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Milton for Millenials: Sponsoring Digital Creativity through *Milton Revealed*

by Hugh Macrae Richmond.

Our website *Milton Revealed* was not conceived through epiphany or built in a day, but resulted from many persons' career-spanning processes of discovery in a variety of contexts. In my own sixty-year academic career I have seen [John](#) Milton's reputation oscillate to a remarkable degree, and I attribute consolidation of its progression from frequently negative to firmly positive to be partly due to the evolution of electronic technology and its impact on literary studies. As a graduate of both Oxford and Cambridge, I have been exposed to their contrasting [seventeenth-century](#) traditions: Oxford as the effective capital of royalism and tradition, Cambridge as the hotbed of Puritanism and the new philosophy of science and technology—illustrated in the mixture of religion and science in Isaac Newton's mind, as Professor of Mathematics at Cambridge. That Puritan emphasis survived into my stay at Emmanuel College, 1951-54, which had fostered such graduates as Peter Sterry and John Harvard. My room at Emmanuel overlooked the front court of Christ's College, equally Puritanical to Emmanuel, where Milton resided as an undergraduate. Milton's own fascination with science led to his meeting with Galileo, in Florence, and gave to his works an astronomical perspective that provides precedents for modern science fiction.

The research specialty I chose for my B.A. degree was Milton, although at that time Cambridge was associated with a powerfully anti-Miltonic critical tradition, including William Empson, Frank Leavis, and a host of New Critics. Even more ironically, when I progressed to Oxford to

complete a D.Phil. on seventeenth-century poetry. I found a strongly pro-Milton faculty which included C. S. Lewis, Helen Gardner; and among my contemporaries were C. A. Patrides and Christopher Ricks. By the time Patrides and I were both hired to teach Milton at U.C. Berkeley, a pro-Milton revolution was in progress, reinforced by [the institution's](#) subsequent hiring of my office-mate there, Stanley Fish; and later still of another Oxford [alumnus](#), James Turner. Meanwhile, in the sixties and seventies the radical movement at Berkeley ensured the popularity of Milton as prophet for the Free Speech movement: our Milton lecture courses ran to over 200 students. Such class sizes seemed to deny much interaction with students. [But then, as the new millennium approached,](#) electronic technology burst on to the scene, introducing many audio-visual options: use of multiple slides, reinforced by progressively more dynamic modes of electronic performance via cinematic film, then television modes, evolving from cassettes to DVDs and to use of online sources such as YouTube.

In such terms, the “millennial” experience [this chapter expounds](#) may be defined as that of the generation coming to maturity around the progression from the twentieth-century to the twenty-first, [from the 1990s](#) through the present—for whom the nature of experience shifted drastically through the information revolution permitted by electronic devices such as the [personal computer](#) [and](#) general access to the Internet. This vast increase in information flow parallels the shock effect of printing and the New Science associated with the European Renaissance. Now instead of access being limited to such physical locations as libraries, museums, and galleries, the current generation [has](#) increasingly instant access from most locations to almost the whole of previous human experience in recorded form. This access is not merely to print but to imagery both still and moving. Travel is no longer [as](#) essential for cultural experience.

The next generation will necessarily be preoccupied with controlling and redeploying this flood of data, of which perhaps this essay is a modest anticipation, by its display of how the previously accumulated mass of audio-visual material can be re-applied to assist the assimilation of Milton's characteristic insights into the modern worldview. He proves intrinsic to many of the uniquely cherished literary achievements of our modern world. By accommodating Milton to the technological perspective of millennials, one is also accommodating him to the whole range of his modern readers of all ages. While I have recently been offering some courses to the older participants of life-long learning courses, I have no hesitation in suggesting that while the discussion which follows may suit the tastes and methods of millennials, it can also serve equally well for their parents. I recently pursued this theme of Milton's epic as the model for a highly modern procedure of self-discovery in a course entitled "The First Modern: John Milton in the Digital Age," taught for the U.C. Berkeley Osher Life-Long Learning Institute (Winter, 2016), and I conclude with the prospectus for that course, which was favorably received, as making him accessible to modern readers of Milton of all ages.

Performance

Perhaps because of the Puritan association with hostility to the theatre during the Reformation in England, seen in the closing down of the theatres in 1642 (ratified by Act of Parliament in 1648), Milton commentary has hitherto not stressed the relevance of performance to Miltonic texts. But his early poetic career involved the creation of two masques that were actually performed with sufficient success to promote his early idea of *Paradise Lost* as a play, of which the powerful

passages of direct speech in the finished epic are vivid re-evocations. Though there were few professional drama companies in the San Francisco Bay Area when I first arrived here in 1957, the period immediately following vastly corrected this deficiency, to my great advantage as a teacher not only of Shakespeare, but of Milton. Professional theatre made it easier to invite classroom performances by professional actors, and the development of U.C. Berkeley's theatrical facilities, including the development of a dynamic Drama Department, ensured the accessibility of performance options.

Student exposure to vivid professional performances invited their own performance experiments, giving rise to alternative oral assessment options in Milton courses—interactive options which proved so effective that they provided invigorating material for a whole staging session presented to each course, which could be easily recorded for subsequent video illustrations. Like many other institutions, the university has finally become attuned to the value of media in teaching and has increasingly provided facilities for audio-visual presentations. The formats range from performance of a sonnet to a speech by a character in *Paradise Lost* to a scene involving several characters. The sonnets offer a striking tonal range of speaking voices, best perceivable in live performances, from the flamboyant rhetoric of “Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughter’d Saints” to the dulcet Horation tones of the invitation of Henry Lawrence to dinner. Moreover, such performances encourage students to perceive more fully the intense personal revelations about Milton’s blindness in “When I consider how my life is spent,” and the tragic immediacy of “Methought I saw my late espoused Saint” (the latter is memorably read by Ian Richardson in a recording available on YouTube).¹

¹ “Sonnet 23 (1658) by John Milton. Performed by Ian Richardson.” *YouTube*. 2008. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yjOEXLbYAO>. Accessed 19 October 2017.

As for *Paradise Lost* scenes, performance provides unique illustration of the progression of Adam and Eve's [relationship](#), from naïvely picturesque to somberly realistic. Of course, the devils' debate in [Hell](#) provides a vivid vocal range of responses to defeat. But [a fine](#) example of the viability of pursuing the epic's relation to modern experience came unexpectedly from a group of students [from the Philippines](#), who offered a version of *Paradise Lost*, in thirty minutes. They first evoked a composite of the Edenic setting, with Adam and Eve dressed in traditional native [Philippine](#) costume and communicating in Tagalog—this whole section being perhaps the first version of Milton in that language. When Satan arrived, he turned out to be a missionary [from the U.S.](#)—who introduced them to Sin and destroyed the indigenous culture, imposing [Western](#) clothing and English speech. It was probably the most memorable creative experience in all my Milton courses, stunning the class who watched it, and leaving me frustrated that I had failed to call in our recording team. For several of the student performers, English was a second language, and I have found that learning to perform such masters of English idiom as Shakespeare and Milton has proved a very positive asset for them in acquiring effective expression in English.

Almost inevitably this kind of performance option progressed to the video recording of a full staging of *Comus*; and to a two-hour recording of a live version of *Paradise Lost*, based on its direct speech episodes. Added together these episodes from the epic produced a coherent two-hour script, [subsequently published](#) as *Milton's Drama of Paradise Lost*.² Because of the new television technology, both productions could be recorded and thus produced fresh educational materials, reinforced by a documentary staging of Lawes' subtle music for *Comus*, performed by professionals, [and now available on YouTube](#).

² [Hugh Macrae Richmond, *John Milton's Drama of Paradise Lost* \(New York: Peter Lang, 1992\).](#)

With [an](#) increasing facility [with media](#) technology, we consolidated this raw material into a thirty-minute video documentary: *Milton by Himself*, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, still distributed by Films for the Humanities, and partly available on YouTube as *The Early Life of John Milton*. This documentary deployed Milton's passages spoken *in propria persona*, stressing his wry progression from fallible youthful assurance to heroic public service, until he met political defeat with stoic resilience. It also presented stills and video clips from our tour of Miltonic sites in England, ranging from Christ's College, and the setting of the first performance of *Comus* at Ludlow Castle, to the site of completion of *Paradise Lost* at the cottage and garden at Chalfont St. Giles. We [also secured](#) interviews [with](#) local authorities and academic experts.

With the arrival of the Internet, this audio-visual material was consolidated into a University of California at Berkeley website entitled *Milton Revealed*. The new media served well to illustrate and re-examine his relation to theatricality, as recorded in our audio and visual experiences. The material allowed us to develop teaching approaches to Milton, using performance [in](#) a variety of [media](#): musical performances, video clips of masques, and stills of archetypal situations evoked by Milton, such as the life of Samson, a popular subject [in art history](#). Our principal concern remains to enhance the sensory experience of Milton [for](#) a broad audience [using](#) dynamic approaches. The major method is to recognize and illustrate the artistic impact of Milton's works overall, including all aspects of performance—not just in theatrical staging but in all the Fine Arts—to clarify why he has achieved such popularity in recent [Western](#) culture. Because of [easier](#) copyright [conditions governing](#) early visual materials, we accumulated a vast resource of images: data from [seventeenth-](#) century history relevant to Milton, [and](#) contemporary art which Milton

could have seen in London and on his travels to Italy (paintings by Van Dyke, stage and architectural designs [by](#) Inigo Jones, paintings by Rubens and Poussin, baroque designs [by](#) Bernini, [and so on](#)). We show how these are reflected in his poetry ([for example](#), St. Peter's in Rome as Pandemonium).

The new accessibility to bibliography and citation via Google facilitated one of the most explored features of our website, covering Milton's artistic impact [as](#) a double bibliography. [The](#) first part, [provided by Brendan Prawdzik, explores](#) the specific theme of Milton's work in staged performance. For example, modern public awareness of Milton has been powerfully furthered by the fact that in 2006 there were stage performances of a three-hour version of *Paradise Lost* at the Oxford Playhouse (U.K.). The second part of the bibliography, [which I completed](#), is concerned with investigations of creative [artists'](#) responses [to](#) Milton's *oeuvre*, as [treated](#) by John Shawcross in his *John Milton and Influence: Presence in Literature, History and Culture*. For example, as part of [Milton's](#) impact on music, the bibliography explores how Handel deployed his great musical affinities with Milton's poetry. [Handel's](#) opera *Samson* follows Milton's play script closely at certain points, and elaborates it skillfully, in ironically festive music for the Philistines. We present professional recordings of such passages, and of the attempted re-seduction of Samson by Delilah, a masterly exercise in musical artifice. The evocation of Samson's despair in his blindness and his transcendence of it are also evoked [vividly](#). Such arias from [Handel's](#) setting of *Samson* appear regularly in concert programming, as featured in our video gallery, with comments in the bibliography. [Another](#) libretto based on *Paradise Lost* by Benjamin Stillingfleet with music by John Christopher Smith the Younger [was](#) first performed in 1760; [the](#) printed version [was](#) re-edited by Kay Stevenson and Margaret Sears in 1998.

Many other musical versions of Milton exist, and Handel's unique empathy for Milton is also seen in his settings for *L'Allegro and Il Penseroso*, [used](#) by [choreographer](#) Mark Morris for his dance productions. Discussions of these are offered [on the](#) website, with performance samples in [the](#) video gallery. Another striking illustration of Milton's modern multicultural impact is also accessible from our website's video gallery: Krzysztof Penderecki's opera *Paradise Lost* (two acts in 42 scenes), with an English libretto by Christopher Fry, based on Milton's epic. Penderecki called it a *sacra rappresentazione*, written on commission for the 1976 [United States](#) Bicentennial. The first production was [in](#) 1978 at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, then [in](#) [Milan](#) (at La Scala), [Stuttgart, and Munich through the following year](#). [The opera has been more recently revived in](#) [Münster \(2001\)](#) and [in](#) [Breslau](#) by Opera Wroclawska (2009-10). We include access to a startling recording of this work on our website.

[Comus Updated](#)

[This potential](#) for Milton's work to inspire creativity [is more powerful and widely realized than might be expected](#). It is to be found, [for example](#), in the impact [that](#) *Comus* has had on art forms of all kinds over the centuries, particularly on live performance. Perhaps the site's most eccentric example of Milton's impact on radical modern music lies in our excerpt from "Song to Comus," from the album *First Utterance* (1971) by a band named after the Greek god Comus. [This group produced](#) acoustic-art rock, with elements of Eastern percussion, early folk and animalistic vocals. [Their "Song to Comus," its plot following that of Milton's masque but with lyrics by band member Roger Wootton,](#) evokes fear, confusion, [and](#) despair, but with calmer passages. The group disbanded after this album but reunited, with new members, for their final album in 1974. Their account shows that Milton's influence extends to ["a crazy psychfolkrock band"](#) ([as one](#)

YouTube [uploader not unjustly calls them](#)), indicating the emotional power and currency of Milton's imagination.³

If Comus [the](#) band sounds like a unique example of Milton's popular impact, this seemingly esoteric masque also has a complex historical tradition of popular performance illustrated in Jan Piggott's account of its staging.⁴ We also cite how this kind of influence culminated in one of the most popular civic celebrations in the world: the New Orleans Carnival. Since the [nineteenth](#) century, Carnival has been a secular ritual practiced by New Orleanians and visitors, its survival and character secured by the precedent of Milton's *Comus*. In December 1856, six Anglo-American New Orleans businessmen, formerly of Mobile, Alabama, gathered at a clubroom above the Gem Restaurant in New Orleans' French Quarter to organize a secret society to observe Mardi Gras in a less crude fashion than in Mobile.⁵ The inspiration for the name of the group came from [Milton's](#) Lord of Misrule in [the](#) masque. One Mardi Gras historian describes the Mistick [Krewe's](#) creation in New Orleans thus: "It was Comus who in 1857 saved and transformed the dying flame of the old Creole Carnival with his enchanter's cup; it was Comus who introduced torch-lit and thematic floats to Mardi Gras processions; and it was Comus who ritually closed, and still closes, the most cherished festivities of New Orleans splendor

³ ["Comus - Song to Comus," YouTube \(2009\), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ae5ckjTB5o8>. Accessed 1 October 2017.](#)

⁴ [Piggott, Jan, "Milton's *Comus*: from Text to Stage, the Fine Arts, and Book-illustration, c. 1750-1850." \[23 illustrations\] *British Art Journal* XV.2 \(Winter 2014-15\), 18-32.](#)

⁵ [On the genesis of the New Orleans Mardi Gras see Reid Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival* \(Cambridge: Harvard U.P., 1995\); Arthur B. LaCour. *New Orleans Masquerade: Chronicles of Carnival* \(Gretna CA: Pelican Publishing, 1952\); and "Carnival/Mobile Mardi Gras Timeline." \[1852\] \(Mobile: Museum of Mobile 2002\).](#)

and pomp.”⁶ Comus’ first-night parade—with torches, marching bands, and rolling floats—was so wildly popular with the earliest Carnival revelers that the prospect of a second one attracted thousands of out-of-town visitors to New Orleans.⁷

The Comus Krewe jealously guarded the identities of its membership. Carnival legend has it that admittance to the Comus Mistick [Krewe’s](#) ball was so sought-after that uninvited ladies formed a flying wedge to force their way in. Often uninvited persons tried to beg, buy, or steal invitations. Even long after the balls, Comus invitations are prized by collectors as beautiful and rare. On Mardi Gras night, Comus provided the final parade of the New Orleans Carnival season for over [one hundred](#) years. It was smaller and more sedate than the other parades of [the](#) Rex and Zulu Krewes. The Comus parades were known for their sometimes obscure themes relating to ancient history and mythology. While other parades had themes like “Foods of the World” or “Broadway Show Tunes,” Comus presented themes like “Serpent Deities of the Ancient Near-East.” [Milton Revealed](#) includes clips of current Comus Krewe rituals.

[Milton and Popular Culture](#)

That our site can include such a range of audio-visual materials is the result of modern technology, appealing directly to the styles and habits of modern [media production and consumption](#). After its first version reached [one](#) hundred thousand page visits a year, we upgraded the technology of the site to heighten its accessibility and cross-references. Currently it receives up to [one](#) thousand visits daily. Such

⁶ [Henri Schindler, *Mardi Gras Treasures: Invitations of the Golden Age*. \(Gretna CA: Pelican Publishing, 2000\), 13.](#)

⁷ [Robert Tallant, *Mardi Gras*. \(Gretna CA: Pelican Publishing, 1976\), 117.](#)

popularity invites speculation about Milton's status as a broad modern influence, overriding his loss of prestige in the earlier twentieth century following his almost biblical status in Victorian times. No doubt some of this is an inheritance of his recognition as a radical model in the 1970s, but there is another more immediate driving force, admittedly unexpected: awareness of Milton's works as prototypes for modern science fiction and science fantasy. This status as a model for modern popular arts was fostered in more literary terms by C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, whose Oxford University careers expanded epically into works of popular science fiction and fantasy such as *Perelandra*, the Narnia sequence, and *The Lord of the Rings*. It is this shift in perspective of the Miltonic tradition that our site's bibliographies stress.

The popular revival in Milton's reputation owes much to Lewis's *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, a text that set the stage for Milton as a possible Christian prophet for the millennial era, and beyond that to the science fiction novels Lewis based on the epic. *Perelandra* illustrates how Milton's literary perspective corresponds to that of Lewis, even in a modern setting. The story starts with the philologist Elwin Ransom explaining to Lewis that Ransom is to travel to Perelandra (the planet Venus), to counter an attack by Earth's Black Archon (Satan). Ransom meets the Queen of the planet, human in appearance except for her green skin color. She and the King of the planet are the only human inhabitants: the Eve and Adam of their world. When the scientist Professor Weston arrives seeking power, Ransom resists him. Weston falls into demonic possession, finds the Queen, and tries to tempt her into defying the orders of the planet's god, Maleldil; but Ransom ultimately defeats Weston in a physical battle. Milton's epic model proves surprisingly adaptable to this

modern fictional genre, as studied in many works in [the website's](#) bibliographies.

We record similar discussions of the work of Philip Pullman. The title of [the](#) *His Dark Materials* trilogy comes from “His dark materials to create more worlds” (*Paradise Lost* 2.915). Pullman wanted a version of Milton's poem for teenagers, and spoke of Milton as “our greatest public poet.” [Materials collected on Milton Revealed](#) trace the Miltonic patterns pursued by Pullman. *His Dark Materials* is an epic fantasy, in part a retelling and inversion of *Paradise Lost*, with Pullman sardonically commending humanity for what Milton saw as its most tragic failing. It pursues the coming of age of two children, Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry, as they wander through a series of parallel universes. In the cloistered world of Jordan College, Oxford, Lyra initially learns of the existence of Dust—an elementary particle researched by Lord Asriel, supposedly her uncle, but actually her father. The Magisterium is a Church body that represses heresy, [associating](#) Dust with Original Sin ([and](#) thus to be avoided). This dominant Authority resembles Christianity, seen here as an oppressive institution. Adam and Eve are most openly referenced in *The Subtle Knife*, in which Lyra Belacqua is a new Eve. Lord Asriel opens a rift between the worlds in [hopes](#) of establishing a Republic of Heaven, raising an army, [Satan-like](#), in rebellion against the Church. We record how the series earned criticism for its negative portrayal of Christianity and religion. Cynthia Grenier, in *Catholic Culture*, said: “In the world of Pullman, God [the Authority] is a merciless tyrant.”⁸ But Rowan Williams, former [Archbishop of Canterbury](#), argues that [Pullman's](#) attacks focus on the dangers of dogmatism and religious oppression,

⁸ [Cynthia Grenier \(October 2001\), “Philip Pullman's Dark Materials,” The Morley Institute. Accessed 5 April 2007.](#)

not on Christianity itself.⁹ We discuss how Pullman's sales in the U.S. equaled [the Harry Potter series](#).

The idea of Milton as the patron saint of other popular modern genres appears in our account of the career of Terrance Lindall, with illustrations of his art.¹⁰ [Lindall's Paradise Lost Illustrated](#) has been compared to [the work of](#) other Milton illustrators including William Blake. Our site-stills document this continuity, recording [Professor Karen Karbiener of New York University finding \(from a lecture delivered at the Williamsburg Art & Historical Center in 2004 on "Milton's Satan and his impact on countercultural artistic movements from William Blake to the Beat poets"\)](#) that many students preferred [Lindall's](#) version, [some plates from](#) which [also](#) appeared in [the magazine Heavy Metal](#). Lindall's art for *Paradise Lost* appears on the cover of *Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton* from Random House (2007); and Holt Rinehart & Winston used another Lindall *Paradise Lost* image in a 2009 high school textbook. Oxford [University's](#) major exhibit "Citizen Milton" [also](#) used one of [Lindall's](#) artworks for *Paradise Lost* [now housed at the Yuko Nii Foundation in the Williamsburg Art & Historical Center](#). Critical response to Lindall's [series](#) includes William Kerrigan, former president of the Milton Society of America, who remarked:

Radical artist and nonconformist Terrance Lindall has channeled Milton's spirit into a modern context, in a provocative series of illustrations to *Paradise Lost*. His visual celebration of Milton reveals his remarkable affinity for the radical English poet, and

⁹ [Rowan Williams \(10 March 2004\), "Archbishop wants Pullman in class," BBC News Online. Accessed 10 March 2004.](#)

¹⁰ [All material cited in this paragraph is derived from data listed in the Preface to Bibliography 2, on our website at http://miltonrevealed.berkeley.edu/](#)

his ability to create a fitting tribute to Milton's enduring influence in the arts.

Lindall created the "[Grand *Paradise Lost* Costume Ball](#)," which opened the largest festival in the world honoring John Milton's 400th birthday, September 27 to November 2, 2008, at the Williamsburg Art & Historical Center, exhibiting over 70 contemporary artists from around the world: writers, poets, composers and performers. Our website's outline of these events confirms the currency of Milton's influence in the [twenty-first](#) century.

[Milton's New Science and the New Media](#)

[By way of conclusion](#), I would like to point out a triple perspective, reconciling Milton's own declared purpose, in the world of the New Science, to address and reassure a "fit audience though few" (*Paradise Lost* 7.31), with millennials' [perspectives](#) as re-evoked by various options in the modern digital context. Critics and scholars tend to place Milton, and *Paradise Lost* in particular, primarily in a backward-looking context of classical mythology and Old Testament theology. [But](#) the poem is ultimately located in a world closer to ours, as confirmed by the frequent autobiographical allusions in Milton's works to his contemporary context. These interventions are not incidental but central to the deep structure of the work. They reflect his awareness of the then coming scientific revolution that we are still experiencing now. This [attainment of](#) a broad [yet](#) personal synthesis is the true distinction of the epic, as validated by its encyclopedic fusion of biblical, classical, and scientific research in a synthesis of modern consciousness. Milton was confronted by the epic obligation of reconciling several major concentrations of information and values: that of the pagan classical world recovered by Renaissance Humanists; the Christian vision, as complicated by the current tensions between

Catholic and Protestant; and the increasing accumulation of fresh knowledge resulting from the “experimental science” initiated by such innovators as Galileo.

It is easy to demonstrate that Milton was aware of such conflicting elements in defining his own consciousness in *Paradise Lost*, for his powerful personal intrusions imply pursuit of personal clarification comparable to that aspired to by most moderns. The boldest demonstration of the epic’s modernity lies in its record of Milton’s pursuit of current scientific awareness, reflected in his visit to Galileo during his travels in Italy, an occasion which he found relevant to include in the poem, noting how “by night the Glass / Of Galileo . . . observes / Imagined Lands and Regions of the Moon” (5.261-60). Milton is concerned to stress his awareness of current astronomy, and to repeat the reference to:

the Moon, whose Orb
Through Optic Glass the Tuscan Artist views
At Ev'ning from the top of Fesole,
Or in Valdarno, to descry new Lands,
Rivers or Mountains in her spotty Globe. (1.287-90)

We should also remember that, wiser than Ptolemy-following Sir Francis Bacon, Milton was a Copernican, alert to current scientific data. As a pure intellect the Archangel Raphael is also made a truthful Copernican, dissuading Adam from anticipating the extravagant confusion with which retro-astronomers of the seventeenth century strove to reconcile Ptolemy’s archaic system to the latest research:

This to attain, whether Heav'n move or Earth,
Imports not, if thou reck'n right, the rest
From Man or Angel the great Architect
Did wisely to conceal, and not divulge

His secrets to be scann'd by them who ought
 Rather admire; or if they list to try
 Conjecture, he his Fabric of the Heav'ns
 Hath left to thir disputes, perhaps to move
 His laughter at thir quaint Opinions wide
 Hereafter, when they come to model Heav'n
 And calculate the Stars, how they will wield
 The mighty frame, how build, unbuild, contrive
 To save appearances, how gird the Sphere
 With Centric and Eccentric scribl'd o're,
 Cycle and Epicycle, Orb in Orb:
 Already by thy reasoning this I guess,
 Who art to lead thy offspring, and supposest
 That Bodies bright and greater should not serve
 The less not bright, nor Heav'n such journeys run,
 Earth sitting still[.] _____ (8.70-89)

The subjective perspective within which the frequent autobiographical interjections frame the epic establishes that, in its progression, Milton is working to explore the synthesizing of human experience, both by Adam and by himself.

This is equally the supposed role of the modern robot in an acclaimed recent video game called *The Talos Principle*. In the game, a robot attempts to grasp the comprehensive modern vision we now associate with the creation of the Internet. Research for our website found that Milton's worldview remains accessible, meaningful, and popular in the twenty-first century, memorably corroborated by its transposition into this advanced piece of gaming software. *The Talos Principle* has proved one of the most successful of modern video games, according

to a review by Chris Suellentrop.¹¹ In Greek mythology, Talos was a mechanical giant made of bronze. A version of him appears as Talus, Sir Artegal's iron man in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. In *The Talos Principle*, the modern Robot, an amnesiac, awakens in an unfamiliar world including a temple, a garden, a covenant and the possibility of immortality, but a world devoid of humanity, extinct from a disease provoked by global warming, a little like the ruin which [Milton's](#) universe risks in the War in Heaven. Identifying with this robot, any game player experiences his attempt to recreate a viable world from these ruins. The Robot seeks both [to](#) understand himself and his unfamiliar world, not unlike Adam coming to consciousness in Eden, or the adjustments required after the Fall. Advised by the voice of Elohim (God's name in the Hebrew Bible), the Robot seeks out various texts hidden behind barriers of increasing complexity. The Robot is haunted by "the Milton Library Assistant," who encourages all his explorations. But Elohim forbids the player from climbing a central tower that contains knowledge of some other world, rather like the Tree of Knowledge. "Milton" encourages disobedience by the game player acting as Robot, like Satan in *Paradise Lost*: here, to ascend the tower. A variety of ultimate outcomes is available, depending on the choices made, all of which explore the nature of artificial intelligence, seeking to determine if the player can be proven to be a conscious being. The option favored by "Milton" leaves the Robot capable of free will, defying Elohim, and uploading all ["Milton's"](#) knowledge—which humanity had hopefully stored before their own extinction. This mastery of available knowledge completed, the game's test world disappears, and the combined information of the android and ["Milton"](#) is uploaded as part of a project to maintain humanity's knowledge. The

¹¹ [Chris Suellentrop, "Enticing All to see the Bigger Picture," *New York Times Arts*, 28 January 2015.](#)

validated Robot/[player](#) can now leave the test environment carrying the best of human knowledge into the real if fallen world.

Much of the incipient scientific knowledge essential to the modern player in the *Talos Principle* was available to Milton, as many of the game's pre-1700 based tests make explicit. So we now have a triple perspective available to the modern reader. First, there is the original personal pursuit of a coherent point of view for the "early modern" man [represented by](#) Milton, [who](#) sees himself as evolving, via his [recreation of](#) epic [in](#) the self-discoveries of Satan, Adam, and Eve. Next, in *The Talos Principle*, we discover a modern attempt, by the Robot, to achieve mastery not only of Milton's sense of the past and of his own present, but also of all the more recent complexities of human knowledge, aided (but often confused) by Elohim and the Milton Library Assistant. Finally, we may diffidently offer a parallel challenge to visitors to our website *Milton Revealed* to those previously made to Adam, to Milton himself, and to the Robot. That is, to attempt to achieve their own version of all these aspirations for themselves, based on our offerings, by which our team seeks to encourage users to [synthesize](#) all these other options. This effort depends largely on our actual re-enactments of the most dynamic aspects of Milton's *oeuvre*, as seen in our recreation and recording of *Paradise Lost* as the play it was [at an early point](#) conceived to be, coupled with connections to as many alternative live recreations of the epic and [of Milton's](#) other works, such as *Comus* and *Samson Agonistes*. These may be merely [a](#) preliminary [indication](#) of [the](#) potential value [of performance](#) to Miltonists, but it is only recently, via the world of modern technology, that such lively options have become readily available. We can only [hope and](#) anticipate that later seekers of Miltonic insights may achieve the full realization likely to be elicited by yet more professional productions of Milton's works. At present there are only [faint](#) rumors of

future experiments in the creation of such Milton artifacts [in the media of](#) film and television, but these may ultimately prove [even](#) more inspiring than the challenge of *The Talos Principle*.¹²

APPENDIX

THE FIRST MODERN: JOHN MILTON IN THE DIGITAL AGE

A Course at U.C. Berkeley's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

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1. COURSE CONTEXT

John Milton is a hero to [millennials](#): C. S. Lewis based *Perelandra* on *Paradise Lost*; Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials Trilogy* mirrors the epic; Mark Morris's best ballet is [L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, e Il Moderato](#); digital artist Terrance Lindall created virtual images of *Paradise Lost* for the Oxford U. Press; *Comus* is the originator and lead Krewe for the New Orleans Carnival, and the name of an acoustic-art rock band. *Paradise Lost* provides the basis for one of the most successful recent video games, *The Talos Principle*, in which Milton plays a major character. His autobiographical recoveries from failed ambition provide therapy for modern trauma. We cover, audio-visually, the relevance of

¹² [A listing of recent plans for such projects can be found in the Blog of the U. C. Berkeley web-site at http://miltonrevealed.berkeley.edu/blog](http://miltonrevealed.berkeley.edu/blog)

Sonnets, Lycidas, Comus, Paradise Lost (Books [1](#), [2](#), [9](#), [and 10](#)), *Paradise Regained* (Book [4](#)), and *Samson Agonistes*.

2. COURSE AIMS AND METHODS

The purpose of the course is to illustrate and explain John Milton's great modern popularity by showing his unique relevance to our own current culture, its resources, and its challenges. There will be two phases to each session: presentation about the texts (and audiovisuals of their modern analogues, where available), followed by open discussion, after a ten-minute break.

3. SIX SESSIONS' TOPICS (Readings, Audiovisuals)

1. Modern Autobiography: *Sonnets 1, 7, 9, 13, 18, 19, and 23; L'Allegro and Il Penseroso* (videos: *Milton by Himself*, Handel, [and](#) Morris).

Preparation: read the seven sonnets and two poems. If you have access to the Internet explore (via YouTube, etc.) Handel's setting for *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, e Il Moderato*, and any clips of the Mark Morris ballet set to it, also on the UCB website at

<http://miltonrevealed.berkeley.edu/> (and some will be presented in class). The Mark Morris Dance Group will perform *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, e Il Moderato* 11-13 March 2016 at U.C. Berkeley.

Discussion: Why is Milton's self-awareness still significant?

2. Failures Transcended: *Lycidas, Comus* (videos: music & staging).

Read the poem and playlet. Audiovisuals are available on the website *Milton Revealed*. Discussion will center on the causes of Milton's continual failures and how his remarkable recoveries and transcendence remain rewarding.

3. Milton, Satan, Pullman: *Paradise Lost* (Books [1 and 2](#): images [and](#)

video). Read the first two Books of *Paradise Lost*. These are available as performance on the *Milton Revealed* site as *Paradise Lost Part 1*. Illustrations from *The Talos Principle*. Discussion: Why do many modern readers from Blake and Shelley to Empson and Pullman, feel Satan is heroic?

4. Eve as Heroine: *Paradise Lost* (Books 9 and 10: images and video). These Books are staged on *Milton Revealed* as Parts 7, 8, and 9. Discussion centers on Milton's surprisingly modern view of marital and sexual parity, and how Milton's Eve emerges as the dynamic key to human evolution, despite some feminists' views.

5. Beyond Rome and Athens: *Paradise Regained* (Book 4: performed). The last book of *Paradise Regained* reorganizes the humanistic perspective about the role of the classics in modern awareness, focused on Milton's vivid evocation (and censure) of ancient Greece and Rome.

6. Motives for Action: *Samson Agonistes*. (Handel opera, etc.). Read the play and explore, on YouTube and *Milton Revealed*, Handel's magnificent *Samson*, derived from Milton's tragedy, an opera which is a part of Handel's remarkable modern celebrity in concerts and opera houses world-wide. Discussion: What are the motives and validations sought by terrorists in the modern world?

4. TEXTS AND AUDIOVISUALS

All texts are available on the internet at various sites under the search title of John Milton: *The Complete Poems*, one of the more accessible being the Gutenberg to be found at

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1745/1745-h/1745-h.htm>. Alternatively there are many reliable, very inexpensive paperback editions available

from Amazon, eBay, and most bookshops. Our website survey of some relevant audio-visual and bibliographical materials is accessible at <http://miltonrevealed.berkeley.edu>.

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