The Life of John Milton

A Critical Biography
Revised Edition

Barbara Kiefer Lewalski

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For Ken, David, and Laurence

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Preface

More than two centuries ago Samuel Johnson pronounced categorically, as was his wont, that "Nobody can write the life of a man but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him." Social intercourse with Milton being now impossible, I have to hope that living in intellectual and aesthetic intercourse with his works for most of my professional life will do. A literary biography should, I believe, focus on what is of primary importance in a writer: his or her works. Milton more than most demands to be seen as an author of many kinds of works: magnificent poems in all the major genres – lyric, dramatic, epic – but also polemics, history, theology, and treatises on political, ecclesiastical, educational, and social issues. No writer before Milton fashioned himself quite so self-consciously as an author. He often signs his title pages "The Author John Milton" or "The Author J. M." He incorporates passages of autobiography that make something like a *bildungsroman* of his early life. He claims poetry and also his polemic service to church and country as a vocation. And he often presents himself as prophet–teacher and as inspired Bard. In text after text he calls attention to his authorial self engaging with the problems of the work in hand: justifying the use of invective and satire in his antiprelatical tracts; making occasion in *The Reason of Church-governement* to comment on the kinds of poems he might write; and registering in the divorce tracts and elsewhere the conflict he feels between citing authorities and claiming originality. In *Paradise Lost,* Milton constructs his bardic self in collaboration with his "heavenly Muse" in four extended Proems whose length and personal reference are without precedent in earlier epics. While all these autobiographical passages are designed to serve poetic or polemical purposes, they also allow us to glimpse the emergence of the modern idea of authorship.

Postmodern literary theory, with its emphasis on the instability and undecidability of both texts and history, challenges the fundamental assumptions of biography, which has to ground itself on empiricism, probability, and narrative. To focus on

the endlessly proliferating meanings that can be found in Milton's texts and on the uncertain dating of many of his works would not produce a biography of Milton but an essay about the problematics of such an enterprise. For most readers and writers of literary biography the interest lies in what we can know or probably conclude about the life, character, thought, and works of the person treated, what we can reasonably suppose about the order of composition of his or her works, what story makes best sense of all the evidence in hand. In constructing my narrative about this complex man I try to take account of the messiness and contingencies of life and history and to avoid some obvious pitfalls: assuming a teleology of growth and development, or offering a single interpretative key, or presenting an always integrated and self-consistent Milton. There will be and should be as many versions of Milton as there are Milton biographers, and readers will have to judge this one by its plausibility and its insight.

Because Milton was a public figure and because he was so self-conscious about his role as polemicist and poet, we have more extensive materials relating to him than we have for any other important writer to his date. J. Milton French has published five volumes of Milton's *Life Records*: birth, baptism, and marriage records, property deeds, wills, and other legal documents, together with many contemporary references to him. A new *Chronology* compiled by Gordon Campbell adds several items to this record and corrects some errors. We have some sketches of Milton's life by persons who knew him well or knew those who did: his nephew Edward Phillips, his pupil Cyriack Skinner, and those seventeenth-century compilers of brief lives of contemporary worthies, John Aubrey and Anthony à Wood. Several early eighteenth-century editors and biographers of Milton collected facts and anecdotes (some of them dubious) from many sources; in the late nineteenth century David Masson's six-volume *Life* gathered a treasure-trove of historical as well as biographical information; and in 1968 William Riley Parker published the two-volume standard biography, to which Gordon Campbell has recently supplied a very useful appendix of updated notes. Since Parker's *Life*, however, many additional aids to biographical research and interpretation have become available: the last four volumes of the Yale Milton's *Prose,* John Shawcross's invaluable *Milton Bibliography for the years 1624–1700*, several shorter biographies and investigations of particular aspects of Milton's life, and some extended analyses of little-studied works, including Milton's State Papers, Latin poems, and *History of Britain.* A new Milton biography at the new millennium has the challenge and the opportunity to rethink the course of Milton's life, thought, and writing with the benefit of all the new scholarship. Still, some significant problems remain, and my investigations have not solved them definitively. I can only offer plausible inferences about, among other things, the date of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* or *Ad Patrem* or the "Blindness" sonnet, or what Milton was doing from 1646 to 1649, or which wife Milton addressed as his "late espoused saint," or exactly when *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* were begun and finished, or when Milton's daughters left home.

A new Milton biography has especially the challenge and the opportunity to rethink his life in a new interpretative milieu. I hope to bring into focus a Milton rather different from the figure portrayed in some earlier biographical accounts: the transcendent poet who mostly soared above contemporary struggles; or the Christian humanist whose poetry and prose gives eloquent voice to mainstream Christian theology and philosophy; or the "Grand Whig" whose dedication to advancing individual liberty was straightforward and uncompromised; or the polemicist and poet who sharply segregated the products of his right and his left hand; or the leftist Milton whose poems are often thinly veiled political allegory; or the deconstructed Milton who serves as a sounding board for multiple and contradictory cultural voices. Recent historiography on the English Civil War and Interregnum – both revisionist and counter-revisionist – has extended and complicated our knowledge of that period and Milton's place in it. Also, some of the best recent Milton criticism has explored the complex ways his poems and prose works respond to their historical moment and material circumstances, while attending as well to how they engage with literary models and intellectual traditions, and how they address issues of enduring interest to modern readers. We now have richly contextualized studies of Milton's treatment of women, gender, companionate marriage, love and sex; of Milton's republicanism, animist materialism, and radical Christian humanism; and of the relation of his poems to an emerging literary marketplace and to Restoration politics and cultural norms. As well, we have many illuminating analyses of genre, texture, and style in Milton's poems and prose works, sometimes probing the interrelationships between those two modes. This biography is indebted on every page to the community of Miltonists, past and present, on whose work it gratefully builds.

I undertake here to describe the quotidian John Milton at the various stages of his life and also to treat all his prose and poetry, to tell two stories that intersect continually but are in some important ways different stories. To that end, the second part of each chapter is an in-depth discussion of a particular work or works from the relevant years, focusing on the development of Milton's ideas and his art. I also endeavor to attend to the many contexts in which Milton's works demand to be seen. Because he was a public figure – Latin Secretary to the Republic and to Cromwell's Protectorate and an official polemicist for both – he was responsible for a large body of state papers and polemic tracts that have to be examined in their immediate historical circumstances. More broadly, because his life and writings as political thinker, theologian, and poet were so intimately connected with the political and religious conflicts and the culture wars of his times, those connections must be examined at every stage. More broadly still, because the context for Milton's poetry and prose is virtually the entire Western literary and intellectual tradition, I have tried to recognize that in a very real sense Milton saw Homer and Virgil and Cicero and Ovid and several other great poets and thinkers as his contemporaries, as much as Cromwell or Bradshaw or Marvell or Vane.

The Milton I present in these pages is a man who began even as a young poet to

construct himself as a new kind of author, one who commands all the resources of learning and art but links them to radical politics, reformist poetics, and the inherently revolutionary power of prophecy. He was deeply involved with the major intellectual and political issues of his time, developing, arguing passionately for, and in some cases changing his views about, the central issues fought about in the revolution and after: monarchy, tyranny, idolatry, rebellion, liberty, republicanism, popular sovereignty, religious toleration, separation of church and state. He also took up issues on the periphery of the contemporary discourses: divorce, unlicensed publication, intellectual freedom, reformed education. And in his unpublished theological treatise *De Doctrina Christiana* he set out most fully a number of extreme positions and attitudes also present in his other works: Arianism, Arminianism, monism, mortalism, a qualified antinomianism, creation *ex Deo*, the absolute authority of the individual conscience illumined by the Spirit, the priority of the inward Spirit's testimony over scripture itself, and the need to interpret scripture according to the dictates of reason, charity, and the good of humankind. The Milton in these pages did not, as is sometimes supposed, retreat from political concerns after the Restoration: his major poems – *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* – are profoundly and daringly political as well as being superlative aesthetic achievements. They dramatize in terms relevant to the Restoration milieu subjects Milton had addressed earlier – monarchy, tyranny, rebellion, idolatry, inner liberty, love and marriage – but with new emphasis on the nature of Christ's kingdom and on the difficulties of interpreting God's word and his action in history. In these last poems Milton employs the educative power and imaginative reach of poetry to help readers better understand themselves, the human condition, and the ways of Providence, so they might learn to live as free moral agents and as virtuous citizens who value and deserve personal and political liberty.

A biographer cannot, I expect, get very close to a subject she does not like. I like and admire Milton for many things: for his readiness to judge received doctrine by the standards of reason, charity, human experience, and human good; for his far-reaching – even though not total – commitment to intellectual freedom and toleration; for his republican ideals, albeit compromised in times of crisis; for his insistence on free will as the ground of human dignity; for his delight in natural beauty and exuberant creativity; for his efforts to imagine marriage and its sexual pleasure as founded on companionship of the mind and spirit, albeit partly undermined by his assumptions about gender hierarchy; for the courage it took to write *The Readie & Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* on the eve of the Restoration; and for the largeness of spirit that enabled him to write his three greatest poems when totally blind and disillusioned by the defeat of the political cause he had served for twenty years. Milton the man had his share of faults and flaws and limitations, as I trust this biography recognizes. But they do not diminish the achievement of the poet, "soaring in the high region of his fancies with his garland and singing robes about him."

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I cannot begin to indicate, let alone properly thank, all the scholars, past and present, whose writings or comments have contributed to this book. To mention them here by name would be to replicate the notes and bibliography, which are themselves only a partial and inadequate record of debts accumulated over a scholarly lifetime of reading and thinking about Milton and his milieu. I have profited especially from stimulating and helpful responses to portions of this work in progress by colleagues in the Northeast Milton Seminar, the Milton Society of America, the International Milton Symposia at Bangor and at York, the Literature and History Conference at Reading, England, the Renaissance Society of America Conference in Florence, and the Renaissance Doctoral Conference at Harvard. Several libraries and their research librarians made needed resources available: the British Library, the Bodleian Library, Trinity College (Oxford), and Christ's College Libraries in Cambridge University, the Public Record Office, the Guildhall (London), the Widener and Houghton Libraries at Harvard University, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the New York Public Library, the J. Pierpont Morgan Library, and the Newberry Library.

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Abbreviations

AV	The Holy Bible, 1611 (Authorized Version)
BL	The British Library
Carey	John Carey, ed., *John Milton: Complete Shorter Poems*
CSPD	Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series
Chronology	Gordon Campbell, *A Milton Chronology*
CM	*The Works of John Milton*, ed. Frank A. Patterson, et al.
CPW	*Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, et al.
DNB	*Dictionary of National Biography*
EL	*The Early Lives of Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire
Fletcher	Harris Francis Fletcher, *The Intellectual Development of John Milton*
Fowler	Alastair Fowler, ed., *John Milton: Paradise Lost*
Hughes	Merritt Y. Hughes, ed., *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*
Hill	Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution*
LR	J. Milton French, ed., *The Life Records of John Milton*
Masson	David Masson, *The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical and Literary History of His Time*
ME	*A Milton Encyclopedia*, ed. William B. Hunter, et al.
MQ	*Milton Quarterly*, ed. Roy C. Flannagan, et al.
MS	*Milton Studies*, ed. James D. Simmonds and Albert C. Labriola
Parker	William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association*
Poems, 1645	*Poems of Mr. John Milton*, 1645
Poems, 1673	*Poems, etc. Upon Several Occasions. By Mr. John Milton*, 1673
PRO	Public Record Office
SP	State Papers, Domestic Series

Sprott	*John Milton: A Maske. The Earlier Versions*, ed. S. E. Sprott
SR 1554–1640	*Stationers Registers, 1554–1640*, ed. Edward Arber
SR 1640–1708	*Stationers Registers, 1640–1708*, ed. George E. B. Eyre, et al.
TM	The Trinity manuscript
Variorum	*A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, ed. Douglas Bush, et. al.
Wood	Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 1500–1690, ed. Philip Bliss

1

"The Childhood Shews the Man" 1608–1625

Milton's childhood and schooldays turned out to be a fortunate seedplot for a budding poet. Though his father expected him to take orders in the church, he encouraged and nurtured his poetic talents, his sheer delight in learning, and his wide-ranging scholarship. His schoolmasters taught him languages, literature, and verse writing (in Latin and Greek), and two of them became his friends. He also began a friendship with a schoolmate that was to be the most intense emotional attachment of his youth. He was reared in a bourgeois Puritan milieu that fostered in him qualities of self-discipline, diligent preparation for one's intended vocation, and responsibility before God for the development and use of one's talents, as well as a commitment to reformist, militant Protestantism. He grew up amid the sights and sounds and stimuli a great city like London can provide, and was conscious from early childhood of growing religious and political conflict in English society. These factors interacted with the gifts of nature: poetic genius, a prodigious intelligence, a serious and introspective temperament, a slender body, delicate features, and weak eyes.

In early youth Milton developed character traits and attitudes that lasted a lifetime: lofty aspirations and a driving compulsion to emulate and surpass the best and noblest; very exacting standards of personal morality and accomplishment; high expectations for human institutions (schools, marriage, government, the church); a disposition to challenge and resist institutional authorities who fell short of such standards; and a strong need for and high idealism about friendship and love. He gave evidence as a schoolboy of his intellectual and poetic gifts but may have begun to worry even then, as he certainly did later, about his comparatively slow maturation.

Milton's own retrospective comments supply much of what we know about his early years. Most often he resorts to autobiography for the rhetorical purpose of defending his qualifications and his character from polemic attack, but even so, his

remarks offer a fascinating insight into how he wished to remember his boyhood and represent it to others.

"Destined . . . in Early Childhood for the Study of Literature," and for the Church

Milton was born into a prosperous middle-class family of Puritan leanings and considerable culture, on "the 9th of December 1608 die Veneris [Friday] half an howr after 6 in the morning," as he himself noted in a family Bible.[1] On December 20 he was baptized in his parish church of All Hallows, Bread Street.[2] The Miltons subleased spacious apartments on five floors of a building known as the Spread Eagle and also as the White Bear, on the east side of Bread Street, close to Cheapside – a street that was, according to Stow's *Survey of London*, "wholly inhabited by rich merchants," many of them in the cloth trade.[3] Milton's childhood home was a big house in the busy center of London, then a city of some 220,000. At the poet's birth his father was about 46 and his mother about 36, and he had one older sibling, a sister, Anne (birthdate unknown). His maternal grandmother Ellen Jeffrey, then widowed, lived with the family until her death in 1611, and a younger brother Christopher was baptized December 3, 1615, at All Hallows.[4] Two sisters died in infancy: Sara, christened for her mother on July 15, 1612 and buried on August 6; Tabitha, baptized on January 30, 1614 and buried on August 3, 1615.[5] Besides the immediate family the household contained several apprentices and household servants.

The poet's father, John Milton senior (1562?–1647), came from a yeoman family settled around the village of Stanton St John near Oxford. John Aubrey's notes toward a life of Milton, gathered from family members and contemporaries, state that his father was "brought-up" in Oxford University, "at Christchurch": his later musical interests and achievements suggest that he was trained there as a boy chorister.[6] His father, Richard Milton, held fast to the Roman Catholic religion and paid fines for recusancy; John senior embraced Protestantism and (according to an often-repeated family story) was cast out and disinherited when Richard found him reading an English Bible.[7] He came to London about 1583, was apprenticed to a scrivener, and in 1600 was admitted to the Company of Scriveners. His profession combined some functions of a notary, financial adviser, money-lender, and contract lawyer: records show that he drew bonds between borrowers and lenders, invested money for others, bought and sold property, loaned money at high interest, and gave depositions in legal cases. His shop on the ground floor bore the sign of the Spread Eagle, the scriveners' emblem. The poet's nephew and biographer Edward Phillips states that by "Industry and prudent conduct of his Affairs" Milton's father (Phillips's grandfather) obtained a "Competent Estate, whereby he was enabled to make a handsom Provision both for the Education and Maintenance of his

Children."[8] In 1615, 1622, and 1625 he held minor offices in the Scriveners Company. Later, in a rhetorical defense of himself, Milton claimed descent from an "honorable family" and described his father as a man of "supreme integrity"(*CPW* IV.1, 612) – a quality not often associated with scriveners. But he nowhere refers to more distant ancestors or seeks to trace a family tree, preferring to begin his story with the self-made bourgeois scrivener.

Milton senior's considerable ability and reputation as a composer of madrigals and psalm settings contributed greatly to his son's enduring passion for music and to his development as a poet. Aubrey called attention to the "delicate, tuneable voice" of young John, noting that "his father instructed him" and that he played often on a small organ in the family home; he was also said to have played the bass-viol.[9] Edward Phillips calls up the image of Milton taking part in small domestic consorts, either singing or playing: "Hee had an excellent Ear, and could bear a part both in Vocal & Instrumental Music" (*EL* 32). Through his father, Milton came into social contact with music publishers and composers such as Thomas Myriell, John Tomkins, Thomas Morley, and Henry Lawes. Edward Phillips describes the prosperous scrivener attending to business and music in happy combination: "he did not so far quit his own Generous and Ingenious Inclinations, as to make himself wholly a Slave to the World; for he sometimes found vacant hours to the Study (which he made his recreation) of the Noble Science of Musick" (*EL* 1). His skill was such, noted Aubrey, that he once composed an I*n Nomine* of 40 parts, and for his songs "gained the Reputation of a considerable Master in this most charming of all the Liberal Sciences."[10] He contributed a song, "Fair Orian," to a volume in tribute to Queen Elizabeth, *The Triumphs of Oriana* (1601), and four religious anthems to William Leighton's collection, *The Teares, or Lamentations of a Sorrowfull Soule* (1614),[11] joining such distinguished composers as Thomas Morley, John Wilbye, Thomas Weelkes, and William Byrd. He also provided four-part settings for six psalms in Thomas Ravenscroft's popular collection, *The Whole Book of Psalmes*.[12] That he had some interest in theater is indicated by his appointment in 1620 as one of the four trustees of the Blackfriars Playhouse.[13] But his gifts did not extend to poetry, as is evident from his pedestrian commendatory sonnet for John Lane, who wrote an equally pedestrian poetic tribute to Milton senior's musical gifts.[14] The scrivener's experience as amateur composer probably disposed him to assume that his son might pursue his literary interests along with his intended profession, the ministry. Milton later claimed that "My father destined me in early childhood for the study of literature" (*CPW* IV.1, 612), but also stated, in different rhetorical circumstances, that "by the intentions of my parents and friends I was destin'd of a child, and in mine own resolutions" to serve the church (*CPW* I, 822).

Almost nothing is known about Milton's mother, Sara Jeffrey (1572?–1637), the elder daughter of a merchant tailor, Paul Jeffrey, and his wife Ellen, of St Swithin's parish, London. There is no record of Sara's marriage to John senior, but it probably occurred in 1599 or 1600; on May 12, 1601 they buried at All Hallows an

unnamed infant who died soon after birth.[15] Milton's pupil and friend Cyriack Skinner attributes some of the scrivener's success to "the Consortship of a prudent virtuous Wife," and Edward Phillips termed her "a Woman of Incomparable Vertue and Goodness."[16] Milton described her as "a woman of purest reputation, celebrated throughout the neighborhood for her acts of charity" (*CPW* IV.1, 612). These laconic phrases are not entirely formulaic: they praise a woman who fulfilled the duties prescribed for the bourgeois Protestant wife – helpmeet to her husband and dispenser of a prosperous family's charity. Aubrey supplies another detail, that she "had very weake eies, & used spectacles p[re]sently after she was thirty yeares old," whereas the scrivener "read with out spectacles at 84" (*EL* 4–5). Aubrey, the family, and Milton himself apparently believed that he inherited his weak eyes from his mother.[17] Milton's rather impersonal description of her might suggest some lack of warmth in their relationship, or it may simply indicate that he took pride in, and found rhetorical force in, the public recognition of her goodness. His only other mention of her links her death with his decision to travel abroad. Milton often refers to his father as a major beneficent influence on his development, but if he felt some important debt to his mother he did not say so.

As a boy John Milton went to church and catechism at All Hallows, where the respected Puritan minister Richard Stock (1559?–1626) had been rector since 1611. Stock preached twice on Sunday, demanded strict observance of the Sabbath, inveighed against Roman Catholics and Jesuits, urged continuous reading of the Bible and the English commentaries, and catechized the parish children daily for an hour before school, boys and girls on alternate days. Milton later repudiated Stock's sabbatarianism, defense of tithes, and conservative views of marriage and divorce, but his antipapist diatribes and his readiness to censure the sins of the powerful – usurers, oppressors of the poor, morally lax aristocrats – likely had an enduring influence.[18] And of course Milton began reading the Bible early.

Sitting under a Puritan minister and growing up among hard-working tradesmen proud of their steadily expanding wealth, power, and status as citizens of London, Milton would have become conscious early on of political, religious, and cultural strains in the national fabric. While the divisions were not yet unbridgeable, they were manifestly widening during the Jacobean era (1603–25). A king who vigorously defended royal absolutism was opposed by a parliament increasingly jealous of its rights and privileges. A pacifist king disposed to mediate between Catholic and Protestant powers in Europe and a queen openly supportive of Spanish interests were opposed by a militant war party eager to fight for international Protestantism – especially after the loss of Bohemia and the Palatinate by the Protestant Elector Palatine touched off the Thirty Years War.[19] A court perceived as extravagant, morally decadent, infiltrated by Papists, rife with scandal, and increasingly controlled by the king's homosexual favorites was opposed by a London citizenry self-styled as hard-working, wealth-producing, and morally upright, and a county-based aristocracy sensible of its diminished honor and power. An estab-

lished church perceived to be clinging to the idolatrous remnants of Roman Catholic liturgy, ceremony, and church government, and to be promoting an Arminian theology that made some place for free will and personal merit, was opposed by an energetic Puritan clergy bent on preaching the Word of God, reforming morals, holding fast to Calvinist predestinarian theology, and bringing the government of the English church into closer harmony with the Presbyterian model in Geneva and Scotland. A bright child had to be aware, at least subconsciously, that his life would be affected by such controversies and tensions.

The 1612 family Bible (Authorized Version) into which Milton later entered records of family births and deaths contains what seem to be a coherent set of underlinings and marginal annotations with the initials KJ marking verses from 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Psalms. Cedric Brown argues plausibly that the initials invite comparison of various biblical kings with King James and that they were most likely made in 1620–5, reflecting concerns among militant Protestants about the danger from Catholic enemies, the defection of kings, foreign and idolatrous queens, and purity of religion.[20] While the annotator cannot be identified – the handwriting does not seem to match that of Milton's father, nor the scant samples we have of Milton's youthful hand – the likely presence of the Bible in the Milton family reinforces the evidence that he grew up in a reformist political milieu.

Much of Milton's childhood was given over to study, arranged by a father who was eager to give his extraordinary son the best education possible. Between the ages of five and seven, most likely from a private tutor, Milton learned to read and write in English and to do arithmetic; seven was the usual age for beginning Latin with a tutor or at a grammar school. Milton mentions having "sundry masters and teachers both at home and at the schools" (*CPW* I, 809) but we know the name of only one, Thomas Young (1587?–1655), a Scots Presbyterian who may have been recommended by Stock. Richard Baxter commended his great learning, judgment, piety, and humility, and especially his knowledge of the church Fathers.[21] Thomas Young seems to have been Milton's tutor between the ages of nine and twelve and was apparently the schoolmaster Aubrey heard about from Milton's widow: "Anno Dom. 1619 he was ten yeares old, as by his picture, & was then a Poet. his schoolmaster was a puritan in Essex, who cutt his haire short"(*EL* 2). Young's benefice, Ware, is in Hertfordshire, not Essex, but it is very close to the Essex border and about 20 miles from London.[22] Aubrey's note points to the striking portrait, said to be by Cornelius Janssen, depicting an elegantly garbed, rather wistful child with close-cropped auburn hair – almost certainly Milton (plate 1).[23] His parents had him painted as a young gentleman and the haircut (ascribed to the tutor) marks him also as a young Puritan.

In a Latin letter written at college Milton addressed Young as "best of Teachers" and as another Father who merits his "unparalled gratitude"; in a Latin Elegy to Young he recalls that "Under his guidance I first visited the Aonian retreats . . . I

drank the Pierian waters and by the favor of Clio I thrice wet my blessed lips with Castalian wine."[24] This could mean that Young was Milton's first teacher in classics, beginning around 1615 when he was seven, but the terms probably suggest that Young introduced Milton to the reading and writing of Latin (and perhaps Greek) poetry at some later stage. If the "thrice" ("ter") refers to three years under Young's tutelege, their association probably began about 1618, since Young went to Hamburg in 1620 as chaplain to the Merchant Adventurers. Young was clearly an important influence in nurturing Milton's classicism and his Puritanism.

While continuing the home tutorials Milton's father also sent him to one of the finest grammar schools in the country, St Paul's, founded in 1512 by the humanist John Colet and managed by the Mercers Company of London.[25] He may have entered at age seven (1615), but probably did so at Young's departure in 1620.[26] He was then about twelve, the age Milton proposed for entry into his model academy in *Of Education*, and he would then have joined the Upper School (forms five to eight). In the *Defensio Secunda* (1654), Milton designated his twelfth year as marking a new intensity of application to his books: "For the study of literature . . . I had so keen an appetite that from my twelfth year scarcely ever did I leave my studies for my bed before the hour of midnight." Answering taunts that his blindness was a divine punishment for wickedness, he claimed rather that these youthful nocturnal studies were "the first cause of injury to my eyes, whose natural weakness was augmented by frequent headaches." But, he continued, "since none of these defects slackened my assault upon knowledge, my father took care that I should be instructed daily both in school and under other masters at home" (*CPW* IV.1, 612). He represented these arrangements as the admirable manifestation of his father's care and affection in nurturing his natural talents for languages, literature, and philosophy. From Milton's brother Christopher, Aubrey was led to associate his nocturnal study with going to school and making poetry: "When he went to Schoole, when he was very young he studied very hard and sate-up very late, commonly till 12 or one aclock at night, & his father ordered ye mayde to sitt-up for him, and in those yeares composed many Copies of verses, which might well become a riper age."[27] Breaking through this language of industry and paternal encouragement is the image of a delighted child enthralled by learning and literature.

Whenever he became a "pigeon of Pauls" – the epithet bestowed on the schoolboys in allusion to the many pigeons in Paul's courtyard – Milton then entered into a stimulating environment for a poet-in-the-making. The school was located in a stone building at the northeast corner of the courtyard only a few blocks from the Milton home in Bread Street. Walking back and forth, Milton daily passed by the thronging booksellers' stalls in the courtyard, which he was later to frequent. Also, he daily saw the massive (then gothic) cathedral with its clustered pillars, pointed arches, and famous rose window; and often heard the music of organ and choir; on occasion he may have heard sermons by John Donne, who was Dean of St Paul's from 1621 to 1631. The Milton family likely knew John Tomkins, the cathedral

organist, given Milton senior's musical connections and the fact that both men contributed settings for Ravenscroft's *Psalmes*. These early sights and sounds may contribute some elements to a memorable passage in *Il Penseroso*:

> But let my due feet never fail,
> To walk the studious Cloysters pale,
> And love the high embowed Roof,
> With antick Pillars massy proof,
> And storied Windows richly dight,
> Casting a dimm religious light.
> There let the pealing Organ blow,
> To the full voic'd Quire below
> In Service high, and Anthems cleer,
> As may with sweetnes, through mine ear,
> Dissolve me into extasies,
> And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes. (ll. 155–66)

John Strype, a student of Paul's from 1657 to 1661, describes the physical appearance and operation of the school at that period. It was much the same as when Milton was there:

> The Schoole House is large and spacious, fronting the Street on the *East* of St. *Paul's* Cathedral. It consisteth of Eight *Classes* or Forms: in the first whereof Children learn their Rudiments; and so according to their Proficiency are advanced unto the other Forms till they rise to the Eighth. Whence, being commonly made perfect Grammarians, good orators and Poets, well instructed in *Latin*, *Greek*, and *Hebrew*, and sometime in other *Oriental* Languages, they remove to the Universities. . . . The School is governed and taught by two Masters, *viz*. an High Master, and a Surmaster, and a Chaplain: Whose customary Office was to read the *Latin* Prayers in the *School* . . . and to instruct the Children of the two first Forms in the Elements of the *Latin* Tongue, and also in the Catechism and Christian Manners; for which there is a Room called the *Vestibulum*, being the Anti-room to the School, where the Youth are to be initiated into the Grounds and Principles of Christian Knowledge, as a good and proper Introduction into other Human Learning.[28]

The High Master taught and dictated from a chair on a raised platform at the front of the schoolroom. A curtain that could be drawn aside separated the first four forms taught by the surmaster from the last four taught by the high master; an under-usher helped teach the younger boys. The pupils sat on benches arranged in three tiers along each side of the long hall; the best scholar in each of the forms (Milton, often?) had a small desk of his own. There was also a chapel for divine services.

The school was charged by its statutes to admit 153 students. A prospective student must already know how to "rede & wryte latyn & englisshe sufficiently, soo that he be able to rede & wryte his owne lessons."[29] The school was free, save for a

fee of fourpence at entrance which was to be paid to a poor scholar or poor man for keeping the school clean. Students attended classes for eight hours – from seven to eleven in the morning and one to five in the afternoon – for about 242 days, with half-holidays on Thursdays. The rules required the boys to speak only in Latin, to sit in the places assigned, to write neatly, to have books and writing implements always ready, to ask questions when in doubt, and to serve, if asked, as pupil teachers for the younger children. Milton's angry denunciation in *Areopagitica*, "I hate a pupil teacher, I endure not an instructer that comes to me under the wardship of an overseeing fist" (*CPW* II, 533) may register his antipathy to this practice at Paul's.

Milton's teachers at Paul's were Alexander Gil (1564–1635), the high master, William Sound the surmaster, and Oliver Smythe the under-usher. Gil was a Greek and Latin scholar and theologian of considerable repute, and his theological writings – *A Treatise Concerning the Trinitie* (1601) and *The Sacred Philosophie of the Holy Scripture* (1635) – defended the uses of reason in religion. If Young helped form Milton as a Puritan, Gil pointed him toward the tradition of Protestant rationalism from Hooker to the Cambridge Platonists. Gil was also an avid proponent of English spelling reform and the preservation of native Anglo-Saxon elements in the English language – views urged in his *Logonomia Anglica* (1619), an English grammar for foreign students. That book's practice of illustrating rhetorical schemes and tropes from the English poets – Spenser ("our Homer"), George Wither ("our Juvenal"), Samuel Daniel ("our Lucan"), Philip Sidney ("our Anacreon"), John Harington ("our Martial") – suggests that Gil may have encouraged that early love of English and of the English poets that Milton attests to in his poem "At a Vacation Exercise." In his masque *Time Vindicated* (1623), Ben Jonson ridiculed Gil's practice of having his pupils turn George Wither's satires into Latin, but such a practice indicates that Gil was remarkably progressive in attempting to bring contemporary English poetry into relation with the Latin canon. Gil also had a reputation for flogging that exceeded the norm in an age when the practice was common. Aubrey calls him "a very ingeniose person" but given to "moodes and humours, particularly his whipping fits."[30]

In describing his schoolboy self later, Milton emphasized his warm relationships with various teachers and friends who valued and nurtured his talents. In curiously involuted terms, as if afraid to offend good taste in recording such comments, he points to his teachers' early praise of him as prose writer and poet: "it was found that whether ought was impos'd me by them . . . or betak'n to of mine own choise in English, or other tongue, prosing or versing, but chiefly this latter, the stile by certain vital signes it had, was likely to live" (*CPW* I, 809). He found a good friend and early literary mentor in the high master's son, Alexander Gil, Jr. (c. 1597–1642), who became under-usher at Paul's in 1621. Milton was then in the higher forms, so Gil Jr. was not formally his teacher. Milton's later letters to him (in Latin) refer to their "almost constant conversations" at school, from which he never departed "without a visible increase and growth of Knowledge, quite as if I had been

to some Market of Learning" (*CPW* I, 314). He exchanged poems and literary critiques with Gil over several years, and expressed his admiration for Gil's Latin and Greek poetry, for his judgment as a critic, and for his politics. On the basis of his collected Latin verse (1632) Anthony à Wood termed the younger Gil "one of the best Latin poets in the nation."[31] While Milton was still at Paul's Gil wrote Latin and Greek occasional poems and contributed several of them to miscellanies; he also wrote a virulent poem (1623) celebrating the death of over 90 Roman Catholics when their chapel in Blackfriars collapsed. That poem afforded Milton an example close to hand of militant Protestant politics and poetics.[32]

Some 30 of Milton's schoolmates at Paul's have been identified, among them Nathaniel Gil, another son of the headmaster, and Henry Myriell, son of the music publisher Thomas Myriell.[33] But Milton seems to have formed only one close friendship, with Charles Diodati (1609–38). The headnote to his funeral elegy for Diodati in 1639 emphasizes their special amity based on shared interests: they "had pursued the same studies" and were "most intimate friends from childhood on."[34] The Diodatis were a distinguished Protestant family who became voluntary exiles from Catholic Italy. Charles's father, Theodore, was a prominent London physician with patients at court and in aristocratic families. His uncle was Giovanni Diodati of Geneva, a well-known Calvinist theologian, Hebraist, promoter of international Protestant collaboration, and distinguished biblical scholar, known especially for his translation of the Bible into Italian (1603) and for his *Pious Annotations upon the Bible*, published in English translation in 1645. Milton visited him in Geneva in 1639 and may have met him when he visited England in 1619 and 1627.[35]

Charles Diodati entered St Paul's School in 1617 or 1618; if Milton entered in 1620 they were schoolfellows for three years. Charles, though a few months younger than Milton, was conspicuously on a faster track: he went to Paul's earlier and left earlier, matriculating at Trinity College, Oxford at age 13 (February 7, 1623). Less than three years later (1625) he graduated AB when Milton was in his first year of college; and nine months before Milton took his Baccalaureate Diodati received his Master's degree (1628). He was an accomplished Latinist and poet who published an artful Latin poetic tribute to William Camden in 1624, while Milton was still at school.[36] He seems to have been one of those bright students to whom everything in the realm of conventional academic expectation comes very easily. Milton admired and loved Diodati for his virtue, his liveliness, his conversation, his learning, and his poetry. But Diodati's precocious accomplishment probably contributed to Milton's anxieties about his tardiness in fulfilling his obvious promise.

Milton completed the regular curriculum of studies at Paul's, which retained John Colet's humanist emphasis on pure classical Latin and Greek models for reading, writing, and speaking.[37] He probably covered with his tutor(s) at home the matter of the first four forms, which would have included the Latin grammar text by William Lily, first master of Paul's (mandated by royal authority),[38] Cato's *Disticha Moralia*, Aesop's Fables, Erasmus's *Colloquies*, Caesar for history, Terence's Com-

edies, Ovid's *Tristia, Heroides*, and *Metamorphoses*, and several elegiac poets, especially Ovid. He memorized grammar rules and model passages, paraphrased Latin texts and analyzed in minute detail their language and rhetorical figures, translated passages from Latin to English and back again, and wrote short themes and poems on various topics drawn from or imitating Aesop, Cato, Cicero, Ovid, and Terence. He read a good deal of Latin literature, and started Greek. And of course he studied the Bible and the principles of Protestant Christianity.

In the Upper School (the last four forms) when he was certainly at Paul's, he studied Greek grammar and continued with Latin. He would have been assigned selections from Sallust, Virgil's *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, and *Aeneid*, Cicero's letters and *De Officiis*, Horace, Martial, Persius, and Juvenal. In Greek, in addition to the Greek New Testament, he read poetry from Hesiod, Pindar, Theocritus, Homer, and Euripides, Isocrates or Demosthenes for oratory, Plutarch's Moral Essays, and perhaps Dionysius of Halicarnassus for history. He became adept at keeping commonplace books of notable passages from his reading, arranged by topic; at double translation of Greek into Latin and back again; at freely imitating the best models – Cicero for letters and orations, Ovid and Propertius for elegiac verse, verse letters and brief narratives, and Virgil for other poetic styles and genres. In his last year he began Hebrew grammar and read the Hebrew Psalter. However, the school offered only meager instruction in the mathematical sciences of the quadrivium: Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and (Ptolemaic) Astronomy.[39] Students' extra-curricular activities included viewing an occasional play (probably Terence) at the Mercers Hall, and disputing – traditionally on St Bartholomew's Eve – about principles of grammar with students from other schools.[40]

Milton was also taught to compose and declaim more or less original Latin and Greek themes and orations on set topics, and to write poems of various kinds in several meters. A few of his school exercises survive in manuscript: a Latin essay and Latin verses on the theme of "Early Rising" probably date from his final two years at Paul's.[41] The essay is based on and takes its title from a proverb in Lily's *Grammar*, "Betimes in the Morning Leave Thy Bed"; its structure follows closely a model theme in Reinhard Lorich's widely used rhetorical exercise book based on Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata*; and it is filled with echoes of Cicero, Virgil, Quintilian, Homer, Lily, Erasmus, and more, in a typical display of schoolboy learning.[42] His "Carmen Elegiaca," twenty lines in elegiac verse, offers a stock catalogue of the delights of dawn and spring filled with echoes of Ovid, Catullus, Virgil, Propertius, and Horace, among others.[43] Also, an eight-line poem in lesser Asclepiad meter, "Ignavus satrapam," is based on *Aeneid* 9.176–449, the slaughter wreaked on the sleeping Rutulians by Nisus and Euryalus. Milton may have preserved these set exercises because their theme – anxiety about time and the need to make proper use of it – was important to him early and late. In his 1673 *Poems* Milton chose to publish some elegiac verses on Aesop's fable of the Peasant and the Landlord, "Apologus de Rustico et Hero," that probably originated as a school assignment of

the sort William Bullokar proposed in his *Aesop's Fables in True Orthography* (1585). Milton's closest model and the source of some verbal parallels was Mantuan's Latin metrical version of the fable.[44] He published in the 1645 *Poems* another early exercise, the Greek epigram "Philosophus ad regem," written to a King as from a Philosopher wrongfully condemned to death because captured along with some criminals. It may have been a school assignment, but its sharp warning to the king that the philosopher's death will silence a wise man the city badly needs shows schoolboy Milton voicing an early critique of kings.

Milton credited his father with giving him early access to languages and sciences outside the usual school curriculum, by tutorial instruction: "I had from my first yeeres by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, whom God recompence, bin exercis'd to the tongues, and some sciences, as my age would suffer, by sundry masters and teachers both at home and at the schooles" (*CPW* I, 808–9). In "Ad Patrem" (1637?) he specifies French, Italian and Hebrew (possibly including Aramaic and Syriac)[45] as the languages he then learned in addition to his schoolboy Latin and Greek:

> I will not mention a father's usual generosities, for greater things have a claim on me. It was at your expense, dear father, after I had got the mastery of the language of Romulus and the graces of Latin, and acquired the lofty speech of the magniloquent Greeks which is fit for the lips of Jove himself, that you persuaded me to add the flowers which France boasts and the eloquence which the modern Italian pours from his degenerate mouth – testifying by his accent to the barbarian wars – and the mysteries uttered by the Palestinian prophet. (Hughes, ll. 77–85)

Milton's *Apology Against a Pamphlet* (1642) includes a fascinating retrospective account of his literary interests and private reading from schooldays through the university and after (*CPW* I, 889–90). Though designed to demonstrate how his early reading led him to develop a lofty ideal of premarital chastity as an answer to scurrilous charges that he was licentious and frequented brothels, the narrative rings true enough. It tells the story of a sensitive, bookish schoolboy and aspiring poet who found in literature a means of sublimation and a support for the sexual abstinence urged upon him by his strong sense of religious duty, his adolescent anxieties, and his high idealism in matters of love and sex. Some of this reading (and certainly his reflections upon it) pertain to his Cambridge years and after, but we can preview the passage here since he claims to have begun working through this reading program while yet at Paul's. The climactic organization of the several kinds – elegies, Italian sonnets, romances, philosophy, the Bible – is only partly chronological: it recognizes their relative nobility and importance in forming his standard of sexual morality. He offers the review as "the summe of my thoughts in this matter through the course of my yeares and studies" (*CPW* I, 888).

Again pointing with pride to the "good learning" bestowed upon him at "those

places, where the opinion was it might be soonest attain'd," he notes that at school he studied the authors "most commended," and that he was at first most attracted to, and best able to imitate, the elegiac poets, Ovid, Propertius, and others:

> Some were grave Orators & Historians; whose matter me thought I lov'd indeed, but as my age then was, so I understood them; others were smooth Elegiack Poets, whereof the Schooles are not scarce. Whom both for the pleasing sound of their numerous writing, which in imitation I found most easie; and most agreeable to natures part in me, and for their matter which what it is, there be few who know not, I was so allur'd to read, that no recreation came to me better welcome. (*CPW* I, 889)

He insists that he found moral value in those often erotic poets by supposing that they meant to celebrate "high perfections" under various women's names: clearly, he was disposed early on to redeem recalcitrant texts by forcing them to conform to a nobler interpretation. Also, he claims that these poets sparked his resolve to choose his own objects of praise "much more wisely, and with more love of vertue" than they sometimes did. They taught him, as well, to distinguish between biography and art: "if I found those authors any where speaking unworthy things of themselves; or unchaste of those names which before they had extoll'd . . . from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplor'd" (*CPW* I, 889–90).

He then turned to Dante and Petrarch, in whom he found a more elevated concept of love: "the two famous renowners of *Beatrice* and *Laura* who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts, without transgression" (*CPW* I, 890). Romances – Spenser, Chaucer, perhaps Malory, and no doubt others – he identifies as recreational reading, "whether my younger feet wander'd" (*CPW* I, 890–1). Romances were notorious for inciting to wantonness, but Milton insists that they strengthened his idealism and commitment to premarital celibacy and chaste marital love:

> Next . . . I betook me among those lofty Fables and Romances, which recount in solemne canto's the deeds of Knighthood founded by our victorious Kings; & from hence had in renowne over all Christendome. There I read it in the oath of every Knight, that he should defend to the expence of his best blood, or of his life, if it so befell him, the honour and chastity of Virgin or Matron. From whence even then I learnt what a noble vertue chastity sure must be. . . . Only this my minde gave me that every free and gentle spirit without that oath ought to be borne a Knight . . . to secure and protect the weaknesse of any attempted chastity. So that even those books which to many others have bin the fuell of wantonnesse and loose living, I cannot thinke how unlesse by divine indulgence prov'd to me so many incitements as you have heard, to the love and stedfast observation of [chastity]. (*CPW* I, 890–1)

Though he claims to have "tasted by no means superficially the sweetness of philosophy" as a schoolboy (*CPW* IV.1, 613) he assigns to his "riper yeares" read-

ings from Plato and Xenophon that further refined his concept of virtuous love (*CPW* I, 891–2). But he points to his continued reading and instruction in the Bible from early childhood as providing the firmest basis for his developing views about chastity, gender hierarchy, and virtuous marriage:

> Last of all not in time, but as perfection is last, that care was ever had of me, with my earliest capacity not to be negligently train'd in the precepts of Christian Religion. . . . Having had the doctrine of holy Scripture unfolding those chaste and high mysteries with timeliest care infus'd, that *the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body*, thus also I argu'd to my selfe; that if unchastity in a woman whom Saint *Paul* termes the glory of man, be such a scandall and dishonour, then certainly in a man who is both the image and glory of God, it must, though commonly not so thought, be much more deflouring and dishonourable. (*CPW* I, 892)

While Milton was still at school his sister Anne married Edward Phillips, a government official, at St Stephen's Walbrook on November 22, 1623; the minister who officiated, Thomas Myriell, was the music collector who published Milton senior's songs.[46] The scrivener bestowed a considerable dowry upon Anne: £800 as well as property rights secured to her interest and that of her future children. Milton and his mother Sara witnessed the settlement; this is Milton's first recorded signature.[47] Their first child, John, was baptized on January 16, 1625. Milton entered Cambridge that year, at age 16, later than several of his schoolmates but better prepared than most by his rigorous program of preparatory studies.

"The Stile by Certain Vital Signes it Had, Was Likely to Live"

The story of Milton's writing also begins during these early years. According to John Aubrey he wrote poetry from the age of ten (*EL* 2, 10), though he preserved very few examples. But he chose to publish two free psalm paraphrases written in 1623–4 that sound some continuing themes: Psalm 114 in English decasyllabic couplets and Psalm 136 in iambic tetrameter. He dated them carefully in 1645 as "done by the Author at fifteen years old," and placed them just after the Nativity Ode. These may have been school exercises, or they may have been proposed by Milton senior, who had composed several psalm settings. Alternatively, the choice of psalms may have been Milton's own. Psalm 114, "When Israel went out of Egypt, and the house of Jacob from the barbarous people," had political resonance in late 1623: that Exodus Psalm was sung in thanksgiving at St Paul's Cathedral when Prince Charles delighted the nation by returning from Spain in October without the Catholic Infanta he had hoped to wed.[48] The 136th Psalm, "O give thanks unto the Lord: for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever," had a similar resonance, since its chief example of God's goodness is the Exodus story of Israel's deliverance from Pharaoh and establishment in the Promised Land.

These psalms, Milton's earliest extant English poems, were influenced by George Buchanan's Latin metrical psalter (1566) and Joshua Sylvester's enormously popular translation of Du Bartas under the title, *Divine Weekes and Workes*.[49] Milton imitates Du Bartas's vowel elisions, use of simple meters and simple rhymes, ornate language, and picturesque epithets. He calls on Sylvester for some linguistic embellishments – "glassy floods," "crystal fountains," "Erythraean main" (for the Red Sea), and "walls of glass" (for the Red Sea divided). In devising compound epithets he looks to both Homer and Sylvester: for example, the sea's "froth-becurled head," God's "thunder-clasping hand," the "golden-tressed sun."[50] Also, these earliest English poems display Milton's characteristic fascination with unusual geographical names and verbal sonorities.

Milton elaborates the eight verses of Psalm 114 into 18 pentameter lines, and makes each of the 26 verses of Psalm 136 into a four-line stanza with a couplet refrain. At times his lines have no biblical equivalent. In the *Book of Common Prayer* the first two lines of Psalm 114 simply record the Exodus event: "When Israel came out of Egypt, and the house of Jacob from among the strange people, / Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion." But Milton's six-line paraphrase underscores the Israelites' hard-won liberty and God's protective power:

> When the blest seed of *Terah's* faithfull Son,
> After long toil their liberty had won,
> And past from Pharian fields to *Canaan* Land,
> Led by the strength of the Almighties hand,
> *Jehovah's* wonders were in *Israel* shown,
> His praise and glory was in Israel known.

Also, his paraphrase of Psalm 136 echoes Buchanan's "Cui domini rerum submittunt sceptra tyranni" in offering a politically charged interpretation of "Lord of Lords":

> O let us his praises tell,
> That doth the wrathful tyrants quell.
> For his mercies ay endure,
> Ever faithfull, ever sure.

It is remarkable but hardly surprising that the original passages in the 15-year-old Milton's psalm paraphrases reveal attitudes prevalent in his cultural milieu and announce themes that he reiterated throughout his life and in many forms: the people's hard struggle for liberty and God's power to destroy tyrants.

2

"To Cambridge . . . for Seven Years" 1625–1632

Milton wrote appreciatively about his childhood and schooldays, with some patina of nostalgia, but he was disappointed by and sharply critical of the education he received at Cambridge University. He completed, while constantly complaining about, the required studies and exercises in disputation for the Baccalaureate and Master of Arts degrees. But he felt alienated from the curriculum and from his fellow students, finding, he lamented, "almost no intellectual companions here" (*CPW* I, 314). He came to Cambridge intending to prepare for ordination and, as his commitment to poetry intensified, probably hoped to combine poetry and the ministry as had John Donne, George Herbert, Giles and Phineas Fletcher, and others. Yet in his collegiate writings he never speaks of himself as a prospective minister but always as a poet and scholar; clearly those were the roles engaging his mind and heart. While Milton portrayed his relations with his Cambridge associates as uneasy and sometimes hostile, he continued to express warm regard for three friends whose learning, poetry, and reformist politics he had long admired: Thomas Young, his former tutor, Alexander Gil, the mentor–friend from St Paul's School, with whom he continued to exchange poems, and his dearest comrade, Charles Diodati.

Milton's early works return often to concerns common among late adolescents – awakening sexuality, relations with peers, the mix of work and leisure, the worth of academic studies, choice of vocation, politics – providing the basis for what may be the most complete self-portrait of the author as a young man before the nineteenth century. His works show us something of how he saw his student self and how he represented that self to others: as an early rebel against authority, as a young man much affected by feminine beauty yet defiantly chaste, as an ardent but very discriminating friend, as a lover of London pleasures but also of nature and the English countryside, as a zealous reformist Protestant, as a severe critic of his college education and his student peers, and above all, as an aspiring poet.

His writings in these years trace his early development as poet and rhetorician, cultivating his technical skills and deepening his religious and political engagement. His undergraduate *Prolusions* foreshadow and prepare for his later polemics, affording him practice in conventional modes of argumentation and rhetorical suasion as well as in challenging authority. As poet, he recurred often to some common poetic subjects: springtime, love, death, friendship, religion, the poet's life. He also looked to many models and tried out a great variety of genres and poetic styles, in Latin and English, but in most of them he soon discovered his own voice. When he discussed his early reading program and literary models in 1642,[1] he recorded his recognition – probably while still a student at Cambridge – that life and poetry are closely interconnected:

> And long it was not after, when I was confirm'd in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought him selfe to bee a true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honorablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroick men, or famous Cities, unlesse he have in himselfe the experience and the practice of all that which is praise-worthy. (*Apology*, *CPW* I, 890)

Within and among several of his early works he staged a debate about alternative kinds of life and poetry, setting up choices or at least some assessment of relative value. Those alternatives include: sensuous delight and asceticism, eroticism and chastity, retired leisure and arduous labor, academic oratory and poetry, classical and Christian myth, Latin and English language, elegy and the higher poetic forms, mirth and melancholy.

Some of Milton's early writings can be dated precisely but several others cannot; we have to weigh probabilities when attempting to place them in Milton's development as an author. Of his surviving university exercises known as *Prolusions*, first published in l674, we can only date Prolusion VI with confidence. Also, some of the dates Milton assigned to his early poems in his 1645 and 1673 collections are demonstrably too early – due, perhaps, to his own forgetfulness long after the fact, or to printers' errors, or to his subconscious effort to compensate for a sense of belated development. His usual dating formula, *anno aetatis*, means in his usage, "written at the age of."

All but two of Milton's undergraduate poems are in Latin, replete with classical allusions and adapted phrases; since Latin was still the international language, collegiate poets regularly practiced their skills in Latin verse. But most of Milton's Latin poems rise well above the flood of imitative Latin verse the age produced: Dr Johnson observed that Milton was "the first Englishman who, after the revival of letters, wrote Latin verse with classick elegance."[2] The chief influence on Milton's early poems was Ovid, but there are many others: Virgil, Horace, Propertius, Tibullus, Catullus, Callimachus, Seneca, Lucan, Statius, and such neo-Latin poets as George

Buchanan, Joannes Secundus, and Marullo.[3] Rather than imitating specific poems, Milton absorbs, plays with, and freely transforms Ovid and the others, turning them to his own purposes.[4] He began with elegy, "which in imitation I found most easie; and most agreeable to natures part in me" (*CPW* I, 889), and he used that meter – paired lines of alternating dactylic hexameter and pentameter – for several traditional purposes: three verse letters (Elegies I, IV, VI), two funeral elegies (Elegies II and III), a love elegy (Elegy VII), and an erotic celebration of spring (Elegy V). He also wrote in other Latin meters and kinds: epigrams, a satiric mini-epic, funeral poems. His graduate years saw a decisive turn to the vernacular: Petrarchan sonnets in Italian, and in English some epitaphs and lovely lyrics as well as three English masterpieces: the hymn *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, and the companion poems *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*.

Significantly, throughout his university career Milton's muse entirely ignored the various royal and courtly occasions celebrated by other university poets – the death and funeral of James I, the coronation and wedding of Charles I, the visits of Charles and Buckingham to the university, the births and deaths of royal children. Unlike Donne and Herbert, this serious-minded young bourgeois poet seems never to have thought about courtiership; though not yet an antiroyalist, he showed no inclination whatever to look to the court for patronage or imaginative stimulus. Some of his collegiate writing bears an overt or covert political charge – vehemently anti-Catholic, anti-Laudian, critical of Stuart religious repression, supportive of Protestant militancy in Europe, prophetic – a politics that aligns him with reformist and oppositional views. We can sometimes glimpse in the student Milton the Puritan revolutionary in the making.

"I Devoted Myself to the Traditional Disciplines and Liberal Arts"

Milton the avid student no doubt came to the university expecting to find an exciting intellectual community: challenging studies, learned teachers, stimulating companions. He registered at Christ's College, Cambridge, on February 12, 1625; he may have remained in college or returned to London for some weeks before taking the matriculation oath in the university on April 9.[5] On those trips he may or may not have traveled with old Hobson the Carrier, but he surely did so sometimes. Once a week Thomas Hobson (1544–1630) ferried students between Cambridge and London and also rented horses and carriages to them, making them accept whatever horse or equipage stood nearest the stable door – hence the phrase, "Hobson's Choice." Easter term, which began April 28 that year, was the usual entry period; graduation came four years later, at the Bachelors' commencement at the end of March. Milton began college at 16, the most common age of entry to Cambridge colleges in the 1620s.[6] Many students came at age 12 or 13, though

Henry Peacham declared that the college program was much beyond the "childish capacities" of such "tender plants," and that "scarce one among twentie" succeeded.[7] Such a student population contributed to Milton's sense of alienation at college.

Most students came from moderately well-to-do families, and, like Milton, paid fees of about £50 a year as "lesser pensioners." Above them in rank were the "fellow-commoners" or "greater pensioners" – the sons of nobles and wealthy gentry who paid most, had the best accommodation, and dined at high table. Below them were the sizars who paid least, performed various menial duties and had inferior accommodation. Very able poor students might receive exhibitions from their schools or college scholarships. A fellow Pauline, Richard Pory, registered at Christ's along with Milton; other student contemporaries whom he may have known but never mentions include, at Christ's, the poet John Cleveland and the Cambridge Platonist Henry More, and in other colleges, the poet Richard Crashaw and the playwright Thomas Randolph.[8]

When Milton came up to Cambridge in 1625 he found a town of around five thousand and a university with sixteen colleges, inhabited by more than three thousand men and boys. The Arts faculty was then educating unprecedented numbers of young gentlemen to fill various positions in English society, but a primary role was still the preparation of ministers. Many students left before taking the Baccalaureate degree, some to read law at the Inns of Court, some to take up appointments in the court or county bureaucracy, some to live on their estates or enter into commerce. Prospective ministers proceeded to the Master of Arts degree and ordination; some other bachelors entered the faculties of law and medicine. An occasional graduate might be elected as a fellow of his college and stay on to tutor students and proceed (usually) to an advanced degree in divinity.

At both Cambridge and Oxford the colleges were the principal sites of the students' education. Milton and his father probably chose Christ's – founded in 1505 and in 1625 the third largest college with some 265 members – because of its strong reformist traditions. During Elizabeth's reign many residents of Christ's were in trouble for non-conformity or for Puritanism. Recent fellows and students included the famous reformist and Puritan theologians William Ames, William Perkins, Lawrence Chaderton, Hugh Broughton, Thomas Goodwin, Edward Dering, Andrew Willett, and John Smyth the Se-Baptist.[9] But shortly before and during Milton's years Christ's, like Sidney Sussex and Emmanuel, were marked by heightened conflict between their Calvinist/Puritan traditions and the growing power of the Laudian faction throughout the university. The Master of Christ's, Thomas Bainbridge (1622–46), was not strongly partisan, but the 13 fellows were sharply divided in their opinions and allegiances.[10]

Christ's College in 1625 was attractive, with open fields (Christ's Piece) to the east and the river Cam about half a mile beyond them. Surrounding the spacious court were two-story buildings of sandstone and red brick, comprising living quarters, master's lodge, dining hall, and chapel (plate 2). Beyond were extensive gar-

dens for master and fellows, an orchard, and an enclosed tennis court. Throughout the university student living quarters were crowded. At Christ's, the fellows occupied first-floor rooms in the courtyard buildings, perhaps sharing with their sizars. Sleeping chambers held two, three, or even four students, usually with separate beds; some rooms had studies attached. In violation of university statutes, overflow students were lodged in a nearby inn, the Brazen George. Tradition, unsupported by any evidence, has assigned Milton a choice first-floor room at the left side of the courtyard; he might possibly have shared this room with another student toward the end of his college career, but for much of it he probably lodged with one or two roommates in less desirable quarters, such as the small wooden "New Building" known as "Rat's Hall."

At college the tutor stood *in loco parentis* to his students, had major responsibility for their instruction, and often took charge of the money for their fees, books, and living expenses. One of the two most respected tutors at Christ's during Milton's years was his own first tutor, William Chappell, famed for his erudition, his strictness with his pupils, his Arminian (anti-predestinarian) theology, and his formidable disputations in the university assemblies – including one with King James.[11] During the 1620s he had more than twice as many students as any other tutor – which may testify to his reputation, his popularity, or simply his readiness to take on paying work. Joseph Mede was still more renowned. He was a student of divinity and mathematics, an authority on Homer, a Socratic teacher noted for tailoring instruction to his students' needs and interests, and a distinguished biblical exegete best known for his *Clavis Apocalyptica* (1627), a scholarly analysis and application of biblical apocalyptic prophecy to contemporary history which went far to legitimate millenarianism among mainstream Puritans before, during, and after the revolution.[12] Mede was also part of a network of correspondence relaying news of the court, the government, and especially of European affairs and the Thirty Years War.[13] Milton may, or may not, have had much contact with Mede, but his millenarianism and his attention to the fortunes of European Protestants formed part of the intellectual milieu of Christ's.

The academic year had three regular terms: Michaelmas (October 10 to December 16); Lent (January 13 to the second Friday before Easter); and Easter (from the second Wednesday after Easter to the Friday after the first Tuesday in July – the day commencement exercises were held for graduate degrees). Then came the "long vacation" or Midsummer term. Students assembled in chapel at 5 a.m. for morning service and perhaps a brief talk, called a "commonplace," by one of the fellows. After breakfast small groups met for tutorials in their tutors' rooms, and for sessions at which lectors read Aristotle and other texts with them. They might also attend or participate in disputations to prepare for or fulfill degree requirements. After lunch they attended other disputations in college or in the "Public Schools" (assemblies) of the university, or spent time in private study. Though not required to do so they could and Milton probably did attend lectures by the distinguished Regius Profes-

sors of the university: Robert Creighton (Greek), Robert Metcalfe (Hebrew), and Samuel Collins (Divinity). Milton may also have heard the eloquent Puritan preacher Richard Sibbes of Catherine Hall and the poet George Herbert, though the latter's duties as the university's Public Orator (until 1627) were then chiefly performed by a deputy. After Vespers and dinner students were free. Statutes, not rigorously enforced in Milton's day, forbade them to be out of college after nine (or ten) at night, to go into town without special permission, or to visit taverns. Except during hours of relaxation they were to speak only Latin, Greek, or Hebrew. Misbehavior, defiance of the rules, or absence from required sessions were penalized according to seriousness, by fines, rustication for a limited period, corporal punishment, and expulsion.

We do not know exactly what Milton studied at Cambridge.[14] During Milton's years the curricular emphasis was on logic, rhetoric, ethics, metaphysics, and theology. The amount of time given to Greek, Hebrew, politics, geography, classical history, and (ancient) science – physics, astronomy, biology, geology, etc. – depended largely on the tutor's interests and capacities and to some degree on the student's.[15] Joseph Mede's records of student book purchases indicate that his students chiefly read Aristotle and compendiums based on Aristotle, though also Ramist logics and rhetorics.[16] The university had a mathematics professor, and Bacon had won some converts in his Alma Mater to the new science and philosophy, but there was no formal study of modern science, modern history, or vernacular literature. Milton evidently went well beyond the norm in mathematics, Hebrew, and Greek, his mastery of which is evident from his carefully annotated copy of Aratus purchased in 1631.[17] As time permitted he no doubt followed his own recommendation in Prolusion III for wide reading in history, science, and the modern literatures. Mede's accounts indicate that some students paid for special tutors in French, music, fencing, and horsemanship. Milton may have done so: he later takes pride in the mastery of his weapon (*CPW* IV.1, 583) and in his good Italian.

Rhetoric was pervasive, mastered chiefly by practice. Tutors assigned handbooks based on Cicero, Quintilian, Aristotle, Aphthonius, the Ramist Omer Talon, Bartholomaeus Keckermann, and others, and from the first term on practiced their students in disputation to prepare them for the required public orations and disputations on logic, ethics, physics, metaphysics, and theology. Third- and fourth-year students disputed regularly in their own colleges and in university assemblies. They defended or attacked propositions (as assigned), both in extempore speeches and in carefully organized and memorized Latin orations that were supposed to make effective use of logical argument, rhetorical proofs, and stylistic flourishes. In the final year, as part of the exercises for the Baccalaureate, they were required by statute (not always strictly enforced) to maintain two Latin theses on selected moral or metaphysical topics ("Responsions" or "Acts"), against three opponents belonging to other colleges; and to serve as opponent on two such occasions.[18]