

Daniel Shore. *Milton and the Art of Rhetoric*.

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The title proclaims both the subject and method of this book. First, Daniel Shore sets out to affirm a belief long held, and now undergoing a minor revival but currently undervalued by Milton scholars, that the poet was a master of humanist rhetoric who “intends to persuade his readers of particular positions to which he is undoubtedly dedicated” (11). Second, Shore positions his argument between what he represents as a conflict between two camps: “worldly” scholars, the dominant group, who read Milton’s works within his historical context and focus on his “desire to transform ‘the world’”; and “otherworldly” scholars, chiefly Stanley Fish, who find in Milton’s language his “desire to withdraw from it” (4). Seeing Milton as

a humanist rhetorician allows Shore to reconcile the two camps by arguing that Milton's apparent renunciations of rhetoric are ingenious rhetorical strategies crafted to persuade a wide variety of audiences.

Shore's presentation echoes his thesis. He divides his argument into two main parts with three chapters each and an epilogue. The first part, which includes a previously published essay that received a prize from the Milton Society of America, details Milton's "renunciatory strategies" (15) in many of the prose works, focusing on *Eikonoklastes*, *Of Prelatical Episcopacy*, and *Areopagitica*. Drawing on Cicero's forensic speeches, Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, and the "Pauline rhetorical tradition" (51), Shore focuses less on technique and more on Milton's concern with training right readers and protecting "the proper conditions of public discourse" (79) that allow for free and open debate.

The second part, while continuing analysis of the prose works, extends the discussion to the major poems, with special focus on *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Beginning with a chapter that has recently appeared in *PMLA*, "Why Milton Is Not an Iconoclast," Shore challenges two decades of scholarship to argue that Milton's apparent icon breaking is actually a complex maneuver in which he incorporates and critiques opponents' rhetoric, whether that of Royalists or fallen angels, in order to persuade readers to "discover our independence from idols" (103). The section continues with an examination of the role of *gestus*, a traditional part of delivery, in the process of creating and incorporating the orator's multiple selves and concludes with an identification in *Paradise Regained* of a "new, Christlike oratory" (144) grounded in the imitation of Christ, a process that makes "rhetoric and moral standing identical" (130).

The epilogue offers a provocative reading of *Samson Agonistes* that presents it as an "extended analysis of communicative failure as a means of persuasion" (146). From this perspective, *Samson* becomes "a threat from a persecuted Protestant minority to a dominant Protestant majority" (153) of what could happen if enforcement of the Clarendon Code were to continue. The drama thus becomes "a threat designed to forestall the violence it depicts" (164). Shore's argument manages a neat reconciliation of two major currents in criticism of the drama.

The book is clearly and elegantly written. Shore displays extensive familiarity with modern political philosophy and literary theory and offers sensitive readings of Milton's work. His argument flows smoothly from its initial premise. But that premise is questionable. The problem with this book — and it is serious — is a problem with current Milton studies. Too many scholars continue to write about Milton's rhetoric as if the past thirty years of work in the history of rhetoric (which includes logic) did not exist. Shore presents himself as a historicist, and demonstrates the importance of historical and political contexts, so it is fair to ask why he limits his study of rhetoric to ancient and medieval writers. The only early moderns he discusses are the sixteenth-century writers Thomas Wilson and George Puttenham, neglecting if not dismissing major trends in seventeenth-century theory and practice. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that writings on rhetoric, logic, and grammar in the period were highly politicized and therefore certainly relevant to any study of

contemporary polemics. Milton himself contributed to that discussion, and yet readers will not learn about that fact from this book. Scholars continue to believe in Milton the humanist rhetorician as much as C. S. Lewis believed in Milton the orthodox Christian. Shore will make a major contribution if he prompts others to pay more attention to those who challenge his perspective.

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