to collapse into each other, leaving a “wayfaring” rather than a “warfaring” Christian to deal with the collapse of such easy binaries: “Good and evil then elide into truth and error, and error can be treated as a wandering from the truth or more philosophically, as truth’s insufficient presence. Warfaring slips into wayfaring” (144).

In sum, Rajan is suspicious of Miltonists who offer simple responses to complex problems. Wittreich says it best when he contrasts the subtle, nuanced approach of Rajan with the more simplistic assertions of earlier critics: “Rajan displaces the certainties of [C. S.] Lewis, [Douglas] Bush, and [A. J. A.] Waldock with a hermeneutic of suspicion, one of whose initial objectives is to contradict Milton and his critics out of their contradictions” (“Afterword: His More Attentive Mind,” (155). Finally, I am pleased to report that this collection does not mark the terminus of Rajan’s career; as recently as March 2007 he has been pleased to enlighten us on how “Samson Hath Quit Himself / Like Samson” in a seminal article that appeared in *Milton Quarterly*.


This book vibrantly sets before us nine engaging and informed articles by leading scholars of John Milton in tribute to Stanley Fish, one of “our most provocative, as well as most eloquent, of critics” (ix), and closes with a tenth by the honoree himself. The title is curious—“The Age of Fish” flashes forth the grand elevation usually reserved for volumes on Milton himself, or for other preeminent figures in literature or history (e.g. “The Age of Shakespeare,” “The Age of Elizabeth”). But though the editors remain silent in the Preface as to their choice of words, there is no mistaking the affection and admiration they mean to convey about this “most eloquent” writer and thinker. The Introduction sets the tone and is by Lana Cable who recalls her former student days under Fish’s “analytic and persuasive genius” as he inflamed her classmates to follow his brilliant lead in “the pursuit-of-truth-enterprise” (4). As one would expect in a tribute volume, the essays are varied: half spotlight Milton’s view of himself as author or are examinations of what influenced
him to the style and manner of presentation in his poetry and prose; the other half feature Milton as seen by Fish. Four highlight *Samson Agonistes* and the charge, brought by John Carey after the attack on the World Trade Towers in September 2001, that both Milton and Fish endorse terrorism.

In the first section of the book, called “Authorship and Authority,” there are three essays by Marshall Grossman, Barbara Lewalski, and Annabel Patterson. Grossman’s “The Onomastic Destiny of Stanley Fish,” is a largely psychological work that intends to be “funny” yet “nontrivial” as it seeks “to say something celebratory about the remarkable intellectual itinerary of Stanley Fish” (28). It begins with a fishing epigram Grossman has borrowed from Bunyan’s “Apology for a Book”—“You see the ways the Fisher-man doth take / To catch the Fish,” a passage Fish quotes in *Surprised by Sin*—and, playing on the homophones Fish and fish, proceeds to suggest that Fish, by his very name, was almost fated to fish out meaning and fish for readers, just as Milton hooked Fish himself (30). The essay is far too complexly organized to summarize fully or fairly and so this one example from Bunyan will have to be suggestive. From outset to finish Grossman deluges the reader in an onomastic blizzard, a snowfall of names and technical terms, some familiar, some obscure, which he lets fall from the various fields of psychology, philosophy, literary theory, novels and movies. Freud and Lacan provide the theoretical basis for his discursive, probing, analysis of the person he calls “the character Fish bespoken in a public discourse” (40). How the author Fish (not the private and actual person of that name) has revealed and identified himself as a “Miltonist” is what occupies Grossman’s thinking. And that thinking unfortunately revels in setting itself forth in cloudy mazes of syntax uncoiling in locutions such as these not atypical examples: “mobility of emotion is facilitated when disparate chains of signifiers are imbricated so that associated feelings may jump from an unconscious chain of signifiers to another, conscious one, the links of which are similarly configured” (41-42); “When through metaphor or metonymy a material sign is made the signifier of an unnamed other, the resulting compound sign is subject to two sets of associations that may be made on the basis of the signified and on the level of the signifier” (43). Humor and clarity suffer when theoretical lingo and an overly complex sentence structure take control, as they do here.
The essays by Lewalski and Patterson do not deal directly with Fish, but instead look closely at Milton’s manner of thinking about authorship. Lewalski’s “Milton’s Idea of Authorship” commandingly surveys much of his prose and poetry in proof of her assertion that Milton always kept in mind a “rhetorical theory appropriate to worthy authors” (54). He believed an author is a reformer of “society and its culture” (60), and its guide to “moral and political knowledge, virtue, and inner freedom” (62). An author’s life was to be independent of patronage, either from the state or the church, and was to be the ground out of which the works sprang: “In Apology for Smectymnuus he insists in all seriousness that the high poet can only make his poem out of his own wide experience and the values and virtues he has cultivated within himself” (64). Even the Bible is not to be a final arbiter of belief or authority greater than the author himself. Milton only allowed its determination of his thoughts and actions in so far as Scripture was to be judged worthy by Milton’s own subjective inner authority, his sense of “charity” (70).

Patterson’s “Milton’s Negativity” emphasizes Milton’s stylistic and psychological habit of putting “his most important positives [...] in negative form” (81), a habit accentuated in his later writings and poetry by two things, his steeping in negative Latinate diction and his blindness. As Lewalski has done, Patterson impressively surveys much of Milton’s prose and poetry to develop her thesis. Milton’s meticulous attention to negative form helps him not only to deny certain things but also to emphasize, to bring out, to compel attention to positive ideas. They also work to describe the indescribable, as happens with the Father in *Paradise Lost* who is immutable, immortal, infinite (94). Patterson herself works confidently in the negatives of Milton’s Latin. In one of the many lessons taken from her study, she neatly denies a theory of early composition for *Art of Logic* (1672) which rests on the notion that it is too complexly organized to have been written when Milton was blind, but must have been the work of a sighted Milton during the 1640s. Milton, she counters, was doing the same complex writing in his *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Secunda* (1651), a work filled with Latin privatives and composed after he was entirely blind (87-88).

There are four papers by Albert Labriola, Stella Revard, Joan Bennett, and Joseph Wittreich in the second division called, “Text and Context.” Labriola’s is a unique and curious theological paper, “The Son as an Angel in *Paradise Lost*” — unique because it is almost alone in its view, and curious because
of its twists on conventional theology concerning the Son. As analogue for his discussion of the Son as an angel, Labriola offers the pseudepigraphal work The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, a work he does not establish Milton as having read but which he offers for its striking parallels to what he believes is happening to the Son in *Paradise Lost*. The Son is both deity and angel in the epic, a being Labriola calls the “christological angel or *theangels*” (112). The Martyrdom exhibits the Son descending through various orders of angels on his way to the incarnation, and as he goes taking on each station’s less glorious essence until he becomes a man on earth. With this notion as his guide, Labriola sees something of the same kind going on in the epic: the Son begins as deity concealed within the brightness of the Father and thus beyond the angels’ knowledge. His deity, however, is not co-extensive with that of the Father: “the Father endowed the Son with divine nature akin to, but not the same as, his own” (106). This, Labriola says, is the first of three literal begettings and takes place sometime before the action of the poem. But once the Son is presented openly to the angels, he is himself angelic: “The Son appears in the epic only and always in the form and nature and with the features of an angel” and is “the means by which his ontological relationship with the Father is clarified” (106). This is the second begetting. The third is his appearance to Adam and Eve in the Garden, but Labriola does not cover this. One would expect Labriola to conclude from his angelic assertions that the Son in Milton’s theology is unorthodox and that his Trinity is defective. But he does not. “My argument concerning the Son’s status as a divine person is not situated in the context of ongoing commentary on Milton’s orthodox trinitarianism, Arianism, or subordinationism” (274, n.2). His concern, he asserts, is to explain how the Son is an angel and how this state is parallel to that in the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah. Labriola’s accounting for the mystery of the Son is insightful insofar as it offers the possibility of the Son’s having been hidden but existent prior to his day of presentation, but it needs further development along the lines he presently avoids entering, and one hopes that he will undertake that task.

Revard’s fascinating thesis in “Milton and Henry More: The Chariot of Paternal Deity in *Paradise Lost*, Book 6” is that “Milton’s Son goes forth to claim his kingdom, and the manner in which the chariot is described makes it clear that it is his millennial kingdom he is establishing” (135). The impetus for Milton’s treatment derives from both Ezekiel and Revelation ultimately but
was mediated by his study of the Kabbalah, an interest he had in common with Henry More (in his *Divine Dialogues*, 1668). Though the two men likely were acquainted, they “pursued their kabbalistic studies independent of one another” (124).

“Mary Astell, Lucy Hutchinson, John Milton, and Feminist Liberation Theology” is Bennett’s renewed defense of Milton against the old simplistic charge of secular feminists that he was a misogynist, a charge addressed and overturned in the 1980s by Diane McColley. Bennett’s new path to a feminist reading of Milton is theological rather than merely secular. “Feminist liberation theology exercises a hermeneutics that can open texts like Milton’s, as it opens the Bible, to the needs of a feminism that wants women to exercise agency [...] as builders of a society that frees the full potential contribution of each member–female and male–to the whole” (152). The women she highlights are different in religious views and politics, yet both exhibit a feminism working within the establishment orthodoxy centered on male superiority. Astell is Episcopalian and a deplorer of Dissent, whereas Hutchinson is a Dissenter. Using insights on the freedom both women represent, and the insights gained from a modern feminist theologian, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Bennett discusses *Paradise Lost* 10.145-56, the Son’s charge to Adam concerning his role as governor of Eve. She says that Milton, a dissenter, found abhorrent “Charles I’s submission to his queen [and] Charles II’s to his mistress.” Such is the context for properly taking what the Son says to Adam in judging “Adam’s fall as the failure of a governor” when he submitted to Eve. For if we mistakenly take the Son’s words “with a strictness of literal interpreting, God’s words to Adam would place a great and sad oppression on many women” (160). Perhaps they would, but to see things this way, Bennett surely exaggerates the sense of oppression by men that most women of the seventeenth-century would likely have felt. And to arrive at her defense of Milton against the charge of being a misogynist, Bennett must minimize the literal reading of both Genesis and Milton, and must ignore or minimize the strictures of his own time (and likely his own mind) regarding the subordinate position of women in the home and society.

Stanley Fish “is arguably the most influential of Milton’s living critics” (168), states Joseph Wittreich in “The Ramifications of those Ramifications: Compounding Contexts for *Samson Agonistes*.” Beginning with the charge made by John Leonard that Fish’s *How Milton Works* ignores contexts, par-
ticularly religious and literary, Wittreich’s essay is a declaration to the contrary, that Fish works in these areas “cunningly,” and never loses either the aesthetics or the theology of Milton’s craft. “Milton’s rebellious writings find their counterpart in Fish’s provocative readings” (168). Wittreich, working in the vein of modern revisionist criticism, seeks to expand the appreciation and understanding of Samson by taking into account the reception of the work and its multiple contexts, both modern and of Milton’s day, that complicate any straight line interpretation that travels from the Bible to Milton. Thus Wittreich upholds the ambiguity Leonard (and others) seemingly deplore. He stresses this ambiguity at the very outset when he declares of Milton criticism that it “is progressively taking direction from contexts compounding, steadily shifting, multiplying in number, and often eliding with one another” (167).

Instead of the old way of asking what influence the Bible had on Milton, Wittreich asks us to reverse this to “consider, alternatively, Milton’s influence on the Bible,” that is his influence on Biblical criticism written subsequent to Samson and the epics. He surveys many literary and religious commentators, mostly of the nineteenth century to show forth a “new hermeneutic” (182), one which goes beyond the Bible to reveal a “Samson ambiguous, even defective, in his heroism” (185). The weakness in Wittreich’s preference for the new hermeneutic is that it is a way both he (and Fish) have of minimizing the historical seventeenth-century understanding Milton and England would have taken in the Bible’s account of the historical Samson. Wittreich is guilty of the very charge Alan Rudrum makes and which Wittreich airily quotes and dismisses in a note: “the fundamental problem of most revisionist criticism,” says Rudrum, is that “it outlines what significance the poem might have for modern readers and then imputes it back to Milton as his meaning” (287, n. 30).

The final section of the volume, titled “The Terrorist Plot,” has three articles by David Lowenstein, Michael Lieb, and Stanley Fish. All center on the sensational and moralistic charge made by John Carey, as set forth in the Times Literary Supplement (September 6, 2002). Samson’s violence makes him a “terrorist” and Milton an endorser of terrorism. By implication Fish is as well, to judge from an assertion he makes in his How Milton Works (426), wherein he claimed that Samson’s act in killing so many was actually “a virtuous action” since he believed it to be God’s will. “There is Nothing He Cannot Ask: Milton, Liberalism, and Terrorism” is Fish’s refutation of Carey’s
kind of liberalism that abhors any kind of violence for any purpose whatever. “Milton would have us proceed by looking to the spirit within which an act is performed—to its intentional structure—rather than to what may or may not occur in its wake” (250). Fish surveys several of Milton’s prose works to mine evidence for the interior guide to behavior. He recognizes the danger that those acting in the name of God may in fact be deluding themselves and acting from the source of their own will. But even so, Samson’s actions, from his own view, are faithful to what he perceives is God’s will. Thus the interior, and not the exterior, of any event is always the judge of that which is worthy of praise. “This is all I mean by the judgment that so incenses Carey: the judgment that, insofar as Samson’s act is the outward gesture of his interior desire to do God’s will, ‘it is a virtuous action’ and ‘no other standard for evaluating it exists’” (256). Besides, Carey should know better than to engage in “morality” when he is doing “literary criticism” (257). Fish’s name for Samson (and Milton himself) is “antinomian,” meaning one who disregards exterior law for an “internal justification of the Spirit of God working within him” (258). But to be an antinomian is not the same as being a terrorist, and Fish is explicit in his rejection. “Stanley Fish is a literary critic” and “no reading he gives commits him to terrorism or to becoming an apologist for terrorists” (262). Nor can the label fairly apply to Milton or Samson. Both “may be many things—regicide, misogynist, elitist, bully, boor—but they are not terrorists” (264).

The essays by Lowenstein and Lieb uphold Fish’s take on Samson Agonistes in refutation of Carey’s charges. In “Samson Agonistes and the Culture of Religious Terrorism,” Lowenstein points out how easily “terrorist” now lends itself to abuse when used “to demonize opponents”; the act of doing so blocks “discriminating analysis” and “rational argument” regarding violence in religion (207). Milton is disconcerting in light of our current concerns with terrorism as can be seen in his favorable writing about Cromwell’s Irish campaign while at the same time upholding freedom in religion and politics (210). But against Carey, Lowenstein asserts that he has too easily equated the terror in Samson Agonistes with today’s suicide bombers. Though Samson is a “unique dramatization of religious terror” (212), and though “Milton’s God is “a God of terror” (222), we must not connect these particulars with the acts of terror we associate now with suicide bombers. Lowenstein’s final comment is useful as a gauge to true terrorism. “The destruction and ven-
geance depicted in *Samson Agonistes*, then, dramatizes a kind of awesome religious terror,” but “as unsettling as the horrific events dramatized at the end [...] may be, they do not concern terrorist activity—or ‘an incitement to terrorism’—in the way that we usually understand it” (227). In this elegant statement he does away with the easy equations Carey and others try to assign when they mistakenly align the language of terror they see in literature such as *Samson* to events now. There is no real correspondence to the wantonness involved in the latter.

Lieb, in a similar vein, attacks Carey’s misreading of Fish in his “Returning the Gorgon Medusa’s Gaze: Terror and Annihilation in Milton” and in doing so sets before us a far more radical Fish than Carey knows or than Lieb may consciously mean to champion. Lieb points to Carey’s mishandling of *How Milton Works*: “Carey’s error is in associating Fish with the regenerationist point of view and then castigating Fish as one who, in the fashion of the regenerationists, looks approvingly upon Samson’s massacre of the Philistines” (233). Regenerationists see Samson at the play’s end moving toward inner light from darkness and the final act of vengeance as an expression of God’s will. Fish is no regenerationist and no endorser of terrorism as that term is now understood. Instead, Lieb sees Fish as “downright subversive” (231) because he believes that the final scene of *Samson* “is one of complete occlusion, rather than of reassuring revelation” (232) and that what we have before us is a poem without interpretive possibilities, one “with no meaning to be grasped” (234). But is this not an implicit endorsement of blank nihilism, both in Milton and Fish as well? Lieb seems to make way for this conclusion when he says: “Fish’s outlook may be nihilistic or perhaps antinomian, but it is not one that claims annihilation as the inevitable outcome of regaining one’s station with God” (234). This is a curious defense and one that is hardly flattering since it makes of Fish, by implication at least, if not by declaration, one who has no moral compass, who does not see a moral purpose in literature at all. Whatever else one may say of Carey’s passion, it cannot be said that he lacks a moral compass. But in taking away any morality from Fish, as Lieb seems to imply, he has left his champion in a dark place by implication at least. Lieb does clear Fish of Carey’s charge in his conclusion: It is not “meaningful,” given the premises of *How Milton Works* to argue that Fish “would endorse the idea of Samson as a terrorist” for “to speak of terrorism or the committing of terrorist acts is to speak of motive” (241). The poem has no
motives in view; thus Samson is not one, nor is Fish an enorser of the idea. In an earlier note, however, Lieb makes a regrettable equation in his application of “terrorist” to the present situation in Iraq. He speaks of “the horrific events of 9/11” but then says: “In a kind of quid pro quo, however, one might also suggest that the U.S. attacks on Baghdad in March 2003 represent their own form of terrorism” (236).

Only if we wish to empty the word “terrorist” of its present meaning in association with the deliberate jihadist murders of 9/11 or the strapping on of suicide belts can this equation be made. Clearly Lieb does not wish to do this, but he should better have used the word “terrify” or “terror” of the U.S. raids to avoid the confusion of terms.


Aimed at college and university survey courses and the “general reader” and designed to complement Blackwell’s *A Companion to Milton* (2001), edited by Thomas Corns, the *Concise Companion* features twelve newly-published chapters and two reference sections. Part I: Surveys, addressing the central role of Miltonic texts in the English and international literary canon, contains the following essays:

Robert Thomas Fallon, “A Reading of His ‘left hand’: Milton’s Prose”

John T. Shavecross, “‘Shedding sweet influence’: The Legacy of John Milton’s Works”

Roy Flanagan, “‘The world all before [us]’: More than Three Hundred Years of Criticism”

Shavecross makes the case for the vast influence of Milton while conceding the difficulty of systematizing an influence which transcends historical, genre, and other conventional categories. In keeping with the introductory nature of the volume, he includes a clear, comprehensible definition of “influence in literary materials” and identifies the forms influence might typically take. Examples of Miltonic influence range from Spanish baroque illustrations of *Paradise Lost* to contemporary drama, poetry, and the novel, including Aldous Huxley’s *Eyeless in Gaza* (1936) and Walker Percy’s *Lust in the Ruins*. 