Milton as Multilingual

Ad Patrem (77-85)
Officium chart taceo commune parentis,
Me poscunt maia, tuo pater optime sumpta
Cum nihil Romuleae patris facundia linguas,
Et Latii venerate, et quae locis era decebant
Granda magni linguis clara vocabula Graalit.
Addereユーザ quos aetat Gallia flores,
Et quam degeneri novus Italus ore loquemur
Scilicet, haec aetate lepitas voce tuebatur,
Quaeque Palaestinus legitur mysteria vates.

To my Father
I say nothing of the usual duties of parent to child;
Greater gifts demand my speech; for at your own cost, best of fathers,
(Once the eloquence of the Roman tongue had been opened to me,
The graces of Latin and the grand words raised high by the magnifique Greeks
Which graced the mouth of Jupiter)
You persuaded me to add the flowers of which France boasts,
And the language which the modern Italian pours forth
From his degenerate mouth, testifying by it the barbarians innovations,
And the mysteries which the prophet of Palatine utters.

SELECTED ESSAYS, 1982 - 2004

John K. Hale

Edited by
Lisa Marr and Chris Ackerley

with an
Introduction by Beverley Sherry
(University of Sydney)

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Preface

The dedication thanks my colleagues in the Department of English at the University of Otago for help and stimulus over the span of these essays. Because this is a book about multilingualism, it has a bilingual dedication, whose Latin portion thanks my greatest encouragers: Latin can say some things which English cannot, as well as vice versa.

For the production of the essays as a volume in the series *Otago Studies in English*, I owe a major debt to Lisa Marr for research assistance and all sorts of editing; to Chris Ackerley as supporter and editor; and to Shef Rogers, Lyn Tribble, and Greg Waite of the Publications Committee. Editors of the journals which published the first fourteen of these essays are thanked together here for that indispensable first step. Full acknowledgements follow in a moment.

No further thanks should delay the Introduction by Beverley Sherry. In case readers desire to know more about the prompting, circumstances, or connections of an essay, I have added some afterword-paragraphs. The essays are presented in order of writing within each section. The rationale of the sections is explained at the beginning of each.

John K. Hale
Introduction

Beverley Sherry

Milton had a varying grasp of ten languages and a particular knowledge of at least five. Master of his native English, excelling in his second language Latin and in Greek, fluent in Italian and French, knowledgeable in Hebrew, he used his manifold linguistic skills to compose in foreign languages, to translate, even to make scholarly philological annotations. Over the course of his life, he spoke and wrote in Latin at school and university, and taught it later; conversed in Italian and French during his continental journey; wrote numerous works in Latin as Cromwell’s Secretary for Foreign Tongues; translated Greek, Latin, and Hebrew texts; wrote personal letters in Latin; read from the Hebrew Bible and, after his blindness, had it read to him daily; knew Homer virtually by heart; and, inspired by a multitude of foreign texts, shaped his English compositions under their influence. Without continual and varied use of languages and texts other than English, he would scarcely have known what he thought about anything, or have understood himself and his aims. This book explores and showcases Milton as multilingual, and persuades abundantly that foreign tongues were part of his life and central to his growth as an author.

The book brings together seventeen essays by John Hale on topics ranging from Milton’s verse paraphrase of Psalm 114 in 1624, at the age of 15, to his rearrangement of Paradise Lost along arguably Virgilian lines in 1674, the year of his death. Fourteen of the essays were published previously from 1982-2003 in geographically scattered journals, some of them not readily accessible. Three new essays on the theological treatise De Doctrina Christiana are included and, together with an essay of 2003, they apply the subject of multilingualism to that work. An over-riding design has been newly created in which the seventeen essays become chapters grouped into five sections—“Composing,” “Language-Arts,” “Self-Understanding,” “Paradise Lost and its Early Reception,” and “De Doctrina Christiana and Language-Issues.” Brief preambles or headings are added to each section and an “Afterword” follows each chapter. This five-part structure and the new preambles and Afterwords invest the volume with a rationale, shaping it into a book in its own right.

The standard work previously published on Milton’s multilingualism is John Hale’s own Milton’s Languages (1997). The present volume differs in important ways. In particular, the four chapters on De Doctrina Christiana represent a new departure in addressing the vexed questions of authorship, style, and collaboration in that controversial document. Further, whereas the earlier book focused
especially on the multilingualism of Milton’s English works, the present volume
deals more exclusively with Latin, Greek, Italian, and Hebrew texts. A general
difference is that *Milton as Multilingual* offers closer and more extended readings
of texts. This is typified by the detailed analysis of how the final line of the
*Epitaphium Damonis* is composed.

“Composing” is the title of the first group of essays, and it opens with an
essay on *Epitaphium Damonis*. In her *Life of John Milton*, Barbara Lewalski
makes the generally accepted claim that this elegy for Charles Diodati is “Milton’s
most impressive achievement as a Latin poet,” and she writes a commentary on
an English translation. It is instructive to compare this with John Hale’s essay
because to do so throws light on the distinctive contribution of *Milton as
Multilingual*. Working with Milton’s Latin original, scrutinizing diction, sound,
rhythm, and allusion, and offering as an aid some of his own translation as he
proceeds, Hale unveils and makes accessible the Latin poem. Always linking
formal elements with the thought and feeling they embody, he demonstrates, for
example, how “Milton yokes diction and prosody to imitate the very movement
of the mourner’s mind” (8), how he stretches decorum in fusing Bacchic with
Christian elements to transcend grief and conclude the poem “downright
corybantically” (16). It is an analysis which makes us see that the living flesh of
Milton’s poem is *Latin*, and Latin as he uses it. A similar close attention to the
verbal fabric of Milton’s writing characterizes the award-winning essay “Milton
Meditates the Ode.” This chapter covers a vast sweep of Milton’s compositions,
in both English and other languages, from 1629 to 1671, and reveals his life-long
possession of Pindar, even to his curious production of a “biblical Pindaric” when
he translated Psalm 114 into Greek (25). Turning to achievements in Latin prose,
Hale sets Milton’s polemical compositions of the 1650s in the context of the
fierce debate in Europe over the execution of Charles I in 1649. Again, there is
close attention to syntax, diction, and auditory effects. These elements are shown
as combining to suggest the dignity and energy of Cromwell, while Milton is
interpreted as projecting himself in the persona of “a principled, dignified citizen-
spokesman, a latter-day Roman in fact, exploiting with vigour the Romans’
hostility to kings and tyrants” (55). For compositions of this kind, at this time
and place, Latin was the right—the only—medium and Milton wielded it with
strenuous individuality.

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2 This essay won the Milton Society of America’s James Holly Hanford “Most
Distinguished Essay” Prize for 1996.
Part two, “Language-Arts,” pays homage to Milton as both a translator of poetry and a competent philologist whose annotations on Euripides are still accepted by classical scholars. Translating was, for Milton, not a mere skill but an art in which he experimented with different poetic voices. It was a part of his life, and could relate to deeply felt experience. Chapter 6, “Why did Milton Translate Psalms 80-88 in April 1648?” proposes that this work was undertaken as “a spiritual, as well as a translating, exercise” (102): Milton hears the voice of Israel in Psalms 80-88 and, translating the Hebrew, takes on the role of spokesman for an England which he felt resembled Israel, a chosen people on the brink of crisis in April 1648, teetering on civil war.

Part three moves to the subject of “Self-Understanding” and focuses on how Milton understood himself as an author, particularly in his endeavours to edit his own works. “Milton’s Self-Presentation in Poems, 1645” (Chapter 7) interprets this collection of poems as a consciously proud multilingual publication consisting of works in English, Latin, Italian, and Greek, chosen and arranged by Milton himself. Observing that speaking in a different language creates a different self, Hale sees Milton consciously displaying “a multiple self, one that varies with the language-roles adopted for each occasion” (111), and publishing not for money but for sending out complimentary copies to friends, libraries, and members of the British and European intelligentsia. It is a Milton declaring: “[t]his is my self; these are its powers” (115). Grouped also under “Self-Understanding” is a close analysis of one of Milton’s letters, Number 23, written in 1657 and published in 1674. Milton was the first English author ever to collect and publish his own letters, his Epistolae familiares (“familiar letters”), and that he chose to do so in the last year of his life would seem a deliberate exercise in self-portraiture. Letter 23 is a reply to a continental scholar, Henry De Brass, on the question of what is the best style for history-writing. Noting that Milton’s letter praises the Roman historian Sallust above all, Hale argues that, in the process, Milton allies himself with Sallust by the Sallustian energy of his Latin prose—“[i]t is the doctrine of decorum brought memorably to life” (148).

The scope of the book is broadened in an interesting and valuable way with the fourth part, “Paradise Lost and its Early Reception.” Chapter 10, “The Significance of the Early Translations of Paradise Lost,” investigates the wide and varied European reception of Milton’s epic from 1686 to 1899. Saint-Maur’s French prose translation, for example, went through thirty editions between 1727

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and 1899. Hale makes distinctions between the various cultural receptions, and this illuminates Milton’s original. The Latin translations were responding to something about the sublimity of \textit{Paradise Lost} that was Latin, “especially Virgilian” (158). For prose translation, Chateaubriand’s French version of 1836 is singled out as the best of its kind: here “[w]e feel at once that Milton’s intellectual voltage . . . has been given back to him by the combination of fidelity and elegance” (170). The Italian translations were all in \textit{verso sciolto} (“loose verse”), unrhyming iambics close to English blank verse, and are pre-eminent for their “special relationship with the poet’s high style” (176). In this chapter, Hale’s own multilingual skills shine. Not only is he the most knowledgeable scholar today on Milton’s multilingualism, but his own linguistic skills are unequalled among Miltonists. Who else could have negotiated their way through Latin, German, Dutch, French, and Italian translations with ease, made acute distinctions, and concluded that the difficulty of translating \textit{Paradise Lost} meant that Milton did not receive from his translators what Virgil received from Dryden, Homer from Pope, or Shakespeare from Tieck and Schlegel?

Another dimension of the early reception is explored in Chapter 11, which is a serious condemnation of Richard Bentley’s treatment of \textit{Paradise Lost}. Bentley’s marginal notes are carefully examined together with his published edition of 1732. The marginalia show that Bentley continually looks for “possible causes of aural error in transmission” (183), and exercises his personal taste even more egregiously than in his edition. He is rightly exposed for both suppression of evidence and obfuscation, and, in all, for a “deeply-flawed ego-trip” (190)\textsuperscript{4}.

Continuing the exploration of the early reception of Milton’s epic, Chapter 12 offers an explanation for Milton’s rearranging \textit{Paradise Lost} from ten books in 1667 to twelve in 1674. Going beyond Arthur Barker’s work on this subject\textsuperscript{5}, Hale detects a range of “Virgilian ‘signatures’” in Milton’s works from 1667 to 1674 (197). He presents a cumulative weight of circumstantial evidence from Milton’s work, life, and times which all points towards Virgil (in 1650, for example,  

\textsuperscript{4} In striking contrast is the work of the first Milton scholar, the multilingual Patrick Hume (versed in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, French, and German). His \textit{Annotations of Milton’s Paradise Lost} (London, 1695) is a major achievement and a highly significant early reception of the poem. It includes exhaustive biblical, classical, geographical, and etymological references. Some of Hume’s commentary is reprinted in \textit{Paradise Lost 1668-1968: Three Centuries of Commentary}, ed. Earl Miner (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2004).

there appeared a publication entitled *Virgilius Evangelizans* which was a life of Christ composed entirely from Virgilian words and tags). The 1674 revising of *Paradise Lost* into twelve books, like the *Aeneid*, is thus interpreted within a broad Virgilian context.6

The fifth and final group of essays addresses *De Doctrina Christiana*. One of the liveliest debates in current Milton studies concerns this treatise, and an international group of scholars has been working on it since 1993. As a member of this team, John Hale’s role is to make a transcription of the entire work, translate it, and prepare an edition with annotations. “On Translating the *De Doctrina Christiana*” (Chapter 14) critically examines the earlier translations of Sumner and Carey. Frankly regarding the Latin of the treatise as barbarous in places, Hale is against converting it into “smoothed-out English,” preferring instead to retain “the manuscript’s wartiness” (234). He puts his finger on one of the work’s hallmarks, its opinionated determination to win an argument at all costs. This is made particularly clear in Chapter 16, “Latin Bibles and *De Doctrina Christiana*,” where the long passage in the treatise on *fornicatio* in relation to divorce is exposed as twisting the Bible in order to win a heretical argument—“Would you buy a used chariot from this person?” (260). The much contested question of the authorship of *De Doctrina Christiana* is left open, the author being referred to consistently as “the author” or “our author,” never “Milton.” While a fair weight of evidence is offered which casts doubt on Milton as author, other evidence is presented, especially some verbal details, which do suggest his authorship of the passages where they occur. Hale proposes, for example, that the repeated use of the unusual word *duntaxat* (“to this extent, in so far, simply, merely, only”) could be a “fingerprint” pointing to Milton (274-76). Finally, he believes that the treatise is unfinished, in places slap-dash, and that the opening epistle is “the disconcertingly polished portal of a disconcertingly uneven whole” (273).

By the end of part five, I was aware of an autobiographical strand in the book, a story line suggesting the journey of a Milton scholar. The collection is a self-edited retrospective and, in the process, a self-assessment. The framing preambles and Afterwords, written for this volume, provide details of Hale’s work over a twenty-five year period. He observes that his 1982 essay on the *Epitaphium Damonis* “started off a number of themes of my subsequent research, such as the sound of [Milton’s] verse, its orality” (18). The Afterword to Chapter 5, “Milton’s Euripides Marginalia,” dates the origins of that essay in “a prolonged and delightful time in 1988 working at the Bodleian Library on the two volumes of Milton’s

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6 An interpretation to bear in mind when assessing recent assertions of the centrality of Lucan to Miltonic epic.
own copy of Euripides” (97), while the Afterword to Chapter 7, “Milton’s Self-Presentation in Poems, 1645,” explains that this 1991 essay “marks the beginning of my attempts to understand Milton by applications of sociology and anthropology” (124). The preamble to section four, “Paradise Lost and its Early Reception,” acknowledges that this group of essays had its beginnings in 1979, when the author discovered the treasure-house of early translations, versions, and editions of Paradise Lost at the Turnbull Library in Wellington, New Zealand. Of Milton’s own retrospective, his Poems 1645, Hale observes, “[t]o self-edit is to self-assess” (120), and this is partly what he is doing for himself in Milton as Multilingual.

A large slab of John Hale’s life as a scholar, however, is not represented: his Milton marathons. And yet, in fact, these relate to a leitmotif of the book. There is throughout a recurring awareness of the aural and the oral in Milton. This is evident in the masterly analysis of the diction and prosody of Epitaphium Damonis; in the response to an even “more than Pindaric sweep and swirl of rhythm” in the jubilant Latin ode to John Rouse—“[it] moves like the sprung rhythm of Hopkins” (27); in the attention to alliteration and rhythm which lend power to Milton’s Latin polemic; in the detecting, even in his marginalia to Euripides, that Milton “read Greek with his ears as well as his eyes,” with a “scholarly concern for right rhythm” (90). Time and again, we are alerted to the sound of Milton’s words read aloud. The elegant and sonorous Latin of the opening epistle to De Doctrina Christiana is considered “of a nature to be heard as we read. Was it written to be read aloud, . . . or, at any rate, to be heard in the head?” (269). “Voicing Milton’s God” (Chapter 13) explores the different registers Milton creates for the Father and the Son in Paradise Lost, and concludes that the Latinate sarcasm of the Father’s first speech (III.80-86) cannot be white-washed away: “I dwell on the point because it has been confirmed, repeatedly, by my experience of reading the speech aloud and hearing how others—unprompted—read it” (212). The leitmotif of the aural and the oral is here connected with the reception of Milton’s poetry, and provides an opportunity for me to pay tribute to John Hale’s Milton marathons at the University of Otago.

Milton marathons—the public reading aloud of Milton’s works, almost invariably Paradise Lost—are a world-wide phenomenon, as I discovered in researching the topic for a new Milton Encyclopedia. They are performed within many academic communities and today are regularly reported on the Internet. Usually, they are a one-day event, but have sometimes taken the form of a book-

a-week, a book-a-day, or even all-night stints. More often than not, the readings are un/rehearsed; Milton’s birthday on the 9th of December is sometimes the occasion; and sometimes there is a charitable cause. From 1992-2004, John Hale has organized such events annually at the University of Otago as all-day readings. I have had first-hand experience of them, having judged the marathons of 2000 and 2004, both on *Paradise Lost*. They draw in the wider community of the city of Dunedin and are exceptional for their lively experimentation, especially with rehearsed and competitive formats. The impetus for organizing them has always been John Hale’s teaching and research, as is evident in a conference paper he delivered in 2000 on “Research Implications of Performing *Paradise Lost* Aloud.”

His web page, “Milton at Otago,” offers pedagogic justifications for the marathons, first and foremost the orality of poetry: “[p]oetry—from Homer to Ginsberg—cannot be appreciated, in fact understood, till it is heard: Milton’s poem illustrates this axiom, being oral in conception, execution, and first reception; so why not also in a present-day reception?” The question is closely connected with the concerns of *Milton as Multilingual*.

In assessing the contribution of this volume to Milton studies, I would single out its close attention to the verbal fabric of Milton’s writing because this addresses a major weakness in current scholarship. In the past sixty years, since the work of, say, C. S. Lewis, Rosemond Tuve, Arnold Stein, F. T. Prince, Frank Kermode, Joseph Summers, Christopher Ricks, there has been a general move away from formalist study, which includes verbal criticism, towards an emphasis on Milton’s thought—moral, religious, philosophical, and political. This development has overtaken the close study of Milton’s handling of words, resulting in a neglect of his minutely sensitive and endlessly creative genius with decorum, which remained for him “the grand master piece to observe.”

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8 For an account of the 2000 marathon, see my article “*Paradise Lost* ‘Made Vocal,’” *Milton Quarterly* 37 (2000): 128-29.


10 See http://www.otago.ac.nz/english/milton/milton_index.html under “Perform.”


unveils that genius of Milton. More particularly, through attention to the oral and the aural, Hale persuades that, to read Milton in his original tongues is to hear with Milton’s ears, to hear the run of a thought on his tongue when he dictated, or the rightness of a rhythm, cadence, or sentence in his mind’s ear. These elements are crucial in his poetry but they are true also for his rhetoric, his notional or actual speeches, and his voice when (as very often) he is forcing an opponent onto the ropes. The lack of attention to the aural and the oral in Milton scholarship is possibly counterbalanced by the practice of Milton marathons, but the knowledge gained from these events needs to be developed and channelled into Milton scholarship. John Hale is showing the way by combining his marathons with research seminars, as at the 2004 event at the University of Otago. A further contribution of the book is that its attention to Milton as polyglot comes at a time when Milton studies are becoming more monoglot. In the present climate, in which increasing interest in Milton’s thought is matched by decreasing ability to read it in its original languages, these essays promote recovery of Milton’s thought-forms and a more exact understanding of the thought itself. This is done in an eminently reader-friendly fashion—in unfailingly lucid prose, with the help of some translation along the way, and without a skerrick of condescension.

More generally, Milton as Multilingual uncovers a whole dimension of Milton which is largely hidden and which we lack to our detriment: a thinking, feeling author, writing and speaking passionately and eloquently on a range of subjects in a variety of genres, styles, and languages. We cannot become instant linguists, but John Hale helps us, as no other scholar today can, to gain access to this Milton.

13 The 2004 marathon was preceded by a day devoted to a research seminar at which John Hale gave a paper entitled “Performing Epic: From Homer’s Time to Tomorrow,” Mark Houlahan presented “Milton’s Paradise Lost and Performance Anxiety,” and, in “Oral Milton and the Sound of Paradise Lost,” I put forward a theory about rhythm which was then tested by means of the marathon the next day.
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