

The Five Senses in Medieval and Early Modern England

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Contents

Acknowledgments	VII
Notes on the Editors	VIII
Notes on the Contributors	X
List of Illustrations	XIV

Introduction 1

Annette Kern-Stähler and Kathrin Scheuchzer

PART 1

Sensing and Understanding

1 Sight and Understanding: Visual Imagery as Metaphor in the Old English

Boethius and Soliloquies 21

Katherine Hindley

2 Coming to Past Senses: Vision, Touch and Their Metaphors in

Anglo-Saxon Language and Culture 36

Javier E. Díaz-Vera

PART 2

Vision and Its Distortion

3 Bleary Eyes: Middle English Constructions of Visual Disabilities 69

Beatrix Busse and Annette Kern-Stähler

4 Exterior Inspection and Regular Reason: Robert Hooke's and Margaret

Cavendish's Epistemologies of the Senses 96

Virginia Richter

5 Hierarchies of Vision in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* 117

Tobias Gabel

PART 3

The Perilous Senses

- 6 **Strange Perceptions: Sensory Experience in the Old English "Marvels of the East"** 137
Dieter Bitterli
- 7 **The Perils of the Flesh: John Wyclif's Preaching on the Five Bodily Senses** 163
Sean A. Otto
- 8 **The Senses and Human Nature in a Political Reading of *Paradise Lost*** 177
Jens Martin Gurr

PART 4

The Multisensual

- 9 **The Multisensoriality of Place and the Chaucerian Multisensual** 199
Richard G. Newhauser
- 10 **'Eate Not, Taste Not, Touch Not'. The Five Senses in John Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*** 219
Kathrin Scheuchzer

PART 5

The Theatre as Sensory Experience

- 11 **Smell in the York Corpus Christi Plays** 239
Rory G. Critten and Annette Kern-Stähler
- 12 **The Sensory Body in Shakespeare's Theatres** 269
Farah Karim-Cooper

Afterword: From Gateways to Channels. Reaching towards an Understanding of the Transformative Plasticity of the Senses in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods 286

Elizabeth Robertson

Index Nominum 297

The Senses and Human Nature in a Political Reading of *Paradise Lost*

Jens Martin Gurr

Milton, so far as I know, is the first to turn to the story of the Fall to explain the failure of a revolution.¹

Introduction

Let us begin with what seems a politically inconspicuous passage on the five senses. Here is Adam, lecturing Eve on reason, fancy and the senses:

But know that in the soul
Are many lesser faculties that serve
Reason as chief; among these fancy next
Her office holds; of all external things,
Which the five watchful senses represent,
She forms imaginations, airy shapes,
Which reason joining or disjoining, frames
All what we affirm or what deny, and call
Our knowledge or opinion [...].²

What we find here is a rather standard early modern understanding of the relationship between reason, fancy and the senses.³ But what is illuminating is the way in which this discussion is metaphorically politicized by means of the body politic analogy: the relations among the inner faculties, as so often in Milton, are rendered in the political terminology of rule, domination and

1 Hill Ch., *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: 1977) 352.

2 Milton John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Fowler A., 2nd ed. (London: 1998) v, 100–108. Further references by book and verse will be to this edition.

3 For this as 'a fairly straightforward account of Aristotelian faculty psychology', cf. Moshenska J., "Transported Touch: The Sense of Feeling in Milton's Eden", *English Literary History* 79, 1 (2012) 1–31, 24, n. 8.

subservience.⁴ This conflation of mental and political hierarchies, this politicization of the senses, I will argue, is central to an understanding of Milton's anthropology and its role in a political reading of *Paradise Lost*. I here follow Walker, who has argued that, '[t]hough there is considerable disagreement amongst historians of political thought over what the republican view of human nature is, there is [...] strong agreement that a view on this issue is a major premise in republican argumentation about politics.'⁵ Walker compares Milton's views to the tradition of republican thought (Aristotle, Cicero, Machiavelli) and adduces a number of the key passages from *Paradise Lost* that I also discuss, but the importance of Milton's anthropological convictions and his image of human nature for a reading of the epic in the light of the English Revolution remains to be established.

While there are by now innumerable readings of Milton's politics in *Paradise Lost* on the one hand and, on the other, a number of recent contributions on the senses in the poem,⁶ the connection between the senses and the politics of *Paradise Lost* has remained largely unexplored. What I hope to do here is to add to the debate about a political reading of *Paradise Lost* by looking at the role of the senses and the assessment of human nature developed in the text.

I will argue that the key to a political reading lies in an anthropological discussion in which Milton breaks loose from the moorings of his earlier optimism and sets out on a probing exploration of the problems at the heart of any liberalism. This exploration will be shown to revolve around the problematic nature of the senses and their relationship to reason. More specifically, I will argue that the senses are politicized by means of the body politic analogy: the internal hierarchies of reason, senses and passions are rendered with remarkable consistency in the *political* terminology of domination and subservience.

4 Cf. also *Paradise Lost* III, 176–177, VII, 546 (Raphael admonishes Adam to 'govern well thy appetite' and to 'take heed lest Passion sway / Thy Judgment to do aught, which else free Will / Would not admit' [VIII, 635–37]), IX, 351–356; for these passages cf. also Walker W., "Human Nature in Republican Tradition and *Paradise Lost*", *Early Modern Literary Studies* 10, 1 (2004) 6.1–44 <<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/10-1/walkmilt.htm>> (accessed May 15, 2013), § 25, who, however, discusses them purely as referring to the human faculties and does not comment on the body politic metaphor or on political implications here.

5 Walker, "Human Nature in Republican Tradition and *Paradise Lost*" § 2; emphasis added.

6 Cf. especially Moshenska, "The Sense of Feeling" and Gabel's essay on Milton's "Hierarchies of Vision" in this volume.

I take my cues from interpretations such as those developed by Christopher Hill and Andrew Milner, who both read *Paradise Lost* (like *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*) as centrally concerned with the sense of utter defeat of the revolutionary cause after the Restoration of 1660.⁷ But what I wish to highlight is the role of Milton's anthropology and particularly his view of the senses and their relationship to reason in such a political reading. I especially concur with Hill's reading on many points; however, though he argues that 'the Revolution had utterly failed [...] because the men were not great enough for the Cause',⁸ I regard Milton's critique of Cromwell in *Paradise Lost* as far more devastating than Hill and, more importantly, I believe that Milton's anthropological views, as they become explicit especially in some of his later prose works and as they are developed in the Adam and Eve relationship, are far more central to a reading of the political subtext of *Paradise Lost* than they are in previous accounts of the poem.

Rather than being an apology for the Revolution, as the classic 'left-wing Satanist' reading maintains, *Paradise Lost* is the account of the failure of a revolution: both in the English Revolution and in Milton's epic, political idealism clashes with anthropological realities. First, however, we briefly need to consider Milton's view of Cromwell and of the revolutionary leaders generally as providing one side of his account.

'One Shall Rise / Of Proud Ambitious Heart': Milton's View of the Revolutionary Leaders

A number of more recent commentators have used both Milton's prose and his oblique but striking allusions in *Paradise Lost* as well as *Paradise Regained* to argue that the poet was far more critical of Cromwell than has been generally acknowledged, especially by previous adherents to a political reading of *Paradise Lost*.⁹ I have already discussed this at some length

7 Cf. Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* and Milner A., *John Milton and the English Revolution: A Study in the Sociology of Literature* (London: 1981); cf. also Hill Ch., *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London: 1984).

8 Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 367.

9 For a representative earlier example, cf. Milner, *John Milton and the English Revolution*, who also reads Milton as uncritically defending Cromwell throughout and thus does not comment on the double logic of Milton's oblique account of the English Revolution. For more balanced assessments of Milton's increasingly critical views of Cromwell,

elsewhere.¹⁰ As an example, let us take a passage from the *History of Britain*, begun in 1647 but not published until 1671. Here we find fairly drastic criticism of the revolutionary leaders who have proven to be 'unfit':

Thus they who of late were extoll'd as our greatest Deliverers, and had the People wholly at their Devotion, by so discharging their Trust as we see, did not only weaken and unfit themselves to be dispensers of what Liberty they pretended, but unfitted also to the People, now grown worse and more disordinate, to receive or to digest any Liberty at all.¹¹

The most astonishing reference to Cromwell, however, is the following passage from the Archangel Michael's account to Adam of the future of mankind in book XII of *Paradise Lost*, a passage which (if it is read politically at all) is commonly taken to refer to Charles I:¹²

[...] one shall rise
Of proud ambitious heart, who not content
With fair equality, fraternal state,

cf. Woolrych A., "Milton & Cromwell: 'A Short but Scandalous Night of Interruption'", in Lieb M. – Shawcross J.T. (eds.), *Achievements of the Left Hand: Essays on the Prose of John Milton* (Amherst: 1974) 185–218, Dzelzainis M., "Milton and the Protectorate of 1658", in Armitage D. – Himy A. – Skinner Q. (eds.), *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge: 1995) 181–205, Norbrook D., *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge 1999) 326–337, and especially Worden's study, Worden B., *Literature and Politics in Cromwell's England: John Milton, Andrew Marvell, Marchamont Nedham* (Oxford: 2007); here, cf. particularly chapters 13 ("Milton and the Protectorate", 289–325), 14 ("Milton and the Good Old Cause", 326–357), 16 ("Milton and the Fall of England", 384–398).

10 For an overview of key readings, cf. my earlier essay, on which my discussion in this essay is based: "When Upstart Passions Catch the Government": Political and Mental Hierarchies in *Paradise Lost*, in Gurr, *The Human Soul as Battleground: Variations on Dualism and the Self in English Literature* (Heidelberg: 2003) 81–103.

11 Milton John, "Mr John Miltons Character of the Long Parliament in 1641", in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D.M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: 1953–1982) vol. 5.1, 439–451, 448 [first printed in 1681 as a digression in Milton's *History of Britain*].

12 Cf. for instance Lewalski B.K., "Paradise Lost and Milton's Politics", in Evans J.M. (ed.), *John Milton: Twentieth-Century Perspectives* (New York – London 2002) vol. 4, 213–240, 228; Loewenstein D., "The Radical Religious Politics of *Paradise Lost*", in Corns Th.S. (ed.), *A Companion to Milton* (Oxford: 2001) 348–361, 357ff.; Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* 463.

Will arrogate dominion undeserved
Over his brethren, and quite dispossess
Concord and law of nature from the earth [...] [F]rom heaven claiming second sovereignty;
And from rebellion shall derive his name,
Though of rebellion others he accuse.¹³

Given Milton's repeated reference to Cromwell's ambition, and given Cromwell's constant invocation of divine authority – worthy of a Stuart monarch –, the implication leads to Cromwell. In addition, the arrogation of dominion over one's 'brethren' is much more resonant when interpreted as a reference to a Puritan republican as ruling over his brethren equals than to a Stuart monarch.

When, despite his overly positive assessment of Milton's view of Cromwell and the Revolution, Hill states that '[b]lame for its failure, in Milton's eyes, rested with its leaders', this is no doubt partly true.¹⁴ But if we take *Paradise Lost* seriously as containing Milton's account of a failed Revolution, it also has another story to tell. A further problem contributing to the failure of the Revolution, I contend, is a much more fundamental anthropological one.

'By Nature Slaves, and Arrant Beasts': The Senses, Licence and Liberty in Milton's View of 'the People' in his Prose Works

The ideal form of government – and the one that would allow for the maximum degree of freedom –, Milton claims in the "Readie and Easie Way to

13 Milton, *Paradise Lost* XII, 24–37; cf. also XII, 64–78.

14 Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 379; cf. also 375ff. and Fowler's annotation on IX, 482–488: 'Eve's fall may additionally typify the tragedy of a people betrayed by its leaders', Milton John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. A. Fowler, 2nd ed. (London: 1998). In one of the best contributions on Milton's republicanism, Dzelzainis similarly argues that "[f]or a committed Republican like Milton [...] the republic collapsed not because republicanism was intrinsically inferior to other forms of government, but because its proponents had failed to keep faith with its guiding principles. [...] It was therefore possible to provide a coherent account of the failure of the republic in republican terms, and it follows from this that Milton [would have regarded] these events as a confirmation [...] of his fundamental convictions", Dzelzainis, "Milton and the Protectorate" 182. For an extremely subtle republican reading, cf. also Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, ch. 10, "Paradise Lost and English Republicanism" (433–495).

Establish a Free Commonwealth", would be a republic 'where no single person, but reason only swaies'.¹⁵ Barbara Kiefer Lewalski summarizes Milton's view on the subject as follows:

Like others in the tradition of Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli, [Milton] believed that kinds of government – monarchy, aristocracy, democracy – must conform to the nature of the people, and that people get the government they deserve and are fit for. [...] [Monarchy] is a debased form of government only suited to a servile, debased people. Properly, government should be shared among the large body of worthy citizens who are virtuous and love liberty [...].¹⁶

This interdependence of the citizens' individual reason and virtue on the one hand and the freedom a nation is capable of attaining and maintaining on the other hand, is indeed fundamental also to *Paradise Lost*.¹⁷ The possibility of freedom, Milton argues in both his prose and his poetry, depends on the ability of the people to be reasonable, to control their senses and restrain their passions: 'Liberty hath a sharp and double edge, fit only to be handled by just and Vertuous Men, to bad and dissolute, it becomes a mischief unweildy [sic] in their own hands'.¹⁸ It seems, however, that as the 1650s wore on, Milton progressively lost faith in the moral and intellectual capabilities of his compatriots. This is what we need to study now, first in the prose works, then in *Paradise Lost*.

In *Eikonoklastes*, his 1649 defence of the regicide, Milton expressed his disgust at the popular reception of the idolatrously royalist *Eikon Basilike*. He here speaks of the people as an 'inconstant, irrational and Image-doting rabble' and 'a credulous and hapless herd [...] enchanted with these popular institutes of Tyranny' and denounces his countrymen as 'by nature slaves, and arrant beasts; not fitt for that liberty which they cri'd out and bellow'd for, but fitter to be led

15 Milton John, "The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth and The Excellence therof Compar'd with the Inconveniencies and Dangers of Readmitting Kingship in this Nation" [2nd ed., April 1660], in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D.M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: 1953–1982) vol. 7, 407–463, 427.

16 Lewalski, "Milton's Politics" 214f.; cf. also 228 *et passim* for the correspondence between inner liberty and political liberty; for the connection between individual and state, cf. also Worden, *Literature and Politics in Cromwell's England* 320f., 392 *et passim*.

17 Cf. for example Milton, *Paradise Lost* VI, 176; IX, 351ff; XII, 83ff.

18 Milton, "Character of the Long Parliament" 448.

back again into thir old servitude, like a sort of clamouring & fighting brutes'.¹⁹ In the "Defence of the People of England" of February 1651, he laments the 'stubborn struggles of the wicked citizens' and complains that kings were able to 'shelter [...] themselves behind the blind superstitions of the mob'.²⁰ In one of the more striking of his vulgophobic outbursts he rails: 'what a miserable, credulous, deluded thing that creature is, which is call'd the Vulgar', to whom he ascribes 'a besotted and degenerate baseness of spirit'.²¹ In the "The Readie and Easie Way", his last fierce and desperate argument against the Restoration during the last chaotic weeks of the Commonwealth, he advocated restricted franchise and an oligarchy to keep the mob in check.²²

Hill rightly argues that '[f]or Milton liberty is licence, tending to anarchy, unless it is tempered by a recognition of God's purposes'.²³ And his belief in the reason of the populace to acknowledge and follow just these 'God's purposes' seems to have been limited to begin with and to have waned entirely as the 1650s wore on. Trubowitz even goes so far as to argue that 'Milton's later writings are marked by a profound contempt for the English people'.²⁴

Let us turn to *Paradise Lost* and a reading of Milton's assessment of the 'licence and liberty problem' and the hierarchy of the faculties.

'For Understanding Ruled Not': The Politics of Edenic Hierarchies

This is not the place to attempt to add to centuries and libraries of discussion about Milton's account of Adam's and Eve's relationship and of the Fall itself. I am only concerned here with Milton's discussion of the proper relationship of the faculties, particularly of the senses and passions as opposed to reason, insofar as that is relevant to a political reading.

In the very first view we get of Adam and Eve in book IV, there seems to be a distinction in the attribution of the faculties of mind and body to Adam and Eve respectively:

19 Milton John, "Eikonoklastes: In Answer to a Book Intitl'd Eikon Basilike, The Portrature of his Sacred Majesty in his Solitudes and Sufferings", in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D.M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: 1953–1982) vol. 3, 337–601; 601, 581.

20 Milton John, "A Defence of the People of England in Answer to Salmasius's Defence of the King", in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D.M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: 1953–1982) vol. 4.1, 301–537; 316f., 521f.

21 Milton, "Eikonoklastes" 426, 344.

22 Milton, "Readie and Easie Way" 458ff.

23 Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 267.

24 Trubowitz R.J., "Body Politics in *Paradise Lost*", *PMLA* 121, 2 (2006) 388–404, 390.

For contemplation he and valor formed,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace,
He for God only, she for God in him.²⁵

This distinction is confirmed by Eve in her account of her first encounter with Adam just after her creation and after she has seen her own reflection in the pond. She too affirms the superiority of 'wisdom' over 'beauty':

I yielded, and from that time see
How beauty is excelled by manly grace
And wisdom, which alone is truly fair.²⁶

Though this seemingly simple and traditional conception of gender hierarchies, to be sure, is complicated and undermined in numerous ways,²⁷ Eve here affirms what is discursively explicit throughout much of *Paradise Lost*, namely male superiority through superior intellect. But although Adam tells Raphael

For well I understand in the prime end
Of Nature her th'inferior, in the mind
And inward faculties [...],²⁸

he is not able to maintain his superiority in the face of 'her loveliness'.²⁹ Passion interferes and subjects 'all higher knowledge' to its rule.³⁰ This is again made plain in the Archangel Raphael's admonitions not to confuse 'love' with 'subjection' in moments of passionate 'transports':

For what admir'st thou so, what transports thee so,
An outside? Fair no doubt, and worthy well
Thy cherishing, thy honouring and thy love,
Not thy subjection [...].³¹

25 Milton, *Paradise Lost* IV, 297–299.

26 Milton, *Paradise Lost* IV, 489ff.

27 For a detailed discussion, cf. Wittreich J.A., *Feminist Milton* (Ithaca: 1987); for a brief but insightful discussion, cf. Lewalski "Milton's Politics" 232–234; cf. also Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic* 480–484.

28 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 540ff.

29 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 547.

30 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 551.

31 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 567–570.

Raphael exhorts him not to allow sexuality – shared by 'cattle and each beast' – to 'subdue' his soul; sexuality is here tellingly referred to as the 'sense of touch':

But if the sense of touch whereby mankind
Is propagated seem such dear delight
Beyond all other, think the same vouchsafed
To cattle and each beast, which would not be
To them made common and divulged, if aught
Therein enjoyed were worthy to subdue
The soul of man, and passion in him move.³²

Commenting on Adam's preoccupation with touch and its impact on gender hierarchies, Rogers incisively argues that 'touch is that sensation that compels Adam to forget the divine marriage commandment, the arbitrary decree by which he was appointed Eve's superior'.³³ Deploying the classic Platonic and Neoplatonic image of the *gradatio amoris*, God's messenger then again draws the sharp distinction between laudable 'love' as associated with 'reason' and contemptible 'passion' as associated with the senses and the body, and holds out the prospect of an ascension to an angelic state of 'heavenly love' as opposed to a debasing state of being 'sunk in carnal pleasure':

In loving thou dost well, in Passion not,
Wherein true love consists not; love refines
The thoughts, and heart enlarges, hath his seat
In reason, and is judicious, is the scale
By which to heavenly love thou mayst ascend,
Not sunk in carnal pleasure [...].³⁴

In a 2012 article in *ELH* Moshenska perceptively comments on this passage by taking his cue from Barbara Lewalski, who has pointed out the role of Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* as a source here. Ficino consistently refers

32 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 579–585.

33 Rogers J., "Transported Touch: The Fruit of Marriage in *Paradise Lost*", in Martin C.G. (ed.), *Milton and Gender* (Cambridge: 2004) 115–132, 128. I owe this reference to Moshenska, "The Sense of Feeling" 25.

34 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 588ff.

to touch as the most problematic sense.³⁵ Here Moshenska's observation is highly significant:

The fact that Adam's touching of Eve proceeds directly from sight – 'transported I behold / Transported touch' – is also perturbing on Ficinian terms: beholding is supposed to lead upward, to rational contemplation. In the sixth speech of Ficino's *Commentary*, Tomasso Benci claims that 'every love begins with sight. But the love of the contemplative man ascends from sight to intellect. That of the voluptuous man descends from sight to touch' (Ficino 119).³⁶

Moshenska persuasively, I think, argues that Milton infinitely complicates the assessment and evaluation of 'touch' – neither is it predominantly sexual nor is sex imagined to be excluded at all: 'Sexual touch is included without being either effaced or over-emphasized: like other acts of touch, it simply takes its place within the thousand decencies of shared Edenic life without being granted special precedence.'³⁷ Given this insight, it is hard to see why Moshenska then sees a contradiction in Raphael's account: 'Even though Raphael has already stated that the angels share in all of the human senses, it seems almost incomprehensible, after he has so sternly objected to human touch, that angels could partake in it at all.'³⁸ The point, however, is not that Raphael admonishes Adam not to have sex! It is important to note that this is no simple dismissal of the sense of touch as inherently 'base' or 'primitive'; in the logic of the epic, there is nothing *per se* problematic in the senses and their use, even their enjoyment: angels as well as humans 'both contain / Within them every lower faculty / Of sense, whereby they hear, see, smell, touch, taste'.³⁹ Moreover, as the discussion of angelic love-life in book VIII makes clear,⁴⁰ sex itself is perfectly innocent if balanced by intellectual pursuits. Thus, there is nothing wrong with the sense of touch in itself (or with sexual pleasure, even in prelapsarian Eden⁴¹); touch only becomes problematic when the senses overpower reason.

35 Cf. Lewalski B.K., *Paradise Lost and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms* (Princeton: 1985) 214–215 and Moshenska, "The Sense of Feeling" 5.

36 Moshenska. "The Sense of Feeling" 25, n. 17.

37 Moshenska. "The Sense of Feeling" 19.

38 Moshenska. "The Sense of Feeling" 7.

39 Milton, *Paradise Lost* v, 409–411. For a detailed discussion of the distinction between the angelic and the human sense of vision (both physical sight and spiritual insight), cf. Gabel's essay in this volume.

40 Milton, *Paradise Lost* VIII, 618–629.

41 Moshenska, "The Sense of Feeling" 6.

Given the centrality of reason to liberty in Milton's politics *and* theology, it is surprising, I believe, that Moshenska, like many other critics commenting on Milton's discussion of the senses, does not comment on the political implications of these anthropological discussions. Curiosity, passion, envy, hate: according to Milton in *De Doctrina Christiana* as well as in *Paradise Lost*, all factors in the Fall of Satan as well as Adam and Eve are sinful in that they are departures from reason.⁴² As far as the anthropological implications of the Fall are concerned, Christopher Ricks has argued that Milton sought to dissolve the 'dichotomy between body and spirit'.⁴³ However, I have been arguing that Milton very firmly upholds the dichotomy: he merely dissolves the clear attribution of body to Eve and spirit to Adam. But although *Paradise Lost* undermines a one-to-one correspondence of Adam with reason and Eve with body, Milton's frequent stress on her beauty and his capacity for contemplation at least echo the traditional allegorical readings of the Fall, as A.B. Chambers has shown in an overview of Milton's sources and his reliance mainly on the reading of St Augustine.⁴⁴ One such allegorical reading was known to him in the form of Thomas Aquinas's summary of St Augustine, a reading ultimately going back to Philo Judaeus:

In every sin we discover the same order as in the first temptation. For, according to Augustine, the temptation begins with concupiscence of sin by the sensuality, signified by the serpent; reaches to the lower reason by pleasure, signified by the woman; and extends to the higher reason by consent to the sin, signified by the man.⁴⁵

However, whether it is passion, pity, or uxoriousness that causes Adam's Fall (as commentators in the considerable critical debate over the question have variously maintained), Diekhoff rightly remarks that the dialogue with Raphael foreshadows Adam's Fall and its cause: an insufficient use of reason to which the senses and the passions they induce are not suitably subjected.⁴⁶ Raphael's

42 Cf. book I, chapter XI of *De Doctrina Christiana*.

43 Ricks Ch., "Introduction", in Milton John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Ch. Ricks (New York: 1968) xvii.

44 Cf. Chambers A.B. "The Falls of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*", in Kranidas Th. (ed.), *New Essays on Paradise Lost* (Berkeley: 1969) 118–130.

45 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 165, A. 2, quoted and translated in Chambers, "The Falls of Adam and Eve" 128; Chambers also refers to Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XII, 12–13, and Philo Judaeus, *De opificio mundi*; cf. Chambers, 128.

46 Diekhoff J.S., *Milton's Paradise Lost: A Commentary on the Argument* (New York: 1946) 64ff.

earlier admonitions are then closely echoed in the Son's reproaches to Adam after the Fall:

Was she thy God, that her thou didst obey
 Before his voice, or was she made thy guide,
 Superior, or but equal, that to her
 Thou didst resign thy manhood and the place
 Wherein God set thee above her [...]
 [...] whose perfection far excelled
 Hers in all real dignity? Adorned
 She was indeed, and lovely to attract
 Thy love, not thy subjection, and her gifts
 Were such as under government well seemed,
 Unseemly to bear rule, which was thy part
 And person hadst thou known thyself aright.⁴⁷

In the post-lapsarian state of Adam and Eve, the subjection of passion and the senses to reason is yet once more brought home as having been the central sin and fault. The inversion of the classic Platonic hierarchy of the faculties is here again tellingly depicted in a blend of political and psychological terms:

For understanding ruled not, and the will
 Heard not her lore, both in subjection now
 To sensual appetite, who from beneath
 Usurping over sovereign reason claimed
 Superior sway.⁴⁸

Conclusion: The Senses, 'the People' and the Politics of Paradise Lost

The anthropology developed in the relationship of Adam and Eve, I would argue, can be read as an expression of Milton's exasperation at the lack of reason and understanding in the populace. The course of the Revolution, it seems, led Milton to shed much of his earlier faith in reason – or more precisely, in the capacity of the majority of his countrymen to use theirs.

47 Milton, *Paradise Lost* x, 145–156.

48 Milton, *Paradise Lost* ix, 1127–1131.

While it may well be true that Milton's hope in the 1640s for a divinely inspired purgation of England by a revolution that would initiate a rule of the saints did not lead him to believe with Hobbes that a revolution must necessarily result in anarchy and the loss of freedom,⁴⁹ the anthropology implicit in the Adam and Eve relationship and explicit in the passages from his later prose works discussed above show that this is precisely what he did believe later on. This, *Paradise Lost* implies, lay at the heart of the failed Revolution: Milton's anthropological realism is at odds with his political idealism. 'Blame for failure lies not in the aims – which were God's, and remain right – but in the English people [...]. Political failure was ultimately moral failure.'⁵⁰

What becomes evident in *Paradise Lost* is not so much just a partisan's disappointment in the collapse of the English Revolution, but a more fundamental insight into the ambitious and unreasonable side of human nature, much as that may have been the cause of Cromwell's disappointment of expectations and of the inability of his countrymen to handle the 'sharp and double edge' of 'Liberty'.⁵¹

Milton's judgement on the failure of the Revolution in terms of the 'avarice' and 'ambition' of political leaders is to be seen in his assessment of Cromwell: explicitly, if in diplomatically subdued form, in his earlier poetry and prose; implicitly, but even more forcefully, in *Paradise Lost* (and *Paradise Regained*, for that matter). Anthropologically and with reference to his general understanding of man's rational and moral capabilities, the failure of the Revolution is dramatized in Adam and Eve, the people. The following passage, which Milner calls 'almost certainly one of the most important in the poem',⁵² uses the analogy of the body and the state to blend subtly the political and anthropological judgements on the 'upstart passions' usurping the government from 'reason', resulting in the loss of freedom:

Since thy original lapse, true liberty
 Is lost, which always with right reason dwells
 Twinned, and from her hath no dividual being;
 Reason in man obscured, or not obeyed,
 Immediately inordinate desires
 And upstart passions catch the government

49 Cf. Dyson A.E. – Lovelock J., "Introduction", in Dyson A.E. – Lovelock J. (eds.), *Paradise Lost: A Selection of Critical Essays*, 6th ed. (Basingstoke – London: 1986) 11–24, 11.

50 Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 350.

51 Milton, "Character of the Long Parliament" 448. Cf. above.

52 Milner, *John Milton and the English Revolution* 163.

From reason, and to servitude reduce
 Man till then free. Therefore since he permits
 Within himself unworthy powers to reign
 Over free reason, God, in judgement just,
 Subjects him from without to violent lords;
 Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
 His outward freedom: tyranny must be,
 Though to the tyrant thereby no excuse.
 Yet sometimes nations will decline so low
 From virtue, which is reason, that no wrong,
 But justice, and some fatal curse annexed
 Deprives them of their outward liberty,
 Their inward lost [...].⁵³

Milner reads this passage as follows:

the responsibility for the Restoration rests neither with the Stuarts nor with those Independents who had failed to provide adequate political guarantees against the possibility of a Restoration, but rather with that English nation which had declined so low from virtue that it no longer deserved any fate other than that of tyranny.⁵⁴

Moreover, the passage closely corresponds to one in the "Second Defence of the English People" of 1654 highlighting a nation's ability to 'rule and govern itself' rather than giving in to 'its own lusts', a precondition for any form of political liberty: 'By the customary judgement and, so to speak, just retaliation of God, it happens that a nation which cannot rule and govern itself, but has delivered itself into slavery to its own lusts, is enslaved also to other masters whom it does not choose'.⁵⁵

53 Milton, *Paradise Lost* XII, 83–101.

54 Milner, *John Milton and the English Revolution* 164; cf. also Lewalski, "Milton's Politics" 228, who argues that this passage 'accounts for the Stuart Restoration and for absolute monarchy wherever it exists: inner servility leads to deprivation of outward freedom [...] political liberty depends on inner liberty, which is the product of reason and virtue' (228); cf. also Hill's brief if insightful comments, Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 382f.

55 Milton John, "A Second Defence of the English People Against the Base Anonymous Libel, Entitled The Cry of the Royal Blood to Heaven against the English Parricides" [1654], in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. D.M. Wolfe et al., 8 vols. (New Haven: 1966) vol. 4.2, 548–686, 684. This passage is also cited by Lewalski in "Milton's Politics" 215, who does not, however, emphasize Milton's increasing pessimism about the people's ability

The fundamental problem of liberty as staged in *Paradise Lost*, then, is the problem of 'licence' and 'liberty', or the inability of the masses responsibly to use their freedom and to subdue their senses and their passions by means of reason. The dialectic of licence and liberty in Milton's social thought finds one of its earliest and most memorable expressions in Sonnet XII (1645/46), in which Milton responds to the attacks against his liberal divorce pamphlets of 1643–45. Here he complains about the

[...] hogs,

That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,
 And still revolt when truth would set them free.
 License they mean when they cry liberty;
 For who loves that must first be wise and good [...].⁵⁶

Only the 'wise' and the 'good', Milton here maintains, can justly claim liberty – conversely, the argument implicitly but unmistakably continues, the unruly mob has no right to liberty.

In the *History of Britain* Milton similarly argues:

liberty hath a sharp and double edge, fit only to be handled by just and virtuous men; to bad and dissolute, it becomes a mischief unwieldy in their own hands: neither is it completely given, but by them who have the happy skill to know what is grievance and unjust to a people, and how to remove it wisely; what good laws are wanting, and how to frame them substantially, that good men may enjoy the freedom which they merit, and the bad the curb which they need.⁵⁷

Milton's understanding of the necessarily different degrees of freedom permissible to different sets of people is virtually indistinguishable from the arguments Edmund Burke advanced over a hundred years later in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* and the "Letter to a Member of the National Assembly of France", which can be seen as a summary of Burke's anthropology and the necessity for restrictions of freedom he derives from it:

to restrain themselves but rather his continuing efforts to 'prod, goad, and educate his countrymen' (214).

56 Milton John, "Sonnet XII", in Milton, *Poetical Works*, ed. D. Bush, 13th ed. (Oxford: 1992) 173, lines 8–12.

57 Milton, "Character of the Long Parliament" 448.

Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites [...]. Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.⁵⁸

Unlikely allies that Burke and Milton seem to be, Milton, we may argue, would have fully subscribed to this view of the connection between people's ability to control their senses and rein in their passions on the one hand and the amount of freedom they merit on the other. What connects Milton to Burke, then, is the conflation of political and mental hierarchies: it is precisely in their inability to control the senses and the passions by subjecting them to reason that, according to this view, the majority of people reveal their inability to handle freedom. For Burke, this is the justification for a conservative ideology that does not trust people's reason: 'We are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small.'⁵⁹ For Milton, this failure exemplified in Adam and Eve and their Fall explains the failure of the people in the English Revolution and thus the failure of the 'Good Old Cause'. Behind both Milton's and Burke's conceptions, of course, there lurks a far older tradition: their consistent conflation of political and psycho-physical hierarchies as well as the notion that the subordination of the senses to reason by analogy implies and calls for the subordination of the unreasonable herd of society to the wise and the good is indebted to a long tradition of thought in terms of the body politic that goes back at least to Plato's *Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Timaeus*.⁶⁰

To be sure, the reading experience of *Paradise Lost* in places appears to work against the arguments the text makes on a more discursive level: there

58 Burke E., "Letter to a Member of the National Assembly of France", in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, 8 vols. (London, Thomas M'Lean: 1823) vol. 6, 1–68, 64. Cf. Gassenmeier M. – Gurr J.M., "Burke's Conservatism and its Echoes on the Continent and in the United States", in Sondrup S.P. – Nemoianu V. in collaboration with Gillespie G. (eds.), *Nonfictional Romantic Prose: Expanding Borders* (Amsterdam – Philadelphia: 2004) 117–139.

59 Burke E., *Reflections on the Revolution in France and on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to That Event*, ed. C.C. O'Brien (Harmondsworth: 1986) 183.

60 For a discussion of the classical and medieval tradition behind such thought, cf. Gurr J.M., "From Plato to Chaucer, from Scripture to Fabliaux: Classical and Medieval Intertexts on Dualism and the Self", in Gurr J.M., *The Human Soul as Battleground: Variations on Dualism and the Self in English Literature* (Heidelberg: 2003) 21–43.

is surely an effect that might be called 'redemption through poetry', for instance as far as Eve is concerned, where the poetry goes against the grain of doctrine.⁶¹ Discursively and as far as the dominant impression is concerned, however, *Paradise Lost*, it seems, develops an essentially pessimistic anthropology: Adam and Eve – and who are they but 'the people' in Eden – are unable responsibly to use their senses and to control the passions by means of reason. The consistent conflation of mental and political hierarchies then serves to establish a connection between a hierarchy of the senses and political systems, with republicanism requiring an ability to control the senses. If, as I think we must, we read *Paradise Lost* politically as a coded account of the failure of the English Revolution, then Milton's views on the failure of 'the people' during the English Revolution, their inability to handle liberty and subject their senses to the control of reason is staged in the account of the Fall of Adam and Eve and their inability to do the same.⁶²

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61 For this contrast in the relationship of Adam and Eve, cf. Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* 128f., 376f.

62 This essay draws on my earlier attempt at coming to terms with the conflation of the inner faculties with political hierarchies in *Paradise Lost*; cf. Gurr, "Political and Mental Hierarchies in *Paradise Lost*".

- Gassenmeier M. – Gurr J.M., “Burke’s Conservatism and its Echoes on the Continent and in the United States”, in Sondrup S.P. – Nemoianu V. in collaboration with Gillespie G. (eds.), *Nonfictional Romantic Prose: Expanding Borders* (Amsterdam – Philadelphia: 2004) 117–139.
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