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MILTON BIOGRAPHY IN THE ROMANTIC ERA

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE SEARCH FOR MILTON

He who seeks the bubble of another's reputation must beware, not of the cannon's mouth, but of the mouths of idolaters. (William R. Parker, Milton's Contemporary Reputation).

The search for the "real" John Milton is a never-ending and confusing affair; for, like D. H. Lawrence, Milton asks tauntingly from the grave: "Which of me are you looking for? I am a dark forest. I am not one man. I am many men." To those who have studied Milton's life and works he is an elusive figure compounded of his own utterances and those of his biographers. In the words of Richard D. Altick, our conception of Milton the man is "the sum of various Miltons who have been portrayed in biographies. Present-day opinion may, of course, emphasize certain aspects of poem or person at the expense of others that are currently held to be less relevant or less 'true,' but the image nevertheless contains, by a sort of retinal persistence, the residue of former notions."¹ In one sense, then, John Milton is an idea rather than a reality; "a large and highly promising unknown territory for investigation, with extraordinary interest for the sociology of letters and undoubted importance in the history of Anglo-American thought."²

Beginning with the Early Lives, the story of Milton has been influenced by abstract and simplified conceptions which have led us further
and further away from the flesh-and-blood man who lived three centuries ago and have left us with a gigantic and many-dimensioned abstraction which goes by the name of John Milton. By trying anew to find the Milton who once was, and by coloring him with its own needs and biases, each successive generation of biographers has contributed to the abstraction which bears but partial resemblance to the seventeenth-century poet. As Helen Darbishire puts it, "Later biographers have quarried the historical records of his time to build a formidable monument from which in the end the living man has escaped."³

One apparent reason for this confusion is that Milton was made up of many different qualities and tendencies which, to later generations, may seem incompatible, and indeed, even contradictory. He was a child both of the Reformation and of the Renaissance, a Humanist and a Puritan, a liberal and a conservative. To attempt to reconcile these elements of personality and outlook is "to wander up or down the curiously triangular scale which might be constructed with St. Augustine at one corner, Erasmus at another, and Praise-god Barebones at the third."⁴ Failure at reconciliation leads to those slight distortions and even major misunderstandings which become part of the Milton tradition; for example, the legacy of the
nineteenth-century Satanists, who saw Milton as the heroic projection of his own arch-villain.

No other author has been the cause of so much controversy about his life and the relationship between his life and works. No other author until his time left such abundant evidence to make the search for him tantalizing and discovery all but impossible. To this confusion Milton himself generously added. The autobiographical passages in his prose works, especially in *The Reason of Church Government, An Apology for Smectymnuus*, and the *Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano* make eminently clear that Milton wanted to construct a pleasing and indestructible public image of himself and that he intended his life to be edifying, doctrinal even to his detractors, a "true poem." Says James H. Hanford, "He made his own character an issue in the public causes for which he fought."5 Moreover, since in his prose works Milton was constantly defending himself from his enemies, he tailored his public image so as to make it an effective weapon against them. A skilled rhetorician, he could do nothing else.

Driven by the taunts of his enemies and by his high opinion of himself, Milton announced himself to the world in autobiographical portraits which are partial revelations of his character: "His personality as a poet and even as an apologist in prose is something other than the real man, as he lived, a fellow creature with ourselves.
Yet the two bear a relation to each other, and we are not without means of tracing the lineaments behind the mask."

This is not to claim that Milton was deliberately fabricating his self-description, but rather, that the environment of the prose writings forced Milton into a self-defense which may not tell the whole truth. Certainly no one but a cynical detractor would call Milton a liar; however, concerning the interpretation of motive one may raise certain questions. Just how much did Milton rationalize himself? Was he really reluctant to leave his studies and enter the fray of hoarse public dispute? Was he as oblivious as he claims to the praise of his contemporaries? Did he give up his intention of taking orders because of ecclesiastical tyranny? Did he really plan his prose works dispassionately as part of a preconceived plan to further the cause of liberty? These and other questions must be answered with some degree of satisfaction if the search for Milton is to be fruitful.

One group of men who engaged in this search are Milton's English biographers during the romantic era. Their names, together with the titles of their works and dates of publication, are as follows: Charles E. Mortimer, An Historical Memoir of the Political Life of John Milton (London, 1805); Charles Symmons, The Life of John Milton (London, 1806); Henry John Todd,

Since "romantic" refers primarily to a particular kind of poetry and to a special brand of literary criticism, and since "romantic" in reference to Milton ordinarily means the search for the man behind the poetry, the term is something of a misnomer. Indeed, the romantic movement never really became involved in literary biography:

Romanticism, by its fascination with the unknown and the unknowable, its stress on introspection and intuition, its love of freedom and individualism, its vaunting ambitions, and its emotionalism, might have been expected to contribute a new dimension to biography. In fact, though it rose to prominence at a time when biography was flowering as never before, it added little to the form. Throughout the first third of the nineteenth century, while the romantic movement was at its peak, no one approached the level of Boswell or Johnson. The romantics supplied admirable source material for later biographers . . . but they made little direct contributions to biography.
Romanticism is an extremely plastic concept, however, one of its corollaries being the interest in and emphasis upon the personality of the poet, upon the creator behind the creation. In this sense the romantic biographers are romantic. The word "romanticism" is also suggestive of liberal politics, the devotion to individual liberty; and a great part of this study is the story of the transformation of Milton by these biographers from the poet to the liberal prophet and patriot.

This dissertation, then, is a study in emphasis, in the presuppositions which seven English biographers of Milton between the years 1798 and 1837 (the dates being a mere convenience to delimit the romantic period) brought to their work. It is intended to reveal their answers to the intriguing questions about Milton's life: How many and what sort of friends did Milton make at St. Paul's and at Cambridge? How did he spend the "hidden years" at Horton? Was he rusticated from Cambridge, and if so, why? Was Milton really whipped by a tutor for insubordination or for some other offense? How, exactly, did he comport himself during his Italian journey? Was he really an outspoken defender of his religious beliefs, and did he offend his hosts by his candor? Were the Jesuits in Italy really out to harm him? Why did Milton marry Mary Powell? When did the two first meet? What precisely happened between them? Did Mary leave of her own accord, or was she, as
her mother later testified when trying to gain her inheritance, sent away by her husband? What was the true occasion of the divorce tracts? Did Milton have them in mind before Mary's refusal to return to him? What sort of relationship did Milton have with his wives and daughters? Was he the Turkish tyrant that Dr. Johnson pictures him to be? What was Milton's motive in writing the Tenure of Kings and Magistrates? When was it written? How much power did Milton actually have in the governments of the Commonwealth and Protectorate? What was his relationship to Cromwell in these days? What happened to Salmasius? Did Milton plan his writings on liberty beforehand, as he claims in the Defensio Secunda, or did he write merely to justify his actions in immediate circumstances? What kind of man was Milton—what was dominant in his character?

The problem here is not so much what materials the romantic biographers had at their disposal as it is how they interpreted the abundant materials which would have been available to anyone.

Again, Hanford is to the point: "Everyone agrees that Milton was no ordinary person; but the judgments that have been passed on his personality and character have varied with the political sympathies, the moral attitude, and the personal temperament of each biographer.
Every age, and, indeed, every individual, will, in a measure, have his own Milton . . . ."¹⁰

Briefly, it can be stated that Milton's romantic biographers mainly wrote to supply the omissions of Elijah Fenton and to controvert the Toryism of Dr. Johnson, the biographies of Milton of these two men being those most often published during the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries. 'Truly, "The study of the Romantic interest in Milton . . . begins very appropriately with the year 1779, which marked the publication of this famous biography by Dr. Johnson of the idol of Romanticism by the great apostle of classicism. This enthusiasm for the poet and growing understanding of the politician continue well into the Victorian age . . . ."¹¹ The romantic biographers' defenses of Milton take various forms; some are more moderate than others; some are avowed Whigs or ultra-liberals; one is a dedicated Tory. Nevertheless, all have somehow been touched by the Great Rebellion, a civil war which has never been concluded and in which Milton is a symbolic figure. "Throughout that period," says T. S. Eliot, English society was so convulsed and divided that the effects are still felt."¹² These are "new" biographies, the first to express a great interest in Milton's political, religious, and social milieu, and, with one exception, the first to be "dedicated to the propagation of Milton's political and religious views and activities,
and, of necessity, to the exposition of the prose rather than the poetry. They rescued the prose works from virtual oblivion.

In 1825 Macaulay expressed his regret that Milton's prose writings were neglected:

It is to be regretted that the prose writings of Milton should, in our time, be so little read. As compositions, they deserve the attention of every man who wishes to become acquainted with the full power of the English language. They abound with passages, compared with which the finest declamations of Burke sink into insignificance. They are a perfect field of cloth of gold. The style is stiff with gorgeous embroidery. Not even in the earlier books of the Paradise Lost has he ever risen higher than in those parts of his controversial works in which his feelings, excited by conflict, find a vent in bursts of devotional and lyric rapture. It is, to borrow his own majestic language, 'a sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies.'

The romantic biographers of Milton wrote to rectify this situation -- to highlight the hallelujahs and the symphonies and to eulogize or explain Milton the public man. Three of the seven -- Carpenter, Mortimer, and Ivimey -- barely mention the fact that Milton was a poet. Todd and Mitford, even though they found many of Milton's political and religious opinions offensive, devote considerable space to Milton the public figure.

With the exception of Sir Egerton Brydges (and even he staunchly defends Milton against the accusations of Dr. Johnson), the romantic biographers took Milton's self-revelations in his prose works at
face value: he was the defender of liberty and the champion of the people, a pure and spotless antagonist of all those who would enslave the bodies and the minds of men. Milton wrote in defense of himself, and his biographers took up the cudgel with him. Milton wrote as if to say, "He who is not with me is against me," and his romantic biographers were, to a great extent, with him in his battle for freedom. Thus the more liberal of the biographers -- Mortimer, Symmons, Ivimey, Carpenter -- are more press agents than biographers, and their task was made easy because Milton had already supplied them with copy. It remained for them to complete the task of justifying the ways of Milton to man. He became, in their hands, something of a martyr who had been manhandled by Dr. Johnson and other eighteenth-century biographers who were either blatantly reactionary or who extolled the poet in the hope that their readers would forget about the nasty Puritan of the prose works.

We do not go to the romantic biographers of Milton to learn about Milton the poet nor, except for Todd's biography (1826 edition), which published certain important state papers never before revealed, to learn anything more about the facts of Milton's life than we could learn from the five Early Lives. Rather, we go there to discover how a man can be made into a rather stern and otherworldly monument to posterity. This icon-making by the
romantic biographers elevated Milton to a position far exceeding that which the eighteenth century had accorded him and, claims Altick, "fundamentally affected the nature of his literary fame."15

A secondary purpose of this dissertation is to place these romantic biographies in the tradition of nineteenth-century literary biography. Unfortunately, none of these biographies is successful enough to merit notice except as a social document, a period piece. Most of them belong to that vast wasteland of lives of literary and public men, eulogistic and polemical and honeysuckle lives, which appeared all too often between the times of Boswell and Strachey. The others are standard scholarly biographies, excessively annotated and lifeless. All of them manage in various ways "to suppress the living richness of random detail which may be found in every page of 'Honest John Aubrey's' minutes."16 Few would dispute Joseph W. Reed's conclusion that "The early nineteenth century was not (as it was for autobiography) a golden age for biography. It is more notable for quantity of production than quality of workmanship, more significant for suppression than revelation, more noted for rules and checks on development than for biographical innovation."17 Nevertheless, these romantic biographies are important as works which, like many others in the first third of the nineteenth century, contributed to man's understanding of himself and threw light "on the development and workings of the mind in general and of
the artistic mind in particular.\textsuperscript{18} As such they express, both implicitly and explicitly, rather interesting concepts of the theory and practice of life writing.

The study of the biographies of Milton is important mostly because of the incalculable ways in which these accounts have influenced our thinking about and our criticism of Milton. To explore the exact relationship between biography and criticism is outside the scope of this study. However, one need only imagine the vast difference in criticism of Milton's works if we knew as little about him as we know of Shakespeare.\textsuperscript{19} Quite often the Milton whom one finds in the biographies determines the kind of Milton one brings to the criticism. One wonders, for example, how different much criticism of \textit{Paradise Lost} would have been if Milton had not written his prose works and rebelled against authority even to the point of writing \textit{The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates}, thus inviting a comparison between himself and his creation and a search for the "real" hero of the epic. As Douglas Bush points out in "The Critical Significance of Biographical Evidence," "The critics's conscious or unconscious endeavor has often been not to study the poem itself but to fit the poem into his picture of the man; hence the distortions in regard to rebellious pride, sensuality, Puritanism, and what not."\textsuperscript{20} In such instances biographical evidence has been misused, but the
intelligent reader and critic must be aware of all the successive
distortions which have affected the image of Milton in order to
establish a just view of the man. This is one crucial means of
"wiping spots off the spectacles with which we read the poetry."\(^{21}\)
The fact is that biography and criticism have been yoked together,
for better or for worse, and all the attempts to read the text unaided
by "extraneous considerations" have neither dimmed nor diminished
the various images of Milton which have taken shape over the cen-
turies. Says Altick, "In practice, biography has profoundly and con-
tinuously affected everyone's attitudes toward the literature he reads;
toward, indeed, his very concept of the institution of literature."\(^{22}\)
Thus Milton's romantic biographers found in his life and prose writ-
ings a mighty, unyielding and sublime organ-voice which they carried
over into their criticism of the poetry. Their narrow vision has
been detrimental to a full view of Milton's complex character and
work and has had a lasting effect upon later generations of readers
and critics. Their work has been subsumed into the corpus of the
Milton tradition.

Thus the history of literary biography, like that of criticism,
records the process by which readers from era to era turn
an object of literary interest—the received image of a poet,
or his work itself—this way and that, each generation
adopting the perspective and concentrating on the facts that
are selected by its characteristic set of literary, intellectual,
and ethical values. In so doing, it provides useful evidence
of the communal mind and standards of every generation since the eighteenth century.  

Biography and criticism meet so often in studies of Milton that one can scarcely afford to neglect the former. Indeed, they sometimes become so intertwined as to be inseparable. Someone is forever trying to discover "the living face behind the mask," to search out those symbols by which the writer, once removed from reality, reveals himself to the world, to add a new dimension to his stature. Even the narrow-minded biographer who can see only one side of Milton can influence our understanding of him and perhaps even make his work more intelligible to us.

The name of Milton is supercharged with emotion. It would be interesting to make a "Miltonometer" and test with it the reactions to Milton's name by all those who have written about him. Numerous are the questions about his character and the incidents in his life which arouse the animosity of biographers and critics: "Whatever Milton's actual faults of character, it is a curious thing that his high and rare measure of virtue and righteousness causes much more offense than the scarlet sins of other writers." Even in our enlightened age of the new criticisms and the modified new criticism, critics of Milton cannot let the man alone. Often the measure of the man becomes the measure of his work. For T. S. Eliot, J. Middleton Murry, G. Wilson Knight, F. R. Leavis, Ezra Pound,
and S. B. Liljegren, Milton is still the Turkish tyrant among women, the arch-rebel who could not submit to any kind of authority. He is presented, says Douglas Bush, as "a powerful but repellent personality who expounded repellent beliefs and ideas in verse of repellent organization and texture." In his Studies in Milton, Liljegren portrays Milton as a conceited, vainglorious, self-seeking, often unprincipled rebel; a satanic character who inherited the intense, overreaching individualism of the renaissance and of Machiavellianism; a coarse disputation who refused to treat his antagonists as human beings. And, like many another detractor of Milton, Eliot admits that he shares the antipathy of Dr. Johnson: "As a man he is antipathetic. Either from the moralist's point of view, or from the theologian's point of view, or from that of the political philosopher, or judging by the ordinary standards of like- ableness in human beings, Milton is unsatisfactory." Eliot admits further that these biases may "obscure the glass" through which one examines the poetry, most likely because Milton took an active part in events which still evoke heated responses.

The romantic biographers, though their view of Milton is not so informed and rounded as that of a Tillyard, a C. S. Lewis, or a Douglas Bush, provide an antidote to such disagreeableness. Their prejudices usually run in the opposite direction, but their picture of
Milton seems more just because they were closer to him in imaginative and political sympathy. To experience their conception of Milton is to add another valuable chapter to the Milton tradition.

This dissertation is intended to illumine that chapter and, together with other similar excursions into the Milton tradition, will provide Milton scholars with a complete picture of the great man and poet as he has been experienced through the centuries. Other works which are either related to or similar to this dissertation are as follows: (1) Edward L. Ruhe, "A Study in the Early Lives of Milton" (unpubl. diss., Columbia University, 1959); M. Manuel, "The seventeenth-Century Critics and Biographers of Milton" (unpubl. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1956); Karl F. Thompson, "Milton's Eighteenth Century Biographers" (unpubl. diss., Yale University, 1950); (4) Edward Dowden, Milton in the Eighteenth Century, 1701-1750 (New York, 1909); (5) Milton C. Albrecht, "Sixty Years of Miltonic Criticism: from Aiken to Masson" (unpubl. diss., University of California, 1938); (6) John A. Wiegel, "The Miltonic Tradition in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century" (unpubl. diss., Western Reserve University, 1939); (7) Shan Wing Chan, "Nineteenth Century Criticism of Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes" (unpubl. diss., Stanford University, 1937); (8) Frank W. Plunkett, "The Milton Tradition in One of Its
Phases: The Criticism of Milton as Found in Leading British Magazines of the Pre-Romantic and Romantic Periods (1779-1832)"

In 1666 Milton wrote sadly, and somewhat wistfully, to his friend Peter Heimbach, "For what you call policy . . . I would rather have you call loyalty to one's country, --this particular lass, after inveigling me with her fair name, has almost expatriated me, so to speak."31 Had he been able to anticipate the Settlement of 1689 and the Act of Toleration (1701), his spirits might have been somewhat uplifted. And had he known that his biographers in the romantic era would eulogize him as a great prophet and patriot and savior of his country, he probably would have been incredulous. Such is the burden of William R. Parker's story in Milton's Contemporary Reputation:

Thus the irony of fame. Dead Milton, who had vainly hoped to be a leader of thought in his own age, rose from the grave to stir the minds and hearts of his
countrymen. The brave, futile words, the challenging ideas that his own contemporaries had ignored, walked the earth again and helped to create a world which the blind dreamer imagined but never saw... men and women of after-days, dazzled by majestic verse, deceived by nostalgic admiration, and accepting the poet's own estimate of his contemporary prestige, fancied that he had been an important and influential figure in his time. This was not the fact, but faith in the living word gave it a measure of truth. 32
Notes to Chapter I


6 Ibid, p. x.


8 Several other accounts of Milton's life were published during the romantic period, but all of them are insignificant for the purposes of this study. They are brief accounts of the major events in Milton's life which borrow heavily from the Early Lives. None is an independent contribution.


12 "Milton," Sewanee Rev., LVI (1948), 188.


15 Altick, p. 409.

16 Ruhe, p. 76.


18 Altick, p. 103.


21 Ibid.

22 Altick, p. 403.

23 Ibid., pp. 407-408.


26 Ibid., p. 7.

27 Ibid., p. 9.


30 "Milton," p. 188.


32 (Columbus, Ohio, 1940), p. 55.
CHAPTER II

THE STATE OF MILTON BIOGRAPHY
AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Fortunately for this study, the Early Lives and the major
eighteenth-century biographies of Milton have already been the sub-
ject of full-length works. This chapter is, for the most part, a sum-
mary of the conclusions reached by Edward L. Ruhe ("A Study in the
Early Lives of Milton"\textsuperscript{1}) and Karl F. Thompson ("Milton's
Eighteenth-Century Biographers"\textsuperscript{2}). The former surveys the biog-
raphies by an anonymous biographer, John Aubrey, Anthony Wood,
Edward Phillips, and John Toland; while the latter covers the lives
by John Toland, Elijah Fenton, Jonathan Richardson, Francis Peck,
Thomas Newton, Thomas Birch, Samuel Johnson, William Hayley,
and Henry John Todd (1801 edition).\textsuperscript{3} Such a summary aids im-
measurably in placing the romantic biographers of Milton in proper
perspective within the Milton tradition.

Before Charles E. Mortimer published the first of the romantic
biographies in 1805, the image of Milton had undergone several
transformations. Milton's Tory enemies, contemporary with him,
Began the process of fragmentation by centering upon the divine
punishment which they believed had visited him because he had con-
doned -- in their terms, applauded and abetted -- the regicide of

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Charles I. With earnest and righteous malice they seized upon this hobby horse and rode it for years, "distorting, exaggerating, and misinterpreting, and accomplishing little except to guarantee that Milton's name would continue to be known, if mainly in infamy."

The events of 1660 ensured notoriety for Milton; his cause was discredited, and the English were of a mind to villify or forget the republicans and radicals who had led them to the sorry state of affairs immediately preceding the coming of Charles II.

At the same time that Milton the public and political man was undergoing a demise, the other Milton -- the poet -- was steadily rising in reputation. As Ruhe says, "Significantly, the Milton of Paradise Lost, while increasingly praised, was practically never acknowledged as the defender of regicide, while the much-reviled defender of regicide was only gradually coming to be known as the author of a great poem. As a consequence we have very few references to the double Milton even for this early period, before the habit of quietly glossing over Milton's political beliefs became a custom." Thus Milton existed in two pieces; but unlike many of the eighteenth century biographers and critics, these contemporaries did not attempt, squintingly, to take in both parts at once. At any rate, when he died Milton could scarcely have hoped for vindication as a man and a public figure. He was, as he had said, almost
without a country. His public image was that of a very bad man.

Then came the early biographers to the rescue. Their contribution was to put Milton together again and to present him as a human being, for the most part a likeable and affable person, dedicated to his country and to his religion, a great Christian man and poet. Except for Toland -- and even he, the liberal, had reservations -- they were either lukewarm toward or, as in the case of Wood, against his politics. Nevertheless, they remade his public and private image into something which resembled the real man.

From them we learn all the homely details which make for successful circumstantial biography: the color of Milton's hair, his height, the quality of his voice, his work habits, his daily routine, and so forth. We also learn all that was truly laudable about his character -- his generosity, his dedication to his work. "Though their bias was," says Helen Darbishire, "for the noble portrait and the moral life, they knew the value of trivial human facts. If they tell us little or nothing discreditable to Milton, that is not simply because they were writing for edification. Perhaps there was little discreditable to tell. Aubrey was frankly unbiassed and incurably indiscreet, yet he had nothing worse to repeat than that Milton was whipped by his tutor at Cambridge and that he in his
turn whipped his nephews. And Wood, who was harshly disposed to Milton, gives evil interpretations but no evil facts.\textsuperscript{16}

These early lives of Milton are most important because they were written within a framework of direct transmission of biographical evidence and because they present a Milton who was not to be seen again for nearly two centuries. As contrasts to the iconography of the romantic biographies -- the picture of the stern and unyielding moralist and political theorist -- they are especially significant here. Not until the twentieth century, with the writings of James H. Hanford and Douglas Bush, have scholars and students of Milton regained a sense of Milton the man, a man of pleasantry and wit and engaging manners, a man who was solidly in his milieu, not soaring somewhere above it.

Of special interest among these biographies is the work of John Toland. Of all the Early Lives his is closest to the spirit of the majority of the romantic biographies. His is the first thoroughly polemical life of Milton, and the early nineteenth-century biographers, except Todd and Mitford, followed his lead. A liberal in politics and in religion, a Whig and a deist, Toland prepared his biography of Milton for an edition of the prose works, a rather rare and unlikely achievement at this early stage of the Milton tradition. His Milton, states Ruhe, is "primarily the public Milton -- that
important fraction of the poet's character which the prose writings
project so strongly. This is the image which remains capable of
arousing the strongest feelings of admiration and aversion even to
the present day, and it is the image to which Toland most clearly
responded. 7 Like the romantic biographers, he sought to restore
Milton's public image, and in so doing he gave undue emphasis to
Milton the "embattled controversialist." 8 In all, remarks
Thompson, "Toland's picture of Milton is of an undaunted rebel who
sacrificed everything to his love of English liberty." 9

The Milton who arises from the pages of the early biographers
is an undaunted but tender spirit whom all students of Milton would do
well to keep in mind:

Milton's ardent spirit was austere, his character as a
political fighter not only indomitably courageous but also
hard and unbending. In public controversy he could be
harsh, coarse and brutal. But in his private life his
friends and relatives knew a different man -- a man of
culture and breeding, generous, companionable, witty,
peaceable, loving music and good talk, loving quiet and
all the delights of intercourse with affectionate, intelli-
gent companions. This is the Milton with whom the first
biographers were familiar, and who comes alive in their
pages. 10

Lacking this portrait, one is left with the lifeless status of a Milton
which appears with tedious regularity in the later biographies.

Because various writers praised or deprecated Milton accord-
ing to their own lights and prejudices, there is no such phenomenon
as the Milton of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, it can be said that in general this century saw Milton with the eyes of a schizophrenic. Early in the century Elijah Fenton and Jonathan Richardson distinguished the politician from the poet, lauding the one while glancing rather testily at the other. Milton's political career, as distinct from his noble political theories, was plainly an embarrassment to most of his biographers and a scandal to Dr. Johnson. By being a rebel and a non-conformist and an abettor of regicide, he had debased himself and forced even some of his supporters -- Thomas Newton and Thomas Birch -- into an orientation of split vision. The best they could do was rationalize that Milton had spoken nobly about "liberty in general." Only Dr. Johnson stood in general condemnation of Milton, and only William Hayley, at the end of the century, like many of his successors among the romantic biographers, made Milton into a demigod. For the eighteenth-century biographers, therefore, the overall picture of Milton is that of the pious Christian bard and philosopher who was, regrettably, a republican controversialist. Fortunately, in their ambivalence and concern with controversy not all the eighteenth-century biographers lost sight of Milton the man. The preservation of the last traces of direct biographical tradition by Birch, Richardson, and Newton is an essential part of their history.
"For the early biographers," remarks Thompson, "Milton was a social person; for those at the end of the eighteenth century, the exalted Milton was lonely and great, completely wise, altogether virtuous. Milton becomes progressively the inspired poet and less the citizen concerned with the problems of nation and fellow man."¹³

This distortion began when, in 1825, Fenton idealized the portrait by praising the poetry while slighting Milton's politics and religion; continued with Birch and Newton, who put forth Milton as the libertarian conscience of all England, the promoter of liberty for all; and ended when "Hayley and Todd finally succeeded in detaching Milton from reality and in placing him in a realm apart."¹⁴ By deprecating or conveniently forgetting what they could not credit to sound Whig libertarianism in Milton's politics, the eighteenth-century biographers created a Milton whom many of the romantic biographers, with their own special brand of distortion, tried to reinterptet.

Probably the epitome of eighteenth-century sentiment toward Milton is expressed in Gilbert Burnet's A History of My Own Time, written not long after 1700:

John Goodwin and Milton did also escape all censure, at the Restoration, to the scandal of all people. -- Milton had appeared so boldly, though with much wit, and great purity and elegance of his Latin style, against Salmasius and others, upon that argument, and had discovered so
virulent a malice against the late king and all the family, and against monarchy, that it was a strange omission if he forgot, and an odd strain of clemency if it was intended that he should be forgotten; but he was not excepted out of the act of indemnity. And afterwards he came out of his concealment, and lived many years, much visited by all strangers, and much admired by all at home for all the poems he writ, though he was then blind; chiefly that of Paradise Lost, in which there is a nobleness both of contrivance and execution, that, though he affected to write in blank verse without rithm, and made many new and rough words, yet it was esteemed the beautifulest and perfectest poem that ever was writ, at least in our language. 15

In this statement are evident the hatred of the politician, understandable among royalists, but, at the same time, an "irresistible national pride" in the great epic poet who had honored all England by his work. 16 By mid-century the uncomplimentary highlights of this portrait had been considerably softened. Milton had then been dead for several generations, and the Puritan movement was remote enough to be the subject of sometimes dispassionate historical analysis. In this atmosphere Whigs such as Birch and Newton, along with others, the clergyman Francis Blackburne and the Scotch poet James Thomson, were able to make Milton's prose works comparatively popular. If there was much in them that could not be tolerated, there was much more of value to be preserved; and what could not be praised could be "rationalized into an admirably intense love of private and public freedom. If he mistook the means of achieving public liberty, he was nevertheless a firm and ardent believer in the
great end of liberty, a spokesman for all those who earnestly desire freedom and an example for those whose love of liberty exceeds both their fear of loss of personal possessions and their love of personal gain."¹⁷

By mid-century, then, Milton had experienced a growing sympathy and was an object of national pride. He had become the poet-politician "who walked the earth, but breathed a celestial atmosphere, who saw things in their eternal relations, and spoke with authority, to Man, and for Man."¹⁸ This is the Milton who rises in even greater glory from the pages of the romantic biographers.

Between mid-eighteenth century and these biographers, however, lay the formidable presence of the arch-Tory, Dr. Johnson. The remainder of the century tells the story of rising radicalism and reaction to Johnson's animosity toward the great poet. The stirrings of democracy and the influence of Milton upon radicals such as Rousseau, Godwin, and Paine brought denunciations upon the head of the eminent Doctor and enhanced Milton's fame. "One is not surprised," says John Walter Good, "to find that Milton came to be regarded as the champion of those very reforms within the State which were felt to be necessary during the last decades of the Eighteenth Century."¹⁹

Into this fray came William Hayley, the last of the eighteenth century biographers and precursor of the liberal romantic
biographers of Milton. His work is admittedly panegyric written
in defense of Milton against the strictures of Dr. Johnson. He is
an advocate of the cause which Milton had become, and the
romantic biographers joined him in this defense. Thus, from the
panegyric of Toland to the eulogy of Hayley, eighteenth-century
biography of Milton had come full circle.

The clearest statement of the pre-romantic (1765-1801)
estimate of Milton is that of Good:

The former period having in large measure explained
Milton's Paradise Lost and popularized his Prose, and
introduced his Minor Poems into familiarity, this period
undertook the Romantic application of those materials.
By this is meant mainly that Milton's influence flows full
into the main currents of this great life movement of the
Eighteenth Century. For a hundred years his lofty utter-
ances had gradually wrought themselves into the fibre of
English, and even Continental, life. Already their mold-
ing, directing productive power had been felt. But during
this period they came to their own in the richest fruition
of the Romantic Movement. A new day had dawned upon
the world, a day of larger human sympathies, of better
and brighter hopes; and the Romantic force, with
Milton much in the lead, were showing their right to
occupy the new day. 20

The biographers who followed Milton into this new day are the sub-
ject of the following chapter.
Notes to Chapter II

1 I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Ruhe. His dissertation saved me from having to spend many hours in necessary background reading and research.

2 Thompson's dissertation is something of a prototype study for this work on the romantic biographers. My organization and some of my chapter headings are borrowed from him.

3 Although Thompson has studied Todd's biography of Milton (1801 edition) in his dissertation, I have also included it here because the 1826 edition is substantially changed from its predecessor. Notably, it contains the first publication of government documents relating to Milton's participation in the Commonwealth and Protectorate which were discovered in the State-Paper Office in 1823. Todd's biography is also the first to appear after the discovery of the De Doctrina Christiana.

4 Ruhe, p. 5.

5 Ibid., p. 20.

6 Early Lives, p. xi.


8 Ibid., p. 182.


10 Darbishire, p. lxi.

11 Ruhe, p. 75.

12 Thompson, p. iv.

13 Ibid., p. 209.


16 Ibid.

17 Thompson, p. 186.

18 Good, p. 139.

19 Ibid., p. 225.

20 Ibid., p. 209.
CHAPTER III

BIOGRAPHIES OF MILTON'S ROMANTIC BIOGRAPHERS

When, to sum up, we review a good deal of Miltonic criticism, scholarly as well as unscholarly, from Johnson to Saurat and Eliot, we may arrive at the tentative conclusion that biographical evidence is of the first importance for the study of Milton— that is, that we need to look into the biographies of his critics. (Douglas Bush, "The Critical Significance of Biographical Evidence").

The biographers of Milton during the romantic era were a versatile and various group which included three clergymen, a would-be man of letters, a historian of the Baptists (also a minister), a hack writer of at least one biography, and a political zealot. As might be expected, their beliefs and experiences determined the kind of Milton which they created in their works. These biographical sketches are intended to enhance our understanding of the biographies to be analyzed in subsequent chapters.

The Reverend Charles Symmons, D.D. (1749-1826), Rector of Narberth and Llampeter Velfry, and Prebendary of Clyday, Pembrokehire, was, throughout his life, a man of strong and outspoken political beliefs who might have risen a great deal higher in the church had he talked more about the Gospels and less of reform bills. The story is told that early in 1794, when his patron, a certain Mr. Windham, had secured for him the living at Llampeter, he
imprudently preached a sermon at Cambridge in which he ex-
pressed some Whig sentiments. Unfortunately for Symmons,
political spirits were running high at the time, and a few incensed
individuals carried extracts of his sermon to the Lord Chancellor
and other administrative officials. Windham managed to bail his
young friend out of trouble, but the trials he encountered in so doing
led him to observe, "I could have obtained for another a Deanery
with less difficulty than I have had to get this Welch living for you."

The sentiments which caused this disturbance were of the old
school Whig variety, harmless, inoffensive, and outdated, says the
writer of his obituary, but nevertheless, sincerely avowed.
Symmons was born of an old family of provincial gentry and appears
to have been more at home in the age when he was born than in the
more advanced times of his later years. This same writer excuses
Symmons' vociferousness, with particular regard to "some expres-
sions of asperity used by him in his Life of Milton," on the grounds
that "he really was unconscious of the force of his expressions, and
did not consider how much they would weigh with those who too
often cloak real malignity in the guise of urbanity; and the error re-
solves itself into a fault of style, which had nothing to do with the
heart." Paradoxically, Symmons was an extremely otherworldly
man of great charity and ingenuousness, a man of sincerity and
integrity. The Romans, claims this writer, would have inscribed on his tomb "the really exalted though apparently humble epithet of 'Innocens.'"⁵

Symmons was an educated clergyman (Westminster, Glasgow, Cambridge) who regarded the world of letters as being part of his calling. He was a poet, a dramatist, and an editor. Among his works are "Inez" (1797) and "Constantia" (1800), dramatic tragic poems; Poems by Caroline and Charles Symmons (1812); a "Rymed Translation of the Aeneis" (1817); a Life of Shakespeare prefixed to an edition of Shakespeare's works (1826) by Samuel W. Singer, and his Life of Milton (1806).⁶ This last work, about his favorite author, "was written," says his obituary notice, "con amore, and though the political sentiments may be displeasing to some; yet is is generally allowed to be a very interesting piece of biography, and must be recommended to all by the display of character, the sincerity of profession, and the glow of sentiment discoverable throughout."⁷

When Symmons died, his friend, John Taylor, composed a poem for his epitaph. Although the poetry is wretched, this piece may be worthy of inclusion for what it reveals about Symmons' reputation and interests:
SYMONDS, farewell! in thee is lost a mind
High o'er the standard mass of human kind;
A mind embellish'd with an ample store,
Deriv'd from Grecian and from Roman lore.
Thy noble version of the MANTUAN'S page
So brightly glows with emulative rage,
That British numbers Latian fire display,
And only with our language will decay.
The love of freedom warm'd thy patriot soul,
Anxious to spread the flame from Pole to Pole:
Hence injur'd MILTON rous'd thy patriot pen,
To vindicate his worth from slavish men,
Who to despotick pow'r base homage pay,
And as their sordid int'rest prompts, obey.
SHAKESPEARE'S rapt Muse inspir'd thy latest aim,
O'er widest realms to blazon ALBION'S fame,
While the rich ores of thy own native mine
With fancy, judgment, taste, and feeling shine.
Nor, while embolden'd by thy public zeal,
Less was thy praise domestic worth to feel;
As Husband, Father, Brother, and as Friend,
All duties to fulfil thy steady end.
Ah! justly then thy relatives deplore
The centre of their love is now no more!
But vain this fond attempt thy worth to tell--
A friend's weak tribute--once again farewell!

A man of prodigious energy, the Reverend Henry John Todd,
M.A. (1763-1845), Rector of Settrington, Yorkshire, Archdeacon of
Cleveland, a Prebendary of York Cathedral, and a Chaplain in
Ordinary to Her Majesty, devoted many of his eighty-three years to
studying and editing rare books and manuscripts and the works of
poets. He was among the most noted editors of his day and in 1824
became a member of the Royal Society of Literature.
Todd's edition of Milton, published in 1801, 1809, and 1826, was satisfactory enough to become the standard edition and was not superseded until Masson's work. With Spenser, however, Todd was not successful. In 1805 he published The Works of Edmund Spenser, with Notes and the Life of the Author, in eight volumes, which merited him a scathing review (deservedly so, says the author of his obituary) by Sir Walter Scott in the Edinburgh Review.

Todd's is the most thorough--and the dullest--of the romantic biographies. He seems to have combined the dulness of a pedant with the plodding industry of a textual editor and antiquarian. Still, the range of his interests was immense, as a partial list of his works will reveal: (1) Some Account of the Deans of Canterbury from the new Foundation of the Church by Henry VIII; to which is added, a Catalogue of the MSS. in the Church Library (1793); (2) an edition of Milton's Comus (1798); (3) Illustrations of the Lives and Writings of John Gower and Geoffrey Chaucer, collected from authentic documents, with a copious Glossary (1810); (4) A Catalogue of the Archiepiscopal Manuscripts in the Library at Lambeth Palace, with an Account of the Archiepiscopal Registers and other records there preserved (1812); (5) a revision of Dr. Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language (1814); "A Letter to
his Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury concerning the authorship of Icon Basilike."12 All these and more in addition to his religious writings.

The mind and the talents of Todd are best summed up by an unidentified correspondent in The Gentleman’s Magazine:

Mr. Todd was a very laborious student, and in some sense, a learned man; but the turn of his mind was not poetical; his pursuits, as may be seen from his publications, were antiquarian and bibliographical, and we have often wondered what could have induced him to put a step into the regions of Parnassus. He should have left Milton and Spenser to Southey and Scott. Had he been writing the life of Milton's father, the scrivener, the biography could not have been more dry and dull . . . . The rest of Dr. Todd's writings, lying within his proper sphere of knowledge and talent, are very respectable and useful contributions to literature.13

Charles Lamb once described the Reverend John Mitford (1781-1859), graduate of Oriel College, Oxford, Vicar of Benhall, Suffolk, as "a pleasant layman spoiled."14 Mitford's interests were more wide-ranging than those of the other romantic biographers. He was a skilled arboriculturist, a noted collector of manuscripts and books on the classics and an omnivorous reader of the same, a player and historian of the sport of cricket, a student of French, Italian, and German authors, a botanist and ornithologist, a lover and collector of paintings, a poet, and an editor. In this latter capacity he was the principal writer of
The Gentleman's Magazine from 1834 to 1841, to which he contributed the leading article every month as well as a majority of the reviews. For ten years after that he never failed to contribute at least one article a month.

Mitford is probably best remembered for editing the first accurate edition of Gray's poems (1814) and the Aldine edition of the British poets, a monumental series which included the works of Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Butler, Prior, Swift, Young, Parnell, Goldsmith and Falconer. Perhaps Mitford's catholic interests and experiences as an editor account for the fact that his biography of Milton is the one most heavily laden with lengthy footnotes, many of which have but slight connection with the matter at hand.

Among Mitford's miscellaneous works are Sacred Specimens (selections from early English poets, with a poem by the editor which was much praised by Lamb); The Correspondence of Walpole and Mason; The Correspondence of Gray and Mason; and "Agnes, the Indian Captive," a poem in four cantos.

Joseph Ivimey (1773-1834) devoted most of his life to being a Baptist, which probably explains his enthusiastic but misguided attempt to number Milton among his sect. Raised under Arian influences, he was gradually led toward the Calvinist Baptists. In
1794 he became an itinerant preacher for the area around Portsea, Hampshire (this experience may well have prepared him for the tub-thumping style of his biography of Milton). In 1803 he was recognized as a minister, and in 1804 the Baptists of the church in Holborn chose him as their pastor. Finally, in 1805 he was ordained. Further Baptist activities include Ivimey's participation as a committee member of the Baptist Missionary Society, his editorship of the Baptist Magazine from 1812 on, and his becoming, in 1814, the first secretary of the Baptist Society for Promoting the Gospel in Ireland. This latter position led him to make a missionary journey to Ireland. One doubts his success in this country since his belief in religious liberty, though strong, did not extend to Roman Catholics. He opposed repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts.

Ivimey was a rapid and prolific writer. His principal book was a historical account of the Baptists, a work which swelled to four volumes and which "contains a great deal of information to be used with caution." His other publications include A Brief Sketch of the History of Dissenters, etc. (1810); A Plea for the Protestant Canon of Scripture, etc. (1825); The Life of Mr. John Bunyan, etc. (1825); and Pilgrim of the Nineteenth Century (1827) intended as a continuation of Pilgrim's Progress.18
Sir Samuel Egerton Brydges (1762-1837) was a frustrated poet—he once wrote 2000 sonnets in a year—, a mediocre novelist (Mary de Clifford and Arthur Fitzalbine), a lawyer who never practiced law, a Member of Parliament for Maidstone (1812-1818), a publisher and editor, and a bibliographer. As editor and publisher he supported the Lee Priory Press (1813-1822), losing money in the venture, and "By the works, chiefly reprints, produced at the press . . . Brydges justly claims to have rendered a service to the students of . . . English literature, particularly literature of the Elizabethan period."19 As a bibliographer Brydges was more successful, producing four volumes of the British Bibliographer (1810-1814); Restituta, or Titles, Extracts, and Characters of old Books in English Revived (four volumes, 1814-1816); and Res Literariae (three volumes, 1821-1822). Nevertheless, he spoke scornfully of these labors because, fancying himself a poet, he believed that he had misapplied his energies.20 The sorrow caused by this belief, together with his disappointment at his brother's abortive attempt to lay claim to the dukedom of Chandos (a project which Egerton had urged), greatly affected his naturally drooping spirits. S. Austin Allibone says of him: "In his novel of Arthur Fitz-Albini the reader will find recorded much of the author's sombre experience. Like Lord Byron, whom in some
respects he resembled, Sir Egerton is continually presenting his own woeful visage in his gloomy galleries."\(^{21}\)

Other Brydges publications include an edition of Edward Phillips' *Theatrum Poetarum Anglicanorum* (1800); a new and augmented edition of Collins' *Peerage of England* (nine volumes, 1812); and *Censura Literaria, containing Titles, Abstracts, and Opinions of Old English Books with Original Disquisitions, Articles of Biography, and other Literary antiquities* (ten volumes, 1805-1809).\(^{22}\)

The *Dictionary of National Biography* gives Egerton Brydges this character: "He was by nature shy and proud, yet morbidly sensitive and egotistic, and being tormented by an extraordinary thirst for literary fame, he was unhappily led to mistake his delight in reading great works of literature for an evidence of his capacity to produce similar works himself. From the extremely naive self-portraiture of his rambling but interesting 'Autobiography,' there can be no doubt that he imagined himself a poet and a man of genius."\(^{23}\)

William Carpenter (1797-1874) was a spiritual descendant of John Lilburne, the famous Puritan reformer and protester. Although thrown into prison for espousing his political beliefs too freely and
zealously, he refused to be deterred by such inconveniences and edited the Political Magazine (September 1831-July 1832), later republished as Carpenter's Monthly Political Magazine, from his cell.

Like his brothers in biography, Carpenter was a miscellaneous writer who produced works on history and the Bible and on other subjects of general interest. He edited Scripture Magazine and a morning newspaper and was associated with numerous periodicals, among them Lloyd's Weekly News and the Court Journal. Carpenter also wrote and spoke for the reformation of the political structure of England. Among his works are An Address to the Working Classes on the Reform Bill (1831); The Elector's Manual (1832); and The Political Text Book, etc. (1833). He was also honorary secretary to the Chancery Reform Association, for whom he wrote a great deal.
Notes to Chapter III

1 Mortimer is not discussed in this chapter because nothing about his life and works could be discovered. In an age of cheap paper and unscrupulous publishers it was easy for anyone to hack out a biography of a great personage and get it into print. Mortimer may well have been one of these individuals. Even Allibone allots him but one line, a reference to the fact that he wrote a memoir of Milton.


3 "Obituary--Charles Symmons" (anon.), The Gentleman's Magazine, pt. i (June 1826), 565.

4 Ibid., 566.

5 Ibid., 567.

6 DNB, p. 271.


9 DNB, XIX, pp. 908-910.


11 Ibid., 322.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., 323-324.

14 DNB, XIII, p. 525.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 DNB, X, pp. 518-519.

19 DNB, III, p. 165.

20 Ibid.


22 DNB, p. 165.

23 Ibid., p. 164.

24 DNB, III, p. 1074.
CHAPTER IV

THE OCCASION AND INTENTION OF
THE ROMANTIC BIOGRAPHIES OF MILTON

Because Milton's romantic biographers were such a varied group, few generalizations will hold true of all seven of them.

Nevertheless, it can be said that all these works are in some sense "protest" biographies: protests against previous biographers, particularly Dr. Johnson, for questioning Milton's devotion to his country and his motives in writing the prose works; protests against those Tory biographies which were printed in large, editions prohibitively expensive for the lower classes; and protests against those who had neglected or demeaned Milton's prose writings. In the first four decades of the nineteenth century Milton biography took an important new direction, a direction which was "accompanied by clear and concise objections to the previous biographical writings, and succinct statements as to the aims and purposes of the new."¹

This chapter explores those statements about occasion and intention as a means of introducing the romantic biographers' conceptions of Milton which will be developed in chapters five and six.²

For Charles E. Mortimer, knowing Milton's contribution to English liberty was a patriotic duty. Thus, the object of his memoir is "to familiarize the name of Milton as a patriot: the
merits which are his, fully entitle him to a niche in the same temple which is adorned with the busts of John Hampden and Algernon Sidney. Those who refuse to accord this honor to Milton and the other seventeenth-century patriots, he argues, are undeserving of the blessings of liberty which await them in the nineteenth century. They would sit idly by on their couches and "behold the empire torn from its basis, and its admirable constitution crumble to ruins, without an effort or a sigh." Mortimer is especially insistent that the arguments he will advance are thoroughly English, perhaps in reaction to those earlier biographers who had rationalized Milton's position into an argument for "general" liberty: "If any one is capable of discovering one sentiment, in the following Memoir, that indicates a mind not thoroughly British, I would thank him for his sagacity; but such, I expect, will not be found. To be born an Englishman . . . is the constant boast of my heart; to be a good subject will, I hope, always be the continual aim of my ambition."

The political bias of Mortimer's work is evident in his statement that discussing the virtues of a man who grounded his whole life on the principle of liberty is a dangerous undertaking; for the eyes of the world are cast suspiciously "upon every one who regards the rights of citizens as the first consideration of a great and virtuous
minister . . . ." Such a man is regarded as one whose intention is to excite disorder and confusion. In a passage at the close of his introduction, however, Mortimer expresses his confidence that the time is opportune for such an attempt. The passage, though lengthy, is worth quoting in toto, not only because it summarizes Mortimer's point of view, but also because it emphasizes many of the dominant threads which run through the more liberal of these early nineteenth century biographies:

JOHN MILTON is now no longer beheld as a stern and rigid puritan, vindicating violence to insulted law; his works are no longer seized by the superstitious hand of bigotry, or ignominiously trampled beneath the feet of despotism; the eyes of posterity are open to the truths which he inculcates; the rage of party prejudice has in great measure subsided, and his memory begins to enjoy the gratitude of that nation to whom he has bequeathed the purest principles of civil liberty. As a poet . . . he will be co-eval with the language. As a patriot he will be reverenced as long as freedom itself. Despotic power, has, however, employed agents to blacken his character, and learning and ability to confute his arguments: like the phoenix, however, he rises in the greater splendor from his ashes, and these attempts serve to convince the ignorant that elegance is not always truth, that strength of language is not strength of argument; and that, in spite of every traducement, Milton must be regarded, by every lover of his country, with respect and gratitude.

Charles Symmons wrote his Life of Milton as an introduction to an edition of Milton's prose works. His chief concern, therefore, is to illustrate the public life of "a great and injured
character." Like Mortimer, he has no reservations about pro-
claiming his political bias:

I feel that I am not summoned to propitiate duty with the
sacrifice of prudence, and that, conscious of speaking
honestly, I can enjoy the satisfaction of speaking safely.
Without acknowledging anything in common, but a name,
with that malignant and selfish faction which, surrender-
ing principle to passion, inflicted, in the earlier periods
of the last century, some fatal wounds on the constitu-
tion, or with those men, who in later times, have
struggled in the abandonment of their party and its spirit,
to retain its honourable appellation, --I glory as I profess
myself to be a WHIG, to be of the school of SOMMERS
and of LOCKE, to arrange myself in the same political
class with those enlightened and virtuous statesmen, who
framed the BILL OF RIGHTS and the ACT OF
SETTLEMENT, and who, representing a crown, which
they had wrested from a pernicious bigot and his family,
to the HOUSE OF HANOVER gave that most honourable
and legitimate of titles, the FREE CHOICE OF THE
PEOPLE, to the Sovereign who now wields the imperial
sceptre of Britain.

Disavowing objectivity, Symmons refuses to apologize for mak-
ing these principles and his devotion to the great via media of the
Church of England so prominent in his work: "The nature of these
principles will be obviously and immediately apparent to my read-
ers; for I have made too explicit an avowal of my political creed,
with reference to the civil and ecclesiastical system, of which I
am fortunately a member, to be under any apprehensions of suffer-
ing by misconception . . . .

Still, Symmons argues, he has
been careful not to allow his prejudices to throw "their false tints
upon his canvass."
Unlike Mortimer, Symmons does not believe that the rancor and vilification toward Milton have at all dissipated: "Unfortunately . . . the part, which the great Milton acted on the political theatre of his calamitous times has exposed him to the malignity of party: and this pest, that neither dies nor sleeps . . . has been ever watchful to diminish the pride of his triumph; and to obscure that glory, which it could not extinguish." Indeed, this animosity, claims Symmons, is as strong at present as it was in Milton's lifetime. It is evident in Dr. Johnson, the "new Salmasius," from whose malignant libels and virulent attacks Milton cannot too often be defended: "This atrocious libel has long since reflected discredit on no one but its author; and its falsehood has been so clearly dominated by so many able pens . . . that a new biographer of Milton might well be excused from honouring it with his notice. But a regard to the cause of morals, and the best interests of man, seems to justify that indignation, which would brand, again and again, the hand lifted in violation of the illustrious dead." Although realizing that abuse of such a revered personage as Dr. Johnson may cause resentment, Symmons is confident that history will vindicate him:

Of the radical and pervading malignity of this work no doubt can for an instant be entertained by any dispassionate
reader, and it may justly be questioned whether, as the writer of the Rambler or of the Life of Milton, Dr. Johnson has evinced more friendliness or more enmity to the cause of truth, has effected more good or offered more injury to the great interests of his species. By a party among my contemporaries, I am aware that this doubt will be strongly, and, perhaps, acrimoniously resented: but if a page, like mine, may hope to survive to a distant age, I feel assured that, by the judgment of a generation remote from the prejudices of the present, I shall be absolved from the charge of wounding truth to gratify passion, even though I should assert that the delinquency of the libellous biographer is ill-compensated by the merit of the monotonous and heavy-gaited morality of the sombre and dogmatic essayist. 14

Henry John Todd's biography of Milton, although not the most readable of books, provides a welcome relief from the agitated prose and the vehemence of such writers as Mortimer and Symmons. Todd is the most scholarly of the biographers of Milton during this period, and he makes no pretensions to writing anything other than an unadorned account drawn from trustworthy and authentic sources. 15 "What has been thus liberally supplied," he says, "might indeed by others have been arranged with elegance, and illustrated with taste; but not with greater fidelity than the following pages exhibit. This, with other anecdotes relating to the history of Milton's friends, of his works, and of his times, will plead for attention to an unadorned narration." 16 As mentioned previously, Todd published his biography of Milton in 1801 and
1809. This work can well be included among the eighteenth-century accounts of Milton because it is a compendium of all that biographers in that century had expressed, with the usual exception of Dr. Johnson. What principally occasioned the 1826 Todd edition was the discovery in His Majesty's State-Paper Office of important papers relating to Milton. Through a bookseller in Pall-Mall, a Mr. Evans, Todd had learned of the finding of these documents by Robert Lemon, deputy keeper of the State Papers. Lemon surmised that if one investigated the Orders of Council during the period when Milton had been Latin Secretary to the Council of State, he might uncover some hitherto unknown facts about the Secretary. His guess was correct; the Council Books contain the daily transactions of the Executive Council in England from February 1648-49 to September 1658 and reveal facts concerning Milton's salary and writings ordered by the Council. In the same cache of papers were documents entitled Royalists' Composition-Papers. These consisted of documents pertaining to the sequestration of estates and of particulars relating to property and estates which royalists could retain upon payment of a fine. Among them are sequestration papers concerning Richard Powell, Milton's father-in-law, in which Milton figures significantly. At the same time was discovered the De Doctrina Christiana, that
mysterious compendium of theology about which Edward Phillips had written.

The purpose of John Mitford's biography was to provide an introduction to a seven-volume set of Milton's works for the Aldine edition of the British poets, published in 1831. For this occasion Mitford produced a more or less scholarly biography which aimed at objectivity. His intention is neither to condemn nor to eulogize Milton but to report the facts of his life and works as those facts had been reliably handed down to him. Thus his biography is largely a derivative account which depends a great deal upon the earlier biographers, including Todd. Mitford censures Milton for his rashness in wanting to divorce Mary Powell, but for the most part he eschews too great an involvement in the controversial issues of Milton's life. If he cannot judge one way or another on a particular matter, he remarks that not enough facts are available. Nevertheless, Mitford was attracted toward his subject, and he defends Milton from what he believes are Dr. Johnson's more severe and unfair condemnations. The quality and tone of his verbal blows are light in comparison with those of the other biographers, as is
evident in the following extract regarding Milton's system of education:

Dr. Johnson has severely censured this method of instruction, but with arguments that might not unsuccessfully be met. The plan recommended by the authority of Milton seems to be chiefly liable to objection, from being too extensive; and while it makes authors of all ages contribute to the development of science; it must reject that careful selection, which can alone secure the proper cultivation of the taste. We may also reply to Johnson, that although all men are not designed to be astronomers, or geometricians: a knowledge of the principles on which the sciences are built, and the reasonings by which they are conducted not only forms the most exact discipline which the mind can undergo, giving to it comprehension and vigour; but it is the only solid basis on which an investigation of the laws of nature can be conducted, or those arts improved that tend to the advantage of society, and to the happiness of mankind. Johnson says, we are not placed here to watch the planets, or the motion of the stars, but to do good. But good is done in various ways, according to opportunities offered, and abilities conferred . . . .

Because his was the first biography of Milton to be written from the point of view of a Protestant dissenter Joseph Ivimey looked upon it as unique. He finds it "a little singular, that no writer of this class has ever published the life of this early and powerful defender of their principles, notwithstanding it is to his powerful advocacy that they are indebted more than to any other writer, for all the civil and religious privileges which they now enjoy." Most of the former biographies of Milton, he notes, were written by churchmen who had necessarily disapproved of Milton's
opinions. These men had also presented Milton primarily as a poet, obscuring his position as "a patriot, a protestant, and a non-conformist." In line with his intention to rectify this oversight, Ivimey concentrates upon the prose works of Milton, through which we will allow Milton to appear "as his own biographer." By this technique Ivimey hopes to resurrect the prose works, which have been so little known because of Milton's republican and dissenting principles. What is more, Milton's prose should be ready for general veneration at a time "when the principles of civil and religious liberty which MILTON so powerfully advocated, have been approved by a majority of our legislature, obtained the sanction of so large a portion of our united empire, and produced such an astonishing reform in our representative body."

Still another reason for Ivimey's work is his belief that most biographies of Milton have been so large and expensive that they are not available to the generality of readers. His small volume, he hopes, "comprising every thing of importance respecting this noble-minded and gigantic man, will not be unacceptable to the bulk of his countrymen."
The predominant style and tone of Ivimey's biography are captured in his patriotic dedication, which must be read in his own words to be appreciated:

Imploring the blessing of the Great Head of the Church to rest upon this humble effort to subserve his glory, by causing it to promote the cause of truth and righteousness, the writer, with much respect, dedicates it to the rising generation in Britain; earnestly praying that they may prove themselves a superior race to their most distinguished progenitors, whether of genuine patriots, unsophisticated Protestants, or real Christians, and thus contribute towards promoting the prosperity of their country in its highest and most essential interests--a country respecting which in many respects, it might be said, as it is of ancient Israel, 'THE LORD HATH NOT DEALT SO WITH ANY PEOPLE.'

So incensed was Ivimey at Dr. Johnson's shameful treatment of Milton—that "foul blot on English biography"—that he reserved for it a special portion of his work entitled "Animadversions on Dr. Johnson's Life of Milton." To refute Dr. Johnson's charges point by point, invective for invective, was the final, and most essential, occasion of his biography of Milton. In Ivimey's opinion Dr. Johnson hated Milton because of Milton's principles and envied him because of the "superiority of his learning, talents, and fame." Dr. Johnson's severities were all the more despicable and worthy of refutation because they formed a part of that oft-printed standard publication, The Lives of the British Poets. Ivimey's concluding diatribe against Dr. Johnson contains the essence of his rebuke:

I consider that Johnson's Life of MILTON is a disgrace to the 'Lives of the Poets.' And that instead of having tarnished the lustre of MILTON's character, he has erected a permanent monument to his honour and
reputation, as a public spirited, noble minded Briton, the consistant and fearless defender of civil and relig-
ious liberty—unbribed and unpensioned! Johnson has
by writing it deserved, if not a monument yet a flat
stone to his own memory, one which may be inscribed,
'Sacred to the memory of virtue which he could not ap-
preciate, of principles which he could not comprehend,
and piety which he did not imitate—the contracted Tory
pensioner, dictionary compiler, high-church bigot, and
semi-popish reviler, Dr. Samuel Johnson!'28

A peculiar theory of biography, a low opinion of most of the
previous biographers of Milton, and a fifty-year ambition to do
combat with Dr. Johnson motivated Egerton Brydges to write his
biography of Milton. Brydges believed that all the facts regarding
Milton had been laboriously searched out but that there was still
ample room for the opinions of individuals. The failure of many
previous biographers of Milton, he remarks, is that they slavishly
adhered to tradition and advanced no new opinions, merely repeating
one another and thereby boring the reading public. His account,
however, will be different. It will adhere to the "leading features"
of Milton's life and will present these features from the perspective
of his own feelings, reflections, and convictions. The admiration
expressed therein will not derive from the force of authority upon
which many adorers of Milton base their estimation.29 Brydges'consistent assumption is that his feelings and his convictions about
Milton are what make his biography desirable: "I have followed the steps of no preceding biographer--I have recast the whole. I have expressed no sentiment which I did not feel: I have uttered no opinion but with sincerity." Moreover, it is the biographer's task to construct a biography as he has done: "It seems to me to be a biographers's duty thus to analyse the character of the great man, if it be done with a conscientious desire of explaining the truth. Mere facts, uncommented upon, are neither interesting nor instructive..."

Brydges' peculiar notions of what makes a biography worth reading urged him to make some rather interesting pronouncements about his predecessors. Toland he finds a "heavy writer," and Fenton's biography "is too meagre to satisfy a moderate curiosity." Birch was a laborious researcher, "but had neither the power of reflection, criticism, nor style." Bishop Newton is "languid and feeble." Peck was "a mere antiquary; toilsome but tasteless, frivolous, weak, and absurd." Even heavier criticism is leveled against Symmons: his biography "was coarsely and heavily, though violently, written; and it did not obtain much reception except among readers of a political cast. It was not as a politician that Milton was ever a great favourite in the literary world." Todd is complimented for his indefatigable and curious researches; however, his
too scholarly work can be of little interest to the general reading
public: "The supposed coincidences with the thoughts or expres-
sions of obscure and forgotten poets are only attractive to poring
and minute bibliographers; and rather incumber than illustrate the
great poet." 32

Brydges' long-time ambition to give Dr. Johnson his due
arises, not from agreement with Milton's political principles, but
from a belief that no one can justly call into question Milton's sin-
cerity of motive or his reputation as a poet, as Dr. Johnson had so
clearly done. The situation is one of give and take: "If Milton was a
bigoted democrat, Johnson was a most bigoted royalist. There is
not a particle of benevolence or candour in this furious and bitter
piece of biography of the celebrated critic." 33 Some may object,
says Brydges, that Johnson has already been sufficiently flogged for
his coarseness and prejudice. No so, he retorts:

There are those, who still believe that in soundness of
criticism he is almost infallible; and that they, who de-
fend the higher flights of imagination, have airy notions,
the effects of whim and false pretension;--that Milton
may be ingenious and fantastic;--but that solid sense is
with Johnson. When common intellects have the authority
of a man of Johnson's literary reputation for this sort of
ordinary matter-of-fact taste, they nurse themselves in it
with a triumphant scorn of their opponents. But what can
rich and accomplished minds say of him, who could find
no true poetry in Lycidas? 34
One year later, in 1836, William Carpenter, political reformer and the last biographer of Milton during the romantic era, would remember Brydges' remark that Milton was not venerated as a politician and would write, at least in part, to supply a corrective. Brydges, he argues, more than any other biographer, repressed "the more noble qualities of Milton's intellect and his heart" by emphasizing the poetry and skirting apologetically around the prose works. It is unjust to place Milton solely in the ethereal regions of poetry and remove him from the "coarse conflict of practical affairs." Symmons had fared better (no doubt because his politics were more to Carpenter's liking), but his work is "too voluminous for general circulation, and too discursive and critical for popular reading." In fact, there is too much of Symmons the biographer and critic in the book and not enough of Milton.

Thus Carpenter justifies his production on the grounds that something is still lacking in Milton biography. There is not one work among them all, he claims, "in which Milton's character as a political writer is so fully exhibited and so justly appreciated, as the writer of the following memoir has long felt to be desirable." Too many of Milton's biographers have, in effect, imprisoned him by not making known and generally available a thorough estimate of his political character and patriotic aims. To make Milton
available to the general reader and to proclaim his labors in the cause of universal liberty and those abiding principles upon which the happiness of all men must ever be based is thus Carpenter's principal intention. Until Milton's prose works are known and his political principles acted upon, "civil society will be imperfect in its arrangements, and the people and the governments will be subject to the same perpetual uneasiness and uncertainty, respecting the permanent tenure of their respective rights." 38

These statements provide an overview of the romantic biographers' purposes in writing of John Milton. In their works they applied these general intentions to the specific incidents and phases of Milton's life. How they fulfilled these intentions is the subject of chapter five.
Notes to Chapter IV

1Nelson, p. 77.

2Throughout this and subsequent chapters the romantic biographers will be treated in chronological order.

3Page 7.

4Ibid.

5Ibid.

6Page 9.

7Pages 10-11.

8Page iii.

9Pages ix-x.

10Page viii.

11Page 5.

12Pages 1-2.

13Pages 2-3.

14Page 566.

15Page iii.

16Pages iii, vi.

17Pages iii-vi.

18Page xlii.

19Page vi.

20Page vii.
Page 111.

Page iv.

Ibid.

Page vi.

Page ix.

Page 267.

Page viii.

Page 290.

Page 212.

Page xxv.

Page 178.

Pages xix-xxv.

Page xxii.

Pages xxi-xxii.

Pages iii-iv.

Page iv.

Page iii.

Pages iv, 171.
CHAPTER V

THE PRINCIPAL INTERPRETATIONS OF BIOGRAPHICAL DATA
MADE BY THE ROMANTIC BIOGRAPHERS

Although Milton's romantic biographers added few facts to the Milton tradition, they did have opinions about matters which were open to interpretation. It is in these interpretations and in the writers' manipulation of facts that the value of these early nineteenth-century biographies of Milton chiefly resides. The life of Milton conveniently divides into eight areas of consideration with which these biographers were most concerned: early years and education, Milton's Italian journey, marriage and divorce tracts, the controversial writings, Milton's role in the Commonwealth and Protectorate, Milton's predicament at the Restoration, last years and death, and Milton's religion. ¹

Early Years and Education

Because so little evidence was available to them on the subject of Milton's earliest years, the romantic biographers were forced to begin their biographies with conjectures about Milton's state of mind during his boyhood or with reports about their digging into archives to find the Milton family tree. Todd's special interests led him to search parish registers of the various towns of Milton for traces of
families of the same name, but he found no such entries. He was forced to agree with Wood that Milton's ancestors lived at Milton near Halton and Thame. He adds, "I find in R. Willeii Poematum Liber, 1573, among the Winchester scholars therein named of that period, a John Milton; probably one of this family." Much less specific is Symmons, because he is seeking the origin of something more intangible and elusive, i.e., the source of Milton's "fervid spirit" and sublimity. In his rather intense and expansive style, Symmons concludes:

It was at this period of his life that he imbibed that spirit of devotion, which actuated his bosom to his latest moment upon earth: and we need not extend our search beyond the limits of his own house for the fountain, from which the living influence was derived. Great must have been that sense of religious duty, and considerable that degree of theological knowledge, which could induce the father to abjure those errors, in which he had been educated, sanctioned by paternal authority, and powerfully enforced by the persuasion of temporal interest. But from whatever source the fervid spirit proceeded, in its action on our author's mind it seems to have increased the power as well as to have given the direction; to have invigorated the strong, enlarged the capacious, and elevated the lofty. We are unquestionably indebted to it, not merely for the subject, but for a great part also of the sublimity of the Paradise Lost.

Brydges, on the other hand, saw a paradox in Milton's exceptional devoutness and his rebelliousness and early introduction to Puritanism. His surmise is that the "odious and imbecile pedantry" of James I impressed scorn and hatred upon the boy Milton and
became a "ground of aversion" to a great mind "already strong enough to burst from its bondage." James' foreign and domestic policies, Brydges says, had made England the laughing stock of the world; the body politic was discontented; the Church was no longer venerated; and sects "that had hitherto lurked in holes and corners, arose and displayed themselves openly." As for Puritanism, Brydges doubts that the young Milton imbibed much of it from his tutor, Thomas Young, a zealous Puritan himself: "Nothing could be farther than Milton was, in his own early poetry, from this sour puritanism." Milton's love of poetry and the classics and the theatre and chivalry were not congenial to the harsh ways of the Puritans. Rather, Milton's "lofty temper," which could not submit even to the discipline of the college, must have been the cause of his later espousal of Puritan doctrine. As his hatred of monarchy grew, Milton became more and more entangled with this odious sect. 4

The charges by Peter Du Moulin (Regii Sanguinis Clamor Coelum adversus Parricidas Anglicanos) and by Salmasius (Defensio Regia Pro Carolo I) that Milton was unpopular at school, had been expelled from Cambridge for riotous living and/or insubordination, and Dr. Johnson's "fear" that Milton was one of the last students at either Oxford or Cambridge to suffer "the publick indignity of
corporal correction"⁵ provoked one of the more passionate shows of temper on the part of the romantic biographers.

What is known is that in Elegy I to Charles Diodati Milton had written, "nor am I disposed to continue to endure the threats of the stern Master and other incidents to which my nature cannot submit. If this be exile, to be again in my father's home and, without a care, to follow the pleasant suggestions of leisure, then I reject neither the name nor the lot of a rusticated man, but rather am happy in the terms of my exile."⁶ The time is the spring of 1626. It is also known from the Christ College registers that Milton took his A.B. on March 26, 1629. Since he entered Cambridge in 1625, he could not have lost a term and still have graduated on the former date.⁷ Having rejected expulsion, or even forced rustication, on the basis of what the registers reveal, Symmons had to find another plausible explanation:

What interpretation then are we to assign to those expressions in the Elegy to Deodati /sic/, which certainly refer to some compulsive absence of the young student from college, and which discover no fondness in the poet for the society or the country of Cambridge? As we find, from some lines in the conclusion of the same elegy, that it was his intention to return to his college, we may fairly, as I think, impute the banishment, of which he speaks, to the want of pecuniary supplies for his maintenance at the University; and the example of Gray may instruct us, that it is possible for a man of genius and of taste to dislike the conversation of a college or the naked vicinity of the Cam, without being impelled to that dislike by unpopularity or injurious treatment.
The thought that Milton might have endured corporal punishment Symmons finds even more repugnant. Since Anthony Wood, who was not an admirer of Milton, did not include this incident in his account of Milton's life, says Symmons, the evidence is slight. Moreover, Dr. Johnson has either falsely translated the pertinent passage in Elegy I, or at the very least, has made a forced hypothesis: "He says that Milton declares himself weary of enduring "the threats of a rigorous master and something else, which a temper like his cannot undergo."  Here indeed he translates with sufficient correctness; but in the following sentence, this something else has changed into something more; and we are told that what was more was evidently punishment!!!" The absurd story of corporal punishment is, accordingly, not worthy of serious regard.  

Equally absurd to Symmons is the charge of licentiousness on Milton's part. A man who weakens his eyes by studying half the night can hardly be suspected of spending the remainder of the night polluting himself with debauchery, claims Symmons. Milton so cultivated his intellect that he diverted himself from any desire for sensual pleasure. Too, Milton was early in his life a most religious man.  

Nevertheless, because of Milton's own words Symmons was compelled to admit that something went wrong at Cambridge
between Milton and the authorities. His solution to this problem once more leaves Milton's reputation unbesmirched:

We may answer without difficulty, that he might offend their prejudices by the bold avowal of his puritan opinions; or he might wound their pride by his exposure of their negligent or injudicious discharge of duty: or, lastly, he might excite their displeasure by his haughty inattention to their rules, and by refusing, perhaps, to quit the banquet of his intellect or his imagination on the page of Plato or of Homer, for the barren fatigue of translating a sermon, or of throwing on his memory some cumbersome pages of scholastic divinity. He had already, as we may fairly infer, imbibed from his presbyterian tutor, Young, a dislike to the discipline of our church; and we are assured, by more than one passage in his own works, that he looked with no friendly eye either on the plan of education observed in the University, or on the learning and conduct of its members. We may conceive therefore that he might be excluded from the favor of his superiors in the College, and even be exposed to their censures, without incurring the slightest loss of character, or sustaining the most trifling diminution of our esteem. 10

Todd's evidence on this point is made of sterner stuff. He had learned from Thomas Warton that the University Statutes of Oxford, compiled in 1635, ten years after Milton was admitted to Cambridge, allow corporal punishment to be inflicted only on boys under sixteen. Now, Warton had assumed that Milton was fifteen years of age when he entered the university. Because Todd knew that Milton was seventeen then, and since he surmised that Cambridge generally followed the same general policies with regard to discipline as Oxford, he inferred that "the flagellation of Milton
becomes still less entitled to credit." What is more, Todd had discovered one of the statutes of Christ College, entitled Cap. 27. De Lectoris Authoritate in Discipulos, which seemed to indicate that the same exemption of age was allowed: "After prescribing that they, who absent themselves from certain Lectures shall be fined, the Statute subjoins the following reservation; 'si tamen adultus fuerit; alioquin, virga corrigatur.'" The most logical conclusion that Todd could draw, therefore, was that Milton suffered some sort of academic restriction, or perhaps a threat of punishment, which he believed he did not deserve. Since he received his degree in the usual time, and since the registers do not indicate otherwise, Milton has probably been the victim of twisted facts.  

Although he grants that Milton may have suffered temporary rustication, Mitford avers that "all misunderstanding was removed, and that he soon acquired the kindness and respect of the society with which he lived . . . ." Certainly, Dr. Johnson's invidious charges have been rejected: "To any offenses against College discipline, connected with laxity of moral conduct, it would be unjust, indeed absurd, to look; and it would show a total ignorance of Milton's character—in all that respects purity of life, consistent
from youth to age." It is Mitford's belief that Milton incurred the displeasure of his masters for demonstrating his contempt of scholastic philosophy and "no doubt either neglected to perform such ungrateful tasks or added such expostulation to his refusal, as was resented by his superiors. Of this I feel quite certain, that this was the point of his offense, and this was all; for in a very short time he had not only regained the favour of his tutors, but stood high in their estimation."12

As if to show his impatience toward the whole matter, Brydges quickly agrees with the conclusion of Mitford. In his mind "Caeteraque ingenio non subeunda meo" in Elegy I means nothing more than a repugnance to following petty rules that always insult and irritate great minds. Thus it is foolish to construe the line as referring to flogging. More interesting to Brydges is the condition of Milton's mind at this period:

The poet perhaps already grasped at too immense a circuit of human learning: he might be at this early age darkening his mind with the factitious subtleties of politics and theology, which might overlay the sublime and inimitable fire of the Muse. It seems as if he pursued the most abstruse, dry, and puzzling tracks of study. It is indeed to be remarked, that in most of his poems there is an occasional over-fondness for allusion to these blind parts of learning. Life is not long enough for everything; nor can the most ardent flame of the intellect overcome an excessive superincumbence of dead matter.13
Carpenter's defense of Milton is a summary of those which had preceded his, with the exception that, following his low-church allegiance, he makes Milton take a cut at the episcopal system: "The fact seems to be, that Milton had too strong and settled a distaste for episcopacy to think of entering the church as a profession; and he had too great a mind and too haughty a spirit to submit to the petty formalities and pedantic discipline of the college, after he had made sufficient advances in learning to be able to pursue it by himself, and after the fashion of his own taste." 14

Milton's Italian Journey

Like many of the incidents of his life, Milton's journey to the continent in 1638 to 1639 became a rallying point for both his detractors and supporters. When in his Studies in Milton (1918) S. B. Liljegren attempted to discredit the idea that Milton had visited Galileo and charged that Milton's account of his visit to Italy in the Defensio Secunda was another instance of Milton's "posing before the public in order to make himself seem more important than he was," 15 he was merely following the lead of scoffers and detractors who had written centuries before him. In 1652 Du Moulin (Regii Sanguinis Clamor) had accused Milton of having been expelled from Cambridge for his immorality and then
having fled in disgrace to Italy, there to live a life of even greater dissoluteness. No doubt angered, Milton had struck back in the Defensio Secunda. After describing the hospitable treatment he had received at the hands of Manso, he wrote:

On my departure he gravely apologized for not having shown me more civility, which he said he had been restrained from doing, because I had spoken with so little reserve on matters of religion. When I was preparing to pass over into Sicily and Greece, the melancholy intelligence which I received of the civil commotions in England made me alter my purpose; for I thought it base to be traveling for amusement abroad, while my fellow-citizens were fighting for liberty at home. While I was on my way back from Rome, some merchants informed me that the English Jesuits had formed a plot against me if I returned to Rome, because I had spoken too freely on religion; for it was a rule which I laid down to myself in those places, never to be the first to begin any conversation on religion; but if any questions were put to me concerning my faith, to declare it without any reserve or fear. I, nevertheless, returned to Rome. I took no steps to conceal either my person or my character; and for about the space of two months I again openly defended, as I had done before, the reformed religion in the very metropolis of popery.16

Of Geneva he said: "The mention of this city brings to my recollection the slandering More, and makes me again call the Deity to witness, that in all those places in which vice meets with so little discouragement, and is practiced with so little shame, I never once deviated from the paths of integrity and virtue, and perpetually reflected that, though my conduct might escape the notice of men, it could not elude the inspection of God."17 Milton did not allude in
the Defensio Secunda to his visit to Galileo, but he had previously mentioned it in Areopagitica.

Although one may claim that it was consonant with the purposes of the romantic biographers to praise Milton in everything relating to the Italian journey, and that it was their general practice to take Milton's words at face value, one might also concede that their adulation was probably closer to the truth than the debunking which has characterized so much writing about Milton.

Symmons embellishes Milton's account by stressing the "fierce defence" of his faith in "this strong hold of priestly dominion" and by eulogizing Milton's purity: "His visit, indeed, to Italy was induced by such [pure] motives, and occupied with such business, as to be nearly insusceptible of any tainting suspicion. It was undertaken after a studious and irreproachable youth, when the first effervescence of the blood had evaporated, and for the purpose of continuing, rather than of interrupting his literary pursuits."

Symmons has no doubts that Milton visited Galileo, although he regrets that Milton did not entirely assent to Galileo's brilliantly simple explanation of the heavens and had, accordingly, halted awkwardly between two systems of the universe in Paradise Lost, thereby disfiguring a few pages of the immortal epic. For Symmons
Milton is the admired darling of an ancient culture, a thirty-
year-old Jesus amid the wise men of the Temple:

The applause and respect, which he obtained, seems
to have been unlimited; and the transalpine scholars
appear to be lost in surprise at the spectacle, pre-
sented to them, of a native of Britain, a country just
emerging, as they imagined, from barbarism, who to
an acquaintance, not superficial, with all the sciences,
united a profound knowledge of classic and Italian let-
ters; whose mind was at once sublime and deep, accurate
and comprehensive, powerful and acute; patient to fol-
low judgment in the gradual investigation of philosophical
truth, yet delighted to fly, with the natives of the brain,
on the high and expatiating wing of imagination.18

Amid the usual heavy weight of Todd's pages is a delightful
anecdote which first appeared in a newspaper (Todd does not know
which one), relating how Milton first became inspired to travel to
Italy. The story is that while Milton was asleep in an English wood
a carriage with two lovely ladies happened by. After they had
alighted and looked at him admiringly, the younger of the two took a
pencil, wrote these lines, and left them lying nearby him:

    Occhi, stelle mortali,
    Ministre de miei mali, --
    Se chiusi m'uccidete,
    Aperti che farete?

Which is to say, "Ye eyes! ye human stars! ye authors of my
liveliest pangs! If thus, when shut, ye wound me, what must have
proved the consequence had ye been open?"19 Having read these
words, Milton went off to Italy to find the fair damsel whom he had
so enraptured. If it does nothing else, the anecdote emphasizes
Todd's intense interest in everything relating to Milton and adds a spice of needed levity to his work.

On a more serious level are Todd's researches into the Galileo question. He had learned from a Mr. Walker (presumably the publisher of the Walker's British Classics edition of Milton's poetry in 1818) that Galileo was never a prisoner in the Inquisition at Florence but a prisoner of it. According to this account, by the time Milton arrived in Italy, Galileo had already retracted his dangerous theories, had been liberated, and had returned to the village of Belloguardo near Florence. From there he went to Arcetri, where he could have received Milton.

Todd is one with the nineteenth-century biographers in his admiration of Milton's dauntless defense of his faith; however, his interpretation of Milton's reason for returning to England sooner than he had intended is like that of the biographers of the previous century: ". . . he abruptly changed his course, and hastily returned home to plead the cause of ideal liberty." "Ideal" and "general," as mentioned previously, are words often used by those who could not countenance Milton's specific acts and ideas in fighting for "the good old cause."
Mitford is most excited by the spectacle of a young Englishman
daring the considerable powers of the Vatican in the Eternal City itself:

But we may conceive, that in those times, it was dif-
ficult to withhold opinions on subjects which so much
agitated, affecting the temporal interests of some, and
awakening the spiritual alarm of others. The schism
between the churches was comparatively fresh; the
Church of Rome reluctantly beheld a great and growing
kingdom rescued from her avarice and power. In the
freedom of opinion, and by the discussion of rights,
she saw her safety endangered, or her splendour
diminished. She had fostered for her protection a
body of men the most politic, and deep in worldly
wisdom, whose existence depended on her prosperity:
we shall not therefore be surprised if a young and
zealous Protestant, who could not well endure the ec-
clesiastical establishment of his own country, simple
and moderate as it was, should give offense when ex-
pressing his feelings in the inmost bosom of the Papal
church, in the verge of the Vatican, and under the very
chair of St. Peter himself. 22

It is instructive to contrast this rather straightforward account of
Milton's staunchness and daring with that of IVimey, the one-time
itinerant preacher. Quite often he reveals as much about himself
as of Milton:

From this very brief mention of the frankness and
courage of our Protestant poet, we may safely infer
that his mind was at this time well informed as to the
all-important principles of Protestantism, and that he
felt a detestation of the idolatrous principles and super-
stitious practices of the Antichristian Church of Rome.
It is fair to infer also, that his courageous conduct,
even in the city upon the seven hills, where Antichrist
was seated in all his glory, and where his flattering,
drinking sycophants were shouting, 'who is like unto
the Beast?' arose from his heart having been renewed
by the Holy Spirit of God; for one can scarcely conceive
it possible that any other principle than that of the fear
of God having been put into his heart, could have produced such fearless confidence and such dauntless zeal.

In the same vein is Ivimey's account of fearless Milton refusing to dissemble despite the machinations of the Jesuits and Milton's defending the truth right "under the Pope's eye."  

Since he disapproved of Milton's too Calvinistic religion and too republican politics, Brydges is brief on the matter of the Italian journey. He hurries along, trying to get to Milton's poetry as quickly as possible, stopping only long enough to let his own biases show. On the arrival of Milton at Geneva, he remarks: "Here he is supposed to have renewed his Calvinistic and puritanical prejudices. It is somewhat strange that this small place should have been the focus of all that troubled the governments of Europe for more than a century. They were not content with forming a republican government for their own petty canton, for which it was well suited, but struggled to turn all the great monarchies into republics."  

For the most part Carpenter follows Milton's own description of the Italian journey, but he also is guilty of occasional embellishing to stack the cards for his own special thesis. Whereas Milton had said that he "took no steps" to conceal himself from the Jesuits, Carpenter has him deliberately "remaining two months more in the
stronghold of their power" because he had "resolved to avoid the possible imputation of cowardice." Carpenter's image of Milton the titanic Christian and patriot dictates his interpretation of Milton's return to England from Italy. Having quoted Milton's narration from the *Defensio Secunda* he concludes:

> How beautifully does this simple and unpretending narrative, extorted from him by the malignant accusations of his enemies, develop the real character of Milton, both as a patriot and a Christian. He thought it base to be travelling for amusement abroad, while his fellow-citizens were fighting for liberty at home; and he immediately embarked for England, to take part in the glorious struggle for freedom. He was young and learned; honoured by some of the greatest minds then living, for his genius and conversation; and having open before him the road to fame and fortune, in the way most congenial with his natural temperament and chosen pursuits. Nevertheless, his love of liberty was so predominant over all other affections, and his sense of obligation as a British citizen so paramount to all other considerations, that he at once severed the ties that bound him to his studies, and threw himself in to the hottest part of the battle.²⁵

**Marriage and Divorce Tracts**

Milton's marriage to Mary Powell and the subsequent divorce tracts—*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, *The Judgment of Martin Bucer* *Touching Divorce*, *Tetrachordon*, and *Colasterion*—were a source of consternation to some of his romantic biographers and an occasion of embarrassment to others. Had they possessed
the inquisitiveness of a David Masson or the information of B. A. Wright, perhaps their task of justifying Milton and extenuating his "foolhardiness" would have been made easier. As it was, however, these biographers were forced to accept the standard account of the Milton-Powell courtship and marriage which had begun with Milton's nephew, Edward Phillips, and had been handed down to succeeding biographers through John Toland. This version stated that about Whitsuntide (no year is given) Milton took a journey into the country and after a month returned a married man. His bride was Mary Powell, eldest daughter of Richard Powell, a justice of the peace of Forresthill, near Shotover in Oxfordshire, and a royalist supporter. After a month or so of "philosophic life" in the household of Milton, Mary, homesick for the gaiety of Forresthill requested that she be allowed to return home for a visit. Her request was granted, and her husband enjoined her to return at Michaelmas. When she did not return at the appointed time, Milton sent for her by letter. Receiving no reply, he dispatched a messenger, who came back with no satisfactory answer and said that he had been ridiculed by the Powells. Angered, Milton "thought it would be dishonourable ever to receive her again, after such a repulse; so that he forthwith prepared to fortify himself with arguments to such a resolution, and accordingly wrote two treatises . . . ."27 Later
Toland would supply 1643 as the date of Milton's marriage, and subsequent research would establish that the first divorce tract was published on August 1, 1643.  

Masson was the first biographer to sense a discrepancy in these dates. The Phillips-Toland story would have one believe that Mary's refusal to return at Michaelmas (September 29th in 1643) provoked Milton to pen the divorce tracts. This would be highly unlikely, however, since proof existed that The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce was in circulation almost two months previous to this date. Two suppositions follow: (1) if Phillips is right that Mary's refusal to return home and the Powells' insulting treatment of Milton's messenger occasioned the first tract, then Phillips' and Toland's date must be incorrect; (2) if the dates are correct, then Phillips' estimation of the causes of Milton's writing the tract must be wrong because Milton would have had to be preparing it while Mary was still under his roof in Aldergate Street. "That a man should have occupied himself on a Tract on Divorce ere his honey-moon was well over . . . is a notion all but dreadful," remarks Masson.  

Accordingly, Masson guessed at an earlier date for the marriage. And the researches of Wright have proved beyond reasonable doubt that Milton and Mary Powell must have been married about Whitsunday in 1642. Significantly, even Salmasius,
Milton's avowed enemy, had said in *Ad Johannem Miltonum Responsio*, "The same gentleman has the additional distinction of having repudiated his wife after a year of marriage, for certain or uncertain reasons known to himself, and of propounding the lawfulness of divorce for any cause whatsoever, and wounding the reputation of the wives of others by calumnious insinuations." One would hardly use Salmasius as a reliable source for the facts of Milton's life, but it is interesting that he places the interval between marriage and separation at one year. Interesting too is the accusation that Milton turned Mary away, a charge that would be repeated by Milton's mother-in-law and would be uncovered by Todd in papers relating to Milton's non-cupative will.

In an effort to make Milton's actions seem somewhat less precipitate, Todd presented evidence that Milton may have met, and fallen in love with, Mary Powell as early as 1627. Among his discovered documents was one which revealed that Richard Powell had contracted a debt of 500L. to John Milton during that year:33

We come now to other documents, which also relate to the property of Mr. Powell; in which the connection of Milton with Forest Hill is found so early as in 1627, while he was a student at Cambridge; a circumstance unknown to all the biographers of the poet. And here he might have been subsequently an occasional visitor; he might have been known to the villagers, and thus have given rise to the tradition already mentioned of his residence at the place; and might at a later period (for
she was but young when married in 1643) have tendered his heart to Mary Powell. Yet he never told his love. And accordingly his nephew Phillips relates, as a matter of marvel, that after an absence from London for a month, nobody knowing the reason, his uncle returned with a wife. But it may be thought that the union had been planned by their relations in 1627, (for the grandfather of Milton and Mr. Powell were neighbours,) when the lady was but a child; and that the recorded debt, which will presently appear, was the security for her future dower. If such was the case, Milton bestowed the month of absence from London upon Forest Hill, in order to fulfill the pre-contract. But supposing this absence to have brought him to Forest Hill for the first time, and the debt to have been upon another account, we may imagine him to arrive for the purpose of soliciting the payment of it, and the impression to have then been made upon his heart by the lady.34

Symmons had earlier made up his mind that Milton's choice of a mate was accomplished with undue haste and seemed to have been "the result of fancy alone." For "a connexion so evidently imprudent" Milton had paid the expected price. Since Mary's family was strongly royalist and since she was accustomed to the "affluent hospitality" of her father's house, she could hardly have been expected to be satisfied with the "frugal establishment" and the "re-tired and studious habits, or the political conversation of her literary and republican husband." In Symmon's view her departure was merely a case of effect following closely upon a most predictable cause.35
Mitford's explanation of the conduct of both Milton and Mary Powell rests upon more general social causes. His (and Symmons') constant theme is that Milton—and his wife—lived at a time when society was in a state of upheaval and, consequently, "the golden reins of discipline" had loosened in every relationship:

A resistance so pertinacious and illegal as this, must have rested on some grounds that were at least imagined favourable to the conduct of the wife. We must, therefore, refer to the unsettled situation of the kingdom, by which the authority of the laws was weakened, and obedience imperfectly enforced; and we must recollect, that at the time when she refused to return to her husband's roof, the King, with all his forces, was quartered in the neighboring city of Oxford... that a prospect of success now dawned upon the fortunes of the King; and, looking at the apparent interest of the family, considering her waver- ing or alienated affections, and interpreting fairly the language of Phillips, we may presume that had the side of the royalists been victorious, the marriage with the Puritan husband would have been cancelled or concealed. 36

Much to his regret Ivimey had to place all the blame for this affair squarely on the shoulders of Milton. To the argument that Milton had sent letters to his wife requesting her return, he counters that it would have been better for Milton to pay her an affectionate visit. Furthermore, to send a servant after her and demand action through "lordly commands" was to invite a just and right womanly refusal. There is no justifiable excuse for Milton's conduct either as a man or a husband: "A husband who could act with this haughty
feeling towards his companion, must have strange notions of what,
in such a case, was honorable; and ... seeking repose by such
means, was the most unlucky plan he could have adopted, as the
sequel abundantly shows . . . . In this matter MILTON appears
like Samson when shorn of his Nazarite locks. "37

To the usual account of Mary's dissatisfaction with Milton's
studious and quiet ways, Brydges only adds that Milton too may
have had regrets about his choice: "He was caught by the lady's
beauty, but found neither her mind nor her disposition accordant
. . . ."38

Although, as noted before, Milton's romantic biographers usu-
ally took his word seriously, they were definitely not of a mind to
do so regarding the occasion of the divorce tracts. In the Defensio
Secunda Milton had explained his involvement with the question of
divorce in this way:

When, therefore, I perceived that there were three
species of liberty which are essential to the happiness
of social life—religious, domestic and civil; and as I
had already written concerning the first, and the magis-
trates were strenuously active in obtaining the third, I
determined to turn my attention to the second, or the
domestic species. As this seemed to involve three
material questions, the conditions of the conjugal tie,
the education of children, and the free publication of
thought, I made them objects of distinct consideration.39
Immediately noticeable is the lack of any reference to Milton's own most crucial interest in the question of divorce. The biographers make clear, however, that they believed Milton's own experience with Mary Powell drove him to his pen to justify his actions. Their attitude is summed up in Mitford's succinct words: "Milton, whose mind was never given to half-measures, resolved immediately to repudiate her on the ground of disobedience; and to support the propriety and lawfulness of his conduct, he published ... The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce . . . . That his whole argument hinges on his own case, no one who reads these tracts can reasonably doubt . . . ." 40

Carpenter's explanation of Milton's action is somewhat different in that he assign[s] politics as the principal cause of Milton's disenchchantment and rash action: "Milton now became conscious of the impropriety and folly of which he had been guilty, in marrying into a family whose tastes and politics were so diametrically opposed to his own . . . and Milton, who was too high-minded to submit to insult or injustice, resolved to treat his wife henceforth as a stranger, and to hold himself released from the marriage bond. To justify to the world the step he had taken, he published ... The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce." 41
In their estimation of the divorce tracts, the romantic biographers were divided. Symmons and Mitford both praise Milton's strong arguments and compelling logic, and Mitford concludes: "The whole is composed with uncommon zeal and earnestness, and conveys the sentiments of one who feels his own important interests are at issue..." Ivimey, though he upholds Milton as being, despite this glaring defect, the greatest man the world has ever produced, will grant Milton nothing but shame on this score. His words are expressive of his characteristically explosive style:

The scene which we have been constrained to survey, is most humiliating and confounding. One is ready to say, Oh! that oblivion had in kindness cast its mantle over such disgusting details. The champion of a nation's right, the fearless and undaunted assertor of civil and religious liberty, and the successful advocate of the unshackled press, himself a domestic tyrant! Objecting to the restraint with which God and nature had guarded the marriage union, and refusing to the wife of his bosom, the companion of his life, those equal rights to which with himself she was justly entitled... MILTON and his wife did not, it is evident, understand the principles of the marriage covenant... Nor did he fulfill the conditions of the covenant, into which he had voluntarily entered when she consented to become his wife, a covenant of reciprocal duties, and of equal privileges. His biographers say, that MRS. MILTON 'refused to return;' perhaps she was justifiable in that refusal: she might have been treated superciliously and contemptuously by her husband.

To his discredit, says Ivimey, in this instance Milton had left the path of God and relied on his own stubborn heart, proving that "the best of men are but men at the best" and that even such an object of
adoration as Milton needs the compassion of his fellow men. 44

In Milton's Contemporary Reputation Parker has shown that the divorce tracts probably did not cause as much of a stir as Milton himself would have us believe. The replies to them were scattered and earned Milton only the "reputation of a nuisance and one of the irrational element in society as well as a libertine." Only one full-length reply was made to The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, and that by an unworthy opponent. There were no written answers to the other three tracts. Occasionally people heard rumors about some mysterious sect called "Divorcers" or "Miltonists," but these and other references to Milton's tracts faded quickly after 1654. 45 The romantic biographers believed that the tracts had created a great uproar, however, and to prove their point cited Milton's two sonnets on their reception and the fact that Milton's doctrines were so compelling that a whole sect was raised up to propagate them. Carpenter's words are representative of their general agreement on this matter:

The amount of labour and learning expended upon this undertaking is indeed prodigious, and its publication created a great sensation. The clergy in general . . . if they agreed in nothing else, at least united in assail ing the author; he was attacked with great bitterness, and denounced as an atheist, a heretic, and a lewd monster. The parliament was importuned to condemn the book and its author: all the services he had rendered to the 'puritans' were at once forgotten, and the high and holy motives by which he had been impelled to
sacrifice his repose, and forego the smiles of Fortune, were but as a feather in the scale against the monstrous impiety and depravity of heart imputed to him on this account. 46

Mitford alone agrees with Dr. Johnson that the divorce tracts were received with neglect. 47

The biographers were somewhat scandalized by Milton's attentions to Miss Davis, daughter of a Dr. Davis of London, during the time he was separated from Mary Powell. But even here only Ivimey expressly condemns Milton for his deeds. Symmons and Mitford again extenuate Milton's "offense" by playing on the theme that discipline in the church was in a lamentable state, and Symmons even suggests that part of the blame should fall to Miss Davis because her objections to a match with Milton seem not to have been "of a very serious nature." 48 All of them agree that Milton courted Miss Davis because, being a man of his word, he was determined to practice what he had preached. The fortunate and timely reconciliation between Milton and his wife prevented him from sinking even lower into wrong-doing.

This reconciliation gave the biographers the opportunity of censuring the Powell family for their opportunism and praising Milton for his magnanimity. There is a sense of relief evident in their alternating praise and condemnation. In Symmons' words: "Conduct of so high a character, the offspring of a large and feeling heart, is
above the ornament of any laboured panegyric. Let the facts, in
the intercourse of Milton with the Powells, be placed, distinctly and
at once, in our view, and nothing but atrocious prejudice can with-
hold us from admiring the magnanimity of the former, and from
despising while we pity the meanness of the latter."49

The Controversial Writings

Not all the romantic biographers were of the opinion that
Milton's excursion into the "cool element of prose" was a worth-
while venture either for himself or for posterity. In fact, three of
the seven voiced their belief that Milton would have served mankind
better had he always written with his "right hand," the one which pro-
duced his poetry. Yet all of them found something complimentary to
say about Milton's controversial writings; indeed, some of them were
ecstatic and sent so far as to claim that Milton's prose was as valu-
able as his poetry.

One matter of great interest to all the biographers was the un-
disputed fact that in his prose works Milton had used coarse and
abusive language against his antagonists. All of the romantic writ-
ers, however, found some pretext upon which to excuse the polemi-
cal practices for which Milton had been condemned by previous
biographers. One justification of Milton was that such tactics in
disputation were the practice of the age and that Milton had been
goaded into using them even by the high-minded prelates. Thus
Mortimer remarks with regard to Bishop Hall, "The provocations
Milton received imperiously demanded reply; and if his language
is debased with occasional indelicate allusions, or disfigured by un-
guarded intemperance of expression; such were the natural result of
the manners of his age, and in which his right reverend enemy has
previously set him so august an example."50

Another defense of Milton was based upon the character of the
extraordinary times in which he wrote and the fact that he knew
only certain tactics would have an effect upon such opponents. In
Carpenter's words:

Even Milton's most favourable and partial biographers
deprecate the tone of this work Animadversions Upon
the Remonstrant's Defence Against Smectymnuus, which they characterise as 'personal, rude and offen-
sive;' but again we must remind the reader, that these
polemical works were written at no ordinary time, and
under no ordinary circumstances. The church was the
stronghold of corruption, and it sent forth its turbid and
contagious waters throughout all the channels of the
civil government, and of the country. To cut off these
was a work of pre-eminent importance, and Milton knew
that the shameless guardians and feeders of the foul
spring of mischief were not to be dealt with in soft and
honied phrases, but only in the language of stern, indig-
nant, and bitter denunciation.51
Interestingly, this is essentially the same defense which Milton himself had argued in the Preface to *Animadversions Upon the Remonstrant's Defence Against Smectymnuus*:

We all know that in private and personal injuries, yea, in public sufferings for the cause of Christ, his rule and example teaches us to be so far from a readiness to speak evil, as not to answer the reviler in his language, though never so much provoked: yet in the detecting and convincing of any notorious enemy to truth and his country's peace, especially that is conceited to have a voluble and smart fluence of tongue, and in the vain confidence of that, and out of a more tenacious cling to worldly respects, stands up for all the rest to justify a long usurpation and convicted pseudo-episcopy of prelates, with all their ceremonies, liturgies, and tyrannies... I suppose, and more than suppose, it will be nothing disagreeing from Christian meekness to handle such a one in a rougher accent, and to send home his haughtiness well bespurted with his own holy water.52

Still another reason for not criticizing Milton was his own character. Says Ivimey: "His blunt and biting style exposed him to great opposition and reproach; but he evidently indulged self-gratulation, from the reflection that he had always accustomed himself to what he called 'this just and honest manner of speaking.'"53

Milton's harsh treatment of Salmasius was particularly excusable because this base foreigner had abused the whole English nation as if they were "all mere barbarians and enthusiasts..."54

Moreover, remarks Symmons, even if Milton did go beyond the bounds of decency, "These polemical tracts... are so illumined
with knowledge and with fancy, and open to us such occasional
glimpses of a great and sublime mind, that they must always be
regarded as affording an ample compensation for any harshness of
manner with which they may sometimes offend."^55

Even though they granted the justice of certain of Milton's
polemical methods, some of the romantic biographers had strong
reservations about Milton's career as political controversialist.
Symmons, Todd, and especially Brydges, believed that Milton's
finer qualities were revealed in his poetry and regretted that he had
had to "sacrifice his time to the harsh and crabbed employment of
controversy."^56 It was difficult for them to reconcile their concep-
tion of an other-worldly, spiritual Milton with activities that placed
him so thoroughly and actively in his political and social environ-
ment. Symmons expresses this point of view when he judges that
Milton was a poet and student by an "almost irresistible impulse of
his nature" and a polemicist only because stern duty had forced him
to violate all his "benigner and more refined propensities." He re-
grets that Milton's diverting of his powers to controversy during "the
high noon of his manhood" cost the world many "rich effusions of
fancy, on which we might have dwelt with exquisite delight . . . ."

Nevertheless, comments Symmons, reservations and regrets must
be tempered with the realization that in his prose works Milton has
treated the world to the spectacle of his mighty mind at work in a "strange country" of "very extraordinary magnanimity and self-devotion." Truly, though some of Milton's views are "incompatible with the present system and happiness of Britain," they must be numbered "among that mass of incongruous materials and events, from the collision and conflict of which have arisen the beauty, the harmony, the vigour, and the self-balanced revolution of the English constitution."57

Todd is less open-minded on this matter. As a more refined spirit Milton could well have left the crabbed way of dispute to "such restless and wayward spirits as Prynne, Hugh Peters, Goodwyn, and Baxter. Minds less refined, and faculties, less elegant, would have been better employed in this task." In his prose works, claims Todd, Milton said much that must be regretted and, what is more, opened the way for a show of his "asperity and repulsive form of puritanism . . . ."58

The strictures of Brydges are yet stronger. The day that Milton diverted himself from the path of poetry was an evil day. His sublime spirit could not thrive under the heavy weight of so much abstruse knowledge. One must lament this aspect of Milton's life:

I cannot help lamenting that Milton spent so many years in these bitter political and sectarian squabbles: 'coarser
minds' would have done for that work. He was always powerful—sometimes splendid; but here his passions were human, and too often mingled with earthly dross. That magnificent and stupendous imagination must have often slept: his faculties duly employed might have produced other epic poems... he might even have gained something more of facility and softness... his youthful purpose of some romantic tale of chivalry might also have been executed. While Milton's mind was immersed for twenty years in all those mean contests of human ambition or bigotry, in which intrigue, artifice, and selfish passions pervert and darken the heart and the head, he must have stifled those radiant visions of spiritual beauty, which were his natural food and delight. A suppressed fire often turns to poison; and perhaps it gave some embitterment to the poet's feelings: but the fire now and then blazed unexpectedly in a glorious flame amid endless pages of subtle or heady prose.59

Carpenter, representing the other biographers, provides the rebuttal to the "waste of time" theory. He is amused by Brydges' "lugubrious reflections" on this epoch of Milton's life. He objects to dividing Milton into the writer of prose and the writer of poetry, with the consequent diminution of the former. All of Milton's astounding mental powers, he argues, were employed in his political and controversial writings, just as they were when he wrote Paradise Lost. Milton wrote, not for a sect, but for the entire world; "not for a momentary and petty triumph in dialectics, but for the establishment of those immutable and ever active principles which are identified with the well-being of society to the end of time.

Every page of his political writings exhibits the fervour of his mind,
and the enthusiasm with which he prosecuted a task which his biographer Brydges persuades himself must have been so abhorrent to his feelings."

Of Milton's genuine and selfless integrity in engaging in the disputes which occupied so many of his best years the romantic biographers were certain. Wherever Milton looked he saw evil—an abused parliament, an overweening group of prelates, arbitrary taxation, restricted freedom of press and speech, and horrible persecution, particularly in Laud's Star Chamber court. He determined, says Symmons,

from his first acquaintance with the struggles of his country, to devote himself to her service; he did not hesitate with respect to the part in which he was to act. Conscious of his own proper strength, and sensible that genius, armed with knowledge, with a power of far greater and more extensive efficiency than the bodily force of any individual, he decided in favour of the pen against the sword; and stationed himself in the closet, where he was himself an host, rather than in the field, where every muscular common man would be his superior. This is substantially the account which we have from himself; and the motives of his conduct must obtain our approbation as honourable and wise.

Mitford seconds this view: "That Milton engaged in the heat and dust of the great controversial questions, from motives of conscience and with intentions upright and pure, no one can reasonably doubt...

And Brydges agrees that, even though Milton's politics
were "violent and fierce . . . it cannot be doubted that they were conscientious."\textsuperscript{63}

Milton's connection with the execution of Charles I occasioned uneasiness on the part of some of the romantic biographers. Brydges is especially discomforted in thinking that his idol was a regicide, and he cannot reconcile Milton's attitude toward Charles with his other finer characteristics: "To say the truth, this is a part of Milton's character which puzzles me--and no other. This blood thirstiness does not agree with his sanctity, and other mental and moral qualities . . . . In the poet, however, posterity has forgotten the regicide."\textsuperscript{64} Implicit in Brydges' remarks on The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates is the accusation that Milton had written against Charles personally and had urged his beheading. Milton himself had said of The Tenure that it had made its appearance after the death of the King "and was written rather to reconcile the minds of the people to the event, than to discuss the legitimacy of that particular sentence which concerned the magistrates, and which was already executed." And further, "I did not insult over fallen majesty, as is pretended; I only preferred queen Truth to king Charles."\textsuperscript{65} Believing Milton, Symmons argued that during "this distressful and opprobrious transaction" Milton had stayed aloof and was in no way an accessory to Charles' death.
However, he cannot go so far as to agree with Milton's ultimate conclusion in *The Tenure*. Surely, remarks Symmons, human guilt, even that of a king, may be punishable by human justice; however, if one admits that kings may be put to death by human hands, "a fearful opening will be left for mischief; and the sword, directed by private passion or, perhaps, by individual caprice, may injure the interests of thousands while it strikes a criminal magistrate."

Even granting this, Symmons concedes that some of the regicides were honest patriots.

Carpenter, too, defends Milton's character. To charge Milton with indecency and lack of feeling because of what he had written in *The Tenure* is to forget that "Milton possessed a nobleness of soul which was incompatible with such an act." Milton never wrote against Charles until the "pseudo friends" of the king forced him to vindicate the leaders of the revolution and defend the people's rights. And in answer to Brydges' charge of bloodthirstiness, Carpenter retorts:

How strangely do political predilections sometimes pervert man's judgments, and modify and change the character of every object at which they look! Would the king-loving baronet denounce the execution of a regicide or a man-slayer, as proof of murder and bloodthirstiness; or is it only when execution is done upon kings and magistrates that his sympathy is called forth and his piety awakened? If he deprecate all taking away of human life, for whatever offence, then indeed we have no controversy with him; and we deny his right—so long
as the present usage of treating murderers shall be universally tolerated and practised, --to impute bloodthirsty propensities to all those who happen to approve of the usage of an awful exercise of the law, rendered necessary for the common good of society. But we do not believe that he goes to this extremity; it is only the persons of kings that he holds to be sacred and inviolable; --a doctrine 'in the highest degree objectionable . . . ."67

Their dislike of Charles I and of royalist abuses enabled most of the romantic biographers to see Milton's side of the issue, if not to justify him entirely. Mortimer reminds his readers that the Eikon Basilike, reputed to have been written by Charles himself, issued from the presses when the fury of the people began to cool and the offenses of the King had been partially forgotten. As a consequence, the touching picture of the suffering monarch that is set forth in Eikon Basilike led many people to consider Charles "as an ill-advised and unfortunate monarch, [rather] than as a prince acting up to the hereditary opinions of his family."68 Symmons also is unsympathetic. The excesses of Charles--his mistreatment of parliament and of his office and his unrelenting persecution of the Puritans--were shocking to the liberal-minded and fearful to the wise. All the more dangerous was Charles because the episcopal hierarchy supported his egregious practices. The cause of Charles is much more easily assaulted than defended, says Symmons, and he must be placed in history not too far from Nero himself.69
It was impossible, says Mitford, that Milton should not answer the King's book. It was popular enough to go through fifty editions in the first year and stirred the patriotic feelings of the populace. The forgiveness of Charles toward his enemies was presented "as the forgiveness from the Cross." Milton had no choice but to give Charles' words "an ignominious interpretation and throw the ridiculous over the sublime. Milton knew the sentiments of those who employed him in his task; and he was prepared to satisfy them, perhaps he fully shared them." By this interesting remark Mitford too reveals that he did not believe that Milton shared full complicity in the execution of Charles.

Finally, Ivimey was stirred to rebuttal against those who charged Milton with tergiversation for writing against his former Presbyterian allies in *The Tenure*: "The circumstance of MILTON having employed his pen against those whom he formerly united with in writing against the prelates, has subjected him to the charge of tergiversation. Let it be recollected, however, that MILTON wrote against erroneous principles, and finding the Presbyterians enemies to a full toleration in religion, he opposed them on that account as much as he had before opposed the prelates on the same account."
When he engaged in head to head combat with Salmusius, Milton knew that he had performed a great and enduring service for his people. As he said in the preface to the second edition of

**Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano:**

It is now several years since I published the foregoing, in haste, as reason of state then required, for I kept thinking that if ever I might take it in hand again at leisure... I might thereupon smooth out, or remove, maybe, or add somewhat. This I now judge that I have accomplished, though more briefly than I used to count upon doing it: a memorial which, such as it is, I see will not easily perish. Though someone may be found who may have defended civil freedom more freely than it is here defended, yet there shall hardly be found anyone who hath defended it in a greater and more glorious example. If, then, an action or example so high and illustrious is believed to have been as successfully accomplished as not without God's prompting undertaken, let this be reason good for thinking that in these my praises too it hath even by the same Might and Inspiration been glorified and defended.

And in the **Defensio Secunda** he reminded his audience that he was the same Milton who had gained "a complete and glorious victory" over "that fierce advocate of despotism," Salmusius, by silencing him with his own weapons at a time when he was generally reputed to be invincible. So completely was Salmusius vanquished that he was forced to leave the court of his patroness, Christina of Sweden. This is the Milton, that champion of the people, who is most universally appreciated and applauded by the romantic biographers.
Mortimer begins the accolades by mentioning that Salmasius was a "mere scholar" who spent his time in emending and collating the classics, and by constructing a historically questionable scene in which the Council of State in England, having read "the most gross misrepresentations and vulgar calumnies of Salmasius in *Defensio Regia Pro Carolo I,*" rose to their feet and "spontaneously named Milton as the only one completely fitted to the task" of confronting this enemy. Concerning Milton's answer—*Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano*—Mortimer says: "Perhaps no book of that age was sought after with such insatiable eagerness as this defence of the people of England; it was written with such masculine energy, such comprehensive observance of ancient and foreign customs and laws, such subtility and truth of reasoning, as is altogether remarkable and astonishing." For this performance Christina, Queen of Sweden, applauded Milton, and Salmasius, "overcome with confusion and vexation," wrote a reply and "finished his life in a way that drew from Milton the unworthy boast of having contributed to his death."74

Symmons echoes Mortimer's praise and elaborates the story of Salmasius' disgrace and demise, repeating accounts from "some of the newspapers of that day" that Christina had cashiered Salmasius "as a pernicious parasite and a promoter of tyranny." Whether
Milton's success led directly to Salmasius' dying of a broken heart, Symmons is not sure: "It has been asserted that the various afflictions of his pride on this occasion proved eventually fatal to his life; and it cannot surely be regarded as improbable that the pains arising from such a cause should, in their intensity, be injurious to the health and accelerate the crisis of dissolution." And in a footnote he comments on the word "died": "Of the gout, to which he had been subject, as his biographer Clements assures us; but few complaints are more exasperated by the disorders of the mind than the gout."75

Carpenter rejoices in Milton's conquest of the foreign Goliath by noting that Milton had his reward in knowing that while his opponent's work was lingering on the vendors' shelves his own book was translated into several languages and "occupied a large space in the public mind." He also repeats the tale that Salmasius died at Spa of "chagrin and mortification."76

Indulging a more scholarly bent, Todd is interested in whether Milton received a stipend from the Council for answering Salmasius. Dr. Johnson had made capital on this point. In the Defensio Secunda Milton had claimed to have received no such remuneration.

Todd adds:

The Council-Book confirms this assertion. '1651. June June 18. Ordered, that thanks be given to Mr. Milton on
the behalfe of the Commonwealth for his good
services done in writing an answer to the books of
Salmasius, written against the proceedings of the
Commonwealth of England.' But all this is crossed
over, and nearly three lines following are obliterated,
in which, the accurate Mr. Lemon says, a grant of
money was made to Milton. But after the cancelled
passage, the regular entry thus follows: 'The Councell
takeing notice of the manie good services performed by
Mr. Milton, their Secretarie for Forreigne Languages,
to this State and Commonwealth, particularlie for his
books in vindication of the Parliament, and people of
England against the calumies and invectives of
Salmasius have thought fitt to declare their resent-
ment and good acceptance of the same; and that the
thanks of the Councell bee returned to Mr. Milton,
and their sense represented in that behalfe.'77

Being more skeptical than Symmons, Todd doubts the accuracy
of the story that Salmasius had been completely done in by Milton:
"The supposed credit of destroying a literary antagonist may indeed
be deducted, without injury, from the achievements of Milton."
Like Mitford, also a doubter, he knew that when Salmasius died
Christina had written a letter to his widow "full of concern for his
loss, and respect for his memory . . . ." It is more probable to
believe that Salmasius "went with honors to his grave."78

In summary, regarding the controversial writings of Milton,
Todd and Mitford would undoubtedly have agreed with the judgment
of Brydges that "The summit of fame is occupied by the poet, but
the base of the vast elevation may justly be said to rest on these
prose works; and we invite his admirers to descend from the
former, and survey the region that lies round about the latter:--a less explored, but not less magnificent domain." No doubt the other four biographers would have argued that there were two equal summits--the poetry and the prose.

Milton's Role in the Commonwealth and Protectorate

The questions which most interested the romantic biographers concerning Milton's activities as Latin Secretary were his motives in accepting the position, the degree of influence which he held, and his relationship with Oliver Cromwell. Some of the biographers thought Cromwell guilty of usurpation of power and thus had to justify Milton's continued participation in the Cromwell government. Others, who revered the Protector, had to justify his actions in order to clear Milton's name of infamy. All of the biographers were reacting to Dr. Johnson, who had said:

That his authority was lawful, never was pretended; he himself founded his right only in necessity; but Milton, having now tasted the honey of publick employment, would not return to hunger and philosophy, but, continuing to exercise his office under a manifest usurpation, betrayed to his power that liberty which he had defended. Nothing can be more just than that rebellion should end in slavery; that he, who had justified the murder of his king, for some acts which to him seemed unlawful, should sell his services and his flatteries to a tyrant, of whom it was evident that he could do nothing lawful.
Mortimer's encomiums of Milton are somewhat exaggerated in that he comes close to presenting Milton as a maker of state policy. So perfect were Milton's writings for the government that to him "may be attributed, in a great measure, the almost universal success of the negotiations in which England was, during the protectorate engaged." Although admitting that Cromwell was on the way to becoming a tyrant, Mortimer exonerates Milton by claiming that Milton remained with Cromwell only in order to bring good from evil:

In all revolutions, the good, in order to bring about a desired object, are not only necessitated to act with the vicious but to employ them. The virtuous Roland, against his wishes, and even his judgment, allowed Danton to be his colleague; the admirable Aristides consulted with Themistocles, and Milton and Hale served under Cromwell; we are inclined, however, to think that as Cromwell's character unravelled itself, Milton found a necessity of remaining in office, in order to seize any future opportunity to perfect his favourite system. Upon the discovery of an error, it is far from being a proof of profound wisdom to destroy every hope by precipitance of impatience. At such times private dissimulation becomes public virtue. 81

Symmons too praises Milton's state documents as models of energy and wisdom which must have impressed foreign states with a high opinion of the government from which they originated. He then launches into the questions of Milton's "inconsistency" of principle in serving Cromwell. First of all, he points to some of
Milton's familiar letters as indicating his disapproval of existing conditions, maintaining that Milton "seems to have acquiesced under the existing evil only as it was remediable, or as it was temporary, or as it appeared to be inferior in degree to that of the royalists [coming] into power with their exiled and exasperated monarch." Secondly, he insists that Milton was not guilty of inconsistency or dereliction of principle because he had no connection with the usurpation, no power over it, and no influence upon Cromwell. If anything, Milton was profoundly disappointed: "We have seen his magnanimous address to the usurper [in the Defensio Secunda]; and from some of his private letters we may collect his acute feelings of mortification and disappointment in consequence of the afflicted state of the commonwealth, and the abandonment of that cause which was always the most near to his heart." 82

The spectacle of Milton, once a "mere schoolmaster in the estimation, first of the PRELATES, and then of the NEW PRIESTS WRIT LARGE!" delighted IVimey. How this must have galled and mortified Milton's enemies. That one whom the bigots had once tried to make appear before the House of Lords to answer for his principles was now a member of, "or at least a constant attendant on, the chief council of the nation" is indeed thrilling. Milton's having the ear of Cromwell especially pleased IVimey, for he is sure
that the time will come when "the governors of the nation will be so sensible of the obligations of Britain to that illustrious ruler and his noble compatriots, as, maugre the mean power of ignorance and prejudice, will decree him a monumental inscription in the sepul- chres of our kings." Milton--made into a near egalitarian by Ivimey--is also worthy of great praise, for his state letters exhibit "the characteristic features of his spiritual and ardent mind in the cause of pure and undefiled religion, of oppressed and suffering humanity."83

Brydges' only comment upon this phase of Milton's career is to the effect that Milton did not take a position in the government for personal aggrandizement. He did not look for riches or power, and neither had he any intimacy with Cromwell. Brydges does say, however, that Milton, having the mind of a poet, was not particularly suited for this sort of business.84

As usual, Carpenter is quick to controvert Brydges:

This is all beautifully poetical ... but the truth is, that Milton was not a mere poet; he did not--he could not live in the world of fiction and sport with the mere abstrac- tions of his own fertile brain. His heart was overflowing with human sympathy--it was full of love for his country and for mankind; he was not a man of mere sentiment and of principle; and though his soaring mind swept its way through 'woods and forests' ... and held converse with 'those aerial beings who visit the earth' in regions where the busy and turbulent passions of men break not in upon the sublime stillness of nature, he was too deeply touched with the infirmities and the superinduced political and
social maladies of his kind to suffer him to live in the world as though he were not of it. The appointment of Milton as Foreign Secretary to the Council of State, offered him the opportunity of rendering active and essential service to the republic, and to the cause of humanity and liberty all over the world . . . .

And in answer to Dr. Johnson and other detractors, Carpenter remarks that Cromwell did not exalt himself above what the circumstances of the time required of him. Therefore, Milton was justified in praising Cromwell for the work that he had accomplished and must be praised for standing before the supreme magistrate "like one of the inspired prophets of old, and, with fearless intrepidity and a dreadless majesty" reminding him of his weighty obligations to the body politic. Milton realized the danger the republic was in when Cromwell seized power, remarks Carpenter, and knew that only the personality of Cromwell could weld together all the dangerous factions. Thus, his praise of Cromwell did not violate his principles or make him any less independent: "Milton was no parasite; he scorned to offer the incense of adulation to the great and powerful; and extravagant as some of his praises of Cromwell may be thought, it cannot be denied that even in these he discovers 'the quality of an erect and independent spirit.'"
Milton's Predicament at the Restoration

The romantic biographers were primarily concerned with the middle years of Milton's life. As this study has shown, they had little to say about Milton's early years; and as they got further and further away from Milton's controversial writings and from what could be construed as fact, they had less and less to write about. Mainly, they depended upon the accounts of earlier writers, especially Richardson, for information about Milton's situation at the Restoration. One overwhelming question for them was, who saved Milton? Mortimer\textsuperscript{86} unequivocally sides with Richardson in claiming that Sir William Davenant delivered Milton from his perilous situation, and Symmons agrees that "D'Avenant must have been Milton's intercessor against the vengeance of Charles . . . ."\textsuperscript{87} Mitford repeats the story but is not certain of its authenticity,\textsuperscript{88} and Brydges merely gives thanks that Milton was saved, praising the clemency of the government and giving "glory to those who exerted influence" in his behalf.\textsuperscript{89}

Having little else to say, Symmons uses the occasion to vent his political views about the accession to power of Charles II:

By every intelligent and reflecting man the restoration of the monarchy of England must be hailed as a most auspicious event: but it may be questioned, whether the unconditional restoration of it, and this alone was properly the act of Monk, can be regarded as a benefit
either to the prince or to the people;--to the former, whom it allured to those excesses which induced the final expulsion of his family from the throne; to the latter, whom it immediately exposed to the evils of an injurious reign, and eventually subjected to the necessity of asserting with the blood of two domestic wars, their right to civil and religious liberty.\textsuperscript{90}

Ivimey, however, is angered at Dr. Johnson's opinion that Milton was not in much danger at the Restoration and enraged at the government for burning Milton's books:

Some idea of the danger to which, at this time, he was exposed, may be seen from the fate to which some of his books were condemned. His work, entitled \underline{Eiconoclastis /sic/}, and his \underline{Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano}, were proscribed on the 27th of August, 1661, and several copies of them were publicly committed to the flames by the common hangman.

Impotent malice! Would not the divine right of kings and bishops have preserved the nation, as by a charm, from the contagion of these pamphlets? But the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people has been thought epidemical since the time of Charles II.\textsuperscript{91}

Last Years and Death

Ivimey's eulogy of Milton may well stand as representative of the biographers' attitude toward Milton's death. Like Damon and Lycidas, Milton was assured a place in heaven:

He died without much pain, the 8th of November, 1674, in the 66th year of his age. None of the biographers have preserved any account of the state of his mind in his last sickness: there can be no reasonable ground for doubting, but that having through life 'given diligence to make his calling and election sure,' that in his death he did not 'fall':--'And so an entrance was
administered to him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whose direction he had scrupulously, and on whose promise he had steadily relied:--'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.'

Milton's Religion

Milton bequeathed to the world a legacy of religious thought which is as interesting as it is valuable. Throughout his life he argued so often and so insistently for complete toleration and primacy of the individual conscience that Dr. Johnson remarked rather sneeringly that Milton was not even a Protestant. Perhaps Masson was correct in noting that Milton's religion cannot be restricted to the beliefs of any one sect and that he gradually changed his allegiance to various schools of thought until at last he was convinced that one man alone is sufficient to make a church. Thus the constant theme of religious freedom which appears in his writings, no more so than in his treatise Of True Religion and in the De Doctrina Christiana. In the former work he argued for the primacy of the scriptures and for unrestricted controversy in religion. Echoing his earlier Areopagitica, he proclaims: "There is no learned man but will confess he hath much profited by reading controversies, his senses awakened, his judgment sharpened, and the truth which he holds more firmly established. If then it be profitable for him to read, why should it not at least be tolerable and
free for his adversary to write? In logic they teach, that con-
traries laid together more evidently appear: It follows, then, that
all controversies being permitted, falsehood will appear more
false, and truth the more true."\textsuperscript{93} And in the \textit{De Doctrina} he
summed up his thought on liberty and heresy:

It has also been my object to make it appear from the
opinions I shall be found to have advanced, whether
new or old, of how much consequence to the Christian
religion is the liberty not only of winnowing and sifting
every doctrine, but also of thinking and even writing
respecting it according to our individual faith and per-
suasion. Without this liberty there is neither religion
nor gospel--force alone prevails,--by which it is dis-
graceful for the Christian religion to be supported.
Without this liberty we are still enslaved, not indeed,
as formerly, as under the divine law, but, what is
worst of all, under the law of man, or to speak more
truly, under a barbarous tyranny. But I do not ex-
pect from candid and judicious readers a conduct so
unworthy of them,--that like certain unjust and foolish
men, should stamp with the invidious name of heretic
or heresy whatever appears to them to differ from the
received opinions, without trying the doctrine by a
comparison with Scripture testimonies. According to
their notions, to have branded any one at random with
this opprobrious mark, is to have refuted him without
any trouble, with a single word.\textsuperscript{94}

Because of their own intense interest in matters of religion,
the romantic biographers were especially alive to this legacy and to
the issue of Milton's orthodoxy or heterodoxy. Milton's religious
writings, his virtuous life, Dr. Johnson's pronouncement, and
Toland's remark that "in the latter part of his life he was not a
professed member of any particular sect among Christians, he
frequented none of their assemblies, nor made use of their peculiar rites in his family, "95 were of crucial importance to their conception of Milton.

Symmons accepts what he terms the rather slight evidence of one remark of Toland but goes on to say that the cause of Milton's not attending a church may well be sought in the blindness and infirmity which in his later years confined him to his house, rather than in any disgust toward the contending religious sects. In any event, says Symmons, a person must be narrow-minded indeed to suspect a man's devotion because he does not exercise it within a church. Many people are aware of the efficacy of public worship and for them to omit it would be wrong; however, "the degree of the obligation must be measured by the standard in the bosom of the individual . . . ." That Milton was an extraordinarily devout man, remarks Symmons, no one can deny. He regularly spent the first hours of the day in scriptural reading and meditation and taught his pupils Christian theology. And if he did not summon his family to formal prayer, one may be sure that he was not undutiful but that, "having impressed their minds with a just sense of the relation in which they stood to their Creator, he might allowably withdraw his interference, and leave them to adjust their homage and their petitions to their own feelings and their own wants."96
Having read the *De Doctrina*, as Symmons had not, Todd was convinced that Milton was not orthodox. He announces that in this treatise Milton is at variance with the Church of England, with the tenets of those sects to which he had once shown allegiance, and even with himself. As for Milton's Arianism, Todd is at a loss to explain it, except to say that he sees in the *De Doctrina* "some explanation as it were of the revolted spirit, which breathes through so many of his pages."  

Mitford's defense of Milton is similar to that of Symmons. He reminds his readers that in his later days Milton was old and blind and infirm. Furthermore, he was hostile to the Established Church, antagonistic toward the Presbyterians, and separated from the Independents. His belief in religious liberty did not accord with the tenets of any sect. Still, Milton was a prayerful man: "Knowing his religious opinions, and considering the great infirmities of his health, who could have expected more?"  

The *De Doctrina* Mitford pronounces a failure. Such doctrines as are therein expressed are too exalted and too abstracted to be of any general use. There is nothing solid in them for a person to believe. Having no fixed doctrines and no fixed forms of worship, Milton's religion is the creed of one who dwells apart in silent meditations, "cloistered from public gaze, and secluded within the humbler sanctuary of the adoring heart . . . ." In the *De Doctrina*, Mitford
declares, Milton had had his final say against venerable human institutions. He had thrown off authority as well as custom: "Safe in his own inflexible integrity, in the great purity of his heart, and singleness of purpose, what his conscience dictates, his courage proclaims." Milton pushed his beliefs to the limit, even to the limits of divorce and regicide. Yet there is a reason for Milton's behavior, one which Mitford had previously advanced:

It must be remembered, that he lived in an age when men were busy pulling down and building up; a fermentation was spreading over the surface, and dissolving the materials of society. Old faith was gone; old institutions were crumbling away. Long, splendid vistas of ideal perfection opened before men's eyes, dazzling their senses, and confounding their judgments. Grey-headed men, grown old in the business of life and in the pursuit of practical wisdom, yielded to the syren influence. It pervaded the senate, the city, and the camp. What wonder, then, if the Poet, the visionary by his profession, the dreaming theorist, the man dwelling in ideal worlds and abstract notions, should be led astray. 99

Ivimey's interest in Milton's religion center on his belief that Milton was, like himself, a Baptist. To support this contention he points to a passage in the De Doctrina in which Milton says that infants ought not to be baptized because they cannot speak for themselves and thus cannot enter into a covenant with God. Like the others, however, Ivimey defends Milton's lack of formal religion. His reasoning is that sects with which Milton had any connections had very few, if any, places of public worship until 1672. Thus
they usually met privately in their own homes. "If, indeed, by 'places of public worship,' is intended the parish churches, it is very true; but that is no more than may be said of several Britons now--the Protestant Dissenters and Methodists," Ivimey retorts. As to Milton's not having any worship in his family, all this signifies is that he used none of the prescribed forms of the Established Church. To this he sarcastically adds: "And as to his 'seeming to have had but little regard to the exterior of religion in his last hours,' I suppose this only means, from the pen of a churchman [here Johathan Richardson], that he did not send for a clergyman to give him the sacrament, and pronounce the absolution service!"

Ivimey laments the 'finding of the De Doctrina and hopes that people will not be led astray because the work bears the illustrious name of Milton. His pronouncements in this treatise are at such variance with his former beliefs, as, for example, in Paradise Lost, that they can scarcely be believed. History shows us, says Ivimey, that some men live too long and in their old age reveal "remarkable proofs of imbecility." Even Milton was not without fault and the failings of mortal man. Such is Ivimey's disappointment that he can no longer consider Milton a great theologian:

Such was my veneration for the character of Milton before I read this 'Treatise on Christian Doctrine,' that I had placed him, as a theologian, in the first rank of
inspired men: I acknowledge that my high opinion of him has been greatly lowered, and I could weep over him on account of his having ventured to use his pen to lower the dignity of my Divine Lord . . . . I certainly should be pleased, could anyone furnish irrefragable evidence that the manuscript entitled 'Treatise of Christian Doctrine,' was not written by the eminent man whose 'superscription,' but not whose 'image,' is stamped upon it. 101

Always consistent, Carpenter is busy defending Milton's independence, on this occasion from the opinion of some unnamed person to the effect that Milton was really an adherent of the establishment and wanted to reform, not destroy, it. "This we deny," affirms Carpenter. "Milton was too profoundly learned in the Scriptures and in the early ecclesiastical writings--too deeply impressed with the mischiefs that had ever flowed out of the church's association with the state--too sensitively alive to the secularising and formalising influence of an endowed church upon the purity and spirituality of the Christian faith and practice, to be an advocate for such an alliance." 102
Notes to Chapter V

1. Throughout the various sections of this chapter I have followed the practice of omitting what a biographer has to say on a certain point if his account is merely derivative and adds nothing significant to his picture of Milton.


4. Pages 3-4, 11.


6. Patterson, p. 85.

7. Masson interprets the facts as follows: "Towards the close of the Lent Term of 1625-6 Milton and his tutor Chappell had a disagreement; the disagreement was of such a kind that Bainbrigge, as Master of the College, had to interfere; the consequence was that Milton withdrew or was sent from college in circumstances equivalent to 'rustication'; his absence extended probably over the whole of the Easter vacation and part of the Easter Term; but, at length, an arrangement having been made which permitted him to return in time to save that term, he did return, only exchanging the tutorship of Chappell for that of Tovey." The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connection With the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time, I (London, 1881), p. 167.

Harris Francis Fletcher, knowing what Masson was unaware of, i.e., that Milton's father had a country residence at Hammersmith about the time Elegy I was written, decipheres these puzzling lines as follows: "Milton was not on the Cam, meaning not at the university but in a city (urbs) washed (alluit) by the waves (unda) of the ebbing and flowing (reflua) Thames, and he was not there against his will. He stated that he was in his home (patria), a term that cannot be used loosely under these circumstances, but which will allow considerable leeway. Thus, Milton may have been either in London or in Hammersmith when he wrote the lines to Diodati, since patria is an idea, not a particular place such as the house in Bread Street or the one in Hammersmith, but either. He was not at the time troubled
(cura) by his absence from Cambridge or by being away from his Lares (laris) there. This last word has troubled translators, since lar usually means one's home, lar being the household. Most translators have taken it to mean his rooms at Cambridge; but in line 11 he expressly stated that he had no desire to be in Cambridge, from which he is now removed though not against his will."


8 Pages 31-32.

9 Pages 33-34.

10 Page 34.

11 Pages 16-17.

12 Pages xiv-xvi.

13 Pages 9, 19.

14 Pages 14-15.

15 Page 36.

16 Patterson, p. 1146.

17 Ibid.

18 Pages 120-122, 93-94.

19 Page 29.

20 Page 34.

21 Page 39.

22 Page xxxv.


24 Page 70.


27 Student's Milton, p. xxxvii.


29 Pages 43-46.

30 See note 26.

31 Quoted in French, II, p. 68.

32 Page 93.

33 See French, I, p. 137.

34 Pages 79-80. Masson (II, p. 504) terms this suggestion "totally absurd . . . . ."

35 Page 197.

36 Pages 1-li.

37 Pages 72-73.

38 Page 103.

39 Patterson, p. 1147.

40 Pages li-liv.

41 Pages 54-55.

42 Page 202.

43 Page lv.

44 Pages 72, 87.
Masson (III, p. 719) says: "That Milton's *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, though not published till after the King's death, had been on hand before, if not completed, might be inferred from the pamphlet itself, the language and tense of some parts of which are scarcely explicable otherwise."
But see his account of the composition of the pamphlet in his Def. Sec. He there says that the book did not come out till after the King's death, and consequently had no direct influence in bringing about that fact; but this very statement, and the sentences which precede it, confirm what is said in the text as to the time when the pamphlet was schemed and begun.

66 Pages 250, 245.
67 Pages 112, 81.
68 Pages 39-40.
69 Pages 172, 274-275.
70 Page xci.
71 Page 99.
72 Patterson, p. 1137.
73 Ibid., p. 1138.
74 Pages 50-61.
75 Pages 306, 337-339.
76 Pages 116-117.
77 Pages 127-128.
78 Page lxxiv.
79 Page 76.
81 Pages 36, 70-71.
82 Pages 396-397, 521.
83 Pages 95-96, 131, 171.
84 Page 159.
85 Pages 94-95, 133, 127-128.
86 Page 80.
87 Page 428.
88 Page xcix.
89 Pages 161-162.
90 Pages 411-412.
91 Page 219.
92 Page 248.
93 Patterson, p. 919.
94 Ibid., p. 921.
95 Early Lives, p. 195.
96 Pages 522-526.
97 Pages 306-307, 314.
98 Pages cxliv-cxlv.
99 Pages cxlvi, cli-clii.
100 252-253.
101 Pages 257, 262-265.
102 Page 39.
CHAPTER VI

MILTON AS HE APPEARS IN THE ROMANTIC BIOGRAPHIES

From the material which the previous chapter has provided, there begins to emerge a pattern, a series of figures in the carpet which represent the various attitudes which the romantic biographers took toward Milton. A composite picture suggests itself. Since the biographers' attitudes are sufficiently varied, this picture cannot be likened to a representational portrait; rather, it is a large montage with the various facets of the life and character of Milton standing out in greater or lesser relief. Most strikingly apparent are scenes relating to the heroic career of Milton the embattled controversialist, the patriot and prophet, his person larger than life, his character sublime and spotless, strong and stern, oracular and justifiably proud. Behind everything and at a distance, looking over all, stands Milton the Puritan, dressed in black, one arm raised in a gesture of defiance. Arising rather icon-like and serene in the center foreground and touching all the points is Milton the sublime poet.

The message behind this montage is that the romantic biographers, unlike their eighteenth-century predecessors, no longer regarded Milton as being the man and the poet, as the great Christian bard who was, only incidentally, also an outstanding political and
religio us figure in his time. In rather striking fashion they have
merged the two characters, almost taking the poet for granted, and
have promoted a near idolatry of Milton the person. By putting the
two together they discovered a saint. He has a few minor imperfec-
tions, but they are practically unnoticeable because of the gigantic
dimensions of the figure. The romantic biographers' view of Milton
is more just and comprehensive than that of their predecessors, but
it is nonetheless a limited and partial view because of the romantics'
particular emphases.

Milton the Puritan is not preeminent in the romantic biographies
of Milton, but he appears often enough to exert a vague influence over
the character of Milton as a whole. It is obvious that the biographers'
conception of Puritanism was limited to half-formed and nebulous ideas,
sometimes to distinct prejudices. None of them, for example, would
have been capable of Macaulay's fascinating and balanced judgment:

Thus the Puritan was made up of two different men, the one
all self-abasement, penitence, gratitude, passion; the other
proud, calm, inflexible, sagacious. He prostrated himself
in the dust before his Maker: But he set his foot on the
neck of his king. In his devotional retirement, he prayed
with convulsions, and groans, and tears. He was half-
maddened by glorious or terrible illusions. He heard the
lyres of angels, or the tempting whispers of fiends. He
catched a gleam of the Beatific Vision, or woke screaming
from dreams of everlasting fire . . . . But, when he took
his seat in the council, or girt on his sword for war, these
tempestuous workings of the soul had left no perceptible
trace behind them . . . . These fanatics brought to civil
and military affairs, a coolness of judgment, and an im-
mutability of purpose which some writers have thought
inconsistent with their religious zeal, but which were the necessary effects of it. The intensity of their feelings on one subject made them tranquil on every other. One overpowering sentiment had subjected to itself pity and hatred, ambition and fear. Death had lost its terrors, and pleasure its charms. They had their smiles and their tears, their raptures and their sorrows . . . but not for the things of this world. Enthusiasm made them Stoics, had cleared their minds from every vulgar passion and prejudice, and raised them above the influence of danger and of corruption. It sometimes might lead them to pursue unwise ends, but never to choose unwise means . . . . When all circumstances are taken into consideration, we do not hesitate to pronounce them a brave, a wise, an honest and an useful body.¹

Neither did the biographers seem to understand, as William Haller would later make clear, that Milton's divorce tracts were consistent with a civilizing Puritanism which idealized marriage as the means by which man and woman aided one another to salvation. Thus a man could suffer few greater curses than to be bound to a mate who was uncongenial and unresponsive. In arguing that the compact between a man and a woman could be broken by offenses other than adultery, and even by mutual consent, Milton was only furthering his designs for freedom in all human institutions:

The marital relationship was commonly understood to be the seed and mirror of every other relationship, and any consideration of the origin, purpose, and structure of this institution in the general scheme of things necessarily involved consideration of the conditions underlying every other. Milton's argument concerning marriage and divorce proceeded from the same premises as Parker's argument concerning liberty and obedience in the state and arrived at by parallel reasoning to a similar conclusion.²
Most seriously, the biographers, with the possible exception of Ivimey and Carpenter, seemed not to comprehend the nature of the struggle between the Puritans and the Established Church: that Puritanism was in fact a movement deeply grounded in the church itself and that most of the Puritans accepted royal supremacy and even acquiesced at first to the hierarchical establishment. Only when the Puritans were not allowed to preach and worship as they pleased did they become defensive and "puritanical" in the sense in which that term is commonly understood:

It followed that the spokesman for the central Brahmin caste of preachers, as they approached the final collapse of their hopes, found less and less to say in their pulpits about calling and covenant and more and more about the sins of those who did not think as they did. In this they were falling into a pattern which would be followed by other Puritan groups as each in turn was compelled to give up the hope of making over the church and the world according to its own notion of divine intention. Puritanism everywhere, when put on the defensive by forces it had itself helped to set moving, was to become at last puritanical.  

Instead, the biographers saw Puritanism in terms of an austere, cold, bitter, and repressive way of life in which Milton had unfortunately taken part. Todd speaks of Milton's pen which "when dipped in the gall of puritanism, hurries him into judgment without candour and condemnation without mercy" and of his "asperity and repulsive form of puritanism" so hideous and disgusting that it weakened support for the causes he espoused.  

Brydges went
so far as to maintain that when Puritanism took possession of
Milton's soul and he joined the forces of destruction, the muse left
his side for twenty years: "Coming fresh from the living fountains
of imaginative creation \textit{in Italy}, the happy delirium of glorious
genius subsided into a cold and harsh stagnation of all that was elo-
quent and generous. The blight was more violent and effective in
proportion as the bloom had been strong . . . . The crabbed lore
of puritanical gloom overshadowed the native fire of a heavenly
imagination."\textsuperscript{5} And Ivimey, as Chapter V has revealed, condemned
the divorce tracts as striking the very heart of human dignity and
institutional solidarity. On the other hand, Carpenter accepts
Milton's puritanism and refutes Brydges' contention that a gloomy
change came over Milton, but his response indicates no great under-
standing of the issue at hand:

The truth is, that his biographer is incapable of compre-
hending the nobler portion of Milton's character. He can
appreciate his amazing powers of invention and descrip-
tion, dwell with rapture on his poetic sensibilities, and
marvel at his extraordinary mastery over the mechanism
of language; but history predilections \textit{sic} render the
'puritan' and 'regicide' an object of his strongest dislike,
and prompt him to assume the office of an apologist to
Milton, where no extenuation or apology is called for.
The very earliest of his writings breathe the same divine
spirit, and indicate the same high and holy purpose, as
are found in those which were avowedly put forth in the
defence and furtherance of republicanism, and for the il-
lustration and enforcement of the Christian system.\textsuperscript{6}
Milton the Puritan, then, appears in the romantic biographies as a little understood, dim, and often foreboding figure whose presence is probably best expressed by the remark of the typical undergraduate student, "I respect Milton, but I could certainly never like him."

Only in terms of the way in which Milton saw and revealed himself can the romantic biographers' conception of Milton the patriot and prophet be properly appreciated. In Prolusion VII, defending the thesis that knowledge renders a man happier than ignorance, Milton had spoken of the effect which one wise man could have upon the world: "Undoubtedly, one family, one man endowed with knowledge and wisdom, like a great gift of God, may be sufficient to reform a whole state." That Milton may well have believed these words applicable to himself is indicated by some of his later utterances. In the Apology for Smectymnuus he spoke of the "wearisome labors and studious watchings, wherein he had spent and tired out almost a whole youth . . ." and of the devotion to liberty and to the cause of religion "... when it shall require firm hearts in sound bodies to stand and cover their stations, rather than to see the ruin of our protestation, and the enforcement of a slavish life." Still later, in the Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano, he spoke of the zeal which had fired him from the time of his youth and urged him
"if not to do great deeds himself, at least to celebrate them," and in the Defensio Secunda of the courage which forced him to participate in the great events of his day: "For though I did not participate in the toils or dangers of war, yet I was at the same time engaged in a service not less hazardous to myself and more beneficial to my fellow citizens; nor, in the adverse turn of our affairs, did I ever betray any symptoms of pusillanimity and dejection: or show myself more afraid than became me of malice or of death . . . ."9 Not for himself alone or even out of his own being had he written, Milton claims, but because "the supreme wisdom and beneficence had enlarged my faculties, to defend the dearest interests, not merely of one people, but of the whole human race, against the enemies of human liberty; as it were in a full concourse of all the nations of the earth . . . ."10 He had, as he wrote in the sonnet To Mr. Cyriack Skinner upon His Blindness, given his all, but he had solace in knowing that he was known and his works were read:

... What supports me, dost thou ask?  
The conscience, Friend, to have lost them /eyes/  
overply'd  
In libertyes defence, my noble task,  
Of which all Europe talks from side to side.  
This thought might lead me through the world's vain mask  
Content though blind, had I no better guide.
Thus Milton presented himself as a prophet, as one overwhelmed with a message which he must deliver to the whole human race, and so the romantic biographers likewise saw him.

Probably no words better express their attitude toward this aspect of Milton than the articulation by Christ of his own identity in

**Paradise Regained:**

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When I was yet a child no childish play
To me was pleasing, all my mind was set
Serious to learn and know, and thence to do
What might be publick good; my self I thought
Born to that end, born to promote all truth,
All righteous things: therefore above my years,
The Law of God I read, and found it sweet,
Made it my whole delight, and in it grew
To such perfection, that e're yet my age
Had measur'd twice six years, at our great Feast
I went into the Temple, there to hear
The Teachers of our Law, and to propose
What might improve my knowledge or their own;
And was admir'd by all, yet this not all
To which my Spirit aspir'd, victorious deeds
Flam'd in my heart, heroic acts, one while
To rescue Israel from the Roman yoke,
Then to subdue and quell o're all the earth
Brute violence and proud Tyrannick pow'r
Till truth were freed, and equity restor'd . . . .
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*(II, 201-226)*

And again,

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But to guide Nations in the way of truth
By saving Doctrine, and from errour lead
To know, and knowing worship God aright,
Is yet more Kingly, this attracts the Soul,
Governs the inner man, the nobler part,
That other o'er the body only reigns,
And oft by force, which to a generous mind
So reigning can be no sincere delight.
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*(II, 473-480)*
It is understandable that the romantic biographers (Brydges excepted) would adopt the conception of Milton as patriot and prophet and would overestimate Milton's political influence in his own time. As early as the last decade of the seventeenth century, with the enactment of the Act of Toleration and the permanent lapsing of the Licensing Act, Whig theory had begun to carry the day in issues which had been made critical by the Puritan rebellion. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the Act of Settlement of 1701, though brought about by a Whig-Tory coalition, were mainly the result of Whig initiative. In all these events Milton, not long dead, played a part:

If Milton contributed to this triumph through his revolutionary programs, if Whigs made effective use of the tracts in whole or in part to argue against licensing acts and the divine right of kings, and for toleration, a free press, and the theory of compact, then John Toland and Richard Baron, together with their Whig fraternity in the Age of Reason, quite rightly raised Milton to a position of eminence and recommended him as an oracle to all young gentlemen of England. He in fact contributed so vigorously to the victory of principles which lay at the basis of Revolutionary Settlement and the Bill of Rights that long before Whigs of the eighteenth century made him an oracle of political wisdom Tories had already with accuracy, if with considerable irony, deemed him 'that grand Whig Milton.'

By the time the romantic biographers wrote, they could look upon their own day as a time of comparative peace which had reaped many of the benefits for which Milton had fought, and several of them could see "Milton the statesman through the misty eyes of
political nostalgia." Milton was indeed a prophet. Moreover, most of these biographers wrote during the eras which Elie Halévy has termed "the liberal awakening" and "the triumph of reform." It was a time when William Godwin was arguing against the inequalities of accumulated property and laws which favored the rich over the poor. It was a time when the great philanthropist and humanitarian Robert Owen would advance A New View of Society which taught that human "machines" might benefit from proper care as much as would mechanical contrivances. Certainly, said Owen ironically, if one perceives that an inanimate mechanism performs best when properly cleaned and supplied with suitable lubricants, then he will recognize that the "more delicate complex living mechanism" also benefits from cleanliness, fresh air, nourishing food, and the like. And it was also a time when William Cobbett was taking his "rural rides," pointing up the miserable plight of the laborer and arousing sentiment for reform.

Now, Milton was anything but an egalitarian, if his words in The Ready and Easy Way and Sonnet XII are to be believed. He certainly would have objected to his name being tied up with any Rousseauean theories of the natural goodness of man. For him all history began with the Fall--happy fault or not--and man had an inclination toward evil. Only the wise and the knowledgeable and the
virtuous--and they were few--were sufficiently redeemed to rule the multitudes. Nevertheless, Milton's vehement demands for freedom in all areas of life made him attractive to all reformers of liberal persuasion and a force to reckon with among those who could not accept his republican politics. Those who agreed with him appropriated Milton as a spokesman for democratic reform; those who disagreed could at least recognize the power of his influence and the purity of his motives. All were in some way influenced by the considerable shadow he cast upon the political events of the Great Rebellion and of their own time.

It is in the context of these preceding remarks that the romantic biographers' concept of Milton the patriot and defender of liberty must be understood. Believing that "Milton must be regarded by every lover of his country, with respect and gratitude," Mortimer may well declare: "Such was Milton! and while the hands of the Muses will always decorate his temples with perpetual laurel, the majestic figure of Liberty will contemplate, with mournful pleasure, the cypress on his tomb." For such was Milton's devotion to liberty that he never used his words or his office to gain money or favor in the government. He watched "with a jealous eye the welfare of his country, to which he was bound by the most enthusiastic fondness . . ." and employed his powers to the utmost to further a noble
cause: "Perhaps a more noble instance of real regard for one's
country is not upon record than his continuing his defence, when as-
sured of the consequent loss of his eyes."18 Apparent here is
Mortimer's belief that Milton acted primarily out of love for
England, not just for some hazy concept as "general liberty."

Symmons' praise is just as all-encompassing. Milton,
"obedient to a heart actuated by the purest benevolence," exerted
all his manifold resources in promoting the welfare of the whole
human race. Not only did he defend his country in a time of crisis,
he also wrote on the subject of education and defended, "with a
power which has never been exceeded, that great guardian of liberty
and truth, the freedom of the press." So great was Milton's con-
tribution to the world that apologies on his behalf are no longer neces-
sary: "For those political opinions, by which he was steadily
actuated from the beginning to the termination of his career, some
apology has always been expected, when in truth none can be neces-
sary. From his own to the present times, the republicanism of this
great man has uniformly been regarded as throwing a shade over his
character, which the most affectionate of his biographers have
rather hoped to extenuate than been ambitious to remove." A man
who surrendered himself to "a high and imperious duty" in contending
with tyranny and abuses of power wherever he found them should be
openly revered, not hidden from the world.19
Nevertheless, Symmons wonders whether Milton would have acted as he did had he been able to foresee the cost to himself of his heroism:

If some minister of the divine wrath, commissioned to disclose the vision of our poet's advancing life, had, at this instant, exhibited to him the Milton of later days, sacrificing his prime of manhood to the sullen and fiery demon of religious and civil discord; exposed to rancorous and savage calumny; making a cheerful surrender of his sight to the cause, as he deemed it, of his country and his species, yet afterwards abandoned and persecuted; with his public objects lost; his private fortune ruined; his society avoided; his name pronounced with execration; his life itself saved only by a kind of miracle from an ignominious and a torturing execution; and his old age, more deeply clouded also by the unkindness of children, finally closing amid dangers and alarms, in solitude and darkness—if this scene, I say, in its full deformity had been exposed to our poet's eye in his happy retreat at Horton, the cup of joy would have fallen from his hand; his fortitude, strong as we know it to have been, would probably have yielded to the shock; and, prostrate before the Father of mercies, he would have poured his soul in solicitous supplication for the refuge of an early grave. 20

To Todd, Milton the patriot is a man whose "constant aim and end was liberty," but he cannot find consistency in Milton's love of liberty and his service to the usurper Cromwell. He agrees with others, though, that Milton must have been deceived by Cromwell's character and ends by defending Milton's principles from the attacks of Dr. Johnson and recommending Hayley's defense: "The political principles of Milton were those of a thorough republican; which have been ascribed, by Dr. Johnson, to a native violence of temper, and
to a hatred of all whom he was required to obey. The frequent asperity of this eminent biographer towards Milton, has been repeatedly noticed, by Mr. Hayley, with reprehension and regret; and, in the following instance, with eloquence, dignity, and instruction."

Mitford finds in Milton one whose constant aim was the liberty of his people and the happiness of his country. His writings alone attest to this fact. For the justice of Milton's cause Mitford cannot answer, but he feels "bound to vindicate his character from the charge of being influenced in his great patriotic exertions by any feelings but those of a good and elevated nature." Furthermore, he agrees that Milton was truly patriotic in attempting to reform the corrupt manner of government in his day:

Putting aside all favourite and partial views, and looking at the question with an equal indifference, it may be said, that if all must have seen the necessity of amending the manner in which the government was conducted, what wonder if some objected even to the form? ... Milton might have despaired of seeing that limited and legal monarchy, which we never possessed till the reign of the Stuarts had passed away: and which for the first time erected the safety of the throne on the secured liberty of the subject and the inviolable sanctity of the laws. Periods like the one we are contemplating, occasionally recurring, and long and secretly prepared, produce, when they arrive, great ferment and desire of change ... nor must we too severely blame those who in the ardour of hope aspire to a perfection that human institutions have never reached, and who, disgusted with the real abuses of the past, would turn to the imaginary advantages of the future.
Indeed, had Milton lived in more peaceful times which saw the acceptance of many of his opinions, his pride and his violent feelings might have been subdued; but the times in which he lived and the abuses which he saw made him inflexible.  

Ivimey's initial description of Milton establishes the most consistent motif of his biography; he calls him "This most extraordinary man, this prince of English poets, this consistent champion of civil and religious liberty..." The extreme importance of the very subjects about which Milton wrote--the welfare of the Church, the deliverance of the nation from tyranny, the freedom of the press--establish him as one of the outstanding patriots in English history. Truly, Milton is a champion of Christianity and of civil liberty:

My opinion respecting the unimpeachable integrity of MILTON's character, and the unequalled powers of his mind, remains unaltered: as a stern patriot, and ardent lover of his country--as an enlightened Christian, contending for the unalienable birthright of conscience in matters of religion--as a zealous Protestant, defending the doctrines of the Reformation, and as a genuine believer, 'careful to maintain good works;' I consider him as having realized and exemplified his devout wish mentioned in a former part of this work, 'AS FOR ME MY WISH IS TO LIVE AND TO DIE AN HONEST MAN.'

Carpenter speaks of Milton almost exclusively as a great liberal champion of the people. Although he possessed the ethereal feelings of the poet, Milton was able to descend into the commonplace affairs
of life and exhibit his "enlarged and liberal feelings . . . ."

Always his sympathies were with the multitude of his fellow men, and the sight of oppression and injustice excited him to action. This is the mark of the true patriot, says Carpenter. He must not merely rejoice when good triumphs and be sad when evil holds sway; he must be so sensitive to social evils and to the duty of every citizen to eradicate them that he is "impelled forward into the arena of political strife, at the hazard of liberty and life . . . ." Such a man was Milton. Such was he when he acted in his capacity as prophet to foretell what would happen under the successive corrupt monarchies of England. His "prophetic eye" saw that even after the 'glorious revolution" a government entrusted to profligate and evil men would lose England the most valuable of her colonies, endanger her possession of the others, make the industrious poorer, and burden everyone with excessive taxation. "Many of our modern legislators may read their own characters in these eloquent pages . . . ." reminds Carpenter.24

Carpenter's summation of Milton's character and contributions to the world as prophet and patriot provides a keynote for a conception of Milton which the "new" biographies emphasized:

John Milton was one of those glorious lights which seem to be sent forth into the world after long intervals, to chase away the darkness accumulated by error and vice, and to point out to mankind the path which leads to
freedom and glory. His sympathies were as enlarged and active as his mind was stupendous and fertile. His creative genius gave birth to other worlds . . . but still he lived and thought, and felt with man. Patriotism had with him all the life and vigour of a passion. Wealth and worldly honour could not tempt him to separate himself from the struggles of his countrymen when their liberty was endangered or their emancipation was to be recovered; danger and death could not deter him from taking his place in the foremost ranks, while a gleam of hope remained to encourage resistance to the tyrant. 25

The romantic biographers' unanimous propensity for seeing Milton as a larger-than-life being accounts for the exaggerated proportions of the figure mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. In their vocabulary of epithets to describe Milton the person, the words "lofty," "sublime," "unyielding," "aloof," "stern," "proud," "pure," and the like consistently appear. Every quality of the great man is presented as an intensification, as traits which assumed larger and larger proportions as Milton increasingly immersed himself in his monumental works.

Symmons begins the recitation of Milton's character by presenting the standard contrast between Milton and Shakespeare. In the latter everything emanated from his own mind; the former, because of his vast erudition, was always creating from materials which the learning of the past furnished him. Nevertheless, Milton was original. In brief, "With Milton, from whatever mine the ore may originally be derived, the coin issues from his own mint with
his own image and superscription; and passes into currency with a value peculiar to itself. To speak accurately, the mind of Shakespeare could not but create; and that of Milton invented with equal or nearly equal power and effect...." Even in his system of education Milton geared everything to his individuality and to his own gigantic mind. He could not envision even a small difficulty in the curriculum that he offered to his students, and he "could not easily condescend to the effects of inferior capacity."

Having paid tribute to Milton's immense knowledge and force of personality, Symmons gives him this character:

His temper was grave, without any taint of melancholy: sanguine and bold in the conception of his purposes, impetuous yet persevering in their execution. Ardent in kindness and vehement in resentment, he was inflexible only in the former; and his friendships were permanent while his enmities were transitory. Of the facility and the heartiness with which he could forgive, his conduct to the Powells exhibits a memorable instance; and no circumstances of his life can be adduced to convict him of that severity and moroseness of which he has been rashly or maliciously accused. The brutal ferocity of his political assailants offers a full justification of the means which he employed in his defence; and if his weapons were more sharp or were wielded by a more vigorous arm, theirs were aimed with all the deadliness and were infected with all the venom which their inferior powers could supply.26

What is more, Milton was able to overcome these opponents and other adversities and rise to the highest of heights in his epic. One can see Paradise Lost, says Symmons, "like a pine on the
rocks of Norway, ascending to its majestic elevation beneath the inclemency of a dreary sky, and assailed, in the same moment, by the fury of the ocean at its feet, and the power of the tempest above its head."

To Todd, Milton is the great exemplar of Christian sainthood. His favorite book was the Book of God from the time of his boyhood. Early he found the richest stores of God's revelation, and "To devotional subjects his infant strains were dedicated." Like David the shepherd boy, he never forgot to acknowledge the sacred inspiration which he derived from the Holy Spirit. The sanctity so evident in all his writings and the Christian lessons which they teach "silence and put to shame a pretense by which modern Republicanism hoped to profit, of his being their auxiliary... The designs of the crafty sensualist, and of the besotted ungrateful atheist, it was his constant endeavour, not to promote, but to overthrow."

In the man who wrote the *De Doctrina Christiana*, says Mitford, everyone acknowledges one who wrote calmly and conscientiously in the pursuit of truth. By the time he completed this treatise Milton had forgotten or given up the animosities of his youth and, in the dignity of age, had tried to approach the work of God with humility.
No longer seen are the haughtiness of his earlier years and the defiance which marked Milton the controversialist. Still, Milton has not essentially changed:

Such are some of the singular opinions advanced in this curious, and late discovered document of Milton's faith, they serve to show us that its author is everywhere the same, the same severe and uncompromising investigator of truth, the same fearless and independent judge of its reality. In the honesty of his opinions uninfluenced, in the sanctity of his morals unblemished, in the fervour of his piety unquestioned. But there was both in his political and religious opinions, a visionary attempt at perfection, a grasping of the ideal and the abstract, a lofty aspiration after the most exalted means, that while they supplied his imagination as a poet, in its boldest and most extended flights, unqualified him for the more cautious and practical character of the theologian and statesman. There was much in his situation, as well as perhaps in the warmth of his disposition, unfavourable to the calm and dispassionate investigation of truth.29

Ivimey's interest in Milton's high-mindedness and fearlessness is especially evident in his remarks concerning Milton's return from the continent. If one knows the times, he says, the cruel persecution of Laud, the way in which the Church of England was fast returning to popish ways, and the manifold dangers to civil and religious liberty, he will realize how noble Milton was. And he "will then form some conception of the danger into which MILTON voluntarily ran, by returning at such a time to his beloved native country; indicating a spirit similar to that displayed by the brave men who perished at Thermopylae and Marathon; or, like the few noble
citizens of Calais, who devoted themselves to perish, in order to save their fellows from destruction! This was indeed to manifest the true Protestant and the true patriot."

Brydges' description of the character of Milton is more comprehensive than that of the other biographers and most clearly exemplifies the romantic and victorian inclination toward seeing Milton as an oracle with a resounding organ-voice. Milton is "Serious, profound, devoted, gigantic in conception, and sublime in words," and "he speaks as an inspired emanation of a higher state of being! There is a sombre awe in him, to which we listen as to an oracle. He dictates, and imposes a force of authority, which we dare not question. We tremble while we believe." Such is the Milton whom Brydges admits he prefers. His L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are beautiful odes, but they lack the solemnity, "the awful and gigantic thunder . . . the terrible roll and bound and swell . . ." of some of Milton's other works. In Milton's poetry one does not find frivolousness and "sickly whinings" and "forced deliriums" and "the dreamy mistiness of unmeaning verbiage . . . ." To the contrary, "All is pure majesty; the sober strength, the wisdom from above, that instructs and awes. It speaks as an oracle, --not with a mortal voice."
Even as a child, claims Brydges, Milton must have been stern and solitary and unbending, contemptuous of the littleness of men. He must have lived in a world which was above this sublunary one. Later, these qualities were only further developed: "Loftiness was a prime ingredient in his disposition, as well as in his mental faculties: detraction and contumely enraged him: his opinions were strong and fixed—he would bend to no man." Like Samson, Milton would destroy all around him rather than submit and allow his foes to triumph. But his mind was never corrupted: "His heart was the seat of all earthly integrity, and exalted by the most purified and spiritual aspiration. Of all the mean passions, envy could least enter a bosom which had so lofty and calm a confidence in the superiority of his own intellectual gifts . . . ." And toward the end, when he was blind and alienated and alone, Milton had the pleasure of knowing within himself that his work would one day be recognized:

Sitting in the humble porch of his humble house, blind, poor, meanly clad, unattended, how great must Milton have felt above all kings and conquerors of the earth, --above the possessors of the wealth of the world, the inhabitants of marble palaces and golden saloons! He knew his own dignity; and it was among his glories that he knew it. He never shrunk from the assertion of his own ascendancy. It did not lower his self-esteem to hear the popular shouts bestowed on his inferiors, --on Waller, and Cowley, and Denham, and the wits that basked in the sunshine of the Court, while he was neglected, and his sublime strains unfelt and untasted: he knew the day would come when all that was wise and great must acknowledge his supremacy. 32
Finally, Carpenter sums up the character of Milton the man in these three words: "virtue, religion, and patriotism . . . ."\textsuperscript{33}

Such, then, is the Milton perceived by his biographers in the romantic period. He is a man above men, a titanic being who stood out above all the events of his troubled times, a man almost without blemish of character. In the words of Robert Fletcher, "The man--the patriot--the bard--the Christian--Milton is before us!"\textsuperscript{34}
Notes to Chapter VI


4 Pages 232, 56.

5 Pages 66, 129.

6 Pages 15-16.

7 Patterson, p. 1122.

8 Ibid., pp. 541, 547.

9 Ibid., pp. 1135, 1137-1138.

10 Ibid., p. 1139.


13 Parker, p. 53.

14 An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice.


16 "Another way will be, to well qualify and refine elections: not committing all to the noise and shouting of a rude multitude, but permitting only those of them who are rightly qualified, to nominate as many as they will; and out of that number others of a better breeding, to choose a less number more judiciously . . ."

(Patterson, p. 907).
"I did but prompt the age to quit their clogggs
  By the known rules of antient libertie,
  When strait a barbarous noise environs me
  Of Owles and Cuckoes, Asses, Apes and Doggs.
As when those Hinds that were transform'd to Froggs
  Railed at Latona's twin-born progenie
Which after held the Sun and Moon in fee.
  But this is got by casting Pearl to Hoggs;
That bawle for freedom in their senseless mood,
  And still revolt when truth would set them free.
  Licence they mean when they cry libertie;
For who loves that, must first be wise and good;
  But from that mark how far they roave we see
For all this wast of wealth, and loss of blood."

Pages 82, 64, 13, 61.

Pages 208, 517, 521.

Page 54.

Pages 245, 252.

Pages cxxxii, cxxiv, cliii.

Pages 17, vii, 265.

Pages 9-10, 136-137.

Pages 166-167.

Pages 60-61, 512-513.

Page 405.

Pages 248-249.

Pages cxlvi-cxlvii, clii.


Pages 212, 34, 203.
32 Pages 190, 126, 129, 153, 204-205.

33 Page 16.

CHAPTER VII

CRITICAL RECEPTION OF THE ROMANTIC BIOGRAPHIES

The romantic biographies of Milton were not generally received in their own time with enthusiasm and applause. On the contrary, most of them were severely criticized as adding little or nothing valuable to the study of Milton because, having been written from a "party" point of view, their books revealed more about the authors' political opinions than about the subject of the biography. It appears that the majority of the contemporary reviewers of these books were conservatively inclined and that those who were not had enough sense and discrimination to recognize an obviously inferior product.

These reviews are important to this study, not only because they reveal contemporary opinions about the biographies, but also because they provide further evidence as to Milton's reputation during the romantic period. As is often the case when men review books about Milton, they tend to dwell more upon him than upon the book at hand. Moreover, these reviews provide a kind of antidote to the excesses of such biographers as Mortimer, Symmons, Ivimey, and Carpenter.
Mortimer's slim volume was reviewed only once, and unfavorably, the anonymous writer affirming that a work as superficial as Mortimer's can satisfy none of Milton's admirers. Certainly, admits this writer, Mortimer's veneration of the great patriot's merit is just and his "delineation" is "animated"; however, "had it been his object to induce modern readers to contemplate the nervous language employed by Milton in support of the principles which he defended, numerous extracts should have been made from his writings . . . ." Mortimer is also censured, as Symmons and Ivimey would be later, for not keeping himself sufficiently in the background. This review ends as it began, on an uncomplimentary note: "It is unnecessary to point out the errors which appear in Mr. M's unsatisfactory, yet showy memoir."  

Symmons' biography of Milton was the subject of a review in the Anti-Jacobin Review and Magazine for November, 1806. Obviously a Tory, the unnamed writer commences by assuring his readers that he in no way shares Dr. Symmons' political biases and proceeds to destroy Symmons' and Milton's republicanism with one blow. It is known, he says, that Mrs. Macaulay, "of republican memory," used to claim that she thought little of Milton the poet but adored Milton the patriot. Of this the reviewer, sounding somewhat like Egerton Brydges, remarks: "For
a man like Dr. Symmons, however strong his political prejudices may be, we should expect an opinion directly the reverse, and we should deplore the public pursuits which drew aside the author of such charming poems as the Comus, the Lycidas, L'Allegro, and Il Penseroso, for twenty years from his poetical studies, and overwhelmed his mind in seditious controversy . . . ."4

Evident throughout Symmons' work, claims the Anti-Jacobin reviewer, is a "predilection for usurped government," particularly in his praise of Milton's eulogy on Cromwell in the Defensio Secunda. In this writer's opinion the eulogy "is almost equal in adulation to the praises lavished on Buonaparte by the literary sycophants of France . . ."; nor is it any excuse that Milton was trying to convince Cromwell to found a republic. Had one of Charles' ministers petitioned him in "such abject terms" to abandon the levy of ship money, what would history think of him? But, the reviewer remarks, "we shall see presently the favourable distinction made by the pseudo patriots of the present day with regard to usurpers, when compared with lawful princes."5

With evident relief this reviewer contemplates turning from Milton the writer of offensive prose to Milton the poet, and in so doing advances a rather unhistorical opinion about democrats: "We shall turn with pleasure from the remarks on the prose writings of
Milton, where a strong spirit of republicanism is apparent throughout the whole, notwithstanding a few saving clauses scattered here and there with a sparing hand, that the work might not be too offensive to the generality of its readers (for we believe the number of democrats is diminishing every day), to contemplate the man of taste and genius in the remarks on the poetry of Milton.

Symmons also merited notice in an unsigned review of Todd's biography of Milton printed in the Quarterly Review of London for 1827. This writer is more concerned with Symmons' style and approach to his subject than his politics. Since this distribute would lose something in paraphrase, it is presented here in the original: "Dr. Symmons, who has since produced a life of the poet, has the advantage of admiring his subject to idolatry, but his style is pitiable--feeble, inflated, aiming at that of Johnson, and succeeding, as he who stuffs himself as large as Falstaff, makes himself a prince of wits. The Doctor is a great lover of liberty in church and state, and, therefore, chants forth Milton and independence for ever, with the discrimination of a burgess for Westminster . . . ." An anonymous reviewer of Mitford's life of Milton was also inspired to administer Symmons a verbal thrashing. For this reviewer the most obvious feature of Symmons' book is the fury of its
political animosity and the intemperateness of its partisanship.
Symmons blusters on the subject of Milton's love of liberty with
"the tone and energy of a leader of the great unwashed haranguing
the ten thousand of the Birmingham democracy" and stupidly re-
marks that Paradise Lost would have been an inferior poem had it
been written by a Tory. 10

Symmons' most disgusting failure, claims the British Critic
correspondent, is his limping imitation of Dr. Johnson's style:
"The Rambler's Iron Mace, which was so accursed a weapon when
employed with all the giant strength of its owner in dealing destruc-
tion upon the head of a martyr-whig, becomes a consecrated instru-
ment when performing a like friendly office upon the head of a Tory.
But Symmons' mace is a counterfeit. He is no more like Johnson,
the very construction of whose sentences he sedulously imitates,
than a certain creature, more particularly mentioned in one of
Aesop's fables, to the noble animal which it sought to resemble."
In trying to imitate Dr. Johnson's style, says this reviewer,
Symmons copies all the defects and none of the beauties. He at-
tempts to write in "rushing torrents" but succeeds only in sounding
as if he were squealing at the top of his voice. Symmons says few
things as they ought to be said, and "the simplest and most self-
obvious circumstance is announced like an eastern satrap, with a
flourish of trumpets." 11
The anonymous reviewer of Todd's biography of Milton in the *Monthly Review*\(^{12}\) would undoubtedly have been more kindly disposed toward Symmons' work than were the reviewers previously cited. He is of the opinion that the "calm and dignified self-respect with which Milton delineated his own character" in *Areopagitica* has now been universally bestowed upon "the sacred poet of England." The old rule that the English can see no good whatever in a man whose principles they dislike no longer applies to Milton. After half a century, says the writer, the bitter animosity which Dr. Johnson bore toward Milton's character and political conduct has "wholly lost its sting," and men, whatever their political persuasion, look upon Milton "as one walking through life, with a mind wholly set apart and dedicated to 'the serious and hearty love of truth.'" It is in this spirit that all the world, and especially all Englishmen, receive every new work relating to Milton. Todd's volume "is a valuable contribution of some most curious materials, to our previous stock of knowledge regarding Milton; and as such, deserves an 'attentive and minute consideration.'"\(^{13}\)

One part of this contribution disturbs Todd's reviewer, however; i.e., the documents which relate Mrs. Powell's futile attempts to obtain from her son-in-law that share of her husband's estate which she claimed to be rightfully hers. As the romantic
biographers often did when they found what might be a blot upon Milton's character, the reviewer hopes that Milton can be cleared of any guilt and spared any resemblance to ordinary human beings: "It is, perhaps, to be deplored that these documents have seen the light; but let us hope, in charity, that this great man, in thus appearing to share the frailties of common minds, might have had some secret justification which we cannot now discover; and that his virtues, though of a stern and severe character, were not mixed with any alloy of rapacity and oppression." 14

Nevertheless, says the writer, Todd's book is a valuable compilation of what the labors of Todd and other researchers have discovered about Milton, and the biographer has accomplished his purpose: "The writer before us, in his preface, claims the merit alone of 'fidelity' and of 'an unadorned narration.' We cannot, therefore, with propriety object, that the work is one which cannot be designated by the term 'amusing;' and that the facts might have been thrown into a more popular and inviting shape. Mr. Todd has done it so far well." Also, Todd's work has produced a character of Milton which is both valuable and attractive. One gains, the reviewer says, a sense of Milton's "unwearied industry" and a refutation of the old adage that genius is necessarily indolent. Probably no other man than Milton, raised by training and application to
of a state of contemplation and "elevation above the common occurrences of life," has so energetically performed ordinary duties:

When we behold the author of Paradise Lost, descending from the elevated region of his own thoughts, to translate verbose and tedious State Papers, and compile dictionaries and systems of logic, the drudgeries of life may be endured by those of inferior endowments without complaint; and as the employments into which men are thrown, are rarely such, as in every particular, would be their choice, the example of Milton may teach them, that there is no occupation, not dishonourable in itself, which is incapable of being made tolerable, and even pleasant, by the great reward of all human actions, the consciousness of performing a duty. 15

An unnamed writer in the Quarterly Review (London) 16 made his review of Todd's work the occasion for a lengthy discourse on the character and politics of Milton. He regards it as natural that the discovery of the De Doctrina Christiana and of state papers relating to Milton should excite men's curiosity, but warns that a great name should not be allowed to lead men astray. One must bow to Milton the poet; in Milton the divine and statesman, however, one should see only a visionary. Thus, to praise Milton in these latter capacities "is to come forward (if we may use the words of a great master of elegance) 'with hymns and cymbals to adore the mighty luminary when he is suffering an eclipse." 17
For this reviewer Milton must be understood as "a magnificent specimen of the Puritan in his least offensive form . . . ." He has fervor and devotion and moral fearlessness "unalloyed however by the hypocrisy, the vulgarity, the cant, the cunning and bad taste, which have so generally made the name to stink in the nostrils of men." This statement leads to reflections on Puritanism which are a shade more sophisticated than those of the romantic biographers:

It is most true that we owe much of the present beauty of our constitution to this rigid scrupulosity; and so it is true, that we owe much of the present beauty of our metropolis to the great fire; yet small praise is due to the element itself, in either case, for the good of which it was the accidental cause. Out of the fury of the flames arose spacious and regular streets, out of the commotion of the zealots the Bill of Rights and Act of Toleration. But we should feel more grateful for the benefit, did we perceive less selfishness in the benefactor. The Puritans, like many others, were just patriots enough to struggle manfully for the possession of power, and to keep it carefully in their own hands when they had got possession. 18

As to the character of Milton, the Quarterly Review writer dismisses him as an inconsistent and impetuous visionary who acted on "momentary impulse" rather than mature principle. Thus, Milton would hear of no obstacle and admit no compromise. He would follow his own headstrong inclination "with the obstinacy of a Roman road." Such an attitude made him ill qualified to partake of the political events and decisions of his time: "He might, for aught we
know, have legislated admirably for the inhabitants of the moon, but for those of the earth it was out of the question. He lived in a world of his own creation, and peopled it with beings of other passions than ours." Certainly a man who spent so much of his life in living in the third heaven would not have been Cromwell's choice as an adviser or confidant. Ludicrous, then, is Symmons' effort "... to exalt the secretary of foreign tongues into the secretary of state for foreign affairs!" In this regard, says the reviewer, Milton may be compared with Shakespeare, who united the powers of imagination and common sense. Nature blessed Milton with prodigious imagination but gave him a niggardly amount of the latter quality. No wonder that Milton's politics had, "until recently, been consigned to oblivion by common consent..." It is better that they remain in oblivion and that the world remember Milton for the "triumphant memorial" of his poetry.¹⁹

Interspersed between these lengthy remarks on Milton are some disparaging judgments on the volume which gave rise to them. The reviewer admits that a sound life of Milton is still to be desired in English literature because of the unrestrained hatchet-work which Dr. Johnson performed upon Milton. Todd's biography will not fill this hiatus, however; its modesty and lack of pretension "disarm criticism, but it has more the air of a legal instrument than of a
poetical memoir." Even the facts which Todd has exhumed from the State Paper Office are dismissed as "of trifling importance."

Clearly, Todd, though "a laborious man," is out of his element in editing poets:

To edit an author is not to empty upon him the contents of a pedantic common-place book; notes are only useful or desirable when they serve to illustrate ... But Mr. Todd's quotations seldom show anything but that other writers have expressed a common thought like Milton, where it would not have been easy for them to have expressed it differently; and, after the fashion of his craft, he is too apt to desert us in our distress and cumber us with help when we are safe on land.

This same criticism was leveled at Todd by an anonymous reviewer of Mitford's biography. In his opinion, Todd's work might have been more popular "had he been less bountiful in the use of his large stores of antiquarian knowledge, which tend rather to crush the delicate beauties of poetry, than to invest them with any alluring and comely ornaments."

Mitford's biography was the subject of three reviews, the first of which appeared in the Athenaeum for December 17, 1831. The anonymous writer of this notice is fearful that Mitford's unadorned work will not succeed in dispelling the ugly impression which Dr. Johnson gave of Milton, "for it is seldom that the truth of a plain unadorned narrative prevails against a story set off with all the attractions of genius and scholarship." Still, Mitford's book,
remarks the writer, is well meant and well written; and, "though not abounding in sagacious remarks on verse or profound observations on human nature . . .," it has the benefit of compiling a great deal of information about Milton and his works.  

This writer is also concerned about the image which Milton left of himself as a man of morose disposition. He notes that, although Milton's wives and daughters must have thought him austere, his nephews, who knew his disposition, never spoke unkindly of him. Instead, they were silent on the subject. Also, says the writer, it should be borne in mind that he was afflicted with blindness, that he was accounted only as an old man who could write Latin, by the profligates of the court of Charles: that vice flourished, and tyranny held up her hideous head before him; and that he was disowned as a genius by the Clarendons, the Thurloes, the Temples, and the Whitelockes. All these things, no doubt, pressed sorely on his proud severe spirit: his melancholy was mistaken for moroseness by his daughters, who seem not to have comprehended, any more than Clarendon, that their father, in genius, surpassed all mankind.  

The second review of Mitford's work is a brief account in which the anonymous writer announces that he wishes to speak of Milton because of "the present season of popular excitement and moral anarchy . . ." and because he wishes to commend Mitford for his "spirit of gentle and candid searching after truth which cannot be too highly estimated or too carefully cherished." This writer's only reservation is that Mitford's work is too brief, causing him to pass
over many significant events too quickly. The reviewer also takes pains to convince his readers that the liberty which Milton sought was liberty of soul. It thus had nothing to do with popular democratic movements and "the tyranny of the multitude." 25

A third review of Mitford's biography of Milton was printed in the New Monthly Magazine for 1832. 26 This reviewer is of the opinion that Mitford, a poet himself, as well as a scholar, is well-qualified for the job of editing Milton's works and of writing his biography. Apparently a man of liberal convictions, this reviewer claims that Mitford's acute and often original remarks on Milton's life are written "as if the last piece he had read before he took up his pen was the noble treatise for 'the liberty of unlicensed printing.' This is as it ought to be." The writer does criticize Mitford, however, for an ostentatious show of learning in some of his notes and for not searching the depositories of records in London which were readily available to him. 27

Ivimey's volatile non-conformist biography of Milton elicited several equally volatile reviews, the first of which was written by E. C. Tracy for the American Quarterly Observer in 1833. 28 Tracy discredits Ivimey at the outset by citing the factual errors in his book—the mistakes in dates and names, the misquotations and
misinterpretations of Milton's words, the assigning of various quotations to the wrong work. "One would think," says Tracy, "that Mr. I., after collecting his quotations, had lost his references, and was obliged to assign them their places by guess." 29

Even more damning to Ivimey, remarks Tracy, is his not too subtle twisting of evidence to suit his non-conformist and ultra-liberal thesis:

The great principles of civil and religious liberty which glow with such varied and attractive beauty along Milton's galaxy of thought; his bursts of pure and noble sentiment, and his views of the great ends of government--of what makes liberty of thought and action an imperious duty and an inalienable birthright, seem to have been almost forgotten; while his harshest language against prelacy, tithes, religious establishments, &c. is made studiously prominent. The fact, we suppose, is that Mr. I. wrote with some of the great questions that now agitate the British public, rising full-orbed before him.

In short, Tracy says, Ivimey has manipulated Milton's ideas to produce a piece of party hackwork. That Milton wanted a free commonwealth and ecclesiastical reform Ivimey's book does not fully reveal. This makes "its tendency positively pernicious . . .," antagonizing Milton's enemies, perpetuating their prejudices, and debasing the ideas which Milton so nobly presented "by tearing them from their roots in the principles themselves, and leaving them to be nourished only by the pestilential atmosphere of prejudice, passion, and partyism." 30
It is apparent, claims Tracy, that the presentation of Milton as Christian patriot in a volume for popular usage belongs in the hands of a man of greater mentality and talent than Joseph Ivimey. Few writers better reward those who wish to serve their country than Milton, and he thus deserves the attention of scholarly and able writers.  

An anonymous writer in The Gentleman's Magazine is caustic toward both Milton and Ivimey. Of the general character of Ivimey's biography he remarks: "The object of this work is not so much a Life of Milton, or an impartial detail of the peculiar opinions in religious matters of his extraordinary mind, as an attack, at a moment which the author hails as peculiarly propitious, against the constituted authorities of the Church of Christ; when, according to his opinion, the principles of civil and religious liberty which Milton so powerfully advocated, have 'produced such an astonishing reform in our representative body.'" Moreover, says the reviewer, in the strictly biographical part of his book Ivimey has not done his own work; he has done little more than add lengthy quotations and his own dissenter principles to a transcription of Toland. And Milton's state letters, which take up sixty-three pages of the book, are "no originals brought to light . . . but a piecemeal reprinting from Phillips' Life of Milton, published in 1694."
Of Milton this reviewer says that he had the misfortune of living at a time when a small group of fanatics introduced madness into all of England. Being himself contemptuous toward human authority, Milton became a sectary and a republican. "It is an humiliating lesson to human nature," says the reviewer, "that, in proportion as the understanding is refined and elevated far above mortal competition, in that proportion it is in danger of being misled by novelties of its own conception, brilliant but unstable, because at war with those principles of order by which Providence directs human concerns." Ivimey, he says, lacked comprehension of this fact and in his book exhibited "sober Christian judgment" only in censuring Milton for promoting the doctrine of divorce. In animadverting against Dr. Johnson, however, Ivimey was his usual misguided self. An honest and sensible man, Dr. Johnson "detected at a glance the false bottom on which Milton had based his civil and religious principles. He exposed them with severity, without respect to person. The animadversions on Johnson consist not in argument, but in sheer abuse."  

This review ends with the following conservative judgment:

We have treated Mr. Ivimey's as a party book because he has avowedly written it for party purposes; had it taken a lower and more Christian tone of vindicating Milton's religious scruples, without reference to political changes, we should have met it in another way; but it is high time to speak out when one writer
is for excluding Bishops from their just place in the legislative body, another for abolishing their office, a third for annulling the second estate in our justly poised Constitution, the House of Lords. However, artillery of more force must be brought up against these bulwarks than the piece now before us. The darts from this catapult will be blunted by the soundness of the materials composing the walls against which they strike. The weapon here employed, launched by an unskilful though willing hand from a powerless bow will fall far short of its aim.35

The most withering review of Ivimey's biography was printed in the *New Monthly Magazine* for 1833.36 The anonymous writer of this article thinks it ludicrous that John Milton and Joseph Ivimey should ever have been joined in anything: "The greatest and the meanest names in our literature thus strangely associated was a problem which at first startled us, but we soon solved it, when we remembered that inferior minds frequently mistake arrogance for ambition, and that 'fools rush in where angels fear to tread.'"37 The reviewer stamps Ivimey as a "coarse, unclassical, bigoted Baptist" who greatly overreached himself in trying to write about Milton. He possessed no qualifications for the task and wrote only to show his prejudice toward Roman Catholics and to "add something to the glory of his sect by connecting the name of Milton with their distinguishing tenet—that of adult . . . baptism. This he might have done in the Baptist Magazine, or in some single page of some forthcoming homily, without attempting his life. If a jury could be summoned to
decide on this remarkable case, they might, perhaps, bring in a verdict of 'insanity;' we are sure it would not be 'justifiable homicide.' 

As to Ivimey's assertion that he wrote because former biographies of Milton had not sufficiently exhibited him as patriot, Protestant, and non-conformist, and because these volumes were too large and expensive, the reviewer can only exasperatedly point out that Symmons' book, available in nearly every library in England, is not too much larger or more expensive than Ivimey's. Moreover, Symmons' presentation is manly and just, while Ivimey's is coarse and vulgar and ungrammatical. Surely, says the reviewer, a biography of Milton as Protestant dissenter could have been justly presented by the great liberal Robert Hall. He could "'Soar aloft where Milton sits,' while Joseph Ivimey never waddled beyond the precincts of a barn door in his life. We imagine that educated, high-minded, and liberal Protestant Dissenters will feel themselves under very slender obligations to this their good Baptist brother for meddling with things too high for him." 

An anonymous writer reviewed Brydges' life of Milton in The Athenaeum for June 13, 1835. This writer credits Brydges with setting aside political differences and in the remainder of the review
takes issue with Brydges' political judgments and critical sense. He cannot, for example, believe with Brydges that the years of Milton's prose works were years of drudgery during which Milton might have written other great epics: "We believe that those were years of preparation—of training and disciplining—trials of heart as of mind—and, that the almost superhuman calmness with which he eventually looked on all the busy turmoil around him, and heard unmoved its 'barbarous dissonance,' was attributable in degree to the consciousness of having done his duty as a citizen and a fellow-labourer in the good cause—in which, though he failed, he 'fell but was not vanquished.'" By so training and disciplining himself, says the writer, Milton left a noble example of how great genius can bend to suffer the common cares of the world with the rest of humanity.

Another reviewer in *The Athenaeum* is pleased with Brydges' rebuff of "that despot of modern criticism," Dr. Johnson, but is piqued at Brydges' suggestion that another poet might have written *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. The reviewer rises to object: "Pray, who are these others? Be there any Miltons unknown, to whom Sir Egerton could introduce us? So much do we differ on this head from the tasteful Baronet, that even though there is one higher name than Milton in poetry, we think even he could not have written as wonderful things in their kind."
Notes to Chapter VI

1 No reviews of Carpenter's biography of Milton are discussed in this chapter because none could be discovered.


3 XXV, 225-232.


7 XXXVI, 29-61.

8 *Ibid.*, 42.

9 *The British Critic Quarterly Theological Review and Ecclesiastical Record*, XII (1832), 43-64.


12 III, n.s. (September 1826), 258-273.


16 XXXVI (1827), 29-61.


20 Ibid., 42-44.

21 The British Critic Quarterly Theological Review and Ecclesiastical Record, XII (1832), 47.

22 814-815.

23 Ibid., 814.

24 Ibid., 815.

25 The British Critic Quarterly Theological Review and Ecclesiastical Record, XII (1832), 43, 50, 58.

26 Anon., XXXIV, 581-582.

27 Ibid.

28 I, 115-125.

29 Ibid., 116.

30 Ibid., 116-117.

31 Ibid.

32 CLII, pt. i, (March 1833), 242-245.

33 Ibid., 242-244.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 244-245.

36 XXXVIII, 102-103.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 No. 398, 446.

40 Ibid.
41 No. 423, 902-903.

42 Ibid., 903.
CHAPTER VIII

THE ROMANTIC BIOGRAPHERS: THEORY AND PRACTICE; THEIR PLACE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY BIOGRAPHY

Chapters IV and VII of this study have already suggested the general character and shortcomings of the romantic biographies of Milton. Several questions remain, however: what tradition(s) did these biographers follow? what part do their biographies play in the development of nineteenth-century biographical writing? what, if anything, did they contribute to this development? what, precisely, did they consider to be the principal function of a biographer?

In his preface to Eminent Victorians, Lytton Strachey remarked: "The art of biography seems to have fallen on evil times in England. We have had, it is true, a few masterpieces, but we have never had, like the French, a great biographical tradition . . . . With us, the most delicate and humane of all the branches of the art of writing has been relegated to the journeymen of letters; we do not reflect that it is perhaps as difficult to write a good life as to live one." And in the same work he spoke of

Those two fat volumes, with which it is our custom to commemorate the dead--who does not know them, with their ill-digested masses of material, their slipshod style, their tone of tedious panegyric, their lamentable lack of selection, of detachment, of design? They are as familiar as the cortege of the undertaker, and wear the same air of slow, funereal barbarism . . . . How many lessons are to be learnt from them! . . . to preserve for instance, a becoming brevity--a brevity
which excludes everything that is redundant and nothing that is significant--that, surely, is the first duty of the biographer. The second, no less surely, is to maintain his own freedom of spirit. It is not his business to be complimentary; it is his business to lay bare the facts of the case as he understands them.¹

Whether Strachey read any of the romantic biographies of Milton is a matter of conjecture, but his words aptly describe them--the ill-digested masses of material in Todd and Mitford, the weary panegyrical of Mortimer, Symmons, and Ivimey, the lack of detachment of Brydges and Carpenter. For these romantic biographers were solidly in a tradition which might well be termed the wasteland of biographical writing between Boswell and Strachey. Except for Southey's Nelson, Lockhart's Scott, Moore's Byron, Froude's Carlyle, and a few others, nothing very significant happened to the practice of biography in the nineteenth century. As John A. Garraty says, "The historian of biography in the century after Boswell's death can record few really significant developments. There were changing fashions, and some refinements of tools and techniques, and perhaps an improvement in the general level of biographical writing, but outstanding works were scarce. No startling methodological developments occurred until early in the twentieth century."² Moreover, during the early nineteenth century the noted theorists of biography--those who dared to speak
of the biographer's responsibility to his art--numbered only two: James Stanfield (An Essay on the Study and Composition of Biography) and Thomas Carlyle. The result of this lack of development both in theory and in practice was a plethora of works lacking in imagination and design, many of which are merely those of "a man pasted together from his own utterances . . . ." Much of this third-rate writing can be traced to the opinion of both writers and publishers that biographies were extremely easy to write, especially if the subject was a famous man long dead. All one had to do, says Joseph W. Reed, was recast him "in the modern mold."\(^3\) Whether they wrote a memoir, like Mortimer, or a full-length study, like Symmons, this is precisely what most of the romantic biographers tried to accomplish.

In actuality, the romantic biographers were in the mainstream of several traditions which criss-crossed one another throughout the early nineteenth century. One of these traditions, inherited from the eighteenth century, was the treatment of biography as history in order to give biography increased respectability. Reed explains this point: "The treatment of biography as history had several attractions. Lives took on the added lustre of educational literature when so dignified by association. Biographies,
especially those of men in public life and of military figures, deserve more serious consideration when regarded as history: they took on 'utility.' Idle curiosity about the details of private life . . . was not proper incentive for the reader, but when shown to be history, biography was worthy of the attention of any serious reader eager for improvement." Such a point of view accounts for the weight of historical evidence in Symmons, Todd, and Mitford and the emphasis upon Milton as English patriot and public figure by Mortimer, Ivimey, and Carpenter. It also explains, at least in part, their general lack of artistry, for, as Reed continues, once biography became recognized as a "useful" branch of history it was judged by criteria that were anything but aesthetic. The external aspects of biography became paramount, militating against the more artistic requirements of "selection, arrangement, and image."

What one is witnessing in the early nineteenth century, then, is the primitive stages of the writing of social and cultural history at a time when the guidelines for such studies had not yet been laid out. In Richard D. Altick's words, "Biographical theory would have been oddly unresponsive to the intellectual currents of the time had it not stressed the importance of milieu. The vital role of social and cultural environment in forming character had become a commonplace to English thought as early as Boswell's time . . . .
Nowhere were the shaping effects of milieu more extensively revealed than in the lives of poets. Such statements as Mitford's and Symmons' that Milton's attitudes stemmed partially from his living at a time when "the golden reins of discipline had been loosed" in all institutions; Brydges' tracing of much of Milton's character to the ugly taint of Puritanism; and the others' attempt to show how controversy and persecution shaped Milton's life—all these place the romantic biographers among the many incipient cultural historians. Their overall failure to provide anything important to social history can be attributed to their lack of training and/or proper temperament for the task. Those who tried to be objective--Todd and Mitford--were more antiquarian than historian; their works reveal a decided lack of understanding of the great events of Milton's day. They could trace the analogues of a line of Milton's poetry, but they little understood the battle between the sects and the Establishment. On the other hand, those who could not be impartial lacked the most essential quality of the non-contemporary biographer-historian, i.e., perspective. Moreover, Symmons, Ivimey, and Carpenter consistently saw Milton as a nineteenth-century Whig liberal or as an ultra-liberal egalitarian. Their attempt to place Milton in his milieu led often to a violent and absurd wrenching of the great man from his rightful place in history.
Running concurrently with these beginnings of cultural history was the conception of the force of human character in history. In the early nineteenth century men were increasingly regarded as the prime movers in historical events, not just as pawns which were driven by some inexorable historical force. Says Reed, "Carlyle's histories and biographies realized the logical extension of historical polytheism later in the century, but for the readers of the early nineteenth century there were compelling illustrations of the force of character and power of personality moving among them, and moving nations with them. Napoleon, Nelson, and Wellington were persuasive examples, the French Revolution an overwhelming demonstration of the theory." Understandably, then, apart from their hero-worship, those of the romantic biographers who more or less agreed with Milton's political principles (Mortimer, Symmons, Ivimey, and Carpenter) would tend to make Milton and his works more prominent in their time than they actually were. In their view such a mighty character as that of Milton must have acted with great impact upon contemporary events, and he may well have been the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs while acting in the more lowly capacity of Secretary for Foreign Tongues. Moreover, Milton, as an artist, would be regarded as a higher being influencing the destinies of others. The artist, remarks Altick, has
become increasingly popular in the past one and one-half centuries, "a period which has also been marked by a growing sense that the artist as a person is detached from society, indeed is a special kind of being quite apart from the common run of men. This powerful notion . . . reaches back to classical antiquity but received its modern impetus from the romantics at the beginning of the nineteenth century . . . ."

Because they were not even near contemporaries with Milton and had not the opportunity of accompanying him to the ale-house, as Boswell did with Johnson, the romantic biographers were lacking an advantage even before they began writing. They could not, like Richardson, tell life-giving anecdotes about their subject: "Other stories I have heard concerning the Posture he was Usually in when he Dictated, that he Sat leaning Backward Obliquely in an Easy Chair, with his Leg flung over the Elbow of it, that he frequently Composed lying in Bed in a Morning . . . . I have been well in­form'd that when he could not Sleep, but lay Awake whole Nights, he Try'd; not One Verse could he make; at Other Times flow'd Easy his Unpremeditated Verse, with a certain Impetus . . . as Himself seem'd to believe." Neither could the romantic
biographers give Milton a sense of life and full dimension that is possible for the biographer who has seen "his man" in the flesh before him. Leon Edel speaks of the advantage of this biographer:

The biographer who works from life, as Boswell did, has an extraordinary advantage over the biographer who works from the document . . . . He has seen his man in the flesh, he has been aware of a three-dimensional being, drawing breath and sitting in the midst of an age they both share. In his mind he retains a sharp image of his subject. He has heard the voice and seen the gesture . . . . The late-coming biographer hears only the rustle of the papers amid the silence of the tomb. This is explanation enough for the fact that the greatest biographies in our literature have been those which were written by men who knew their subjects and painted them as a painter paints his picture--within a room, a street, a landscape, with a background and a context rich with its million points of contemporaneous attachment. Boswell, Froude, Lockhart, Forster re- pose upon our shelves with vividness and mass and authority which late biographers cannot possess. 9

Lacking the advantages of contemporaneity and newness of technique, and not having even the dubious advantage of a political thesis to peddle, Todd and Mitford wrote two most ambitious but uninspiring biographies of Milton during the romantic era. Theirs are standard scholarly biographies, what Edel calls the chronicle life, "a large, roomy life in which documents are constantly in the foreground and the author is never so happy as when he can be quoting liberally from them . . . . For the chronicle life essential background is established; the documents are usually presented in chronological fashion and annotated. Sometimes the background
looms very large."10 Both Todd and Mitford slavishly adhere to chronology and make no pretensions to stylistic elegance; their primary aim is to present all available facts about Milton through what Todd calls an "unadorned narration."

Since the writers of chronicle lives depended so much upon documents, their works tend to be heavily factual and show a highly developed interest in anything relating to their subject. Thus Todd tries throughout his work to trace the various residences of Milton in London. The following passage offers only one illustration of that attempt and also reveals the general character of the work:

"Entry \(\text{From the Council Book}\): '1651. June 11. Ordered, that Lieutenant Ge. Fleetwood, Sir John Trevor, Mr. Alderman Allen, and Mr. Chaloner, or anie two of them, bee appointed a Committee to goe from this Councell to the Committee of Parliament for Whitehall, to acquaint them with the case of Mr. Milton, in regard of their positive order for his speedie remove out of his lodgings in Whitehall; and to endeavour with them, that the said Mr. Milton may bee continued where hee is, in regard of the employment which he is in to the Counsell, which necessitates him to reside neere the Counsell.'

By his biographers Milton has been usually represented, as removing from his apartments in Scotland-yard (called in the preceding orders, his lodgings in Whitehall,) on account of his health being impaired. Phillips, his nephew, here hesitates, however, in his narrative. 'From his apartment in Scotland-yard,' he says, 'whether Milton thought it not healthy, or otherwise convenient for his use, or whatever else was the reason, he soon after took a pretty garden-house in Petty-France in Westminster ...' The reason of his removal is explained in the order of the Council, which has just been cited; with which Phillips was evidently unacquainted.11
And Mitford, also an antiquarian, has a special interest in portraits of Milton: A portrait of him when only ten years old painted by Cornelius Jansen"shows the affection of the parents for their handsome and accomplished child . . . ." To which he adds, "This picture was in the possession of T. Hollis, Esq., and is engraved by Cipriani, in his Memoirs, p. 96, it represents the youthful poet in a richly worked collar, and striped jacket. It was purchased by Mr. Hollis at C. Stanhope's sale, who bought it for twenty guineas of the executors of Milton's widow. The picture of Milton when about twenty, was in the possession of the Right Honourable Arthur Onslow."12 Furthermore, both of these biographies, like most chronicle lives, have, in Altick's words, "dust-bin appendages," i.e., a summary of the characteristics, mannerisms, and personality of Milton thrown in at the end.13

The scholarly chronicle, or annalistic biography, as it is sometimes called, was a common commodity throughout the nineteenth century, the Aldine edition of various English poets edited by Mitford being but one prominent example. The chronicles of Todd and Mitford are useful prefatory biographies which present the salient facts about Milton's life and works; and although they are low-keyed and not very readable works, they are more valuable to the Milton tradition than the "o altitudos" of Mortimer, Brydges, and the others.
Whatever their individual differences, Mortimer, Symmons, Ivimey, Brydges, and Carpenter belong to the most pervasive and popular tradition in early nineteenth-century biography, that of the eulogy or exemplum. These men are not primarily concerned with facts and details but with the moral character of their subject. In effect, these writers were not really composing the life of a man, they were making a vaguely lifelike statue of an heroic figure. They did not care for the rough edges of personality and conduct and, accordingly, touched up everything in order to make all the parts fit into a coherent whole which will demonstrate a particular thesis. Such an approach is anathema to biography because it leads to a lack of perspective and an identification of the biographer with his subject, the dangers of which W. S. Lewis relates in "The Difficult Art of Biography": "The danger is particularly present when the subject is dead. The biographer does not have the finitude of the man himself to remind him that his hero is mortal. He discovers in his researching and thinking qualities of the man which have been slighted or forgotten or not known; thus he shows the hero in a new light and tried to undermine or mitigate all the charges brought against his man by previous biographers." At this point, says Lewis,

the hero has become a pattern for schoolboys and the biographer a crusader determined to right the injustice done him. To do this the base and ignorant
persons who have traduced the hero must be dragged forward to receive their due from an awakened and angry public. In carrying out this agreeable duty the biographer becomes one with his subject ... criticism of the great man is criticism of the biographer, whose book has now ceased to be the life that his subject lived and has turned into a polemical apology for the author himself. 13

It is in this spirit of hero-worshipping defense and apology that Mortimer, Symmons, Ivimey, Brydges, and Carpenter animadvert against Dr. Johnson and all of them but Brydges seek to exhibit Milton as prophet and patriot and saint. To suggest that these works are flawed merely because the authors admired their subject would be unfair; however, it is certain that excessive adulation—complete with capital letters for the hero's name, a great many exclamation marks, and a feeble attempt at thundering rhetoric—and worthwhile biography do not go hand in hand. Such an incompatible mixture leads to a distorted and one-sided picture of what was at one time a human being. The mixture gives us, remarks Edel, "a cold, strange, ideal form instead of a man to whom we could feel distantly related." 14 There is little art and often less truth in the attempt of Mortimer and his successors to bring a preconceived image of Milton to their work and to fit him into it by using his own words, carefully arranged and selected to uphold a thesis.
The practice of writing lives of great men for the valuable ethical generalizations that can be drawn from them is as old as Plutarch, but certain special conditions in the early nineteenth century may have influenced the romantic biographers to regard biography as polemical and eulogistic. For Reed the most significant influence was an increase in the reading public and a change in its character: "Two of the ruling passions of biography grew out of concerns external to the art of biography: mass production and mass readership produced a concern for the new readers and their sensitive, unformed minds, which in turn brought about a resurgence of an old biographical bugaboo, the exemplary principle . . . "\(^\text{15}\) Altick refines this thesis by pointing out that moral utility has always been endemic to English biography: "From its very birth as an English literary form until well past the middle of the nineteenth century, the universal justification of biography was its didactic usefulness. Because this moral preoccupation hampered biography's development as a candid report of life, its eventual jet-tisoning was an event over which we can never cease to rejoice."\(^\text{16}\) The concept of moral usefulness in biography may also account, in part, for the emphasis of Mortimer, Symmons, Ivimey, and Carpenter upon Milton's public life and prose works; for this aspect
of Milton's career was most conducive to ethical generalizations. Few morals can be derived from the poet composing in his private study.

In all, the biographies of Mortimer, Symmons, Ivimey, Brydges, and Carpenter fit the description of early nineteenth-century biographical writing offered by Reed:

If the subject's virtue commended him to biographical treatment, the greater the virtue, the greater respect the book commanded. The measure of quality was the subject's moral beauty, not the biographer's artistic skill. The biographer was only the organizer and compiler of documents. He made certain that the virtues were properly displayed in order, that vices (whenever present) were properly stigmatized. The subject was the real artist, acting out the virtuous progress, battling an adverse environment, holding the good thought.¹⁷

Such a biographical creed explains Symmons' panegyric: "But even amid the ruins of Britain, Milton will survive: Europe will preserve one portion of him; and his native strains will be cherished in the expanding bosom of the great queen of the Atlantic, when his own London may present the spectacle of Thebes, and his Thames roll a silent and solitary stream through heaps of blended isolation,"¹⁸ as well as Ivimey's reluctant censure of Milton for writing the divorce tracts: "I acknowledge that I have drudged through this erroneous pamphlet [The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce] with much pain of heart; and could have wished, had it been possible, to have gone backward and thrown a veil over such painful reasonings,
on a subject which the work of God has made so plain, that 'the wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err,' if he pay a simple regard to marriage."19 Understandable also is Brydges' encomium: "The lesson of his life is one of the most attractive that biography affords: it shows what various and dissimilar powers may be united in the same person, and what a grandeur of moral principles may actuate the human heart; but at the same time it shows how little all the combined talents and virtues can secure the due respect and regard of contemporaries."20

Though he shared the exemplary principle with other biographers, Brydges' theory and practice of biography is, in one respect, unique among the romantic biographers. In "The Art of Biography" Virginia Woolf judges that Strachey's Elizabeth and Essex was a notable failure because the author attempted to combine facts of two orders, those which were verifiable and those which were not. Such intermingled facts, Woolf says, destroy one another.21 Moreover, Edel warns that the biographer must never imagine his materials.22 This is essentially what Brydges did. Surmising that his audience would want to know more than mere facts, he took it upon himself to supply the deficiency of fact with a number of often ludicrous and always questionable conjectures about Milton's thoughts, temper, and so on. As his own words reveal,
Brydges realized that such a practice might not be appreciated; this did not deter him, however, for he sought a higher end: "Less in this way has been attempted by my predecessors in this task than seemed to me to be requisite. Perhaps I have been more copious in my own reflections and conjectures than many will approve: but if there is a raciness in my narrative--a freshness of tints, yet not over-coloured--a picture not dry, and barren, and faint; but distinct and prominent, yet natural--then I shall not have worked in vain."23

History seems to have judged that, despite his "raciness" and "freshness of tints," Brydges was no more successful as a craftsman than any of the other romantic biographers of Milton.
Notes to Chapter VIII

1 (London), 1918), pp. viii-ix.

2 The Nature of Biography, p. 97.

3 Reed, English Biography in the Early Nineteenth Century, pp. 163, 19.

4 Ibid., pp. 16, 18.


6 Reed, p. 15.

7 Page xii.

8 Darbishire, pp. 289-291.


10 Ibid., p. 83.

11 Pages 139-140.

12 Page vii.


14 Page 8.

15 Page 26.

16 Page xiii.

17 Pages 36-37.

18 Page 81.

19 Page 85.
20 Page 187.


22 Page 1.

23 Page xxvii.
CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION: THE ROMANTICS' MILTON

The names applied to historical and aesthetic movements can be most deceiving. There is a temptation to think that such epithets can be applied indiscriminately to all the persons who lived during a specific period of time, that, for example, all the people who lived in the "age of faith" were pious; that all eighteenth-century men were rationalists; and that all those who lived between the years 1798 to 1837 were "romantic." Accordingly, one might expect that the romantic biographers of Milton would share the views of Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats with regard to Milton. As Chapter I mentioned, however, the romantic movement passed by the romantic biographers. Only in a few isolated instances, notably with Brydges, does anything resembling what C. S. Lewis calls the "personal heresy" appear, and there is no evidence to indicate that these biographers were even aware of a romantic movement or of the satanist controversy which arose with Burns and Blake and continued throughout the nineteenth century, culminating in the Life of Milton by Raleigh, published in 1900.

Several reasons can be advanced to account for the negative conclusion of this study that the romantic biographers were not
"romantic." First of all, the romantic poets mainly derived their conception of Milton the subjective (or, in Schiller's term, "sentimental") poet from Milton's poetry, particularly Paradise Lost.

As this thesis has indicated, however, Mortimer, Symmons, Ivimey, Todd, and Carpenter were not much interested in Milton the poet; and those biographers who did attempt criticism of the poetry were classically oriented critics. In fact, Brydges spoke disparagingly of both the poetry and the critical premises of his own time:

Beautiful poetry, with an equal regard to the four essential principles, may be written on a far humbler subject than Milton's: but where is it now to be found? One cause I would assigne is this, that false criticism chills it. Technical critics require technical excellencies: they like finer work, and gaudy colours, and varnish: they pay little regard to the solid ore; they look to the mechanical workmanship: there must be a flower here, and a piece of gold leaf there; and all must be polished into one uniform model till it shines, and sparkles, and dazzles: or, on the other hand, it must be full of such wonders as were never heard or thought of before;--raving expressions, irregular and dissonant numbers, and an affected sort of madness, which is called originality and invention! Since the bursting forth of the French Revolution in 1789, we have had a great deal of this: it has begun to subside; better criticisms and wiser times are come. Nothing unnatural and monstrous has ever long kept its hold on the public taste.

And Brydges said of Addison: "Addison's rules are so founded on eternal reason, that they never can be shown. There cannot be true poetry of a high order without invention of fable, characters, and
sentiments, and those having such qualities as the critic demands." Symmons, too, bows to Addison and speaks of poetry in terms of fable, numbers, characters, grandeur of conception, and the like, all terminology which the nineteenth century inherited from the previous century. Mitford's criticism of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* is also filled with stock neo-classical terms:

That the *Paradise Lost* excels in variety of invention, in splendour of imagery, in magnificent thoughts and delineations, and in grandeur and sublimity of description, no doubt can be entertained; but the latter poem is finished with equal care, and as perfect in another style. The reasoning is clear, the argument close and weighty, the expression most select and chosen, the versification harmonious, differing in structure from that of the former poem, but admirably in union with the subject. The language, as in the poetry of Lucretius, always moves closely with the argument; plain and simple where plain and simple sentiments only were required . . . .

Obviously, the premises and tenets of neo-classicism did not suddenly die out in 1798, as a squinting, hindsight view of history might tempt one to believe.

Another reason why the romantic biographers were not in what would later be recognized as the main critical current of their day is that none of them looked upon themselves primarily as critics. It is true that, as Altick says, biography and criticism became inseparable in the eighteenth century and that in the succeeding century...
biographical, or, put another way, the literary work ceased to be an
artistic object and was transformed into the person of its creator. 3
Nevertheless, the romantic biographers of Milton either refused to
mix biography and criticism or did not attempt criticism at all.
Criticism was outside the scope of their interests and/or capabili-
ties. Thus Symmons remarks, "It does not belong to the plan of the
present work to enter into a regular examination of the beauties and
defects of the Paradise Lost; and they have so frequently undergone
the investigation of acute and powerful minds, that nothing more can
be expected on the ground than a few straggling ears after a well
gathered harvest." 4 And Ivimey: "I shall not attempt any descrip-
tion of its [Paradise Lost] unrivalled excellencies; this has re-
peatedly been done by writers who were more equal to such criti-
cisms than to which I can have any pretensions. As to the correct-
ness of its theological sentiments, I speak without any hesitation;
and as to the sublimity of its sentiments, I profess myself to be lost
in wonder and admiration." 5 The other biographers imply by the
very nature of their works that their primary interest lies in an
aspect of Milton other than the poetic.

A third reason why the romantic biographers were non-
romantic is that they were Strachey's "journeymen of letters." It
seems that almost any semi-literate person in the early nineteenth
century could talk himself into or be talked into writing a biography. Critics were not so easy to come by. Since by training and inclination these biographers were antiquarians and clergymen and politicians, it is not to be expected that they would be in the forefront of a radical literary movement led mainly by well known poets.

The personal heresies, or biographical fallacies, of the romantic biographers are quite underdeveloped and subdued when compared with those of Blake and the romantic poets. Symmons suggests that Milton's bitterness over the Restoration and defeat of the "good old cause" "may be distinctly traced in some pathetic and animated strains in the Samson Agonistes." Todd finds some allusions to Milton's first marriage in lines from the same poem:

The first I saw at Timna, and she pleas'd Me, not my parents, that I sought to wed The daughter of an infidel.

Brydges discovered Milton's character and residence in L'Allegro and Il Penseroso: "These poems are familiar to all: they are rich in picturesque description of natural imagery, selected and combined with the power of splendid genius, according to the opposite humours of cheerfulness and contemplative melancholy; and are the more attractive, because they paint Milton's individual taste, character, and habits. The style of the scenery is principally adapted to the spot and the neighborhood where he now lived."
The virtual harmlessness of these speculations is obvious when one hears Blake's words from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell:

"Note. The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it." Blake saw Satan as the projection of Milton's ego and judged that Milton wrote Paradise Lost out of despair as a song of Experience, "a poem that accepts the fallen world's restraint of human desire." Milton, however, could not entirely submit himself to God, and his rebellion burst forth in spite of himself: "Because he was a true poet, his creative exuberance burst the fetters of Right Reason, and the Satan who dominates the first third of the poem came into his powerful existence."10

The Satan of the first four books of Milton's epic was the Satan preferred by the romantic poets and by the nineteenth century. He was the Satan of Shelley, who said:

Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in some purpose which he conceives to be excellent, in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy --not from any mistaken notion of bringing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the open and alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments . . . Thus much is certain that Milton gives the Devil all
imaginable advantage; and the arguments with which he exposes the injustice and impotent weakness of his adversary are such as had they been printed, distinct from the shelter of any dramatic order, would have been answered by the most conclusive of syllogisms—persecution.11

The romantic conception of Milton—the search for the man behind the mask of his verse—as we know it today is expressed in these words of Blake and Shelley and in the dictum of Coleridge:

"In the **Paradise Lost**—indeed in every one of his poems— it is Milton himself whom you see: his Satan, his Adam, his Raphael, almost his Eve— are all John Milton; and it is a sense of this intense egotism that gives me the greatest pleasure in reading Milton's works."12 Coleridge might easily have added to his list Milton as the faithful Abdiel, Milton as Christ scorning all the allurements and designs of the Devil, and Milton as sightless Samson wreaking vengeance upon his tormenters and enemies.

Such conceptions were beyond the scope of the romantic biographers of Milton. No doubt they would have been astounded by such an approach to his life and works. For them Milton was a magnificent figure whose rebelliousness and sanctity could be discerned in his works, but which were in no sense projected into all his characters. Their enthusiasm and confidence convince one that the romantic biographers believed that they knew the real Milton. To
them it was apparent that Milton was the man he presented himself as being in the autobiographical passages of his prose works--a serene, sometimes severe, fearless, relentless, sublime, and titanic individual, truly one of the great men in human history, a patriot and a prophet. It would have seemed absurd to them to search behind anything for someone who had revealed his character so clearly.
Notes to Chapter IX

1 Pages 245-246.

2 Page cxviii.


4 Page 466.

5 Page 225.

6 Page 437.

7 Page 80. Italics are Todd's.

8 Page 33.

9 Quoted in Harold Bloom, Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument (Garden City, N. Y., 1965), p. 79.

10 Ibid., pp. 80-82.


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