Introduction

According to standard accounts of English literary history in the six-teenth and seventeenth centuries, the prestige and usage of allegory rapidly dwindle either somewhat before 1600, or soon after, but in any case much before the publication of *Paradise Lost* in 1667. Even Edmund Spenser has been often said to forsake allegory as *The Faerie Queene* progresses. However, the hypothesis of an abrupt and easy literary paradigm shift around 1600, in which allegorical poetics fast became passé, probably reveals much more about the wishes, concerns, and biases of our own time than anything about the past. The previous literary ascendancy of allegory had endured for many centuries, and was deeply implicated in conceptions of "the human condition" and nature of the cosmos that were fundamental to Renaissance culture. Dominant ideologies have very protracted cultural half-lives, as it were, and tend to remain widely influential not only well after their authority starts being strongly questioned, but even after their rationales have been long discarded. For most of the twentieth century, condemnation of allegory was almost critically *de rigueur* outside medieval and Spenser-ian circles, and the doctrine of its decline and fall *circa* 1600 originated at least partly as a function of that now-outmoded literary ideology. As much of the later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century canon as possible, especially favorite authors, could thus be rescued from the ostensible taint of allegorism, and the critical assumptions which entailed devalu-ation of allegory were themselves protected from embarrassments by the canon. Spenser could be rendered a transitional anomaly, and *Paradise Lost* cleared from any serious association with the mode, so that allegory became readily disposable in English literature, as if it were always somehow extra- or subliterary. However, since many appreciative stu-dies of allegory have recently appeared, so that modern "allegori-phobia," as Carolynn Van Dyke calls it, is no longer automatic, we

should now begin searchingly to reconsider previous representations of the literary history of allegorism.[1]

This study focuses on the relationship of allegory with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century heroic poetry, for the characteristics of allegory vary greatly according to its generic context and cultural circumstances. Especially in periods like the Renaissance, when the prestige of certain literary texts supported strong conceptions of genre and generic decorum through the educational system and otherwise, allegory needs to be considered historically and generically *in situ*, so to speak. However, even when not transhistorical, the numerous current studies of the mode, often very general in approach, tend to underestimate the extent to which it varies according to its interactions with particular genres. For example, Walter Benjamin's currently influential generalizations about allegory in *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* ruinously depend on his reading of seventeenth-century *Trauerspiel*, which literally means "mourning play" and refers to German baroque tragedy. This generically and culturally narrow focus predetermines Benjamin's strong linkage of allegory with mourning. Likewise, in his much-cited aphorism, "allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things," *Trauerspiel* again doubles for Benjamin's allegory to some extent: "in the spirit of allegory," he declares, *Trauerspiel* "is conceived from the outset as a ruin." Yet, as in biblical exegesis, much of the history of allegory and allegoresis is characterized by assumptions that an allegorical text, despite its seeming diversities, expresses an underlying harmony and concurrence of meaning, and that this can be constructively established. Moreover, if allegory is ruinous in *Trauerspiel*, it can be much more concerned wih reconstructive edification in different generic and cultural contexts. Particularly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, emphasis on social and personal usefulness as a main criterion of literary value ensured that the legitimacy and truth of allegory and allegoresis were widely thought guaranteed by their edifying import. The influence of those assumptions varied according to generic context, for some literary kinds were commonly considered more inherently and purposefully constructive than others, and almost always epic most of all. So, if baroque allegory is "ruinous" relative to earlier Renaissance uses of the mode, as Catherine Gimelli Martin proposes (partly following Benjamin), such a characteristic would nevertheless play out differently in different generic and discursive contexts, and application of this metaphoric term to epic would be especially problematic.[2]

When assessing shifts in the role, prestige, and currency of allegory in literary history, commentators on developments in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries should also note, as they typically do not, that this mode would remain most vitally resilient in conjunction with the most closely associated kinds, such as pastoral, and its connection with epic was strongest by far. This especial affiliation of allegory with heroic poetry has major importance for historical analysis of the role of allegorism in European culture, and for historically contextualized interpretation of heroic poems and their positions in literary history. Transgeneric hypotheses about Renaissance literary allegory thus appear very questionable, for the particularly entrenched epic tradition of the mode would have tended to conduce many significant differences from allegory in other generic contexts. By analysing the evolvement and features of the relationship between allegory and heroic poetry, we become newly cognizant of numerous factors affecting their roles in literary theory and practice of the time.

My approach thus differs from Michael Murrin's and Mindele Anne Treip's admirable previous studies of allegorical epic. Although Treip avoids Murrin's assumption that allegory in general suffered a rapid decline and fall much before Milton, her work does not seek directly to challenge this dominant conception of the literary history of the mode. I supplement Murrin's and Treip's relatively general standpoints by focusing on the interactions of allegory and heroic poetry in Part One, partly through recourse to theories of genre, discourse, and intertextuality. Since epic was very much a cross-cultural, retrospectively inclusive, and internationally competitive form, my study of its relations with allegory is broadly comparative. Unlike Treip, I emphasize the impact of the Homeric epics, as well as the *Aeneid*, on conceptions of allegorical heroic poetry and on its seventeenth-century vitality.[3]

A basic element of my terminology needs initial clarification. Colin Burrow has recently shown the interpenetrations and coalescences of epic and romance, and the potential meanings of "epic" expanded greatly in the Renaissance, as in Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*. Throughout this study, my usage of the term is historicized accordingly, to include possibilities of romantic and biblical variation, and the breadth implied by "heroic poem," in which "heroic" has modal connotations. The critical debate about the epic legitimacy of Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* was central for both the theory and practice of this genre, and both Giambattista Cinzio Giraldi and Torquato Tasso assumed an expansion of "epic" in accord with contemporary practice,

despite their opposing viewpoints. For Cinzio Giraldi, Ariosto's exten-
sive incorporation of chivalric romance aptly updated epic in accord
with contemporary culture, whereas Tasso included the *Orlando furioso* in
the genre but only as a model inferior to the ancients. Giovambattista
Strozzi's *Lettione in lode del poema eroico* of 1594 advises, "let us . . . suppose
that the Heroic Poem and Epic be one and the same, as I assume that
you all understand these terms as referring to great and magnificent
poetry, which tells of real and majestic actions, like Homer's *Odyssey* and
Iliad, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's sacred poem, Ariosto's *Orlando furioso*,
Alamanni's *Girone* and *Avarchide*, and Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, and let
us not argue at this time whether Dante's poem is a comedy or Ariosto's
a romance." I will only seek to specify heroic subtypes and mixtures,
such as "romantic epic" and "biblical epic," as my context requires.[4]

In Part One, I survey the relations of allegory and heroic poetry
during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Chapter One estab-
lishes that allegory was then commonly considered a definitive formal
ingredient of this literary kind, in contrast to others. Whereas Renais-
sance allegory in general has often been critically identified with fading
medievalism, new access to the Homeric epics and their Greek allegor-
esis, to the complete works of Plato, and to Aristotle's *Poetics* changed
and revitalized literary conceptions and uses of the mode, as literary
theorists and poets assimilated these fresh influences and resultant
contemporary intellectual trends. Other factors included the Reforma-
tion, the Council of Trent, and the Counter-Reformation, which rein-
forced the contemporary topicality of utilitarian or morally instrumental
approaches to literature, and thus of allegorism itself. In the case of
heroic poetry, the most prestigious exemplars, the Homeric and Vir-
gilian epics, were commonly considered profound allegories, and so
allegorism especially pressured conceptions of this genre. The late
sixteenth-century critical trend to produce extensive accounts of par-
ticular literary genres made the strong associations of allegory and epic
fully explicit, so that various formal definitions of the latter, such as
Torquato Tasso's, incorporated allegory. The normative force of such
conceptions appears to have peaked only after the publication of René
Le Bossu's *Traité du poëme épique* in 1675. Literature in general did not
increasingly exclude allegorism *circa* 1600, for allegorical epic tended to
double for and displace epic throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth
centuries.[5]

Chapters Two and Three assess the effects of this formalization of
allegory upon the evolving practice and repertoire of heroic poetry from

Ariosto to Milton. I first consider the interactions of allegory with literary genres in Chapter Two, with special attention to its workings in epic. Though "speaking other" is fundamental to allegory etymologically and otherwise, prior accounts of this mode do not address and define its multivoiced effects in coordinating diverse discursive and generic resources. Like parody and satire, allegory is a parasitic form through which some generic host is appropriated for redevelopment, but differs from them by producing that effect through figurative mediation between the host form or mixture, and the discourses and inter-texts relevant to the allegorical tenor. By analysing these hitherto little-studied aspects of literary allegorism, we can better elucidate its functions in particular host genres and contexts, and also its cumulative influence on specific generic repertoires over time, as in the Western postclassical history and ultimate modal diffusion of epos.

In Chapter Three, I turn to analyse the repertoire of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century allegorical heroic poetry, as indicated in literary theory, practice, and commentary of the period. Typical ingredients include certain narrative patterns; aspects or techniques of characterization; themes, topics, motifs, and structural devices; significant images, such as, most obviously, the heroic armaments; applications of word-play; and strategies for figurative redevelopment of the standard epic repertoire, along with any further generic or discursive inclusions. I focus especially on identification of the codes and conventions of moral-*cum*-psychological allegory, in a broad sense, for that was not only the main usage of the mode in epics of the time, but also the main means of their allegoresis. Just as representation of some edifying heroic model was central for epic, the genre tended to become assimilated to moral philosophy and related disciplines, allegorically and otherwise. Renaissance heroic poetry thus epitomizes much of the history of the subject in the period.

To apply the findings of Part One and clarify the English development of allegorical epic, I reconsider Sidney's *Arcadias*, Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost* in Parts Two to Four. The supposedly general demise of allegory *circa* 1600 has strongly conditioned previous interpretation of these texts and their relative positions in literary history. I attend most to Milton's poem because its engagement with this generic tradition is most original and complex.

In accord with the critical animus against allegory that characterized most of the twentieth century, Sidney has been commonly promoted since the late 1920s as the precocious harbinger of the dawning new

literary age, who embraced Aristotle to cast allegory aside and foretoken the novel, and thus, in the more extreme versions of this critical narrative, forever eclipses antiquated Spenser, who inescapably designated *The Faerie Queene* "a continued Allegory" in the Letter to Raleigh. However, as C. S. Lewis already saw in 1954, the modern audience for the *Arcadias* has long been inversely proportional to their widely acknowledged canonical importance, recently reaffirmed by Harold Bloom. Sidneians should thus question whether the dominant literal analysis has done justice to the full capacities of these texts, and their ways of treating plot, setting, imagery, diction, themes, and characterization. Even the most committed recent advocate of Sidney's antiallegorical anticipation of the novel, S. K. Heninger Jr., acknowledges that novelistic "motivation, inner conflict, and personal identity" incomparably differ from Sidney's portrayal of character in the *Arcadias*. Many Arcadian contexts are actually vehicles of figurative significance, so that, if literalized, these texts appear over-elaborated, awkward, wayward, slow-paced, or idiosyncratic, much as *The Faerie Queene* would. Though we could ignore Sidney's allegorism, as we could Spenser's, that would limit our appreciation of the scope, content, figurative elements, structural and thematic correspondences, and experimental aspects of both *Arcadias*.[6]

Chapter Four shows that Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* promotes a fundamentally allegorical poetic, as Sidney's close associates recognized, and that the *Old Arcadia* and *New Arcadia* involve extensive allegory that deals with heroic attainment. In keeping with current notions of the body politic, political and psychological conditions are complementary and mutually expressive in Arcadian narrative, so that the outside bodies forth the inside, and inner states are analytic paradigms for social developments. Rather than being an antiallegorical anomaly contrary to his contemporary Spenser, Sidney is that poet's immediate literary progenitor within England: as allegorical heroic poems, the *Arcadias* are quite comparable to the somewhat later *Faerie Queene*, despite the distinctiveness of Sidney's and Spenser's interpretations of the genre. Thus reconsidering Sidney's relation to Spenser and Milton as English heroic poets, I redefine them as a closely related triad, in which Sidney is the seminal figure, in Chapter Five.

Partly because the Letter to Raleigh insists on the continued allegorism of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser has remained focal for English allegorical poetics, like Dante in Italian literature. Yet even *The Faerie Queene* has been assimilated to the ostensible decline of allegory, for many have

declared that, especially in the last completed book, Book VI, Spenser himself came to abandon the mode. Hence Susanne Wofford recently perceives "increasing . . . non-allegorical fiction in the later books of the poem" and especial "diminishment . . . of allegorical method in Book VI." Since Spenser's general usage of the mode in *The Faerie Queene* has already received much attention, I seek instead to clarify the relation of its final completed portion to allegory, and thus the position of heroic allegorism in literary history, by establishing Spenser's continued commitment to this mode in Book VI. In Chapter Six I strategically focus on the episode involving Turpine, Enias, the Savage, and Arthur, the central hero of *The Faerie Queene*, to exemplify the continuance of Spenserian allegorism. Illuminating Spenser's fundamental technique of heroic allegory, composite heroism, the alliance of Arthur with Enias and the Savage allegorizes a tripartite heroic paradigm drawn from Renaissance moral philosophy, psychology, and theology. Rather than being retrograde or nostalgic, the allegorism of the later *Faerie Queene* constitutes a distinctive revision of heroic conceptions and representative practices that were vibrantly evolving well beyond Spenser's lifetime both on the continent and within England.[7]

This revealing segment of Book VI further reflects Spenser's strong interiorization of epic, through which inner potentials become partial counterparts of faery, and Chapter Seven assesses the poet's allegorical promotion of inner heroism and a meritocracy of virtue within the nationally celebratory context of the genre. Revolving around the virtues that entitle each book, *The Faerie Queene* makes virtue the chief heroic consideration rather than noble birth, courtliness, or martial prowess; and "vertues seat is deepe within the mynd" (VI.pr.5). Allegory enhances latitude for articulation of this ideal despite the constraints of epic, a relatively official and politically sensitive form. Through Spenser's indirect expression of a Christian heroic standard that challenges the norms of any human societies, and his resultant politics of ultimately transcendental aspiration, *The Faerie Queene* anticipates the focus of *Paradise Lost* on attainment of paradise within, yet avoids Milton's related deletion of national celebration from the epic repertoire, by postulating a deferred, idealized model of English imagined community that socially fulfills individual pursuits of virtue.

Though approaches to questions of allegory in Milton's poem have differed greatly, most Miltonists, unlike Spenserians, tend to avoid noting or discussing its allegorical potential, just as books on Milton rarely even index "allegory." Among those who address the relation of

the mode to *Paradise Lost*, many allow for significant usage of allegory, to varying extents, whereas some claim that Milton excludes or refuses the mode, or uses it at most incidentally. Though the latter group seems much outnumbered, not least because the allegorists have Sin and Death on their side, *Paradise Lost* still tends to be considered apart from allegory, through reliance on unspoken assumptions that, since the mode was rapidly waning in the seventeenth century anyway, it can have no substantial interpretive importance to this text. But allegory remained strongly associated with heroic poetry throughout the seventeenth century, as I show in Chapter One. Whereas conventional versions of English literary history oppose an antiallegorical Sidney to Spenser, and treat Milton as a Spenserian inheritor who rejects or dissipates the allegorical part of the legacy, Milton is a distinctive exponent of heroic allegorism who follows both Sidney and Spenser.[8]

Milton uses allegory in *Paradise Lost* mainly to help adapt the heroic repertoire to Christian theology, biblical materials, and accommodated representation of matters considered beyond human apprehension. The basis for portrayal of heroic community in *Paradise Lost*, I show in Chapter Eight, is the motif of composite heroism from allegorical epic. Building on precedents in Spenser's poem and Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata*, Milton assimilates that motif to the doctrine of the mystical church, through which Christ is supposed to incorporate and head his true adherents. Composite heroism comes to express a "heroic ecclesiology," then, and the mystical church has much textual importance in this poem, for its role is not simply literal but allegorically diffused throughout. While adumbrating this network of relationships between Milton's God and his creatures, the poem also involves an elaborate cosmology of correspondences; in effect, the pervasive communal ties of Milton's heroic ecclesiology are interpersonal expressions of the universal analogies of his God's creation. Milton draws on allegorical technique for portrayal of the complex relationships involved in his conjointly heroic and communal ideal, which requires participation in the Son's mystical body. Just as the poet's later political thought is strongly ecclesiological, the mystical church is the ultimate social model of *Paradise Lost*, and Milton redefines the politics and communal aspirations of epic accordingly.[9]

Miltonic composite heroism in *Paradise Lost* further evokes and expresses Christ's greater manhood as God–man, as I explain in Chapter Nine, through the anticipated Incarnation. Heroism in *Paradise Lost* is christocentric, and focuses on the God–man as the union of divine and

human orders that underwrites the epic synthesis of the poem. The positive model of Christian heroism in *Paradise Lost* conflates the composite heroic type with the ancient epic motif of the godlike man whose ancestry is partly divine, and with epic promotion or construction of a great society. Thus Milton promulgates a new composite heroism of "collective individuality," focused in its particular representation of the God–man and his meaning for humankind; yet thus also in the various subjectivities of regenerate persons, and in the community of the regenerate headed and incorporated in Christ. Just as the Incarnation itself is not within the immediate scope of the action, Milton most often treats that event and its significance indirectly, through various prefigurings of the God–man that constitute an extensive allegorical subtext. Milton exploits the techniques of allegorical epic to engage and explore major theological issues beyond the ready compass of his plot, and adapt the heroic repertoire for expression of Christian perspectives.

I conclude, in Chapter Ten, by assessing Milton's allegorism in *Paradise Lost* in relation to Sidney's and Spenser's in the *Arcadias* and *The Faerie Queene*. Despite differences in technique and approach, they commonly construct heroic plots of trial and temptation, treat heroic action as a means to explore the potential of the psyche, exploit the resources of allegory to pursue these ends, and advance the marked interiorization of epic in their time. Through extensive religious allegorism, including use of radiant Gloriana to symbolize the telos of divine glory, Spenser's poem had demonstrated the potential of the mode for accommodating the heroic repertoire to the representation of theological matters deemed to transcend human apprehension, and also for producing narratives that encourage the probing of appearances to disclose inner structures of spiritual meaning. While exploiting allegory for such effects, Milton distinctively synchronizes the literal and allegorical senses in *Paradise Lost* so that both focus on the relationship of God and humanity, and redevelops allegory in a strongly self-reflexive, analytic way perhaps most anticipated by Sidney.

Not only Spenser but also Sidney and Milton should be considered major allegorists of English literature: the *Arcadias*, *The Faerie Queene*, and *Paradise Lost* each involve substantial allegories that much expand our understanding of the scope and resources of literary allegorism. Rather than generally declining in currency and viability in these writers' lifetimes, the mode had actually entered one of its most dynamic experimental phases, in conjunction with epic. The potential of allegory for comprehensive polysemic expression has been perhaps most richly

realized within this encyclopedic host form as conceived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the intensive allegorization of heroic poetry during the period involved reinterpretation, loosening, and dissolution of the host's external structure, and thus the ultimate diffusion and modal transformation of epos.