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978-0-521-58353-4 - Milton's Languages: The Impact of Multilingualism on Style

John K. Hale

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Milton's poetry is one of the glories of the English language, and yet it owes everything to Milton's widespread knowledge of other languages: he knew ten, wrote in four, and translated from five. In *Milton's languages*, John K. Hale first examines Milton's language-related arts in verse-composition, translations, annotations of Greek poets, Latin prose and political polemic, giving all relevant texts in the original and in translation. Hale then traces the impact of Milton's multilingualism on his major English poems. Many vexed questions of Milton studies are illuminated by this approach, including his sense of vocation, his attitude to print and publicity, the supposed blemish of Latinism in his poetry, and his response to his literary predecessors. Throughout this first full-length study of Milton's use of languages, Hale argues convincingly that it is only by understanding Milton's choice among languages that we can grasp where Milton's own unique English originated.

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JOHN K. HALE

University of Otago



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*For my family, with fondest love:
Ken and Betty Hale (died 1990 and 1995)
Beatrice Hale
Elizabeth Beatrice Rachel Hale
Katharine Margaret Kenealey Hale
and
John David Francis Hale*

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Preface

The book's premises are threefold. First, because learning foreign languages is enjoyable, and Milton enjoyed doing so, my own enjoyment of language-learning gives a suitable angle of address to 'Milton's languages'. Secondly, while more languages are studied nowadays, Milton's ten included classical or extinct ones which are less studied in the English-speaking world; which means that readers of his English need help to recover what his mind was like in so far as it moved among his languages. Thus, thirdly, a study from the inside of its processes, rather than a mere assimilating of their product in the drab form of English footnotes, is timely.

But what are my credentials for the undertaking, since nobody can know Milton's languages exactly to the same extent and in the same way as he did? My Greek and Latin are of long standing and reputable. My Italian is similar. Hebrew, I have had to learn for this project; which means a loss of disinterestedness, as well as the wine being new and raw. Is it only special pleading, nonetheless, to think my known incapacity equips me as well as competence would to enter into Milton's mental processes, the 'quick forge and working-house' of his polyglot versatility?

One other credential should be mentioned. Like most students of Classics (*Literae Humaniores*) till this century, I was compelled to write Latin and Greek verses, in the manner of approved ancient models like Ovid or Euripides. I found this a barren exercise in itself. But it has left me with a vivid sense of how good Milton and a few others were in this arcane field of combat; and it has left me with a grateful willingness to explain what value can be found within the process of verse-composing. Composing is hard, for the remarkable reason that Virgil and Ovid and Horace purposely made it harder, by refining the norms of rhythm to reflect more clearly the underlying muscle of Latin in verse. Milton's success in these lists is not merely praiseworthy. It mattered so greatly in his milieu that it will be valued wrongly in ours unless emphasized.

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Preface

In a work on languages the problem of method, of how best to present them in translation, becomes acute. I give originals *and* translations, hoping that the reader will not plump for one or the other. I hope that instead the reader will move between the two. The translations of Milton are purposely drawn from several translators, including myself, so that the varieties (and defects) of translating can be felt on the pulse. An appendix illustrates the problem and my solution of it, for those who are interested.

For the Bible, on the other hand, I keep to the King James Version. Modern versions may be more correct, but they are less resonant and less close to Milton's world and oracy. The Latin Bible poses a special problem: did Milton work exclusively from the Junius-Tremellius-Beza (Protestant) version, or did he move between that and a Vulgate? And in both cases, which printing did he favour? Even if this could be determined, I myself could not, through not having access to enough Bibles to decide the matter. Accordingly, I explain my choices at each point where they matter.

The somewhat eclectic method of quotation, then, is meant to help readers stand away from any single version, so as to share my own excitement in following Milton's practice of the language-arts which he so esteemed, and applied to the needs of his many-sided life. With respect to languages he was both a theorist and a pragmatist. He was a user of them and a player amongst them. Because of this lifelong diversity of engagement with them, and because he played upon them as if they were musical instruments, we meet a Milton here who differs from current versions.

The work harnesses most of the intellectual arts I have ever exercised. It seeks especially to combine the essentials of what I respect as enduring work on poetry, namely scholarship and criticism, together with a sufficiency of theory, inductively arrived at and pragmatically employed.

The debts incurred in a work using many languages and many kinds of scholarship are likewise many, and I gladly acknowledge them. Outweighing even acknowledgement, though, is my gratitude to everyone who gave me time and help, and who implicitly or explicitly encouraged me. It has been a long road.

Among them are: Agathe Thornton; Anthea Morrison and Ann Moss (Durham); Maurice Andrew and George Knight; Roger Collins; Robin Hankey, in fact the entire Classics Department of the University of Otago; the neo-Latin Seminars at Otago; my colleagues and pupils in

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the English Department of Otago; Kevin Lee (Sydney); Frank Woodhouse, Philip J. Ford, Helena M. Shire, Ingrid Smets, Zweder von Martels and Philip Hardie (Cambridge); Gordon Campbell (Leicester); Jozef IJsewijn (Louvain); James Binns (York); Roy Flannagan (Ohio); John Carey, Dennis Burden, Don MacKenzie and Tony Nuttall (Oxford); Harold Jenkins; Tom Corns (North Wales); David Reid, Neil Keeble and Robin Sowerby (Stirling); Michael Spiller (Aberdeen); Roger Green (St Andrews); Stella Revard (Southern Illinois); Paul Stanwood (British Columbia); Stuart and Jean Strachan; Stuart Sellar; Leo Miller; my original teachers at Oxford, especially Eric Gray, John Gould, E. R. Dodds and Eduard Fraenkel; and many more.

I thank conference and seminar audiences who helped me improve work in progress, in Dunedin, Christchurch, Perth, Delhi, Vallombrosa, London, Bangor, Stirling, Vancouver and San Diego. And I thank the editors and readers for the Cambridge University Press, especially Linda Bree.

Not only did I receive help from these good and great people, but, as the formula rightly has it, the mistakes which remain are my very own. In a work covering several languages, centuries and fields of scholarship, there will surely be mistakes. I hope readers will alert me to such, perhaps privately however, rather than with a trumpet in the market-place.

Some portions of the book have been printed in a fuller form by journals, especially *Milton Quarterly*, *Milton Studies* and *Renaissance Studies*. I thank their editors for confidence and advice: nothing is perfect, especially first versions. Chapter 3 in particular is substantially the same as printed in *Milton in Italy. Contexts, Images, Contradictions*, edited by Mario Di Cesare for *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies*, and I thank *MRTS* for permission to use the material here.

I am grateful to the staff of libraries in which I have worked for the book: especially the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington; the Cambridge University Library; the Bodleian Library; the British Library; the Library of the University of Colorado at Boulder; and the Library of the University of Illinois.

I dedicate the finished enterprise to my family, the dead as well as the living. One and all, in varied ways, they enabled me to conceive this work and finish it.

Dunedin, University of Otago

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Campbell	Gordon Campbell (ed.), <i>John Milton. The Complete Poems</i> (London: Everyman, 1980)
Carey and Fowler	John Carey and Alastair Fowler (ed.), <i>The Poems of John Milton</i> (London: Longman, 1968)
<i>ColWorks</i>	<i>The Works of John Milton</i> , General editor Frank Allen Patterson, The Columbia Edition, 18 vols. + 2 index vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–40)
Darbishire	Helen Darbishire (ed.), <i>The Poetical Works of John Milton</i> , 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1952)
<i>EpFam</i>	<i>Epistolarum Familiarium</i> , Milton's 'Familiar Letters', as printed in <i>ColWorks</i> vol. xii
<i>FQ</i>	<i>The Faerie Queene</i>
Hughes	Merritt Y. Hughes (ed.), <i>John Milton. Complete Poems and Major Prose</i> (New York: Macmillan, 1957)
<i>LSJ</i>	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon, Compiled by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott</i> , revised by Henry Stuart Jones and Roderick McKenzie, with a supplement (Oxford University Press, 1968)
MacKellar	Walter MacKellar (ed.), <i>The Latin Poems of John Milton</i> , Cornell Studies in English 15 (New Haven: Yale University Press for Cornell University, 1930)
<i>OED</i>	<i>The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1971)
<i>OxLD</i>	P. W. Glare (ed.), <i>The Oxford Latin Dictionary</i> (Oxford University Press, 1982)
Parker	William Riley Parker, <i>Milton. A Biography</i> , 2 vols. (Oxford University Press, 1968)
<i>PBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the British Academy</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Paradise Lost</i>

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<i>PR</i>	<i>Paradise Regained</i>
<i>RES</i>	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
<i>Samson</i>	<i>Samson Agonistes</i>
<i>Variorum</i>	Douglas Bush (ed.), <i>A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton</i> , (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), vol. 1
<i>YPW</i>	Don M. Wolfe et al. (eds.), 8 vols., <i>Complete Prose Works of John Milton</i> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953–82)