CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Of things invisible

> His eyes are said never to have been bright; but if he was a dexterous fencer, they must have been once quick.
>
> – Samuel Johnson[1]

When Milton in *Paradise Lost* complains that blindness has separated him irrevocably from nature – what he calls "the book of knowledge fair" (III.47) – critics have tended to take the author at his word. Whereas some twenty-five years earlier, in *Lycidas*, Milton had sought consolation for the death of a friend by meditating on nature's cycles, he now emphasizes his isolation from the physical world:

> Thus with the year
> Seasons return, but not to me returns
> Day, or the sweet approach of ev'n or morn,
> Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
> Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;
> But cloud instead, and ever-during dark
> Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men
> Cut off, and for the book of knowledge fair
> Presented with a universal blank
> Of Nature's works to me expunged and razed,
> And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out. (III.40–50)

Here the sequence of hard enjambments dramatizes the speaker's sense of disconnection – "returns / Day," "dark / Surrounds," and "ways . . . / Cut off." The abrupt line-breaks underscore the pain of the speaker's separation from the visible world, while the comprehensiveness of "universal blank" and "ever-during dark" reinforces the finality of "expunged," "razed," and "shut out."

Yet even in these lines, which provide a glimpse into Milton's personal experience, the apparent poignancy of the specific things that the speaker

[1] *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Birkbeck Hill, 3 vols. (New York: Octagon, 1967), I: 151.

can no longer see seems to be undermined by the list's conventionality. Milton already sounds detached from his physical world as he turns from an unspecified "vernal bloom" to "flocks, or herds," a group of images that sound more like standard pastoral topoi than parts of Milton's lived experience in seventeenth-century London. Perhaps also tellingly, he figures the natural world in this passage as a book instead of granting nature its own reality. If Matthew Arnold criticized William Wordsworth because the Romantic author "should have read more books," Milton, we might worry, may have read too many.[2] Even Milton's most personal self-expressions appear to be mediated through poetic tradition instead of firsthand knowledge.

Samuel Johnson was among the first readers to highlight this potential problem in *Paradise Lost*. Whereas Joseph Addison had praised Milton's "Multitudes of Beauties . . . especially in the Descriptive Parts of his Poem," Johnson was dissatisfied with the epic's visual images, in particular, the depiction of the war in heaven.[3] Johnson criticized the poem's design because it "requires the description of what cannot be described, the agency of spirits," and he wished that Milton had kept "immateriality out of sight" instead of "unhappily perplex[ing] his poetry with his philosophy."[4] Johnson also found fault with the epic's natural imagery because, he felt, it was unrealistic. He complained that Milton's "images and descriptions of the scenes or operations of Nature do not seem to be always copied from original form, nor to the have the freshness, raciness, and energy of immediate observation."[5] Johnson admired Milton's "accumulation of knowledge . . ., fermented by study and exalted by imagination," but he maintained that the imagery's "original deficience cannot be supplied" and "The want of human interest is always felt."[6]

In this book, I wish to challenge Johnson's disparaging assessment of the epic's "images and descriptions." Examining visual representations in *Paradise Lost* in relation to what Johnson dismissed as the poem's "confusion of spirit and matter," I argue that Milton's epic contains acute and sometimes astonishing images that grew out of his reading and imagination but were also influenced by his contemporary culture.[7] Specifically, I am

[2] Matthew Arnold, "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," in *Lectures and Essays in Criticism*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1962), pp. 258–85 (p. 262).
[3] Joseph Addison, *Criticism on Milton's "Paradise Lost,"* ed. Edward Arber (London, 1869), p. 75. In contrast to Johnson, Addison went on to praise specifically Milton's depiction of the war in heaven for its "Pregnancy of Invention" and "Strength of Imagination" (pp. 93–94).
[4] Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, I: 184.
[5] Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, I: 178.
[6] Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, I: 183.
[7] Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, 1: 185.

analyzing Milton's depictions of material objects and physical reality in light of his materialist philosophy. Milton depends on this imagery, I argue, to advance his poem's narrative and express his theological beliefs. I am accordingly concerned with three related questions: How does Milton's imagery contribute to the meaning of both individual episodes and *Paradise Lost* as a whole? How does Milton combine poetic tradition and seventeenth-century culture to render the invisible visible? And, how does material culture find expression in a text that explicitly theorizes the etiology of the material from which all things are created?

Admittedly, to announce that this book focuses on Milton's imagery may at first seem old-fashioned or, given the wealth of superb readings of *Paradise Lost* that have been published over the past decades, redundant. But whereas Rosemond Tuve attempted to identify "great central figurative conceptions" around which *Paradise Lost* "organizes" itself, and Theodore Banks assembled a taxonomy of image clusters with the expectation, as Banks puts it, "that the imagery reveals Milton the man," the aim of this book is more specific. I wish to discover inductively the epic's visual strategies by spotlighting previously neglected or misunderstood images that strike me as either surprisingly incongruous or especially significant.[8] By "imagery" I thus do not mean poetic language that conveys the "sensuous qualities of experience," nor am I looking at figurative language in general, which the term "imagery" came to encompass within the New Criticism.[9] Instead, I am looking more narrowly at visual representations in Milton's epic – what T. S. Eliot presumably intended when he referred to the poem's "visual imagination."[10]

Yet Eliot famously followed Johnson in faulting this aspect of *Paradise Lost* and went further, blaming Milton for a so-called "dissociation of sensibility" in English verse beginning in the 1600s. After Milton and Dryden, according to Eliot, "the language [of poets] became more refined, the feeling became more crude."[11] Although subsequent critics have dispelled Eliot's canard about a rupture of thought from sensation in seventeenth-

[8] Rosemond Tuve, *Images and Themes in Five Poems by Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), p. 4; and Theodore Howard Banks, *Milton's Imagery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), p. xiii.

[9] Rosemond Tuve, *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery: Renaissance Poetic and Twentieth-Century Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), p. 3; and Cleanth Brooks, Jr., and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Poetry* (New York: Holt, 1938), p. 555. For an application of this latter definition of "imagery," see Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery, and What It Tells Us* (1935; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

[10] T. S. Eliot, "Milton I [1936]," in *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1957), pp. 156–64 (p. 158).

[11] Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets," in *Selected Essays*, 3rd edn. (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp. 281–91 (p. 288).

century poetry, the lack of visual detail in Milton's verse – his epic's "generic" or "archetypal imagery" – has become a commonplace in early modern scholarship.[12] F. R. Leavis, for one, detected "a certain sensuous poverty" in Milton's poetry and found Milton in *Paradise Lost* "focussing [*sic*] rather upon words than upon perceptions, sensations or things."[13] Leland Ryken countered that the epic's scenes do carry "sensuous force," but the "sensory impressions belong to the apocalyptic senses of smell and hearing rather than to the everyday world of visual details."[14] One still widely accepted assumption is that Milton's visual descriptions declined as his own sight began to fail. Surveying Milton's imagery, Banks, for example, proposed that Milton's "visual sense . . . weakened, but his other senses – smell, hearing, and touch – became more quick and sharp."[15] Samuel Taylor Coleridge's disparaging assessment of Milton's imagery also seems to assume a connection between the author's blindness and a lack of visual detail. Milton, Coleridge felt, was among those writers who, instead of portraying "*individual* objects as actually present to his Senses," settled for "*classes* of things, presented by the memory and generalized by the Understanding."[16]

Underlying both Banks and Coleridge's critiques, however, is the false assumption that a reliance on memory dulls a writer's visual acuity. Recent scholarship on perceptions of the past in early modern England shows that personal and popular memory was often closely associated with visible things and features, and psychologists have concluded that a person who goes blind after the age of seven does not experience a decline in mental imagery or visual memory.[17] Milton, in other words, would not have been hampered in envisioning the world of his epic simply because he could no

[12] William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, ed. Gordon Campbell, 2nd edn., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), p. 594. For a contrary view, see John Ruskin, who complained that Milton's imagery was "too far detailed." *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols., ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903–1912), IV: 250.

[13] F. R. Leavis, "Milton's Verse," *Scrutiny* 2 (1933): 123–36; rpt. in *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), pp. 42–67 (pp. 47, 49). Leavis adds that Milton "exhibits a feeling *for* words rather than a capacity for feeling *through* words; we are often, in reading him, moved to comment that he is 'external' or that he 'works from the outside'" (p. 50).

[14] Leland Ryken, *The Apocalyptic Vision in "Paradise Lost"* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 229.

[15] Banks, *Milton's Imagery*, p. 137. Eleanor Gertrude Brown, for example, offers a similar interpretation in *Milton's Blindness* (1934; New York: Octagon, 1968), p. 136.

[16] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Letter to an Unknown Correspondent, 1820," in *Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Roberta F. Brinkley (Durham: Duke University Press, 1955), pp. 599–600. And, in the same volume, see Coleridge's "Lecture on Milton and the Paradise Lost," pp. 572–79. E. M. W. Tillyard similarly describes Milton's imagery as "a composite of several recollections or imaginings not the reproduction of something seen and intensely apprehended in every-day life." Tillyard, *The Miltonic Setting: Past and Present* (1938; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966), p. 99.

[17] Daniel Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past: English Historical Culture, 1500–1730* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 360–61; Stephen Michael Kosslyn, *Ghosts in the Mind's Machine: Creating*

longer see his own. Instead, following cultural tradition, the author might have clung more tenaciously to images he recalled from experience as a way of staying mnemonically connected to his forty-three years of sight.

Yet Eliot's belittling of *Paradise Lost*'s visual sense has had far-reaching influence. Eliot emphatically asserted that "At no period is the visual imagination conspicuous in Milton's poetry," and he ultimately described Milton's imagination as "purely auditory," adding that even before Milton went blind he "may be said never to have seen anything." "Indeed," Eliot writes, "I find, in reading *Paradise Lost*, that I am happiest where there is least to visualize."[18]

Various scholars since have attempted to answer Eliot's rebuke and to defend Milton's visual imagination. Most notably, Roland Frye, in *Milton's Imagery and the Visual Arts*, demonstrated that the author of *Paradise Lost* was responding to and borrowing from an array of traditional representations in order to render more vividly the epic's scenes and characters. As Frye notes, "Without a knowledge of the visual lexicon available to Milton and his contemporaries, it is all too easy to find in him a blindness that is really our own."[19] Much of my study accords with Frye's premise that Milton's "use of visual allusions was consciously directed to reinforce and undergird both his poetic and his religious purposes."[20] But whereas Frye's monumental book situates Milton's verbal depictions within the context of Western art – "the great panorama of paintings, mosaics, and sculptures"[21] – I return repeatedly to the blending of poetic knowledge and lived experience, and am specifically interested in the ways that Milton's articulation of the epic's philosophy and religion often depends on his visual descriptions.

Regarding the relevance of Milton's firsthand experiences, critics have tended to privilege the young poet's thirteen-month continental journey instead of the possible effects of his life in England. Marjorie Nicolson, for example, suggested that Milton's visit to the volcanic Phlegraean Fields near Naples informed *Paradise Lost*'s description of Hell's burning landscape, while other commentators, as I discuss in chapters 3 and 5, have

and Using Images in the Brain (New York and London: Norton, 1983), pp. 77–79; and Alan Baddeley, *Human Memory: Theory and Practice*, rev. edn. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1990), pp. 71–77.

[18] Eliot, "Milton I," pp. 158, 162. In a later essay, Eliot amplified this argument: "Milton's weakness of visual observation . . . was always present – the effect of his blindness may have been rather to strengthen the compensatory qualities than to increase a fault which was already present." See Eliot, "Milton II [1947]," in *On Poetry and Poets*, pp. 165–83 (p. 177).

[19] Roland Mushat Frye, *Milton's Imagery and the Visual Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 7.

[20] Frye, *Milton's Imagery and the Visual Arts*, p. 8.

[21] Frye, *Milton's Imagery and the Visual Arts*, p. 3.

proposed Roman and Tuscan influences on, respectively, the descriptions of Pandemonium and the fallen angels.[22] More often, examinations of the epic's imagery focus on Milton's likely artistic and literary reminiscences. Diane McColley uncovered medieval and Renaissance topoi that shed light on Milton's depiction of Adam and Eve's prelapsarian and regenerate experience, while Stella Revard concentrated on the literary context of Milton's spiritual creatures.[23] Revard showed in particular how Milton's vision of the war in heaven appropriates and redeploys imagery from other sixteenth- and seventeenth-century epics so as to discredit the classical heroic ethic.[24] Douglas Bush offered a related but broader defense of what he called Milton's "suggestive visual images."[25] Highlighting the opening description of Satan in Hell and the account in book VII of the world's creation, Bush emphasized that in *Paradise Lost* "the solid and literal continually merge with the metaphorical and symbolic," and he concluded that even the poem's most abstract ideas have a tangible quality to lend Milton's cosmos "a substantial solidity."[26]

The last phrase – "substantial solidity" – seems to allude to John Keats' observation that Milton in *Paradise Lost* "is not content with simple descriptions" but relies on "stationing" his characters in relation to solid objects. Keats' language – he refers to both "stationing" and "statuary" – grows out of nineteenth-century theories of visual art and nineteenth-century paintings in which figures stand within a particular scene or are "caught in a suspended, significant moment."[27] Writing about the surviving marginalia that Keats jotted in his copy of *Paradise Lost*, Beth Lau has determined that the Romantic author largely experienced Milton's epic as a visual, almost cinematic work – "as a series of still shots, whether medium-range views of complete figures or close-ups of revealing facial expressions."[28]

More generally, as evidence of Milton's ability to create rich visual details, we might note the more than 150 artists who have illustrated

[22] Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *John Milton: A Reader's Guide to His Poetry* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1963), pp. 194–95.
[23] Diane Kelsey McColley, *A Gust for Paradise: Milton's Eden and the Visual Arts* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).
[24] Stella Purce Revard, *The War in Heaven: "Paradise Lost" and the Tradition of Satan's Rebellion* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 197.
[25] Douglas Bush, *John Milton: A Sketch of His Life and Writings* (New York: Collier, 1964), p. 157.
[26] Bush, *John Milton*, pp. 173, 172.
[27] Nancy M. Goslee, "'Under a Cloud in Prospect': Keats, Milton, and Stationing," *Philological Quarterly* 53 (1974): 205–19, especially pp. 205–06. See also Goslee, *Uriel's Eye: Stationing and Statuary in Blake, Keats, and Shelly* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985); and Ian Jack, *Keats and the Mirror of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), especially pp. 48, 141.
[28] Beth Lau, *Keats's "Paradise Lost"* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), pp. 38–39.

Paradise Lost, from the first illustrated edition in 1688 to works by such diverse artists as Gustave Doré, William Blake, J. M. W. Turner, and Salvador Dali. The more than three centuries of vivid and evocative drawings, engravings, and paintings based on *Paradise Lost* would seem to give the lie to Johnson's and Eliot's critical characterization of the epic's imagery.[29] As early as 1668, in *An Idea of the Perfection of Painting*, an anonymous reader has written in the margin that he deemed "y^{e} Paradise Lost of Milton" one of the "Books of advantage to a Painter," and most recently the cinematic adaptation of Milton's epic in production at Legendary Pictures promised, in one producer's words, to "make extensive use of digital effects" and emphasize the epic's visual qualities.[30]

Yet, Johnson's original observation that *Paradise Lost* "requires the description of what cannot be described" is nevertheless incisive because it captures one of the crucial challenges that Milton knew he faced: how to depict what has never been and can never be seen. In the invocation to book III, Milton appeals to his muse for inner illumination as compensation for the "universal blank" imposed by his blindness (line 48), but he also explains that he needs assistance from his muse so that he "may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight" (lines 54–55). Milton, I will show, also sought other, more practical solutions to describing the epic's invisible scenes and characters, and drew on the works of his predecessors and contemporaries as well as his seventeenth-century culture. In contrast to Johnson, who cordons off Milton's reality from "worlds where only imagination can travel," I argue that the two are related in important ways in *Paradise Lost* and that the poet's real experience often enriched his imaginative portrayal.[31] Whereas Johnson objected that Milton's "knowledge" and "study" diminished the impact of his natural imagery, I wish to show how Milton imbricates poetic tradition and cultural experience to add sometimes subtle implications to the things he depicts. As a young man, Milton claimed not to have finished his poem "The Passion" because he found "This subject . . . to be above the years he had when he wrote it" (*CPMP* 33). Perhaps he nevertheless published "The

[29] Wendy Furman-Adams has examined in depth Milton's artistic legacy. See, for example, her essay, co-authored with Virginia James Tufte, "Ecofeminist Eve: Artists Reading Milton's Heroine," in *Ecofeminist Approaches to Early Modernity*, ed. Jennifer Munroe and Rebecca Laroche (New York: Palgrave, 2011), pp. 55–83.

[30] *An Idea of the Perfection of Painting . . . Translated by J. E.* (1668), cited in Michael Lieb and John T. Shawcross, "Preface," *"Paradise Lost": A Poem Written in Ten Books*, ed. Lieb and Shawcross (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007), pp. ix–xv (p. xiv); and Michael Joseph Gross, "It's God vs. Satan. But What About the Nudity?" *New York Times* (4 Mar. 2007): Arts 18. The film's production was halted in early 2012 due, at least in part, to escalating costs.

[31] Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, I: 178.

Passion" in its incomplete form in 1645 and 1673 because it had taught him a valuable lesson – namely, to match his writing to his experience.

In addressing the historical context of Milton's imagery, I am also building on recent work in object studies in several of the chapters and examining what material things can reveal about the culture that produced and used them and the authors who, consciously or unconsciously, appropriated and alluded to these objects' social values and moral significance.[32] But I am not researching the diachronic trajectory or "life history" of a specific artifact, nor am I offering a Marxist critique of commodification and subject/object relations.[33] Instead, this book focuses on what Patricia Fumerton has helpfully called the "everyday," a category which focuses on familiar things, but includes social practices and collective values.[34] Specifically, I am investigating how Milton combined and exploited the meaning of cultural and poetic objects and gestures in an effort to overcome the inherent limitations of his epic's subject. What associations might readers have had with scales or shields during the seventeenth century, for example? What did it mean to Milton and his readers to wear long hair? Simply put, if we return to Johnson's complaint about the war in heaven, I am analyzing how Milton uses *things* in *Paradise Lost* to help him render the invisible visible. While critics have long acknowledged the classical and scriptural traditions that inform the epic's imagery, the following chapters examine the various ways that he combines this knowledge with the more immediate experience of living in seventeenth-century London.

Imagistic traditions

Discussions of imagery in early modern literature often begin with Horace's well-known formulation that "A poem is like a picture" (*Ut pictura poesis*).[35] Horace may have been influenced in turn by the poet Simonides of Ceos who, centuries earlier, according to Plutarch,

[32] See, for example, Catherine Richardson, *Shakespeare and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[33] For these alternative approaches to object studies, see, for example, the essays in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). For the concept of an object's "life history," see Arjun Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 34.

[34] *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 4–5; see also Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," in *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 69–95.

had asserted that "painting is inarticulate poetry and poetry articulate painting."[36] But Horace, in *Ars Poetica*, develops this relation more fully – although not, as is often thought to be the case, as a general aesthetic theory. Primarily, Horace compares the diversity of critical evaluations that poetry and painting can prompt, and argues that both poets and painters should pursue simple and consistent visual depictions. Both have the freedom of their imagination, he asserts, "but not so far that savage should mate with tame, or serpents with birds, lambs with tigers."[37]

Writing roughly three hundred years earlier, Plato and Aristotle had also compared poetry and painting. Aristotle used the analogous relation between the two art forms to explain the potency of imaginative imitation or *mimesis*, whereas Plato emphasized the resemblance between poetry and painting to underscore the limitations of the same aesthetic theory.[38] Socrates, in the *Republic*, accordingly concludes that poets, like painters, create merely "phantoms" or "a dim adumbration" of nature which appeal "to the inferior part of the soul."[39] Although a poet may seem to be well informed about his subject, he actually knows "nothing but how to imitate." He "lays on . . . the colours of the several arts" in such a fashion that only "others equally ignorant, who see things only through words, will deem his words most excellent."[40]

But if Socrates finds fault with both painting and poetry for being far removed from nature and human excellence, Horace's comments imply that painting holds a privileged position over poetic expression because the visual arts more effectively resemble natural objects and allow for the instantaneous perception of what they portray. When, for example, Horace, in his discussion of drama, asserts, "Less vividly is the mind stirred by what finds entrance through the ears than by what is brought before the trusty eyes," he is referring to the oracular experience of play-going and suggesting that hearing – and thus reading – are inferior to seeing because language introduces an added level of mediation.[41] During the

[35] Horace, *Ars Poetica*, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), lines 361–65 (p. 481).

[36] Plutarch, *Moralia*, ed. and trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, et al., 16 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927–1969), IV: 346 (p. 501). Plutarch goes on to explain that artists and writers "differ in the material and the manner of their imitation; and yet the underlying end and aim of both is one and the same; the most effective historian is he who, by a vivid representation of emotions and characters, makes his narration like a painting" (IV: 347).

[37] Horace, *Ars Poetica*, lines 11–13 (p. 451).

[38] See, for example, Aristotle, *Poetics*, ed. and trans. Stephen Halliwell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), IV, 1450a (p. 53); II, 1448a (p. 33); and VI, 1450a (p. 51).

[39] Plato, *The Republic*, 2 vols., trans. Paul Shorey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), book X, sec. VI, II, VI (vol. II: pp. 459, 427, 457).

[40] Plato, *The Republic*, book X, sec. IV (vol. II: pp. 442–43).

Renaissance, Leonardo da Vinci explained this idea in physiological terms. Most likely influenced by ancient theories of optics that described vision as coming from objects emitting copies of themselves, he proposed that to understand a painting involves less work than reading poetry because the visual arts transmit their subjects directly to spectators – "with the same truth as is possible with nature." By comparison, he argued, poetry, because it occurs in the writer's mind and imagination, presents information "more confusedly" and requires that readers study its meaning over time.[42]

A similar argument about the force and immediacy of the visual arts occurs in many of the ancient rhetorical treatises that Milton would have first encountered as part of the humanist curriculum at St. Paul's School. Echoing Horace's discussion of drama and visual cognition, Cicero, for example, writes:

> that the keenest of all our senses is the sense of sight, and that consequently perceptions received by the ears or by reflexion can be most easily retained in the mind if they are also conveyed to our minds by the mediation of the eyes, with the result that things not seen and not lying in the field of visual discernment are earmarked by a sort of outline and image and shape so that we keep hold of as it were by an act of sight things that we can scarcely embrace by an act of thought.[43]

Here Cicero argues that direct oracular perception allows viewers to comprehend and retain what they perceive, in contrast to language, which conveys only "a sort of outline and image and shape." He goes on to recommend that orators try to incorporate imagery in their speeches – an "almost visual presentation of events" – both for "stating a case" and "explaining and amplifying the statement."[44] The best an orator can do, in other words, is to emulate the act of sight.

This long-standing assumption about the relative statuses of painting and poetry may help to explain the controversy over religious imagery that erupted during the seventeenth century in England. If pictorial representations were thought to affect viewers directly, then visual depictions of

[41] Horace, *Ars Poetica*, lines 180–82 (p. 465).

[42] Leonardo da Vinci, *Leonardo on Painting*, ed. Martin Kemp, trans. Martin Kemp and Margaret Walker (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 37, 23. In Leonardo's words, painting "presents its essence to you in one moment through the faculty of vision by the same means as the *imprensiva* receives the objects in nature," whereas poetry "presents the same thing but by a less noble means than by the eye, conveying it more confusedly to the *imprensiva*" (p. 23). By *imprensiva*, Leonardo seems to mean a "receptor of impressions."

[43] Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2 vols., trans. E. W. Sutton (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1948), II. lxxxvii.357 (vol. I, pp. 468–69).

[44] Cicero, *De Oratore*, III.liii.202 (vol. II, pp. 160–61).