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PARALLEL WORD CONSTELLATIONS IN THE WRITINGS OF JOHN MILTON

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Opponents: Professor H. Mutschmann
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Parallel Word Constellations in the Writings of John Milton.

(A word constellation is a grouping together, within the space of comparatively few lines, of a number of striking or significant words. Parallel word constellations are two or more such groups of the same or similar words.)

The thesis first established the method employed, of investigating parallel word constellations, by showing how similar investigations had been made concerning the methods of other poets, such as Wilde, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. Furthermore, the work already done with parallelisms between word constellations in Milton's writings and similar constellations in other writers, was adduced in support of the method.

It was then shown that Milton's own statement of his method of composition, to be found in his poem *At a Vacation Exercise*, as well as his practice in his poem *On Shakespeare*, furnished ample evidence that a study of such parallel word constellations as might be found in his works might well be fruitful of results. Incidentally, a probable source for Milton's much-discussed "star-ypointing pyramid" (*On Shakespeare*, l. 4) was cited from an epitaph in Dugdale's collection ascribed by Dugdale to Shakspeare.

A close comparison of Books IV and IX of *Paradise Lost* was first undertaken, to show the reality of the existence of parallel word constellations in Milton's writings, and to show the nature of some of these parallelisms. These books were selected for first treatment because they deal with the various events of the same narrative, concerning the same characters, in the same place. Many parallel word constellations were discovered, and those constellations in Book IX were found to be more formal than those in Book IV.

It was shown that some of the constellations in Book IV were paralleled not only by passages in Book IX, but also by passages elsewhere in Milton's writings, both in the prose and in the poetry. Therefore Book IV was next compared with *Comus*; between the two were found a number of significant parallelisms. Some were also found between Book IV and other minor poems.

Next, Book IV was shown to be related through parallel word constellations to the *History of Moscovia*, and to a less degree with other prose works.

Continuing investigation of Book IX next, relationship between it and *Comus* and other minor poems was shown, as well as between it and the *History of Moscovia* and other prose works. However, the relationship was not so close as was the case with Book IV and the other writings.

The argument thus far seemed to support the contention of Professor H. Mutschmann, in his *Studies concerning the Origin of "Paradise Lost"*, that the *History of Moscovia* was compiled from materials which Milton had assembled and used for poetical purposes. It was shown, certainly, that Milton more than once repeated materials in his poetry, as well as in his prose. However, from this investigation no conclusions could be drawn as to the methods of work employed by Milton.

The investigation was therefore continued to show parallel word constellations in the minor poems, after which it was extended to Book I of *Paradise Lost*. Book I showed a close relationship to the minor poems, and to certain parts of the prose works. Similar results were obtained by an investigation of Book II.

Book III, however, was shown to be related only remotely to the other books already considered, and hardly at all to the minor poems and to the prose works. A reason for this was suggested, namely, that Book III is a philosophical disquisition,

and not at all of the kind of poetry to be found in the parts of Milton's writings so far considered.

Book V, connecting the story of the fall of man and that of the fall of the angels, was shown to be related, though not intimately, to the books dealing with these two stories, namely, Book IV and IX, and Books I and II. It was shown to be connected in like manner with some of the prose works, and especially with the *History of Moscovia*.

Book VI showed a very close connection with Books I and II, as might have been expected.

Book VII showed little connection with the rest of Milton's writings, a fact which might have been inferred from the nature of that book, dealing with the creation of the world from the point of view of Genesis.

There are a number of parallel word constellations between Book VIII and other passages in Milton's work dealing with the Garden of Eden. Book X shows little relationship to the rest of Milton's writings, while Books XI and XII show so little as to be negligible, so far as this thesis might be concerned.

The change of style which was noticeable in the course of the progress of *Paradise Lost*, from the sensuous to the philosophical, was found to be practically complete in *Paradise Regained*, inasmuch as there were practically no parallelisms of word constellations in *Paradise Regained* with constellations in Milton's earlier poetry. All such ornamentation and embellishment as he had used before, he used almost not at all in *Paradise Regained*. The study of parallel word constellations, therefore, showed that the style of *Paradise Regained*, often felt to be bare and lacking in sensuous appeal, is really so.

Samson Agonistes showed the same lack of relationship through parallel word constellations which was found in *Paradise Regained*. There was no use made of sensuous materials,

such as had delighted the Milton of the minor poems and the earlier books of *Paradise Lost*; there was no repetition of such philosophical ideas as had appeared in the earlier poems. *Samson Agonistes* was found to be quite unlike the earlier writings in this matter of style.

In drawing up conclusions, an effort was made to use as data no material which might easily be questioned: as many as possible of the parallelisms were assumed to be chance reminiscences of words — verbal reminiscences. But a number of the longer parallelisms could hardly be so regarded, and principally upon them the conclusions were based. It was pointed out, however, that the verbal reminiscences in no way invalidated the argument, but rather supported it.

The material assembled, added to what other commentators and critics had already assembled, afforded new proof of the theory that much of Book IV was the earliest part of *Paradise Lost*; and to a complete demonstration of the value of the parallel word constellations in determining this question of chronology a considerable amount of space was given.

The conclusions supported by the investigation are as follows:

1. The parallel word constellations are a real feature of Milton's style.

2. They are not all of one kind: some are apparently accidental, whereas others are clearly deliberate.

3. Mere literal memory will not explain the parallelisms, either accidental or deliberate, as practically all seem to be altered according to context. Memory plays a large part, of course, but is not sufficient to explain the parallelisms.

4. Though not always, Milton often thinks of like ideas in like terms; but in his repetition of like ideas in like terms he employs three methods:

- a. Very rarely, simple repetition;
- b. Expansion, formalization, latinization; and
- c. Extraction or condensation.

5. There are many smaller parallel passages most easily explained as verbal reminiscences, in which like ideas seem to have carried with them some of the words used to express them, but which are so short and often so ordinary that there is no need to assume more than subconscious association for the origin of the parallelisms. (Similar association was shown to exist in the work of other poets.)

6. If the theory of verbal reminiscence in the case of these shorter parallelisms be rejected, these shorter parallelisms support and do not negate the conclusions based on other parallelisms.

7. Certain subjects, even when repeated, seem to have aroused in Milton such great emotion that he wrote about them at each repetition with all lyric freshness, relying on no rhetorical methods. To this class belong the nightingale passages and the passages dealing with the fall of the angels.

8. No final conclusion can be reached as to the degree of consciousness and mere craft with which Milton reworked his materials, although his own confession of "slow-endeavouring art" would go to show that in early days, at least, he worked quite consciously as a craftsman in words.

9. Later reworkings are, on the whole, more formal and intellectual, and less spontaneous, than the earlier passages.

10. The examination of parallel word constellations supports the theory, already proposed by others on other grounds, that Book IV is one of the earliest, if not the earliest, of the books of *Paradise Lost*. The thesis adds considerable evidence to the theory that certainly a great part of Book IV is the earliest writing in *Paradise Lost*.

11. Milton's method in his prose works is like that in his poetry: he uses whatever he finds suitable, whether previously used or not, and whether or not intended for other purposes.

12. The minor poems confirm the deductions and arguments.

13. *Paradise Regained* shows little relationship to Milton's earlier works as far as parallel word constellations are concerned. It shows, rather, the culmination of the intellectual style, of the poetry of idea, of the poetry of philosophy. This change towards the intellectual style is obvious in the course of *Paradise Lost*; in *Paradise Regained* the change is complete, and there is therefore little opportunity for the introduction of old materials used in the sensuous poetry.

14. There are few parallelisms between *Samson Agonistes* and earlier work. A few intellectual ideas are repeated which bear great emotional power; but here emotion is expressed in terms of the intellectual, rather than of the sensuous. There is practically no embellishment, and therefore little opportunity for introducing materials used before. The intellectual content is not that of *Paradise Regained*, and the sensuous is lacking.

Thus has been adduced evidence which is valuable in support of theories already advanced but not completely proved. Possibilities have been pointed out which future research may establish as facts. The thesis has thrown some light on Milton's methods of work; it has contributed towards establishing a chronology of Book IV of *Paradise Lost*; it has shown that Milton was very literally a poet of words. Furthermore, it has shown another method of considering the change of style in Milton's poetry, and served to emphasize the difference between the earlier poetry and the later, and especially the difference in the body of *Paradise Lost*.

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