Inscribing textuality: Milton, Davenant, authorship and the performance of print.

Rachel Willie, Liverpool John Moores University

Milton never completed a play intended for performance and his involvement in masque culture seems limited to the Welsh Marches,[1] but he did engage with drama and larger conversations about the stage throughout his career. Indeed, sketches and fragments of dramas based mainly on biblical stories exist in the Trinity Manuscript and Milton defended drama in his commonplace book and these engagements may be seen a form of reception. The topic of Milton and drama seems to go through critical cycles. Jonas Barish's *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (1981) seems to have invited assertions that Milton's writing exudes a disdain for the stage, a poise that would be in keeping with his Puritan leanings.[2] Stanley Fish's influential work has led many to

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I would like to thank Douglas Clark, Phillip Sutcliffe-Mott and the editors for comments upon earlier drafts of this essay, and Tom Charlton for helpful conversations.

[1] In addition to *Comus*, Milton also wrote *Arcades* (1634), a pastoral entertainment comprising song, dialogue and masque-like elements in honour of Alice Spencer Egerton, Dowager Countess of Derby. Towards the end of his life, Milton also published *Samson Agonistes* (1671), a closet drama not intended for performance. In his commonplace book, Milton asks, 'What in all philosophy is more important or more exalted than a tragedy rightly produced?' (CPW I:490-91). On Milton's commonplace book, see William Poole, 'The Genres of Milton's Commonplace Book', *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 367-81. On the Trinity Manuscript, see William R. Parker, 'The Trinity Manuscript and Milton's Plans for Tragedy', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 34 (1935): 225-32. See also Timothy J. Burbery, *Milton the Dramatist* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 33, 96.

[2] See, for example, Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: The University of California Press, 1981); T. H. Howard-Hill, 'Milton and "The Rounded Theatre's Pomp"', *Of Poetry and Politics: New Essays on Milton and His World*, ed. P. G. Stanwood (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995), 95-121.

be of the opinion that the theatricality of Satan in *Paradise Lost* demonstrates Milton's dismissal of the stage as a fallen and corrupting force.[3] Others have proposed that Milton's tenacious use of blank verse and the reception of it as being old-fashioned and archaic is representative of the way in which Milton presents himself as being against the aesthetics of rhymed heroic couplets, the politics present on the Royalist Restoration stage and within the marketplace of print.[4] The antitheatricalism present in *Eikonoklastes* thus can be interpreted as strategically adopted to frame *Eikon Basilike* as a theatrical text; by so doing, the theatricality of the king's book can be attacked.[5] Other critics have highlighted the metaphorical quality of textual spectatorship and how drama connects to the theatrum mundi trope to show how Milton is not against *all* drama, but instead uses drama as a form of moral representation.[6] Moving beyond a focus on Milton as dramatist, Brendan Prawdzik examines the problem that dramatic form presents for Milton in his attempt to reconcile the chaste, public poet with the stage: these insights highlight Milton's theatrical poetics and how they connect to embodiment, selfhood and language.[7]

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[3] Stanley Fish, *Surprised by Sin: the Reader in Paradise Lost*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). For a sample of the large body of work that explores the theatrical inflections in Milton's epic, see Elizabeth Bradburn, 'Theatrical Wonder, Amazement, and the Construction of Spiritual Agency in *Paradise Lost*', *Comparative Drama* 40 (2006): 77-98; John G. Demaray, *Milton's Theatrical Epic: The Invention and Design of 'Paradise Lost'* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); James Holly Hanford. 'The Dramatic Element in *Paradise Lost*', *Studies in Philology*, 14 (1927): 178-95; Michael Lieb, 'Milton's "Dramatick Constitutions": The Celestial Dialogue in *Paradise Lost*, Book III', *Milton Studies* 23 (1987): 215-40; Mary Nyquist, 'Reading the Fall: Discourse and Drama in *Paradise Lost', ELR*, 14 (1984): 199-229; Paul Stevens, *Imagination and the Presence of Shakespeare in 'Paradise Lost'* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

[4] Elizabeth Sauer, *Paper Contestations and Textual Communities in England, 1640-1675* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

[5] Ibid., 57-76.

[6] Vanita Neelakanta, 'Theatrum Mundi and Milton's Theater of the Blind in *Samson Agonistes*', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 11 (2011): 30-58. David Kezar juxtaposes the antitheatricalism within *Eikonoklastes* with the inescapability of drama to examine *Samson Agonistes* from the context of *ars morendi* literature. See Kezar, 'Samson's Death by Theater and Milton's Art of Dying', *ELH* (1999): 295-336.

Milton certainly had a sustained interest in dramatic form, though whether this interest is for poetic or performative reasons is open to speculation. Deborah Milton stated her father 'most delighted with [reading] Homer, whom he could almost entirely repeat; and next, with Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and Euripides'.[8] Milton's love of reading classical authors provides some insights into his own reception and interpretation of drama: his heavily annotated copy of the plays of Euripides, which he purchased in 1634, survives.[9] It is annotated in four different hands, though Milton's scribal interjections seem to be limited to the period between his purchasing the two-volume edition and his total blindness in 1652, and most of his annotations were made before 1638.[10] Milton, as Maurice Kelley and Samuel D. Atkins contend, not only engages with the text as an editor and translator by correcting the Latin translation appended to the Greek text, but he also reads the text as a scholar and a poet.[11]

Milton's marginalia demonstrate his scholarly and poetic engagement with dramatic form: in his annotations of lines 754-71 in *Supplices*, he speculates that they are probably incorrectly given to the Chorus and the Messenger.[12] For John Hale, this engagement with dramatic form demonstrates, not so much Milton's interest in staging as his concern with dramatic value, his metrical knowledge, and his sense of the 'staged moment'. Drama thus rematerializes upon the page, but this does not necessarily mean the words are a purely textual form. Hale suggests that Milton's annotations show how he read with his ears as well as his eyes as he restored the Greek scansion.[13] But reading itself sits at the threshold of hearing and seeing due to text being read aloud.[14] What this demonstrates is that Milton had a keen sense of the dramatic tradition – perhaps especially in relation to the legacies and reception of classical drama – and this comes through in his poetic works.[15]

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[7] Brendan Prawdzik, '"Look on Me": Theater, Gender and Poetic Identity Formation in Milton's Maske', *Studies in Philology* 110 (2013): 812-50.

[8] John K. Hale, 'Milton's Euripides Marginalia: Their Significance for Milton Studies', *Milton Studies* 27 (1991): 23-35 (33).

[9] It is housed at the Bodleian Library: Don. d. 27 and 28.

[10] Maurice Kelley and Samuel D. Atkins, 'Milton's Annotations of Euripides' *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 60 (1961): 680-87 (684).

[11] Ibid., *passim*.

[12] Hale, 'Milton's Euripides Marginalia', 28-29. Hale notes that Christopher Collard agrees with Milton in his 1975 edition of the play.

In asserting Milton's theatricalism, critics desire to view Milton's poetry and prose as staged events. Conversely, those who seek to assert Milton's antitheatricalism tend to discreetly shy away from evidence that Milton might have inherited from his father a trusteeship of the Blackfriars Playhouse;[16] was involved in theatrics while at Cambridge;[17] wrote a poem expressing admiration of Shakespeare that was published in the 1632 second folio;[18] and collaborated with Henry Lawes in

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[13] Ibid., 28.

[14] For a detailed exploration of reading aloud in the early modern period, see Jennifer Richards, *Voices and Books in the English Renaissance: A New History of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). See also Jennifer Richards and Richard Wistreich, 'Voice, Breath and the Physiology of Reading', in *The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities,* ed. Anne Whitehead and Angela Woods, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 276–93.

[15] Scholars have long identified 'theatrical residues' in Milton's poetry and prose, and the complex and sometimes contradictory ways in which he responded to drama, perhaps especially Shakespeare. See, for example, Paul Stevens, *Imagination and the Presence of Shakespeare in "Paradise Lost"* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Nicholas McDowell, 'Milton's Regicide Tracts and the Uses of Shakespeare', in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton* ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 252-71.

[16] Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11-12.

[17] John K. Hale, 'Milton Plays the Fool: The Christ's College Salting, 1628', *Classical and Modern Literature* 20 (2000): 51-70; Ann Baynes Coiro, 'Anonymous Milton, or, *A Maske* Masked', *ELH* 71 (2004): 609-29.

[18] 'An Epitaph on the admirable Dramaticke Poet, W. Shakespeare', *Mr. VVilliam Shakespeares comedies, histories, and tragedies Published according to the true originall copies* (London, 1632)

1634 to produce *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* – or *Comus* as it is more commonly known.[19] Instead, the antitheatricals often focus upon Milton's final published closet drama, *Samson Agonistes* (1671), where Samson destroys the philistine theater and suggests this is indicative of blind Milton's desire to destroy the profane Royalist Restoration stage; comments in his prose works that appear to be against the stage; and the how the theatrical elements of *Paradise Lost* could be aligning performed drama with the fallen angels. However, we are told that, with Milton's blessing, Dryden adapted *Paradise Lost* into an unperformed, but hugely popular in print Restoration opera complete with heroic couplets.[20] These apparent paradoxes in Milton's approach to stage plays mean that the debates regarding his view of drama are likely to be ongoing. In what follows, I aim to add another dimension to these discussions, which I hope will suggest that, far from being inconsistent, Milton's view of performance remains remarkably stable.

In order to make this case, I will focus upon two seemingly unrelated episodes in the performance of seventeenth century drama, namely Thomas Heywood's publication of *An Apology for Actors* in 1612, and Davenant's publication of his preface to *Gondibert* (1650). While Milton is not directly influenced by Heywood or by Davenant's writing, their observations regarding words and performance show that Milton's views on drama are part of wider conversations about dramatic language, authorship, publication, authority, collaboration and reception. As we will see, Heywood's *Apology* provides insights into performance culture that are vital for understanding why Milton might struggle to write for the stage and Davenant's observations regarding language show that Milton is not the only writer who

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A5r. For discussion of Milton's engagement with Shakespeare, see Stephen Dobranski's chapter in this volume.

[19] Ian Spink notes that Lawes' posthumous reputation is predicated upon his collaboration with Milton, demonstrating that while Milton's engagement with performance may be limited it has lasting and far-reaching implications. See Spink, *Henry Lawes: Cavalier Songwriter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 55-57.

[20] Diana Treviño Benet, 'The Genius of Every Age: Milton and Dryden', *Milton Studies*, 57 (2016): 263-91; Nicholas von Maltzahn, 'The First Reception of *Paradise Lost*', *RES*, 47 (1996): 479-99. See also Emma Depledge's chapter in this volume.

considers literary legacy. Instead, Milton, with his concern for the controlled articulation of authorial voice, demonstrates that he is operating within a wider cultural context that is engaged with reception histories.

Apologising for Actors, Attacking the Archaic

Heywood's *Apology for Actors* is famously concerned with refuting antitheatrical tracts. Through allusion to antiquity, Heywood emphasizes the longevity and nobility of the profession of acting. By referencing Philip Sidney, he also emphasizes the ability of the theater to teach and delight its spectators. However, the third and final treatise in the *Apology* ends with a plea to his fellow playwrights:

> Now to speake of some abuse lately crept into the quality as an inueighling against the State, the Court, the Law, the Citty, and their gouernments, with the particularizing of private mens humors (yet aliue) Noble-men, & others. I know it distates many; neither do I any way approue it, nor dare I by many means excuse it. The liberty which some arrogate to themselues, committing their bitternesse, and liberall inuectiues against all estates, to the mouthes of Children, supposing their iuniority to be a pruiledge for any rayling, be it neuer so violent, I could aduise all such, to curbe and limit this presumed liberty within the bands of discretion and gouernment. But wise and iuditial Censurers, before whom such complaints shall at any time hereafter come, will (I hope) impute these abuses to any transgression in us, who have ever been carefull and provident to shun the like[21]

Absolving himself of involvement in iniquitous performances, Heywood is directly addressing Samuel Daniel, John Marston, Ben Jonson, George Chapman, John Day and other playwrights for the boy acting companies. In the first decade of the seventeenth century, the two boy acting companies gained notoriety for the biting satire and politically risqué content of their plays. Paul's boys was a little more cautious of attacking authority figures than the company based at the Blackfriars theater, and this might be due to the paradoxical support which the Blackfriars had from authority figures. From 1604 until 1606, Anna of Denmark was the patron of the Children of the Queen's Revels, though before the company folded in 1608, they had lost their royal patron. In sponsoring the acting company, Anna's poet Samuel Daniel was appointed the boys' governor and given responsibility for licensing their plays. This does not appear to have been a productive career move: the same year, Daniel was called before the Privy Council after the allegory of his tragedy *Philotas* was interpreted as a narrative about the relationship between Elizabeth and Essex. A year later in 1605, Marston went into hiding and Jonson and Chapman (in fear of having their ears and noses cut) voluntarily imprisoned themselves and wrote obsequiously apologetic letters after anti-Scottish satire in *Eastward Ho!* offended the king. A year after that, the boys were reprimanded and some were jailed after Day's *The Isle of Gulls* annoyed the French Ambassador and was also interpreted as being a personal attack on the king. Eventually, Anna appears to have lost interest in what the French Ambassador had noted was her enjoyment of the railing performed at her husband's expense and an exasperated James declared that the boys 'would never play more but should first beg their bread'.[22]

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[21] Thomas Heywood, *An apology for actors Containing three briefe treatises. 1 Their antiquity. 2 Their ancient dignity. 3 The true vse of their quality.* (London, 1612), sig. G3v.

In the context of the theatrical climate of the 1600s and the liberties taken by the Children of the Queen's Revels, Heywood's concerns about the damage to the profession caused by using boys as mouthpieces for sedition has pertinence. Knowing the distaste that is generated by this 'presumed liberty', Heywood pleads with his fellow professionals to revise their text. In order to prevent inspiring the wrath and indignation of those in authority and the inevitable punishments that will be inflicted upon all who operate in the playhouse, Heywood requests that playwrights self-censor. By addressing 'all such' people who have been involved in the production of these dramas, Heywood's appeal is addressed, not only to the playwrights, but also to the boy actors. Through acting the part, the boy actor could mediate the sedition present in the play text. This emphasizes that the performed text is not stable, but can be altered by the actor speaking the words. The stage thus becomes a space where the reception and circulation of dramatic text is provisional and open to modification and change.

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[22] For a brief summary, see Martin Butler, 'Literature and the Theater to 1660', *The Cambridge History of Early Modern Literature* ed. David Loewenstein and Janel Mueller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 565-602 (571-75). For a detailed account of the repertory and theatre history of the company, see Lucy Munro, *Children of the Queen's Revels: A Jacobean Theatre Repertory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Sixty years later, London had experienced Civil War, regicide, commonwealth and the restoration of the monarchy. Between 1642 and 1660, the playhouses were officially closed by three Acts of Parliament (though there is evidence to suggest that drama continued to be performed with and without the blessing of the state).[23] Through the many cultural and political shifts of the seventeenth century, the connection between the actor, play text and the spoken word remained constant. As we will see, it is this malleability of the spoken word, shown in Heywood's reaction to the staging of plays, that is relevant when considering Milton's response to drama, but Davenant's views on language, as articulated in his preface to *Gondibert,* are also important for understanding how text circulates upon the stage and on the page.

Davenant may have been poet laureate, but some questioned whether he was deserving of his laurels:

> After so many sad mishaps
> Of Drinking, Ruining, and of Clappe
> I pitty most thy last misshappe.
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> That having past the soldiers paines
> The Statesmans Axe, the Seamans gaines
> With Gondibert to butcher thy braines[24]

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[23] Leslie Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1928); Janet Clare, *Drama of the English Republic: 1649-1660* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Susan Wiseman, *Drama and Politics in the English Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Rachel Willie, *Staging the Revolution: Drama, Reinvention and History, 1647-72* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

[24] John Donne the younger, 'To Sr William Davenant', February 1651 [1652]. BL Thomason 669.f.15 (82) fol. 1.

Thus began ‘to Sr William Davenant’, a poem that was penned by John Donne the Younger and circulated in manuscript in February 1652. Donne makes pretence of both congratulating and pitying Davenant. Having run the gauntlet of drunkenness, debauchery and sexually transmittable diseases, it is suggested that Davenant continues to commit indecent acts. Private corruption is coupled with public heroics and the succinct biography goes on to refer to Davenant’s prowess on the battlefield. After being knighted in 1643 for his services to the royalist cause, it seems inevitable that (following the execution of Charles I in January 1649 and the establishment of the commonwealth), Davenant would become an enemy of the state. This notoriety would be consolidated in 1650, when Davenant was captured by the commonwealth, imprisoned and sentenced to death. As mishaps go, this would seem to be pretty disastrous, but within six years Davenant was not only pardoned, but also producing ‘reformed’ dramas that celebrate Protectorate foreign policy. Davenant succeeded in negotiating regime change, but Donne’s poem suggests a more sinister state of affairs. Regardless of Davenant’s invidious status as an enemy of the state, he ought to be imprisoned for his crimes against poetry.[25]

John Donne the younger was not the only person to comment upon Davenant’s literary aspirations and this is partly due to Davenant’s interventions in the playhouse. As early as the 1630s, professional playwrights such as Phillip Massinger were embroiled in a textual war with Davenant and his fellow courtier-playwrights.[26] At the outbreak of civil war in 1642, this literary controversy may have been suspended, but it would continue in the Restoration and be conjoined with memory of the civil war period. When the playhouses were officially re-opened at the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Thomas Killigrew and Davenant were granted patents that made them each a manager of one of the two acting companies that were licensed to perform drama and Davenant was also permitted to mount productions in the 1650s.[27] Henry Herbert, who had been reinstated as Master of the Revels, noted this with perplexity. For Herbert, Davenant ranked amongst the most notorious of the turncoats and yet the restored monarchy chose to reward Davenant for his disloyalty.[28] The very act of granting the patent to Davenant would mean that he would hold considerable sway over the restored theatrical scene.

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[25] Mary Edmond, *Rare Sir William Davenant: Poet Laureate, Playwright, Civil War General, Restoration Theatre Man* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

[26] Peter Beal, ‘Massinger at Bay: Unpublished Verses in a War of the Theatres’, *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 10 (1980): 190-203.

[27] Willie, 89-132.

Davenant's ability to negotiate civil war, commonwealth and Restoration with his cranium still attached to his neck may have caused disquiet in some quarters, but it also meant that, for some, Davenant could be ridiculed. John Donne the younger's comments regarding Davenant's lack of literary talent chime with many of the observations made by the London wits and within royalist circles; perhaps most notably, a literary community comprising John Denham and other cavaliers satirically critiqued in print and in manuscript Davenant's lack of conformity to literary conventions.[29] Conversely, others (perhaps most famously Davenant's friend and occasional collaborator, John Dryden) praised Davenant for his ingenuity and blamed the circumstances of suspended theater for Davenant penning 'unformed' Protectorate theatricals.[30] In this wider context where text is received, critiqued and compared to past textual utterances, far from butchering his brains with the tedium that is *Gondibert*, Davenant presses for a style of verse stripped of the follies to which celebrated poets of the past had succumbed. In a prefatory verse to *The Preface*, Abraham Cowley applauds Davenant's plainer style:

> Methinks Heroick Poesies, till now
> Like some fantastic Fairy land did show;
> Gods, Devils, Nymphs, Witches, & Giants race,
> And all by man, in mans best work had place.
> Thou like some worthy knight, with sacred Arms

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[28] N. W. Bawcutt, ed., *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels, 1623-73* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 223; Willie, 119.

[29] Marcus Nevitt, 'The Insults of Defeat: Royalist Responses to William Davenant's *Gondibert* (1651)', *The Seventeenth Century* 24 (2009): 287-304; Timothy Raylor, *Cavaliers, Clubs, and Literary Culture: Sir John Mennes, James Smith, and the Order of the Fancy* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994), 197-99.

[30] Willie, 134.

Dost drive the Monsters thence, and end the Charms:[31]

Simultaneously adopting the rhetoric of knight errantry while condemning its negative connections with the fantastical, Cowley celebrates Davenant for rescuing heroic poetry from the clutches of fairyland. Unlike his predecessors, Davenant focuses his narrative upon the known world and the actions of humanity. There is an implicit critique of earlier authors such as the Elizabethan writer, Edmund Spenser, whose unfinished epic romance, *The Faerie Queene* (books 1-3, 1590; books 4-6, 1596), was presented to the reading public as having the purpose of fashioning a gentleman into virtuous behaviour through the example set by various quests through fairy land.[32] The rich allegory of *The Faerie Queene* offers numerous references to contemporary concerns, but for Cowley, the recourse to the non-human renders these types of narrative flawed.

Both Cowley and Davenant wrote epics in the mid-seventeenth century that stripped the epic form of archaic language. As Lucy Munro has deftly demonstrated, archaism – both in terms of language and in terms of form – were integral to the epic even if archaisms were unpopular by the time Cowley and Davenant were penning their epics. Munro's thesis also sheds light on how Milton uses archaism: Dryden assumed Milton simply imitated Spenser in his recourse to the archaic, but, in *Paradise Lost*, archaic words cluster around Satan and Hell. For Munro, this precise use of words demonstrates how Milton deconstructs Classical epic and reconstructs it as Christian epic.[33] Both Milton and Davenant are concerned with the 'fit' use of language, but they address how words are used differently. Milton, as Hannah Crawforth eruditely notes, uses the etymological roots of words to attempt to construct a national language of liberty, but the idealist use of language in his earlier work gives way to scepticism as the republican agenda wanes.[34] Conversely, Davenant directly engages with how language in the present more broadly connects with language in the past: in *The Preface*, he praises and derides in equal measure. Starting with Homer, Davenant assesses the relative merits of deceased poets and completes his inventory with Spenser. While Spenser may be applauded for his ingenuity, he is also to be criticised for his vulgar use of language:

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[31] Abraham Cowley, 'To Sir William Davenant, upon his two first Books of Gondibert, finished before his voyage to America', *A Discourse Upon Gondibert. An Heroick Poem Written by Sr. William Davenant. With an Answer to it by Mr Hobbs.* (Paris, 1650), sig. A3r.

[32] See 'A Letter of the Authors Expounding His Whole Intention in the Course of this Work', appended to the 1590 edition *The Faerie Queene* (Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* ed. Thomas P. Roche (London: Penguin, 1978), 15).

[33] Lucy Munro, *Archaic Style in English Literature, 1590-1674* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 226-32.

> Language (which is the onely Creature of Man's Creation) hath, like a Plant, seasons of flourishing, and decay; like Plants, is remov'd from one Soil to another, and by being so transplanted, doth gather vigour and increase. But as it is false Husbandry to graft old Branches upon young Stocks: so we may wonder that our Language … should receive from his [i.e. Spenser's] hand new Grafts of old wither'd Words[35]

Spenser may have constructed a pastoral romance, but Davenant argues he knows little of horticulture. Rather than purifying language, in looking to the past and using archaic forms of English, Spenser corrupts an evolving language, which prevents language from progressing. As Munro argues, Davenant presents archaism as a highly self-aware process that 'does not breach merely stylistic decorum, but also temporal decorum'.[36] For Davenant, the reception of text and the legacies of authorship rest in being part of an evolutionary process whereby language organically modifies, adapts and changes over time. As I have already noted, Milton was a keen reader of classical authors and, like Davenant, his writing thus becomes situated within a literary tradition that stretches back to antiquity. Later in this essay, I will address how Milton asserts a sense of authorship through recourse to the old, but before returning to Milton it is worth noting Davenant's paradoxical engagement with past linguistic utterances.

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[34] Hannah Crawforth, *Etymology and the Invention of English in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 147-84.

[35] Davenant, 'The author's preface to his much honoured friend, Mr Hobbes', *A Discourse Upon Gondibert. An Heroick Poem Written by Sr. William Davenant. With an Answer to it by Mr Hobbs.* (Paris, 1650), sig. A9v.

[36] Munro, *Archaic Style*, 27.

In the preface, we see not only the rationale for adapting old play texts, but also a criticism of engaging with previous writing. As Michael Dobson, Paulina Kewes and others have noted, the folios of Jonson, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, published 1616, 1623 and 1647 respectively, established these writers as literary grandees.[37] Natural Shakespeare, artful Jonson and the witty double-act of Beaumont and Fletcher all produced texts that were worthy of being printed in folio and the paratexts to each volume asserted the linguistic and literary achievements of each writer. The Restoration stage would continue to pay homage to past playwrights by reviving some pre-civil war play texts and altering others.[38] However, for Davenant, old language needs to be handled with care. Lacking the purity of late-seventeenth century English, older play texts have to be modified to make them fit for a more refined age: whereas Heywood implores writers to take care in how they craft drama to maintain the decorum of the stage, Davenant presents language (and through it drama also) as in need of constant alteration and refinement. Through some cutting, re-writing and grafting of new scenes onto the old play, the old language can be made relevant for a contemporary audience.

Such observations chime with thoughts regarding the recovery of words and the relationship between heroic language and language as a living form that had currency in the Restoration; but they also emphasize the disconnection between heroic poetry and new ways in which words are used.[39] This disconnection is not reconciled through altering old texts: Davenant may reject archaic form, but the processes of adaptation could be conceived as recourse to the old. While the old play text has been modified, it still comprises 'old wither'd words'. There is a tension between the assessment of the evolution of language and how performing drama carries this language through to the Restoration stage. Another tension in Davenant's rejection of old words lies in the generic conventions that he employs. Unconventionally, the author's preface was first published separately from the poem and later enlarged and printed with the unfinished epic. In this respect, it does not only serve the purpose of introducing the poem, but also advertises the poem to its reading public – even if Denham and his coterie severely criticised Davenant for publishing a preface without the poem.

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[37] Michael Dobson, *The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation and Authorship, 1660-1769* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Paulina Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation: Writing for the Stage in England, 1660-1710* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

[38] The earliest Shakespeare adaptations did not reference Shakespeare as a source for the altered text. Through being attentive to the book trade and how Shakespeare circulated on the page and the stage, Emma Depledge has uncovered the rich afterlife of the Shakespeare text in the long eighteenth century. See Emma Depledge *Shakespeare's Rise to Cultural Prominence: Print, Politics and Alteration, 1642-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

The perception that Davenant's poetics demonstrated a lack of understanding of generic conventions exposed him to ridicule. As Niall Allsopp has shown, the marginalia in one copy of Davenant's text shows how readers actively engaged with each other's scribal annotations and with literary conventions to lampoon Davenant's literary pretensions.[40] Davenant may have attempted to utilize the paper stage to enact drama in textual form, but contemporaries questioned Davenant grasp of poetics. Yet in these critiques, politics and poetics conjoin. Although Davenant gestured towards the poem as being his valediction to life as he stoically awaited his execution, early readers (somewhat cynically) understood that the poem was not a swan song. Instead, it could be interpreted as forming part of Davenant's lobbying of parliament to pardon him. Later, Davenant composed a tract and a letter to Thurloe which advocated utilizing the stage for moral representations.[41] Protectorate poetics are thus infused with political didacticism and questions regarding ethics, yet *The Preface to Gondibert* heralds Protectorate poetics by drawing attention to aesthetics.

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[39] Milton's nephew and amanuensis, Edward Phillips presents early modern lexicography as preserving language from 'the barbarisms and ruinous deformities of the time', suggesting that there is a disconnect between heroic language and spoken language that may be mediated through dictionaries (Crawforth, 171-75).

[40] Niall Allsopp, '"Lett none our Lombard Author blame for's righteous paine"': An Annotated Copy of Sir William Davenant's *Gondibert*', *The Library,* 16 (2015): 24-50.

[41] C. H. Firth, 'Sir William Davenant and the Revival of Drama During the Protectorate', *English Historical Review,* 18 (1903): 319-21; James R. Jacob and Timothy Raylor, 'Opera and Obedience:

The poem, we are told, defies the generic conventions of heroic poetry and instead looks to the stage for its structure and form:

> I cannot discern by any help from reading or learned men … that any Nation hath in representment of great actions … digested Story into so pleasant and instructive a method as the English by their *Drama*: and by that regular species (though narratively and not in Dialogue) I have drawn the body of an Heroick Poem: In which I did not onely observe the Symmetry (positioning five Books to five *Acts* and *Canto's* to *Scenes* …) but all the *Shadowings*, *happy strokes*, *secret graces*, and even the *drapery* … I have (I hope) exactly followed[42]

Davenant asserts that, in penning his heroic poem, he is drawing from both the beauty and the mechanics of drama. The stage rematerializes upon the page. Stripped of dialogue, drama still maintains its form. In appropriating English drama for poetic ends, Davenant suggests that he is purifying heroic poetry of the flaws that previous poets added to the form. As Timothy Raylor has perhaps most recently demonstrated, in *The Preface to Gondibert*, Davenant proposes a new literary aesthetic; this aesthetic is founded less upon improbabilities, poetic metaphor and figurative language and more upon philosophical and scientific learning.[43] The virtually impenetrable poem that inspired John Donne the younger's derision is based upon these tenets. However, this seems to be at odds with much of Davenant's dramatic output, both pre- and post-Restoration, where neoplatonic love and honour seem to be

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Thomas Hobbes and "A Proposition for Advancement of Morality" by Sir William Davenant', *The Seventeenth Century*, 6 (1991): 205-50.

[42] Davenant, sig. B10r.

[43] Timothy Raylor, 'Hobbes, Davenant, and Disciplinary Tensions in *The Preface to Gondibert*', *Collaboration and Interdisciplinarity in the Republic of Letters* ed. Paul Scott (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 59-72.

the driving force.[44] This apparent contradiction emphasizes the difficulties in reconciling the need to draw from tradition and past textual events as a way of asserting the precedence and longevity of a type of writing while at the same time suggesting that a new and radical form of writing is being developed. Generic conventions are being endorsed as they are being challenged because Davenant struggles to identify what the next development in the English language may be. The rejection of Spenser’s archaism and the arguments for a mode of writing that conforms to the unities of drama only emphasizes the strong connection with the literary inheritance that Davenant seeks to reject. *Gondibert* thus signals a shift in literary culture on the page and upon the stage, but it is a transmission that is self-deconstructing and intensely concerned and indebted to the past that it is anxious to abjure.

Antitheaticalism, Authorship and Reception

In different ways, Davenant’s text and Heywood’s *Apology* demonstrate the liminal space of the stage and emphasizes the extent to which drama is a collaborative act between not only playwright and acting company, but also the printed play text and audiences. Milton implicitly acknowledges this when he prepared *Comus* for publication in 1637.[45] Rather than providing the text as it was performed in 1634, Milton revised the text and in so doing asserts the primacy of the author. However, both Davenant and Milton rework drama to be a textual form. In ‘Of that sort of dramatic poem, which is called tragedy’, which prefaces *Samson Agonistes*, Milton makes the case for considering the poem as a tragedy:

> Tragedy, as it was anciently composed, hath been ever held the gravest, moralest, and most profitable of all other poems … The Apostle Paul himself

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[44] For a study that examines Henrietta Maria’s influence on court drama and how this connected to politics and aesthestics that in turn influenced Davenant’s work, see Karen Britland, *Drama at the Courts of Queen Henrietta Maria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[45] Cedric C. Brown, *John Milton's Aristocratic Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 132-52.

> thought it not unworthy to insert a verse of Euripides into the text of Holy Scripture, I Cor. xv.33, and Paræus commenting on the *Revelation*, divides the whole book as a tragedy, into acts distinguished each by a chorus of heavenly harpings and song between. Heretofore men in highest dignity have laboured not a little to be thought able to compose a tragedy … This is mentioned to vindicate tragedy from the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day with other common interludes; happeing through the Poets error of intermixing comic stuff with tragic sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons, which by all judicious hath been counted absurd; and brought in without discretion, corruptly to gratify the people … In the modelling therefore of this Poem, with good reason, the Ancients and Italians are rather followed, as of much more authority and fame … Division into act and scene referring chiefly to the Stage (to which this work never was intended) is here omitted.[46]

I have quoted the preface to *Samson Agonistes* at length because Milton's observations here are telling. Unlike Davenant, who conceived his heroic poem in five books to mirror the five acts of a play, Milton has stripped back the performance elements of drama to focus upon the poetic. For Elizabeth Sauer, this presents a reconfiguration of theatrical culture, which rejects the 'common interludes' of Restoration drama and the restored royalist stage. In so doing, Milton preempts the unpopularity of his poem and establishes a dramatic culture that is in opposition to the royalist stage and the marketplace of print.[47] This interpretation of the poem thus imagines an authored reception history for the poem, echoing the 'fit audience … though few' (*PL*, 7.31) Milton imagined reading *Paradise Lost*. Yet, in invoking classical tragedy as a poetic form to be read, Milton is positioning himself within a framework that presents him as the inheritor and redeemer of literary form. His annotations of Euripides – perhaps especially his editorial interventions to correct error in the translation – also feed into this relationship between past and future textual utterances. Milton is concerned with the legacies of authorship and how the text is received through freeing the author's word from the interruptions and disruptions of the stage; by writing performance out of dramatic form, the uninhibited dramatic poetry can be transmitted to the judicious reader.

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[46] John Milton, 'Samson Agonistes,' *Milton: The Complete Shorter Poems* 2nd ed., ed. John Carey, (Harlowe: Pearson Education, 2007), 349-413 (355-57).

[47] See Sauer's epilogue in *Paper Contestations*.

What has often been perceived as his antitheatrical response to the publication of *Eikon Basilike* also highlights the need for authorial integrity. When Milton famously attacked the frontispiece to *Eikon Basilike* as being 'drawn out to the full measure of a Masking Scene, and sett there to catch fools and silly gazers' (*CPW* III.342), it was not just visual representation and the dramatic that came under fire. Milton goes on to attack the disjunction between words and text. Assuming the reading public would be awed by a Latin inscription that many of them would not be able to translate, Milton undertakes the role of interpreter and condemns the opacity of the text:

> And how much their intent, who publish'd these overlate Apologies and Meditations of the dead King, drives to the same end of stirring up the people to bring him that honour, that affection, and by consequence, that revenge to his dead Corps, which hee himself living could never gain to his Person, it appears both by the conceited portraiture before his Book … and by those Latin words after the end *Vota debunt quæ Bella negarunt*; intimating, That what hee could not compass by Warr, he should atchieve by his Meditations. For in words which admit of various sense, the libertie is ours to choose that interpretation which may best minde us of what our restless enemies endeavor, and what wee are timely to prevent. And heer may be well observ'd the loose and negligent curiosity of those who took upon them to adorn the setting our of this Book: for though the Picture sett in Front would Martyr him and Saint him to befool the people, yet the Latin Motto in the end, which they understand not, leaves him, as it were a politic contriver to bring about the interest by faire and plausible words, which the force or Armes deny'd him. (*CPW* III.341-2)

Milton registers the instability of words and how this instability can render text open to the interpretation of the reader, which makes the clarity of language all the more important as a way to impart meaning. The use of visual images ought to aid interpretation. However, instead of harnessing word to meaning, the ‘conceited portraiture’ renders the relationship between text and image fragmented: fools and silly gazers are caught in a performance designed to elicit sympathy because they fail to interpret the woodcut as an image that is full of conceit. Yet ‘conceited’ itself is a word that has varying meanings, which include ‘ingenious’, and having a favorable opinion of an object.[48] There is a tension between word, image and interpretation, which is amplified by Milton’s anxiety to recast the text into theatrical form.

Thomas Anderson intriguingly observes that Milton needs *Eikon Basilike* to be a theatrical text and this need is less concerned with the morality of staging plays and more focused upon the tension between Charles’s word and deed. By mapping drama onto the king’s book, Milton can destabilize sovereignty. In accepting Charles as the author of *Eikon Basilike*, Milton places the king’s book within a dramatic literary tradition and thereby exposes the ways in which Charles appropriated the rhetoric of Shakespeare and plagiarized Sidney.[49]

However, Milton’s discussion of the frontispiece complicates this reading. By comparing the frontispiece to a masque scene, Milton acknowledges the connection between sovereign authority and the specific way in which this was embodied in the Stuart Court masque. It is not so much performance that comes under attack as the visual representation of sovereign power. Furthermore, Milton’s analysis of the frontispiece brings into focus the apparent disparity between the image and the Latin text. Censuring idle authors who do not make their meaning clear, Milton is as much concerned with authorship as he is with theatrics. Milton is not only condemning the opacity of language, but also the way in which *Eikon Basilike* has become a collaborative venture between word, image and borrowings from other writers. Through grafting Shakespeare and Sidney’s language and words onto a text that is presented as the word of the king, the meaning of the text becomes muddled. This eschews authorial integrity and blurs the sincerity of what is being conveyed. Nonauthorial interventions and stealing from other writers leads to the corruption of the text. In *Areopagitica* (1644), Milton was to write that 'Books are not absolutely dead things, but doe contain a potencie of life in them to be as active as that soule was whose progeny they are; nay they do preserve as in a violl the purest efficacie and exaction of that living intellect that bread them' (*CPW* II.492). Printing becomes a form of cloning, and any form of intervention, whether it is from editor, licensor, censor or inattentive compositor, merely corrupts the written word. Books enshrine textual truth, but collaborative acts become a means of corrupting this truth.

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[48] ‘conceited, adj. and n.’. OED Online. June 2017. Oxford University Press.

http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/38076?redirectedFrom=conceited (accessed August 18, 2017).

[49] Thomas Anderson, *Performing Early Modern Trauma from Shakespeare to Milton* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 169-87.

This is a thread to which Milton returns: in *Colasterion* (1645), Milton attacks the writer of *An Answer to the Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1644), arguing that 'his very first page notoriously bewraies him an illiterat, and arrogant presumer in that which hee understands not; bearing us in hand as if hee knew both Greek and Ebrew, and not able to spell it; which had hee bin, it had bin either writt'n as it ought, or scor'd upon the Printer' (*CPW* II.724-25). The anonymous author has either exposed his lack of learning or laziness in permitting an imperfect copy to be published. Given Milton's concern with the accuracy of print and the integrity of the author's word, Steven Zwicker's observation that our reading of *Eikonoklastes* is complicated by the way in which Milton asserts that he is a 'reluctant author'[50] may seem ironic. However, this emphasizes Milton's concern with textual integrity as he takes pains to let his reader know how irksome he has found the task. This apparent sincerity makes the ambiguity regarding his antitheatrical poise all the more remarkable.

Perhaps Milton's engagement with the stage is complex precisely because of his lack of engagement with drama as a performative form. As Heywood demonstrates, performed drama was (and is) a collaborative act and Milton's response to *Eikon Basilike* shows a mistrust of collaborative ventures. In attacking *Eikon Basilike*, Milton draws attention to the way in which the king's book ventriloquizes drama; *Eikon Basilike* becomes an elaborate plagiarism and therefore lacks authenticity. This textual disagreement, when married with Heywood's plea to the boy actors and their playwrights brings into focus the way in which an actor may mediate the author's word. Whereas the book is the repository for a writer's lively intellect and a means of presenting authorial integrity (as long as the author's word has not been mediated by non-attributed interpolations by other writers) the spoken word is more malleable. Providing freedom of speech is uninhibited, the mechanics of print production allow for tighter authorial control, even if the processes of printing mark an intervention in the reception of text between reader and author. The stage is a more unpredictable platform. The actor may be a mouthpiece for the author, but can also alter the author's text through the act of performance.

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[50] Steven N. Zwicker, *Lines of Authority: Politics and English Literary Culture, 1649-1689* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 46.

It is not so much that Milton has antitheatrical or theatrical leanings; rather, he is skeptical of collaborative acts – despite his later reliance upon amanuensis and the processes of print production being collaborative. Through inscribing textuality, Milton can assert the importance of the written word as a way of conveying truth and his deep understanding of etymology underscores his careful use of words. Using an actor as a spokesperson can only inhibit freedom of speech and the integrity of the author's word. What this emphasizes is an anxiety with regards to the flexibility of language, an anxiety that is neatly summarized by Plato:

> Every word, once it is written, is bandied about, alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect or help itself[51]

Rhetoric not only relates to the author's use of words, but also to a listener or reader's cognition and anxieties with regards to how an author can reconcile ideas and language in the material world. The author thus becomes the defender of the word; as the parent from which the word has sprung, the author protects it and injects meaning into it. Yet reception is not linear, with an author imparting words to a reader/spectator; instead reception connects to wider networks of meaning. Davenant and Milton are both considering authorship as part of broader discussions about dramatic language, authorship and the collaborative nature of the stage and the page. The author's reception of ideas thus informs his or her writings as much as her or his writings are received and handed down to reader or spectator. Both Milton and Davenant are concerned with authorial legacy and how to protect words from being bandied about, but this anxiety of authorship manifests itself differently. For Davenant, authorship is located in using language that encapsulates the idiom of the age and the malleable interplay between stage and page; for Milton, authorship is located in the precise and uninhibited use of language.

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[51] Plato, *Phaedrus*. 565, 275e