

### **Milton, Power, and the Power of Milton**

There are some Divines that tell us, that in the frame of this lower World God proceeded from the less to the more perfect; and thereupon, according to them, the Woman's being created last will not be a very great argument to debase the dignity of the Female Sex. If some of the Men own this, 'tis the more likely to be true: The Great *Milton*, a very grave Author, brings in *Adam* thus speaking to *Eve*, in his *Paradise Lost*, lib. 9: O fairest of Creation? last and best Of all God's Works.

---Lady Mary Chudleigh, *The Female Preacher* (1699)

Patience and Submission are the only Comforts that are left to a poor People, who groan under Tyranny, unless they are Strong enough to break the Yoke. . . Not *Milton* himself would cry up liberty to poor *Female Slaves*, or plead for the Lawfulness of Resisting a Private Tyranny.

---Mary Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage* (1700)

[These writers] however, are all of a simple character; the men have been supposed to remain men, the women women when they write. They have exerted the influence of their sex directly and normally. But there is a class which keeps itself aloof from any such contamination. Milton is their leader; with him are Landor, Sappho, Sir Thomas Browne, Marvell. Feminists or anti-feminists, passionate or cold--whatever the romances or adventures of their private lives not a whiff of that mist attaches itself to their writing. It is pure, uncontaminated, sexless as the angels are said to be sexless.

--Virginia Woolf, "Indiscretions" (1924)

For my belief is that if we live another century or so . . . and have five hundred a year each of us and rooms of our own; if we have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; . . . if we look past Milton's bogey, for no human being should shut out the view . . . then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down.

---Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1928)

Thus with the Year  
Seasons return, but not to me returns  
Day, or the sweet approach of Even or Morn,  
Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summer's Rose,  
But cloud instead, and ever-during dark  
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men  
Cut off, and for the Book of knowledge fair  
Presented with a Universal blanc  
Of Nature's works to me expunged and rased,  
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.  
So much the rather thou Celestial Light  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight. (*Paradise Lost* 3.40-55)

What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost; the unconquerable will,  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield:  
And what is else not to be overcome?  
That glory never shall his wrath or might  
Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace  
With suppliant knee, and deify his power,  
Who from the terror of this arm so late  
Doubted his empire, that were low indeed,  
That were an ignominy and shame beneath  
This downfall. (*Paradise Lost* 1.105-16)

But he who reigns  
Monarch in heaven, till then as one secure  
Sat on his throne, upheld by old repute,  
Consent or custom, and his regal state  
Put forth at full, but still his strength concealed,  
Which tempted out attempt, and wrought our fall.  
(*Paradise Lost* 1.637-41)