Milton could have drawn on the

Metamorphoses and its ironization of Virgil's tragic Orpheus – a deflation that hints at the dangers of self-enchantment and reminds us that even a divinely gifted poet requires the cooperation of the audience. In describing the dialogical appeal of Milton's poetry to his audiences, I apply more widely to his oeuvre Elizabeth Sauer's theory in *Barbarous Dissonance* that his epics are "multivocal texts" whereby the reader "becomes engaged in comparing and evaluating the poetic and extra-literary voices" (3). But perhaps no study has taught us more about the democratizing ramifications of such an engaged readership than Sharon Achinstein's *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader*. Her analysis of the able audience imagined in his polemical pamphlets and in *Paradise Lost* supports my contention that, instead of striving merely to enchant his audience like Orpheus, Milton challenges readers in his poetry as in the best of his prose. My discussion of the politicization of Orpheus in England is underpinned by *Elizabethan Mythologies*, Robin Headlam Wells's stimulating study of myth's ideological service to the Elizabethans. Finally, with regard to the seventeenth-century politics of myth, Stella Revard's analysis of the Papal and Caroline appropriations of Apollo, in *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera's Hair*, has provided a parallel for my enquiry into the equally loaded uses of Orpheus by Milton and his contemporaries.

Chapter one will trace the idealized Orpheus of the Renaissance courts and academies from its roots in Greek and Roman literature, attending also to Ovid's deflation of Virgil's bard as a model for Milton's own critique of enchantment. The often royalist career of Orpheus in English verse, and Milton's vexed relationship with the mythic poet in a warring culture turning away from myth and poetry, will be the subject of chapter two. Chapters three and four will elucidate my thesis through close

readings of selected poems by Milton. While each of these final chapters proceeds more or less chronologically, I depart from most critics in dividing the more secular poems from the sacred rather than the earlier from the later. This has the advantage of preventing a teleological view of Milton's progress towards his great epic (a view that he himself finds convenient) from obscuring the ways in which poems as chronologically disparate as the Nativity Ode and *Paradise Lost* may wrestle with some of the same problems. The conclusion will summarize my findings and further reflect on the personal, political, and cultural implications of Milton's poetics.

My special interest in the poetry has partly to do with taste and temperament, and partly with my conviction that its beauty, depth, and stature dwarf the achievements of the prose in spite of the latter's importance to modernity. This study has also been motivated by the ways in which my reading experience clashes with some of the more entrenched images of Milton in the literature. It seems almost customary nowadays to add the caveat that his criticism of the court does not make Milton a democrat. Yet my analyses of the poems suggest that not just their themes but also their very textures challenge and empower readers – and in time why not the "Image-doting rabble" – to raise themselves out of subjection towards citizenship.

Chapter One

Taking on Orpheus: Ironic Deflation versus Nostalgic Inflation

The myth of Orpheus the enchanting poet is one of antiquity's most literary, achieving its characteristically tragic form relatively late, in Virgil's *Georgics* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. By the time Dryden was famously praising the former as "the best Poem by the best Poet," the latter had long been a second Bible, albeit a controversial one, for artists of all kinds. Like many Early Modern poets, Milton looks to these two titans of Roman letters as well as to his own contemporaries in taking on – both contending with and to a limited extent assuming – the figure of Orpheus. Ovid's deflation of Virgil's Orpheus provides Milton with a model of irony enabling not just politico-religious and literary critiques but also self-criticism. Indeed, such irony turns out to mark Milton's Janus-faced treatment of myth generally. His Ovidian distancing of myth "corrects" the nostalgic tendency in the English courts and in elite Renaissance circles such as the Florentine Camerata to idealize Orpheus as an authority figure divinely empowered to impose order on the masses.

If it would suit the idealizers to pass over the more tragic scenes of the Virgilian drama, they could also look to an earlier tradition in which Orpheus was a successful hero. Until the *Georgics*, no broken taboo had derailed his quest for Eurydice. Euripides has Admetus lament in *Alkestis* that he cannot win back his wife as Orpheus did. And the legendary singer that Plato attempts to undermine in his *Symposium* (77) as the retriever of a mere "phantom" could not have returned from the underworld empty-handed. Citing further Greek examples such as the *Lament for Bion*, Peter Dronke observes that the rescue of Eurydice from Hades, like that of

Semele by her son Dionysus, reflects "a permanent aspiration of shamans the world over," one based on "the intimation that the here and the beyond are not irrevocably opposed" (205). The dimly known mystery religion of Orphism, which lies beyond my scope here, "seems to have developed this aspect of the myth" (Segal 157).[2] Despite the massive influence of Virgil and Ovid, the happy ending would return again and again in Western art, sometimes to make Orpheus a more apt precursor or type of Christ the redeemer, at other times simply to make him a cheerier operatic hero for wedding entertainments.[3]

A wise, highborn and successful Orpheus also plays a leading role in the *Argonautika* of Apollonios Rhodius, an Alexandrian epic composed some two centuries before the *Georgics*. Significantly, the enchanter is the first of the heroes recruited by Jason for his quest, a generation before the Trojan War:

> First in our record be Orpheus, whom famous Kalliope,
> After bedding Thracian Oiagros, bore, they tell us,
> Hard by Pimpleia's high rocky lookout: Orpheus,
> Who's said to have charmed unshiftable upland boulders
> And the flow of rivers with the sound of his music,
> Wild oaks still form a memorial to that singing:
> On the Thracian shore they flourish, marching in order,
> Dense-packed, just as Orpheus long ago bewitched them
> With the sound of his lyre, brought down from Pieria. Such was
> Orpheus, whom Aison's son Jason persuaded to join him,
> At Aison's advice, on his quest, and gave him warm welcome:
> Pieria's royal lord, the Bistonians monarch.
>
> (1.23-34)

Here, as tradition has him, Orpheus is born of Calliope the Muse of epic poetry. Of the royal house of Thrace on the northeastern fringes of Greece, he wields the

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[2] On Orphism and its associated texts, including the so-called Orphic hymns (actually of late antiquity), see Guthrie and West.

[3] See Dronke for some medieval examples of the successful Orpheus as a type of Christ. On the myth's adaptations in early Italian opera, see McGee and Monteverdi.

authority of both lyre and crown, though it is to the former that he owes his universal fame and persuasive power. Rachel Falconer can justly remark of his multifarious seventeenth-century incarnations that "there is nothing *intrinsically* Royalist or Republican" about Orpheus (26). But the bard's blue blood would be convenient for aristocratic appropriators such as the Camerata. In the case of Arion, another legendary role model, they were forced to imagine him "dressed in his regal costume – granted then to musicians and poets but only the noble ones" (Galilei 214).

On this voyage of the valiant the poet turns out to be indispensable in all sorts of ways. In the first book alone, we find Orpheus resolving quarrels amongst the Argonauts (1.493); educating them about the gods and the origins of things (1.496); aiding the rowers in "keeping time together/ To the thrum of the lyre" (1.538); teaching them the rites necessary to gain safe passage across the waters (1.915); and leading the warriors in "the war dance in full armour" (1.1134). Calliope's son further proves his worth by relieving their "helpless terror" at the vision of Apollo (2.674), and by drowning out the deadly song of the Sirens with "a sprightly theme" from his lyre (4.891). Through the figure of Orpheus, a tempting alter ego for the author, Apollonios thus smuggles aboard the Argo a dogged defense of poetry as a complementary brand of heroism in a martial society.[4] Without the poet's saving grace, the epic implies, not even the most courageous warriors will get very far – a lesson that would have encouraged Milton as he wrestled with the poetic vocation.

But the *Argonautika* suggests some ambivalence over the poet's semi-divine gift. Orpheus has much in common with the Sirens, likewise identified as the offspring of a Muse (Terpsichore). In fact, Apollonios characterizes Orphic and Siren

[4] See Emmet Robbins (esp. 17-20) on Orpheus as an alternative type of Greek hero.

songs and their effects with striking similarity. The heroes' response to the charming voice of Orpheus – "all heads still eagerly craned/ Forward, ears straining, held still and spellbound; such/ Enchantment did he shed on them with his singing" (1.513-15) – can hardly be distinguished from their reaction to the "seductive/ Songs of enchantment" of the Sirens (4.893-4). Equally striking are the similarities of Orphic influence to that of Eros or "Love the destroyer" (3.296) on Medeia: "striking her heart speechless./ . . . all else was forgotten, her spirit/ Flooded over in that sweet ecstasy" (3.284-90). According to Apollonios, the crucial difference lies in the effects on the will and the spirit. Eros and Siren song are destructive because they undermine these – "her spirit/Flooded over," "her mind's resistless anguish" (Medeia, 3.289-97); "wasting away their will," "his spirit melted" (Sirens and victims, 4.902-13) – whereas the Orphic voice, no less enchanting, seems to delight and enlighten listeners without necessarily threatening their agency. Nevertheless, Apollonios situates poetic persuasion, edification, and pleasure uncomfortably close to seduction, coercion, and destruction.

This closeness is a running theme in the literary tradition, borne out linguistically as well as literarily. In current English, "chant" and "enchant" share a root in the Latin *cantare*, "sing," so that etymologically "enchanting" suggests "singing into" the listener or victim. And "charm," which we often use to signify erotic attraction, issues from the Latin *carmen*, "song." As Charles Segal explains, the same goes for ancient Greek: "song, *aoidé*, is closely akin to *ep-aoidé*, 'enchantment'"; and Homer and his successors employ *thelgein*, another word for "enchant" or "charm by a spell," to characterize both "erotic seduction and the seduction exercised by poetry" (10-11). The *Odyssey* describes more or less

synonymously the voices of the bards Phemius and Demodocus (translated variously as "rending," "wounding," "stirring, rapturous" [1.392-3, 8.75]) and those of the witch Circe and the Sirens ("spellbinding," "enthralling," "ravishing" [10.243-9, 12.208]). This view of language as enchantment was anathema to Plato, whose dialectic purported to seek knowledge and consensus by reason alone (Segal 11). Through complex characters such as Comus, Satan, and the narrator of *Paradise Lost*, Milton continually thematizes the moral and political dangers that Plato and so many others had evidently seen in poetic persuasion. The lady of his Italian sonnets wields an Orphic power that is perilously erotic: "When you speak in beauty, or sing in joy, so that the trees might be moved off the mountains, let him who is unworthy of you guard well the entrance of his eyes and ears" (Sonnet 2, ll. 9-12).[5] The Orphic chant-enchant-charm nexus so obvious here may help account for Milton's and others' harping on the epic poet's need for chastity: "*Additur huic scelerisque vacans, & casta juventus,/ Et rigidi mores*" (Such a poet should be required to have a youth chaste and free of crime, and an austere character; Elegy 6, ll. 63-4). In other words, the gods' great gift is not to be used merely to get girls.

Despite the literary tradition's ambivalence over this Orphic nexus, the figure of the irresistible artist had irresistible appeal for the courts and salons of Renaissance Europe. They took as their locus classicus not the problematic *Argonautika*, however, not Virgil's tragic myth or Ovid's ironic revision, but rather Horace's unproblematic allegorization of the bard as a civilizing force:

[5] As the Columbia editors suggest, Milton's parenthetical praise of the singer's capacity to move trees off mountains appears to draw on Apollonios's account of the "wild oaks" bewitched "down from Pieria" by Orpheus (qtd. in full above, p. 18).

> When men still roamed the forests, Orpheus, the priest and prophet of the gods, deterred them from slaughter and from an abominable way of life. On account of this he is said to have tamed savage tigers and lions. . . . Once it was deemed wisdom to keep what was public separate from what was private, what was sacred from what was not, to issue prohibitions against promiscuity, to set down laws for those who are married, to build towns, to inscribe laws on wooden tablets. In this way honour and renown came to poets, inspired by the gods, and their songs. (*Art of Poetry* 391-400).

As Robin Headlam Wells has shown, in Horace's inspired lawmaker the ruling class "found a model . . . for its own mythical account of the process by which authority persuades its subjects to accept willingly the rule of law" (8). A conservative nostalgia for such an ordering Orphic voice of authority marks the discourses and practices of the Renaissance elites. Prominent among the inflators of the mythic enchanter was the Florentine Camerata of Count Giovanni Bardi, which in the latter half of the sixteenth century offered education and recreation to noblemen (Palisca 4-5). Basing their enterprise on a revival of the fabled music and verse of the ancient Greeks, Bardi and his colleagues pursued the broadly Neoplatonic goal of harmonizing the soul and the state with the cosmic order through the arts. Orpheus is not their only symbol of the compelling powers of song; as in Horace, Amphion and other legends are invoked alongside him. But, in apparently bridging myth and history, Orphic song came to serve the academies as an attainable model of a marvelous past. Pastoralism with its evocation of an Arcadian golden age became a prominent aristocratic mode, and Orpheus one of its signature figures (Cody 14).[6]

Much as we find him in Horace, our bard emerges in the central text of the Camerata, Vincenzo Galilei's *Dialogue on Ancient and Modern Music* (c. 1581-2), not

[6] With reference to Poliziano's *Orfeo* and Tasso's *Aminta*, Richard Cody observes that "the invocation of [Orpheus's] name in an appropriate context of love, landscape, and poetry can be said to signalize the Renaissance pastoral mode" (14).

as the ravishing enchanter but as "the learned poet, wise priest, and singular musician Orpheus" (222). Galilei upholds the archetypal poet with his seven-stringed lyre as a musical and moral example to the "decadent" times – "To use more than seven [strings]. . . would have been vanity" (305-6). Current music has forgotten the classical purities and turned trickily polyphonic; "one does not ever understand a word, as if they were ashamed to be reasoning animals" (205). By contrast, the Orphic monody or plainchant of the ancients enabled the words, "the most noble, important, and principal part of music," to express clearly and movingly "the thoughts and states of the soul" (206).[7] Coeval French academies with similar goals developed the style of "vers et musique measurés à l'antique" (or *musique mesurée*), whereby "all voices sang the same syllable at the same time" (Walker "The Aims" 91-2). D. P. Walker characterizes Baïf's Académie, patronized eagerly by Charles IX, as a would-be "aristocratic dictator of musical and poetical style" seeking "to impose this new music from above on the general public" for the sake of social order and "'les moeurs des Citoyens'" (92). In Italy, to his own emphasis on the moral dimension of art Vincenzo Galilei attaches an authoritarian politics that harnesses Orpheus and other classical symbols to oligarchic values. As the ancient texts seemed to prove, the enlightened nobleman who "uses the muses with reason" ought naturally to govern the ignorant crowd, given to "irrational pleasure" and merely to "delighting the sense" (208-9). If the Orphic arts of antiquity "quieted discords among peoples" and "instilled good

[7] The quasi-puritan spirit of the academies' critique of modern music animates Milton's attack on rhyme, "the jingling sound of like endings," as "the Invention of a barbarous Age" (*Paradise Lost* "The Verse"). As we shall see, however, Comus and other tricky Miltonic characters connect decadence not so much with the people as with the aristocracy.

habits" (213-14), then their revival was as politically expedient as it was aesthetically desirable.[8]

The political fingerprints of Plato and the philosopher-king of his *Republic* could hardly be plainer here. "The divine philosopher" (as Galilei and others refer to him) had granted the arts a prominent role in maintaining or corrupting the interrelated orders of the soul and the state. The Neoplatonic ideals of the Camerata were largely mediated by Plato's first translator in the Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino, commonly described in his day as Orpheus reborn. However, whereas the mythic bard would be appropriated by the aristocrats as an artistic and political figurehead, in Ficino "the emphasis is rather metaphysical and moral" (Warden 90). The teacher of Pythagoras and then (indirectly) Plato, Ficino's Orpheus becomes the first *theologus poeta*, the "go-between in the liaison between Hebrew and Greek" traditions of wisdom (91). According to Ficino, Orpheus was god-gifted with all four of the holy madnesses or furors described in the *Phaedrus* – those of prophecy, ritual, poetry, and love (Cody 28-9). Thus, the "natural magic" of Orphic song can heal and purify us, even awaken us to the divine love. It literally and figuratively attunes us to the cosmic harmony echoed by the lyre, which sounds the intervals or ratios that (as in Plato's *Timaeus*) underpin the very structures of the soul and the universe. By all accounts, Ficino liked to sing the so-called Orphic hymns to his circle of friends and patrons, accompanying himself on a lyre "emblazoned with a picture of Orpheus" (Warden 87).[9]

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[8] See Claude Palisca, ed., for a selection of writings by key members of the Camerata, including Bardi. Frances Yates (*The French Academies* 19-27) discusses the moral and political interest of Charles IX in Baïf's Académie. While the serious projects of Bardi and Baïf have much in common, many academies devoted themselves mainly to "learned play" and entertainments (Nardo "A Space" 136).

[9] On Orpheus in Ficino, see also Voss and Walker ("Ficino's Orphic Song," in *Music*; and "Orpheus the Theologian").

Ficino and his followers could draw on a long tradition relating Orpheus to the Pythagorean Music of the Spheres as its ideal "translator" to our mundane sphere. In theorizing that the enchanter was "able to play the tones and intervals of planetary music, and thus bring down this harmony to earth" (Rierdan 174), they looked to the influential fifth-century *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* by Macrobius (Hutton 26). Like its key source, Plato's myth of Er, Cicero's Dream had aimed to promote virtue by charting the dutiful soul's journey through the heavens to its reward. Macrobius quotes Cicero's dream-guide on the concentric spheres of the Greek universe: "This great and pleasing sound . . . is a concord of tones . . . caused by the rapid motion of the spheres themselves. . . . Gifted men, imitating this harmony . . ., have gained for themselves a return to this region" (155-6, 185). These "gifted men" would include the great poets, philosophers, and other creators. Macrobius goes on to link the Music of the Spheres to the workings of the soul in a macro-micro relationship that was to be the subject of many a treatise:

> The soul carries with it into the body a memory of the music which it knew in the sky, and is so captivated by its charm that there is no breast so cruel or savage as not to be gripped by the spell of such an appeal. This, I believe, was the origin of the stories of Orpheus and Amphion, one of whom . . . enticed the dumb beasts by his song, the other the rocks. . . . Thus every disposition of the soul is controlled by song. . . . [The sphere-music] is too full to be taken into the narrow range of our ears. . . . Cicero would have us understand that if the ears of a man who deserved to participate in the heavenly secrets were filled with the vastness of the sound, surely the hearing of other mortals would not catch [it]. (195, 199)

The link relating the macrocosm of the sphere-music to the microcosm of the individual was the gift of art represented by Orpheus and Amphion, which (re)attuned to the cosmos those souls forgetful of its harmony. The true artists are those deserving of "heavenly secrets" – in Horace's terms, those "inspired by the gods" – whose

mission is then to go on a civilizing charm offensive. In sum, the Renaissance academicians maintained that the captivating arts of Orpheus, properly revived, ought to "quiet discord among peoples" (to recall Galilei) by echoing or making manifest the cosmic hierarchy.

For Christians less eclectic than Ficino and the academicians, the only "true Orpheus" capable of reopening "the narrow range of our ears" and restoring the cosmic harmony to us would be Christ himself, armed with what one enthusiast called "the sweetness and force of his Evangelical musick" (Ross 338). By the Renaissance, in fact, Orphic song and the Music of the Spheres had already undergone centuries of Christianization by Clement of Alexandria, Boethius, Martianus Capella, Cassiodorus, and others. The pagans' celestial music had come to be understood as purposeful praise issuing from "the hosts and choirs of singing angels and the blessed" (Meyer-Baer 35). Boethius influentially refined the platonic sphere-soul relation into a tripartite system of corresponding *musicae*: *musica mundana* (of the spheres), *humana* (of the soul), and *instrumentalis* (in practice). However, if the academicians would idealize Orpheus as the uniter of all three *musicae*, Boethius becomes in *The Consolation of Philosophy* one of the first of many thinkers to turn the myth instead to Christian allegory.

One obvious lesson of the *Consolation*'s famous allegorization is that the passions must be kept in check: "But [Orpheus's] passions unrepressed/ Burned more fiercely in his breast;/ Though his song all things subdued,/ It could not calm his master's mood" (ll. 14-17). And the concluding moral of this, the book's longest poem, is that to look back at Eurydice is to turn away from God, to give in to the "darkness" of materialism and sin:

> For you I sing the sad affair,
> Whoever sing the upward way
> To lift your mind into the day;
> For who gives in and turns his eye
> Back to darkness from the sky,
> Loses while he looks below
> All that up with him may go.
> (ll. 52-8)

Given the tendency for poets to identify with Orpheus, Boethius here may be addressing himself before he found his guide Philosophy, or himself were he to lose his spiritual way. In any case, such Christian allegorizations would proliferate through the medieval era and the Renaissance into Milton's century. After all, Saint Augustine had prescribed appropriation as a Christian duty: "what [pagans] have said should be taken from them as unjust possessors and converted to our use" (75).[10]

The anonymous *Ovide Moralisé* (thirteenth century) follows Augustine so far as to "convert" Orpheus into the godhead or Christ, Eurydice into human nature, their marriage into the Incarnation, the snake in the grass into the satanic serpent, and the taboo-breaker into the sinner (not Christ!) drawn to the unholy darkness (Vicari "*Sparagmos*" 70-1). Some Christian appropriators, as we noted in passing (p. 18), preferred to fashion a happy ending for Orpheus and his underworld quest in order to render him more recognizable as a type or *figura* of Christ the saviour (Dronke 206). Others used Orphic error and failure as a foil for Christian truth and success. While Clement of Alexandria draws liberally on pagan traditions, his well-known *Protreptikos* features an early example of the latter approach. According to Clement, the arts of Orpheus lead listeners along a false path of idolatry, but "far different is my minstrel [Christ], . . . the only one who ever tamed the most intractable of wild beasts –

[10] The various allegorical traditions will be only tangentially relevant to my analysis of Milton. See Dronke, Friedman, and Vicari ("*Sparagmos*") for further examples.

man. . . . See how mighty is the new song[,] . . . this pure song, the stay of the universe and the harmony of all things" (qtd. in Dronke 207). Orphic song is redressed by that of Christ, the divine Word held to be the very cause of the cosmic order.

For most Reformers as for Clement, there could be just one authoritative Word: the biblical Word of God offered equally to all, not the word or music of any legislating artist. For the nostalgic aristocrats, by contrast, it is also *Orphic* song – the resurrection of the supposed golden age of Greek song – which is to tame the masses with its ordering power. This contrast helps to explain why the figure of Orpheus was so problematic even for a Christian poet as humanistic as Milton. Thanks in part to the courts' and academies' harnessing of myth and the arts to their own conservatism, the more radical of the Reformers had reacted by demonizing both, even to the extent of eschewing all song beyond the mass singing of psalms (McColley *Poetry* 79). The fact that Milton neither excludes myth with the radicals nor allegorizes it with the moralists clearly attests to his humanism. But as he developed through the 1630s and '40s into a vocal anti-authoritarian he would have been repelled by the self-aggrandizing classicism of the Stuart court. Milton's problem is then how to refashion and reposition Orpheus and other potent classical figures within a progressive poetics of his own.

Ovid's example will be crucial because, in taking on Virgil and his Augustan poetics of grandeur, he faced much the same problem. A central battleground was the myth of Orpheus, already a contested figure in debates over poetics and politics. Apollonios used the Orphic figure both to valorize the poet as an indispensable type of hero and to explore the traditional ambivalence over the nature of poetic creation and persuasion. If Homer's bards had invariably been "rapt," Plato had gone so far in the

Ion as to have Socrates opine that the poet "cannot make poetry until he . . . goes out of his senses and no mind is left in him" (18). It is because Horace's *Art of Poetry* rehabilitates Orpheus as an inspired but sensible craftsman that it had such appeal for the Renaissance. Omitting the poet's untimely madness, consuming grief and grisly end in the *Georgics*, erasing the ambivalence of his song in the *Argonautika*, Horace sets his own ideal civilizer against a caricature of the *Ion*'s witless bard: "Sensible people are afraid to touch the mad poet, and run away from him. . . . He, his head in the clouds, belches out his poem and loses his way. . . . Once he gets his hands on a person, he doesn't let go until he kills him with his reading" (ll. 453-76). Although Horace's satire on the mad, bad and dangerous poet serves as a foil for his own Orpheus, we may nonetheless glimpse in him something of the flawed Orpheus of Virgil and Ovid.

Compared to Horace's civilizer, neither of these latter poets' figures for the artist would have had great appeal for the nostalgic inflators of Orpheus. Unlike the *Metamorphoses*, however, the *Georgics* both affirms the compelling authority of the Orphic voice and draws the reader into its empathetic treatment of his tragedy. Even the temporary insanity (*furor* or *dementia*) that Virgil attributes to Orpheus seems only to add to his mystique as an artist. At the same time, the author takes pains to put a certain distance between his own art and the problematic chant-enchant-charm nexus traditionally bound up with Orpheus. He tends to associate his poem less with Orphic enchantment than with Roman *labor*, less with the erotic than with the spiritual loves of homeland and of poetry itself:

> *me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musæ,*
> *quarum sacra fero ingenti percussus amore,*
> *accipiant*[.] (2.476-8)

(May the sweet Muses, whose acolyte I am,
Smitten with boundless love, accept my service.)

hic labor, hinc laudem fortes sperate coloni.
nec sum animi dubius, verbis ea vincere magnum
quam sit, et angustis hunc addere rebus honorem;
sed me Parnasi deserta per ardua dulcis
raptat amor[.] (3.288-92)

(I'm well aware how great
A task it is by mastery of words
To invest such humble things with dignity;
But love transports me to Parnassus' steeps.)[11]

The poet serves Rome and the Muses with a love that is boundless and uplifting; far from bringing his downfall like Medeia's "Love the destroyer," it will lead him to the heights of artistry. In keeping with the work ethic and family values that will be promoted by his patron Caesar, he embraces his role as a labour demanding not so much an Orphic enchanter as a master craftsman.

Given such a persona and the didactic material – the cultivation of crops (Book 1), trees and vines (2); animal husbandry (3) and bee-keeping (4) – the very presence of the myth of Orpheus in the concluding episode calls for explanation.[12] Structurally, the episode with its theme of rebirth seems to respond to the previous book and its emphasis on "Diseases, suffering and gloomy age" (3.67). Virgil gives us a further clue by forging an unprecedented bond between the archetypal bard and the shepherd-god Aristaeus, also the patron of beekeepers. Seeking to redress "the loss through famine and disease/ Of all his bees" (4.317-18), Aristaeus learns from the sea-deity

[11] I quote from L. P. Wilkinson's translation of the *Georgics* for Penguin Classics; the line numbers apply to the Latin original.
[12] In fact, the fourth-century commentator Servius claimed that the myth was a late substitution for a eulogy of Virgil's friend Gallus. While few critics now accept this uncorroborated story, its longstanding credence is one measure of the interpretative challenge posed by the episode.

and seer Proteus that he has incurred a divine penalty, invoked by Orpheus, for having caused the death of Eurydice, bitten by a snake while fleeing from his embrace. The Alexandrian tradition of the epyllion or short epic provided the precedent for such an insetting of one story within another, which invites us to read Aristaeus and Orpheus as complementary figures or doppelgangers. As Stephanie Nelson remarks, "The question central to both myths is the possibility of the recovery of life, and meaning, from the fact of suffering and death" (155). By Virgil's novel account, whereas the poet fails in his quest to recover Eurydice, the shepherd succeeds in his mission to restore his swarm. Tragedy is contained within comedy, crowned by the "miracle" of the bees' regeneration from the carcasses of sacrificial oxen in the custom known as the *Bugonia* (4.554).

For Virgil to identify with his own creation would then be to align himself with a tragic loser. No wonder the Renaissance aristocrats would seek to imitate Orphic enchantment rather than Virgil's enchanter. And yet, just as the narrator of the *Aeneid* will risk identification with the doomed lover Dido, the poet of the *Georgics* handles his mythic forebear in his most "subjective" style (Otis 200-1). Most notably, we are assured that the mysterious "madness" (*dementia*) that leads Orpheus to look back at his beloved would be "pardonable indeed/ Did Hell know any pardoning" (4.488-9). The rhetorical questions – "What should he do,/ Where turn, bereft a second time of her?" (4.504-5) – also savour strongly of sympathy. Moreover, it is difficult not to see in Virgil's descriptions of Orphic song the fantastic fulfillment of his own ambition: "*temptanda via est, qua me quoque possim/ tollere humo victorque virum volitare per ora*" (I must find a way/ Of my own to soar above the common ground/ And 'fly victorious on the lips of men'; 3.8-9). Recalling the *Argonautika*, the *Georgics* gives

us a poet-hero capable of "*mulcentem tigres et agentem carmine quercus*" (entrancing tigers/ And drawing oak-trees; 4.510). M. Owen Lee's contention that Orpheus is "Virgil's signature figure in the *Georgics*" (xii), with Aristaeus as Octavian Caesar, seems simplistic given the rather un-Orphic authorial persona. But his subjective style suggests that to some extent Virgil does identify with his "entrancing" creation. Tellingly, whereas Ovid dwells on his grisly murder and comments on his failure to sway his attackers, Virgil will say no more than that they "tore him apart, this youth, and strewed his limbs/ Over the countryside" (4.521-2).

This empathy differs markedly from the attitude of Book 3, where human lovers belong on the same level as beasts: "Indeed all species in the world, of men,/ Wild beasts and fish, cattle and coloured birds/ Rush madly into the furnace. Love is common/ To all" (3.242-4). As reluctant as he was to tell Aristaeus the tale, the seer Proteus ends with "Eurydice!" as if the cry were his own:

> His head, now severed from his marble neck,
> 'Eurydice!' the voice and frozen tongue
> Still called aloud, 'Ah, poor Eurydice!'
> As life was ebbing away, and the river banks
> Echoed across the flood, 'Eurydice!'
> So saying Proteus plunged into the depths.
> (4.524-8)

This Orpheus, unlike that of Ovid, remains magically articulate even in death. Although the mother of Aristaeus, Cyrene, reduces all this to a simple story with a simple moral – an unfortunate crime requiring a propitiating sacrifice – her son is "shaken" by it (*timentem* 4.530). The harrowing and charming of Hades, the madness of looking back, the lament of Eurydice, the seven months' mourning and spurning of other women, the dismemberment at the hands of the Bacchantes, and the last cries of the severed head – all of these affecting Virgilian touches have become hallmarks of

the myth. It is easy to forget Aristaeus altogether, the only one whose values, despite their brutality, seem to be granted a future. Replacing one swarm of bees with another, "Aristaeus never looks back" (Nelson 162). Victory must be his, but Virgil's pathos renders it Pyrrhic at best.

Virgil will be hard-pressed to distance himself from the failings of Orpheus without relinquishing this appeal to pathos. Where then does the *Georgics* censure Orpheus and his magical song? One critical commonplace is that the problem lies in the "individualistic" bent of his love (Segal 47). As Nelson remarks, the farmer Aristaeus recovers in the end because he "deals with the whole, regardless of the consequences for individuals. . . . In Orpheus, we are shown the dependence of one individual on another" (162). However, in extolling Caesar and indeed the extoller himself, the poem as a whole, rather than problematizing the individual, seems to propound a "great man" theory of history. Unconvinced by such supposed contrasts between Orpheus and Aristaeus, William Batstone observes that the two "merge as they separate: both are passionate, self-absorbed, and destructive of others" (127). This affinity in destructive passion becomes clearer when we notice that "everything is concentrated on the fateful moment when Orpheus looked back" (Wilkinson 40). Apart from the final cry of Orpheus, the only speech recounted by Proteus bursts from Eurydice at that very moment: "what utter madness [*furor*] is this?" (4.495). As so often, Virgil suggests that unrestrained emotion leads to tragedy.

The crucial flaw of madness manifests itself as the forbidden act of looking back:

> When suddenly a madness [*dementia*] overcame
> The unwary lover – pardonable indeed
> Did Hell know any pardoning: he halted

> And on the very brink of light, alas,
> Forgetful, yielding in his will, looked back
> At his own Eurydice.
> (4.488-91)

The episode's structural emphasis on this fatal backward glance, not to mention the relentless lamenting that follows, bears out Brooks Otis's insight that Virgil's Orpheus displays not just a lack of self-control ("yielding in his will") but the tendency to get stuck in the past (205). The problem of nostalgia had long been central to the literary tradition, of course, as Odysseus is marked above all by that painful yearning to return (*nostos-algia*). Yet he would go back to a future with his wife; the Orphic danger of getting stuck in the past in fact threatens from the Sirens with their appeal to share his war-stories: "We know all the pains that the Greeks and Trojans once endured on the spreading plain of Troy" (*Odyssey* 12.205-6). Bernard Knox observes that "the Sirens' song is an invitation to live in the past, and that is a kind of death; the Sirens' island is piled with the bones of dead men" (34). In "lamenting for Eurydice/ And Pluto's cancelled boon" for month upon month (*Georgics* 4.519-20), Virgil's monomaniacal Orpheus in effect becomes his own deadly Siren, inviting himself again and again to look back, to inhabit his loss. To demand that he simply move on would be harsh, but his failure to do so as a poet ensures that his last word will be "Eurydice."

The nostalgia that marks the Augustan and the Renaissance elites thus turns out to have a precedent as an Orphic trap. Like the Sirens, it invites the mere repetition of the past, idealized as a golden age that brooks no change. Not so the poetry of Ovid, which persistently punctures the deadening nostalgia in authoritarianism's denial of difference and change. The eventual exile's *Art of Love* changes Augustan monuments and memorials into pick-up joints (1.67-176), and goes on to deflate the cult of

nostalgia more explicitly: "Let others worship the past; I much prefer the present" (3.121). Topping the list of these "others" would be Virgil. By proffering "mythic fictions in place of historical memory," David Quint explains, Virgil's *Aeneid* and other poems were helping Augustus to legitimize one-man rule in terms of "a distant, legendary past" (*Epic* 62-3).[13] In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid reshapes the myth of Orpheus to his critique of such a poetics: he not only makes light of Virgil's tragic grandeur by deflating the bard and his vaunted voice of authority, but also makes his own demystified Orpheus change into a guest narrator who has cast off much of his Virgilian nostalgia. As Thomas Greene remarks of imitative poets, faced with "a past that threatened to overwhelm him" Ovid needed "to *distance* [himself] from the subtexts and force us to recognize the poetic distance traversed" (*The Light* 2, 40).

Whereas Virgil had refrained from rendering the winning words in Hades, Ovid promptly jolts the reader by doing just that. Orpheus announces his quest in unexpectedly stiff and borrowed terms:

> 'Ye deities who rule the world below,
> Whither we mortal creatures all return,
> If simple truth, direct and genuine,
> May by your leave be told, I have come down
> Not with intent to see the glooms of Hell,
> Nor to enchain the triple snake-haired necks
> Of Cerberus, but for my dear wife's sake[.']
> (10.17-23)[14]

Promising Hades the "simple truth, direct and genuine" (10.19), the bard is anything but direct as he goes on to announce what his purposes are not (10.20-2). His appeal

[13]According to Quint, Virgil's *Aeneid* politicized the epic genre both for fellow imperialist poets and for republicans such as Lucan. Quint finds Ovid to be anti-imperialist, noting that on Virgil he is "rarely less than sardonic" (*Epic* 82). However, Virgil himself was "far from . . . uncritical" of the Augustan regime (11) – a qualification arguably confirmed by his tendency to problematize nostalgia even as he promulgates it.

[14] I quote from A. D. Melville's translation for Oxford World Classics; the line numbers apply to the Latin original.

to Pluto and Persephone as fellow lovers (10.28-9) equates their union through violence (*rapinae*) with his own marriage for love (*amor*). The subsequent clichés on death's dominion, some taken from Horace, confirm W. S. Anderson's sense that Ovid is deflating the legend of Orphic song (40): "we hasten, late or soon,/ To one abode; here one road leads us all" (10.33-4). The bard's clumsy flattery actually provides Pluto with reason to hang on to Eurydice: "To you are owed/ Ourselves and all creation" (10.31-2). Although the song turns out to be persuasive enough, this is hardly poetic enchantment.

Ovid's deflation is characteristically ironic – highly indirect and yet sharply critical. The pointedness of Ovidian irony, manifested through what Linda Hutcheon calls "conflictual textual or contextual evidence," incites the reader to look beyond the letter of the text to realize the "evaluative force" of the critique (11-12). As we have just seen, the text depends heavily upon "conflictual" subtexts, above all the *Georgics*, which the able reader supplies. Two or more voices are put into play, as in every case of *imitatio*, but the ironist "imposes a hierarchy on these voices" (Greene *The Light* 259). Ovid's elaboration of the song in Hades not only exposes his own budding bard as wooden and derivative but calls into question the unvoiced "magic" of Virgil's tragic figure, prompting us to consider whether it is only in the imagination that Orphic song can possibly live up to its legendary powers. Even poetic giants such as Orpheus and Virgil, the ironist suggests – not to mention the author himself – must start small, feebly rehearsing received wisdom and mimicking their betters.

In deflating before developing Orpheus, Ovid may be engaging in some self-ironization as well, with a wry backward glance at his own poetic beginnings. Ovid revises Virgil to focus on the bard and his voice; besides spelling out a twenty-three-

line Orphic song in Hades, he silences Eurydice and excises Aristaeus altogether. More tellingly still of this fresh emphasis, he turns Orpheus into a fellow myth-spinner – a worthy stand-in whom the Oxford annotator E. J. Kenney calls "Orpheus-Ovid" (435). Ovid does grant a certain power to the Orphic voice, even if he brings the fabled persuasion of Pluto down to earth. Orpheus thus develops through Books 10 and 11, and develops as a poet in ways that parallel, up to a point, the makings of Ovid himself. Like the well-trained young rhetorician of the *Amores* and the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid's bard begins as a love-poet of dubious sincerity. After "the double death of his Eurydice," he "[holds] himself aloof from women" and grieves for three whole years (10.64, 80), evidently becoming a better poet, if not a better person. Besides those of Hyacinth, Venus and Adonis, Atalanta and others, Ovid assigns to Orpheus the celebrated myth of Pygmalion, another key figure of the artist. The bard's virtuosity confirms that he has blossomed into a surrogate Ovid.

This Orpheus becomes an Ovidian artist by overcoming the Virgilian nostalgia that would confine him to ceaseless lamentation. Even the mature "Orpheus-Ovid," however, is fair game for ironic deflation. There remains a striking incongruity between his preamble and his performance. In Hutcheon's terms, this time the irony's "conflictual evidence" is textual rather than contextual. "But now I need a lighter strain," says he, "to sing/ Of boys beloved of gods and girls bewitched/ By lawless fires who paid the price of lust" (10.152-4). As Anderson points out, the tales of beloved boys (e.g., Hyacinth) mostly end in tears despite the singer's partiality, while those of bewitched girls (e.g., Atalanta) cannot be "reduced to a simple formula of libido and punishment" (46). By showing us a poet who undermines his own program, Ovid stops short of placing his guest narrator on the same level of understanding as

himself.[15] Moreover, the bard's turning from epic themes to the "lighter strain" of love-stories (10.148-54) merely reverses the Virgilian sequence or *rota* of genres, whereas the *Metamorphoses* dares to fashion, partly out of love stories themselves, an experimental brand of un-Virgilian epic. Still, the creator does grant his creation a self-deprecating insight into his legendary Orphic charms. "Terrible my tale will be," warns Orpheus dramatically as he begins to sing of the incestuous Myrrha; "Away, daughters! Away, parents! Away!/ Or, if my singing charms [*mulcebunt*] you, hold *this* tale/ In disbelief; suppose the deed not done" (10.300-3). By reminding us that we are free to suspend our suspension of disbelief, Ovid adds the debunking of Orphic enchantment to his critique of nostalgia.

This is not to say that Ovid or any ironist necessarily stands supreme on top of a hierarchy of voices. As Segal insightfully remarks (91), the silence of Eurydice at the moment of the backward glance suggests that Ovid is on one level bowing to the inimitability of her affecting speech in the *Georgics*. Again, what Anderson takes for the epitome of sardonic mockery – Ovid's substituting "a sorrowful something" (*flebile nescio quid* 11.52) for the famous last cries of "Eurydice!" – may also be a humble acknowledgement of "the impossibility of competing with the Virgilian pathos" (Segal 91). Since the voices of Ovid and Virgil "literally 'interact' . . . to create the real 'ironic meaning'," irony is as "inclusive and relational" as it is critical (Hutcheon 12). Ironization can therefore be a risky business; its indirection inevitably "removes the semantic security of 'one signifier: one signified'" (13). The appropriated, even when subjected to a subordinating hierarchy, may shine through as

[15] See also Micaela Janan on the ways in which Orpheus's "insights [into love and desire] begin to deform his initial agenda" (111).

more compelling than the appropriator. As if to preempt this danger, imitative poets may choose to muddy any hierarchy by providing for "a two-way current of mutual criticism between authors," thereby "tak[ing] on a kind of humility" (Greene *The Light* 45, 47). Segal is pointing to just such a "two-way current" between Ovid and Virgil. By holding back at such moments, Ovid lets his great predecessor shine in readers familiar with the *Georgics*, knowing all the while that he risks appearing the duller of the two.

Even so, the "evaluative force" of Ovid's demystification emerges plainly in his ironic treatment of the Virgilian theme of madness. He simply erases the crucial *furor* that brings disaster to Virgil's tragic lovers; Orpheus looks back out of nothing more dramatic than fear and eagerness (*metuens avidusque* [10.56]). To read this pointed erasure in terms of love alone – "Orpheus' love lacks *furor* because it lacks genuine commitment" (Anderson 47) – would be to overlook the debate on the nature of poetry signalled by Ovid's new focus on Orpheus as poet. The *Metamorphoses* brings the poetic psyche down to earth by locating *furor* not with the bard but with the crazed Bacchantes alone. Ovid also adapts the climax of the *Georgics*' myth to his own critique by adding a comical postmortem reunion in Elysium:

> There hand in hand they stroll, the two together;
> Sometimes he follows as she walks in front,
> Sometimes he goes ahead and gazes back –
> No danger now – at his Eurydice.
> (11.65-8)

While Ovid seems to enjoy the idea that Orpheus can go on succumbing to temptation now that it no longer matters, more pertinent is the suggestion that the bard can look both ways because he has shuffled off his Virgilian nostalgia.

If Ovid is at pains to demystify the Orphic figure, he insists equally that the power of poetry depends as much on the audience as it does on the performer. The voice of Orpheus charms his attackers' weapons for a time, but not the Bacchantes themselves, against whom "his words/ Were useless and his voice of no avail" (11.39-40). As we have seen, Orpheus-Ovid's preamble to the tale of Myrrha – "hold *this* tale/ In disbelief; suppose the deed not done," etc. – also brings out, albeit less dramatically, poetry's dependence on the imaginative cooperation of the audience. Evidently Ovid will have no truck with the traditional mystification of the Orphic bard as a "mad" worker of magic upon the passive ear. As opposed to the paternalistic model of art embraced by the Renaissance, poetic persuasion becomes in the *Metamorphoses* a joint effort with the audience. In fact, Ovid's epilogue concedes that the fate of his own words rests ultimately with readers of Latin: his word-power can extend no further than "Wherever . . . the might of Rome extends" (15.877).

Thanks in part to his absorption of Ovidian irony, Milton rejects the nostalgic elitism that idealized Orpheus as the bringer of order to the recalcitrant masses. His Ovidianism preceded his anti-authoritarianism, but the one would arguably have nourished the other.[16] Noting Ovid's concern with "authority and the author's relationship to it," Micaela Janan observes of the *Metamorphoses* and its guest narrators that, "by allowing multiple voices to speak in their own register, Ovid's poem becomes self-critical, contradictory, never allowing the reader any easy assumptions – and thus escapes becoming, willy-nilly, *authoritative*" (134). The same

[16] Rooted in the *imitatio* he practised at St. Paul's School (Clark), Milton's Ovidianism is well-documented; see esp. DuRocher, Kilgour, and Martindale. Milton's daughter reportedly spoke of the *Metamorphoses* as a perennial favourite with him; and his preferred English poets, Spenser and Shakespeare, were themselves Ovidians (Martindale "Ovid in Milton" 301).

can be, and indeed has been, said about Milton and his greatest poems, notably by Elizabeth Sauer. *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* are not only packed with dialogues but driven by fully-fledged characters who seem to tell their own stories (Sauer 4-5). Ultimately Milton refuses the role of authoritarian Orphic enchanter, practicing in his poetry the dialogism that he preaches in his prose.[17] He develops an anti-authoritarian poetics that rejects the celebration of mastery so evident in Renaissance appropriations of the Orphic figure. It is an indirect, ironic poetics that points instead to our human interdependency. As J. Hillis Miller observes of ironists' heavy dependence on creative readers, irony "cannot be used as an instrument of mastery. . . . He who lives by this sword dies by it too" (105-6).

Like those of Ovid, however, Milton's texts are not just deeply dependent on their often pagan subtexts (and hence on the reader's provisions) but sharply critical of these contributory voices. They show us the "conflictual" Janus face of irony by deflating the very terms, images, and concepts on which they rely. "Lycidas" dismisses pagan figures and rituals lest the poet "dally with false surmise" (l. 153), all the while exploiting the pastoral tradition of Theocritus and Virgil along with mythic characters such as Orpheus and Apollo. That here in the 1645 *Poems* Milton's "backward glances" at pagan myth are already more ironic than nostalgic suggests that his lifelong apprenticeship with Ovidian poetics bore fruit early.

As a Christian poet, Milton has his religious and literary reasons for ironizing pagan traditions and the powerful authors from whom he inherits them. But as an

[17] Milton's are not the only Early Modern responses to Ovid to be infected by his subversive dialogism. Heather James demonstrates that various commentaries on the *Metamorphoses* show traces of anti-authoritarian "counterdiscourses," as commentators struggle to reconcile Ovid's deflation of Augustan pretensions (such as the emperor's divine right) with the royalist values of their highborn patrons.

ardent anti-authoritarian by the 1640s he would also have been wary of the ruling class's tendentious appropriations of Orpheus and other myths. Their ideal of a compelling Orphic voice was all too real for Milton's Britain in the form of the Stuart monarchy. In fact, the Neoplatonic traditions that connected Orphic song with the larger "harmonies" of community and cosmos had long been exploited by Europe's rulers to characterize the state as "a family, united in loving concord by the offices of a paternal musician-king" (Wells 17). For Milton, the word of neither a poet nor a monarch belongs at the centre of things; the true musician-king is God with Christ his Word. Thus, poems such as the Nativity Ode and *Paradise Lost* associate the music of the cosmic order not with his own fallen song, nor with his conflicted country and its oppressive regime, but rather with the divine harmonies of Heaven and the Creation. His epic locates Orphic song amongst the devils (e.g., 2.546-55), exposing the oppressive and degrading potentials of enchantment. If "the corollary of a classic view of human nature [as flawed or fallen] is the need for powerful authority" (Wells 148), Milton's ironic poetics and republican politics alike resist the centralization of that authority in any single figure apart from God.

Ironists such as Ovid and Milton who "thus escape[] becoming, willy-nilly, *authoritative*" (Janan) begin to approach what Kenneth Burke calls "true irony, humble irony" (514). In Greene's terms, they "take on a kind of humility." Humble irony valorizes its contributing voices by conceding a certain artificiality in the barrier between these (sub-) perspectives and the ironist's "perspective of perspectives":

> Irony that really does justify the attribute of 'humility'. . . is not superior to the enemy. . . . [It] is based upon a sense of fundamental kinship with the enemy, as one *needs* him, is *indebted* to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him *within*, being consubstantial with him. This is the irony of

> Flaubert, when he recognizes that Madame Bovary is himself. (Burke 514; italics his)

Ovid "contains" Virgil within but ironizes the *Georgics* and its lamenting bard in order to outgrow the "enemy" and his tragically nostalgic hero. Similarly, as in "Lycidas," Milton's Christian poetry concedes a "sense of fundamental kinship" with Orpheus and other mythic figures even as it takes care to make enemies of them. While Milton's ego has been the subject of much speculation, that he is no stranger to humility becomes clearer when we recall his including "The Passion" in his debut collection of 1645. He puts his own early incompetence on display by publishing this broken and unfixable song together with a self-critical footnote that must have offered hope to many a young poetaster: "This subject the Author finding to be above the yeers he had, when he wrote it, and nothing satisfi'd with what was begun, left it unfinisht" (52).[18]

Burke's formula, however, calls for discourse that "is not superior to the enemy," and there is good reason to doubt whether either poet attains to such a saintly ideal, at least with any consistency. Does Ovid offer merely an alternative vision of Orpheus to those of Virgil and Apollonios? Does Milton's oeuvre not put his own poetics, politics and religion above those of his "enemies"? The indirectness of irony would seem to render such questions unanswerable, bearing out Hutcheon's dictum that "irony can only 'complexify'; it can never 'disambiguate'" (13). Many readers may feel nonetheless that, for all his kinship with pagan poets such as Ovid, and with

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[18] Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns contend that the footnote "smacks of arrogance" (*John Milton* 53). As the next chapter will suggest, Milton's ego is tempered both by humility vis-à-vis his craft and by the classical ideal of public service. The enigma of a large ego with a larger purpose inspired Coleridge to remark admiringly that "the egotism of such a man is a revelation of spirit" (qtd. in Wittreich 277).

the mythic Orpheus, Milton does tend to assume both politico-religiously and literarily a superior stance. To be sure, he will idealize the Orphic figure himself on certain rhetorical occasions, as in "*Ad Patrem*," where he enlists the bard to epitomize poetic achievement. But we shall see that Milton grasps the dangers of Orphic enchantment and nostalgia firmly enough to thematize and ironize them in poem after poem, even at the expense of his own authority. His distance from Orpheus is less a claim to superiority than a measure of his distaste for compulsion.

Sensitizing ourselves to the irony in Milton's negotiations with myth will help to bring his apparent pagan-Christian ambivalence into focus. If he insists in *Areopagitica* that the human task will forever be "to unite those dissever'd peeces which are yet wanting to the body of Truth" (1018), he puts the Christian era ahead of the pagan in its greater hold on truth. Where the nostalgic inflators of Orpheus see a golden age to be revived, Milton sees a stage to be transcended. But he often employs irony with such sensitivity that, in spite of his skepticism, he "takes on a kind of humility," building community between eras. In "At A Solemn Musick," the musical cosmos of myth provides the conceptual link between voiced verse on Earth and choral song in Heaven: "That we on Earth with undiscording voice/ May rightly answer that melodious noise,/ As once we did" (ll. 17-19). The Orphic notion of imitating the celestial harmony elucidates the poet's prayer for a prelapsarian closeness to God. Milton also has the humility to recognize that his own art has a "fundamental kinship" with myth as an ambiguous auxiliary to truth. Forced in the Nativity Ode to wait for Christ to "redeem our loss" (1. 153), the poet can but offer his "humble ode,/ And lay it lowly at his blessed feet" (ll. 24-5). Yet the poems bravely assert that the art that must fail to redeem the fallen world still has a crucial role in the dialogue of

regeneration. Milton manifests a persistent quasi-Orphic desire to move the world with his word.

The pretensions of Orphic song must be deflated all the same because, unlike the nostalgic inflators, Milton insists that the fallen world ought to be dialogical. He expects his audience not simply to be moved by his "apt Numbers," as the passive stones and trees were charmed by Orpheus, but to sing for its supper in return. As Ovid's revision of Virgil had implied, poetic enchantment ought to be a joint effort with a willing audience. The "fit audience" for whom the poet prays in *Paradise Lost* (7.30) is born of Milton's pamphlets. His *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1644) memorably describes the able reader as a "skilfull and laborious gatherer" (969). No parroting conservative of "obstinate literality" or "alphabetical servility," the Miltonic gatherer will "consider[] upon what occasion everything is set down" and "compare the words he finds, with other precepts" (949-50, 969). In other words, Milton seeks the kind of interpreters willing to assess the "conflictual textual or contextual evidence" involved in irony and other modes of criticism (Hutcheon). *Areopagitica* (1644) likewise challenges readers to work alongside the author at "gathering up limb by limb" the broken body of truth (1018).[19] By thus "disputing, reasoning, reading, discoursing, ev'n to a rarity," creative readers may become "a Nation of Prophets" busy with the "reforming of Reformation it self" (1019-20). "For in words which admit of various sense," Milton urges the nation in *Eikonoklastes* (1650), "the libertie is ours to choose" (1080). For the sake of liberty, the skillful and laborious gatherer

[19] Stephen Dobranski shows that "Milton's texts reveal not only a demanding poet but also one who wanted his audience to work with him" (200).

dares to weigh even the “fair spok’n words” of a king against “his own farr differing deeds” (1081).

But Milton will learn both from the ugly fate of Orpheus and from the turbulent state of England that his audience, far from labouring alongside him, may equally take offence and turn into Bacchantes ready to silence the singer for good. Or they may misread him, even ignore him. How then can the tarnished Orphic figure help Milton to work out the artist’s role in a culture growing skeptical of myth and poetry while remaining all too nostalgic for the “enchantment” of monarchy? Besides the broader politico-religious and literary motives discussed here, there are local, English reasons for Milton’s adopting a poetics of irony so as to have Orpheus and eat him too. The next chapter will aim to elucidate these reasons in examining the career of Orpheus in English poetry through the seventeenth century.

Chapter Two

The Quill and the Crown: Orpheus Among the English

As we have seen, Orpheus had since antiquity been a touchstone in debates over the worth and roles of poetry and poets. These controversies would be particularly heated in seventeenth-century England. Baconian and Puritan reformers, equally suspicious of traditional authorities, were fostering a spirit of utilitarianism that valorized common sense over erudition, the prosaic over the poetic. As Milton doggedly pursues the poetic vocation against the grain of his culture, the Orphic figure becomes a tempting but risky helpmate, one to be put to use but kept at a distance with Ovidian irony. The budding Christian poet, himself increasingly wary of authority, finds his mythic counterpart tainted by association not just with an inadequate worldview but more importantly, and yet relatedly, with an authoritarian politics. The Renaissance Orpheus now flourishing in English art is typically the enchanter of the people; he echoes the Music of the Spheres and affirms the hierarchical cosmos of which that unchanging harmony is the all-too-perfect expression. How fitting a figure for the court masque with its glorification of one-man, top-down rule! Given such a state of cultural affairs, Milton may well seem an unlikely poet, and Orpheus an unlikely helpmate. But Milton will discover that the same figure inflated nostalgically by the royalists, an emblem first of their powers and then of their losses, can still be adapted to his own (self-) defense of a different brand of poetry.

If the myth by Milton's time was taking on a narrower political significance, English verse had once demonstrated the adaptability of Orpheus. Chaucer had cited the bard as a quasi-divine ancestor – "Orpheus, god of melodye" (*The Book of the*

Duchess l. 569) – and also translated Boethius's *Consolation* with its much-imitated moralization of the tragedy (*Boece* 3.12). Meanwhile the fourteenth-century fairytale *Sir Orfeo* revived the dimly known tradition of the happy ending to anticipate the comedic resolutions common in later operas. It transforms Orpheus into a romantic knight who successfully retrieves his lady following her abduction by fairy folk. The fifteenth-century Scottish poet Robert Henryson set a different example again. He shadows Virgil closely in his own retelling of the myth, "The Tale of Orpheus and Erudices His Quene," while adding a Boethian "*Moralitas*" after the medieval fashion. "Blyndit with lust," we forget that "our desire [should] be soucht up in the speris" (ll. 454-5). Hollander notes that "the music of the spheres is seen as educating the questing Orpheus" (87):

> In his passage amang the planetis all,
> He herd ane hevinlie melody and sound
> Passing all instrumentis musicall,
> Causit be rolling of the speris round;
> ……
> Thar leryt he tonys proporcionate.
> (ll. 219-26)

Here as in Macrobius we find already the elevating correspondence between Orphic song and cosmic order that will be a commonplace in Renaissance politicizations of the myth.

A significant step in the politicization of Orpheus in England was his emergence in the mode of pastoral, which by the seventeenth century would include many court masques. On the continent, as Richard Cody has shown, the myth of the poet-lover had been the natural subject for the first pastoral play, Angelo Poliziano's *Orfeo* (1480). While sometimes a forum for political debate, Renaissance pastoral tends to idealize the courtier as poet-lover while exploring the Neoplatonic themes of

love, beauty and art supposedly close to his heart. The tradition grew as much out of Plato's *Phaedrus*, with its idyllic intellectual intercourse beyond the city walls, as it did out of Virgil's Arcadia. In the most influential English pastoral poem, *The Shepheardes Calender*, Orpheus appears in "October" as the supreme shepherd-singer, just as he enters Spenser's model, the *Eclogues* of Virgil (4.55-7), to vie with the author. Spenser's Piers sings the praises of his fellow swain Cuddie by likening him to Orpheus:

> Soone as thou gynst to sette thy notes in frame,
> O how the rurall routes to thee doe cleave:
> Seemeth thou dost their soul of sence bereave,
> All as the shepheard, that did fetch his dame
> From Pluto's balefull bowre withouten leave:
> His musicks might the hellish hound did tame.
> (ll. 25-30)

But Cuddie's response is to lament the poet as an endangered species: "So praysen babes the Peacoks spotted traine,/. . . But who rewards him ere the more for thy?" (ll. 31-3). Cuddie goes on to cite Virgil and Augustus as the ideal power couple – a perfect symbiosis difficult to imagine in these days of lesser men, "after virtue gan for age to stoop" (ll. 67-8). As we saw in the nostalgic theories of the Florentine Camerata, Orpheus serves to evoke a golden age of "musicks might" when song supposedly enjoyed pride of place with the powers that be.

In the epic poem that would earn him at least a pension, Spenser looks again to Orpheus to restore the fabled union of poet and monarch. *The Fairie Queene* participated in the "cult of Elizabeth" that elevated the virgin queen into "a semi-divine figure sent by God to fulfil the historic task of defeating popery and restoring the authentic primitive church" (Wells 8). Spenser puts the poet in this historic picture

by upholding the equally "godlike" Orpheus as a champion of civil order capable of quelling

> wicked discord, whose small sparkes once blowen
> None but a God or godlike man can slake;
> Such as was *Orpheus*, that when strife was growen
> Amongst those famous ympes of Greece, did take
> His silver Harpe in hand, and shortly friends them make.
> (4.2.1.5-9)

The reconciling rhythms of the mythic bard, together with those of the biblical David, are then summed up as "wise words with time concented":

> Or such as that celestiall Psalmist was,
> That when the wicked feend his Lord tormented,
> With heavenly notes, that did all other pas,
> The outrage of his furious fit relented.
> Such Musicke is wise words with time concented,
> To moderate stiff minds disposed to strive:
> Such as that prudent Romane well invented,
> What time his people into partes did rive,
> Them reconcyld againe, and to their homes did drive.
> (4.2.2)

According to Livy (*History of Rome* 2.32), the wily patrician Menenius Agrippa ("that prudent Romane") used the fable of the belly to convince rebellious soldiers that plebians could never live without patricians to rule them. While the stanza begins with the soothing effects of music on the passions, the likening of Orphic song to Agrippa's reinforcement of hierarchy brings out the paternalism in the poet's "moderating" of dissenting minds. As Wells observes, "When Spenser implicitly compares his own art with that of Orpheus, the effect is to align himself with the authority Orpheus represents" (9) – that is, with the ordering power of throne-speech.[20]

[20] Thomas Cain examines Spenser's allusions to Orpheus and finds that "all except one have direct or implicit reference to himself as poet" (28). The myth also served some Elizabethans simply as a ripping yarn of love, death, and murderous revenge. See R. B.'s *Orpheus His Journey to Hell* (1595) and the anonymous *Legend of Orpheus and Euridice* (1597).

In keeping with *The Fairie Queene*'s conjoining of poetical and political power, Lorenzo's famous speech in praise of music in the final act of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* sets Orpheus against all those "fit for treasons":

> Therefore the poet
> Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones, and floods,
> Since naught so stockish, hard, and full of rage
> But music for the time doth change his nature.
> The man that hath no music in himself,
> Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
> Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
> The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
> And his affections dark as Erebus:
> Let no such man be trusted.
> (5.1.78-87)

This is more beautiful than logical, as James Hutton points out: "If there is 'naught' so stockish but music doth change his nature, how is there room for the man who 'is not moved'? It is in fact hyperbole. This man whose spirits are dull as night and affections dark as Erebus is below the beasts, and no man but a devil" (50). Since music and poetry were held to penetrate the soul through the mediation of "spirits" arising in the blood (51), the impenetrable person would be not just unmusical but spiritless, less than human. In short, Lorenzo demonizes the political dissident as the very other of Orpheus.

Thus, just as the continental Renaissance had turned Orpheus into the voice of authority, some of the most celebrated English poets of the turn of the century fashioned the enchanter into an authorial figurehead for the vaunted stability of monarchy. The king's (or queen's) men indeed. But then power and art, kings and bards, had always gone hand in hand. Orpheus in the *Argonautika* is himself a "royal lord" (1.34). Boccaccio boasts of the traditional intimacy as a great compliment to poets, "who enjoyed at their pleasure the friendship and domestic intercourse of kings

and nobles, such as never fall to the lot of crude and oafish men" (55). As in Cuddie's vision of Caesar and his Virgil, the Jacobean and Caroline courts and their poets joined forces in appropriating ancient authorities for their mutual aggrandizement. Orpheus and other classical heavyweights played leading roles in the nostalgic court entertainments that mystified and mythologized, in the grandiloquent style of Augustan Rome, the alleged divine right of the royal family. Since most of these masques reached a much wider audience through publication (Sharpe 27), poets in the court's employ were by no means preaching only to the converted.

In *The Lords' Masque* (1613), created by Thomas Campion for no less of an occasion than the wedding of Princess Elizabeth, Orpheus acts as the very medium of Jove's, which is to say James I's, mind-bending power. "Jove into our music," declares Orpheus in the opening scene, "will inspire/ The power of passion, that their thoughts shall bend/ To any form or motion we intend" (197). As David Lindley observes, "right at the beginning of the masque, the power of music is identified with the political power of the king" (290). In effect, the masque positions Campion alongside James by exalting the Orphic arts that exalt the royal patron. The plot turns on Orpheus's rescue of Entheus, or divine poetic inspiration, from the clutches of "Mania with her Frantics" (Campion 197-8). Mania's hold over Entheus suggests that, as far as Campion is concerned, the age-old caricature of the poet as maniac is alive and well in seventeenth-century England. The "Frantics" whose "thoughts shall bend" include stereotypes of the mad poet such as "the self-lover, the melancholic man full of fear, the school-man overcome with fantasy" (198). After freeing Entheus from these lunatics, Orpheus seems to speak for Campion as he contrasts the enlightenment of the court with the philistinism of the age:

> What! Number thee [Entheus] with madmen! O mad age,
> Senseless of thee, and thy celestial rage!:
> For thy excelling rapture ev'n through things
> That seems most light, is borne with sacred wings:
> Nor are these music, shows, or revels vain,
> When thou adorn'st them with thy Phoebean brain.
> (199)

The bard hailed by Entheus as "Divinest Orpheus" defends and idealizes the "music, shows, or revels" that in turn elevate earthly James into celestial Jove. What James liked to claim for monarchy, Orpheus claims for poetry: it is "borne with sacred wings."

At the same time, Campion heads off any hint of rivalry between court poet and royal patron by subordinating the feats of Orpheus to the will of the king. Whether to liberate Entheus or to rival Pygmalion at metamorphosis, Orpheus invariably invokes his master's authority:

> Therefore Jove by me
> Commands thy power straight to set Entheus free.
> (197)

> Powerful Jove, that of bright stars,
> Now hast made men fit for wars,
> Thy power in these statues prove
> And make them women fit for love.
> (206)

Lest the poet then seem dispensable, other characters repeatedly call upon his special gifts both as artist and as mediator between monarch and subjects: "Orpheus, apply thy music, for it well/ Helps to induce a courtly miracle" (202). By the final song, Orpheus and Entheus have amply proven the miraculous powers of art by animating stars and statues into dancers, and conversely by immortalizing the newlyweds in golden likenesses, "dedicate to Fame" (210). Jove-James reigns supreme, but

Campion uses the figure of Orpheus to place the court poet at the king's right hand – at times, even to empower the poet *as* the king's right hand.[21]

Endearing Orpheus to the court of Charles I was the Neoplatonism in fashion there by the mid-1630s, imported and propagated by his French Queen, Henrietta Maria (Sharpe 24). Despite his ambivalence over poetry, Plato was in this view the inheritor of Orphic wisdom as well as the guru of spiritual love. Broadly speaking, the Neoplatonists conceived of love, beauty and the arts as modes of mental climbing – from the sensible to the intelligible, from the mundane world of the senses to the celestial realm of the "forms" or ideals. In service to this creed, William Davenant's masque *The Temple of Love* (1635) presents Divine Poesie, "the Secretary of Nature," and Orpheus, her "chief Priest," as agents of platonic love. The bard is "to calme the Seas with his Harp" in order that "the Temple of Chast Love should be re-established in this Island" by Queen Indamora (played by Henrietta Maria) and her ladies (382-3). As Chief Priest to Divine Poesie, Orpheus is set above the "company of ancient Greek Poets" attending her arrival (384). She informs Homer, Hesiod, Sappho and others that they have sung of "false" love, presumably the sensual instead of the intellectual:

> *Rise you, from your dark shades below,*
> *That first gave words an harmony,*
> *And made false Love in numbers flow,*
> *Till vice became a mystery*.
>
> *And when I've purifi'd that Ayr*
> *To which death turn'd you long agoe,*
> *Help with your voyces to declare*
> *What* Indamora *comes to show*. (384)

[21] Campion's *Lord Hay's Masque* (1607) represents James as Apollo – "one lampe enlightning all" – while "the Thracian harpe" (of Orpheus) and "*Amphions* lyre" illustrate his enchanting power (219-20). And Orpheus is again the idealized and idealizing court poet in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Beautie* (1608). The bard sings the masquers' praises as their throne, topped by the figure of Harmonia, revolves with the Music of the Spheres.

Introduced later in a separate scene, Orpheus seems to be exempt from this censure. Moreover, whereas the lesser poets appear "in habits varied and of several colours" (384), Orpheus (in "a white Robe girt") and Divine Poesie share in the whiteness commonly associated with purity (390). The "milk white swan" that she keeps by her may itself signal a further bond between them (384). Because swans were said to sing sweetly in dying, one Renaissance tradition held that Orpheus in the end was metamorphosed into a swan.[22] Like Queen Indamora and her "Royal Lover" (383), whose exemplary union is finally blessed by the figure of Chaste Love, Orpheus comes to represent the Neoplatonist nirvana, straddling humanity and divinity.

As Graham Parry observes, "Essentially the masque was a form of platonic theatre, illustrating the ideal influences that emanated from the King's divinity" (17). In Davenant's *Temple*, among the "Enemies to chast Love" attempting to disrupt the influence of Orpheus is "a Modern Divel, a sworn enemie of Poesie, Musick, and all ingenious Arts, but a great friend to murmuring, libeling, and all seeds of discord" (382, 389). The rebellious character of this "Modern Divel" – the adjective hinting at current enemies such as the more radical Puritans – harks back to Lorenzo's politically loaded warning (quoted above) that one "not moved with concord of sweet sounds,/ Is fit for treasons, strategems, and spoils." In the Caroline masque, monarchy's victory over such treasonous enemies most often unfolds as "a transformation of nature – from chaos to order" (Sharpe 199). Such is the fantasy world of masque that enemies then vanish without a struggle. The *Temple* is no exception, as the triumphant turn from anti-masque to masque takes the form of the calming of the seas. The obvious man for

[22] As quoted in my introduction, Pierre Gautruche's mythography (1659) reports this tradition together with the more familiar one that the harp of Orpheus was placed among the stars (157).

the job is Orpheus the enchanter. As in *The Lords' Masque*, the ordering power of the throne asserts itself through the harmonious song of the bard.

Underpinning this alliance is the fact that traditionally Orpheus not only moved the flora and fauna but also ruled the waves. In the *Argonautika*, he "charmed unshiftable upland boulders/ And the flow of rivers with the sound of his music" (1.26-7). The court masque's conventional turning point – the royal assertion of mastery over nature's savagery – requires the very power credited to the bard. English image-makers of all kinds had long represented Britain as an island kingdom overseeing a maritime world and imposing a beneficent order on the seas of barbarity. As Andrew Marvell will put it, "The ocean is the fountain of command" ("The First Anniversary" l. 369). In the *Temple*, the Orphic harp commands the very ocean itself. By making Orpheus both the masquers' champion and a figure for himself, Davenant stakes his own claim to the utility of the poet as a civilizer worthy of complementing as well as complimenting the king. That Orpheus stands in for the author, as we have seen so often, becomes obvious when the temple's priests answer the reconciling harp of Orpheus in song:

> *Heark*! Orpheus *is a Seaman grown,*
> *No winds of late have rudely blown,*
> *Nor waves their troubled heads advance!*
> *His Harp hath made the winds so mild,*
> *They whisper now as reconcil'd,*
> *The waves are sooth'd into a dance*.
>
> *See how the list'ning Dolphins play!*
> *And willingly mistake their way,*
> *As when they heard* Arions *straines!*
> *Whom once their scaly Ancestor,*
> *Convay'd upon his back to shore,*
> *And took his musick for his pains*.

We Priests that burn Loves Sacrifice,
Our Orpheus *greet with ravish'd eyes;*
For by this calmnesse we are sure,
His Harp doth now prepare the way,
That Indamora's *voyage may*
Be more delightful, and secure.
(391)

Through the harp of Orpheus that sets things dancing, and which "doth now prepare the way" for Queen Indamora's voyage, Davenant pledges his pen to Henrietta Maria and the court. The Orphic water-imagery may well have suggested to Charles and his courtiers a more consequential role for the court poet, beyond that of revel-master – the imperial role established by Virgil and imitated by Spenser. If "Orpheus *is a Seaman grown*," he belongs at the side of the king who would likewise rule the waves.

In the final scene, however, Davenant wisely humbles himself before his employers by having the authorial figures of Divine Poesie and Orpheus join the chorus of the lesser poets. The souls of Thelema (the will) and Sunesis (the understanding) unite to invoke Amianteros, or Chaste Love, who descends from on high. Amianteros upholds the king and queen as the very model of Thelema wedded to Sunesis: "And now you may in yonder Throne,/ The pattern of your Union see" (394). In keeping with the philosophy of Neoplatonism, the golden age that Amianteros imposes through the throne will be one of the heart and mind, not of the senses or seasons:

Softly as fruitfull showres I fall,
And th'undiscern'd increase I bring,
Is of more precious worth then all
A plentuous summer pays a spring.

The benefit it doth impart,
Will not the barren earth improve,
But fructifie each barren heart,

And give eternal growth to Love.
(394)

The royal lovers, Sunesis affirms in reply, "rule b'example as by power" (394); their ideal love, echoed by their subjects, binds and inspires the kingdom. It even enjoys divine sanction, as the chorus proclaims in the final line: "heaven hath seal'd the grant as a Decree" (394). In other words, the golden age of heroic virtue, to which poets after Orpheus can but refer, now belongs to the Stuarts. "Charles the Mightiest and the Best,/ And . . . the Darling of his breast" (394), naturally dominate the masque's conclusion. But the inflated Orpheus of the Renaissance, his giddy blunder and bloody murder forgotten, provides a commanding alter ego for the court poet of ambition. In Davenant's Neoplatonist *Temple*, Orpheus helps the author to carry the burden of the court's nostalgia, to enact the authoritarian fantasy of quasi-divine government and miracle-working art.

The Orphic symbolism was peculiarly apt for the Caroline court. The myth's Renaissance inflators liked to imagine Orphic song as irresistible, its quasi-divine power moving the seemingly immovable to order and civility. As the song goes in Shakespeare's and Fletcher's *All Is True* (*Henry VIII*), "Orpheus with his lute made trees,/ And the mountain tops that freeze,/ Bow themselves when he did sing" (3.1.3-5). Likewise, as Kevin Sharpe observes, the king expected his subjects simply to "bow themselves" at his word: "Charles did not enter into debate . . .; to him the royal word was not an argument to be weighed, but an order to be executed" (189). After all, this is the lofty monarch who did away with Parliament altogether for as long as he could finance one-man rule – that is, for the entire decade of the 1630s – and when finally brought to trial refused to answer any of the charges against him. The theatrical

Charles, who has been called "the king of images" (Potter 157), evidently preferred propagandists to parliamentarians. The likes of Rubens and Van Dyck painted his ceilings and portraits; and the ingenious Inigo Jones, once Jonson's collaborator under King James, continued to set the stages for the extravagant masques and plays composed by "*Orpheus* sons." Davenant not only refers to the circle of court poets or cavaliers in this fashion (Helgerson 197) but also assumes the Orphic persona to flatter Henrietta Maria ("To the Queen . . . From Orpheus Prince of Poets").

With such a king for a patron, even Ovid's unVirgilian Orpheus could be cast in a royalist mould, as we find in George Sandys's influential translation and explication of the *Metamorphoses* (1621-32). His prefatory "Panegyricke to the King" both begins and ends with the union of poet and monarch: "Jove, whose transcendent Acts the Poets sing"; "Time shall a Poet raise,/ Borne under better starres, to sing his Praise." Proceeding to vindicate Ovid by quoting authorities, he indirectly defends the court's classicism from the Puritans who "have profaned our Poet with their fastidious censures" (17). Sandys follows the Christian moralists in interpreting Orpheus's double loss of Eurydice as "invit[ing] us to a moderation in our desires, least we loose what wee affect by to much affecting" (476). But the meaning of the bard's murder is clearly political:

> Therefore well may these drunken *Bacchides* be taken for the heady rage of mutiny and Sedition, which silence the authority of the law, and infringe that concord (the musicke of *Orpheus*) which had reduced wild people to civility; returning now to their former pravity and naturall fiercenesse: himself, the life of philosophy, torne in peeces by their fury. Moreover; nothing more endangers the harmony of government then the distemperature of *Bacchus*. (519)

Just as the Renaissance tended to inflate Orpheus into the voice of legislation, Sandys adopts the musical metaphor for national unity whereby the harmonious "musicke of

Orpheus" represents civil obedience. Alexander Ross's mythography *Mystagogus Poeticus* (1648) takes this political argument further, perfecting the union of poet and monarch by identifying Orpheus with the "Prince" who rules "by the *Melodious* harmony of peace and concord" (337). While Ross provides multiple interpretations of the myth, he goes on to underline this identification of the enchanter with the ruler: "By *Orpheus* charming of stones, trees, birds, and beasts with his musick, is meant, how Governors, at first, by their wisdom and eloquence did bring rude and ignorant people . . . to Civility, and Religion, and to submit themselves to wholsom Laws" (338).

What the royalist appropriations of Orpheus often gloss over is their own suggestion that there will always arise some "not moved with concord" – at least not with the concord of monarchy. There will always be "anti-masquers" bringing "disorder," driven by motives that cannot be reduced to "the distemperature of *Bacchus*." As Ovid had emphasized in his rewriting of Virgil, even an Orpheus requires a cooperative public. This was to be stunningly realized in the 1640s with civil "discord" culminating in the arrest and execution of the self-styled Orphic king. As Rachel Falconer has shown, the falling of the crown's fortunes prompted many royalist poets to rediscover the angst and violence in the myth. Instead of celebrating the power of Orphic eloquence, Abraham Cowley "invokes the dismemberment of Orpheus as an image of royalist losses in the civil war" (25):

> In sencelesse Clamours and confused Noyse,
> We lost that rare and yet unconquered *voice*.
> So when the sacred *Thracian Lyre* was drown'd,
> In the *Bistonian Woemens* mixed Sound,
> The wondering *stones*, that came before to heare,
> Forgot themselves and turn'd his *Murderers* there.
> The same lowd storme blew the grave *Miter* downe,

It blewe downe that, and with it shooke the *Crowne*.
(*The Civil War* 1.143-50)

Here in Cowley's aborted epic, the drowned lyre of Orpheus belongs equally to the late Earl of Strafford ("that . . . *voice*") and the bishops ("the grave *Miter*"), and potentially to the king himself ("the *Crowne*"). In fact, as Nigel Smith observes, "Orpheus would be used as a name for Charles I in post-regicide laments" (101). Among the many poems to go unpublished "for obvious reasons of discretion" was the pastoral elegy "Orpheus his descerpsion":

See the wild Satyrs how they runne
All smear'd with Blood, what have they done?
The Muses in a rout do stray
Phoebus hath flung his harpe away.
And heer's a Crowne
Comes tumbling downe
The head rould after which it did weare,
Whose Blood and plaints yet sad the aire.
(ll. 17-24; qtd. in Smith 290)

The Orphic end of the royal patron, complete with postmortem "plaints," calls into question the future not just of the kingdom but of its poetry and arts ("the Muses").

With the ascendancy of Oliver Cromwell to the central role of Lord Protector, however, the images of Orphic power return in verses celebrating his influence over the nation. Marvell's poem "The First Anniversary of the Government Under His Highness the Lord Protector," published anonymously in 1655, reiterates the metaphor of the Music of the Spheres so often used by royalists to align the kingdom with the cosmos:

While indefatigable Cromwell hies,
And cuts his way still nearer to the skies,
Learning a music in the region clear,
To tune this lower to that higher sphere.
(ll. 45-8)

The panegyric makes an apt addition to the courtly trappings of "His Highness," which included portraits, palaces, entertainments, and finally a funeral in the royal chapel of Westminster Abbey.[23] Marvell goes on to elevate Cromwell to "our Amphion" (l. 73) – the mythic musician who raised the walls of Thebes, and who is paired with Orpheus by the key contributors to the Orphic tradition (including Horace and Macrobius). A generation earlier, Edmund Waller had lauded King Charles in the same terms.[24] Just as "Th' harmonious city of the seven gates" was ordered by Amphion's "sacred lute" of seven strings (ll. 65-6), so under Cromwell

> The Commonwealth then first together came,
> And each one entered in the willing frame;
> All other matter yields, and may be ruled;
> But who the minds of stubborn men may build? . . .
> Yet all composed by his attractive song,
> Into the animated city throng.
> (ll. 75-8, 85-6)

Harping on the "wondrous order and consent" (l. 67) among the new community of the "willing," Marvell's poem struggles to manage the problem of dissent, as the subsequent references to "crossest spirits" and "opposèd minds" make clear. Its ingenious solution is to imagine these oppositional forces as unwitting buttresses of the social structure: "While the resistance of opposèd minds,/ The fabric (as with arches) stronger binds" (ll. 95-6). In spite of the protestations to the contrary (ll. 387-90), the Orphic imagery (e.g., "attractive song") combines with standard royalist symbols such as sun, star, and father (ll. 8, 101, 282) to render Cromwell indistinguishable from a king for whom dissent is equivalent to atheism or patricide.

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[23] See Laura Knoppers, esp. ch. 2, on the ways in which "the republic appropriated and revised monarchical forms of portraiture, panegyric, and ceremony" (31).

[24] In Waller's "Upon His Majesty's Repairing of St. Paul's," Charles "like Amphion makes those quarries leap/ Into fair figures from a confused heap:/ . . . Those antique minstrels sure were Charles-like kings,/ Cities their lutes and subjects' hearts their strings" (qtd. in Helgerson 198).

Conversely, from the losing side, a royalist poet back in his native Wales looks to the myth of the enchanter to "recenter[] . . . his art in sources of energy and authority independent of statecraft and its institutions" (Thomas 240). No longer able to position the poet alongside his king, Henry Vaughan launches *Olor Iscanus* (1651) by likening himself composing by the river Usk (or Isca) to a solitary Orpheus hymning by the Hebrus: "And holy *Orpheus*, Natures *busie* Child/ By headlong *Hebrus* his deep *Hymns* Compil'd" ("To the River Isca" ll. 3-4). Vaughan thus invokes Orpheus not to associate himself with the powers that be – now Cromwell and the Parliamentarians – but rather to fashion himself into a regional voice of prophecy. Moreover, he joins Cowley in recalling the bard's vulnerability as well as his vatic gift. Near the volume's end, Vaughan movingly memorializes the terrible fate of Orpheus in a Latin lyric again addressed to his river: "*Per te discerpti credo Thracis ire querelas*/ *Plectrumq; divini senis*" (I believe that the plaintive songs of the poor torn Thracian drift along your waters and the sound of strings touched by that godlike old man; "*Ad Fluvium Iscam*" ll. 11-12).[25] The royalist poet exiled at home seeks consolation in the myth's insistence that death's dominion over art is never complete. But the plaintive Orphic songs seem nearly as poor and torn as the bard himself.

Few English poets, royalist or republican, could have failed to sympathize with such lines. Most were finding themselves more or less beleaguered, at least as artists, in these hardheaded years of fundamentalism, utilitarianism, and war. After all, this is a crisis that brings even a poet of Milton's ambition to turn his talents mainly to prose – first to polemic in the pamphlet wars and then to diplomacy as Cromwell's Latin

[25] This translation is adapted from that of John Carey in the Norton edition.

Secretary. A rare wartime excursion into verse, Milton's ode to the Oxford librarian John Rouse pleads in the first-person plural on behalf of poets in general:

> *Modò quis dues, aut editus deo*
> *Pristinam gentis miseratus indolem*
> *(Si satis noxas luimus priores*
> *Mollique luxu degener otium)*
> *Tollat nefandos civium tumultus,*
> *Almaque revocet studia sanctus*
> *Et relegates sine sede Musas*
> *Jam penè totis finibus Angligenûm;*
> *Immundasque volucres*
> *Unguibus imminentes*
> *Figat Apolloneâ pharetrâ,*
> *Phinéamque abigat pestem procul amne Pegaséo*.
> (ll. 25-36)

> (May some god, or some man born of the gods, be moved by sympathy for the native talent our country has displayed for centuries, only if we have atoned sufficiently for our earlier sins and our effeminate luxury, and might stop this damned civil war and its skirmishes and restore with holy power our vital pursuits, recall the vagrant Muses, banished now from almost every corner of England, and pierce with Apollo's arrows the detestable harpies that hover over us with their claws, driving Phineus's rout away from the river of Pegasus.)

Barring perhaps only the condemnation of luxury, such a plea to end "this damned civil war" and to "recall the vagrant Muses" could have issued from Vaughan or any other royalist. English poets shared in the pressing need to defend their art, regardless of their political persuasions.

Well before the civil war, as Kenneth Gros Louis has demonstrated, the broadly utilitarian bent of English culture had elicited similar laments for the arts. Moreover, what many writers felt to be an increasingly anti-poetical climate had already begun to bring out the dark side of the myth of Orpheus, soon to become so apt for the routed royalists. Early-seventeenth-century poets such as Michael Drayton and John Marston "recall the climax of the myth, and compare the attacks on their art with the brutal attack of the screaming, vulgar Bacchantes" (73). In the concluding song of

Poly-Olbion (1612-22), his massive epic poem on the lands and legends of Britain, Drayton complains that not even Orpheus could find a fit audience among the slimy minds of his countrymen:

> the Bestiall Rout, and Boorish rabblement
> Of those rude vulgar sots, whose braines are onely Slime,
> Borne to the doting world, in this last yron Time,
> So stony, and so dull, that Orpheus which (men say)
> By the enticing Straines of his melodious Lay,
> Drew Rocks and aged Trees, to whether he would please;
> He might as well have moov'd the Universe as these.
> ("The Thirtieth Song" ll. 6-12)

Here the myth forcefully expresses what Gros Louis identifies as "a growing sense of isolation and frustration" among seventeenth-century English poets (75).[26] After struggling for years to get the second of his two installments into print, the embittered poet addresses his final preface "To Any That Will Read It" and adds "barbarous Ignorance" and "Lethargy . . . incurable" to the epic's many charges against the reading public (391). Like Vaughan, then, Drayton portrays himself as an Orpheus in a cultural wilderness. He is the great singer who must go unsung in a "lunatique Age" ("To the Generall Reader" v).

By mid century some of the less ambitious English poets seemed instead to acquiesce to the waning of their influence, as the Orphic mystique of the artist began to fade together with that of the monarchy. They reduced the myth of the archetypal poet either to a mere vehicle for compliment or to an amusing tale to be tossed off in little. In the late 1640s the erstwhile Anglican vicar Robert Herrick, who would publish but a single book of verse, found himself in much the same situation as Vaughan – swept

[26] Gros Louis's useful study, which also cites "Satire V" from Marston's *Certaine Satyres*, overlooks the situation of the court poets, who sometimes criticize English philistinism but show little "sense of isolation" until the royalists' collapse.

aside by the Puritans. However, whereas the more prolific Vaughan draws on Orpheus for poetic empowerment, Herrick's *Hesperides* (1648) turns the Orphic motifs into pretty praises of his Julia. Just as Hades once hung on the enchanter's every word, "So smooth, so sweet, so silv'ry is thy voice,/ As, could they hear, the Damn'd would make no noise,/ But listen to thee" ("Upon Julia's Voice" ll. 1-3; qtd. in Hollander 337).[27] As for the myth itself, Herrick rehearses it with startling brevity in a witty poem baldly entitled "Orpheus":

> Orpheus he went, as poets tell,
> To fetch Eurydice from hell;
> And had her, but it was upon
> This short, but strict condition;
> Backward he should not look, while he
> Led her through hell's obscurity.
> But ah! It happen'd, as he made
> His passage through that dreadful shade,
> Revolve he did his gentle eye,
> For loving fear or jealousy;
> And looking back, that look did sever
> Him and Eurydice forever.

The unflattering motive of jealousy (of Pluto?) rears its ugly head, and there is neither a tragic martyrdom nor even the comedic reunion supplied by Ovid. The myth becomes ridiculous, as when Ovid sums up Virgil's *Aeneid* in half a dozen lines (*Metamorphoses* 14.568-73).[28] While Herrick and Vaughan treat Orpheus in decidedly different ways, neither poet after Charles I's fall from grace presents the bard in his Renaissance guise as the acknowledged legislator of the people.

Renaissance tradition had held that poetry derived civilizing and affective powers – the powers vested in Orpheus – from the cosmic *harmonia* that its "numbers"

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[27] See Hollander (ch. 6) for further examples of Orphic compliments from Robert Heath, William Strode, and other mid-century poets.

[28] Just a few years later, John Cotgrove's *Wits Interpreter* (1655) reduces the myth to a pretext for cynical comment on the contemporary state of marriage ("Musick from hell" 92-4).

echoed. In Elizabethan England, Philip Sidney continued to praise the "planet-like music of poetry" as a divine gift (121), while George Puttenham followed Horace in naming Orpheus and Amphion as the first to foster "orderly life" through "lessons uttered in harmonie" (23). But the *raison d'etre* of such English claims for poetry's cultural centrality was the burgeoning trend to push it to the margins. As humanism spread from the continent in the sixteenth century, leading lights such as Thomas Elyot, Roger Ascham, and Francis Bacon imbued it with English practicality and took a relatively dim view of poetry (Fraser 3-4). Unlike the nostalgic inflators of Orpheus, they put verse to the test of "advancement" and found it wanting. Bacon maintained that, whereas history makes us wise and natural philosophy deep, poetry makes us merely witty (*Major* 81). "For as for Poesy, it is rather a pleasure or play of the imagination, than a work or duty thereof" (218). This was to damn poetry with faint praise.

Bacon's painstaking explications of myth in *On the Wisdom of the Ancients* (1609) may seem at first to suggest a greater respect for the Muses. But Bacon takes care to dissociate myth from the poets – "I should never expect anything singularly great or noble from such an origin" (*Moral* 202) – admiring it rather as a relic of prehistory. Furthermore, his allegorization of the myth of Orpheus erases the archetypal bard to reveal in his stead a Baconian natural and moral philosopher, or in modern parlance a physical and social scientist. The quest after Eurydice in the underworld becomes medicine's struggle with mortality, while the charming of rocks and beasts becomes the "forming [of] men into societies." The dismemberment of Orpheus represents the rise and fall of civilizations: "philosophy is infallibly torn to pieces," yet "learning rises again, and show[s] its head, though seldom in the same

place" (*Moral* 223-4). In Bacon's hands, the myth of Orpheus has little to do with poetry *per se*.

Orpheus was thus a touchstone both for poetry's detractors and for poets struggling to claim a role in England's booming "culture of fact."[29] The indirect language of myth, allegory, metaphor, and conceit seemed out of tune with this new culture. Even so, the marginalization of the arts in Early Modern England might appear merely to recapitulate an age-old debate. As we have seen, Virgil needed to present the *Georgics* in terms of labour and service because the Romans were Baconians before the fact in setting "work or duty" above "pleasure or play" (to recall Bacon's binary). Sidney's defense of the poet as a quasi-divine maker of universal truths borrows from Boccaccio's *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods*, which itself replies not just to the naysayers of his day but also to Plato. Boccaccio's attempt to refute the standard charges of inutility, immorality, and falsity by explaining why Orpheus "enclosed the high mysteries of things divine in a covering of words" (44), invoking the Horatian coupling of edification with delight (51), demonstrating that Plato would ban only obscene poets (93) – all of this would be rehashed in the English arena. Nevertheless, if many of the arguments and counterarguments already resound across the centuries, the ascendant discourses in English culture were putting poetry and the arts under extraordinary pressure.

The musical, mythical, geocentric cosmos of antiquity was also undergoing a marvelous revisioning. In light of Copernican theory and Galilean observation, consensus begins to turn away from the pagan Music of the Spheres towards the

[29] See Barbara Shapiro on the ways in which "the legally derived concept of 'fact' . . . became part and parcel of the generally held habits of thought" in Early Modern England (3).

mechanical or "clockwork" universe, in which the earth, like any other planet, moves on its lawful yet imperfectly elliptical orbit about the sun. On this turn hinges the "new philosophy" that John Donne famously feared "calls all in doubt" ("An Anatomy of the World" l. 205). The exalted role of the Renaissance Orpheus as one "able to play the tones and intervals of planetary music, and thus bring down this harmony to earth" (Rierdan 174), tended to diminish as the concept of planetary music became an empty symbol and lost its cultural currency. In effect, poetic song itself was brought at least partway down to earth, disarmed of some of its grandiose pretensions and cosmic resonances. Busy "untuning the sky" (Hollander), trivializing pagan mysteries, and "objectifying" music as "an acoustic fact" (Chua 18), the new empiricism of the so-called "moderns" inevitably called the arts of Orpheus into question.[30]

Moreover, poetry's association both with pagan myth and with the ruling class rendered it immediately suspect to many of the radical Protestants, or Puritans, now on the rise in England.[31] The privileged families of Milton's generation gave their children a classical education. It was at St. Paul's School, where Greek and Latin thrive to this day, that Milton discovered just how "agreeable to natures part in me" was the imitation of Ovid and other "smooth Elegiack Poets" of antiquity (CPW 1.889). He was already learning that to be a poet meant in one sense to stand on the shoulders of the pagan giants. Yet Bacon associated poetry with pagan failings: it is no wonder that "the whole religion was an idol in itself . . ., considering the chief doctors of their church were the poets" (*Major* 209). And William Prynne echoed

[30] See Richard F. Jones on the debate between humanistic "ancients" and Baconian "moderns" in Milton's England.

[31] "Puritan" is a notoriously slippery term in seventeenth-century England, applied vaguely (and often abusively) to those critical of the court and church hierarchies. See Hill's *Society and Puritanism* (esp. 14-29).

other Puritans in questioning a curriculum based on "such amorous Bookes savoring . . . of Pagan Gods" (916). He singles out Ovid and notes approvingly his banishment by Augustus (919). Most telling is his index entry for poets: "Poets, banished by Plato p. 449, 918. the chief fomenters of Paganisme p. 78, 80. the greatest Panders p. 385, 915, 916, 919 to 925" ("The Table"). Besides the sin and error, there is also the waste: indulging in "fabulous poeticall discourses" contravenes the Christian duty "not to lay out our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfies not: but to redeeme the time" (923). Milton will express (if not experience) the worry that his father, though himself a composer as well as a scrivener, might condemn poetry on the same grounds: "*Nec tu perge precor sacras contemnere Musas,/ Nec vanas inopesque puta*" (Please do not scorn the holy Muses, don't think that they are idle or unprofitable; "*Ad Patrem*" ll. 56-7).

While the "Puritan" Miltons were anything but the uncultured killjoys of royalist caricature, their England was nonetheless plagued with "a profound and vigorous philistinism" (Corns "Varnish" 27). Henry Peacham's complaint that "poets nowadays are of no such esteem, as they have been in former times" (94), would seem to express more than the artist's familiar cry for attention. By the 1640s Puritan reform brought not just civil war but an aesthetic of plainness and the closing of the theatres. The attack on plays and poetry was also a denunciation of the court that "spent infinite summes of mony upon Stage-playes, Masques, and such like prodigall Shewes" (Prynne 320-1). Some poets themselves hastened the culture's demotion of pagan models and concentrated on Christian and scientific topics. Thomas Carew marked the passing of John Donne by saluting him for ridding English letters of "Old Orpheus" and "all the ancient brood/ Our superstitious fools admire" ("Elegy Upon the

Death of John Donne" ll. 40-1). Similarly, Abraham Cowley prefaced his unfinished *Davideis* with a derisive dismissal of the "confused antiquated Dreams of senseless Fables and Metamorphoses" (12). In several cases the poet developed a troubled bitextuality. Carew uneasily set his "unwash'd Muse" apart from his sacred one, just as Herrick apologized for the "unbaptized Rhymes" that accompanied his devotional lyrics (Swardson 21). In such a puritanical climate, and with patrons in ever shorter supply, few poets even attempted to challenge Spenser or Drayton with a major work.

Soon Thomas Hobbes was to contend in *Leviathan* (1651) that the metaphorical language at the heart of poetry is simply a misuse of words for the deceiving of others (Willey 217). His chapter "Of Speech" (I.4) defines words primarily as signs for the ordering and recording of judgments and desires. With the Restoration, Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* (1667) reduced Orpheus to a fabling moralist "useful at first, when men were to be delightfully deceiv'd to their own good" (6). As for myth, "the Wit and the Fables and Religions of the Ancient World is well-nigh consum'd: They have already serv'd the Poets long enough; and it is now high time to dismiss them" (414). The conceiving of word as mere sign, like the objectification of music as mere sound, is far removed indeed from the Orphic tradition that had linked the power of the poet to the harmony of the spheres. For the would-be English bard, modernization tends to bring disenchantment.

The great resister of modernity's demotion of poetry is Milton. While his oeuvre shows signs of such disenchantment, as in its anxieties over audience, his self-fashioning in verse as in prose suggests a commitment to his art that remains remarkably unshaken by the vicissitudes of cultural attitudes. This is not to say that he can escape his fellow poets' need to defend themselves – or, in his own words,

"*revocet . . . relegates sine sede Musas/ Jam penè totis finibus Angligenûm*" (to recall the vagrant Muses, banished now from almost every corner of England; Ode to Rouse ll. 30-2). Partly for this reason, the myth of Orpheus was an irresistible point of reference for Milton as for his contemporaries. For the most prominent poets of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, i.e., the royalists, the myth served to bind and aggrandize the quasi-divine voices of poet and monarch, or in crisis to provide either or both with tragic images of exile and martyrdom. As chapter one suggested, Milton does not attempt simply to reclaim Orpheus from the bard's royalist bedfellows. To identify closely with the Orphic voice of enchantment, like Vaughan, would be to risk reproducing in his own words the master-slave dynamic whereby "the royal word was not an argument to be weighed" (as Sharpe puts it). And yet to trivialize the myth, with Herrick, would be to risk trivializing poetry itself. Preferring to emulate Ovid, Milton learns to refashion the myth of Orpheus in a poetics of anti-authoritarianism – a dialogical poetics that, as we shall see, replies to the polarizing cultural trends with a more balanced model of modernity.

But in one sense Milton's juvenilia may have problematized this project. The budding poet had indulged in lofty Orphic pretensions, albeit possibly with tongue in cheek, in very early poems such as the Latin elegies (c. 1626-9). "*Elegia Quinta*" associates spring and the poet with the *furor* long attributed to bards: "*Concitaque arcane fervent mihi pectora motu,/ Et furor, & sonitus me sacer intùs agit*" (my soul is deeply stirred, glows with mysterious impulses; the madness of inspiration and holy sounds stir me to my depths; ll. 11-12). Just as Henryson's Orpheus soars amid the Music of the Spheres, "*Jam mihi mens liquidi raptatur inardua coeli*" (now my mind whirls up to the heights of the sky; l. 15). Again like Orpheus, the speaker penetrates

the underworld as well as the heavens: "*Perque umbras, perque antra feror penetralia vatum,/ Et mihi fana patent interior Deûm*" (I am led through shades and grottos, the secret places of the bards; the inmost shrines of the gods are open to me; ll. 17-18). Similarly, "*Elegia Sexta*" exalts the practices of both elegiac and epic poetry through the figure of Orpheus, even as it weighs the one against the other. Aligned with elegy, the addressee Diodati is aided not just by Bacchus, Apollo, and Ceres, but also by the Thracian bard: "*Nunc quoque Thressa tibi caelato barbitos auro/ Insonat argutâ molliter icta manu*" (Now the Thracian lyre, too, with its fretted gold, sounds for you, touched softly by an artist hand; ll. 37-8). As for the epic poet, his model of austerity should be "*senem[]/ Orpheon edomitis sola per antra feris*" (aged Orpheus, in the lonely grottos, after he had tamed the wild beasts; ll. 69-70). Whether we place the author in the epic camp, as many critics do, or more sensibly see him in both, Milton's sixth elegy reinforces the fifth's suggestion that he means to become a poet not so much by taking on as by taking after Orpheus.

Such youthful visions of quasi-Orphic control bear out Helgerson's comment that Milton's early poems "show themselves to have been deeply engaged in the world frequented by his cavalier contemporaries" (257). Indeed, in his debut collection of 1645 Milton chooses to include tributes from Italian aristocrats lauding him in Orphic terms. Antonio Francini echoes Milton's elegies by praising the "divine prophetic power" of his "sweet lyre," while Charles Dati credits him with "hear[ing] the harmonies of the heavenly spheres" (177, 179). Moreover, Milton boasts of this high praise in one of his first pamphlets, *The Reason of Church Government* (1642). Among the discerning Italian academicians his poems "met with acceptance above what was lookt for," thereby confirming his teachers' conviction that he "might

perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as [his nation] should not willingly let it die" (922). At times the young Milton is happy to present himself as England's answer to Orpheus, a poet of "eminent respectability" (Corns "Milton's Quest" 778), toast of the continental elite.

Unlike the royalist writers, however, Milton never invests in the traditional alliance of poet and monarch. The extent of his involvement in the design of the 1645 volume, which admittedly foregrounds his relationship with "Mr. HENRY LAWES Gentleman of the KINGS Chappel," remains a matter of conjecture (Flannagan 32). As far as the poems themselves are concerned, not even in the juvenilia, where he comes closest to identifying with Orpheus the enchanter, does he deploy the trinity of author-Orpheus-monarch through which (among other symbols) the court poets embraced the power of their royal patron. "*Elegia Sexta*" puts the poet at the service of "*caelesti semine regem*" (l. 81) – the King born of heavenly seed. But this is not James or Charles but Christ, hailed in the Nativity Ode and elsewhere as "the Son of Heav'ns eternal King" (l. 2).[32]

If Milton's early poems subvert indirectly by their silence on the mundane King, not to mention their remaking of royalist pastoral and masque, his pamphlets counter the establishment more directly. *The Reason of Church Government* appears at first to present him as prime candidate for the Spenserian position of national poet:

> These [poetic] abilities . . . are the inspired gift of God rarely bestow'd, . . . and are of power beside the office of a pulpit, to inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu, and publick civility, to allay the perturbations of the

[32] In Milton's juvenilia on the Gunpowder Plot, the late King James does appear briefly as the head of the good Protestant nation targeted by evil Catholics. Not even a proto-republican Protestant poet could be expected to side with the latter. John Hale points out that "*In Quintum Novembris*" (1626), unlike most Plot-poems, "is not *about* James. . . . It redirects the propagandistic intention of this whole genre, away from monarchism and towards a Reformation Protestantism, more concerned with the people as a whole" (170, 179).

> mind, and set the affections in right tune, to celebrate in glorious and lofty Hymns the throne and equipage of Gods Almightinesse. (923)

The inspired gift, the hymning of the heavens, the "tuning" of minds – the Orphic motifs add up to a position of fantastic influence, dedicated "to Gods glory by the honour and instruction of [his] country" (922). Nevertheless, the pamphlet reflects the hard times for poetry by presenting this prime candidate as better employed elsewhere, indeed as commanded by God to set aside his poetic ambitions. "But when God commands to take the trumpet and blow a dolorous or a jarring blast, it lies not in mans will what he shall say" (921). God in fact commands that Milton give up Orphic harmony for jarring "noises," that instead of singing enchantingly above the crowd he argue hoarsely amidst it: "with what small willingness I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no lesse hopes than these, . . . to imbark in a troubl'd sea of noises and hoars disputes" (924). The would-be national bard comes partway down to earth by taking on some of the gritty contrariety of an Old Testament prophet. Milton thus distances his pen even further from the centre of power and the static hierarchy epitomized and imposed by the court.

In so doing, Milton distances himself from the enchanting Orpheus with whom he had flirted in his juvenilia. If kings and bards had always gone hand in hand, as with Charles and his cavaliers, kings and prophets had often been at odds. Samuel versus King Saul, Nathan versus David, Ahijah versus Solomon, Elijah versus Ahab: it was the prophet's job to set the king straight. The prophetic posture of Milton's major poems develops also in his political pamphlets, though in both cases the iconoclasm

arguably owes as much to Ovid and other classical precedents as it does to the Bible.[33] Orpheus, *pace* Falconer, appears just once in Milton's radical tracts; as something of a Neoplatonist and royalist icon, the bard could not easily be turned into an iconoclast. Only in the *Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano* (1651) does Milton refer to Orpheus, briefly citing the Orphic hymns on the supremacy of the law (CPW 4.382-3).[34] In *The Reason* as in his other political pamphlets, Milton identifies not with Orpheus but with prophets such as Jeremiah, oppositional figures called to shoulder the "burden" of speaking out (920). As Satan's outspoken opponent Abdiel confirms in *Paradise Lost*, in times of crisis there remains a role for the lone prophetic voice capable of stirring others to dialogue.

The fact that Milton never abandons his quasi-Orphic ambitions to stir us in verse can be explained only in part by the failure of the republican cause that provoked him to prose. The civil struggle diverts him from poetry for a time, but Milton clings to the ideal of the great poet against the grain of English culture. We do know from the *Apology* (1642) that St. Paul's School taught him to imitate the best of the ancient poets, and that he was "so allur'd to read, that no recreation to [him] came better welcome" (CPW 1.889). In other words, poetry came to him naturally: "I thought with my selfe by every instinct and presage of nature . . . that what imbolden'd them to this task might . . . imbolden me" (1.889). His family nurtured his aspirations as well. Since his "father destined [him] from childhood to the study of humane letters," he

[33] Other classical models include satirists such as Juvenal, who upheld satire as an "inescapable vocation" (Budick 28). See J. S. Hill and Kerrigan on Milton's investment in the biblical tradition of prophecy as such a vocation.

[34] Falconer claims that, "Across the range of references in his prose works, Milton can be seen to cast David and Orpheus as distinctly Republican heroes" (26). With the exception of the *Defensio*, however, the writings cited by Falconer (the undergraduate prolusions and *Of Education*) refer to Orpheus not as a political hero but merely as a poetical exemplar.

"was daily taught by other masters at home" (*Second Defence* 209). It was likewise at home that he learned his religion; the Puritanism that had come between Milton Senior and his own father would in turn come between his son and the established church. The notion of being called to a particular duty is central to Protestantism. Calvin had written that "the Lord enjoins every one of us, in all the actions of life, to have respect to our own calling. . . . [H]e has assigned distinct duties to each" (qtd. in J. S. Hill 19). Milton's early aptitude for letters seemed to distinguish poetry as his particular calling.

This sense of poetic vocation would have been reinforced both by the Renaissance valorization of the artist and by the high achievements of recent English poets. As Sidney boasted, "Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet" (76). The *vates*, unlike the rhetorician, is born to the role: "*orator fit, poeta nascitur*" (111). Expanding nations and empires need their bards, "For poetry is the companion of camps" (105). The challenge to produce an English Homer or Virgil had been taken up by Spenser with his *Fairie Queene*. Milton doubtless came to disapprove of the poem's investment in the traditional alliance of poet and monarch, but he could nonetheless take inspiration from Spenser's unprecedented achievement of a didactic epic in English.[35] Crowning that generation, of course, was Shakespeare. In his memorial poem (1630) for the Second Folio, the young Milton assures himself that an English bard can become a "great heir of Fame":

> What needs my *Shakespear* for his honour'd Bones,
> The labour of an age in piled Stones,
> Or that his hallow'd reliques should be hid
> Under a Star-ypointing *Pyramid*?
> Dear son of memory, great heir of Fame,

[35] Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644) praises "our sage and serious Poet *Spencer*" as "a better teacher than *Scotus* or *Aquinas*" (1006).

> What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
> ("On *Shakespear*" ll. 1-6)

Shakespeare's real monument, the true source of his fame, is the response of his audience:

> Thou in our wonder and astonishment
> Hast built thy self a live-long Monument.
> For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavouring art,
> Thy easie numbers flow, and that each heart
> Hath from the leaves of thy unvalu'd Book,
> Those Delphick lines with deep impression took,
> Then thou our fancy of it self bereaving
> Dost make us Marble with too much conceaving;
> And so Sepulcher'd in such pomp dost lie,
> That Kings for such a tomb would wish to die.
> (ll. 7-16)

Shakespeare's lines are "Delphick" or oracular and "flow" with inspired ease. If Milton's juvenilia tend to express Orphic desire, his enchanting Shakespeare is equally Orphic in his ability to move audiences beyond themselves: "thou our fancy of it self bereaving." Yet this curious phrase, like the notion of conceiving to excess and turning to marble, alerts us to the risks in attending to such a powerful voice. As in his panegyrics on the singer Leonora Baroni (discussed in the next chapter), we find Milton writing uneasily from amidst the audience of the enchanted. His evident sensitivity to the effects of such captivating artistry may well have hastened the outgrowing of his own Orphic aspirations.

In assessing the bard's reception, Milton's poem dwells on the material numbers, lines, and leaves of "thy unvalu'd Book" (l. 11), Shakespeare's own invaluable oeuvre. In one sense this conception owes much to another great English exemplar, Ben Jonson. Jonson was one of the first poets to gather his own writings under the weighty heading of "works" – *The Workes of Beniamin Jonson* (1616) –

thereby preparing the ground for the folios of Shakespeare (1623, 1632). Joseph Loewenstein has shown that the system of patronage was giving way to a new literary market, helping "to transform authorship into a form of public agency increasingly distinguished by possessiveness" (2). To characterize poems and plays as one's personal "works" seemed bold indeed at a time when so many were condemning the theatre and the arts. On the one hand, Jonson was attempting to expand the acceptable "labour of an age" ("On *Shakespear*" l. 2) to include the arts by redefining poetry as both invaluable and valuable, both worthy and worth buying. On the other hand, he was in effect reducing poetry from its lofty station in Renaissance theory to another product for the marketplace. The fact that Jonson was forced to write begging letters in his old age, even appearing as a petitioner in his last portrait (Van Den Berg 11-12), points to the difficulty of negotiating this transition in a utilitarian culture. Milton's long struggle to become an epic poet, rather than a versifier of occasions, would have been epic indeed without his father's money.

While Milton naturally had much to learn from Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson and other masters, his dogged determination to fashion himself into a great poet exceeds the sum of its parts. Certainly Milton would have been not just politically but vocationally challenged; his stance as a poet in his modernizing England was necessarily defensive. Indeed, as J. S. Hill and other critics have noted, Milton's major poems feature protagonists undergoing, as he himself did, vocational trials – Adam and Eve after the Fall, Samson in captivity, Jesus in the wilderness. "I call my life as yet obscure, & unserviceable to mankind," Milton declares around 1633 in a letter "To A Friend" (1049-50). Commanded by his God to "Labour," he is nagged by the thought that he ought to be "early entring into creditable employment" instead of

staying with what might turn out to be "the emptie and fantastic chase of shadows & notions" – a phrase born of the Platonic critique of poetry, and which could have been written by any of the railers against the arts. Milton must persuade himself that building his abilities patiently "will give advantage to be more fit," but somehow he needs surprisingly little convincing that in the long run poetry will always be a glory worth pursuing.

One of Milton's most remarkable achievements is to invent himself, against the political and the cultural grain, as the poet of an alternative modernity. We shall see that his brand of enlightenment departs significantly from the exclusionary model that comes to dominate his time and arguably ours – that of the Baconians who outdo Bacon in championing the moderns at the expense of the ancients. Dialogism, as suggested in chapter one, enables Milton to negotiate a less wasteful *via media* that gathers traditions both ancient and modern, royalist and republican, into a critical but inclusive vision of the future. As this chapter has made clear, so ambivalent a figure as Orpheus, the pagan enchanter tarnished further by authoritarianism, was unfit for anything like full partnership in such a Christian venture. But the next two chapters will show that Orpheus still has crucial parts to play even for a poet who refuses his traditional seat at the right hand of the king.

Chapter Three

"That *Orpheus* self may heave his head": Enchantment and Engagement in Milton's Secular Poetry

Milton's more secular poems develop an irony as pointed as it is playful. At times he flirts with a quasi-Orphic persona, as in the early elegies. Characteristically, however, even here with no pressing Christian motive, Milton deflates the enchanter after the fashion of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. As I will show, this distancing has more to do with the contemporary politics of myth than with the tension between pagan and Christian traditions. Milton can irreverently evoke the Renaissance fantasy of Orphic power in "*Ad Patrem*" to thank his father for financing his studies, or tellingly put himself in the audience's shoes in the Italian sonnets and "*Ad Leonoram*" to explore the effects of enchanting singers. When he begins to scrutinize the paths to "immortal verse" in "L'Allegro" (l. 137) and "Il Penseroso," Orpheus looms no less equivocal. These brilliant companion poems, two ways of art and life that prove equally confining, epitomize Milton's subversive irony. Finally, his *Mask Presented at Ludlow-Castle* takes on its court models by problematizing instead of celebrating the Orphic arts with their authoritarian ramifications. As Milton invites his audiences to temper enchantment with dialogue, he works not so much with as against the contested figure of Orpheus.

Nowhere do these various works use the myth to harness, with the royalists, poetical to monarchical power. On the contrary, Milton's ironizations of the enchanter call into question any such "enchantment" of others by a single person. Given the indirectness of this critique, however, the earlier poems' attitudes to myth as to politics

have eluded critical consensus. Thomas Corns argues that Milton progresses from syncretism towards a more puritanical "subordination of pagan discourse to Christian" ("Varnish" 279). Yet Gordon Teskey sees Milton as a "pillager" of classical culture who "always held it in contempt" (125). My arguments suggest that, while Corns's smooth teleology neglects the shifting demands of rhetorical occasion, Teskey overlooks both Milton's engagement in the politics of myth and his humility in including pagan traditions at all. The theory of irony may also clarify Rachel Falconer's double vision of Orpheus in Milton as "the analogy that can be rejected" and "the mask that fits" (8). Barring perhaps some of the juvenilia, Milton is too good a student of his royalist rivals and of Ovid to don that tainted mask, or to make Orpheus "the means of creating a heroic self" (Falconer 17). The early secular and sacred poems alike belie the critical commonplace that Milton identified strongly with a masterful Orpheus.[36] The political stance of Milton's debut publication is also much debated. Many readers would once have concurred with Graham Parry that "Milton in these early poems seems like a figure of the Caroline establishment, but with vaster ambitions and more philosophic elevation" (83). Only more recently have critics such as Barbara Lewalski and Stella Revard pointed out ways in which the *Poems* and *Poemata* of 1645 subtly subvert the monarchy under the licenser's nose.[37] As I will argue, Milton's critique of Orphic power amounts to subversion.

The strategic uses of Orpheus in "*Ad Patrem*" (1631-2?), an elaborate thank-you note to the poet's father, recall the heady Latin elegies of Milton's juvenilia.

[36] Like Falconer (see esp. 44), Michael Lieb echoes critics such as J. M. Evans and Louis Martz in claiming that Milton long imagined himself as an Orphic poet, and "throughout his earlier works fostered a vision of Orpheus that portrayed him . . . as replete with indomitable power" (41).

[37] Alternatively, Annabel Patterson concludes that the young Milton was both radical and elitist, or "intelligently, constructively, confused" (22). The new biography by Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns reaffirms the older view.

Indeed, the poem refers to itself and its companions as "*juvenilia carmina, lusus*" (l. 115) – youthful songs, games or pastimes. While it can be read on one level as "Milton's apology for poetry" (Mander "*Epistola*" 158), an attempt to vindicate his vocation, "*Ad Patrem*" sets itself a narrower rhetorical goal: the son thanks the father for supporting his ongoing education in the worthy ways of poetry. In lightly adapting both classical myth and Renaissance poetics to this familial task, Milton turns to "*juvenilia . . . lusus*" what recent courts and academies had politicized. Broadly speaking, they used the myth of the compelling singer to idealize the artist as governor and *vice versa*; Orpheus "instilled good habits" and "quieted discords among peoples" (Galilei 213-14). But Milton borrows the loaded figures of Orpheus and Apollo together with the Renaissance theory of Orphic song mainly to give his father the ironic honour of remaining his son's humble servant, even as he affirms the kinship between their artistic callings – poetical and musical composition. The poem thus delightfully domesticizes myth and theory alike.

"*Ad Patrem*" appears to affirm straightforwardly the brotherhood of artists. The opening statements of thanks implicitly liken poetry to the musical and financial occupations of Milton's father:

> *haec nostros ostendit pagina census,*
> *Et quod habemus opum chartâ numeravimus istâ*
> *Quæ mihi semoto somni peperere sub antro Clio.*
> (ll. 12-14)

> (This page is all the wealth I have, I have counted it out on this sheet of paper, and that wealth is nothing but what golden Clio has given me.)

Numerare, as M. N. K. Mander notes, "points up that aspect of poetic activity which most closely connects it to music: the ordering process" ("*Epistola*" 160). The poet's page, like a sheet of music, unfolds an art of number granted by the Muses, the sources

of a lasting wealth. The Muses later return with Apollo their father to bind together more explicitly the measured arts of Milton Junior and Senior as "*Cognatas artes, studiumque affine*" (like-minded arts and kindred studies):

> *Nec tu prege precor sacras contemnere Musas,*
> *Nec vanas inopesque puta, quarum ipse peritus*
> *Munere, mille sonos numeros componis ad aptos,*
> *Millibus & vocem modulis variare canoram*
> *Doctus, Arionii meritò sis nominis hæres.*
> *Nunc tibi quid mirum, si me geniuses poëtam*
> *Contigerit, charo si tam propè sanguine juncti*
> *Cognatas artes, studiumque affine sequamur:*
> *Ipse volens Phœbus se dispertire duobus,*
> *Altera dona mihi, dedit altera dona parenti,*
> *Dividuumque Deum genitorque puerque tenemus*.
> (ll. 56-66)

> (Please, do not scorn the holy Muses; don't think that they are idle or unprofitable, since you yourself compose a thousand melodies through their generosity, fitted skillfully to your voice. May you inherit the fame of Arion. How is it strange then for you to have fathered me, a poet, if you and I so closely tied by blood should pursue like-minded arts and kindred studies? Apollo, wanting to divide himself between us, gave half his gifts to me and the other half to my father, so we both have shares of the god.)

The fear that the father as a scrivener might find poetry "idle or unprofitable" is dispelled by a kind of family communion in Apollo. The god of poetry and music conveniently divides himself into equal shares (*se dispertire duobus*,/ *Altera . . . altera*). Poet and composer are as one not only in blood but in owing their artistic achievements – their "*mille . . . numeros*" (l. 58) – to the god and his daughters.

Yet the poet has already employed the myth of Orpheus to set his own vocation above that of his father. By using the archetypal poet against the god often said to be his father, Milton wittily turns the tables on his own father. The poet's art is not only the most divine, he insists, but enjoys the power to stir the very gods:

> *Nec tu vatis opus divinum despice carmen*,
> *Quo* ***nihil*** *aethereos ortus, & semina cæli,*

> ***Nil magis*** *humanam commendat origine mentem*,
> *Sancta Promethéæ retinens vestigial flammæ.*
> *Carmen amant superi, tremebundaque Tartara carmen*
> *Ima ciere valet, divosque ligre profundos,*
> *Et triplici duros Manes adamant coercet.*
> (ll. 17-23, emphases added)

(Do not despise divine poetry, creation of the prophetic bard: *nothing better* shows our heavenly origins, our divine seed, our human intellect, those holy traces of Promethean fire. The gods love poetry, and song has power to stir the depths of quaking Tartarus, to seize the gods of the underworld; song binds unfeeling ghosts with triple bands of steel.)

Though Milton's father composed some vocal as well as instrumental music, this inflated allusion to the persuasive song of Orpheus in the underworld stakes an exclusive claim for poetry. The power of enchantment belongs to the *vates* (l. 17) – a term traditionally reserved for divinely inspired seers and poets. Moreover, Orpheus returns in name to underline this self-serving hierarchy in spite of the Apollonian bond. Music is little more than child's play without "*Verborum sensusque*" (words and their meanings):

> *Denique quid vocis modulamen inane juvabit,*
> *Verborum sensusque vacans, numerique loquacis?*
> *Silvestres decet iste choros, non Orphea cantus,*
> *Qui tenuit fluvios & quercubus addidit aures*
> *Carmine, non cithara, simulachraque functa canendo*
> *Compulit in lacrymas; habet has à carmine laudes*.
> (ll. 50-5)

(What pleasure after all will there be in music well attuned if it is empty of the human voice, or empty of words and their meanings, or of the rhythms of speech? Such strains befit woodland choirboys, not Orpheus, who by his singing and not his lute captivated streams, and caused oak trees to grow ears to listen to his songs, and by his singing made lifeless ghosts weep: it is from his song that he has these praises.)

As in Renaissance theory, the instrument must accompany the voice and not *vice versa* for Orphic song to work its magic. The Camerata privileged the words as "the most

noble, important, and principal part of music" (Galilei 206). So much, it would seem, for the brotherhood of artists.

The tone of "*Ad Patrem*," however, sets it apart from academic theory, and indeed from much of the Orphic tradition. Where Virgil had the shades awe-struck by the song of Orpheus, Milton has them bound with triple bands of steel. Where Apollonios had oak-trees circling the singer, Milton has them growing ears. These hyperbolic conceits, out of place in any serious defense of poetry, recall Ovidian touches such as the Furies' tears or the trees' casting down their leaves in grief. They signal to the poet's father as to later readers that the contest has been no contest, rigged against the elder from the outset. As William Kennedy remarks, Apollo too becomes the subject of a "learned joke" between father and son (79) – "*Non potiora dedit, quamvis & tuta fuissent,/ Publica qui juveni commisit lumina nato*/ *Atque Hyperionios currus, & frœna diei*" (Those weren't any better gifts that the father gave who allowed his youthful son the sun, the property of all humankind, and Hyperion's chariot, and the reins to control the day; ll. 97-9). The sun-god's gift of the car-keys to Phaeton, as Ovid tells (*Met.* 1.750-2.400), results in nothing less than the fiery death of his son and the near-destruction of the world. Milton's ironic comparison could be a dark comment on the perils of the poetic gift (Revard *Tangles* 214), but as a backhanded compliment it invites his father to bond with him in laughter.

Such levity, in keeping with Milton's send-up of Platonists and Aristotelians in the preceding poem ("*De Idea Platonica*"), arguably carries political implications in the charged contexts of the 1630s and '40s. Many of Ovid's readers reason that just this sort of wit – taking lightly what the powers that be take seriously – may well have led Augustus to banish him to the Black Sea. In other words, to domesticize myth is

not to depoliticize it but to gesture towards a political critique. We have already seen that English court poets and other royalist writers had appropriated Orpheus as a figure for monarchical power. Similarly, as Revard has shown, Phoebus Apollo was both "a potent symbol in the iconography of the Roman Catholic Church and a political symbol in contemporary Stuart England" (*Tangles* 66). Charles had even directed one painter of Apollo and Diana (Gerrit van Honhorst in 1628) to give the pair his own and his wife's features (77). For Revard, Milton's banishing of Apollo in the Nativity Ode is not just a religious but a political statement. By the same token, to take on Orpheus and Apollo with such levity in "*Ad Patrem*" may be in one sense to make light of the Stuart regime through its iconography. By overinflating Orpheus to the point of deflating him, Milton's hyperbole calls attention to the Renaissance strategy of inflating the mythic singer into an authority figure. To reduce icons of Caroline verse and masque to players in a Milton family comedy amounts to an oblique act of subversion.

Lest this seem to read too much into a tone that remains debatable, there are less covert clues to be found both in and around "*Ad Patrem.*" The poem qualifies the traditional alliance of kings and bards just as tendentiously as it domesticizes myth. Milton takes care to relegate the alliance to a distant past, innocent of present excess:

> *Carmina regales epulas ornare solebant,*
> *Cum nondum luxus, vastæque immensa vorago*
> *Nota gulæ, & modico spumabat cœna Lyæo*.
> (ll. 41-3)

> (Songs used to adorn noble feasts of kings back when luxury and the huge mouth of gluttony were as yet unknown, and banquet tables ran over only with modest wines.)

This implies with surprisingly little tact that the Caroline court currently ruling without Parliament has in fact become a huge mouth of gluttony, its banquet tables running over with immodest wines. The Greek verses that follow "*Ad Patrem*" only reinforce this strong hint of Puritan antiroyalism (Revard *Tangles* 85-6). Psalm 114 proclaims that, when "the children of Israel . . . were the one holy race, . . . among its peoples God was king, a king of great might." Holy peoples will honour no king save God. Moreover, the succeeding epigram, "*Philosophus ad regem*," gives voice to a law-abiding philosopher arbitrarily condemned to death by a king. Psalm and epigram all but force the reader to consider, in moral as well as financial terms, the costs of the royal prerogative.

Despite these hints of republicanism, "*Ad Patrem*" could still be seen as flirting with the Orphic figure and hence with the quasi-monarchical power to enchant the people. That Milton overinflates the myth to stage a comic contest with his father and to puncture the powers that be does not entirely vitiate the flirtation. His mythologizing of the poetic vocation seems to respond also to familial and cultural pressure to outgrow the arts and go "*ad leges*," or "*area lucri*" (into the legal profession, or where the money is; ll. 69-71). In this light, the fame of the prophetic poet is one Orphic theme about which Milton may be defensively in earnest: "*habet has à carmine laudes*" (it is from his song that [Orpheus] has these praises; l. 55); "*Ergo ego jam doctæ pars quamlibet ima catervæ/ Victrices hederas inter, laurosque sedebo*" (Since I am already a part, though only a low part, of the troop of learned people, I will sit someday among those who wear crowns of ivy and of laurel; ll. 101-2). Even so, the poem alludes to Orpheus not so much as a figure of worldly influence as a lone charmer of nature and quester in the underworld of "lifeless ghosts" (ll. 53-

5). The claim to membership in the elite "troop of learned people" confirms that only by his peers does the poet expect to be crowned. In sum, the quasi-Orphic desire in the "*juvenilia carmina*" of "*Ad Patrem*" has little in common with the courtly pursuit of political influence at the heart of the royalist identification with the enchanter.[38]

This is not to say that Milton scorned all courtly pursuits. After all, his poetic oeuvre ranges to courtly compliments. But the Italian sonnets to a lady (1629-30?) and the Latin epigrams to the singer Leonora Baroni (1638-9) flirt with the Orphic figure even more productively than "*Ad Patrem*" by showing us the enchanter from the other side – the side of the enchanted. In Sonnet 2 and the first epigram especially, Milton develops a telling analogy between the poet bewitched by his lady and the audience charmed by Orpheus. To read such poems as fully-fledged political allegories, cautionary tales of the subject's enchantment by the monarch, would be more convincing were they Elizabethan. What they do suggest is that, from quite early in his career, Milton grapples with Orphic song not just in terms of the singer but as a drama involving a certain kind of audience. The poems themselves dramatize a range of relations between artist and audience, from the sharply hierarchical model of Orphic song to more dialogical possibilities. This implies a range of audiences between which readers, themselves drawn into dialogue, are then free to choose. Milton problematizes the Orphic audience of passive admirers – figured in the mythic tradition by the trees and beasts spellbound by the bard, and in the sonnet tradition by the helpless lover bewitched by his lady – at the same time as he fosters an alternative audience of active partakers. The fact that the dialogical model marks these pretty

[38] Milton's final letter to Diodati (1637) confirms that literary fame was often on his mind: "You ask what I am thinking of? So help me God, an immortality of fame" (1052); cf. "Lycidas," ll. 78-84.

compliments suggests that Milton in the 1630s is already questioning royalist values and power relations, even if he has yet to cry openly for citizens over subjects.

The "bright lady" of Sonnet 2 possesses the Orphic power to move trees off mountains with her singing:

Donna leggiadra il cui bel nome honora
L'herbosa val di Rheno, e il nobil varco,
Ben è colui d'ogni valore scarce
Qual tuo spirto gentil non innamora,
Che dolcemente mostra si di fuora
De suoi atti soavi giamai parco,
E i don', che son d'amor saette ed arco,
Là onde l'alta tua virtù s'infiora.
Quando tu vaga parli, o lieta canti
Che mover possa duro alpestre legno,
Guardi ciascun a gli occhi, ed a gli orecchi
L'entrata, chi di te si truova indegno;
Gratia sola di su gli vaglia, inanti
Che'l disio amoroso al cuor s'invecchi.

> (Bright lady, whose fair name honours the flowery vale of Reno and the famous ford, truly he is destitute of all worth that is not moved to love your gentle spirit; which sweetly reveals itself, never neglectful of giving those soft looks and gifts that are the arrows and bow of Love – there, where blooms your lofty virtue. When you speak in beauty, or sing in joy so that the trees might be moved off the mountains, let him who is unworthy of you guard well the entrance of his eyes and ears. Only grace from above may help him, ere amorous desire fixes itself in his heart.)[39]

So taken is the poet by the lady's voice that he evokes the *Argonautika*'s vision of "wild oaks . . . brought down from Pieria" to the Thracian shore, "just as Orpheus long ago bewitched them" (1.28-30). Combined with her virtue and "soft looks," such Orphic power makes the lady well-nigh irresistible. The poet runs the risk of casting himself in the passive role of the enchanted. As we saw in chapter one, Orphic song had always been linked to Siren song and the workings of Eros. The conceit of guarding one's ears, the first of the sonnets' several references to Ulysses and the

[39] Translations of the Italian sonnets are adapted from J. S. Smart (qtd. in Honigmann) and Flannagan.

Sirens, interacts with the allusion to Orpheus to call up this knotty problem. If love fixes itself in the poet's heart, as the last line warns, he will have embraced the hierarchical model in which he becomes the powerless audience ravished by the powerful enchanter.

While Milton grasps the appeal of Orphic ravishment, just as he later comments on his countrymen's weakness for monarchical subjection, he makes room for an alternative model. As Anna Nardo observes, "these sonnets imply a greater degree of mutuality than is conventional in Petrarchan sonnets" (*Sonnets* 34). In Sonnet 2, one way of resisting lopsided enchantment might be the way of worthlessness; he who is "destitute of all worth" will certainly remain unmoved (ll. 3-4). But this man is another version of Shakespeare's anti-Orpheus, the unmusical villain of Renaissance tradition: "The man that hath no music in himself,/ Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,/ Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils" (*Merchant of Venice* 5.1.82-4). Even if it were possible to be so dull-spirited or destitute of worth, this way of avoiding enchantment would preempt any relation at all between artist and audience. The poem's ending offers a more promising possibility. Those of some worth but still unworthy of the lady may be helped by "grace from above." Heavenly grace apparently works to temper the otherwise overwhelming effects of Orphic song. It is not so much that "[the lady's] singing even has Orphic power to draw the hearer beyond his stubborn self" (Nardo 34). The sonnet suggests rather that the hearer will need heaven's help to skirt the temptation to grant her Orphic power. Grace may enable the listener to respond with a love more valuable than the rapture and "*disio amoroso*" (amorous desire) produced by Orphic song – presumably, that is, to respond with the more volitional and rational love of her "*spirto*

gentil" and "*alta virtù*" (gentle spirit and lofty virtue). But the response is up to the listener nonetheless; to those who lack faith in heavenly grace the lady will be a Siren. This Christian cadence allows for a more active response to the singer, and hence for a certain reciprocity between lady and sonneteer, artist and audience.

Like the more mature poems, Milton's sonnets invite readers to choose not only what kind of "singer" to make of the author but also what kind of audience to make of themselves. Sonnet 3 develops the relational possibilities in Sonnet 2 by proposing a collapsing of the two roles, as the lady moves the poet to step into the role of singer: "*Cosi Amor meco insù la lingua snella*/ *Desta il fior novo di strania favella,*/ *Mentre io di te . . . Canto*" (So Love awakens on my ready tongue the new flower of a foreign speech, as I sing of you; ll. 6-9). Whereas the Orphic other of the traditional sonneteer captivates or binds him, producing at best a sterile lament, the lady's effect on the poet is genuinely creative. Love inspires him to a new mode of speech that promises further intimacy. Perhaps the poet has yet to choose between engaging in a dialogical relationship and retreating into monological lamentation. But his readiness to learn the lady's language tilts the sonnet towards the dialogical model whereby the audience sings back to the singer.

Still, not all of these sonnets allow the reader to choose between competing models of the artist-audience relationship. The next sonnet addresses Milton's friend Diodati and returns to the poet's anxiety over the lady's Orphic power:

> *Parole adorne di lingua più d'una,*
> *E'l cantar che di mezzo l'hemispero*
> *Traviar ben può la faticosa Luna,*
> *E degli occhi suoi avventa sì gran fuoco*
> *Che l'incerar gli orecchi mi fia poco*.
> (Sonnet 4, ll. 10-14)

> (Her speech adorned with more than one language, and singing that would take the labouring moon off course in the middle of its hemisphere; and from her eyes darts such fire that to stop up my ears would avail me but little.)

The poet finds himself caught between the lady's vocal and ocular charms. Revard insists that "Milton emphasizes the artistry, the intellect that her singing conveys" (*Tangles* 38). Yet the poem closes with another troubling allusion to Ulysses and the Sirens ("stop up my ears"). And this time there is no mention of saving grace, even though the lady's charms outstrip the merely aural appeal of Homer's *femmes fatales*. Moreover, the sonnet leads to "Milton's most conventionally Petrarchan poem" (Nardo *Sonnets* 33). Sonnet 5 purports to address the lady, only to harp on the poet's inarticulate "*sospiro*" (l. 8), his sigh of suffering, thereby making nonsense of any dialogue.

Not until the last of the Italian sonnets does the poet regain enough composure to reassert the worth of his heart and his own art. Like a personal advertisement, Sonnet 6 spells out what his heart has to offer the lady: "*fedele, intrepid, costante,/ Di pensieri leggiadro, accorto, e buono*" (faithful, dauntless, loyal, and its thoughts fair, wise, and good; ll. 5-6). He emphasizes that he means to be the kind of audience that sings back to the singer, indeed an inspired poet in the grand tradition:

> *Tanto del forse, e d'invidia sicuro,*
> *Di timori, e speranza al popol use,*
> *Quanto d'ingegno, e d'alto valor vago,*
> *E di cetra sonora, e delle Muse*.
> (Sonnet 6, ll. 9-12)

> ([My heart is] as heedless of chance and envy, of common hopes and fears, as it is covetous of genius and lofty worth, and of the sounding lyre and of the Muses.)

Thus, while some of these poems seem conventional, the Italian sonnets as a sequence, like the more unconventional among them, dramatize the poet's struggle between

Orphic enchantment and dialogical reciprocity. They valorize the latter as a source of creativity, while critiquing the former as a form of enslavement that reduces the audience to hopeless lament or wordless sigh.

Milton worries at the same Orphic dilemmas a decade later in his epigrams to the singer Leonora Baroni (1638-9). The first and most substantial of the three epigrams calls Orphic enchantment into question by fashioning a compliment out of an antithesis between Leonora's singing and the silence of everyone else:

Angelus unicuique suus (sic credite gentes)
Obtigit æthereis ales ab ordinibus.
Quid mirum? Leonora tibi si Gloria major,
Nam tua præsentem vox sonat ipsa Deum.
Aut Deus, aut vacui certè mens tertia cœli
Per tua secretò guttura serpit agens;
Serpit agens, facilisque docet mortalia corda
Sensim immortali assuescere posse sono.
Quòd si cuncta quidem Deus est, per cunctaque fusus,
In te unâ loquitur, cætera mutus habet.

An angel protects each person (believe it, ye peoples)
Heavenly winged from the celestial orders.
What wonder, Leonora, if to you comes greater glory:
Your voice itself expresses God among us.
God, or at least a third mind leaving Heaven
Steals on his own through your throat and works his way;
Works his way, gently leading mortal hearts
Sensibly to grow used to immortal sounds.
But if God is really all, and infused through all,
In you alone he speaks, and keeps the rest in silence.
(trans. McColley "Tongues" 128)

Leonora is idealized as a latter-day Orpheus insofar as she is able to bring "immortal sounds," the Music of the Spheres or the angelic choirs, down to "mortal hearts." The second and third epigrams confirm the Orphic nature of her voice by granting it calming and soul-swaying (*flexanimo*) powers, and by gushing in conclusion that "*Atque homines cantu detinet atque Deos*" (she with her singing captures mortals and

gods alike). As such an ending would suggest, the epigrams outdo the sonnets in problematizing Orphic song. And this is nowhere more obvious than in the first epigram's troubling final words, "*cætera mutus habet*," which retain most of their force in Diane McColley's fine translation: "keeps the rest in silence."

All three of the epigrams invite us to consider the singer in relation to others. The second poem proposes Leonora's Orphic voice as the balm for a poet's self-destructive love, but its hyperbole renders her song potentially destructive as well: "*Ah miser ille tuo quantò feliciùs ævo/ Perditus, & propter te Leonora foret*!" (Poor man, how much more happily had he been lost now, and because of you, Leonora!; ll. 3-4). He could lose himself in her song as easily as in his love. And the third epigram compares her to Parthenope, traditionally one of the Sirens, albeit a goddess "rehabilitated" by the Neapolitans as their local patron (Revard *Tangles* 147). These comparisons intensify the suspicion that Milton arouses in the first epigram with the repetition of "*serpit agens*" (works or creeps its way), which warns with apt subtlety that "a serpent lurks" (McColley "Tongues" 143). Is Leonora possessed by the divine or by the Devil? In asking us to weigh the implications of such puns and comparisons for artists and audiences, Milton invites us to question too our own position as the readers into whom his poems "creep."

While Milton opens the poems to all the disturbing implications of Orphic song, he also enables us to discern a dialogue between artist and audience, author and reader. He thus provides us with a perspective from which to ironize Orphic song as ravishment, and hence to perceive it more clearly as a threat. Falconer contends that, far from asking us to make comparisons or to question our position, Milton would have us remain passive, powerless in the grip of his own Orphic mastery: "It is a

rhetorical power [Milton] himself quite evidently seeks, . . . the skill to render an audience mute and powerless" (44). Admittedly, some of Milton's earliest works show signs of quasi-Orphic desire, or what I have called his flirtation with Orpheus. In these sophisticated epigrams, however, he maintains a certain distance – and thereby allows us a certain distance – from the figure of the Orphic singer. Although these poems could be dismissed as hyperbolic panegyrics that have little to tell us about Milton's philosophy of art, McColley rightly points out that intrinsic to the genre is its elevation of the individual to the symbolic ("Tongues" 145). Leonora does become on one level a test case for the artist in general. What it demonstrates is not Milton's identification with the Renaissance Orpheus but rather his ongoing critique of that model as a maker of masters and slaves.

Leonora does not "render an audience mute and powerless" in the first epigram. The agent is God or God's messenger, who speaks through her but "keeps the rest in silence." This could mean that the others are silent, or merely that God is silent in them, as some translations have him: "in you alone he speaks, in all the rest he is present but silent" (*The Student's Milton*, qtd. in McColley "Tongues" 146). God inspires the artist alone but remains within the rest, each of whom enjoys also the attention of a guardian angel (l. 1). In any case, lines 7-8 inform us that Leonora's singing in fact teaches her audience. The verb *docere* implies not just that others may respond actively by learning or following but also that the artist is gifted for their sake. This is power for the purpose of spiritual enlightenment rather than social control. Yet "*serpit agens*" interjects its repeated note of warning all the same. As McColley remarks (143), it is up to Leonora's audience, including the poet (who seems to have heard her in the course of his travels in Italy), to respond rightly by attending to the

divine in her. The serpent to which the collocation alerts us, I would add, is in one sense the overpowering Orphic singer that we are tempted to make of Leonora. Bad students are content to be enchanted; in idolizing the teacher, they render themselves mute and powerless. If Milton seems to identify with Leonora the inspired artist who uplifts her audiences, he strives to distance himself and his readers from Leonora the Orphic enchanter who captivates them.

Initially, the next epigram divides us further from Leonora's song. It warns that her voice may bring loss or destruction despite, or perhaps because of, its pleasures (*feliciùs . . . Perditus*; ll. 3-4, qtd. above). But the final lines insist on the restorative potential of her artistry for the crazed lover:

> *Tu tamen errantes cæcâ vertigine sensus*
> *Voce eadem poteras composuisse tuâ;*
> *Et poteras ægro spirans sub corde quietem*
> *Flexanimo cantu restituisse sibi*.
> ("*Ad eandem*" ll. 9-12)

> (Yet you by your voice could have calmed his wandering senses, and you, breathing peace into his lovesick heart, could, by your soul-swaying strains, have restored him.)

Although *quies* (peace or quiet) could raise the spectre of *mutus*, this "soul-swaying" involves restoration more than domination, giving or giving back more than taking or imposing. The lover would come to his senses and lose only his madness. The third and final epigram hints again at the potential for destruction as well as (re)construction. Here Leonora becomes a "*liquidam Sirena*" (liquid-voiced Siren; l. 1), recalling the ambiguous lady of the Italian sonnets. Is this Parthenope benign or malign? The last lines leave it up to the reader: "*Illic Romulidûm studiis ornata secundis,/ Atque hominess cantu detinet atque Deos*" (Basking in the adoration of Rome's sons, she with her singing captures mortals and gods alike; ll. 7-8). Does

detinere carry the possibly malign sense of "capture," as in this translation, or the more benign sense of "engage"? Similarly, *ornatus* can mean "honoured" instead of the more idolatrous "adored." To choose adoration and captivity would be to inflate Leonora into an Orphic enchanter. While Milton refuses to make this choice for us, the three epigrams together, like the Italian sonnets as a sequence, give readers reason enough to be wary of Orphic enchantment.

As in the sonnets, Milton here proposes a politically loaded alternative to Orphic enchantment in an audience that can be inspired without being ravished, moved without being muted, and which makes of the artist an example and not an idol. Milton maintains a certain distance of his own by avoiding the first person and writing of Leonora's influence over "mortal hearts," Torquato Tasso the legendary mad poet, or "Rome's sons." Just as his divorce tracts call for a "gatherer" willing to "compare the words he finds, with other precepts" (969), so these epigrams, published the following year, challenge readers to weigh their "conflictual textual or contextual evidence" (Hutcheon). Leonora's voice can be either instructive and restorative or seductive and destructive, depending on the audience. As Milton contends in *Areopagitica*, "Good and evill . . . grow up together almost inseparably," and God leaves it up to each person "to be his own chooser" (1006). The epigrams ironize Orphic song by associating it with Siren-song, which (like censorship) leaves one with little choice. Orphic mastery constitutes what Kenneth Burke calls a "participating sub-perspective" (512), without which Milton would be hard-pressed to formulate his dialogical alternative. Insofar as we adjudicate the poems' competing accounts of artistry, we may become the active "choosers" to which they point.

The companion poems "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" likewise call upon us to sample and adjudicate competing accounts, alternative ways both of life and of art. Instead of choosing one sub-perspective, however, Milton lets each sensibility ironize the other as well as deflate itself. He leaves it to the reader to piece together the best of both worlds. That the myth of Orpheus the archetypal poet is central to both worlds, indeed one of the most obvious links between them, suggests that cheerfulness and pensiveness are not just possible modes of being but potential paths to poetry. Like so many of the 1645 poems, "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" are poems about poets and poetry. Focussing on the ways in which Orpheus haunts both of these poems in Ovidian guise clarifies their refusal to endorse either sensibility as the gateway to deathless verse. That both ways smack of self-enchantment is often overlooked by critics who assume that Milton's early works uphold Orpheus as "the greatest of singers," and his song as a "metaphor for the human capacity to impose artful order on existence ("L'Allegro") and achieve a significant interpretation of experience ("Il Penseroso")" (Williamson 378). Blinding us further to the distancing irony has been the tendency to identify "Milton himself as the more studious, melancholy, and thoughtful one" (Flannagan 65). As John Creaser demonstrates, opening our ears to the poems' delightful "rhythmic buoyancy" reveals not personal statements or ideals but "a sophisticated and resilient playfulness" ("'Through Mazes'" 377-8). Once again, Milton's playfulness with the myth of Orpheus carries implications both vocational and political.

The speaker of "L'Allegro" compares the "*Lydian* Aires" and "immortal verse" that he hopes to enjoy from Mirth with the feats of Orpheus:

` Lap me in soft *Lydian* Aires,
Married to immortal verse
Such as the meeting soul may pierce
In notes, with many a winding bout
Of lincked sweetnes long drawn out,
With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
The melting voice through mazes running;
Untwisting all the chains that ty
The hidden soul of harmony.
That *Orpheus* self may heave his head
From golden slumber on a bed
Of heapt *Elysian* flowres, and hear
Such streins as would have won the ear
Of *Pluto*, to have quite set free
His half-regained *Eurydice*.
These delights, if thou canst give,
Mirth with thee, I mean to live.
(ll. 136-52)

As an ironic euphemism for "unregained," "half-regained" might have made Ovid proud. The speaker imagines that, had their music been heard in Hades, Mirth and her crew would have "quite" finished the job, presumably by moving Pluto so deeply as to release Eurydice unconditionally. In other words, Mirth would have moved him as Orpheus could not. Whether or not the floral bed contains Eurydice, the scene in the Elysian fields may remind us of Ovid's provision of a happy reunion there for the couple. But the passage stresses the failure of the bard's quest to the underworld. By separating "*Orpheus* self" from "his head," moreover, it outdoes the tragicomedy of the *Metamorphoses* with a subtle reminder that he lies in Elysium because the Bacchantes once heaved his head in the throes of a different ecstasy. So deflated is this Orpheus that he becomes the hearer instead of the singer, the ravisher ravished.

While Orpheus seems to be hoist on his own petard, Milton's irony disrupts the distinction between Orphic song and the superior verse that the speaker expects from Mirth. To begin with, "the term 'Lydian' was the standard reproach for everything

thought to be vicious in music" (Hughes 1). Aroused by "soft *Lydian* Aires," our suspicions may well grow as we read on through winding, wanton, giddy, melting, and mazes. Melting musical verse that pierces the soul sounds much like Orphic song. Furthermore, as Thomas Greene observes, the "final couplet introduces a conditional whose irresolution seems to reach backward and embrace the whole poem" ("Meeting Soul" 170-1). The "if" in "if thou canst give" casts doubt on Mirth's capacity to fulfill any of the speaker's desires. The closing conditional implies that a revelation of the very "soul of harmony" (l. 144) may be too much to ask not just of Orpheus but of anyone. "L'Allegro" thus sounds out the possibility that such consummate art may be no more than a tantalizing pipe-dream. After all, a poetry with the power to raise the dead from Pluto's realm would be a poetry with the power of Christ.

From the outset, both "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" call into question their own speakers along with the gifts of their respective goddesses. The cheerful speaker complicates his nominal posture in the first ten lines by banishing Melancholy with such redundant relish (loathed, blackest, Stygian, forlorn, horrid, unholy, uncouth, brooding) as to hint at an attraction to his enemy. The pensive speaker follows suit by protesting too much about "joyes" (vain, deluding, little, idle, fond, gaudy, hovering, fickle). Having dismissed joys as "likest hovering dreams," for instance, he wishes for "som strange mysterious dream" (ll. 9, 147). Both speakers go on to propose incestuous ancestries for their chosen goddesses. Melancholy issued from Saturn and his mother Vesta, and Mirth either from Venus and Bacchus or from Aurora and Zephir, a mother and son. Incest suggests the Orphic traps of solipsism and nostalgia, or arrested development – a charge that Milton will bring more earnestly against Satan (with Sin his daughter and Death their son). The mirthful speaker seems but a distant

spectator of the rural labourers whom he fancies whistling, singing, and storytelling (ll. 63-8).[40] When "streit [his] eye hath caught new pleasures" (l. 69), he sees them through the lens of literary genres – the "Towers, and battlements" of romance (l. 77), Corydon and Thyrsis the shepherds of pastoral (l. 83), "stories told" of the imps of folklore (l. 101), the "mask, and antique Pageantry" of court entertainment (l. 128), and "the well-trod stage" of comedy (l. 131). While not nearly as solipsistic as his pensive counterpart, the speaker of "L'Allegro" seems almost as bookish.

Milton punctures the speaker of "Il Penseroso" more sharply by having him conjure up a "pensive Nun" (l. 31) who combines qualities of the Orphic enchanter and the enchanted. Melancholy's gait is "musing," her soul "rapt," her passion "holy," and through her companions Peace, Quiet, and Fast she "hears the Muses in a ring" (ll. 38-47). Active meets passive: on the one hand, she is to "fix" her eyes and "joyn" or "bring" her companions, with "looks commercing with the skies" (ll. 39-51); on the other hand, she is to be "rapt," "held in holy passion still" to the point where she may "forget [her]self to Marble" (ll. 41-2). This Nun is as self-enchanting a creature as her incestuous ancestry might suggest. The image of marble recalls "On Shakespeare" and its notion that the thought-provoking playwright will "make us marble with too much conceiving" (l. 14). If Shakespeare can overwhelm his enchanted audiences, Melancholy seems to spellbind herself. The appearance of "Contemplation,/ And the mute Silence" as the Nun's next attendants (ll. 54-5) points to stasis and speechlessness as potential dead ends of otherworldly musing. A popular theory held that the melancholy humour sometimes produced imaginative genius (Stevens 383).

[40] Milton has been accused of aestheticizing or pastoralizing rural labour here. However, even granted the possibility of a warning "note to self" in the speaker's distance from the world, there is no warrant for identifying Milton with his creation. See Michael Wilding for a discussion of the controversy.

But the alternative to silence here is scarcely more productive: the private lament of the solitary nightingale ("'Less *Philomel* will daign a Song,/ In her sweetest, saddest plight" ll. 56-7), to which Virgil compares the despair of Orpheus after his double loss (*Georgics* 4.511-13). Musing may be no bad thing, but nursing Orphic aspirations to the extreme either of otherworldliness or of self-absorption may bring wordlessness or hopelessness as soon as "immortal verse."

What were dangers to the enchanted in the Italian sonnets thus become pitfalls for the would-be enchanter in "Il Penseroso." When the speaker likens the moon to "one that had bin led astray/ Through the Heav'ns wide pathles way" (ll. 69-70), one may well suspect that he is the one led astray. His books seem to lead him beyond the literariness of the previous speaker and into the "high lonely Towr" (l. 86) of his self and his sensations. Like the "glowing Embers" of his imaginings, he tends "to counterfeit a gloom,/ Far from all resort of mirth" (ll. 79-81). He yearns for a lonely tower in which to study with Hermes and Plato, but in expecting the latter simply "to unfold" the secrets of "The immortal mind" (ll. 89-91) he forgets that the Socratic method was the more demanding one of dialogue. As musically inclined as his cheerful counterpart, he wishes that Melancholy would call up the greatest singers of myth:

> But, O sad Virgin, that thy power
> Might raise *Musæus* from his bower,
> Or bid the soul of *Orpheus* sing
> Such notes as warbled to the string,
> Drew iron tears down *Pluto*'s cheek,
> And made Hell grant what Love did seek.
> (ll. 103-8)

Longing to hear the love-song of Orpheus in Hades, the speaker puts himself in the dubious position of its monarch Pluto, who (according to Ovid) melts at the bard's

reminder of what his own "Love did seek," the rape of Proserpine. And "L'Allegro" has just reminded us that "ultimately hell did *not* grant what love did seek" (Brown 10). Instead of confronting the tragedy of Orpheus and Eurydice, the speaker savours the sentiment that love – and Orphic song – conquers all, as indeed it does in contemporary operatic treatments of the myth. Moreover, he reduces Chaucer to "him that left half told/ The story of *Cambuscan* bold" (ll. 109-10), i.e., the sentimental romance "The Squire's Tale." Since this hardly qualifies as one of the "sage and solemn tunes" that he claims to prefer (l. 117), one effect may be to reduce the speaker himself.

After all of these weighty invocations, the speaker's climactic wishes are to hide himself, to dream, and to be dissolved in "extasies" in preparation for "something like" prophecy:

> Hide me from Day's garish eie, . . .
> And let some strange mysterious dream,
> Wave at his Wings in Airy stream, . . .
> And as I wake, sweet musick breath
> Above, about, or underneath,
> Sent by som spirit to mortals good,
> Or th' unseen Genius of the Wood.
> But let my due feet never fail,
> To walk the studious Cloysters pale,
> And love the high embowed Roof,
> With antick Pillars massy proof,
> And storied Windows richly dight,
> Casting a dimm religious light.
> There let the pealing Organ blow,
> To the full voic'd Quire below,
> In Service high, and Anthems cleer,
> As may with sweetnes, through mine ear,
> Dissolve me into extasies,
> And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes.
> And may at last my weary age
> Find out the peacefull hermitage,
> The Hairy Gown and Mossy Cell,
> Where I may sit and rightly spell,

> Of every Star that Heav'n doth shew,
> And every Herb that sips the dew;
> Till old experience do attain
> To something like Prophetic strain.
> These pleasures *Melancholy* give,
> And I with thee will choose to live.
> (ll. 141, 147-8, 151-76)

These inward turns lead not to truth but rather to a striking vagueness: "*some* strange mysterious dream"; "sent by *som* spirit . . . *Or* the unseen Genius"; "*something like* Prophetic strain." Just as the dying Orpheus mutters "something or other tearful" in the *Metamorphoses* (11.52-3), last words of wisdom here seem few and far between. Moreover, the speaker's inwardness belies his desire for musical dissolution into "extasies," to be transported beyond or outside of himself by sacred art. The outdoor scenes of the previous poem, its sociable speaker's "walking not unseen" (l. 57), have shown us part of what is missing here – complementary forms of experience through which to expand one's existential and artistic horizons. As in "L'Allegro," the beautiful and yet limited path of the speaker and his goddess, qualified again by a closing conditional ("give . . . live"), seems unable to produce an exemplary life or art. Without dismissing it, Milton calls into question whatever wisdom or poetry that Melancholy might deliver. Ultimately the way of the prophetic poet must depart from the path of "Il Penseroso."

Besides their vocational significance, Milton's playful critiques of his speakers also carry political implications. By exposing the limitations of these fantasies of Plato and Orpheus, Milton queries both the producers and the consumers of the Neoplatonic ideals and grandiloquent masques of the Caroline court. The cheerful speaker's weakness for "the melting voice through mazes running" ("L'Allegro" l. 142) mirrors the pensive speaker's surrender to "sweetness, through mine ear" ("Il

Penseroso" l. 164). Given to self-enchantment, both leave themselves open not just to Orphic mastery but to monarchical subjugation. Roy Flannagan remarks of the passage quoted above that,

> In view of Milton's later career as antiprelatical and anti-Roman Catholic pamphleteer . . ., the image in "Il Penseroso" of the author in his projected old age as a hermit wearing a hair shirt and living in a mossy monastic cell seems regressive, as does the author's reverence for nuns, cloisters, stained glass, dark chapels, and anthems, all of which he would later condemn as a member of Cromwell's Interregnum government. (77, n69)

Though the time of writing remains unknown, the companion poems were published in 1645, when Milton was already busy pamphleteering. Furthermore, the contrasting titles invite us to distinguish between the speakers and the author (a distinction less vital to, say, "*Ad Patrem*" or the sonnet to Diodati). As I have tried to show, the hand of the ironist is clearly visible behind both characters. What is being deflated appears to be more than just these sensibilities. Regardless of Milton's intentions at the time of writing, the passage that disturbs Flannagan would have spoken volumes to readers in 1645, in the midst of a civil war being fought over just such issues. If reverence for cloisters and stained glass leads to solipsism and arrested development, so might the trappings and rituals of the Caroline regime and its established church.

Milton's running commentary on the court and its authoritarian values surfaces most prominently in "L'Allegro's" presentation of royal spectacle:

> Towred Cities please us then,
> And the busie humm of men,
> Where the throng of Knights and Barons bold,
> In weeds of Peace high triumphs hold,
> With store of Ladies, whose bright eies
> Rain influence, and judge the prise
> Of Wit, or Arms, while both contend
> To win her Grace, whom all commend.
> There let *Hymen* oft appear
> In Saffron robe, with Taper clear,

> And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
> With mask, and antique Pageantry,
> Such sights as youthfull Poets dream
> On Summer eeves by haunted stream.
> (ll. 117-30)

If the "Knights and Barons" seem medieval, the Stuarts were known for their "mask, and antique Pageantry," as when James entered London in 1604 in the superhuman guise of a *roi soleil*. The Caroline court poets, whom Milton derides as "riming parasites" in *The Reason of Church Government* (924), contended to win "the prise/ Of Wit" – lucrative commissions of revels for Charles and Henrietta Maria. Wedding feasts and other state occasions called for masques, politically charged extravaganzas here reduced to "Such sights as youthfull Poets dream/ On Summer eeves by haunted stream." This "image of a young and melancholy – and slightly silly – poet" (Flannagan 70 n52) reflects on the slightly silly speaker. The deflation of such pompous productions and their audiences is Milton's.

Just as he questions not so much the world of "Il Penseroso" as the speaker's attitude towards it, Milton suggests in "L'Allegro" that we assume all too readily the passive role of the bedazzled. Orphic art ought not to conquer all. In *Eikonoklastes* (1650), his response to the campaign to make a martyr of Charles, Milton likens the King's "conceited portraiture" to a "Masking scene, . . . set there to catch fools and silly gazers," and mocks its "quaint Emblems and devices begg'd from the old Pageantry of some Twelf-nights entertainment at *Whitehall*" (1080). The radicalism of "L'Allegro" is comparatively muted, but its comment on royal spectacle as youthful dreaming underscores the fictionality, the make-believe in "Such sights" (l. 129) as can make us believe in the divine right of kings and queens. This is not to say that Milton finds fault with fiction itself, as did the Puritan extremists. But the self-enchanted

make themselves ripe for royalist enchantment. They arrest their own development by enfeebling the god-given capacity to be, in *Areopagitica*'s terms, their own choosers.

It may then seem inconsistent of Milton to accept invitations from an aristocratic family to write an entertainment and a masque himself. While *Arcades* (1632?) fêted the Countess Dowager of Derby, mother-in-law to the Earl of Bridgewater, *A Mask Presented at Ludlow-Castle* (1634) celebrated nothing less than the Earl's installation as Lord President of Wales, a vice-regal post to which he had been appointed by the King. The performers at Ludlow included the Earl's children Alice, John, and Thomas Egerton, all of whom had appeared in Caroline masques, and their music master, the prominent court musician Henry Lawes. Despite the constraints of occasion, however, Milton finds subtle ways to reshape a royalist genre. Both *Arcades* and *A Mask*, as Barbara Lewalski has shown, "reform the court genres and the values associated with them" (297).[41] *Arcades* snubs the Catholic Queen by lauding the Protestant Countess as a "rural Queen" (l. 94), and disrupts the court's equation of beauty, virtue, and blue blood by upholding the seventy-three-year-old Dowager as its moral example (300). The more substantial *Mask* transforms the genre from dramatic spectacle into spectacular drama. Here in the climatic work of the 1645 *Poems*, Milton challenges the royalists' arts of enchantment, designed "to catch fools and silly gazers" (to recall his own mockery), with his developing poetics of engagement.

In the typical court masque, artist-figures like Orpheus bound the power of the monarch to its would-be complement – the power of poetry. As we saw in chapter

[41] David Norbrook ("Reformation") provides a context for Milton's reformism, which builds on criticism attracted by court entertainments since the late sixteenth century.

two, royalist poets such as Campion and Davenant used versions of the Orphic singer to place themselves and their enchanting art at the right hand of the king, to set up shop in the centre of political authority. By contrast, as Revard points out, "Milton is silent about the Egertons' connections with the Stuart court" (*Tangles* 154). *A Mask* appeals to both a lower community and a higher court; it puts song at the service of Britain and Heaven while looking beyond the Orphic figure that it reveals to be as politically and morally flawed as it is artistically limiting. While it begins to realize the "grace notes" of a more humane song, Milton's *Mask* is about the limitations as much as the potentials of human art.[42] To ironize Orphic song is to bring poetry at least partway down to earth, and the masque and its mortal aristocrats along with it.

The *Mask* shows us at least two kinds of Orphic singer, one more exemplary and the other cautionary, and two corresponding kinds of listener or audience. The exemplary super-Orpheus, fittingly played by Lawes, is the Attendant Spirit, who like his mythic original descends to a perilous realm to help a lady in distress. Unlike Orpheus, he is able to help because, acknowledging the limitations of his own song, he has the humility to seek help from another quarter. Conversely, the Lady is a cautionary Orpheus who, like the bard in the hands of the Bacchantes, cannot save herself in a crisis. Just as Satan will be an old-style warrior lost in a Christian epic, the idealistic Lady, played by Alice Egerton, seems in some ways a court masquer lost in a radical masque. The Spirit is also the exemplary listener. As he tells it, he is momentarily stunned by the Lady's Orphic voice but collects his wits to hear it as a call to action. His perverse counterpart is Comus, himself a Bacchante of sorts as the son of Bacchus and Circe. The tempter likewise perceives "somthing holy" in the

[42] See Patricia Vicari ("The Triumph") for an argument that the *Mask* is about the triumph of art.

Lady's song (l. 246). And yet, instead of identifying with it, Comus knowingly chooses to attempt its ruin. The persistence of evil (ll. 939-41), only exacerbated by such Orphic artistry, calls for an alternative, mutually beneficial model of relations between creatures and realms. A provisional resolution comes not from the Spirit or the brothers alone but from the "fountain pure" and the healing chant and touch of the local water nymph Sabrina (l. 912).

The Orphic figure of the artist serves the Attendant Spirit as it did the young Milton – as a model to be tested and surpassed. After explaining his mission of "defence, and guard" (l. 42), the Spirit takes on an Orphic persona:

> But first I must put off
> These my skie robes spun out of *Iris* Wooff,
> And take the Weeds and likeness of a Swain,
> That to the service of this house belongs,
> Who with his soft Pipe, and smooth-dittied Song,
> Well knows to still the wilde winds when they roar,
> And hush the waving Woods.
> (ll. 82-8)

Milton gives Lawes, the music master actually in "the service of this house," the pleasure of presenting himself in the guise of a shepherd as gifted as Orpheus. He controls the forces of nature with his pipe and song, as the Elder Brother reiterates: "*Thyrsis*? Whose artful strains have oft delaid/ The huddling brook" (ll. 494-5). But the Orphic persona is more than just a compliment. Like the mythic bard, the Spirit descends to a kind of hell, "the smoak and stirr of this dim spot,/ Which men call Earth" (ll. 5-6) – anything but the court masque's idealization of Caroline England. His quest after the Lady and her brothers takes him to a "drear Wood,/ The nodding horror of whose shady brows/ Threats the forlorn and wandring Passinger" (ll. 37-8). In the case of Orpheus, the failure of his quest after the forlorn Eurydice deepens the

divisions between his own and the lower realm.[43] The ferryman refuses to let him cross again, and the Hell that holds his wife seems to him more hellish and cruel than ever (*Georgics* 4.502-6; *Met*. 10.72-7). By contrast, as Richard Neuse remarks, Milton's Spirit will depart with "a changed attitude to the earth." As in the image of the rainbow (l. 992), "Heaven and earth . . . now come together" (100). His happy departure from what he comes to see as the "green" earth (l. 1014) seals a significant departure from the myth of Orpheus, and one that points to Milton's levelling politics. Rather than imposing order on a lower realm like a benevolent dictator, the Spirit anticipates the God of Milton's epics by engaging with its denizens in creative exchanges that bring change to all.

The Spirit's successes and changes turn on his capacities as a listener. At least the equal of Orpheus at singing, he is arguably the bard's superior at listening. On the one occasion that requires of Orpheus to listen, the pact with Pluto not to look back, he proves to be unmindful. But the Spirit's opening speech presents him as both an Orphic singer and a careful, albeit impressionable, listener capable of moral discrimination by ear. Besides hushing the winds and woods, he can "hear the tread/ Of hatefull steps" as Comus approaches (ll. 91-2). To some degree, the Lady shares this moral sense: "This way the noise was, if mine ear be true,/ My best guide now, me thought it was the sound/ Of Riot" (ll. 170-2). Yet her ear yields to her eye and the "Magick dust" through which she sees Comus as "som harmles Villager" (ll. 165-6). If at first she meets his flattery with "unattending Ears," like Eve she opens them soon

[43] Brown makes this point to advance his thesis that "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" are "interpenetrating" (11).

enough: "Shepherd I take thy word" (ll. 272, 321). Her brothers learn from the Spirit that a careful ear can be a moral compass as well as a directional guide:

> The wonted roar was up amist the Woods,
> And fill'd the Air with *barbarous dissonance*,
> At which I ceas't, and *listen'd them a while*,
> Till an unusuall stop of sudden silence
> Gave respit to the drowsie flighted steeds
> That draw the litter of close-curtain'd sleep.
> At last a *soft and solemn* breathing sound
> Rose like a steam of rich distill'd Perfumes,
> And stole upon the Air, that even Silence
> Was took e're she was ware, and wish't she might
> Deny her nature, and be never more
> Still to be so displac't. *I was all eare*,
> And took in strains that might create a soul
> Under the ribs of Death, but O ere long
> *Too well I did perceive* it was the voice
> Of my most honour'd Lady, your dear sister.
> Amazed I stood, harrow'd with grief and fear,
> And O poor hapless Nightingale thought I,
> How sweet thou sing'st, how neer the deadly snare!
> Then down the Lawns I ran with headlong hast
> Through paths, and turnings oft'n trod by day,
> Till *guided by mine ear* I found the place.
> (ll. 549-70; emphases added)

Although Dr. Johnson found this "a long narration, of no use because it is false" (82), the story has its uses for the brothers as a lesson in turning Orphic enchantment to dialogical engagement. As he tells it, the Spirit listens critically and then acts promptly. His ear enables him to make a moral distinction between the "barbarous dissonance" of Comus and the "soft and solemn" sound of the Lady. But he emphasizes that such encounters with compelling artistry can be seductive. He likens the sound to "a steam of rich distill'd Perfumes" that "stole upon the Air." Even more suggestive is his conceit that silence was "took e're she was ware." Once the Spirit becomes "all eare" and "took" leads to "took in" ("I was all eare,/ And took in such strains"), he appears ready to be ravished too. Momentarily he stands as

"Amazed" as the speaker of "L'Allegro" and his "melting voice through mazes running." Yet the Spirit suggests that exerting our critical faculties enables us to experience beauty without ravishment. He assesses the Lady's song to Echo and its Orphic qualities ("strains that might create a soul/ Under the ribs of Death") soberly enough to identify the singer, and rouses himself to pursue her "guided by [his] ear." So powerful is the verse of his "long narration" that he seems tempted to reproduce in the brothers the amazement that he reports. However, just as he translates wonder into action in the story, so he bends his Orphic charm to his pedagogical purpose in the telling. In other words, the Spirit shepherds the brothers through the same stages of experience that he claims to have gone through himself. He compresses the rest of the tale into some ten lines, allowing his excited listeners to respond to him and to each other, and so to prepare for action by eliciting the crucial moral themselves. Against tempters such as Comus, the inner ear is mightier; "thy sword can do thee little stead" (l. 611). This conversation and its ending in social action confirm that, in practice as in theory, the Spirit puts enchantment at the service of engagement.

The *Mask*'s suspicion of Orphic artistry emerges also in the Lady's singing to Echo, a symbol of grief and powerlessness. The Lady's song links her to a chain of losers. Caught abetting Jove's philandering, Echo is punished by Juno with the loss of her own speech: "'Your tongue,' she said,/ 'With which you tricked me, now its power shall lose" (*Met*. 3.364-5). Echo ends up as consumed with grief as her beloved Narcissus does with self-love. The Lady aptly proposes as the nymph's companion the "love-lorn Nightingale" that "her sad Song mourneth well" (ll. 234-5) – Virgil's figure for the lamenting Orpheus, and one that the Spirit applies no less aptly to the Lady herself ("O poor hapless Nightingale" [l. 566]). The song elicits no reply at all from

Echo, despite its prayer that the nymph be "translated to the skies,/ And give resounding grace to all Heav'ns Harmonies" (ll. 242-3). Given the lack of response from Echo, this concluding flourish on the Music of the Spheres, which she all but promises to the nymph ("So maist thou be translated"), suggests a dubious otherworldliness. The Orphic Lady shares the tendency towards self-enchantment that "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" connect to Orpheus.

The Lady falls into this Orphic trap again in the climactic confrontation with Comus. That he threatens to hold her "all chain'd up in Alablaster,/ . . . a statue" (ll. 660-1), reinforces the link between otherworldly idealism and fixity that Milton forges especially in "Il Penseroso" (e.g., "Forget thy self to Marble"). Since her self-defense relies on lofty abstractions such as Temperance and Chastity (ll. 767-82), Comus cleverly uses what she calls his "gay Rhetoric" (l. 790) to polarize her choices: either wed herself to abstract ideals like another "pensive Nun" (to recall Melancholy) or awaken to "all the pleasures/ That fancy can beget on youthfull thoughts" (ll. 668-9). Unlike Queen Indamora and her "Chast Love" in Davenant's Neoplatonic *Temple*, the Lady cannot simply impose her ideals through the influence of her beauty or the magic of Orphic song. In what turn out to be her last words to anyone, she takes refuge from argument in another Orphic flourish:

> Thou are not fit to hear thy self convinc't;
> Yet should I try, the uncontrouled worth
> Of this pure cause would kindle my rap't spirits
> To such a flame of sacred vehemence,
> That dumb things would be mov'd to sympathize,
> And the brute Earth would lend her nerves and shake,
> Till all thy magick structures rear'd so high,
> Were shatter'd into heaps o're thy false head.
> (ll. 792-9)

This splendid threat to unleash an earthquake with Orphic force ("That dumb things would be moved") impresses Comus enough to worry him: "She fables not, I feel that I do fear/ Her words set off by som superior power" (ll. 800-1). Her words are conditional ("should I try"), but a power that he likens to "the wrath of *Jove*" (l. 803) seems to him to charge them all the same. Undeterred, however, he gets straight back to business: "I must dissemble,/ And try her yet more strongly" (ll. 805-6). In this trial, then, it does the Lady little good to dwell upon her own "magick structures" – the spiritual rapture of Orphic song, its sacred flame and influence over nature, and so on. Her situation of moral struggle calls for something more than such art or a discourse upon it. In fact, Comus has already heard her prayer to Echo, and ironically its Orphic "magic" has only confirmed him in evil.

Milton shows us in Comus the most dangerous kind of listener or perceiver. He is neither the unmusical blockhead incapable of response nor the weak-kneed dreamer eager for spellbound servitude. He would make a good Miltonic resister of tyrants, if only he were not a tyrant himself. Every bit as acute as the Attendant Spirit, he too listens carefully before acting promptly:

> Can any mortal mixture of Earths mould
> Breath such Divine inchanting ravishment?
> Sure somthing holy lodges in that brest,
> And with these raptures moves the vocal air
> To testifie his hidd'n residence;
> How sweetly did they float upon the wings
> Of silence, through the empty-vaulted night
> At every fall smoothing the Raven doune
> Of darknes till it smil'd: I have oft heard
> My Mother *Circe* with the Sirens three,
> Amidst the flowry-kirtl'd *Naiades*
> Culling their potent hearbs, and balefull drugs,
> Who as they sung, would take the prison'd soul,
> And lap it in *Elysium*, *Scylla* wept,
> And chid her barking waves into attention,

> And fell *Charybdis* murmur'd soft applause:
> Yet they in pleasing slumber lull'd the sense,
> And in sweet madnes rob'd it of it self,
> But such sober certainty of waking bliss
> I never heard till now. Ile speak to her
> And she shall be my Queen.
> (ll. 244-65)

His reaction initially mirrors that of the Spirit, first appreciative and then analytical. He clearly recognizes the good in the Lady, who like Milton's Leonora seems possessed of "somthing holy." Its sweetness moves him to poetry ("the wings/ Of silence"), as if his own "darkness . . . smil'd." The "inchanting ravishment" of the Lady's voice reminds him of the Sirens and their uncanny influence on the hard hearts of Scylla and Charybdis. But he makes the same distinction between Orphic and Siren-song that we saw in the *Argonautika*: only the latter robs listeners of their reason altogether. The Lady might overwhelm him were she an evil Siren. That she is not allows Comus just enough wit to reassert himself; and so, Neoplatonism notwithstanding, his ear for beauty only whets his appetite for evil. Unlike the susceptible Pluto, Comus has no mercy on the singer. While his sense of "waking bliss" (l. 263) raises the possibility of reformation through the bliss of Heaven, his intentions are clear and unwavering – to make her his bride (l. 265). As powerful as it may be, the Lady's Orphic song appears to have no moral influence.

If *A Mask* problematizes Orphic enchantment, it valorizes further the alternative poetics that we began to see in the Attendant Spirit. The Lady's rescue depends above all on the responsive and responsible voices and ears of the Spirit and Sabrina. As the Spirit explains to the brothers, a shepherd has rewarded his poetry with a root that counters magic:

> He lov'd me well, and oft would beg me sing,
> Which when I did, he on the tender grass
> Would sit, and hearken even to extasie,
> And in requitall ope his leather'n scrip,
> And shew me simples of a thousand names
> Telling their strange and vigorous faculties;
> Amongst the rest a small unsightly root,
> But of divine effect, he cull'd me out.
> (ll. 623-30)

This "small unsightly root,/ But of divine effect," seems to be fit "requitall" for poetry. Song earns the Spirit a healing agent that brings together high and low, the dirty with the divine. The root's reaching for the sun had long symbolized humanity's bridging of realms, its power to heal attributed to that very congruity (Neuse 91-2). The lowliness of haemony, stressed in the next lines ("Unknown, and like esteem'd"), reflects the humble status of the giver, deemed "Of small regard to see to" (l. 620), in keeping with the Spirit's own appearance. Yet the lowly root has apparently enabled him to identify Comus and to decipher his spells: "for by this means/ I knew the foul inchanter though disguis'd,/ Enter'd the very lime-twigs of his spells" (ll. 644-6). And it will also protect the brothers as they "Boldly assault the necromancers hall" (l. 649), albeit to little effect. Crucially, the singing Spirit has the humility to accept that song alone, for all its Orphic claims to be itself a divine bridger of realms, would not protect them any more than it does the Lady. But Sabrina's subsequent intervention confirms that a certain kind of poetry can not only call forth the means to collective salvation but itself participate in it.

In fact, it is thanks to another poet – Spenser, "the soothest Shepherd that ere pip't on plains" (l. 823) – that the Spirit is able to invoke in song the water nymph and her saving grace. The aristocratic brothers bungle the rescue; "O ye mistook," cries the Spirit, "ye should have snacht his wand/ And bound him fast" (ll. 815-16). Like

their sister, they seem surprised to find themselves in a radical masque where evil will not shrivel at the sight of the nobility. The Spirit humbly admits that without Sabrina they "cannot free the Lady that sits here/ In stony fetters fixt, and motionless" (ll. 818-19). Spenser has taught him that the power of "warbled Song" can call up the nymph from the waters of the Severn:

> as the old Swain said, she can unlock
> The clasping charm, and thaw the numming spell,
> If she be right invok't in warbled Song,
> For maid'nhood she loves, and will be swift
> To aid a Virgin, such as was her self
> In hard besetting need, this will I try
> And adde the power of som adjuring verse.
> (ll. 852-8)

The verse that will bring forth Sabrina can have little interest in spellbinding its audience, as the Lady now is "fixt" by Comus. Unlike Orphic song, it must hail the nymph and call her to action. Just as Sabrina's own song is said to "unlock" and "thaw," this alternative poetry awakens and engages the listener.

The keynote of the Spirit's invocation is the call to *listen*, a theme that chimes with the importance of his own aural capacities. "Listen" repeats three times in his brief song, and also brackets the chant that follows: "Listen and appear to us"; "Listen and save" (ll. 867, 889). There can be saving grace in listening well. Both song and chant are certainly enchanting, fittingly full of watery L- and S-sounds; "Listen where thou art sitting/ Under the glassie, cool, translucent wave" (ll. 860-1). Rather than seeking merely a reaction of wonder, however, the invocation requests an active response: "Till thou our summons answer'd have./ Listen and save" (ll. 888-9). "Summons" might suggest an order, but there is no trace of coercion in Sabrina's prompt reply: "Gentle swain at thy request/ I am here" (ll. 900-1). Her own song and

chant share the meta-Orphic qualities of the Spirit's invocation. On the one hand, their gorgeous sound effects would likely enchant most audiences. On the other hand, the poetry also engages with them in social action for their sake: "Shepherd 'tis my office best/ To help" (ll. 908-9). That Sabrina's is not an Orphic song of mastery is underscored by her final words, which tell of other service: "And I must haste . . . To wait in Amphitrite's bower" (ll. 920-1). Admittedly, liberation and healing require more than even such alternative song – Sabrina's hand and its dispensation of "pretious viold liquors" from her watery realm (l. 847). After the Spirit pleads for her "powerful hand/ To undoe the charmed band," she undoes the spell not just with her verse but also with drops from her "fountain pure" and with the touch of her "chaste palms" (ll. 912, 918). If ultimately insufficient, inadequate to the tactile realm of the body, poetry proves nevertheless to be a necessary form of action.

In Milton's *Mask*, poetry never enchants others without engaging and enlightening them as well. A call but not a command, it must be grounded and supplemented, rooted in the local world and tied to other modes of action. Like "Lycidas," *A Mask* is on one level a document of vocational struggle that prefigures Milton's engagement in more direct forms of political activity. Yet the *Mask* already sketches out a politics of levelling whereby "decisive power is no longer wielded by social eminence" (Creaser "The Setting" 127). Bereft of their aristocratic mystique, the Lady and her brothers turn out to be babes in the wood, ineffectual in the face of evil. Their shortcomings call for aid both from above, in the form of the Attendant Spirit, and from below – the humble realm of earth and water, shepherds and nymphs, alive with its own spiritual potential. Initially hostile to the realm below, the Spirit comes to represent Heaven and Earth in tandem, spirit embodied as a shepherd. In him

and also in Sabrina, Milton continues his search for the ideal artist. The Spirit transcends Orphic song for others' sake by acknowledging with humility the limitations of all song. The singing Spirit thus offers Milton an alternative model for a poetry of mutual benefit to artist and audience. The Spirit's epilogue does not exempt poets from the category of fallen mortals in need of grace as well as art:

> Mortals that would follow me,
> Love virtue, she alone is free,
> She can teach ye how to clime
> Higher then the Spheary chime;
> Or if Vertue feeble were,
> Heav'n it self would stoop to her.
> (1018-23)

Even if human art could resonate with the Music of the Spheres – the traditional claim for Orphic song – it could never reach high enough. The Spirit implies that a poetry of virtue would not pretend to climb to Heaven, but would "teach ye how to clime." For Milton, this will be enough.

As we have seen, Milton recognizes early both the appeal and the danger of Orphic "climbing" and enchantment. Moreover, he perceives that the Renaissance theory of Orphic song – the quasi-divine one enchanting the many – functions as a model of and for the Stuart monarchy and its arts. His secular poetry suggests that, like one-man rule without a parliament, Orphic artistry can lead others to slavish passivity, the dead ends of nostalgia, idolatry, vagueness, otherworldliness, or even speechlessness. For the sake of creativity as well as a more dialogical politics, Milton playfully but tellingly ironizes Orpheus and his song – even at the cost of qualifying his own poetry, as didactic as it is ecstatic, as much a means as an end. The myth teaches him that the would-be poet must guard against self-enchantment as well as the ravishment of others, because the two go hand in hand. As Michael warns Adam,

"since hee permits/ Within himself unworthy Powers to reign/ Over free Reason, God in Judgement just/ Subjects him from without to violent Lords" (*Paradise Lost* 12.90-3). Milton's poems and pamphlets alike call for "skilfull and laborious gatherer[s]" (to recall again the divorce tracts), active readers willing to exercise their own "free Reason" and "Judgement just." Skillful and laborious readers of these poems may learn to value mutuality over mastery in all its aspects, from spectacular royalism to self-enthralling solipsism. Yet Milton's developing poetics of engagement frees the reader by dramatizing instead of excluding its rivals.

In the same spirit of proud humility, Milton recognizes that there is a place for pagan myth in his most religious verse. Just how problematic the myth of Orpheus proves to be for his sacred poetry will emerge in the next chapter. On the one hand, appropriating any aspect of the myth here requires again the critical distance of Ovidian irony. On the other hand, the myth that expresses some of his aspirations also captures some of Milton's existential and vocational anxieties, just as it serves the royalist poets in their darker hours. To identify with Orpheus completely would be to risk not only embracing authoritarianism but also conflating the poet's role with that of Christ the martyr. Just as Campion cannot let the power of Orpheus supplant that of the monarch in *The Lords' Masque*, Milton cannot claim to be himself the redeemer. He can only gesture beautifully, like the Attendant Spirit, towards the true teacher. As we shall see, this gesture of humility does not always come easily to a poet who, in spite of personal and cultural vicissitudes, never lets go of his quasi-Orphic desire to stir the world with song.

Chapter Four

"With other notes then to th' *Orphean* Lyre": the Anti-authoritarianism of Milton's Sacred Poetry

Milton develops his anti-authoritarian poetics of engagement at a time when the Caroline regime was using the arts to promote "a harmonious pattern of ritualized submission" (Norbrook "Politics" 48). His sacred poetry distances itself from the Renaissance Orpheus of compelling power not so much as a comment on paganism as a critique of something more threatening: authoritarian poetics and politics. While Milton aspires to "the honour and instruction of [his] country" (*Reason* 922), this distance helps him both to subordinate the poet's role to that of Christ the redeemer and to avoid authoritarianism himself as a solution to the dissonance of the fallen world. Even as he ironizes the Orpheus of mastery, Milton exploits his own affinities with the Orpheus of frailty, letting the bard's vulnerability give the lie to the nostalgic inflators of the master-singer. Like the more secular verse, however, the sacred poetry fosters dramatic conflict and readerly freedom alike by exploring also the various temptations of Orphic power, including self-enthrallment and submission as well as domination. The fact that some readers identify Milton with the poetics of mastery confirms the perils of such an enterprise, just as his God, for all his involvement in dialogue with his creatures, can seem as much an enchanter as an engager. As ever with Milton, readers must be choosers.

This chapter will show that, while the early poems reveal a poet working out his poetics, *Paradise Lost* fulfils their suggestions that even a fallen world can and must learn the ways of dialogue. In the Nativity Ode, Milton may be tempted to rival

the influence of Christ with an Orphic "art of cosmic control and comprehension" (Broadbent 28). But the Ode hails the cosmic art of Heaven while making a poetic virtue of uncontrollable disunity. By dividing us from any "age of gold" and leading us into "the Courtly Stable" (ll. 135, 243), Milton exposes the Stuarts' misappropriations of Orphic artistry and divine royalty. "At A Solemn Musick" also examines the uses and abuses of art. Unlike the speakers of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," the poet resists Orphic ravishment by the "Blest pair of *Sirens*, . . . Voice, and Vers" (ll. 1-2). The sacred music in and of the poem invites us instead to make a choice – to make ourselves worthy of Heaven's song, long since drowned out by our Bacchanalian "din" (l. 20). In "Lycidas," Milton wrestles again with the role of the poet in a sobering world of corrupt leaders and sudden death. Though he seems to fall into the ways of Orpheus, he upsets the Renaissance inflation of the bard by visiting him at his most vulnerable, and (self-) deprecates the Orphic "Swain" as a role ultimately inadequate to the sorry state of the nation. Partly by virtue of this very admission, the poem becomes an example of the political engagement that it asks of readers. *Paradise Lost* announces itself as something "other" than Orphic song. Bent on composing a republican epic for a culture looking back to monarchy and away from poetry, Milton has his narrator sing "With other notes then to th' *Orphean* Lyre" (3.17). If the poet develops and humanizes the Attendant Spirit of *A Mask*, the poem vindicates dialogue as trial in the spirit of *Areopagitica*. The characters progress and regress through conversation and debate, while the verse thrives on the interaction of traditions ancient and modern. As in "Lycidas," the beleaguered poet concedes a kinship with the Orpheus of frailty as he challenges readers to overcome the Satanic song of mastery in favour of the rough-and-tumble of dialogue.

"On the Morning of CHRISTS Nativity. Compos'd 1629" launches the 1645 *Poems* into the politicized space of a divided culture. Writing just a few months after the King's autocratic dissolution of parliament, the youthful poet finds his politico-religious feet by returning Orphic power and divine royalty to God. Milton's description of the Nativity Ode in his verse-letter to Diodati hints at these related tropes in the first line, which in the Latin begins with "peacemaking" and ends with "king": "*Paciferum canimus cælesti semine regem*" (I am writing of the peacemaking king, of heavenly seed; "*Elegia Sexta*" l. 81). The proem of the Ode eschews the sentimentality of the genre to introduce its subject in royal terms. He is "the Son of Heav'ns eternal King" who graced "Heav'ns high Councel-Table" with a "blaze of Majesty" (ll. 2, 9-10). Outdoing the Attendant Spirit's brief condescension in *A Mask*, the Son "Forsook the Courts of everlasting Day,/ And chose with us a darksom House of mortal Clay" (ll. 13-14). The metaphor of kingship is conventional, but Milton emphasizes the distance to be bridged between these "Courts" and us mortals, kings and poets included. The humbling of earthly monarchs becomes explicit in the Hymn: "And Kings sate still with awfull eye,/ As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by" (ll. 59-60). And the poem closes with a politically loaded oxymoron: the "Courtly Stable," where the infant sleeps attended by troops of "Bright-harnest Angels" (ll. 243-4) – a babe in arms indeed. The lowliest stable turns out to be the loftiest court in a sundering of worth from status that invites readers to question all so-called royal courts. The birth of the "dredded Infant" (l. 222) thus seems especially momentous for the most and the least powerful on Earth, the kings rendered "still" and the shepherds surprised by "rapture" (l. 98).

Milton reclaims for Christ the beneficent influence that England's ruling class had long attributed to itself through Orpheus and other figures of authority. With characteristically challenging irony, the Ode redirects the musical myths while subjecting them to Christian critique. The event that stuns kings and shepherds has a super-Orphic effect on the natural as well as the human world: "The Windes with wonder whist,/ Smoothly the waters kist, . . . While Birds of Calm sit brooding on the charmed wave" (ll. 64-8). Christ's arrival, heralded by peace "Unstain'd with hostile blood" (l. 57), momentarily rules the waves like another Creation; "brooding on the charmed wave" suggests revitalization as well as Orphic ordering. Whereas Orpheus could echo but never silence the Music of the Spheres, the very stars "with deep amaze/ Stand fixt in stedfast gaze" (ll. 69-70). As the shepherds can attest, the new order announces itself with the sweeter music of praise:

> When such musick sweet
> Their hearts and ears did greet,
> As never was by mortall finger strook,
> Divinely-warbled voice
> Answering the stringed noise,
> As all their souls in blissfull rapture took:
> The Air such pleasure loth to lose,
> With thousand echo's still prolongs each heav'nly close.
> (ll. 93-100)

When Milton listens to Leonora, "rapture" is to be experienced but transcended. One must resist the temptation to surrender to ecstasy itself – one of the Orphic traps in "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" as well. Here in the Ode, the divine music can safely be echoed a while, even if it merely heralds the main event. The immortal fingers belong to Cherubim and Seraphim "Harping . . . to Heav'ns new-born Heir" (ll. 115-16). Milton adopts the Orphic motifs of charming nature and swaying souls, but "Divinely-warbled" trumps the "warbled" voice of Orpheus in "Il Penseroso" (l. 107).

He also stresses the extrasensory impact of heavenly song ("*hearts* and ears"; "all their *souls*"). Anticipating the song of Sabrina and the Spirit, which hails and "unlocks" the listener, this music seems to speak to the whole person through the senses. Apparently the shepherds need not cry ravishment at being so divinely "taken" in heart and soul, since "such harmony alone/ Could hold all Heav'n and Earth in happier union" (ll. 107-8).

The problem is that no such "happier union" can come to be until the work of Christ is done. Most tempting for the poet, then, would be to jump to this harmonious conclusion himself, identifying his own poem with the divine music and ravishing his readers more than inspiring them to action. An enchanting Milton, wielding imperatives and future indicatives, appears to do just that:

> Ring out ye Chrystall sphears,
> Once bless our human ears,
> (If ye have power to touch our senses so)
> And let your silver chime
> Move in melodious time,
> And let the Base of Heavn's deep Organ blow,
> And with your ninefold harmony
> Make up full consort to th' Angelike symphony.
>
> For if such holy Song
> Enwrap our fancy long,
> Time will run back and fetch the age of gold,
> And speckl'd vanity
> Will sicken soon and die,
> And leprous sin will melt from earthly mould,
> And Hell it self will pass away,
> And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day.
>
> Yea Truth, and Justice then
> Will down return to men,
> Orb'd in a Rain-bow; and like glories wearing
> Mercy will sit between,
> Thron'd in Celestial sheen,
> With radiant feet the tissued clouds down stearing,
> And Heav'n as at som festival,

Will open wide the Gates of her high Palace Hall.
(ll. 125-48)

Milton certainly enjoys the sphere-music tradition, Christianized here to encompass the angels' praises to God. He touches on the theme of re-Creation by calling for a cosmic symphony supported by a heavenly organ, the instrument of instruments and one that seventeenth-century illustrators liked to picture as "a recapitulation of creation" (McColley *Poetry* 235). As part of a poetic vision that has time running backward, and vanity, sin, and Hell passing away, all this might seem presumptuous. The poet himself appears to hold "all Heav'n and Earth in happier union" – the very promise of the Stuart monarchy with its rhetoric of Divine Right. John Broadbent has gone so far as to claim that "the sanction of the poem's action is not divine power but Miltonic art and intellect" (29). But Milton restrains himself and warns off his readers by inserting several key conditionals. What seems at first a parenthetical aside, "(If ye have power to touch our senses so)," casts doubt on any imminent bridging of the gap between the celestial and the human. Another conditional – "if such holy Song/ Enwrap our fancy long" – puts the glorious vision even farther out of reach, since "our fancy" remains fallible, indeed fallen, and the shepherds' rapture cannot last "long." "If" leads to a crucial "but": "But wisest Fate sayes no,/ This must not yet be so" (ll. 149-50).

Moreover, the style of this central fantasy of "the age of gold" (stanzas 13-15 of 27) suggests not just a poet's dream of Orphic harmony and control but that of the self-mythologizing Stuarts. That these stanzas and their "Palace Hall" evoke a court masque has not gone unnoticed. Broadbent points out that, in Jonson's Jacobean masque *The Golden Age Restor'd*, "Astrea and the Golden Age descend in just this

way" (24).[44] Campion's *Lords' Masque*, overseen by Orpheus, likewise implies that the Stuarts are reviving that happy age with the help of the arts: "Gods were with dance and with music served of old./ Those happy days derived their glorious style from gold" (213). The significance of the Ode's glance at such masques and their claims is debated. In keeping with his view that Milton was "a magus determined to control the mystery" of the Nativity, Broadbent maintains that "the masque-like stanza indicates the direction of Milton's poem as a whole – theoretical, ornate" (31, 25). Revard's more recent reading rightly takes account of current events: "Milton was reacting at Christmas 1629 to claims that the imminent royal birth would establish a Stuart Age of Gold. . . . Christ must be reborn – not another Charles" (82). The passage exposes the outrageous imposition in the dynasty's pretense to redeem the nation, which for Milton amounts to a kind of blasphemy. Truth and Justice cannot be brought down to Earth here and now by the "machinery" of a monarchy that has already shut down parliament; "wisest Fate sayes no." In *The Lords' Masque* as in royalist art generally, Orpheus and his enchanting song had done wonders for the Stuarts: "Orpheus, apply thy music, for it well/ Helps to induce a courtly miracle" (Campion 202). But Milton reminds English readers that the real miracle is "Heav'ns new-born Heir." The truly "holy Song" was heard at the Creation, reprised for the Nativity, and will sound again only after the "horrid clang" of Judgment Day (ll. 133, 157).

This returns us to the question of the dissonant meantime, a problem that surfaces more pressingly in Milton's sacred than in his secular poetry: what now, what

[44] Martz compares such scenes in the poem to a pageant (55); and Moseley sees a "formal triumph," especially given the subsequent "procession of those [pagan gods] whom [Christ] has defeated and conquered" (110-11).

is the poet or anyone else to do or say now, besides waiting for Christ to be as good as his Word? Once the Ode has looked beyond Judgment Day ("And then at last our bliss/ Full and perfect is" [l. 165-6]), Milton must check himself again and find some more immediate consequence of the Nativity ("But now begins" [l. 167]). What he does find is bound to be anticlimactic after this talk of perfect bliss. In the here and now, there is little to show that "Th' old Dragon" is actually "In straiter limits bound," or that all "The Oracles are dumm" (ll. 168-73). The poem's problem of what to say about the birth itself parallels the poet's problem of what to say for himself; putting Christ centre stage makes it as difficult to position the author as to place the baby Jesus. If the figure of the Renaissance Orpheus claims the monarchical centre, already occupied by Christ the true king, Milton strives to establish for the Christian poet a place more humble. Such an ec-centric poet can offer his "humble ode" first of all as a gift to God (ll. 24-5), whatever its ultimate utility in the fallen world.

Anticipating *A Mask*'s acceptance of the need for grace, the Ode thus dramatizes the struggle of the budding poet with the boundaries of the artist's role in this uncertain "meantime." In the proem, an "odd humbleness" restrains "a pride bordering on dementia" (Moseley 103). Milton asks the "Heav'nly Muse" to afford him "a present to the Infant God" (ll. 15-16). With a show of deference, he refers to the poem as "thy humble ode" and requests the Muse to "lay it lowly at his blessed feet" (ll. 24-5). At the same time, he urges the Muse to overtake "the Star-led Wisards" with the gift of poetry: "Have thou the honour first, thy Lord to greet" (ll. 23, 26). Although the proem avoids the first-person "Let me," the final allusion to the purification of Isaiah's lips ("toucht with hallow'd fire" [l. 28]) underscores the claim of divine inspiration made through the Muse. Furthermore, the exhortation to "joyn

thy voice unto the Angel Quire" (l. 27) smacks of the Renaissance fantasy of Orpheus harmonizing with the Music of the Spheres. Evidently, the ceding of that central role to Christ the cosmic poet will come at some cost to the earthly poet of ambition.

The potential cost to Milton becomes clearer in the Hymn's treatment of the pagan gods, a loud and lingering procession that has vocational as well as politico-religious import. On one level this seems to be an allegory of the Reformation. Revard argues that the famous image of the "dredded Infant" who "Can in his swadling bands controul the damned crew" (l. 228) signals "the defeat of Satan with the Resurrection and also the defeat of Satanism in modern Europe by a Herculean England" (90). The banishment of Apollo in favour of Christ the true son/sun (stanzas 7 and 19) furthers an agenda both anti-Catholic and anti-Caroline. Ubiquitous in the Vatican, Apollo was "the symbol of a threatening Catholic religious movement" that appeared to many Protestants to be gaining ground at the English court (66).[45] Yet certain stanzas bear a level of significance more personal. The nymphs are evicted more gently than Ashtaroth or Moloch. Charles Martindale remarks of stanza 20 that "Milton's feeling for the power of classical fables seems to have been of unusual proportions" ("Paradise" 320):

> The lonely mountains o're,
> And the resounding shore,
> A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament;
> From haunted spring, and dale
> Edg'd with poplar pale,
> The parting Genius is with sighing sent,
> With flowre-inwov'n tresses torn
> The Nimphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.
> (ll. 181-8)

[45] Quint lends support to this view with a parallel from "*In Quintum Novembris*" (ll. 54-67), where Milton "describes a papal procession in Rome as a . . . dark pagan ritual" (213).

This is the landscape of pastoral, the "resounding" stage on which Orpheus typically laments his Eurydice. The pained vowels of mourning in "lonely mountains o're . . . resounding shore" (O, OU, OR) render pathetic the primal scene of pagan song. Quint points out that the old ways do not go quietly: the sound of Osiris's "Timbrel'd Anthems dark" (l. 219), too, suggests "the Classical Tradition itself, that continues to echo" (212). What Milton begins to realize in the Ode will animate his entire oeuvre: rather than stilling the dissonant echoes, he can let them resound and make them as "serviceable" as the "Bright-harnest Angels" attending the babe. What Christ supersedes still belongs in the poet's story. Milton thus forfeits the premature purveying of harmony or unity but gains for the poet an important role as a critical reshaper of the culture's disparate discourses. He mitigates the cost of foregoing Orphic centrality by having it both ways. As dialogical as his secular verse, Milton's sacred poetry includes but critiques alternative traditions and politics, just as it includes but decentres the author as servant to Christ.

Whether we take the "old Dragon" to mean Satan, Catholicism, paganism, passion, or all of these, it goes undefeated, merely "In straiter limits bound" (ll. 168-9). And the Nativity Ode helps Milton to see that this is no bad thing for poets. Even as he orients us to the joy that was and will be, Milton acknowledges, if at first reluctantly, that poets should no more play the Renaissance Orpheus and attempt to impose peace and order now than the Stuarts should play God and claim to revive the age of gold. Indeed, the overarching narrative, where harmony precedes and succeeds the sinful age of dissonance, implies a "fundamental kinship" (to recall Burke) between pagan and Christian traditions. Both are fallen; the "voice of weeping heard, and loud lament" (l. 183), could belong to either. With a proud humility that will be

characteristic, Milton makes a virtue of the fact that any Christian or Protestant victory must be provisional. The "tedious Song" finds its end, but our end is to be "serviceable" still:

> But see the Virgin blest,
> Hath laid her Babe to rest.
> Time is our tedious Song should here have ending:
> Heav'ns youngest teemed Star,
> Hath fix't her polisht Car,
> Her sleeping Lord with Handmaid Lamp attending:
> And all about the Courtly Stable,
> Bright-harnest Angels sit in order serviceable.
> (ll. 237-44)

The vision of the stable is broken into two separate couplets by four lines ("Time… attending") that link the Ode to the attendant star-lamp. Like the "youngest teemed Star," poetry is nothing more, and yet nothing less, than a "Handmaid Lamp" to Christ the super-Orphic illuminator, just as pagan myth serves Christian art. The "Courtly" ending re-emphasizes the poet's allegiance to the one true king while implying, as do all of the Ode's interpretative challenges, his allegiance also to the English readers on whom any poetics of engagement must rely.

"At A Solemn Musick" further explores the misapprehensions and abuses of art as it shows us how to harness artistic enchantment to spiritual engagement. While ostensibly less political than the Nativity Ode, the poem enters into the politico-religious debate over church music that also marks "Il Penseroso." The poet as exemplary listener demonstrates that responding to sacred or "solemn" song need not mean surrendering, as some Puritans feared, one's will or self-control. The music inspires him instead to a prayer that it may awaken us to the music of Heaven. "Solemn Musick" builds this prayer out of a plurality of reworked traditions, just as it crosses the divide between attitudes to musical worship. The myths of Orpheus and

the Music of the Spheres interact with biblical subtexts both to examine the effects of song on the imagination and to represent the Fall as a dismemberment of "the fair musick that all creatures made" (l. 21). Like the Ode, the poem relegates harmony to Eden and to Heaven, while its insistence on the listener's active cooperation belies the Renaissance's inflation of the Orphic singer into benevolent dictator. Milton accepts that we are "out of tune" or fallen, but suggests that art, including his own poem, may help us to ready ourselves for redemption.

In keeping with the ironic technique of the Ode, "Solemn Musick" both recalls and reworks pagan myth and Renaissance tradition for its particular purposes. The poet appears to conceive his hopes for the power of song in terms of the myths of Orpheus and the Music of the Spheres:

> Blest pair of *Sirens*, pledges of Heav'ns joy,
> Sphear-born harmonious Sisters, Voice, and Vers,
> Wed your divine sounds, and mixt power employ
> Dead things with inbreath'd sense able to pierce,
> And to our high-rais'd phantasie present,
> That undisturbed Song of pure concent[.]
> (ll. 1-6)

The poet invokes Sirens who are "Sphear-born harmonious Sisters" as well as "pledges of Heav'ns joy," bringing to mind those one-note singers riding on the spheres in Plato's myth of Er. "Perched upon each of the circles," Er explains, "is a Siren carried round along with it, and singing one sound, one note, so that from all the eight there was one concord" (418). To the Renaissance these Sirens symbolized the cosmic order, "the song of the universe" also figured by the Muses (Macrobius 194). But in reducing them to just a pair the poet has already begun to revise the mythic subtexts. We soon find out that the pair represents "Voice, and Vers," the two aspects of human as well as angelic song, as if the heavens had come down to earth. Indeed,

the prayerful imperatives (wed, employ, present) urge the sisters, more and more unlike the remote celestial Sirens, to sound their divine song for everyone ("to *our* high-rais'd phantasie") who is willing to listen ("*high-rais'd* phantasie"). In the elitist Renaissance tradition, only the likes of Pythagoras and Orpheus were privy to Siren-song. In Greene's terms, Milton refashions the subtexts and "force[s] us to recognize the poetic distance traversed" (40).

Hollander's assessment of the poem as "Milton's synthesis of Christian and pagan themes" (328) thus requires some qualification. Granted readers familiar with the subtexts, Milton achieves not so much a synthesis as what Burke refers to as a loaded "interaction of perspectives" (512). The notion that song can pierce "Dead things with inbreath'd sense" (l. 4) seems a straightforward allusion to the power of Orpheus to stir rocks and streams (Flannagan 57, n1). Earthly song ought to inspire us to turn our sometimes "dead" minds to its heavenly counterpart, "That undisturbed Song of pure concent" (l. 6). Yet this Christian prayer suggests that the listener bears the lion's share of the responsibility for the artistic experience – a key amendment to the Renaissance ideal of Orphic song as a well-nigh irresistible governor of souls. The poet makes clear with "high-rais'd phantasie," along with the subsequent exhortation "That we . . . May rightly answer . . . As once we did" (ll. 17-18), that the answer is up to the listener. In a telling departure from the mythic subtexts, whether to raise one's "phantasie" or imagination to human art's divine model remains for Milton a matter of choice.[46]

[46] Cf. *Paradise Lost* 5.95-121, where Adam explains to Eve that only in our dreaming is the imagination divided from reason and the will.

In the momentous matter of free will and self-government, "Solemn Musick" sets readers a different example from that of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso." The listening poet answers the music with a visionary but sober prayer that keeps in view our "disproportion'd sin" (l. 19). He welcomes Orphic enchantment but refuses to give himself up to it, just as the poet of the Italian sonnets refuses to surrender himself to a slavish love. Milton's extensive revisions of the opening lines confirm his attention, in fact his temptation, to artistic escapism and its sublimated eroticism. In one draft, a dreamy plea to the Sirens for escape from Earth follows the allusion to song's Orphic power to stir "Dead things":

> And whilst yor equall raptures temper'd sweet
> In high mysterious holie spousall meet
> Snatch us from earth a while
> Us from our selves & home bred woes beguile.
> (Trinity MS, qtd. in Hollander 327)

Hollander observes that this passage would "reinforce the metaphor of wedding with an almost erotic image" (327). This is not to say that Milton expunges every trace of erotic escapism from the poem. Without "raptures," "sweet," and "beguile," a wedding of Siren sisters seems suggestive enough already to alert us to the potential for Orphic ravishment. But evidently Milton thought better of the plea to beguile us from ourselves. While reflecting the Renaissance commonplace of the ecstatic or transporting potential of music, this desire goes against the grain of his poetry as of his prose. The zeal of theorists like Gioseffo Zarlino (1558) leaves little room for the listener's will: "Harmony alone gives pleasure; harmony with number suddenly has great power to move the soul; but join speech to these two, and it is impossible to say

what force they have" (qtd. in Hutton 59).[47] For Milton, to embrace such poetical beguilement would be to suppress, even if only for "a while," God's precious gift of free will.

Milton's remoulding of myth thus has at least as much to do with its authoritarian overtones as with its epistemological shortcomings. But the pagan traditions still inhabit the poem (in "Sirens," "Sphear-born," and so on) and Milton relies on their presence there. In fact, it is partly by virtue of the mythic framework of musical correspondences between realms that voiced verse on Earth can be imaginatively linked to choral song in Heaven. The very power attributed to Orpheus – the ability to imitate the heavenly harmony – carries the prayer for a prelapsarian closeness to God: "That we on Earth with undiscording voice/ May rightly answer that melodious noise,/ As once we did" (ll. 17-19). With characteristic irony, the poem concedes a deep indebtedness to the mythic concepts even as it takes care both to democratize them ("we on Earth") and to subordinate them to Christianity. As the exhortation turns to the Fall and its disruption of that close harmony with God, Milton lets the mythic subtexts resurface:

> As once we did, till disproportion'd sin
> Jarr'd against nature's chime, and with harsh din
> Broke the fair musick that all creatures made
> To their great Lord, whose love their motion sway'd
> In perfect Diapason, whilst they stood
> In first obedience, and their state of good.
> (ll. 19-24).

Alongside the Christian concepts (sin, a loving Lord, etc.), phrases such as "nature's chime" and "perfect Diapason" acknowledge again the sphere-music tradition appropriated in the opening lines. "Chime," like "concent," typically describes the

[47] See also Gretchen Finney ("Ecstasy") on musical ecstasy in the Renaissance.

spheres' concord; and "Diapason" usually means the octave or double octave said to be spanned by the spheres (McColley *Poetry* 198). In employing such terms, Milton admits that there is no better way to capture the happy state of the cosmos before the Fall, including the intimacy between creator and creature, than by adapting the Music of the Spheres. A parallel with the myth of Orpheus may also be at work. We who "with harsh din/ Broke the fair musick" play the role of the Bacchantes, whose "huge/ Clamour . . . drowned the lyre" of Orpheus (*Met.* 11.15-18), while "all creatures" become the bard. For us human creatures, the rub of the Orphic parallel is that we break our own "fair musick"; in choosing to sin, we become the murderers of our better selves. As in the Ode, Milton revises and redirects the myths to dramatize the riches-to-rags-to-riches tale of Christianity – from the harmony of paradise to the din of paradise lost and, hopefully, onward to the concord of paradise regained. Just as his verse valorizes the church music banned by Puritan extremists, so it also finds uses, in some ways "Puritan" uses, for the pagan myth that they likewise decried.

"Solemn Musick" reminds us that human song, which could not save us from ourselves in Eden, will save no one without our choosing again and again to "rightly answer" (l. 18) the lost song of Heaven. It also affirms, however, especially in the final prayer, that the music or art that it exemplifies can help us so to answer:

> O may we soon again renew that Song,
> And keep in tune with Heav'n, till God ere long
> To his celestial consort us unite,
> To live with him, and sing in endles morn of light.
> (ll. 25-8)

Milton comments elsewhere on poetry's capacity to "set the affections in right tune" (*Reason* 923). Here, the musical metaphors, with the key idiom "keep in tune," suggest a deeper role for art, even though no solemn music or poetry can fully "renew

that Song." Rather than an Orphic dream – a means of escaping our world, or a way of imposing "pure concent" on it without the cooperation of each will – art should be an invitation to raise one's "phantasie." Each of us can choose to make of it an occasion for imagining, discerning, and attuning ourselves to our good. As McColley remarks, the poem's tenor is "responsiveness: of voice to verse; of the listener to both; of all creatures to each other's voices and to the Maestro" (199). As in the Ode, Milton broadens the cultural role of poetry by making "Solemn Musick" responsive to the "voices" of myth and other traditions. Just as his pamphlets define the reader as a "skilful and laborious gatherer," so his verse presents the poet as a laborious gatherer and skillful critic of discourses. In taking on traditions, Milton takes the measure less of their historical truth or literary standing than of their politico-religious ramifications.

And yet, Milton seems in "Lycidas" (1637) to fall under the dubious spell of Orphic song. The poem first appeared in a volume commemorating a fellow Cambridge poet, Edward King, drowned in a shipwreck at twenty-five. Milton's headnote in the 1645 *Poems* describes his pastoral elegy as a "monody" that "bewails" a late friend. A mode of "declamation in stilo recitativo for a solo voice . . . [that] permitted the words of the text to be clearly heard" (Hunt 163), monody became the music of choice for the Renaissance humanists seeking to recreate the magical effects of Orphic song.[48] Not only was Orpheus the central figure in the early Italian operas that developed this style, but one of the most celebrated monodies of the century was

[48] We know from the Trinity MS, which contains the first sentence of the 1645 headnote, that Milton wrote "Lycidas" with monody in mind. According to Paul Stanwood, Milton would have understood monody in terms of both "the current musical sense" and the Greek literary "tradition of the lamenting poet-singer" (300).

the lament of Orpheus ("Possente Spirto") from Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (1607). Here the bard pours out his passion for some nine minutes (Stanwood 299) – almost as long as it takes to recite "Lycidas." But Milton's headnote insists that his monody does much more than pour out passion: "And by occasion foretels the ruine of our corrupted Clergy then in their height." A poem that "protested the corruption of the Stuart clergy and by implication the Stuart kingship" (Revard 195) thus becomes all the more "Puritan" in 1645.[49] My contention is that Milton uses Orphic scenes and themes not only to confront existential and vocational issues but also to pursue this political critique and to work out its implications for his poetics. By identifying partially with the bard at his most vulnerable, Milton displaces the Renaissance Orpheus and his wave-charming mystique, even at the cost of calling into question his own pursuit of poetry. At the same time, by identifying partially with the quasi-Orphic "Swain" (l. 186), Milton concedes that even the most engaging poetry partakes of Orphic enchantment. But in the final *ottava rima* he also becomes the deliverer of his poem from that flawed speaker to the reader, calling upon us to realize it as a different kind of song.

That the poet seems at times elusive in this ostensibly personal poem, notwithstanding the presence of the archetypal poet, has often been remarked. Milton chooses in pastoral an indirect mode that "implies a distance between the narratorial voice in the poem and the creating poet" (Moseley 144). Furthermore, "Milton explicitly compares Orpheus to Edward King, not to himself; and when the shift of

[49] Revard adds that Milton may have chosen the name of Lycidas to evoke the heroic Protestantism of Sidney, memorialized in that persona in a 1587 collection (190). Norbrook ("Politics") finds political consciousness in Milton's contributing to the volume at Cambridge, a centre of Puritanism, while ignoring an Oxford collection of "conservative elegies" for Ben Jonson (52). See also Leonard's "'Trembling ears'," on which I draw below.

identification is made to the speaker of the poem, this speaker turns out to be . . . an uncouth, unknown young swain" (Falconer 63). For Dr. Johnson, "Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief" (79). But the pastoral fiction that annoys Johnson with its "long train of mythological imagery" (80) enables Milton not so much to avoid violence and death as to encounter them at a certain distance while skirting the censor and challenging us to read between the lines. As Michael Lieb observes, "Death was in the air" (44). Ben Jonson, the Countess Dowager of Derby, and Milton's mother had all recently died along with Edward King, and the resurgent plague had claimed many lives. The comparison with the death of Orpheus could well be "a projection of Milton's deep-seated fears of a similar fate" (Lieb 45). What seem to be distancing devices are also dramatic devices for staging the poet's anxieties and drawing in his readers. Milton's allusions to current events, moreover, point to political and poetical choices that make "Lycidas" all the more personal.

While the poem's concerns come to involve the poet profoundly, the Orphic temptations of enchantment and nostalgia exacerbate his struggle to engage with a corrupt world. John Creaser shows in a recent article that fear of change, a hallmark of Satan, is a recurring theme in Milton: "For him, our innate conservatism, our holding on to what we know, is one of the deepest temptations we face" ("'Fear of Change'" 161). Edward King had no choice, of course, but to let go of the life he knew. But his mourners, even as they hold on to memory, must confront the heavy change and conquer the temptation to wallow in nostalgia. The allusion to the death of Orpheus can be seen as the climax of a *cri de coeur* that begins in earnest some twenty lines earlier:

> But O the heavy change, now thou art gon,
> Now thou art gon, and never must return!
> Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,
> With wilde Thyme and the gadding Vine o'ergrown,
> And all their echoes mourn.
> (ll. 37-41)

This harping on the "heavy change" reminds us of Satan and his fear of "hideous change" or "dire change" (*Paradise Lost* 1.313, 625). Fear of change, Milton suggests, can be self-consuming. In Satan's case, this very fear fuels the change, as to his ruin he reacts against God's apparent promotion of the Son. One need not read backwards from *Paradise Lost*, however, to realize that the speaker's struggle to accept the ultimate change of death is also an Orphic one that foreshadows the direct reference to the myth. Like Virgil's Orpheus after his failed quest, who "For seven whole months on end . . . sang his tale of woe" (*Georgics* 4.507-10), the speaker risks a kind of self-enchantment, arresting himself in repetition with a circling song of sorrow.

In fact, these Orphic tendencies mark the poem from the outset: "For *Lycidas* is dead, dead ere his prime/ Young *Lycidas*"; "Begin, then, Sisters, . . . Begin" (ll. 8-9, 15-17). The opening lines have been described as "directionless" (Martz 65), even as "beg[ging] the question of beginning" (Falconer 84). The monody, the voice that must now go solo, keeps trying to play "our song": "Who would not sing for *Lycidas*? he well knew/ Himself to sing"; "And old *Damœtas* loved to hear our song" (ll. 10-11, 36). Movingly and yet clingingly, the speaker modifies "We drove afield" with the doubly redundant "Together both" (ll. 25-7). Making characteristically heavy demands on his readers, Milton also sets up "echoes of echoes" and "allusions to allusions" (Evans 10) to create a further level of repetition, which mires the backward-

glancing speaker not just in his grief but within the pastoral tradition. The complaint that leads to the comparison with Orpheus, "Where were ye Nymphs," echoes both Theocritus (*Idylls* 1) and Virgil (*Eclogues* 10). But the comparison proper, a markedly Ovidian one, helps to precipitate a crisis from which Milton, parting ways with the quasi-Orphic speaker, finally emerges as more forward- than backward-looking. "Lycidas" thus reenacts the Ovidian critique of Virgilian nostalgia.

To come to terms with a young poet's death at sea is to realize not just that no one can escape change but also that no art can have saving grace. The speaker pushes his conventional question, "Where were ye Nymphs," towards an impasse unusual in English verse:

> Ay me, I fondly dream!
> Had ye [Nymphs] been there – for what could that have don?
> What could the Muse her self that *Orpheus* bore,
> The Muse her self, for her inchanting son,
> Whom Universal nature did lament,
> When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
> His goary visage down the stream was sent,
> Down the swift *Hebrus* to the *Lesbian* shore.
> (ll. 56-63)

Instead of ironizing the conventional master-singer, as in "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," Milton overwrites him by recalling for the first time Ovid's insistence on the powerlessness of the bard and his "inchanting" song against the "hideous roar." J. N. Brown has shown that Milton's revisions of the passage draw on Arthur Golding's *Metamorphoses* (1567) "verbally and substantively; and collectively they indicate careful selection from the translation to emphasize the horror and tragedy" (233). In a poem that "foretels the ruine of our corrupted Clergy," we might expect Milton to look

to Golding rather than to the ostentatiously royalist Sandys.[50] Touches likely derived from Golding's Ovid include "rout," which appears thrice there, "hideous roar," "down the stream," and the doleful repetition of "down." Conversely, Milton has "suppressed details . . . that might bring comfort at this juncture" (Revard 173). There is no miracle whereby the "goary visage" might sing on; neither was Edward King able to "calme the Seas with his Harp" like Davenant's Orpheus. To read the Muse's son as a type of Christ here, and the violence as a promise of renewal, would be to ignore Milton's specific selections and omissions (Evans 37).[51] This is a rhetorical question that, far from prefiguring resolution, drives the drama to the sticking point. As we have seen, Drayton and Marston had evoked the attack on Orpheus to lament their own neglect or ill-use by English audiences. But these and the next lines emphasize something quite different: not only did Orphic song lack saving grace but the Muse lacked the authority ("What could the Muse her self") to save her son from the rout and from the higher powers that sealed his bloody fate.

Milton draws on the *Metamorphoses* as he begins to probe the conflict between conscientious artistry and entrenched authority, a conflict that puts poets of conscience in a difficult and often dangerous position. As in a classical ode, "The themes he explores transcend the ostensible occasion" (Revard 167). The figure of Orpheus, a fitting one for pastoral, does reflect Edward King's poetic gift and watery end. Still, if King's death was an accident, the speaker has reason to fear for himself and other

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[50] See Raphael Lyne (esp. ch. 1) on the Puritan attitudes in Golding's "Englishing" of the *Metamorphoses*; cf. my ch. 2 on the royalist Orpheus of Sandys.

[51] J. Martin Evans rightly faults Mayerson and others for this. Falconer too claims that "the horrific image . . . has its regenerative aspect" (88). For Evans, the passage has to do with the injustice that death makes no exception for the chaste – perhaps a worry for Milton. But this exposes Evans to his own critique: Milton chooses to omit the detail of the grieving bard's aloofness from women.

poets like him an end as violent as that of Orpheus. Ovid begins his tale with the sputtering torch of Hymen, suggesting that Orpheus and Eurydice, for all the former's weakness, were doomed by the gods, ill-starred from the start. The bard in Hades bewails the decrees of the Fates; Hell's king will grant him no second chance, and Apollo will save his head from a snake but not his life from the Bacchantes. Likewise, the complaints of Milton's speaker that neither the nymphs, "the Muse her self," nor nature could have intervened suggest that the poet was doomed by higher powers. Unfortunately for Lycidas and the speaker, poets and pastors of conscience seem to have but minor female authorities on their side.

As the succeeding lines confirm, the crisis that the bard's murder brings to a head has as much to do with the politico-religious choice of what kind of poet to be as it does with broader issues of death and literary fame. The speaker questions his own choice not just of the poet's "trade" in general but of his muse in particular:

> Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
> To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade,
> And strictly meditate the thankles Muse,
> Were it not better don as others use,
> To sport with *Amaryllis* in the shade,
> Or with the tangles of *Neæra*'s hair?
> *Fame* is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
> (That last infirmity of Noble mind)
> To scorn delights, and live laborious days;
> But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,
> And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
> Comes the blind *Fury* with th' abhorred shears,
> And slits the thin-spun life. But not the praise,
> *Phœbus* repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears[.]
> (ll. 64-77)

Choices upon choices plague the speaker here. Most explicitly, he weighs his quest after poetry and fame against the philosophy of *carpe diem* – the pursuit of happiness and the immediate "delights" of love. More covertly, he measures his "thankles

Muse" against the more rewarding muses of certain "others." Amaryllis and Neæra are "the girls whose presence distracts the shepherds from their pastoral labours in Virgil's Arcadia" (Evans 46), and whom Milton's early readers would have known also as mistresses in numerous Renaissance imitations (Revard 182-9). Since these girls represent the poetry as well as the lifestyle of amour, the "others" would seem to be the court or cavalier poets with their *carpe diem* poems, and all those "writers who were failing to face up to the challenge of creating a national voice by which England might know itself" (Moseley 156) – a challenge that Milton would soon declare (in the *Reason*) his readiness to meet. This view finds support, as I will show, both in the suggestive diction here and in the coming tirade against the "lean and flashy songs" of the corrupt authorities (l. 123). What is at stake here for Milton is not just whether to write poetry at all but whether to be a poet of the Caroline court or a poet of conscience.

The diction reveals Milton's apprehension that his critical stance exposes him and his writings to violence from the official "Bacchantes" of the regime. While pastoral makes everyone a shepherd of sorts, the speaker describes his "homely slighted" vocation as a "trade" demanding of him (and not of those "others") "laborious days." He sees an attractive alternative to this "thankles" job in the court poets' mutually aggrandizing service to their thankful patrons. If the cavaliers "sport with *Amaryllis* in the shade," the exposed speaker is tempted to abandon his exacting life not just for the sake of erotic "delights" but because it may be cut short by "the blind *Fury* with th' abhorred shears." Milton specifies a Fury – a violent avenger – instead of the Fate that one might expect. That this avenger "slits the thin-spun life" with "shears" connects the blind Fury to the "shearers feast" of the officials about to be

blasted by St. Peter as "Blind mouthes" (ll. 117-19). Norbrook can justly identify the Fury as "a censor, cutting off the existence of a poet who hoped to 'burst out into sudden blaze'" ("Politics" 57). Noting the speaker's "trembling ears," Leonard reminds us that, just months before the writing of "Lycidas," three middle-class critics of the establishment had been sheared of their ears by the public hangman and shipped to various islands. Phœbus Apollo's subsequent reassurances that "all judging *Jove* . . . pronounces lastly on each deed" (ll. 82-3) carry an emotional charge, coming from the father (by Ovid's account) of the murdered Orpheus (Evans 49). But they only mitigate the dangers that they do not deny. The "goary visage" of Orpheus tempts the speaker still to break his engagement with the thankless Muse – to give up on the poetical and political reform of the nation – in favour of escapist nostalgia or delightful acquiescence.

In fact, the Orphic tendencies that plagued the backward-looking speaker before this crisis resurface in the wake of Orpheus and Apollo. He sinks again into Virgilian melancholy by listening all too willingly ("But now my Oate proceeds,/ And listens" [ll. 88-9]) to the sentimental figures of nature who make appearances only "to disclaim responsibility for or to express sorrow at Lycidas's death" (Revard 175). Hippotades of the winds conjures up a kind of pirate ship of doom, a "fatall and perfidious Bark/ Built in th' eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark" (ll. 100-1). His lament for the "sacred head" of Lycidas (l. 102) offers little more than a cosmetic change to the "goary visage" of Orpheus. Nostalgia for Cambridge days claims the floundering speaker again as he attends to the grieving Camus: "Ah! Who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest pledge?" (l. 107). When the prophetic voice of St. Peter breaks in, no wonder the speaker finds it "stern" (l. 112). That he perceives the voice as

calling him away from this mode of Orphic lament becomes clear afterwards, as he feels the need to invoke the threatened sources of pastoral: "Return *Alpheus*, the dread voice is past,/ That shrunk thy streams; Return *Sicilian* Muse" (ll. 132-3).

"The Pilot of the Galilean lake" (l. 109) encourages the poet to sing out against the corrupt "songs" of the authorities. By contrast with Apollo, he emphasizes local injustice over heavenly justice:

> Blind mouthes! that scarce themselves know how to hold
> A Sheep-hook, or have learn'd ought els the least
> That to the faithfull Herdmans art belongs!
> What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
> And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
> Grate on their scrannel Pipes of wretched straw.
> (ll. 119-24)

Bristling with exclamation marks, rhetorical questions and stern monosyllables, St. Peter strives to awaken the speaker from his Orphic sentimentalism and nostalgia. But the wake-up call goes largely unanswered in spite of its message that Christians of conscience have a duty to speak out against injustice: "the grim Woolf with privy paw/ Daily devours apace, *and little sed*" (ll. 128-9; italics added).[52] The speaker seems relieved that "the dread voice is past," and resumes his lament by indulging in a beautiful but distracting catalogue of flowers "To strew the Laureat Herse where *Lycid* lies" (ll. 151). Once again, Milton hints at the power of enchantment to carry us away from the rigours of engagement.

The speaker's escapism thus furthers the poem's covert critique of the Caroline court and its light pastoralists who "sport with *Amaryllis*." Only after some twenty

[52]Norbrook elucidates St. Peter's broad but telling indictment of England's officialdom, particularly of the self-serving clergy who preferred to keep the flock in ignorance ("Politics" 57). The "grim Woolf" would have evoked not just Catholicism but the coat of arms of "the Jesuits who were making converts at court" (58). Flannagan adds that "privy paw" suggests a Privy Council of "officials convened secretly by a monarch" (105, n55).

virtuosic lines of floral dreaming does the "dread voice" sink in enough to rouse him to self-criticism: "For so to interpose a little ease,/ Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise./ Ah me!" (ll. 152-3). Milton would wrestle with "frail thoughts" of his own in Sonnet 23 (1658?). In terms that recall Orpheus clutching at the vanishing Eurydice on the threshold of Hades, he dreams of his late wife beckoning to him: "But O as to embrace me she enclin'd,/ I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night" (ll. 13-14). Though she was "brought to me like *Alcetis* from the grave" (l. 2), he wakes not to the bliss of Admetus, whose wife was restored, but only to his grief. The "night" suggests both the darkness of blindness and the nightmare of loss, from neither of which can he awaken. The speaker of "Lycidas" is likewise tempted to become another self-enchanting Orpheus instead of learning from the bard's fate. St. Peter calls the poet to confront, in spite of his Orphic vulnerability, not just the fact of death but the "lean and flashy songs" of an authoritarian regime (l. 123).

For the speaker as for Milton and his Christian readers, even the vision of Heaven carries the risk of escapism, a kind of nostalgia for the home eternal. Realizing that his efforts have taken Lycidas nowhere but to "the bottom of the monstrous world" (l. 158), the speaker shepherds his friend to a poet's paradise of song:

> [He] hears the unexpressive nuptiall Song,
> In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.
> There entertain him all the Saints above,
> In solemn troops, and sweet Societies
> That sing, and singing in their glory move[.]
> (ll. 176-80)

As in the Nativity Ode, the true Kingdom in effect rebukes the so-called kingdom in which "hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed" (l. 125), and the songs of the self-

styled "Saints" are "lean and flashy." Weep no more for Lycidas. But what of the lower kingdom and its pressing problems? The harmony of Heaven cannot yet embrace the fallen world of dissonance. The speaker seems too ready to join the heavenly choir with Lycidas, even though, as if sensing this, he makes the latter also "the Genius of the shore" (l. 183). Instead of ending the poem here, then, Milton moves to relieve the speaker of his duties, relegating the song thus far to reported speech: "Thus sang the uncouth swain" (l. 186). It would seem that Milton at least, searching for an alternative to Orphic song, is determined to bring the poem down to earth. As we saw in *A Mask*, Milton is learning that effective poetry must be rooted in the local world and tied to other modes of action.

Milton reframes and refocuses the song of the uncouth swain, stealing the last word from him and delivering a different poem to the reader. If the swain remains all too Orphic, the shift to a point of view beyond his own enables the poem to outstrip him. Milton finds a conclusion by contemplating that singer from a distance:

> Thus sang the uncouth Swain to th' Okes and rills,
> While the still morn went out with Sandals gray;
> He touch'd the tender stops of various Quills,
> With eager thought warbling his *Dorick* lay:
> And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,
> And now was dropt into the Western bay;
> At last he rose, and twitch'd his Mantle blew:
> To morrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.
> (ll. 186-93)

The singer has been "warbling" his inspired ("With eager thought") but too often backward-looking or otherworldly lament like Orpheus to trees and streams ("to th' Okes and rills"). He seems in no hurry ("At last he rose") to heed the call of the highest authority and to look forward to "Pastures new." As we have seen, he listens actively to the distracting voices of Hippotades and Camus but hears passively, even

reluctantly, the exacting voice of St. Peter. Granted, the Orphic laments of uncouth swains are preferable to the "lean and flashy songs" of corrupt officials; moreover, in reframing the poem in terms of the swain, Milton does not disown the Orphic singer.[53] But his taking over of the poem suggests that it is not enough for the reader to choose the harmless over the harmful. The completed poem calls upon England to discern and outstrip the enchantments of nostalgia after its example, to respond to the "dread voice" from which the swain could only shrink.

By challenging the reader in so many ways, "Lycidas" itself responds to St. Peter's blast against all those authorities "encouraging ignorance and superstition" (Norbrook "Politics" 57). Milton's careful allusions to Orpheus and the pastoral tradition as well as (more guardedly) to current events bear out Moseley's remark that much of "the real imagery of the poem is . . . submerged" (165). The series of symbolic guest speakers such as Camus complicates exegesis, while the sudden shift to a new speaker, a critical crux to this day, relies on us to work out what was lacking in the old one. Evans aptly sums up the reading experience as "strenuous[,] . . . an activity which is simultaneously receptive and creative" (10). Like all of Milton's best poems, "Lycidas" demands that readers become "skilful and laborious gatherers," creative reformers "disputing, reasoning, reading, discoursing, ev'n to a rarity"– to recall yet once more Milton's prose tracts. We too are to spend "laborious days" strictly meditating the (hopefully not thankless) muse. Still, just as the Nativity Ode and "Solemn Musick" concede what Burke would call a "fundamental kinship"

[53]Evans remarks that the "swain is still a part of Milton," but insists that the ending "announces [Milton's] departure from the pastoral world and all it stands for," i.e., "chastity, retirement, and poetry" (73). Not only did five years pass before his marriage and political pamphleteering, however, but his poetry, "Lycidas" especially, was already political.

between pagan and Christian traditions, "Lycidas" acknowledges the power of enchantment as well as the call to engagement. Milton ironizes the singer as "uncouth" not with derision but with affection for his "eager thought," granting him still the bulk of the song. If he realizes the limitations of Orphic song, Milton recognizes his own kinship both with the vulnerable Orpheus and with the swain who recalls the bard's death. Looking back is as necessary to poetry as it is to memorialization and to nationhood. The task is not so much to erase as to outstrip the enchanting song, grief, or politics that circles nostalgically in traditionalism, sentimentalism, or authoritarianism. By leaving so much to his readers, Milton invites us to cultivate "Pastures new" of our own choosing.

Nowhere does Milton leave more to his readers than in *Paradise Lost* (1667, 1674), a magnificent return to song in spite of his vulnerability as a notorious republican.[54] A return need not be a retreat. William Parker's view that the poem represents an inward retreat from history – a view that overemphasizes Michael's notion of "A paradise within thee" (12.587) – remains influential. Not only does Milton's epic develop politico-religious themes of the Revolution, however, but his controversial rhetoric of the 1640s and '50s already "include[d] all those in the nation on the side of reformation in an epic venture" (Smith 212). Like the revolutionary pamphlets, *Paradise Lost* calls for heroically engaged readers. While it cannot wear its politics on its sleeve, it continues to champion citizenship over subjection precisely by demanding and fostering such readers. Its multifarious challenges, as Sharon Achinstein has shown, serve "to mold a readership that was increasingly required to

[54] Lieb sums up the accounts of Milton's furtive life in the early days of the Restoration, when he briefly suffered imprisonment while some of his pamphlets were burned and colleagues executed (73-5).

know how to decipher conflicting interpretations" (*Milton* 15). After the collapse of his hopes for a "free Commonwealth," it would have been understandable for the beleaguered poet to write in a more quietist vein, or indeed not at all. Equally tempting would have been an authoritarian poetics of enchantment hostile to "conflicting interpretations." Thankfully, if Milton the pamphleteer sometimes falls into the constrictive monologism of propaganda, Milton the poet hardly ever does.[55] Far from setting readers straight, *Paradise Lost* tends to set them stridently at odds. Itself thoroughly dialogical – creator with creature, creature with conscience, angel with man, rebel with loyalist, biblical with classical, author with reader – the poem continues to generate intense debate. As well as delving into the workings and pitfalls of dialogue, it unearths a deeper problem: the passivity that pre-empts debate and invites subjection. As I will show, Milton often uses Orphic motifs to fathom these issues as he calls upon us not just to be enchanted but to choose an active part in the gathering up of renewal from loss.

Dialogue is both the essence of Milton's Heaven and the road towards it. Whether the ways of Heaven are as freely dialogical as God assures us has been hotly debated for centuries.[56] The notion of a deity who manufactures others in his own image might suggest a divine narcissism that fails to transcend monologism. As in the Nativity Ode, the Creation demonstrates God's super-Orphic ordering and vitalizing

[55] Achinstein provides a working definition of Early Modern propaganda: "writers who recognized its power saw propaganda as disallowing its readers their freedom to interpret" (*Milton* 24). Creaser comments on "how rarely [Milton's] verse . . . is infected by the aggression and dogmatism that emerge . . . in the simplicities of controversy" ("'Fear of change'" 175).

[56] In Shelley's view, Milton "alleged no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil" (qtd. in Empson 16). C. S. Lewis contended that to take issue with Milton's God is only to quarrel with Christianity itself. William Empson memorably made the case for Milton's God as a tyrant who plots the Fall; Dennis Danielson countered that he is good mainly because he endows his creatures with free will. My argument supports that of Danielson.

powers, while Heaven illustrates his kingship. However, as Maggie Kilgour argues, Milton's God in fact creates creators: "Separation from God allows his creatures to become creative in their own right" (308). The Father's great promise in the council of Heaven is to let them earn what the English people had lost – their way out of monarchy. "The democratic appeal of [this] prophecy," William Empson conceded, "is what makes the whole picture of him just tolerable" (137). Often by means of irony, God engages his creatures in trial by dialogue, provoking them to exercise their freedom of choice instead of "enchanting" them into hollow obedience. The controversies of the 1640s and '50s had taught Milton that God prefers "to dispense and deal out by degrees his beam" (*Areopagitica* 1023), just as "Christ meant not to be tak'n word for word" (*Divorce* 950). Like the poem itself, Heaven calls us to trials of interpretation without stifling our freedom with full disclosure.[57] The central models of this educative process are the council in Heaven, in which the Son takes upon himself the burden of human sin, and the conversation with Adam regarding human partnership.[58] Because God enjoys foreknowledge, such exchanges may seem rigged. Upon close reading, however, they reveal no megalomaniac but a pedagogue who has "withdrawn his controlling power" (Danielson 53) so as to draw his creatures into the drama of becoming. The ongoing creation is then less the Creator's achievement than that of his creatures, whom he challenges to become (co-) creators themselves. Milton's God did not invent other beings merely to play Orpheus spellbinding the beasts and trees.

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[57] *De Doctrina Christiana* likewise upholds creaturely freedom: e.g., "God made no absolute decrees about anything which he left in the power of men, for men have freedom of action" (155). It also affirms that "the various uses of irony are calculated not to deceive but to instruct" (761); cf. E. M. Good on the irony of the Old Testament God.

[58] See Hugh MacCallum's fine study of the Son as the poem's primary model for spiritual progress.

The council in Heaven guarantees the angels' "freedom to choose" (*Areopagitica* 1010) by offering choices to all. The Father addresses his central question not just to the Son but to all of his heavenly creatures:

> Say Heav'nly powers, where shall we find such love,
> Which of ye will be mortal to redeem
> Mans mortal crime, and just th' unjust to save,
> Dwels in all Heaven charitie so deare?
> He ask'd, but all the Heav'nly Quire stood mute,
> And silence was in Heav'n[.]
> (3.213-18)

The Son has already taken it upon himself to challenge the divine justice, echoing (or rather anticipating) Abraham's dispute with God (Gen. 18): "For should Man finally be lost . . . ? That farr be from thee, Father" (3.150, 154). Contentiousness in dialogue displeases neither the Old Testament God nor that of Milton, as the Father's delight confirms: "O Son, in whom my Soul hath chief delight" (3.168). God knows that the Son will also take upon himself the redemption of humanity: "Behold mee then, mee for him, life for life/ I offer" (3.236-7). But the fact remains that no member of the "Heav'nly Quire" is exempt from this choice. All but the Son choose freely to do nothing, to stand as "mute" in the trial of dialogue ("*Say* Heav'nly powers") as all but the singer in "*Ad Leonoram*."[59] Milton underscores once again the inadequacy, as in "Lycidas," of choosing harmlessness over harmfulness. "Intercessor none appeerd,/ Much less that durst upon his own head draw/ the deadly forfeiture" (3.219-21). One thing necessary for the triumph of evil may be for good angels, not to mention good English people, to do nothing. The Son demonstrates that constructive dialogue

[59] I recall the ending of the first epigram to Leonora ("*caetera mutus habet*"), discussed in chapter three. Michael Lieb ("Milton's 'Dramatick Constitution'") brings out the drama of the council in Heaven, though his comment that the Son "responds according to his nature" (235) risks collapsing free will into determinism.

demands of us daring as well as humility, tests our faith and reason alike. Not even he can be sure what taking on mortality might entail.

The Father can justly single out the Son as the prime agent of his own abdication as well as our salvation. The Father's ceding of "all power" matches the Son's "quitt[ing] all," establishing the levelling and bonding power of humility that we will find in Eve:

> Because thou hast . . . quitted all to save
> A World from utter loss, and hast been found
> By Merit more then Birthright Son of God, . . .
> Therefore thy Humiliation shall exalt
> With thee thy Manhood also to this throne;
> Here shalt thou sit incarnate, here shalt Reign
> Both God and Man, Son both of God and Man,
> Annointed universal King; all power
> I give thee[.]
> (3.305, 307-9, 313-18)

And yet God plans to put an end to this concentration of power. After the judgment of the "Bad men and angels" (3.331), the rest will emerge from trial with no more need for the "royal" justice of what proves to be a caretaker-king:

> Then thou thy regal Sceptre shalt lay by,
> For regal Sceptre then no more shall need,
> God shall be All in All.
> (3.339-41)

The Father's enigmatic prophecy suggests a communal growth into full knowledge rather than a nostalgic return to Edenic innocence.[60] As Creaser remarks, "the whole of the divine creation opposes our conservatism and is based on processes of change" ("'Fear of Change'" 162). Unlike the perpetual flux in the world of Ovid's

[60] I concur with Sauer that Milton's epics encourage reformation through dialogue rather than "a return to an original language or a former state of edenic innocence" (9). See Hill (*Milton* 303), Norbrook (*Writing* 475), and Empson (137) on the politics of God's great offer. Milton derives the "All in All" from 1 Cor. 15:22-8.

Metamorphoses, these processes of change enjoy a purpose (Martz 243). But God as usual chooses to "deal out by degrees his beam"; he leaves the angels with a testing enigma, granting them food for thought by rationing explanation. By refraining from narrative comment, Milton leaves the reader, too, to ponder God's Fatherhood, how a deity who once was simply "All" is to be "All in All" by giving up soliloquy for colloquy with free creatures.

Adam's productive colloquy with the Father over human partnership confirms that Heaven prefers two-way dialogue to one-way enchantment. It speaks volumes of Milton's humanism that, *Genesis* 2:18 notwithstanding, he should have Adam commission his maker as matchmaker. So rewarding is his dialogical daring that Adam takes another liberty in telling his tale ("now hear mee relate/ My Storie") to Raphael, who seems no less "Pleas'd with [his] words" than was God (8.204-5, 248). Rather than simply producing Eve, God tests Adam's creative capacities for perceiving, reasoning and choosing by hinting that something is missing: "all the Earth to thee and to thy Race I give" (8.338-9). That "each Bird and Beast" approaches "two by two" to be named (8.349-50) also puts Adam on his mettle: "but in these/ I found not what me thought I wanted still;/ And to the Heav'nly vision thus presum'd;/ ' . . . with mee/ I see not who partakes'" (8.354-6, 363-4). In God's obvious approval of this presumption ("with a smile more bright'ned" [3.368]) we glimpse Milton's republican vision of responsive leaders and empowered citizens.

In wrestling dialogically with Heaven, Milton suggests, we begin to realize our potential as co-creators. Just as God praises the Son for daring to speak up in the council, Adam's elaboration of a partner as one "fit to participate/ All rational delight," a formula in keeping with Milton's own writings on companionate marriage, brings the

Father to commend him for "Expressing well the spirit within [him] free" (8.390-1, 440). Perhaps most astonishing is God's hinting at desire of his own for mutuality: "How have I then with whom to hold converse/ Save with the Creatures which I made, and those/ To me inferiour[?]" (8.408-10). While this provokes Adam to define his own need for "Collateral love" (8.425-6), the Creator could be touching on the very motive for creating in the first place. In any case, as God explains to him, Adam will be rewarded for examining and speaking his mind: "Thus farr to try thee, Adam, I was pleas'd,/ and finde thee knowing not of Beasts alone . . . but of thy self,/ . . . for trial onely brought,/ To see how thou could'st judge of fit and meet" (8.437-9, 447-8). Adam's first trial by dialogue earns him knowledge of himself, his world and his maker, as well as partnership with Eve, "[his] likeness" (8.450) and another "with whom to hold converse."

Not just in such free exchanges or in his challenging commissions does Milton's God prove to be no Orphic enchanter of his creatures, but also in the "everyday" song and dance of Heaven. Satan himself admits that the music of praise is neither a chore nor an imposition: "What could be less than to afford him praise,/ The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks,/ How due!" (4.46-8). It may then seem odd that a critic as acute as Stanley Fish, apparently forgetting that harmony depends on difference, should hear this music as the epitome of authoritarian rule and regimentation. Yet Milton's frequent references to the Music of the Spheres problematize the nature of creaturely freedom. "In spite of Milton's arguments for religious and political liberty," McColley observes, "to many readers the 'pure concent' with which the saints and angels and all creatures sing . . . suggest[s] an authoritarian political theology" (*Poetry* 205). For Fish, this "concent" comes without

consent, marking a static and deterministic circle of divine narcissism. God spends eternity "listening to his work or to his own works working," and because the song "has only one note . . . everyone is in the position of Ovid's echo" ("With Mortal Voice" 511). Creatures are little better than automatons, "standing still even though to the untutored eye there seems to be movement and variation" (512). But a metaphor is hardly the totalizing identification that this tendentious argument requires. Winifred Maynard provides a commonsensical corrective:

> The angels . . . are capable of choice: they offer praise or, like the rebels, withhold it. In having motive, they are unlike the spheres, but they are very like the spheres in their motion. . . . They do not move and make harmony everlastingly and involuntarily like the spheres: . . . their music is tribute, not mathematical consequence[.] (244, 246)

As Satan's rebellion makes clear, engaging in the song and dance of praise is always a matter of choice.

What Maynard passes over, however, is the "variation" that Fish dismisses as superficial. Fish can still reply that God allows but one choice: either go through set motions in his orbit, like "a meer artificiall Adam, such an Adam as he is in the motions" (*Areopagitica* 1010), or be damned. But even the harmonious music of praise turns out to be markedly dramatic, as only the music of free creatures can be. The angels spontaneously celebrate the council in Heaven:

> No sooner had th' Almighty ceas't, but all
> The multitude of Angels with a shout
> Loud as from numbers without number, sweet
> As from blest voices, uttering joy, Heav'n rung
> With Jubilee, and loud Hosanna's filld
> Th' eternal Regions . . .
> . . . and with Praeamble sweet
> Of charming symphonie they introduce
> Thir sacred Song, and waken raptures high;
> No voice exempt, no voice but well could joine

> Melodious part, such concord is in Heav'n.
> (3.344-9, 367-71)

They break into song with a shout, an outburst of joy that seems anything but regimented. The music is not all of a piece but varied and dramatically structured, beginning with a "Praeamble sweet" and climaxing in "raptures high." No Orphic master-singer enchants the others from the centre. In the heavenly concord, each voice enjoys its "Melodious part," as we would expect from "a Protestant poet highly conscious of individual choice" (McColley *Poetry* 211). They also move freely from topic to topic, from the Father to the Son and from victory to sacrifice, so that singing becomes a mode of understanding. The harmony issues from variety; like the sexual generation so central to *Paradise Lost*, where "two great Sexes animate the World" (8.151), it requires a balance of likeness and difference. That this is neither the pagan Music of the Spheres nor a one-note tune "at every point and at every instant the same" (Fish 513) becomes even clearer when we notice the gleeful notes of vengeance in this postwar ode to joy: "o're the necks/ Thou drov'st of warring Angels disarraid" (3.395-6).

The best-known of such musical passages, Adam's lovely evocation of "Celestial voices to the midnight air," stresses the dialogue between solo voice and choir:

> how often from the steep
> Of echoing Hill or Thicket have we heard
> Celestial voices to the midnight air,
> Sole or responsive each to others note
> Singing thir great Creator: oft in bands
> While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk
> With Heav'nly touch of instrumental sounds
> In full harmonic number joind, thir songs
> Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to Heaven.
> (4.680-8)

"Sole or responsive each to others note," hill or thicket, watch or walk, vocal and/or instrumental: Milton's Creator and creatures alike take pleasure in "ceaseless change" and "still new praise." *Pace* Fish, what is merely echoing here is "Hill or Thicket," not the responsive spirits. In contrast to the effects of Orphic song, neither the angels nor their listeners are stilled or ravished by this harmony. More like the song of Sabrina or the Attendant Spirit, it seems to engage and to ennoble their thoughts as they work or rest. Instead of a chamber of echoes already signed and sealed by God, the poem presents a freely evolving universe of creative variations. Against the fixed monochord of absolute monarchy, Milton lifts our thoughts to the developing concord of his dialogical republic.

If Milton's Heaven is the epitome of dialogue, his Hell is the perversion of dialogue. In the aftermath of the War in Heaven, Satan limits debate to the question of means, himself determining his followers' end as "open Warr or covert guile" (2.41). As one reader points out, "Satan wrote a script in which Beelzebub would propose his plan, and then Satan himself 'prevented all reply' (2.467). This is not a true dialogue" (Achinstein 203).[61] Milton uses music to dramatize the devils' demoralization as they let themselves lapse into the stagnation of monologism. Initially, making music helped them to maintain morale, even to bear the pain of hellfire: "Thus they/ Breathing united force with fixed thought/ Mov'd on in silence to soft Pipes that charm'd/ Thir painful steps" (1.559-62). Once "Hells dread Emperour" (2.510) has "prevented all reply" and embarked on his self-appointed mission to corrupt Eden, the fallen angels "ravish" each other with philosophical speculation and Orphic song:

[61] See Achinstein (ch. 5) for a full discussion of the parliament of Hell in its generic context. While Satan limits and rigs the debate, Achinstein's claim that "Satan coerced his audience by his sole voice's power" (203) downplays his followers' complicity in the perversion of dialogue.

> Others more milde,
> Retreated in a silent valley, sing
> With notes Angelical to many a Harp
> Thir own Heroic deeds and hapless Fall
> By doom of Battel; and complain that Fate
> Free Vertue should enthrall to Force or Chance.
> Thir Song was partial, but the harmony
> (What could it less when Spirits immortal sing?)
> *Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment*
> *The thronging audience*. In discourse more sweet
> (For eloquence the Soul, Song charms the Sense,)
> Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,
> In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high
> Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,
> Fixt Fate, free will, and foreknowledg absolute,
> And found no end, in wandring mazes lost.
> (2.546-61; italics added)

The spirits "Suspended Hell," as when Orpheus stilled Hades with his song. "Partial" to themselves, they pervert the rhetoric of praise by rehearsing "Thir own Heroic deeds and hapless Fall," just as Virgil's Orpheus could sing nothing but "his tale of woe" (*Georgics* 4.510).[62] They confine themselves to self-pitying victimhood (hapless, doom, enthrall to Force or Chance, Fixt Fate), like the bard who blamed "Pluto's cancelled boon" (*Georgics* 4.519). The audience taken thus "with ravishment" walks into the trap of surrender that Milton recognized and skirted in the Italian sonnets and "Solemn Musick." Orphic song tempts the fallen spirits to embrace the passive role of the ravished, to allow their wills to be eroded further. While "fixed thought" already suggests stagnation, only after their acquiescence to the pseudo-debate does their music-making become unmistakably Orphic.

[62] As Stephen Buhler suggests (19), "partial" may also connote an overly intricate polyphony that muddies the text. But we have just noted that Heaven's angels, too, gifted with superhuman intuition, like to "joine/ Melodious part." In *Poetry and Music* Diane McColley demonstrates that Milton's poems celebrate "the kinds of music the puritans denounced," including polyphony, and "mediate between the dogmatic positions" (92-3).

Though certainly ill-used by Satan, the spirits have become their own enemies as well. Their "wandring mazes" of "discourse more sweet" recall "L'Allegro" and the speaker's dubious desire for the "lincked sweetnes" of a "melting voice through mazes running" (ll. 140-42). Milton uses repetition ("Foreknowledge, Will and Fate,/ Fixt Fate, free will, and foreknowledge") to characterize these charming speculations as "vagrant quests for the self-knowledge to which the fiends can never attain" (Hollander 318-19). Self-knowledge must be sought beyond abstractions shaped by partiality to past "Heroic deeds." The spirits embody some of Milton's worst fears for the English people, whom he had striven to warn against such crippling nostalgia, "to set free . . . from *longing to returne* poorly under that Captivity of Kings" (1090; italics added). The concluding images of the people in *Eikonoklastes* (1650) resonate strikingly with the enchantment and self-enchantment of Hell's angels:

> That like a credulous and hapless herd, begott'n to servility, and inchanted with these popular institutes of Tyranny, . . . hold out both thir eares with such delight and ravishment to be stigmatiz'd and board through . . . . The rest . . . some error, less then fatal, hath for the time misledd. (1095; italics added)

Both pamphlet and poem employ "hapless" and "ravishment"; this "herd" could be Hell's "thronging audience"; "inchanted" resembles "suspended" and "charms"; and "error" matches "wandring." However, whereas Milton urges his countrymen to "find the good grace and good guidance to bethink themselves, and recover" (1095), the narrator holds out no hope for the spirits. If (for the purposes of *Eikonoklastes*) the English people are as sinned against as sinning, not so the fallen angels, who have mainly themselves to thank for their own ongoing fall.

Given Satan's own quasi-Orphic powers, this is not to say that the devils are never sinned against by their self-styled king, who sits "High on a Throne of Royal

State" (2.1). His right-hand devil Beelzebub has no doubts about his vocal mastery: "If once they hear that voyce, thir liveliest pledge/ Of hope in fears and dangers, . . . they will soon resume/ New courage and revive" (1.274-9). Sure enough, "Yet to thir Generals Voyce they soon obeyed" (1.337). Here the narrator compares Satan's voice to the "potent Rod" with which Moses called up a plague of locusts (1.338-41). Yet to ascribe too much potency to the voice of Satan vis-à-vis the angels would be to make him solely responsible for their ruin. God announces that, whereas Adam and Eve are only partially to blame for the Fall, the angels "by thir own suggestion fell,/ Self-tempted, self-deprav'd" (3.129-30). Milton justifies the ways of God by showing that Satan's rule depends as much on the others' cowardice as it does on his vocal mastery. After Satan carries out his plan at the infernal council, the angels seem more cowed than enchanted by their master's voice: "But they/ Dreaded not more th' adventure then his voice/ Forbidding" (2.473-5). They co-operate in their own surrender to idolatry: "Towards him they bend/ With awful reverence prone; and as a God/ Extoll him" (2.477-9). As in "*Ad Leonoram*," Milton suggests that even Orphic rapture requires from the audience a certain willingness to be enraptured, "self-deprav'd." The ultimate image of their depravity will be the voicelessness of serpents, a single, unindividuated, "long and ceaseless hiss" (10.573).

Milton shows that evil thrives on unquestioning attitudes, especially to authority. According to Raphael, Satan's first speech of sedition "infus'd/ Bad influence into th' unwary brest/ Of his Associate" (5.694-6). Lucifer's infusing "Bad influence," as Leonard remarks, "abuses his stellar nature" but is hardly enough to make any angel "a helpless victim" (*Naming* 154). As this influence reaches the others, their obedience has more to do with the archangel's high "degree" than with his

rhetorical skills: "all obey'd/ The wonted signal, and superior voice/ Of thir great Potentate; for great indeed/ His name, and high was his degree in Heav'n" (5.704-7). They are "allur'd" also by his "count'nance," and "with lyes" that they fail to question (5.708-9). The angels could engage him in debate so as to make a more informed choice. But the seraph Abdiel alone has the courage to uphold his point of view. As rebel squares off with loyalist over God's apparent favouritism towards the Son, it is up to each listener, as also to each reader, to arrive at an interpretation. Lucifer plausibly claims that "Another now hath to himself ingross't/ All power" (5.775-6), while Abdiel faithfully insists that God means "rather to exalt/ Our happie state under one Head more neer/ United" (5.829-31). Rather than taking part in the debate or even pausing to consider their course, the rest respond to the lowly seraph with "hostile scorn" (5.904) and follow the lofty archangel lazily to their ruin.

The Devil as an irresistible Renaissance Orpheus would be too simplistic a scapegoat for Milton's poem, which insists that all free creatures harbour the potential for evil. Satan enjoys the advantage over Eve, but Milton refuses to allow her to be "enchanted" overwhelmingly. As McColley and other critics have noted, *Paradise Lost* challenges the traditions that saw Eve as too ignorant or too weak to argue; for Milton, innocent humankind must be less blameworthy than the angels and yet not blameless. Eve does react with wonder to the phenomenon of a talking snake – "at the voice much marveling; at length/ Not unamaz'd" (9.551-2) – but wonder does not cause the Fall. The one who nearly succumbs to wonder is the tempter, momentarily "overawd" by her "Heav'nly forme" and "graceful Innocence" (9.457-61), as Comus was by the voice of the Lady. After the fashion of the angels, though more forgivably, Eve is swayed mainly by the serpent's "perswasive words, impregn'd/ With Reason"

(9.737-8). Satan does not charm her out of reason so much as he "bestows names and words amiss so as deliberately to lead Eve into false interpretations" (Leonard *Naming* 199).[63]

To himself, however, Satan becomes in many ways ever more Orphic, self-enslaved in a spiral of enchanting nostalgia, self-pity, and lamentation. This bears out Michael's teachings on the involuted, self-enchanting nature of evil: Satan "permits/ Within himself unworthy powers to reign over free Reason" (12.90-2); or, as Abdiel replies to his taunts of servitude in Heaven, "Thy self not free, but to thy self enthrall'd" (6.181). The lack of direction in Satan's laments, in keeping with the snake's "mazie folds" (9.161), reinforces his malice and despair. Bracing himself to possess the snake, "first from inward griefe/ His bursting passion into plaints thus pour'd" (9.97-8):

> With what delight could I have walkt thee round,
> If I could joy in aught, sweet interchange
> Of Hill, and Vallie, Rivers, Woods and Plaines,
> Now land, now sea, and Shores with Forrest crownd,
> Rocks, dens, and Caves; but I in none of these
> Find place or refuge; and the more I see
> Pleasures about me, so much more I feel
> Torment within me.
> (9.115-21)

If Eurydice haunts Orpheus as his paradise lost, Eden and Heaven alike haunt Satan. He catalogues obsessively the natural beauty from which he is alienated further by his own rhetoric. His choice of structures such as "the more I see . . . so much more I feel" helps to convince him that he has little choice. The Earth reminds him of his former home: "Terrestrial Heav'n, danc't round by other Heav'ns/ That shine . . . . As

[63] See ch. 4 of Leonard's *Naming in Paradise* for a full discussion of the temptation of Eve, to which I return below.

God in Heav'n/ Is Center, yet extends to all" (9.103-8). "Hating God," Leonard observes, "he is nevertheless unable to forget the joy his worship of God once brought him. . . . His memory of the angels' dance around God's Throne is painfully awakened by the dance of the stars around the earth" ("'Once Fawn'd'" 103). Indeed, everything seems to remind Satan of his erstwhile eminence and joy. He launches his first soliloquy in Eden at the sun because it "bring[s] to my remembrance from what state/ I fell, how glorious once above thy Spheare" (4.38-9). The sight of Adam and Eve, too, turns his thoughts to Heaven: "my thoughts pursue/ With wonder, and could love, so lively shines/ In them Divine resemblance" (4.362-4).

The fact that these monological laments have their quasi-dialogical moments suggests that, contrary to the claims of Empson and Fish, Satan is not doomed as soon as he conspires. In the first soliloquy especially, Satan hears but then shuts down his conscience. Momentarily he opens himself to self-knowledge and renews his vision of a praiseworthy Creator:

> Pride and worse Ambition threw me down
> Warring in Heav'n against Heav'ns matchless King:
> Ah wherefore! he deservd no such return
> From me, whom he created what I was
> In that bright eminence, and with his good
> Upbraided none; nor was his service hard.
> What could be less then to afford him praise[.]
> (4.40-6)

However, he is soon cursing God again: "Be then his Love accurst, since love or hate,/ To me alike, it deals eternal woe" (4.69-70). Satan's "'fear of change,' with his 'dread of shame' (4.82) at any change of course, keeps intervening to prevent . . . growth" (Creaser "'Fear of Change'" 164). He raises the possibility of repentance and forgiveness: "is there no place/ Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?"; "say I

could repent and could obtaine/ By Act of Grace my former state" (4.79-80, 93-4). But Satan's fears ("dread of shame"), pride ("high thoughts"), and rhetoric return him finally to his despair ("All hope excluded"), more determined than ever to transform humankind into junior Satans and Earth into another Hell – "As Man ere long, and this new World shall know" (4.82, 95, 105, 113). The Devil willfully takes evil to be his only "thou": "Evil be thou my Good" (4.110). Fear of change, Milton suggests, goes hand in hand with fear of others and leads to self-consuming monologism.[64]

The course of evil appears to depend not just on passive acquiescence to authority or degree but also on active abuse of the rhetorical arts. Just as the devils lose themselves in Orphic song, Satan confirms himself in evil by using spellbinding poetry to enchant himself out of reason and beyond dialogue. The "unworthy powers" within him "reign over free Reason" (to recall Michael's monarchical psychology of evil) partly by virtue of his poetic gifts. As memorable as they are decisive, inventions such as "Evil be thou my Good" exert on him, as on the reader, a compelling charm. Their insistent rhythms and repetitions mask the spuriousness of their logic: "And in the lowest deep a lower deep" (4.76). As a kind of epic poet, Satan charms Hell and aggrandizes himself with a "satanic counter-epic, imitated by the devils" (Sauer 71), in which they appear as heroes who will yet emerge triumphant thanks to their leader. What he has admitted to be glorious can seem inglorious, one third swell to "welnigh half," and an army shrink to "I": "since I in one Night freed/ From servitude inglorious welnigh half/ Th' Angelic Name" (9.140-2). Satan can also look back on himself as a victim, externalizing his own attributes as irresistible foes: "Till Pride and worse

[64] Elizabeth Sauer describes this soliloquy in similar terms as "an act of solipsism" (74). Satan's incestuous relationship with his creation Sin, "the product of satanic auto-reflection" (Kilgour 309; see 2.764-7), encapsulates his narcissistic fears.

Ambition threw me down/ Warring in Heav'n against Heav'ns matchless King" (4.40-1). Intrinsic to such self-persuasion is the powerful spell of poetry itself, on which the narrator and many of his characters draw for better or, as in Satan's case, for worse.

In light of this misuse of poetic power, the narrator might seem another charming and manipulative Orpheus lamenting fruitlessly the loss of his paradise. What if his voice and its machinery were so many more "unworthy powers" to "reign over free Reason" – the reader's as well as his own? The sixteen intricate lines of the stunning opening sentence establish him immediately as a virtuoso bard. Images of height and flight suggest vocal mastery and superiority: he invokes none other than the "Heav'nly Muse" that inspired Moses "on the secret top/ Of *Oreb* or of *Sinai*" (1.6-7); his song "with no middle flight intends to soar/ Above th' *Aonian* Mount" to attain "the highth of this great Argument" (1.14-15, 24).[65] This is a voice of high ambition inflected by prophetic notes of "lordly certitude" (Kerrigan 125); it makes "some readers feel that they are being dominated by a dazzling genius whose purposes they distrust" (Stein 6-7). Milton does not hide the commonalities between the narrator's great argument and the devils' ravishing song and mazy speculations (Riggs 74). Their Orphic song revisits "thir own Heroic deeds"; his enchanting poem will be his own heroic deed, "unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime" (1.16). They betray nostalgia for the joys of Heaven; he indulges in nostalgia for the intimacies of Paradise, "where God or Angel Guest/ With Man, as with his friend, familiar us'd/ To sit indulgent" (3.1-3). They bemoan their "hapless Fall" into Hell; he laments his descent into blindness, "from the chearful wayes of men/ Cut off" (3.46-7). Like his demons,

[65] For Stephen Fallon, "Overreaching is the central danger for Milton as epic poet" (207); see his ch. 8, "If All Be Mine," for a fine discussion of the proems.

moreover, the poet has "reason'd high/ Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will and Fate," leaving not a few readers "in wandring mazes lost." As William Riggs insightfully observed, Milton demonstrates a "willingness to expose how close his hoped-for light is to darkness" (74).

If for many readers the narrator ultimately withstands scrutiny, this is due not just to the greatness of the poem as a whole but to his facing head-on its potential to lapse into Orphic song. Milton had argued in *Areopagitica* that "we bring impurity [into the world]: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary" (1006). He evidently realizes now that the narrator must take on directly the "contrary" poetics and politics of enchantment. Yet *Areopagitica* speaks of purifying, not of purity; the process can never be complete in this world of contraries. The poem's strategy is not to claim purity by exorcising Orpheus but rather to face up to impurity by engaging with him and all that he represents. Like the swain of "Lycidas," the narrator is as tempted by Orphic nostalgia as he is chastened by the bard's fate. Like Satan, he wrestles with the will to Orphic power and with his subordination to "one greater Man" (1.4), the Son, whose redemptive offices (as in the Nativity Ode) he must await. Dramatizing his own trials enables the narrator to lead us further into the trials of his characters. He then emerges not as a lone lamenter or monological master but as a storyteller reminiscent of the Attendant Spirit, at once humble creature and surefooted creator.

Twice contrasting himself explicitly with Orpheus, the narrator distances his song first from the "*Orphean* Lyre" of poetic enchantment and then from the Ovidian scene of the poet's defenselessness. He marks the shift from Hell to Heaven in book

three with an invocation to the "holy Light" (3.1) that develops like a classical ode through narrative digression into prayer (Revard "Epic Proemium" 129):

> Thee I re-visit now with bolder wing,
> Escap't the *Stygian* Pool, though long detain'd
> In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight
> Through utter and through middle darkness borne
> With other notes then to th' *Orphean* Lyre
> I sung of *Chaos* and *Eternal Night*,
> Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down
> The dark descent, and up to reascend,
> Though hard and rare: thee I revisit safe,
> And feel thy sovran vital Lamp[.]
> (3.13-22)

As the range of critical responses confirms, we too undergo trial in sounding out these "other notes." Roy Flannagan interprets the distinction in the broadest terms both as a "rejection of the classical sources of inspiration" and as an assertion of importance: "Orpheus also used his lyre to regain his lost wife . . . , but Milton is separating his own song from anything less important than 'Mans First Disobedience'" (416, n14). For Merritt Hughes, Milton dissociates his poem and its vision of Hell more specifically from the esoteric wisdom attributed to Orpheus, as in the so-called Orphic hymns to deities such as Night (258, n18). Interpreting the descent and re-ascent in terms of the allegorization in which Eurydice represented elusive truth, Alistair Fowler concludes that Milton is claiming "not to have lost his Eurydice" (167, n17). Critics have also compared the narrator with the descending and re-ascending Satan. The Devil's own flight out of Hell has just proven as unsafe as it is self-serving, diminishing him to "a weather-beaten Vessel" (2.1043). And the light hymned here

will soon be "anti-hymned" in Satan's spiteful soliloquy in Eden ("how I hate thy beams" [4.37]).[66]

Such scope for the reader is just one aspect of the collaborative rapport fostered by the narrator's insistence on "other notes then to th' *Orphean* Lyre." He distinguishes not just between pagan and Christian sources but also between contrasting poetics and the political orientations that go with them. For the Renaissance, as we have seen, the lyre of Orpheus both symbolized and echoed the fixed order of the cosmos, the Music of the Spheres. Besides evoking the mythic tradition, the narrator's rejection of Orphic song refers us back to the devils' Orphic song – i.e., to the "harmony . . . [that] Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment/ The thronging audience" (2.552-5). Unlike Orphic enchantment with its authoritarian tenor, the narrator's allusive song engages more than it ravishes, provokes more than it suspends dialogue, by leaving so many decisions to the reader. Indeed, the very lines that reject the enchanting lyre of Orpheus engage us in another open-ended intertextual labour. When the narrator claims to be "Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down/ The dark descent, and up to reascend,/ Though hard and rare" (3.18-20), he alludes to a famous passage in the *Aeneid*. So was Aeneas taught by the Sybil: "*facilis descensus Averno;/ . . . sed revocare gradum superasque evadere ad auras,/ Hoc opus, hic labor est*" (the way downward is easy from Avernus; but to retrace your steps to heaven's air, there is the trouble, there is the toil; 6.126-9). And the narrator's anxiety over his own presumption – "May I express thee unblam'd?" (3.3) – recalls the anxiety of Virgil: "*sit mihi fas audita loqui*" (may it be right to tell what I have heard; 6.266).

[66] Martz cites Satan's journey as an example of the mock-heroic mode that Milton likely learned from Ovid (217-18). See Revard on the "Hymns and Anti-hymns to Light in *Paradise Lost*."

As so often, allusion opens the text and intertext to the collaboration of the reader. Stephen Fallon argues for a broad comparison. Pointing to the prophecy of Roman supremacy that Aeneas gleans from the underworld, he remarks that "Milton claims kinship with Virgil's hero at the point in the epic . . . when he combines the functions of visionary and hero to which Milton aspires" (220). In this dual role Aeneas might be a model for the Christian poet. But focussing on the vision itself brings out a possible contrast as well. Whereas Aeneas brings to light his father's prophecy of Roman rule, the narrator ascends to unveil his Father's prophecy that rule will pass away – the promise that Empson, as we have seen, termed democratic. Thus, just as the narrator calls upon us to distinguish his epic from Orphic song, so he may be asking us to contrast the destiny of Rome with the telos of Providence. Satan would have us see the latter as another imperialist union; Abdiel and the loyalists disagree. In arriving at his verdict in God's favour, the narrator offers his readers scope as well as guidance, in keeping with his proem's rejection of Orphic enchantment.

The same proem further complicates that guidance by dramatizing the narrator's struggles with self-enchantment:

> but thou
> Revisit'st not these eyes, that rowle in vain
> To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;
> So thick a drop serene hath quencht thir Orbs,
> Or dim suffusion veild.
> (3.22-6)

Momentarily, this oft-called Hymn to Light takes on the plaintiveness of Satan's laments, albeit never the hatefulness of his anti-hymns. The repetition ("To find . . . and find") heightens the narrator's appeal to pathos. But he refuses to succumb to self-pity. The faltering "but" gives way to a rebounding "yet": "Yet not the more/ Cease I

to wander where the Muses haunt/ Cleer Spring, . . . Smit with the love of sacred Song" (3.26-9). The narrator reaffirms his art and his aspiration to join the illustrious line of poets and prophets, from Homer to Phineus, whose insightfulness was bound up with their sightlessness. Still, his comparison of the poet with the solitary nightingale ("the wakeful Bird" [3.38]), to which Virgil likened Orpheus, points to uncertainty: he could be either a Philomela who reaches an audience in spite of trial or an Orpheus who merely "fills all the air with grief" (*Georgics* 4.516). And he soon lurches from self-confidence back into self-pity with another "but": "but not to me returns/ Day, or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn,/ . . . or human face divine;/ But cloud in stead, and ever-during dark/ Surrounds me, from the cheerful wayes of men/ Cut off, . . . And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out" (3.41-50).

Were he to quit the proem here, the narrator might indeed become another backward-looking Orpheus consumed by nostalgia, shutting himself out from the sources of growth and creativity. What enables him to look both ways, and hence to come through trial, is his willingness to embrace dependence, to be as good a listener as the Attendant Spirit in the presence of Sabrina. Instead of seeking to escape his condition so as to claim self-sufficiency like Satan, he accepts his frailty and transforms it through prayer. The blind Milton had honed this quintessentially Christian strategy of reversal in his political pamphlets, reminding himself and his readers of "those ancient bards and wise men of the most distant past, whose misfortune, it is said, the gods recompensed with far more potent gifts" (*Defensio Secunda* [1654]; qtd. in Flannagan 417, n20). The narrator finally rights his invocation by opening himself within to "potent gifts" from without:

> So much the rather thou Celestial light
> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight.
> (3.51-5)

Whereas the all-too-Orphic swain of "Lycidas" had wallowed in loss and then tried to transcend it, the wiser narrator of *Paradise Lost* looks to his "thou" to help him transform it.

Having eschewed "th' *Orphean* Lyre" and embraced his own frailty, the narrator remains haunted by the primal scene of the poet's frailty – the drowning out and dismemberment of Orpheus. The familiar images of height and flight ("above th' *Olympian* Hill I soare,/ Above the flight of *Pegasean* wing" [7.3-4]) in the next proem revive the vulnerability with which he wrestled in book three. Pegasus reminds him of Bellerophon and his hubris, fueling the fear that he too may "fall/ Erroneous . . . to wander and forlorne" (7.19-20), and thus returning him to self-pitying lament. Milton as usual employs repetition to underscore its circularity: "though fall'n on evil days,/ On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;/ In darkness, and with dangers compast round,/ And solitude" (7.25-8). The narrator in his solipsism momentarily resembles the self-consuming figure of Sin, "With terrors and with clamors compasst round" (2.862) of her own creation (Kilgour 309). As usual, it is by recalling himself to dialogism that the narrator keeps sin at bay, reconnecting not just with his heavenly muse but also with his earthly audience. He sings neither by himself nor for himself: "yet not alone, while thou/ Visit'st my slumbers Nightly, . . . still govern thou my Song,/ *Urania*, and fit audience find, though few" (7.28-31). His song, as Milton realized in the Nativity Ode, must look to the Word that sustains it and to the able

audience that proves it "serviceable." But the "evil tongues" return nevertheless in the terrifying form of the "barbarous dissonance" that undid "the Thracian Bard" (7.32, 34).

The bard's undoing can still capture the vulnerabilities, both to his readers and to his rulers, of a poet attempting a rather "un-Orphic" poetics of dialogue in the hostile arena of the Restoration. If Orpheus is murdered in "Lycidas" at some distance from the author, nothing comes between the torn bard and Milton in *Paradise Lost* but the narrator and his prayer:

> But drive farr off the barbarous dissonance
> Of *Bacchus* and his revellers, the Race
> Of that wilde Rout that tore the Thracian Bard
> In *Rhodope*, where Woods and Rocks had Eares
> To rapture, till the savage clamor dround
> Both Harp and Voice; nor could the Muse defend
> Her Son. So fail not thou, who thee implores:
> For thou art Heav'nlie, shee an empty dreame.
> (7.32-9)

The "barbarous dissonance" and "savage clamor" recall the "rout that made the hideous roar" in "Lycidas," as if to say *plus ça change*... . As Martindale remarks, Milton's "old fears that the blind Fury might preempt his great task must have returned to him with peculiar strength" ("Paradise" 324).[67] While the violence is figured mainly as noise (dissonance, clamour), this time it seems even closer to home, issuing from "*the Race*/ *Of* that wilde Rout" – presumably, that is, from the Bacchantes' descendants in the here-and-now of the Restoration. The public hangman had been

[67] The "evil tongues" of the preceding lines (7.26) may link this proem to Milton's Caroline poetry through the Virgilian motto on the 1645 cover: "*baccare frontem/ cingite, ne uati noceat mala lingua futuro*" (bind my brow with foxglove, lest an evil tongue hurt the bard to be; Eclogue 7, ll. 27-8). For Hill, the phrase "unchang'd/ To hoarce or mute" (7.24-5) also hints at continuity with the earlier, radical Milton, "the defender of divorce, regicide, and the republic" (*Milton* 365). Achinstein's *Literature and Dissent* shows that the later Milton remains a countercultural figure, "defend[ing] dissent in his great poem" (e.g., through Abdiel's dissent from Satan) in the spirit of the Dissenters from the established church (123).

busy with the public, and Charles II was leading the new revelry by conspicuous example all over London. Writing yet once more under the eye of the King's censor, Milton points again to the risks in choosing to serve another muse as a poet of conscience: "nor could the Muse defend/ Her Son." That Milton emphasizes "Both Harp and Voice" rather than the "goary visage" suggests that he fears as much for his poem's integrity and survival as for his own life.[68] The more the poet puts engagement over enchantment, dialogue over assertion, the less he exerts control over his poem. Though censors may find little with which to quarrel, as seems to have been the case (Campbell and Corns 335-6), readers may decide to find little but what they like.

The intertextuality of the proem as a whole underscores this political and poetical vulnerability both by demanding so much from the reader and in the comparisons that it leaves to the reader. William Porter reminds us that Milton's opening line, "Descend from Heav'n *Urania*" (7.1), revises the invocation to the enchanter's mother in one of Horace's odes (3.4), "*Descende caelo . . . Calliope*" (ll. 1-2). Horace not only claims to enjoy Calliope's protection himself but also presents her as counsellor to Caesar, after Hesiod's dictum in the *Theogony* that "she attends upon reverent kings" (qtd. in Porter 73). Porter therefore concludes that, "By rejecting Calliope, Milton implies his rejection of the restored King Charles II" along with the role of spokesperson for the powers that be (74). As the proem's genealogy of Orpheus's murderers likewise implies, there is more at stake here than Milton's need to "distinguish his Muse from that pagan source of inspiration on whom one may no longer depend" (Lieb 63). The allusion to Bellerophon may strengthen these

[68] Kerrigan arrives at the same conclusion from another angle: "Since the 'wilde Rout' is the unfit audience of *Paradise Lost*, this passage must equate the body of Orpheus with the epic itself" (134).

subversive implications, as Revard has argued, by resonating with Pindar's *Isthmian 7*, another poem composed in old age and political defeat. Pindar uses the myth ostensibly to illustrate the observation that each person is destined for a different death: "truly the winged Pegasus threw/ his master Bellerophon when he tried to come to the/ homes of heaven into the society of Zeus" (qtd. in Revard "Milton and the Progress" 134). Like Milton, Pindar hopes to "win the flowery crown, not by venturing, as Bellerophon did, but by service and prayer" (134). According to Revard, however, the myth carries a more covert message as well: "the poets both seem to be glancing at the risks of speaking too plainly in politically charged circumstances" (134). This mythic thread thus extends the proem's allusive web of dissidence.

Whereas the Orphic swain had no answer to the poet's vulnerabilities but to picture Lycidas in paradise, the narrator trusts in the heavenly muse to protect him, a different kind of poet. Yet the abruptness of the proem's ending suggests how little distinguishes his frailty from defenselessness, and his song from that of the enchanter. Against some twenty lines of lament, with little to mitigate Bellerophon's fall, "evil days" and "that wilde Rout," the narrator mounts but two simple lines of prayer: "So fail not thou, who thee implores:/ For thou art Heav'nlie, shee an empty dreame" (7.38-9). A certain overlap persists between his song and Orphic song, a kinship of failings between him and the mythic bard, which it is the reader's task to adjudicate. Still, as we have seen, the narrator manages to contain, if not overcome, his personal frailty by defining it interpersonally as dialogical dependency – on careful readers as well as on the help of Heaven: "still govern thou my Song,/ *Urania*, and fit audience find, though few" (7.31). He thus seems in the final proem more at ease with his song. One keynote is surefootedness. He announces the coming Fall decisively – "I now

must change/ These notes to tragic" – and boldly declares his "argument/ Not less but more Heroic then the wrauth/ Of stern *Achilles*" (9.5-6, 13-15). But he conditions this tone with further admissions of vulnerability: "*If* answerable style I can obtaine/ Of my Celestial Patroness"; "*unless* an age too late, or cold/ Climat, or Years damp my intended wing/ Deprest, and much they may, *if* all be mine,/ Not Hers who brings it nightly to my Ear" (9.20-1, 44-7; emphases added). Perceiving his circumstances as obstacles, he is still as tempted to lament his burdens and losses as he is at times to enchant and to lecture his readers. Even so, he bows out of the proems as the humble receiver of his muse's gifts ("to my Ear"). Like the Attendant Spirit, he must listen well to others in order to sing "with other notes then to th' *Orphean* Lyre."

In light of his wariness of the song and fate of Orpheus, whether the narrator is in effect "all ears" vis-à-vis the heavenly muse becomes a crucial test of his own claims. If he rejects Orphic ravishment only to be ravished himself by the muse, then his own free will, and by extension his justification of God's ways of freedom, would be in question. His creativity, hardly his at all, would be akin to the fleeting "rapture" of the shepherds captivated by the divine music in the Nativity Ode (l. 98), or to the Attendant Spirit's momentary enchantment by the Lady in *A Mask*. The proems do present some contradictory evidence. Kerrigan can claim with some justice that the narrator embodies John Donne's paradoxical view of the prophet as both agent and instrument. "It is Satan," Kerrigan adds, who "treats his prophets like *tubæ* and bagpipes," as when he possesses the serpent in order to tempt Eve (103). The problem of instrumental agency also animates and agitates Jesus and Samson, the respective men of destiny on trial in Milton's last poems, *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes* (1671). But the notion that a destiny awaits one does not mean that one

simply waits for it, at least not in Milton's universe. As the narrator of *Paradise Lost* makes clear, the trial is to realize – both to grasp and to perform – one's own part.

The proems together suggest that, while he can be suitably self-effacing, the narrator's relationship with the muse is characteristically dialogical. The first invocation introduces the heavenly muse as the poet's instructor, illuminator and supporter (1.19-23). He bids her sing but then calls the song and its purposes his own ("my adventrous Song"; "I may assert . . . /And justifie" [1.13, 25-6]). In book three the poet claims his own voice again ("May I express thee unblam'd?"), while crediting the muse with its training: "I sung of *Chaos* and *Eternal Night*,/ Taught by the heav'nly Muse" (3.3, 18-19). The process of artistic inspiration that he lays bare for us involves the will ("voluntarie") as well as the intellect of the poet: "Then feed on thoughts, that voluntarie move/ Harmonious numbers" (3.37-8). The next proem presents the muse as his leader, guide, and protector: "Up led by thee/ into the Heav'n of Heav'ns I have presum'd" (7.12-13). That she "Visit'st [his] slumbers Nightly, or when Morn/ Purples the East" (7.29-30), appears to put him in a passive position. But she visits his "slumbers" or dreams rather than himself, and once again the song remains his own ("govern thou my Song" [7.30]). In the final proem he can shift between modes ("I now must change/ These Notes to Tragic" [9.5-6]) and decide what sort of argument suits him ("Mee of these/ Not skilld nor studious, high Argument/ Remains" [9.41-3]). If he ends on a passive note by declaring the poem "Hers who brings it nightly to my Ear" (9.47), a few lines earlier he downplays the instrumental side of Donne's formula by shifting quickly from dictation to inspiration: "And dictates to me slumbring, or inspires/ Easie my unpremeditated Verse" (9.23-4). In sum, Heaven instructs the poet more than it enchants him.

The narrator's various struggles sensitize him and his readers to the humanizing trials of Adam and Eve. Like the listening narrator, the human pair begin to realize their creaturely potential to be co-creators with God by embracing their dependence on him. They thrive by engaging in the trial of dialogue with Heaven, with each other, and with their world. Eden is an evolving paradise of industrious mutuality in which they declare themselves "happie in [their] mutual help/ And mutual love" (4.727-8), even if we feel at times the absence of twenty-first-century equality. When they lapse, the same Orphic tendencies that test Satan and the narrator come to the fore – lamentation, nostalgia, sentimentalism, domination, narcissism, monologism, and so on – some of them to solidify in new forms. The narrator's quest for intimacy with Heaven parallels its partial recovery by Adam and Eve after the Fall through the re-engagement in dialogue that humility alone enables.[69] But domination will plague postlapsarian relationships from the household to the state seen as its macrocosm. The Son warns Eve in his judgment on the couple that "to thy Husbands will/ Thine shall submit" (10.195-6). And in turning to the Fall the narrator must resign himself to the fact that God will likewise be more enchanting and less dialogical than the Father who bade the "sociable Spirit" Raphael (5.221) be Eden's guest:

> No more of talk where God or Angel Guest
> With Man, as with his Friend, familiar us'd
> To sit indulgent, and with him partake
> Rural repast, permitting him the while
> Venial discourse unblam'd.
> (9.1-5)

Attending to the ways in which Adam's and Eve's Orphic tendencies undermine dialogue and hinder growth helps us to understand both the course of the

[69] In Sauer's terms, "the remembering of the Word through the restoration of dialogue leads to moral and social healing" (123)

Fall and the nature of the recovery. At first, reflecting their unfallen state of intimacy with God and all creation, their hymns differ markedly from the devils' Orphic song:

> Lowly they bow'd adoring, and began
> Thir Orisons, each Morning duly paid
> In various style, for neither various style
> Nor holy rapture wanted they to praise
> Thir Maker, in fit strains pronounc't or sung
> Unmeditated, such prompt eloquence
> Flowd from thir lips, in Prose or numerous Verse,
> More tuneable then needed Lute or Harp
> To add more sweetness[.]
> (5.144-52)

Adam and Eve sing not of "Thir own Heroic deeds" but of their Maker and his works, and the "holy rapture" and adoring attitude belong not to a spellbound audience but to the singers themselves. Whereas the Orphic lyre seems to "add more sweetness" to the point of ravishment, their voices suffice for the purposes of praise. They do address like Orpheus the natural world. Far from enchanting or suspending it, however, they invite all creation to join them in prayer variously: "yee in Heav'n,/ On Earth joyn all ye Creatures to extol/ Him" (5.163-5).

In fact, so engaging is edenic song that it collapses any distinction between singer and listener. Adam and Eve not only celebrate "whatever moves and develops" (Blessington 489) but call these movers to celebrate in their own ways:

> And yee five other wandring Fires that move
> In mystic dance not without song, resound
> His praise, who out of Darkness call'd up Light.
> Aire, and ye Elements . . .
> . . . let your ceaseless change
> Varie to our great Maker still new praise.
> . . . Fountains and yee, that warble, as ye flow,
> Melodious murmurs, warbling tune his praise.
> Joyn voices all ye living Souls[.]
> (5.177-80, 183-4, 195-7)

The singers of Paradise hail everyone and everything as singers or dancers, as if to realize on a cosmic scale the creative reciprocity glimpsed in the Italian sonnets, where the singing lady inspires the poet to sing back. As McColley observes, Milton's Eden "shows us what we could be if we rejoined the universal song" (*A Gust* 112). The couple's hymn of praise opens them further to God, their world, and the promise of the future: "Hail universal Lord, be bounteous still/ To give us onely good" (5.205-6). No circle of nostalgia or will to power entraps them at this stage. Their "unmeditated" poetry proclaims their prayerfulness as anything but the slavishness that Satan pretends to scorn as "the Minstrelsie of Heav'n" (6.168).

If such "un-Orphic" song makes the Fall seem almost inconceivable, Orphic motifs also hint at the possibility of gathering clouds. The couple's occasionally unquestioning reactions to Raphael point to the perils of elevating any fallible creature into an enchanter.[70] As Stanley Fish remarks, Adam "endows Raphael's voice with the Orpheus-like power to control nature" ("With Mortal Voice" 522). Hoping to elicit another story, Adam indulges in the conceit that the angel's "potent voice" has suspended the very sun: "And the great light of Day yet wants to run/ Much of his race though steep, suspens in Heav'n/ Held by thy voice, thy potent voice he heares" (7.98-100). Such flattery may be harmless. However, in commenting on Raphael's account of the War in Heaven, the narrator has just drawn our attention to the danger of enchantment:

> [*Adam*] with his consorted *Eve*
> The storie heard attentive, and was *fill'd*

[70] Critics too tend to forget that Raphael is as fallible as Uriel and Gabriel, who fail in their mission to guard the walls of Eden. Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana* confirms that "neither Man nor Angel" can be exempt from limitations: "there are many things of which the angels are ignorant. . . . Dan. 8:13" (CPW 6.348).

> *With admiration*, and deep Muse to heare
> Of things so high and strange, things to thir thought
> So unimaginable as hate in Heav'n,
> And Warr so neer the Peace of God in bliss
> With such confusion: but the evil soon
> Driv'n back redounded as a flood on those
> From whom it sprung, impossible to mix
> With blessedness. Whence *Adam* soon *repeal'd*
> *The doubts that in his heart arose*[.]
> (7.50-60; emphases added)

As every reader knows, the admiring couple's apparent assumption that evil has been "Driv'n back . . ., impossible to mix/ With blessedness," will prove to be a dangerous error. Rather than translating his doubts into questions about the "hate in Heav'n," Adam simply "repeal'd/ The doubts that in his heart arose," inquiring instead about the Creation. Equally telling is the narrator's comment following Raphael's next lesson: "The Angel ended, and in Adams Eare/ So Charming left his voice, that he a while/ Thought him still speaking, still stood fixt to hear" (8.1-3). Though Adam shakes off his fixity to question Raphael here, at the beginning of book seven dialogue succumbs to Orphic charm and wonder. Indeed, right from the outset Adam finds the voice of Raphael even more charming than angelic song:

> Thy words
> Attentive, and with more delighted eare,
> Divine instructer, I have heard, then when
> Cherubic Songs by night from neighbouring Hills
> Aereal Music send[.]
> (5.544-8)

Milton thus subtly reinforces his epic's many suggestions that the medium of dialogue matters as much as any message. Raphael may be an imperfect instructor, but, as we saw in Milton's poems to Leonora, more problematic is the listeners' temptation to allow his enchanting lessons to go unquestioned. This is not to say that the angel always encourages free dialogue of the respectfully contentious kind that we

saw between the Father and the Son, and between God and Adam. As Martin Kuester observes, "[Raphael's] knowledge of coming human disobedience makes him insist even more firmly on automatic obedience" (271). Raphael's urgent counsel that Adam cultivate "self esteem" so as to assert authority over Eve and "all her shows" sits uneasily with Adam's own experience of her "thousand decencies" and the "Harmonie . . . in wedded pair" (8.572-5, 601-5). If Eve overhears all this, as appears likely (9.275-8), then her much-debated proposal that they garden separately may express a natural need to test and reconfirm their "happie nuptial League." Whether Raphael unwittingly contributes to the Fall by upsetting the couple's dialogical mutuality becomes another of the poem's countless conundrums for the reader.

What could be seen as an erosion of edenic dialogue marks the so-called Separation Scene. In their early days, the couple exchanged more suggestions and questions than pleas or commands: e.g., "let us not think hard/ One easie prohibition"; "But wherefore . . . shine these" (4.432-3, 657). And yet, by the end of the Separation Scene, Adam at least is wielding blunt imperatives: "Go; . . . Go in thy native innocence, relie/ On what thou hast of vertue, summon all,/ For God towards thee hath done his part, do thine" (9.372-5). A fracturing of dialogue might then form part of the "all" in Eve's fatal vision of the forbidden fruit as "the Cure of all" (9.776). Even if Raphael has played a part in stirring up conflict, however, the problem with this line of argument is that it makes evils of strong language and normal disagreement, not to mention of mere separation. It is the damned who like to march about "Breathing *united* force with *fixed* thought" (to recall the music-making in Hell). What seems an erosion of dialogue can also be taken as a sign of the healthy differences at the very heart of human intercourse.

Even as the couple's conversation appears to be faltering, Milton fuels the dialogue with his readers by making it difficult to pin down the cause(s) of the Fall. To begin with, there appears to be more than one way to go wrong. While my argument suggests that self-/ enchantment can be a threat to reason, the fact that Satan "bestows names and words amiss so as deliberately to lead Eve into false interpretations" (Leonard) points to limitations in reason itself. The premises from which we argue, the very bases of our interpretations, may become faulty unless we inform them with faith and love as well as with experience and reason. Satan succeeds with Eve in part by establishing false premises; the serpent in which he speaks seems to have attained to rationality through the forbidden fruit instead. As Adam points out in the Separation Scene, "Reason [God] made right,/ But bid her well beware, and still erect,/ Least by some faire appeering good surpris'd/ She dictate false, and misinforme the Will" (9.352-5). Reason is essential to freedom of the will – "Reason also is choice," God reminds us (3.108) – but we must not let reason alone "dictate" our choices.

While overconfidence in reason at the expense of faith may be one causal factor in the fall of Eve, the poem challenges us to distinguish causes from mere markers of the Fall. On the one hand, as we have seen, Adam and Eve already display a tendency to submit to enchantment that could well be a significant cause. On the other hand, this and other Orphic failings come to the fore after Eve's fall, as if they were but markers of that destructive turn. The fallen Eve hides burgeoning narcissism behind extravagant sentiment, telling herself that "*Adam* shall share with me in bliss or woe:/ So dear I love him" (9.831-2). She then declares to Adam that she means to dissolve some of the differences on which free dialogue depends: "never more/ Mean I

to trie, what rash untri'd I sought,/ The pain of absence from thy sight" (9.859-61). Yet the unfallen Adam wallows too in neediness: "How can I live without thee, how forgoe/ Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly joyn'd./ To live again in these wilde Woods forlorn?" (9.908-10). These rhetorical questions, posed in soliloquy before the fact, foreclose on nobler options. As Leonard remarks, "Adam dies with Eve, for his own sake. He might have died for her, for her sake" (*Naming* 217). Adam's weak but decisive reply confirms that, like the fallen Eve, he is all too ready to erase the differences on which both love and dialogue depend: "Our State cannot be severd, we are one" (9.958). Narcissism and other markers of the fall of Eve seem all too ready to rise up in Adam to become causes. Milton thus calls us to further interpretative labour by problematizing not just the causes of the Fall but the difference between fallen and unfallen.

That the two states are nevertheless divided emerges most clearly in the perversion of the couple's sexual relations along with their dialogue. Whereas unfallen sex moves from the mutuality of hand in hand to that of "side by side" (4.739-41), fallen sex literalizes the devils' Orphic song that "took with ravishment" the willing audience. It begins with poetry almost too direct to be seductive: "But come, so well refresh't, now let us play, . . . For never did thy Beautie . . . so enflame my sense/ With ardor to enjoy thee" (9.1027-31). The poetical ravishing of the mind then becomes the sexual ravishing of the body. "Her hand he *seis'd*, and to a shadie bank, . . . He led her nothing loath; . . . There they thir fill of Love and Loves disport/ *Took* largely" (9.1037-43; emphases added). While Adam seems to initiate, the aggressive verb "Took" applies to Eve as well. With the hangover come nostalgia and escapism. Looking back at the lost "joy/ And rapture" of dialogue with Heaven, Adam wishes for

a solitary life in the wilderness: "O might I here/ In solitude live savage, in some glade/ Obscur'd" (9.1081-2, 1084-6). When Eve uselessly laments what might have been "Hadst thou been firm and fixt in thy dissent" (9.1160), he sinks to misogyny: "Thus it shall befall/ Him to worth in Women overtrusting" (9.1182-3). Most significantly, as the narrator stresses in the book's conclusion, the dialogue between them turns more adversarial than that of the Separation Scene: "Thus they in mutual accusation spent/ The fruitless hours, but neither self-condemning,/ And of thir vain contest appeer'd no end" (9.1187-9). Just as sex falls from love-making into love-taking, conversation lapses from discussion into accusation, taking contest beyond healthy disagreement. By revealing these differences to be merely of degree, the poem suggests that Adam and Eve, like all free creatures, have always carried within them the (more or less realized) potential for narcissism, nostalgia, submission, domination, and other destructive motives. Ever threatening to the creative dialogue on which we thrive, these failings are both causes and markers of ruin.

As with the narrator, it is humility that rekindles creativity and rescues dialogue, enabling reorientation to God as well as to each other and to the future. If Adam takes on more of Satan, Eve takes the lead in humility. His lengthy "complaint" to himself after the Son's judgment resembles the passionate "plaints" of Satan descending into monologism: "To sorrow abandond, but worse felt within,/ And in a troubled Sea of passion tost,/ Thus to disburd'n sought with sad complaint" (10.717-19). Adam does flirt with responsibility, just as Satan flirts with repentance. Momentarily Adam shoulders the blame in terms that echo the Son's sacrifice for humankind: "On mee, mee onely, as the sourse and spring/ Of all corruption, all the blame lights due" (10.832-3; cf. 3.236-7). But self-indulgence exaggerates the burden

("*the* sourse . . . of *all*"), tempting him to shift it back onto Eve, "that bad Woman" (10.837). He then spirals back into despair like the Devil, who only found "in the lowest deep a lower deep" (4.76): "I find no way, from deep to deeper plung'd" (10.844). The deeper humility of Eve shows the way out of the abyss. She too bursts into "plaint," but renews their rapport by addressing "humble" words not to herself but directly to Adam (10.912-13). Her suit revives a more constructive mode of discourse – "Between us two let there be peace" – and she concludes on the note of humility that Adam abandoned: "On me, sole cause to thee of all this woe,/ Mee mee onely just object of [God's] ire" (10.924, 935-6). As a good listener, Eve helps to reorient them to Heaven by recalling the Son's prophetic curse upon the serpent: "one enmitie/ Against a Foe by doom express assign'd us,/ That cruel Serpent" (10.926-8). A more forward-looking Adam can then reason, "unless/ Be meant, whom I conjecture, our grand Foe/ *Satan*, who in the Serpent hath contriv'd/ Against us this deceit" (10.1032-5). What they can now begin to realize is that humanity has a part to play in healing the satanic wound in creation. Thanks largely to the humility of Eve, then, the couple redress some of their failings and re-engage in the creative and interpretative dialogue that Milton's God invites.

Like the dialogical God that it celebrates, *Paradise Lost* engages our creative and critical capacities, lifting our thoughts without narrowing them. The generosity of Milton's orchestration enables the poem's various speakers, temptations, and traditions to have their say and leave their marks (Sauer 84). If the verse often enchants, it resists the Orphic urge to ravish or rule and instead draws us into interpretation after the free-willed fashion of the Father who "withdraw[s] his controlling power" (Danielson). In other words, Milton's "other notes" enchant towards engagement,

inviting readers to make choices rather than charming them to order like Orpheus. The narrator tells us of Satan's despair, but we need not make up our minds until we hear his own words in soliloquy. The narrator distinguishes himself from Orpheus and the poem from the devils' Orphic song, but we need not concur until we assess his relationships with his muse and his readers. The narrator comments on the Fall, but his refusal to offer narrow proscriptions leaves us to search out the causes in Adam and Eve and within ourselves. To be tested so is hardly to undergo a "programme of reader harassment" (Fish *Surprised* 4). If only more poems would harass us so pleasurably and productively![71]

Both our freedom to make such choices and some of the most important among them reflect the author's political choice of republicanism over monarchy. In relating Heaven's musical community to the perfect Music of the Spheres, Milton relies on us to work out for ourselves the limits of the likeness and the implications of the unlikeness for the ways of God. The threat of authoritarian regimentation, and of the passivity that would sustain it, appears only to be countered by divine dialogue and the celestial voices singing dramatically and variously of change. But the mixed evidence leaves the verdict in our hands. Nor does the narrator attempt to explain just how "God shall be All in All." That Empson and others can argue without absurdity for divine totalitarianism; that Blake can put the author in the Devil's camp – all this testifies to the freedom that the poem promotes. The parliament in Hell and the council in Heaven, the many conversations and disputes, provide grist for the reader's

[71] As Norbrook remarks, Milton seems more interested in fostering "self-reliance" in his readers than in chastening them (*Writing* 479). See John Rumrich's critique of Fish and the authoritarian version of Milton in the introduction to *Milton Unbound*. Fish replies in his preface to the second edition of *Surprised By Sin*, but phrases such as "reader harassment" speak for themselves.

mill. Epic similes and wide-ranging allusions complicate the interacting perspectives, making the narrator at times "a poor guide for the reader's understanding, offering only qualification upon qualification" (Achinstein *Milton* 217). A monarchical author interested in producing good little subjects could have drawn firmer lines between "darkness" and his "hoped-for light" (Riggs), and between Orphic poetics and "other notes." The narrator's many admissions of frailty and uncertainty empower the reader by problematizing and diffusing authority. Such complexity argues that the epic's fit readers are not those willing to toe the line but rather those "skilful and laborious gatherers" who learn to draw lines for themselves. If Milton seeks to reign over meaning and to spellbind readers into sharing his politico-religious views, he does a remarkably poor job of it.

In keeping with Milton's practice of blank verse, however, the fit reader realizes freedom through a certain discipline.[72] The skillful and laborious gatherer refuses to ravish the text. I hope to have shown that the myth of Orpheus and its motifs help us to chart the course of the various falls and recoveries at the heart of the poem. Author and narrator, Adam and Eve, Satan and Raphael wrestle alike with enchantment, including the power of poetry. As England's welcome for Charles II would have reminded Milton, letting another assume the power of a Renaissance Orpheus can be even more tempting than sharing in power oneself. What is worse, the potent "other" can also be part of oneself; the falling and the fallen turn out to be most Orphic in overpowering their own "free Reason," ever necessary, if insufficient, to genuine freedom. Whereas Satan sinks farther into xenophobic monologism and

[72] The conservatism in other poets' preference for rhyme emerges in Dryden's criticism: rhyme "bounds and circumscribes the fancy," which "must have clogs tied to it" in order to produce the "clearest thoughts" (187-8).

despairing nostalgia, the human couple and the narrator partially recover through the humility and receptivity without which community cannot be. The "other notes" of engagement on which all creatures thrive, perverted in the Orphic songs of Hell, sound most clearly in the co-creative, and perhaps ultimately levelling, dialogue and music of the edenic and heavenly communities. Just as education serves "to repair the ruins of our first parents" (*Of Education* 980), so *Paradise Lost* looks backward to Eden in order to look forward to a "fraternal state" in which no Nimrod "Of proud ambitious heart . . . Will arrogate Dominion undeserv'd/ Over his brethren" (12.25-8). The poem points a way through trial by looking both ways as well as up to Heaven.

Milton thus finds his poetical and political feet as a sacred singer in part by taking on the mythic model of Orpheus. He realizes as early as the Nativity Ode that neither poet nor king belongs at the centre of things as their Orphic enchanter, a role he expands to honour God the Creator and Father. While he tellingly critiques the Stuarts' presumption, the budding poet struggles to establish a mediating role for the artist in this dissonant "meantime" in Christian history. In "Solemn Musick" it is up to worshipper and reader alike to respond to sacred song as actively and faithfully as Milton reworks myth to serve his levelling Christianity. We complete and contain the role of art by refusing to let it enchant us out of reason. "Lycidas" realizes more fully the liabilities and limitations of Orpheus and his song, building on Ovid's critique of the self-consuming artist and gesturing towards an alternative poetics. *Paradise Lost* follows through with "other notes then to th' *Orphean* Lyre," but not without an epic battle with the ways of enchantment. As the narrator, Adam and Eve, Satan and other figures are tried by the dialogical ways of God, the epic poet realizes something barely glimpsed by the Ode's composer. For better or for worse, God sets us free by refusing

to lend his Word the Orphic power to enchant. Our tragedy is that we so often choose to enchant each other and ourselves.

Conclusions

Wanted: Skillful and Laborious Gatherers

Milton inherited myth as a poetical currency loaded with political significance. As the first two chapters established, Orpheus the enchanting poet was central to Renaissance ideals of art and government. Despite the Greeks' ambivalence over the seductive power of Orphic song, Virgil's tragedy of Orpheus and Eurydice gave rise to a range of influential artistic, moral, and political models. Whereas Ovid had deflated the bard's mystique and stressed his dependence on the audience, Horace, Macrobius and the Neoplatonists idealized him as a bringer of order. Paternalistic Renaissance courts and academies, nostalgic for a supposed golden age of song and civility, thus appropriated Orpheus as a figure for the harmonizing of soul and state with the stable Music of the Spheres. In an unstable England drawn to Puritanism and utilitarianism, this Renaissance Orpheus empowered artists, monarchs, and "Protectors" alike, often by uniting the forces of quill and crown. The court masque epitomized a poetics of Orphic enchantment designed to enrapture the audience. Well-schooled in Ovidian irony, Milton came to reject such an art of mastery along with the traditional union of bard and king in favour of service to what he saw as the godly reform of his country. His attraction to the archetypal poet, evident especially in his juvenilia, would have been tempered by the need to take account of the myth's predominantly royalist currency. Growing in anti-authoritarian conviction during the personal rule of Charles I, Milton sought to refashion and to reposition Orpheus within a dialogical poetics of engagement that might inspire readers to realize their god-given freedom.

Bringing together Milton's more secular poems in chapter three revealed the political and poetical motives, too often obscured by theories of pagan-Christian tension, driving his critique of Orphic artistry. In search of a mutually beneficial relation between artists and audiences, governors and peoples, Milton weighs this authoritarian model against more dialogical alternatives. The underrated Italian sonnets and the Latin epigrams to Leonora grant him insight into the audience's position as he likens erotic bewitchment to Orphic enchantment. By questioning the passivity of the muted admirer, Milton encourages his own readers to take a more active and vocal role and hence to question power relations in general. The poems begin to present dialogue, which the Orphic model tends to exclude, as a source of creativity and growth. "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" further problematize enchantment by linking the pursuit of Orphic song to nostalgia, idolatry, vagueness, and otherworldliness – not just for the audience but for the poet as well. The ironic glances at court masque and its Neoplatonic pretensions hint that the self-enchanted open themselves to political subjection. If the reduction of Caroline icons such as Orpheus and Apollo to familial in-jokes in "*Ad Patrem*" constitutes another subversive gesture, *A Mask* takes on directly the razzle-dazzle of royalist poetics. The Attendant Spirit marks Milton's progress towards a more engaging art by fostering educative dialogue and singing a new song that, far from merely spellbinding, hails others and awakens them to social action.

As I argue in chapter four, Milton's sacred poetry harnesses the Christian concept of trial to such a poetics of engagement, delving more deeply into the temptations of Orphic power and the problem at their heart: why do we so often prefer enchantment to engagement, too often deserve subjection for failing to earn

citizenship? The poems expose the danger and presumption in concentrating such power in anyone but God, and yet insist that no one can enchant us out of reason and beyond faith without our acquiescence. While betraying some authorial desire for Orphic influence, the Nativity Ode redirects to Heaven the musical myths abused by the Stuarts and tests the limits of the poet's role in a world redeemable by Christ alone. Milton begins to realize the poetic advantages of mediating dissonance – between conflicting traditions, politics, and poetics – rather than imposing order like Orpheus. "At A Solemn Musick" confirms that enchantment and engagement need not be mutually exclusive, as the listening poet chooses to make the former serve the latter. That Milton's critique of enchantment expresses his politico-religious dissidence becomes clearer in "Lycidas," where it is the swain's Orphic tendencies (mainly nostalgia, melancholy, and escapism) that prevent him from embracing change and engaging with the corruption around him. As in *Paradise Lost*, the dissenting author can acknowledge a certain kinship with the beleaguered Orpheus of the myth's conclusion, a rare sight in English poetry, while neither identifying with the bard like Vaughan nor trivializing him like Herrick. Milton builds his epic and his God alike on the levelling model of dialogue. *Paradise Lost* suggests that, while the freedom fostered by that model is fragile, engaging in open debate gives us a taste for the choosing that it requires, stimulating the desire to exercise our free will further. Yet the poem demonstrates the merits of dialogue as much through its perversions as by its successes. Satan spreads his fear of change and of others by exploiting the complacency whereby free creatures acquiesce to pseudo-debate and let authority go unquestioned. The one whom he enchants out of reason and freedom, mainly by means of his Orphic gifts, turns out to be himself. Like the prayerful narrator, Adam

and Eve find a way out of such self-enchantment in humility, the *sine qua non* of the dialogue through which they revive together their capacities for faithful reasoning and choosing. The "skilfull and laborious gatherer[s]" expected in Milton's prose become the engaged and collaborative readers, themselves challenged to be choosers, for whom his epic calls by refusing merely to enchant us.

In resisting any "puritanical" poetics of exclusion, Milton further frees his readers by equipping them to be skillful gatherers of traditions. His critical inclusion of myth despite its controversial pagan origins makes him and his readers mediators between the so-called ancients and moderns offering competing models of cultural progress. As Milton was publishing *Paradise Lost*, advocates of Baconian science were insisting that "the Wit and the Fables and Religions of the Ancient World is well-nigh consum'd . . . and it is now high time to dismiss them" (Sprat, qtd. in ch. 2). Their opponents upheld the classics as the sole guarantors of civility while faulting science for its supposed materialism and godlessness, as in time would Blake and many other believers. Charting a middle course that let no wisdom go to waste, Milton realized that myth remained a living language coeval with the newer discourses such as science that also belonged in his verse.[73] Moreover, one corollary of the monism that many critics discern in *Paradise Lost* and *De Doctrina Christiana* is that no discipline has a monopoly on truth. Unlike the dualist who cordons off a spiritual realm, the monist views matter and spirit as aspects of a single substance, in Milton's case the body of God. To valorize matter as godly is to make the knowledge of matter

[73] Milton's creative uses of modern science, as in the allusion to Galileo's telescope in *Paradise Lost* 1.284-91, have been illuminated in recent years by Karen L. Edwards and Harinder Singh Marjara, among other critics. Earlier commentators such as Kester Svendsen tended to see Milton as more resistant to science. Other new discourses animating his poetry include voyagers' tales of discovery, though Satan's journey may suggest that Milton doubted their claims to heroism (Demaray 196).

godly; modern science's study of the material world becomes one way of discovering the divine.[74] But the "ancient" figure of Orpheus had more to contribute to Milton's mediating vision of modernity because it was invested with many of the Renaissance ideals of art and government that he sought to revise. By not just including but dramatizing and criticizing myth along with other discourses ancient and modern, Milton's poetry invites readers to investigate those traditions and to weigh their accumulated baggages for themselves.

This rigorously dialogical vision of poetry and progress is anything but nostalgic. The notion that Milton yearned for a golden age of Orphic orality, in which his word would move souls directly through the ear and go more or less unquestioned, misses the forward-looking and collaborative spirit of his poetry.[75] And the same spirit animates the best of his prose. *Areopagitica* hails the medium of print for its opening of the word to public criticism: "what can be more fair, then when a man judicious, learned, and of a conscience, . . . openly by writing publish to the world what his opinion is" (1017). Print gives us an advantage over Christ himself; "he preacht in publick; yet writing is more publick then preaching" (1017). Here Milton has much in common with moderate Baconians such as Joseph Glanvill, who likewise sang the praises of print for enabling dialogue across space and time: "We communicate upon easie terms at the remotest distance, converse with the Wisemen that went before us, and securely convey down our Conceptions to the Ages that shall follow" (79). Like

[74] On Milton's monism and its various implications, see D. Bentley Hart and John Rogers. For Hart, monism underscores God's involvement with his creatures – "the divine story . . . contains human history" (25) – while Rogers makes a connection between monism's ontological solidarity and the political solidarity of republicanism.

[75] Randall Ingram argues to the contrary that Milton's volume of 1645 shows how "one poet, gradually and grudgingly, comes to accept the less powerful modes of writing and print" (180).

Milton, Glanvill refuses to dismiss the ancient traditions, declaring himself and the Royal Society "very ready to do right to the Learned Ancients" and yet "not willing that those, however venerable Sages, should have an absolute Empire" (6-7). Such "anti-imperialist" dialogue demands both the humility to be open and inclusive and the confidence to remain forward-looking and critical. As Milton makes clear in the Son's and Adam's educative exchanges with God, dialogue requires neither agreement nor parity to be productive and free.

Milton takes on the Orphic tradition with a combination of generosity and severity that most often falls just short of what I call in chapter one the "saintly ideal" of Burkean irony. While he makes no claim to charm trees down off the mountains like Orpheus, he puts the Christian word ahead of any myth. A "non-judgmental" relativist Milton certainly is not. He proposes his own relational model of dialogical engagement as poetically, politically, and spiritually superior to the ways of Orphic enchantment that it subsumes. But the "enemy" to which his poetry aims to be "superior" (in Burke's terms) is not so much myth as its self-serving appropriation, as in court masque, by the powers that be. In order to confront this enemy, his poetry "*needs* [Orpheus], is *indebted* to him, is not merely outside him as an observer but contains him *within*" (Burke). Yet the readings in chapters three and four reveal more distance between the many guises of Orpheus and of Milton than critics have hitherto uncovered. If the bard's fame was to be envied, his fate was definitely to be avoided. The most significant source of this distance, however, is the myth's tendency to assign the poet what Milton came to see as the wrong kind of power – one more enrapturing than enlightening, more binding than freeing of others. In wrestling with

authoritarianism and his literary inheritance, Milton learns that his poetry can be generous to the Orphic tradition but must be severe to Orphic enchantment.

Focussing on the problem of Orphic enchantment brings out the politico-religious defense of free will that critics have long remarked at the heart of Milton's mature work especially. As we have seen, Orphic art can stifle the free will of both the artist and the audience, feeding complacency with nostalgia, sentimentalism, and idolatry. The poet becomes more ravishing than inspiring, more idol than example. If the monological enchanter is therefore a natural ally of the authoritarian ruler, Milton had to become a different kind of poet or else betray his increasingly republican convictions. By 1660, what he had seen of Charles I and then of "som ambitious leaders in the Armie" had made him suspicious of the concentration of power and desperate for a government "where no single person, but reason only swaies" (*Readie and Easie Way* 1140, 1139). He saw that the arts could be part of the problem of compulsion. Yet he nowhere suggests that any poet or ruler can take away what God has granted us – the freedom to choose that is our birthright as human creatures. A willing surrender of free will may seem paradoxical, but for Milton this is precisely what the British people allowed in the Restoration of the monarchy. His poetry clarifies the ways in which the arts of enchantment subtly tempt us so to give up liberty of our own accord, to permit within ourselves "unworthie Powers to reign/ Over free Reason" (*Paradise Lost* 12.91-2).

Milton overturns the Renaissance Orphic model and makes dialogue the hero of his epic both to help himself attain to greatness in his own way and to help his readers prepare themselves for the republic of the future. If the God of *Paradise Lost* is less an enchanter than an educator who prefers dialogue, it is because he plans to

help his creatures earn full citizenship in Heaven: "For regal Scepter then no more shall need" (3.340). Building an epic on conversation and debate, "With other notes then to th' *Orphean* Lyre" (3.17), enables Milton to be true to his politico-religious and literary convictions without crying republicanism from the royalist rooftops. This negative claim to "other notes" might seem an appropriation no less self-aggrandizing than the royalists' mostly positive uses of the Orphic figure. What in my view redeems the poem's service to the author is its greater service to his readers. As we saw in chapter four, *Paradise Lost* leaves us not only with a beautiful monument of Early Modern learning but with an inexhaustible smorgasbord of interpretative choices and challenges. Milton's refusal to insult readers by spellbinding or browbeating them into consensus encourages us to raise ourselves into the "fit audience" to which his epic appeals. Milton does not reject one-man rule in his politics only to pursue one-man rule himself in his poetics.

This suggests a poetical persona, or set of personae, characteristically different not just from that of an Orphic enchanter but also from the egotistical authoritarian some critics describe. The censorious schoolmaster popularized by Stanley Fish has lived on too long in other guises such as Rachel Falconer's Orphic Milton who would "render an audience mute and powerless" (44). Nor does the poet quite merit all the adjectives with which his most recent biographers introduce Milton (before devoting just fifteen pages to his great epic): "flawed, self-contradictory, self-serving, arrogant, passionate, ruthless, ambitious, and cunning" (Campbell and Corns 3). If the proof of the pudding is in the eating, then the fact that so many consumers of the verse have found it nourishing supports my argument for Milton's development into a generous and yet rigorous poet of dialogical engagement. His poetry exerted "an enabling and

exciting influence on Romantic writers" in particular, presenting them not so much with an intimidating obstacle (as Harold Bloom suggested) as with a stimulating model for their own creative endeavours (Newlyn ix). Milton's is hardly a kind and gentle voice of unconditional welcome for all other voices. His challenging art and industrious life alike argue that a fit voice, like a just state, has to be earned. Nowadays one must go to school just to grasp some of his starting points. But I hope to have shown that the poems call us to the kind of education that gives us more than enchanting lectures. By demanding so much of us and leaving so much to us, Milton's poetry helps us in so many ways to raise the bar for ourselves.

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