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SYMBOLS, IDENTITY, AND INVENTION*

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*Back cover:* The strait gate and the wide gate in Matthew 7, 13  
as represented on the cover of Calvin's *Institutio Christianae religionis*,  
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KATALIN G. KÁLLAY

## Idolatry in All-Demanding Eyes: A Reading of Flannery O'Connor's *Parker's Back*<sup>1</sup>

Flannery O'Connor is one of the most puzzling and least conventional women writers of the American South, combining the rawest material with the most refined ways of expression – her surprising effects can hardly be described even through a list of contradicting superlatives. In her life, two pairs of almost crucifying opposites, seemingly incompatible drives can be observed: being a devoted Catholic and being a Southerner; being a prolific writer with a brilliant career and being in the constant proximity of death, due to the hereditary illness that eventually took her away at the age of 39. (The two opposites can be visually imagined on two rectangular axes, giving the shape of a cross.) Bearing such a personal cross, while writing, she had to keep it in balance with extreme caution, never allowing the weight of any of the four ends to pull her down. The mystery she celebrates is never direct or outspoken, to many readers it may even seem blasphemous. Her protagonists' search for the metaphysical experience gets manifested in their running away from it, the "moment of grace" she intends to grant the characters very often comes as a violent shock, and the price they have to pay for it is frequently no less than their lives. As Patrick Galloway points out in his essay "The Dark Side of the Cross: Flannery O'Connor's Short Fiction", O'Connor's writings can be characterized by

cathartic bitterness, a belief in grace as something devastating to the recipient, a gelid concept of salvation, and violence as a force for good. At first it might seem that these aspects of her writing would detract from, distort or mar the fiction they are wrapped up in, but in fact they only serve to enhance it, to elevate the mundane, sometimes laughably pathetic events that move her plots into sublime anti-parables, stories that show the way by elucidating the worst of paths. What at first seem senseless deaths become powerful representations of the swift justice of God; the self-deluded, prideful characters that receive the unbearable revelation of their own shallow selves are being impaled upon the holy icicle of grace, even if they are too stupid or lost to understand the great boon God is providing them.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> All references to the text are made on the basis of the following edition: Flannery O'CONNOR: *The Complete Stories*, New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1996, 510–530.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick GALLOWAY: "The Dark Side of the Cross: Flannery O'Connor's Short Fiction", [cyberpat.com/essays/flan.html](http://cyberpat.com/essays/flan.html) Accessed: 30 August, 2023.

“Parker’s Back” is one of her last stories, written in 1964 and published posthumously in 1965. As Stephen Sparrow remarks in his essay on the story,

Caroline Gordon Tate [a friend and fellow writer] recalled visiting O’Connor in hospital shortly before she died and tells how O’Connor said she wasn’t supposed to be working but then smiled and pulled from under her pillow a notebook in which she said she was putting the finishing touches to something. What she was touching up was “Parker’s Back.”<sup>3</sup>

It is indeed touching to read this before touching the text. It might as well be seen as a gesture of “keeping in touch” with the dimensions of the birth of the story. But in the course of an encounter with O’Connor’s words, gentle touches might turn into flogging – she deliberately avoided all forms of sentimentality the same way in which she rejected didactic moralizing. She, nevertheless, was willing to discuss her writing method and *ars poetica*. In her collection of essays on the topic, *Mystery and Manners*, she openly talks about the risks of the writer who is at the same time a believer. Since in this paper I wish to focus on eyes, seeing and being seen, it might be helpful to quote an excerpt from the essay “Catholic Novelists” that deals with *sight*.

For the Catholic novelist, the prophetic vision is not simply a matter of his personal imaginative gift; it is also a matter of the Church’s gift, which, unlike his own, is safeguarded and deals with greater matters. It is one of the functions of the church to transmit the prophetic vision that is good for all time, and when the novelist has this as a part of his own vision, he has a powerful extension of sight.

It is, unfortunately, a means of extension which we constantly abuse by thinking that we can close our own eyes and that the eyes of the Church will do the seeing. They will not. We forget that what is to us an extension of sight is to the rest of the world a peculiar and arrogant blindness, and that no one today is prepared to recognize the truth of what we show unless our purely individual vision is in full operation. When the Catholic novelist closes his own eyes and tries to see with the eyes of the Church, the result is another addition to that large body of pious trash for which we have so long been famous.

It would be foolish to say there is no conflict between these two sets of eyes. There is a conflict, and it is a conflict which we escape at our peril, one which cannot be settled beforehand by theory or fiat or faith. We think that faith entitles us to avoid it, when in fact, faith prompts us to begin it, and to continue it until, like Jacob, we are marked.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Stephen SPARROW: “The Ultimate Heresy. The Heartless God in ‘Parker’s Back’ ”, mediaspecialist.org/ssultimate.html Accessed: 30 August, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Flannery O’CONNOR: *Mystery and Manners. Occasional Prose*, selected and edited by Sally and Robert FITZGERALD, New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1969, 179–180.

Problems of eyes, of being marked, as well as the conflicts between religious and secular ways of seeing are addressed in “Parker’s Back,” although the characters are far from being Kierkegaardian “knights of faith”<sup>5</sup> or radical atheists. They are plain and poor people, with simple and uneventful lives, without the flavor of uniqueness or extravagance. The similes alluding to food express this in a powerful way: the hero, O.E. Parker is “as ordinary as a loaf of bread”<sup>6</sup> and the skin on his homely wife’s face is “thin and drawn tight as the skin on an onion.”<sup>7</sup> Bread and onion make a very modest diet, still, in the context of the story, they seem to disagree in the course of digestion. (The wife is not much of a cook, either.) Although the two characters are relatively of the same social background, both of them coming from poor white Southern families (referred to as “white trash” in the vocabulary of some of Faulkner’s characters and rated below the black population), there is not much more in common between them. Sarah Ruth is the daughter of a “Straight Gospel preacher”<sup>8</sup> and her ethical norms are based on a literal, fundamentalist reading of the Bible: she is “sniffing up sin”<sup>9</sup> everywhere. O.E. (preferring the initials because he is ashamed of his Biblical name, Obadiah Elihue – references to a prophet and one of Job’s companions in the Old Testament) has a different moral framework: he instinctively would not object to all the pleasures that Sarah Ruth feels obliged to abstain from and regards as sinful. He had an initial spiritual experience at the age of fourteen (Richard Giannone observes that this “neatly divides his history in half” since at the time of the story proper, he is twenty-eight).<sup>10</sup> The spiritual awakening is caused by the sight of a man at a fair, whose whole body is covered with colorful tattoos: this fascinates Parker and, uplifted, he stares at the man with his mouth hanging open. Before this moment he had never had any sense of his own existence – from now on, he will seek for the wonder he witnessed to. The only way to satisfy his hunger for fascination is through having tattoos of his own: one by one, he collects the various colorful images on his body after leaving school at age 16, doing odd jobs to have the money to pay for them. When his mother (Betty Jane, whose name is also among the tattoos in a heart – but could be taken for any girl’s name, so it’s not too embarrassing for Parker) takes him to a revival session, he feels abhorred, flees and joins the navy. This way, he not only gets the physical training to become a strong man (leaving the habit of staring with an open mouth) but he also has the opportunity to collect new tattoos from all the parts of the earth. However, the satisfaction the new images provide him with is temporary: very soon

<sup>5</sup> Cf. “Fear and Trembling,” translated by Walted Lowrie, in: *A Kierkegaard Anthology*, ed. Robert BRETALL, New York, Random House, 1943, 116–134.

<sup>6</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 513.

<sup>7</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 510.

<sup>8</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 517.

<sup>9</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 510.

<sup>10</sup> Richard GIANNONE: *Flannery O’Connor and the Mystery of Love*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1989, 221.

after getting a new picture, he feels discontent again. What seemed like an organic, colorful miracle on the body of the man in the fair, alive and in constant motion, is nothing more than a patchwork of botched images on his own body, loosely and haphazardly covering his skin. It is important to note that he wants to see all his tattoos in the mirror and this is why his back remains white – a kind of *tabula rasa* – for a long time. After being dishonorably discharged from the navy (since he attempted to run away without official leave), he decides to move to the country, buys a truck and tries to earn his living by selling apples. This is how he meets his future wife, Sarah Ruth.

The plot is not chronological, various reminiscences follow one another and we are told about his tattoos and fascination in the middle of the remembrance of the first conversation with his wife. Their relationship starts and seems to end with a broom: At the first encounter between them, when Parker only senses that a woman is watching him, he puts up a scene of pretending he had hurt his hand and starts cursing: “God dammit!, he hollered, Jesus Christ in hell! Jesus God Almighty Damm! God dammit to hell!”<sup>11</sup>. As a response to his mouthful of oaths, “a terrible bristly claw”<sup>12</sup> of Sarah Ruth’s broom hits him – foreshadowing the final scene when he is similarly swept out of his house. This cursing scene is the second time in the story when God’s name is mentioned (the first is a casual “God knew some paint would have improved it,”<sup>13</sup> in connection with his wife’s face). Both times, breaking the commandment, the name of the Lord is taken in vain – I intend to return to the other contexts of God’s name later in the paper.

Although the tattoos give him some confidence – they attract most of the women who see them – they fail to fascinate Sarah Ruth. Parker doesn’t understand why he keeps returning to the girl who doesn’t respect him and whose skinny kind he never liked, as later he is puzzled about why he had married her at all. She thinks only “a fool Indian”<sup>14</sup> would do such things to their skin and it is symbolic that she mistakes Parker’s first tattoo, the eagle for a chicken. What seems to win her heart, however, is his Biblical name (kept in secret and only whispered to her ear after she swore she wouldn’t tell anyone). Obadiah Elihue sounds like a magic spell for the girl – and they get married. Their marriage is unhappy – although fruitful: at the time of the story Sarah Ruth is pregnant. This circumstance only adds to Parker’s discontent: there is no future outlined for the new life in their family. Sarah Ruth spends most of her time talking to him about the “Judgement Seat of God,”<sup>15</sup> where he will have to account for his sins (this might bring into mind O’Connor’s next and very last story which bears the title “Judgement Day”). Parker, in turn, wants

<sup>11</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 511.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 510.

<sup>14</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 515.

<sup>15</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 519.



to make Sarah Ruth jealous by describing the old lady he works for as a “hefty blonde,”<sup>16</sup> who calls him a “walking panner-rammer.”<sup>17</sup>

The next existential conflict, which can be seen as the second spiritual experience, happens on the tenth page of the twenty-page story: because of trying to think of an appropriate tattoo on his back which would please his wife as well and which would have to be “better even than the Bible,”<sup>18</sup> Parker absent-mindedly drives his tractor on the old lady’s field into a tree, thereby setting it on fire. In his shock of being propelled out of his seat barefoot, seeing the burning tree and his own burning shoes, he hears himself crying out: “GOD ABOVE!”<sup>19</sup> Many critics (Richard Giannone and Jordan Coher, for example) have pointed out the Biblical allusion to Moses’ burning bush in this scene – except that Parker cannot comprehend what has happened and, true to his habit, he runs away from the place, to the town where he could immediately get a new tattoo. The artist gives him a cold and distrustful welcome but Parker pays in cash and after asking for “pictures of God,”<sup>20</sup> selects the image of “a flat, stern Byzantine Christ with all-demanding eyes”<sup>21</sup> to be put on his back. It is the eyes that capture him, and he wants the work to be elaborate, with all the “little red and blue and ivory and saffron squares.”<sup>22</sup> He is naturally dissatisfied when, at the end of the day, the image is not yet ready and it is just the eyes that are still missing. On his cot at the shelter at night, he envisions the burning tree again as well as the eyes of his tattoo – and the latter seem to him much more horrifying than the “icepick”<sup>23</sup> eyes of Sarah Ruth. When he is asked by the artist next day whether he is “saved,”<sup>24</sup> he denies all connections to religion, saying: “A man can’t save his self from whatever it is he don’t deserve none of my sympathy”<sup>25</sup> – but he barely dares to look at his back in the two mirrors. When he sees the image, he “turn[s] white and move[s] away.”<sup>26</sup> He goes to a pool hall where he meets some old acquaintances who greet him painfully with a slap on the back, so he has to tell them about having a fresh tattoo. When the shirt is pulled up, the company falls silent and the shirt, “like a veil”, falls back “over the face.”<sup>27</sup> Being at a loss how to explain the image, he gets into a fight and flees: he wishes to see his wife and her surprise. (Earlier, to the artist, he had said: “She can’t

<sup>16</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 511.

<sup>17</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 519.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 520.

<sup>20</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 521.

<sup>21</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 522.

<sup>22</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 523.

<sup>23</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 510, 524.

<sup>24</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 524.

<sup>25</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 525.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 526.

say she don't like the looks of God."<sup>28</sup>) On the way home he realizes that "all along that was what he wanted, to please her."<sup>29</sup> The tattoo seems to have brought about a change: he feels "not quite like himself. It was as if he were himself but a stranger to himself, driving into a new country though everything he saw was familiar to him, even at night."<sup>30</sup> Upon arrival, he finds the front door barred, and Sarah Ruth asks four times "Who's there?"<sup>31</sup> before letting him in. As the day breaks, he sees streaks of light in the sky, and as he utters his magic password, "Obadiah Elihue,"<sup>32</sup> he has a new spiritual sensation: "all at once he felt the light pouring through him, turning his spider web soul into a perfect arabesque of colors, a garden of trees and birds and beasts."<sup>33</sup> The magic is gone as soon as he enters: Sarah Ruth (who had heard about the tractor accident from the old lady and is angry about having to pay for the damage) doesn't want to look at his back. When she finally does, she first doesn't recognize the image. And when Parker tells her "It's him. God!"<sup>34</sup> she starts screaming "Idolatry!"<sup>35</sup> and picks up the broom and beats him so hard that large welts begin to form on the face of Christ in the fresh tattoo. Being swept out of the house, the last image we get of him is leaning against the pecan tree, "crying like a baby."<sup>36</sup>

The word "idolatry" comes up twice in the text: first, when their wedding at the County Ordinary's office is described: Sarah Ruth had rejected to go to a church because she "thought churches were idolatrous"<sup>37</sup> and at the end, when she accuses her husband. If we accept some Christian theologians' view according to which the absolutization of an idea may count as idolatry,<sup>38</sup> Sarah Ruth's behavior could just as well count as idolatrous. Her obsession with keeping intact from all the sins she sniffs causes a blindness to her own way of spiritually tattooing herself with (and thus hiding behind) abusable Bible quotations: her absolute certainty in her righteousness hardens her heart and her eyes to the extent that she flogs the image of Christ so that the freshly tattooed image may seem to start weeping.

The idol, in Parker's case, could be seen as his dependence on demanding and commanding eyes: first, the eyes of his mother; then, the eyes of his officers in the navy; next, the piercing ice-pick eyes of Sarah Ruth as well as the eyes of his employer, the watchful old lady; finally the "superior"<sup>39</sup> eyes of the tattoo artist

<sup>28</sup> O'CONNOR (1996): 525.

<sup>29</sup> O'CONNOR (1996): 527.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> O'CONNOR (1996): 528.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> O'CONNOR (1996): 529.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> O'CONNOR (1996): 530.

<sup>37</sup> O'CONNOR (1996): 518.

<sup>38</sup> John MACQUARRIE, *Principles of Christian Theology*, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977, 145.

<sup>39</sup> O'CONNOR (1996): 521.

and the all-demanding eyes of the Byzantine Christ. His own eyes, in turn are described first in the navy: “He stayed in the navy five years and seemed a natural part of the gray mechanical ship, except for his *eyes*, which were the same pale slate-color as the ocean and reflected the immense spaces around him as if they were a microcosm of the mysterious sea.”<sup>40</sup> These eyes, full of the capacity of wonder, turn gradually hollow as he cannot live up to anyone’s expectations and gets more and more dissatisfied. After he first sees the tattooed man at the fair, “a peculiar unease settle[s] in him. [...] as if a *blind* boy had been turned so gently in a different direction that he did not know his destination had been changed.”<sup>41</sup> When the old lady tells him how to drive the tractor around the tree, she explains things “*as if he didn’t have eyes*,”<sup>42</sup> and right before hitting the tree, “The sun, the size of a golf ball, began to switch regularly from in front to behind him but he appeared to see it both places *as if he had eyes in the back of his head*.”<sup>43</sup> His *eyes* were *cavernous*<sup>44</sup> right after the accident. The artist doesn’t recognize Parker in the “*hollow-eyed* creature”<sup>45</sup> before him, and Parker’s “*eyes blared*, as if he were ready for a fight”<sup>46</sup> when the artist wanted to postpone the job. His eyes seem to lose their significance to the extent others’ eyes are fixed on him. The Byzantine Christ’s eyes, when he first flips through the pages of the book, “glanced at him swiftly,”<sup>47</sup> then it is his heart (mentioned only once) that “appeared to cut off; there was absolute silence. It said plainly, as if silence were a language itself, GO BACK.”<sup>48</sup> When he remembers these all-demanding eyes at night, not yet having them on his back, “even though he could not summon up the exact look of those eyes, he could still feel their penetration. He felt as though, under their gaze, he was as transparent as the wing of a fly.”<sup>49</sup> When the tattoo is ready and he finally looks at it in the mirror, “the reflected face continued to look at him – still, straight, all-demanding, enclosed in silence.”<sup>50</sup> And when he sobers up after the fight in the pool hall, he feels that “The eyes that were now forever on his back were eyes to be obeyed.”<sup>51</sup>

It is at this point that I would like to turn to Sartre for the explanation of the importance of differentiating between seeing and being seen. In *Being and Nothingness*, when discussing the third ontological dimension of the body, he states:

<sup>40</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 514.

<sup>41</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 513.

<sup>42</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 520.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* All emphases are mine.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 521.

<sup>46</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 523.

<sup>47</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 522.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 524.

<sup>50</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 526.

<sup>51</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 527.

I exist for myself as a body known by the Other. [...] The shock of the encounter with the Other is for me a revelation in emptiness of the existence of my body as an in-itself for the Other. Thus my body is not given merely as that which is purely and simply lived; rather this 'lived experience' becomes – in and through the contingent, absolute fact of the Other's existence – extended outside in a dimension of flight which escapes me. My body's depth of being is for me this perpetual 'outside' of my most intimate 'inside.'<sup>52</sup>

I think such a strange sensation can be described when Parker feels “as if he were himself but a stranger to himself.”<sup>53</sup> When talking about shyness and embarrassment, Sartre points out:

I cannot be embarrassed by my own body as I exist it. It is my body as it is for the Other which may embarrass me. Yet [...] I can be only embarrassed by a concrete thing which is presented inside my universe [...] Here the embarrassment is more subtle, for what constrains me is absent. [...] it is in principle out of reach, and all the acts which I perform in order to appropriate it to myself escape me in turn and are fixed at a distance from me as my body-for-the-Other. Thus I forever act 'blindly,' shoot at a venture without ever knowing the results of my shooting.<sup>54</sup>

Parker, in this sense, has the vague existential experience of his body-for-the-Other and acts 'blindly' throughout the story. He is dependent on the look of others until he is swept out of his house. One more last quotation from Sartre (from the chapter discussing concrete relations with others) might be elucidating here:

If we start with the first revelation of the Other as a *look*, we must recognize that we experience our inapprehensible being-for-others in the form of a *possession*. I am possessed by the Other; the Other's look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculpts it, produces it as it *is*, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret – the secret of what I am. He makes me be and thereby he possesses me, and this possession is nothing other than the consciousness of possessing me. I in the recognition of my object-state have proof that he has this consciousness. By virtue of this consciousness the Other is for me simultaneously the one who has stolen my being from me and the one who causes “there to be” a being which is my being.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Jean-Paul SARTRE: *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, transl., intro.: Hazel BARNES, New York, Philosophical Library, 1956, 351–352.

<sup>53</sup> O'CONNOR (1996): 527.

<sup>54</sup> Jean-Paul SARTRE: op. cit. 353.

<sup>55</sup> Jean-Paul SARTRE: op. cit. 364.

I would go so far as to say that Parker is in such an ambivalent relationship with Sarah Ruth until the very last scene when the Byzantine Christ is flogged on his back.

The secret of his being can also be approached from the point of view of the power of his name: *Obadiab* means “God’s servant” in Hebrew, and *Elibue*: “my God is He.” God’s name is used and abused several times in the text, in the formerly quoted casual expression “God knew,”<sup>56</sup> then in the cursing scene, then in another casual offside remark when Parker meets Sarah Ruth and wonders “Who in God’s name would marry her?”<sup>57</sup> When at the time of the accident he hears himself “yelling in an unbelievably loud voice, ‘GOD ABOVE!’”,<sup>58</sup> he is – to echo Sartre – both outside and inside of himself, and when he runs to the artist, wanting an image of “Just God.[...] Christ. I don’t care. Just so it’s God,”<sup>59</sup> it sounds almost like a desperate prayer, asking for immediate help. When finally he is told by Sarah Ruth that “God don’t look like that!”<sup>60</sup> and that “He don’t *look*. He’s a spirit. No man shall see his face,”<sup>61</sup> the reader might have the feeling that God indeed didn’t look at Parker, or looked some other way – that, in spite of (or precisely because of) the huge image of the Byzantine Christ, this is a godless story.

Of course, it is impossible to leave it at that. In spite of the quite direct prohibition against tattoos or cuts in the flesh in Leviticus 19:28, “Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I am the LORD,” we read in Deuteronomy 30:6: “And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thine soul that thou mayest live.” Perhaps it is not blasphemous to make a connection between circumcision and tattoos: in this sense, the Almighty tattoo artist has the power to mark whom he loves, to carve his sign *inside*. The question is whether Parker is ever granted the moment of grace to recognize this. Whether in the piercing physical pain of getting the tattoo or in the even more piercing physical and spiritual pain of being swept out of the house with the broom, he ever becomes aware of any kind of freedom and care. Flannery O’Connor intended to bestow such a moment on most of her characters. Shall we find this moment before Parker enters the house, utters his own name and feels “light pouring through him”<sup>62</sup> recognizing for the first time in his soul “a perfect arabesque of colors”<sup>63</sup> Or shall we find it after he had literally turned his back to Sarah Ruth, offered his back to the blows and leans against the pecan tree, “crying like a baby”<sup>64</sup> Seemingly in this moment of absolute despair

<sup>56</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 510.

<sup>57</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 516.

<sup>58</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 520.

<sup>59</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 522.

<sup>60</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 529.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 528.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> O’CONNOR (1996): 530.

and failure, Flannery O'Connor abandons her hero without compassion. But in *Mystery and Manners*, in the essay entitled "The Grotesque in Southern Fiction," she points out the following:

It's considered an absolute necessity these days for writers to have compassion. Compassion is a word that sounds good in anybody's mouth and which no book jacket can do without. It is a quality which no one can put his finger on in any exact critical sense, so it is safe for anybody to use. Usually I think what is meant by it is that the writer excuses all human weakness because human weakness is human.<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps the author's compassion is shown in the last word of the story, the text ends on the note of "baby." Can we say or hope that in any sense, Parker in this moment is "reborn"? The title of the story, "Parker's Back," might also be read as the contracted form of the sentence "Parker is Back" at some place of origin (this reading might be strengthened by the sentence he utters to the keyhole stopped with paper, before whispering his magic password, his real name: "It's me, old O.E. I'm back").<sup>66</sup> Has he arrived at the start to start anew? This can only be suggested by extra-textual speculation. The text, however, exposes his vulnerability to the full and places the judgement in the hands of the reader. It must also be noticed that the word "baby" might have other meanings in light of Sarah Ruth's pregnancy: if she can be so cruel to her husband, how might she treat the future son or daughter she is expecting?

Parker's back is turned on his wife, as well as on the reader in the closing gesture of the text. Beside the exposure of vulnerability, the all-demanding eyes of the tattooed Christ are also turned on her and on us. This is the moment when Flannery O'Connor's sarcastic remark about the danger of religious writing turning into a "large body of pious trash" enters into a conversation with Sartre's existential "nakedness." It is as if the sentimental painted eyes on Parker's back returned "the gaze of the Other," demanding some kind of a response.

How then, are we supposed to take this gesture? I think we'd better take it to heart. Perhaps it is worth trying to experiment with the examination of various gestures that mark out a special pattern, a colorful arabesque in the text. One might even try to select colors arbitrarily to match the gestures: When Sarah Ruth's ruthlessness is mentioned, yellow could be used, when God's name turns up, maybe red. When Parker's eyes are described, blue would be the color, with a white spot over it whenever they are "hollow." When the warmth of emotion is evident, orange could signal it, when Parker is seen by others, perhaps dark green. Light green may be used for the "as if" images connected to sight and brown when the

<sup>65</sup> O'CONNOR (1969): 43.

<sup>66</sup> O'CONNOR (1996): 528.

word “look” gains special significance. Of course, a more thorough study of color-symbolism would be needed to make the selection less haphazard. One may write the quoted sentences of the gestures in brick-like colored blocks, one scene under the other, following the linearity of the text. And what would come out of this crazy painting, not much resembling the “little red and blue and ivory and saffron squares”? The pattern may not show much more than a shaky tower or edifice built without skill, a botched shanty of bricks. Perhaps two things might safely be stated: it would be colorful and it would be vulnerable. Could we accept it as a tattoo of a reading experience? And shall we put it on our backs, or under our pillows?

The bizarre complexity of the story may well be carved into the hearts of both fictive characters and living readers: the ironical representation of Bible-belt piety and the authentic expression of true devotion keep alternating in the text in a surprising and unpredictable, almost scriptural way.

Turning the pages of the Bible to the shortest, one-chapter book, the Book of Obadiah, we may read:

But upon Zion shall be deliverance, and there shall be holiness; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.<sup>67</sup>

And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's.<sup>68</sup>

And if, inspired by the other magic name, we turn to Elihue's words in the Book of Job, we might as well read of the delivered man:

His flesh will be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth:

He shall pray unto God, and he will be favourable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness.<sup>69</sup>

Although Elihue's words fail to comfort Job and although the reading experience can hardly end with a comfortable conclusion, I hope the words taken out of the strictly Biblical context as well as the offered vulnerability and humbleness of writer, character, and reader can open up new scopes for conversation.

<sup>67</sup> Obad 1:12

<sup>68</sup> Obad 1:21

<sup>69</sup> Job 33:25–26

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*Abstract*

"Parker's Back," Flannery O'Connor's penultimate short story shows how a simple and ordinary man with a Biblical name (Obadiah Elibu) wishes to prove his uniqueness by covering his skin with a mixed patchwork of tattoos. The last of these is a huge image of Christ with "all-demanding eyes" he wants to wear on his back in order to impress his simple but extremely pious wife. In this paper, I will focus on the recurring images of eyes in Flannery O'Connor's text, taking into consideration various possible interpretations of seeing and being seen. Sartre's ideas of "the gaze of the Other" will help my investigations – since I take the story as a study of existential questions. I will further discuss the occurrences of the word "God" and the meaning of the word "idolatry" in the story, as well as the question of tattoos as intended markers of belonging. In the end, I experiment with the presentation of a possible colorful patchwork based on the collection of paralleled phrases and gestures in the text. Can such an imaginary tattoo become the imprint of a reading experience?

**Keywords:** eyes, sight, Sartre, existentialism, tattoo, idolatry, faith, religion, irony, vulnerability



*Rezümé*

A Parker háta Flannery O'Connor utolsó előtti novellája. Címszereplője, egy egyszerű, ám biblikus nevű ember (Abdiás Elibú) azzal akarja bebizonyítani egyediségét, hogy színes képeket tetováltat a bőrére. Az utolsó kép egy mindent látó, ellenállhatatlan szemű Krisztust ábrázol, ezt a hátára szánja, hogy elkápráztassa vele szintén egyszerű, de bigott feleségét. Ebben a tanulmányban a szemek visszatérő motívumát szeretném vizsgálni a szövegben, különös tekintettel a látás aktív és passzív változataira, mit lát maga Parker és milyen érzés, hogy mások őt látják. Segítségemre lesz ebben az a jelenség, amire Sartre hívja fel a figyelmet, "a Másik tekintete." Úgy gondolom, a novella egzisztenciális kérdésekkel szembesíti az olvasót. A szemek mellett az "Isten" szó előfordulásait és a "bálványimádás" jelentőségét is elemezni szeretném, illetve azt, hogy a tetoválás mennyiben fejezi ki a valahová tartozás vágyát. A tanulmány utolsó részében megkísérlem magát az elemzést egyfajta párhuzamos kifejezésekből és gesztusokból álló színes tetoválásként bemutatni. Vajon meg lehet-e így jeleníteni egy olvasmányélmény lenyomatát?

**Kulcsszavak:** szem, látás, Sartre, egzisztencializmus, tetoválás, bálványimádás, hit, vallás, ironia, sebezhetőség

EDIT GÁLLA

## Gothic Elements in Sylvia Plath's Poetry

Gothic fiction was a reaction against the Enlightenment and the rule of reason it promoted. Sylvia Plath's stance on the 18th-century literature of the Enlightenment is perhaps most clearly expressed through the thoughts of the heroine of her autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*: "I hated the very idea of the eighteenth century, with all those smug men writing tight little couplets and being so dead keen on reason. So I'd skipped it. [...] I'd spent most of my time on Dylan Thomas."<sup>1</sup> Plath clearly preferred Romanticism to reason, a predilection which shows not only in her novel but also in her poetry.

The Gothic subgenre is as old as Romanticism itself: it developed side by side with this larger artistic movement and even survived it – as the contemporary relish for, and proliferation of, Gothic horror stories, populated with ghosts and vampires, amply demonstrates. The origins of the Gothic genre go back to Burke's famous definition of the sublime, which he contrasted with the beautiful: this latter generates unmingled pleasure. Burke explains the notion of the sublime by arguing that danger and pain can also be delightful if they are distanced and modified. For Burke, a "delightful horror [...] is the most genuine effect, and truest test of the sublime."<sup>2</sup>

Whereas eighteenth 18th-century thinkers and aesthetes emphasised terror's potential to elevate the mind and broaden the range of feelings that the individual can experience, social sciences emerging in the early twentieth century tended to stress the primitive or archaic origin of people's craving for sensations that appear to be unpleasant. In this vein, Freud introduced the notion of the uncanny and defined it as an experience when what seemed familiar and comfortable is suddenly threatened by the return of hidden fears, ideas, or wishes: "[...] this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old – established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression."<sup>3</sup> This results in a breakdown in the subject's sense of a unified self and leaves it exposed to both unconscious and external disturbances.<sup>4</sup> The Freudian notion of the uncanny is particularly apposite to contemporary Gothic fiction, in which the uncanny threat

<sup>1</sup> Sylvia PLATH: *The Bell Jar*, London, Faber and Faber, 1999, 132.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund BURKE: *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, Oxford University Press, 1990, 67.

<sup>3</sup> Sigmund FREUD: "The Uncanny." In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17, trans. James Strachey, London, The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1919, 241.

<sup>4</sup> Fred BOTTING: *Gothic*, London & New York, Routledge, 2014, 8.

is brought closer to, and thus amplified for, the readers by its “intrusion [...] not into the comfortably long ago and far away but into the emphatically familiar fabric of our own lives.”<sup>5</sup>

Another Freudian theory applicable to Gothic fiction is that the subject reacts to overstimulating traumas by actively recreating the negative experience: “At the outset he was in a passive situation – he was overpowered by the experience; but, by repeating it, unpleasurable though it was, as a game, he took on an active part.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, the individual can move from passive victimhood and an overwhelming sense of loss to an active role in imaginatively reconfiguring, then expelling the disturbance.<sup>7</sup>

These theories are relevant not only to the Gothic genre in general, but to many of Plath’s late poems as well. In Plath’s late poetry, Gothic elements and motifs abound. Like classic Gothic texts, her poems:

Depict supernatural or seemingly supernatural phenomena [...] that actively seek to arouse a strong affective response (nervousness, fear, revulsion, shock) in their readers; that are concerned with insanity, hysteria, delusion [...] and that offer highly charged and often graphically extreme representations of human identities, sexual, bodily, and psychic.<sup>8</sup>

A considerable number of Plath’s late poems feature such Gothic themes and motifs, while staying relevant to the poet’s own era as well as her own intellectual and emotional preoccupations. This paper focuses on three poems: “The Moon and the Yew Tree,” “Little Fugue,” and “Death & Co.” and argues that Gothic elements do not appear only opportunistically in these poems to create atmosphere, but that Gothic sensibilities inform and permeate their universe to the extent that they can be considered as veritable Gothic texts.

In “The Moon and the Yew Tree,” the speaker is a solitary visionary, who has become completely alienated from her surroundings:

This is the light of the mind, cold and planetary.  
[...]  
Fumy, spiritous mists inhabit this place  
Separated from my house by a row of headstones.  
I simply cannot see where there is to get to.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ann B. TRACY: “Contemporary Gothic.” In Marie Mulvey-Roberts (ed.): *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, New York University Press, 1998, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Sigmund FREUD: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, New York & London, W. W. Norton & Company, 1961, 10.

<sup>7</sup> BOTTING *op. cit.* 8.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly HURLEY: “British Gothic Fiction, 1885-1930.” In Jerrold E. Hogle (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 194.

<sup>9</sup> Sylvia PLATH: *The Collected Poems*, ed. Ted Hughes, New York, Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981, 172-173.

Besides the uncanny quality of the supposedly homely environment, which is perceived as alien in every sense of the word, – a wider range of connotations that is made possible by the word “planetary” – it is also a characteristically Gothic setting, complete with church and churchyard. In Gothic novels, the locations often have religious associations<sup>10</sup> and feature prominently in the narrative: in this poem, the church also plays an important role. In addition to presenting the Gothic backdrop of the poem, the first stanza alludes to another feature of the genre: a superstitious belief in ghosts, which is especially characteristic of gothic fiction written by women.<sup>11</sup> Ghosts seem to be lurking in the fog: the archaic meaning of the word “spiritous” is “ethereal” and it also alludes to the word “spirit,” denoting a supernatural being.

The last sentence of the first stanza encapsulates the speaker’s despair. It has two possible meanings, one of which is that she cannot envision a future for herself, and the other is that she is so circumscribed by the place she lives in that she deems it impossible to escape from it. The latter is a situation commonly occurring in Gothic fiction: the young heroine regards the family home as a prison since, while it might provide protection from the outside world, it can also hide commensurable dangers<sup>12</sup> such as domestic tyranny and violence.

One of the two titular “protagonists” of the poem, the moon makes its appearance in the second stanza. It is likened to a face that reflects the speaker’s desperation and entrapment:

The moon is no door. It is a face in its own right,  
White as a knuckle and terribly upset.  
It drags the sea after it like a dark crime; it is quiet  
With the O-gape of complete despair. I live here.<sup>13</sup>

The speaker’s mental incapacity to devise a way to escape her distressing situation is coupled with an excess of imaginative power when she sees the moon as a strained face. Moreover, the moon is associated with the secrets of the past: in Gothic writings, the unknowable past is never quite laid to rest, therefore, it is liable to return and disturb the present.<sup>14</sup> The sinful despair of the moon is contrasted with the solemn affirmation of belief in Christ’s resurrection as the speaker recalls the bong of the church bells on Sunday. Thus, the moon and, by association, despair are closely linked to the refusal to believe in God. Whereas the second stanza opens with the image of the moon, the third introduces the other main emblem

<sup>10</sup> BOTTING *op. cit.* 4.

<sup>11</sup> Gina WISKER: *Contemporary Women’s Gothic Fiction: Carnival, Hauntings and Vampire Kisses*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, 3.

<sup>12</sup> BOTTING *op. cit.* 122.

<sup>13</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 173.

<sup>14</sup> Diana WALLACE: *Female Gothic Histories: Gender, History and the Gothic*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2013, 4.

of the poem, the yew tree, which “has a Gothic shape.” These two are intimately connected since the yew seems to point upwards to the moon. The persona declares: “The moon is my mother. She is not sweet like Mary. / Her blue garments unloose small bats and owls.”<sup>15</sup>

Even as the speaker emphasises the moon's difference from Mary, some obvious similarities emerge: the moon is also a mother and, like the Virgin Mary, is clad in blue. However, this pagan version of the Holy Mother is savage and uncaring, as opposed to the Virgin's “sweetness” and “tenderness.” Even though the speaker associates herself with the moon's crude paganism, her attitude towards the Christian religion, far from being dismissive, is deeply ambivalent:

How I would like to believe in tenderness –  
The face of the effigy, gentled by candles,  
Bending, on me in particular, its mild eyes.

The speaker's reservations about Catholicism are mingled with a strong yearning for the spiritual protection it seems to offer from the awful moon and the lugubrious yew tree – the dark couple that haunts her. According to Jungian psychoanalysis, all archetypes have two opposing sides, thus, the mother archetype has both nurturing and destructive features. Jung lists the positive characteristics of the mother archetype: “maternal solicitude and sympathy [...] all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains.”<sup>16</sup> These qualities are also attributed to Mary by the speaker as she imagines that a painting or statuette of the Holy Mother is looking at her kindly, trying to console her. In contrast, the dark aspect of the mother archetype includes “anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the moon dragging her “dark crime” and inducing terror in the speaker strongly corresponds to the negative aspect of the mother archetype.

Because of its close affinity with the moon, the yew tree can be regarded as the representative of the speaker's father. Britzolakis argues that the moon symbolises maternal castration and dispossession, while the yew transmits a ghostly paternal literary tradition.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the sinister pair symbolises her absent or dead parents and she wants to find refuge from their eerie presence in the emotional solace of religion.

However, this spiritual comfort is denied to her due to her perceived fall from grace. Even though she tries to cling to the outward and visible signs of Christianity – such as the church bells, the effigies and the votive candles – in order to ward off the sinister powers that are taking hold of her psyche, her effort proves only an

<sup>15</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 173.

<sup>16</sup> Carl Gustav JUNG: *Four Archetypes*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, London & New York, Routledge, 1972, 15.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Christina BRITZOLAKIS: “Gothic Subjectivity.” In Harold Bloom (ed.): *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Sylvia Plath*, New York, Infobase Publishing, 2007, 126.

ineffectual token gesture to alleviate her spiritual unease since it does not originate in strongly felt convictions. As she is incapable of believing in redemption made possible by a transcendental, universal love for all human beings, her vision of the “gentled” interior of the church soon gives way to one that reflects her own alienated and despairing state of mind:

Inside the church, the saints will be all blue,  
Floating on their delicate feet over the cold pews,  
Their hands and faces stiff with holiness.<sup>19</sup>

As her brief hope for the possibility of redemption evaporates, the speaker is left alone with her demons and the desperation they reflect and amplify: “The moon sees nothing of this. She is bald and wild. / And the message of the yew tree is blackness – blackness and silence.”<sup>20</sup> By rejecting religious belief, she finds herself deprived not only of comfort, but also of the means to make sense of the external world and her own life situation.

The yew tree is likewise an emblematic image in “Little Fugue,” in which, as in the closing lines of the previous poem, the yew is associated with blackness and failed communication:

The yew’s black fingers wag;  
Cold clouds go over.  
So the deaf and dumb  
Signal the blind, and are ignored.<sup>21</sup>

The negation of knowledge or facts that could be acquired through communication is a well-established element in Gothic fiction. The melancholic gloom of the poem’s tone is established through the abrupt juxtaposition of short sentences and the dramatic dichotomy of black and white – colours which symbolise the inability to send or receive messages:

I like black statements.  
The featurelessness of that cloud, now!  
White as an eye all over!  
The eye of the blind pianist<sup>22</sup>

In the first sentence, the persona firmly aligns herself with the Gothic mode, which is a reaction against the light of reason. Bailey draws attention to the poem’s

<sup>19</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 173.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 187.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

erie atmosphere, calling it “a poem of revenants, of cultural haunting and buried memories revisited [and] a mental graveyard.”<sup>23</sup> The blackness or darkness that the speaker prefers indicates a return to the past, to the immature self, to the buried memories and emotions of the unconscious, where the paralysing encounters with the unspeakable<sup>24</sup> can be relived and perhaps conveyed in words.

Gothic horror emanates from the memory of the completely white, blind eye of the pianist and the way in which “He felt for his food. / His fingers had the noses of weasels.”<sup>25</sup> The loss of a sense is compensated by the excess of another as sight is replaced by touch. Also, a confusion of the senses results as tactile perception is combined with olfactory recognition. This interchangeability of the senses is conferred from the visually impaired pianist to the apparently able-bodied speaker as she proceeds to associate the sounds of the Grosse Fuge with the “Black yew, white cloud” that are the opening images of the poem.

Her inability to convey her feelings is alluded to in a second summary statement that confesses her inclination towards the dark universe of the Gothic:

I envy the big noises,  
The yew hedge of the Grosse Fuge.

Deafness is something else.  
Such a dark funnel, my father!  
I see your voice  
Black and leafy, as in my childhood,

A yew hedge of orders,  
Gothic and barbarous, pure German.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, while the melody of the piece by Beethoven played on the black and white keyboard of the piano reminds her of a dark yew hedge set against a pale, cloudy sky, both the composer's deafness and the loudness of the music revive childhood memories of her father. Father, like daughter, is closely linked to the Gothic. However, in contrast to the daughter, who has an affinity with the artistic or literary aspects of the Gothic genre, the father is connected to the original meaning of the word, which refers to the Goths, a barbarous Germanic tribe.<sup>27</sup> His savagery is juxtaposed with her superstition as the speaker declares: “Dead men cry from

<sup>23</sup> Sally BAYLEY: “‘The Trees of the Mind Are Black, the Light Is Blue’: Sublime Encounters in Sylvia Plath’s ‘Tree Poems.’” In Sally Bayley – Tracy Brain (eds.): *Representing Sylvia Plath*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, 100.

<sup>24</sup> BOTTING *op. cit.* 4-6.

<sup>25</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 187.

<sup>26</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 188.

<sup>27</sup> BOTTING *op. cit.* 2-3.

it. / I am guilty of nothing.”<sup>28</sup> Thus, the persona’s sense of an indeterminate guilt is revealed as the underlying cause of both her disturbed state of mind and her attraction to this gloomy genre, which often deals with the crimes of the past. The speaker denies her emerging sense of guilt called forth by memories of her father and tries to expel it by invoking a religious metaphor: “The yew my Christ, then.”<sup>29</sup> Since the yew represents the father’s voice in the previous stanzas, it seems that the father assumes Christ-like qualities in these lines, despite the barbarous features attributed to him.

At this point of the poem, the persona focuses more clearly on the person her father was, imagining him “during the Great War / In the California delicatessen // Lopping the sausages!”<sup>30</sup> As the awe-inspiring memory of the father’s cruelly authoritative voice gives way to an exalted image of him as a tortured Christ-like figure, only to be replaced by a mundane image of him working as a lowly assistant in a grocery store, his figure emerging from the distant past becomes more definite and nuanced but also more contradictory. The German father, living as an immigrant in the United States during World War I, must have experienced the general dislike and aversion to Germans.<sup>31</sup> When the persona likens the sausages to human corpses (“They color my sleep, / Red, mottled, like cut necks”<sup>32</sup>), the German origin of the father is linked to the bloodshed of the first, and possibly, to the subsequent second World War since both wars were instigated by Germany. Thus, the guilt and disorientation felt by the speaker may partly originate in the ostracised status of her father in American society and the rootlessness that immigrant life involves, but she also feels ashamed of the atrocities of war with which his father’s nationality is associated.

Throughout the poem, a range of sensory and physical impairments are named. While blindness is mentioned in connection with the pianist, and deafness in connection with the Grosse Fugue, the speaker now refers to muteness as she exclaims: “There was a silence! // Great silence of another order.”<sup>33</sup> These lines allude to the new world order that was established with American victory in the wake of World War II and to the large number of people killed during its atrocities. Also, the “Great silence” suggests a deficiency of interaction, and a regression into an infantile state: “I was seven, I knew nothing. / The world occurred. / You had one leg, and a Prussian mind.”<sup>34</sup> The persona becomes a child as a result of recalling an image of her father hacking raw meat: terror makes her regress into childhood. For Freud and other materialist thinkers, the supernatural is a figment of the collective

<sup>28</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 188.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Farley GRUBB: *German Immigration and Servitude in America, 1709-1920*, London & New York, Routledge, 2011, 418.

<sup>32</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 188.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*



imagination, “a residue of the childhood of the race, repeated in every person,”<sup>35</sup> a mere lack of reason and knowledge. That is why irrational fears are commonly associated with immaturity. However, the Gothic treats such apprehensions very seriously because such nervous intuitions provide a gateway into a realm beyond the mundane and demonstrate the limits of human knowledge and agency.

The father's silence is now coupled with his physical disability with which the speaker identifies: “I am lame in the memory.”<sup>36</sup> So, the bodily disfigurement suffered by the father is transformed into a psychological deficiency in the daughter, whose ability to remember becomes impaired. The ultimate cause of her inability to grasp his father's past, and, therefore, her own, is that his father is dead and cannot possibly answer her questions anymore: “Death opened, like a black tree, blackly.”<sup>37</sup> Surely, death is the supreme example of the incomprehensible and the unspeakable. As the father's figure is shrinking from a larger-than life, monstrous, haunted yew tree to an ordinary human being, some more personal memories emerge such as his eye colour or the gifts he brought her. That is why the speaker exclaims as she recognises her late father's humanity: “This was a man, then!”<sup>38</sup> Having realised that his father was neither a monster nor God, she implicitly admits that the incomprehensibility of death that separated them is the source of her distortions and lack of knowledge about his father's past as well as her own roots.

This results in a destabilisation of the self that involves a sense of estrangement from the people and the activities in her everyday life. Kendall emphasises that the double meaning of the word “fugue” is crucial to understanding this poem: it is both a reference to Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge* and a psychiatric condition, “a flight from one's own identity.”<sup>39</sup> The final stanza undercuts any certainty as to whether the speaker's present identity is genuine or only make-believe, and thus merely another flight from her real self:<sup>40</sup>

I survive the while,  
Arranging my morning.  
These are my fingers, this my baby.  
The clouds are a marriage dress, of that pallor.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Robert F. GEARY: *The Supernatural in Gothic Fiction: Horror, Belief, and Literary Change*, Lewiston, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992, 126.

<sup>36</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 188.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Tim KENDALL: *Sylvia Plath: A Critical Study*, London, Faber and Faber, 2001, 76-78.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 189.

The guilt of the surviving family member is echoed in the first two lines: as Rose pointed out, the word “morning” also refers to “mourning.”<sup>42</sup> The alienation from herself is conveyed by disconnected body parts: fingers touching a baby. The persona has to remind herself that these belong to her. In the closing lines, the metaphor of clouds as a marriage dress refers back to the opening stanza where the clouds introduced the image of blindness. While the clouds obviously remind her of her own marriage, a connotation of blindness or an inability to perceive has already been attached to the image of clouds so it must apply to the marital relationship, too. Moreover, the notion of impairment coupled with the idea of marriage convey Gothic fears of entrapment within marriage and domesticity.<sup>43</sup> From another perspective, the notion of marriage might also symbolise her strong and enduring attachment to the past.

Whereas defects in the senses and perception caused by the inaccessibility of the secrets of the past lead to the persona’s psychological paralysis in “Little Fugue,” it is a more immediate, traumatising encounter with the unspeakable that leaves the speaker physically immobilised in “Death & Co.” In this poem, the speaker comes face to face with her own mortality and the double nature of death.

Notions of the double constitute an important tradition in Gothic fiction.<sup>44</sup> Plath utilised the trope of the double in many of her late poems, usually in the form of archetypal images such as the two aspects of the mother in “The Moon and the Yew Tree.” The opening lines of “Death & Co.” highlight the duality of death: “Two, of course there are two. / It seems perfectly natural now –.”<sup>45</sup> Death is personalised throughout the poem “as two men, two business friends, who have come to call,” as Plath remarks in her note to the poem.<sup>46</sup> In accordance with the Gothic’s fascination with death, the poem conveys a morbid preoccupation with corpses, both with their artificial preservation and their natural decay. Plath lays an emphasis on this duality: “The poem is about the double or schizophrenic nature of death – the marmoreal coldness of Blake’s death mask, say, hand in glove with the fearful softness of worms, water and other katabolists.”<sup>47</sup> Plath’s fascination with the dead body is congruous with the growing interest in anatomy, corpses and liminal states between life and death in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Gothic fiction of this period reveals that “knowledge about the living was intertwined with, dependent on, and ultimately inseparable from knowledge about death, which included managing, dissecting and, on occasion, preserving

<sup>42</sup> Jacqueline ROSE: *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1993, 222.

<sup>43</sup> Soňa Šnircová: *Girlhood in British Coming-of-Age Novels: The Bildungsroman Heroine Revisited*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017, 49-50.

<sup>44</sup> David PUNTER: “Scottish and Irish Gothic.” In ed. Jerrold E. Hogle: *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 107.

<sup>45</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 254.

<sup>46</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 294.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

corpses.<sup>48</sup> In a similar vein, the speaker's initiation into self-knowledge by means of the encounter with the repulsive pair of visitors is interwoven with her study of the mortal body.

The characters that appear in the poem can easily be identified as the usual protagonists of Gothic fiction: the two "business friends" are recognisable as the evil characters of the older tyrant and the younger villain, whereas the speaker identifies herself with the persecuted heroine – a central character for most women writers in the Gothic tradition, and a figure through which anxieties about gender relations can be expressed.<sup>49</sup> The first evil character introduced is that of the older man, whose appearance is reminiscent both of a marble bust and that of a predatory bird:

The one who never looks up, whose eyes are lidded  
And balled, like Blake's,  
Who exhibits

The birthmarks that are his trademark –  
The scald scar of water,  
The nude  
Verdigris of the condor.<sup>50</sup>

Significantly, the bust is that of a renowned Romantic poet, who was obsessed with Biblical visions of life after death and the netherworld: "Religion was, arguably, the primary theme and motive of all [Blake's] art, poetic and pictorial."<sup>51</sup> Despite Blake's reputation as a great visionary poet of the Romantic period, the speaker represents him in a way that implies blindness or, at least, reluctance to see since he "never looks up" from under his heavy eyelids. The greenish-grey colour of the marble statue reminds the persona of a predatory condor's beak, and she proceeds to attribute the same callous violence to this Blakean figure: "I am red meat. His beak // Claps sidewise: I am not his yet."<sup>52</sup> While the suggestion that he might devour the speaker clearly implies his death-dealing nature, there is also a sexual connotation in this confrontation: the tyrant considers her, and makes her see herself as, "red meat," an easy prey to male power and a predatory male sexuality. The assault, however, due to the limited vision or "short-sightedness" as well as the twisted character of the Blakean tyrant, is not a direct or straightforward one, which allows the persona to evade it.

<sup>48</sup> Laurence TALAIRACH: *Gothic Remains: Corpses, Terror and Anatomical Culture, 1764-1897*, University of Wales Press, 2019, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Carol M. DAVISON: *Gothic Literature 1764-1824*, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2009, 84-85.

<sup>50</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 254.

<sup>51</sup> Robert RYAN: "Blake and Religion." In Morris Eaves (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, 150-168.

<sup>52</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 254.

Having failed to wound her, the tyrant continues to assail the speaker in a more insidious way:

He tells me how badly I photograph.  
 He tells me how sweet  
 The babies look in their hospital  
 Icebox, a simple

Frill at the neck,  
 Then the flutings of their Ionian  
 Death-gowns,  
 Then two little feet.<sup>53</sup>

The conjunction of photography and corpses evoke the Victorian custom of making photographic portraits of deceased family members:

In Victorian Britain – as opposed to nineteenth-century America, where postmortem photography was more widespread and had a more lasting popularity – photographs of dead children, especially infants, were the most common type of postmortem photography.<sup>54</sup>

Even more horrifying than envisioning her own postmortem portrait is picturing “the babies” – possibly the persona’s own children – dressed in mortuary shirts. The paralysing effect of this image derives not only from age-old maternal fears of seeing one’s own children dead, but also from the abhorrence of such a direct juxtaposition of a symbol of life that evokes tenderness – the baby – and that of the awful stiffness and decomposition – the small bodies are preserved in an icebox – that death entails. Moreover, the dead babies might also symbolise thwarted development: an image recurrent in Plath’s writing, most notably in *The Bell Jar*, where the foetuses preserved in glass jars<sup>55</sup> are closely connected to the protagonist’s dread of her own thwarted psychological development and recurrent episodes of mental illness. This thwarted personal development represented by the infant cadavers can also be linked to women’s terror connected to the female body and conveyed by Gothic fiction. This interpretation of the genre was first formulated by Moers, who claimed that Gothic texts by women are “a coded expression of women’s fears of entrapment within the domestic and within the female body.”<sup>56</sup> In

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Deborah LUTZ: *Relics of Death in Victorian Literature and Culture*, Cambridge University Press, 2015, 161.

<sup>55</sup> PLATH: *The Bell Jar*, 66.

<sup>56</sup> quoted in WISKER: *op. cit.* 7.

the poem, a fear of entrapment within the female body and its reproductive abilities is concomitant with tabooed feelings of aversion to childbirth and motherhood.

The stern demeanour of the older tyrant who “does not smile or smoke”<sup>57</sup> is sharply contrasted with the repulsively ingratiating behaviour of the younger villain:

The other does that,  
His hair long and plausible.  
Bastard  
Masturbating a glitter,  
He wants to be loved.<sup>58</sup>

Smiling, in the Plathian poem, is often indicative of deceit, while the adjective describing his long hair, “plausible,” which means “pleasing” but also “specious,” confirms the disingenuous quality of both the younger man’s appearance and behaviour. The effeminate and obsequious villain seems to regard the older man as a father-figure: this observation is supported by the word “bastard” that the speaker applies to him – a word that does not only refer to his villainous qualities but also implies that the two men have a relationship similar to the bond between father and son. What is more, the adjective “plausible” also means “manifesting praise or approval,” and hence it can refer to the servile flattery with which he plies his older patron.

The last two stanzas and the single closing line of the poem establish a close connection between death and a certain twisted, predatory and narcissistic sexuality:

I do not stir.  
The frost makes a flower,  
The dew makes a star,  
The dead bell,  
The dead bell.

Somebody’s done for.<sup>59</sup>

As a result of the Blakean tyrant’s gruesome threats and the repulsive villain’s slyly exploitative sexuality, the persona becomes paralysed with fear and disgust. The crystallised patterns made by frost or dew are reminiscent of the younger man’s “masturbating a glitter.” The allusion to sexual exploitation is intimately connected with a sudden and demeaning death to which the vulgar phrase “Somebody’s done

<sup>57</sup> PLATH: *The Collected Poems*, 254.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> PLATH *op. cit.* 255.

for” refers. The reason why the experience of a surreptitious sexual assault can evoke a terror of a humiliating demise is that both death and sexual exploitation involve a negation of the subject’s personhood and agency.

The resulting traumatised mental state of the persona causes her to regress into a primitive register: the short, repetitive, and then truncated sentences are followed by a rudely colloquial phrase to refer to dying. Ostriker comments that the last complete stanza possibly refers to Donne’s Meditation XVII: “[...] any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”<sup>60</sup> Ostriker argues that the phrase “done for” expresses “contempt for literature alongside dread of death”<sup>61</sup> – it might also be a pun on Donne’s name. Ostriker’s argument is supported by the poem’s earlier reference to the blind and predatory character that wears Blake’s death mask, conveying disdain for an ossified literary establishment.

The three poems discussed in this paper are all informed and shaped by Gothic themes and sensibilities, while they also reconfigure the conventions of the genre to address or express other, more recent concerns. These are the loss of signification in the subject’s life due to a lacuna of transcendental beliefs and values, which is conveyed by “The Moon and the Yew Tree,” the emotionally crippling effect of rootlessness, deficiencies in communication, and a resulting destabilisation of personal identity in “Little Fugue,” and the exploitation and intimidation of women by male literary traditions and predatory sexuality in “Death & Co.” Plath’s late poems demonstrate that Gothic imagery can be made relevant to contemporary poetry since the Gothic operates with powerful, age-old symbols that can be invested with a wide range of specific meanings. Still, at no point do these poems seem formulaic imitations of an old and popular genre due to the peculiar Plathian style that deploys associative images and terse statements which are seamlessly interwoven with traditional Gothic tropes.

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<sup>60</sup> JOHN DONNE: *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions, Together with Death’s Duel*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 2003, 109.

<sup>61</sup> ALICIA OSTRIKER: “The Americanization of Sylvia.” In Linda W. Wagner (ed.): *Critical Essays on Sylvia Plath*, Boston, G. K. Hall & Company, 1984, 103–104.

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### Abstract

*Gothic fiction and its preoccupations with the terrifying continued to hold sway over the collective imagination, inspiring writers well beyond the age of Romanticism. American writers, in particular, found the Gothic genre a fertile ground for psychological exploration. This paper argues that Sylvia Plath deployed Gothic themes and motifs in some of her late poems to explore the constraints and fears attached to women's condition in the early 1960s. This paper offers close readings of three poems – "The Moon and the Yew Tree," "Little Fugue" and "Death and Co." – in which images of churchyards and corpses, the threatening return of the past, the terror of approaching madness, a sense of isolation and a fear of entrapment within the female body constitute the Plathian Gothic. Despite their Romantic sensibilities, the poems still remain relevant to their era through their accessible language and the psychological states of mind they conjure up through their images.*

**Keywords:** Gothic fiction, American poetry, Sylvia Plath

### Resümé

*Gótikus elemek Sylvia Plath költészetében*

*A gótikus irodalmi művek, illetve a félelmetes dolgok iránti vonzalom, amely ezekre a művekre jellemző, a romantika kora óta foglalkoztatták az emberi képzeletet és nyújtottak ibletet a későbbi írónemzedékeknek. A gótikus műfajt különösen az amerikai írók találták alkalmasnak a rendkívüli lelkiállapotok feltérképezésére. A jelen tanulmány fő állítása az, hogy Sylvia Plath kései verseiben a gótikus témák és motívumok sokasága lelhető fel, amelyeket a költő arra használ, hogy megvilágítsa és kifejezze a női lét kötöttségeit és félelmeit a saját korában, az 1960-as évek elején. A tanulmány három vers – „A hold és a tiszafa,” „Kis fúga” és „Halál és Tsa.” – szoros olvasatát adja. Ezekben a versekben a temetők és holttestek képei, a múlt fenyegető visszatérése, az épelméjűség elvesztésétől való rettegés, az elszigeteltség és a női testbe való bezártságtól való iszony alkotják a jellegzetes Plathi gótikát. Romantikus érzelmi töltetűk ellenére ezek a versek relevánsak maradnak arra a korszakra, amelyben keletkeztek, részben könnyen érthető nyelvezetűk, részben pedig a bennük megjelenített lelkiállapotok miatt.*

**Kulcsszavak:** gótikus irodalom, amerikai költészet, Sylvia Plath



KATALIN FREY – BÍBORKA RADVÁNYI

## Old English Poems as Possible Sources of *Paradise Lost*

Finding possible sources of inspiration for John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has long been a particularly prominent topic in Milton scholarship. Milton was familiar with quite a few languages: Latin, Greek, Italian, French and Hebrew, among many others, but it has been widely debated whether he was proficient enough in Old English to be able to read the original text of Old English poems and use them as inspiration for his epic.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we will take a closer look at the possible connections between *Paradise Lost*, *Genesis B*, and *Christ and Satan*, and consider the possibility that these Old English texts might have been sources of Milton's poem. We wish to examine some important features of Satan's portrayal that are used both by Milton and by the Old English writers, highlighting certain key similarities. While scholars are divided on whether or not Milton used these two Old English poems of the Junius Manuscript as sources for *Paradise Lost* (or if Milton had even come into contact with the manuscript), the correlation between Milton's epic and the two Old English poems in question has long been recognized. According to Elisa Ramazzina, it is worth noting that both *Paradise Lost* and *Genesis B* are rewritings of the same biblical stories, and that "both poets, even separated by centuries, created two original texts of undoubted literary richness and complexity drawing on and reusing existing – and sometimes shared – sources."<sup>2</sup> In the case of *Christ and Satan*, the comparison with *Paradise Lost* is based on the idea that both poems depict Satan's rebellion as an act specifically directed against Christ (or the Son, as Milton preferred to call him).<sup>3</sup> We intend to focus on two particular motifs present in these three poems: the motivations behind Satan's rebellion and his reaction to his Fall. By uncovering some remarkable similarities between the three poems, we wish to argue that Milton's character of Satan was influenced by the Old English poems *Genesis B* and *Christ and Satan*.

Ramazzina argues that in *Paradise Lost* and in *Genesis B* the poets "[create] two characters who are similar in their description as heads of their retinue, as leaders, and as exiles, but who are at the same time extremely different, especially with regard to their feelings and emotions, which make Milton's Satan much more human than the Anglo-Saxon one."<sup>4</sup> It is, however, important to note that Satan

<sup>1</sup> Elisa RAMAZZINA: "The Old English Genesis and Milton's Paradise Lost: the characterisation of Satan". *Lanalisi linguistica e letteraria*, 24.1, 2016, 89–117. 91–92.

<sup>2</sup> Elisa RAMAZZINA: *op. cit.* 95.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas D. HILL: "The Fall of Satan in the Old English 'Christ and Satan'". *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 76.3, 1977, 315–325. 317.

<sup>4</sup> Elisa RAMAZZINA: *op. cit.* 95.

in *Genesis B* also exhibits human features and emotions, although in a more covert manner: through the depiction of the Fall as exile. In his study on the theme in Old English poetry, Greenfield argues that there are four “compulsory” – or at least, regularly included – aspects of the portrayal of exile, “1. status 2. deprivation 3. state of mind 4. movement in or into exile,”<sup>5</sup> all of which appear in the following section of *Genesis B*:

Hete hæfde he æt his hearran gewunnen, hylde hæfde his ferlorene,  
gram wearð him se goda on his mode. Forþon he sceolde grund gesecean  
heardes hellewites, þæs þe he wann wið heofnes waldend.  
Acwæð hine þa fram his hylde and hine on helle wearp,  
on þa deopan dala, þær he to deofle wearð,  
se feond mid his gefeorum eallum. Feollon þa ufon of heofnum  
þurhlonge swa þreo niht and dagas,  
þa englas of heofnum on helle, and heo ealle forsceop  
drihten to deoflum.<sup>6</sup>

[He had earned hatred from his Master, his grace he had forlorn,  
and God grew angry in his heart. For that reason he must seek the abyss  
of terrible hell-torments, just as he struggled against the Holder of Heaven.  
He exiled him then from his favor and cast him into hell,  
into the deep chasm where he changed into a devil,  
the enemy with all his allies. They fell down from heaven  
a very long time: three nights and days,  
those angels from heaven into hell—the Lord debased them all into demons.]<sup>7</sup>

Firstly, the section serves as an announcement of the new, exiled *status* of Satan and his comrades. Secondly, *deprivation* appears in two different forms, both of which are repeated. On the one hand, the poet declares that Satan lost the favour, grace, or loyalty of God (“hylde hæfde his ferlorene” and “acwæð hine þa fram his hylde”), showing the withdrawal of affection and the erosion of the relationship between king and thane (which was also the basis of the social system depicted in Old English poetry). On the other hand, the poet mentions being cast away from heaven twice, and thus portrays Satan as being deprived of his place of origin. In this sense, the author shows both the physical and social repercussions that

<sup>5</sup> Stanley B. GREENFIELD: “The Formulaic Expression of the Theme of ‘Exile’ in Anglo-Saxon Poetry”. *Speculum*, 30.2, 1955, 200–206. 201.

<sup>6</sup> “Genesis A/B”. In Martin Foys, et al. (eds.): *Old English Poetry in Facsimile 2.0*, Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2019–. [oe.poetryfacsimile.org](http://oe.poetryfacsimile.org). Lines 301–309a. Accessed August 30, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Aaron K. HOSTETTER (trans.): “Genesis A/B”. In Martin Foys, et al. (eds.): *Old English Poetry in Facsimile 2.0*, Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2019–. [oe.poetryfacsimile.org](http://oe.poetryfacsimile.org). Lines 301–309a. Accessed August 30, 2023.

follow an unsuccessful rebellion. Thirdly, the mentions of heaven, hell, and the Fall depict a vertical, downwards *movement*, which fits the fourth aspect proposed by Greenfield. The third aspect, *state of mind* is seemingly missing from the description of the Fall, however, the narrator claims that Satan and his companions changed into devils as a consequence of their actions, signalling a radically negative change in their status. Although it is not specified whether this change is a social, mental or physical one, some scholars, such as Ganze, argue that negative emotional and physiological changes were often connected by Old English poetic vocabulary, and emotional states were often depicted by adding bodily symptoms to the description, such as the increased blood flow due to anger or heart palpitations due to grief.<sup>8</sup> While in this case it is doubtful whether a bodily condition is depicted, the poem suggests an overall negative change in the state of the fallen angels, which might be related to a negative state of mind. Moreover, as exile is one of the core concepts of Old English poetry and is always portrayed as a dire situation, often with a suggestion that it is a state comparable to death, the inclusion of the topic may work as a general evocative device, recalling the hardships of banishment and the struggles of losing one's lord as portrayed in different poems in the Old English corpus. In this way, it might even be unnecessary for the poet to include a detailed description of Satan's feelings.

In contrast with *Genesis B*, which does not explicitly show how Satan reacts to his exile, *Christ and Satan* gives him a voice, and in addition, a lamenting monologue that paints a desperate figure lost in nostalgia:

Eala drihtenes þrym! Eala duguða helm!  
 Eala meotodes miht! Eala middaneard!  
 Eala dæg leohta! Eala dream godes  
 Eala engla þreat! Eala upheofen!  
 Eala þæt ic eam ealles leas ecan dreames,  
 þæt ic mid handum ne mæg heofon geræcan,  
 ne mid eagum ne mot up locian,  
 ne huru mid earum ne sceal æfre geheran þære  
 byrhtestan beman stefne!  
 Ðæs ic wolde of selde sunu meotodes,  
 drihten adrifan, and agan me þæs dreames gewald,  
 wuldres and wynne, me þær wyrse gelamp  
 þonne ic to hihte agan moste.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ronald GANZE: “The Neurological and Physiological Effects of Emotional Duress on Memory in Two Old English Elegies”. In Alice Jorgensen, et al. (eds.): *Anglo-Saxon Emotions: Reading the Heart in Old English Language, Literature and Culture*, London, Routledge, 2015, 211–226, 212.

<sup>9</sup> “Christ and Satan”. In Martin Foys, et al. (eds.): *Old English Poetry in Facsimile 2.0*, Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2019–. [oe.poetryfacsimile.org](http://oe.poetryfacsimile.org). Lines 163–175. Accessed August 30, 2023.

[Alas the majesty of the Lord! Alas the Helm of Multitudes!  
 Alas the might of the Measurer! Alas middle-earth!  
 Alas the light of day! Alas the joys of God!  
 Alas the host of angels! Alas upper heaven!  
 Alas that I am without all the joys of eternity,  
 so that I cannot reach out to heaven with my hands,  
 nor may I look up with my eyes, nor indeed shall I ever hear  
 with my ears the voice of the brightest trumpets!  
 Because I wished to drive the Lord, the Son of the Measurer  
 from his throne, and keep its power of delight for myself,  
 the glory and the joy. But something worse befell me,  
 than I was allowed to have as a hope.]<sup>10</sup>

Firstly, it is remarkable that the poet gave Satan such an emotional speech, as this monologue suggests that he himself understood the consequences of his rebellion. Although Satan is not capable of repentance, and later he is shown to tempt Christ, he seems to accept his fate and punishment, as he claims that “sceal nu wreclastas / settan sorhgcearig, siðas wide.”<sup>11</sup> [“I must now set myself / upon the ways of exile, sorrowing, upon these wide paths”<sup>12</sup>]. Leonard H. Frey claims that this quotation sums up “the essence of Satan’s exile condition: total alienation from the sublimest spiritualities and constant recollection of them.”<sup>13</sup> This state, however, can also be applied to other narrators in Old English poetry who were either exiled or lost their lords, such as the speaker in “The Seafarer,” who also recollects his memories about the beauties of the past:

Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig fægriað,  
 wongas wlitigað, woruld onetted;  
 ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne  
 sefan to siþe, þam þe swa þenced  
 on flodwegas feor gewitað.<sup>14</sup>

[The groves take on blossoms, beautifying the cities,  
 gardens grow more fair, the world hastens –

<sup>10</sup> Aaron K. HOSTETTER (trans): “Christ and Satan”. In Martin Foys, et al. (eds): *Old English Poetry in Facsimile 2.0*, Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2019–. [oepoetryfacsimile.org](http://oepoetryfacsimile.org). Lines 163–175. Accessed August 30, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* Lines 187b–188.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* Lines 187b–188.

<sup>13</sup> Leonard H. FREY: “Exile and Elegy in Anglo-Saxon Christian Epic Poetry”. *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 62.2, 1963, 293–302. 301.

<sup>14</sup> “The Seafarer”. In Martin Foys, et al. (eds.): *Old English Poetry in Facsimile 2.0*, Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2019–. [oepoetryfacsimile.org](http://oepoetryfacsimile.org). Lines 48–52. Accessed August 30, 2023.

all these things make the hurrying heart mindful,  
 the soul to its travels, to him who so imagines  
 on the flood-ways, to travel far away.]<sup>15</sup>

The speakers of both lamentations are nostalgic about the past; however, there is a sharp contrast between their possible futures: while the narrator of “The Seafarer” appears to find consolation in religion, no such possibility is available for Satan. Although this factor does create a rift between the human speaker in “The Seafarer” and Satan, the comparison of the two poems might prompt a reconsideration of Satan as a character who experiences human feelings. In addition, the remembrance section in *Christ and Satan* might establish a connection between Satan and the audience as well. Harbus suggests that through the recital of memories, “[t]he reader or hearer of this text, even at a distant cultural remove, is invited to engage in narrative thinking and emotional reaction, and to recruit memory, imagination, and synthetic reasoning, a process made possible by the shared cognitive basis of meaning and feeling.”<sup>16</sup> In this way, the feeling of loss creates a common ground between the audience and Satan, and thus humanizes Satan’s figure to a great extent.

In *Paradise Lost*, Satan’s feelings on the topic of his exile are perhaps most clearly articulated during his famous speech on the top of Mount Niphates, where “horror and doubt distract / His troubl’d thoughts, and from the bottom stirr / The Hell within him” (4.18–20).<sup>17</sup> Addressing the Sun of God’s newly created universe, he confesses all his regrets that he, up until that point, has tried to conceal completely.

...to thee I call,  
 But with no friendly voice, and add thy name  
 O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams  
 That bring to my remembrance from what state  
 I fell, how glorious once above thy Spheare;  
 Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down  
 Warring in Heav’n against Heav’ns matchless King:  
 Ah wherefore! he deservd no such return  
 From me, whom he created what I was  
 In that bright eminence, and with his good  
 Upbraided none; nor was his service hard.

<sup>15</sup> Aaron K. HOSTETTER (trans): “The Seafarer”. In Martin Foys, et al. (eds.): *Old English Poetry in Facsimile 2.0*, Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2019–. [oeepoetryfacsimile.org](http://oeepoetryfacsimile.org). Lines 48–52. Accessed August 30, 2023.

<sup>16</sup> Antonina HARBUS: “Affective Poetics: The Cognitive Basis of Emotion in Old English Poetry”. In Alice Jorgensen, et al. (eds.): *Anglo-Saxon Emotions: Reading the Heart in Old English Language, Literature and Culture*, London, Routledge, 2015, 19–34, 32.

<sup>17</sup> John MILTON: *Paradise Lost*, edited by Barbara Lewalski, Oxford, Blackwell, 2007. In this paper we quote Milton’s epic from this edition, referencing our quotations within parentheses indicating the book and the line number(s) in the main body of the text.

What could be less then to afford him praise,  
 The easiest recompence, and pay him thanks,  
 How due! yet all his good prov'd ill in me,  
 And wrought but malice; lifted up so high  
 I sdeind subjection, and thought one step higher  
 Would set me highest, and in a moment quit  
 The debt immense of endless gratitude,  
 So burthensome, still paying, still to ow (4.37–53.)

Satan admits to having made a mistake by rebelling against “Heav’ns matchless King” and losing all that glory that was once freely his in Heaven, the nostalgic note in his speech being noticeably similar to the lamenting monologue found in *Christ and Satan*. In both poems, as we will later show, the characters describe the happy and bright state they fell from and suggest that that brightness is now completely lacking, conveying the loss of their angelic essence and the pain it has caused. Both in the Old English poem and in *Paradise Lost*, Satan is given a dramatic monologue in which it is emphatically stressed that true repentance is no longer an option for him. In Milton’s poem, this speech comes at a point when Satan’s character has already been established as not being regretful in the slightest, as previously, in Book 2, his main concern has only been to determine “what best way, / Whether of open Warr or covert guile” to recover Heaven for themselves (2.40–41), but here Milton also shows just how much the loss of his place in Heaven has hurt the fallen angel. Satan not only admits that he regrets his rebellion, but also goes on to admonish himself, exclaiming how easy it would have been to simply continue to obey God, and offer him the praise he obviously deserves. It seems that in addition to the loss of heavenly glory, he also laments his lack of intellect when choosing to go against the word of God and to rebel. This admission is especially powerful from a figure that has since become famous for his unshakeable reason; he was previously able to justify the rebellion to his followers, asking them “Who can in reason then or right assume / Monarchie over such as live by right / His equals, if in power and splendor less, / In freedome equal?” (5.794–797), but by this point, this confidence in his argument has disappeared. While Milton’s Satan is careful to hide his more vulnerable side from his followers even during his lowest moments, *Paradise Lost* shows a Satan figure that is just as emotionally complex as the one that could be previously seen in *Christ and Satan*. Satan’s constantly warring emotions also manifest themselves in his ever-changing appearance, as C. S. Lewis writes:

From hero to general, from general to politician, from politician to secret service agent, and thence to a thing that peers in at bedroom or bathroom windows, and thence to a toad, and finally to a snake – such is the progress of Satan.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> C. S. LEWIS: *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1969, 99.

Starting in Book 4, Satan's appearance changes almost every time we see him, the emergence of his feelings of self-doubt, envy, and anger clashing with his previously pure angelic being, and he becomes more and more human-like in essence as time passes. This is further reinforced by Milton's first detailed description of Satan in Book 1, where, as Neil Forsyth writes in *The Satanic Epic*, (against expectations) "the reader's experience of Satan has been transformed backwards, as it were, from an infernal serpent to a heroic angel."<sup>19</sup>

While the experience of loss is depicted in a similar fashion in all three poems, Satan's communication with his supporters about the rebellion and the consequent expulsion from Heaven are portrayed differently in *Christ and Satan* and *Paradise Lost*, the two poems which contain dialogues between the leader (Satan) and his followers. The author of *Christ and Satan* chose an intriguing approach towards these issues, since, in the poem, Satan seems to be aware of the foolish nature of his actions:

[...] Hwær com engla ðrym,  
 ða þe we on heofnum habban sceoldan?  
 Ðis is ðeostræ ham, ðearle gebunden  
 fæstum fyrclommum; flor is on welme  
 attre onæled. Nis nu ende feor  
 þæt we sceolun ætsomne susel þrowian,  
 wean and wergum, nalles wuldres blæd  
 habban in heofnum, hehselda wyn.  
 Hwæt, we for dryhtene iu dreamas hefdon,  
 song on swegle selrum tidum,  
 þær nu ymb ðone ecan æðele stondað,  
 heleð ymb hehseld, herigað drihten  
 wordum and wercum, and ic in wite sceal  
 bidan in bendum, and me bættran ham  
 for oferhygdum æfre ne wene.<sup>20</sup>

[...] Whence has come  
 the majesty of angels, which we in heaven were used to possess?  
 This is a shadowy home, violently bound with fixed fiery bands.  
 The floor is in a boil, ignited in poison. It is not far from the end  
 which we must together suffer torment, pain and affliction –  
 not at all the fruits of glory we once had in heaven,  
 the joys of high seats. Listen! Once we possessed delight before the Lord,  
 singing in the skies, in better seasons, where now stand  
 the noble warriors around the Eternal and his high throne,

<sup>19</sup> Neil FORSYTH: *The Satanic Epic*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2002, 211.

<sup>20</sup> "Christ and Satan". Lines 36b–50.

praising the Lord with words and deeds, and I must in torment  
abide in bonds, nor ever hope for any better home for my over-mind.]<sup>21</sup>

This section implies that Satan, as characterised by the author of *Christ and Satan*, is fully aware that the Fall was his own fault, and it was his pride (“over-mind”) that cast him out of Heaven; and while he never calls it a sin, he acknowledges the dire consequences of his actions, and seems to be regretting them to an extent. Moreover, even though Satan only talks about his personal loss of hope for a better home in these lines, the poem later reveals that he is in fact a compassionate leader, who feels responsible for the state of his followers as well. He calls his army “earme heap” [miserable company], and claims that it was he who led them to their hellish home.<sup>22</sup> The poem thus portrays Satan as a dutiful lord, who keeps the fate of his subjects in mind, and is aware of the fact that he is to be blamed for their misfortune and their consequent deformation.

In terms of compassion, the case of Milton’s Satan is slightly more complex, as he seemingly tries to hide his true feelings from his followers. Although we have previously shown how regretful Satan becomes in Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*, it is important to distinguish between those words uttered alone, and the ones he has previously said to his followers in the first two books. The angry and remorseful Satan that laments his lost place in Heaven is not the Satan that his followers can see in Hell after their tragic Fall. There, he assumes the role of a mostly optimistic – and perhaps somewhat naive – leader, who tries to convince his followers that there is still hope for them. Upon waking up, he gives his first impressions of Hell to Beelzebub, claiming that their greatness cannot be diminished by the fact that they are no longer in Heaven:

The mind is its own place, and in it self  
Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n.  
What matter where, if I be still the same,  
And what I should be, all but less then he  
Whom Thunder hath made greater? Here at least  
We shall be free; th’ Almighty hath not built  
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:  
Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce  
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:  
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav’n (l.254–263)

This is one of Satan’s speeches that Neil Forsyth uses to demonstrate the power of the fallen angel’s words, its seductive nature being compared to that of a Siren’s

<sup>21</sup> Aaron K. HOSTETTER (trans.): “Christ and Satan”. Lines 36b–50.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* Lines 87–88.



song in *The Satanic Epic*.<sup>23</sup> It is essential to remember that Satan's speeches in Hell are always twofold; on the surface this is simply a twisted motivational speech, but given his always-present desperation with proving his unchanged state, his "fixt mind," this speech is just as much for his own benefit as it is for Beelezbub's. As Lewis writes, "Satan *wants* to go on being Satan. That is the real meaning of his choice 'Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n'."<sup>24</sup> Satan claims that Hell will, in some ways, be even better for him and the other fallen angels, as, distanced from God's influence, in Hell "at least [they] shall be free." Milton's Satan is similar to the main character of *Christ and Satan* in that he also keeps the fate of his followers in mind, but slightly dissimilar from the Old English Satan in that, instead of focusing on his own faults, he is already thinking of the possible (perhaps only imagined) advantages that Hell might offer them. This attempt at praising Hell continues in Book 2, during his opening speech in Pandæmonium, where he stresses the lack of possible envy they might feel towards each other in Hell:

...The happier state  
 In Heav'n, which follows dignity, might draw  
 Envy from each inferior; but who here  
 Will envy whom the highest place exposes  
 Formost to stand against the Thunderers aim  
 Your bulwark, and condemns to greatest share  
 Of endless pain? where there is then no good  
 For which to strive, no strife can grow up there  
 From Faction; for none sure will claim in Hell  
 Precedence, none, whose portion is so small  
 Of present pain, that with ambitious mind  
 Will covet more. (2.24–35)

Once again, Satan has an ulterior motive with this seemingly inspiring speech; he asserts his right to be their official leader even in Hell, reinforcing his claim to a rule that he believes he obtained "with full consent" (2.24). On the surface, the dutiful lord that is present in *Christ and Satan* is also found in *Paradise Lost*, however, Satan's own obsession with himself in Milton's epic noticeably undermines the former Archangel's sincerity. Milton's Satan is very familiar with lying, even if it is to himself; it is truly as Lewis writes: we as readers can never be sure "whether we can distinguish his conscious lies from the blindness which he has almost willingly imposed on himself."<sup>25</sup> As Lewis suggests, after a while it is not only the other characters or us readers that have cause to doubt Satan's sincerity, but also himself, as he seemingly falls victim to his own propaganda.

<sup>23</sup> Neil FORSYTH: *op. cit.* 147.

<sup>24</sup> C. S. LEWIS: *op. cit.* 103.

<sup>25</sup> C. S. LEWIS: *op. cit.* 97.

After considering the similarities between the descriptions of Satan's reaction to his Fall, it is time to take a closer look at how the events and decisions leading up to his rebellion are presented in the three poems. Milton was of course inspired by several religious texts and traditions. According to Arnold Williams' article, "The Motivation of Satan's Rebellion in 'Paradise Lost,'" before *Paradise Lost*, there were three main, widely accepted explanations for the Fall of the angels, based on three different texts: *The Book of Enoch*<sup>26</sup> 69:6, the *Latin Life of Adam and Eve* XII–XV, and *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch* 25:4–5.<sup>27</sup> All three of these texts date from "the period of the two or three centuries immediately before and after the beginning of the Christian Era."<sup>28</sup> It is important to note here that while Milton's aspiration for *Paradise Lost* was to create a specifically Christian epic, none of the books of Enoch are included in the traditional Christian Bible. Nevertheless, these were three of the primary stories that Milton possibly would have looked at as sources of inspiration for his epic poem, and thus, they are important to consider before we take a closer look at how Satan's rebellion in Heaven is depicted in *Paradise Lost*. In *Enoch*, about two hundred angels were sent to Earth to guard humans, where they "were lured by women and sinned carnally with them":<sup>29</sup>

1 And it came to pass when the children of men had multiplied that in those days were born unto 2 them beautiful and comely daughters. And the angels, the children of the heaven, saw and lusted after them, and said to one another: "Come, let us choose us wives from among the children of men 3 and beget us children." And Semjaza, who was their leader, said unto them: "I fear ye will not 4 indeed agree to do this deed, and I alone shall have to pay the penalty of a great sin." And they all answered him and said: "Let us all swear an oath, and all bind ourselves by mutual imprecations 5 not to abandon this plan but to do this thing." Then sware they all together and bound themselves 6 by mutual imprecations upon it.<sup>30</sup>

This explanation places the time of the Fall after the creation, temptation and Fall of man, therefore, it "could not serve [Milton's] purpose"<sup>31</sup> for his epic. The second example that Williams mentions is already somewhat closer to what Milton ended up writing, as in *Vita Adae et Evae*, what causes the Fall of Satan and his followers is his refusal to worship the newly created man; as he says, "he will not worship him

<sup>26</sup> Following Williams' example, in the following we will refer to *The Book of Enoch* simply as "Enoch", and *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch* as "Secrets".

<sup>27</sup> Arnold WILLIAMS: "The Motivation of Satan's Rebellion in 'Paradise Lost'". *Studies in Philology*, 42. 2, 1945, 253–268. 254–256.

<sup>28</sup> Arnold WILLIAMS: *op. cit.* 254.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold WILLIAMS: *op. cit.* 254–255.

<sup>30</sup> R. H. CHARLES (ed.): *Book of Enoch: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1913, no pag., lines 6:1–7.

<sup>31</sup> Arnold WILLIAMS: *op. cit.* 255.

[man] who is lower and posterior to [him].”<sup>32</sup> As Williams suggests, this account even has “scriptural authority of a sort,” as the idea of commanded worship is already present in Hebrew 1:6, “And again when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.”<sup>33</sup> As Williams writes, “in both the *Vita* and *Paradise Lost* God makes an announcement and commands an act of obedience by the angels. In both documents Satan refuses to perform the act of obedience.”<sup>34</sup> Already here, Satan’s sense of pride and superiority becomes the main point of the conflict, which will reemerge in Milton’s poem, although, in *Paradise Lost*, Satan’s refusal to subject himself will be in response to the sudden exaltation of the Son instead of the creation of mankind.

Finally, in *Secrets*, the motivation behind the rebellion is Satan’s reckless ambition “to place his throne higher than the clouds above the earth, that he might become equal in rank to my [God’s] power.”<sup>35</sup> While during Satan’s initial reaction to the exaltation of the Son this ambition is not as strongly stated as his refusal to submit, over the course of Milton’s poem it becomes quite evident that Satan’s desire “to set himself in Glory above his Peers” (l.39) is used as his main motivating factor for most of his actions. All things considered, it can be said that even if none of these three stories could be declared the one official main source that Milton used to imagine his version of Satan’s rebellion, it is clear that certain elements from all of them can be found in *Paradise Lost*.

In the Old English *Genesis B*, Satan similarly “resolves to be God and works northwards and westwards to set up his throne,”<sup>36</sup> and it is for this reason that he is thrown out of Heaven:

Ac he wende hit him to wyrsan þinge,    ongan him winn up hebban  
wið þone hehstan heofnes waldend,    þe siteð on þam halgan stole.  
Deore wæs he drihtne ure;    ne mihte him bedyrned weorðan  
þæt his engyl ongan    ofermod wesan,  
ahof hine wið his herran,    sohte hetespræce,  
gylpword ongean,    nolde gode þeowian.<sup>37</sup>

[But this one turned himself away unto worse affairs.  
He thought to heave up a struggle against the highest,  
the Sovereign of Heaven aseated upon the holy throne.

<sup>32</sup> B. CURTIS, G. ANDERSON, and R. LAYTON (trans.): *Latin Life of Adam and Eve*, Marquette University, n.d., 3. 14:3. [marquette.edu/maqom/Latin%20Life%20of%20Adam%20and%20Eve.pdf](http://marquette.edu/maqom/Latin%20Life%20of%20Adam%20and%20Eve.pdf). Accessed August 30, 2023.

<sup>33</sup> Arnold WILLIAMS: *op. cit.* 256.

<sup>34</sup> Arnold WILLIAMS: *op. cit.* 263.

<sup>35</sup> Qtd. in Arnold WILLIAMS: *op. cit.* 256.

<sup>36</sup> Arnold WILLIAMS: *op. cit.* 257.

<sup>37</sup> “Genesis A/B” *Lines* 259–264.

Beloved was he to our Lord – this could not be hidden from him  
 so that his angel began to become overly proud,  
 heaving himself up against his Master, seeking hateful words  
 and boasting speech against him. He wished to serve God no longer.]<sup>38</sup>

There is a clear emphasis on Satan's importance and his high status in Heaven, which Milton's epic also describes repeatedly. Furthermore, *Christ and Satan* depicts the relationship as one of a lord and his thane – a valued tie in Anglo-Saxon society – by showing God as a king and Satan as a beloved subject in the prelapsarian era. Similarly to *Paradise Lost*, this is done with the intention to contrast Satan's prelapsarian and postlapsarian self. Milton describes Satan as being "of the first, / If not the first Arch-Angel, great in Power, / In favour and præeminence" (5.659–661), showing, as Satan says, "what state [he] fell" from as a result of his rebellion (4.38–39). In the end, Milton's version of the narrative becomes a curious mix of the second and third ideas that Williams lists, with Satan reacting negatively to being asked to bow to the Son and "confess him Lord" (5.608):

Who can in reason then or right assume  
 Monarchie over such as live by right  
 His equals, if in power and splendor less,  
 In freedome equal? or can introduce  
 Law and Edict on us, who without law  
 Erre not, much less for this to be our Lord,  
 And look for adoration to th' abuse  
 Of those Imperial Titles which assert  
 Our being ordain'd to govern, not to serve? (5.794–802)

Sandra M. Gilbert, in "Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers: Reflections on Milton's Bogey," comments on this "pseudoliberal speech" of Satan to his followers, comparing the reasons behind Satan's Fall to that of Eve's, suggesting that both of them were dissatisfied with their place and made the mistake of wanting to be "Equal with Gods" (4.526).<sup>39</sup> As Barbara Lewalski points out, this speech also closely resembles some of Milton's own ideas expressed in his political pamphlet from 1649, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*:<sup>40</sup>

No man who knows ought, can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were borne free, being the image and resemblance of God himself, and were by

<sup>38</sup> Aaron K. HOSTETTER (trans): "Genesis A/B" Lines 259–264.

<sup>39</sup> Sandra M. GILBERT: "Patriarchal Poetry and Women Readers: Reflections on Milton's Bogey". *PMLA*, 93.3, 1978, 368–382. 372.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in John MILTON: *Paradise Lost*, 145.

privilege above all the creatures, born to command and not to obey: and that they liv'd so.<sup>41</sup>

This is not the only instance where elements of Milton's own political ideas permeate his epic poem. Satan's ever-changing and ambitious character in particular calls to mind some of the poet's descriptions of tyrants in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*:

Sometimes they seem furiously to march on, and presently march counter; by and by they stand, and then retreat; or if need be can face about, or wheele in a whole body, with that cunning and dexterity as is almost unperceavable; to winde themselves by shifting ground into places of more advantage.<sup>42</sup>

Even if Milton's own claims on the matter of kingship and tyranny might be considered biased by some because of his own political stance, Satan's resemblance to the tyrannical figure Milton presents here is obvious. As Lewalski writes in her introduction to Milton's poem, Milton portrays Satan as a "self-styled grand rebel marshaling Milton's own republican rhetoric from *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* against what he calls the 'tyranny of heaven.'<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, in *Paradise Lost*, Satan not only expresses his scepticism towards the legitimacy of the Son's authority over them, but, in response to Abdiel's powerful attack on his previous claims, also "asserts that the angels were self-begot, and that God falsely claimed the credit for this [the creation of the angels]":<sup>44</sup>

That we were formd then saist thou? and the work  
Of secundarie hands, by task transferd  
From Father to his Son? strange point and new!  
Doctrin which we would know whence learnt: who saw  
When this creation was? rememberst thou  
Thy making, while the Maker gave thee being?  
We know no time when we were not as now;  
Know none before us, self-begot, self-rais'd  
By our own quick'ning power... (5.853–861)

As C. S. Lewis sums up in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, Satan "attempts to maintain that he exists 'on his own' in the sense of not having been created by God, 'self-begot, self-raised by his own quickening power.'<sup>45</sup> To be able to argue that he is equal

<sup>41</sup> John MILTON: *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, London, 1649, no pag.

<sup>42</sup> John MILTON: *The Tenure*, no pag.

<sup>43</sup> John MILTON: *Paradise Lost*, 22.

<sup>44</sup> Joad RAYMOND: *Milton's Angels the Early Modern Imagination*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, 209.

<sup>45</sup> C. S. LEWIS: *op. cit.* 66–67.

not just with the Son but also with God, Satan must first and foremost renounce any part that God may have had in his creation. Milton's Satan not only denies the idea, but dismisses it entirely, as though it was only Abdiel's "strange [...] and new" assertion, instead of being a universally accepted fact, undermining the strength of the very claim. This denial might seem especially confusing to readers, as in Book 4, Satan has previously admitted to being created by God (4.43). It is evident from these that Milton drew upon many of the previously established narratives detailing Satan's rebellion and his possible motivations, and then by intensifying Satan's pride and ambition, he created his own entirely unique version of the story.

Similarly to *Paradise Lost*, the core issue of Satan's rebellion against God in *Genesis B* is the question of authority, and to an extent, self-governance. While Milton's Satan touches upon concepts such as equality in terms of freedom or the possibility of governing instead of service, the Old English poet had a coinciding idea about the potential causes of Satan's Fall:

“Hwæt seal ic winnan?” cwæð he. “Nis me wihtæ þearf  
 hearran to habbanne. Ic mæg mid handum swa fela  
 wundra gewyrcean. Ic hæbbe geweald micel  
 to gyrwanne godlecran stol,  
 hearran on heofne. Hwy seal ic æfter his hyldo ðeowian,  
 bugan him swilces geongordomes? Ic mæg wesan god swa he.  
 Bigstandað me strange geneatas, þa ne willað me æt þam stride geswican,  
 hæleþas heardmode. Hie habbað me to hearran gecorene,  
 rofe rincas; mid swilcum mæg man ræd geþencean,  
 fon mid swilcum folcgesteallan. Frynd synd hie mine georne,  
 holde on hyra hygesceaftum. Ic mæg hyra hearra wesan,  
 rædan on þis rice. Swa me þæt riht ne þinceð,  
 þæt ic oleccan awiht þurfe  
 gode æfter gode ænegum. Ne wille ic leng his geongra wurþan.”<sup>46</sup>

[“Why must I toil,” he asked. “There is no need at all  
 for me to have a master. I can mold many  
 wondrous things with my own hands.  
 I have great enough power to make ready  
 a godly throne — to be master in heaven.  
 Why must I scrape after his favor, bowing to him in such vassalage?  
 I can be a god just like him –  
 Strong warriors stand beside me, who will not withdraw from battle,  
 heroes hard-hearted. They have chosen me as their lord,  
 these brave warriors. With such allies one could devise a plan

<sup>46</sup> “Genesis A/B” Lines 278–291.

to seize with such comrades-in-arms. These eager friends are mine,  
loyal to their hewn hearts. I can be their master,  
to rule this realm. And so it does not seem to me right  
that I should need to flatter him at all, a god after any god.  
Nor will I be one of his subordinates for long.”<sup>47</sup>

While *Genesis B* does not talk about submission specifically to Christ, only to God, the essential idea is similar to Milton’s: Satan believes he is equal to God and is thus entitled to have an equal influence in the world. Although in *Genesis B* Satan does not directly question the creation of angels, he claims to have creative powers equal to God and states that he would be able to establish a better throne in Heaven. Furthermore, he assumes godhead by describing himself as a lord chosen by valiant soldiers. In his speech, Satan implies that on the one hand, he has a status equal to God in terms of rank; on the other hand, he suggests that the fact that his comrades chose him as a leader might add to the legitimacy of his rule. Relegation of power and the issue of inheritance, however, was not this simple in the Anglo-Saxon society. While the importance of support from retainers is also depicted as a relevant issue in Anglo-Saxon literature and society, as, according to Biggs, it was only possible to retain power through the command of warbands,<sup>48</sup> dynastic ties also played an important role in ascension to the throne. According to Biggs, the importance of dynastic ties appears in *Beowulf*, too. In another article, Biggs proposes that by showing that Beowulf was deserted by his retainers in his battle against the dragon, the poet emphasizes Beowulf’s lack of a son who “might [...] have begun using the tribe’s wealth to prepare for the beginning of his own rule,” and thus would have been able to continue his bloodline.<sup>49</sup> Regarding this aspect of Anglo-Saxon succession and the tradition of primogeniture in the Christian world, Satan’s speech in *Genesis B* might suggest that his rule is doomed to fall apart, as he has no son, only comrades to rely on.

Another, less frequently mentioned similarity between *Paradise Lost* and *Genesis B* is the fact that there is a possibility that both Milton and the author of the Old English poem were motivated not only by artistic or religious, but also political reasons. In this respect, the case of Milton is easier, as his pamphlets and other writings – such as the *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* – present his republican ideas, while the oral background of Old English literature and the distorting effects of time and copying provide no place to explain private ideas. However, there are two clues which suggest that the Old English poem might have some political implications: firstly, its Old Saxon origin, and secondly, the political

<sup>47</sup> Aaron K. HOSTETTER (trans): “Genesis A/B” Lines 278–291.

<sup>48</sup> Frederick M. BIGGS: “The Politics of Succession in ‘Beowulf’ and Anglo-Saxon England”. *Speculum*, 80.3, 2005, 709–741. 732.

<sup>49</sup> Frederick M. BIGGS: “Beowulf and Some Fictions of the Geatish Succession”. *Anglo-Saxon England*, 32, 2003, 55–77. 60–61.

tension in Wessex around the poem's assumed creation date. As for the first issue, it must be mentioned that both textual and linguistic evidence shows that *Genesis B* is a fractional translation of an Old Saxon poem narrating the Book of Genesis.<sup>50</sup> Thomas states that based on its literary context, e.g. its allusions, or the dating of the manuscript it was preserved in, the Old Saxon *Genesis* was supposedly composed in the first half of the 8th century, in the Carolingian empire, during the often unstable rule of Louis the Pious or the years of power struggle following his death, and the conflict of Satan and God in the poem can be understood as an allusion to these turbulences.<sup>51</sup> Thomas also adds that the translation of the poem into Old English might thus have been motivated by two reasons: on the one hand, it could contribute to the spreading of Christian theology in England; on the other hand, it could draw a parallel between political treachery and the disobedience of Satan by depicting the devil as a figure of Anglo-Saxon aristocracy.<sup>52</sup> As the mid-ninth century status of Wessex was comparable to Louis's Carolingian Empire in terms of problems of power division and political authority,<sup>53</sup> the translator might have been inspired by the contemporary political climate, or, alternatively, the poem itself might have had an influence on the assessment of the situation. Although the time of the translation is uncertain, Doane theorizes that the Old Saxon *Genesis* came to England somewhere between 850 and 900 based on the linguistic evidence,<sup>54</sup> in which case the remnants of previous power struggles in the century might have been perceivable.

While the authors of *Genesis B* and *Paradise Lost* decided to show the motivation for Satan's rebellion in a speech uttered by Satan himself, the poet of *Christ and Satan* chose a peculiar method to shed light on the reasons of Satan treachery. Instead of listing Satan's incentives himself, in the role of the narrator, or giving Satan a monologue about his discontent with God, it is the group of followers who sum up the events for the reader:

Duhte þe anum þæt ðu ahtest alles gewald,  
 heofnes and eorþan, wære halig god,  
 scypend seolfa. Nu earttu earm[.] sceaðana sum  
 in fyrlocan feste gebunden.  
 Wendes ðu ðurh wuldor ðæt þu woruld ahtest,  
 alra onwald, and we englas mid ðec.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas D HILL: "Pilate's Visionary Wife and the Innocence of Eve: An Old Saxon Source for the Old English 'Genesis B.'" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 101.2, 2002, 170–184. 174.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel THOMAS: "Revolt in Heaven: Lucifer's Treason in Genesis B". Larissa Tracy (ed.): *Treason: Medieval and Early Modern Adultery, Betrayal, and Shame*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, 149–150.

<sup>52</sup> Daniel THOMAS: *op. cit.* 163.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel THOMAS: *op. cit.* 164.

<sup>54</sup> Alger Nicolaus DOANE. *The Saxon Genesis. An Edition of the West Saxon Genesis B and The Old Saxon Vatican Genesis*, Madison, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, 52.



Atol is þin onseon! Habbað we alle swa  
 for ðinum leasungum lyðre gefered.  
 Segdest us to soðe þæt ðin sunu wære  
 meotod moncynnes; hafustu nu mare susel!<sup>55</sup>

[To you alone it seemed that you owned all power,  
 the heavens and the earth, that you were Holy God,  
 the Shaper himself. Now are you bound fast  
 in fiery locks, just another criminal –  
 You believed by your glory that you possessed the world,  
 power over everything, and we were your angels by your side.  
 Terrifying is your face! Ill we have suffered for all your lying.  
 You said to us as truth that the measurer of mankind was your son –  
 now you have the more torment!]<sup>56</sup>

What makes this description of the situation especially interesting is the fact that on the one hand, the text reveals that Satan himself feels remorse for his actions; on the other hand, his remorse is not even enough to make his own followers empathise with him. Satan is as heavily criticised by his supporters as by the narrator; if only the preceding section of the poem is observed, the band of devils is harsher in their description of their leader than other parts of the text. Whereas the devils claim that Satan's face is terrible, and their suffering originates from his lies, the narrator only used the expression "se alda"<sup>57</sup> [the old one] to describe Satan, making the devils' judgement appear even harsher in comparison. In a sense, this portrayal and the dynamic between Satan and his supporters may signal that Satan's guilt is not strong enough to gain him forgiveness either from God or from his followers, which shows that he has failed both in his role of an angel, a symbol of his connection to God, and in his role as a chief, which is a political and social function.

Such a reaction on the followers' part, however, seems to reveal a key feature of Satan's original motive. The fiends say that Satan claimed that his son was the ruler of men; in addition, their account of the events suggest that Satan lied to them on purpose, which makes his drive for the rebellion utterly selfish, even though he acts like a responsible leader after the Fall. Milton's Satan is comparable to him from the aspect of leadership as well. On the one hand, Milton's Satan holds his council in Hell, which implies that he takes the opinion of his fellows into consideration, portraying him as an arguably attentive leader; on the other hand, the text also suggests that the most important aspect of his agenda was his own progress. He claims that "[he] sdeind subjection, and thought one step higher / Would set [him] highest" (4.50–51). This resonates with the account of Satan's actions in *Christ and*

<sup>55</sup> "Christ and Satan" Lines 53–64.

<sup>56</sup> Aaron K. HOSTETTER (trans.): "Christ and Satan". Lines 54–64.

<sup>57</sup> "Christ and Satan". Line 34.

*Satan*, where the devils' speech implies that Satan was, in fact, posing as God, and thus positioned himself as if he were to fulfil the highest role in Heaven. It is important to note that while both poems depict Satan as a self-motivated, yet caring lord, the reactions from his fellows greatly differ. The shortcomings of Satan in *Christ and Satan* are voiced by those fallen spirits that once supported his cause, showing that in the end, even sinners are disillusioned by his lies and understand their own fault in following him during the events of the rebellion. This nuance shows that although Satan seems to exhibit characteristics of Anglo-Saxon leaders, he failed in this role, as he can no longer provide safety for his thanes; moreover, his followers lost their trust in him. In contrast, the flaws in the arguments of Milton's Satan are not called out by his supporters, as they are willing to work together with him and listen to him even after being exiled, and "as a God / Extoll him equal to the highest in Heav'n" (2.478–479). Problems with Satan's reasoning are only addressed by the angel Abdiel, prior to the rebellion, who calls his words "blasphemous, false and proud" (5.809). Because of this, Milton's Satan might be interpreted as a more successful leader, as his subjects do not decide to oppose him even in a dire situation. Moreover, it might also imply that the Satan of the Old English poem lied to his followers more deliberately, while in *Paradise Lost*, the whole host of devils might have agreed with his agenda of not subjecting to the Son.

In terms of motivation, there is another curious similarity between *Paradise Lost* and *Christ and Satan*. Dustoor explains that Milton's decision to have Satan rebel against God due to the exaltation of the Son is a divergence from the medieval tradition, since most works in the Middle Ages suggested that his Fall was either a consequence of envy for Mankind, or his own vanity.<sup>58</sup> Of course, directing Satan's revolt against Christ specifically is not unprecedented in literature or theology. As a possible source of this idea, Dustoor mentions *Discourse of Divels*, an addition to Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* from 1558, which was republished in its supplemented form in 1665, and the Junius Manuscript's *Christ and Satan*.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Hill adds that although the idea of Satan rebelling directly against Christ was a well-known tenet of Puritan theology, scattered references to such an understanding of Satan's Fall can also be found in other Old English religious poems, for example in *Andreas* or the poem entitled *Resignation* from the Exeter Book.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, references to the direct causes of Satan's rebellion in *Christ and Satan* are neither clear nor undivided; however, some excerpts imply that instead of rebelling against the Holy Trinity as a whole, Satan's disobedience was directed at Christ. In the poem, three different speakers – the narrator, Satan and the band of devils – all comment on this issue. Firstly, the narrator, who can be said

<sup>58</sup> P. E. DUSTOOR: "Legends of Lucifer in Early English and in Milton". *Anglia. Zeitschrift für englische Philologie*, 44, 1930, 213–268. 246.

<sup>59</sup> P. E. DUSTOOR: *op. cit.* 247.

<sup>60</sup> Thomas D. HILL: *op. cit.* 318.

to represent an outside perspective, claims that the rebels “[...] woldon benæman nergendne Crist / rodera rices”<sup>61</sup> [that they wished to seize from the Savior Christ / the kingdom of heaven];<sup>62</sup> a statement that explicitly portrays the revolt as a fight against Christ. Secondly, Satan himself says that he “[...] wolde of selde sunu meotodes, / drihten adrifan”<sup>63</sup> [I wished to drive the Lord, the Son of the Measurer / from his throne],<sup>64</sup> suggesting that his claim to the heavenly throne was put up against Christ. Thirdly, the group of fiends mention that “[s]egdest us to soðe þæt ðin sunu wære / meotod moncynnes”<sup>65</sup> [You said to us as truth that the measurer of mankind was your son – / now you have the more torment!].<sup>66</sup> Although the last claim contains no direct reference to Satan working against Christ, it does suggest that Satan wanted to replace him with his own son. This act can also be viewed as an attack on Christ in his role as Lord.

There are many undeniable similarities between the ways the figure of Satan is depicted in *Paradise Lost*, *Genesis B*, and *Christ and Satan* that seem to suggest that Milton might have looked at these specific Old English poems as sources of inspiration. Although most of the more overarching themes used in the poems are those generally used in almost all texts depicting the events surrounding the fall of Satan, some of the more specific details of Satan’s character itself suggest a connection between these narratives that is deeper than simply their shared story. While on the surface Satan might simply be the embodiment of pure evil, all three poems manage to show a figure that has intriguingly complex emotions. Although in *Genesis B*, Satan’s emotions are never directly expressed, the tragedy of his Fall is still as deeply felt as in *Paradise Lost* or *Christ and Satan*, in both of which works he is given a dramatic lamenting monologue confessing his regrets. Furthermore, the motivations behind and consequences of his rebellion also share various common features. In all three poems, at the core of Satan’s rebellion is his unwillingness to submit to or accept any figure of authority besides himself. His main motivation is always to prove himself to be equal with God, which is clear in both Milton’s work and the Old English poems. During our research, we have come to the conclusion that a deeper look into Milton’s use of other Old English poems might reveal hitherto unnoticed parallels to *Paradise Lost*, further enriching the already extensive scholarship not on just Satan’s character, but also on Milton’s poetry.

<sup>61</sup> “Christ and Satan”. Lines 345–346a.

<sup>62</sup> Aaron K. HOSTETTER (trans.): “Christ and Satan”. Lines 345–346a.

<sup>63</sup> “Christ and Satan”. Lines 172–173a.

<sup>64</sup> Aaron K. HOSTETTER (trans.): “Christ and Satan”. Lines 172–173a.

<sup>65</sup> “Christ and Satan”. Lines 63–64a.

<sup>66</sup> Aaron K. HOSTETTER (trans.): “Christ and Satan”. Lines 63–64a.

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### Abstract

*In our paper, we analyse and compare the figure of Satan in Paradise Lost, as well as in Genesis B and Christ and Satan – two works of Old English literature – in order to see whether the poems in the Junius Manuscript might have served as a source of inspiration for Milton's epic. The comparison was based on the individual analysis of three different factors. In the first part of our paper, we study the characterisation of Satan, his reactions, emotions, and responses to the event of his exile. In the second part, we concentrate on Satan's social function as a leader, his relationship with his subjects, their responses to his actions and the overall evaluation of his position based on the assumed rules of the societies in which the Satan-figures were created. Lastly, we contrasted the motivation of Satan in the three poems. Our*

*comparison showed that parallels between Satan in Paradise Lost and Old English poetry exist in many respects.*

**Keywords:** *Paradise Lost*, Old English poetry, Satan

### *Rezümé*

*Óangol versek mint az Elveszett Paradicsom lehetséges forrásai*

*Tanulmányunk témája az Elveszett paradicsomban, valamint a Genesis B és a Krisztus és Sátán című óangol versekben megjelenő sátánfigura összehasonlítása. Célunk az volt, hogy elemzéseink segítségével megtudjuk, Milton használhatta-e forrásként a Junius-kézirat verseit eposzához. A műveket három nézőpontból hasonlítottuk össze. Tanulmányunk első részében Sátán megformálását – reakcióit, érzelmeit és a száműzésre adott válaszát – vizsgáltuk. A második szakaszban Sátánt vezetői szerepében vizsgáltuk: értékeltük alattvalóival való kapcsolatát, azok hozzáállását Sátán tetteihez, valamint azt is, hogyan tölti be az uralkodói pozíciót a vers keletkezési idejének társadalmi kontextusában. Az utolsó részben Sátán motívációit vizsgáltuk a három szövegben. Összehasonlításunk megmutatta, hogy számos párhuzam fedezhető fel az Elveszett paradicsom és az óangol költemények Sátánjai közt.*

**Kulcsszavak:** *Elveszett Paradicsom*, óangol költészet, Sátán

PÉTI MIKLÓS

## A London–Budapest–Moszkva-tengely: Szenczi Miklós Milton *Moszkóviájáról*<sup>1</sup>

A magyar olvasók többsége körében valószínűleg kevésbé ismert tény, hogy John Milton, az *Elvesztett* és a *Visszanyert Paradicsom* szerzője történeti műveket is írt. A *Britannia történetét* (*History of Britain*) az 1640-es évek végén kezdte el, de néhány év múlva abbahagyta, s végül befejezetlenül adta ki 1670-ben. Ez a mű a homályba vesző kezdetektől a normann hódításig tekinti át Nagy-Britannia, de főleg Anglia történetét: Milton sajátosan elegyíti benne a maga korában korszerű, tárgyi emlékekre és megbízható forrásokra alapozó (ún. antikvárius) történetírói szemléletet a meseszerű hagyományok, legendák, mondák idézésével – „ha másért nem, de az angol költők és szónokok hasznára, akik mesterségük révén tudni fogják, hogyan használják ezeket megfelelően.”<sup>2</sup> A másik, leginkább címében történeti mű, a *Moszkóvia rövid története* (*A Brief History of Moscovia*) szintén az 1650-es évek előtt íródott, viszont csak 1682-ben, nyolc évvel Milton halála után jelent meg. A kiadó által adott cím alapján történeti munkát várnánk, az előszó ettől eltérően földrajzi értekezést ígér, a szöveg azonban etnográfiai különlegességeket, az angol–orosz kapcsolatok diplomáciatörténeti összefoglalóját és az oroszországi politikai rendszerrel és vallással kapcsolatos megfigyeléseket is tartalmaz. Nehéz eldönteni, Milton minek szánhatta a *Moszkóviát*: George B. Parks szerint például lehetséges, hogy a Cromwell-kormányzat által Oroszországba küldött diplomátákat eligazító jegyzékről lehet szó, míg mások szerint Milton pedagógiai munkásságának része: tankönyv-féleség, amely kivonatolja a tárgyban elérhető legfontosabb forrásokat.<sup>3</sup> Akárhogy is legyen, a *Moszkóviát* első megjelenése óta szerény (különösen a költő késői mesterműveihez képest szerény), de nagyjából állandó érdeklődés övezi a Miltonnal foglalkozó irodalomtudósok és a Miltont kedvelő nagyközönség körében.

A *Moszkóvia* valóban megérdemli a figyelmet. A korabeli Angliához képest földrajzilag és kulturálisan is rendkívül távoli vidékekről való tudósítás önmagában is

<sup>1</sup> Részlet a szerző által készített *Moszkóvia*-fordítás utószavából.

<sup>2</sup> John MILTON: *The History of Britain, that Part Especially Now Call'd England*, London, 1670. Az idézet eredetije: „be it for nothing else but in favour of our English Poets, and Rhetoricians, who by thir Art will know, how to use them judiciously” – a továbbiakban, ha másképp nem jelzem, az angol nyelvű szövegeket saját fordításomban közlöm, a Miltontól idézett szövegek esetében lábjegyzetben közölve az eredetit is. Az antikvárius történetírással kapcsolatban ld. Graham PARRY: „Milton's *History of Britain* and the Seventeenth Century Antiquarian Scene”. *Prose Studies*, 19.3, 1996. 238–246; általánosan magyarul: ERŐS Vilmos: „A XVI–XVIII. századi történetírás”. *Világosság*, 2009 nyár. III–125.

<sup>3</sup> Don M. WOLFE (szerk.): *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8. kötet, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982, 460–462.

érdekfeszítő, hiszen Milton leírásában keverednek a kora modern földrajztudomány legkorszerűbb módszerei és megfigyelései a „szentanúk” gyakran fantáziadúsan kiszínezett tudósításaival és útleírásaival és az antikvitásból vagy a középkorból hagyományozott tudásanyaggal. Ráadásul a szerző személye garancia arra, hogy óvatoskodó, diplomatikus megfogalmazások helyett határozott állásfoglalások és nyílt politikai ítéletek jellemezzék a szöveget – egyetlen példának elég itt megemlítenünk, hogy Milton már az előszóban „Európa legészakibb civilizáltnak tartott terület[ének]” határozza meg Oroszországot.<sup>4</sup> A művet a huszadik századi és a jelenkori Milton-recepció is fontosnak tartja: R. R. Cawley 1965-ben beszédes című monográfiájában (*Milton's Literary Craftsmanship* – kb. Milton irodalmi mestersége) mutatja be a *Moszkóviára* jellemző stilisztikai és szerkesztési bravúrokat, a narrátor sajátos sűrítési technikáját, rámutatva, hogy a műben „szokatlanul erősen nyilatkozik meg egy párhuzamosságokra érzékeny, szócéplést nem tűrő, pontos és precíz elme.”<sup>5</sup> R. D. Bedford 1993-ban arra hívja fel a figyelmet, hogy már a *Moszkóviában* tetten érhető az *Elveszett Paradicsom* vezérmotívuma, a „szerencsés Bukás”: amikor ugyanis (az ötödik fejezet elején) Milton az Oroszországba vezetett angol expedíciók mögött meghúzódó kapzsiságról beszél, akkor egyúttal azt is megjegyzi, hogy ezekről a vállalkozásokról reményteljesen tudósít, mivel „gyakran a rossz események is jó következményekkel járnak.”<sup>6</sup> Bedford szerint ez a megállapítás – utazással és felfedezéssel kapcsolatos kontextusát figyelembe véve – „magának az *Elveszett Paradicsomnak* is hangzatos, előremutató mottója” lehetne, hiszen az „bukott világ ismerős működésére” és benne „az emberiség kockázatos kalandokkal teli útjára” is utalhat.<sup>7</sup> Az utóbbi évtizedek recepciójában áthelyeződött a hangsúly a *Moszkóviában* megjelenő ideológiai pozíciókra. Sharon Eytan a tényekre és forrásokra támaszkodó érvelésmód és a teremtő képzelet viszonyát vizsgálja a műben, s arra a következtetésre jut, hogy a *Moszkóvia* „angol” karaktere egy Milton és kortársai által megkonstruált európai identitásba illeszkedik be.<sup>8</sup> Matthey Binney pedig egy frissen megjelent tanulmányában igyekszik árnyalni Milton megállapítását az orosz cárról („A cárnak korlátlan hatalma van”),<sup>9</sup> rámutatva, hogy ez a megfogalmazás a késő tizenhetedik században korántsem az orosz uralkodót zsarnoknak, az oroszokat pedig szolgáknak beállító sztereotípiá megnyilvánulása, hanem olyan sajátos meglátás, amely már az orosz cár 18. századi, döntően pozitív angol ábrázolásai felé mutat.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Don M. WOLFE (szerk.): i. m. 475. – „the most northern Region of Europe reputed civil” (kiemelés tőlem).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Ralston CAWLEY: *Milton's Literary Craftsmanship: A Study of A Brief History of Moscovia*, New York, Gordian Press, 1965, vii.

<sup>6</sup> Don M. WOLFE (szerk.): i. m. 524. – „as good events oft times arise from evil occasions.”

<sup>7</sup> Richard D. Bedford: „Milton's journeys north: *A Brief History of Moscovia and Paradise Lost*”. *Renaissance Studies*, 7.1, 1993. 71–85, 76.

<sup>8</sup> Sharon EYTAN: „Eastern Imaginings: Milton's *Moscovia* and Beyond”. *The European Legacy*, 17.3, 2012. 367–376.

<sup>9</sup> Don M. WOLFE (szerk.): i. m. 487. – „The Emperour exerciseth absolute power.”

<sup>10</sup> Matthew W. BINNEY: „Russia as 'Pattern or Example': John Milton's *A Brief History of Moscovia* (1682)”. *Prose Studies*, 42.2, 2021. 150–176.



Milton más műveihez hasonlóan a *Moszkóviát* sem kizárólag angol nyelvű és angolul író szerzők tárgyalták. A mű kivételes helyet foglal el Milton prózai életművében, amennyiben egy Angliától földrajzilag, kulturálisan, valamint vallási és politikai szempontból is távoli birodalomról tudósít, ahol az angol érdekek szükségképpen marginálisak. Ez a tény már viszonylag hamar, a tizenkilencedik század közepén felkeltette az orosz irodalomtudósok érdeklődését, akik (érthető módon) lényegesebbnek tartották Milton stilisztikai eljárásainál vagy az *Elveszett Paradicsom*-mal való lehetséges párhuzamoknál annak a vizsgálatát, hogy Milton milyen színben tünteti fel az orosz népet, és hogy az oroszországi viszonyokról való tudósításai mennyiben állják meg helyüket a korabeli források között. A mű orosz történeti recepciója az elmúlt másfélszáz év orosz történelmének megfelelően meglehetősen kiterjedt és sokszínű. Oydin Uzakovának a miltoni életmű orosz és szovjet fogadtatástörténetét feldolgozó doktori disszertációjában a *Moszkóvia* az egyik leggyakrabban citált mű, amelyet „történeti és irodalmi kuriózumnak” (Polugyenzskij, 1860), „méltán elfeledett könyvnek” (Tolsztoj, 1874), de akár az orosz kultúrát kritizáló szatirikus műnek is beállították már. Ezekről a véleményektől eltérően Karnovics „a hazánk korábbi állapotáról szóló angol források átfogó és lelkiismeretesen összeállított gyűjteményéről” beszél, s vannak olyanok, akik szerint a mű – azáltal, hogy angol forrásokon keresztül orosz utazók szemtanú-beszámolóit is kivonatolja – az európai földrajztudományhoz való orosz hozzájárulásról tesz tanúságot.<sup>11</sup> Ezeknek a különféle értelmezési lehetőségeknek köszönhetően a *Moszkóvia* mindmáig foglalkoztatja (és megosztja) az orosz irodalomtudósokat, történészeket és társadalomtudósokat: egyetlen példának hadd idézzük itt Olga Dmitrijeva, a Moszkvai Állami Egyetem professzorának jellemzően kétértelmű méltatását 2006-ból, mely szerint Milton műve adja a legjobb képet „a Moszkóvia által az angol világképben elfoglalt helyről,” miközben „teljes mértékben felismeri [Oroszország] kulturális és vallási különbségeit.”<sup>12</sup>

Az angol-amerikai és az orosz kritikai hagyományban tapasztalható érdeklődéshez képest a *Moszkóvia* magyar recepciója meglehetősen gyér. A mű miltoni életműben elfoglalt helyét tekintve ez nem meglepő (rövid, posztumusz kiadott szövegről van szó), de viszonylagos ismeretlenségéhez valószínűleg az is hozzájárult, hogy a tizenkilencedik század végétől fogva Milton magyarországi befogadása elsősorban az *Elveszett Paradicsomra* és (kisebb mértékben) a rövid költeményekre irányult. Ez különösen a második világháború utáni időszakban, a „létező szocializmus” évtizedeiben vált szembeűnővé, amikor – nyilvánvaló ideológiai okokból – felértékelődött Milton forradalmisága, azonban ez (meglepő módon) nem járt együtt a valóban „forradalmi” (azaz: az 1650-es években írt) prózaművek újraértelmezésé-

<sup>11</sup> Oydin UZAKOVA: *The Reception History of John Milton in Russia and the Former Soviet Union (1745–2013)*, doktori disszertáció, Oklahoma State University, 2014, 65, 72, 68, 67.

<sup>12</sup> Olga DMITRIJEVA és Natalya ABRAMOVA (szerk.): *Britannia & Muscovy: English Silver at the Court of the Tsars*, New Haven, Yale Center for British Art, 2006, 29.

vel.<sup>13</sup> Egyedül Szenczi Miklós, a huszadik század anglista-professzor próbálta megismertetni a *Moszkóviát* a magyar olvasókkal – és nem csak velük, hanem a nemzetközi tudós közönséggel is, hiszen orosz és angol nyelven is publikálta kutatásait a tárgyban. Az utóbbi tanulmányok, keleti blokkból származó anglista esetében szinte kivételes módon be is kerültek a nemzetközi szakirodalomba: a Milton prózai műveinek ún. Yale-kiadásában a *Moszkóviát* szerkesztő George B. Parks például kiemeli, hogy a közelmúlt tanulmányai közül Szenczi szövege „tárgyalja kiemelten a *Moszkóviában* megjelenő csípős ellenszenvet Oroszország és az oroszok iránt.” Ugyanebben a kötetben jelenti ki John B. Gleason a *Moszkóvia* orosz recepciójának tárgyalása során, hogy Szenczi orosz nyelvű tanulmánya „nem foglalkozik a [mű] történeti értékével, ami az orosz írókat szinte kizárólagosan érdekelte.”<sup>14</sup> Úgy tűnik tehát, Szenczi mind az orosz, mind az angol-amerikai kritikai hagyományhoz képest újat és érvényeset – vagy legalábbis valami érdekeset – tudott mondani saját kora számára, s ezért feltétlenül érdemes itt röviden áttekintenünk főbb téziseit. Az angol és orosz nyelven írt tanulmányok mellett Szenczi két rövid, Dávidházi Péter által fordított részletet is beválogatott a műből az 1975-ben megjelent *Milton, az angol forradalom tükré* című szemelvény-gyűjteménybe: az ezekhez fűzött kommentárok, illetve a válogatás általam rekonstruálható logikája is az összkép részét alkotja majd. Szenczi munkáját természetesen befolyásolták korának politikai és kulturális kontextusai, s ilyen szempontból a *Moszkóviával* kapcsolatos munkássága talán többet tár fel a szocialista kultúrpolitika és irodalomtudomány működéséről, mint Milton művéről. Tény azonban, hogy Szenczit tanulmányozva a *Moszkóviáról* és talán magáról Miltonról is valamivel többet megtudunk.

Az 1904-ben született, egyetemi tanulmányait Budapesten és Aberdeenben végző Szenczi Miklós Országh László mellett a huszadik századi anglisztika egyik vezéralakja volt. Nincs lehetőségem itt felsorolni munkásságának minden aspektusát – ezt megtették már nálam hozzáértőbb személyek, akik ráadásul személyesen is ismerték<sup>15</sup> – ezért csak röviden emlékeztetnék arra, hogy Szenczi az anglisztikának szinte minden ágában jelentőset alkotott. Diplomái megszerzése után nyelvkönyvíróként kezdte pályafutását (évekig gyakorló középiskolai tanár is volt), majd miután megírta és megvédte doktori disszertációját Webster drámáiból, megszervezte és egy évtizedig vezette a londoni University College magyar intézetét (ma a School of Slavonic and East European Studies része). Irodalomtörténeti publikációi ebből az időszakból főleg az angol–magyar kulturális kapcsolatokkal foglalkoztak. Magyarországra visszatérve fordítóként is tevékenykedett, tudósként pedig az angol irodalom minden korszakával kapcsolatban publikált. Hihetetlenül sokrétű élet-

<sup>13</sup> Milton magyar recepciójáról a kommunizmus évtizedeiben ld. PÉTI Miklós: *Paradise from Behind the Iron Curtain: Reading, Translating and Staging Milton in Communist Hungary*, London, UCL Press, 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Don M. WOLFE (szerk.): i. m. 469, 609.

<sup>15</sup> FRANK Tibor: „A magyar anglisztika nehéz születése: Szenczi Miklós és Országh László”. In Papp Gábor (szerk.): *Értelmiségi választak 1945 után*, Budapest, Kossuth, 2017, 25–36; GYERGYAI Albert: „Arcképvázlat Szenczi Miklósról”. *Nagyvilág*, 20.12, 1975. 1912–1913.

műve alapján azt gondolhatnánk, Szenczinek csendes, nyugalmas, alkotó élet jutott osztályrészül, de ez nem teljesen igaz: londoni tevékenysége éppen a második világháború idejére esett, a Rákosi-diktatúra idején pedig elbocsátották az egyetemről, így kénytelen volt fordításokból fenntartani magát. Csak 1956 után kapta vissza egyetemi professzori székét, s az ezután következő időszakban – élete utolsó két évtizedében – dolgozott legfontosabb munkáin: az *Angol reneszánsz drámák* háromkötetes gyűjteményén (1961), a Szobotka Tiborral és Katona Annával együtt írt *Az angol irodalom történetén* (1972), vagy a Kéry Lászlóval és Vajda Miklóssal közösen szerkesztett, posztumusz kiadott *Klasszikus angol költők* című antológián (1986). Ebben az időszakban – a kádári konszolidáció éveiben – írta meg a romantikusokkal és Miltonnal kapcsolatos legfontosabb műveit is, amelyek közül kiemelkedik a *Moszkóviából* részleteket tartalmazó *Milton, az angol forradalom tükre* című, Milton prózai munkáiból rövid részleteket közlő gyűjtemény.

A *Milton, az angol forradalom tükre* egyszerre nagyratörő és szerény vállalkozás. Nagyratörő, mert Szenczi válogatása a teljes, rendkívül kiterjedt miltoni prózai életmű keresztmetszetét nyújtja az olvasóknak (a Cambridge-ben írt korai iskolai feladatoktól (az ún. *prolusióktól*) kezdve egészen a latin nyelvű és mindmáig vitatott szerzőségű *De Doctrina Christiana*ig. Szerény azonban, mivel minden műből csak részleteket közöl és minimálisra fogja a magyarázó jegyzeteket. A *Moszkóviából* is csak két rövid szemelvény került be Szenczi válogatásába „Fjodor cár koronázása” és „Angol követ Borisz Godunov udvarában” címmel (mindkettő Dávidházi Péter fordításában), de ezek a részletek hangsúlyos helyen, Szenczi kötetének a legvégén foglalnak helyet, terjedelmükben pedig közelítenek a válásról szóló röpiratok bemutató részhez (azaz: 5–6 nyomtatott oldalt tesznek ki). Szenczi a részletekhez fűzött bevezető jegyzetében röviden ismerteti a mű szerkezetét, majd megjegyzi, hogy „mind a koronázás, mind a követfogadás leírása alkalmat adott Miltonnak a festői részletekben, barokk pompában való gyönyörködésre.”<sup>16</sup> A Szenczi által kiválasztott, bámulatosan részletgazdag és élénk jelenetekben bővelkedő leírások valóban kitűnő példával szolgálnak Milton ábrázoló képességeire, de az egész mű kontextusában szembeűnő, hogy mennyire nem reprezentatívak sem az orosz történelem, sem pedig az angol–orosz kapcsolatok miltoni felfogásának tekintetében. Leegyszerűsítve azt mondhatjuk, hogy Milton ezeket a pompás leíró részeket az elbeszélés drámai feszültségeit oldó, azokat tagoló betétekként iktatta be művébe: a koronázási jelenet például IV. (Rettegett) Iván uralkodásának leírását követi és Oroszország hírhedt „zavaros időszakának” izgalmas elbeszélését előzi meg, míg Sir Thomas Smith 1604–1605-ös sikeres követjárása kevésbé eredményes diplomáciai kapcsolatfelvételek egész sorának ismertetése után zárja magát a művet is. Különösen szembeűnő a Szenczi által válogatott *Moszkóvia*-részletek és a kötetben közvetlenül előttük szereplő, a *Britannia történetéből* vett szemelvények közötti kontraszt: utóbbiak (különösen a normann hódításról szóló rész) mozgalmas, drámai jelenetekben bővelkedő elbeszélésrészeket tartalmaznak, míg az előbbie-

<sup>16</sup> SZENCZI Miklós (szerk.): *Milton, az angol forradalom tükre*, Budapest, Gondolat, 1975, 167.

ben Oroszország messzi, csodálatosan gazdag és jól kormányzott birodalomként jelenik meg, szinte mint a mesékben. A Fjodor cár koronázásáról szóló rész így fejeződik be:

Röviddel ezután a cár, Borisz irányításával, meghódította Szibéria hatalmas birodalmát, és foglyul ejtette annak királyát. Ugyanakkor leváltotta a becstelen tisztviselőket, és megszüntetett néhány korábbi adót. Summa summárum, a kormányzatban nagy változás következett be, de nyugalanság nélkül, békésen.<sup>17</sup>

A Borisz Godunov udvarába látogató angol követség leírása pedig a következőképpen záródik:

Amikor a követ visszaindult hazájába, a városból egy mérföldnyire vitték el ugyanolyan méltósággal, ahogy jövelekor fogadták, itt a követ leszállt a cár szánjáról, és beszállt egy másik szánra erősített hintójába; a többiek is szánra ültek, és simán, kellemesen utaztak hazáig.<sup>18</sup>

Nem vitás, hogy ezek a részletek is kiemelt pillanatait rögzítik a *Moszkóviában* bemutatott Oroszország-történetnek. Feltűnő azonban, hogy Szenczi kizárólag ezeket tartotta fontosnak közölni, s a szöveghez fűzött kommentárban sem ejt szót azokról az Oroszországra nézve kevésbé hízelgő részekről, amelyek egyértelműen kedvezőtlenül mutatják be az orosz kultúrát és politikát. A szövegben több szempontból is problematizált diplomáciai kapcsolatokról például Szenczi csak ennyit ír (George B. Parks fent idézett tézise nyomán): „A kapcsolatok fenntartását nyilván Cromwell köztársasága is fontosnak tartotta.”<sup>19</sup> E megállapítás és a Szenczi által kiválasztott részlet alapján az olvasó azt hihetné, hogy az orosz–angol kapcsolatok kora modern története egy diplomáciai sikersztori, amely mindkét fél kölcsönös meglegedésére virágzott – ezzel szemben a *Moszkóvia* szövege ennél jóval árnyaltabban, a sikerek mellett a mélypontokra is figyelve, kiszámíthatatlan alakulásában mutatja be ugyanezt a folyamatot.

A *Milton, az angol forradalom tükré* című kötet nem specialistáknak, hanem a művelt nagyközönségnek szült, ezért talán nem túlzás azt állítanunk, hogy Szenczi válogatásában a korabeli kultúrpolitika hatását is felfedezhetjük. Nehéz elképzelni, hogy a kor kulturális döntéshozói számára tolerálható lett volna, hogy Milontól – azaz egy olyan szerzőtől, aki kereszténysége miatt eleve problematikus volt a szocialista könyvkiadás számára – nyílt kritika jelenjen meg az oroszországi politikai viszonyokról – még akkor is, ha ezek a régmúlt politikai viszonyai voltak, melyeket a szerző forrásai alapján, gyakran fantáziája segítségével rekonstruált. Nem tudhatjuk (és talán nem is lényeges), hogy Szenczi maga válogatta-e a kötetben szereplő

<sup>17</sup> SZENCZI Miklós (szerk.): i. m. 182.

<sup>18</sup> SZENCZI Miklós (szerk.): i. m. 184.

<sup>19</sup> SZENCZI Miklós (szerk.): i. m. 166.

részleteket vagy egy szerkesztő/cenzor keze nyomán alakultak-e így: akárhogy is történt, a *Moszkóviából* közölt részletek emblematikus példái a Kádár-kori kultúrpolitika látszólag nyitott, de lényegében hamis alapokon nyugvó és torzító hatású kompromisszumkényszerének.

Ez a hazai viszonyokra jellemző kompromisszumkényszer, a *Moszkóvia* szemelvényezéssel történő „kozmetikázása” a *Milton, az angol forradalom tükré* című kötetben különösen akkor feltűnő, ha tekintetbe vesszük, hogy Szenczi a nemzetközi szakmai közösség előtt jóval összetettebb szempontok alapján nyilatkozott a *Moszkóviáról*. Az oroszul „Milton o Rossziji,” angolul pedig „Milton on Russia” című tanulmány, amelyet, mint korábban is említettem, a Yale-kiadás szerzői is idéztek, 1966-ban és 1967-ben jelent meg a *Russzko-jevropeszkije lityeraturnijü szvjazi*, illetve a *The New Hungarian Quarterly* hasábjain (a két szöveg azonos).<sup>20</sup> A tanulmány az angol-amerikai és az orosz álláspontok kiegyensúlyozott tárgyalásával indít, de Szenczi (az antológiában közölt részleteket figyelembe véve meglehetősen ironikus módon) nem elégszik meg azokkal a kritikái véleményekkel, amelyek a „kihagyás vagy elhagyás negatív [értsd: hiányon alapuló] erényében” („the negative virtue of elimination or omission”), azaz Milton sajátos sűrítő forráskezelésében azonosítják a szöveg jelentőségét, s kijelenti, hogy „ha a műnek bármilyen állandó érdeklődésre számot tartó értéke van, az bizonyos pozitív [értsd: meglévő, jelenvaló] tulajdonságokból vagy érdemeiből kell, hogy következzen.”<sup>21</sup> Szenczi ezek után Milton forrásait és a mű megalkotásának szándékát kezdi vizsgálni, majd – a mű emlékezetes szófordulatait idézve – az alábbi következtetésre jut:

A *Moszkóvia* különös jelentősége abban a tényben áll, hogy a nagy angol hazafi és nagy költő, aki olyan időben írta ezt a művét, amikor úgy érezte, hazája vallási és politikai ügyekben is az emberi fejlődés élvonalában áll, meghatározza az „Európa legészakibb civilizáltnak tartott területéhez” való viszonyát, egy olyan országhoz való viszonyát, mely csak nemrég „szerzett ismeretlenségből hírnevet,” mely viszonylag új jövevény volt az európai nemzetek közösségében, és a tizenhetedik század korai éveiben gyötrelmes „zavaros időszakon” esett át.<sup>22</sup>

A *Moszkóvia* „pozitív” tulajdonságai vagy érdemei ezek szerint a mű azon pontjain keresendők, ahol Milton újradefiniálja az angol–orosz viszonyt. Szenczi ennek megfelelően a továbbiakban nem riad vissza a Milton vallási, kulturális és politikai elfogultságáról (vagy George B. Parks fent idézett szavaival: „csípős ellenszenvéről”) tanúskodó részek idézésétől és értelmezésétől, de ugyanilyen fontosnak tartja a mű esztétikai jellegzetességeinek, a „leírásokat átható költőiségnek,” illetve Milton „festői és pompás [jelenetek] iránti érzékének” kiemelését, s ha szükséges, proble-

<sup>20</sup> M. SZENCZI: „Milton o Rossziji”. *Russzko-jevropeszkije lityeraturnije szvjazi*, Moszkva–Leningrád, 1966; Miklós SZENCZI: „Milton on Russia”. *The New Hungarian Quarterly*, 25.8, 1967. 177–182.

<sup>21</sup> Miklós SZENCZI: „Milton in Russia”, 178.

<sup>22</sup> Miklós SZENCZI: „Milton in Russia”, 179.

matizálását.<sup>23</sup> A források és történeti kontextusok korrekt és precíz bemutatásán túl itt-ott persze találhatunk néhány kötelező gesztust a marxista-leninista kultúrpolitika irányába – ilyen például az a kijelentés, hogy „Milton morális problémákra fordított túlzott figyelme leginkább a közigazdaság területén torzítja el ítéletét” vagy amikor Kuzma Minyint, az 1612-es népfelkelés vezetőjét „az egyszerű ember képében megjelenő felszabadítónak” nevezi, akinek Milton „szívélyes elismeréssel adózik.”<sup>24</sup> Az összkép azonban jóval árnyaltabb és teljesebb a *Milton, az angol forradalom tükre* című kötetben közölt részleteknél: ha az utóbbiaknál egyfajta kényszeres kompromisszumot véltünk felfedezni a részletek válogatásában, itt inkább az objektív tárgyalás igényét érzékelhetjük abban, ahogy Szenczi a mű által felvetett ideológiai problémák mellett, azokat részben ellensúlyozva, részben kiegészítve a szöveg esztétikai sajátosságait is kommentálja.

Úgy tűnik tehát, hogy Szenczi ebben a tanulmányában határozottan miltoni szellemű, az *epikriszis* vagy *adiudicatio* retorikai stratégiáját alkalmazó kritikát ír: híven megőrzi a *Moszkóvia* gondolatmenetét és maradéktalanul előszámlálja a mű tulajdonságait, ahol azonban szükségesnek tartja, kritikával is él a miltoni gondolatmenet vagy elbeszélésmód kapcsán.<sup>25</sup> Ezzel alkalmasint magasabb szintű és talán elfogadhatóbb kompromisszumot köt a szocialista kultúrpolitikával, mint a pár évvel később megjelent *Milton, az angol forradalom tükre* című kötetben. Fontos azonban látnunk azt is, hogy Szenczi mindkét műben megpróbál túllépni a tolmács vagy a békítő kényszerű szerepén, hogy egy sajátos közép-kelet-európai perspektívával gazdagítsa a *Moszkóvia* fogadtatástörténetét. Mind az antológiában, mind az orosz és angol nyelvű tanulmányokban kitér ugyanis egy, a Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum tulajdonában levő 17. századi festményre, amely egy cári követfogadást ábrázol a Kremlben található Granovitaja-palotában.<sup>26</sup> Jelen tudásunk szerint a kép valószínűleg lengyel vagy magyar követek fogadását örökíti meg, Szenczi azonban felveti annak a lehetőségét, hogy az ábrázolás tárgya Sir John Merrick 1620-as látogatása a Romanov-házat megalapító I. Mihály cárnál. Erre ugyan nem szolgál bizonyítékkal, de megjegyzi, hogy „Milton színes leírása” segíthet a művészettörténészeknek a kérdés eldöntésében.<sup>27</sup> Egyéb tudományos munkáiban Szenczi általában tartózkodott a spekulatív érveléstől, a *Moszkóvia* kapcsán azonban, úgy tűnik, fontosnak tartotta, hogy felvillantson egy pusztá feltételezést, melynek alapján teljesen új kulturális kontextusba, az angol–orosz kapcsolatok viszonyrendszerébe illeszthette a budapesti festményt. A szövegből nem derül ki egyértelműen, hogy Szenczi előremutató tudományos eredménynek vagy csupán a tudós közönség figyelmére számot tartó érdekességnek gondolta-e a képpel kapcsolatos eszmefuttatását. Öt

<sup>23</sup> Miklós SZENCZI: „Milton in Russia”, 181.

<sup>24</sup> Miklós SZENCZI: „Milton in Russia”, 180, 179.

<sup>25</sup> Az *epikriszis/adiudicatio* miltoni stratégiájáról ld. Daniel SHORE: „Why Milton is not an Iconoclast”. PMLA, 127.1, 2012. 22–37.

<sup>26</sup> Ismeretlen művész: „Követség fogadása a Kremlben”, XVII. század első fele, fa, olaj, 43,5 x 64 cm, Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum, Ltsz.: MTKCS 7.

<sup>27</sup> Miklós SZENCZI: „Milton in Russia”, 182.

évtized távlatából nézve leginkább szellemes kultúr- és tudománydiplomáciai gesztusnak, Nyugat és Kelet között új kapcsolatot építő ötletnek tűnik az elképzelés, hogy Milton sajátos Oroszország-képének alaposabb megértéséhez egy magyarországi festmény nyújthat segítséget. Milton elbeszélése szerint az első angol utazók a Dvina folyón át közelítették meg Moszkóvia birodalmát – Szenczi leleményes elgondolása ezzel szemben a Duna partjáról, Budapestről mutatott utat Milton *Moszkóviájához*.

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*Rezümé*

*John Milton posztumusz kiadott A Brief History of Moscovia (Moszkóvia rövid története, 1682) című prózai műve a 17. századi angol történetírás igazi kuriózuma, amelyben az Elveszett Paradicsom szerzője a korabeli tudósításokra és útleírásokra támaszkodva tudósít Oroszország történetéről, földrajzáról, az ott élő népek szokásairól, valamint az angol–orosz kapcsolatokról. A Moszkóvia Milton magyar recepciójában is szerepet játszott: Szenczi Miklós, a nagy 20. századi miltonista tudós a 60-as évek végén nemzetközileg is elismert szaktanulmánnyal járult hozzá a mű értelmezéséhez. Dolgozatomban ezt a tanulmányt és Szenczi további, Milton Moszkóviájával foglalkozó munkáit vizsgálom.*

**Kulcsszavak:** John Milton, Moszkóvia, Szenczi Miklós, fogadtatástörténet

*Abstract*

*The London–Budapest–Moscow Axis: Miklós Szenczi on Milton’s Moscovia*

*John Milton’s posthumously published A Brief History of Moscovia (1682) is one of the lesser-known works of the great poet, in which eyewitness reports and early modern travelogues are collected to provide a concise summary of Russian history, geography, ethnography, and Anglo-Russian relations. This work also played some role in Milton’s Hungarian reception: Miklós Szenczi, the great 20th-century Miltonist, published an article in the late 1960s which, quite uniquely for a Central-Eastern European English Studies scholar, made its way to mainstream Milton criticism. In my paper, I consider Szenczi’s position on Milton’s treatise.*

**Keywords:** John Milton, Moscovia, Miklós Szenczi, reception history



TIBOR FABINY

## The Apocalyptic Tradition in Medieval and Early Modern English Literature

Apart from the Passion Story, the Apocalypse, or the Book of Revelation was perhaps the most important biblical influence in Medieval and Renaissance English literature. As early as in his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), Northrop Frye wrote that Revelation is “our grammar of apocalyptic imagery,” which combines and unifies the most significant symbols of the Western literary tradition.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I will provide an inventory of the most significant apocalyptic works and their authors from the Medieval and Early Modern periods.

### *The Middle Ages*

#### The Vision of Piers Plowman

In Middle English literature there are several literary documents of apocalyptic spirituality. Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202), with his trinitarian view of history and his prophetic imagination, has most probably influenced apocalyptic literary works. John Wycliff and the 14th century Lollards criticized the corruption of the clergy and wanted to return to the simplicity of the early church. The most popular 14th century poem was a Lollard work: *The Vision of Piers Plowman*. A candidate for the authorship is a certain William Langland, of whom we do not know too much. The theme of the poem is the pilgrimage of man’s soul in search of the ultimate truth. The allegorical poem also provides the reader with a realistic image of 14th century England.

*Piers Plowman* exists in three different manuscripts and was written during the “alliterative revival.” It has been called a “Fourteenth Century Apocalypse.”<sup>2</sup> The poem is written within the dream-vision tradition: the poet falls asleep on Malvern Hills and in his dream he sees a large field “full of folk.” On this field he sees the Tower of Truth and the Dungeon of Falsehood and the crowd of people running after vanities. Pilgrims, palmers and pardoners are among the corrupt people. It is described how the Devil, the Father of Lies fell from heaven. When the dreamer asks Holy Church how he may recognize Falsehood, she then shows him how Lady

<sup>1</sup> Northrop FRYE: *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1957, 141.

<sup>2</sup> Morton W. BLOOMFIELD, “‘Piers Plowman’ as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse”. *Centennial Review*, 1961. 281–295.

Fee, Falsehood's daughter marries Fraud. The he dreams of the Seven Deadly Sins. The only positive hero in this dreamworld is Piers the Plowman, whose plainness and simplicity makes him a type of Christ. In fact, in the dream Piers becomes identified with Christ when the dreamer envisages the founding of the Holy Church. In the last book (Passus XX), the dreamer has a vision of the Antichrist:

When Need has scolded me so I fell asleep at once  
 And dreamed most marvellously that in man's form  
 Antichrist came then and cut Truth's branches,  
 Quickly turned the tree upside down and tore up the roots,  
 And made False spring up and spread and support men's needs.  
 In every country where he came he cut away Truth  
 And got Guile to grow there as if he were a god.  
 Friars followed that fiend, for he gave them copes,  
 And religious orders did him reverence and rang their bells,  
 And all the convent came to welcome a usurper  
 And all his followers as well as him, save only fools,  
 Which fools would prefer far more to die  
 Than to live any longer since Lewte was so despised,  
 And a false fiend Antichrist put all folk beneath his rule.

(Trans. E.T. Donaldson)

In the last pages of the poem the vivid battle against Antichrist is described in great detail.

### Pearl

*Pearl* is perhaps the most beautiful poem in Middle English literature, therefore, it deserves closer attention. The poem was preserved in a collection with three other famous Middle English poems, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Patience*, and *Purity (Cleanness)*, and was written during the alliterative revival at the end of the 14th century in the North West Midland dialect. The author is unknown.

*Pearl* contains 101 rhymed octosyllabic 12-line stanzas in 20 "chapters." There are 1212 lines altogether in the poem, the rhyme scheme is *abab abab bcbc*, the stanzas are knit together by a final refrain.

This poem was also written within the "dream vision convention" like *The Dream of the Rood*, *La Roman de la Rose*, *The Book of the Duchess*, *Piers Plowman*, Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale*, and so on. In this tradition the dream was seen as medium for utterance of serious religious matters.

The sources of the poem come partly from the medieval romance tradition: the Virgin Mary is called the "Queen of Courtesy" in stanza 37. But the most important

source is the Christian Bible: there are altogether 99 biblical quotations, mainly from the Book of Revelation.<sup>3</sup> Structurally there are reminiscences of the parable of the Pearl (Mt 13:45–46) or parable of the Lost Coin Lk 15:8–9).

The subject of *Pearl* is very simple: Pearl is the author's daughter, an only child whom he lost when she was less than two years old. Wandering disconsolate in the garden where she is buried, the author falls asleep and has a vision of a river beyond which lies Paradise. Here he sees a maiden seated, in whom he recognizes his daughter grown to maturity. She, however, comforts him for his excessive grief and explains her blessed state. He strives to join her and plunges into the river, and awakes from his trance, comforted and resigned to his lot.

The artistic merits of the poem lie both in its aesthetic and religious values. There is a strict harmony between passionate grief and lofty moral vision (mystical experience). The child (just as Dante's Beatrice in *The Divine Comedy*) instructs the father in heavenly wisdom and sacred theology and she even shows him a vision of heaven. Pearl is beauty "without a spot" (or "spotless Pearl"): her beauty radiates the heavenly world of Apocalypse which is entirely different from worldly or earthly beauty.

The central motif of the whole poem is the "marriage of the Lamb" as it is described in Rev 19:8–7, cf. l.163 (14) and l:197 (17) 413–17 (35!):

for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints.

The father is instructed by his heavenly daughter to submit to God's will. When he says how much he is puzzled that his daughter who died so young can be the "Queen of Heaven," Pearl answers her father's question by citing the parable of the workers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1–16), suggesting that it means that a person who died as young as she can enter first the Kingdom of God. Moreover, Jesus insisted on a child-like quality in those who enter the Kingdom (50–62).

In the rest of the conversation Pearl evokes the world of apocalypse to her father. The poet cannot understand why Pearl is alone the bride of Christ. Pearl says she is one of the many brides described in the Apocalypse (63–66). The poet is asking Pearl:

O spotless pearl in pearls so pure...  
 Who formed for thee thy fair figure?  
 Who wrought thy raiment was full wise.  
 Thy beauty was never born of nature (63)

<sup>3</sup> E. V. GORDON (ed.): *Pearl*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1953, 164–165.

The answer is:

O spotless Lamb who doth defeat  
 All ills, my dearest Destiny  
 Chose me His mate, although unmeet  
 At first had seemed that unity  
 From the world of woe I did retreat.  
 He called me to His company:  
 ‘Come hither to me, my beloved sweet,  
 There is no mote nor spot in thee.’  
 Might and beauty He gave to me.  
 In His blood He rinsed my robes before  
 He crowned me clean in virginity,  
 Adorning me in pearls so pure (64)

This was a reference to Rev 7:10–15: “Which are these [...] that are arrayed in white robes and whence came they? These are they that came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Pearl explains that she is one of the wives of the 140.000:

All wives of the Lamb in bliss we have been  
 A hundred and forty thousand lot,  
 As in the Apocalypse it is seen.  
 St John saw them gathered all in a knot,  
 On the hill of Sion, that seemly spot.  
 The Apostle saw them, in his vision’s dream,  
 Arrayed for the wedding on that hill top,  
 The fair new city, Jerusalem (66)

Here the reference was to Rev 14:1–4:

And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood with him on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his father’s name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb withersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

Pearl then proceeds to extol the meekness of the Lamb (67), and then the Passion is described with reference to Isaiah 53:

Like sheep to a slaughter led was He,  
 And like lambs when the shearer seizes them,  
 So He closed His mouth from each inquiry,  
 When the Jews judged Him in Jerusalem (67)

Pearl describes the bliss in the world of the New Jerusalem (71–75). The poet wants to see the New Jerusalem and Pearl therefore guides him there so that he could see it himself (81). Pearl warns him that only the pure can set foot in it. Enraptured by sight, the poet describes the New Jerusalem in detail based on Rev 21:83–91. The poet becomes aware of a procession of heavenly maidens led by the Lamb (92–93). Elders do honour to the Lamb while the song of heaven is sung (94). Then the poet contemplates the bleeding wound of Christ and adores the Lamb:

Delight in the Lamb, in looking on him,  
 Filled with marvel my mind amazed.  
 Best was he, gentlest and most to esteem  
 Of all the high ones I ever heard praised.  
 Most meek and courteous was his mien,  
 Although his garments were gloriously white.  
 But close to his heart, torn through the skin,  
 Was a cruel wound, bleeding and wide:  
 The blood gushed out of his body's white.  
 Alas, thought I, who did that spite?  
 For sorrow the breast should burn up quite  
 That in such torment could take delight. (95)

The poet sees his own Pearl among the maidens (96), and, frenzied with longing, resolves to go to her, though the attempt would bring death (97). God breaks the vision, the poet awakes in awe (98–99). He resolves to follow God as Pearl had advised and in the calm of mind submitting to the will of God prays that he would deserve the blessed life. Here ends this cathartic poem.

### John Gower

John Gower (1330–1408) was a late 14th century poet, Geoffrey Chaucer's friend and contemporary, the "moral Gower" who wrote in three languages: French, Latin and English. *Speculum Hominis* or *Mirour de l'Omme* is a long commentary on the dilemma of the fallen man. The highly apocalyptic Latin poem *Vox Clamantis*

discusses the evils in society, with man as the microcosm in which the sins of the world are abundantly exhibited. Finally, the English *Confessio Amantis* was meant for entertainment, but in the Prologue Gower cannot descend from the pulpit: he discusses the corruption of the world, the decay of the age, and the coming destruction based on Nebuchadnezzar's dream from the book of Daniel.

### The Mystery Plays

Last but not least we should mention the mystery plays or the Corpus Christi cycles. These cycles covered the history of redemption from Genesis to Doomsday. Each cycle contained a drama on Judgement Day. There is an Antichrist-play in the Chester-cycle and the figure of the Antichrist also appears in the 14th poem *Cursor Mundi*.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Early Modern Period*

#### John Bale and the Tudor Apocalypse

The English Renaissance was preceded by the Reformation in England. English reformers shared the apocalyptic mentality of their continental counterparts. Apocalypse became a Tudor genre as demonstrated by Richard Bauckham's *Tudor Apocalypse*, in which he collected the English texts of "The Lantern of Lyght" (1530), Francis Lambert (1528), Sebastian Meyer (1539), George Joye (1545), Bartholomew Traheron (1557), Heinrich Bullinger (1561), William Fulke (1570), John Chardon (1580), and George Gifford (1596).<sup>5</sup> A little German tract *Passional Christi and Antichristi*, illustrated by twenty-six woodcuts from Lucas Cranach (1521), must have been influential on the first English commentary on the Book of Revelation, namely John Bale's *Image of Both Churches* written in the 1540s.<sup>6</sup> The false church was represented by the Roman church, while the true church was the Protestant one. The idea might go back to St. Augustine's distinction between *civitas diaboli* and *civitas dei*, or even to Tyconius's idea of the "bipartite body of Christ" in his *Liber regularum*. Katherine Firth in her excellent book *Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530–1645* suggests that Bale "accepted the Joachimist vision of the Church as a progression through seven periods, from the death of Christ to the end of the

<sup>4</sup> Bernard MCGINN: *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil*, New York, Harper Collins, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Richard BAUCKHAM: *Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth century apocalypticism, millenarianism and the English Reformation: From John Bale to John Foxe and Thomas Brightman*, Oxford, The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Hildegard SCHNABEL (ed.): *Lucas Cranach: Passional Christi und Antichristi*. Berlin, Union Verlag, 1972.

world.”<sup>7</sup> The main theme of the work was “the slow and secret advance of Antichrist in the Church.”<sup>8</sup>

In his Preface unto the Christian reader Bale says that:

Herein is the true Christian church, which is the meek spouse of the Lamb without spot, in her right-fashioned colours described. So is the proud church of hypocrites, the rose-coloured whore, the paramour of antichrist, and the sinful sinagogue of Satan, in her just proportion depainted, to the merciful forewarning of the Lord’s elect. And that is the cause why I have here entitled this book *The Image of Both Churches* [...] He that knoweth not this book, knoweth not what the true church is whereof he is a member. For herein is the estate thereof from Christ’s ascension to the end of the world under pleasant figures and elegant tropes decided, and nowhere else thoroughly but here, the times always respected.<sup>9</sup>

### Robert Crowley

Bale’s commentary also influenced the Tudor Gospeller Robert Crowley, who published a contemporary version of *Piers Plowman* around 1550. The work had a strong anticlerical tone and advocated the simplicity of Christ. Crowley respected the original text, but by his preface and marginal glosses converted the Middle English work into Protestant propaganda.<sup>10</sup> Crowley even added a companion entitled *The Voyce of the Laste Trumpet*, in which he advocated Bale’s theory, namely that the reign of Edward VI marks the advent of the millennium.<sup>11</sup>

### Jan Van der Noodt

Apocalyptic mentality was also reflected in emblem literature. The first English emblem book is the work of the Dutchman Jan Van der Noodt, and its title is *The*

<sup>7</sup> Katherine FIRTH: *Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain 1530–1645*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1979, 41.

<sup>8</sup> Katherine FIRTH: *op. cit.* 50.

<sup>9</sup> John BALE: *The Image of Both Churches*, London, 1545, reprint in *Select Works of John Bale*, ed. for the Parker Society by Rev. Henry CHRISTMAS, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1849. On Bale’s reception see Bauckham, Firth, and King, as well as Paul Kenneth CHRISTIANSON: *Reformers and Babylon: English Apocalyptic Visions from the Reformation to the Eve of the Civil War*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1978, and Claire MCEACHERN: “‘A whore at the first blush seemeth only a woman’: John Bale’s *Image of Both Churches* and the terms of religious difference in the early English Reformation”. *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 25, 2, 1995. 245–269.

<sup>10</sup> John KING: *English Reformation Literature*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982, 327.

<sup>11</sup> John KING: *op. cit.* 342.

*Theatre of Voluptuous Worldlings*, published in London in 1569. There are twenty plates in the book followed by explanatory verses. The first part of the book depicts the ruins of time, while the second part depicts John's Vision of the Apocalypse: it contrasts the corruption of the Roman Catholic church with the spiritual city of God established at the end of time. It is worth comparing Cranach's *Passional Christi und Antichristi* as well as his apocalyptic illustrations to Luther's New Testament of September and December 1525, respectively, as well as John Bale's *Image* and the emblem depicted in Van der Noodt's book. The text attached to this emblem is said to be a "Sonet."

I saw a Woman sitting on a beast  
 Before mine eyes, of Orenge colour hew:  
 Horrour and dreadfull name of blasphemie  
 Filde hir with pride. And Seuen heads I saw,  
 Ten hornes also the stately beast did beare.  
 She seemde with glorie of the scarlet faire,  
 And with fine perle and golde puft up in heart.  
 The wine of hoordome in a cup she bare.  
 The name of Mysterie writ in hir face.  
 The bloud of Martyrs dere were hir delite.  
 Most fierce and fell this woman seemde to me.  
 An Angell then descendinge downe from Heaven,  
 With thondring voice cride out aloude, and sayd,  
 Now for a truth great Babylon is fallen.

### Edmund Spenser

Two of Edmund Spenser's sonnet translations were published in Van der Noodt's book. Edmund Spenser (1552–1599) elaborates the apocalyptic double image of the church in the first book of his *The Fairie Queene*. The hero of the book is the Red Cross Knight who is both the type of Christ as well as an Everyman-figure. Spenser inherited an apocalyptic view of church history from Bale's *Image of Both Churches* (c. 1550) as well as from John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (1563). Both works were influenced by the *Magdeburg Centurion* written by the Lutheran Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–1575). According to this historiography, "Christian history is a drama of the True Church opposed by the False, Jerusalem by Babylon, the Bride by the Whore."<sup>12</sup> For Protestants in Tudor England the two royal sisters Bloody Mary and Elizabeth epitomized the struggle between the Whore and the Bride.

<sup>12</sup> Florence SANDLER: "The Fairie Queene: an Elizabethan Apocalypse". In C. A. Patrides – Joseph Wittreich (eds.): *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance thought and literature*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984, 148–173, 158.



Mary's death in 1558 was seen as God's vindication of the new Virgin Queen who is the Apocalyptic Bride, the True Church.

Spenser also shared this dualistic image of the church: Una is the true church who is identified with the woman "clothed with the sun" (Rev 12:1). The false church is Duessa who plays multiplicity to Una's integrity: she is also the Whore of Babylon, the scarlet woman of Revelation 17 and also the church of Rome. Archimago is Antichrist, the beast from the land from Revelation 13, the papacy. Canto VIII describes her as follows:

And after him the proud *Duessa* came,  
High mounted on her manyheaded beast,  
And every head with fyrie tongue did flame,  
And every head was crowned on his creast,  
And bloudie mouthed with late cruell feast. (Stanza 6)

Then tooke the angrie witch her golden cup,  
Which she still bore, replete with magick artes,  
Death and despeyre did many thereof sup,  
And secret poyson through their inner parts,  
Th' eternall bale of heavie wounded harts (Stanza 14)

And there beside of marble stone was built  
An Altare, carv'd with cunning ymagery,  
On which true Christians bloud was often spilt,  
And holy Martyrs often doen to dye,  
With cruell malice and strong tyranny.  
Whose blessed sprites from underneath the stone  
To God for vengeance cryde continually,  
And with great grieve were often heard to grone,  
That hardest heart would bleede, to heare their piteous mone. (Stanza 37)

So as she bad, that witch they disaraid,  
And robd of royall robes, and purple pall,  
And ornaments that richly were displaid,  
Ne spared they strip her naked all.  
Then when they had despoiled her tire and call,  
Such as she was, their eyes might her behold,  
That her misshaped parts did them appall,  
A loathly, wrinkled hag, ill favoured, old,  
Whose secret filth good manners biddeth not to be told. (Stanza 46)

## Bible Translations and the Junius Apocalypse

The 16<sup>th</sup> century is the great age of Bible translations. Before the famous Authorized Version of 1611 we have William Tyndale's New Testament of 1526, which was followed by Miles Coverdale's complete Bible translation in 1535, the Great Bible in 1538, the Geneva Bible ("The Breeches Bible") of 1557, The Bishop's Bible in 1558, Laurence Tomson's revision of the Geneva New Testament in 1576, and the Geneva-Tomson-Junius New Testament of 1602. The latter is significant for our purposes, as it contains the English translation of Francis Junius's commentary on the Book of Revelation. Francis Junius was a Huguenot professor of divinity at the University of Heidelberg, and his extended commentary was first published in English by Richard Field in 1592, entitled: *Apocalypse. A brief and learned commentarie upon the Reuelation of Saint Iohn the Apostle and Euangelist... Written in Latin by M. Francis Iunius, Doctor of Diuinitie [...] And translated into English.*<sup>13</sup>

## William Shakespeare and the Apocalypse

The English Bible translations had a great influence on Shakespeare's imagery, as was demonstrated by the scholarly works of Richmond Noble in the 1930s or in the last ten years by Naseeb Shaheen.<sup>14</sup>

When we come to Shakespeare's use of apocalyptic imagery, we cannot but agree with Frank Kermode, who in his famous *The Sense of an Ending* said as follows: "When tragedy established itself in England it did so in terms of plots and spectacle that had much more to do with medieval apocalypse than with the *mythos* and *opsis* of Aristotle."<sup>15</sup>

Apocalyptic imagery in Shakespeare has been studied especially in *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *King Lear*.<sup>16</sup> The striking presence of evil in these tragedies echoes the Book of Revelation. Macbeth's sentence: "and mine eternal jewel / Given to the common enemy of man" (3.1.68–69) is an indirect allusion

<sup>13</sup> Gerald T. SHEPPARD (ed.): *The Geneva Bible (The Annotated New Testament, 1602 Edition)*, New York, The Pilgrim Press, 1989.

<sup>14</sup> Richmond NOBLE: *Shakespeare's Biblical Knowledge*, London, Macmillan, 1935; Naseeb SHAHEEN: *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Tragedies*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1987; *Biblical References in Shakespeare's History Plays*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1989; *Biblical References in Shakespeare's Comedies*, Newark, University of Delaware Press, 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Frank KERMODE: *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1966, 30.

<sup>16</sup> Mary LASCELLES: "King Lear and Doomsday". *Shakespeare Survey*, 26, 1973. 69–79; Jane H. JACK: "Macbeth, King James and the Bible". *English Literary History*, 22.3, 1955. 173–193; Ethel SEATON: *Antony and Cleopatra and the Book of Revelation*. *The Review of English Studies*, 22.87, 1946. 219–224; Jack LINDSAY: "Antony and Cleopatra and the Book of Revelation". *The Review of English Studies*, 89, 1947. 66; Helen MORRIS: "Shakespeare and Dürer's Apocalypse". *Shakespeare Studies*, 4, 1968. 252–262.

to Rev 12:9, just like Banquo's question "can the devil speak true?" (1.3.107) or the statement "To win us to our harm, / The instruments of darkness tell us truths" (1.3.123–125). Jane Jack is correct when she says that "Shakespeare lent heavily on *Revelation* and James' commentary on it for the expression of his imaginative apprehension of overwhelming evil."<sup>17</sup> *Antony and Cleopatra's* indebtedness to the Book of Revelation is especially striking. It is not only the "new heaven – new earth" motive right at the beginning of the play (1.1.17, cf. Rev 21:1), but especially that Cleopatra appears as the great whore of Babylon: "He hath given his empire / Up to a whore, who are now levying / The kings of the earth for war" (3.6.66–68, cf. Rev 17:1–2, Rev 19:19). Antony is the great star that is fallen (3.13.145–147, cf. Rev 9:1). And "The star is fallen / And time is at his period." (4.14.106–107, cf. Rev 8:10: "There fell a great starre from heauen." Or consider Cleopatra's description of the dead Antony:

His face was as the heav'ns, and therein struck  
A sun and moon, which kept their course, and lighted  
The little O, th' earth. [...]  
His legs bestrid the ocean, his rear'd arm  
Crested the world, his voice was propertied  
As all the tuned spheres, and that to friends (5.2.79–84)

This description is reminiscent of Rev 10:1–5: "And I sawe another mightie Angel come downe from heauen, clothed with a cloude, and the rainbowe vpon his head, and his face was as the sunne, and his feete as pillars of fire."

Naseeb Shaheen is most probably right when he writes that

Shakespeare's use of the book of Revelation in *Antony and Cleopatra* is outstanding. The Apocalypse seems to have supplied him with some of the most vivid images in the play. Since only three chapters of Revelation were read during Morning and Evening Prayer in the Anglican Church (chapter 19 on All Saints Day, November 1, chapters 1 and 22 on the Feast of St. John, December 27) Shakespeare must have read privately much of Revelation shortly before or during the composition of the play.<sup>18</sup>

Joseph Wittreich has written both an article and a whole book on the relationship between Shakespeare's *King Lear* and the Book of Revelation.<sup>19</sup> Undoubtedly,

<sup>17</sup> Jane H. JACK: *op. cit.* 186.

<sup>18</sup> Naseeb SHAHEEN: *Biblical references in Shakespeare's Tragedies*, 176.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph WITTREICH: "'Image of that horror': The Apocalypse in *King Lear*". In C.A. Patrides – Joseph Wittreich (eds.): *The Apocalypse in Renaissance Thought and Literature*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984, 175–206; *"Image of that Horror": History, Prophecy and Apocalypse in King Lear*, San Marino, The Huntington Library, 1984.

Shakespeare ridicules Gloucester's superstitious belief in astrology: namely, in the "late eclipses in the sun and the moon" the apocalyptic allusions are persuasive throughout the tragedy. The play's last scene's hint at the final judgement: "Is this the promis'd end? / Or the image of that horror" (5.3.263–264) makes the presence of apocalypse quite evident. Wittreich demonstrated that *King Lear* was performed before the King at Whitehall "upon St. Stephen's night" in 1606. Since Shakespeare put the plot of the play into a pre-Christian setting, Cordelia's death could be seen as the prefiguration of the Christian proto-martyr St. Stephen. King James himself was interested in apocalyptic myth: John Napier's *A Plain Discovery of the Whole Revelation of Saint John* (Edinburgh, 1594) was dedicated to him and he himself wrote *A Paraphrase upon the Revelation of the Apostle S. John* published in 1616 and 1619. It is not only the horror and judgement but several other motives that echo the Book of Revelation. The hypocrite daughters Goneril and Regan (both in love with Edmund) might correspond to the great whore. Moreover, there are allusions to the seven stars, cracking thunder, eclipse of the sun and the moon, the black angel, and the wheel of fire, which all evoke the Apocalypse. Lear's remark of the naked Edgar "unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" might echo Rev 3:17: "thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked." Cordelia's figure has long been associated with Christ: "O dear father / It is thy business that I go about" (4.4.23–24, cf. Luke 2:49), as she "redeems nature from the natural curse / Which twain have brought her to" (4.6.205–207). The garment-imagery has a crucial function in the drama. The naked and mad Lear when at last in the company of benevolent powers receives a new garment: "We put fresh garments on him" (3.7.23). The new garment or raiment is also an apocalyptic image (Rev 7:13–14): "Blessed is he that watches and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame" (Rev 16:15). In the great reunion of Lear and Cordelia in Act 4 Scene 7 Lear says: "Be your tears wet? Yes, faith. I pray, weep not" (4.7.71). In Rev 7:17, we read that "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." In the Book of Revelation, as in *King Lear*, the true and good ones are always tried (or weighed), and even they are found wanting. They (Edgar, Kent) have to hide themselves in order to preserve themselves. Another apocalyptic image is that of the trumpet in *King Lear*. In the last scene, when Edgar, his identity still being hidden, challenges his wicked brother Edmund to a duel, five trumpets are sounded. "Only with the trumpet comes the possibility of the renewal of the world, a resurrection after death."<sup>20</sup> Wittreich's conclusion is interesting: "Apocalyptic reference, besides importing mythic dimensions to this play, also turns the apocalyptic myth against itself in such a way as to challenge received interpretations of it. Like the Lear legend, the myth of apocalypse is first ravaged, then created anew, and this is part of the larger ravaging of Christianity itself."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Joseph WITTRICH: "Image of that horror': the Apocalypse in *King Lear*". 188.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph WITTRICH: "Image of that horror': the Apocalypse in *King Lear*". 192.

**John Donne**

John Donne, the most famous metaphysical poet, devoted most of his mature poetry to religious subjects. It is interesting to observe that the Apocalypse or the Last Judgement occurs rather infrequently within his religious verse; he seems to be more concerned either with the crucial event of Christ's redemptive action, i.e. the passion, or, even more conspicuously, with the drama of his own individual conversion.

Even where the apocalyptic imagery is indeed intense and sharp, his ultimate concern is to learn to properly lament while he is still on earth: Sonnet VII of his *Divine Meditations* evokes Rev 7:1: "After these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth:"

At the round earth's imagined corners, blow  
 Your trumpets, angels and arise, arise  
 From death, you numberless infinities  
 Of souls, and to your scattered bodies go,  
 All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,  
 All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,  
 Despair, law, chance, hath slain, and you whose eyes,  
 Shall Behold God, and never taste death's woe.  
 But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,  
 For, if above all these, my sins abound,  
 'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace,  
 When we are there, here on this lowly ground,  
 Teach me how to repent, for that's as good  
 As if thou hadst sealed my pardon, with thy blood.

**John Milton**

There were two significant 17th century commentaries on the Book of Revelation that Milton studied. David Pareus (1548–1622) was first the Professor of the Old Testament at Heidelberg, then the Professor of the New Testament. He gave lectures on Revelation in 1609 and published them in 1618, shortly before his death. The English translation *A Commentary upon the Divine Revelation of the Apostle and Evangelist John* (published in 1644) was the work of Elias Arnold. The other commentator was Joseph Mede (1586–1638), who was a Fellow at Christ's College, Cambridge while Milton studied there. Mede's famous work was *Clavis apocalyptica* (1627). Both commentators assumed that the world was soon coming to an end.<sup>22</sup> Pareus'

<sup>22</sup> Michael MURRIN: "Revelation and two seventeenth century commentators". In C.A. Patrides – Joseph Wittreich (eds.): *The Apocalypse in Renaissance Thought and Literature*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984, 125–146.

great invention was to apply literary or aesthetic categories in his discussion of the Book of Revelation. He understood that the book had a dramatic structure and he considered it to be a tragedy. For Pareus, the Book of Revelation contained seven little dramas. Section 6, for example, was the tragedy of Antichrist: Act I. (Ch.17) The whore and the beast, Act II. (Ch.18) The burning of the whore, Act III (Ch.19.1–11) The marriage of the Lamb, Act IV (Ch.19.12–21) Armageddon. Milton in the second book of *The Reason for Church Government* cites Pareus approvingly when he calls Revelation to be a Tragedy: “And the Apocalyps of Saint John is the majestick image of a high and stately Tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn Scenes and Acts with a sevenfold Chorus of halleluja’s and harping symphonies: this my opinion the grave authority of Pareus commenting that booke is sufficient to confirm.”<sup>23</sup> In the Preface to his *Samson Agonistes* (“Of That Sort of Dramatic Poem Which is Called Tragedy”) Milton again mentioned Pareus: “Paraeus commenting on the *Revelation*, divides the whole book as a tragedy, into acts distinguished each by a chorus of heavenly harpings and song between.”<sup>24</sup> In 1627, a decade after Pareus, the millenarist John Alsted also talked about the protasis, epitasis and catastrophe in the drama of the Antichrist. The English translation was published in 1643.<sup>25</sup>

C. A. Patrides says that Milton’s attitude to the Book of Revelation in *Paradise Lost* is but a gesture.<sup>26</sup> He quotes Rev 6:16: “And said to the mountains, and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb,” and finds a corresponding episode in the description of the fight of Satan and Michael in Book 6.643–655 of *Paradise Lost*:<sup>27</sup>

[God’s mighty Angels]  
 From thir foundation loosing to and fro  
 They pluckt the seated Hills with all thir load,  
 Rocks, Waters, Woods, and by the shaggie tops  
 Up lifting bore them in thir hands: Amaze,  
 Be sure, and terrour seis’d the rebel Host,  
 When coming towards them so dread they saw  
 The bottom of the Mountains upward turn’d,  
 Till on those cursed Engins triple-row  
 They saw them whelm’d, and all thir confidence  
 Under the weight of Mountains buried deep,

<sup>23</sup> John MILTON: *Selected Prose*, ed. C. A. Patrides, London, Penguin, 1974, 56.

<sup>24</sup> John MILTON: *The Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey, London, Longman, 2007, 355.

<sup>25</sup> Michael MURRIN: *op. cit.* 134.

<sup>26</sup> C. A. PATRIDES: “‘Something like a prophetic strain’: Apocalyptic Configurations in Milton”. In C. A. Patrides – Joseph Wittreich: *The Apocalypse in Renaissance Thought and Literature*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984, 206–237, 231.

<sup>27</sup> John MILTON: *Paradise Lost*, ed. Barbara Lewalski, Oxford, Blackwell, 2007. All quotations from *Paradise Lost* are taken from this edition.

Themselves invaded next, and on thir heads  
Main Promontories flung, which in the Air  
Came shadowing, and oppresst whole Legions armd (6.638–655)

In Book 12, Michael foretells the future of mankind between the first and the second advent: Jesus went to heaven but

thence shall come,  
When this worlds dissolution shall be ripe (12.458–459)

Though Christianity will quickly spread, soon false and superstitious teachers will come who oppress truth. Hypocrites will align themselves with secular power and they will impose spiritual laws on every conscience. The corruption will grow, but this “perverted world” will be “purged” by the Second Coming and the new heaven and new earth will bring about “joy and eternal bliss”:

but in thir room, as they forewarne,  
Wolves shall succeed for teachers, grievous wolves,  
Who all the sacred mysteries of heav'n  
To thir own vile advantages shall turne  
Of lucre and ambition, and the truth  
With superstitions and traditions taint,  
Left onely in those written Records pure,  
Though not but by the Spirit understood.  
Then shall they seek to avail themselves of names,  
Places and titles, and with these to joine  
Secular power, though feigning still to act  
By spiritual, to themselves appropriating  
The Spirit of God, promis'd alike and giv'n  
To all Beleevers; and from that pretense,  
Spiritual Lawes by carnal power shall force  
On every conscience; Laws which none shall finde  
Left them inrould, or what the spirit within  
Shall on the heart engrave. What will they then  
But force the Spirit of Grace itself, and bind  
His consort Liberty, what but unbuild  
His living temples, built by Faith to stand,  
Thir own faith, not another's: for on earth  
Who against Faith and Conscience can be heard  
Infallible? Yet many will presume:  
Whence heavie persecution shall arise  
On all who in the worship persevere

Of Spirit and Truth; the rest, farr greater part,  
 Will deem in outward Rites and specious formes  
 Religion satisfi'd, Truth shall retire  
 Bestuck with slandrous darts, and works of Faith  
 Rarely be found. So shall the World goe on,  
 To good malignant, to bad men benigne,  
 Under her own waight groaning till the day  
 Appeer of respiration to the just,  
 And vengeance to the wicked, at return  
 Of him so lately promiss'd to thy aid  
 The Womans Seed, obscurely then foretold,  
 Now amplier known thy Saviour and thy Lord,  
 Last in the Clouds from Heav'n to be revealed  
 In glory of the Father, to dissolve  
*Satan* with his perverted World, then raise  
 From the conflagrant mass, purg'd and refin'd,  
 New Heav'ns, new Earth, Ages of endless date  
 Founded in righteousness and peace and love  
 To bring forth fruits Joy and eternal bliss. (12.507–551)

### John Bunyan

We end our survey of apocalyptic motives in Medieval and Renaissance English literature with John Bunyan (1628–1688), whose *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) contains one of the greatest visions of the New Jerusalem. The passage is in the closing pages of the book describing the moment when the pilgrims cross the perilous waters of the River and ascend Mount Zion. The image is clearly inspired by Revelation 21.

The talk that they had with the Shining Ones was about the glory of the place, who told them that the beauty and glory of it was inexpressible. There, said they, is the Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. You are going now, said they, to the Paradise of God, wherein you shall see the Tree of Life, and eat of the never-fading fruits thereof, and when you come here, you shall have white Robes given you, and your walk and talk shall be every day with the King, even all the days of Eternity.



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### Abstract

*Apart from the Passion Story, the Book of Revelation, or, as it is commonly known, the Apocalypse, was perhaps the most important biblical influence in medieval and Renaissance English literature. In this paper I discuss the most significant Apocalyptic authors and works from these periods.*

**Keywords:** Revelation, Apocalypse, Shakespeare, Milton, Donne, Bunyan

### Resümé

*Az apokaliptikus hagyomány a középkori és reneszánsz angol irodalomban*

*A Biblia Jézus szenvedéstörténetét bemutató részei mellett a Jelenések könyve, más néven az Apokalipszis fejtette ki a legnagyobb hatást a középkori és reneszánsz angol irodalomra. A tanulmány bemutatja a korszak legjelentősebb Apokalipszis-iblette szerzőit és műveit.*

**Kulcsszavak:** Jelenések könyve, Apokalipszis, Shakespeare, Milton, Donne, Bunyan

## GIOVANNI PATRIARCA

**A True Light in the Darkness: Gasparo Scaruffi and a Monetary Chimera in the Sixteenth Century***Historical introduction*

Between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Italy definitively lost its economic centrality. The commercial and credit centers of Genoa, Milan, Florence and Venice could not withstand the trade shift from the Mediterranean Sea to the Atlantic Ocean. The decline in trade led to the bankruptcy of many private bankers, which was followed, in a ripple effect, by a long crisis in manufacturing and production.<sup>1</sup> The economic crisis affected social psychology, leading to a sharp reduction in banking and financial activities. The entire system also found itself unprepared for the inflationary spiral that spread across the continent, generated by the influx of silver and other metals from the Spanish territories of America.

The negative situation extended from Spain to its possessions outside the Iberian Peninsula, especially the Italian ones. “[T]he value of money is fickle,” wrote the British historian Marjorie Grice-Hutchison, describing the pain that afflicted Europe at this time, adding that “gold and silver are not synonymous with wealth. [...] The dream of *El Dorado* had been followed by a harsh awakening.”<sup>2</sup> Those tensions had a clear moment in the Spanish *Revueltas of the Comuneros*<sup>3</sup> and in the fire of the Medina del Campo in August 1520.<sup>4</sup> In Italy, in particular, inflation extended to the agricultural sector in the face of demographic growth and increasing demand for food products. The return to extensive agriculture, without any real productive change and in the context of a structural crisis, caused some historians to speak of a *process of refeudalization*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Carlo M. CIPOLLA: “The Economic Decline of Italy”. In Carlo M. Cipolla (ed.): *The Economic Decline of Empires*, London, Routledge, 2010, 202.

<sup>2</sup> Marjorie GRICE-HUTCHISON: *The School of Salamanca*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1952, 1.

<sup>3</sup> José Antonio MARAVALL: *Las comunidades de Castilla: Una primera revolución moderna*, Madrid, Revista de Occidente, 1970; and Joseph PÉREZ: *La révolution des “Comunidades” de Castille (1520–1521)*, Bordeaux, Institut d’Etudes Ibériques et Ibero-Américaines, 1970.

<sup>4</sup> Aurelio ESPINOSA: *The Empire of the Cities: Emperor Charles V, the Comunero Revolt, and the Transformation of the Spanish System*, Leiden, Brill, 2009, 71.

<sup>5</sup> The term “refeudalization” (or, more rarely, “feudal restoration” or “feudal offensive”) has come into use to indicate “the reappearance of a whole array of privileges, prerogatives, abuses, and shackles” in the countryside at the hands of the landed nobility, with the result that “peasant conditions experienced a slow, but continuous deterioration.” A further consequence, it has been claimed, was that a once dynamic economy driven by a progressive middle class was increasingly “smothered” and underwent a “process of involution,” at the end of which the feudal nobility had secured a commanding position in both economic and social terms.” Domenico SELLA: *Italy in the Seventeenth Century*, London, Routledge, 2014, 113.

While the theme of inflation and monetary alteration appeared many times throughout the Old Continent, in Italy it assumed the bitter tones of a tragedy. The peninsula was divided between many states and small principalities, and faced geopolitical changes as sudden as they were traumatic. Precisely for this reason, Italians' reflections on such events were both passionate and highly scientific. Ironically, Hayek argues in the opening pages of *Price and Production* that sixteenth-century Italy had “the worst money and the best monetary theory.”<sup>6</sup> In this context, Gasparo Scaruffi published his *L'Alitinofo* in 1582 in Reggio Emilia, imagining a *universal stable currency*. The treatise is both a technical argument about metallurgy and coinage as well as a proposal for a new international monetary policy. It arose from the intersection of multiple forms of expertise in Renaissance Italy, namely commercial mathematics, metallurgy – historically linked to alchemy<sup>7</sup> –, and monetary theories.

### *Between Emilia and Europe*

Among the numerous independent political and territorial entities of Italy during the early modern age, the Duchy of Modena and Reggio was geostrategically preeminent due to its hinge position between Tuscany, the Papal States, Lombardy and the plains between the Po, the Adige, and the Venetian lagoon. Furthermore, from a historical and cultural standpoint, the duchy is inextricably linked to the *House of Este* and its related political vicissitudes.<sup>8</sup>

Situated on the *Via Emilia*, Reggio is historically at the center of mercantile traffic, not only between Romagna and the Po Valley,<sup>9</sup> but also at the dynamic crossroads between Genoa and Venice.<sup>10</sup> The trade in silk and wool was predominant, as

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich A. HAYEK: *Price and Production*, New York, A. Kelly Publishers, 1935, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Useful connections between alchemy and coinage can be found in Pamela H. SMITH: *The Business of Alchemy: Science and Culture in the Holy Roman Empire*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1997; as well as in Sebastian FELTEN: *Money in the Dutch Republic: Everyday Practice and Circuits of Exchange*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022.

<sup>8</sup> See Claudio M. GOLDONI: *Atlante Estense. Mille anni nella storia d'Europa. Gli Estensi a Ferrara, Modena, Reggio, Garfagnana e Massa Carrara*, Modena, Artestampa, 2011; Alessio ANCESCHI: *Geografia degli Stati Estensi: i confini dell'Emilia e dell'alta Toscana e le strade del ducato*, Sassuolo, Incontri, 2016; Riccardo RIMONDI: *Estensi: Storia e leggende, personaggi e luoghi di una dinastia millenaria*, Ferrara, Cirelli e Zanirato, 2004; and Luciano CHIAPPINI: *Gli estensi. Storia di mille anni*, Ferrara, Corbo Editore, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Alfredo SANTINI: “L'economia reggiana nell'epoca di Scaruffi”. In Alfredo Santini (ed.): *L'unione monetaria nel Rinascimento: l'«Alitinofo» di Gasparo Scaruffi per il duca d'Este*, Ferrara, Corbo Editore, 1999, 37–55.

<sup>10</sup> See Maria FUSARO: “Genoa, Venice and Livorno (a tale of three cities)”. In Maria Fusaro (ed.): *Political Economies of Empire in the Early Modern Mediterranean: The Decline of Venice and the Rise of England, 1450–1700*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015, 89–109; and Giovanni ASSERETO: “Lo sguardo di Genova su Venezia. Odio, ammirazione, imitazione”. In Uwe ISRAEL (ed.): *La diversa visuale: Il fenomeno Venezia osservato dagli altri*, Roma, Venetiana-Centro Tedesco di Studi Veneziani, 2008, 89–114.

was their transformation into valuable fabrics.<sup>11</sup> Their manufacture was renowned outside the borders of the peninsula.<sup>12</sup> In this context, Gasparo Scaruffi was born on May 17, 1519, into a wealthy family involved in international trade and banking, part of a dense network of financial exchanges both *ad intra* to Florence and Rome and *ad extra* to Flanders and England.<sup>13</sup>

International trade is by no means unrelated to monetary conflicts. Moral debates also flourished, especially and not surprisingly in Italy and Spain. It is not at all a coincidence that the most eminent theologians, such as the Dominican Domingo de Soto<sup>14</sup> and the Jesuit Diego Laínez,<sup>15</sup> were engaged in these economic disputes, with completely original and interdisciplinary nuances in the conjunction between law, theology, and economics. From their analysis of the cycles of instability and volatility, the canonists and moralists deepened their understanding of the temporary validity and eventual expiration of “monetary contracts.”

### *Gasparo Scaruffi*

The Scaruffi family was one of the most influential in Reggio Emilia in the sixteenth century. Their banking activity mainly supported textile manufacturing and export. After they purchased farms and fertile land in the Po valley, the trade and production of agricultural goods, especially cereals, also became significant. Yet there is little information about Gasparo Scaruffi’s early years. It appears that his

<sup>11</sup> Stefano COMINO – Alessandro GASPARETTO: “Silk Mills in the Early Modern Italy”. *Advances in Historical Studies*, 2020/9. 284–294. See also: Carlo PONI: “Archéologie de la fabrique: La diffusion des moulins à soie ‘alla bolognese’ dans les états vénitiens du XVI e au XVIII e siècle”. *Annales E.S.C.*, 27, 1972. 1475–1496; and Francesco BATTISTINI: “La Tessitura Serica Italiana durante l’Età Moderna: Dimensioni, Specializzazione Produttiva, Mercati”. In Luca Molà – Reinhold C. Mueller – Claudio Zanier (eds.): *La seta in Italia dal Medioevo al Seicento: dal baco al drappo*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2000, 335–351.

<sup>12</sup> John H. MUNRO: *The Rise, Expansion, and Decline of the Italian Wool-Based Textile Industries, 1100–1730: A study in international competition, transaction costs, and comparative advantage*, Working Papers 440, Toronto, Department of Economics University of Toronto, 2011; and Luca MOLÀ: *The Silk Industry of Renaissance Venice*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Marco BIANCHINI: “Una famiglia, una città, un visionario progetto”. In Angelo Mazza – Elio Monducci – Maurizio Zamboni (eds.): *Palazzo Scaruffi. Storia, Arte, Restauri*, Parma, Grafiche Step, 2010, 9–36. Apart from this primary reference, all biographical and historical information about Gasparo Scaruffi and his family throughout this article is taken from the following texts and monographs (in Italian): Andrea BALLETTI: *Gasparo Scaruffi e la questione monetaria nel secolo XVI*, Modena, G. T. Vincenzi e Nipoti, 1882; Alfredo SANTINI (ed.): *L’unione monetaria nel Rinascimento: l’Alitinofo di Gasparo Scaruffi per il duca d’Este*, Ferrara, Corbo Editore, 1999; Giuseppe GIANNANTONI: *Il “Vero lume” di Gasparo Scaruffi e la ricerca della moneta universale (secoli XVI–XVIII): L’alchimia monetaria di un finanziere italiano del Rinascimento*, Bologna, Compositori, 2000; Marco BIANCHINI: “Gasparo Scaruffi”. In *Il Contributo italiano alla storia del Pensiero: Economia*, Roma, Istituto dell’Enciclopedia Italiana, 2012, 142–146.

<sup>14</sup> Georges JARLOT: “Dominique de Soto devant les problèmes moraux de la conquête américaine”. *Gregorianum*, Vol. 45, XLIV/1, 1963. 81–87.

<sup>15</sup> H. GRISAR (ed.): *Jacobi Lainex disputationes Tridentinae*, Innsbruck, 1886, T. II, 227–321.

education took place within the classical perimeter of the *abacus schools* that were very developed in Central-Northern Italy at the time. These institutions offered mainly technical-economic training through the teaching of accounting methods and the use of tools to test coins and precious metals, as well as financial knowledge based on bills of exchange, insurance techniques, and international banking transactions.

This pedagogical background would have been shared with other members of Gasparo's family. His brother Gian Maria held one of the highest offices of the municipal mint in 1542, and in 1546 his name was listed among the *Elders of the Municipality* who discussed the *salt tax* and the problems of monetary exchange in trade with Ferrara. In 1544, Gasparo worked in Piacenza at the *Banco di Agostino da Lodi*. We are not able to say whether this was an apprenticeship or something more, but the experience was certainly central to his formation and to the development of his theories.

In 1547, Gasparo was entrusted with the prestigious position of assayer of the Mint. This experience prepared him for a delicate task of monetary diplomacy. It was discovered that some coins in use in Reggio were suffering an unfair depreciation compared to other currencies that were equivalent in terms of metallic composition. A revaluation was therefore necessary through a wise mix of political skills and technical knowledge. The success of this effort led him to win a contract for the production of coins. From 1550 until 1555, he was the head of his bank at a time of political change. The new Prince Alfonso II was attempting to forge a strategic balance between the Papacy, the Empire, and the Spanish dominions to which Milan belonged at that time.<sup>16</sup>

Under the government of Alfonso II, all monetary power was concentrated in Ferrara, effectively depriving Reggio Emilia and Modena of the right to mint coins. This was a cause of cyclical tensions that led Scaruffi to once again head a delegation to discuss the value and role of various foreign currencies that were circulating in Reggio and provoking speculative bubbles as well as difficulties in real valuation.

### *Practical methods and economic language*

Authors' libraries and letters are an inexhaustible source of information about how ideas emerge and evolve.<sup>17</sup> According to the chronicles, the notary Prospero Bisi was the person in charge of the contract for the printing of *L'Alitino*. In his documents, a catalogue of books was found, and a significant part of the listed texts are *abacus*

<sup>16</sup> Carlo M. CIPOLLA: *Il governo della moneta a Firenze e a Milano nei secoli XIV–XVI*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1990, 258.

<sup>17</sup> A very important archival source is the so-called "Note Archivio Scaruffi," donated by Maria Balletti Ghidoni, daughter of the economist Andrea Balletti, to the Library Panizzi in Reggio Emilia (376 CC).

*treatises*. This catalogue can certainly be linked to Scaruffi and his milieu.<sup>18</sup> In this framework, the Franciscan Luca Pacioli's *Summa de arithmetica, geometria, proportioni e proportionalità* (1494) is often considered to be the point of reference for accounting and applied mathematics, but his contribution summarizes and completes a long tradition without which this kind of work would not have been possible.<sup>19</sup> The *abacus teachers* had consolidated the knowledge of the time,<sup>20</sup> including the method of the *false position* and the *double false position*.<sup>21</sup>

The main interests of Gasparo Scaruffi can be summarized in three broad areas: abacus, natural philosophy, and texts of classical and religious culture. The formation of a specific technical and practical language emerges with a recourse – common in the Renaissance – to an articulated prose rich in alchemical (and, in some cases, esoteric) terminology.<sup>22</sup> Among the contemporary authors present in his library, two deserve our attention: Giovanni Agostino Panteo and Vannoccio Biringuccio.

Panteo (d. 1535), a Catholic priest, published a work entitled *Ars transmutationis metallica* (*The Art of Metallic Transformation*) in Venice in 1519. Although the Council of Trent had prohibited the practice of alchemy since 1488, precisely because of problems relating to the counterfeiting of coins, the ecclesiastical authority and Pope Leo X authorized the manuscript's publication. This demonstrated the severity of the monetary crisis<sup>23</sup> and the attempt to find possible solutions in that (atypical) convergence of inorganic chemistry and a "cabala of metals."<sup>24</sup> In 1530, Panteo published a treatise with the cryptic title "*Voarchadumia contra alchimiam: ars distincta ab archimia, et sophia: cum additionibus, proportionibus, numeris et figuris*," in which he proposes a new chemical science.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>18</sup> It is very likely that this entire library belonged directly to the Scaruffi family, because Prospero Bisi was their personal notary.

<sup>19</sup> Giovanni PATRIARCA: "Escuelas de ábaco: La invención de un lenguaje". *Mirabilia Journal*, 32, 2021/1. 48–80.

<sup>20</sup> Elisabetta ULIVI: "Scuole e maestri d'abaco in Italia tra Medioevo e Rinascimento". In Enrico Giusti – Raffaella Petti (eds.): *Ponte sul Mediterraneo: Leonardo Pisano, la scienza araba e la rinascita della matematica in Occidente*, Firenze, Polistampa, 2016, 121–159; Raffaella FRANCI – Laura TOTI RIGATELLI: "La matematica nella tradizione dell'abaco nel XIV e XV secolo". In Carlo Maccagni – Paolo Freguglia (eds.): *Storia sociale e culturale d'Italia*, vol. V: *La Storia delle Scienze*, Busto Arsizio, Bramante Editore, 1989, 68–94; and Luigi MAIERÙ – Massimo GALLUZZI – Nadia SANTORO: *La tradizione latina, Fibonacci, le scuole d'abaco, il Cinquecento*, Roma, Aracne, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Vico MONTEBELLI: "Ex falsisverum: Il metodo della falsa posizione, semplice e doppia, nell'ambito della matematica abachistica del Medioevo e del Rinascimento". *Quaderni dell'Accademia Fanestrese*, 2004/3. 191–230.

<sup>22</sup> Erwin F. LANGE: "Alchemy and the sixteenth century metallurgists". *Ambix*, 13/2, 1966. 92–95.

<sup>23</sup> Fausto PIOLA CASELLI: "Innovazione e finanza pubblica: Lo Stato Pontificio nel Seicento". In Società Italiana degli Storici dell'Economia: *Innovazione e sviluppo: Tecnologia e organizzazione fra teoria economica e ricerca storica (secoli XI–XX)*, Bologna, Monduzzi, 1996, 449–464.

<sup>24</sup> Peter J. FORSHAW: "Cabala Chymica or Chemia Cabalistica: Early Modern Alchemists and Cabala". *Ambix*, 60/4, 2013. 361–389.

<sup>25</sup> Scaruffi quoted the *Voarchadumia* in capital letters on p. 58a (Chapter XLVII) of his *L'Alitinofo*.

Thanks to his practical experience in various Italian cities, Biringuccio (1480–1539) wrote the first manual on metallurgy: *De la pirotechnia*. It was published posthumously in 1540. Among other things, it deals with various metals, the research and examination of minerals, discovery of mines, and construction of tunnels. Although the presentation of metals and minerals, starting with gold, silver, copper, and lead, is a summary of the known literature of the time, the manual also contains – in addition to precise technical information – the first instructions for isolating antimony.<sup>26</sup>

According to C. S. Smith and M. T. Gnudi, “written by a master craftsman in a time when knowledge was kept alive by the spoken rather than the written word, this classic marked the beginning of a true technological literature, with both craftsmanship and science united by a writer’s pen to form a record of an important facet of man’s achievement as a stimulus to further advance.”<sup>27</sup> Biringuccio’s fame had, in fact, led him to offer his services in Siena, Florence, Venice, and Rome, where he became head of the Apostolic Foundry and director of the papal artillery factory. It is also interesting to note that his work predates the *De re metallica* by Georgius Agricola by about 14 years.

### *A True Light in the Darkness*

In these circumstances Scaruffi began to write *L’Alitinofo*. In a tradition typical of the Renaissance and the modern age, the title is a neologism resulting from the union of two ancient Greek words that together mean “true light.” Another custom of the time was a summary subtitle from which the central theme emerged: “reason and concordance of gold and silver; which will serve in universal; just to provide for the endless abuses of shearing and spoiling coins; how much to settle all sorts of payments, and also reduce the whole world to a single currency.”<sup>28</sup> According to the author, the work was written at the request of Prince Alfonso II<sup>29</sup> and Alfonso Tassoni, governor of Reggio Emilia.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>26</sup> John PERCY: *Metallurgy: The Art of Extracting Metals from Their Ores. Part I: Silver and Gold*, London, John Murray, 1880, 673.

<sup>27</sup> Vannoccio BIRINGUCCIO: *Pirotechnia*, edited and translated by Cyril Stanley Smith and Martha Teach Gnudi, Cambridge, MA, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1959, II.

<sup>28</sup> Gasparo SCARUFFI: *L’Alitinofo*, Reggio Emilia, Hercoliano Bartholi, 1582, front cover. All quotations will be taken from this original edition. According to the custom of the time, numbered pages have a front and a back, so in this article each page will be followed by the letter *a* (front) or the letter *b* (back).

<sup>29</sup> See Guido PANCIROLI: *Storia della Città di Reggio*, Reggio Emilia, G. Barbieri e Soc. Editori, 1846, Libro VIII, 267.

<sup>30</sup> Luigi UGHI: *Dizionario storico degli uomini illustri ferraresi*, Tomo II, Ferrara, Eredi G. Rinaldi, 1804, 181. It should, moreover, be added that the Tassoni family – both in its Reggio and Ferrara branches – is no stranger to promoting banking activities. Ottavio Tassoni, in fact, figures among the founders of the *Banco di Santo Spirito* in Rome in 1604. (Luigi DE MATTEO: *Il Banco di Santo Spirito 1605–1992*, Roma, Edizioni del Banco di Santo Spirito, 1992).



The *Alitimonfo* is a completely original work. Although the structure of the abacus and accounting treatises is traceable in it in many ways, it distances itself from them due to its monographic and non-generalist character.<sup>31</sup> The technical focus on monetary policy makes it unique, enriching a long history of monetary literature, which – albeit valuable and influential – remained defined by scholastic philosophy. While applying a traditional moral reflection to contingent facts, Scaruffi uses a technical language that is characterized by a form of disciplinary protoindependence, “starting from the functions of money and dealing with problems of coinage in a strongly metallist vein.”<sup>32</sup> In fact, in the preface we read that

There is no doubt that men always cared about the right and the honest, although sometimes they let themselves be carried away dazzled by the usefulness and their own interest, so much so that despite many inconveniences that happen – every day for different reasons and in particular out of respect of gold and silver that boil down to Coins –, they would remain entirely correct. And because to most people in these times it seems that those two precious Metals are almost the ultimate goal, to which human thoughts are addressed [referring to worldly activities], and it is believed, indeed it is held for certain, that from correction, or from their agreement it would follow that the actions depending on them would be moderated and any caused abuse and disorder would be removed. Having been other times in the past, as well as those in the present, without a firm rule, or without universal order, in dispensing money [as it is evident], and for this reason they are influenced by it, and from all this so great disorders arise, in giving payments both in the same city or from one city to another, as well as from one province to another and they will arise more if not provided.<sup>33</sup>

Although the rigorous prose of the preface may suggest a style typical of moral philosophy, the content takes a completely original direction from the very first pages, focusing on the mineral composition of metals, their strengths and weaknesses, the manufacturing processes, their shape and quantity, tariff rules and taxation norms, as well as weights and measures. The influence of the abacus tradition is clear.<sup>34</sup> The text is accompanied by tables with mathematical and commodity details, and the designs for proposed new coins are of excellent workmanship.

The coins would differ in weight, fineness, and metallic composition. The invitation to each state to harmonize the monetary circuit according to shared parameters would give rise to a system that would be not only universal but also lasting. This

<sup>31</sup> See Oscar NUCCIO: “Gasparo Scaruffi: Un progetto di unificazione monetaria internazionale”. In Oscar Nuccio: *Il pensiero economico italiano*, Sassari, Gallizzi, 1992, 939–990.

<sup>32</sup> Joseph A. SCHUMPETER: *History of Economic Analysis*, New York, Routledge, 1954, 278.

<sup>33</sup> Gasparo SCARUFFI: *L'Alitimonfo*, Ia (my translation).

<sup>34</sup> Enrico GAMBA – Vico MONTEBELLI: “La matematica abachista tra recupero della tradizione e rinnovamento scientifico”. In I.V.S.L.A.: *Cultura, scienze e tecniche nella venezia del Cinquecento*, Venezia, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti, 1987, 169–202.

would avoid the ancestral problem of speculation caused by inappropriate alterations and consequent inflation of the prices of consumer goods. As Scaruffi himself states,

For the aforementioned reasons, it should be taken into consideration that, changing from time to time, for many reasons, the prices and values of these precious metals, it follows that many sorts of coins go from hand to hand, and then create other coins of the same alloys. And in doing them, new superfeatures are made enter in their values for which the Coins remain lighter and are then used with the values of the previous ones or even sometimes for higher values. And in using them in this way, it seems that goods and other things increase in price, all this proceeding many times from the decreased weight, or rather from the altered values of those coins. Sometimes it also happens that these coins are used in different places even though they are not in their first state. From here we really understand how necessary it is for money to be made only once and regulated under firm and certain orders, in which they must then be kept forever.<sup>35</sup>

The term *superfeature* is not to be underestimated, not only as an addition to an independent scientific language but also for its monetary contextualization. A shared account base, in fact, would have guaranteed a fair exchange in the international balance of payments, because otherwise “Someone will be indebted for a quantity of scudi or lire, in Italian, Spanish, German or other coins; Not being able to have the same to pay the debt, he will be obliged to return to the creditor other Coins of the same quality, or similar, in which there is more than just as much pure, & up to weight as there was in the first ones; and this will be so easy to do [...]”<sup>36</sup>

In addition, monetary stability would make the calculation of depreciation and related costs or profits less artificial, even over the long term. In order to achieve this, Scaruffi wrote, some common rules should be shared. By universal law, a single unit of monetary value and a single unit of weight should be adopted.<sup>37</sup> According to Scaruffi, the *imperial lira* – due to its already wide diffusion and ancient tradition – lent itself to being the main instrument on which to base subsequent subdivisions. It could be divided into 12 *soldi*, 240 *denarii*, or 480 *bagattini*. Thus, the following conversion rates emerge:

1 lira = 12 *soldi*  
 1 soldo = 20 *denarii*  
 1 denaro = 2 *bagattini*

<sup>35</sup> Gasparo SCARUFFI: *L'Alitinofo*, 40a (Chapter XXVI).

<sup>36</sup> Gasparo SCARUFFI: *L'Alitinofo*, 8b–9a (Chapter XIII).

<sup>37</sup> Giuseppe GIANNANTONJ: *Il “Vero lume” di Gasparo Scaruffi e la ricerca della moneta universale (secoli XVI–XVIII): L'alchimia monetaria di un finanziere italiano del Rinascimento*, Bologna, Compositori, 2000.

The unit of weight, on the other hand, would be based on the Bolognese pound equal to 12 ounces. In turn, the ounce was equivalent to 24 *denarii* and the *denaro* to 24 *grains*. The operation was completed by establishing the exchange between gold, silver, and copper, based on the proportion existing in nature between the corresponding quantities. Here Scaruffi offers, on the basis of his personal experience, a very precise and detailed table of correspondence. He said that, according to natural and divine law, each unit of gold corresponds to 12 of silver and 1440 of copper. He also attributed the value of 6 imperial liras to an ounce of silver. Based on this *weight-price-cost triad* it would have been possible to calculate the natural and legal value of an ounce of gold (equivalent to 72 liras) and an ounce of copper (equivalent to 5 cents of a lira).

To facilitate exchange operations, Scaruffi thought that it would be necessary to write at least three numbers on some coins, indicating: a) the accounting value in imperial lira, b) the alloy used in the composition according to the percentages of gold or silver and c) the number of pieces needed to reach one pound of weight. Adopting this *golden rule*,

Any occasion for dispute, which may arise, in dealing with Coins, both Gold and Silver, due to the variety of values given to them under different titles, will be removed. However, in counting them in terms of pure and fine, the corrupt ones will not be taken; proceeding all this in the form of one by twelve, and twelve by one as regards the weights, as well as evaluating the gold as equal to 7 imperial liras per ounce and the silver equal to 6 imperial liras.<sup>38</sup>

For Scaruffi, this currency – legally and materially anchored to gold, silver (and copper) – plays the role of facilitator of daily exchanges due to its simple and universal nature. Being conceived as a convenient unit of both account and weight, people would have practical reasons to agree to use it. It would become the standard for transactions because it would not undergo (or be affected by) the fluctuations of noble minerals and would not radically affect the most vulnerable parts of the population.<sup>39</sup> The community, in fact, by supporting this *Pavilion of coins*, would stand as a public guarantor to verify their value:

All gold and silver coins will be known by any person – who can read and also by those who cannot – by practice for their right value, that will be showed and imprinted on them. [...] It will follow again, that the Golds and Silvers, both coined and not, will be negotiated with regulated orders and with *Founded Reason* which will be easily understood by all.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Gasparo SCARUFFI: *L'Alitinofo*, 58a (Chapter XLVII).

<sup>39</sup> Arthur NUSSBAUM: "A note on the idea of world money". *Political Science Quarterly*, 3, 1949. 420–427.

<sup>40</sup> Gasparo SCARUFFI: *L'Alitinofo*, 60b (Chapter XLVII).

For copper coins, on the other hand, only two marks would be sufficient to indicate: a) the value and weight (in *bagattini*) and b) the number of units required to reach the weight of one ounce. Scaruffi also addressed the challenge of parallel circulations, according to the commonly perceived risks of what would come to be known as *Gersham's Law* (which had already been explained by Oresme, Gabriel Biel, and Copernicus).<sup>41</sup> It would be necessary for the precious coins in circulation to be weighed and measured in order to estimate their purity and the proportion of the various metals they contained. Another possibility would be to re-melt all copper coins – of any origin and kind – or to evaluate them only by weight.

### *A paradigmatic proposal or a political chimera?*

Scaruffi's reasoning did not stop at purely technical issues but went to the frontiers of the very concept of coinage.<sup>42</sup> His reflection had two pillars: *the first* focused mainly on the nature of the material content, *the second* involved the legal implications. A universal currency must be sure to harmonize the metallic and nominal values. As long as fine metal and minted coin (according to precise and commonly accepted technical indications) have the same value, he said, private individuals should not be prohibited from freely possessing precious metals in all their forms (raw, worked or polished). This would allow them to make any payment based on specific weight. But this was complicated by the practice of including the mint's costs and interests in the *nominal value* of the currency.<sup>43</sup>

The second pillar, therefore, outlines a radical criticism against any (additional) *production tax*, tariffs, or related costs to be obtained through the classic alteration of metal alloys. This opposition to any kind of imposed interest or seignorage was a bottom-up proposition addressed to the prince himself.<sup>44</sup> He would be the spokesperson and guarantor of a practice that would be as effective as it is efficient, giving life to a virtuous custom that would gradually extend to other states and their rulers. The conceptual novelty is that this reform would not be a centralistic political mandate, but rather the product of the experience of the markets, which need monetary certainty in order to avoid cyclical crises.

<sup>41</sup> Although already partially announced by Aristophanes in a passage of *The Frogs*, Oresme defines its formulation about two centuries before Gersham, also anticipating a similar intuition expressed both in the monetary theories present in Gabriel Biel's *Collectorium circa quattuor libros Sententiarum* and in Copernicus' *Treatise on the Coinage*.

<sup>42</sup> Marzio A. ROMANI: "Una alchimia monetaria alla metà del Cinquecento". *Economia e storia*, 1976/1. 5–26.

<sup>43</sup> "Although Scaruffi concedes that the prince may bear all or part of the expense of the mint, for the honor and glory of it, he thinks it would be preferable to collect payment from those who have the coining done." Arthur E. MONROE: *Monetary Theory before Adam Smith*, Kitchener, ON, Batoche, 2001, 40.

<sup>44</sup> This implies – according to Schumpeter – "a lot of fairly advanced theory" for that time. (Joseph A. SCHUMPETER: *op. cit.* 278).

In order to harmonize this decision on a continental level, *L'Alitimonfo* proposes a *Diet of Princes* – converging peacefully – under the (moral) authority of the pontiff or the emperor. Some critics believe that this formulation, present in Chapter XLV, is a subsequent addition to Scaruffi's original structure. However, he returns several times to the idea and insists on the need for a system of guarantees to ensure that the process of conversion moves towards the universal currency. A reference to a universal mint is found in the preface. The theme is hinted at as if it were a necessary evil.

A careful textual analysis reveals a certain ambivalence about the political role of the prince, which he seems to view as necessary but also dangerous. In this way the author proves to be a child of his time as well as part of a mercantile and financial aristocracy that – despite being in the midst of an international economic network – necessarily had to deal with the city and local power, its court and its ruler. This aspect is even more evident in other texts by Scaruffi. In fact, his letters note that monetary alterations can be real but also of a psychological nature, with the paradox that the fine metal coins of some cities or states in precarious economic conditions or political instability have *a priori* a lower value.<sup>45</sup>

This idea is highlighted by the incontrovertible fact that – on the basis of arguments already expressed by Luca Pacioli – Scaruffi supports a fixed 1:12 ratio between gold and silver. According to Cossa, his general remedy is “the adoption of a unitary monetary system with double standard based upon nothing less than the *Plato's ratio of value* (12 to 1).”<sup>46</sup> Schumpeter is also somewhat critical of the “irrational faith in an invariable relation,” but instead seems to be positively surprised by the definition of money “as a stamped piece of metal [where] the stamp has only declaratory importance.”<sup>47</sup> Both of the eminent economists just quoted dwell on Scaruffi's supposed bimetallism, but in this regard a more in-depth analysis would be required.

From a careful reading of *L'Alitimonfo*, one notes instead the proposal of a sort of *trimetallic balance*, in which gold and silver are combined with a less noble metal (copper or bronze). Scaruffi states that “beyond gold and silver, values are three

<sup>45</sup> In his commentary on the *Alitimonfo*, Bernardino Pratisuoli tells the story that he visited Gasparo Scaruffi shortly before his death in 1584, and reports a private conversation in which Scaruffi allegedly said that “It is indeed part of the liberty of the princes to do as they like about the things in their power; but since money which is spent all the time now here and now there, belongs to the world, princes have no special authority over it: that is to command it to depart or to remain according to their will. Therefore, money is like the birds (of the air) which no prince can command, to depart or to remain in his city or realm, as they go to live where they find their best feeding grounds.” Bernardino PRATISUOLI: *Digressione sopra il discorso delle monete di Gasparo Scaruffi*, Scrittori Italiani Classici di Economia Politica, parte antica, vol. 294; English translation: Germano MAIFREDA: *From Oikonomia to Political Economy: Constructing Economic Knowledge from the Renaissance to the Scientific Revolution*, London, Routledge, 2016, 127.

<sup>46</sup> “The cost of minting should be paid partly by the State and partly by those who bring metal to be minted.” Luigi COSSA: *An Introduction to the Study of Political Economy*, London, McMillan, 1893, 173.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph A. SCHUMPETER: *op. cit.* 278.

different things; nevertheless they have to be one body.<sup>48</sup> Even though the mixed alloys – manufactured through the use of copper – “could not, by Arithmetical reason, accommodate the proportionate division,”<sup>49</sup> they are generally used “*per poter fare varie sorti di monete.*”<sup>50</sup>

### *Concluding remarks*

Andrea Balletti, in a valuable publication, expressed his doubts about the stylistic nature of *L'Alitinofo*. Without prejudice to the content and its authorship, it was the form that aroused his suspicions. He noted that there is an all too evident rhetorical diversity with slavish insertions in order to make the author's ideas “philosophically acceptable.” Through a literary *labor limae* there has been an effort to avoid the linguistic minimalism of commercial and banking circles. According to some scholars, Scaruffi's memoirs were adjusted and filtered with the canons of the cultured language of the time by the jurist Pier Giovanni Ancarani.<sup>51</sup>

This stylistic sensitivity is also evident in the *Instruction on the discourse of Gasparo Scaruffi to regulate the things of money* (published as an appendix to *L'Alitinofo*) by an author who calls himself *Il Prospero*,<sup>52</sup> whose real identity is unknown, but who is most likely to be the notary Prospero Bisi.<sup>53</sup> According to Balletti, this work was seasoned with quotations from Plato, Cassiodorus, and Aristotle<sup>54</sup> in order to make it more attractive to the audience of learned society. This approach is consolidated in Bernardino Pratisuoli's *Considerations on Alitinofo* (published in 1604), designed to make Scaruffi's thought and proposal accessible to a not strictly technical public.<sup>55</sup>

Pratisuoli's commentary has a dual function of (scholastic) clarification and support for Scaruffi's theses regarding the monetary unit. The work demonstrates a thorough knowledge of (official) culture and scholarship. It includes precise references, inspired especially by the legal thought of Diego de Covarrubia y Lleiva. This demonstrates a certain knowledge (albeit filtered) of the doctrines of the

<sup>48</sup> Gasparo SCARUFFI: *L'Alitinofo*, 20a (Chapter XXII).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* (“in order to make various kinds of coins”).

<sup>51</sup> Andrea BALLETTI: *op. cit.*

<sup>52</sup> IL PROSPERO: *Breve instruttione sopra il discorso fatto dal mag. m. Gasparo Scaruffi, per regolare le cose delli danari*, Reggio Emilia, Hercoliano Bartoli, 1582.

<sup>53</sup> Gaetano MELZI: *Dizionario di opere anonime e pseudonime di scrittori italiani o come che sia aventi relazione all'Italia*, I, Milano, Giacomo Pirola, 1848, 149. As already mentioned, Prospero Bisi was in charge of the printing of *L'Alitinofo*. It cannot be excluded that he is also the author who wrote a commentary on Scaruffi's work under the name Bernardino Pratisuoli.

<sup>54</sup> The only three classic authors present in *L'Alitinofo*.

<sup>55</sup> Bernardino PRATISUOLI: *Considerationi del M.co M. Bernardino Pratisuoli regiano, sopra l'Alitinofo del S. Gasparo Scaruffi, nelle quali con chiarissime ragioni si tratta della cose delle monete*, Reggio Emilia, Fratelli Falvio et Flaminio Bartholi, 1604.

*Salamanca School* in the Emilian intellectual circles. The question that might arise to a historian is whether there was a mutual influence – at least indirectly – between the ideas of Scaruffi and those of the theologians of Salmantine provenance (especially Jesuits) on monetary issues.

Historically and symbolically, two answers – though partial – could open further fields of inquiry. First of all, it should not be ignored that the Venetian Jesuits had opened their own college in Reggio Emilia in 1571.<sup>56</sup> This would lead to not excluding even a mediated diffusion of Scaruffi’s work in the Jesuit communities. Another (partial) response can be found in a manuscript catalogue of the *Bibliotheca Major* of the Roman College,<sup>57</sup> currently at the National Central Library in Rome,<sup>58</sup> in which the presence of Pratisuoli’s commentary on Scaruffi’s work is confirmed. The copy belonged to the Jesuit Giovanni Battista Coccini (1570–1641),<sup>59</sup> Dean of the Auditors of the Apostolic Tribunal of the Roman Rota, who bequeathed his personal library to the Society of Jesus in 1640.<sup>60</sup>

In any case, twenty years after the publication of *L’Alitimonfo*, the Jesuit Juan de Mariana published his famous *De Monetæ Mutatione* in 1609, after his apostolate in Messina and Rome. Both with his work on money and with *De Ponderibus et Mensuris* (*On the Weights and Measures*), Juan de Mariana enriches discussions of the commercial and actuarial disputes of his time. Although these themes were by no means extraneous to the theological domain, Mariana uses the more concise and direct language of the abacus tradition. He incorporates it into the style of the Late Scholastics with references to Greco-Roman, biblical, patristic, as well as canonistic and magisterial sources in order to construct the scholastically rational justifications of the postulates but presumably also to improve the chances that his treatise would be accepted by the political and ecclesiastical authorities.

In any case, *L’Alitimonfo* did not originate in university classrooms or in the courts. It was a mature fruit of experience in the field of commercial and banking practice.<sup>61</sup> Taking for granted that “its importance, however, lays not in any systematic theoretical analysis but in its clear exposition of certain practical proposals [...]”

<sup>56</sup> David SALOMONI: “Le scuole di una comunità emiliana nel Rinascimento tra religione e politica: Il caso di Novellara”. *Educazione. Giornale di pedagogia critica*, V/2, 2016. 27.

<sup>57</sup> MS Ges. 882, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma.

<sup>58</sup> With the capture of Rome and the unification of Italy, the Roman College had to leave its historic location. In 1873 its library was nationalized and the National Central Library of Rome originated from its collections.

<sup>59</sup> Domenico DE ZAULIS: *Annotationes decisivæ Johanne Baptistæ Coccini*, Roma, 1672.

<sup>60</sup> Margherita M. BRECCIA FRATADOCCHI: “La Biblioteca Major del Collegio Romano e i suoi antichi cataloghi”. In Marina Venier – Jean-Eudes Girot: *Homo in libri ac litterulis abditus: I libri di Marc Antoine Muret alla Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma*, Roma, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma, 2013, 53, n. 14.

<sup>61</sup> His experience at the *Banco di Agostino da Lodi* and direct contact with the specialised artisans working at the mint helped him learn established practices and commonly accepted theories on metallurgy and coin composition. These practical circumstances are also a way of delving into the cultural environment of the mint and assay workers of the time.

Scaruffi's merit lies in having advocated a stable monetary unit in terms of fine metal and having proposed international monetary unification."<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the epistemological analysis of *L'Alitimonfo* offers three noteworthy perspectives. First of all, the extensive and structured use of an economic logic. The complexity of monetary relations is reduced through a series of cases and possible solutions, with a mathematical rigor supported by the precision of calculation, arithmetic operations, measurement, and graphic tables.

Secondly, the role of sectoral observation leads to a heuristic approach and a rigorous procedure in which a hypothesis follows the prediction of a result, which must then be validated in any case.<sup>63</sup> Thirdly, through this long-term process of investigation and verification, the richness of information allows for an independent disciplinary development aimed at resolving concrete cases of public interest and their anomalies. In this context, *L'Alitimonfo* is an essential text not only historically (and ethically) because of the originality of its proposal of a universal currency,<sup>64</sup> but also for the way it highlights the centrality of monetary policies and their consequences in local, national, and international economic circuits.

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<sup>62</sup> Edwin R. A. SELIGMAN: "Gasparo Scaruffi". *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. 13, New York, Macmillan, 1942, 561.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Marco BIANCHINI: "Gasparo Scaruffi". In *Il Contributo italiano alla storia del Pensiero: Economia*, Roma, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2012, 142–146.

<sup>64</sup> "As was to be expected, the princes did not even consider, much less adopt Scaruffi's projects. One cannot believe that an experienced craftsman such as Scaruffi [...] should have been unaware of the political obstacle which his project was bound to encounter. However, his system had a definite theoretical value quite apart from the question of its adoption in practice (actually some of his points were borne out later)." Arthur NUSSBAUM: *Money in the Law National and International: A Comparative Study in the Borderline of Law and Economics*, 2nd ed., Brooklyn, The Foundation Press, 1950, 549.



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### Abstract

*In a context of severe inflation and constant monetary alterations, Gasparo Scaruffi proposed a universal stable currency, based on the proportion existing in nature between the corresponding quantities of gold, silver, and a less noble metal (copper or bronze). In his L’Alitinonfo (1582) – whose title is a neologism resulting from the union of two ancient Greek words that together mean “true light” – Scaruffi explained a sort of moderate trimetallism in an articulated prose that demonstrates a close link with the abacus tradition and a not at all secondary alchemical knowledge. The primary focus on monetary policy makes L’Alitinonfo a completely original and unique work as well as a masterpiece in the history of economic theories.*

**Keywords:** economic history, Renaissance and Italian studies, history of economic thought, Early Modern history, monetary theories

### Rezümé

*Igaz fény a sötétben: Gasparo Scaruffi 16. századi monetáris víziója*

*A súlyos infláció és az állandó pénzváltások közepette Gasparo Scaruffi olyan egyetemes, stabil fizetőeszközt javasolt, amely az arany, az ezüst és egy kevésbé nemes fém (réz vagy bronz) megfelelő mennyiségei között a természetben fennálló arányon alapul. L’Alitinonfo (1582) című művében – a neologizmus két ógörög szó egyesítéséből származik, amelyek együttesen „igaz fényt” jelentenek – Scaruffi egyfajta mérsékelt trimetallizmust fejtett ki tagolt prózában, amely szoros kapcsolatot mutat az abakusz hagyományával és az alkímiai tudással. A monetáris politikára való elsődleges összpontosítás teszi a L’Alitinonfót teljesen eredeti és egyedülálló művé, valamint a közgazdasági elméletek történetének remekművévé.*

**Kulcsszavak:** gazdaságtörténet, reneszánsz és olasz tanulmányok, gazdasági gondolkodás története, kora újkori történelem, monetáris elméletek

## BOOKS REVIEWS – RECENZIOK

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*Az angol irodalom története 3: Az 1640-es évektől az 1830-as évekig,*  
 Első rész, Budapest, Kijarat Kiadó, Budapest, 2021, 516 o.

**KOMÁROMY Zsolt – GÁRDOS Bálint – PÉTI Miklós (szerk.):**  
*Az angol irodalom története 4: Az 1640-es évektől az 1830-as évekig,*  
 Második rész, Budapest, Kijarat Kiadó, Budapest, 2021, 331 o.

A 2020-as években több okból is szinte lehetetlen küldetésnek tűnhet *Az angol irodalom története* című könyv(sorozat) elkészítésére vállalkozni. Elég, ha a címben említett három szó jelentéshorizontján gondolkodunk el, melynek mindegyike olyan sokrétű változásokon ment keresztül az elmúlt évtizedekben, hogy szinte pontosabb lenne, ha egy-egy kérdőjel állna inkább minden szó mögött. Természetesen ez a sorozat létrejötté szempontjából sem mellékes körülmény. Sőt, bizonyára ezen jelentésváltozások, átforduló paradigmák motiválták a kötetek elkészültét. *Az angol irodalom története* ugyanis tudatosan reflektál ezen változásokra, önkritikus irodalomtörténeti szemlélete szerves részét képezi a kötetek szerkesztési elveinek. Ebben természetesen kulcsszerepe van a 2017-ben tragikusan elhunyt Kállay Gézá-nak, a magyar anglisztika kiemelkedő alakjának, aki nem csak a kötet létrejöttének aktív kezdeményezője, de foglalkozott történelem, irodalom és történetírás komplex kapcsolatrendszerével.

Az előszóban a kötetek szerkesztési elveiről és a kötet céljairól olvashatunk. Megtudhatjuk, hogy a sorozat létrejöttének fontos szempontja, hogy a különböző fejezeteket merőben eltérő megközelítések jellemzik, ami a projektben résztvevő 29 egyéni szerzőnek köszönhető. *Az angol irodalom történetének* harmadik és negyedik kötete tartalmát tekintve egy könyvet alkot, amely az olvashatóság és egyéb praktikus, könyvészeti szempontok miatt két részre tagolódik. Bár a külön bibliográfia és tárgymutatóknak köszönhetően önállóan is jól használhatóak, a két kötet mégis egyben nyújt átfogó áttekintést az 1640-es évektől az 1830-as évekig terjedő időszakról. Az első rész inkább általános bevezetést nyújt a korszak történelmi és irodalmi vonatkozásaiba, az első fejezet kitér a tágabb összefüggésekre, például az irodalomra gyakorolt történelmi, ideológiai, művészeti és esztétikai hatásokra, a második nagyobb fejezet a kor legfontosabb, kanonikus szerzőit tárgyalja, a harmadik pedig a költészetről szól. A második rész a korszak színház- és drámatörténetét, valamint a prózairodalom különböző formáit járja körül.

Lineáris történeti narratíva felállítás helyett *Az angol irodalom története* az 1640-es évektől az 1830-as évekig többféle megközelítésnek ad teret, inkább párhuzamos, vagy egymásra reflektáló történelmi szálakat tárva fel. Ennek az (ön)kritikus törekvésnek a legszemléletesebb jellemzője a rendkívül izgalmas kereszthivatkozási rendszer: a lapszéleken vagy a főszövegbe ékelődve eltérő hosszúságú megjegyzések és hivatkozások olvashatók, melyek a kötetek egyéb fejezeteire mutatnak, tematikailag is összekapcsolva ezzel különböző szöveghelyeket. Ez a rendszer elősegíti a felfedezést, az aktívabb olvasói attitűdöt és a téma bővebb megértésére serkent azáltal, hogy nem lineáris olvasásra ösztönöz. Végző soron a mű igyekszik rugalmasságot kínálni az olvasóknak, hogy saját preferenciáiknak megfelelően foglalkozzanak a tartalommal, elősegítve az angol irodalom történetének szélesebb körű és kalandosabb felfedezését. Következésképpen a két kötet szerves részét képezik bizonyos szintű ismétlődések is. Ez a sajátosság szintén szándékos tervezés eredménye, amely a kötetek részleges és átfogó olvasottságát egyaránt lehetővé teszi, azzal a céllal, hogy a tárgyalt témákat, fogalmakat és jelenségeket egy átfogó kereten belül kontextualizálja.

A harmadik kötet általános bevezető fejezettel veszi kezdetét, melynek első része Komáromy Zsolt több alfejezetéből áll. Ezek az írások igyekeznek „megágyazni” a kötetnek, olvasmányos, de mégis inkább leíró módon tágabb kontextusba helyezni a korszak irodalmi, esztétikai és művészettörténeti viszonyrendszerét. Külön alfejezeteket kap az angol barokk kérdésköre, a restaurációkori irodalom, majd a romantika is. Ezt követi az „Irodalomszemlélet változásának kontextusai” című alfejezet, mely inkább eszme- és kultúrtörténeti jelenségekkel foglalkozik. Végül a „Nyelv és nemzet” alfejezet ismerteti az angol, mint „nemzeti nyelv” problematikáját – mely helyett célravezetőbb „soknyelvű és soknemzetű irodalomról” (69) beszélni.

Ezután a szerzői köröket tárgyaló fejezet következik, mely a hagyományosan kitüntetett figyelmet kapott kanonizált szerzők portréi helyett (mint például Milton, Pope vagy Johnson) azok emberi, gazdasági és szellemi viszonyrendszereiket is bemutatni igyekeznek. Ennek célja, hogy az olvasó számára is világos legyen, ezen szerzői géniuszok nem az „az irodalom tengeréből kiemelkedő szigetek” (140), hanem egyéni teljesítmények mellett legalább annyira koruk közösségi életének eredményei.

A kötet utolsó, lírával foglalkozó fejezete eszmetörténeti vonatkozásokat is részletesen mutat be (politikai vagy vallásos költészet), vagy a múlthoz való viszony különböző változatait (hellenizmus, orientalizmus). A fejezet nagy érdeme, hogy a kötetben általánosan jelen lévő többszólamúság és önreflexió a kortárs kritikai irányzatokkal szemben is érvényben marad. Györke Ágnes és Hübner Andrea alfejezete az orientalizmusról több szempontból is körbejárja a jelenséget, felvillantja annak sokszor ellentmondásos, máskor viszont produktív erőként is ható viszonyrendszerét: „az orientalizmus egyáltalán nem olyan egységes és következetes módon jelenik meg a nyugati kultúrában, mint azt Said tézise alapján gondolnánk” (287).

A negyedik kötet a színház és drámatörténetről szóló fejezete Schandl Veronika „A dráma, mint szórakoztatóipar és irodalom” című rendkívül informatív és részletes áttekintésével indul. Akár a kötet egésze, ez a rész is arra törekszik, hogy témáját a mai korból nézve kontextualizálja, megfogható párhuzamokat vonva hozzá közelebb az olvasóhoz. Schandl például így összegzi a színház átalakulásának folyamatait: „A színház arisztokrata időtöltésből tömegkulturális szórakoztatássá vált, emellett kialakult a színházi kritika műfaja és a színészek sztárkultusza is” (7).

Kiséry András ugyanitt folytatja „Színház és dráma a polgárháborúk és az interregnum idején” című tanulmányában, amely szinte pontosan az 1640-es évtől kezdődik: „Amikor 1642. szeptember 2-án a parlament elfogadta a színházak bezárásáról szóló rendeletet, az angol drámai irodalom és színházi kultúra egy vitathatatlanul nagy korszaka és vele a kapitalista szórakoztatóipar első nagy formája ért véget váratlanul” (15). A „kapitalista szórakoztatóipar” kifejezés váratlan anakronizmusként is érhetne minket, Kiséryt olvasva azonban hamar feltárulnak számunkra a polgárháborús időszak kultúr- és társadalomtörténeti következményei, és az említett kifejezés is a helyére kerül.

Mint láthattuk, *az Angol irodalom történetének* szerkesztési elveiből világosan látszik, hogy egy-egy szerzőt vagy művet nem önálló fejezetként tárgyal, az egyik kivétel a néhány közül Péti Miklós „A küzdő Sámson, Milton ’antik’ tragédiája” című fejezet, mely művet a szerző egy „sajátos zárványnak” nevez a restauráció korának irodalomtörténetében (72). Ennek elsődleges oka Péti szerint az, hogy a görög tragédiaszerzők közvetlen hatása inkább a kor második felében érhető tetten, ám Milton már a 17. század első felében tudatosan használta ezen műveket. A tanulmány, az egész kötetre jellemző módon szintén izgalmas kitekintést tartogat a 9/11-es terrortámadásra és a posztkoloniális és feminista kritikákra is.

A kötet második fele már a prózairodalomra koncentrál, Hartvig Gabriella a „Próza sokfélesége” című tanulmánya a történeti bevezetés mellett betekintést ad a 18. század eleji irodalmi viszonyokba. Hartvig kiemeli, hogy bár a korban az irodalom lassan önálló diszciplínává szilárdul, a mai (vagy 20. századi) értelemben vett regény, amely a prózairodalom kifejezés hallatán sokunknak jutna eszébe, még közel sem uralkodó műfaj. Sokkal inkább beszélhetünk használati irodalomról, olyan populáris műfajokról, mint illemkönyvek, botránynarratívák, prédikációk vagy akár a naplók, levelek, melyek például „a romantikus szerzők kedvenc prózai formái közé tartoz[tak]” (132).

A regény és maga a kötet végül Ruttkay Veronika „A romantikus regény” című alfejezetével zárul, mely a románc és a regény viszonyát igyekszik tisztázni. Ruttkay szerint az utóbbi néhány évtized irodalomtudománya sokat tett azért, hogy a Scott és Austen mellett bemutasson szerzőket, „akik kihullottak a viktoriánus korban rögzülő regénykánonból [valamint megmutassa azt], milyen változatos műfaji kísérletezés zajlott, és milyen fontos szerepe volt a regénynek és a róla szóló diskurzusnak a francia forradalom és a napóleoni háborúk korában a sok szempontból kritikus időszakát élő, forrongó és megosztott, de rendkívül dinamikusan fejlődő

modern brit társadalomban” (310). Mary Shelley Frankenstein című regényének egy lehetséges értelmezésével, miszerint a szörnyeteg maga a regény, Ruttkay már a modernitás kezdeti gondolatiságát is igyekszik felvillantani.

*Az Angol irodalom történetének* legnagyobb kérdése az utóéletre vonatkozólag, hogy mennyiben gyümölcsöző feladat egy hasonló volumenű projektet könyv formájában elkészíteni egy posztprint világban. A nyomtatott könyvnek, mint médiumnak természetesen a mai napig számos előnyét ismerjük a digitális formátumokkal szemben: textuális stabilitás, archiválhatóság, tartósság. A kötetben tárgyalt összefüggések, egymáshoz kapcsolódó információk hálózata azonban hiperlinkek híján a margóra szorult, bár talán jobban érvényesülne a digitális formában. Mindez természetesen nem csökkenti a kötetek érdemeit, minden értelemben vett magas színvonalát, tartalmi változatosságát és lendületes szerkesztését. A sorozat ezért minden irodalmár és a téma iránt érdeklődő polcán előkelő helyet találhat.



RÉKA VAJDA

Miklós PÉTI: *Paradise from behind the Iron Curtain: Reading, Translating and Staging Milton in Communist Hungary*, London, UCL Press, 2022, 296 pp.

Over the past few decades, there has been an increasing emphasis in literary theory on the significant interplay between literary works and the cultures that interpret them. Questions are raised about the ways in which critiques and translations engage with the text and in which these responses consequently shape the public's reading choices and interpretations. A remarkable illustration of this phenomenon, as shown by Miklós Péti, can be found in the reception of Milton's oeuvre in Hungary between 1948 and 1989, which reveals a highly politicized and ideologically driven response.

The translator behind the first Hungarian translation of *Paradise Regained* since the 18th century, Péti has already written extensively on the subject matter of his first monograph in studies such as "In 'Milton's Prison': Milton in Hungarian Translation" or "*Paradise Lost* on the Hungarian Stage in 1970." Now his focus becomes crystal clear: he provides a comprehensive documentation of how the reception of John Milton's works was influenced by cultural policies during the four decades of Hungarian state socialism. Péti traces how the reevaluation of Milton's writings led to a selective promotion of certain works, such as *Paradise Lost* or the revolutionary sonnets, while others were marginalized or, on the contrary, like *Samson Agonistes*, brought back from oblivion.

Péti cites the renowned Hungarian poet Lőrinc Szabó's correspondence about the translation of *Paradise Lost* in the first chapter of the book. Szabó writes: "I shudder to think of Milton, the magnificent, whom I should really start now." As Péti points out, the poet's anxiety is "as much fuelled by personal artistic concerns as by the workings of communist cultural policy" (19). Part of Szabó's concern was indeed well-founded, considering that during the era, authors faced censorship and suppression. The control over literature rested in the hands of individuals occupying positions of authority within the cultural hierarchy, granting them the power to dictate its course. Yet, Péti shows how Milton's words, with the help of Szabó's lyrical genius or that of Ágnes Nemes Nagy, among others, resisted ideological constraints and stayed what they really are: profound thoughts on humanity, which, even if only momentarily, "suspended [the] Hell of the Cold War" (146).

Péti lays the groundwork for his study by highlighting its necessity: after all, it indeed surveys "a narrow and rather marginal segment of Milton's international reception" (6). By doing so, he ends up uncovering intriguing parallels and distinctions between Milton's Hungarian and Anglo-American reception in the

second half of the 20th century. The reader is also provided with a few pages of historical context that the author elaborates on in the coming chapters, so the book becomes rather easy to grasp for those less familiar with Eastern European history.

Chapter 1 examines the reception of Milton's two epics, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, which received completely contrasting treatments during the era. While *Paradise Lost* was praised, the latter "virtually ceased to exist for Hungarian audiences" (24), mainly due to its thematic misalignment with the propaganda that aimed to highlight the revolutionary nature of Milton's works and bury the religious aspects as deep as possible. By close reading short excerpts, Péti provides commentary on Szabó Lőrinc's and István Jánosy's translations as well as on the 1970 stage adaptation.

In Chapter 2, Péti draws attention to the rather surprising emergence of a critical tradition that focuses on *Samson Agonistes*, resulting in several different translations. This tradition reveres Samson as a proto-socialist hero, both in Anglo-American Marxist and socialist writings, as well as in the countries behind the Iron Curtain. Péti points out that while these explicitly politicized perspectives on Samson indeed demonstrate a comprehension of the work's political potential, the reasons behind them have to do more with the dynamics of communist cultural policies than with the drama itself.

Chapter 3 focuses on Milton's prose works, such as *Areopagitica*, which itself presents a captivating subject matter given the relative obscurity of scholarship on Milton's prose. The chapter's highlight is the commentary on Tibor Lutter and Miklós Szenczi, who emerged as influential figures in all matters related to Milton during this time, and whose treatment of Milton's works, as Péti shows, serves as a symbolic representation of the wider patterns of reception in communist Hungary.

Chapter 4 deals with Milton's shorter poems and presents the intriguing story of a 1958 publication of a select few of these. The volume ended with an afterword that attempted to guide the readers towards a specific interpretation, while, as Péti points out, the poems themselves presented Milton as a classic poet who primarily explored traditional themes. The highlight of the chapter and possibly the whole book is Péti's discussion of *Sonnet 23* as translated by Ágnes Nemes Nagy, a female poet otherwise silenced by the regime, as it challenges the patriarchal views that surrounded Milton's Hungarian reception as well as the perceived "masculinity" of the poet himself, pointing out how literary translation when done masterfully is able to complement the original.

In the second half of the book the reader is provided with the Hungarian script of the 1970 theatrical performance of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (based on Jánosy's text), accompanied by an English rendition by Péti himself, which allows for further contemplation.

Despite the similarity in overarching conclusions across each chapter, Péti's meticulous scrutiny of translations, journals, correspondence and so on, combined with the intelligence with which he puts the pieces together, never leaves the

reader bored. *Paradise from behind the Iron Curtain* is not only a much-needed piece of Milton scholarship, which points out the connections and divergences between the Anglo-American and the Eastern European treatment of Milton's works, but also an outstanding example of a reception study that, as the reader may have previously hoped, goes beyond being merely a compilation of different translations and critiques. It offers astute commentary on the profound influence of politics on interpretive practices, highlighting, at the same time, the ways in which the voices of resistance are able to shine through ideology – a lesson that is, unfortunately, a valuable one nowadays.

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