

God and Mammon: The Wealth of Milton's Literary Memory

"Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (Mt. 6:24)

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd virtue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat . . . Which was the reason why our sage and serious Poet *Spencer*, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than *Scotus* or *Aquinas*, describing true temperance under the person of *Guion*, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bowr of earthly blisse that he might see and know, and yet abstain. (Milton, *Areopagitica*, p. 1006)

Then gan a cursed hand the quiet wombe
Of his great Grandmother with steele to wound,
And then hid treasures in her sacred tombe
With sacrilege to dig . . . (*FQ* 2.7.17, "Cave of Mammon")

One other time I took your part he [Zeus] caught me
around one foot and flung me
into the sky from our tremendous terrace.
I soared all day. Just as the sun dropped down
I dropped too, on Lemnos--nearly dead.
The island people nursed a fallen god. (*Iliad* 1.588 ff.)

By which he saw the ugly monster plaine,
Halfe like a serpent horribly displaide,
But th'other halfe did womans shape retaine,
Most lothsom, filthie, foule, and full of vile disdaine.

And as she lay upon the durtye ground
Her huge long taile her den all overspred,
Yet was in knots and many boughtes upwound,
Pointed with mortall sting. Of her there bred
A thousand yong ones, which she dayly fed,
Sucking upon her poisonous dugs, eachone
Of sundry shapes, yet all ill favored:
Soone as that uncouth light upon them shone,
Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone. (*FQ* 1.1.14-15, "Errorr")

Mnemosyne

Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* (1532)

Recommended reading:

William Kerrigan, *The Prophetic Milton*, on Milton's inspiration

John Guillory, *Poetic Authority*, on Milton and Spenser

Maureen Quilligan, *Milton's Spenser*, on Milton and Spenser