

idea of *imitatio Christi* in an era that saw the “erosion of imitative and exemplary traditions” (142).

In a coda, Shore daringly reads *Samson Agonistes* as Milton’s last great rhetorical effort to win over his ideological opponents. Arguing that Milton addresses the work not only to his fellow dissenters but also to the “Royalist and Anglican elites” who persecuted them, Shore proposes that Milton wrote the poem as a veiled threat: an attempt to bring those elites to the negotiating table by painting a picture of what will happen if the new regime fails to bring about “the social and discursive conditions that would make violence unnecessary” (148; 162).

One wonders whether England’s ruling authorities would be prepared to identify in this way with the Philistines—and whether, in reading about the horrors wrought by “a single misguided enthusiast, one who is merely ‘persuaded inwardly’ that his motions are from God,” they would hold out much hope for a negotiated peace with the radicals they feared (160). Shore’s portrayal of Milton as a pragmatic bridge-builder, seeking comity between the Restoration regime and its dissenting minority, will be hard for some readers to accept. But throughout the book, Shore makes a bold case for approaching Milton’s writings not so much as documents of hard belief but as practical tools of persuasion, “less as expressions of commitments rooted in his soul than as ways of coping with and influencing the contingencies of Interregnum and Restoration England” (10). Shore’s own rhetorical style, furthermore, is a model of clarity and aphoristic elegance. His sharp-eyed close readings will prompt Milton scholars to rethink the poet’s strategies of self-presentation and the rhetorical occasions that prompted them.

Danielle A. St. Hilaire. *Satan’s Poetry: Fallenness and the Poetic Tradition in Paradise Lost*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2012. x + 246 pp. \$58.00. REVIEW BY ADAM SWANN, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW.

It is becoming increasingly challenging to find things unattempted yet in *Paradise Lost* criticism, and nowhere is this truer than in studies of Satan and the fallen state. St. Hilaire is under no illusions about

her entrance into an already crowded field, opening the book with the recognition that “beginning a reading of *Paradise Lost* with Satan these days is a difficult approach, if only because so much has already been said on the matter” (2). While critics who focus on Satan tend to do so in order to determine how his characterisation affects the success of Milton’s theodicy, St. Hilaire “sidestep[s]” these readings, instead proposing that “we may read Satan as a kind of centre to the poem . . . [because] the act of writing poetry—and epic poetry in particular—is a distinctly fallen activity, not because it is somehow evil, but because the language in which poetry speaks is a product of the fall” (3).

While Regina Schwartz suggested that *Paradise Lost* is an “an attempt to participate in divine creation by mimicking divine language,” St. Hilaire argues that the epistemological (and therefore linguistic) consequences of the Fall “make such a mimicry impossible” (16). Rather, the poem’s “redemptive gestures reside in its construction of a fallen poetics,” the model for which is initially located in Satan (16). Critical readings of Satan’s creativity tend to fall into two types: the first, represented by Schwartz, interprets Satanic creation as sterile, repetitive compulsion, while the second finds its archetype in Stanley Fish’s suggestion that Satan’s creativity is merely an illusion. St. Hilaire offers an alternative: “because Satan’s activity in the poem has very real effects on Milton’s world, that activity is indeed creative, or, more specifically, re-creative” (17).

The central moment of Satan’s re-creation is, of course, his declaration that the angels are “self-begot, self-rai’d / By [their] own quickn’ing power” (*PL* 5.860-1), and St. Hilaire engages in an illuminating and extended close reading of this passage. As elsewhere in the poem, Satan speaks in this passage primarily in questions, and in a nice turn of phrase (just one of many), St. Hilaire observes that “the medium of a question, which may imply an answer but which nevertheless does not itself declare one, opens up a gap in discursive logic wide enough for the Archfiend to slip through” (26). If not rhetorical, Satan’s questions are nevertheless unanswered, and so we see that “Satan rejects the search for answers, preferring the lack of knowledge implied by his questions, at the moment of his revolt in book 5” (31). For St. Hilaire the absence of knowledge is central to Satan’s self-creation, and in declaring “we know no time when we

were not as now" (*PL* 5.859) Satan "recreates himself negatively, in that moment seizing a power that had hitherto been yielded only by God ... [Satan] can create, but his creation is negative, invested with existence in the world only through its relation to the very power that it rejects. This is what makes Satan not only a poetic figure, but a figure for poetry" (38).

Poetry is Satanic for St. Hilaire due to the distinction between divine and fallen language: the former does not require interpretation since "its meaning is ontologically connected to its utterance," while the latter "does not bring understanding or communicate anything directly," and so is "something whose form begs us to understand it but ... cannot actually yield that understanding" (49). Poetic voices are therefore necessarily fallen, since if they communicated divinely they would all "sing the same song" (50).

This leads to the crux of the book's argument regarding *Paradise Lost's* relationship with its poetic tradition: the poem's self-identification as "unattempted" (*PL* 1.16) rather than "new" or "better" suggests that, like Satan, the narrator "can only establish his newness through a negative formulation ... his poem is significant precisely because it is *not* other poems" (50). With Hegelian dialectic and Gadamerian hermeneutic horizons in the background, St. Hilaire proceeds to unpick Milton's poetic allusions in an extended section of close reading which is arguably the strongest, if the most self-contained, section of the book. Tracing the trope of the bleeding tree through Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Dante, and Tasso to its modulated manifestation in *Paradise Lost*, it becomes evident that "Milton's allusions are expressions of difference" (81), not sameness.

Having established that fallen language is predicated on separation rather than sublation, St. Hilaire proceeds to examine Eve's temptation in book 9. Eve interacts with Satan in the same way Milton does with his literary forbears: they use the same techniques as their predecessors but to different ends. Eve's first words to Satan are questions ("What may this mean? Language of Man pronounc't / By Tongue of Brute, and human sense exprest?" (*PL* 9.553-554)), and this "recognition of particularity is thus for Eve, just as it was for Satan, the beginning of her fall, the moment that initiates her self-creation" (122). We thus see how Eve "adopts Satan's form of language—the question, but

because that questioning is rooted in the negative, her use of Satanic language necessarily produces something different" (119). She answers Satan's questions with more questions of her own, and in doing so "recreat[es] herself according to her own ideas, her own arguments, her own choice" (130).

Adam's fall, too, is characterised by questions. St. Hilaire astutely picks up on parallels between Adam's self-questioning after the judgement in book 10 and Satan's soliloquy in book 4: "Adam attempts to reason through his situation with a long series of questions, which lead him, like Satan, to accuse God for making him and to reflect on the fairness of God's terms and his own responsibility for falling" (191). St. Hilaire hears in Satan's lament "my self am Hell" (*PL* 4.75) an already stony heart finally hardened by the inability to escape subjectivity, and Adam is only brought back from this brink by the intervention of Eve. Eve serves as the other Adam sets against himself, which allows him to recover his intersubjectivity (128). For St. Hilaire, the embracing of intersubjectivity is a crucial facet of Milton's soteriology, and the discovery of a Paradise within Eve, happier far is not a sin but a necessity, since "in the absence of God after the Fall ... love of the individual becomes the means to redemption" (201-2).

While *Satan's Poetry* is a valuable addition to *Paradise Lost* scholarship, it is not flawless. St. Hilaire's argumentation can be uneven; at times, her concern for linking ideas back to their previous iterations leave her occasionally labouring a point, while at the other extreme, the chapter which treats Milton's interaction with poetic tradition, in itself the most effective section of the book, is rather awkwardly integrated into the overall argument. Nonetheless, *Satan's Poetry* offers a fresh and insightful reconsideration of the epistemological and ontological causes and consequences of fallenness in *Paradise Lost*.