Catherine Gimelli Martin. *Milton Among the Puritans: The Case for Historical Revisionism.*

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Literary Studies has been zealously preoccupied with the problem of identifying the religious persuasions of early modern writers. Unlike Shakespeare's beliefs, for which there is much debate and much less evidence, Milton's fundamental affiliation has seldom been debated: he has virtually always been seen as a Puritan, although his particular theologies have been the subject of vigorous revision. Recently, Thomas Corns and Gordon Campbell shook Milton Studies with the view that the poet was not a Puritan in his youth. In *Milton among the Puritans*, Catherine Gimelli Martin goes still further, arguing that Milton never was one. This is a radical inversion of a well-established orthodoxy, and remarkable from several standpoints, perhaps most of all in the fact that a question so basic can still be asked.

If not a Puritan, then what was he? The book is more interested in dislodging rooted views of Milton than in finding a new label. Often polemical, it surveys a vast array of secondary literature, both to create the foundations for a revisionist account and to expose misguided constructions. At times, however, this tactic produces arguments that cast doubt without conclusive scrutiny. "As most Miltonists know," Martin asserts at the outset, "any evidence that their author was ever affiliated with any Puritan congregation is also non-existent, and he was married and buried according to the rites of the Church of England" (xi). On the surface this seems convincing, yet the book is not arguing that Milton belonged to the Church of England — indeed, he reputedly did not frequent a physical church, so his non-participation in a Puritan congregation (as opposed to any other) seems beside the point. The nonexistence of evidence is not alone sufficient to support so strong

a claim, especially when many Puritans created their own spiritual networks while they went through official rites of passage.

Certainly, much distortion of literary meaning and biography can be attributed to a reductive conception of Milton the Puritan, and Martin is right to shake the confidence of this association. Yet more care might have been taken with regard to what Milton himself was saying. Vital passages are explained too briefly: "he was alienated from a Puritan regime whose 'insanities' and other 'crimes' he found 'worthier of silence than of publication'" (21, 210). This suggests Milton objects to a single interregnum regime, when the quoted words, taken from a private letter, speak to a particularly uncertain historical moment. Although Martin omits the date, it is late December 1659, with Cromwell dead, and Milton is worried "lest to the lately united enemies of religion and liberty we shall, in the midst of civil dissensions or rather insanities, seem too vulnerable." Milton sees himself fighting against "enemies of religion": the enemies are the royalists, not the Puritans — the "we" referred to here.

One of the great puzzles in Milton scholarship is how and why Milton coexisted intellectually with Puritans with whom he deeply disagreed. Martin astutely faces this urgent question. "His *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* shows that by the end of the 1640s he had read Cartwright (*CPW* 3:248–49), but only for polemical purposes" (56). But again Milton's text deserves more attention: he lists the Elizabethan Puritan "among our own Divines," later calling him one of "the true Protestant Divines of England, our fathers in the faith we hold" (*CPW* 3:251). There is certainly something polemical (or rhetorical) about this, since Milton would not have agreed with Cartwright in many respects, yet there could hardly be a more effective way to raise a Puritan flag than to speak of these Puritans as fathers. Theologically speaking, Milton may not seem like a Puritan, but from his perspective — liturgically, politically, and in terms of church government — he was. He identifies himself as one of the group of English Protestants who rose up against the English Church, its prelates, and, ultimately, the king.

And yet, as Martin demonstrates, Milton bears little in common with what is generally thought of as Puritan; indeed, his theological positions often seem to have little in common with any group, and sometimes he seems paradoxically aloof, passionately participating and yet not believing in it all. His separation from mainstream and not-so-mainstream Puritanism is at times startling, as Martin shows in a series of chapters that span the course of Milton's career from his early prose and poetry to the Restoration culture of the major poems. Martin highlights Milton's Arianism, his anti-Calvinist belief in free will, his anti-trinitarianism, the lack of emphasis on conversion, his lack of self-abnegation, and his rationalism, which suggests "a Baconian, not a Puritan, view of truth" (85). While this parallel might be questioned, Martin makes terrific comparisons between Bacon and Milton, as for example the famous "streaming fountain" passage of *Areopagitica* (131). In addition to theological positions, there are cultural differences that distinguish him, in particular his appreciation of music and theater. Milton broke nearly every mold.

As a learned scholar wishing to liberate Milton from the chains of an inveterate misconception, in a sense Martin had two choices: either to redefine Milton as not a Puritan, or to explain the complexity of a religious category that encompasses diametrically opposing systems of belief, a body of coreligionists who were so complicated that after overthrowing the prelates they were at war with themselves. Unfortunately, this second point of view, truer to history and to Milton's conception of himself, remains much harder to explain to the wide audience that needs to hear it.

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