Milton and Maternal Mortality

All too often, childbirth in early modern England was associated with fear, suffering, and death, and this melancholy preoccupation weighed heavily on the seventeenth-century mind. This landmark study examines John Milton’s life and work, uncovering evidence of the poet’s engagement with maternal mortality and the dilemmas it presented. Drawing on both literary scholarship and up-to-date historical research, Louis Schwartz provides an important new reading of Milton’s poetry, including Paradise Lost, as well as a wide-ranging survey of the medical practices and religious beliefs that surrounded the perils of childbirth. The reader is granted a richer understanding of how seventeenth-century society struggled to come to terms with its fears, and how one of its most important poets gave voice to that struggle.

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MILTON AND MATERNAL MORTALITY

LOUIS SCHWARTZ

University of Richmond
This book is dedicated to the memory of my grandfathers,

Louis Schwartz (1903–1959)

and

Moe Ash (1912–1971).
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Abbreviations

KJV The Bible: Authorized King James version, eds. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Citations to Milton’s poetry employ standard abbreviations and are taken from The Complete English Poetry of John Milton, ed. John T. Shawcross (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1963). These citations appear parenthetically in the body of the text. Notes will be used for other references, with each chapter’s initial citation of any given work provided in full.