UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DE SANTA CATARINA
CENTRO DE COMUNICAÇÃO E EXPRESSÃO
PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM INGLÊS: ESTUDOS LINGUÍSTICOS E LITERÁRIOS

Andrey Felipe Martins

The Legacy of Miltonic Divorce:
Uniting and Putting Asunder in Milton, Blake and Yeats

Florianópolis
2023

Andrey Felipe Martins

The Legacy of Miltonic Divorce:
Uniting and Putting Asunder in Milton, Blake and Yeats

Tese submetida ao Programa de Pós-graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários da Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina para a obtenção do título de doutor em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários.

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Maria Rita Drumond Viana
Coorientador: Prof. Dr. James Grantham Turner

Florianópolis

2023

Ficha de identificação da obra elaborada pelo autor,
através do Programa de Geração Automática da Biblioteca Universitária da UFSC.

Martins, Andrey Felipe
The Legacy of Miltonic Divorce : Uniting and Putting Asunder in Milton, Blake and Yeats / Andrey Felipe Martins ; orientador, Maria Rita Drumond Viana, coorientador, James Grantham Turner, 2023.
225 p.

Tese (doutorado) - Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Centro de Comunicação e Expressão, Programa de Pós Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários, Florianópolis, 2023.

Inclui referências.

1. Inglês. 2. Divorce. 3. Sexuality. 4. Milton studies. 5. Irish studies. I. Viana, Maria Rita Drumond. II. Turner, James Grantham. III. Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina. Programa de Pós-Graduação em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários. IV. Título.

Andrey Felipe Martins

The Legacy of Miltonic Divorce:
Uniting and Putting Asunder in Milton, Blake and Yeats

O presente trabalho em nível de doutorado foi avaliado e aprovado, em 10/08/2023, por banca examinadora composta pelos seguintes membros:

Profa. Maria Rita Drumond Viana, Dra.
Instituição: Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto (UFOP)

Prof. James Grantham Turner, Dr.
Instituição: University of California, Berkeley

Prof. Christopher Kendrick, Dr.
Instituição: Loyola University Chicago

Profa. Beatriz Kopschitz Bastos, Dra.
Instituição: Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC)

Profa. Margaret Mills Harper, Dra.
Instituição: University of Limerick

Profa. Juliana Steil, Dra.
Instituição: Universidade Federal de Pelotas (UFPel)

Profa. Renata Lucena Dalmaso, Dra. (suplente)
Instituição: Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (UFSC)

Certificamos que esta é a **versão original e final** do trabalho de conclusão que foi julgado adequado para obtenção do título de doutor em Inglês: Estudos Linguísticos e Literários.

ICP-Edu
Documento assinado digitalmente
Lincoln Paulo Fernandes
Data: 07/11/2023 16:13:14-0300
CPF: ***.832.529-**
Verifique as assinaturas em https://v.ufsc.br

Coordenação do Programa de Pós-Graduação: Prof. Dr. Lincoln Paulo Fernandes

ICP-Edu
Documento assinado digitalmente
Maria Rita Drumond Viana
Data: 06/11/2023 15:45:25-0300
CPF: ***.782.036-**
Verifique as assinaturas em https://v.ufsc.br

Profa. Maria Rita Drumond Viana, Dra. (Orientadora)

Florianópolis, 2023

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes first to acknowledge his gratitude to CAPES (Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education) for funding this research and to express my debt to Dr. James Grantham Turner, who kindly received me at the University of California, Berkeley during 2021-2022. The final product of this dissertation would not exist without a network of people that made possible the most privileged experience a doctoral candidate can have. The director of this work, Dr. Maria Rita Drumond Viana, has employed all her means to put me in dialogue with distinguished scholars in her area of expertise. In 2019, I was awarded a scholarship to attend the Yeats Summer School in Sligo, Ireland where, among other activities, I took an introductory course to *A Vision* with Dr. Margaret Mills Harper. I owe my sincere gratitude to Susan O'Keeffe, Matthew Campbell, and the old librarian at the Yeats Building. Dr. Beatriz Kopschtiz Bastos has taken a close interest in the development of my academic life, being invaluable for the activities of the NEI group at UFSC, and I'm thankful for her encouragement. In the US, I was lucky enough to benefit from the friendship of Catherine MacGillivray, whom I had met previously in Brazil as a Fulbrighter and who is responsible for my interest in French feminism. Her influence can be felt throughout this dissertation. I also want to thank Dr. Christopher Kendrick, who perused an early version of my manuscript, and whose elegant blending of Milton and theory remains an example to me. I am also indebted to my family, particularly my sister Maria Paula, and to the friends who supported me in this long journey: Jean Silva, Anaís Magalhães, Eric Chen, William Wanderlinde, Marília Dantas, and Malea Martin. To Marcelo Martinez, I owe some of the best conversations I had during these five years. Finally, I would like to thank the people who have involuntarily helped me, although they don't know me, such as Samuel McCormick, for his clear and accessible videos on Lacanian psychoanalysis, and John Rogers. Without his Yale lectures, I would not have been interpellated by Milton studies ten years ago.

> The unconscious is the infinite universe's grip on the speaking being's thought, but as such it can only be sexual; sexuality is the infinite universe's grip on the speaking being's body, but as such it can only be unconscious. This gets us back to modern science.
> (MILNER, 2021, p. 45)

RESUMO

Durante o seu mandato como senador do Estado Livre Irlandês (1922-1927), W.B. Yeats se envolveu num debate em torno do divórcio, opondo-se à imprensa católica. Argumentando que o divórcio era um direito ganho pelos esforços dos cidadãos da ascendência anglo-irlandesa, então em declínio, o poeta laureado apresentou, para a surpresa dos membros do Dáil, uma defesa do tema em 1925 baseada na prosa de John Milton. Durante sua vida, o poeta setecentista havia, de fato, ganho a fama de "divorceador" devido a quatro tratados que escrevera a respeito do tema em meados da primeira guerra civil inglesa. Em *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, *The Jugdment of Martin Bucer*, *Tetrachordon* e *Colasterion*, Milton defende a dissolução do matrimônio no caso de falhar em criar o ideal cujas principais balizas doutrinais refinaria ao longo de três anos (1643-45). A campanha do divórcio se tornou tão importante para a sua carreira que Milton viria a compor uma das versões mais definitivas da história de Adão e Eva em *O Paraíso Perdido* (1667). Particularmente sensível para como a instituição do casamento serviu durante a história para suturar com idealizações imaginárias o empecilho fundamental aos laços amorosos que a psicanálise expressa sob a máxima "não há relação sexual", o encontro contigente entre os dois poetas no senado irlandês é o ponto de partida desta tese para examinar as ideologias que formam as representações de casamento e divórcio na obra de Milton, William Blake e Yeats.

Palavras-chave: divórcio; sexualidade; John Milton; estudos irlandeses; Romantismo.

ABSTRACT

During his term as a senator of the Irish Free State (1922-1927), W.B. Yeats became enmeshed in a controversy with the Catholic press concerning divorce. Claiming that divorce was a right gained by the efforts of men of the then-declining Anglo-Irish Ascendency, the poet laureate surprised the members of the Dáil by basing his 1925 defense on the prose works of John Milton. A notorious public man, the seventeenth-century poet had himself been known in his lifetime as the "divorcer" because of four treatises written during the First English Civil War. In *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, *The Judgment of Martin Bucer*, *Tetrachordon* and *Colasterion*, he had defended the dissolution of marriage on the grounds of its failure to create a companionate ideal, whose main doctrinal guidelines were refined in the time span of three years (1643-45). The divorce campaign became, indeed, so pivotal for his career that Milton would compose one of the most successful and enduring renderings of the story of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* (1667). Particularly attuned to how the institution of marriage has throughout history sutured with imaginary idealizations the fundamental imbalance of amorous liaisons that psychoanalysis expresses with the maxim "there is no such thing as sexual relationship," the contingent encounter between the two poets in the Irish Dáil is the point of departure of this thesis to undertake an examination of the ideologies informing the representation of marriage and divorce in the works of Milton, William Blake and Yeats.

Keywords: divorce; sexuality; Milton studies; Irish studies, Romanticism.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

CP I	*Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume I, 1624-1642.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.
CP II	*Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume II, 1643-1648***.** New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.
CP IV.I	*Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume IV - Part I, 1650-1655*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.
CP VI	*Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume VI - ca.1658-ca.1660*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973.
CP VIII	*Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume VIII - 1666-1682*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.
E	*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake.* Edited by David V. Erdman. New York: Random House, Inc., 1988.
MHH	*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Blake Archive)
M	*Milton* (Blake Archive)
CW I	*The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume I, The Poems*. New York: Scribner, 1997.
CW III	*The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume III, Autobiographies***.** New York: Scribner, 1997.
CW V	*The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume V, Later Essays.* New York: Scribner, 1994.
CW VIII	*The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume VIII, The Irish Dramatic Movement.* New York: Scribner, 2003.
CW X	*The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume X, Later Articles and Reviews.* New York: Scribner, 2010.

CW XIV *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume XIV: A Vision, the Revised 1937 Edition***.** New York: Scriber, 2015.

1. INTRODUCTION: ONE FLESH

"That there was a neerer alliance between *Adam* and *Eve*, then could be ever after between man and wife, is visible to any. For no other woman was ever moulded out of her husbands rib, but of meer strangers for the most part they com to have that consanguinity which they have by wedlock" (*CP* II, p. 601), writes John Milton in his 1645 treatise *Tetrachordon*. According to his argument in the divorce tracts, human dignity and freedom, often obfuscated by rigid laws, should shine in the "prime institution of Matrimony." In medieval times, marriage had been conceived as indissoluble, separations being a rare exception, and it was only with Protestantism that the scriptural statements about fornication and adultery began to animate defenses of divorce. Guided by his own enlightened turn of mind, Milton debunked the priority historically assigned to procreation or the "lawfulness of the marriage bed" (*CP* II, p. 592). He offered instead a view on the traditional concept of one flesh whereby the failure to embody the "divine image" was reason enough to dissolve a union. God "ordain'd it [the ordinance of marriage] in love and helpfulness to be indissoluble, and we in outward act and formality to be a forc'd bondage" (*CP* II, p. 594-95). Milton's divorce tracts provide a privileged treatment of a question that has occupied couples for centuries and touches on the kernel of the discontent that troubles married life. Since wives are not fashioned out of their husbands and marriage is not natural or ordained by God, being more a fiction or assemblage, what is the truth of this fiction? The question raised by Milton concerning the genuine ends of matrimony remains relevant. From Plato to Jacques Lacan, Eros has been elected as the central experience of the rational and, later, linguistic animal. As the psychoanalyst comments in one session of his famous seminar on feminine sexuality: "'We are but one.' Everyone knows, of course, that two have never become but one, but nevertheless 'we are but one.' The idea of love begins with that. It is truly the crudest way of providing the sexual relationship" (1999, p. 47).

This research is concerned with the legacy of Miltonic marriage and divorce, particularly in the handling of Edenic marriage by William Blake and in W.B. Yeats's Milton-

inspired defense of divorce in the early Irish Free State. The primary aim of that approximation is not to establish a causal and hierarchical relationship between the three. Rather, it aims to unfold the interplay and overlapping of some central motifs shared by them, with the consciousness that the inflection and particularity of each version are provided by the historical and cultural context to which each of the poets belonged. The occasion for gathering in the same study authors otherwise divided by relatively long temporal gaps is the conviction that the continuity between them sheds light on the transformations of literary tradition as well as provide rich examples of the ideologies informing the representation of marriage. The significance of marriage for these authors is approached specifically from what they have to say about the constitutive incompleteness of the being of husband and wife that psychoanalysis explores under the thesis "there is no such thing as sexual rapport" (*il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel*). Such an aphorism is copiously substantiated by the conflicts that, historically, afflict married couples and that we find at the root of the very invention of psychoanalysis, a practice attentive to the disharmony of conjugal relations and how they are manifested in the obstacles to speech. Such a theoretical corpus is privileged here because, we believe, it is liable to open new paths in research into the field of sexuality, which has been exhaustively prominent in the humanities in the last decades.

In the seminars of the late 1960s and early 1970s, from XVIII, through XIXA/XIXB to the famous XX (*Encore*), Lacan is intent on giving the Freudian discovery of the nexus between sexuality and the unconscious structured like a language such a novel treatment that, from it, emerges the seeds of a revolutionary understanding of the interplay between sexuality, discourse, logic, and truth. Although constructed out of a scathing critique of the hegemony of metaphysics, and particularly Aristotle, with its election of a first principle, Lacan's thinking does not abandon the structural necessity of the place of truth (often taken by God). However, he finds behind the univocity of philosophy an enjoyment that leads him to posit that "sexuation," the alienation in the signifier, and the gaps or empty places that it opens in speech reveal the complicity between the possibility of logical thought and the impossibility of representing sex in the human species. As the Italian philosopher Lorenzo Chiesa writes:

> "There is no sexual relationship" stands for the limit of logic, and that logic is structurally coextensive with this limit, sustains itself through it. The truth of phallic incompleteness lying at the core of *Homo sapiens*' transcendental structure equates with the incompleteness of our logical thought as a species-specific linguistic trait capable of founding knowledge. Reciprocally, logic's ability to fully justify itself

> formally by, in the end, also accounting for sex as a rapport would totalize language and lead to its demise. (2016, p. 81).

Certainly, psychoanalytic efforts consist in showing how traditional metaphysics mystified the incompleteness of its hypothesis by reproducing a fusional discourse that, on the ideological field, often meant the subordination and silence of women. Although psychoanalysis avoids the reification of difference by conceiving its reciprocity in the constitution of the One, it nonetheless points out how the *heteros* of woman is precisely what has been repressed. As Thomas W. Laqueur points out in *Making Sex* (1992), the attention to a specific modality of female enjoyment is a relatively recent phenomenon (dated to the eighteenth century). Psychoanalysis, in that sense, only tries to formalize the aporias to which thought falls when it attempts to think woman beyond the philosophical premises that have enshrined man as the model of the species, which continue to inform surreptitiously how we think of sex and in the name of equality (which is politically desirable) often eclipses sexual difference. In her character as *heteros*, a woman cannot be fully counted, otherwise, she would be one like a man. Traditional ideology nonetheless needs her to be derived from man so that reproduction can run smoothly. As Guy Le Gaufey writes, reading Genesis: "it is necessary therefore for them to constitute only a single species, and hardly are they two, then they fold back into a single flesh which is better understood if it is said in advance, as is the case of this very brief text, that the one is 'flesh of the flesh' of the other" (2020, p. 2).

Although their treatment of the theme is marked by the contours of their philosophies, the three authors analyzed in this research are attuned to the reciprocity between knowledge and sexuality in its (quasi-)ontological dimension. That each of them was in their way religious or at least interested in what, as I show in the next section, will become the philosophical problem of God as the extra-linguistic guarantee of the truth of discourse is relevant for the present inquiry: to say that there is no sexual rapport, other of the Other and such figures of the failure of the totalization of language is to claim that God does not exist, although even as we deny such an existence, we are obliged to use words that try to convey a part of truth and create a semblance of the One – a testament to the inherent deception and alienation that comes with the entrance into language. Ultimately, as medieval authors well knew, the problem of the incorporation into one flesh has a strange resemblance to the mediatory role of the Word: "the medieval theologians did not to be sure lack the means since the divine and the human, this irreducible duality, were found united in Christ, the one whose double nature in no way

damages unity" (LE GAUFEY, 2020, p. 3). Moreover, the issue of the relation of matter and form, body and soul, letter and spirit, onto which traditional thought gives sexual values (masculine as active, feminine as passive, etc.) will prove of crucial importance to their handling of sexuality.

1.1. The fortune of the story of the fall

The myth of the garden of Eden has been ubiquitous in our culture, not least because it articulates civilization's discontents. As the elusive meaning of the modest biblical account of the first couple pressed for an answer in the imagination of its readers, the short narrative exuded a mysterious aura that only fetishes usually radiate, the issue of the incorporation into one flesh being as fascinating as the sublimation of gold. Generations of interpreters devoted their time to minutely reconstitute the full picture of that lost state because, despite the strictures of church discipline, it provided a screen where humanity could dream of a home. The fortunes of a whole civilization became inextricably linked, like the elm and the ivy, to a folkloric tale from the tenth century BCE, the very simplicity of which might account for its enduring uncanniness.

The main question has always been about the criteria for the assemblage of the human species. If sixteenth-century anatomy tried to substantiate the thesis of only one existing sex through the isomorphism of male and female genitalia, the notion that the human body was a microcosm of the universe intimates the metaphysical scope of the concept of sex. Even to this day, while the discarded image of that universe has certainly dwindled, the human must organize its body in pieces before the mirror around a center; it is the identification with that ideal external image that provides the epistemic conditions whereby an ego perceives objects. Yet, as a signifier and later a function, the phallus in relation to which humans position themselves within the genus, furnishing their individual unity as well as sense of belonging, is not to be conceived solely in the imaginary register. In other words, man and woman as entities are sustained linguistically, and that in turn demands an exploration of the relation between universals and the reality to which they point, where that reality might be something of the order of the idea. The hegemony of the phallus might be prone to criticism, but a critic as insightful as Judith Butler was aware that the phallus names an elusive property that bodily

parts "share," their capacity for erotogenicity or libido. What shared predicate is the site both for the unification of the body as well as its recognition with the others? Perhaps there is a history to be written from Galen's *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* (1968), that Bible of medieval and early modern medicine, all the way to *Encore* (1975) interested as it is in questions of usufruct and useless enjoyment, the only end-in-itself to be accepted.

The first chapters of Genesis served, for centuries, as the starting point to formalize the universality of the species and to spell out the nature of the interaction between its two genders (as Le Gaufey points out, despite their difference, the male and female sex must relate to a third term that assures that in such a difference they still belong to the same species, a commensurability which for Lacan is extremely feeble in the case of humans), and from that followed the juridical and ideological notions that ratified the legitimacy of marriage and divorce. If ideology is sustained by libidinal ties, then the myth of the garden of Eden and the ideal of marriage that it nurtured is a privileged object to understand the ideological core sustaining the economic system (in the sense that, for example, the family has a pivotal role in the reproduction of capitalism for Engels). As is well known, the biblical text itself is rife with inconsistencies and contradictions, the most serious being the incompatibility between the Priestly and the Yahwist accounts of the creation of mankind. The crucial passages are the following:

> And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness […] So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.
> And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Gen. 1: 26-28).[1]
>
> And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.
> And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.
> Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Gen. 2: 22-24)

These two narratives offer different configurations both of ontogenesis and of power relations. In the first account, a hymn celebrating the creation, God creates the human couple simultaneously and the distribution of the divine image, the distinctive trait, is egalitarian. The

[1] All the biblical references are from the King James Bible.

famous blessing “be fruitful, and multiply” suggests that, unlike what would become doxa, sexuality was originally included in prelapsarian life. If the text reflects a type of anthropocentrism, the analogy between generation and fruitfulness shows that humanity is still natural. The Yahwist account, in contrast, by having woman engendered from man opened the way to rigidly subordinationist readings. However, those are more accurately an effect of the Pauline mobilization of that story, since there is no reason to rule out the possibility that the first woman is superior precisely for being the last one created – an interpretation that Milton does not discard. The adjacency of “cleave unto” to the statement that in marriage husband and wife become one flesh brings up the topic of erotic desire for the first time, and perhaps the longing which in future centuries became an “unquenchable flame” arises from Adam missing a part of himself.

The philological attempt to settle what the writers of the period of the Second Temple meant by the image of God, if indispensable for shedding light on the original text, cannot extricate itself from the textual post-life. Karl Barth remains, in that regard, one of the most influential modern expositors of the short poem of Gen. 1:26-28, although exegetes such as James Barr have proposed alternatives. The divine image bestowed on mankind stands, in the architecture of creation, as the most accomplished manifestation of the creator; the distinction between human and animal sexuality being precisely that the verse “male and female created he them” is an expression of being created in God’s image. Barth proposes a dialectical model in which the biblical statements are read to justify (for him) the relational nature of human existence. In that view, Genesis essentially validates the underlying metaphysical assumptions that informed the view of sexual difference through millennia. Although the independence of the wife is secured through her promotion to the position of alterity, the relation through which man and woman are unified seems to have precedence over their individuality: “God created them male and female, in this true plurality but in this alone. Men are all that this differentiation and relationship includes” (1970, p. 187). Relying on a dialogical structure inspired by Martin Buber, the crucial distinctive feature of the first woman is conceived as her being an interlocutor in a way that the animals could not be: “if it were only like him, a repetition, a numerical multiplication, his solitariness would not be eliminated, for it would not confront him as another but he would merely recognize himself in it” (1970, p. 290).

Ultimately, the poem of vv. 26-28 presents the main terms that the Christian tradition would use to conceive the interaction between the collectivity of sexed humanity and its support on the idea of the image of God. As Paul Niskanen remarks, while Barth's conclusions are clearly informed by inquiries which are only meaningful within the context of the rise of the modern social sciences and his doctrinal interests, that does not annul the possibility that the Priestly account might contain a discussion of the "personal and the communal aspects of humanity" (2009, p. 426). The term which is specifically used in 1:27a to refer to humankind is *hā·'ā·ḏām* (humankind, Adam) to which, in contrast to the previous verse, is added a definite article. The flexibility of the noun in question and the type of concreteness that it suggests tends to be lost in translations, since it can assume both a plural and a singular use. That polyvalency is explored by the Priestly account through the chiastic structure of 27b, where the thought moves from an undifferentiated humanity to each individual and then to the sexually differentiated all ("male and female he created them"). Given the deliberative plural used by God previously, the effect is that "אלוהים [God] speaks as many and acts as one in creating אדם [humankind], who is simultaneously one and many" (2009, p. 426).

Whereas there is a scholarly consensus that the main attribute of the divine image is dominion, one line of interpreters diverges on whether the sexuation of v. 27c should be integrated into it. Theologically, they want to forestall the attribution of gender to God. If Barth and Niskamen are right, nonetheless, we can accept the surmise that the procreativity enjoined by the famous blessing should be seen as an extension into humanity of creative power. The generation of humankind is the crowning of creation because those two creatures enjoy a different relation to divinity from other terrestrial creatures, being the only ones who resemble their maker. Just as Milton draws an analogy between conjugal eroticism and God's "recreations" before time, it can be argued that, even though not explicitly, the structural role played by the "absolute enjoyment" of the deity in the theological articulations between humanity and the divine image turned the latter into the touchstone for marital bliss in the tradition emerging from medieval exegesis – although then the drama of the fall into postlapsarian sex put that ideal tantalizingly at a remove from human reach. For instance, it is precisely because Milton and Blake constantly challenged orthodoxy and denied a radical gap between pre- and postlapsarian nature that their visions of Edenic sexuality are unique – for bringing heaven to Earth.

If humankind has a privileged status in the creation, it is because the *imago Dei* reduplicates the creative Logos in a being formed by that very generative word; creation as the manifestation of a mystery and the "mysterious parts" (*PL* IV, 312) of human genitalia surprisingly overlap. One is tempted to juxtapose Gen. 1:27 and Gen 5: 3 where Adam "ha[s] a son in his likeness, after his own image" to suggest that there is a fundamental analogy between God's manifestation through his son, the great historical paradigm of the pure performative of a word that posits what it enunciates, and the more precarious union in one flesh between husband and wife, involving the incorporation of the "spirit" as a third term. The notion that both the divine essence and the human genus must engender a derivative being without which their unity cannot be sustained points in the direction of the "metaphysical incest" that, according to Oliver Bounois (2004)**,** is pervasive in the thinking of the unity out of two [*deux*] ideally attributed to the human "couple" in Christianity.

Remarkably, the biblical text itself gestures towards those concepts of the human genus where the linguistic counts, epitomized in the influence that the controversy concerning universals would have over understanding *genera* in the medieval period. By adding a definite article to "humankind," Niskanen argues that God bestows a deictic function to the noun: "Put another way, one cannot say אלוהים until there is a specific, concrete אדם in the world to which one can point" (2009, p. 434). Despite his latent allegiances to Thomism, he shows that "humankind" in Gen. 1:27 raises questions appertaining to the semantic and referential dimensions of names. Le Gaufey, in contrast, is fascinated with how Abelard (1079-1142) sustains the species "on the tongue" and not in thought through the concept of *status*: "only a universal word, and not a thing, can fulfil this function. We no longer take the measure of Abelard's audacity in inserting in this way, between singular things and the pure *flatus vocis* of the name, this *status*, this state which flirts with the Platonic idea […] without conferring on it the slightest real existence" (2020, p. 7-8). The critic is interested in that philosopher precisely because his linguistics seem to anticipate the modern Lacanian attempt to revolutionize the discourse of sexuation by exchanging a mythical substance for the correlate of a structural function. Theologians who are inevitably committed to a notion of the creation as revelation, of course, have a hard time accepting the collapse of the theopoetics of the *verbum efficax* to modern theories of speech acts. If anything, that shows how psychoanalysis maintains a complex non-relation with a theology which it nonetheless knows it cannot completely reject.

In the last analysis, the partial enjoyment inherent to human sexual liaisons requires the idealization of a unity whose paradigm is the absolute. In the history of religion, that has materialized in the figure of the incarnation of the word, which the incorporation into the one flesh of a couple resembles. Before the emergence of modern science and the centrality of biology for the constitution of sex, sexual difference was thought mainly in a logical and linguistic register, although these discourses could not be divorced from metaphysics. Although the psychoanalyst was cognizant in the science of his day, the terms of the Christian tradition sketched above deeply influenced how Lacan thought about "the sexual," even if he mobilized them to perform a desacralization. For as we saw, his aphorism "there's no sexual rapport" was enunciated in marked opposition, perhaps even as a provocation, against the wisdom of orthodox Christianity. Lacan knew that we owe to religion the widespread concept of love as the desire to be One. By separating the logic from the metaphysics underlying the assumptions inherited from tradition in thinking about the sexes, he made a discourse that while acknowledging the necessity of the God hypothesis and even flirting with some of its offshoots (mystical jaculations), longed to move beyond old avatars of the Aristotelian universality. Lacan hoped that, through Cantor's revolution in mathematics, psychoanalysis would be able to scientifically rearticulate the logic of sexuation past the mystifications that continue to inform discourse on love. The search for a framework where individuals could be counted in a "non-universal" series, associated with the feminine side of his famous formulas (with all the dialectic needed to forestall reifying the other), remains one of his most relevant inventions.

1.2. Summary of the chapters

In modern societies, we have lost the capacity to conceive the shock effect that the very suggestion of divorce could have. Since marriage was understood for centuries as an unprofanable sacrament, when, in the 1640s, John Milton claimed that keeping an incompatible couple under a "formal wedlock" was the true idol, he inadvertently was making a permanent contribution to the history discussed above. As codified in medieval and early modern compendia and digests, the covenant into which a couple entered in marriage was an indissoluble knot (save exceptional cases such as adultery), and the indestructibility of the kind of unity of that relation emerged from its having been made by God. Chapter 1 explores how

Milton's description of the nature of marriage relies on a broader engagement with the Law, defending its rational nature in a way that is deeply informed by the emerging scientific frame of mind of the mid-seventeenth century. In other words, his defense of divorce cannot be divided from the problem of understanding the "spirit" of the fragmented letter whose unification (a social work in progress) would usher in the reconstitution of the divine image and, consequently, ideal sexuality. As critics have pointed out, Milton's concept of marriage is notably silent on issues that occupied most of his contemporaries, such as procreation or the social role of the family *vis-a-vis* the Church, while he chose to place his main emphasis instead on an affective dimension ambiguously grounded in "nature." Just as for some writers the duty of husband to wife in marriage was considered more important than to his original family, matrimony materializes for Milton a unique manifestation of the Law which exceeds the civil sphere. Furthermore, the fact that, among the ends usually listed as the formal causes of marriage, he elects the consolation of loneliness (from Gen. 2) as the *object* of matrimony will prove crucial to understand the notion of desire that permeates the pages of the divorce tracts and its ontological consequences.

Chapter 2 addresses *Paradise Lost* from the point of view of the complex link established between prohibition, knowledge and sexuality. While the first couple can fulfill their hunger for knowledge concerning the nature of the universe if they acknowledge their need for limit, the fall represents an abortive attempt to immediately achieve a One that triggers the discovery of the partial nature of sexual enjoyment. These concepts are used to intervene in the debate concerning the differences between pre- and postlapsarian sex, since both have such cunning resemblances in the text: the terms of the semantics of ornament, *copia* and luxuriousness which discursively fabricate sex are radically transfigured and transvaluated by the fall. The fact that the latter ensues from an argument between the first couple evokes the importance that the controversy on divorce played in Milton's life. Adam and Eve can nonetheless weather the storm of their crisis by supporting each other precisely by acknowledging the traumatic finality of their fault; hence, in contrast to the unyielding Milton of the domestic treatises, the matrimonial tie is strengthened. If tradition sought in marriage an indissoluble knot, an indestructible unity, the answer provided by Milton is to be found in the "link of nature" that Adam adduces for his decision to fall with Eve.

Chapter 3 deals with the figurations of marriage and the sexual relationship in two texts by William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and the poem-prophecy *Milton*, and makes a case for their indebtedness to Milton's vision of the nature of married life. As I hope to show, the Romantic poet's lifelong engagement with both the earlier poet's prose and his poetry makes his *oeuvre*, more than that of any other poet in the English tradition, emerge as a close, agonistic commentary on the understanding of sexuality that can be reconstructed from Milton's texts. Besides the subversion of the very notions of originality and derivation, in trying to re-embody the "vital spirit" that gave plasticity to the letter of his predecessor, which in accord with the argument of *Areopagitica* achieved its most refined form precisely in his literary effusions, Blake preserves the materialist orientation of Milton's poetry, with its revaluation of sexuality and the flesh, while pushing beyond its perceived limitations. His criticism of the logic of atonement underlying the structure of Milton's argument lends itself to an analysis of the relation of the poet to castration, just as his mysticism is read as a manifestation of enjoyment. However, the longing for perfect harmony between the couples and opposite principles governing the analyzed texts, which is rendered in the apocalyptic terms of the overcoming of an ontological divide introduced by modern science and epistemology provides the clue for the moment of imaginary unity and specularization that reveals his own masculism, even if the latent polyphony of *Marriage* might be indicative of a different sensibility towards the feminine.

Chapter 4 investigates the divorce controversy that took place in the early years of the Irish Free State, exploring how W.B. Yeats's defense fits within the broader ideological project of re-enlivening the Anglo-Irish traditions from the eighteenth century that represents a move away from his early Celticism. Just as the project to recreate the bygone tradition was mostly aesthetic, as registered in the poet's fascination with the architecture of the Big House, this chapter reveals how the very discourses responsible for establishing a peaceful "union" between England and its original colony tried to cement the domination that marked their relationship through ideological figurations where marriage was mobilized in order to solve the conflict. With that background in mind, the increasingly central role that Yeats attributed to the family, education, and tradition in his later years, which uncomfortably coexists with a Modernist rhetoric of sexual disruption, comes to head in his incursions into politics and the Milton-inspired defense of divorce in the Irish Dáil in 1925.

Chapter 5 continues to explore the role of sexuality in Yeats' work, as particularly visible in the philosophy of metapoetical texts such as *Per Amica Silentia Lunae (1917)*. An early editor of Blake's poetry, Yeats inherits and rearticulates the tension between nature and imagination, body and soul that was a crucial component of the Romantic poet's own thought. In that way, the analysis resumes its concern for the philosophical underpinnings which historically informed the conceptualization of sex and how poetry is a privileged literary sphere to understand the melancholic backdrop of language, where the signifier tries to make up for the constitutive lack of the human being. As the chapter shows, in Yeats we paradoxically find both a sensitive acknowledgement of the kinship between sex and death, through his interest in "generations" and tradition.

2. THE LIKENESS OF GOD AND THE DESPIRITUALIZED LIMB: THE RATIONALITY OF THE LETTER IN MILTON'S DIVORCE TRACTS

> So that the soul may come into being, woman is differentiated from it from the beginning. She is called woman (*on la dit-famme*) and defamed (*dif-fâme*). (LACAN, 1998, p. 85)

2.1 Character and the body

Milton's career as prose polemicist began shortly after his return from the voyage to the continent in 1639. Afraid of letting the occasion slip to employ his education in a worthy cause, the poet interrupted his commitment to poetry and joined his countrymen in the work of reformation, resulting in the notorious prose output and political engagement of the 1640s. Such engagement was not without its vicissitudes. During the period of composition of the antiprelatical treatises, his alignment was closer to that of the Presbyterians, whose position in the fight against prelacy, while demanding the dissolution of church hierarchy, shied away from the full-fledged democratization to be advocated soon by dissenting sects. By the time he published the revised version of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643-44), the political camp had undergone such transformations that Milton's views caused him to be perceived as a radical. Formerly, owing to the employment of his pen in the cause of the Smectymnuus group, he was able to hold friendly relations with the members of the rising party and be esteemed in their eyes. As the ascension of the hegemonic group to power nonetheless increasingly began to prove that "Bishops and Presbyters" were becoming "the same to us both name and thing," the poet found himself gradually isolated. The Westminster Assembly of Divines' dismissal of the divorce pamphlet as licentious in nature without perusing its content marked his alienation from what had become the orthodoxy. Milton discovered the vulnerability to which he was exposed by getting involved in public controversy, since the abrupt overturns in the political and religious space made the value of the place from which one spoke quickly change.

In the proliferation of sects and civil instability, as the "center" came under attack and could not hold, the pledge that an individual from the laity such as Milton could offer to defend

the justness of his cause was his temperance, character, and "speaking deeds." In the text previous to the first divorce tract, *An Apology against a Pamphlet* (1642), he famously had claimed that "he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true Poem" (*CP* I, p. 890) and "they express nature best, who in their lives least wander from her safe leading, which may be called regenerate reason" (*CP* I, p. 874). As his expectation that a writer's work should express his inner worth attests, Milton put heavy demands on conduct and especially bodily integrity. Indeed, the ethical subject that emerges in his political prose crystallizes particularly around the concept of virtue. With the latter, he articulates on several discursive levels (theological, ethical, aesthetic) the complex implication between doctrine and practice essential to his religious ethos. Moreover, Milton's interventions in the pressing issues that prompted each pamphlet share a common overarching ambition of redesigning the coordinates of biblical exegesis from a specific Protestant outlook. In *The Reason of Church-Government* (1641), a treatise where elucidating the gospel's statements about church discipline was pivotal, the poet pitches in an argument for the primacy of rational apprehension over human tradition in interpretation of the divine letter that would become one of his central hermeneutic tenets. Ultimately, discipline "is not only the removall of disorder, but if any visible shape can be given to divine things, the very visible shape and image of virtue" (*CP* I, p. 751). In contrast to palliative human laws, the divine word correctly understood would effect a regeneration of the power of reason through disciplined behavior capable of turning man to an embodied image of virtue, and hence able to regain his kinship with and access to "divine things." With the clarity of the internal sight of his reason restored, man would not need the encroaching of human traditions in order to ascertain scriptural statements about church service and discipline.

At the very historical juncture when the establishment of the true church seemed to be at hand, Milton found a suitable outlet for his youthful discontent with the fate of the body in fighting for a "restoration" of church discipline that, successfully carried out, would grant each soul the physicality of a temple. Reasoning that if God was so meticulous in laying down the rules for building external temples, he would be even more so apropos the proportions and measures of the internal one, Milton concludes: "should not [God] rather by his owne prescribed discipline have cast his line and levell upon the soule of man which is his rationall temple [...] the sooner to edifie and accomplish that immortal stature of Christs body which is

his Church, in all her glorious lineaments and proportions?" (*CP* I, p. 757-8). The "teachers" were responsible for the discipline of the believers such that, through temperance, English society might emerge as a regenerate body in which the soul with the "lovely shape of virtue" would shine as one with its vessel. That is, once that gap between divine and human things was bridged, the soul should reveal itself as the truer body in contrast to the semblance of reality of the fallen one. Although the drift of the idea seems traditional, there is a subtle twist in the terms, given that the rhetoric lingers on rendering *the soul* in physical terms. In such passages, Milton intimates that recurrent longing for an "immortal flesh" that William Kerrigan identified in his work; a longing surreptitiously registered in his conflictual relationship with orthodox figurations of the body and capable of finding an outlet only in rhetorical flourishes. Discussing the apparent incongruity between the poet's youthful interest in the mysterious phenomenon of assumption and his later espousal of mortalism, Kerrigan concludes: "yet the formulation that separates these two modes of dying also connects them: neither assumption nor mortalism, unlike the orthodox conception, permits the body to be severed from the soul" (1975, p. 145). (In the first, the person is assumed to heaven without undergoing death, and in the second the soul is believed to lie dormant with the body until its reawakening.) Indeed, these monist intimations scattered throughout his prose appear in acute form in the systematic correlation of the achievement and maintenance of virtue to physiological processes, and specially feeding (see *CP* I, p. 749).

From an early age, as can be reconstructed from his juvenilia, sex had played a constitutive role in the discursive fashioning of Miltonic virtue, since the virtuous body was broadly conceived as capable of approaching the regeneration of the flesh by fighting intemperance. The lengths to which Milton went in the severity of the type of bodily virtue that he endorsed as a young man has been a point of contention among scholars, but, for our purposes, it is noteworthy that by the time of *An Apology* he could claim that marriage should no longer be taken as a defilement. Further, through a vindication of the blamelessness of humoral disposition, he tries to reconcile bodily impulses with the rationality of the virtue which actualizes the "true Poem" that the righteous writer should be. In that regard, the domestic treatises that follow his self-vindication become privileged points from which to measure how far he had travelled from the assumptions about the body that he entertained in his youth. In the divorce tracts, the ostensive dualist language cannot fully accommodate the

more radical view of bodily freedom that the author reserves for the virtuous husband, the husband whose discipline has purified his body to an "image of virtue" so that he has a legitimate claim to read the scriptures according to reason. Further, their revaluation of the body in the direction of a monistic view – as analyzed at length by Stephen Fallon – benefits from considering the specific social turmoil that allowed the quick proliferation of new articulations of civil liberties, and which was particularly conveyed through heretic figurations of the body. That means, of course, that Milton's monism emerges less from explicit philosophical statements than from the rhetoric that punctuates the subtext of his pamphlets. In that regard, as John Rogers has been the one to argue more cogently, the phenomenon of monism must have its meaning assessed in light of the inevitable ideological mediations that tended to color the language in which natural philosophy rendered its discoveries (such as the circulation of blood, ferment, etc.). If monism is a signifier by means of which the poet articulates politico-religious commitments with his philosophical inclinations and taste for unorthodox speculation, its relevance in expressing the manifestation of the real processes that obliquely determine it transcends the actual content of its metaphysical claims.

In that sense, the figuration of a monist body can be read as correlative to the event of the emergence of a new *truth* unable as yet to find proper embodiment. As Rogers intuits, it is ultimately a name for a widespread tendency to rethink the arrangement of wholes and parts or universal and particular (the beheading of the king becoming the dramatic emblem, as it were, of the decentering of the structure), which manifests itself homologically in different discourses (such as natural philosophy and politics). Even though Milton's most unorthodox metaphysical statements are still squared within Aristotelian terms, the centrality of monism to understand his prose is justifiable, in my view, insofar as otherwise we run the risk of deflecting the eccentricity of his politics, reducing his thinking to the procrustean bed of scholasticism (which he so hated!). We unwittingly miss the "terrible beauty" born in the mid-1640s and best exemplified in *Areopagitica* and the politico-ideological role that monism performs in that pamphlet. The new figurations of the body during the 1640 and 1650s bear traces in a rhetorical level of the growing discomfort with traditional hierarchies and social organization, which then took the form of a new configuration between truth and body in general, registered in the proliferation of eccentric philosophies.

If as critics have suggested, then, monism crystallizes what is most unassimilable to orthodoxy in Milton's political prose, that it is most productive when understood as a "semantic figure" that mediates broader processes, the question emerges of the framework that one brings to bear on it. In that regard, a detour through a passage from the preface of *Doctrine and Discipline* might be helpful. Resorting to the figure of the prophet whose sharply spoken truths inevitably makes him a public enemy, he writes: "for this let him be sure he shall be boorded presently by the ruder sort, but not by discreet and well nurtur'd men [...] who [the former] when they cannot confute the least joynt or sinew of any passage in the book; yet God forbid that truth should be truth, because they have a boistrous conceit of some pretences in the Writer" (*CP* II, p. 225). As will be noticed, Milton here anticipates the rhetoric of his pamphlet against licensing, where, in a symptomatic exaggeration, he argues that books should be allowed to enjoy free circulation because "they are not absolutely dead things" but "doe contain a potencie of life in them to be as active as that soule was whose progeny they are" and he "who destroyes a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God," kills "an immortality rather then a life" (*CP* II, p. 492-3). Milton's logic is adamant here and, in line with the philosophical tradition, conceives the manifestation of truth as instantiating something indestructible in the world. An irrefutable argument, by literally incorporating the liberatory spirit of the holy "writ," becomes like unbreakable joints and sinews, akin to the "immortal flesh" the longing for which, we saw, was part of Milton's imagination. With that said, this chapter intends to frame monism particularly through an exploration of the features of the "charitable" reading of the letter that constitutes Milton's hermeneutic procedure; that aim is connected with vitalism insofar as *spirit* is increasingly figured through bodily "virtue" (in the sense, as it were, of the life fluid). I am especially interested in the tendency to make the criteria of readability of the holy writings adaptable to the emerging modern discourse of "reason it selfe."

At this point, it must be observed that Milton's text is rife with discursive tensions and archaisms at times, and that is part of his complexity. His project of bringing exegesis of the Scriptures to coordination with other up-to-date developments which were then contributing to advance human freedom is at once his boldest enterprise and the most inassimilable to the course science took. In *The Reason of Church-Government*, for instance, that aspiration is conveyed in a passage where he is rendering astral bodies as the privileged referent of

harmonious discipline: “our happiness may orbe itself into a thousand vagancies of glory and delight, and with a kind of eccentric equation be as it were an invariable Planet of joy and happiness, how much lesse can we believe God would leave [...] his Church [...] in this our darke voyage without the card and compass of Discipline” (*CP* I, p. 752-53). Milton tries to divest the profession of the priest from its externalist position, using language that betrays the desirability for him of a church discipline capable of achieving a degree of practicality comparable to the fruits of recent, experience-driven thought.[2] The dissatisfaction with the overall barrenness of prelacy to restore mankind into its original dignity is felt in the contrast between the defunct ceremonies of the prelatical institution and the conflation of the Scriptures with the exciting explorations into the nature of heavenly bodies and voyages into unknown lands with “card and compass” characteristic of early modern history. The Protestant democratization of reading conjoined with the power of the press to give access to a written culture where knowledge was deposited and circulated gives a new valence to the meaning and the ideological function of the divine letter. For insofar as mosaic law and the scriptures in general had to remain the unquestionable bearers of the enunciation of truth, the letter must be reclaimed from the hegemony exercised over it by scholasticism and, through a work of “restoration,” be shown to be perfectly compatible and indeed reflexive of the horizon of truth of Milton’s time.

On the threshold of the historical moment that would witness the de-spiritualization of reality, such that, no longer reliant on a “soul” for its intelligibility, the language of nature would henceforth become literal, Milton’s natural books pulsate with the tensions inherent in the bold claims that modern knowledge makes apropos the theoretical and practical instruments developed to grasp reality. For modern science, insofar as reality is a cognoscible and univocal

[2] Although Milton’s rendering of the ideal form of discipline through the analogy to the supposed perfect movement of a planet is indebted to old astronomy, as the first chapter of *RCG* progresses his images become more modern and concrete. From the allusion to sixteenth-century mariners’ instruments (that exemplifies how he conceives discipline as “technical”) to the conclusion where a priest is compared to a physician, a certain enthusiasm for recent scientific developments coexists with their theological mobilization (as a dubious telos of perfecting man’s fallen being through knowledge). See, for instance: “discipline is the practick work of preaching directed and apply’d as is most requisite to particular duty; without which it were all one to the benefit of souls, as it would be to the cure of bodies, if all the Physitians in London should get into the severall Pulpits of the City, and assembling all the diseased in every parish should begin a learned Lecture of Pleurisies, Palsies, Lethargies (...) and so without so much as feeling one puls, or giving the least order to any skilfull Apothecary, should dismisse ’em from time to time, some groaning, some languishing, some expiring, with this only charge to look well to themselves” (*CP* I, p. 755-56).

object it must already contain the literal form which the theory only elicits. The remaining dimension beyond that form, if it can be said to exist at all, plunges thought into the aporetic effort of trying to express that which is indifferent towards its own manifestation. In that regard, scholars such as Joanna Picciotto have particularly illuminated how Milton's characterization of the emancipatory power of the press relied on a wide-ranging transformation of knowledge production whose accent fell on experimentation. Where Milton nonetheless parts with modern science most glaringly is in the fact that, however reliant knowledge is on experience, the dimension of formalization tends to perform a radical de-vitalization of nature by approaching phenomena from the point of view of its radical exchangeability. It is noteworthy that a staple of modern scientific methodology like Francis Bacon, for example, still betrays the minimal ideological dimension of the production of knowledge by mobilizing the language of power to render the overcoming of the "obscurity of things" as the *ideal* of conquering nature with obedience (2000, p. 33). Thus the inevitable dilemma posed to the assessment of Milton's depiction of the role of books for preserving the vitality of the nature and intellect that produced them, the paradigmatic manifestation of his monism, is whether it is an inverted expression of the modern emptying out of nature of any "intrinsicality" (nature can only exist insofar as it submits to the intelligible form of the instruments meant to examine it) or a celebration of the fact that modernity indeed makes possible precisely the access to that immanence but on the condition that vitality becomes simply a poetic embellishment for a pre-philosophical life departing from the modern world similar to the pagan deities in the *Nativity Ode*.

One helpful way to look at animist vitalism then might be by conceiving it in terms of an index of the semiological dimension of signification, which injects figurative life into the otherwise "dead letter." That was the path taken by Christopher Kendrick when he aptly rendered monism as a "semantic figure." To the extent that with the trope of vitality the poet is trying to safeguard *sense* and *content*, the purity of the letter is then connected with the intentionality of "external" factors such as history and the body (a disposition of terms which is more provisional than definitive). Akin to the proliferation of "fanatic" pamphlets in the mid-1640s, the pulsating excessiveness of Milton's imagery performs a semiotic overflow within the text itself. Besides, Kendrick's work helpfully shows that broader processes in operation condition Milton's defense of experimental reason and its methods; processes in which it is not always easy to distinguish, due to ideological distortion, idealization from the very critical

discourse meant to demystify the idols obstructing the path to genuine knowledge. What I am trying to suggest, therefore, is that the philosophical assessment of Milton's monism needs a dual perspective. On the one hand, it captures a revaluation of the possibility of interaction between finite and infinite, between the grammar and logic of thought and the interdicted beyond of things themselves. Monism challenges the medieval scholasticism that tended to construe the rationality of God's command as beyond understanding, and so turn him and his manifestations into a fetish.[3]

During the English Revolution, Milton celebrates the possibility of "no more driving holinesse out of living into livelesse things" (*CP* I, p. 844). Of course, the poet "reifies" books as though they were alive, but that only proves that for him the bare finitude of the natural body in itself did not have much value. His scandal remains the longing for an immortal flesh. As I show throughout this chapter, on the other hand, the concepts of life and nature themselves remain a challenge for interpretation. In the last analysis, in our view, his animist vitalism is more than an archaistic eccentricity insofar as it tackles the problem of the *possibility* of philosophy in the modern world. And here we understand by philosophy a discourse about a thing the intelligibility of which is provided by the internal necessity of its own self-movement. The specter of a self-moving thing haunts modern epistemology as a prohibition, from the vitalist moment of the 1650s, through the Hegelian hope that "science dare only organize itself by the *life* of the Notion itself" (1977, p. 31) all the way to the psychoanalytic subject of enjoyment. Although psychoanalysts would rightly point out that analytic discourse, following Kant, is well-aware that thought falls into aporiai and inconsistencies in the realm of pure

[3] In that regard, a passage from N. K. Sugimura (2009) is symptomatic of the problems involved in evaluating the reach of Milton's ambitions. Discussing the unavoidable epistemological problems at play in Raphael's account of the war in heaven in the epic, she concludes: "[the narrative] does not really render things more intelligible as the *technique* intends but instead reminds us of the *fissure* existing between the reality we receive in narrative [...] and the celestial Reality it claims to depict" (2009, p. 215, emphases added). On the one hand, the critic's scrupulousness to highlight the fissure between perception and the ultimate Real is sound because the thetic function of judgement which is necessary to make propositions about an object is dependent on that gap (monism is regressive to the extent that it gives expression to a pre-philosophical longing for the infamous indistinctness between subject and object). However, her castrating prohibition concerning access to God as intelligible essence reduces the deity of the epic to the same old status of the unconceivable, which as Hegel would be the first to point out, is conceived as such *within* thought (how can thought think that it radically cannot think something, if it *is* thinking that prohibition?). Christopher Kendrick, in my view, does more justice to the progressive elements of the poem by analysing how its form already bear traces of the crisis of the "in-itself": "the mere narrativization of God's activity, then [...] both accentuates the problem of theological determinism and imposes on theology the choice or vision just described, between a split or schizoid God and an all-determining or despotic one" (1987, p. 133).

reason, Lacan was aware of the genealogy of the problem he was approaching when he claimed that enjoyment is the only substance that psychoanalysis accepts. For our purposes, these considerations are all the more important because the dimension of the elusive short-circuit between epistemology and enjoyment, which is the closest we come to an ontological concept in psychoanalysis, is precisely what gives access to the sphere of *sex*.[4]

What has been said so far can as well be rendered through the following thesis: the phenomenon of monism reflects changing attitudes in the conception of the power of technology to grasp the world, to the point that one almost borders on claiming that there is nothing that cannot be known, provided the right technique is developed. My particular claim and interests lie in exploring how that is reflected in the "liberation" of that primordial tool of thought which is the letter from its subservience to ("carnal") sense. Technology is simply the implementation on "bodies" of discoveries in the theoretical realm; *devices* are *letters* in practice or "alive," just as, in Milton, discipline constitutes an exercise of virtue whereby chastened flesh embodies the remnants of the divine characters impressed in the soul. In order

[4] Enjoyment or jouissance is a concept that Lacan introduces by way of Bataille's *Eroticism*. The concept is brought to prominence in the watershed of sorts that 1973 was in his oeuvre. Thus, we read in Seminar XX: " 'Usufruct' means that you can enjoy (jouir de) your means, but must not waste them [...] That is clearly the essence of law – to divide up, distribute, or reattribute everything that counts as jouissance [...] Jouissance is what serves no purpose (*ne sert a rien*)" (1999, p. 3). As can be seen, Lacan displaces the appraisal of sex from the biological sphere, although maintaining interest in discoveries of that field. In framing his articulation of the concept both through Bentham utilitarianism and, as per the essential writing "Science and Truth", the overlapping of enjoyment with the foreclosed dimension of the subject of science (the Cartesian subject), Lacan interestingly comes close in his conclusions to the Frankfurt school's critique of *instrumental reason* – that is, philosophically rendering sex as a problem that pertains to the sphere of the disillusionment of nature through technology. "Nature" as on object mapped and produced by the history of philosophy sticks to the world of theoretical science and the web of rights regulative of the possession of its devices and usufruct of accumulated value, as the never completely exorcizable phantom of the useless, the end-in-itself, God etc. (the work of Regina Schwartz provides, in special, a detailed historical analysis of this transitional process in the seventeenth century). The most elegant recent attempt to unwind and make sense of this otherwise counterintuitive view of sex is Alenka Zupancic's *What* Is *Sex?* (MIT Press: 2018) which defines sex in psychoanalysis as inhabiting the interface between epistemology and ontology. Following the orientation of the "Slovene school" in general, sex is of philosophical interest to the extent that it is bodied forth in "negativity," in other words, de-substantialized and indeed de-naturalized by *negation*, which already is a function of logic. Concerning Lacan's interest in utilitarianism, it is noteworthy that already in the Seminar from 1953-4, he points out that "to be capable of enduring its [the object's] emptiness is, in the end, to identify it as a truly human object, that is to say, an instrument, capable of being detached from its function. And it is essential in so far as in the human world, there is not only utility, but also the tool, that is to say instruments, which exist as things in their own right" (1999, p. 104). Let's remember that Kerrigan's *Sacred Complex* climaxes in the analysis of how Satan's perversion consists precisely in resisting acceding to a reality in which people can exist in their own right: Eve is simply a useful instrument that he must exploit and break as a toy. Note how what the poem mobilizes to disarm Satan is precisely the *magic* of Eve's beauty, which is not so much a vital substance but an aesthetic experience.

to understand the revolution in the nature of perception and the production of knowledge operated by the press, we must have in perspective, as Jean-Claude Milner writes in *A Search for Clarity: Science and Philosophy in Lacan's Oeuvre*, how philology became a desirable model for other fields of knowledge in the Renaissance due to its "literality": "to speak of the book of Nature or the world or the universe is in itself an ancient trope, but it takes on a new significance once scholars started using printed volumes … literality, which is at one and the same time its index and means, sheds light on how far mathematization can go when it comes to Nature." In short: "thanks to humanism, all of the disciplines of the letter are the ideal science as far as precision is concerned" (2021, p. 26). Furthermore, psychoanalysis is particularly helpful because it approaches technology precisely from the dimension of its knot with sexuality. Although limitation of space hinders a long discussion, it is important to observe the following for our purposes: if we keep in mind that sexuality might be defined as "the infinite universe's grip on the speaking being's body" (MILNER, 2021, p. 45), it becomes more intelligible why in the early seventeenth century, precisely when man's relation to the infinite was being systematically redefined, Milton's monism has a direct bearing on the representation of sexuality, whose ground-breaking character turns him a forerunner of modern attitudes.

Milton's not always univocal de-transcendentalization of the beyond in order to make agency immanent and not external to matter had, as we saw, the enthusiastic thrust in the power of knowledge. The erstwhile debasing emphasis on human finitude mobilized by the church as an ideological means of social control was increasingly shattered with humanity's discovery that it could peep into the stars and that, through grace, divine inspiration could inhabit the human bosom. The archaistic implications of vitalism aside, the progressive moment of Milton's monism lies in its envisioning that matter is capable to harbour a trace of the infinite. Lacan's provocative thesis that there is not such a thing as sexual relationship is the logical outcome of the reconfiguration between universal and particular necessitated by a decentred universe that no longer can rely on a substantive point of exception outside it to sustain the consistency of its totality: the infinite is no longer of the order of the eternal idea or of the divine substance but the effect of a name that in its pure difference is capable of grasping the limitless multiplicity of the diverse of experience. Although I hope it is clear that I envision Milton as an author caught between the claim of different and often incompatible universes, what I have said is surprisingly condensed in the opening of the poem he believed "aftertimes"

would not "willingly let die," in the famous and often analyzed simile featuring Galileo, where technology is eroticized by providing access to what was hitherto out of reach (seeing details of the "feminine" moon).

2.2. Milton publishes The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce

When John Milton made his first excursion into the unsafe field of divorce apologetics in 1643, although moved by a bitter constraint, he rushed into the argument with the characteristic boldness, which for some seems to verge on innocence, of those who are not afraid to proffer unpopular truths due to the conviction of obeying an internal dictate. Here was the angel Abdiel, undaunted to express his position, even if it meant being the only one in the multitude to dissent. Having just finished writing a series of treatises about reformation, the last one of which consisted on a vindication of his reputation from slanders, Milton turned to the domestic sphere. As he later chronicled, in a narrative tinted by the wish to give a sense of design to his early life, once the assaults on the bishops were no longer necessary, he "directed his attention elsewhere" and, desiring to pursue the defense of other varieties of liberty considered essential to civic life, he turned to "the cause of true and substantial liberty, which must be sought not without, but within [...] Hence I set my views on marriage, not only its proper contraction, but also, if need be, its dissolution" (*CP* IV.I, p. 624). The rhetoric of his defense of reformation, anticipative of Enlightenment values, was pervaded by an iconoclastic thrust against the ceremonies of Catholic religious service and the rigidity of Canon Law, both of which, like the wolf into the sheep-fold in *Lycidas*, were climbing again into the structure of the Reformed Church through the Presbyterians. As the revolution became increasingly theocratic, Milton thought the household was the crucial sphere to be reformed against the tyranny of "unnatural" laws that had hitherto hindered the achievement of freedom in the most fundamental social tie. Considering the prominent place that the marriage of Adam and Eve enjoyed in the seventeenth century as the model of the original, non-coercive society (insofar as gender hierarchy allowed), it is no wonder that Milton turned to the marital relation for a site of "true and substantial liberty."

Ernest Sirluck's reconstruction of the quick-paced emergence and dissolution of allegiances in the political field during the short-span of the years in which Milton published

some of his most celebrated treatises shows that those, like the poet, who valued the conscience's entitlement to worship according to its own revealed faith, strategically moved towards the defense of separation of church and state. The use of force against "tender consciences" was perceived, for some, to be inconsistent with the goals of a reformation desirous to restore Christ's kingdom (whose war could only be fought with words), such that controversy from this time reveals unexpected moments of reverence to sincerity. A pamphleteer could hold the view that "the Church belongs wholly to the order of grace" (*CP* II, p. 68). Indeed, some "tolerationists" evinced enough open-mindedness to deem it better to allow sectarians to follow their own form of worship (as their faith might constitute a legitimate manifestation of divine grace), than to compel them to follow a different doctrine which, nonetheless, might as well be expressive of the truth. After all, only the future would show who was right, and if the nonconformist was found to have been unjustly repressed, one would have subdued a genuine manifestation of God. This does not mean that such stances were the rule, however, since a marginalized group might be characterized precisely by the vehemence with which it condemned orthodoxy, making unwillingness to sacrifice truth to agreement a matter of principle. "Heretic" and "sectarian" were pejorative terms in both sides of the field (see *CP* II, p. 75). Later in *Paradise Lost*, Abdiel captures this delicate state of affairs where someone might have to remain unaided in the defense of his faith, so reminescent of the 1640s, when he taunts Satan with "my Sect thou seest, now learn too late / How few sometimes may know, when thousands err" (VI, 147-48). It is easy to imagine thus that in the middle of such unprecedent proliferation of conflicting claims to the truth, unless one was a royalist, Parliament inevitably was destined to play the mediatory role. Historically speaking, the controversies regarding the precise scope of Parliament's power constitute the backdrop of Milton's treatises. While the main bulk of the argument underwent profound changes from the first edition of the *Doctrine and Discipline* to the *Tetrachordon*, both treatises were addressed to the Parliament, its main interlocutor, and Milton's strategy was to insist that their jurisdiction was subordinate to the Word of Scripture, interpreted according to the rule of charity, and the "law of nature."

The seventeenth-century audience which first came across the treatise entitled *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), published in a quarto the front-page of which has "doctrine" and "discipline" disposed in a visual rhyme, met an anonymous text supporting an

alarming thesis. As then, so now, it requires more effort to overcome the initial prejudices informing a reading encounter with an unknown author than one is often disposed to go through, and the reception of his countrymen, where it was chronicled, was largely negative.[5] Milton undeniably put a strain on his reader, construing an argument with such nuances of meaning, and rife with so many problems that it continues to occupy scholars centuries later. Given this picture, misunderstanding perhaps was bound to happen. The problem nonetheless was that the readings were *too* simplified, to the point of a willing dismissal, as the critics seemed not to have deigned to peruse the work before issuing their condemnation, which the poet tried to mitigate by signing the revised edition (in 1644) and adding a preface to it with a vindication of his credentials – a practice to which he was becoming accustomed. The subtitle intimates the scope of the duty Milton believed to be fulfilling in engaging in the divorce controversy, and the main thrust of his rhetoric makes the texts emerge in retrospect as one of his several life-long attempts to vindicate the Law (although, ironically, he is trying to demolish the English law of divorce).[6] There is a dimension in which, in spite of the particular content enunciated in each pamphlet being streaked by the occasion, Milton could be said to be writing the same thing throughout his career, since his locus of enunciation ultimately was that of the unity of the divine utterance. From the statement in *The Reason of Church-government* that Moses was "the only Lawgiver that we can believe to have been visibly taught by God" (*CP* I, p. 747), through his assertion in the preface of the first domestic treatise of "bringing in my hands an ancient and most necessary, most charitable, and yet most injur'd Statute of *Moses*"

[5]Most famously in the sermon preached to the Parliament by Herbert Palmer (1601-1647) on 13 August 1644, published the same year as *The Glasse of Gods Providence Towards His Faithfull Ones*. The sermon, which overall is an attempt to read a recent event as an expression of "divine vengeance," attempts to dissuade the Parliament from sympathy towards toleration and argument pleading freedom of conscience. Palmer says, having read the revised edition: "If any plead Conscience for the Lawfulnesse of *Polygamy*; (or for divorce for other causes then Christ and His Apostles mention; Of which a *wicked booke* is abroad and *uncensured*; though *deserving to be burnt*, whose *Author* hath been so *impudent* as to *set his Name* to it, and *dedicate it to your selves*,) or for Liberty to *marry incestuously*, will you grant a *Toleration* for all *this*?" (p. 58) [digitalized by and available on < https://quod.lib.umich.edu>, retrieved May 2021]. Milton would address Palmer's criticism in the preface to *Tetrachordon* (see *CP* II, p. 580). Although Milton would never be so rash as to defend polygamy in public, some passages of *The Christian Doctrine* give support to the practice, as analysed by Leo Miller in *Milton Among the Polygamophiles* (1974). Another contemporary pamphlet which mentions a "Tractate of Divorce" is Daniel Featley's *The Dippers Dipt* (1646), to which our poet alludes as well in the mentioned preface (see *CP* II, p.583). The author does not name Milton, and associates the pamphlet with Anabaptism and Familism (radical sects).

[6] The long subtitle is "Restor'd to the good of both *sexes*, from the bondage of *canon law*, and other mistakes, to the true meaning of Scripture in the Law and Gospel compar'd."

(*CP* II, p. 224), to the evocation of the image of mount Sinai in the outset of his epic, Milton wants to make sure to his audience that his only authority is that of the Scriptures.

The divorce treatise establishes from the title-page the scope of its ambition by enlisting divorce in the cause of the restoration of a lost liberty obscured by man's relapse into a form of servitude, a relapse so ingrained in his nature that the memory of original freedom is almost forgotten. In a sense, he is grappling with the same epistemological handicap to be fully elaborated in *Areopagitica*: innocence cannot be restored by a mere act of willing, since corrupted humanity can only regain virtue by the momentary abandonment to experience and the more tortuous path of purification by trial, being guided towards truth by abandoning erroneous presuppositions. Throughout the tracts the author thus will attempt to recover the meaning of the divine Word in order to remember the freedom man was intended to have, an originally conceived dignity which should guide contemporary exegetes of the divine law in union with a concomitant adaptation to the limitations of fallen nature: the problem was that in the present state the "high and Heaven-born spirit of Man" was depressed "farre beneath the condition wherein either God created him, or sin hath sunken him" (*CP* II, p. 223). His work of reformation hence strove to achieve a strained conciliation between making man's divine image shine again, insofar as he still contained it, and respecting the limitations of nature. The "bondage of Canon Law" alluded in the title pointed out precisely that the servitude to which citizens submitted was harsher than necessary, and indeed illegitimate, being of man's own making. Using the same rhetoric to be mobilized in the epic, from the introductory note on the "bondage" of modern verse to the simile about the "sojourners of Goshen," the divine utterance of the law, as the bearer of freedom, has, as it were, the practical task of breaking the links with which the oppressor yokes and maintains humans in their minority, and such a work is particularly carried out through an enlightenment logic of iconoclastic unveiling and denunciation. In the divorce tracts, Milton's main invective consisted in showing that the laws governing marriage in England were a mistake maintained by incrustations of antichristian harsh rules.

The preliminary answer to the exegetical problems awaiting Milton in a defense of divorce reliant on the scriptures is already suggested in the chosen epigraph: "Every scribe instructed to the Kingdom of Heav'n, is like a Maister of a House which bringeth out of his treasurie things old and new" (Matthew 13:52). As readers of the divorce tracts point out, the

fact that the Gospel was stricter than the Old Testament in marriage legislation was the most serious hindrance to the argument. Especially in the first divorce tract, the poet had therefore to harmonize the Pauline statement that the believer of the new faith was no longer bound to the Law, with the more nuanced claim by Christ that his coming constituted its fulfilment, of which neither a jot nor tittle would fail to be realized.[7] The epigraph also hints at the pedagogical framework in which the interpretative activity usually takes place in his works, and reveals a dialectical exchange of places between the instructed scribe and the position of the master.[8] Such a scribe's talent is particularly marked by a keen eye to see the appropriate relation between the Old and the New Testament (things old and new), bringing a renovation and vitality to the Word which, even when departing from the letter, constitutes a fulfilment of its earlier manifestation, and hence is all the more faithful to it. Christ's parabolic comparison of the Scriptures to a treasury is also remarkably apposite. "To bring out things old and new" in the divorce tracts implies then the ability to be so faithful to the Word as to uncouple it from the petrified, idolized content that precludes the perception of its creative and liberating function.

The complexity of Milton's argument can be perceived especially by the preface he wrote for the revised edition of *Doctrine and Discipline*. His strategy in the address to Parliament, on which as per usual he deposits his trust in the capacity to carry out the reformation properly, is to claim that the divorce treatise, when properly understood, would release present legislation from the imputation of conniving with divorces which were adulterous, to acquit the institution "from the long suffer'd ungodly attribute of patronizing Adultery" (*CP* II, p. 232). This concern is meant on a first level to be a part of the general commitment to rid England from statutes derived from Roman Catholicism, since one of the usual cases in which divorce was granted in its *mensa et thoro* modality was precisely that of adultery; at another level, however, it picks up the thread of the critique previously elaborated on the view that Moses allowed divorce as indulgence to the Jewish people's weakness, an indulgence, so the argument goes, abolished by Christ. For Milton such a leniency was tantamount to suggesting that the Law surreptitiously gratified sin. The argument is, therefore,

[7] Respectively Romans 7:6 and Matthew 5:18.

[8] See Galatians 3:24 for the law as "school-master" which leads to Christ, whom Milton, in turn, calls "the divine Master" of truth in *Areopagitica*. For the "pedagogical framework" see Kerrigan (1983), p. 79.

so orchestrated that it seems that it is not him who is defending something generally taken as "licentious" as divorce by his shifting the focus to the censurable character of the type of divorces so far allowed by England. Milton starts his defense of divorce by criticizing the type of divorce he is not defending. The latter turns out to be the very legislation of marriage, given that the maintenance of the matrimonial tie between two incompatible people, bound to be married or divorced for life, turned out to be, for Milton, an involuntary legal formalization of divorce under the name of marriage. The right doctrine of divorce would prove the practice to be as licit and in accord with a wholesome understanding of the law and as expressive of man's "native liberty" as a genuine marriage. His initial position is not so much stated as the criticism to which he might be liable forestalled. However, the very defensive stance towards the imputation of licentiousness continues to hover uncomfortably over his argument. It is crucial to differentiate himself from the unchaste with whom it is nonetheless so easy to be confused; it is a task as difficult as that imposed on Psyche of sorting out the seeds, mentioned in *Areopagitica* apropos the virtual impossibility of discerning good from evil without experience. The full force of the argument must ultimately be supported by "virtue" and "character."

2.3. Truth, Custome and Error

Significantly, the preface itself opens with a question concerning the most suitable "maister" or "teacher" to guide general understanding in matters of religion, concluding that while virtue and conscience are usually commended, "custome" is still the one to draw more students and to be taken for the best instructor. Milton, who had studied at Christ's College, Cambridge, is known to have disapproved the usual methods employed in the university and championed the integration of the study of modern authors into the curriculum. As Christopher Hill wrote long ago: "by 1628 Milton had taken a firm stand as a Baconian, a supporter of George Hakewill's defence of the Moderns against the Ancients, a critic of scholasticism and an advocate of more science and more history in the university" (s/p). Kerrigan qualifies the poet's endorsement of these new developments by observing that the he strove for their harmonization with traditional humanism: "he favored a marriage between the old humanism and the new empiricism, not a divorce" (1983, p. 195). Milton's early political treatises certainly evince a characteristic distaste for empty formalism, and openly criticize the "thorny

lectures of monkish and miserable sophistry" which leave students "with a burre in their throats [...] [and] crackt their voices for ever with metaphysical gargarisms" (*CP* I, p. 854). The theme of oral incorporation and acquisition of knowledge, to which Milton was extremely sensible and which appears here through the harmful sophistry which is fed to the students, as we are going to see, provides the ground for the opening reflections of *Doctrine and Discipline.* The reliance on reason characteristic of the emergent scientific mentality and the Protestant emphasis on the superiority of inner faith over tradition united in Milton to create an individual ambivalent towards established authority, which is not to say that he resisted it in itself. The intellectual and religious context encouraged him to divest tradition of everything which had become rigidified and unnecessarily coercive in it. The individual's own consciousness of what constituted a legitimate use of power and a certain intransigency to its abuse anchored him in the invectives against what Satan would call "old repute, / Consent or costum" (I, 639-40). The way to truth was marked by unveiling the idols which obstructed the pursuit of knowledge, as urged by Francis Bacon (cf. 2003, p. 41-42). Indeed, Milton's criticism of the general state of learning is reminiscent of the philosopher's: "among the people the kinds of learning which are most popular are those which are either controversial and combative or attractive and empty, that is, those which ensnare and those which seduce assent" (2003, p. 9).

The hermeneutic activity in Milton thus develops in a scene of instruction, through a dialogic structure in which the meaning of a text, in this case, the text of the Law, is negotiated between those responsible to instruct (the Parliament), in the aid of whom Milton enlists his service, and the people. The poet is eager like the scribes in the Scriptures to assume the position of teacher of Christ's doctrine. However, he needs first to differentiate between the tyranny of a law expounded to keep people in an "unworthy bondage," and an interpretation which would allow them to recognize the letter of the law as the agency of their very freedom. As is well known, the de-centralization of power from the figure of the priest paved the way to the democratization of interpretation characteristic of Protestantism. With this in the background, we can understand why, for instance, the poet is able to insist in *An Apology* that his studious life entitled him to argue with the prelates in spite of their differences of age. In a transvaluation of values, power, position, or age become, at least for the early Milton, no longer the appropriate criteria for discussion but reason (which is not to deny that his own interpretations often had serious lapses):

> If lastly it be but justice not to defraud of due esteem the wearisome labours and studious watchings, wherein I have spent and tired out almost a whole youth [...] it were but a hard measure now if the freedom of any untimely spirit should be oppressed merely by the big and blunted fame of his elder adversary [...] and that his sufficiency must be now sentenced, not by pondering the reason he shews, but by calculating the years he brings (*CP* I, p. 869).

Although Milton himself could produce a compendious list of authorities to support his views on occasion like in the early antiprelatical pamphlets, he observes that authorities are nonetheless often produced in arguments only to "stun children": "the main bulk of that specious antiquity, which might stunne children, and not man" (*CP* I, p. 872). Respecting an argument, the only claim to power of which is its venerable character, is dismissed for the work of custom in its mystifying aspect (in *Tetrachordon*, he adds a nuance to his understanding of custom). At the same time, what Milton means by reason is more slippery than might seem at first. At the anonymous "modest confuter's" self-praise of the temperance of his affections, Milton ironizes his enemy's self-indulgence in terms anticipative of his discussion of virtue in *Areopagitica*: "this man, beyond a *Stoick apathy*, sees truth as in a rapture, and cleaves to it; not as through the dim glass of his affections, which, in this frail mansion of flesh, are ever unequally tempered, pushing forward to error and keeping back from truth ofttimes the best of man" (*CP* I, p. 909, original emphasis). This passage rehearses Milton's perspective on the role of the sensible in the complex web of experience which gives us knowledge. Reason for him is not incompatible with the affections, articulated here especially in terms of humoral physiology; their repression might actually prove more harmful. Knowledge is a question of trial and error and, given that to the pure all things are pure, the confrontation with evil, far from staining one's character, strengthens it all the more. As can be taken from his general stance towards the romance genre (discussed at length in *An Apology*), it is often the case that the sensible can only be accepted in its hierarchical subjection to the spiritual, although even here it is recognized as an important dimension of human life, surrendering of which is detrimental and even an act of hubris. Such a stance, as we are going to see, is not without its ambiguities.

From what has been discussed so far, the concerns which Milton brings to bear in the divorce tracts become more intelligible. He dramatizes himself as a young David ready to strike a blow at the Goliath of "Canonicall ignorance" (*CP* II, p. 224). To the initial rhetorical question concerning the general preference for custom as master, his answer is that "she" draws more disciples due to her "glib and easy" method (*CP* II, p. 222). The characteristic Miltonic

theme of the relation between knowledge and oral incorporation drives the first extended metaphor of the preface (which always borders on being more than metaphoric), in which he surmises that the fame of her teaching might be "in some manner like to that vision of *Ezekiel*, rowling up her sudden book of implicit knowledge, for him that will, to take and swallow down at pleasure; which proving but of bad nourishment in the concoction [...] puffs up unhealthily, a certain big face of pretended learning" (*CP* II, p. 222-23).[9] The apparent effects of custom's teaching are condensed especially in an image which juxtaposes physiological processes with knowledge, justifying those who envision an emergent tendency to monism in the tracts. The "heedless devouring" of the followers of custom is contrasted with the "wholsome habit of soundness and good constitution" appropriate to the right path of learning. The "bad nourishment" with which she feeds them, moreover, after a strange metabolization, creates the big face of pretended learning "mistaken among credulous men, for the wholsome habit of soundnesse and good constitution; but is indeed, no other, then that swoln visage of counterfeit knowledge and literature" (*CP* II, p. 223). The unhealthy ingestion affects directly the human face, the mirror of God's own image, turning it into a mere appearance which must be unveiled in its fallacy. Custom's disciples are cheated of genuine knowledge like Eve is deceived by Satan, and they "swallow down at pleasure" a "book of implicit knowledge" which deprives them of their humanity in a metamorphosis into surface. As in the case of "our mother," the knowledge which was supposed to turn them into gods actually degrades them into the inhuman. No wonder that in the sequence Milton passes to the register of allegory. The poet rehearses the narrative of man's deception and fall in order to explain humanity's proclivity to servitude, and discovers in it an epistemological problem: man prefers a hallucination of satisfaction to the renunciation necessary to accede to the level of the law and truth proper. Let's remember that the object of knowledge is constituted through reiterated operations of bodily rejection by means of which, through differentiation, the external world is allowed to subsist independently and the exchange with it is confined to the intermediacy of signs (the world of discursive knowledge, one of the earliest guises of which is precisely the school-room). As Julia Kristeva writes: "[rejection] separates the object and constitutes the real and *absence*" (1984, p. 170, original emphasis). Rejection and loathing, the first manifestations of

[9] Compare Custom's "implicit knowledge" with Eve "impl'd / Subjection" (IV, 307-8). The implicit is linked to the feminine and is contrasted with the declarative character of man (associated with the "head").

which take place in the interaction with food, are necessary conditions for the emergence of signification. On the other hand, the mimetic relation to the order of things to which Milton was particularly attuned was a continuous occasion of ambivalence and reiterated trial.[10]

Virtue emerges therefore as a fantasized immanence sustained by the ability to continually *reject* poisoned knowledge. In that regard, it is noteworthy that the language Milton employs to characterize virtue indexes the problem of the thing-in-itself, the opacity of which to knowledge emerges from a fundamental fetishist inversion whereby an object appears with intrinsic value. The incipient capitalist economy with its commodity logic provides, in a sense, the best example of such a metaphysics with material efficacy; and we have glimpses of it in those moments when Milton's characters draw analogies between the unravishability of virtue and the accumulated value of money, such as in the "unsunn'd heaps /Of Miser's treasure" (398-399) that one encounters in *A Mask*.[11] Although the play tends to assign different positions to characters for dramatic effect and we cannot rely on their statements to deduce what Milton thought in 1634/37, in its approximation of the rarified realm of the soul with the brute materiality of (preserved, hidden) money, the mask already contains an oppositions of the Miltonic universe that in the next decade will find a new treatment under the sign of monism. The point is not to take sides with the Elder or the Second Brother but to read how the metaphor

[10] As Fallon (1991) points out, the intellectual climate of the seventeenth century allowed Milton to continuously attempt a synthesis between science/philosophy and art. This longing can be seen, for instance, in *Comus*: "How charming is divine Philosophy! Not harsh and crabbed as dull fools suppose, / But musical as is Apollo's lute / And a perpetual *feast of nectar'd sweets*" (476-479, emphasis added). In true Platonic fashion, knowledge emerges from desire in Milton.

[11] Here, a few comments are due to avoid misunderstanding. As mentioned above, the type of virtue that Milton endorsed as a young man is a point of contention among Miltonists, and the discussion came to a head in the 1990s with the heated debate between Kerrigan and John Leonard. For the former, the young Milton endorsed an emphatic type of bodily chastity, while for the latter such a "vow of virginity" is untenable. Such a subject affects the issue of monism particularly because, had Milton endorsed such a stern virginity, he would seem to be much more on the side of the rarified soul. After all, as the speech of the second brother from which I quoted shows, *A Mask* itself registers a tension between different notions of the exercise of virtue: that in which virtue is an indestructible "hidden strength" which even when drowned in darkness preserves itself "by her own radiant light", or the more down-to-earth view of the second brother according to which an exposed treasure is clearly not safe if left by "an outlaw's den." It seems to me that the objection to the Elder Brother is that his view ends up as an "unexercised virtue." While the practical view that value is proportional to work/action tends to be privileged because it is in keeping with the experience-driven tendency of the modern mind, my wager is that insofar as capital itself spawns a metaphysics of sorts (it has its own indestructible body), the analysis of the nature of virtue cannot be reduced to a view in which, in contrast to previous theological-philosophical "sublimation," it is truer simply for being practical. The market in its mundane face is itself haunted by metaphysical deceptions: as in the worn formula, that dimension of reality that claims to be evident, given, concerned with what is practical, beyond ideology, is the ideological manifestation *par excellence*.

symptomatically betrays that character and virtue are categories of analysis that articulate the mundane realities of the ethics of the emerging economic system with the philosophical concepts ciphering them. In *A Mask* we cannot ascertain the nature of Milton's views, but we find traces of oppositions that intimate what they will be.[12] For instance, the preservation of virtue by avoiding the pollution by evil (see 460-62) formally resembles the same logic of the warrior virtue of *Areopagitica* or even the metabolization of Adam and Eve's body into spirit in the epic poem (which relies both on their food and intellectual diet), even if of course we cannot conclude that Milton was a staunch Platonist in the 1630s with the same degree of certainty that we can make affirmations about treatises where he speaks in his own voice. Based on the comments cited from *The Reason of Church-Government* (1642) above, I would claim that virtue is a central concern and structuring element from the beginning of his political prose, and cannot be excluded from our understanding of discipline in the divorce tracts. Moreover, the intricacies of the problem of freedom and predestination (the emphasis on virtue is meant to safeguard rational choice) affect the criterion for the preservation of virtue. The fact that virtue must simultaneously preserve its worth and prove its meaning by, as it were, undergoing circulation without "losing currency" creates a vicious circle of sorts in his ethics.[13] Mental and bodily temperance thus are meant to transform the body by degrees to the purity of the soul,

---

[12] Important passages are the following. The attendant spirt that opens the play paints the image of a Platonic universe for us, although of course in itself it does not tells us what Milton himself thought:

> Before the starry threshold of Jove's Court
> My mansion is, where those immortal shapes
> Of Bright aërial Spirits live inspher'd
> In Regions mild of calm and serene Air,
> Above the smoke and stir of this dim spot
> Which men cal Earth (...)
> Unmindful of the crown that Virtue gives
> After this mortal change, to her true Servants (1-6; 9-10).

And:

> [Elder Brother] So dear to Heav'n is Saintly chastity,
> That when a soul is found sincerely so,
> A thousand liveried Angels lackey her (...)
> Till oft converse with heav'nly habitants
> Begin to cast a beam on th'outward shape,
> The unpolluted temple of the mind,
> And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,
> Till all be made immortal (453-55, 459-63).

[13] There is a sense in which the problem that I am trying to lay out through these formal homologies (in *A Mask, Areopagitica*, *PL*), in spite of the discomfort that their momentary equivalence might cause, is that of the position in a circuit that has to preserve its identity independently of all the variations to which it might be liable (the place of the Other). As most problems, their form already contain their answer. The "soul" poses the problem of the extra-discursive element (which is, as it were, half-written inside the discursive operation that makes speech possible) that would provide the referent to all metaphorical substitutions.

although full interpenetration would only be possible after death. A well-nurtured body, on the other hand, is the effect of the capacity to have the knowledge of evil and abstain, of constantly being proved and having discernment enough to so spot counterfeit knowledge/tainted food so as to avoid *proving* it. In fact, the argument in the *Areopagitica* goes even further and suggests that the sedimented character of the person conversant with virtue makes him or her virtually invulnerable to the ingestion of harmful food. Milton sustains an uneasy position: while he denounces a "lazy" virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, yielding a vision in which the "immortal garland" must be won after trial and strife and is the effect of one's reiterated choice to be virtuous, at the same time the virtuous person is such (at least in the 1644 pamphlet) even when he is momentarily "corrupted"; *his capacity to be virtuous largely relies on his already being so*. The vicious, on the other hand, has a "vitiated stomach" and wholesome books are of little avail to him. Milton is caught in the paradoxes of Calvinist predestination, for while one can be responsible for the maintenance of one's own worth, insofar as it participates in truth, which is described as "light," such virtue is unstainable. If truth cannot be shaken in its steadfastness, how does its exchange with error, the overcoming of which yields substantial experience, take place? Like Christ in *Paradise Regained*, truth oscillates between difference and *indifference* towards its enemy.

These considerations immediately impact on two aspects of the understanding of the divorce tracts. First, what distinguishes the husband who legitimately defends divorce from the licentious citizen is the self-sustaining claims of his character, to the point that the licentious seems to be by constitution bound to misunderstand him. Secondly, they introduce the difficulties involved in reading the preface to *Doctrine and Discipline*. As truth is wholly spiritual, and thus cannot be stained, the poet with prophetic ambitions must be cautious in his exchange with the world and false knowledge so that by preserving his body he might attain to the level of spirituality of truth itself (although not in the sense of discarding the body, since in casting the beam on the outward shape, the soul is reconciled with the "corporeal"). In this context, it is all the more meaningful that the nourishment of Custom's disciples is the scroll eaten by Ezekiel (a strange choice at first sight, as it alludes to a genuine prophet), which suggests that she tempts by offering false visions in which one, like Eve, hallucinates the power promised by knowledge. Subduing the appeal of the urge for oral incorporation, in contrast,

constitutes for Milton the first step towards safe knowledge and vision (admittedly different levels), and by extension, we could say, proper exegesis.

Milton's divorce tracts prove to be an exercise at expounding the Law and redeeming it from "alphabetical servility" (*CP* II, p. 280), by interpreting it instead according to the spirit. Such "alphabeticity" nonetheless should not be regarded as the letter in its original form, in which its materiality would provide as legitimate a sensuous dimension as the ideal marriage conceived for the "gentle spirits." It is more consistent with Milton's emergent monism that the servility criticized is not so much *to* the letter but *of* the letter, as we are going to see in the analysis of the episode of Christ's encounter with the Pharisees. The different strategies of expounding the sacred text have necessary consequences to the way the reader, for Milton, positions himself in relation to the Scriptures: whether as statutes externally and mysteriously binding him beyond his grasp and well-being, or as "ordinances" into the rationality of which his human understanding can penetrate. Thus, the divorce tracts' recurring distinction of the righteous and the licentious divorcer will correspond to two exegetical attitudes: one in which the law is charitably interpreted to favour the *ends* for which it was created (in this special case, as a "remedy" to man's loneliness), and the other in which it is discovered "patronizing Adultery" by allowing what it prohibits, and hence turning a prohibition to an invitation to transgression. In this regard, the allegories breaking the usual tone of the preface by staging the irruption of a mode allowing more flexibility of expression, are "symptomatic" of this constitutive opposition of the text:

> To persue the Allegory, Custome being but a meer face, as Eccho is a meer voice, rests not in her unaccomplishment, until by secret inclination, shee accorporate her selfe with error, who being a blind and Serpentine body without a head, willingly accepts what he wants, and supplies what her incompleatnesse went seeking. Hence it is, that Error supports Custome, Custome count'nances Error [...] God [...] cals together the prudent and Religious counsels of men, deputed to represse the encroachments. (*CP* II, p. 222)
>
> For Truth is as impossible to be soil'd by any outward touch, as the Sun beam. Though this ill hap wait on her nativity, that shee never comes into the world, *but like a bastard*, to the ignominy of him that brought her forth: till Time the Midwife rather than the mother of Truth, have washed and salted the Infant, declar'd her legitimat, and Churcht the father of his young Minerva, from the needlesse causes of his purgation (*CP* II, p. 225, emphasis added)

Previously described as indulgent mistress offering false knowledge, Custom now assumes more precise contours through the comparison with Narcissus' despised lover: insofar as the allegory picks up the previous reflections on education, her main role seems to be to

maintain her pupils in an ignorant state, as it is implied, by gratifying or echoing their self-absorption (in contrast to the often-shattering effect of truth). The allegory in fact achieves darker connotations if we take to account, as for instance Rosana Cox has observed (2010, p. 131), that the couple Custom and Error prefigures the likewise allegorical and incestuous duo Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*. In a parody of the aim of human marriage described in the divorce tracts, where we are told that woman was created to "remedy" man's loneliness by their becoming one flesh, Custom here fuses with error in a markedly hierarchical relationship with sexual hints. In contrast to the Aristotelian man able to be an end in himself, Error, who "wants" (lacks) a head or a face, embodies the paradigm of the "slavish" body alienated from his spirit to such an extent that he can only conceive of the law as something externally imposed on him. He serves Custom insofar as she provides that he remains in ignorance; insofar as it is she who thinks and legislates for him. In fact, perhaps it is not the case that he is completely deprived of spirit, for as the allegory suggests, what Custom turns a blind eye to ("countenances" in the sense of conniving) might be precisely his desire to continue living in subjection. It seems to be in accord with the general thrust of Milton's thought that, were Error to revolt against his consigning of the control of his life to Custom, he would rediscover his native dignity: not a face of pretended learning but the remains of the "human face divine." The dimension of the reproduction of ignorance comes clearly to the fore in a pamphlet alluded by the editor of the Yale edition in a footnote: "Ignorance the mother of error and professed enemie to Gods Trueth hath two daughters, by whose flatteries and subtile practices she blyndeth mans eyes (...) and withdraw us from the way of knollage: Custome, and Negligence" (*CP* II, p. 223). Clearly, the implicit role of custom here is to transmit or *reproduce* ignorance from one generation to the other. At this point, one thinks particularly of the service in Catholic and Anglican churches to which Puritans were so averse: the ritual actions performed by the congregation were a type of blind acting the significance of which was only accessible to their "head," the priest.[14] In that regard, Milton's denunciation of Error joins in an incipient critique of ideology that can be chartered throughout his other pamphlets ("ideology" in the emphatic sense of the material effectivity of a fundamental deception sustained by practice/discipline).[15]

[14] In *An Apology* we read, for instance, that "the service of Prelaty is perfect slavery, and by consequence perfect falshood" (*CP* I, p. 854).

[15] Picciotto is a particularly helpful critic in that sense for showing how Bacon's examination of idols consisted on a critique of ideology *avant la lettre*: "it stands to reason that Jacques Larrain's history of the concept of

The allegory also clarifies the discussion articulated so far concerning the hermeneutic problem involved in interpreting the Law, the main coordinates of which Milton is establishing at the outset. Custom is not only a teacher. She might be interpreted as a mother (like Sin) who tries to supplement what she lacks with the body of her son or the fruit of her *sin* (what "her incompleatnesse went seeking"), and guarantees that he remains "a blind body" by deferring his confrontation with truth by means of continuously covering it. Similar to echo, she searches for a voice to give support to her existence, but here Milton's allegory achieves a pungent irony, since to search for support in error is as doomed an enterprise, to use the image from the gospel, as building a house in the sand. The support which error provides cannot stand firm. The most telling expression is particularly "Custom count'nances Error," which refers both to the fact that she provides him with a face, but also that she surreptitiously tolerates, patronizes, and protects him from confronting his ignorance and "bondage" to her. Milton corroborates this reading of Error when in the same preface he links the "incestuous" nature of Antichrist with the view of those who claim that Moses allowed divorce as a form of indulgence to infirmity: "But that opinion, I trust, by then this following argument hath been well read, will be left for one of the mysteries of an indulgent Antichrist, to farm out incest by, and those his other tributary pollutions" (*CP* II, p. 227).[16] Moreover, it is meaningful that "Narcissus" is only implied in the whole allegory, for what Milton is ultimately reiterating is that acceding to a socio-symbolic world demands a discontinuation with imaginary "devouring." The proficiency of Milton's renunciation of orality is chronicled in his long, protracted sentences

ideology begins with Bacon's idols: empiricism's reinvention of sensory experience as a type of distortion that needed to be diagnosed and corrected" (2010, p. 27). Milton contributes by showing us how such a critical procedure is part of the heritage of religious thought (just as the Protestant work ethic). Precisely because "ideology" is a remnant of a world where the distinction semblances-essence was operative and hence there were "eikons" (semblances) to be unveiled by iconoclasts, that in the post-modern world, where truth becomes utterly subjective, "ideology" as a category of social analysis tends to disappear. Jeffrey Gore, in an unpublished paper with which I had contact after the core of this chapter was written, provides an in-depth study of "discipline" in Milton and alludes to Althusserean "ideology" in an endnote, too. Of course, one should note that although Althusser had a profound interest in the notion of the split subject and developed it in important directions, his falling out with Lacan testifies the difference of their approach in the last analysis.

[16] Of course, the semantic spectrum of "incest" was much broader in the seventeenth century, and seemed to circumscribe transgressions of the law in general (as in Palmer's usage in a previous footnote). My interest in this aspect of Milton's allegory arises from a desire to see how it condenses a fetishist relation to the law, in which the law is used to keep its subjects in "blissful ignorance." Marriage was one of God's commands (laws), but the Antichrist uses the law to forbid what God allowed. The Antichrist encourages incest (a repugnant marriage) while claiming to forbid it (*CP* II, p. 595).

that border the object and defer conclusion in an attempt, as it were, to look at it from all the possible angles before succumbing to the necessity of ingestion. The strength of the repulsion nonetheless only shows the force of the repression. In order to be a "Scribe in the Kingdom of God," he needed to reject primary narcissism thoroughly. Moreover, we could say that the allegory opening the pamphlet captures the essential role of the family in preparing individuals for the exercise of power, but in such a way that, conversely, how one relates to power in general, at least in modern societies, bears residues of its archaic configuration in the family. The virtuous citizen and righteous interpreter of the Law must learn to repudiate the blackmail of maternal Custom which attempts to trade his freedom for ignorance.

The two allegories are further united in being descriptions of contrasting births, although the first (perhaps purposefully) makes it especially difficult to pin down the nature of the relation being established. We are never told what is the offspring of Custom's union with Error, as she seems to "accorporate" herself with Error precisely to give birth to her partner, without nonetheless ever "releasing" him. Given the need to keep error in ignorance, the logic behind why *this* infant, in contrast to truth, cannot be brought forth to light seems to lie in the fact that his very existence is conditioned on his remaining in darkness. Were error to be issued forth, light would expose his fallacy.[17] Decorum of course would never allow Milton to suggest these grotesque images explicitly. He resorts to a metaphorical mode which allows improper meaning to insinuate itself by distortion and disturbing incongruity. Thus far we have analyzed the first allegory to show how it introduces (and condenses) the theme of slavish submission to the Law. The second birth is more clearly stated: Truth springs from her father's head as Minerva from Jupiter's. What remains only implied here is precisely the figure that dominated

[17] Another cluster of images which attaches to the duo Custom-Error (especially in *Tetrachordon*) is that of error as a tumor or a disease. Stephen Fallon reads their "interbreeding" as producing only flatulence, foregrounding precisely the lack of substance of error. The central role of digestive metaphors in the poet's work is well-known to Milton scholars, and given that indigestion is a prominent image of rebellion or *disobedience* for him – "a rebellion against the father taking an anal shape" (KERRIGAN, 1983, p. 210) –, it harmonizes with the suggestion that Custom is unable to "release" error, which was incorporated as poisoned, indigestible food. The inter-relation between digestion and *vision* (the face of pretended learning or the image of God) assumes a pungent quality if we recall that later, following Renaissance medicine, Milton would believe that his blindness was caused by his chronic digestive problems: "the immediate cause of the obstruction, in this as in all cases of cataractic blindness, was the failure of the body to evacuate 'vapors' produced during the digestion of food. Collecting in the troughs of the eyes, these unpurged vapors hardened into opacity" (ibid., p. 202). For the implications of this retention for the relation mother-child, see for instance the following remark: "[...] [Freud] discovered the equation child = penis = faeces. This discovery does indeed shed a good deal of light not only on male fantasies concerning childbirth, but also on female fantasies insofar as they conform to the male ones" (KRISTEVA, 1985, p. 146).

the other allegory. The reader is only told that Time is *not* Truth's mother, and it takes some effort to realize that Truth is her own progenitor, as Fallon concludes: "truth is both a mother and child, both a womb and that which is born from the womb" (1990, p. 76). Further, despite the contrasting duties the allegories are intended to perform, they nonetheless surprisingly converge in the assertion that truth never comes to the world but as a bastard, with its anticipative echoes of the intertwinement of good and evil in other treatises. In its first manifestation in the world, truth, God's legitimate offspring, must be confused with his bastard. The great ethical trials of the fallen world indeed arise from the difficulty of distinguishing truth from error, since a man crucified among thieves might prove to be God, or a sectarian Puritan might prove to actually experience genuine revelation (be a true "witness"). A defender of divorce, ostensibly disagreeing with the traditional interpretation of marriage law, might be the one truly faithful and obedient to the divine ordinance, expressing his obedience precisely by disobeying earthly masters.

In *Tetrachordon*, Milton would nonetheless qualify this understanding of the nature of Custom and the role it might play in the formalization of laws:

> But suppose it were not a writt'n Law, they never can deny it [divorce] was a custom, and so effect nothing. [...] All custom is either evil or not evil; if it be evil, this is the very end of Law-giving, to abolish evil customs by wholsome Laws; unless wee imagin *Moses* weaker [...] If it be, as they make this divorce to be, a custom against nature, against justice, against chastity, how, upon this most impure custom tolerated, could the God of purenes erect a nice and precise Law [...] In few words then, this custom of divorce either was allowable, or not allowable; if not allowable, how could it be allow'd? If it were allowable, all who understand Law will consent, that a tolerated custom hath the force of a law, and is indeed no other, but an unwritt'n Law (*CP* II, 617-18)

Commenting on the important codification of Jewish marriage laws in Deuteronomy 24, Milton argues that God could only create a rule based on a legitimate practice, and not as a "sufferance" to the chosen people's weakness, that is, as an exception to the more rigorous and definitive command on marriage to be later pronounced by Christ. Indeed, given the contemporary religious tumult described above, the reference to "tolerated customs" might resonate with the controversy around toleration. For our immediate purposes, however, what is remarkable is that it throws new light on the opening of *Doctrine and Discipline*. Originally, divorce (for Milton) was a custom which had the force of a law. It is precisely what we could call the "Pharisaic" (and by extension, Roman Catholic) interpretation which established "an evil custom" of forbidding divorce, and thus hindered the husband from the *wholesome remedy*

which the Law allowed, but the access to which is occluded by its usurpers, as by the cherub with the flame-sword. Such a custom turns marriage to a remediless disease to which the husband is subjected: the wife eats into his flesh as an *erroneous* choice to which he tied himself – one might say, which he incorporated – and of which he does not have legal means to get rid (cf. *CP* II, p. 590). His error becomes a mark on his body and an irreversible degradation of his nature for his supposed disobedience or his mistake, which, moreover, is the obverse of the token of the original covenant with God (the "divine image"). It should be observed that, of course, for Milton this was the Antichristian doctrine, as God, so he believed, allowed the remedy of divorce.

Stephen Fallon (1990, p. 71) in his important essay on the metaphysical underpinnings of the divorce tracts calls our attention to the fact that Milton addresses his discourse to two audiences: a "wise monist," also characterized as "gentle spirit," for whom the hope of a less hierarchical relation between the intellectual and corporal dimension of marriage is envisioned, and the dualist bound to his fleshly understanding (like error). From what has been discussed so far, it is clear that the hope of living in a genuine marriage is largely dependent on an honest relationship to the Law, which for Milton implied a radicalization of the principles of the Reformation. In fact, as the treatises from the 1640s attest, he conceived this as a work in progress to be accomplished by the whole nation, since there were many remnants from previous Catholic rule to be wiped out from the emerging New Jerusalem. In the usual mode of sustaining his argument in several levels, Milton establishes that erecting the ordinance of matrimony over the freedom of the Law comes down to nothing less than subjecting a husband to unwillingly committing idolatry. This is such an important aspect of his early argument that the latter chapters of the first book of *Doctrine and Discipline* are dedicated to discuss St. Paul's pronouncements on marriage to a "gentile." What is especially noteworthy in this regard is that this hindering of true Reformation of marriage laws, in a public level, is described as equivalent to being compelled, on the religious one, to remain married to "Rome" even after having "divorced" her, whose description in *An Apology* anticipates that of Custom.

Discussing the "modest confuter's" defense of set forms of liturgical procedure, especially by conceiving the ability to conduct prayer the possession of a chosen few, Milton expresses his opposition by claiming that praying is a gift of the Spirit and can come to anyone who can also preach. Besides, such a need to rely on written formulas is described as an

infirmity allowed to those who are children in matters of faith: "let [set forms] be granted to some people while they are babes in Christian guifts; were it not better to take it away soone after, as we do loitering books, and *interlineary* translations from children" (*CP* I, p. 937). While the formulas found in books might help as a support for those who have not learned to walk on their own, the "adult" in faith is he who no longer needs an externally binding law, because the gift of the letter is engraved inside him: "if alwayes not writt'n in the characters of law, yet engrav'n in the heart of man by a divine impression" (*CP* II, p. 588). It is this emancipation which Milton strove to achieve through the Reformation. In contrast to the dead external letter, the internal one is a spring from which novelty and the inspiration of the spirit flows. For the poet of *Paradise Lost*, traditional liturgy was dishonest "faire seeming pretence" (*CP* I, p. 937). This comes to a head in the description of Rome:

> If we imagine that all the godly Ministers of England are not able to new mould a better and more pious Liturgy then this which was conceav'd and infanted by an idolatrous Mother: how basely were that to esteeme of Gods Spirit, and all the holy blessings and priviledges of a true Church above a false? Heark ye Prelats, is this your glorious Mother of England, who when as Christ hath taught her to pray, thinks it not enough unless she adde thereto the teaching of Antichrist? (*CP* I, p. 940-1)

The original purpose of prayer consists on a communication in two directions: it is because God has given his creatures the gift of life that, in religious worship, the believers return the gift in such way as if they were not "paying" anything, since their act must be sincere and genuine. Such a demand on the way one gave thanks explains Milton's usual suspicion towards the adoption of formalism in religious service: following a prescribed procedure might function as a means of turning worship into its degeneration into a mere payment; religious service becomes a work which one performs grudgingly and insincerely as a slave. Although the form or the act is performed, it is without "substance" and indeed in a *de-subjectivized* manner, because it was performed mindlessly (one does not need to think to follow a rule, but only repeat an action). For our poet these dynamics had profound implications for his argument against the usual privilege accorded to copulation in marriage. As always, the marriage doctrine of canon laws was all form and no content, which impacted directly on the offspring: the child of an incompatible couple is the child of an idolatrous mother (or a wife which a husband is compelled by human laws to set over God as an idol), who similar to Custom gives birth to an erroneous doctrine and discipline of divorce lacking essence; the fruit of an institution hypostasized over love.

We have said above that one of Milton's main concerns was to divest tradition of what had become rigid and unnecessarily coercive in it. This is clear in the passage immediately following the excerpt quoted above, in which liturgical formulas are described as "gorgeous clothes" dressing the expression of one's faith. In one of those paradoxes dear to the poet, the maintenance of the whole imposing attire or *costume* derived from Catholic service, instead of "magnifying" the Church, "display[s] her nakednesse to all the world" (*CP* I, p. 942). With characteristic iconoclasm, Milton is intent on unveiling the idols, and as he would do in *Paradise Lost*, recover the "naked majesty" of words which fuse with the innocence they express, and lay bare the lack of substance of dead metaphors: "though the formalist will say, what no decency in Gods worship? Certainly Readers, the worship of God singly in it selfe, the very act of prayer and thanksgiving with those free and unimpos'd expressions which from a sincere heart unbidden come into the outward gesture, is the greatest decency that can be imagin'd" (*CP* I, p. 943). In the same way that Milton could argue that a "forc't yoke" is more licentious and idolatrous than the practice of divorce, which for some was precisely the desire for license to adultery, he could claim that tradition embodied in custom was really shameful (naked) in spite of all its gorgeous clothes, while the nakedness of Adam and Eve in the Garden was the highest mark of their dignity. The slightly disorganized worship of Puritan congregations evinced a genuine unity, while the imposed organization or "show of order" of what would become "high church" was really disorder.

In short, Milton begins his argument in the divorce tracts by framing the restoration of the true doctrine of divorce as part of the larger educative work to be carried out by Parliament. While in *The Reason of Church-Government* the Scriptures are the most trustworthy chart and compass to accomplish the restoration of man's native dignity, the statutes of God are likewise to be "turn'd over" and "scann'd anew" in the domestic treatises for being the "native and domestick Charter giv'n us by a greater Lord then that *Saxon* King the Confessor" (*CP* II, p. 230) (as usual Milton is comparing and contrasting the pagan/secular with the divine). All happens as though commentary was the great villain responsible for distorting the meaning of the Bible. Just as Yeats would render the emergence of free Ireland as the birth pangs of a terrible beauty, Milton sees the incorporation of truth into the social body of his nation in terms of a labor of deliverance from bondage concomitant to the delivery of an embryonic truth daily brought forth in the press. The sloth of the followers of custom is

contrasted with the "industry of free reasoning" of man like Milton, which is endangered by being rendered as "innovation": "as if the womb of teeming Truth were to be clos'd up, if she presume to bring forth ought, that sorts not with their unchew'd notions and suppositions" (*CP* II, p. 224). In an unexpectedly Rabelaisian image, the womb/mouth of truth runs the risk of being gagged through the persecution of dissenters and the motions for regulation of the press, which in *Areopagitica* would be explicitly rendered as a type of violence. The press becomes the privileged medium of enunciation of the interpretation of the meaning of the Scriptures, to which each citizen can have access depending on his particular endowments: "with divine insight and benignity measur'd out to the proportion of each *mind* and *spirit*, each *temper* and *disposition* […] all to become uniform in virtue" (*CP* II, p. 230, emphases added).

Milton's argument for divorce has to be located, as we have been proposing, in a particular discursive formation in which insight into the rationality of the law is important so that obedience might be grounded on persuasion and understanding and not on force. In contrast to a discipline that, given the supposed corruption of nature, would restate the inevitable dependence of mankind on external authority, Milton relies on the idea that the gospel is the medicine capable of restoring human nature to its native liberty (inasmuch as it is possible) and argues that the divine letter correctly understood can bring about rational freedom. The labor performed by the pamphleteers in the press was part of the process of effectuation of truth: the circulation of knowledge and the right teaching were literally "vital" steps to free man's body from its undue subjection. In that way, body through temperance might work up to achieving rational form and perchance an immortal flesh; at the same time, the substance of truth itself would relinquish its purity and be born into time, undergoing a processualism. To search the divorce tracts for a full-fledged metaphysics is, perhaps, besides the point. As we have seen, the monist heresy emerges out of the inquisitiveness of a bold young man who aspired to express invisible things, who believed that by studiously mobilizing all the "strength of Scripture" he would be contributing to the process of recreation of the body of truth, and that his utterance would share in the power of Moses'. My interest lies specifically in the fact that the monist tendency registers the hope that truth can take place in a finite reality with the assistance of a new literality in exegesis of the divine writing. Of course, Milton would assign what is usually taken as the literal to the sphere of the servile, the "alphabetic servility" of the "crabbed textuists." Counterintuitively enough, however, the antiliteral orientation does

not make the Scriptures an open work for Milton, and signals instead a radicalization apropos the precision of its meaning. We find a tension here, for while the poet advocates the freedom to interpret according to internal insight, he obviously could not endorse a relativistic indetermination and neither the idea that the true meaning was solely the effect of consensus and debate. True, he believed that each man had to industriously labor to contribute to the emerging society, and that debate was an important dimension of that process. However, it seems to me that the meaning of the Bible could not be in the last analysis a matter of negotiation for him; what would seem to be the case is that in debate and controversy the truth of the divine writing bodies itself forth or is *manifested*, which is a very different thing to say. If Milton sternly criticizes a type of "alphabetick" servility, just as the gospel's overcoming of the Law, it is in name of an internalization whereby the Law begins to burn in one's bones and flesh. Paradoxically, it instances a more radical literality, since we are told that not one jot or tittle will avoid being fulfilled. Even if he plays with the reader's expectations, reader-response approaches do not seem to be capacious enough to grasp his hermeneutics, since the "strength" of the letter is almost a matter of ontology.

2.4. So God created man in his owne image

After *Doctrine and Discipline* had gone through two editions and the poet had discovered in Martin Bucer an important ally, Milton engaged in one more defense of his point. The new invective took the form of an explicit harmonization of the biblical passages dealing with matrimony and divorce, which was instilled by "some readers" who found his argument compelling but in need of further proof: "The former book, as pleas'd some to think, who were thought judicious, had of reason in it to a sufficiencie; what they requir'd, was that the Scriptures there alleg'd, might be discuss'd more fully" (*CP* II, p. 582). *Tetrachordon* is, in terms of genre, conventional scriptural exegesis, organizing the commentary by having a verse as a head followed by a minute analysis drawing its implications. As his argument had been since *Doctrine and Discipline* to defend the loosening of the matrimonial knot on the basis of the freedom brought by the gospel, which "redeemed us" by "dissolving the whole law into charity" (*CP* II, p. 588), his point of departure continued to be Christ's words. But the Savior's reply, in turn, to the Pharisees' question concerning divorce is to refer them to the beginning:

"have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female?" (Mt 19:4). Of course, as Milton realized to his advantage, there are several ironies in this retort: the Pharisees ask him whether divorce for every cause should be allowed in an attempt to snare him in a transgression of the Law, but Christ is the Law and he simply quotes himself. The Pharisees are a mere "Eccho" like Custom. To refer them to the beginning is also only to remind them that in the beginning was the Word. Milton therefore returns to the first chapters of Genesis to ground his interpretation.

The poet's hermeneutic accuracy at this point might be impeached depending on the criteria mobilized to assess it. The main difficulty is whether the explicit sense of the Bible or its creative potential should be privileged. Milton constantly attacks the reduction of the meaning of the Scriptures to the intentionality of its human enunciation. The holy writing is most potent when it becomes a legal means of defense for the impotent (say, the otherwise doomed mistaken husband). As we are going to see, within the context of the scientific revolution, the legal sphere within which Milton operated had inevitably to make reference to nature, since the intelligibility of the latter was assigned precisely to the divine utterance. At first, the confusion between the sphere of human laws with the regularity or the "legality" informing the natural world seems dangerously metaphorical for us, given that human laws came to be understood as arbitrary and the effect of contractual relations between men. Milton belongs to a time in which intersubjective relations were still believed as able to be grounded on a rationality objectively written in nature; grasping Milton's modernity involves exploring the solutions he offers to the radical changes effected on the fabric of nature, as well as its ideological mobilizations, with the onset of secular modes of thought. In order to defend the rationality of his statements, the ideal interpreter had to make recourse to the utterance of the subject who infused his reason into nature and reality. Our suggestion here is that Milton's hermeneutic practices need not be seen simply as misreadings, for insofar as he makes recourse to God as the utterer of the Word that expresses the reason of nature, he is simply struggling with the problem of the subject of the letter. At the same time, as we saw, with the Galilean event, it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain that the rational, mathematizable letter is grounded in any spirit, which increasingly dwindles into metaphor and, no wonder, can only

be rearticulated within the aesthetic sphere.[18] In that regard, our aim is not far from that of a critic such as Regina Schwartz for whom, roughly speaking, the issue of the dissolution of the law in charity is the point where Miltonic hermeneutics, grounded as they are in the scientific revolution, nonetheless tackles the possibility of the existence of justice in a scientific world. Discussing the vanishing of the sacramental dimension attached to the ritual of the eucharistic transubstantiation, she writes: "The claim for visibility of the once-invisible harbors an implicit tension for the social body; on the one hand, access to the divine opens the way to instrumentality [...]; on the other hand, such visibility means losing recourse to the protection that only a completely inaccessible transcendence can offer" (2008, p. 34).[19] Looking in retrospect, Milton's hope that the letter of the law would provide the agency of people's freedom is a hope that, if lost like his Puritan paradise, maintains its radiance because the justness of its cause demanded more than the horizon of the text could accommodate. He is faithful to the letter of the law even when against it, or precisely *because* against it when its interpretation succumbs to a fetishization of the means.

Milton's "patterning after the beginning" is a return to origins undertaken to lay the foundations of his argument in the anthropological essence of man, to the effect that the impossibility of seeking divorce becomes a violation of his nature. A great part of the exegesis of Genesis consists then in bringing out the implications of man's creation in God's image (Gen. 1:27). The theological motif of *homo imago Dei* has a long history going back to pre-Christian Jewish interpreters, middle Platonism and the Church fathers. In his reconstruction of the most significant turning points of this history**,** Alexander Altmann discloses that in early

---

[18] The status of the exact nature of the revolution brought by the "Tuscan artist" is a point of contention, as can be seen from the following contrast of evaluation by Alexandre Koyré and Gaston Bachelard: "Although he [Bachelard] certainly had no objections to Koyré's discontinuous view of the history of science, his conception of epistemological rupture did not overlap with Koyré's revolution. As Koyré saw it, the scientific revolution was by no means a revolution against philosophy. Galileo's anti-Aristotelism and his Platonism were the motor of it. [...] For him, the epistemological ruptures in the inquiries into nature, rather than reflecting a rupture in metaphysics, represented a break away from non-scientific thought" (CHIMISSO, 2001, p. 146).

[19] Her point is that the disappearance of the sacramental dimension in several spheres of life resulted in idolatry, which is the temptation that always haunts the idealization of technology, hence her attempt to safeguard the sacramental by preserving an "inaccessible transcendence" like Levinas. At this point, it is worthy to mention that my argument in this section arises from an attempt to approximate both Milton's insistence on the rationality of the letter (with the naturalistic tendencies of his thought) with a possible materialism of the letter (in the way that Barbara Cassin analyzes how Lacan's letter, the indivisible atom of his system, is the clue to his materialism, comparing it to Democritus etc.) As must be clear by now, I do not want by any means to "Lacanize" Milton, making his statements agree with psychoanalytic theses, but to create an analysis of the centrality of the letter for him that might benefit from what psychoanalysis has to say about it. In that regard, check Nancy & Lacoue-Labarthe (1973).

commentaries this verse was a source of anxiety, as rabbinic translators of the text to Aramaic attempted to forestall any suggestions of anthropomorphism by rendering it as "similitude" (1968, p. 235-36). It was only when the influence of Platonism penetrated translations of the Bible, that the motif became explicitly linked to the set of considerations that "image" entailed in Plato, and was accordingly interpreted to fit the conception of reality as sustained by ideas. The totality of ideas constituted Logos, which was itself a manifestation of the intelligence or soul sustaining the universe, so that in point of fact the divine image in man was taken as a reflection of the image which provided the mediation between God and humanity. Milton himself conceives the main predicate of such original resemblance to God by saying: "the Image of God wherin man was created, is meant Wisdom, Purity, Justice, and rule over all creatures. All which being lost in Adam, was recover'd with gain by the merits of Christ" (*CP* II, p. 587). In this regard, he follows the usual Christian interpretation, although the preponderance given to reason over will distinguishes him from reformers such as Luther and Calvin. The main point of contention between interpreters however was the degree to which such an image was irretrievable and to what extent it represented, in the creature, traces of a non-created God.

The main novelty introduced by the early fusion of Platonism with Christian soteriology was the idea that Christ had regained for mankind the original image of God corrupted by the fall, which in its more philosophical guise was identified with intellectual faculties inscribed in the soul, and responsible for activities such as the relative autonomy for rationally informed choice. Calvin, for instance, claims that "there is no doubt that the proper seat of the image is in the soul" (2006, p. 188). Following the tradition for which the main feature of such divine resemblance was a judicious understanding and the ability to cultivate righteousness, he argues that "it is certain that the knowledge of it [righteousness] was engraved upon the soul [...] [and] the more anyone endeavours to approach God, the more he proves himself endowed with reason" (2006, p. 192-193). For our purpose, it is especially meaningful that the attributes of such image are described as divine gifts bestowed on man and lost in the occasion of his trespass: "the many pre-eminent gifts with which the human mind is endowed proclaim that something divine has been engraved upon it" (2006, p. 184-185). From Philo of Alexandria to Calvin, then, the recurrent metaphor for how this image is bequeathed to man is that of an inscription on a substance, an indelible mark which has been obscured by the fall,

and even after Christ's redemption continues to be concealed from man by some religious rulers. In such a context, the Aristotelian definition of man as the rational animal endowed with the capacity to be an end in himself unites with this "image of God" to give a double meaning to the word "character":

> The term "the seal of the first Adam," as well as the simile of the coin, is here used in the same sense in which Philo speaks of the heavenly man or reason which is created after God's image as a seal impressed on the earthly man and stamped on the soul as on a coin [...] Man, he [Rashi] says, "was made by a seal like a coin that is made by an impression", and the image (of this "coin") that "was prepared for him" as "an image in the similitude of his Creator" (ALTMANN, 1968, p. 242).

Milton himself when speaking of man in his "original rectitude" resorts to the same metaphors, as we have seen previously: "in [his] brest all that was naturall or morall was engrav'n without externall constitutions and edicts" (*CP* II, p. 602). God writes in man's heart a law, engraves a letter, which is stronger than external constraints and is a token of his own resemblance to his creator. The hypothesis that the distinction of the human animal might be the gift of language has held such sway in Western thought, that at the moment of most confidence in structural linguistics, Lacan could half-jokingly claim that "psychoanalytic experience has rediscovered in man the imperative of the Word as the law that has shaped him in its image" (2007, p. 264).

To explore the discursive effectivity of the concept of Image of God in mid-seventeenth century, after briefly tracing its long history, is inevitably bound up with analyzing its ideological mobilization in the attempts at doctrinally rethinking legislative foundations during the conflict between parliament and monarchy that divided the country. While the central premise of this doctrine was that the soul had an internal light capable of aiding man in his knowledge of nature, the very recourse to nature at the period became a deeply charged and controversial topic. The first point to be made is that nature referred to a set of immutable laws and dispositions placed (indeed, written) by God in the very structure of reality. The intelligibility of these laws was commensurate with human reason, provided man engaged in the necessary discipline to carry out a rigorous inquiry. As Sirluck writes apropos the concept of natural law: "to live agreeably to nature – that is, to conform to the divine order of the universe – therefore meant to obey 'right reason,' freeing the will from thralldom to pleasure and pain and choosing only what was right and good ('virtue')" (*CP* II, p. 24). Within the

context of the controversy about the scope of the power of the two main legislative bodies of the country, natural law became a type of floating signifier harnessed to serve the aims of the contending factions. Therefore, even though the concept was particularly mustered to inform the emerging doctrine of popular sovereignty of the partisans of the parliament, Milton, who was briefly an enthusiast of that institution, could nonetheless take the concept of natural law in radically different directions.

One of the pivotal objects of controversy concerned precisely, given the corruption caused by the first man's evil meal, the extent to which post-lapsarian nature could share in the rationality of the Adamic intelligence, because hanging on that issue was the rationale for the necessity of external, civic and social constrains. An author such as Henry Parker could write: "Man being depraved by the fall of Adam grew so untame and uncivill a creature, that the Law of God written in his brest was not sufficient to restrayne him from mischiefe" (p. 13). While, like Hobbes, Parker acknowledges the inevitability of constraint, he grounds his views on a theory of "natural law," with its implied freedom, to which the mechanist philosopher would be averse. In that regard, he follows a widespread tendency to provide a natural foundation for the emerging subject, that is, in which freedom becomes a natural endowment of man. The rhetoric of Milton's own discourse is found in other pamphlets of the time, in which the "the clearest beames of humaine reason" go hand in hand with "the strongest inclinations of nature": man's struggle for freedom to the point of regicide was simply a means of asserting his natural rights. In the opposite side of the spectrum, nonetheless, a royalist could conceive nature in itself as irredeemably alienated from and abandoned by the divine: "not the law of simple, holy, and inviolate nature (for that state of innocence was in paradise alone), but of a defiled and corrupted nature" (p. 134-5 qtd. SIRLUCK, 1959, p. 32). While the excerpts mentioned so far concern politics specifically, we significantly encounter the same language in the scientific realm of Bacon's philosophy of nature. One of his central contentions consisted on claiming that, since the fall was a *moral* corruption, there was no basis for claiming a radical unknowability of the natural realm, and hence the presupposition of an inherent limit to the inquiries of reason: "the pure and immaculate knowledge by which Adam assigned appropriate names to things did not give opportunity or occasion for the Fall" (2003, p. 12). In short, such a context reveals pamphleteers belligerently assembling around nature with different claims, but mostly agreeing that insight into its mysteries was the condition for the access to truth and

the realization of human potentials. Whereas in the case of Bacon such a confidence would differentiate the discourse on nature to a scientific methodology, the same confidence would push Milton in an aesthetic direction.

It is helpful therefore to bear in mind that nature was a central concept articulated in a philosophical, political and individual level, in a fusion bound to be inconsistent. At this point we can therefore expand our mapping of the connections that constitute Milton's understanding of virtue/character. The retrieval of prelapsarian nature is mobilized, in the concept of virtue, as a regulating ideal for the actualization, in several spheres, of mankind's vocation to live according to rationality (his resemblance to the creator): as a citizen, the fact that freedom is a predicate of his nature justifies his obedience to parliament or monarch only insofar as their government furthers his own self-preservation, because it would be *unnatural* not to revolt against tyranny; however, the conscience of one's own divine resemblance does not fall from heaven, and exacts the work of educating reason, not by force, but by using the internal light in the pursuit of knowledge. And if there is no reason to suppose an unsurpassable barrier to access the secrets of nature, the possibility of the revaluation of sexuality, which for some was precisely the dimension of Adamic nature responsible for human corruption, emerges with full force. At this point we are finally in a position to formulate that, in the domestic treatises, the contested concept of nature, in all of its resonances, is harnessed so as to provide the very criterion for a legitimate marriage. By means of an association which is never completely made explicitly, the reattainment of the *imago Dei*, as a capacity to purge the internal vision of reason from the distortions of the fallen senses, is juxtaposed with the contemplation of the wife, who is after all the image of man.

The divorce tracts already sketchily give signs of that silent substitution whereby the communion of the spirit capable of reestablishing innocent nature in the religious body of the church increasingly retracts to the secular and private sphere, and in particular the relationship between husband and wife. The image of God was "recover'd with gain by the merits of Christ" (*CP* II, p. 587) and so the religious assembly was at first the privileged body where the monist utopia could be accomplished. However, as Schwartz has shown, as the eucharist began to be denounced as a fetishist practice, the possibility of communion underwent crisis and had to be transferred to other spheres: "a striking and in many ways counter-intuitive phenomenon took place during the Reformation when the doctrine of transubstantiation was rejected by many

Reformers. Aspects of the Eucharist began showing up in the poetry of the Reformation" (2008, p. 7-8). Although *Paradise Lost* itself is the accomplished essay at a solution to that problem, the divorce tracts' emphasis on communication between a couple evinces Milton's attempt to coordinate the disciplined engendering of a monistic nature both in the level of politics (he was not disillusioned as yet) and in the domestic sphere. Thus, it is extremely significant that in *Doctrine and Discipline* the poet devotes a chapter to contend that forbidding divorce for natural causes is against "nature," in a turn of his argument that has puzzled critics in its inexorability, and that is of interest here for, as it were, bringing to the fore the several levels where nature operates for him. We read:

> What can be a fouler incongruity, a greater violence to the reverend secret of nature, then to force a mixture of minds that cannot unite, & to sowe the furrow of mans nativity with seed of two incoherent and uncombining dispositions; which act being kindly and voluntarie, as it ought, the Apostle in the language he wrote call'd *Eunoia*, and the Latines *Benevolence*; intimating the original thereof to be in the understanding and the will; if not […] [it] is the most injurious and unnaturall tribute that can be extorted from a person endew'd with reason (*CP* II, p. 270-1).

In this passage, temperament, taken from humoral physiology, achieves such importance that the individual is in danger of wasting the effort to discipline his soul and body in case he is forced to remain married to someone with an incompatible temperament. First, it is important to note that the *logic* of discipline hereby revealed is an exchange of sorts, in which both innocent nature and the correlated gift of the wife are construed as symbolic rewards for the obedient and rationally endowed. Just as discussions raged on concerning whether subjects were bound to accomplish duties to their political representatives when performance of those duties entailed a breach in their own self-preservation, the forced mingling of incompatible natures becomes here a violation of what is most spontaneous for the rational faculties (that is, counterintuitive to the understanding and will, *nous* and *volens*). While St. Paul had indeed claimed that "benevolence" (a euphemism for sexual "intercourse") encompassed the most important duty of husband to wife and vice-versa, a marriage maintained in spite of natural incompatibility was a contradiction in terms with the benevolence on the name of which it straightened the yoke of the law. Furthermore, since Milton's monism privileged the spiritual moment in materiality, the mental incompatibility of the couple directly affects how they relate to their bodies. Let us remember that, for instance, mental incompatibility was a much more serious breach of marriage for Milton than carnal adultery. He continues:

> If the noysomnesse or disfigurement of body can soon destroy the sympathy of mind to wedlock duties, much more will the annoyance and trouble of mind infuse it self into all the faculties and acts of the body, to render them invalid, unkindly, and even unholy against the fundamentall law book of nature; which Moses never thwarts, but reverences. (*CP* II, p. 272)

At one level, the poet is making the perfectly intelligible point that falling in love involves a certain affinity of mental disposition, similar tastes and so forth, since otherwise one would have to assume a radical exchangeability between individuals: "that every woman is meet for every man, none so absurd to affirm" (*CP* II, p. 272). Those who defended the indissolubility of matrimony did not realize that, when it came to choosing a partner, there were more factors than making a vow before a priest, and that some of those were immutable. However, given that Milton wants to ground these dispositions on nature, an argument of this character, as his education had trained him to see, inevitably involved a recourse to philosophy, even though that led him to shaky ground. The great problem for the poet was how to substantiate his recourse to nature in a proper signified. In the vein of the eclecticism proper to his humanism, Milton tries out several possible answers. He even considers with some reticence, at his most Yeatsian, the influence of the stars: "but what might be the cause, whether each ones alotted Genius or proper Starre, or whether the supernall influence of Schemes and angular aspects or this elemental *Crasis* here bellow […] I dare not, with the men I am likest to clash, appear so much a Philosopher as to conjecture" (*CP* II, p. 271). At this point two important aspects must be observed. First, critics have usually found it hard to reconcile the freedom elsewhere assigned to innocent nature and the dispositional constraints advocated by the divorce tracts. The polemicist who was going to famously claim that "reason is but choosing" had to confront, particularly when dealing with marriage, the fact that a certain degree of determination is not incompatible with freedom, as we are going to see in the next chapter. Further, because they were signs of the speculative and the "reverend secrets of nature," astral bodies exercised a fascination analogous to that of the bodies and the sexuality of the first couple or of the angels.

Milton's argument hinges therefore on the characteristically humanistic trust on the power of the divine endowment of rational capacity to release humanity from the grasp of a natural world whose blind laws constituted fear-inspiring, petrified idols. The difficulty of the concept of freedom underlying the divorce tracts might be clarified if we frame the discussion from the viewpoint according to which the motif of the *imago Dei* condenses a reconfiguration

of the hierarchy of power between human reason and nature. The case is not that freedom consists of unrestrained power of choice, but that nature itself is discovered as teleologically already containing freedom as its forgotten origin. Although there certainly is a genuine scientific interest in the laws of nature in Bacon's forays into methodology, the complexity of the fabric of that concept in the mid-seventeenth century crops up in the fact that, as a cypher for a rigidified set of laws encoding undue subservience, corrupt "nature" also refers to an archaic social structure in the process of dissolution. The functioning of the laws of the natural world in its rigidified sense is tinted by a language of mastery and slavery which is recurrently contrasted with the emerging ideal of rationally informed argument in the public sphere. In other words, exhibiting an articulation that transcends the inquiry into the physical world *per se*, the ambiguous status of nature in Milton's early prose and the divorce tracts in particular arises from its intertwinement with the *historical*. At this point, a terminological clarification proves helpful. There is a dimension of the concept of nature that coalesces with the philosophical sphere of ontology in its meta-historical role of providing the coordinates for what can manifest itself as historically intelligible. That is why in our view historicism proves a limited approach and one needs a *philosophy* of history, since only the latter is able to account for the emergence of the historical as the production of the *new* in naturalized structures, complexes which possess a compulsive ontological force over the conforming of phenomena. Therefore, in one sense, we must bear in mind that nature as approached by philosophy simply names the regime of production of interiorities within a semi-transcendental framework. That is considered "natural" which, by submitting or exhibiting a certain legality or logicality in the consistency of its identity, appears as legible. As these terms perfectly show, we are interested in that sense of nature in which it would refer not so much to the physical world in its supposed non-conceptual immediacy but to the regularity of a type of phenomena that conforms to a regime of identity. The philosopher T.W. Adorno, who claims that "the question of ontology (...) is none other than what [he] mean[s] by nature" (1984, p. 111-12), is also helpful when he defines history as "characterized primarily by the occurance of the qualitatively new; it is a movement that does not play itself out in more identity, mere reproduction of what has always been, but rather one in which the new occurs" (1984, p. 111). Ironically enough, thought is only able to capture in its texture what is more than its own laws, the very process of constitution whereby it communicates with its object, precisely when it comes against phenomena that resist symbolization, in other words, when it bumps against nature as mute

image or allegory deprived of life: the irruption in the web of thought of a pure *transience* that eludes legibility. In our view, then, Nature as ontological production of interiorities and nature as waste and transience are profoundly dialectical. The point is not to search for the access to a transcendence outside the universe (which makes me slightly disagree with Schwartz), but how ontology is able to register in the workings of its machine the irruption of what we could indeed call a miracle, the mute manifestation of freedom, the brief flickering of the spirit.

This detour is justified because, as readers of the divorce tracts are aware, the diametrically opposite determination of nature as waste-product and deprivation of symbolic or spiritual plasticity appears in the treatises as a foil in the figure of the unnatural "unmeet" wife. Instances of this semantics of the lack of meaning are found in passages as the following. Contrasting prelapsarian perfection with the present state of man, he writes: "how much more is it needful now against all the sorrows and casualties of this life to have an intimate and speaking being, a ready and reviving associate in marriage: whereof who misses by chance on a mute and spiritles mate, remains more alone than before" (*CP* II, p. 251). Some pages later, using the language of the old humoral physiology, Milton continues. The disciplined husband might find himself *tempted* to despair of providence if he finds himself "bound fast to an uncomplying discord of nature, or, as it oft happens, to an image of earth and fleam [phlegm]" (*CP* II, p. 254). Phlegm was the humor associated with the tendency to sluggishness and apathy, and in the philosophical world to which Milton belonged stood close to the mechanistic materiality from which the divine utterance had departed perhaps irremediably. At this point, Milton found himself at a crossroads: did Christ's redemption not consist precisely in assuming human form, including that moment of utter despair when the flesh finds itself being tortured almost without hope of meaning or transcendence, as best rendered in Hans Holbein's *The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb*? There is a strange resemblance and dangerous indifference between the moment of divine alienation in the muteness of the flesh and the sinfulness of error itself that, as critics point out, Milton registered but of which he nonetheless attempted to escape due to his aversion to sacrifice. Thus, at the same time that Milton's envisioning of a monistic redemption of the liveliness of nature from dualism comes out as a celebration of the symbolic power that lends plasticity to otherwise inert matter, what the orientation of his thought does not realize and remains ambiguous towards is that at the center of the life-lending Word we find the mute pain of nature which can only be rendered

aesthetically. As Walter Benjamin writes: “this is the heart of the baroque, secular explanation of history as the Passion of the world […] the greater the significance, the greater the subjection to death, for death digs most deeply the jagged demarcation line between physical nature and signification” (1998, p. 166).

In a world from which, as Schwartz has analyzed, the possibility of communion with the divine increasingly disappears, we can locate Milton’s criticism of yoking the husband to the idolatrous image of a wife within his broader criticism of doctrinal formalism whose privileged index was the “idol” of the eucharist so deplored by Protestants. Genuine conversation does as little take place by bringing two people together than communion with the divine by the *tempting* ingestion of bread. In that sense, the divorce tracts already evince how the ideal of the restoration of the dignified primordial nature of man, in which the traffic between the spiritual and the bodily would be unhampered, tacitly informed the characterization of the matrimonial sphere. In other words, Milton’s monism in the divorce tracts has to be read in light of the historical process of de-transcendentalization of the communion with the divine substance, or the substance the partaking of which was responsible for the synthesis of the social body. The vitality and power of the laws were no longer simply conceived as emanating from the central figure of the monarch but ultimately from man’s own original divine similitude. Perhaps, to articulate Schwartz and Rogers, we could say that what the latter has called the “vitalist moment” represented, on the philosophical level, the hope that the secularization proper to philosophical enlightenment, with its renewed interest in nature, would speed the possibility of communication with the divine by discovering it as latent in the very corpuscular structure of matter and the universe.

If this research dwells so much on the figure of the incommunicable wife, it is because we identity in that element of Milton’s discourse in the domestic treatises a symptom of the non-relation proper to sexuation in the psychoanalytic sense. Just as we had to qualify what we meant by nature, what is being called sexuation has as little to do with traits of the physical body. Insofar as sex is an existential marker of entities, and psychoanalysis submits that the signifier has an ontological effectivity over the constitution of speaking subjects, the very form of the “being” of those entities is informed by a logico-linguistic structure. Such an approximation between what the poet and the psychoanalyst have to say about “sex” is justifiable to the extent that the formulas of sexuation intervene critically on the limitations of

traditional logic as it is articulated particularly by Aristotle (even as they try to write what is impossible to be written: the real of sexual enjoyment). His metaphysics has had a hegemonic influence over the determination of what counts as legitimate cognition, neglecting the thinking that exists in "spurious" phenomena such as parapraxes, and hence it privileges univocity over equivocation.[20] The principle of non-contradiction, specially, has had a hegemonic binding force to the point that thinking properly has been reduced to the identity function of cognition. For our aims, the problem of sexuation tackles, as the philosopher Barbara Cassin points out, precisely the dimension in which the capacity to think in accord to traditional logic becomes an ideological marker of anthropological distinction. For Aristotle, to inhabit language is always to say something, to refer to a *presence* or identifiable object; in contrast, to speak of nothing or to make a use of speech that privileges the creative over the reporting function is to blur the line between the humanly rational and mere sophistry, which is ultimately linked to the non-human. As the Stagirite writes in his *Metaphysics*: "We can, however, demonstrate negatively even that this view is impossible (for the same thing to be and not to be), if our opponent will only say something; and if he says nothing, it is absurd to seek to give an account of our views to one who cannot give an account of anything, in so far as he cannot do so. For such a man, as such, is from the start no better than a vegetable" (p. 1588, 1006a10-15). Cassin glosses this passage with the following comment: "he [the opponent] does have to speak, if he's a man, an animal endowed with logos – a man, and not just a plant. Therein lies all the meanness of the refutation, a refutation that's not just pragmatic (...) but transcendental, grafted onto the conditions of possibility of language as definitional of man's humanity: speak, if you are a man" (p. 8-9). In the terms that we have been employing, we have seen that Nature as an ontological compulsion to produce identity only becomes history when it recognizes itself in nature as pure indifference (the indifference of a plant, the unfit wife beyond the logos, or rather repressed at its core).

For the purposes of this research, what is relevant about these broader philosophical issues is that they throw a revealing light in a very palpable phenomenon around which we

[20] I am using univocity and equivocation as Aristotle defines them in the beginning of the *Categories*: "Things are equivocally (ὁμώνυμα) named, when they have the name only in common, the definition (or statement of essence) corresponding with the name being different (...) Things are univocally (συνώνυμα) named, when not only they bear the same name but the name means the same in each case – has the same definition corresponding" (1962, p. 12).

could say that the Miltonic canon pivots: the crucial role of scenes of temptation. Does not the drift of Aristotle's argument evoke the strategies of Comus and Satan in their respective temptations? As will be remembered, the utter undramatic passivity of the Son, which drives his opponent to exasperatedly exclaim "what dost thou in this world?", stems from his refusal to be initiated and act in the wrong time. Even in the divorce tracts, in the way he handles the confrontation between Christ and the Pharisees, Milton has a strange intuition that the law is most potent precisely when it gives voice to silence. The internality of the law achieves its consistency by the exception that confirms the rule; and that is perfectly, if mysteriously, rendered in the fact that Christ as the accomplished embodiment of the law must appear to his enemies as a transgressor; the Word is most resonant when it resorts to silence.

2.5. It is not good that man should be alone

Unlike the treatises dealing with public issues, Milton's divorce tracts are a suitable ground to see the intertwinement of the law with enjoyment, and the different forms of erotization to which it is prone. Moreover, if it is assumed that the main criterion concerning the fittest to govern the Commonwealth in his prose *ouevre* is a fusion of Aristotelian character with Pauline grace, then the divorce tracts add a Platonic component to this synthesis by arguing the privileged status of the marital relation as fundamental social bond. This is to suggest, in other words, that Miltonic ethics has a place for a markedly erotic dimension. Previously we pointed out that for Milton sensibility played an important role in knowledge, and that he did not remove the affects from reason (as in a rationalistic understanding of the concept), all of which reveals that he conceived that the best manner to lead a righteous life, in which one fulfilled his duties to society and to himself, should include considerations apropos the marital bond ordained by God in the beginning. As we gather from his definition of the genuine marriage, it constitutes "conjugal love arising from a mutual fitnes to the final causes of wedlock, help and society in Religious, Civil and Domestic conversation" (*CP* II, p. 608) and "mariage is a conjunction of one man and one woman lawfully consenting, into one flesh, for mutual helps sake, ordain'd of God" (*CP* II, p. 610).

The fact that God ordained erotic pleasure (which usually is that which a law limits), while showing that divine law is different in quality precisely because Christ's "yoke is easy,"

does not prevent the introduction of some reflections on its form. It raises the same paradoxes of free will: if the deity *commands* freedom, does one best express his independence by simply *assenting* to the command or by *transgressing* it? Of course, the question does not resist deeper inquiry, because a notion of freedom as utter indeterminacy of choice is extremely poor; freedom is precisely a state of high-level of determination. The genuinely free Christian *cannot but* obey God's command; he is completely determined to fuse with the desire of God. Thus, for those who obey his (apparently) paradoxical command, losing the promised erotic conversation is tantamount to being confused with the damned, who is denied or rather chooses to lose the gift. (In a characteristic Miltonic exaggeration, Roman Catholicism is equated with the interdiction of the sexual dimension for priests.) The impossibility of leading a fit conversation with a wife (remaining bound in an unhappy marriage) might suggest to the husband the atheistic thought that God created a rule that cannot be obeyed (which, developed in a different way, amounts to a command man is destined to transgress). Indeed, the thought often appears in the divorce tracts that a God who punishes a husband tying him to an incompatible wife administers a disproportionately bitter remedy for a minor mistake of judgement or error. Within the obsession that Milton had with the myth of Eden, that logic immediately recalls the impression that death was too great a penalty for someone who did not have any experience of evil (certainly, in the epic he would go to great lengths to justify the genuine God by having him send angels to "instruct" Adam and Eve to prevent their "failing the test").

One of Milton's central arguments, as we saw, is that since marriage is a remedy for loneliness, to make it remediless goes against its original purpose. He says, for instance, "that there was a neerer alliance between *Adam* and *Eve*, then could be ever after between man and wife, is visible to any. For no other woman was ever moulded out of her husbands rib" (*CP* II, p. 601), and although he is careful to distinguish between marriage before and after the fall, he will often use as metaphor for the incompatible wife the image of a diseased limb:

> When as nature teaches us to divide any limb from the body to the saving of his fellows, though it be the maiming and deformity of the *whole*; how much more is it her doctrin to sever by incision, not a true limb [only for Adam it was a literal limb] so much, though that be lawfull, but an adherent, a sore, the gangrene of a limb, to the recovery of a *whole* man. (*CP* II, p. 602, emphasis added.)

As legislation stands, the husband does not have legal means to purge himself of the poisoned wife. These considerations occur in the context of the poet's interpretation of the

purpose of Eve's creation in light of his "master-verse" from Genesis: "And God said: It is not good that man should be alone, I will make him a helpe meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). The emphasis on mutuality and companionship implied in the verse allowed him to draw the center of the marital relationship from copulation to compatibility of disposition, that is, at least in thesis, to the sphere of consent.

One of the most telling passages in this regard is the following:

> Hitherto all things that have bin nam'd, were *approv'd* [my emphasis] of God to be very good: lonelines is the first thing which Gods eye nam'd not good: whether it be a thing, or the *want* [my emphasis] of somthing, I labour not; let it be their tendance, who have the art to be industriously idle. And heer *alone* is meant alone without woman [...] till *Eve* was giv'n him, God reckn'd him to be alone [...] God supplies the privation of not good, with the perfect gift of a reall and positive good; it is mans pervers cooking who hath turn'd this bounty of God into a Scorpion (*CP* II, p. 595).

When God proves loneliness, its taste is reproved. Here we are going to be a little industriously idle, but for the sake of enrichening the understanding of Milton's text. In the hiatus of a colon, the poet seems to be dismissing the problem of evil in man's constitution. The rather Catholic question of whether man's original condition is that of being in want (desire/deprivation) of good is by-passed by the Protestant poet. Of course, to call it evil is our interpretation, as he insists in using "not good." The phrase "Gods eye nam'd" is meant to recall the association between light and the Word found in Genesis and in the Gospel of John (eyes were believed to emit light, so that the image here is that of God's eye speaking reality into manifestation – similar to error, loneliness is that whose birth is undesirable, better not brought into light). There is a sense that "not good" is indeed a better expression since it only implies the absence of something that should be there, and hence does not ontologize negation, at least at this prelapsarian moment. Falling into a loop of sorts, Milton has to deal here with an original privation which cannot be acknowledged as such and was there, as it were, only waiting to be filled with God's gift. Given that within the logic of the myth, evil was introduced into the world through the woman, to claim that this original "not-good privation" was evil would nonetheless smack of predestination, an absurd conjecture: "God is no deceitful giver, to bestow that on us for a remedy of lonelines, which if it bring not a sociable minde [...] leavs us no less alone then before" (*CP* II, p. 598). Remarkably, nonetheless, it is to this very loneliness that the mismatched husband is subject after the fall; the incompatible wife is not "a positive good" but a sore, the gangrene of a limb. Although he has a companion, the husband

succumbs to melancholia, which was associated with the phlegmatic, whose bodily equivalent is the slow decaying of an organ. We previously saw how concerned Milton was with the preservation of his body, and this explains the virulence of his attacks on the "heretic" wife.

In the original myth, Adam names every beast of the field but does not find a suitable partner for him. As Milton says, the original is more expressive: "God as it were not satisfy'd with the naming of a help, goes on describing *another self, a second self, a very self it self*" (*CP* II, p. 600). Just as the Word, we are told in Proverbs, was constantly playing before God, Eve is *mutatis mutandis* created to fulfil a mimetic longing, the desire to see himself externalized in a form he can contemplate, even as God, the creator, contemplates himself in man. This is clear in *Paradise Lost* where the creation of Eve is explicitly linked to the faculty of Fancy. The first man nonetheless is warned not to erect a fetish out of his wife, since she should be interpreted primarily as God's gift: she is Adam's *sanctioned* echo, saved from turning to an empty image, as Custom, we could conjecture, because their obedience infuses spirit into their relation. Were Eve to remain obedient, her womb would conceive truth and not death. Hollander, the critic who has analyzed the role of Echo in Milton more closely, tells us: "it is in the milieu of Pan that Echo becomes a credential voice, associated with truth rather than with the qualities of the other Echo, the spurned lover of the self-loving Narcissus" (1981, p. 11).[21]

Previously, we saw that the aspirer to exegete of the Law had to resist the temptation of Custom's false teaching. His rejection of her poisoned food or knowledge is a condition for being able to let the divine word touch his lips (and reverberate in his oral cavity). But if immediate oral incorporation is surrendered on a level, the mimetic, erotogenic quality of material relations is retrieved in and transferred to the very materiality of the letter. As James Turner has told us, the interpretation of the Logos (different, say, from more rationalistic traditions) has an erotic dimension for Milton, and its exegesis involves an exercise of *imagination.* The imaginative dimension of the Law and the enjoyment expected from a suitable marriage (which after all is a command) are analogous:

[21] The following passage is also revealing: "The negative readings of Echo come from associations of fragmentation of the anterior voice, *the hollowness of her concavities* of origin transferred to the figurative *hollowness of her words*, and progressive diminution of successive reverberations" (1981, p. 11). The expression "the hollowness of her concavities" cannot but recall the womb and throws further light on Custom's mock-birth.

> We cannot therefore alwayes be contemplative, or pragmaticall abroad, but have need of som delightfull intermissions, wherin the enlarg'd soul may leav off a while her severe schooling; and like a glad youth in wandring vacancy may keep her hollidaies [...] in no company so well as where the different sexe in most resembling unlikenes, and most unlike resemblance cannot but please best. [...] Lest we should be too timorous, in the aw that our flat sages would form us and *dresse us*, Salomon among his gravest Proverbs *countenances* a kinde of ravishment and *erring* fondnes in the entertainement of wedded leisures. (*CP* II, p. 597, my emphases)

In this often-cited passage, marriage amounts to the recreation of an industrious student (like research into the nature of "not-good," marriage is circumscribed in the sphere of idleness, which positions it in an economy of work). The reasoning is triggered in special by the realization that in our fallen state a constant pursuit of Wisdom without intermission wearies our "faint and sensitive abilities" (*CP* II, p. 597). To say that the woman was created to remedy loneliness assumes here the literal implication that, without her restorative power, man would fall ill under over-exertion and contemplation: "in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love" (*SE XIV,* p. 85), says Freud in his classic paper on narcissism. The trajectory that I have built so far must make intelligible the affirmation that what is most intriguing here, philosophically speaking, is why man must create in order not to languish, and why creation (which is the prototype of what later becomes work) has a healing power. There is an evil parasite called Death eating into our flesh of which we protect ourselves by paradoxically projecting ourselves to our exterior.

Critics have pointed out the abnormal disgust conveyed by some of the images Milton uses to express the horror of remaining tied to an undesired wife:

> Our Saviour spake cheifly against putting away for casual and choleric disagreements [...] not hereby meaning to hale and dash together the irreconcilable aversations of nature, nor to tie up a faultlesse person like a parricide, as it were into one sack with an enemy, to be his causelesse tormenter and executioner (*CP* II, p. 677).

This image is one in a series, the starkest of which is probably that of Mezentius's practice of punishing vanquished enemies by tying them to dead corpses (cf. *CP* II, p. 326). The allusion to "our Saviour" is also appropriate because, since Christ's death was meant to save us from the disease of sin, to command indissoluble marriage would be equivalent to denying salvation, health or *help* (helpmeet), condemning the husband to a living hell. Moreover, described as an enemy sticking to one's body as a site of pollution, the incompatible

wife must be vehemently repulsed as a "despiritualized lump," the farthest on can get from God's image. Indeed, Milton traces divorce in the tracts back to the very creation of the world. His need to argue for the objectivity/naturality of incompatibility of dispositions demanded the position of an original separation between good and evil inscribed by God himself in the nature of things, even against the thrust of his more confrontational "epistemology" in *An Apology* and later in the treatise against licensing. As we have shown above, in a certain level Milton's allegory unwittingly seems to chronicle that the strange resemblance between the obedient and disobedient son intrigued him: truth must be confused with a bastard at her birth, even though later her baptism unequivocally reveals her identity and sets her apart from any corruption.

What does the fact that in some societies objects of defilement are simultaneously sacred tells us about the Law? At least in the Hebrew Bible, the constitution of the signifying space of the Law through the establishment of rituals of purification, limits etc., that is, the establishment of mechanisms of defense and punishing measures against residues and excesses is clear (cf. KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 90-113). The allusion to Ezekiel in the preface to *Doctrine and Discipline*, in this regard, is strangely revealing and suitable, since God forces this particular prophet to do precisely what Milton always shuddered from. As a judgment passed on the chosen people's iniquity, the text tells us that God asked the prophet to bake food "using fuel of human waste in their sight" (4:12). To this sadistic command, the prophet answers in one of the most painful passages of the Bible: "Ah, Lord God! Indeed, I have never defiled myself from my youth till now; I have never eaten what died of itself or was torn by beasts, nor has abominable flesh ever come into my mouth" (4:14). God forces the prophet to demonstrate his obedience by acting as a rebelling son just as the disobedient Israelites, destroying the limits of his body and losing the identity that hitherto he had preserved as a sign of his respect and love for the space of the law which, as a signifying space, his body mirrored. The Old Testament God inaugurates here a maddened superegoic pact with the Law in which the obedient son (the prophet) himself is as it were *rewarded* with punishment.

In Deuteronomy, we are told that a husband has the right to write a bill of divorcement to his wife precisely if he finds any *uncleanness* in her. The Law teaches, indeed *sanctions* our hatred of that which hurts our consistency; and in establishing the perverse pact in which one is allowed to be aggressive to those who embody error and deviancy, it restitutes the anal enjoyment in hurting, hating, and expulsing under the pretense of following rules. For Milton,

certainly, such a Law could only be the rule of Antichrist, an authority who *enjoys* punishing. We do not need nonetheless to succumb to the despairing position that legality and perversion ultimately collapse to one another. That Milton was aware that a Law worthy of vindication should provide a ground for exploration and error can be seen in the tantalizing excerpt cited above: "Salomon [...] countenances an erring fondnes in the entertainment of wedded leisures" (*CP* II, p. 597). Is it mere coincidence of expression or is the poet alluding to the charged meaning assumed by "countenance" and "error" in the allegory analyzed in the beginning of the chapter? We know that in *Paradise Lost*, he would go great lengths to retrieve the prelapsarian, innocent meaning of words like "error" and "wandering," and, of course, here his task was to retrieve the original meaning of God's command of the institution of marriage, which led to a complex reflection about law and enjoyment. According to the logic of the tracts, we do not need to transgress the law because there is a sanctioned error within its bounds. To what extent is the state of innocence an original error for which nonetheless one should not be guilty, in the same way that nakedness is the expression of man's "majesty"? Did Christ not redeem man in the cross precisely to save him from being punished for his errors, so that this state of original error becomes the very substance of freedom? After all, Christian law identifies with the criminal, not the punisher, precisely to save him from the moment of vengeance in justice by transforming his error into innocence. Is not the fact that Milton must admit a moment of fantasy in the law the expression that, in a deep level, a just, reasonable law must always already contain that which unveils it, that shows its resemblance to error; a just law must be aware that in some level it resembles the criminal it punishes, and the perception of such a resemblance should deter it in its mad course of acting like him, and instead offer charity. The interesting issue that the divorce tracts raise to the overall understanding of Milton is how we already find in them the anxiety produced by the fact that we resemble that which we reject, that life is sustained by the nourishment (from milk to the Word) that poisons us to death, and which would be central in the epic. Moreover, the more one reads the divorce tracts the more one realizes that the logic of its argument is less inconsistent than haunted by a strange difference around which the oppositions that it establishes pivots. Intuitively realizing the insistence of this discursive logic, discussing not husband and wife, but Christ and Satan in the much more contrasting context of the late poetry, Kerrigan writes: "What God has put asunder, Milton joins" (1983, p. 102).

3. LUXURIOUS BY RESTRAINT: ADAM AND EVE'S SEPARATION IN *PARADISE LOST* IN THE LIGHT OF THE DIVORCE TRACTS

In the beginning of Book VIII of *Paradise Lost*, the colloquy between Adam and the angel guest moves from history to astronomical speculation, just as the first man takes advantage of the illustrious visitor's presence to relieve his thirst for the knowledge of "things else by me unsearchable" (VIII, 10). Previously, in the invocations, Milton had iterated the image of soaring high "on the wing" of his muse into a sublime register, in a figure that condensed his ambition and fulfilled the wish already voiced in 1628 of "singing of secret things that came to pass / When Beldam Nature in her cradle was" ("At a Vacation Exercise," 45-6). While elsewhere, on the level of the poet's relation to the muse, this unattainable vision refers to the recollection of the past without which the poem cannot be written, in the dialogue between Adam and Raphael, this "speculation" into the unknown becomes scientific inquiry. In a mirror play of sorts, the announcement that Adam "by his count'nance seem'd / Ent'ring on studious thoughts abstruse" (VIII, 39-40) is the equivalent within the diegesis of the poem of the desire to "soar high" that structures the narrative frame. Indeed, Raphael treats Adam to a display of erudition on astronomy, and make so ample use of specific terms that for some lines he is barely understandable on first reading (VIII, 131-149). By the time he infamously tells Adam to be "lowly wise" we realize that the import of his excursion into astronomy ultimately is that, while he can easily dazzle Adam with building and unbuilding hypotheses about issues that strain human understanding, the main task of his visit nonetheless is to work on his obedience. Adam agrees with him and says "therefore from this high pitch let us descend / A lower flight" (VIII, 198-9). Still, a tension begins to build up which breaks into a crisis in the next book. In order to avoid making the first couple susceptible to the charge of leading a sedentary life, just as Adam complains that the Earth does (in the Ptolemaic universe), the poem skillfully posits the body of the angels as an ideal for the first pair to strive for. Therefore, it is not that knowledge of abstruse matters is simply denied to them, but that they should work on remaining obedient because obedience

is the condition for their freedom and leisure to expand their knowledge of the universe, which might be otherwise revoked. As the whole poem gravitates towards Eve's over-eagerness to acquire "forbidden knowledge," the poet, to avoid having his ambition confused with hers, must "descend a lower flight" and show that, if he receives divine visions of inscrutable matters from the muse, it is because he is above all proficient in obedience. He has a delicate problem to navigate, for the wish to see what is invisible to mortal sight might be dangerously close to longing for that which is fundamentally denied to humans. The authority of Milton's word is sustained in the oscillating space where desire for what is forbidden merges with the desire for restraint: "see and know, and yet abstain" (*CP* II, p. 516).

Milton's argument must hinge on proving that the first couple would be granted what as yet they could not achieve if they accepted to comply with its prohibition. Such is the double-bind that structures the tragedy which begins to be spun in Book VIII. But this is an important book especially because the married life of Adam and Eve comes to the fore again, after the introduction to them in Books IV and V. Questions concerning gender hierarchy and the power relations of the society of Eden are particularly couched and interwoven into cosmological and metaphysical speculations in a manner that confirms Rogers's thesis that, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's recourse to natural philosophy has direct bearings on his political science. As Raphael well perceives (VIII, 86-97), Adam's concern for the hierarchy of celestial bodies masks misgivings about the social organization of Eden. Caught between hierarchy and egalitarianism, Milton's universe strangely bears traces of the conflicts between "the sexes" and their communication. As Raphael says to Adam: "other Suns perhaps / With thir attendant Moons thou wilt descry / Communicating Male and Female light, /Which two great Sexes animate the World, /Stor'd in each *Orb* perhaps with some that live" (VIII, 148-151, emphasis added). Specifically, the moments leading to the fatal trespass announced in the beginning of the poem frame the awaited disobedience in a context of matrimonial crisis: the reflection about law and transgression of Milton's theodicy becomes haunted by the articulation of that same subject matter, but in a domestic context, that he had made in the divorce tracts. In this chapter, after expanding on the scaffolding of Milton's doctrine of marriage and divorce built in the previous chapter, I intend to analyze how the concern with rational and slavish uses of the law that had been crucial to conceptualize marriage reappears

in the crucial moments leading to the fall in the epic. In the divorce tracts, domestic turmoil had led the poet to realize that a just law (that permitted divorce) had to be vindicated, however tentatively, on the level of proving that it safeguarded free will; in the epic, questions appertaining to free will and "slavish" work will dramatically burst out again in the context of the depiction of the first domestic crisis. At the center of his great epic, marriage becomes a critical issue as it had been three decades earlier.

3.1. Pauline Burning; Law and Sin

We have seen that one of the central arguments of the divorce treatises was that the rigidity with which commentators adhered to the letter of the law typified a servile understanding inimical to the interpretation of legislation according to its ends characteristic of a free Commonwealth. It is consonant with the ethics of the gospel, according to which a man is not defiled by what touches him but by what comes out of his mouth, that the most serious hindrance to true reformation might lie in the sphere of intimacy. Within this logic, comments such as the following from *Tetrachordon* appear less hyperbolical: "the strictest observance" of "civil and subodinat precepts" can "oftimes prove the destruction not only of many innocent persons and families, but of whole Nations" (*CP* II, p. 588). If the strictest observance of a law "against the good of man" might cause the ruin of whole nations, it could be that the failure of the English Revolution hinged on an unnecessary, "carnal" subservience to the law. Perhaps his fellow citizens were not ready for the freedom and charity of the "living Spirit" (ibid.). Did Milton think, from the privileged viewpoint of the 1660s, that the failure of his inspired prose, such as his four divorce tracts, to elicit the approval of his countrymen, and more generally of his prose to forestall the demise of the republic, were somber signs foreshadowing the future? In *Paradise Lost*, at any event, the unravelling of the society of Eden is surprisingly framed by a matrimonial crisis, in a way that puts the intriguing compulsion of the sexual at the core of man's relationship to freedom. Although the reader might rightly point out that Milton privileged marriage and divorce so much due to his own biography, the fact is that he came to see marriage as a thermometer of broader social issues: "nothing nowadayes is more degenerately forgotten, then the true dignity of man, almost in every respect, but *specially* in this prime institution of Matrimony" (*CP* II, p. 587, emphasis

added). His poem is not simply a diagnosis of the past, however, but a symbol for what could be repeated differently. The first couple's crisis, in spite of its peculiarities, foreshadows all conjugal crises to come, and specially that state of unnecessary "strictest observance" under which the poet lived. This is not to deny the wildly different contexts of the two interventions, but to explore their intertwinements as important moments of his career when he had to approach the same subject matter. As Kerrigan tells us: "it is extremely difficult to speak of Milton's 'development,' his movement from one position to another. He returns again and again to the same metaphors, same biblical texts, same themes, same words" (1973, p. 180).

As we saw, the Genesis verse which affirms that man was created in God's "immortall Image" was essential to the argument of the divorce tracts, and in Milton's interpretation that image "wherin Man was created" meant "Wisdom, Purity, Justice, and rule over all creatures. All which being lost in *Adam*, was recover'd with gain by the merits of Christ" (*CP* II, p. 587). The necessity of taking into account irreconcilable dispositions led Milton to qualify, nonetheless, the extent to which postlapsarian marriages could be modelled on the first couple's (see *CP* II, p. 309). The myth still provided an anchoring point to guide present doctrines, since the definition of the institution as created to forestall man's loneliness was essential to the poet, but Milton had to systematically reinterpret what was meant by "one flesh." As a poet of prophetic aspirations, he wanted his interpretative retrieval of this long-lost image to have effects in his own reality. The work of reassembling the dispersed body of truth into its lost unity was not only contemplative but practical. Further, as we saw, such a "portraiture" of God implied that the first man was allowed to be similar to his creator precisely in his having an image made in his own similitude. It is no wonder, then, that Adam's loss of divine resemblance in *Paradise Lost* coincides with the loss of his wife, as we read in the prose-paragraphs that opens the book of the fall: "Adam at first amaz'd, but perceiving her lost, resolves through vehemence of love to perish with her" (p. 378). Here in what has to be the most important book of the poem, the first woman becomes nothing less than the lost referent of the paradise of the title. In a sense, this is the "tragedy" *Paradise Lost* is going to tell us: when Eve returns, and seized with horror Adam drops the recently made flower-garland, her very presence becomes a reminder, from now on, that she is forever lost.

If Milton left the Lady's doctrine of virginity unformulated, he was able, in contrast, to come up with four treatises concerning a doctrine of marriage and divorce in the course of the years 1643-5, the main distinction of which was its strong emphasis on mutual compatibility and mental fitness. I intend to explore how the tracts inform the conception of marriage of the epic and are therein rearticulated. The well-known verse from Matthew 19:6: "what therefore God hath joined let no man put asunder" is a good starting point to approach one of the main challenges to Milton's argument, namely, the nature of this joining and the conditions that sustain it. In the meeting point between civil and religious life, his matrimonial doctrine oscillates between the language of modern contracts and of religious covenant. An avowed enemy of formalized reason, Milton conceives the matrimonial contract as binding insofar as the reality which it "formalizes" continues to exist, which might seem intuitive enough but in the seventeenth century, after centuries of Catholic hegemony on the topic, struck an unorthodox note. The argument nonetheless cuts deeper, and goes against our own understanding of the binding force of contracts. It agrees with common sense that a contract should be cancelled if it does not fulfill the good it promised, but when Milton claimed that a marriage which did not provide the "meet help" that constitutes its end is essentially no marriage he borders on putting in question the alienating power of contracts (that is, one's subjection to the conditions of the contract once they have been accepted).[22] Especially in this issue of marriage, there is an agreement of natures which transcends their choice, which, as he observes, might well be misguided by appearances, and this objective criterion is set over the subjective pledge. That over which we do not have control is precisely the justification for our freedom, the cause to divorce one's wife. These natural "conjunctions and operations" (*CP* II, p. 680) remain nonetheless the great crux of the divorce tracts, and ask for a nuanced analysis.

On one level, the argument for divorce might be easily interpreted in a heuristic, *ad hoc* manner. For example, if one takes into account the overarching thesis that marriage was instituted to assuage man's loneliness and to provide him with a helpful society, as when he

[22] The unconventionality of the nature of matrimonial contracts can be glimpsed from John Halkett's following comment on Milton's contemporaries: "the phrase 'according to the ordinance of God' suggests, as does Dod and Cleaver's definition, a kind of contract which has a special supernatural binding force and is not to be judged according to the usual principles of human contracts" (1970, p. 12). More recent works about the topic, include Kahn (2009).

writes that "in matrimony there must be first a mutual help to piety, next to civill felowship of love and amity, then to generation, so to houshold affairs" (*CP* II, p. 599), the question of divorce might seem settled. Here we find the more liberal thrust of Milton's politics, which, privileging the life of the mind, admonishes his countryman that elevating copulation as the main end of marriage, the "errand of the body" to the detriment of the "mind unspeakably wrong'd" (*CP* II, p. 600), is a violence done to the prime institution. Conjugal life is conditional on the agreeableness of the society which it instantiates, otherwise it is false: "when love finds it self utterly unmatcht, and justly vanishes, nay rather cannot but vanish, the fleshly act indeed may continue, but not holy, not pure, not beseeming the sacred bond of mariage" (*CP* II, p. 609). As love and the life of the mind disappear, the couple constrained to remain married is caught in the meaningless repetition of a dead act. If one recalls for how long the emphasis on procreation in religious discourses, in ideologically disguised forms, has held hegemony over the modern family, the Miltonic argument, if perhaps marked by the coldness of the intellectual, maintains a continuity with the value of companionate friendship which we moderns came to praise. Every discourse has nonetheless its philosophical underpinnings, and as Fallon has shown, Milton's are particularly conflicting in the divorce tracts:

> Milton the marrier unites body and spirit into one substance, and treats doctrinal and moral offense as aspects of a single error. Milton the divorcer, like the God of *Paradise Lost* and the *Doctrine and Disciplie*, creates order by separation, by circumscribing a world for gentle, wise, and monist individuals (1991, p. 70).

Insofar as the divorce treatises mobilize a certain proto-modern notion of reason in the consideration of the citizen or the believer's rights and duties in marriage, the argument is sustained by the fashioning of a "subject" whose "substance" is nonetheless defined elusively (since it is not simply will/choice but a psychological disposition grounded on the "reverend secret of nature"). The privileged referent of the substance believed to legitimize marriage was traditionally the biblical "one flesh." Milton found the main hindrance to his argument in how that concept was mobilized by Catholic doctrine to justify matrimonial indissolubility. When Milton says that the "Antichrist [is he] who forbids to marry" (*CP* II, p. 595) or the narrator of the epic comments that "Our Maker bids increase, who bids abstain / But our Destroyer" (IV, 748-49), a reference to celibacy, it absurdly rings as a hyperbolical judgment on the Catholic doctrine as a whole: "for what difference at all whether he abstains

men from marying, or *restrain* them in a marriage hapning totally discommodious?" (*CP* II, p. 595, emphasis added). In that regard, he was only following the common trend, since, as Roderick Phillips tells us, the history of divorce in Western societies coincided with the rejection of the Roman Catholic position, although "among the European states whose church broke with Rome in the sixteenth century, England was alone in not abandoning the doctrine of marital indissolubility" (1991, p. 24). Whereas for centuries the ecclesiastical courts had granted annulments and separation from "board and bed," the so-called divorce *a vinculo matrimonii*, a dissolution allowing both parties to remarry was indeed a Protestant gain, as Yeats was to claim in the early twentieth century. Formerly, the joining of the spouses during the ceremony was believed to be performed by God himself in such a way that henceforth, after the formalization of the sacrament, they mysteriously became an individual flesh. Milton, however, with the characteristic irony of the denouncing prophet would say: "if it be unlawful for man to put asunder that which God joyn'd, let man take heede it be not detestable to joyne that by compulsion which God hath put assunder" (*CP* II, p. 651).

From the first chapters of *Doctrine and Discipline*, Milton then sought to invert the order of priorities which expositors following canon law usually established in their definitions of marriage, since the causes which usually led to the granting of annulments and separations were those which interfered with the possibility of consummation of the marriage such as impotence and frigidity. These "carefull provisions against the impediments of carnall performance" of the "courts of concupiscence" were taken by Milton as a degradation of the main end of the institution. Since marriage had been established in Eden, when man still was perfect and in full control of himself, it was absurd to imagine that marriage was originally subservient to the "disappointing of an impetuous nerve" (*CP* II, p. 249), although, in turn, provisions should be made for the fallen condition. When Milton claims that "among Christian Writers touching matrimony, there be three chief ends thereof agreed on: Godly society, next civill, and thirdly, that of the mariage bed" (*CP* II, p. 268) and establishes a hierarchy from the first to the third, he is nonetheless going against even more orthodox Protestant commentators. As John Halkett writes: "Continental and Puritan authorities who were disposed [...] to uphold the propagation and of children in the interests of the civil or

ecclesiastical body as the primary ends of marriage are implicitly controverted by Milton's [...] formulation of the nature of marriage (1970, p. 13).

Indeed, to peruse some contemporary pronouncements on the topic is to be left with the impression of an ongoing discursive change of emphasis, which, however, is not as yet strong enough to debunk the traditional prominence of copulation. Protestants were wont to emphasize the social, companionate dimension of the marital tie and, as Phillips tells us, were responsible for a gain in quality in the content of the formal relationship (see 1991, p. 26-27). However, it goes without saying that the main aim of marriage was still conceived as the generation of new believers. William Whateley's *A Bride-Bush, or A Wedding Sermon*, insists that "men and women that before were parts of some other family, doe therefore marry, that they may bee the chiefe of a new family; and begetting children [...] may store the world with people, and prouide plants, as it were, for the Church, Gods owne Vineyard" (1619, p. 14), and in Jeremy Taylor's more poetically inspired *The Marriage Ring*, he tells us that "the noblest End [of marriage] is the multiplying children" (1883, p. 13). Christian theology found itself caught in a conundrum, since it doctrinally elevated as main objective of marriage a notion of reproduction that inevitably relied on the flesh with which it always led a conflicting, ambivalent relation.

The Protestant emphasis on the content of married life and its reassessment of the legitimacy of sexual life could not help but bear traces of millenary distaste for the "body" insofar as it was associated with sin. However, in a sense, Milton seemed to be right when he claimed in *Tetrachordon* that the doctrine of the precedence of mutuality in marriage was an egg of his contemporaries' own hatching. Roman Catholicism condemned the flesh and then elevated reproduction as the principal aim of marriage. Protestants condemned the sexual act insofar as it could lead to the excessive dysfunctionality or "perversion" which Freud, the man who radically changed the meaning of the word libido for us, would claim as constitutive of sexuality itself. They nonetheless yielded a less constraining view of erotic life, allowing it within certain moderate bounds. What is surprising and easily forgotten is how this gradual penetration of the legitimation of the erotic in intellectual discourse, and later in public life, had had its mainspring in unorthodoxy. One of the few instances when the word "carnal" is not used pejoratively in Milton is in the context of the discussion of the mysterious marriage of Christ and Church, of whose "thousand raptures" Solomon sings

"farre on the hither side of carnall enjoyment" (*CP* II, p. 597). It is intriguing that precisely the mystical tradition, which can otherwise be read in light of an institutionalized sublimation of "polymorphous perversity" in the Church, provided the language for a new approach to the sexuality of married life.[23] In the same way that Protestantism attempted to democratize interpretative power, its doctrine logically should lead to a democratization of the erotic life of the Word. Every couple could realize that the great "mystery" might manifest itself in their married life. The involuntary fear of the consequences that this might bring about, however, may lie behind the ultimate restatement of procreation.

If marriage was to be analogous to the incarnation of the Word (the support of reason), Milton realized that it could not be an institution and ordinance meant to regulate "the prescribed satisfaction of an *irrationall* heat" (*CP* II, p. 249, emphasis added). In the same way that eucharistic transubstantiation should not be taken literally (*CP* II, p. 325), the joining of the married couple into one flesh should be interpreted in the light of its spiritual communication**.** Sexual urges in their non-subjective compulsion are easily dismissed in *Doctrine and Discipline* as the work of intemperance that might otherwise be brought under control through bodily discipline: "that other burning, which is but as it were the venom of a lusty and over-abounding concoction, strict life and labour with the abatement of a full diet may keep that low and obedient anough" (*CP* II, p. 251). Just like in *Areopagitica* good and evil emerge from the same tasted apple, the "rational burning" that Milton defends as the genuine meaning behind St. Paul's words coexists with the same biblical passage which, from another perspective, signifies man's subjection to sexuality after the fall:

> First we know St. Paul saith, *It is better to marry then to burn*. Mariage therefore was given as a remedy of that trouble: but what might this burning mean? Certainly not the meer motion of carnall lust, not the meer goad of sensitive desire; God does not principally take care of such cattell. What is then but that desire which God put into *Adam* in Paradise before he knew the sin of incontinence; that desire which God saw it was not good that man should be left alone to burn in [...] This pure and more inbred desire of joyning to it self in conjugall fellowship a fit conversing soul (which desire is properly call'd love) is stronger then death, as the Spouse of Christ thought, *many waters cannot quench it, neither can the flouds drown it*. This is that rational burning that mariage is to remedy ... who hath the power to struggle with an intelligible flame, not in Paradise to be resisted, become now more ardent, by being fail'd in what in reason it lookt for (*CP* II, p. 250-2.)

[23] Alenka Zupančič makes that point in *What Is Sex?* (see 2017, p. 12-19).

As the irreproachable word “conjugall” has its parody in “cattle” (an association implicit in the etymology of conjugal, “fellow-yoke”), the interpretation according to the spirit of the concept of “burning” has its literalist equivalent in “carnall lust.” Milton’s attempt to restore the long-lost meaning of the Law hinges on nothing less than convincingly purifying Pauline “burning” from the pejorative semantic layers sedimented on it over centuries. It would be easy, however, to gather instances throughout his first divorce tract where Milton’s defense of this “pure desire” is shadowed by the anxiety caused by the fact that to speak of desire itself is to possibly speak of imperfection. In an ingenious rhetorical move, the ontological poverty which accounts for man’s drive to love is transported to the more problematic argument of the relative immutability of (postlapsarian) nature in order to justify the latter as perfectly unblameable. The inevitable wish to divorce a wife once she is found unfit, indeed the hatred that arises, is unblameable because it is man’s nature to long for love. The husband is moved by an unquenchable flame that when inhibited might be kindled into the vehement utterances of the prophet-poet. The problems and anxieties at stake concerning this “flame” which incorporates the couple into one flesh should be clear after the discussion of “want” in the last chapter. Sexuality which is the mark of our guilt and defection from the Image of God, *one day provided the very matter of our freedom*. The fact that Adam was imperfect enough to desire a companion in Eve, although retroactively intimating his propensity to sin, is at the same time the index of his happiness, and indeed of his perfection. His perfection was conditional on his being sufficiently able to distance himself from his happiness so as to wish, choose, and long for what he already had.

Milton’s argument, as we saw, pivots around a crucial distinction between the possible perspectives from which to approach the law, which is then reflected in his own take on the divorce regulation in Deuteronomy. The divorce tracts, in the last analysis, by trying to lay out the scriptural statements on marriage and divorce, discover that this task cannot be properly accomplished without clarifying the nature of the law itself, and once the law is freed from its apparent contradictions and the oppressive ends to which it was put, the rationality of the right of divorce would follow immediately. In this regard, Milton’s own interpretation of “hardness of heart” is significant: for him it means that God suffers the unrighteous to use his commands for dishonest ends, sanctifying a crime under the name of the law. The deity allows himself to be misinterpreted by his enemies because the freedom

to vacillate between hermeneutic options is the right of virtuous men who will eventually understand correctly. Without the ability to judge the rationality of God's command, the faculty to freely choose obeying God's command would be endangered since his rules would simply be enjoined mysteriously and in an authoritarian manner. Moreover, by the same token that the law is allowed to be corrupted through dishonest shows of obedience and understanding, the dignity of marriage is degraded to a mere legal means of overseeing and countenancing what is otherwise essentially condemnable (lust): "it is better to marry than to burn." Milton, of course, is intent on exposing this hidden scene of licensed sin, and this breaks out in one of the most revealing passages of the *Doctrine and Discipline*. After he has affirmed how God cannot have two wills, and that although we cannot presume to search the "hidden wayes of his providence," He still makes himself perfectly intelligible and "commensurate to right reason" through his laws, we read:

> His legall justice cannot be so fickle and so variable, sometimes like a devouring fire, and by and by connivent in the embers, or, if I may say so, oscitant and supine. The vigor of his law could no more remit, then the hallowed fire on his alter could be let goe out. The Lamps that burnt before him might need snuffing, but the light of his Law never. (*CP* II, p. 292)

Within the immediate context of this citation, a chapter that broaches the thorny issue of whether God might be the author of sin *vis-à-vis* predestination, this reflection about the unity of his revealed will is extremely complex. In chapter 4 of the first book of *Doctrine and Discipline*, Milton had laid the foundations of the emphatic notion of love which according to him was the only justifiable condition for a marriage to be binding and indissoluble. Here, in the second book, the reader realizes that the ontology of desire structuring Milton's argument for divorce is ultimately rooted in man's *desire of the law* in the double sense of the genitive. The indestructible burning implanted in Adam at his creation is his desire for God's light, which is to say that he burns for the Other that sustains his existence as subject capable of love. The echoes of patristic literature are plain. Following the characteristic drift of the divorce tract's emphasis, these erotic images are metaphorically used to convey aesthetically for the reader what otherwise is a rationally intelligible argument. Evocative of the manifestation of divine teaching at Sinai, the very vitality of the Word is a fire that burns erotically. What is surprising is how the poet uses the higher strains of divine love imagery to speak of the love between husband and wife. In the same way that contemplation of truth in Plato's *Symposium* begins with sensible objects and moves up to

the intelligible ideas, the love of the husband for the wife is a step in the ascent to the experience of divine love.

Thus far we have seen how Milton's interpretation of the nature of marriage relies on strong claims on the nature of human desire, which is reconstructed out of the authority of Genesis. Since the main end of the institution of matrimony is a communication between souls which transfigures the otherwise mechanical sexual act and restores its dignity, the argument in the last analysis is dependent on the understanding of soul that it mobilizes. We can see how that impacts the domain of marriage if we recall the puns at stake when our first mother is described as being created to be an "associate," a "solace." The igneous images that we have seen proliferate throughout the divorce tracts evince that Milton's understanding of desire presupposes a certain "pneumatology." In the *De Doctrina Christiana*, we read that

> When God is about to make man he speaks like a person giving careful consideration to something, as if to imply that this is a still greater work; Gen.i.26: *after this God said, let us make man in our image, after our own likeness*. So it was not only the body but also the soul which he made at that time, for it is in our souls that we are most like God. I say this in case anyone should think that souls, which God created at that time, existed beforehand. [...] We learn, then, that all living creatures receive their life from the same source of life and spirit [...] In Holy Scripture that word spirit means nothing but the breath of life, which we breathe; or the vital or sensitive or rational faculty. (*CP* VI, p. 316-17)

God breathes man into life by infusing his spirit, his fire into his nostrils. However, Milton's theology in this treatise will not allow that to mean that man directly participates in the divine essence but that he only resembles the creator; the poet lays a heavy burden on the word "likeness," which is the key to understand the relation between man's and the divine soul. The poet's point is to forestall the idea, which would imply a radical metaphysical divide, that the soul participates in a transcendental realm independently of the body.

In this later treatise, where Milton is less ambiguously a monist, using the language of Aristotelian hylomorphism, the soul is a form immanent to the body and cannot be detached from it: "nearly everyone agrees that all form – and the human soul is a kind of form – is produced by the power of matter" (*CP* VI, p. 322). This is important for understanding the divorce tracts because in his theological treatise sexuality assumes a crucial role in the transmission of the soul and original sin. Although every soul comes from God, he does not externally place the soul, usually conceived as an immaterial substance, in the body; the soul in this context simply means the vital power that turns the otherwise

"senseless trunk" of the body into a living animal. This vital power was infused into Adam's nostrils, and ever since is transmitted, albeit corrupted, in the human "seed":

> If sin is transmitted from the parent to the child in the act of generation, then the πρῶτον δεκτικὸν or original subject of sin, namely the rational soul, must also be propaged by the parents. For no one will deny that all sin proceeds in the first instance from the soul. [...] Add to this Aristotle's argument, which I think a very strong one indeed, that if the soul is wholly contained in all the body and wholly in any given part of that body, how can the human seed, that intimate and most noble part of the body, be imagined destitute and devoid of the soul of the parents [...] when communicated to the son in the act of generation? (*CP* VI, p. 321-22)

The body begins to assume conflicting valences, but Milton grapples with a view of sin coherent with his privileging of the spiritual. The body in itself is not condemnable since free will was not imparted to it, only the soul can be "peccant." The problem which is expressed through abdication of free will coincides with a fetishization of the body, in which it is believed to assume a control over existence that is actually a product of the alienation of one's will to it. In *Tetrachordon* we read that "in human actions the soule is the agent, the body in a manner passive. If then the body doe out of sensitive force, what the soul complies not with, how can man, and not rather something beneath man be thought the doer" (*CP* II, p. 609). Although only the soul is responsible and bears the mark of sin, the operation that brings sin into the world is precisely that when a free man, with complete control over his body, uses this freedom to claim that his body has control over him. The flesh bears the guilt which is the responsibility of the soul. Once the priority of spirituality is perceived, the misrecognition which elevates the body as stand-in for the fault of the soul would, as a false marriage, be dissolved, and the body itself be retrieved in its unblameableness. In the divorce tracts, nonetheless, Milton is still groping towards monism. The *Tetrachordon* citation above itself restates dualism, for even though the passiveness of the body is qualified, its unconscious motions out of sensitive force are not expressive of agency but rather forestall it.

In *Doctrine and Discipline*, "desire" is literally formulated as the soul's constitutive longing for love. Milton is heir to a tradition that conceives the psyche as energy, as we saw in his employment of tropes involving fire. The soul is light and language:

> All ingenious men will see that the dignity and blessing of marriage is plac't rather in the mutual enjoyment of that which the *wanting soul* [my emphasis] needfully seeks [...] Hence it is that *Plato* in his festival discours brings in *Socrates* relating what he fain'd to have learnt from the prophetesse *Diotima*,

> how *Love* was the Sonne of *Penury*, begot of *Plenty* in the garden of *Jupiter*. Which divinely sorts with that which in effect *Moses* tells us, that *Love* was the Son of *Lonelines*, begot in Paradise by that sociable & helpful aptitude which God implanted between man and woman towards each other [...] When therfore this originall and sinles *Penury* or *Lonelines of the soul* [my emphasis] cannot lay it self down by the side of such a meet and acceptable union [...] it cannot conceive and bring forth *Love*, but remains utterly unmaried under a formall wedlock, and still burns in the proper meaning of St. *Paul.* (*CP* II, p. 252-53)

James Turner was the first to discuss the implication of this passage, and how this fusion of Genesis with Plato is important to the definition of marital life (see 1987, p. 209). As a good reading procedure, we should first look to what is only implied in this passage but never articulated. The allegorical character not explicitly stated in this passage is Psyche, the lover of Love (or Eros), although traces of the connection are left behind when Milton finishes the chapter writing that "the loneliness which leads him still powerfully to seek a fit help, hath not the least grain of sin in it" (*CP* II, p. 253).[24] Besides the anxious desire to dissociate original loneliness from sin, the passage suggests that those who hinder divorce by spotting a sin in it create obstacles in the souls' (Psyche's) unblameable quest for love similar to those created by Aphrodite. The parallel between the human love of husband and wife and divine love that *mutatis mutandis* we have seen to be a recurrent motif in Milton's approach to the subject is also possibly suggested when he writes that "Love was the Son of Lonelines, begot in Paradise," which recalls the Psalm that gave us the famous "this day I have begot whom I declare / My only Son" (V, 603-4).[25] Indeed, two centuries later F. W. J. Schelling, in his treatise on human freedom, would precisely claim that God spoke the world into existence as a therapeutic act of love to give vent to his divine depression. By this time, to suggest that the deity himself could sometimes feel sad did not incur blasphemy, adding instead a humanizing touch to him. For Milton, of course, such a claim would be tantamount to building God in the image of lonely Adam, and not the other way around.

Later in his career, when the poet found himself in the position of justifying the first man's longing for a partner, the epic concedes that while in the Maker "no deficience is

---

[24] Compare with the following passage from *Areopagitica*: "The knowledge of good is so involv'd and interwoven with the knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were impos'd on *Psyche* as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixt" (*CP* II, p. 514).

[25] Compare the lines further down in this passage: "your Head I him appoint; [...] Under his great Vice-gerent Reign abide / United as one individual Soul / For ever happy" (V, 606, 609-11) with the epigraph that opens chapter 1: "So that the soul may come into being, woman is differentiated from it from the beginning. She is called woman (*on la dit-famme*) and defamed (*dif-fâme*)." (LACAN, 1998, p. 85).

found" (VIII, 416) this is not true for man, who "by number is to manifest / His single imperfection" (VIII, 422-3). This is such a delicate issue that Adam and Eve's first disagreement revolves around the issue of whether imperfection could be imputed to their happy state (see IX, 337). Although man was created so "defective" as to need "collateral love," Milton had to defend, for the sake of theology, this blameless imperfection from being enlisted as an argument to blame the creator for man's eventual defection. That man "was sufficient to have stood, though free to fall" meant that before the fall he had already to contain in himself the potential to be imperfect, but only virtually. The great challenge and temptation that the theology of the poem attempts by all means to justly forestall is that of believing that the best way to assure oneself of having the freedom to become imperfect is by acting imperfectly, voluntarily failing, for in the moment when freedom is proved genuine in this way it has been irretrievably lost. The powerful conundrum at the center of the mazes of the theodicy is how man can know that he is not "an artificiall *Adam*" if the moment when he commits the error that would prove his effectively being capable of imperfection would also coincide with the moment when he would lose freedom and become artificial: "many there be that complaim of divin Providence for suffering *Adam* to transgress, foolish tongues! when God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions" (*CP* II, p. 527; cf. *PL* III, 107-08). The talent buried in the ground, spent on an inappropriate occasion, is wasted. The reader might well point out that, in terms of temporal sequence, Adam's original loneliness precedes God's utterance of the single command. But insofar as this prelapsarian "imperfection" might be interpreted, after the fall, as tendency to sin, it can only be coherently understood in its intertwinement with the command and the possibility of its transgression. In Kierkegaardian terms, this imperfection is not yet blamable because it is the guarantee of the efficacy of freedom conditional as it is on obeying the command. However, as the command can be transgressed, this unblameable imperfection is simultaneously haunted by the guilt created by the anticipation of the possibility of the crime.

The argument of the divorce tracts deduces a concept of law from biblical passages that becomes a basis for its discussion of marriage. Still, there is a sense in which the two levels (pure legal considerations, and their application to the matrimonial sphere) overlap. Just as matrimony as an ordained institution is degraded when reduced to a legalized

exception for sexual impulses (condemnable to the extent that they are unrestrained and intemperate), those who disparage the legal status of Moses's statements about divorce by reducing it to an overlooking of a condemnable practice end up, according to Milton, ingrafting sin into the divine Law. The Law struggles with its exception, which takes the form of lustful license, on the hand, and transgression of a legal command, on the other. What is most fascinating about the divorce tracts' overarching rhetoric, however, is how Milton reveals a deep intuition that, since immoderation and lust have an affinity, transgression itself is prone to being sexualized and might be condemned in the terms with which lust and license are usually deplored. If Milton's argument so painstakingly pivots on clarifying the nature of the law, it is because lust, against which he fiercely fights, is the canon of all crimes. Although sexuality was hardly known in the seventeenth century in the terms we know it today, by having transgression and intemperance (the fall was caused by an act of gluttony) as almost exchangeable terms in his rhetoric, Milton creates a concept of lust in which dysfunctionality, excess, and "luxury" play a large role. Moreover, these notions are continually mobilized to depict transgressions which are not necessarily sexual.

Milton dedicates especially the third chapter of the second book of *Doctrine and Discipline* to criticize the view of divorce as a legal exception. His contention is that if the practice of divorce was really abhorred by God, one would incur blasphemy in claiming that the deity nonetheless opens an exception and approves a reprovable practice within the very Law (the Torah) that expresses his purity: "it makes God the author of sin, more then anything objected by the Jesuits or Arminians against Predestination" (*CP* II, p. 287, cf. p. 655). I have developed above Milton's anxiety to establish that Adam's ontological imperfection was not blamable. In that sense, besides attempting to prove the validity of the permission of divorce in Deuteronomy, this chapter of the tract picks up the thread of the imaginative elaboration of human "imperfection" previously via myth and provides a more robust theological articulation that sketches answers to issues only touched on. Although it is hard to elicit the degree of consciousness, the problems that the author tackles here, such as whether man was predestined to sin or the extent of his responsibility, answer precisely his anxious concern to jettison from the original "burning" any association with blame. In the divorce tracts, the central prophetic task of restoring man to a rationally ruled life calls for a vindication of original freedom and, in consequence, an acquittal of God's having any direct influence in

sin. The main drift of the chapter is that even in the postlapsarian context, contrary to what some may claim, the law does not have any contact with sin. For the chosen, the law is a remedy for the havoc created by sin, while for the licentious it aggravates their corruption*:* "I spake ev'n now, as if sin were condemn'd in a perpetual *villenage* never to be free by law, never to be *manumitted*: but sure sin can have no tenure by law at all, but is rather an eternal outlaw, and in hostility with law past all atonement: both *diagonial* contraries" (*CP* II, p. 288). In the last analysis, within the radical Calvinism that Milton espoused at this time, sin properly speaking could not even be a slave of the law. The diabolical punishment of sin is that its transgression cannot even achieve the degree of regularity to become a "law" to itself, since it is pure inconstancy (it is philosophically sound that what radically lacks an essence does not in turn become a substance; sin can only be represented on the register of allegory, semblance): "it is an absurdity to say that law can measure sin, or moderate sin; sin is not a predicament to be measur'd or modify'd, but is alwaies an excess" (*CP* II, p. 657). However, the very perversion of the law made by mis-readers consists in presuming that it creates exceptions and precedents for such "cattle."

The reader hopefully will notice the uncomfortable similarity between sin, tantalizingly unable to achieve consistency, and the indestructible wanting of the soul. Of course, what distinguishes both is that God is not a deceitful giver, and hence fulfills Adam's as well as the obedient son's longings for Him and his remedy. As the poet writes in *Tetrachordon:* "it is mans pervers cooking who hath turn'd this *bounty* of God into a Scorpion," for the creator "*indulgently* provides against mans loneliness" (*CP* II, p. 595-97, emphases added). While this indulgence is justifiable in the context of the elect, it might elicit the imputation of slackness if extended to the reprobate: "as little good can the lawgiver propose to equity by such a *lavish* remisnes as this: if to remedy hardnes of heart [...] it more encreases by this liberty, then is lessn'd" (*CP* II, p. 289, emphasis added). From the divorce tracts to his treatise on theological doctrine, Milton perseveres in the assumption that evil and nothingness could not stem from God. The crucial argumentative move to refute the view of the ordinance of divorce as a law of transgression consisted then of acquitting God of willing sin despite his foreknowledge of it. This of course is no mean feat, since it proposes to explain how the divinity *allows* the existence of sin. In that respect, Milton's views would undergo a sea-change during his life, as he ironically defends himself from the Arminianism that he

would espouse later on. Whereas the more elegant argument of *De Doctrina* claims belief as the single condition for election, and the poet draws a distinction between prescience and predestination, his formulation of the problem in the divorce treatises of the 1640s is still tentative. Since even pagan authors could reconcile fate and free will in order to allay the gods from suspicion, he reasons that Christians should all the more be able to do so: "Manilius the Poet, although in his fourth book he tells of some *created both to sinne and punishment*; yet without murmuring and with an industrous cheerfulnes he acquitts the Deity" (*CP* II, p. 294).

If God voices that he does not will some act but – given that for traditional theology nothing happens without his permission – allows it nevertheless to take place, the biting doubt becomes whether, like a hysteric, He secretly does *not* want what he claims to desire. This was such a momentous theological paradox that, in *Paradise Lost,* the success of Satan's temptation hangs on exploiting this gap between statement and intention to convince Eve that the deity encourages her to eat the fruit by forbidding it. Milton, in contrast, is adamant about the intelligibility of divine commandments and the aptitude between his words and rationality, for he "measures and is commensurat to right reason": "if he once will'd adultery should be sinfull, and to be punisht by death, *all his omnipotence* will not allow him to will the allowance that his holiest people might as it were by his own *Antinomie*, or counter-statute live unreprov'd in the same fact" (*CP* II, p. 292, emphasis added). Even as to be minimally consistent sin must be an eternal outlaw, God cannot permit what he forbids in spite of his omnipotence, for otherwise he could be censured for capriciousness. Ironically enough, the poet himself oversteps the limits of decorum by writing "all his omnipotence" and evoking for a moment the idea that divine omnipotence is helpless. Milton's ultimate expedient to settle the issue is to argue that "there be in man two answerable causes" (*CP* II, p. 295) and that man's original freedom is "the adequate and sufficient cause of his disobedience *besides Fate*" (*CP* II, p. 294, original emphasis), although the exceptive phrase in italics exudes the strain put into it. In short, although God in a sense has a participation in the fall since he made man free, it would be ungratefulness in the part of that man to blame his creator for originally enduing him with freedom.

This argument would be compelling if the poet did not have to tackle contradictions in the scriptures. In the treatise which Milton seemed to be acquainted with called *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination* (1532), Jerome Zanchius lists several occasions in

which God commands a biblical character to accomplish a task which is hindered by his secret will:

> Pharaoh was faulty, and therefore justly punishable, for not obeying God's revealed will, though God's secret will rendered that obedience impossible. Abraham would have committed sin had he refused to sacrifice Isaac, and in looking to God's secret will would have acted counter to His revealed one. So Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the reprobate Jews were justly condemned for putting Christ to death, inasmuch as it was a most notorious breach of God's revealed will [...] and Judas is justly punished for perfidiously and wickedly betraying Christ, though his perfidy and wickedness were (but not with his design) subservient to the accomplishment of the decree and word of God. (f. C4^{v}, p. 6)

Two centuries later, Hegel would name this logic whereby a historical actor fulfills the intention of a universal force by failing to be faithful to his own particular design as the "cunning of reason." Milton, however, strongly opposes the suggestion of any cleavage in God's will. When dealing with the same problem in *De Doctrina*, he writes:

> Without doubt the decree as it was made public was consistent with the decree itself. Otherwise we should have to pretend that God was insincere, and said one thing but kept another hidden in his heart [...] As good split the will in two and say: will in God is twofold – a will by which he wishes, and a will by which he contradicts that wish! But, my opponents reply, we find in scripture these two statements about the same matter: God wishes Pharaoh to let the people go, because he orders it: he does not wish it, because he hardens Pharaoh's heart. But, in fact, God wished it only. Pharaoh did not wish it, and to make him more unwilling God hardened his heart. (*CP* VI, p. 177).

If this is a coquettish reluctant delay, it is nevertheless far from amorous. This rationale whereby God exaggerates sin to punish it with its own excess largely condenses his solution to the conundrum.

In *Doctrine and Discipline*, however, Milton embraces the sterner version of the doctrine of predestination. While later on the elect consist simply of those who chose to have faith, in the 1640s Milton would agree (it seems) with Zanchius that God foreordains a class of (postlapsarian) humans to be made all "the more unwilling" and hardened simply because his divine word, the remedy for sin, is not meant for them. In *Tetrachordon*, for instance, he constantly argues that since Christ could not profitably contend with the Pharisees, his mode of teaching is to confirm them in their corruption: "it is a general principle, not only of Christ, but of all other sages, not to instruct the unworthy and conceited [...] but to perplex and stumble them purposely with contriv'd obscurities" for "nor was it expedient to preach freedome to those who had *transgrest in wantonnesse*. When we rebuke a Prodigal, we

admonish him of thrift, not of magnificence or bounty" (*CP* II, p. 643, emphasis added). The Pharisees put Christ under trial/test to probe his acquaintance with divorce legislation, and he makes the gospel more severe than the Old Testament by forbidding divorce in order to punish their licentiousness with an excessive restriction. There is the rub. If the gospel's bounty by definition should allow divorce, then Christ declares a severe law in his interaction with the tempters while meaning the contrary. Whereas the surface of his statement forbids divorce, his secret enunciation allows it at the same time. The liberty that the law encourages the undaunted elect to take would become transgression in the hands of the reprobate. In nothing more did the Milton of the 1640s resemble his own Eve than in his persistent habit of reading freedom into prohibitions. Christ's unprecedented inflexibility is then read as a ruse to evade his enemies' trap by momentarily imitating them. Those interpreters who could not see that Christ wanted to be briefest with the Pharisees, and to say as little as possible since they would distort his words at any rate "make their exposition heer such an obdurat Cyclops, to have but one eye for this text, and that only open to cruelty and enthralment" (*CP* II, p. 669). Milton seems to draw a suitable parallel here between Christ and the cunning Odysseus, since the latter likewise curbs laws that have become "toys of terror" by turning their intentions on their head and profiting from their loopholes. The phrase "*contriv'd* obscurities" might point in that direction. His sternness in the question of matrimony is then a hyperbolical antidote to the "obdurat" nature of his tempters: "no other end therefore can be left imaginable of this *excessive restraint*, but to bridle those erroneous and licentious postillers the Pharises" (*CP* II, p. 668; cf. p. 745, emphasis added). It has been little appreciated how the "Savior" of the domestic tracts is one more figure in the gallery of Miltonic heroes who turn into stone during temptation.

If this argument was not perplexing enough for an apparently simple issue as divorce, it actually becomes more sophisticated. The reader might be asking herself how the punishment for sin can be at once restraining and excessive. Milton realizes this difficulty, for not coincidentally he begins the third chapter of the second book of *Doctrine and Discipline* by expounding Romans 5:20: (I quote v. 19 as well): "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. Moreover, the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." Grace triumphs over sin by offering more

abundance in freedom than in transgression, although this is the abundance of temperance. Milton glosses this as following: "*The Law enter'd that the offence might abound*, that is, that sin might be made abundantly manifest to be hainous and displeasing to God [...] Now if the Law in stead of *aggravating* and *terrifying* sin, shall give out licence, it foils itself, and turns recreant from its own end" (*CP* II, p. 287, emphases added). In modern translations, the tendency is to render this verse as "the law was brought in so that the trespass might increase" and for the purpose of the semantic spectrum in which our analysis is interested it is noteworthy that the verb for "abound" in the Greek had the implication of "redundancy" (as in a pleonastic, tautological style) already in classical literature. The divine light which should guide man's dark steps becomes the fallacious fire of lust: "it holds out fals and dazling fires to stumble men" (ibid.). Milton is playing here with the meaning of "offence" in the original, which can be rendered as well as "false step/slip" or "trespass." Further, his language anticipates that of *Tetrachordon* where, as we saw above, Christ's words "perplex and stumble" the Pharisees, that is, make them transgress the divine will as the very punishment for their transgressive-ness ("hardness of heart" like Pharaoh's).

The law is irritated by licentiousness and that explains the *exaggeration* of Christ's restraint in the topic of divorce. This inevitable reaction that in some passages of the divorce tracts acquires a physiological force justifies the utter hatred that arises both between God and the enemies fated to perdition and between the husband married to a loathed wife. Intolerance towards "offence" with the sense of transgression that it has in Romans is as natural a reaction as nausea is to "offensive" food. As we saw in the last chapter, all the "superstructure" of the semiotics of abomination informing the biblical construction of the space of the law magnifies dynamics of the constitution of the body itself. We must vigilantly hate and reject those who cross that liminal space in order to maintain our consistency. Milton writes: "To banish for ever into a local hell [...] [ancient philosophers] thought not a punishing so proper and proportionat for God to inflict, as to punish sinne with sinne [...] [Cicero] declares it publikly as no paradox to common ears, that God cannot punish man more, nor make him more miserable, then still by making him more sinnfull" (*CP* II, p. 294-95).

The argument takes an economic turn when the excessiveness of sin is linked to the drive to make a profit of usury: the Jews' "hearts were set upon usury, and are to this day,

no Nation more; yet that which was the endammaging [a pun on damming?] only of their estates, was *narrowly forbid*; this [divorce as exception] which is thought the extreme injury and dishonour of their Wives [...] is *bounteously allow'd*" (*CP* II, p. 289, emphases added). The language of this passage condenses so perfectly Milton's rhetoric that later on in *Paradise Lost* when Eve makes her case for working alone as more profitable, she defends her freedom claiming that it would be to suspect their "happy State /Left so imperfet" if they were to live in Eden constantly afraid and "in narrow circuit strait'n'd by a Foe." The point is that if God narrowly curbs the Jews' tendency to amass the excess of usury, he restrains divorces which are indulgences to the luxuriousness of lust much more. As would become even clearer in *Colasterion*, his most vehement divorce tract, Milton of course is not preaching divorce at pleasure (cf. *CP* II, p. 728). It is part of the double meaning of "that the offense might abound" that those predestined to live in sin interpret the *excessive* restraint of Christ's words as a warrant for excess. Whereas the elect use their freedom with temperance, God suffers his law to be misinterpreted by his enemies because after all, in a sense, the fact that their use of the law hardens them all the more in their hardness of heart is already their punishment. It would demand the dialectical capacity of a Parmenides in Plato's homonymous dialogue to convey the idea that the law punishes its enemies by restraining them *with* excess.

Milton continues:

> If [God] shall not onely deliver over and *incite* his enemies by rebuks to sin as punishment, but shall by patent under his own broad seal allow his friends whom *he would sanctify and save, whom he would unite to himself and not dis-joyne*, whom he would correct by wholsome chastning, not punish as he doth the damned by *lewd sinning*, if he shall allow these in his Law [...] the perpetrating of an odious and manifold sin without the lest contesting.[…] This cannot be lesse then to ingraft sin into the *substance* of the law, which law is to *provoke* sin by crossing and forbidding, not by complying with it (*CP* II, 295-96, all emphases added).

It would take a dull and unimaginative reader not to see that Milton is playing with the idea that God provokes (in the sense of creating) sin by forbidding it, although only momentarily to make us "surprised by sin." The proper sense of "provoke" is that of inflaming sin to fight, making it angry, since in Latin one of the meanings of *provocare* is

"to challenge" (and previously Milton spoke of "contesting").[26] As he writes later in *Tetrachordon*: "The Law is, if it stirre up sin any way, to stirre it up by forbidding, as one contrary excites another, *Rom.* 7. but if it once come to provoke sin, by granting licence to sin, according to Laws that have no other honest end, but only to permit the fulfilling of obstinat lust, how is God not made the contradicter of himself?" (*CP* II, p. 633). Kerrigan helps us capture the perplexing transitivity between sin and law in this "provocation" when, commenting on the famous dictum from *Areopagitica* that "that which purifies us is triall, and triall by what is contrary," he finds it "odd to be told that we bring impurity with us into the world, but gain virtue in being tried by what is contrary – by purity? [...] The rebound of contraries that momentarily overturn the intended sense, making virtue into our adversary and tempter, can stand as a vague prefiguration of ... difficulties" (1983, p. 15). Does the law punish criminals by – provoking them to transgress it? The temptation of actually transgressing the law to prove that one is free to do it, as we saw, is the interpretation to be avoided. However, these questions, which for some might seem idle, must at least be raised for otherwise free will and its representation in Eve's fall would be unconvincing dramatically. It is because Eve is so overwhelmed by Satan that she eats the fruit in a rash act. Whatever one may think, Milton himself thought that in tautologically punishing sin with more sin God was perfectly justifiable. The capacity to accept that intolerance towards the intolerant does not turn tolerance to the very enemy it opposes is what sustain our structures of rationality from collapsing. As René Girard puts it in *Violence and the Sacred*: "it is precisely because they detest violence that men make a duty of vengeance" (1977, p. 15).

Milton's well stressed modern defense of freedom had to be negotiated with his apparent endorsement at this point of the strong Calvinist emphasis on predestination. He spends so much ink to clarify the rationality of God's will because he can only imagine a justifiable God if the latter has an escape plan in which the obedient are saved from the infection of remediless sin, fortunately even in this life. As I tried to show, the argument hits

[26] The problem of God's creation of sin by forbidding it has a certain resemblance to the paradox, in psychoanalysis, of the prohibition of something that is impossible (one of the definitions of the real is, famously, that it is the impossible). Herein, for instance, lies the difference between Kant and Hegel in relation to the noumenon and its unknowability. Kantians are still attached to the need to *forbid* the impossible (and hence preserve it), while Hegel poses a "hysterical" question of sorts: if it cannot be accessed, why does one need to forbid it in the first place?

a dead-end in Milton's affirmation that it is no paradox at all to say that God cannot punish man more than by making him more sinful. This "goes without saying," should be obvious, we cannot think beyond it. I would argue, however, that if there is an ideological move in the divorce tracts, it is that of conceiving sin as wholly external to the law instead of constitutive of it: ironically, that is what "plagues" it. This is perfectly indexed in the relation between the sexes: masculinity achieves consistence by the reiterated abjection of the feminine, unless we substantialize linguistic entities and purge them from the constitution by difference, that is, conceive the law as a consistent substance corrupted from the outside and not from within. It is because at the most dramatic moment of *Paradise Lost* Adam realizes that he cannot live without the woman in him, the woman that was taken from him and is his other self, that his tragedy, *pace* the theological condemnation of "uxuriousness," is so humanly cogent.

3.2. The morning argument and the fateful separation

Milton's ideation of an epic on the fall of man goes back to a few sketches dated in the early 1640s by the editors of the Yale prose, and thus composed before his domestic treatises. Of course, this does not prevent his absorption in the subject of divorce and the first couple's conjugal life from strengthening his choice of topic, aside from more discernible factors such as that, after the failure of the revolution, a nationalistic epic was out of the question. In "Adam Unparadiz'd" the first pair only comes to the stage after eating the fruit, and in this early draft we already find both the emphasis on the devil's jealousy of their matrimonial bliss and the conception of a scene of recrimination and disagreement after the original sin: "Adam then & Eve returne accuse one another but especially Adam layes the blame to his wife, is stubborn in his offence" (*CP* VIII, p. 560). Adam's mean and angry tirades against his wife are well-known to the reader of *Paradise Lost.* In the epic, however, different from the tragedy, the father of mankind is also allowed a more dignified role. He is given some speeches before the fall in which he pleads love as the cause of his transgression, given that as per the scene of Eve's creation, he would rather abjure all pleasure than live without her. There is a sense in which justice only emerges when, vengeance suspended, we witness the birth of a claim to truth in error which, as in Adam's case, halts the automatism

of fate in sight of the defenselessness and indefensibility of the condemned. Love is born from a contingency (an accident) that breeds its own reason (becomes inevitable, necessary): the paradoxical nature of an *accident* that becomes *regular* and *inevitable*.

Paradise Lost itself pivots around the accident of Eve's rash disobedience in evil hour. In order to grasp her act in its whole dimension, we have nevertheless to rewind to the morning of the fall, and develop the themes subtly woven into the representation of the couple's first argument, which leads to their choosing to work separately. The drama of the epic stages a marriage on the verge of dissolution, in the sense of a failure in matrimonial "conversation" that it had in his domestic treatises. Just as lack of agreement throws the country into havoc and civil war, the instabilities in the social pact and free association of the two members of Edenic society, whose fragilities are exploited by Satan, starts the unraveling and demise of that "state." Milton had recurrently argued in favor of divorce on the grounds that maintaining a marriage to a wife with a mind "impenetrable to conversation" might lead the despairing husband to commit sins, yet here he found himself in the position of depicting a husband who paradoxically commits a sin in a desperate attempt not to lose the communion with his wife. While the husbands defended in the divorce tracts could plead ignorance, the narrative voice plainly states that Adam was conscious of what he was doing. We can spot the difficulty involved in passing judgment on events in Book IX, which keep lending themselves to opposite interpretations, if we recall that, from another point of view, Eve could be accused of persuading her husband with "female charm" and on that account be divorced. By the same token, when Adam proffers a persuasive inspired monologue, he might be unmasked as simply giving in to unbridled lust, like the reprobate debarred from divorce in the domestic treatises. Milton systematically pushes any rationale that the couple might offer to defend their case to a point of unsustainability, but at the same time he also neutralizes any inflexible rationale that the reader might adduce to pass sentence on them by pressing the law to the moment of deadlock when error is transfigured by grace.

Milton famously claims in the divorce tracts that a husband might easily forgive an adultery of the flesh, which was far less serious a breach of matrimony than a remediless spiritual incompatibility. He makes room in his doctrine for marriages that are able to weather their crisis, rebuking the critics who construed his argument as advocating divorce at pleasure, and there is a sense in which that is what happens to Adam and Eve, who emerge

reconciled from their predicament. In that regard, it is revealing that particularly among early critics we find a tendency to read the scenes of mutual recriminations biographically. Glossing Adam's retort to Eve's suggestion that they work separately, Thomas Newton writes in his 1749 edition of *Paradise Lost* that:

> It is related in the *Life of Milton* that he went into the country in the Whitsuntide vacation, and married his first wife Mary [...] She had not cohabited with him above a month, before she was very desirous of returning to her friends in the country, there to spend the remainder of the summer. We may suppose, that upon this occasion their conversation was somewhat of the same nature as Adam and Eve's; and it was upon some such considerations as this, that after much solicitation he permitted her to go [...] It is the more probable, that he alluded to his own case in this account of Adam and Eve's parting, as in the account of their reconciliation it will appear that he copied exactly what happen'd to himself. (p. 149-50)

John Leonard issues a sound judgement apropos this hypothesis: "the conjecture is not implausible, but freedom is so central a concept for Milton that it would have been an issue at this moment with or without any autobiographical reference" (2013, p. 664). The vehement recriminations, as seen, were already planned in the drafts from the early 1640s, possibly for dramatic effect, and although Milton's unfortunate experience might have made them more pungent, we cannot simply assign Adam's angry tirades, the words of a character caught in a multifaceted cosmic drama, to the poet. Milton is highly ambivalent in his characterization of the first man during and after the fall, at times letting a beam of tragic grandeur shine and at others emphasizing his immediate degeneration.

As previously noted, in the Miltonic universe, character is proved in a temptation scenario in which the act whereby one casts out or withstand the provocation of evil is the "proof" that corroborates his internal righteousness. The trial externalizes the internal character which otherwise would be a "fugitive and cloistered virtue," but one could claim that in a sense it simultaneously posits and creates what it claims to represent. Insofar as this act can take the form of a linguistic performance, such as in the (infamous) Lady's "No" in *A Mask* or the divorcing creative command in the domestic treatises, it becomes a "speaking deed," a linguistic utterance that engenders its own reality and hence provides the paradigm for poetry in the emphatic sense. For Milton, the true poem which the poet expressed in his "speaking deed" externalized the strength of his faith and becomes a sign of his election (in Puritan sects, the believer experienced grace within the recesses of his consciousness). Later in life, however, Milton had abandoned his strong Calvinistic leaning, and to prove one's

election came close of being able to choose freedom and remain obedient. The theological conundrum that had divided Protestant reformers was whether election was a function of one's works of faith, hence more in line with the idea that the exercise of virtue creates its own product, or (as for Calvin) independent of effort.

In *De Doctrina*, Milton claims that no works were asked of Adam: "Adam was not required to perform any works; he was merely forbidden to do one thing" (*CP* VI, p. 351), but the poem problematizes the supposed superfluousness of the first couple's gardening in having them verify that the vegetation is getting out of hand. Milton makes this theological statement in a chapter dedicated to "the institution of the Sabbath and of Marriage" but it is noteworthy that this connection had already been made in *Doctrine and Discipline*, where it surprisingly positions the sphere of matrimony between work and leisure. In the morning of the fall, again, work and marriage will become intertwined with one another in a fatal way. The more immediate occasion for such an approximation, as the reader will recall, is that in Genesis marriage is instituted right after the deity has finished the creation, and set apart the seventh day for rest as his day of leisure. Such a nearness of the two events comes in handy, and even seems to pose a hermeneutic puzzle for Milton. The polemicist begins the second book of *Doctrine and Discipline* by comparing them; the fact that marriage legislation had become the one sphere of human affairs where interpreters dare not expound the scriptures as Christ boldly did (in not observing the Sabbath) seemed to point to the poet that the restoration of the right of divorce was mysteriously linked with that other subject. What some men lacked was that freedom of the spirit to realize that laws are created for man and not the other way around: "we hear that voice of infinite goodness and benignity that *Sabbath was made for man, not man for Sabbath*. What thing ever was more made for man alone [pun] and lesse for God than marriage? And shall we load it with a cruel and senceless bondage?" (*CP* II, p. 281). Both marriage and the Sabbath are rather paradoxical forms of law, since in a way they do not ordain effort but leisure, and it entangles the mind in a "wandering maze" that the "freedom" which was ordained to man should be used (as did canon law) to restrain him more! The architectonic of Milton's argument can be seen from the fact that the slavery of believing man created for the Sabbath and not the other way around is analogous to that of subjecting him to the wife created for him, as in the infamous "Hee for God only, shee for God in him" (IV, 299). Theologically speaking, Adam and Eve's only "work," more in the

early Lutheran than in the economic sense, is that of abstaining from the tree: “It was necessary that one thing at least should be either forbidden or commanded, and above all something which was in itself neither good nor evil, so that man’s obedience might in this way be made evident” (*CP* VI, p. 351-52).

This is not to deny that, in the dynamic reality created by the poem, their gardening becomes an important dimension of their lives. In *Paradise Lost,* work is not compulsive but sustained by free will. Since the vegetation of the garden indeed gives signs of getting out of control, their activity contributes genuinely to its maintenance. However, what ultimately gives meaning to their actual work is the internal travail of remaining obedient. The accomplishment of that work becomes religiously meaningful by being recoded as a manifestation of the exercise of virtue. As Adam tells his wife, “not to irksome toil, but to delight / He made us, and delight to Reason join’d” (IX, 242-3). However, to understand the nature of prelapsarian labor we must disentangle it from the same misconceptions to which the notion of freedom might be prey. Since their work is an expression of their freedom, it cannot be “necessary” in the sense of their needing to earn their living. At the same time, it cannot by the same token be superfluous and meaningless, for the understanding of “free time” as a time for doing nothing would precisely be the cynic, licentious interpretation. In a rational society, as Eden is meant to be, the ideal workers would be so free that they would no longer need free time. As Adorno perfectly puts it: “anyone who knows freedom finds all the amusements tolerated by this society unbearable, and apart from his work, which admittedly includes what the bourgeois relegate to non-working hours as ‘culture,’ has no taste for substitutive pleasures” (2005, p. 130). Reason would be married to delight in such a way that they would be, as a couple, “individual” in the seventeenth-century sense of the word. *Paradise Lost*, nonetheless, narrates the momentous divorce between work and art: Adam will learn to till the ground with pain, and to bruise his body to pleasure his soul.

As the reader might realize, the subject of the relation between virtue and its effectivity is similar to the anecdote of Baron Munchhausen who tried to get himself out a swamp by pulling his hair upwards. Calvin himself cunningly made it possible to argue that, while people cannot influence whether they are elected or not, material wealth amassed out of hard work was an accomplished sign of having been chosen. Thus, he mobilized the very argument, classically analyzed by Max Weber, that people cannot engender their wealth and

faith by their own acts to make them work even more. In that regard, Milton's own celebrated depiction of virtue in *Areopagitica* is a Puritan work ethics of sorts: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race" (*CP* II, p. 515). The great aporia (as hinted at in the last chapter) is the extent to which this exercise *engenders* virtue, as in a muscle-building of the soul, or *reflects* pre-existent virtue or even both: the mazes of the problem of free will and predestination are too intricate for us to be able to come to a simple answer. Readers of *Paradise Lost* have noted that Eve seems to have read precisely some of Milton's statements about virtue in his political treatise since she voices the same doctrine. However, just as Adam could be interpreted as barred from the remedy of divorce for falling of his own accord, Eve's chivalrous doctrine of embattled virtue is uncomfortably misplaced in a prelapsarian world. In *De Doctrina*, Milton implies that only after the fall people need to work for their virtue in a constant combat to overthrow evil: "for since it was tasted, not only do we know evil, but also we do not even know good except through evil. For where does virtue shine, where is it usually exercised, if not in evil?" (*CP* VI, p. 352-53).

In order to forestall the accusation that prelapsarian virtue was rather anemic and dull, the poet had to show nevertheless that real work was demanded in the garden for his image of bliss to be appealing. The very anxiety concerning sloth projected by the fallen perspective onto the text nevertheless secretly spins Eve's over-eagerness to show industry. As the storm gathers in Eden, her exaggerated wish to be obedient "and good works in her Husband to promote" (IX, 234) already betrays, for those acquainted with her story, her impending disobedience. One cannot but feel a tragic sense that she seeks temptation, the traumatic encounter with the enemy (IX, 364-66), as means to master the very possibility of losing paradise by staging and anticipating its loss. She works excessively to appease the guilt before her judge for a crime that as yet she has not committed. Even though the theory of virtue of *Areopagitica* cannot be unconditionally applied to the prelapsarian context, the question still remains of why Milton then makes his character evoke it at all: "what is Faith, Love, Virtue, unassay'd / Alone, without exterior help sustain'd?" (IX, 355-6). As in the case of Satan, Eve's resemblance to the young rebel Milton is rather disorienting.

Particularly in the subject matter of work, *Paradise Lost,* as noted before, constantly reflects, on a metalinguistic level, on its status as a cultural symbol that would reward its

author, in its longevity, for his pains in this world, being evidence of the authority of the vision of his faith. To accept a call, as Milton believed he had been called to write poetry, is like a baptism in which one puts off the old Adam and enters the new covenant of grace, where the fruits of work are the promise that assures the integrity which is a *sign* of election and protection. The issue of whether the elect could be known by their works had been particularly anxiety-inspiring for Milton ever since his youth, since the two biblical passages dealing with the theme could not be less amenable for reconciliation. The two scriptural passages that approach work and its reward are the parables of the talents (Matthew 25: 14-30) and of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20: 1-16). The emphasis of the former is on the celebration of those who multiply the divine gifts and the punishment of the slothful, while the latter in a less meritocratic way implies equality among all those who accepted their calling irrespective of being early or almost too late. Book IX, where we are told that the poem had been long in the choosing and beginning late, is specially haunted by the two parables. In the morning of the fall, Eve is as eager to work as those laborers who went early into the vineyard in the hope of earning more than the ones who came in the end of the day, and uncomfortably focuses on the facet of God as the master of the parable of the talents:

> Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have *abundance*: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25: 27-30; p. 37, emphasis added).

Eve does not want only to be a faithful but a profitable servant. In the end of the day, however, she is going to be driven out crying from the garden. The idea that the first couple divided their work was not original to Milton. In the apocryphal "The Book of Adam and Eve," as Adam narrates the events of unfallen life to his children, he comments: "God gave a part of paradise to me and (a part) to your mother: the trees of the eastern part and the north [...] he gave to me, and to your mother he gave the part of the south and the western part" (n/p). Although there is no evidence that Milton knew this apocryphal book, in *Paradise Lost* such a recreation, filling the details ignored by the original, provides the perfect dramatic situation to explain why Eve was left alone for the temptation. Besides, Milton adds to the depiction of this loaded scene both considerations concerning work that had made him uneasy throughout his life and a staging of matrimonial conflict.

After a recognition by the narrator that the vegetation of the garden was growing wild beyond their control, Eve vouches, in an address to her husband, her dismay at the fact that their work is bordering on being futile:

> Adam, well may we labor still to dress
> This Garden, still to tend Plant, Herb and Flow'r,
> Our pleasant task enjoin'd, but till more hands
> Aid us, the work under our labor grows,
> Luxurious by restraint; what we by day
> Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,
> One night or two with wanton growth derides
> Tending to wild [...]
> For while so near each other thus all day
> Our task we choose, what wonder if so near
> Looks intervene and smiles, or objects new
> Casual discourse draw on, which intermits
> Our day's work brought to little, though begun
> Early, and th' hour of Supper comes unearn'd (IX, 205-12; 220-5).

The verb "to dress" (to trim, ornament, adorn) captures the opposite determinations of the nature of their work, which adorns their happy life without being purely "ornamental." As Sister Mary Corcoran once summarized: "In Milton's Paradise, the work was pleasant but sufficiently arduous to make refreshment attractive and urgent enough to require perseverance [...] although he recognized man's natural need for work, Milton did not make a fetish of it" (1945, p. 55-56). We have seen before that this subject introduces a discussion about the nature of the exercise of freedom. From the divorce tracts to the epic poem, although verging on an uncomfortable indifference, liberty and license are distinguished from one another by means of one's ability to accomplish the task (the act of virtue, works) expressive of his or her character. On the morning of the fall, however, Eve is concerned and distressed that their work is "brought to little," and is increasingly becoming redundant and therefore calling for more energetical exertion from their part. They are responsible for the maintenance of their freedom; God has genuinely put it on their own hands, and their sloppiness might have brought them on the verge of losing control. At the same time, there is something dismaying about the vegetation's behavior, whose trimming seems to be a task growing beyond their capacity, and similar to a society under a tyrannous and unjustifiably rigorous law breeds fanatic dreams, "wild work" of fancy, the more it is restrained: "one night or two with wanton growth derides." Eve realizes that the luxurious growth seems to be *provoked* by the restraint. The sexuality of the vegetation voices a provocative,

carnivalesque derision the real extravagance of which mirrors the possible superfluousness of their task. The essential question emerges of whether they have been assigned a work that they cannot successfully accomplish and, consequently, are doomed to fall. Reading Milton gets vertiginous here for, as we have seen in the divorce tracts, the impossibility of carrying out the "pleasant task enjoin'd" of marriage condemns the husband to lust and what is termed the servile yoke of copulation. In the domestic treatises, marriage is the prototype of the task "enjoined" by God, meant to be a union of mind and body, reason and delight. The failure to carry out a legitimate conversation, in its disjunctive character, betrays a crack that inevitably puts asunder, makes it impossible to accomplish, what God had ordained, en-joined.

Thus, Eve's words have an inevitable irony when she says "our pleasant task enjoined" since it means precisely a task to be carried out together. She complains that the work posed by the luxurious vegetation overreaches the might of two people, but her very solution to make up for the *déficit* of people in the garden is to ask to be more alone, even as future *laissez faire* ideology will uphold that a community is more prosperous and united through the atomization of its individuals. This does not diminish the strength of her argument that freedom entails the capacity to be trusted in overcoming temptation alone, but constitutes delicately poised ironies that make the tragedy of the fall more pungent. In the morning argument for working separately, the couple alternates in making cogent arguments that are nevertheless used on the wrong time and occasion. Furthermore, as can be seen, marriage and work overlap again in Eve's longing for children to help them in the gardening: "till more hands/ Aid us." This expresses the Protestant emphasis on the responsibility of marriage for the production of new believers, a reasoning that one finds in *A Bride-Bush*: "For men and women [...] marry, that they may bee the chiefe of a new family; and begetting children, (and trayning them up, together with servants, according to their place) may store the world with people, and provide plants, as it were, for the Church, Gods owne Vineyard" (f. M3^{v}, p. 88). This recalls John 14:1: "I am the true vine, and my father is the husbandman." The vineyard becomes a charged metaphor for the fruits to be reaped of one's work, and in these instances fuses a vocational and a domestic context.

Eve's dissatisfaction and complaint that they yet do not have the means (more hands) to suitably carry out their otherwise increasingly ineffective work is then subtly modulated into a more elevated discussion concerning whether they are left so imperfect as not to be

equipped with the necessary means to accomplish the more momentous intellectual work/trial of obedience. Doubts are raised only to be vehemently discarded, but as elsewhere in this book, prelapsarian contexts are haunted by their fallen ones. To even suggest that God assigns a task beyond their capacity of accomplishment would be to mistake him for the Antichrist of the divorce tracts, typified as he is specially in the figure of Pharaoh. However, before we explore that possibly implicit connection, we have to make a detour through a passage of *Tetrachordon* that deals precisely with the fundamental issue about the meaning of "fornication" when Christ elects it as the one exception when it is justifiable to end a marriage:

> In this place, as the 5th of *Matth*. Reads it, *Saving for the cause of fornication*, the Greek, such as it is, sounds it, except for the *word, report, speech, or proportion* of fornication. In which regard with other inducements, many ancient and learned writers have understood this exception as comprehending any fault equivalent and proportional to fornication. But truth is, the Evangelist heer Hebraizes, taking *word* or *speech* for *cause* or *matter* in the common eastern phrase [...] And yet the word is found in the 5th of *Exodus* also signifying Proportion; where the Israelites are commanded to doe their tasks, *The matter of each day in his day*. A task we know is a proportion of work, not doing the same thing absolutely every day, but so much. (*CP* II, p. 671).

In this passage, Milton claims that Christ uses "proportion of fornication" to claim that adultery does not encompass literal carnal acts but equivalents of fornication. In the divorce tracts, the transgression of marriage does not hinge on a literal trespass, such as the sexual act of adultery, but a perversion of the sociality of the matrimonial life, such as the stubbornness of a wife. Hence, just as in the 1640s insubordination in the household reflected a topsy-turvy inversion of hierarchy in the state, the overturn of positions between husband and wife in the morning argument foreshadows insubordination to God. For those critics intent on defending Eve from the imputation of sin before the effective act, the general tendency of Milton's thinking against formalism and evident in the "spiritual" interpretation of fornication poses a problem. If the transgression of the divine command is coordinated with a transgression of the purity of marriage, with "fornication," when is the exact moment, if it can be pinned down at all, that our first mother commits adultery? Is an act ratified as expressive of disobedience only after the trespass, or does the fall happens first inside, so that the plucking of the fruit only confirms an existent propensity? Especially after the fall, Adam imputes the tragedy to his wife's "will of wandering" and the more masculinist critics have followed suit in claiming that the fall begins when Adam is not energetic enough to

dissuade Eve. In my view, Eve wins the argument and could even be counted among those wives, in the divorce tracts, who should rule if they are wiser than the husband. She fails when she has to apply the theory to practice. This is not to deny that the sequence of scenes is orchestrated to also suggest that Eve is always bordering on giving in to unmeasured ambition. In the last analysis, the reader becomes enmeshed in tragic ironies which he is invited to ponder. The capacity for freedom that carries the danger of erring but also the power of resisting is always on the verge of being confused with unrestrained license.

Moreover, in the *Tetrachordon* passage above, we have a glimpse of Milton's command of the original texts. He identifies in the Matthew 5:32 phrase "save for the cause of fornication" (παρεκτὸς λόγου πορνείας) the literal transposition into Greek of a common expression in Hebrew, which is particularly found in Exodus, where we read: "Fulfil your works, *your* daily tasks" (5: 13). The phrase "your quota of work" where the term for "quota" is the Hebrew term for "word," "thing," or as Milton prefers, "matter" (דָבָר־ transliterated as "dávar") is lost in the King James translation. In light of the centrality of the division of the proportion of work in the morning argument (and the principle that the work of freedom has to be a feasible task), these disparate passages bridged by the Hebraism of Matthew 5:32 surprisingly, if improbably, coalesce and haunt the rhetoric of the argument for working separately. Eve begins her speech by claiming, as noted, that the amount of work surpasses their capacity: just before this, the narrator had explained that "much thir work outgrew / The hands' dispatch of two Gard'ning so wide" (IX, 202-3). In itself such a suggestion might evoke the dramatic episode in Exodus where Pharaoh commands the Israelites to continue fulfilling the same amount of work but after forbidding the taskmasters to give them straw to make bricks. If we recall that this is the first manifestation of God's hardening of the heart of his enemy, we can appreciate how this episode profoundly condenses a configuration of terms essential for Milton's discourse on the exercise of freedom and predestination:

> And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying, ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: let them go and gather straw for themselves. [...] And the taskmasters hasted them, saying, Fulfil your works, your daily tasks, as when there was straw. And the officers of the children of Israel, which Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and demanded, Wherefore have ye not fulfilled your task in making brick both yesterday and to day, as heretofore? (Exodus 5: 6-7; 13-14)

At this point, let us recall that one of the most moving moments of the poem is that when Milton compares the devils rising from the burning lake to the wasted and destroyed chariots of Pharaoh's cavalry, while, simultaneously, the former slaves watch from the shore their oppressor being engulfed by the closing waves of the Red Sea. The devils are rising to pursue their revenge, but just as they begin to spin their plan, divine mercy has already forestalled and made it redundant. In Book IX, we witness an opposite experience: Eve's work is an accomplished expression of her freedom, but it is beginning to terrorize her as though she was a "sojourner of Goshen" and not of the Promised Land. Adam has to remind her that God's yoke is easy: "not so strictly hath our Lord impos'd / Labor, as to debar us when we need / Refreshment, whether food, or talk between / Food of the mind, or this sweet intercourse." (IX, 235). The wounded lover conjectures whether the wife grows tired of his presence and his conversation: "But if much converse perhaps / Thee satiate, to short absence I could yield. / For solitude sometimes is best society" (IX, 237-9). This is a great concession from the man who presumed to question God's way in order to get a solace for his solitude.

In Book IX, in short, the drama of the fall begins to be woven by the first couple's disagreement concerning how to best carry out their task, and for Milton, who was a walking cross-reference of the Scriptures, such a topic evokes the main biblical episodes in which work and reward (a sign of election) are dealt with. From the divorce tracts to his epic, the task (gardening or leading a married life) assigned by God has to be rational, in the sense that its accomplishment is not beyond man's capacity, otherwise the law proves to be tyranic. Satan is soon going to convince Eve that God is the Antichrist, and then it is no surprise that for dramatic effect the poet leaves open for his character the option of reading her life in Paradise as though she was living in Egypt. Let us recall that Eve's first soliloquy after the fall pungently diagnoses her own sense of undue inferiority. She retroactively rationalizes her eating the fruit "so to add what wants / In Female Sex […] and render me more equal, and perhaps / A thing not undesirable, sometime / Superior, for inferior who is free?" (IX, 821-2, 824-5). In the same way that the proximity between the creation of the Sabbath and the institution of marriage in Genesis leads Milton to read Christ's rigorous words about divorce in light of his stance on the Sabbath, one can imagine that for an individual of the seventeenth century, for whom the Bible was a perfect unit of meaning, the mysterious connection between the episode in Exodus and the exception to fornication in the gospel,

signaled by the Hebraism, was something that he strenuously attempted to clarify, and although never directly thematized strangely makes its way into the cluster of implied associations of the scene leading up to the drama of the fall. Milton mobilizes his formidable grasp of the Biblical text to provide one of the densest renditions of prelapsarian married life, where the fall becomes, among other things, a symptomatic irruption of a crises of "communication" or conversation between man and wife.

2.3. Trial of Exceeding Love

"Shee disappear'd, and left me dark, I wak'd / To find her, or for ever to deplore / Her loss" (VIII, 478-80). I will conclude, after having led the reader through the mazes of free will and predestination, by exploring how Adam's fall itself instances and dramatizes freedom through an act of love. At first sight, his resolution to die with his wife at the unbearable conjecture of living without her is liable to theological condemnation, and the narrative voice delivers that judgement (IX, 998-99). But the tragic quality of the representation of the fall elicits a response on the level of sentiments which conflicts with and disarms the formalism of reason and makes it human. Tragedy is by essence a metalinguistic reflection on justice whereby the irruption of the incommensurable in a legal structure denounces its calcification, and finds a new law in the unintelligibility that violently bursts it. As Victoria Kahn observes: "In making Adam's fall humanly comprehensible in this way, Milton goes a long way toward imagining a purely secular conception of human fallibility and of obligation – one that is not a consequence of the fall but of our natural human embodiment" (2009, p. 220-21). Kahn's cogent argument, from a secular perspective, is that a contract is not simply formalized by the exercise of volition. The subject who so commits him- or herself might be moved by mimetic reasons, such as uncontrollable feelings and embodiment. Besides, on a certain level, the problem tackled here is part of the larger issue of the nature of prelapsarian sexuality. From a human point of view, the early patristic construction of paradisal married life as a state in which man had complete control over his passions – testified in St. Augustine's claim that the prelapsarian phallus was completely obedient to the will – is unappealing dramatically, and that type of ideal at which one would recoil if it were to become real. William Empson rightly questions whether an experience of

love completely under the sway of the will would be genuine and desirable: “the spontaneity of a sexual emotion is like that of any other, love towards God for example. [...] If Milton had presented Adam and Eve as ‘self-controlled’ to this extent they would have seemed like insects and been unable to fall” (1961, p. 169).

If we ponder Adam’s options at the fall, we are struck with characteristic Miltonic vertigo. In his account of the second dream, Eve becomes so essential to him that when she disappears, he drops into a darkness reminiscent of Satan’s despairing abyss (“out of hope”): as in *Doctrine and Discipline*, a suitable conversation with the wife is the genuine amends provided by the law as a remedy for sin, without which the husband despairs and begins to have “thoughts of Atheism” (CP II, p. 260). In Milton’s Protestantism, the promise of salvation of the Word satisfies man’s rational burning for a helpmate; a burning that reflects fallen man’s need for guidance or help in general. Lacan theorized that the *reality* of human desire is sustained solely by a fantasy-formation, which simultaneously dissimulates the wound of “castration” (we remember “wide was the wound”), and a psychoanalytic reader is tempted to point out at this point the obvious inference that *Eve is the fantasy that sustains his desire.* In her absence, he falls into the asymbolic void of melancholy (Adam suggests that he would engage in interminable mourning, “for ever to deplore her loss”) and literally loses desire, with its dire consequences. In her absence, he himself becomes absent as a ruse to avoid acknowledging her loss. The theological line, of course, is that Adam should stick to God, and find support enough in his faith and love for the creator, even if without a wife. But we see the double-bind in which he is caught: he dies if he chooses to fall with his spouse, but he cannot live without her. To engage for a moment in an A. C. Bradley type of criticism, while Adam observes Eve returning and realizes that every sign in her demeanor betrays her crime, we can imagine the horrible thought that crosses his mind: from now on, freedom for him simply means to choose to die: he can only exercise his freedom to lose it. In what has to be one of the strongest scenes in the poem, a petrified Adam lets fall the garland he had made for his “Perdita”:

> Soon as he heard
> The fatal Trespass done by Eve, amaz’d,
> Astonied [he] stood and Blank, while horror chill
> Ran through his veins, and all his joints relax’d;
> From his slack hand the Garland wreath’d for Eve
> Down dropp’d. (IX, 887-892)

And immediately after this he decides, in a silent soliloquy or internal monologue,

> with thee
> Certain my resolution is to Die:
> How can I live without thee, how forgo
> Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly join'd,
> To live again in these wild woods forlorn?
> Should God create another Eve, and I
> Another Rib afford, yet loss of thee
> Would never from my heart; no no, I feel
> The Link of Nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh,
> Bone of my Bone thou art, and from thy State
> Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe (IX, 906-916).

The meticulous description of his physical reaction conveys the internal crystallization of his resolution: as his relaxed hands loosen up what they gather, the mental decision tightens up to the point of shock. By having no means to successfully fight death, the only subterfuge left is to imitate it and become a stone or "a*ston*ied."

In the history of human thought, we have to roughly distinguish two concepts of freedom: the one refers to the possibility of picking up among several objects (it is Eve's concept when she says that they are not in a "narrow circuit straitn'd by a foe"), the other operates in the blurry state in which one *impossibly* experiences choosing to be a subject capable of choice. The latter is the sphere of madness, in the basic sense that a mad individual is someone who is not completely sure that he is responsible for his or her acts. We send people to asylums or to prison precisely to paradoxically force them to be free subjects again, but that they constitute a traumatic core that contains a truth of our societies can be seen from the fact that Foucault was so intrigued by both. In the emphatic sense, like innocence which, for Kierkegaard, is lost the moment we think about it, the radical experience of freedom only begins with its loss. But not in a gratuitous or meaningless act to prove that one is free like Raskolnikov, but as an act of love, taking responsibility for that other who cannot be responsible for him- or herself. In that sense, Adam's trial of exceeding love marks the moment in which his emphatic experience of freedom begins, not in the sense of having unrestrained power of choosing, but that of being so resolute in choosing one thing that he cannot unmake that choice. That is why the confrontation with death is the paradigmatic experience of freedom, since if one chooses death, one cannot un-choose it. At this point, it would be important to observe that Milton weaves several ironies into Adam's speech. As is

the practice in the speeches of the pair after the fall, they vaunt aloud altruism but betray their egotism (Adam even had time to conjecture supplying another rib for a new wife!). Adam's predicament is that even though he chooses to die with Eve to preserve the support that protects him from the confrontation with the "dark," he is already in a fast fall into the Satanic abyss that his choice is supposed to protect him from. Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety*, of course, is probably the most elegant treatment of original sin in the history of Western thought, and sums up what has been developed so far: "I must point out that [anxiety] is altogether different from fear and similar concepts that refer to something definite, whereas anxiety is freedom's actuality as the possibility of possibility" (2008, p. 42-43). In anxiety the finite and the infinite touch one another.

While Adam waits for the stroke of death – whose nature was completely indefinite to them – to which he has resolutely persuaded himself to submit, he experiences the "actuality" of freedom, the compulsion of which is as "the link of nature," an expression that in itself suggests a chain. The more Adam gives in to "lust," to his dependence on the wife out of whom he made a fetish, since she is thoroughly lost, the more he nonetheless has to confront the void of his desire, and confront freedom. In order to make sure that vacillation does not spoil the resolution, however, this very resolution acquires a certain autonomy beyond volition. The subject needs an external supplement to his body that makes sure that he does not recoil from his decision of giving up choice, and insofar as the structure of freedom includes such moment of pure restraint, the emphatic concept of freedom is inextricably "linked" with necessity and perhaps bondage. Within a classical concept of virtue Adam's act is the contrary of freedom, but in a dialectical approach it is only because the loss of Eve is so painful that freedom (the mourning work over the loss of paradise) can have any meaning. Homer perfectly rendered the inception of this notion of freedom *qua* resolution, and how we need the "other" to secure us from recoiling from our choice, although we should do away with it later, in the Ulysses episode with the Sirens. It is because he knows that withstanding temptation is beyond his capacity that he has the crew bind him to the mast and tighten the ropes the more he asks to be set free. In *Paradise Lost*, the link of nature that makes the first man one flesh with his wife plays the part of those ropes to which Adam chose to tie himself irremediably.

4. "ARE WE CONTRARIES O MILTON?": KNOWLEDGE, THE FALL AND RECONCILIATION IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S VISIONS OF MARRIAGE

> There is a Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find.
> Nor can his Watch Fiends find it, but the Industrious find
> This Moment & it multiply. & when it once is found
> It renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed [.]
> (*E*. p. 136; *M*. 35 [39]. 40-43)

A great extent of William Blake's continuation of the "visionary" work began by Milton but, in his view, not carried far enough centered on a reassessment of the seventeenth-century poet's depiction of sexuality and sexual relations. Following Blake's insistence that *Paradise Regained* was the more consummate work of the two major poems, he chose the "short epic" as the model for the genuine poetic expression of the liberation latent in the Christian message. In line with his radical unorthodoxy, Blake undertook a life of scathing denunciations of the repressions operated by institutional religion and steadily upheld the divine nature of the imaginative potential of desire. The unrestricted defense of the imperative of desire in opposition to its curbing by "rationality" led the Romantic poet to expose what he believed to be the serious limitations of *Paradise Lost*, taking issue specially with the rigid logic of its theodicy. The epic still partook of the Christian tradition's uncritical celebration of expiation by providing a rationale for the son's sacrifice; traces of natural religion that would only be fully overcome in the poem that followed it and its choice of moving the emphasis of Christ's trial from the crucifixion to the more interior drama of the temptation in the wilderness. Therefore, although the epic on the fall of man is known as one of the boldest and most successful seventeenth-century attempts to represent prelapsarian sexuality, that very representation, haunted as it was by the rigid discourse of the expiation of sin, turns out for Blake to be the "Robe" that, in covering the "guilty shame" of the discovery of sexuality, only

"uncover'd more" (IX, 1058-9). As is seen in Blake's main prophecies, such as *Jerusalem* (1804) and *The Four Zoas* (1797), the decline of imaginative force after the fall is linked to the advent of reproductive sexuality or what he terms the state of "generation." If each of his prophetic poems concerns a quest to achieve ever-higher degrees of clarity in the poet's vision, the retrieval of that divine image coincides with the overcoming of fallen sexuality in order to achieve the full interpenetration of a lost unity. That does not imply, however, so much a nostalgic longing for a lost paradise as an attempt to free humanity from mystifying forms of repression. Thus, behind the allegorical intricacies that scare many readers, Blake's poetry, in its recurrent mythic formulation of the conciliation between the "awakener" and his alienated female emanation, attempts to be an instrument to further human emancipation by tenaciously returning to the issue of the interconnection between sexuality and the limits of human perception and pushing beyond that "covering cherub."

4.1. The dialectic of body and soul in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Just as in *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789) Blake achieved his aesthetic effects by contrasting the poems representing the two states in an ironic play of mirrors, irony continues to be his foremost rhetorical device in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790).[27] The poet's belief that the voice of indignation constituted the genuine expression of God entails that the anger which often accompanied his utterances are the soul and vitality of his poetry. And since wrath and vehemence were traditionally condemned as closer to vice than virtue, he had to perform a transvaluation of them in order to retrieve the cutting edge of prophetic speech, lost as it had been in its enshrinement in institutional religion. To be a prophet, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, did not mean, strictly speaking, the oracular role associated with it, but rather a certain way of conveying the truth through shock.[28] Although he claims affiliation to

[27] "The mirror poems are pairs of poems, one appearing in each section of the book, that deal with the same subject [...] Such poems invite a side-by-side reading. This is what D. G. Gillham does in Blake's *Contrary States* (2009). Gillham identifies every pair of mirror poems in the book (which includes questionable choices, such as "The Ecchoing Green" and "London"), and makes a reading of them side by side." (WANDERLINDE, 2020, p. 167-68)

[28] "The Hebrew word *nabi* seems to have meant 'proclaimer,' so that I suppose we ought to speak of the 'proclaimers' rather than the 'prophets,' but no one among us will choose to do so, since we are deeply invested in the overtones of the 'prophets' and 'prophecy.' We call them 'prophets' because the Septuagint translated *nabi* by the Greek word *prophetes*, which means 'interpreter.' I think that 'interpreter' is better than 'proclaimer' but

the line of sacred poetry of which Milton perhaps was the last scion, the prophet for Blake is an artist committed to the truth of the energy and the passion of his desire to create. In the spirit of nineteenth-century humanism (e.g., Feuerbach), Blake is always on the verge of affirming that the "Divine Image" is simply the pure creative power of man, since it is even exchangeable with "Divine Humanity." It is on this celebration of the vital power of creativity in connection with a romantic concept of imagination that Blake's reflection about sexuality will center.

Containing the most famous statement about Milton by another poet, *Marriage* is a surprisingly hybrid text. Merging verse, prose and excursuses in prophetic vision named "memorable fancies," the attempt of the work to devise a philosophy of art never gets in the way of its satirical form and aims. Indeed, it is remarkable that most of it is conveyed through the "voice of the devil," because that choice of framing bespeaks the difficulties that Blake had in handling his topic: the problem of trying to speak about innocence is that it is always from the point of view of experience. Consequently, as Harold Bloom remarks about *Songs*, the poems of the earlier book achieve their artistic effect because, against the initial impressions, they are sustained by the tension of a latent irony that, like a *trompe l'oeil*, constantly resurfaces and threatens the innocence of their idyllic background.[29] In *Marriage* the polemical stance assumed by Blake does not leave room for that type of pastoral mood. The poet's tirades against religion avoid the purism of conventional discourse on sexual matters and instead overidentify with the surfeit of "hellish" energy. To understand his movement through opposites, we must bear in mind that his position as a poet cannot be reduced to that of the intradiegetic "voice of the devil," which, although helpful as a device to begin the process of conciliation of the title, proves limited in the end. In that sense, it could be argued that Blake resumes a problem that Milton had faced and gives his own treatment to it. While in the seventeenth-century epic we are introduced to the human couple through the devil's perspective, along with his resentment and the explicit associations with priesthood, the journey back to Eden of Blake's satire is mediated by a devilish voice, too, but now that necessity of framing is not felt as a blemish, and the "signal" has been inverted, since the devil stands for uninhibited desire. As can be seen

---

we are stuck with the word 'prophet,' despite its partly irrelevant meaning of foretelling, of predicting an unalterable future" (BLOOM, 1991, p. 12).

[29] For instance, analysing "Holy Thursday," Bloom writes that "the ambiguity of tone of Blake's songs is never more evident than here, and yet never ore difficult to evidence. One can pont of course to several disturbing details" (1963, p. 44).

in title page (see Fig. 1), the very attempt to run away from the flames, it is suggested, is what leads to the fall (ironically, represented on the top of the illumination): “to rise away from the sexual fire can only lead to loss” (1963, p. 72).

Figure 1. William Blake. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. Plate 1. Copy D. 1795. Library of Congress (Blake Archive).

Marriage, therefore, already intimates the centrality that a whole set of associations derived from Milton would have in the constitution of Blake’s own correction of what he perceived as the earlier poet’s errors. Since his poetry cannot be dissociated from the images that accompany the verse, it is noteworthy, for example, that the prophecy *Milton* (1804-11) is in a way the culmination of a lifelong series of attempts to synthesize the poet’s achievement in a representation or what Joseph Wittreich (1975) aptly calls the idea of Milton. In Blake’s hand, Milton transcends the individual and ultimately stands for the awakening of the poetic spirit and its liberation from the shackles of a fallen world whose best codification was the empiricist philosophy abhorred by Blake. Milton had begun the work of liberation – he speaks

of "liberty's defense, my noble task" in Sonnet XX (l. 11 / HUGUES, 2003, p. 170) – but had not gone far enough. In thar regard, the revolutionary wave in France was an omen of the Apocalypse for Blake. Each Englishman, so he believed, would be able to go past the Cherub guarding the tree of life inside. Moreover, the disruptive rhetoric of the text and its celebration of the power of desire against its curbing partakes of the role that the garden of Eden had played in the English political imaginary (especially visible through sects such as the Ranters during the English Civil War).[30] The impending radical social change proved a perfect scenario for the heightening of the hopes for a conciliation of the (presumed) constitutive opposites of human nature. Given the authority that Milton enjoyed as a writer who brought together poetry, politics, and philosophy for eighteenth-century intellectuals, Blake could not but see the fiery overturning of structures as a reawakening of his "spirit." That is not to deny that, still, the main goals of the "revolution" were couched in religious terms.

At this period of his career (not insignificantly, he was thirty-three), then, Blake already had a sophisticated discernment of the dynamics of Milton's poetics. Given that Milton is also the prototype of every man, Blake will condemn the repression of creative energy by the *ratio* of the five senses chronicled in the pages of *Paradise Lost* and in the poet's life. Blake's discourse and assessment of Milton poses a few problems at this point, especially when a critic such as William Stevenson, commenting on the philosophy of *Marriage*, writes that "the 'clothes' have served their purpose, and can be put away; in the new age, which B. heralds, only naked and pure beauty and truth will remain" or that "truth is found neither through logic nor rule, but through the fearless exercise of the Imagination" (2007, p. 107). Statements such as these bring him dangerously close to irrationalism, although scholars like Bloom and Thompson defend him from that attribution: "any deep reader of Blake now knows – thanks to the work of Damon, Frye, Erdman, and Fisher in particular – that Blake had no quarrel with a genuinely critical and thorough rationality (as opposed to all rationalisms)" (BLOOM, 1972, p. 220). Perhaps, to over-analyze his concept of energy is beside the point and might detract from the enjoyment of his text and the sharpness and relevance of his interventions.

[30] For example, Thompson shows how many of the sexually radical ideas of the ranters were still alive in the 1790s (1993, p. 20).

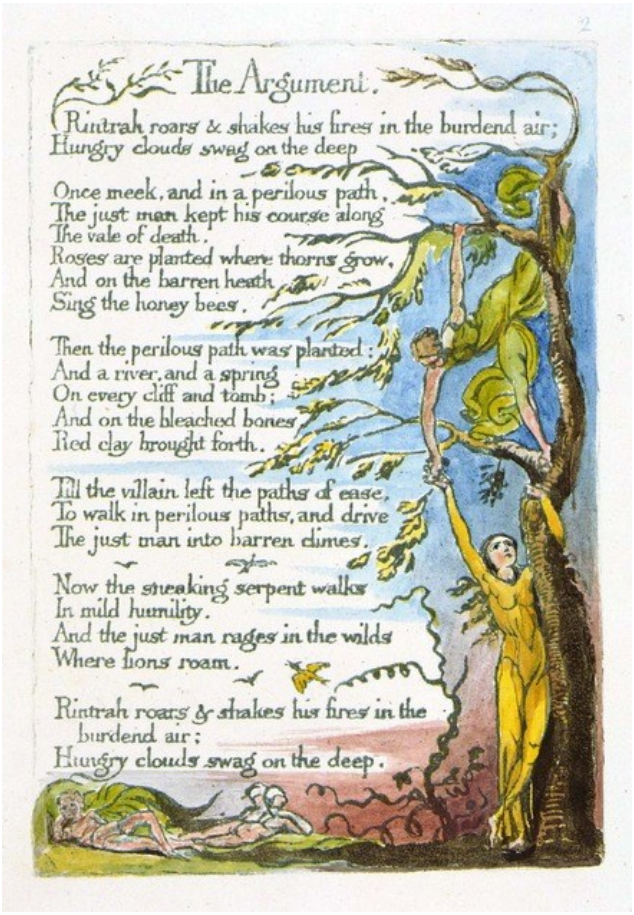

Fig 2. William Blake. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. Plate 2. Copy D. 1795. Library of Congress (Blake Archive).

The lyric that opens the argument stages the dialectical reversals that attach opposite values to the same terms from one stanza to another characteristic of the movement of contraries. The man "once meek, and in a perilous path" of the first verses becomes the "just man rag[ing] in the wilds / where lions roam" of the conclusion (*E*. p. 33; *MHH* 2. 3; 19-20). In other words, the representative of desire has been cast out "into barren climes" as a devil, while the true villains became the angels who defend orthodox religion.[31] The allusion to barren climes evokes the association between the garden and fertility in Genesis, while the "red clay" that brings forth "bleached bones" juxtaposes the contrasting images of woman's creation out of man's flesh and the despairing one of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. The idea found

[31] "The evil figures are those associated in other places with the priesthood who here institutionalized and enforce the new Edenic myth of the villain as one law, as the single explanation of the origin of life, ignoring other possibilities including the myth of the just man 'The Argument' opens with" (*apud* VASSILADIS, 2010, p. 9).

in the prophetic book that the spirit of God will add life and flesh to the bones of the dead in their resurrection becomes material for Blake's hope of a sexuality beyond the cycle of generation. Thus, the gnomic poem (see Fig. 2) introduces the central theme of *Marriage*, which is the denunciation of the false angels, erstwhile devils of exuberant energy who have accepted their fall into the socio-religious and epistemic constraints of the *ratio* of the five senses and all that that entails (his problem was not with perception *per se*, but with its homogenization). That very antagonism is a means that Blake finds to break with Emanuel Swedenborg and, by criticizing his lapse into the ventriloquism of orthodoxy in his later work, develop his own voice.

The immediate occasion for *Marriage* was Blake's immersion and eventual disappointment with Swedenborg. In his annotation to the mystic's *Wisdom of Angels Concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom*, he writes, disapprovingly, that "Good & Evil are here both Good & the Two contraries Married" (*E*. p. 604). While Swedenborg saw the relation between God and man as a unity of "mutual absorption," Blake's criticism is that such a conception fails to provide true antagonism (good and evil end up being the same). At least in the text from 1790, the poet believed then that the progression of opposites was set in motion by two principles or "contraries" that never completely blended into each other; a point worth pursuing is the extent to which he still endorses or has abandoned that view in *Milton*. These ontological considerations between the interaction between God and man in his fallen state treat sexuality in a moral register. The cluster of associations underlying his reasoning being that the fall brought the necessity of learning good through evil, *a contrario*. Since for hegemonic theology the fall coincided with the discovery of sexuality, Christian hermeneutics had a deep intuition of the interconnection between knowledge and sex. Moreover, the dualism of flesh and spirit that informs Pauline psychology was moral rather than metaphysical, which explains how good and evil became categories that dominate the religious understanding of knowledge.[32] As usual, Blake took his views about these moral categories and their connection with the soul and the body from Milton. The relevant passage is the famous one from *Areopagitica*:

> It was from out the rinde of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evill as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World. This is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill.

[32] See, in that regard, *The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology* (ROBINSON, 1772).

> As therefore the state of man now is: what wisdome can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evill? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian [...] that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary (*CP* II, p. 514-15).

The image of the villain who "lea[ves] the paths of ease / To walk in perilous paths" of the "Argument" suggests that the confrontational dialectic of the treatise had left a deep impression on Blake. Commenting on the lyric, D. G. Gillham frames the discussion with the contrast that shapes the passage above: "In the remainder of the poem, Blake, who takes the side of the just man, is obliged to be an advocate of the devil because passive man (the 'villain'), being in charge, has made conformity, restraint, inert reason, into virtues, giving them the sanction of his debased religion" (1973, p. 163). To speak of justice is to introduce a subject that was dear to the poet: theodicy. The seeds of the transformation of the genre that he would accomplish in his later prophecies are already latent in *Marriage*. The lyric opens with the cryptic allusion to the wrathful god Rintrah, whose roaring anticipates that of the just man raging in the wilderness in the second stanza. In the concluding verses, his prophetic anger fuses with that of the furious god of the element of fire, while the poem restates the initial "burden": "Rintrah roars and shakes his fires in the burdened air; / Hungry clouds swag on the deep" (*MHH* 2; *E*. p. 33).[33] The stage has been set for the prophesy of an apocalypse, which is then announced in the following prose paragraph. The previous poem had been a summary of human history, and it leaves the reader at the threshold of the "return of Adam into Paradise" (*MHH* 2; *E*. p. 33).

Given that the characterization of the son as the second Adam is central for the argument of *Paradise Regained*, we can appreciate the subtlety of Blake's craft in tacitly hinting at the theological problems posed by Milton's short epic (itself modelled on the prototype of all theodicies, the book of Job). At this point, it is important to remark that Blake did not read the seventeenth-century poet as simply imaginative literature. Milton's claim to sacred inspiration was not metaphorical for him, and so the authority of his word enjoyed a place in his imagination which was rivalled only by the Bible.[34] Since he espoused the view that reality was a correlate of the creativity of poets of capable imagination, living in the

[33] The effect of this repetition is, then, a nuanced irony akin to the one that opens and closes *The Tyger*.
[34] "We are not to suppose that a formal education (Milton, the Old Testament, Shakespeare, Paracelsus, Boheme) was completed before the American War began" (1993, p. 130).

England of the late eighteenth century meant living in a reality which, as was the case with other Romantic poets, owed a lot to writers like Milton. The fact that people could not recognize immediately in material signs man's creative force reflected the decline in imagination that he was out to criticize. A vehement critic of Locke, Blake believed that social oppression was one with the shrinkage of perception. The poet who writes "how do you know but every bird that cuts the airy way is an immense world of delight, closed by your senses five?" (*MHH* 6; *E.* p. 35) felt ill at ease in a society where nature was stripped of its life and became the inert matter of the random collision of atoms. If images of men working in furnaces, where the clatter of sledgehammers striking on anvils is almost audible, continuously turns up in his poetry, it is because he believed that through work man could retrieve control over a nature that threatened to contract his imaginative capacity to the "point of opacity": "Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast" (*MHH*. 11; *E*. p. 38).

Moreover, as E. P. Thompson has shown, *Marriage* offers Blake's own imaginative response to doctrinal controversies from his *milieu*. There is evidence that the poet attended the meetings where the class of tradesmen and artisans gathered to discuss religion and politics in the London of the last quarter of the century (see 1993, p. 132-33). His interest, mentioned above, in the Swedish mystic was largely caused by the influence of his writings in the new congregations that were rapidly emerging. Indeed, religious newspapers adopted the form of "memorable fancies" to be later used by the poet. Especially significant in that regard is that the enthusiasm and the falling out with the mystic is chronicled in Blake's attraction to The New Jerusalem Church of the late 1780s, which was mainly composed of Swedenborgians. Many of the underpinnings of *Marriage* reveal Blake's disagreements with doctrinal tenets which were fiercely argued over. While, for instance, his composition of *Songs* can be attributed to his willingness to contribute with hymns to a new form of antinomian organization of "praise" (whose semantic distinction from "worship" intimates the difference of stance), in which the believer's experience of the divine was stripped of the ornaments of the "main" tradition, by the time of *Marriage* the realization that the members responsible for organization were already reintroducing ceremonies and priesthood accounts for his disenchantment and eventual polemic against it.

Blake's work, then, reveals a special case of confluence between the excitement of Jacobinism transfigured by the English antinomian tradition, which had largely been associated

with dissent. One of the issues around which, for instance, there was fierce controversy concerned sexuality. The publication of Swedenborg's *The Delights of Wisdom Respecting Conjugal Love* in 1790 elicited responses that warned against the dangers of such books over sexual practices, and it resembled the discussion concerning the nature of the flesh and "community of wives" that had animated polemic prose in seventeenth-century pamphlets, when many took the doctrine of the divine manifestation in the flesh to its logical conclusion, and argued that the redemption from sin involved a liberation of sexual experience. Swedenborg, for one, "condoned fornication by those who 'cannot as yet enter into marriage, and, from their passion for the sex, cannot moderate their desires', so long as they 'limit the vague love of the sex to one mistress" (*apud* THOMPSON, 1993, p. 138). As expected, such exceptions were only granted to men. Hence, we meet here the antinomian spirit that had led to the re-evaluation of sexual life and even a form of sexual liberation rekindled.

However, the theological aspect most likely to engender controversy between the established church and the several threads of marginal tradition that still subsisted in the late eighteenth century were the different understandings of "justification" in its connection with the moral Law and their implications to conceive the specific attributes of the "Divine Image." A crucial tension of "contraries" where antinomianism had to attempt to strike a balance emerged from the fact that its view of the interaction between humanity and godhead, being less hierarchical, came dangerously close to putting too much emphasis on the human element. Sects such as the Swedenborgians upheld a doctrine that criticized trinitarianism and celebrated the humanity of the Son, since it was through his incarnation that material nature was mediated with the divine. The main bone of contention tended to arise from disagreement concerning the extent to which Christ had performed a redemption by his death without need of further supplement, which led partisans to divide themselves along the lines of the contrast of salvation by faith and by works. Those more prone to defend that the need of the Law had not been fully abolished tended to render their "justification" in legalistic terms recalling the atonement and the crucifixion, whereas antinomians like Blake changed the emphasis of Christ's action to forgiveness.

Thus, the same concerns that had affected Milton's interpretation of the biblical legislation of divorce are also indirectly operative in Blake's polemic. But while for Milton the gospel fulfilled the Law, Blake borders on heresy when, for instance, he writes that "I tell you

no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules" (*MHH* 23; *E*. p. 42). Given that we cannot factor out the parodic element in these cutting maxims, Blake's decrying of all rules must be read as performative to a certain extent. His great "revision" of his predecessor will consist of his criticism of the rationale for the sacrifice of the Son in *Paradise Lost*, the "rigid satisfaction, death for death" (III, 212), a point which nonetheless obscures how much both poets' views converged in their contrast to mainstream British religious discourse. A great amount of the anti-prelatical and anti-formalist sentiment of Milton's early prose was formative for a poet who claimed to have read Milton's works from childhood: "Milton lov'd me in childhood & shew'd me his face" (*E*. p. 707).

Blake's first statement on marriage, as mentioned above, is an apocalyptic counterpart to the sacrificial logic underlying theodicy.[35] The proliferation of images of sacrifice, especially in the prophecy to be analyzed in the next section, shows that Blake's work has a recurring concern for the anthropological issue of the intertwinement of representation, law, and sacrifice, although he could not have benefited from the twentieth-century discovery of the regulatory role of "sacrifice" in forestalling violence. If we presuppose, following Bloom and Thompson that, despite the criticisms levelled at reason, Blake still speaks from the point of view of rationality, his apocalyptic "memorable fancies" and the general parodic tone of the text can be read as influxes of mimetic forces that subvert the purity of the symbolic. As Helen Bruder has pointed out, in a text about marriage where women are barely mentioned (except graphically), the affinity that Blake clearly had elsewhere with a discourse of sexual liberation, and with the feminine, is perhaps manifested in the polyphonic heterogeneity that makes *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* a hybrid text:

> Blake is of value to feminism not because he maintained an exemplary and unwavering feminist commitment but rather because he took sexual power seriously and engaged with many of the contemporary discourses and contexts in which it was being exercised or resisted. Moreover, and perhaps more important still, Blake's real 'feminist' gesture is that he constructs a notion of femininity centred upon the concept of dissent. He allows disputatious female voices into his texts in a truly revolutionary way and this polyphonic liberality can be historically located and valued if we look at a pivotal passage from James Fordyce's very

[35] His sensibility to the link between sexuality and castration is striking insofar as the latter is responsible for positioning subjects in relation to the law through the sacrifice of jouissance: "For both sexes, then, the phallus provokes a loss and a choice. Sexual position is the result of that loss which is a sacrifice of jouissance" (BROUSSE, 1991, p. 116).

popular sermon on *The Conduct and Character of the Female Sex* (1776) (1997, p. 36)

Now we can analyze Blake's argument in *Marriage* more detailedly. Plates 3 through 6, particularly, constitute a manifesto of sorts of the theory of knowledge underlying his artistic practice. After the declaration of the advent of the "dominion of Edom, and the return of Adam into Paradise" (*MHH.* 3; *E*. p. 34) which subtly echoes the *Areopagitica* passage quoted above (p. 124), Blake moves from vision to the conciseness of a few propositions. The postulation of the complementary contraries that cannot be reduced to one another introduces the moral categories that will be criticized throughout the work: "From these contraries spring what the religious call Good and Evil. Good is the passive that obeys reason: Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven; Evil is Hell" (*MHH*. 3; *E*. p. 34). The main objection leveled at these terms is that they elect one to the detriment of the other, and in this rejection the subordinate term is deemed "evil." For Blake, in contrast, they should go hand in hand. Indeed, if "spring" repeats Milton's "leap" (good and evil leap as twins from the "one apple tasted"), Blake wants the shrewd reader to remember that the divorce of the two terms began with the fall (when man first had knowledge of good and evil) and its unfair condemnation of sexuality and the energy coming from the body. It is worth recalling that, in the divorce tracts, Milton had resorted to the metaphysical explanation that reality was informed by the principles of love and strife. While he evokes that argument to justify an unchangeable incompatibility, Blake, by defending the mutual interpenetration of opposites, seeks reconciliation.

The section "The Voice of the Devil" tempts us at the outset with the paradox that "sacred codes" have caused Errors. Like Milton, Blake's humanism denounces religions for appealing to the doctrine of original sin to degrade mankind below its inborn dignity. In fact, it should make us ponder that in *Marriage* we find again the denunciation of metaphysical dualism as harmful for ideologically mobilizing the moral Law to justify that man "will be tormented [...] for following his energies" (*MHH.* 3; *E*. p. 34); that is, philosophy is harnessed to legitimize a certain form of the exercise of power. There is an incipient critique of ideology in Blake insofar as his writing reveals that the abstraction of the soul as an entity apart from the body is a useful epistemological ground to preserve structures of domination (let us not forget that the companion piece of "The Image of God" is "The Human Abstract"): "The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects [...] Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from

their objects: thus began Priesthood" (*MHH*, 11; *E*., p. 38). Just as good and evil are twins demanding the work of the exercise of virtue, that is, the capacity to experience and yet abstain, the distinction between the divine image and abstraction is more complex than might appear at first sight.

Different from the radical dualism of traditional religion, the devil claims that "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul, for that called Body is a portion of Soul discerned by the five senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age" (*MHH* 4; *E*. p. 34). Such a statement elicits two observations: first, Blake himself was averse to "materialism" since the notion available to him was impoverished. His disapproval hinged on the fact that mechanical atomism reduced reality to a homogenous grey cloud of indistinct units, abstracting from its sensuous determinations. As an artist, Blake's interest was in well-defined forms that captured the uniqueness of his "visions," and at least in this case, philosophical reflection was a means to an end. Second, the defense of the indivisibility of body and soul, even if superficially privileging the soul, must be understood in the historical dialectical movement in which it is caught. When Blake right in the sequence writes that "energy is the only life and is from the body," he reveals that his main difficulty is to explain how life can be a bodily phenomenon without abandoning the language of his religious background according to which life is a form of inspiration, of "spirit." The political background that has been presented should allow us to read Blake's ontological choices as correlates of his radical stance. To point out the implication between politics and ontology is by no means to claim that philosophy is determined by history alone, but to show that in such a context the aspects underlined by one's philosophy attest to whether the position is historically "progressive" or not.

Modern philosophy from Descartes onward presupposes the discontinuity between extension and cogitation. Several recent new materialisms attempt to return the vitality that the material universe has seemingly been deprived of, in what often amounts to an aesthetic experience. However, despite Blake's claim that energy is from the body, his view is essentially incompatible with any presupposition of a vital principle immanent in matter, and a warning against such a view is to be found in his claim that there is no natural religion. God is manifested through vision. If vision is a certain unity of energy and form, then what Blake means with energy cannot be reduced to matter. Blake is not interested in privileging neither a self-enclosed mind (which he consigns to Ulro in his system) neither the physical universe with its dreadful

chain of causality, which for him inevitably leads to a discourse of domination. For Northrop Frye, Berkeley's *esse est percipi* best represents the emphasis of the poet's excursus into the nature of knowledge, although to take Blake for an idealist would be a reduction. The content of knowledge is essentially perception and while perception is built with the material of experience, Blake would disagree with the radical empiricism of his countryman in his belief that without innate ideas the "corporeal understanding" could not conceive, among other things, the very idea of God.

The natural universe would be barren without the shaping force of life, which is not a uniquely human reality but, for Blake, takes its most accomplished form in Man. The energy which plays such a pivotal role in *Marriage* is ultimately best understood in its connection with the vitality proper to the sexual and to desire. Form is only a means through which that shaping force is bounded. Blake cannot be taken as an irrationalist because he never denies that energy exists, at least for humans, only through the delimiting lines of form. However, as the rational structures of his time consisted of outdated forms, he emphasizes the disruptive power of desire. If human bodies are always emanating light in his engravings, it is because the forms that he uses acknowledge that they are trying to circumscribe what he calls the infinite. In that sense, we find the traditional tension between line and color in painting cast in epistemological terms. The infinity of perception has been shadowed by several manifestations of "error," of which the modern reduction of knowledge to what can be grasped by the five senses is one. Since poetry is an "allegory" directed to the intellectual powers, Blake wants to legitimize a form of mental perception that not necessarily has to "fit" to what is allowed within the ineluctable laws of nature. Because visions come from the "poetic genius," they are more real. His defense that man is out of place in nature agrees with the psychoanalytic thesis of man's imbalance within his environment: "of all animals, man is the most hopelessly maladjusted to nature: that is why he outdistances the animal, the supreme triumph of the imagination" (FRYE, 1990, p. 36). In an annotation to Wordsworth where the poet muses over the adaptation of the mind to the external world, he writes: "you shall not bring me down to believe such fitting & fitted" (*E*. p. 667).

In contrast to the usual passivity of the mind in the organization of perception for empiricists, Blake espouses a view where the mind is active in the creation of its perception – the distinction between the adjusted perception of common sense and that of the artist lying in

the attention to details: “things are real to the extent that they are sharply, clearly, particularly perceived by themselves and discriminated from one another” (FRYE, 1990, p. 16). When the poet speaks that the body is a portion of the soul, he means it in the sense that organs cannot “work” if they are not coordinated with the deliberative instance of the body, the mind. Although Frye never spells it out in those terms, those aphorisms from *Marriage* contain therefore a certain view of the constitution of the ego. It is the mind that walks the legs, moves our arms and so forth. The body is a *portion* of the soul discerned by the five senses.

Moreover, the role of the image of God is reintroduced in Blake’s theory of knowledge, dependent as it is on the complex of ego as “corporeal ego,” and in his conceptualization of the divine image as ultimately the “image” of the species**.** The Poetic Genius of inspiration about which we read in *All Religions Are One* that “so from already acquired knowledge Man could not acquire more. Therefore, a universal Poetic Genius exists” (*E*. p. 1), is a factum of the human genus. Frye substantiates the validity of the nuance of meaning of such a charged keyword by reference to Blake’s use of it in a biological context: “The Oak dies as well as the Lettuce, but its Eternal Image & Individuality never dies, but renews its seed” (*E.* p. 555). The great crux is the precise meaning of image for Blake. For artistic purposes, its foremost significance is that of “form.” I would argue nonetheless that there is a productive latitude in his concept of image, as it encompasses the empiricist sense of idea *qua* the remnant of perception and, given Blake’s prophetic leanings and the role of the infinite in his thinking, it can sometimes assume Platonic overtones. Again, Frye suggests the same when he summarizes that

> There are thus two modes of existence. The ego plays with shadows like men in Plato’s cave; to perceive the particular and imagine the real is to perceive and imagine a part of a Divine Body. A hand or eye is individual because it is an organ of a body: separated from the body it loses all individuality beyond what is dead and useless […] The universal perception of the particular is the “Divine Image” of the *Songs of Innocence*; the egocentric perception of the general is the “Human Abstract” of the *Songs of Experience*. This is the basis of Blake’s theory of good and evil (1974, p. 32).

With this universal perception of the creator, Blake seems to be groping towards a notion of a transcendental subject that sustains the reality of the perception of individuals, whose most elegant articulation would be that of the German Idealists. Harold Bloom even draws a parallel with Coleridge’s Primary Imagination (so that the “Poetic Genius” of *All Religions are One* has more affinity with the artistic “genius” of the Schlegels than the

philosophical "spirit" of later idealists) but adding the caveat that these approximations only throw into sharp relief Blake's idiosyncrasy.

For, in a sense, he avoids this type of speculation because his interest in philosophy preserves the attention to corporeality that was a feature of the late Milton. Blake wants to purify human perception by claiming that the division between the rarefied soul and the corrupting materiality of the body is the major source of error and hence, the true "corruption" (the doctrine of the priests of virginal purity) in the first place. It is remarkable that if such a caste defends "virginity" in the sense of mere spiritual preservation, it is because sacrifice has become a crucial social category. Here we meet again the complex knot where body and soul are not to be taken *purely* in their substances but as terms whose meaning is already caught in an anthropological economy. The soul must defend itself because for traditional religion the human body's perception has been depressed and branded as sinful by the fall. Such a condemnation provided the excuse to ground, for centuries, a rationality of salvation for a body "in debt"; Blake has an intuition of how, behind the metaphysics that justified the "transaction" underlying the notion of the atonement, lay the sacrificial logic through which a body is symbolically posited. Later in *Milton* he would speak of three classes of man: the elect, the reprobate and the redeemed. The divine image, as we learned with Milton, is somewhat the signifier that stands for the perfect body that man possessed in paradise, which was not completely lost since through the exercise of virtue he might achieve that liberty of self-determination again. Both Milton and Blake deplore a withdrawal from the world: the "expansion of sensual delight" and "cleansing of the doors of perception" must begin with the body which we already have. Yet they are not champions of finitude, hence the complexity of their views on the soul and the body. Blake's true dialecticism is not so much in the notion of progression through contraries but in how he is able to understand that the visionary longing for revelation demands a body that, indeed, has been purified, but of the very notion that it stands in opposition to its active principle – so that to defend the body as bare materiality would still be to operate inside the duality he wants to unravel. In that way, both are able to preserve the exuberance of sexuality, which comes from the flesh, and the moral virtue necessary for divine inspiration, since the body emerges stronger and more purified from its confrontation with evil. If the "apocalypse is at hand," each man is going to discover that he shares in Christ's humanity, and that the divine attributes already exist, although shadowed, in the human body.

Since the subject matter of virtue had been treated by Milton by means of this dense web of association between body, soul, and theodicy, we can understand why right after Blake presents the aphorisms that contain his views on the nature of knowledge he leaps into what is perhaps the most resonant piece of Milton criticism. It is as if in Plate 4 he provides his criteria and in Plate 5 he analyzes in his concise formulations the poet's *oeuvre*. "The history of this [the restraining of desire] is written in Paradise Lost & the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah [...] But in the Book of Job Milton's Messiah is call'd Satan [...] In Milton, the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ratio of the five senses & the Holy-ghost, Vacuum!" (*MHH* 5 and 6; *E.* p. 34-5). Blake inaugurates here the practice of provocatively depicting the Son and Satan as indistinguishable, which would be his main contribution to the history of interpretation of Milton's epic. The Satan of the book of Job and the Christ of the epic are similar, nonetheless, to the extent that they usurp the spontaneity of the experience of the divine with rigid statutes. Satan's doubt of Job's faith is a way to tempt God himself; hence, just as happens in *Paradise Regained*, the true point is that everyone can be a genuine son insofar as he skirts the satanic provocation, the tendency to fetishize and conform to a petrified letter to the detriment of the vitality of the spirit. In *Milton*, all the features that characterize the traditional figure of Christ, for instance, (e.g. meekness) are derided by being attributed to Satan. Perhaps, the attempt to sort out one from the other is as impossible as dividing good from evil and the indistinction is part of the uncanny effect of Blake's poetry.

The justification of the transgression of the law as its fulfillment is a delicate topic (the "exception that confirms the rule"), although apocalyptic rhetoric inevitably resorts to that notion. There is a vestige in Blake of Milton's distinction between the vital flesh of the visionary and that of the radical dualists which Fallon analyzes in the context of the divorce tracts. The authority of the poet-prophet lies in the sharpness of his eye, as it penetrates through layers of mystification. Light is the means through which man and divinity meet halfway. The eye becomes a synecdoche for the body in Blake:

> For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at the tree of life, and when he does, when the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite and holy whereas it now appears finite & corrupt.
> This will come to pass with an improvement of sensual enjoyment.
> But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.

> If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite.
> For man has closed himself up, till he sees all thro' the narrow chinks of his cavern.
> (*MHH* 14; *E.* p. 39)

This long passage from Plate 14 should make us ponder. Similar to Sabrina's magical touch on the Lady's body in *Comus*, Blake's illuminated engravings are meant to have a medicinal effect over the shrunk perception of his readers. That is, his printing technique contributes to the dissemination of knowledge and in its vehemence proves that it cannot be dissociated from its "sensual" dimension. The cultivation of the senses, unavoidable for any artist, points to the mode of sensuality proper to Blake's conception of sexuality. More noteworthy are the printing-house metaphors that pervade that excerpt. The notion that man has a body distinct from the soul is to be expunged. If creation appears corrupt "now," it is by a form of corrosion that that corruption, we could risk saying, will be "sublated" and yield the veiled divine image, however much Blake disliked the negative. The passage above, like others, evokes the following thought from *Areopagitica*, where the proliferation of dissension in the press is part of retrieving the divine image in its "infinity":

> Who kills a Man kills a reasonable creature, Gods Image; but hee who destroyed a good Book, kills reason it selfie, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the Earth; but a good Book is the pretious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life [...] We should be wary how we spill the season'd life of man preserv'd and stor'd up in Books (*CP* II, p. 492-3).

We can conjecture that the restraining of desire that Blake speaks of is analogous to the licensing practice that the seventeenth-century pamphlet criticizes. The substance that is preserved in books, the vital spirit that animates the letter, is an "ethereal and fifth essence." Indeed, we might surmise that Milton's bitterness about the series of events that triggered the divorce controversy was that he spilled the "sacred substance" of man's rational being in an unworthy vessel. At any rate, in Blake that metaphysical concept gives place to "eternal delight." The rivalry with the earlier poet nonetheless surfaces when he mocks in his "memorable fancy" in the printing house men "who occupied the sixth chamber, and took the forms of books & were arranged in libraries" (*MMH.* 15; *E.* p. 40). Blake exploits the sexual imagery latent in the activity of printing when he underlines images of "caves" and liquified

metals: “in the fifth chamber were Unnam’d forms, which cast the metals into the expanse” (ibid.).

If Milton represented the most accomplished manifestation of the poetic and prophetic character in England and that society had nonetheless fallen into a universe reduced to natural causality, it might be because his spirit must have been asleep. Such an allegorical image was concretely exemplified in the shrinkage of the perceptive capacity of the common man who “closed himself up” and only “saw through the narrow chinks of his cavern.” The prophecy *Milton* revolves around his quest to redeem Ololon, his “sixfold emanation,” as we are going to see. In a sense, that allegorical language articulates a narrative of the purging of perception from its shadows, so that the artist can perceive things as they are, “infinite.” As Bette C. Werner writes: “In Blake’s work the emanation is a feminine principle, most fundamentally the outpouring and issue of active, masculine creativity. In large measure the emanation thus represents a person’s work” (1986, p. 15). While the number six might be traced biographically to his three daughters and three wives, it more directly approaches the poet’s troubled relation with sex. *Paradise Lost* had condemned the creative energy embodied in Satan and Eve that it had momentarily championed, leading to the fall into dualism and the rigid Puritan morality. For such a view, the evaluation of women is haunted by the sexist view of her as the embodiment of temptation, of Error. Milton must hence redeem his emanation and the condemnation of the body by the soul: “although Blake believed that Milton’s poetry contained an essential core of authentic vision, he was convinced that this essence remained hidden within a veiling cloud of error” (1986, p. 15).

Beginning in *Marriage* but achieving its perfect form in *Milton*, Blake shifts the terms of theodicy to include a different evaluation of the role of desire for creativity. The redemption of the female emanation, to invert genders, is not unlike Isis’s reconstitution of the pieces of Osiris’s body, which is an image of the quest for truth in the anti-licensing treatise. If some of Blake’s works are attempts to give shape to his idea of Milton, that idea, he seems to claim, cannot be divorced from the redemption of the female and the acknowledgement that truth comes from desire: “every thing possible to be believ’d is an image of truth” (*MHH* 8; *E.* p. 37). Of course, the terms that he uses raise some questions. Is not art as a form of mimesis precisely an imitation of ideas? While he speaks of proportion and “fearful symmetry,” the infinite is nonetheless a rather empty concept in his work, a stand-in for a certain intensity of

perception. In short, the cleansing of the doors of perception for man to perceive the infinite in the idea of Milton can be best understood as an aesthetic experience. That is best synthesized in the apotheosis of Christ and his "countenance divine."

4.2. The lament of Milton's Sixfold Emanation

Blake's second major attempt at prophetic poetry, *Milton* is a short epic of two books conceived first in 1804 and engraved around 1810-11. As is the case of some of his other works, Blake's revisions are chronicled in the four versions that we have of the text, whose main differences consist of changes in ordering and the addition of two new plates in copy C. The motto "to justify the ways of God to man" promptly reveals the poem's ambition to be a contribution to the problem of theodicy modelled on Milton's Christianization of the epic genre. Not unlike *Marriage*, the text ponders on the nature of authorship by turning a handicap into a strength and fusing the unmistakably Blakean allegorical mode with literary criticism. *Milton* is surprisingly aware of how marriage condenses the philosophical and doctrinal components that gives Milton's treatment of conjugal life its specificity. A poem where lamentation and mourning are important themes, the body of the text becomes, I will argue, itself a tribute where the awakening of the seventeenth-century poet is imagined. Blake first had the idea for the prophecy while under the patronage of William Hayley in Felpham in Sussex, and, as critics have noted, the poem struggles to overcome the crisis of prophetic inspiration set off by the clash with the narrow-mindedness of his patron and how, within that tense relation, Blake's poetic mentor comes in his aid. The poem begins with Milton's decision to leave the heaven of false morality that he had created and falling into our "mundane shell" to redeem his female emanation and, by proxy, fallen nature. The motor behind such a journey is the apocalyptic longing for a consummation of sacred history. Paraphrase of the poem's content in a chronological order might be misleading since, within the terms of the allegory, the events take place simultaneously in different states and planes of reality. The main action converges nonetheless on the scene of Blake and his wife receiving the lamenting Ololon in her search for Milton in their cottage, after he has inaugurated a new state of existence aiming to overcome death through "self-annihilation." During this momentous encounter, he must cast off his specter, the covering cherub, and reconcile himself with his wife.

I want to suggest here that the prophecy cannot be read apart from the problem of Milton's monism and that, in fact, once we acknowledge that Blake is imaginatively reworking ideas that the earlier poet had laid out doctrinally, the reading of the poem runs more smoothly. Although we cannot cover the whole text, we intend thus to outline a frame for a possible reading. The claim that Milton was a monist is part of a twentieth-century debate, so it is expected that Blake's reception of this issue was not articulated in those terms. His work surprisingly anticipates what recent critics have pointed out at the root of Milton's materialism, namely, his concern with the vicissitudes and fate of the dead body – which is all the more noteworthy given that Blake could not have had access to the treatise on religious doctrine. At some point in the 1650s, Milton had become a thnetopsychist, a believer that the soul dies with the body until it is called back to life in the day of judgement, a view that pervades the pages of *De Doctrina Christiana*. Not finding evidence in the Bible for the existence of a purgatory, Milton moved increasingly closer to the position that the soul cannot exist as an immaterial substance that leaves its vessel in the occasion of death. His argument that life is more on the side of the soul and that the body cannot die because it was never alive in the first place resonates with what has been previously said about the relation between the two in Blake's theory of knowledge. Such a view should not lead to a disparagement of the body, since the co-dependency works in both directions. The point of Milton's mortalism is, ultimately, the preservation of the mortal body as a monument transfigured by the work of the soul: "if the dead are not raised, why do we put ourselves in danger?" (I Cor 15:29). The immortality of the body is then the reward for obedience and the restraining of impulse. Since corruption is a function of movement, Milton imagines that the sleep of death brings the soul to an atemporal standstill to be broken only at the final judgement: "What about the theory that there is no time without motion? Aristotle illustrates this by the story of those men who were said to have gone to sleep in the temple of the heroes and who, on waking, thought that they had gone to sleep one moment and woken up the next, and were not aware of any interim" (*CP* VI, p. 409-410).

Although Blake was not a mortalist, his poem reveals a sensibility to the mortalism underlying Milton's last poems and how believing in that doctrine was the poet's answer to the problem of the economy of salvation (theodicy). Indeed, for our purposes, the interesting aspect of his metaphysics does not lie in its claim that matter and spirit are different modalities of one substance but in how body and soul are caught in a symbolic system, in a thinking that assures

the existence of the unified body even after its diachronic existence in space and time has been dissolved. The language that Milton employs betrays a certain uneasiness concerning the possibility that the soul might not be in its assigned place, that it might be elsewhere: "If Lazarus' soul, that is Lazarus' real self, was not in there, why did Christ call to the dead body, for that would not be able to hear. And if he called to the soul, why did he call it from a place where it was not?" (*CP* VI, p. 408). As usual, in that regard, he had to reconcile his heterodox views with the authoritative statements of the Bible. The chapter on the future of the dead body in the treatise on doctrine ends with a consideration of 1 Corinthians 5:1-10, where the apostle subtly connects mortal and celestial body through the intermediacy of the moment of "appearing at the judgement-seat of Christ," since the redemption of our "vile body" is operated by participation in the covenant of grace. Even if the shrine of "this earthly house" is dissolved, we desire earnestly to be clothed "with our house which is from heaven." "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord" and "We are confident [...] and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (1 Cor 5:6;8). Milton's interpretation of these verses is meant to hinder the possibility that to be with God means dispensing any corporeality. Within the terms of the guiding metaphors of that chapter, we simply exchange clothes: "the word body must be taken to mean this frail worldly life [...] and the word *ekdemesin* in the ninth verse should be interpreted as an indication of our eternal removal to a heavenly existence" (*CP* VI, p. 413). In a sense, Milton is groping towards an insight into a disjunction. To exist in space and time, we must be absent from the Lord. The proper reversal that Milton could not have done is to claim that the Lord might be absence itself. The conclusion of sacred history is, thus, a recollection of the being whose forgetting enables existence, as in the parallel between the reconstitution of the body of Osiris and the quest for truth. The psychoanalytic name for that recollection is the traumatic encounter with the real, the name for that which always comes back to its place. In Milton's theological universe, God anchors the certainty, like an account book, that in the end all those who have been called will be redeemed in an actual eternity. For Lacan, in contrast, the irruption of the logical temporality of the real is a more precarious affair, since it relies on the movement of the structured relations of the symbolic network. Passages such as the following give a secular modulation to the theological issue being discussed at hand. He writes apropos the subject of the unconscious:

> It is important to know who one is calling. It is not the soul, either mortal or immortal, which has been with us for so long, nor some shade, some double [...] It is the subject who is called – there is only he, therefore, who can be chosen. There may be, as in the parable, many called and few chosen, but there will certainly not be any others except those who are called. [...] Recollection is not Platonic reminiscence – it is not the return of a form, an imprint, a eidos of beauty and good, a supreme truth, coming to us from the beyond. It is something that comes to us from the structural necessities, something humble, born at the level of the lowest encounters (1998, p. 47).

Although these considerations about mortalism might seem at first remote from the subject of marriage, the logic behind them surprisingly overlap with our topic. If one recalls that, for Lacan, woman has a privileged relation with the place of the Other, the function that she plays about the mirage of totality longed by phallic jouissance emerges clearly. If there is no sexual rapport, man is invariably separated from the cause of his desire, to which he can only come close by stepping into the dimension of fantasy. In his seminar on feminine sexuality, Lacan suggests that love is one of the few ways of having a possible access to being (1999, p. 47). Here he departs from a critique of the fusional language of love as desire to be one, claiming that insofar as the phallic side of sexuation goes, there cannot be a union of two but only a relation between the One and object a to arrive at the otherness to which woman has an intimate access. Given the hegemony of the phallus that we have seen for example in the ubiquity of the one-sex model, Lacan's interest in a jouissance of the Other is very appropriate, since modern sexual difference is founded in the assertion that feminine enjoyment has its own particularity. That is not to deny that, since such research was usually undertaken by men, feminine jouissance often bordered on succumbing to a mythical totality, hence Lacan's famous statement that there is no Woman. It is part of the confusion of the traces of the impossibility of sexual rapport left over philosophical discourse that while matter as a passive element was usually linked to the feminine, the elusive soul could also be conceived in that manner: "the strange thing is that in this crude polarity that makes matter passive and form the agent that animates it, something [...] nevertheless got through, namely, that this animation is nothing other than the *a* with which the agent animates what? He animates nothing – he takes the other as his soul" (1999, p. 82). With reference to man, woman inhabits the phantasmatic frame where he encounters the object of his desire, always partial, in the other.

Milton follows the patterns of the seventeenth-century poet's main elegies, including his grief for the loss of eyesight in the epic. The underlying action of the poem is thus scaffolded by elegiac dynamics and the psychical work of mourning that they involve. As we shall see,

Ololon's lamentation contains some of the finest poetry in a poem whose reading can be dry at times. More importantly, after the prelude of the song of the Bard, which awakens Milton from his slumber, the issue of the redemption of the body in the last judgement that we have been discussing finds a perfect expression in his first speech:

> Then Milton rose up from the heavens of Albion ardorous!
> The whole Assembly wept prophetic, seeing in Miltons face
> And in his lineaments divine the shades of Death & Ulro [...]
> When will the Resurrection come; to deliver the sleeping body
> From corruptibility: O when Lord Jesus wilt thou come?
> Tarry no longer; for my soul lies at the gates of death.
> I will arise and look forth for the morning of the grave.
> I will go down to the sepulcher to see if morning breaks!
> I will go down to self-annihilation and eternal death,
> Lest the Last Judgment come & find me unannihilate
> And I be siez'd & giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood
> The Lamb of God is seen thro' mists & shadows, hov'ring
> Over the sepulchers in clouds of Jehovah & winds of Elohim
> A disk of blood, distant; & heav'ns & earth's roll dark between
> What do I here before the Judgment? without my Emanation?
> With the daughters of memory, & not with the daughters of inspiration
> I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!
> He is my Spectre! (*M*. 14.10-12; 17-31; *E*., p. 108)
>
> For God himself enters Death's Door always with those that enter
> And lays down in the Grave with them, in Visions of Eternity
> Till they awake & see Jesus & the Linen Clothes lying
> That the Females had Woven for them, & the Gates of their Fathers
> House (*M*. 32[35].40-43; *E*. p. 132)

Although we are told that Milton walked a hundred years pondering the intricate mazes of Providence at the outset of the poem, there is a sense in which this apocalyptic longing resumes a concern for the fate of the dead body which can be traced back to *Lycidas*, where the mourning of the sudden death of the aspiring poet Edward King triggers a reflection about mortality and the frailty of the reward which is promised for those who face danger. Already in that poem, the desire for a type of erotic gratification that gives life to an unblamed sexuality surfaced in the luxuriant catalogues of flowers of the imaged embalmed body. In *Milton*, the resurrection of the body is imagined in erotic terms, too. The kernel of the genre of elegy concerns the mystery of breaking silence for having found a substitution in the word for what has been lost. "What cause at length mov'd Milton to this unexampled deed?" (*M*. 1.21; *E.* p. 96), Blakes asks, possibly with the Lady of *A Mask* in mind. Indeed, virginity and its entrenchment in religion can be said to be the main antagonists of the poem. Moreover, Blake

lets the indebtedness of the mourning theme to *Lycidas* show when the daughters of Beulah go down to Ulro with "soft melodious tears" (*M*. 34.21; *E*. p. 134).

In *Paradise Lost*, the moon is a heavily charged erotic symbol, immortalized in the simile where Galileo looks at it from the "apparatus of jouissance" of his telescope:

> His [Satan's] ponderous Shield
> Ethereal temper, massy, large and round,
> Behind him cast; the broad circumference
> Hung on his shoulders like the Moon, whose Orb
> Through Optic Glass the Tuscan Artist views
> At Ev'ning from the top of Fesole,
> Or in Valdarno, to descry new Lands,
> Rivers or Mountains in her spotty Globe (*PL* 1: 284-291).

In *Milton*, Ololon is described as a river in Eden, strengthening the association between water, fountains and inspiration. Commenting on one of Blake's illustrations to the *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, Bette Werner writes: "the imagery of the milky river, the young virgin, the streaming clouds, and the moon comes together in this picture in a way that suggests a quite possible identification of the figure of the Wandering Moon with Milton's emanation" (1986, p. 156). Knowledge and pleasure intertwine to feed the scopic drive enhanced by the telescope. However, for the antinomian Blake, Milton's overeager trust in the emerging science of his day was a mistake. Since the ultimate access to reality is via the imagination, we read towards the end of the first book of the poem:

> As to that false appearance which appears to the reasoner,
> As of a Globe rolling thro Voidness, it is a delusion of Ulro
> The Microscope knows not of this nor the Telescope, they alter
> The ratio of the Spectators Organs but leave Objects untouchd
> For every Space larger than a red Globule of Mans blood
> Is visionary: and is created by the Hammer of Los (*M*. 29[31].15-20; *E*. p. 127)

Although Blake's answer is idiosyncratic, he shows a clear understanding of the problem of representation faced by Milton. The poet describes Satan's shield through a simile because it is incommensurable with human perception. Its magnitude can only be conveyed by a disparity of proportion that, in producing a dizzy effect (the moon is small in comparison to the actual size of his ethereal shield), momentarily touches the content of the vision.

Blake fuses prophetic and imaginative traditions in *Milton* by suggesting that entering the visionary state is an irruption of apocalyptic time, which explains why the events of the

poem are simultaneous. Milton returns to fallen reality to help the poet regain the strength needed to cast off the "old garments" and dwell in the state of imagination where the body achieves its full creative potential. The iconographic depictions of Milton and Albion reveals, in that regard, that they must be understood as types of Christ, who is traditionally associated with light and the sun. Putting on the new garments woven by the females means rediscovering the clarity of perception of which light is one emblem; to be literally dressed in light. Such a purgatorial process is accomplished through a struggle with whatever hinders the truth that the poet bears, and as in *Paradise Regained* is a quest where he rediscovers his divinity by casting off error. The fallen state can be overcome only by abandoning the detachedness of the virginal stance and giving substance to virtue by being tried by deception. That accounts for Milton-the-character's realization that the Satanic specter that keeps the world of Ulro under its shadows and mystifying clouds is in a sense his own self: "I in my Selfhood am that Satan" (*M*. 14.30; *E*., p. 108). As already seen, Blake believed that the poet's proclivity to privilege dogmatics over inspiration ultimately signaled his complicity with error. In *Marriage*, the war of contraries without acknowledgement of the codependency of their opposition was identified as the main hindrance to the imagination, and in *Milton* the poet resumes that issue. The Mental Fight around which it centers includes a re-integration of his feminine emanation. Since Blake believed that "whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgement passes upon the individual" (*VLJ*, 16), the irruption of apocalyptic time and the awakening of the dead body become profoundly intertwined with the marriage of opposites and the redemption of sexuality.

Like *Paradise Regained*, which famously ends with the Son "returning to his mother's house," *Milton* also attempts to come to terms with the inassimilable remainder of the lost maternal object that conditions desire. Milton annihilates himself to put an end to the condemnation of pleasure by the "Babylon Mother" so that, freed from the grip of religion, his Emanation "shall begin to give her maidens / to her husbands" (*M*. 33[34].17-18, *E*. p. 132). So far, then, I have in a sense made a case for a rapprochement between his visionary time and a type of mystical enjoyment. We do not need to endorse his desire for an actual apocalypse, which at any rate does not take place in *Milton*, to appreciate the poem and its aim of creating a less constraining existence of sexual relations:

> Blake's comment that Milton wished him to correct the misconception regarding the connection between sexual activity and the Fall makes greater sense when we recognize that it is, not sexual activity, but rather the concepts of separation and

> subordination underlying the repressive orthodox moral views of sexuality that constitute for him the real matter of the Fall. The Fall is for Blake a mental act of dis-integration: the divisive separation of male and female principles into warring entities, a rupture Milton repairs in his own case in *Milton* (BEHNRENDT, 1983, p. 24).

The lyrical moments of which *Milton* is capable find a unique expression in the beginning of the second book. After an account of the creation of the realm of Beulah, a feminine garden distinct from Eden in being the place of "mild shadows" where the weary find a habitation to rest from unbounded joy, the poem records the lamentation of the Daughters of Beulah and Ololon. The shadowy nature of this garden recalls Satan's shield, and the ambiguous stance towards its dreamy atmosphere dovetails with the association of the spotty globe of the moon with sin: "Neither did any lack or fall into Error without / A Shadow to repose in all the Days of happy Eternity" (*M*. 31 [34]. 6-7; *E*. p. 130). Beulah is a middle state between paradise and our universe where pleasure and passivity reigns. The illustration in Plate 42 (see Fig. 3) depicts a type of sexual torpor that might be representative of it. The design shows an intimidating eagle flying over a couple in a post-coital position, and according to Behnrendt the bird seems to be a harbinger of revelation. In the poem, the songs of the lark and of the nightingale are responsible for awakening Milton from his slumber. Just as his descent into our universe rehearses the epic theme of the voyage to hell, the songs that open Book II are parallel to the apotheotic confrontation with light after the poet has abandoned the nether regions. Given that the beginning of Book III of *Paradise Lost* is the most condensed moment of the epic, Blake's poetry expectedly rises to the occasion as it assumes the task of metamorphosing a passage that in itself already concentrates the central themes of his mentor's poetry.

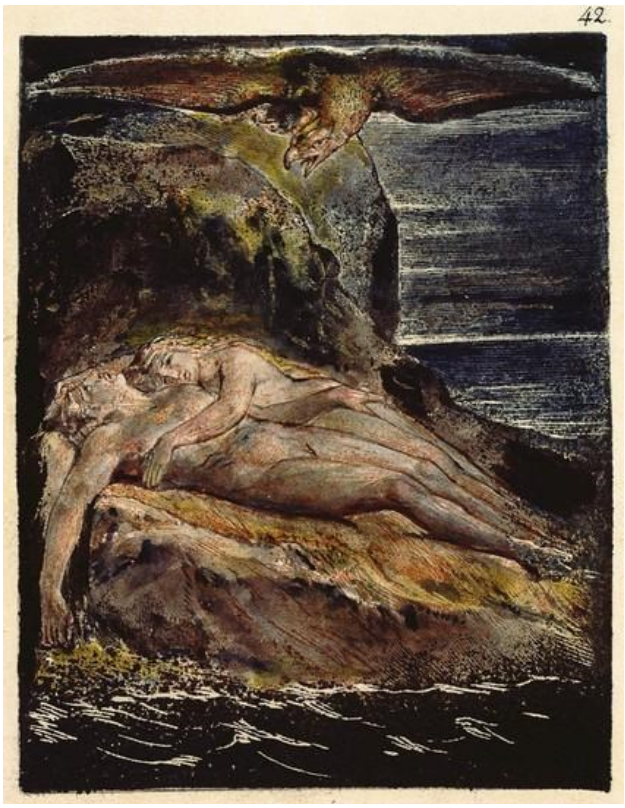

Figure 3. William Blake. Milton. Plate 42. Copy D. 1818.
Library of Congress (Blake Archive).

The weight that Milton tries to unburden himself of in the invocation to light perhaps cannot find proper expression, for in the mourning song for the loss of his eyesight is contained the whole libidinal dynamic which supported his personality. From very early on, when the awareness of an ambition bordering on the unbounded could still be chastised by assuming the role of the apprentice poet, his verse already intimated his aspirations. In *Milton*, Blake describes the poet as lying on a golden couch, which evokes death behind the metaphor of sleep. As early as the "Carmina Elegiaca" of 1625, Milton writes: "Arise, haste, arise! Now that the time is right, shake off gentle slumbers. The light is springing up; leave the posts of your *languid couch*. Now sings the sentinel cock, the harbinger bird of the sun, alert to *call* every man to his task" (2003, p. 6, emphases added)[36]. And some lines below, he brings up indirectly a mythological figure with which he would marry the fortunes of his poetry: the nightingale (Philomela, lover of song): "The Daulian modulates her thrilling song from the

[36] "Surge, age, surge, leves, iam convenit, excute somnos / Lux oritur; tepidi *fulcra* relinque tori. / Iam canit excubitor gallus, praenuncius ales / Solis, et invigilans ad sua quemque *vocat*".

oak-tree and the gentle lark pours out her skillful notes. Now the wild rose is breathing its fragrant perfumes" (ibid.).[37] Surprisingly, the same birds and the roses of this poem anticipates the thematic division of the two songs that opens Blake's second book. For Milton, the nightingale becomes a symbol of approaching spring, and hence its eroticism is linked with the apocalyptic longings that take the shape of heavenly marriage, the reward of an unblamed sexual exuberance where the body rises again purified from sin. In *Epitaphium Daemonis,* although still within the terms of his interest in virginity, he writes to Diodati: "Because you loved the blush of modesty and a stainless youth and because you did not taste the delight of the marriage-bed, lo! the rewards of virginity are reserved for you" (2003, p. 139).[38]

In *Paradise Lost*, the spots of the moon allude to sin, and as a man who had gone blind, despite the preservation of the physical form of his eyes, his vision could be interpreted, from an orthodox point of view, as irrevocably tainted. Insofar as his eyes are stained, he shares in the predicament of every fallen human whose vision is limited, who cannot escape castration and is apart from the object of desire. However, as a prophet he brings the promise of regeneration, and so his blindness is the very symbol of a radical insight or illumination. Within his religious universe, the sublimation promised by God is real. In any event, the song of the nightingale is the erotic correlative of the new purified eyes through which he has nightly visions:

> Then feed on thoughts, that voluntary move
> Harmonious numbers, as the wakeful Bird
> Sings darkling, and in shadiest Covert hid
> Tunes her nocturnal Note […]
> 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 (*PL* 3:37-40; 51-54).

One must bear this passage and its intricacies in mind to fully appreciate *Milton.* Blake shows in key moments of his prophecies that he is capable of the lyricism for which he is best known:

> Thou hearest the Nightingale begin the Song of Spring;
> The Lark sitting upon his earthy bed: just as the morn
> Appears; listens silent; then springing from the waving Corn-field! loud
> He leads the Choir of Day! trill, trill, trill, trill,

[37] "Daulias argutum modulatur ab ilice carmen / Edit et excultos mitis alauda modos. / Iam rosa fragrantes spirat silvestris odores".
[38] "Quod tibi purpureus pudor, et sine labe iuventus / Grata fuit, quod nulla tori libata voluptas, / En! etiam tivi virginei servantur honores!".

> Mounting upon the wings of light into the Great Expanse:
> Reecchoing against the lovely blue & shining heavenly Shell:
> His little throat labours with inspiration; every feather
> On throat & breast & wings vibrates with the effluence Divine […]
> The Nightingale again assays his song, & thro the day,
> And thro the night warbles luxuriant; every Bird of Song
> Attending his loud harmony with admiration & love.
> This is a Vision of the lamentation of Beulah over Ololon!
> Thou percievest the Flowers put forth their precious Odours! (*M*. 31[34].28-35, 42-46; *E*. p. 131)

The corn-field is a reminder of the impending harvest, which is symbolic enough to be the image that closes the poem. In creating an acoustic metaphor through the subtle connection between "ear of corn" and the "heavenly shell," the poem reveals Blake's awareness that figures of echo, as it were, translate the literality of the poetic word. Throughout *Milton*, female characters are responsible for weaving clothes with their looms, bringing into the universe of the poem the social world under a philosophical cipher: the woven fabrics are primarily allegories of the world of appearances. The catalogue of flowers that follows the song of the nightingale shows that the elegiac tone of the central lamentations of the poem are, as already mentioned, indebted to the last movement of Milton's famous elegy and the role that flowers play there in the imagination of the erotic potential of the raised body. Perhaps, the soul lingers inside the body as an echo reverberating inside a shell, or as the perfumed aroma of flowers fight against the decay of the body.

The drama of salvation is played out by means of the allegory of matrimonial reconciliation in *Milton*. For Blake, empiricism and natural religion had turned the external world to an inhospitable reality where humans could no longer recognize themselves and exercise their capacity to shape it creatively. The objectivization of the universe reduced man himself to the status of an object. In that sense, his attempt to reconcile subject and object can be understood as a romantic answer, however idealistic, to the growing totalization of everyday life by the forces of capitalism. That Blake found himself in a watershed moment in regard to the relation between artist and his means of livelihood is registered in the fact that the writing of *Milton* was prompted by the conflict with his patron (see BLOOM, 1963, p. 310). His main "strategy" was an affirmation of subjectivity, by which the externality of the world is overcome and reintegrated. The autonomy of the natural world is rendered in terms of female independence, which lends itself to two interpretations. The first confirms the misogynist association of the fall with the wife's insubordination to the husband. At the same time, Blake's

sympathy for figures of unbounded desire, his being of the devil's party, should signify an approval rather than a condemnation of the first woman. Blake reviles "feminine love" insofar as it instantiates the virginal "jealousy". However, he criticizes the moralistic condemnation of postlapsarian sexuality and to that extent tries to free the female body from its reification. Ololon's appearance in the shape of a virgin to Blake in Felpham's vale shows his struggle with the asceticism of *A Mask*: "Ololon and all its mighty Hosts / Appear'd: a Virgin of twelve years nor time nor space was / To the perception of the Virgin Ololon but as the / Flash of lightning but more quick the Virgin in my Garden / Before my Cottage stood" (*M.* 36[40]: 16-20; *E.* p. 137).

Stephen Behnrendt persuasively suggests that the final scene of *Milton*, where he casts off his specter or Error, should be read in the light of the same scene in *Paradise Regained*, where Satan falls off from the pinnacle after realizing the failure of his temptation. The frequent indistinction between the two aspects of the feminine seems analogous to that between the devil and the son. When the repentant Ololon flies into the depths of his shadow, the poet finally acknowledges his symbolic mandate as the son of God and overcomes one dimension of his narcissism. It is part of the contradictions that Blake's poem proliferates that Milton's apotheosis is a triumph over the self-immersion of his "Selfhood" separated from his female principle, while the rhetoric of casting off the "sexual garments" might be taken precisely as a narcissistic desire for an asexual unity. Perhaps, the best answer to this problem is that, in their inspired and visionary art, poets like Milton and Blake envisioned that almost perfect sublimation that Freud identified in Leonardo da Vinci's work. If the period between the fall and the deluge typifies the whole of human history, *Milton* ends with the modest image of the covenant that puts an end to the war of contraries:

> The Virgin divided Six-fold & with a shriek
> Dolorous that ran thro all Creation a Double Six-fold Wonder!
> Away from Ololon she divided & fled into the depths
> Of Miltons Shadow as a Dove upon the stormy Sea.
> Then as a Moony Ark Ololon descended to Felphams Vale
> In clouds of blood [...] with one accord the Starry Eight became
> One Man Jesus the Saviour, wonderful! round his limbs
> The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment dipped in blood
> Written within & without in woven letters: & the Writing
> Is the Divine Revelation in the Litteral expression.
> (*M*. 42[49]. 3-8, 10-14; *E*. p. 143)

Milton is only a premonition of the apocalypse, which is reserved for *Jerusalem*. Here in the conclusion, the theme of the resurrection of the body that I suggested as a possible thread

to guide the reading through the labyrinth of this dense poem finds its best expression. Behnrendt writes that "in 1 Corinthians Paul admonishes that at his entry into eternity man will put off his mortal, corruptible part and put on immortality. *Milton* describes this process in terms of the poet's spiritual form. *Milton* puts off the old – his spectre – and puts on the new" (1983, p. 21). As I have shown, that Pauline metaphor played a central role in Milton's exegesis of the scriptural passages dealing with the fate of the dead body and the relevance of those formulations to understand the mortalism and thnetopsychism that he embraced towards the end of his career. Blake could not have had access to *De Doctrina*, which was discovered only in the nineteenth century, but that he nonetheless could capture so well the tenor of Milton's views confirms why he remains one of the most original readers of the seventeenth-century poet to have emerged. In Milton's treatise, he comments that "the fourth verse [of II Cor. v 1-20] clearly bears this out [the inseparability of body and soul]: *we do not desire to put off that in which we are created, but to put something over it, so that mortality may be swallowed up by life* […] It is quite plain that this does not mean, for separation of the soul from the body, but rather for us to attain perfection of both" (*CP* VI, p. 413). Subtle as it may seem, if the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was responsible for the mortality of the body, Milton believed, as Kerrigan has argued, that the emergence of he symbolic out of natural functions such as eating was essential to "repeat" the fall differently and achieve redemption. Different from Blake, he believed that the soul died with the body to awaken only at the last judgement, when the delayed light would finally anchor our lost ship in a firmer support, having abandoned its Leviathan-like specter (which in *Milton* becomes a "Polypus"):

> Leviathan, which God of all his works
> Created hugest that swim the Ocean stream:
> Him haply *slumb'ring* on the Norway *foam*
> The Pilot of some small night-founder'd Skiff,
> Deeming some Island, oft, as *Seamen* tell,
> With fixed Anchor in his scaly rind
> Moors by his side under the Lee, while Night
> *Invests* the Sea, and wished Morn delays.
> (I, .201-209, emphases added)

In *De Anima*, Aristotle famously conjectured whether the soul is not related to the body as the captain or the helmsman to his ship. In *Paradise Lost*, in turn, the word "pilot" is used specially to anticipate the simile where Galileo looks at the moon. Blake aptly synthesizes this series of associations with "Moony Ark."

5. "HE QUOTES THE POET, MILTON, AS AN AUTHORITY": YEATS'S REFERENCE TO MILTON IN THE DEBATE ON DIVORCE

Appointed senator of the Irish Free State on December 11, 1922, W.B. Yeats assumed the post amid profound social instability after two years of intense civil war and in a context marked by the moderate politics urged by the inevitable compromises of the Anglo-Irish Treaty. The fledgling constitution specified that the sixty members composing its legislative body should be chosen on the grounds of the relevance of their public service to national life, and in the occasion of the creation of a "cultural panel" in the upper house the Nobel Prize winner seemed as the most intuitive option to occupy that position for members as W. T. Cosgrave and Oliver Gogarty. His main area of activity was accorded to be counselling on issues pertaining to education, literature and the arts in general, since in many ways his participation on the Irish Literary Movement and co-creation of a crucial institution of national artistic life as the Abbey Theatre qualified the poet as someone who had directly influenced in the cultural nationalism that was believed to have ushered in colonial insurgence and the fight for independence. Although the nineteenth-century aestheticism to which he was heir had precluded Yeats from framing his project in the more explicitly political terms of "advanced nationalists", he had played an instrumental role in fomenting national disobedience as most immediately evident in the *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* episode. Discursively, of course, the poet's early project of a throughgoing social transformation by means of the rediscovery of a unified cultural core was mainly an idealized panacea for the looming prognostic of the decline of civilization so widespread in the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. It is at this point nonetheless that the historical analysis of the constellation of events and ideological formations leading up to the independence of the country calls for a certain subtlety; just as scholars of the seventeenth century must have the skill to realize that religion was the language in which political battles were fought out, there is a reading in which the effects of Yeats's early work, while mainly taking the form of cultural renewal, had nonetheless social and concrete subversive effects that exceed the very intentionality of the poet. That is why a historian as Foster still pay homage to the importance of figures such as Yeats and Gregory for the constitution of modern Ireland, even though they framed their nationalistic program in terms that nowadays strike as outdated: "his extraordinary life deserves to be studied for its relationship to his work; it also needs to be studied for its influence on his country's biography" (1997, p. xvii-xviii). In short, it was as an artist who had contributed to bringing about the

independence of his country that Yeats was summoned by the Senate, and it was in that sphere that he mainly attempted to intervene by, among other things, inspecting the quality of education in schools and trying to retrieve for the National Gallery a collection of paintings retained in England.

However, the episode for which Yeats's senator years would become notable pivots not so much on his contributions to the arts, although some readers have signaled the importance of his experience inspecting schools for "Among School Children," but on his polemical and contested speech on the right of divorce. Just as before the publication of the *Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano*, Milton was mainly known infamously as the "divorcer," Yeats's senate period continues to be mainly condensed in his invective against Catholic narrow-mindedness and morality, which admirers uphold as a courageous if solitary defense of liberated sexuality and detractors qualify as theatrical and ineffective. The speech is particularly remarkable for displaying in perfect form the centrality that the intertwinement between reproduction, the family, and tradition had begun to assume in his thought at least since "Meditations in Times of Civil War" in 1922; and, for the student of his political prose, for showing how in a public occasion Yeats could play down the esoteric elements that he usually introduces to the articulation of those themes in the poetry as the need for persuasion led him to assume a more practical and "reasonable" tone. The defense of divorce in 1925 significantly instantiates the watershed that his rediscovery of and allegiance to eighteenth-century Georgian Ireland signaled in his oeuvre. In his intervention the heritage evoked as an ideal to be followed is no longer the Gaelic pre-Christian past but the Anglo-Irish tradition that in his nationalistic youth he had criticized. Divorce emerges then as a convenient floating signifier to be "quilted" and mobilized in his overarching ideological fashioning or mythmaking of a noble, aristocratic Anglo-Irish tradition counterpoised, as regards the course of history, as an alternative to the decline of positivistic civilization; and, within the force-field of the politics of the early Irish Free State, to the threat of democracy. It is in that point that Milton is summoned to join the pantheon along with Burke, Berkeley and Swift as the specific Protestant that had handed to that tradition the "doctrine and discipline of divorce." As always with Yeats, arguments are trickier that they seem at first. At the same time that his argument about the sacrality of desire and the absurdity of the repression of sexuality by morality resonate with the values societies came to defend, an analysis attuned to the larger discourse in which it

participates, best reflected in his sectarian pride in the Protestant credentials of divorce, cannot dismiss its implicit elitism. In order to understand Yeats's recourse to Milton, then, and his defense of divorce at the Senate we have first to localize that phenomenon within the tense field of colonial relations and, particularly, the decline of the Protestant Ascendency. Since the family and reproduction are essential components for tradition, once we have understood Yeats's idiosyncratic notion of tradition, we can then connect it with his concerns with sexuality and the more philosophical subject of love.

5.1. The Anglo-Irish relations: a forced union

Although the history of Anglo-Irish relations cannot be covered in a few pages, some milestones are due in order to understand the formation of the Ascendency and its decline in the late nineteenth-century. And, in that regard, one can easily forget how foreign affairs related to the Irish colony played a decisive role in the course of the English Civil Wars of the 1640s, the very period which was so formative for the author of *Paradise Lost*. Ireland's threatening potential became particularly powerful at least in two central occasions that elicited immediate responses from England. With the escalation of the widespread mistrust of the king among the bourgeois classes and what would become the wing of Independency in the Parliament, the Irish rebellion of 1641 became one of the determining factors that catalyzed the tense conjuncture which led to the dramatic incidents of the Revolution: "Charles I could afford to accept Scots presbyterianism and still remain king of Scotland, but he could not in a similar way accept Irish catholicism [...] His court was full of intrigue and he listened to everyone. His councillors were hesitant, asome of them were fundamentally hostile to the Irish catholics" (MOODY et. al, 2009, p. 312). Given that the ecclesiastical crisis concerning church unification was only a symptomatic eruption of major metamorphoses in the socio-historical web of English society, the demand for representation of a professional class increasingly afraid of kingly prerogative and well aware of the crown's need of their financial help added a distinctly colonial element. In the context of the mounting dissatisfaction with and general outcry for deposition of prelates, any move by the already suspicious king in the direction of sympathy with Catholicism was bound to create a stir and serve only to strengthen the Puritan cause. Thus, it was that when, in the already impoverished diplomacy between the two

countries, a rumor emerged that the king had plans of harnessing the military force of the Irish to his cause by making concessions to them, the eyes of the metropolis were turned to their subjected neighbor for a moment and reactions bordered on hysteria. As Don Wolf writes: "though the document now in question was a forged one, it confirmed suspicions in the minds of many that Charles, partly through the influence of his Catholic wife, was plotting to use the Irish insurrectionists against a recalcitrant Parliament" (1966, p. 75-76). The still unknown John Milton, a bookish young man in his first forays into public controversy, when commenting on recent developments in national politics in *The Reason of Church-Government* was led to tackle in passing the recent Irish rebellion. To modern ears his dismissive stereotypes are as outrageous as the premises of colonial superiority were taken for granted in the seventeenth century. More conservative voices in the clash of opinions had claimed that both the rebellion and the proliferation of schisms were reason enough for a paucity in the degree of de-establishment of church hierarchies, to which Milton retorts: "what can the Irish subject do lesse in Gods just displeasure against us, then revenge upon the English bodies the little care that our Prelats have had of their souls" (*CP* I, p. 798). In Milton's interpretation, the "savagery", well documented during the Irish rebellion, within his emergent physiological-monistic worldview, is a material logical consequence of the hunger under which the Anglican prelates maintain their brethren. The disavowed state of idolatry of Anglican England is chastened almost by a natural response that returns in the real, since the Catholic colony simply exhibits an upper hand in the material world by dominating and massacring her "master" that idolatry already exercises in the spiritual sphere, and the only remedy to which would be genuine reformation.

Ireland would cross Milton's public path once again in the very dawn of the Commonwealth period. Appointed Secretary for the Foreign Tongues by the Council of State on March 15, 1649, where his main function consisted of translating diplomatic documents, one of Milton's earliest tasks in his new capacity was, notoriously, to issue a response to royalist motions in Ireland expressing the new Parliament's repudiation. In the months leading to the king's execution, just as the monarch felt increasingly cornered, he had strategically complied with an Article of Peace composed by his military representative James Butler, the Earl of Ormond. The document made several extravagant concessions to the Irish Catholic Confederacy in the hope of strengthening the royalist cause. Signed on January 17, 1649, barely

one week before the king's beheading, the compromise with the rebels emerged as a serious threat to the recently born republic, because the insurgent forces of the colony, in order to claim their newly acquired rights, might be exploited by the forces challenging the legitimacy of the new government. A glimpse of the complexity of the political conjunction and the conflicts of interest underlying the official line can be seen in the fact that while someone like Ormand could be castigated by Milton's pen for his compliance with the Catholic confederacy, he was in fact a Protestant averse to Independency who simply had tied his fortunes to that of monarchy like several other members of the more conservative wing of the Parliament. Especially for recent Irish historians, Ormand unscrupulously played with the trust of his Catholic countrymen in a tactical move that made him a plaything of English interests, since neither he nor the king intended or could accomplish what they had promised: "the passion of Ormand's life was his loyalty to Charles as the embodiment of that Anglo-Irish ascendency that for him was best expressed and defended by the 'Protestantism' to which he dedicated himself" (WOLF, 1966, p. 173). Hence, it cannot but strike an ironic note that while Yeats takes Milton for a representative of the history of the Protestant people against the hegemony of Catholics, an early representative of the Anglo-Irish ascendency like Ormand could be severely criticized by the seventeenth-century poet precisely because he represented a compromise with "papist" forces and a threat to religion. This is not to deny the existence of sincere attempts to expand the benefits of religious toleration to the shores of Eire. For instance, the soldier Owen Roe O'Neill pursued an amicable relation with Cromwell's government, instead of supporting the king's cause, in a hope for religious freedom that would nonetheless be crashed by the general's brutal re-conquest of the country in the battle of Drogheda in the following August.

Milton's *Observations on the Articles of Peace with the Irish Rebels*, published on May 1649, is the only extent document where the poet directly turns his attention to the "Irish Province" and deals with issues such as colonial subjection. Since the poet is so well known for his eloquent defenses of freedom, his all too orthodox perspective cannot but be a disappointment. Departing from the premise that "more civilized" nations have a natural right to subdued the "uncivilized" precisely to rescue them from their own slavish, anarchic mentality (a discourse one would later find in Christian missions in India), Milton justifies the English subjection of the colony on the grounds that it forestalls their own previous unbounded violence: "the just revenge of ancient Pyracies, cruell Captivities, and the causelesse infestation

of our Coast" (*CP* III, p. 301-2). One of the most fascinating moments of this otherwise infamous text, which in a sense instantiates how the poet mobilizes the contrast between a genuine literality and a fleshly "alphabeticity" whereby the licentious is punished by his own stubbornness – in order to condone, in this case, external coercion in colonial affairs, since the Irish still need to be "taught." Although it can only be a matter of speculation, it is startling that the article of the Articles of Peace which lifted the ban on the Irish practice of plowing with horses by the tail, condemned by England on moral grounds, reminded Milton of his own agricultural metaphors on divorce in the tracts, where he deplores that Catholic doctrine debases marriage to "grind[ing] in the mill of an undelighted and servile copulation" which "must be the only forc'd work of a Christian marriage" by the "yokefellows" (*CP* II, p. 258). Surprisingly, the Irish are of the avatars of the much decried "custom" of the domestic treatises. Commenting on that specific act, he writes that the natives "rejecting the ingenuity of all other Nations to improve and waxe more civill by a civilizing Conquest […] preferre their own absurd and savage Customs before the most convincing evidence of reason and demonstration," and adding insult to injury: "a testimony of their true Barbarisme and obdurate wilfulnesse" (*CP* III, p. 304) where obdurate belongs to the semantic field of the adjectives that the poet usually applied to representatives of the Antichrist. Moreover, just as Milton recurrently highlighted how the idolatrous enunciation of the law was marked by a certain double-articulation or with a "forked tongue," he observes that in previous occasions the very loyalty of Irish priests to the king had been very ambiguous, since they only submitted to further their own ends, and that of course the whole affair of the Articles of Peace came down to a betrayal of England, even though coming from the hands of Anglicans who claimed to be obedient to true religion. The king's compliance with the interests of the colony, which in fact emerges as a criminal alienation of the rights of the Commonwealth, is absurd: how "should [they] be now grac'd and rewarded with such freedoms and enlargements, as none of their Ancestors could ever merit by their best obedience, which at best was alwaies treacherous, to be infranchiz'd with full liberty equall to their Conquerours?" (*CP* III, p. 301). Significantly, the condemnation of the manner whereby the king united with the Irish to deliver the English to the enemy is rendered in a language full of anxious fear of "treacherous obedience" that evokes Dalila's famous deception in *Samson Agonistes*. Centuries later the playwright Alice Milligan, Yeats's fellow-traveler in the Celtic Revival, would perfectly exploit Milton's image of the disloyal Irish subject in its subterraneous ties with the trope of the treacherous wife in the now almost

forgotten *The Daughter of Donaugh: A Cromwellian Drama in Four Acts* (1900). Let's not forget that Eve's rationale for the fall, among other reasons, as in the fascinating oxymoronic formulation, was "the desire to be more equal," although to conceive Adam as her conqueror and not her wooer is already a sign of a fallen mind.

The employment of the matrimonial trope to depict the diplomatic relations between the two countries was not restricted to Milligan. In point of fact, in the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century the very concept of marriage became so ideologically loaded that one can trace in the new valences attached to it in the very historical shifts in the negotiation of power between the metropolis and the colony. Previous to the expanding discontent with archaic social forms whose epicenter was the French Revolution, the legal devices employed by England to exercise control were transparently unconcerned with domination by means of consent or mediatory signs to anchor subjection and secure hegemony through the much more effective mechanism of *identification*. At least since the "Statutes of Kilkenny" of 1366, which were re-enacted by the "Poyning's Law" of 1494, intermarriage between English settlers and Irish natives was strictly forbidden, showing a certain pre-modern form of power exercise where power is not plastic enough yet to work except through restraint. The establishment of Grattan's Parliament and the legislative independence indexed in the Constitution of 1782, which repealed the strictures of the legislation to which Ireland was subject, in concurrence with the increasingly felt need of exercising power to avoid violating the spontaneity that constituted the *telos* of genuine social, free action were pivotal factors for the fashioning of a new ideology intent on cementing via the cultural and the aesthetic what would otherwise succumb to crude power relations. It is in this context that, as M. J. Corbet shows in *Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790-1870* (2000), marriage and particularly the mobilization of the plot of union between the English settler and the headstrong Irishwoman reflect the attempt to re-dimension the wielding of power between the two countries and to provide a less brutal rationale for colonization. Such considerations are important for this study because they reveal how marriage and in special the family, institutions where the reproduction and consolidation of social forms happen more on an affective than a "rational" level, are sites whose very consistency is split by over-arching political tensions, although then one of its aims is precisely to stabilize and contain those.

In that regard, as both Corbet and Terry Eagleton (1988) discuss, Edmund Burke's political prose represents one of the most concise articulations of the political doctrine, conceived as a response to the values of the emerging industrial society, which ideologically informed both cultural production and the ideals of behavior and morality in the early nineteenth century. The reliance of power on a certain aestheticization of quotidian life cannot be dissociated from the very materiality of the reproduction of life in modernity, and it is no wonder that Burke is precisely the famous author of an aesthetic treatise on the beautiful and the sublime. If we bracket that dimension of Yeats's fashioning of tradition which relies on his mystical spiritualism for a moment, we find in the fixation of the content of his best poetry in the 1920s in the dwindling landed aristocracy, pushing forward a mythical idealization of eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish luminaries, a conversative program attuned to the social correlative of the values of Burkean aesthetics. In poems such as "Blood and the Moon" but also deducible from the general orientation of the poet's politics, Burke's elegantly argued, if doctrinally offensive, defense of the authority of custom and tradition in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) seems to have left an indelible impression on the poet. An eloquent defense of monarchy and the principle of succession against the threat of the leveling powers of the Third State, Burke systematically reminds his reader that, although he also is an admirer of liberty in line with the spirit of his time, freedom without tradition to give it substance is merely an abstract concept. From the time of Glorious Revolution, the maintenance of the body politic of England, he argues, has been reliant on the transmission of inheritance and not on democratic elective power. The type liberty cherished by his countryman is that received from the ancestors as a right reliant on rank and materialized in property: "we wished at the period of the Revolution, and do now wish, to derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers. Upon that body and stock of inheritance we have taken care not to inoculate any cyon alien to the nature of the original plant," adding that "all the reformations we have hitherto made have proceeded upon the principle of reverence to antiquity" (1987, p. 27-28). Such passages certainly resonate with the general concerns of the author of *Purgatory*. Still, although Burke usually shows a supercilious distaste for conceptual thought, preferring the intuitive persuasion and force of sedimented habit to silently weave the very nature of perception, his treatise-letter betrays that his conservative politics, similar to Yeats's, ultimately must make recourse to pre-modern philosophy. Whilst the theorists of the doctrine of natural rights of the Enlightenment are considered sophists who offer a vision of

freedom which is a merely contrived figment of speculation, Burke claims that his conservative view construes "artificial institutions" on an analogy with the venerable principle of the self-preservation of nature:

> By a constitutional policy, working after the pattern of nature, we receive, we hold, we transmit our government and our privileges in the same manner in which we *enjoy* and transmit our *property* and our *lives* [...] our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts, wherein, by the disposition of a stupendous wisdom, molding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole [...] is never old but in a condition of unchangeable constancy (1987, p. 29-30, emphasis added)

In what remains his oddest and most metaphysical text, Freud also had come to the conclusion that life is essentially conservative in a mode of speculation not far removed from Burke's. However, the aspect of his intuition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) that, despite its uncanny similarity, reveals his radical departure from such an organicist view, is that even such a conservative eternal repetition of a process is impaired by entropy. While thinking of a pre-modern nature or with pre-modern nostalgia enlists repetition as a principle of preservation of a content from disintegration, modern thinking incorporates difference and negation in a distinct fashion whereby repetition cannot fully contain its capacity for corruption and subtraction, the memory-trace of its inception in contingency. It is in that sense that Yeats goes beyond Burke, for, as Marjorie Howes (1996) argues, his understanding of family values and tradition cannot fully contain the awareness that tradition itself is founded in an illegitimate and possibly violent act that splits it from the inside and thwarts its claim to closure. It is as if although the poet claimed on the level of enunciation to agree to Burke, the genuine artist in him could not fully repress the invaluable demystifying role of art, whose essence is in many senses precisely that of revealing the supplementary scene of the production of signification.

As a spokesman of conservative politics, Burke is surprisingly enlightened and realistic. Moreover, his letter is a significant testament of how modern conservatism is dialectically caught in the web of its own anti-capitalist sentiment. If he does not miss a chance to poke fun at the French and hint that their notion of freedom is the offspring of the debasement of substantial value to a mere "ware," his own rationale for the binding force of tradition is reliant on a defense of the sacrosanct character of private property and its transmission through the family which, after all, are central mechanisms of the reproduction of capitalism. He helps us understand why the imaginary revolving around the eighteenth-century Big House and the

centrality of the family *qua* the *locus* for the preservation of value is elected by Yeats as that element of social life whose crisis threatens the very stability of the state. If only society would look back to the great aristocratic, impulsive but at times selfless men of action of the eighteenth century, and would let its social structure be subliminally conveyed by Georgian architecture, the impending threat of the loosened "blood-dimmed tide" might be hampered. The connection with Burke casts such a decisive light on Yeats because although, of course, the role of his interest in the occult and his visionary system in providing the key to his work have a right to be assessed in their own (we should avoid reductive historicist readings), it reveals the more immediate socio-historical factors woven, even unintentionally, into his poetry and prose.

The mobilization of the family as a means of cementing the social body through a circulation of power less explicitly coercive has an ambiguous status in Burke. Whilst in the level of self-representation his argument defends that the preservation of an aristocratic order is a corrective to the potential anarchy of the market, what Corbett has termed his "familial politics" have the role of precisely stabilizing society in view of the productive forces liberated in the French revolution: "Burke borrows his primary metaphors for political society from the aristocratic idiom […] which naturalizes the link between property and paternity. Over the course of the *Reflections*, natural order is represented as familial just as the family comes to appear naturally ordained" (2000, p. 23). In other words, the function of the family as a social unit where the transmission of property is grounded on a patrilineal line of succession, which can be traced back to Roman society, becomes essential for the distinctly patriarchal nature of early capitalism. For instance, as Max Horkheimer (1972) has argued, the transition of industrial capitalism to so-called late capitalism can be symptomatically charted in the disintegration of the family. Just as, in the case of Milton, familial tropes tinted the language through which the relationship between subjects and monarch was represented (the beheading of Charles I was described as a parricide), Burke has an intuition that in de-politicizing social relations and casting them as familial affective bonds, breaches of loyalty assume a much more unnatural character. In the context of the historical religious contentions in Ireland important for the ensuing analysis, a familial discourse is particularly mobilized in order to reconcile Irish Catholics with the crown, since working-class Catholics are increasingly perceived to be entitled to the right of being part of the big family of the Commonwealth. In more theoretical

terms, the family enjoys such a pivotal position in the synthesis of and stability of the social-symbolic order because, given its opaque naturalness, it emerges as a non-reflexive kernel whereby intersubjective relations hit against their condition of possibility. The family, which is the inevitable entrance into the social world, genealogically holds in its historical content the memory of irrational coercion. As Engels put it in his classical work on the origins of the family: "among the Romans [family] did not at first even refer to the married pair and their children but only to the slaves. *Famulus* means domestic slave, and *familia* is the total number of slaves belonging to one man" (1993, p. 121) and he quotes a more acerbic comment by Marx: "The modern family contains in germ not only slavery (*servitus*) but also serfdom" (ibid.). Burke who explicitly praises the social structure of feudal absolutism becomes in a sense, then, the perfect ideologue for the familial affective bonds necessarily not only to produce future workers but subjects.

To affirm that is to inquire by other means into the role performed by the family in the constitution of the modern subject who enjoys an alienable workforce, that is, an *abstract* legal freedom. What can be easily bypassed in that regard is how the family is centrally poised in the constitution and reproduction of the very operations of abstraction whereby social ontology (the mystification of the commodity) is systematically recoded as epistemological problem. Another way of putting it is to say that the family structures the libidinal backdrop of the subject's passionate attachment to power which, to the extent that it is repacked as purely formal, "noumenal" freedom, engenders the self-sustaining epistemological ego in its fundamental deception. The force of the aesthetic (derived from *aísthēsis* and hence originally an issue of perception and experience) to secure, through what Flaubert would call a "sentimental education," the stability of power relations such that it provides the color of the quotidian, the element in which we are dipped, and without which existence becomes cadaverous, is no more conspicuous than in the fact that to speak with such cold objectivity of the family demands a certain split in our position. To abdicate from the enjoyment drawn from the circulation of affects binding humans in that sphere, even if one is mentally aware that the family comes down in certain respects to a brutalizing mechanism, would itself be callous and inhuman; the measure of our internalization of ideology is proportional to our incapacity to question that "pleasure" without the collapse of symbolic ties. Thus, in the same way that, say, philosophy only rises to eminence in Hegel's thinking after his realization that epistemology

encodes historical process in a displaced language, the family acquires an autonomy in modernity from the socio-historical processes that constitute it which is surprisingly best indexed in the *aesthetic*. At this point we come up against a methodological problem. Although the largely historical perspective adopted so far has proved invaluable and compelling to shed light on Yeats's notion of tradition, we should be wary of this very transparency where the aesthetic seems to surrender to the inquiring gaze and reveal all of its secrets – except precisely the crucial one that entrenched in the very intuitiveness with which the understanding feels at home with the well-defined objects of concrete reality the aesthetic, the very dynamic where meaning is simply conveyed by the pleasure of non-conceptual form, is all the more operative.

The emergence of psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth-century has in a sense unwrapped that strange collusion between the family and the aesthetic. Since the interaction with the bodies of the parents, and specially the mother, provides the libidinal structure for the advent of the body in language and the constitution of a use of *speech* that conveys the body, modern poetry, with its concern with the "materiality" of words, has a strange fixation on the figure of the mother. If in the classical bourgeois family, the father stood for the strictures of moral law, repression, and "reason" (in the narrow sense), the always roughly-ideological maternal figure stood for the flexible and uninhibited flowing of sensations on the surface of the body. The mystery of why the family/generations model seems so befitting to read the poetry produced in a certain line of the English poetic tradition can perhaps be explained by the fact that the inception of signification, which poetry tends to thematize metalinguistically, needs a drama which is first staged in the discursive space of the family. For an author such as Julia Kristeva, for instance, we have then to shift our perspective and see the institution less through the point of view of constituted individuals than precisely that of the production of the "bourgeois" juridical category of the person. The family is a *narrative*, a multi-levelled textuality. And in that regime of signification, the *mother* often played the role of forbidden *jouissance*, figuring the pre-discursive being to be rejected so that the subject could enter the world of sense. That *jouissance* becomes indeed a central element of aesthetic discourse signals the crucial intersection where the bodily sphere connects with moral law and ethics; the sublime covers precisely this phenomenon where the chaotic flux of sensation is linked to a form of lawfulness so that the aesthetic acquires philosophical dignity. Insofar as the mother was raised in early capitalist society to this sublime taboo, the ultimate object of prohibition, a certain

orientation of modern aesthetics, of which I intend to show Yeats was part, consists on disrupting the socio-symbolic fabric precisely with "semiotic" violence, marking precisely the point where the aesthetic *qua mere* ideology or mystification might be harnessed to the unmasking proper to truth. "For the few who practice it, then, is modern art not a realization of maternal love – a veil over death, assuming death's very place and knowing that it does? A sublimated celebration of incest" (KRISTEVA, 1985, p. 145). Still, it is the very reflexivity of aesthetic experience that assures that the subject which is produced by the signifier exceeds the discursive practice which it serves; inalienable freedom is the positive flipside of "subjectivation" or alienation.

5.2. Those dying generations: tradition and Yeats's sexual politics

Throughout his life Yeats searched for modes of expression in different traditions. As scholars Thomas R. Whitaker (1964) and Donald Torchiana (1966) tells us, his early poetry reflects the nationalistic aspirations of a segment of late nineteenth-century Irish society. He was drawn in special to the romantic tales and myths of the Catholic peasant culture, and at this point his perception of the Anglo-Irish ascendency was largely critical since, for him, it stood for the values of thrifty, commercial-wise Puritanism. Yeats looked back to popular culture thus to gather material for the creation of an image of Irish culture meant to rival the usual English stereotypes of it and to sidestep the various uses to which the nation was put in contemporary political discourses. In "Literature and the Living Voice" (1906), for instance, discussing dramatic technique, he says that "in every art, when we consider that it has need of a renewing of life, we go backward till we light upon a time when it was nearer to human life and instinct, before it had gathered about it so many mechanical specialisations and traditions" (*CW* VII, p. 100). It is precisely such a reinvigoration of Irish literature through the recourse to an obscure, neglected tradition that will constitute Yeats's early poetic program. He rediscovers a mythology which, while being elected a token of original Irishness and the model for his striven-for "unity of being," was itself also a myth of origins fashioned and projected onto the future. A forgotten beauty to be remembered or reassembled in the present.

Yeats was always ready to proudly distinguish his interests from those driving the pursuits of his contemporaries, as can be seen from his identification with Pre-Raphaelite

aesthetic and values. And while he established ties with the poets whose dismal fate has brought them under the rubric of "lost generation," Yeats was among the few who were able to outlive the allure of dissipation, and successfully work out its main quandary. A passage from his *Autobiographies* gives a clear picture of his concern with tradition at this period of his life: "[youth's] quarrel is not with the past, but with the present, where its elders are so obviously powerful and no cause seems lost if it seems to threaten that power" (*CW* III, p. 115). There is a more "original" past tradition which has been eclipsed by the hegemony of the powerful elders in the present. As the twentieth century set in, however, Yeats's politics drew back from the Gaelic type of nationalism which he had espoused, and he embarked in the enterprise of a "conservative synthesis" exemplified by his explicit adoption of aristocratic values. If he previously downplayed his association with the Protestant ascendency, he now reconsidered his affiliation to its heritage. His acquisition of the Norman tower at Balylee in 1917 and the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, in particular, were emblematic events that factored in his finally swearing loyalty to his idealized image of Anglo-Irish eighteenth-century gentry. Such a transition in his career is chronicled in the instalments of his autobiographies, which are separated by several years. In the first pages of *Dramatic Personae*, one finds the old Yeats's usually effusive paeans for the dwindling Protestant ascendency, many families of which had by then lost their estates: "every generation had left its memorial; every generation had been highly educated" (*CW* III, p. 291-2)

In that sense, then, while the vision of tradition present in his early work recalls a Romantic celebration of *Volk*, the more the poet's views matured, molded by traumatic social upheavals, the more the Yeatsian recourse to tradition assumed explicitly historical and political contours. That of course does not entail that he disowned his interest in Irish mythology, since after all even his most modernist plays drew from Celtic themes; the case is rather that Yeats increasingly came to the conclusion that, although a retrieval of the suppressed folk-history was certainly important to foment the self-consciousness of the nation and to re-establish the religious feeling arising from the rapport with nature, since the people in their innocence and passion could nonetheless be harnessed to overthrow all order, folk culture needed a supplement. For Yeats, the largely pre-capitalist relations still in effect in the Irish countryside, where the landowner won the sympathy of the peasants through paternalistic benevolence, and which had had their golden age in the eighteenth century, had created the

leisured class in whose bosom a colder, sterner culture had flourished. As Torchiana writes, Yeats identifies the Battle of Boyne in 1690 as a turning point in the "spiritual" [*geistig*] life and history of the country, since the settlement of the Protestant gentry and its immortalization in Georgian architecture, in the Big Houses with horizontal lines and rigid shapes, marked the first time when a social form was strong enough to set an austere organization in what was otherwise dangerously formless. Yeats sees then in both the politics and the culture of eighteenth-century Ireland the correlate of the aesthetic underlying his own late poetry which, as well-known for those acquainted with it, aimed at passion and precision, feeling tempered by a severe syntax. For the main thinkers of Romanticism, with their aim of retrieving the classical *polis*, the ideal "political" community would best reveal the cogency of its social organization in the manifestation of its spiritual life through the pleasurable-ness of its aesthetic form. Similarly, for Yeats, just as the rigid, cold architecture of the Big House unconsciously conveys the social structure condensed in it, the social structure of the time of Grattan's parliament, with its regard for the maintenance of order through the preservation of the interests of the landowning class, emerges itself as a work of art. As previously discussed, both private property and the aesthetic share a homologous structure, strangely indexed in Kantian epistemology (an argument brilliantly developed by Alfred Sohn-Rethel), as avatars of the in-itself, that which is indifferent to its outside because it is supposedly self-sufficient. Yeats's work constantly inspires the insight that we do not need to explain art causally by tracking "externally" its historical factors, because history is already perfectly contained in *form*. Burke underscores so insistently the importance of custom because, by means of habits, a structure of affects sustains the naturality of the structure of the generational transmission of property.

In a sense, Yeats's embracing of the Anglo-Irish Ascendency had always laid latent in the difficulties created by the uneasy position of his identity within the categories of national politics. Similar to other Protestants engaged in the nationalistic revival, the poet could never endorse thoroughly the identification of the specific "essence" of Irishness with the Gaelic past, since such a position would defeat the claims of his own class to be a shaping force in Irish life. Thus, although from his school days in London all the way to the *On the Boiler*, Yeats nurtured a certain disdain for the English (famously condemning, for example, the pompous reception of Queen Victoria in the 1890s), he was by no means a purist and had the political *nous* to know when it would be strategically better to compromise. In that respect, the very

definition of the Anglo-Irish ascendency did not help for it was not even a matter of agreement what was its scope. Significantly, the appellation to the land-owning class under that rubric rose to political importance only late in the nineteenth century, in the very moment when the social structure of the "old demesne" was dwindling into an object of nostalgia. The confusion of definition can be felt, for instance, in the fact that although Edmund Burke was risen in the Church of Ireland, he did not *belong* to the landowning class or the Ascendency (POCOCK, 1987, p. ix). As usual with Yeats, then, the pantheon of Protestant luminaries was a composite of reality and idealization; he seemed to have chosen these great men more for their quality of mind, their exhibition of that aristocratic arrogance of the self in its struggle with the soul he so admired than for their actual blood: "what attracted Yeats most in eighteenth-century Protestant Ireland was more an attitude or quality of intellect than any necessary class distinction" (TORCHIANA, 1966, p. 89). The politician Hugh A. Law, his contemporary, defines the Anglo-Irish Ascendency in the following terms:

> Very roughly then the term is taken to denote a well-known, though never accurately defined, section of our people, differing from the rest very little in blood (since for centuries past we have been, all of us, of mixed race) but differing more or less widely in religious belief or social habits or in political associations ... for our present purpose it may be assumed that the typical Anglo-Irishman is Protestant in faith, has some connection with the land-owning class as it existed here from the end of the 17th to the end of the 19th century, and cherishes family traditions of service to the Crown of these islands (*Irish Statesman* 467, qtd. TORCHIANA, 1976, p. 87-88).

Indeed, as W. J. McCormack has argued, the rise to eminence of the Anglo-Irish Ascendency in the works of Lady Gregory, Synge, and Yeats has to be assessed in light of the hegemonic narratives competing to explain the origin of the socio-political conflicts of the country; and as such serving implicitly for an orientation to the future. Neither advocating the views that national or religious exception preserved the specific difference of the Irish, either as Gaelic folklore or Catholic resistance, the aforementioned authors nonetheless still had to tackle the problem of interpreting modern Irish history. That is not to claim that we should simply reduce that discourse formation to a mere obfuscation of the historical facts as they "really" happened. Irish history cannot be dissociated from the various competing narratives mobilized to give consistency to it, spinning dramatically concrete and practical effects. As Yeats famously wrote: "Did that play of mine sent out / Certain men the English shot?" (*CW* I, p. 345). The emphasis should not fall, however, on pluralistic relativism either. To understand the pivotal role of the Anglo-Irish in the early twentieth century as a distinct discourse, we have

to see it as an instantiation of the important and particularly modern phenomenon whereby "facts" do not speak for themselves, or possess any type of immediate transparency, and rather only have meaning at all within signifying chains which, to the extent that they are bound by aesthetic enjoyment, are held up by fictions powerful enough to stabilize that discursive reality *independently* of what "really" happens. That is why the importance of the Anglo-Irish as a politico-cultural formation cannot be stressed enough, for within the plethora of public and private statements that gradually performed such an "origin" into existence, a crucial signified was produced; and the complexity of such dynamics can be felt in the fact that this very ideal image bears traces of its internal fractures. McCormack perfectly summarizes the foregoing when he defines the Protestant Ascendency as partly an "*ideological* construction of an eighteenth-century *hegemony* of the same name" (1994, p. 9). If we have focused on the ideological-discursive dimension of the Ascendency, that is not to deny the importance of its "sociological" meaning. One of the contradictions of the notion is that it emerges precisely to refer to a mercantile class, such that although it would seem to construe the family as the locus where a traditional material is defended from desacralization by the disintegrating forces of the market, it is rather the case that that is how the emerging middle class needs to represent their practice to themselves.

On one level, as might be easily by-passed, Yeats's abiding interest on tradition gives witness to the historical orientation of his thinking, even though mediated by the occult accent of his theosophical investigations. In the last analysis, he takes part in a broader early twentieth-century concern with the (crisis of) transmission of experience and the questions apropos the very nature of historical time that it raises. So far tradition has appeared mainly in the concrete shape of relations of property and transmission. Although its discursive underpinnings have been stressed, it cannot be forgotten that, as in T.S. Eliot's celebrated essay, tradition is a key-term both stylistically and hermeneutically as well. Indeed, while up to the eighteenth century "style" was a matter of hegemonic schools, the nineteenth century accelerated the logic of obsolescence to the extent that novelty became a matter of generational conflict; we have seen how Yeats strategically endorsed pre-Raphaelite aesthetics. Furthermore, there is a sense in which the signs elected by the poet, in their confluence of proto-sociology, biology, and mysticism, attempt to arrive, inasmuch as he wants to construe a framework to interpret the value of the "aesthetic object," at a defense of tradition that was to find its most elegant

articulation in the authors associated with phenomenological hermeneutics. For a critic such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, for instance, in a certain overlapping with Burke, meaning cannot be solely ascertained by methodological procedures, since it relies for the maintenance of its own vitality on the sedimented "historical content" that a member of a community possesses simply by being inserted in a tradition. Although Gadamer explicitly works on the level of the *understanding,* his emphasis on fore-meaning as a pre-formed apprehension or givenness of meaning resonates then with the role of the aesthetic (that is, intuition) in its broad function since the eighteenth-century. His view is condensed in the following: "The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity, but proceeds from the communality that binds us to tradition. But this is contained in our relation to tradition, in the constant process of education" (1989, p. 730). Both hermeneutics and Yeats endorse the view that meaning and value are ultimately inseparable from a community and its historical consciousness, and emphasize that meaning is decided in a negotiation of horizons; although then the venerable concept of "spirit" in German philosophy allows the critic to affirm that reading is *not* subjective in the narrow sense (let's not forget that the poet similarly speaks of *anima mundi*, although in a rather neo-Platonic way). He goes so far as to affirm that the circle of understanding is "an ontological structural element" (1989, p. 730). Understanding is *natural*, although then the rarefied heights of phenomenology preserve him from going all the way to biological/organic speculation like Yeats. That of course is not to attempt to reduce the purposeful eclectic character of tradition for the Irish poet, but to try to read him in light of other attempts to determine the concept. Yeats's views parts company with hermeneutics at least in two regards: his emphasis often falls if not on the dimension of the individual struggle against the whole *per se* (the crucial role of the "antithetical"), at least on how individuality is doomed to be out of phase with tradition and thus to spoil it from the inside. Second, Yeats's notion of community could at times assume, although not fully consistently, a distinctly racial modulation.

There is another important dimension woven into Yeats's understanding of tradition, which surprisingly draws him closer to the body and in that sense marks off a progress. As Adorno affirmed, the purity of the concept of consciousness in phenomenology comes out as impoverished for not acknowledging the fundamental insight that Hegel himself had already had when he spun the history of spirit out of the primal reality of *desire*. In that regard, Thomas

Whitaker remains the critic that traced most scrupulously the factors that gave the ideas consolidated in *The Tower*, with its pervading concern with heritage, their particular coloring. Interestingly enough, the critic undertakes the important task of harmonizing Yeats's idealization of eighteenth-century Ascendency with the historical image underlying the mythmaking of *A Vision*. In his treatment, it becomes clear how the aristocratic society projected into the past, prior to the supposed degeneration of the Anglo-Irish into a mercantile class, is indebted, as shown in the emphasis of a retrieval of "unity of being," to the widespread European tendency to idealize Ancient Greek society in the threshold of modernity. To be more precise, we witness Yeats and other artist-nationalists trying to transplant the mythmaking so common among German Romantics in which Greek society emerges as the ideal community without division and where everyone is immersed in a living culture which has been hitherto mortified by the forces of mechanic, industrial capitalism. Let us not forget that, for instance, the institution of the Tailteann Games by the Irish Free State in 1924 strongly resembled the ancient Olympic Games. Partly referring to an actual specific stratum of Irish society, the Anglo-Irish community is increasingly transfigured by the very philosophical conundrums of modernity (of course, if we *suppose* a modern break); namely, the creation of a particular type of "empty" temporality prompted by a splitting between men and his environment. The freedom proper to modernity is predicated in a loss of being or any mythological whole. In that sense, following luminaries such as Hölderlin and Nietzsche, Yeats tried to conceive an alternative historiography, prophesizing a new aristocratic, tragic era wherein Christian meekness would give in to Attic arrogance, just as Hölderlin made himself into the oracle of the return of Dionysus. Therefore, the more the Ascendency is ideologically mobilized to body forth in Ireland an ideal "unity of being" taken from a broader continental narrative about modernity, the more his recreation of the "old aristocratic foundations of life" epitomized in the historical system of *A Vision* provides a rationale for the actually very modern practice of electing the aesthetic as the sphere capable of patching up a fragmented community. No wonder that inhe section "Dove or Swan" history is seen from the prism of its aesthetic monuments. As Whitaker sums up: "as a quasi-ideal culture, eighteenth-century Ireland suggested the Renaissance and Periclean Athens. Yeats saw 'in Bolingbroke the last pose and in Swift the last passion of the Renaissance'" (1964, p. 208).

The defense of the sacrality of desire in the debate on divorce cannot then be isolated from the centrality of desire for Yeats's poetics of vision, which will be discussed more at large in the next chapter. Since the sixteenth century, sexuality itself has become a modality of the aesthetic; the body is increasingly treated as a canvas whereon subjects can establish their own circuits of pleasure and give form to the particularly imaginary dimension of desire. Caught between the creative energy of the imagination and the vitalist force of the will, Yeats turns to the heritage of the Protestant Ascendency because he identifies in it a venerable line of public men who are "figures of capable of imagination" and unrelenting desire. In *Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty*, the poet perfectly presents the degree to which finding a corroboration in tradition for what he thought and wrote was crucial for him: "how much of my reading is to discover the English and Irish originals of my thought […] I have before me an ideal expression in which all that I have, clay and spirit alike, assist; it is as though I most approximate towards that expression when I carry with me the greatest possible amount of hereditary thought and feeling" (1971, p. 5-6). He writes that Burke is only tolerable to him in his impassionate moments, and it is precisely the vivid flame expressed by the acts and the speech of the men belonging to his pantheon of ideal public men that most attracted him. Since the prosaic idea that you can be inspired and influenced by what you read in a purely textual level was not esoteric enough for the mystical adept, Yeats looked for a more binding means of connection between present and past than a communal consciousness. He writes rather about the experience of sharing the same vital force of his ancestors and their dangerous imaginative force, interested in mediumship as he was. As Whitaker writes: "these eighteenth-century men […] each stood before him as both reflection and shadow ... projections of his own consciously held position and also of potentialities within himself that he had not yet fully discerned [...] intimation of an ideal passion and ideal unity" (1964, p. 205).

We have seen previously how the organicist analogy with natural processes had played an important role in Burke's own ideal figuration of the political state. In one of the most famous passages of his writing, he compares the state to an oak and writes elsewhere that "we wished at the period of the Revolution, and do wish now, to derive all we possess as an inheritance from our forefathers" (1987, p. 27-28). Yeats's lifelong project of nation-building made him particularly drawn to that image. His literary and political interventions are various ways of trying to make a renewed Irish culture definitely take root in Irish soil, precisely

because, no longer severed from the vitality of traditional life, social life would emanate from the land. The "tree" particularly emerges as one of his most potent symbols, and one can image the poet happily concluding that the mystical tree of the kabbalah found its secular correlative in Burke's political trope. As he writes in "Blood and the Moon":

> And haughtier-headed Burke that proved the state a tree,
> That this unconquerable labyrinth of the birds, century after century,
> Cast but dead leaves to mathematical equality (*CW* 1, p. 241)

Evoking the dying generations of birds from "Sailing to Byzantium," the discursive confluence of state politics and natural dynamics would actually have concrete material effects as the poet became a public figure with the task of literally steering the growth of the recently-born Irish Free State in the direction dictated by his own philosophical and ideological commitments. Especially in the crucial essay "If I Were Four-and-Twenty," Yeats provides the most sustained engagement with the centrality of the family for the reproduction of social life and the growth of the as-yet-young tree of national life, and how the spheres of political life and sexuality intersect one another. He affirms, for example, that "the family is the unity of social life, and the origin of civilization, which but exists to preserve it, and almost the sole cause of progress" (*CW* V, p. 42). Drawing from Darwin and Nietzsche, Yeats even proposes an invariant dichotomy reminiscent of the opposing poles of antithetical and objective in his system when he suggests that history has been divided by moments when family interests predominate (as in traditional societies with strong kinship bonds) and epochs where the individual breaks from the smothering influence of the family and achieves autonomy (as in capitalism). Being a revealing document in regard to that dimension whereby the aesthetic becomes a means for cementing cultural hegemony, Yeats underscores throughout the piece the importance of the emotional component in the preservation of kinship ties: "intellectual agreements [...] we have always had, but emotional agreements, which are so much more lasting and put no constraint upon the soul, we have long lacked" (ibid.) It is surprisingly consistent with his thought, although at the same time odd, that Yeats praises the imaginative power of eighteenth-century Anglo-Irishmen, because the uncoerced persuasion of the aesthetic object has its real life equivalent precisely in these emotional agreements that discursively bind people through the efficacy of affective bonds. His views appear with absolute clarity in the following passage:

> Yesterday I came upon a little wayside well planted about with roses ... and it brought to mind the curious doctrine of Soloviev, that no family has the full condition of perfection that cannot share in what he calls 'the spiritualization of the soil' - a doctrine derivable, perhaps, from the truth that all emotional unities find their definition through the image, unlike those of the intellect, which are defined in the logical process ... I understand by 'soil' all the matter in which the soul works, the walls of our houses, the serving up of our meals, and the chairs and tables of our rooms, and the instincts of our bodies; and by 'family' all institutions, classes, orders, nations that arise out of the family and are held together, not by a logical process, but by historical association (ibid.)

Although an exhaustive inquiry of what is meant by soul here overreaches our scope, it overlaps with what he elsewhere calls "a plastic power," a shaping, creative force. More important for our purposes is that in rendering the preservation of the state and the forms of social life, which are various differentiations of the "family," as dependent on genealogical continuity, the family connects society with whatever ontological invariance humans might have by controlling sexuality. As Burke had claimed: "our political system is placed in a just correspondence […] with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts, wherein [...] molding together the great mysterious incorporation of the human race, the whole [...] is never old or middle-aged or young, but, in a condition of unchangeable constancy" (1987, p. 30). The existence of "forms" which remains indestructible in spite of being shared by perishable things, a crucial conception for Western metaphysics, has an uncanny correlate in the very logic through which human sexuality maintains the genus. Despite Yeats's distaste for logic, this is ultimately, at least to some extent, a problem of the ratio between ensembles and its parts. It is noteworthy, for instance, that biological vocabulary of "species, family, genus etc." seems to have been drawn from the very language of Aristotelianism: to what extent then does philosophy refract the very way we understand the relation between individual and whole when it comes to sexuality? That certainly is not to deny the progresses made in the biological field (the "form" of the species is materially transmitted in the DNA etc.) but at least to make a genealogy of, if nothing less, the historical discursive construction of sex. And in that regard, the fact that Yeats's notion of tradition is haunted by the language of crisis and disintegration becomes extremely meaningful. Marjorie Howes has particularly refined our understanding of the vexed issue of Yeats's defense of the Protestant Ascendency by exploiting those moments where his poems reveal the vulnerability of the organicist claims of tradition. Indeed, she goes so far as to argue that while gender and sexuality are usually mobilized to naturalize social structures, the fact that Yeatsian tradition is always

riven with crises and the return of the memory of its inception in violence undermines tradition's claim to unspotted consistency:

> Yeats constructed the Anglo-Irish as a nationality by definition in crisis by refusing the hegemonic conceptions of gender, sexuality, genealogy, and the family that define them as elements in a natural and stable economy of wholeness, continuity, and reproduction. By repeatedly separating reproduction, sexuality, and genealogy from "nature," Yeats's Big House poems reveal that the continuity of the nation depends not on sustaining or passing on some founding essence or energy but, rather, on a repeated crisis of foundation that demands that each generation begin anew amid isolation and adversity. In this alternate model kindred *is* crisis (1996, p. 109)

Although at times Howes gives too much credit to the author for the self-deconstruction which is partly operated by her own reading against the grain, it is nonetheless true that his poetry is haunted by images of degeneration and *purgatorial* repetition to the point of being symptomatic of a shift in the understanding of sexuality. The early twentieth century after all was the time of Freud, and so the horizon opened by these authors affect his own views. Although Yeats would wish in some contexts for that strong cultural unity philosophically indexed in the whole that remains the same, self-present as an unchanging kernel, in spite of the vanishing of its parts, if Howes is correct, his work shows how that very defense of an "essence" is fractured from the inside by the memory of its inception in crisis, not unlike the logos "preceded" by *différance*.

5.3. "The leadership of John Milton"

As we have suggested, the meaning of Yeats's defense of divorce cannot be understood apart from the backdrop of the political and cultural struggles framing his intervention. The poet's recurrent disrespect for the values of orthodox religion aroused the animosity of the Catholic press towards him, especially given the delicate context of the need to solidify culturally the citizens' trust in the new government. At the time Yeats began to be more candid in public speeches about his shifting political allegiances, some periodicals – already predisposed to be critical of him due to the praise of "paganism" – did not need further hints to launch criticism at the perceived danger of the "new Ascendency." Even though Protestants enjoyed less political clout on public affairs than Catholics, the least threat to traditionally Catholic morality, in a country whose president sworn loyalty to the Pope, was immediately met with pre-emptive disapproval. Thus, it is not without some irony that, despite

the fundamental role played by tradition, custom, and the family in his conservative politics, his cosmopolitan honesty about sexual matters, what he termed "the sacrality of desire," put him in the position of an isolated enemy of public morality. The disruptive discourse of the bohemian intelligentsia in the early twentieth century allowed the Irish poet to inhabit a surprisingly contradictory position. As a spokesman for the rights of artistic creation in its exceeding of social constraints, he joined the ranks of the avant-garde in their struggle against provincial narrow-mindedness. Yeats was always searching for emblems of adversity, and there is a sense in which the logic of becoming the antithetical self applies to the case of the debate on divorce. The great question for the assessment of Yeats's defense of divorce, which on pragmatic terms is so reasonable, is the extent to which it is not plagued by its implicit elitism.

Certainly, it is part of Yeats's complexity that he came out as his anti-self to the public, intertwining the destiny of national politics with the cosmic drama of becoming himself by embodying his *daemon.* Thus, although the Catholic establishment really saw him and the project shared by his associates as the adversary of the common hegemonic forces, the terms of the equation also fit perfectly the image of the liberating poet fighting against orthodox religion which he had inherited from Blake. On one level, his defense of the spontaneity of desire maintains a shadowy resemblance to the way the Romantic poet's own theory of aesthetic creation pivots on the struggle between the imagination and reason (the latter embodied in the institutional curbing of desire). Throughout his several phases, sexual desire was a crucial creative force for writing poetry in Yeats's case, the very foundation of his art, and hence any attempt to censure that dimension of bodily experience elicited his combative response. In that sense, then, as Elizabeth Cullingford writes, the defense of divorce is the public counterpart of the radical description of sexuality being conveyed roughly at the same time in poems such as "Leda and the Swan" and, we could add, "Crazy Jane and the Bishop," where religion is exposed as a nefarious force in social life, not least because of its strange brutality and control of female sexuality: "'Leda and the Swan' with its graphic depiction of the sexual, was the poetic correlative of Yeats's political defense of desire. Rape (unsanctioned union) and divorce (unsanctioned putting asunder) were cognate expressions of transgressive sexuality" (1996, p. 186). Moreover, the political attempt to censure desire in the early Irish

Free State happened alongside broader debates concerning political motions to censure aesthetic innovation, showing how the two spheres overlapped.

As Roy Foster shows, previous to the divorce controversy, the Catholic press criticized Yeats particularly because of the eminent position that he had in cultural life as someone whose pronouncements on art were authoritative. Newspapers such as *The Leader* (which opposed his appointment as senator) and *The Catholic Bulletin* constantly reminded its audience that Yeats's defenses of paganism were supported by the tax-money of righteous Catholic citizens. After the poet delivered a speech in the Catholic Convent Hall in November 1923, where his turn towards the Anglo-Irish heritage became clear, "nearly every issue of the *Bulletin* pursued its vendetta against the 'New Ascendancy', which it saw epitomized by people like WBY, Gogarty, Plunkett, and Russell, and entrenched in institutions such as the Royal Irish Academy, Trinity College, and the Senate" (2003, p. 256). The concurrent motions to censure the handling of Joyce's recently published novel, with its unapologetic depiction of "filthy erotica," reveals that the controversy between the Catholic press and the avant-garde was above all a struggle for cultural hegemony; as the historian perfectly puts it: "the ancient battalions of the turn-of-the-century *Kulturkampf* were wheeled into place once more" (2003, p. 257).

Three years after the creation of the Irish Free State, there still being several political issues to be legislated and defined, the topic of divorce increasingly gained momentum in the public sphere. One year before the motion was discussed, senator James Douglas had already made a preliminary report on the topic which, in the occasion, fueled the anger of the press, culminating in an editorial of the *Catholic Bulletin* in September 1924 repudiating its immorality coupled with a criticism of the literary award created by Yeats in the Tailteann Games of the same year. Throughout the next fall, several leaders expressed their positions in periodicals. When in February 1925 the Dáil (the lower legislative chamber in the dual system that included the senate) requested the "Committee on Standing Orders" to frame a document to preclude the submission of bills to legalize divorce, Yeats considered such a move an aggression to the freedom of the recently born country. Although anticipating the expected ineffectuality of his opposition, the poet wrote a few notes in repudiation which were published as "An Undelivered Speech" by the periodical of his friend AE (George Russell), *The Irish Stateman*, in March 1925. For a sixty-year-old man, the previous year had been quite eventful

in Yeats's life. He was under such a nervous strain that his doctor prescribed absolute rest, resulting in his famous stay in Italy, where he added the finishing touches to and published the first *A Vision*. It can be easily forgotten how the dispute on divorce is poised among such important events in literary history, and how its argumentative drift partakes of the poets' consolidated thought.

The standing order about divorce was only to be considered by the House on June 11, 1925. In the text from March, Yeats starts off in a polemical note, qualifying the proposition of the order as an act of aggression and evidence of the general backwardness of Ireland; he claimed that such intrusion of personal liberties smacked of the censuring practiced by medieval Spanish Inquisition. Both in the earlier text and in the speech delivered in June, Yeats argues that forbidding divorce will first of all hamper the desired union of the two halves of the country. In chauvinistically privileging Catholic values, president Cosgrave was alienating the minority of Irish Protestants and sowing the historical division between the North and the South. Probably inspired to write the notes due to the attacks in the press, Yeats tackles the cynicism underlying the usual defenses of morality by "various journalists [who] have charged those who favor divorce with advocating sexual immorality" (*CW* X, p. 183). Yeats retorts that extra-conjugal liaisons are widespread in Catholic countries such as Spain and Italy, and triumphantly enlists the evidence of a Catholic mother from one of Balzac's novels who in her daughter's wedding-day suggests that in case of her not getting on with her husband, she might get a lover or other expedients, but she is not to destroy the family in any circumstance. That makes the perfect transition to his main counter-argumentative move in the earlier piece, namely, that religion provides the ideological, intellectual justification for an underhand utilitarian defense of the preservation of the family: indissoluble marriage "is a protection to the family, a protection to the children, or it is believed to be so, and its advocates think that the price is worth paying" (*CW* X, p. 183-84). Of course, we have seen how in some contexts Yeats himself, inspired by Burke, could vividly defend the importance of the family in its role of a nucleus that protects tradition, but here a nuance emerges in his view of marriage. Remniscent of Milton, although in March he does not yet quote the poet, Yeats writes of the ill effects of indissoluble marriage in the following terms: "marriage is not to us a Sacrament, but [...] the love of man and woman, and the inseparable physical desire, are sacred. This conviction has come to us through ancient philosophy and modern literature [...] we believe, too, that

where such ties are not formed the emotions and therefore the spiritual life may be perverted and starved" (*CW* X, p. 184). There is an emphasis then on the "spiritual life" emerging from the affinity of the couple, and the importance of emotional ties, that instantiates the broader aesthetic discourse woven in the poet's *oeuvre*. Aesthetic experience teaches us how to feel, and literature plays a pivotal role in that regard. After all, Yeats, following Pound, seems to have been interested in the Provençal troubadours because modern love became a central feature of lyrical poetry precisely due to that tradition.

While one would think that the process to achieve cultural unity had already begun with the foundation of the new state, the poet's disillusion with the aftermath of the civil war makes him side with the endangered minority which in his view might become the "creative intellect" capable of fostering cultural unification: "I want those minorities to resist, and their resistance may do an overwhelming service to this country, they may become the center of its creative intellect and the pivot of its unity" (*CW* X, p. 185). That is, the discourse of the "excited, passionate, fantastical / Imagination" (*CW* I, p. 198), which in philosophical terms belongs to the universal subject of thinking, is given a nationalist coloring. The poet conceives that the creative force or "stamina" (*CW* X, p. 191) of the members of the Ascendency is capable of shaping Irish life in the desired direction. Civil rights such as divorce are after all embosomed in the broader cultural life of that coterie. Furthermore, being at his most progressive, Yeats predicts that the liberties won by that minority will be expanded into society at large in the following generations when the country will "become a modern, tolerant, liberal nation" (*CW* X, p. 185).

The definitive speech, delivered in June, turns around a few argumentative strategies. Raising again the problem of the possible widening of the conflict between North and South, Yeats defends the Protestant antecedents of the right of divorce more forcefully this time through a more robust historical legitimation: "the minority does consider oppressive the denial of a right which it has possessed since the 17th century, a right won originally under the leadership of John Milton and other great men and by struggles that are a famous part of Protestant history" (*CW* X, p. 186). It is not certain whether he is speaking of the context of the British Isles or Protestantism generally, although the latter seems more plausible.[39] His second

[39] The editor of volume X of Yeats's collected works, Colton Johnson, corrects the accuracy of his statement, but if the poet is speaking of Protestant Europe generally, he would be right, since as Milton himself notes in his

main argument, which resonate with the basic tenets of modern law, is that a secular state cannot legislate purely on religious grounds; and in order to substantiate his attempt to safeguard the separation between state and Church, the poet adduces as evidence the philological agreement on the unreliability of the gospels, let alone its relevance to inform legislation two millennia later: "if you legislate upon such grounds, there is no reason why you should stop there. There is no reason why you should not forbid civil marriages altogether, seeing that [they] are not marriages in the eyes of the Church" (*CW* X, p. 187) and he continues: "for an ecclesiastic to ask a statesman to base his legislation upon the assumption that any particular passage possesses historical validity is to appeal to public ignorance" (*CW* X, p. 189). Yeats also resumes the defense against the allegation of immorality already dealt with previously in print, although now he explicitly names members of the Catholic and Protestant clergy who had intervened on the debate. The criticism that divorce would impair virtuous behavior is self-defeating in his view. In point of fact, the bare possibility of procuring a divorce would rather decrease the need for liaisons or, to use Milton's apt expression, to search the neighbor's bed. The poet's statements ultimately reveal that he placed flexibilization of marriage within the framework of larger civilizational progresses, those which, for instance, would lead him to keep a keen interest in education: "I notice that we do not propose to copy these nations [Spain, Italy and "South America"] in our economics, in our agriculture, or in our technical education. It is only in this matter [indissoluble marriage] that we propose to copy them" (ibid.) The argument that divorce actually furthers virtue does not preclude the poet from facetiously deriding morality. In Donald Pearce's transcription of the exchanges in the senate, the Laureate poet excuses his own allusion to the extra-conjugal relations of famous public men by affirming that "it is probably the immorality of my mind that was at fault […] To explain the immorality of my mind a little further, I do not think there is any statesman in Europe who would not have gladly accepted the immorality of the renaissance if he could be assured of his country possessing [its] genius" (2001, p. 102).

John Milton who, as already mentioned, before the publication of the defenses of the English people, was infamously called "the divorcer" and whose *Doctrine and Discipline* was decried by Herbert Palmer as a clear example of the pernicious effects of the unbridled freedom

---

divorce tracts, England was the only Protestant country which still uphold indissolubility of marriage in the seventeenth century.

of the press, comes in handy for the ideological aims of Yeats's discourse. As we saw, his myth-making of the eighteenth-century Ascendency was both a political and aesthetic project that reflected the ambiguities of mainstream bourgeois thought, condensed in Burke, with its ambivalent election of the individual. There is a sense in which Burke, Swift, and Berkeley are united in their expression of what we have called an imaginative force, in the Blakean sense. The Protestant pantheon is composed of arrogant, defiant individuals whose powerful will counterbalance "levelling" powers and the forces of disintegration. For a brief glimpse, then, although neither Irish nor, unfortunately, Ireland-friendly, the author of *Areopagitica*, the most eloquent defense of modern, rational freedom of consciousness, becomes the subject of a digression in the Irish senate. Yeats, of course, could not have found a better example of someone who could be linked, however loosely, to his beloved Anglo-Irish ascendency and who was simultaneously a poet like himself: someone for whom politics was not unconnected with the less immediately pragmatic interests of poets and artists. Right after the poet had finished his speech, the thoughtless colonel Moore questions his evidence:

> COL. MOORE: [Yeats] says that Protestantism stands […] I will not say for liberty, but for this question of divorce. Let us see whether that is true or not … He stated that in the sixteenth century -
>
> DR. YEATS: The seventeenth century.
>
> COL. MOORE: The Senator says now the seventeenth century. In the next one hundred years, from 1600 to 1700, there were only five cases of divorce … He quotes the poet, Milton, as an authority. I do not know whether the poet Milton ever wrote about divorce.
>
> DR. YEATS: One of the most famous of all the prose works of Milton is on divorce, which the Senator should have been taught at school.
>
> COL. MOORE: Anyway, the poet did not divorce his wife. His wife died.
>
> AN CATHAOIRLEACH [President]: We cannot turn this into a question as to what happened to the wife of John Milton. (PEARCE, 2001, p. 100)

Yeats's contribution to the debate on divorce was, then, a multifaceted public intervention. Although his eloquent speech failed to have further effects, just as he anticipated from the outset, it surprisingly turned to the episode for which his political career became mainly known. Coincidentally, both his and Milton's public careers would be associated with defenses of divorce. If Yeats provides mainly a secular argumentation critical of Christianity,

there is nonetheless an attempt to maintain a continuity with the author he is referencing when, for example, we read that "if you give men good education you can trust their intellects and their consciences without making rules that seem to us arbitrary," or then "it seems to us a most sacrilegious thing to persuade two people who hate one another because of some unforgettable wrong to live together, and it is to us no remedy to permit them to part if neither can re-marry," or finally that without emotional congeniality "the spiritual life may be perverted and starved" (*CW* X, p. 184). The foregoing excepts are from the Undelivered Speech, when the poet does not explicitly mention Milton, but even if these are not intended, they are nonetheless in the spirit of the seventeenth-century poet's letter. That desire itself is defined as sacred is going to be quite important in the next chapter, since the sacred migrates precisely to the aesthetic sphere in modernity (as we saw with Blake, God dwindles to a metaphor for imaginative force, which is above all libidinal). Although Yeats's Ascendancy chauvinism has not aged well, as his foremost biography iterates, Yeats was a disruptive figure that helped to shape national life and we cannot simply forget or dismiss him. After all the "ifs," in one level he was simply stating what we take for granted today, and in that sense his prophecy proved true. Moreover, it is not every day that a senator alludes to the authority of a poet in spite of the ridicule that it might bring about. I close with Donald Pearce apt words:

> On the face of it, this is comedy. It is amusing to think of one senator on the floor of the House reproving another senator for being unfamiliar with an essay [sic!] by John Milton. Government officials surely have more to do with their time than to pore over the works of Renaissance poets. Then it suddenly ceases to amuse. One begins to wonder whom, in fact, the senator ought to have read on divorce if not John Milton? … It is necessary to back 300 years, to Milton himself, for a like instance of a great imaginative man comparable involved in the political affairs of his country, that is to say, for a like instance of the union of the practical and the meditative intellect … Yeats's appearance in the Senate of his country compels one, I think, to reflect on the long separation of the man of imagination from the public forum, and of the consequences which that protected alienation has had (2001, p. 25).

Although Pearce uses "alienation" in its common meaning, there is a sense in which Yeats poses the question of the realm of the aesthetic (hence of ideology and alienation) in its relation to civil society long before politics became, problematically when the boundaries are dissolved, culture. Given that for us culture has become a pastime, we need to work hard to envision a trust on the force of art to transform the very nature of reality. With all the problems of aestheticism *tout court*, there is nonetheless a dangerous edge to the uncompromising nature of Yeats's aesthetic discourse.

6. "O BODY SWAYED TO MUSIC": BODY, SOUL AND THE PLASTIC POWER IN YEATS

John Milton unexpectedly plays an important role in an episode chronicled by W.B. Yeats again in his *Autobiographies*. Near the end of *Reveries Over Childhood and Youth* (1914), the poet relates his first participation in a spiritualistic seance to which he had been invited by his friend and fellow writer Katharine Tynan. The incident captures a moment of transition in his early life, which in this point of the narrative works as a culmination of what had been previously related and provides a *segue* to his immersion in the world of the occult set out in the second instalment of his retrospective glance *The Trembling of the Veil* (1917). The reader is specially told that it was during this seance that the poet first exhibited signs of mediumship. What is meaningful in this episode to us is how the quasi-religious dignity that poetry had for Yeats is exemplified by his involuntary recourse to verse, and the poetic utterance evoked by him is Milton's own heartfelt entreaty for inspiration to the heavenly muse. In the account, Yeats relates his initial hesitation to surrender control of his will, and continues:

> I was now struggling vainly with this force which compelled me to movements I had not willed, and my movements became so violent that the table was broken. I tried to pray, and because I could not remember a prayer, repeated in a loud voice–
>
> 'Of Man's first disobedience and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
> Brought Death into the world, and all our woe […]
> Sing, Heavenly Muse' (*CW* III, p. 106).

Apart from the unusual nature of the situation, the scene which the reader is asked to imagine intimates how deeply Milton was fixed in Yeats's poetic universe. The richness of the description of the seance is borne out by closer perusal: the employment of the verses for prayer, if idiosyncratic, is scarcely unexpected from an artist who was interested in the incantatory power of poetry, and was more sensible than most to the origins of poetry in religion, especially if we examine it in light of his general aspirations during the emergence of the Irish Literary Revival: "I had proposed for our consideration that whatever the great poets

had affirmed in their finest moments was the nearest we could come to an authoritative religion, and that their mythology, their spirits of water and wind, were but literal truth" (*CW* III, p. 97). Whereas all the other present people were Christians (and likely to resort to a *paternoster*), Yeats sets himself apart from them by introducing verses by a Protestant poet, and implicitly, similar to the seventeenth-century poet, shows that genuine prayer would ultimately assume the form of poetry. Decades later, in the 1920s, when the desire to unify the country through folk mythology had been given up, and Yeats the senator engages in a defense of divorce whose uncompromising tone makes it a doomed affair, he resorted to Milton's word again, as we saw.

6.1. The soul has a plastic power

Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini* or *Annunciation* (1850) is among the most celebrated Pre-Raphaelite paintings and was particularly esteemed by Yeats. According to Elizabeth Loizeaux, he "liked those paintings whose religious ideas could be associated more narrowly with the practice of his own craft," and he particularly admired "Rossetti's *Annunciation* and *Girlhood of Mary Virgin*" because they "capture moments in tales of divine revelation" (2003, p. 13). The oil painting itself takes up the traditional motif of the angel Gabriel's annunciation to Mary of her pregnancy, but creating an odd atmosphere through the predominance of white that departs significantly from usual depictions. Though the Gospel of Luke relates how the young virgin was troubled at the news and entreated by the angel not to be afraid, nothing in it suggests the fear verging on mental alienation of Rossetti's canvas. In the latter, Mary seems to vacillate at the prospect of being the divine mother, and with an expression reminiscent of late nineteenth-century hysterics draws back from the gift which is offered to her. The most intriguing and telling moment, in the gospel, is when the angel prophesizes to her that "the Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee," since this verse hints at the nature of the mysterious conception without sexual contact. The original here is more expressive, however, to use Milton's phrase, since ἐπισκιάζω (overshadow) could be an allusion, a commentator claims, to the spirit hovering over the waters in Genesis: "by this common figure of the hovering and overshadowing presence of God's Spirit, the original creation, the creation of God's covenant nation and the new creation in Christ are linked together" (REA, 1990, p. 29). Although another reader, in turn, simply concludes that

"overshadowing merely says that the conception of Jesus results from God's creative work" (BOCK, 2004, p. 172). What is meaningful here for us is how Rossetti brings a young woman's fear of sexuality into his picture.

In the beginning of the twentieth century sexuality was being brought into public discourse in all of its fleshiness in a manner without precedent, and in such an increasingly sexually conscious society the figure of an "immaculate conception" became unconvincing as a fantasy support against the confrontation with mortality. Precisely in this context, we have Yeats claiming that we were moving from a society engendered by the conjunction between a virgin and a dove to one engendered by a woman and a swan, which would repeat the aristocratic age before the onset of Christianity. In "Leda and the Swan," he famously describes prophetic and poetic inspiration in a graphical depiction of sexual possession, in which the helpless woman, we could say, has a resemblance both to the figures of the poet and his mediumistic wife. Although the original use of "overshadow" in Luke does not allow us to find a sexual connotation in it, Rossetti seems to depict Mary precisely as afraid of being overshadowed by God's holy spirit in a sexual sense (a dove with a halo even figures in the painting), just as Leda is overpowered by an actual bird. This finally leads us to the figure of the "Covering Cherub," which plays such an important role in Yeats, being commensurate with the *daemon*. Speaking of Blake, but with an eye on the Irish poet, Frye tells us: "the cosmic peacock whose eyes are the stars [,] […] the Covering Cherub is winged, like other angels, and the overtones of 'covering' are sexual, the Earth being his *femme couverte*" (1976, p. 93) or as Yeats says in *Per Amica*: "I am persuaded that the *Daemon* delivers and deceives us, and that he wove that netting from the stars and threw the net from his shoulder" (CW V, p. 11) Is it too rash to say that in poems such as "Leda," Yeats uncovers sexuality in its abject dimension and achieves that "tearing of the veil" spoken of by Mallarmé that he believed was an emblem of his generation (*CW* III, p. 110; *CW* V, p. 32)?

As we shall see, our thesis is that it is impossible to speak of sexuality without bringing death into the picture, since in fantasies such as "immaculate conception" one finds the longing that a non-sexual conception might retrieve our divine, immortal image, at least for those who throughout the centuries saw sexuality as the decisive *mark* of our mortality. Milton resisted this conflation, as James Turner tells us, intervening in the theological debate concerning prelapsarian sexuality by assuming that erotism was an integral part of the first

couple's sexual life. In other words, for him sex was not necessarily a sign of our natural guilt, the latter being itself a primal proto-legalistic category which attempts to explain *why* we must die, and hence, reflexively, why we are born. Although a broad proposition, we could say that reason (and its precursor, *art*) emerges when necessity is turned to freedom, that is, when death becomes the very material out of which we weave the fantasies which move our desire. That explains why speech is sexualized: although, as famously put, the word is the death of the thing, the word "cunningly" triumphs over death by translating the relation to the object to another order of being, and hence preserving it to some extent; and given the association of death and sexuality we can understand why we can only begin to speak by sexualizing our losses and especially that ultimate loss which death is, that is, by fantasizing that we will not die, that a remainder of what disappeared remains.

As William Kerrigan has shown, the ultimate unconscious fantasy of *Paradise Lost* is the indestructible angelic body, whose perfect sexuality is put forward as an ideal for humans to strive for. Yeats's desire for "perpetual tradition" points out in this same direction: one desires an endless repetition in order to "magically" preserve something from ever being lost or in his case forgotten (an eternally preserved "tower"). The philosophical implications of the fact that after the fall the penis became the only external member/organ utterly beyond our control did not escape St. Augustine, whom interpreted it is as a token of necessity, of what is not within the scope of man's will or freedom, and hence death. In this regard, Yeats himself describes with admiration Swedenborg's angels: "Was it precisely because in Swedenborg alone the conscious and the subconscious became one – as in that marriage of the angels, which he has described as a contact of the whole being – so completely one indeed that Coleridge thought Swedenborg both man and woman?" (CW V, p. 198). The whole being in contrast to the mortal being, always sexed, divided. Through his poetry, Yeats could attempt the utopia of a "contact of the whole being," always doomed to fail, always ready to be repeated again better. If he could not have Maud Gonne in real life, the hypnotic rhythms of his words, in their doomed pursuit, could attempt to evoke the experience of the denied pleasure by means of what he calls in *Per Amica* "an empty image of fulfilled desire," although Yeats himself knew that "a desire that is satisfied is not a great desire."

Of the fantasies dispelled by nineteenth-century science, none was so dear to Yeats as that of the immortality of the soul. To give it up was too high a price to pay to have desire

conform to reality. Although he tells us that, early on, he was interested in the scientific knowledge of his day, by the time he was a struggling artist he could proudly state that his difference from his contemporaries was a strong religious sense. This is never better expressed than in the provocative suggestion that the first fish that leaped out of water did not do it for adaptation but simply out of rebellion against the sea (*CW* III, p. 133), that is, against the element conditioning his existence and playing the role of necessity. The fish leapt out of water in the same way that humans have dreamed for centuries of escaping their own element, the earth, and achieving a sublunary paradise. Yeats's discontent with the limitations of reality was thus, in a first moment, the possible driving impulse behind his eccentric interests and pursuit of all things occult, although his endorsement of a more tragic view of existence later in life adds a twist to the picture. One needs only to look to the company he kept (Blavatsky, George Russell, his uncle, etc.) to realize that his romantic interest in mysticism, itself a reaction to what D. H. Lawrence would call the "ugliness" of industrial society, found a perfect *milieu* in the theosophical vogues so common in the beginning of the last century. Yeats was by disposition drawn to the supernatural, and the experience of contact with spirits, which he himself underwent a few times – "one has had a vision; one wants to have another, that is all" (*CW* III, p. 232) – became the fascinating center around which his philosophical system and life revolved. It turned to an exciting riddle, the deciphering of which he set out with full dedication, so that for years he would attempt to systematize the fragmented material which his wife received from her "instructors," in order to compile what has come down to us as *A Vision*, in its two editions (1925/1937).

Yeats's eagerness to experience communication with spirits made him turn to the field of psychical research, resorting to sources which range from medieval Gnosticism to the Christian Kabbala. In *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1917), his first wide-ranging attempt to systematize his philosophy and to lay the principles of how it affected his poetic craft, an early modern figure emerges as an important contributor from whose ideas he constantly draws. The Cambridge Platonist Henry More's work provided Yeats with a "philosophical system" on which to base his belief in the soul. Besides, the philosopher's dualist ontology explores the nature of the communication between immaterial entities and humans through the interaction of "vehicles" in a manner that was extremely congenial to the poet. Yeats tells us, for instance, that "nor have I found the mediums in Connaught and Soho have anything I cannot find some

light on in Henry More" (*CW* V, p. 20). A contemporary of Milton, More was a central figure in the seventeenth-century philosophical controversy between Platonism and emerging mechanist thought. Along with others, he was part of a reaction against the "atheistic" consequences of Hobbesian radical empiricism, being himself more ambiguous in relation to Descartes, since the latter saved a place for a mental *res cogitans* in his thought. Although today we are bound to see him as an expression of religious conservatism, his objections to mechanist philosophy, as Stephan Fallon tells us, tried nonetheless to safeguard an ethical dimension which risked being wiped out were one to follow mechanistic materialism to its logical conclusion: "while Cudworth and especially More were conversant with current scientific thought, their main intellectual concerns were theological and ethical" (1991, p. 51). Milton himself, while more positive in regard to the scientific developments of his time and materiality in general, still could not endorse the emerging mechanistic philosophies completely, since they entailed the denial of freedom and the autonomy of the subject. His espousal of "vitalist animism" was an attempt, induced by the unprecedented exploration of new models made possible by the turmoil of mid-seventeenth century scientific and political thought, to reconcile matter with its informing principle. In this sense, he shares the Cambridge Platonists' concern with the importance of an "active substance," if not their avowed but often inconsistent dualism, since such a vital principle assured the maintenance of freedom, without which the natural realm would succumb to the violent state described in *Leviathan* (1651).

Yeats was more traditionally Platonic than Milton in this subject. His recourse to Henry More seems to have been inspired by a rather Gnostic sense that our "divine flame" has been entrapped in the prison of the material body. If we also take to account that he professed himself as a Berkeleyan later in life, his defense of the legitimacy of sexuality (in contrast to its condemnation by the Catholic Church) is more a celebration of perception and pleasure than of materiality in itself. The extent to which he really believed in More would demand further research, but the idea that souls and the spirit of nature (*anima mundi*) communicate with us via the "animal spirits" was suitable for someone intent on finding a philosophical system that sustained the ideas of the immortality of the soul and the possibility of human communication with it. In *Per Amica*, we read that

> All souls have a vehicle or body, and when one has said that, with More and the Platonists one has escaped from the abstract schools who seek always the power of some church or institution, and found oneself with great poetry [...] The vehicle

> of the human soul is what used to be called the animal spirits, and Henry More quotes from Hipprocates this sentence: "the mind of man is [...] not nourished from meats and drinks from the belly, but by a clear luminous substance that redounds by separation from the blood." These animal spirits fill up all parts of the body and make up the body of air [...] The soul has a plastic power, and can after death, or during life, should the vehicle leave the body for a while, mould it to any shape it will by an act of imagination [...] But how does it follow those souls who never have handled the modelling tool or the brush, make perfect images? […] Our animal spirits or vehicles are but as it were a condensation of the vehicle of *Anima Mundi*, and give substance to its images in the faint materialisation of our common thought (*CW* V, p. 20-1)

In *The Immortality of the Soul*, More undertakes an investigation of the seat of the soul in the body. Differently from Descartes, who famously had located it in the pineal gland, he assigns its place to the left ventricle of the brain (1987, p. 126), because the blood was believed to be purer and thinner there. These two features were important because the most suitable place for the soul, so he reasoned, had to be the most purified corporeal element, which in this case was identified with the "animal spirits" that held a prominent place in Renaissance physiology. As suggested in the Hippocrates citation, what distinguish them from other bodily spirits is that they are made up of a substance exuded and refined from the heaviness of the blood. Whereas, in the belly, the blood conveys the solid particles taken out of meats and drinks and split up (following Galenic medicine) by an internal heat, the spirits which nourish the brain have been so sublimated and became clear and luminous. This "thinner Matter" of the animal spirits is "the immediate Instrument of the functions of the Soul" (MORE, 1987, p. 126), which was also the seat of common sense and hence the cognitive faculties. Being an apologist for the incorporeality of the soul did not hinder More from investigating the minutiae of how its communication with the body happened. As a means of resolving this conundrum, he resorted to the notion of "vehicles" capable of containing incorporeal matter, which was rooted in classical philosophy. However, the metaphorical language which he inevitably uses to describe these invisible operations, as Fallon tells us, often added some inconsistency to his dualism: "More verges towards a near equation of higher vehicles or animal spirits and spirit itself, even while repeatedly affirming the materiality of animal spirits and even of angelic vehicles" (1991, p. 73). This vacillation is plainly visible in a passage in which the philosopher makes the bold claim that the animal spirits contain a celestial substance: "the most subtile and active Body [...] is of the very same nature that the Heavens and Stars are, that is to say, is the very Body of Light, though so mingled with other Matter here below that it does not shine [...]

in which Spirits of necessity [is] contained this *Celestial* Substance" (1987, p. 157, original emphasis).

The plastic faculty of the soul, a crucial concept to Yeats, is introduced precisely in the context of More's attempt to explain the nature of the conjunction between soul and matter. The language employed by More demands a close reading beyond our aims, but what is revealing about it is that, granted that for him matter could not have a vital principle, what drives the soul to "sympathize" with matter in order to infuse it with efficacy is a certain aesthetic predisposition: the soul is ultimately an artistic power which shapes matter to a pleasurable, seemingly living, form. Comparing the impression of being alive that matter might give (which is nonetheless the result of the soul's activity) to how listeners might think that the experience of musical pleasure is to be found in the instrument or the composition, he says:

> Tied by the ear, they are detained by the pleasure they are struck with from good Musick […] But neither is that which they eat alive, nor that which makes the Musick, neither the Instrument [...] the Perceptive part of the Soul is thus vitally affected with that which has no life in it [...] And that *Vital Congruity* which is in the Soul, I mean in the *Plastick* part thereof, is analogous to that Pleasure that is perceived by the Sense. (1987, p. 159)

The Cambridge Platonist is here at his most Kristevan. Does not the pleasure which attaches to the materiality of words, best expressed in the enthralling rhythms of poetry, reflect a similar fetishism? We can only "libidinally" invest on our discursive existence by an analogous misperception, by means of which speech begins to bear traces of our vitality (our affects, intonation etc.). In order to realize the extent to which words are insensitive (perhaps senseless) without a spirit to animate them, we need only to attend to the emptiness and monotony of depressive speech. In short, the Statue must seem to be alive for Pygmalion.

"The soul has a plastic power" is for our aims the most important idea from the long *Per Amica* quote, since, similar to our discussion of the "divine image" in Milton, Yeats elects, at his most speculative, the creative faculty as the essence of the soul. Moreover, I would like to observe is that, as hinted in *Per Amica*, Yeats's notion of *daemon* takes its rudiments from More, for whom the former was a spirit which left its body after death and inhabits a middle aery "vehicle" between the aethereal and the terrestrial. Additionally, the discussion concerning the scope of the plastic power in connection with the imagination is never odder than in the chapter in More's Book II dedicated to explore the "mighty power" that the mother's imagination might have in shaping the fetus already in the womb, that is, the power her fancy

has to affect the child even before it is born. In *Per Amica*, Yeats himself expresses fascination at the account of a hen who gave birth to a hawk-headed chicken, and More tells us:

> For we may easily conceive that the deeply-impassionate Fancy of the Mother snatches away *the Spirit of Nature* [i.e. Anima Mundi] into consent: which Spirit may rationally be acknowledged to have a hand in the efformation of all vital Beings in the World [...] the *Soul of the World* interposes and insinuates into all generations of things [...] which would induce a man to believe that she may not stand idle in the transfiguration of the Vehicles of the *Daemons*, but assist their fancies and desire, and so help to cloath them and attire them according to their own pleasures: or it be may sometimes against their will, as the unwieldiness of the Mother's Fancy forces upon her *a Monstruous birth* [my emphasis] (1987, p. 227)

More momentarily considers that the formative power might be the mother's only to conclude, following usual Western premises, that the masculine soul is the actual actor. The mother's fancy is an unwieldy blockage which distorts what would else be the expression of the *daemon*'s clear intention, the resistance to pliancy offered by a recalcitrant material, like words to the poet. Ddifferent from the vulgar assumption that a poet curbs words to his intention, a poet like Yeats, when he identifies with Leda, knows that a person who loves words use them to listen to the pain (and "enjoyment") of the bodies which *bear* them.

Yeats resorts to More because, in a sense, he wants to privilege the reality of the creations of the plastic faculty over the compulsion of external reality, which stands for for necessity. In his discussion of the plastic power, Yeats affirms that "the soul can mould from these [the animal spirits] an apparition clothed as if in life [...] till it is as visible and tangible as any other object" (*CW* V, p. 20) and, more revealingly, as we find in the long citation above: "the soul has a plastic power, and can after death, or during life [...] mould it to any shape it will by an act of imagination." Through More's philosophical idea of a world soul able to permeate all the pores of the most impenetrable matter and share its vitality with it, the desire to intertwine death and immortality so that we can experience death *qua* immortality find a suitable form of expression for Yeats. We find essentially the same fantasy as that of Milton's angels, for whom a thought is without hindrance immediately an action, the perfect interpenetration of body and soul:

> Angels are the object of wish because their bodies are wholly at the command of wish [...] the will of an angel lays hold of its entire being, and substance is at one with spirit. The angel body has not been *organized*, fixed into an arrangement of parts [...] nor has this body been *engendered* [...] all heart, all head, all eye, all ear they live, and since every part can become any part, [they are] all genital "or both" [...] "Desiring," that is, is not a verb, but an emotional act become a substantive,

> a piece of word-smithing that imitates the angelic unity of mind and thing [...] the angels, freed from "exclusive bars," become utterly and not superficially one (KERRIGAN, 1983, p. 211-3)

Milton's angels nowadays bear an odd resemblance to what a queer theorist would call post-genital erotogeneity, even as their perfect interpenetration exemplify the utopian rapport which Lacan denied to us fallen mortals when he claimed that there is no sexual relationship. Kerrigan's use of wish here is also telling as it points out to the central concept of *Wunsch* in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. If we overlook that *unconscious* wishes strictly speaking can only manifest themselves through distortions (they can only be apprehended through their effects, never in-itself), one could say that the angelic body is literally the dream come true, the utopia of uninhibited, uncensored expression. More's world soul offers to Yeats, similarly, a broad notion of a plastic energy able to assume every shape it wants, just as the desire of the angels, along with the sexuality of the "wise monists" in the divorce tracts, spells a sexuality turned to perfect communication. "Freely we [the angels] serve / Because freely we love" (V, 538-9), Raphael says to Adam, condensing a cluster of connections we have met. The mortal body with the "obstacles" posed "by joints and limbs" (VIII, 624-5) have men "ti'd and manacl'd" (*PL* 1: 426) to his mortality (of which the genitals are the synecdoche), like the "slavish" fallen husband to his idolized wife. The fact that fallen sexuality can only occur by means of organs which "restrain our conveyance" might lead to our confusing desire with the organ (or for that matter the person) through which satisfaction is achieved, and hence turn the means to a fetish, even as a child clings to a nursing nipple as an embodiment of the "incorporeal" love of the mother. The recourse to an easily shapable substance that would allow spirits to embrace in a manner "easier than air with air" in a "union of pure with pure" in Milton, and to a plastic energy which can "clothe" images with life almost as if they were palpable in Yeats seems ultimately to be attempts to capture desire in its "original" form, as pure energy able to be converted to anything else. In this rarified state desire would immediately give birth to the object it imagines, as Adam finds Eve in *Paradise Lost* right after he dreams of her. What is revealing here is that if the "normal" metonymic slippage of desire (in the Lacanian sense) demands a temporal development, as in the long detours of the history of salvation (Christ's birth, the Second Coming etc.), the "desire" of the angels is a paradoxical entity heedless to time and not constituted by a prohibition (the temporality of desire in the psychoanalytic sense being set up precisely by "castration"), an exception to the law which is nonetheless completely

obedient to it. If the word and its object someday were one "in a contact of the whole being," it was here only, to echo Milton.

Moreover, what is telling is that this energy is described by Yeats as what is behind the artistic creations of human history, somewhat analogously to the way in which for psychoanalysis the desire to recreate the lost object of the drive is what moves man first to long for it in the imagination and then to change external reality. In this regard, he tells us, for instance, "but how does it follow that the souls who never have handled the modelling tool or brush, make perfect images?" and later speaking about dreams, "is not the problem the same as of those finely articulated scenes and patterns that come out of the dark, seemingly completed in the winking of an eye, as we are lying half asleep?" (*CW* V, p. 21). Such a protean energy even has a certain resemblance *mutatis mutandis* to libido, and that it seems to have a sexual character can be glimpsed, for example, from its association with the Spenserian Garden of Adonis as "the first seminary / of all things that are born and dead." Yeats's historical thought is at its most interesting in those moments in which it provides wide-sweeping condensations of art history, as when in "Dove or Swan," in *A Vision*, he ranges from Phidias to Michelangelo in what could be called a "history of the eye" (if one pays attention, he is always observing how sculptors depict vision), the eye historically having both a strong sexual and creative connotation, being the organ which was believed to emit beams and to reflect the soul with its fire and heat. Yeats perceives that there is a deeply unconscious component in art, since creation allows repressed wishes and even the unfulfilled desire of the past generations to manifest themselves: "the dead living in their memories are [...] the source of all that we call instinct, and it is their love and their desire, all unknowing, that make us drive beyond our reason [...] it is the dream martens that are [...] master-masons to the living martens building about church windows their elaborate nests" (*CW* V, p. 27).

Both Milton and in Yeats advance ideals of sexuality which become profoundly entwined in the problem of communication between mind and thing. More's answer to this thorny issue was, adding Fallon's reading, that the material vehicle becomes so purified that it borders on becoming indistinguishable from the soul that wishes to express itself by inhabiting it. In the case of both our poets, similarly, the less "coarse" the vehicle the more suitable it becomes to convey and be united with the spiritual. Milton and Yeats nonetheless part ways in the details of their different philosophical commitments, which are going to be discussed now

so that in the sequence we can resume the aspects in which, however, they converge. Milton deemed the traffic between different substances so absurd that he famously reviled the logic behind the eucharistic transubstantiation. In order to resolve the problems posed by the mind-body problem he resorted to a radical vitalist and animistic materialism, which is to say that even though he compares the angelic body to so unsubstantial an element as "air," he understands it as thoroughly material and corporeal: "the deadness of the material world is too high a price to pay for the immortality of a separable soul" (FALLON, 1991, p. 107). With the exception of the "infernal drags" episode in *Paradise Lost,* matter is never a passive vehicle in his mature monism, therefore, since he conceives of it as originally infused with God's holy spirit (the capacity for self-agency) during the creation. Angelic sex is always material for him, even though this materiality is as plastic as we discussed. Yeats, as can be glimpsed from *Per Amica*, and as already mentioned, is much more traditionally dualist, relying on a philosophy of emanations neo-Platonic in nature. For instance, he claims that "there are two realities, the terrestrial and the condition of fire" (*CW* V, p. 25) and later more definitively, "that condition is alone animate, all the rest is phantasy" (*CW* V, p. 26). Milton in his early work was himself deeply influenced by neo-Platonism, and the idea of a "gradation" from the grossness of matter to the purity of spirit never abandoned him, even when he endorsed a full-fledged materialism. In this regard, he is similar to Yeats who establishes a gradation to the effect that the "coarser" the vehicle, the more effort is demanded by the world soul to exercise its plastic power in it. This can be seen in the discussion of how the souls of deceased people are enthralled by the memories of their past life after death. The stronger the impression of these memories the more difficult, he claims, it is for the soul to assume the shape it wants effortlessly. In contrast, the souls of higher spirits are so accustomed to grasp several objects simultaneously in their mind (in a type of quasi-synchronic perception) that, when they attempt to communicate with humans, our sequential, temporal apprehension of objects poses a hindrance to them: "the spirits who mould themselves in that coarse vehicle can only rarely and with great difficulty speak their own thoughts and keep their own memory" (*CW* V, p. 29). The question nonetheless emerges concerning the nature of this "condition of fire," which if it draws from the classical understanding of fire as the nobler part of the soul, in Yeats it nonetheless does not refer to the physical element in any material sense.

As we saw, Yeats adopts an emanationist view of reality as common in various medieval philosophies, unorthodox and mainstream alike. What is interesting here is the emphasis on "fire," which we will attempt to clarify by drawing a parallel with William Blake, whose "system" also heavily relied on the notions of emanations and shadows, and for whom the ultimately reality behind the emanations was energy. The nature of this energy is itself, however, a certain crux in the center of Blake's work, since it is described simultaneously arising from the body (as, say, the impulses "tamed" by orthodox religion) and being the very substance of the immutable human form and the imagination. As we saw, in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake writes that "energy is the only life and is from the body, and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of energy" (*E.* p. 111), whose misleading suggestions are qualified by Bloom when he more rigorously defines the difficult disposition of body and soul for Blake: "Blake is not saying that the soul is part of the body, but that the body is the outward circumference or boundary of the soul [...] it is by an increase and not a diminishment of sensual enjoyment [however] that we can begin to expand our souls to their former dimensions" (1963, p. 76). Yeats is an heir to this problematic, and in this regard the single reference to Blake's *Milton* in *Per Amica* is extremely revealing. The consequences that More's theory of the communication of the soul through the purification of blood might have to one of the at once most revealing but also most obscure moments in Blake's short epic did not escape Yeats. The specific reference to *Milton* is in the expression "pulsation of the artery," which the Irish poet uses as a metaphor for the perception of the approaching presence of the *Daemon*: "the Daemon, by using his mediatorial shades [emanations!], brings man again and again to the place of choice [...] We perceive in a pulsation of the artery, and after slowly decline" (*CW* V, p. 29). The expression from Blake happens in a passage in which he describes how the sons of Los create the units of time. A little further on, towards the apotheotic conclusion, the narrator tells us: "For every Space larger than a red globule of man's blood / Is visionary & is created by the hammer of Los / And every Space smaller than a globule of man's blood opens / Into Eternity" (*E*. p. 570), which Bloom glosses with: "The red Globule beating within us is the inward sun, the pure flame by which we live" (1963, p. 340) and elsewhere he links Blakean energy to libido (cf 1963,. p. 234). In the *Immortality of the Soul*, More attempts, as we saw, precisely to show how, through the vehicle of the animal spirits, a substance refined from the blood might become a receptacle for the soul, and in its own way be open to eternity. Blake, of course, did not seem to be concerned with such a "scholastic" problem such as how the soul

literally communicates with the body (an answer as physiological as More's belongs to seventeenth-century mentality), but his allusion to a "space smaller than a globule of mans blood" is significant. The connection with Blakean creative energy is suitable also because the "condition of fire" is on the last analysis, when deprived of its awkward spiritualism, an emblem for the mental receptivity necessary for the inflow or *influence* of artistic creation. While reading his poems as if for the first time, Yeats says: "I look at the strangers near as if I had known them all my life [...] I do not even remember that this happy mood must come to an end. *It seems as if the vehicle had suddenly grown pure* and far extended and so luminous that the images from *Anima Mundi* [...] would [...] *burn* up time" (*CW* V, p. 31, my emphasis). Here, to become a pure vehicle is simply to purge oneself from all hatred.

In conclusion, to understand the relation between the body and the soul in Yeats poses many more problems than Milton's avowed materialism, and it bears a certain resemblance to the same problem in Blake. Whereas, like Blake, Yeats wants to legitimize the erotic dimension and free the desire of human bodies from the constraints imposed on them by oppressive institutions, he resorts at the same time to an eroticism in which the body fuses with a world soul and its plastic energy, so that it becomes a celestial body (in order to evade mortality). As already said, for him the bodily seems not so much to point to materiality in itself as to the experience and pleasure of the senses.

Now that we have covered the philosophical differences, we can return to the convergence which we believe is most interesting for this study, since it reveals how, if under the forms of different world views and philosophical systems, a similar problem is being explored from distinct fronts. Up until Romanticism, Milton was mainly known as the poet of sublimity, since *Paradise Lost* encompasses vast tracts of time and space, and aims to cause wonder and exemplify *Maraviglia*. An admirer of Edmund Burke, the famous theorist of the sublime, and whom he included among his pantheon of eighteenth-century luminaries, Yeats had similarly a deep concern for making his poetry sublime, which can be glimpsed from the recurrent use of "terrible" in his work. "Terrible beauty," itself perhaps a reworking of "fearful symmetry," is his hint that he is mounting high into a more elevated domain. The word "sublimate" has itself emerged in a scientific context to speak about the transition of a solid to a vapor without becoming liquid, just as in his epic Milton expresses the wish that the human

body might be metabolized into spirit without undergoing death, simply through its diet (see FALLON, 1991, p. 141).

In the famous scene in which the angel Raphael lunches with our parents, we are told: "the Angel […] with keen dispatch / Of real hunger, and concoctive heat / To transubstantiate; what redounds, transpires / Through Spirits with ease" (V, 435,436-39). Different from the Eucharist, the transubstantiation here is not absurd for Milton; besides, as we saw, for More the pure substance of the animal spirits is what "redounds" from the blood, and this process is only possible by a digestive *heat*. In this regard, a passage towards the end of *Per Amica* is also revealing: "But certainly it is always to the Condition of Fire [...] *where there is neither wall nor gate*, that we would *rise*; and the mask *plucked* from the oak-tree is but my imagination of rhythmic body" (*CW* V, p. 30, my emphases). The mask, which is the vehicle through which Yeats can dramatically live the life of others, and hence at least momentarily be "translated" to a higher state of being, is simultaneously something, like a fruit, plucked from a tree. How should we understand it? As Milton's fruit "burnished with Golden Rind," we should attempt to understand that this Yeatsian fruit participates in the same symbolism of the "silver apples of the moon" and "golden apples of the sun" from *Wandering Aengus*, a magical fruit whose taste in this case gives access to the occult, to what is hidden by the Covering Cherub (Yeats probably is following the Gnostics, for whom God actually wanted to keep Adam and Eve in ignorance, while the Serpent offered them forbidden wisdom.). To taunt us, he even says: "I do not think he [the *Daemon*] is with me until I begin to make a new personality, selecting among those images, seeking always to satisfy a hunger grown out of conceit with daily diet." (*CW* V, p. 31).

Philosophically speaking, what is most stimulating about sublimation is that it bears a resemblance to the mental operation by which contraries short-circuit without a middle term. Milton did not simply want an intermediary between body and spirit; he conceived spirit so that when we come across the word, we have to undergo the mental strain of recalling that this spirit *is itself material.* He wanted a vehicle and medium indifferent from that which is being expressed "through" it, as though vehicle and tenor collapsed to one another (Fallon has brilliantly explored this homology with the structure of "meta-phor" in his essay on the divorce tracts). The problem for instance of how thought might not only be a representation of an external object but lent itself to a communication with the object to the effect that it assumes

its impossible perspective has troubled philosophy for centuries (in a sense, only that which seems to preclude apprehension by the mind due to its nature would nonetheless be the appropriate judge to verify the extent to which the mental representation is faithful.) Milton dodges this problem by positing a continuum of matter, so that in principle everything might communicate with everything; the Yeatsian condition of fire tries to answer a similar problem, "how can the body be receptive to communication with souls?". The question that emerges in this context concerns the implication of sexuality in this. The answer to the mystery must lie in the fact that sexuality symbolizes both our weakness (we must die) and our strength (we perpetuate ourselves in the very act which is a token of our mortality). The sexual act is precisely the most evident act in which we perceive death turning to life, and the transition of life to death. As in the various discharges of bodily fluids and elements, we externalize that which is other to us inside us, the death which inhabits us. The "in-itself" which cannot be apprehended by mental representation or perception is not so much so external to us after all, as it has its model in the *petit autre* inside us which we must constantly externalize in order to live. Through the material which we constantly reject, our body has a commensurate term with the "external," for as Julia Kristeva tells us, the rejects open the way to infinity, or as Blake tells us, eternity (KRISTEVA, 1982, p. 102). Can we not spot in the alchemic longing to sublimate gross materials into gold or the philosopher's stone an expression of this logic in which pure and impure short-circuit?

We read in More:

> The Soul may live and act in an Aëreal Vehicle as well as in the Aethereal; and that there are very few that arrive to that Happiness, as to acquire a Celestial Vehicle immediately upon their quitting the Terrestrial one: that Heavenly Chariot necessarily carrying us in triumph to the greatest Happiness the Soul of man is capable of (MORE, 1987, p. 157).

Few privileged souls, we are told, may be immediately conveyed to heaven right after death in a "heavenly chariot." A footnote traces this allusion to Platonic philosophy, but we may wonder if he does not also have in mind Elijah's assumption into heaven in the chariot of fire, a cause of wonder for Christians for many centuries, and which drew Milton's interest in particular as an example of a "translation" or a "transference" into heaven without the mediacy of death. In "On the Death of the Bishop of Ely" we read "Among the winged warriors I was carried aloft, clear to the stars, like the venerable prophet of old, charioteer of a fiery chariot, who was caught up to heaven" (HUGHES, 2003, p. 23), the original word for "caught up"

being the more expressive "raptus" which might recall for us "mystical rapt." We know that the initiates of the Golden Dawn were acquainted with the Book of Enoch, the pre-diluvian patriarch who similarly was translated to heaven alive.

The definitive Yeatsian description of the souls who have achieved the Condition of Fire is the following:

> Then gradually they perceive, although they are still but living in their memories, harmonies, symbols, and patterns, as though all were being refashioned by an artist, and they are moved by emotions, sweet for no imagined good but in themselves, like those of children dancing in a ring; *and I do not doubt that they make love in that union which Swedenborg has said is of the whole body and seems from far off an incandescence* [...] now they run together like to like, and their Covens and Fleets have rhythm and pattern […] When all sequence comes to an end, times comes to an end, and the soul puts on the rhythmic or spiritual body or luminous body (*CW* V, p. 25-26).

When the most purified vehicles ("fleet" is an odd if apposite collective) achieve the condition of fire, they spend their days in Dionysian dances, and enjoy such a perfect sexuality that they seem incandescent from far off. The revealing expression in this context is "like those of children dancing in a ring": speculation about the nature of angelic sexuality lends itself, like in Milton, to conjecture about desire in an uninhibited state, and in this case specifically to the forbidden topic of the sexuality of children: a sexuality which has not as yet fallen under the shadow of a prohibition and therefore is innocent. Speaking about the moments in which he feels as if the "vehicle had grown pure," Yeats even tells us: "I have something about me that, though it makes me love, is more like innocence" (*CW* V, p. 31). Discussing angelical sexuality tends to verge on the comic because innocence is a shame which exhibits itself as yet guiltlessly, a guilt which is uphold as the very token of purity.

6.2. Delight in passionate men

For a poet who could acknowledge that when a man loves a girl "it is as though he wanted to take his own death into his arms and beget a stronger life upon that death" (*CW* V, p. 234), it is clear that, for Yeats, the intertwinement of sexuality and death had a reach beyond his immediate erotic life and was interwoven into his unease and anxiety concerning inheritance and the "posterity" which he begot upon his muse. In his early period, poetry became itself the linguistic practice to which he channeled his sexuality, on which he could

recreate what was lost to death in a "stronger life." On a certain level, the attempt to think what should have precedence creates an experience of vertigo: to what extent is he *not only* speaking about life? To what extent is he *not only* speaking about poetry? However difficult it is to disentangle them and however limiting it is to collapse one to the other, still this "confusion" strangely points out to how through the magical operation of art natural compulsion (death) is "assumed" and "translated" to the realm of what is significant. To say that the sign is the death of the thing and that all signification leads to death seem to verge on exaggeration: do children not speak well before they confront the reality of death? What is the qualitative leap performed between confronting the loss of an object and the object *as* loss? In this regard, the ever-sensitive Yeats provides us with a powerful testimony.

Before compulsive education, in a Christian country, the mystery of the origin of babies was bound to remain obscure well into the onset of adolescence. In a thoughtful recognition of the overlapping of the concepts we have been discussing, Yeats juxtaposes a description of his childhood belief in the magical nature of conception, the discovery of the real "mechanism of sex," and his realization of death in one of the most memorable passages of *Reveries*:

> I asked everybody how calves were born, and because nobody would tell me, made up my mind that nobody knew. They were the gift of God, that much was certain [...] and children must come in the same way. [...] when I was a man I would wait up till calf or child had come. I was certain there would be a cloud and a burst of light and God would bring the calf in the cloud out of the light. That thought made me content until a boy of twelve or thirteen, who had come on a visit for the day, sat beside me in a hay-loft and explained all the mechanism of sex [...] [it] made me miserable for weeks [...] it was the first breaking of the dream of childhood. (C*W* III, p. 55)

To discover the truth of sexuality is to begin to lose the game, and Yeats's contempt for the young men of his generation might be interpreted precisely as a resistance to assume the place of the son who has always already lost. If this is the sad truth, psychoanalytic theories of poetry point out how great poets are precisely those who, to use a loculation Kristeva employs in another context, "do not know how to lose."[40] The whole Bloomian theory of

[40] "The disappearance of that essential being continues to deprive me of what is most worthwhile in me; I live it as a wound or deprivation, discovering just the sarne that my grief is but the deferment of the hatred or desire for ascendency that I nurture with respect to the one who betrayed or abandoned me [my note: that is, the "evil" mother]. My depression points to my not knowing how to lose – I have perhaps been unable to find a valid compensation for the loss? It follows that any loss entails the loss of my being – and of Being itself." (1987, p. 5). See Bloom in this regard: "a poem is a poet's melancholy at his lack of priority" ((1973, p. 96).

competition attempts to account precisely for this tendency among poets, which in more historical terms we could interpret as the attempt of poetry to radically question, from the inside, the legitimacy of the claim to power of the common exercise of secular authority embodied in the figure of the father. If we look to as un-Bloomian a poem as *Paradise Regained*, we still can identify how, in a sense, Christ (whom Milton insists calling "the Son") also does not know "how to lose": the earthly father creates a sort of contract in which the boy-child gives the mother up so that he can find a substitute in *his* world. However, *his* world in that context is nothing but the corrupt domain of Satan whose pleasures must be resisted at all costs. Christ's repression is so strong that he only accepts his loss with the condition that the world (and the authorities) which demanded such loss be overcome in a religiously more just interiority governed by a *heavenly* father. Yeats was far from suffering from a "sacred complex," but does not a play like *Purgatory*, in however unusual way, point out in the same direction with its plot of a father who kills a son to put an end to the perpetual reproduction of a domain founded on a crime (even as Satan's domain, although here the repudiation of "corruption" takes its force from Yeats's unfortunate eugenics)?

In the last analysis, the so-called Oedipus complex can never be completely resolved, because the suffering and the "neurosis" engendered by it gives voice to our inner revolt towards injustice, which is the very motor to make justice as it is conceived by our forebears live up to its concept: the world falls short of the justice it promised. The heavenly father which we bear in ourselves, and which all of us meet as children in that mysterious word-entity, *God*, is simply an expression of the potential we have to make the world more reasonable in contrast to the ways of the earthly father accustomed to how it moves. Yeats, hardly a partisan of reason, still movingly answers, in the conclusion of his introduction to *A Vision*, the anticipated question of whether he believes in his system or not affirming that his "stylistic arrangement of experience" was what allowed him to "hold in a single thought reality and justice" (*CW* XIV, p. 19). Within this context, Yeats's foregrounding of his "athlete" friend (Cyril Veasey) as an implied ego-ideal and his accompanying the career of race-runners (*CW* III, p. 63) in *Reveries* is a fine touch adding a poetic color to his rather bleak early life, what he pungently phrased as the "ignominy of childhood". For if there was an experience to which the Irish poet was constantly submitted while attending school in London, indeed, it was that of being rejected: "I was ashamed of my lack of courage [,] for I wanted to be like my grandfather" (*CW*

III, p. 61). As his friend George Russel (AE) famously put it: “the boy in the book might have become a grocer as well as a poet”.

What accounts for the secret covenant between grandparents and grandchildren from times immemorial, so that a child might experience earlier or later in life the triumphant feeling that, while bound to obey his or her parents, the latter, in turn, are themselves subject to a higher authority – which in his or her eyes, if demanding an uninviting awe and respect, still acquires an aura of wisdom and genuine authority? After all, our fathers and mothers are only children for the grandparent, and always more or less pretending a maturity which the older generation can nonchalantly expose. AE suggested that another suitable title for *Reveries* would have been *Father and Son*, as the text is dominated by John Yeats’s presence and influence over Yeats, but the figure which prevails over the early pages of the autobiographical account is that of his maternal grandfather William Pollexfen. The terms through which he is presented for the reader are extremely revealing, since the features he inspired are those evoked by the sublime: “he was never unkind, and I cannot remember that he ever spoke harshly to me, but it was the custom to fear and admire him” (*CW* II, p. 42), and his description ultimately emerges as that of a super-egoic figure: “I think I confused my grandfather with God, for I remember in one of my attacks of melancholy praying that he might punish me for my sins” (*CW* III, p. 43).

This choice is certainly not a coincidence. Yeats’s retrospective organization of his account of childhood foregrounds that strange affinity of old age with childhood which Shakespeare perfectly expressed in dramatic form in King Lear, and indeed we read in *Reveries*: “Even to-day when I read King Lear his image [William Pollexfen’s] is always before me, and I often wonder if the delight in passionate men in my plays and in my poetry is more than his memory” (*CW* III, p. 43). If such a regression to childhood risks childishness, it still remains a unique means for genuine enlightenment, for the old king during the outbursts of his madness, similar to blind Oedipus, achieves a shattering wisdom that, in perspective, reveals the pettiness of the human world (the father’s world). That is why the sage must inhabit like a ghost the outskirts of the city,[41] since he embodies that unrelenting consciousness of

[41] Yeats himself translated Oedipus plays, including *Oedipus at Colonus.*

approaching death which is a bliss for "the saint" (in Yeatsian terminology), but a source of anxiety and fear for the living.

We return to the mystery concerning the origin of babies. We have seen above that the dwindling of the dream of childhood came for Yeats, so he tells us, by learning the mechanisms of actual sexual, which dissipated his belief in a mysterious conception and that babies were born in a bursting cloud of light, a divine gift. There is a sense in which the idea (and fact) taught us by biology that conception is simply the effect of the fecundation of an ovulum by a spermatozoid posed a serious challenge to any dualism upholding the existence of incorporeal, eternal souls. Although modern philosophy and science has become skeptical about the existence of the soul at least in its metaphysical guise in authors like More, one needs only to recall the vehemence of religious arguments in controversies about abortion to realize how much this problem is still with us. One of Milton's main concerns in regard to an "idolatrous marriage" in the divorce tracts was that the "copulation" with an incompatible wife might bring about a corruption or rather profanation of the "seed" (semen), as if in a contamination of such substance, which was not only physical but also spiritual. Yeats himself seemed to have believed throughout his life that there always was a "spiritual" component in the generation of children. In *Swedenborg, Mediums, and the Desolate Places* (1920), discussing the experiences of the American medium Jackson Davis, he describes, expressing support, how the spirits which communicated with the latter declare "that the soul is no creature of the womb, having lived many lives upon the earth" (*CW* V, p. 59), and, in an echo of the passage from *Oedipus at Colonus* which the poet so admired that he published in *The Winding Stair* (1929) a freestanding version of it, "the sorrow of death, they tell us again and again, is not so bitter as the sorrow of birth, and had our ears the subtlety we could listen amid the joy of lovers and the pleasure that comes with sleep to the wailing of the spirit betrayed into a cradle" (*CW* V, p. 59). Such a feeling finds expression both in the book of Job and in King Lear as well, the former reflecting on the suffering that living entails to the point of affirming that not leaving the darkness of the maternal womb is better than being born at all: "Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb?" (Job 3:11), says Job in one of the most moving passages of the Bible.

Certainly, this feeling is Yeatsian only to a certain extent, because while he shares the pessimism of the insight, having himself a personality in which the "antithetical tincture"

predominates, he would happily embrace the eternal repetitive torture of being born into a world of violence, as can be seen in "A Dialogue of Self and Soul." What is interesting in this regard for the present discussion is that this longing for the womb reveals its sinister double-character and the ambivalence it inspires in the love-hate relation with the mother: for while "pre-Symbolic" infancy is idealized as a time of plenitude and a paradise lost, it is simultaneously interwoven (in the examples above) with a desire for death. Job and Lear (of whom he is as it were "the precursor") do not want to "return to the womb" because the comfort it offers; rather, the comfort which it offers is simply that of dying. As readers point out, and Freud perhaps the most famous among them, Lear's return to childhood is a manner of negotiating his relation with the woman-figures in his life by making peace with death, epitomized in the beautiful final scene in which he carries a dead Cordelia in his arms to the stage.

That Yeats identifies himself with his grandfather might thus throw some light on his own perspective on sexuality, although for the antithetical man the negotiation with death can hardly be through resigned peace; he wants "to take his own death into his arms, and beget a stronger life" upon that, as he said in *On the Boiler* (1938). What I am trying to suggest is that while indeed the boy "of twelve or thirteen, who had come on a visit for the day" (*CW* III, p. 55) explained to Yeats all the plain, realistic mechanisms of sex, dispelling the "dream of childhood," there is a sense in which *he never stopped believing* ("I got a decisive argument for belief...") that there might be a different truth to sexuality, that he actually might reshape its limits in a creative, significant work that would give him more life and become an expression of necessity reflexively apprehended as choice – all of which strangely suggest the preservation of his early theories of magical conception through other means. In "First Principles" (1904), he revealingly tells us:

> Every argument carries us backwards to some religious conception, and in the end the creative energy of men depends upon their believing that they have, within themselves, *something immortal and imperishable*, and that all else is but an image in a looking-glass. So long as that belief is not a formal thing, a man will create out of a joyful energy, seeking little for any external test of an impulse that may be sacred, and looking for no foundation outside life itself. (*CW* 8, p. 58-59).

Although hardly an insight to appeal to a scientist, belief itself is as fascinating a mental formation as faith because their force is drawn from their unconditionality. Yeats who was well-versed in religion seems to have an intuition that it is so difficult to destroy a belief

(for example, by presenting facts) because beliefs are the closest in us to the indestructible, and without which we languish.

Yeats's early theory attempts to account for the age-old mystery of the origins of babies. During early childhood every child is bound to develop such theories, Freud tells us, and, moreover, they are important for being an early manifestations of a spirit of research, providing the occasion for the first experiences of hypothesis formulation and confrontation with their frustration. Such early infantile inquisitiveness might lead later in life to more scientific turns of mind or, as in Yeats's case, to the path of psychical research. In a society in which sexuality remained an unspeakable taboo, which was the case in the late nineteenth-century one, this theme was bound to constitute an enticing mystery to the deciphering of which children eagerly delved. From the most remote times, truth has been conceived as a work of uncovering and confronting a painful piece of reality whose recognition might be shattering, and when one thinks about it the idea of destroying fantasies immediately comes to mind. The object of truth is that which remains invisible as a certain condition of possibility for the domain of visible objects: "[the theme of phenomenology] is something that proximally and for the most part does not show itself at all: it is something that lies hidden, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time, it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself [as] its meaning and its ground" (HEIDEGGER, 2008, p. 59). Following structural anthropology, Lacan placed the phallus as this very irrepresentable vanishing point of signification (its "[lack of] being"). What I suggest here is that the reader mentally entertain *ad hoc* the surprising confluence between these domains: because sexuality has been a taboo department of life, it concentrates a mysterious truth the knowledge of which might be traumatizing for children. We can imagine that when a child finally catches her parents in the act of coitus, her first reaction is to close her eyes since she realizes her seeing something supposed not to be seen. The vision of sexuality or whatever is forbidden is metaphorically "blinding" as it was literally for Oedipus.

In a sense, this accounts for why it is so difficult to approach sexuality in purely naturalistic terms, since it is enmeshed from early life in such hermeneutic questions and quandaries. For children sex is first an issue of meaning, a primordial mark of difference, and as we saw in Yeats's case much was at stake in the investigation of its symbolic character: the genesis of babies is enlisted as an argument for religious belief and becomes a counterpoint to

the views of his more positivistically-minded father. Precisely because sexuality remained a misty field of which he had little knowledge, fantasy could find a fertile ground in its empty and indeterminate space. Besides, since he believed that no one had actual knowledge of the nature of birth and conception, religious notions such as the immortality of the soul could inhabit sex as its possible symbol, or, perhaps, to put it another way, God, the ground of being in traditional philosophy, could manifest himself through sex. As we previously saw, the very fact that the genitals must remain hidden under a cover in our societies strangely present an analogue to the philosophical distinction between essence and appearances, in which the latter manifest the former. The primitive epistemology of children reveals how the inaccessible hidden reality which the perception of our five senses supposedly cannot apprehend is not so much inaccessible as *forbidden* (even as Raphael famously asks Adam not to concern himself with the problem of cosmology, which is beyond his grasp), so that in our Western relation to knowledge, the attempt to know what is being our grasp assumes the shape of a bold crime, as peeping to discover whether the mother has a phallus or not or eating the forbidden fruit. Yeats, as is well known, would have a life-long fascination with the occult, and his resistance to a nihilist sort of answer such as that, for example, there is no mystery behind the veil, can be probed from the vehemence with which he attempted to think total cosmologies and minutely describe the patterns of history. His incursions to the occult were attempts to prove that there *is* something to be seen, that his research is not doomed to end up with the "mechanisms of sex." *A Vision* is indeed an attempt to read the structure of the universe and that of human history in molds evocative of the Ptolemaic universe of the Middle Ages, although Yeats himself (who read Kant) was aware that the attempt to think a "total cosmology" leads to insoluble antinomies, expressed in his dualism of antithetical and objective.

When in the spring of 1917, George started to communicate with spirits in earnest, the usual procedure was that of posing a question to the instructors so that they would, in turn, give their sibylline answer, which became as much as riddle as that posed by the Sphinx to Oedipus: "I had always to question, and every question to rise out of a previous answer and to deal with their chosen topic. My questions must be accurately worded, and, because they said their thought was swifter than ours, asked without delay or hesitation" (*CW* XIV, p. 9). Indeed, the interpretation articulated so far throws passages like the following under a new light: "I read [as a demand of the spirits] with an excitement I had not known since I was a boy with all

knowledge before me, and made continual discoveries, and if my mind returned too soon to their unmixed abstraction they would say, 'we are starved'" (*CW* XIV, p. 10). George's instructors, as good Miltonists, were aware of the intertwinement between knowledge and orality.

We have seen the importance of Lear for Yeats. He is the example of a lucid madness emerging from the confrontation with death and a reconciliation with the Goddess of Death, the primitive mother whose role, in the play, is taken up by his daughter. With this in mind, a poem such as "A Prayer for my Daughter" becomes extremely revealing, since the text itself very implicitly draws this connection by beginning with the significant image of a "howling storm" (as in the scene in which Shakespeare's character wrangles with the elements, but also evokative of Blake's Rintrah). In the celebrated poem, Yeats's daughter herself becomes an emblem of his posterity both in the sense of his family lineage but poetically as well, by being linked with the "laurel":

> May she become a flourishing hidden tree […]
> O may she live like some green laurel
> Rooted in one dear perpetual place […]
> How but in custom and ceremony
> Are innocence and beauty born?
> Ceremony's a name for the rich horn,
> And custom for the spreading laurel tree
> (*CW* 1, 191-2).

His daughter is, as it were, a signifier through which Yeats overcomes mortality in the revery-image of a perpetual tree. The association of his daughter with Daphne from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the young nymph turned to a tree before Apollo could fulfill his sexual pursuit, suggests that she could possibly have a role analogous to the ambiguous one of Cordelia in Lear as both daughter and mother-figure, or Eve (and we discussed how Eve is Adam's sanctioned echo or tradition). That his "jealousy" of his daughter's future husband transpires through the poem is seen from his contempt for the limping figure of Hephaestus ("a bandy-legged smith of a man"), "limping" being the characteristic of swollen-footed Oedipus as well. The old bard is reluctant to hand in his daughter to the new poet, and would rather that she became a tree like Daphne does in order to preserve her virginity and frustrate the e*phebe* (Apollo), thence bound to ever attempt to re-find her in his poetry and fail. In "The Song of Wandering Aengus", as we saw, the wanderer wants to pluck the silver apples of the moon and

the golden apples of the sun – as the crown of the tree becomes an emblem for the sky with its constellations –, which are emblems of the vanishing girl who triggered his eternal pursuit. Is it a stretch to suggest that in "A Prayer for my Daughter," the daughter assumes the role of this unreachable erotic object, strangely cosmological, even as maternal/wifely connotations adhere to her characterization?

A tree also features in another of Yeats's most celebrated lyrics:

> Labour is blossoming or dancing where
> The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,
> Nor beauty born out of its own despair,
> Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.
> O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,
> Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?
> O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,
> How can we know the dancer from the dance?
> (*CW* I, p. 221)

Yeats himself is known to have been a slow writer, and a Variorum Edition of his poems reveal the strenuous work that he put to his process of revision, although as he once said, the final poem must seem as if it had flown spontaneously, just as Milton claimed that *Paradise Lost* came in "unpremeditated verse" for him. Poetry offers a utopia of labour, a type of work which wants to overcome the suffering of separation which occasions it, even though most of the times the industry which was put to it is simply hidden and an image of spontaneity presented to the world. Here in "Among School Children" what Yeats meant with his celestial, rhythmic body comes to the fore with unsurpassed sensibility and clarity. The body of his poem, at least ideally, unlike the logic found in poems such as "Leda and the Swan," is infused or indeed possessed with a rhythm without the soul committing violence to it: "the body is not bruised to pleasure soul". Moreover the "brightening glance" which sways the body into music evokes the plastic power, the flaming, creative eye which we have already discussed. Indeed, the question concerning parts and whole (are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?) expresses an indistinction or lack of hierarchy between parts similar to the Miltonic angelic body: the tree is not located in a single member (just as the phallus is not the penis) but possibly in all. Henry More claimed that we are under a delusion when we take the body, food, or music to be alive, since only spirit can be animated. Although a more precise answer would demand a longer engagement with Yeats's thought, the indifference that the poet creates between dancer and dance implies that More's answer is not enough.

Here my widening gyre draws to a close, and nothing is more appropriate than I quote again, now fully, the passage from *Paradise Lost* which Yeats recited as a prayer in the séance described in *Reveries*:

> Of Man's first disobedience and *the fruit*
> Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
> Brought Death into the world and all our woe
> With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
> Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
> Sing, Heavenly Muse (I, :1-6, my emphasis)

"Of the fruit sing", "of the forbidden tree sing", the parallelism seems to turn the fruit to a synecdoche of the tree until we cannot distinguish whether tree is leaf, blossom (a flower which indicates a fruit) or bole. What can easily be bypassed in these initial lines is that, in similar fashion to the opening of the *Doctrine and Discipline*, the epic begins with a contrasting description of births. In the Gospel of Luke, Elizabeth hails Marry with "blessed be the fruit of thy womb" and Milton's use of the word draws its strength from this passage as well (indeed, the invocations of the poem stage scenes of birth). The fruit of a disobedience, crime, or violent act whose issue is Death might be the Error of the divorce tracts, or the incestuous offspring of an Oedipus or the conjunction between Leda and Zeus. Milton's emphasis of course is in the greater Man, Christ, who will redeem us from death, and his prayer for the muse is that the divine spirit might infuse his words so that he does not give birth to flatulence, as Custom does in the divorce tracts. The poem contrasts the birth of truth with that of error. The whole poem is concentrated in the fruit hanging from the boughs of the tree. Yeats's work, similarly, is full of prophecies and annunciations of a divine birth, although as a good late Romantic, he emphasizes the birth which is issued from the act of disobedience, he is the prophet of the antithetical man, Satan. As our analysis has largely concentrated on *Per Amica*, perhaps the best way to conclude is with its mysterious conclusion: "Once twenty years ago, I seemed to awake from sleep to find my body rigid, and to hear a strange voice speaking these words through my lips as through lips of stone: 'we make an image of him who sleeps, and it is not him who sleeps, and we call it Emmanuel." (*CW* V, p. 32).

7. CONCLUSION

> Milton closes the epic at the moment Adam and Eve acknowledge their loss of paradise as presence and begin to find their way in the new order of presence-in-absence.
> (KERRIGAN, 1983, p. 268)

In this conclusion I would like to summarize some of the main similarities and differences between the concepts of marriage and divorce in Milton, Blake, and Yeats and, in a second moment, attempt to draw a few conclusions concerning the view of sexual relations that they exhibit in the light of Lacan's aphorism "there's no such thing as sexual rapport." Since this work revolves around the legacy of Milton's divorce tracts, we must answer how the vision of married life conveyed in the treatises and the epic is reshaped by the poets of the tradition of English literature associated with the "inner light," of which Yeats is the last representative, and, moreover, how the theme of marriage and sexual relations is entwined with their poetic craft. In the works of the three poets examined here, the figurations of marriage become privileged sites to understand how poetry attempts, through language, to make up for the failure to achieve totality both in the satisfaction of his body and in the relation with the "object" that might be characteristic of man. While our concentration was on the details of the arguments defended by the three authors, we could not avoid incursions into broader issues as new questions arouse – questions that, precisely because of their emergence half-way through the research, were able to condense more clearly the main lines of inquiry, the real problems that the text was surreptitiously addressing. Why does the wife so often coallesces with the body of the ideal poem or vision, ultimately the object cause of desire with which language strives to achieve a rapport? Given that love is an invention that can well be dated to the period of the troubadours or courtly love, it is perhaps not an eccentricity of poets alone that the experience of love in the West has been mediated by language to the point where the latter becomes indistinguishable from our partner (e.g., our capture in the rhythms of presence and absence of the loved one). The history of literature, in thar regard, records the linguistic nature of that Other satisfaction which transcends what Milton would call the workings of an "impetuous nerve" and opens a new dimension of reality to humanity, where the symbolic becomes the support of Love, and discourse prefigures love as an experience of truth. The

overlap, if not homology, between difference conceived as the principle of the signifier and woman as the Other sex explains the erotic dimension of poetry. The Lacanian notion of the decentering of man caused by language, accounts for the nexus between sexuality and the writing of poetry in a way that has not been enough explored by literary studies. Underlying these poets' formulations about marriage and divorce, we find an uncharted field of research from where a fruitful theory of poetry might emerge.

Chapter 1 argued that, in Milton's divorce tracts, the understanding of the criteria for the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a matrimonial alliance sprung from a hermeneutics of the Law influenced by the reliance of the nascent scientific mentality on the rationality of the Scriptures. Milton's critique of the servile adherence to the letter by the opposers of divorce becomes an instance of his lifelong attempt to fashion a concept of virtue/character with immediate consequences for thinking the relation between body and soul. The virtuous citizen contains remnants of the divine image printed in himself, which are a pledge of his covenant with God, to the effect that hindering him from having a "helpmeet" in a wife would be tantamount to debarring him from the remedy to loneliness that the divine Word bestows on him, and only the "Antichrist forbids." As seen in *Tetrachordon*, Milton's view of the nature of marriage is built out of a close (mis)reading of the statements concerning the mystery of the "one flesh" of Adam and Eve in Genesis. This mystery, which evokes the Eucharistic union, becomes a complex concept, since he attempts to solve with it the tension between letter and spirit by means of a monism that would provide an ideal, unblamed sexuality for the couple. As previously suggested, the communication or "conversation" between the married partners and its implicit power relations cannot be separated from the social upheavals and the notion of freedom championed by Milton in the 1640s. Both his attention to the liberatory role of the press and his former invectives against the Prelates engender an original notion of a spiritualized literality which reconceptualizes biblical Scriptures, and ultimately the very rationality of the divine. Social and intellectual "bondage" can be experienced at home in the impossibility of divorcing an incompatible wife and, for him, become a token of the hypostatization of the dead letter of the law. The main rhetorical moves of the treatises, I argued, are then symptomatically summed up in the contrast of the *allegory* of Custom and Error with the *reality* and truth of the divine ordinances; the semblances of discourse and that which grounds its truth, a role traditionally played by God. While psychoanalysis relies on a

transcendental logic of sexuation, Milton's discourse on the relation between the sexes resorts to ontological categories, oscillating between dualism and monism. I have claimed that the (in)difference of the not-all of woman nonetheless bursts and undermines the claim to univocity of the divine command in the figure of the abject, "unfit" wife. If as Lacan points out, under the name of "spirit" we are dealing with the signifier (2006, p. 67),[42] there is no reason why his theory of sexuation might not be helpful, despite the traditional ontology. Reflecting the oscillation between the two sexes in its metaphysics, if Milton's tracts acknowledge the antagonism inherent to sex in defending the possibility of divorce, they nonetheless abject those aspects of the feminine that are not fully under masculine control or do not fit with the fusional ideal of marriage.

Chapter 2 explores how the "infrastructure" of the hermeneutics of the Law informing Milton's perspective on marriage creates productive aporias which receive a new treatment in the morning argument leading up to the fall in Book IX of *Paradise Lost*. The poet's exertions in his political prose had consisted of differentiating freedom from license, where a rationally-informed reading of the Scriptures entailed the liberty to transgress unjust rules in order to remain faithful to the law written inside. In the epic, God's forbidding of the fruit becomes a test where Eve ventures to know whether her taking exception to the law is going to be rewarded as the discovery of a higher freedom or condemned as giving in to lust. Different from the husband of the divorce tracts, whose character (reflected in his temperance) permits him to overturn the unwaranted prohibition of divorce by laws which are "toys of terror," Eve's transgressive act is judged to be excessive. From the point of departure of nature's growing "luxurious by restraint," I scrutinized how Milton fends off, throughout his vindications of the consistency of the divine utterances, the possibility that the law engenders its transgression, even as that possibility nonetheless continues to haunt his text through fantasmatic figures such as Sin: "it is an absurdity to say that law can measure sin, or moderate sin; sin is not a predicament to be measur'd or modify'd, but is alwaies an excess" (*CP* II, p. 657). Sin is rendered here as a type of, say, vanishing quantity which the law cannot grasp, something it cannot measure or have a rapport or *ratio* with. In its first section the chapter

[42] "C'est une idée qui a passé un tant soit peu, bien que rien ne passe jamais tant qu'on le croit, de ce qu'il s'avère que, sous ce nom d'esprit, il ne s'agit jamais que du signifiant lui-même, ce qui met évidemment en porte à faux pas mal de la métaphysique."

resumes an analysis of the divorce tracts to present Milton's own rearticulation of the notion of "burning" from St. Paul. Central to his argument is rescuing sexuality from the centuries of condemnation by, as it were, semantically cleansing the "burning" associated with it through a recourse to a discourse on Eros. A similar process happens in the polyvancy of words such as wandering or wanton in *Paradise Lost*, where they have an innocent meaning. In a fusion of the Bible with Platonic dialogue (*CP* II, p. 252-3), the ambiguities of the sexual burning are explained as the justifiable longing of the "wanting soul" for a partner, which introduces nonetheless the problem of lack, fault and ultimately evil. The author who famously could only think of salvation in bodily terms and took pride of his bodily integrity could not think of an ontology that essentialized human fault in some irrevocable way (we saw his efforts to defend the remains of the divine image even in postlapsarian life), and still he had to make room for "want," which is negative, in his account of the ontogenesis of Adam and Eve.

The wanting soul's relation with sin constitutes, in a sense, the running thread of the chapter. It moves from the divorce tracts, especially *Doctrine and Discipline*, to the formulations of *De Doctrina* apropos the transmission of original sin, which rely on the Aristotelian understanding of the soul as a form immanent to the body, into the analysis of *Paradise Lost*. Our reading of the epic focuses on the tragical paradoxes that mitigate the imputations of guilt of either the first man or the first woman and culminates in Adam's "trial of exceeding love." Book VIII had particularly described the imperfection of mankind *vis-à-vis* the absolute Oneness of God: "No need that thou / Shouldst propagate, already infinite; / And through all numbers absolute, though One / But Man by number is to manifest / His single imperfection, and beget / Like of his like, his Image multipl'd, / In unity defective" (VIII, 419-25). While the conversation with the archangel had warned Adam of the dangers of his elevation of the wife above his creator, in which we can sense the migration of the eucharistic union into the sphere of marriage, beginning with the argument about work in the morning of the fall, the couple becomes increasingly stranged, culminating in their separation. If, on the one hand, the monistic universe of the epic conceives sex as part of the broaders movements of the cosmos, in a certain analogy, for instance, with the movement of the stars, on the other, the problem of the division of labor introduces a fissure in the relationship of the couple: future work would have to analyze how capitalism is registered or indeed coded in the poem in order to investigate the explosion of negativity that the emergence of that economic system

introduces, breaking the connection with any mythic plenitude, and how, in the poem, that coincides with a rift between the two first humans that ends with Eve's unwitting, unconscious rebellion. If the signifier and the sexuation into which the entrance into language submits the human animal has a kinship with death, the agonizing lapse when Adam and Eve are waiting to understand what God means by death, hitherto a meaningless word for them, remains the most tense and poetically charged moment of the poem. After their absolution (they are literally at the mercy of the Word as the Son descends to pass judgment on them), they are able to resume their almost destroyed marriage, and their alliance is delicately re-established through a new covenant, a new knot. If Love is nothing but the desire to be One, the first human couple is then aware of the fragility of that strife. And for our discussion, Milton's anticipates the psychoanalytic hypothesis of the real of sex as numerical. Perhaps the "unity defective" with which the poem closes as Adam and Eve "hand in hand" through Eden take their "solitary" way is not far from the One of psychoanalysis: "the one that is introduced by the experience of the unconscious is the one of the split, of the stroke, of rupture" (1999, p. 25).

Chapter 3 analyzes Blake's rewriting of Miltonic marriage in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and the poem-prophecy *Milton*. As I showed, Blake's idiosyncratic blending of prophecy, satirical prose and illumination turns marriage into an allegorical, apocalyptic drama. Having as a historical background the resurgence of antinomianism in late eighteenth-century London, the argument of *Marriage* centers on a critique of moral categories and how they are mapped onto the metaphysics of sexual relations. Moreover, given Blake's aim of questioning the rationality of Milton's theodicy in *Paradise Regained*, his concept of sexuality cannot be detached from how his critique of sacrifice offers a reconsideration of the values assigned to the body, the flesh and the soul. From its beginning, Blake endorses a type of indistinctness of the body from energy that recalls Milton's own strategy in the divorce tracts. Indeed, the understanding of the moral categories that inform his argument are in close dialogue with the seventeenth-century poet's early prose and religious and political thought. If in *Areopagitica* we have the reconstruction of the body of truth and the recovery of the divine image, the process of production and reading of Blake's illuminated engravings are, in *Marriage*, themselves means to cleanse perception and achieve truth. Properly received, he believed that his visions would restore the human senses to their full potential, since the dialectic between the knowledge of good and evil should finally overcome the subordination

of the body in a reconciliation of which the nuptials of opposites are the emblem. For a text dealing with marriage, Blake's work however notably lacks any feminine voice. Following Helen Bruder (1997, p. 36), I tried to explore the polyphony of his text and its parodic tone as aspects that might be of value to a woman reader. Further, building on Joseph Wittreich's analysis of Blake's works as attempts to perfect the "Divine Humanity" which the *idea* of Milton symbolized for him, I examined the discourse about the nature of *generation* in his handling of the "form" of humanity. The second half of the chapter is dedicated to *Milton*, a dense allegorical prophecy narrating the reconciliation of the poet and Ololon, where the Romantic poet resumes the myth of the reconciliation of the bodily and the rational that is caused by an epistemological fall of sorts. As Bette C. Werner argues, in Blake the emanation, which is feminine, represents a person's work (1986, p. 15) and is an integral part of the poet's idea. Therefore, Milton's quest to redeem his sixfold emanation (his three wives and daughters) is the equivalent of the cleansing of perception in order to experience "the infinity of delight" or creative, imaginative power that had been so crucial for *Marriage*.

Chapter 4 investigated how the interest in the eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish tradition evinced by Yeats in the 1920s informed his defense of divorce. In order to bridge Milton and Yeats, I presented a short history of the conflicting relationship between the two countries. Based on Corbet, I analyzed how matrimonial tropes and narratives cemented the hegemony of England over Ireland, claiming that the family played a central role in anchoring the adherence to power on an affective, aesthetic dimension that instantiates the operation of ideology proper. Moreover, as I showed, the political philosophy of Edmund Burke is especially the foremost influence on Yeats's project in this period, based as it is on a narrative of the decline of modernity. While trying to safeguard the disruptive potential of his aestheticism, which can be glimpsed in his shocking figurations of sexual desire, the assessment of his defense of divorce cannot be separated from its underlying politics. Chapter 5 deals with his philosophy more closely through a reading of *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. Exploring particularly the influence of the philosopher Henry More on Yeats's conceptualization of the nature of the interaction between soul and body, this chapter provides a discussion of the nature of the intertwinement between sexuality and death through the angelic fantasies of pure desire and unhampered bodies that so fascinate the three authors covered in this research. As a running thread, the concept of "the plastic power of the soul"

which, as it were, gives life to the body, is analyzed both in the prose text and in poems such as “Among School Children.”

The inspiration of this research was W.B. Yeats’s allusion to Milton’s divorce tracts in 1925, during his period as senator in the Irish Dáil. Unexpected from a Modernist, he evokes a name from a tradition ignored or de-emphasized by the artists and poets of his generation. However, as shown by Harold Bloom, there is a line of influence that leads from the seventeenth-century to the Irish poet laureate. “Divorce” was, as it were, the nodal point chosen by this dissertation to engage in a mapping of the fortunes of the revolution both for poetry and the discourse on sexuality that Milton’s *oeuvre* represented. Blake, in that regard, emerges as the author who bridges and mediates Milton’s silent presence over the logic of English poetry through his rearticulation of inherited themes. Let’s not forget that Yeats was one of the early editors of the Romantic poet’s most challenging works and a creative close-reader of his by then arcane prophecies. To talk about the concept of sexuality that we find in the three authors’ pronouncements on marriage cannot be extricated from the fact that their poetry has distinctly “prophetic” aspirations. Their very notions of vision and imagination are surprisingly erotic. Milton, who in his “Daemon’s Epitaph” had envisioned the reward of the virtuous poet as an apotheosis of sexual fulfilment at heaven, as we saw, abandons the celibate tendency of his early poetry in order to marry Marry Powell, only to discover that actual matrimony is less Edenic than the fantasies of a young scholar. Certainly, we don’t have to read the divorce tracts biographically, although future generations did not avoid that temptation, from Thomas Newton’s invaluable notes to the epic up to William Blake’s obsession with his poetic mentor to the point of composing a poem where Milton “incarnates” in him. Although we did not include her, George Eliot herself had her own take on what it would have been like to marry John Milton, divided between the desire to be serviceable and dutiful and the silent rebellion that inflamed generations of women writers. Powell and Milton unwittingly become the Adam and Eve for several luminaries of English literature, and *Paradise Lost* the very ideal paradigm of marriage.

The theme of divorce becomes a testament of the opposite poles of a poet’s life, where the idealization of his craft – as Kerrigan analyzed decades ago, sexuality is such a

sensitive topic for Milton because the trading of immediate satisfaction for poetic fame is, as it were, the symbolic game that remains repressed for his poetry to flow – clashes with the concrete figure of a wife ill at ease to attend to an intellectual. To his dismay, he finds her completely inappropriate for the "conversation" or spiritual duet that the good married life was supposed to give him. Oppression in civil society becomes idolatry at home. We cannot affirm for certain that the divorce tracts really address his matrimonial misfortune but they at least show Milton in the hypothetical position of venting the anger of a citizen who is cheated from the helpmeet that Genesis had promised him. Marriages aim at a certain degree of harmony between the parties, but if the wife is "discordant" past all bearing, it is more than rational to wish to divorce her: "with whom he lookt to be the copartner of a sweet and gladsome society, and sees withall that his bondage is now inevitable, though he be almost the strongest Christian, he will be ready to dispair in vertue, and mutin against divine providence". As I have shown, Milton's aim is to vindicate the reasonableness of God's commands and laws, which are harnessed by unnecessarily strict laws to keep citizens in a minority, but the dispairing husband on the verge of mutining against providence has an uncanny resemblance to Eve in the *moment* of her fall, when God and the Antichrist become undistinguishable. It is perhaps one of the contributions of this study that it has drawn attention to how the problem that freedom (to divorce) poses in the tracts anticipates the labyrinth of predestination and free will and the limits of obeying and transgressing the law: "...and Providence thir guide."

More Adam and Eve than Samson and Dalila, Milton and Powell are ultimately reconciled – an episode that provides the inspiration for Blake's emulation of *Paradise Regained* and workshop for his more hermetic prophecies, *Milton*. Not unlike the nineteenth-century women writers who were ambivalent towards Milton, the Romantic poet sees his condemnation of the power of desire as the cause of the alienation from his female emanation. Ololon herself has her share of guilt, for Blake, in the estrangement from her husband because, with the fall, women have increasingly come to repress their sexuality. The flirtation with virginal purity of the early Milton is vehemently condemned in the poem-prophecy. Blake imagines himself as expanding the horizons of perception and defending the "naked majesty" of the human body against those who condemn what he calls desire (which differs from the scope of that concept in the Lacanian-Hegelian tradition). However, interestingly, the unbearable presence of the earlier poet in his language, which fails to repress its indebtedness

and explicitly parodies the text of the precursor, drives Blake to the limits of rationality. It still remains to be written about how much of Blake's fixation on sexuality (Ololon is depicted as giving a *fellatio* in one of the illustrations to the poem), the shamelessness which is ironically a consequence of his innocence, is partly an effect of the agonizing relation to the seventeenth-century poet. The presence of that precursor on his work can be particularly sensed if we compare the language of his prophecies with that of the main achievements of poets like Keats or Wordsworth. Moreover, of all the poets analyzed, Blake is the most problematic when it comes to the aphorism "there is no such thing as sexual relationship." His vision, for us, is too dominated by the longing for imaginary totalization, which is an aspect that the tradition of visionaries of the inner light can be criticized for. While the liberatory thrust of his rhetoric is praise-worthy, he falsifies the faultiness inherent to human relations and sexual liaisons. The apocalyptic grandeur of the reconciliation of Milton-the-poet and Ololon lacks that sensitiveness to the ontological defectiveness which spurns man to seek a partner in *Paradise Lost.*

Moving on to Yeats, we saw that his entrance into the debate on divorce was tinged by the broader political and aesthetics projects with which he identified in the 1920s. As the champion of the Gaelic revival turned his attention to the more sober art of the eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish revival, the struggle of the antithetical Self that marks his career sees in the narrow-mindedness of the Catholic press a worthy opponent against whom he mobilizes Milton, the "divorcer". Given the colonial relations implicit in the religious divide of the country, any assessment of Yeats's divorce speech must be nuanced. On the one hand, he espouses views that have become received opinions, such as the one conveyed when he writes that "it seems to us a most sacrilegious thing to persuade two people who hate one another because of some unforgettable wrong to live together, and it is to us no remedy to permit them to part" (*CW* X, p. 184). However, on the other, his defense of the Ascendency is part of a conservative program for the country. Revolutionary in upholding desire at the cost of the perpetuation of the family and defending the potential for shock of sexuality proper to the Modernism to which he uncomfortably belonged, this research investigated how his ideal of the return of a golden age of Aristocratic men, part of his fascination with the Anglo-Irish tradition, nonetheless showcases the complicity between art and ideology. Following a critic such as Adorno, we can find a disruptive potential in Yeats's aestheticism and the truth it

contains, as “art is magic delivered from the lie of being true”. Still, my analysis was careful in pointing out how his project embodies what Terry Eagleton would call “the ideology of the aesthetic.” At this point, the connection with sexuality resurfaces if we consider how the aesthetic object in its semblance has an affinity to the partial object of psychoanalysis.

Yeats’s philosophy is discussed in the last chapter, particularly through the concept of the plastic power of the soul in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*. As has been shown, his mythology is profoundly indebted to Blake. A poem such as “Fragments,” where we read “Locke sunk into a swoon; / The Garden died; / God took the spinning jenny / Out of his side” (*CW* I, p. 217) brilliantly summarizes the clusters of associations that guides the thick entanglements of the world of *Milton* and *Marriage*. These verses restate the Blakean reading of the loss of paradise as the cause of an epistemological fall (e.g., the shrinkage of perception), where man is thrown, according to certain idealistic premises, from a state where his Ego *qua* the creator is indistinguishable from his creation to the mechanisms of materialistic nature and their unbreakable causal chains. Although inspired by conventional imagery, the creation of woman, who was taken from Adam’s side, is in this instance equated with the fall. The spinning jenny – that emblem of English industrialism – that captures the plasticity of the spirit in the webs of its looms plays a “deceptive” role (again, the semblance), just as the “gangrene of a limb,” presumably the rib subtracted from the first man, is linked to spiritless nature in the divorce tracts (both Milton and Blake have their versions of the “bad wife,” who is linked with bare material, deterministic nature, and hence the lack of freedom).

Milton and Blake, of course, create poems where sex is not conceived as a blemish to integrity, but here we finally can articulate some paradoxes underlying the reflection about sexuality in its ontological dimension. There is a sense in which sexuality is equated with the loss of paradise, reflected for instance in the reference to woman as “the sex.”. This is the view that informs traditional discourse, just as when we read in Marvell’s “The Garden” that “Two paradises ’twere in one / To live in paradise alone”. For this poet, the creation of woman seems to entail the loss of Edenic bliss itself, which is then conceived as the mythical oneness of man’s satisfaction. For the rationally-oriented Milton, who had even suggested in the divorce tracts that a woman might become the head of the couple if she proves wiser than her husband, such a doctrine would smack too much of the teaching of the Antichrist, since he for instance condemns as non-sense the Augustinian idea that a male friend would be more suitable

company for paradise. All the doctrinal influences apart, Milton indeed contributes to a depiction of a more horizontal married relation within the parameters of his time, where the woman is represented with full dignity to the point of becoming the 'goddess humane,' the appellation with which Satan tries to seduce her. Here, Milton has a rebuke to offer to those readers, especially psychoanalytic ones, who condemn every paradise as a longing for a narcissistic self-absorption. He tries to narrate the bliss and working life of a concrete couple. It is when we factor in how his depiction of their lives might reflect overarching philosophical problems that the analysis becomes more troubling.

Does not the paradoxical free subjection ("yielded with coy submission") show how much "masculine" this paradise still is, and that the dignity that the woman enjoys is because she is elevated to the ontological status of man? As elsewhere, thinking about sex leads to aporias: if the woman is included in the one-ness of paradise, she loses her difference by being absorbed into the "monad." However, conceiving her as introducing the rupture or fault in the perfect unity of the "species" has been mobilized for all types of misogynistic ends. That there are two sexes seems to be a certainty (which is not to imply any causation on gender, remember that, for instance, male mystics can experience "feminine jouissance"). However, while common sense tries to imagine a neutral humanity in which both man and woman would partake, psychoanalysis claims that there is not in the psyche a female signifier to subsume women, based on its theory of the constitution of the image of the body. The absence of a ratio or rapport between the sexes can only be "corked" by the phallic function, which holds a complex (non-)relationship with what escapes it, the famous not-all of women. Insofar as the main hypothesis of psychoanalysis is that language appears in the place of the absence of sexual rapport, the "not-two" of sex entails thinking the real of linguistic structure, which, following the Lacanian clue, many recent developments in the field try to find in mathematics. Lorenzo Chiesa comes closest to a clear articulation of the "realism" of the psychoanalytic take on sex, in a problem still riddled with obscurity, when he writes that "all that we can access of the real of our species' sex as natural is numerical: two roughly equal numbers of individuals. The so-called biological real of human nature is filtered (logically as difference) through the logical real qua the impasse of logic: the split into two roughly equal numbers of individuals" (2016, p. 27). If man is ultimately the speaking animal, as the adage goes, then (in)difference is the crucial tool to explore the manifestations of sex throughout history. Guy Le Gaufey has begun

such an undertaking by essaying an inquiry into how the "quarrel of the sexes" is reflected in the medieval quarrel of the universals. The struggle ultimately roughly comes down to whether we presuppose a metaphysical principle in the species (of which even the teleology of biology is not completely innocent) or we accept the aporias of the lack of any foundation or "sexual rapport" (with its paradoxes: how to avoid turning the statement that there is not a metalanguage into a metalinguistic maxim) and the role assigned to difference. Commenting on Genesis, he writes (he is not endorsing the primacy of man but stating the underpinnings of the traditional interpretation of the story of Eden): "The source alone – in this case, man – reduplicated in the woman fashioned by God gives a locus and a place for sexual difference and not, of course, the reverse; otherwise, *it would have been necessary to make of this very difference the principle* that would have held the entire genus under its dependency" (2020, p. 2, emphasis added). Considering the ambition of bringing together a critique of traditional metaphysics, attentive nonetheless to the developments of its history, a science of writing based on the Galilean revolution and its interest in mathematical realism, new dimensions are opened up by psychoanalysis that shatter our preconceptions of the scope of what sex is. Moreover, these new problems might be fruitful to early modern studies and the history of the sexuality in future research.

REFERENCES

ADORNO, T.W. ***Minima Moralia*: Reflections on Damaged Life**. London & New York: Verso, 2005.

_____ The Idea of Natural-History. Trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor. In: **Telos**. v. 60, 1984, p.111-24.

ALTMANN, A. "Homo Imago Dei" in Jewish and Christian Theology. In: **The Journal of Religion**. v. 48, n. 3, 1968, p. 235-259.

ARISTOTLE. Metaphysics. In: BARNES, J. **The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation.** v. 2. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955. 1552-1729.

BACON, F.; JARDINE, L.; SILVERTHORNE, M.(eds.) **The New Organon**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

BADIOU, A.; CASSIN, B. **There's No Such Thing as Sexual Relationship: Two Lessons on Lacan**. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017.

BARTH, K. **Church Dogmatics. Vol. III: The Doctrine of Creation.** Edinburgh: T. & T, Clark, 1970.

BARR, J.The image of God in the book of Genesis: a study of terminology. In: **Bulletin of the John Rylands Library.** v. 51 n.1. 1968:11-26.

BEHNRENDT, S. C. **The Moment of Explosion: Blake and the Illustration of Milton.** University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln and London, 1983.

BENJAMIN, W. **The Origin of German Tragic Drama.** Trans. by John Osborne. London and New York: Verso, 2003.

BLAKE, W.; STEVENSON, H.W. (ed.) **Blake: The Complete Poem**s. 3 ed. London & New York, Routledge, 2007.

BLOOM, H. **Blake's Apocalypse**. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1963.

_____ **Yeats**. London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

_____ **The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry.** 2 ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997 [1973].

_____ **A Map of Misreading**. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

_____ **Ruin the Sacred Truths.** Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1991.

BOCK, D. L. **Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Luke, Volume 1: 1:1-9:50**. Michigan: Baker Publishing Group, 2004.

BOULNOIS, O. Un et Un Font Un. Sexes, Différences et Union Sexuelle au Moyen Âge, à partir des commentaires des Sentences. In:EGENDRE, P. (ed.) **Ils Seront Deux en une Seule Chair, Scénographie du Couple Humain dans le Texte Occidental.**. Bruxelles: Emile Van Balberghe libraire, 2004.

BROUSSE, M-H. Feminism With Lacan**.** In: **NFF Spring/Fall**. v. 5, n. 1&2, 1991.

BRUDER, H. **William Blake and the Daughters of Albion.** London: Palgrave, 1997.

BURKE, E. **Reflections on the Revolution in France**. Indiana/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987.

CALVIN, J.; MCNEILL, J. T. (ed.) **Institutes of the Christian Religion, Volume 1**. Kentucky: Westminster Press, 2006.

CHARLES, R. H. Vita Adae et Evae. **The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament.** Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913. <The Books of Adam and Eve (pseudepigrapha.com)> accessed 12-06- 2021.

CHIESA, L. **The Not-Two: Logic and God in Lacan.** Massachusetts**:** The MIT Press, 2016.

CHIMISSO, C. **Gaston Bachelard: Critic of Science and the Imagination.** London & New York: Routledge, 2001.

CONTI, B. Milton, Jerome, and Apocalyptic Virginity. In: **Renaissance Quarterly**, vol. 72, no. 1, 2019, p. 194-230.

CORBET, M.J. **Allegories of Union in Irish and English Writing, 1790-1870.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

CORCORAN, M. **Milton's Paradise with Reference to the Hexameral Background**. Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1945.

COX, R. Milton, Marriage, and the Politics of Gender. In: HAMMOND, P.; WORDEN, B. (eds.) **John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. p. 125-146.

DALFERTH, I. U."Verbum Efficax: The Theopoetics of Real Presence" In: Schwartz, R.; McGrath, Patrick J. (eds.**) Toward a Sacramental Poetics.** Notre Dame, Notre Dame Press, 2021.

EAGLETON, T. **The Ideology of the Aesthetic.** Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1988.

ENGEL, J. **The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism.** Harvard: Harvard University Press: 1981.

ENGELS, F. **The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.** New York: International Publishers, 1993.

EMPSON, W. **Milton's God.** London: Chatto & Windus, 1961.

ERDMAN, D.V. **The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake**. With Notes by Harold Bloom. New York: Random House, Inc., 1988.

FALLON, S. The Metaphysics of Milton's Divorce Tracts. In: LOEWENSTEIN, D.; TURNER, J.G. (eds.) **Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton's Prose**. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990. p. 69-84.

FALLON, S. **Milton among the Philosophers.** Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991.

FOSTER, R. **W.B. Yeats, a Life: I. The Apprentice Mage**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

_____ **W.B. Yeats, a Life: II. The Arch-Poet**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

FREUD, S. **The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol I: The Interpretation of Dreams**. London: The Hogarth Press, 1957.

_____ On Narcissism: An Introduction. In: STRACHEY, J.; FREUD, A. (eds.) **The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol XIV: On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works**. London: The Hogarth Press, 1957. p. 67-104.

GADAMAR, H.G. The Elevation of the Historicality of Understanding to the Status of Hermeneutical Principle. In: RICHTER, D. H. **The Critical Tradition:** Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1989.p. 721-737.

GIRARD, R. **Violence and the Sacred.** London: The Atholone Press, 1977.

GILHAM, D.G. **William Blake.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973.

HALKETT, J. **Milton and the Idea of Matrimony: A Study of the Divorce Tracts and *Paradise Lost*.** New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1970.

HAWKES, D. The Politics of Character in John Milton's Divorce Tracts. In: **Journal of the History of Ideas**, v. 62, n. 1, 2001, p. 141-160.

HEIDEGGER, M. **Being and Time.** New York: Harper Perennial, 2008.

HEGEL, G. W. F. **Phenomenology of Spirit**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

HORKHEIMER, M. Authority and the Family. In: **Critical Theory: Selected Essays.** New York: Continuum, 2002 [1972]. p. 47-128.

HOWES, M. Family Values: Gender Sexuality, and Crisis in Yeats's Anglo-Irish Aristocracy. In: ALLISON, J. (org.) **Yeats's Political Identities: Selected Essays.** University of Michigan Press, 1996. p. 107-132.

HILL, C. **Milton and the English Revolution**. London & New York: Verso, 2020 [1977].

HOLLANDER, J. **The Figure of Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After**. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.

JEFFARES, N. **A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats**. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1968.

KAHN, V. **Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640-1674**. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009.

KANT, I. **Critique of Pure Reason**. Trans. by Allen W. Wood and Paul Guyer. Cambridge: Cambrige University Press, 1998.

KENDRICK, C. **Milton: A Study in Ideology and Form.** New York & London: Methuen, 1986.

KERRIGAN, W. The Heretical Milton: From Assumption to Mortalism. In: **English Literary Renaissance.** v. 5, n. 1, Studies in Spenser and Milton, Winter 1975, p. 125-166.

_____ **The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of *Paradise Lost*.** Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1983.

_____ The Politically Correct "Comus": A Reply to John Leonard. **Milton Quarterly.** Vol. 27, No. 4 (December 1993), p. 149-155.

KIERKEGAARD, S; THOMTE, R. (ed.) **Kierkegaard's Writings, VIII: The Concept of Anxiety.** Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

KRISTEVA, J. **Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection**. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982

_____ **Revolution in Poetic Language. The Avant-Garde at the end of the Nineteenth-Century: Lautréamont and Mallarmé**. New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

_____ GOLDHAMMER, A. (trans.) *Stabat Mater*. **Poetics Today**, v. 6, n. 1/2, The Female Body in Western Culture: Semiotic Perspectives, 1985, p. 133-152.

_____ **Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia.** New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

LACAN, J.; ALAIN-MILLER, J. (ed.); SHERIDAN, A. (trans.) **The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis.** New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998.

_____ ALAIN-MILLER, J. (ed.). **Le Séminaire: Livre XVI: D'Un Autre à L'Autre.** Paris: Éditions Du Seuil, 2006.

_____ ALAIN-MILLER, J. (ed.); FINK, B. (trans.) **The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XX, On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge.** New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999.

_____ FINK, B. (trans.) **Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English.** New York & London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007.

LACOUE-LABARTHE, P.; NANCY, J.-L. **The Tittle of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan**. Trans. by F. Raffoul and D. Pettigre. New York: State University of New York Press, 1992 [1973].

LAQUEUR, T. **Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud.** Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1991.

LE GAUFEY, G. **Lacan and the Formulae of Sexuation: Exploring Logical Consistency and Clinical Consequences.** London and New York: Routledge, 2020.

LEONARD, J. Saying "No" to Freud: Milton's *A Mask* and Sexual Assault. In: **Milton Quarterly**, v. 25, n. 4, (December 1991), p. 129-140.

_____ "Good Things": A Reply to William Kerrigan. In: **Milton Quarterly.** Vol. 30, No. 3 (October 1996), p. 117-127.

_____ **Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of *Paradise Lost*, 1667-1970.** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

LOIZEAUX, E. B. **Yeats and the Visual Arts**. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003

MILNER, J.C. **A Search for Clarity: Science and Philosophy in Lacan's Oeuvre.** Trans. By Ed Pluth. Illionis: Northwestern University Press, 2021.

MILTON, J.; BUSH, D.; DIEKHOFF, J. S.; HILL, C. et al (eds.) **Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume I, 1624-1642.** New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953.

_____ **Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume II, 1643-1648.** New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959.

_____ **Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume IV - Part I, 1650-1655**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

_____ **Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume VI -1658-1660**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

_____ **Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume VIII - 1666-1682**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

_____ HUGHES, M. (ed.). **John Milton: Complete Poetry and Selected Prose.** Indianopolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, Inc., 2003.

MOODY, T.W.; MARTIN, F.X.; BYRNE, F. J. A **New History of Ireland: Early Modern Ireland 1534-1691**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009

MORE, H.; ALEXANDER, J. (ed.) **The Immortality of the Soul.** Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987.

NISKANEN, P. The Poetics of Adam: The Creation of מדא in the Image of מיהלא. In: **Journal of Biblical Literature.** Vol. 128, No. 3 (Fall, 2009), p. 417-436.

NEWLYN, L. ***Paradise Lost* and the Romantic Reader.** Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

NEWTON, T. ***Paradise Lost*, a Poem, in Twelve Books. With Notes of various Authors, by Thomas Newton, D.D.** London: J. and R Tonson etc., 1750.

PHILLIPS, R. **Untying the Knot: A Short History of Divorce.** New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

PICCIOTO, J. **Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England.** Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010.

REA, J. **The Holy Spirit in the Bible: All the Major Passages about the Spirit: A Commentary**. Lake Mary: Creation House, 1990.

ROBINSON, J.A.T. **The Body: A Study in Pauline Theology.** London: Westminster Press, 1977.

ROGERS, J. **The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton.** Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

SHEARS, J. **The Romantic Legacy of *Paradise Lost*: Reading against the Grain.** Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2009.

SHWARTZ, R. **Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism**. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008.

SIRLUCK, E. Introduction. In: MILTON, J.; BUSH, D.; DIEKHOFF, J. S.; HILL, C. et al (eds.) **Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume II, 1643-1648.** New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959. p. 1-216.

SUGIMURA, N. K. **"Matter of Glorious Trial": Spiritual and Material Substance in *Paradise Lost***. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009.

TANNER, J.S. **Anxiety in Eden: A Kierkegaardian Reading of *Paradise Lost.*** New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

TAYLOR, J. **The Marriage Ring.** Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co. 1883 [1673].

TORCHIANA, D. **W. B. Yeats and Georgian Ireland.** Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1966.

THOMPSON, E. P. **Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law.** New York: The New Press, 1993.

TURNER, J.G. **One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton.** New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

_____ The Aesthetics of Divorce: "Masculinism," Idolatry, and Poetic Authority in *Tetrachordon* and *Paradise Lost*. In: MARTIN, C.G. (ed.) **Milton and Gender.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. p. 34-52.

YEATS, W.B.; FINNERAN, R.J.; HARPER, G.M. (gen. eds.); FINNERAN, R.J. (ed.). **The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume I, The Poems**. New York: Scribner, 1997.

_____ O'DONNELL, W.H.; ARCHIBALD, D. (eds.) **The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume III, Autobiographies.** New York: Scribner, 1999.

_____O'DONNELL, W. H. (ed.)**The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume V, Later Essays.** New York: Scribner, 1994.

_____ FITZGERALD, M. (ed.) **The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume VIII, The Irish Dramatic Movement.** New York: Scribner, 2003.

_____ JOHNSON, C. (ed.) **The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume X, Later Articles and Reviews.** New York: Scribner, 2010.

_____ HARPER, M.M.; PAUL, C. E. (eds.)**The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats: Volume XIV**: ***A Vision*, the Revised 1937 Edition.** New York: Scriber, 2015.

_____ ALLT, P.; ALSPACH, R. K. (eds.) **The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W.B. Yeats**. New York & London: The Macmillan Company, 1957.

_____ PEARCE, D.R. (ed.) **The Senate Speeches of W.B. Yeats**. London: Faber and Faber, 2001 [1961].

_____ **Pages from a Diary Written in Nineteen Hundred and Thirty.** Dublin:The Cuala Press, 1971.

WANDERLINDE, W. W. The Contraries' Progression: Romantic Irony In The Introductory Poems Of William Blake's Songs Of Innocence And Of Experience. In: **Ilha do Desterro**.vol.74, n.1, 2021. p.163-182.

VASSILIDIS, S. **An Analysis of William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.*** Grin Verlag, 2006. [thesis].

WHATELY, W. **A Bride-Bush: or, A Direction for Married Persons.** London: Imprinted by Felix Kyngston for Thomas Man, 1619.

WHITAKER, T. R. **Swan and Shadow: Yeats's Dialogue with History**. Durham: The University of North Carolina Press, 1964.

WITTREICH, J.A. **Angel of Apocalypse: Blake's Idea of Milton.** Madison: University of Winsconsin Press, 1975.

WOOLF, W. The Leaning Tower. In: **Collected Essays by Virginia Woolf, vol. 2**. London: The Hogarth Press, 1966. p. 162-181.

WOLF, D. Introduction. In: **Complete Prose Works of John Milton: Volume IV - Part I, 1650-1655**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966. p. 1-285.

ZANCHIUS, J. **The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination.** Trans. By Augustus Toplady. London: James Matthews, 1779.

ZUPANČIČ, A. **What *Is* Sex?** Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2017.