Milton's
The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth
—A TRAGEDY—

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During the nineteen years of his prose pamphlet career, Milton assumes a tragic tone nowhere else so conspicuously as in the second edition of The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth.¹ This paper is an attempt to approach it from a dramatic point of view and see it as a tragedy, a tragedy of the dramatic persona “Milton” who persists to the last moment in his cause despite the force of inevitability which is sure to defeat him.² The Ready and Easy Way is a political pamphlet aimed at the practical purpose of persuasion. But it is at the same time a utopian literature, a fiction created out of the poet’s imagination. And a utopian literature is inherently tragic, for it is the nature of a utopia that it can never be realized in human terms because of human limitations. Here one must be careful to distinguish between Milton the man and the poet, and “Milton” the dramatic persona whom Milton has created. These two can be easily confused, for they closely resemble each other. One may safely guess that at the time Milton wrote this pamphlet, he was undergoing a tragic experience very similar to the one which the dramatic persona experiences in the pamphlet. And in order to understand well the tragic strain in the pamphlet, it is necessary to
know a certain amount of its historical background, both national and biographical. In the last analysis, however, Milton the man and the poet, and "Milton" the dramatic persona, are not the same. In order to distinguish those two, I am going to put double quotation marks when talking about the dramatic persona.

I have attached at the end of this paper some information about the political background of the pamphlet in question, so that I will here present only those incidents which best inform us of the general atmosphere of England when Milton was writing *The Ready and Easy Way*. With the readmission (Feb. 21, 1660) to the Parliament of the royalists expelled in Pride's Purge of 1648, the Parliament turned from a republican body to a royalist stronghold. And the people were obviously in favor of dissolving the Parliament and for the Restoration. Their distrust in the Rump had gone so far that, when on Feb. 11, 1660 Monk made clear his intention to dissolve the Rump, the people madly rejoiced by roasting rumps and attacking the houses of the Parliament members. The general election campaign began after the dissolution of the Long Parliament on March 16, and very soon it became clear that the royalists were going to win and Charles was coming back. This was so evident that as early as April 9 Monk confidently gave Charles an absolute assurance of unconditional restoration. On April 25 the new royalist Parliament assembled, and Charles was received to the throne on May 25.

The general conjecture concerning the date of composition of *The Ready and Easy Way* is that the main body of the first edition was written between Feb. 4 and 21, 1660. In it Milton offered a proposal to perpetuate the existing Rump as the grand council of his ideal commonwealth. But this idea proved to be of no use when the Parliament readmitted many royalists. Then, to this pamphlet Milton attached a preface written some time between Feb. 21 and 29. After the election campaign began Milton wrote the second edition (written
certainly between March 16 and April 25), amending the first edition mainly in the matter of the perpetual grand council, and published it probably around April 25. Thus Milton was writing the second edition when it was clear beyond doubt that the whole nation was against the cause of liberty as he saw it; and he published it when the whole nation was waiting for the return of Charles within ten days. According to Barker Milton had been living in comparative retirement since 1655 (the year after the publication of the Second Defence), because of his blindness, and he had remained comparatively little disturbed by the confusion following Cromwell's death, until toward the end of 1659. From then till the very eve of Restoration, Milton wrote several letters and pamphlets trying to prevent the inevitable. The second edition of The Ready and Easy Way was his last desperate effort in the cause of liberty and commonwealth.

After he came back from the Continental trip Milton dedicated himself to the cause of liberty even at the cost of his eyesight. He saw in the politico-religious war of Reformation an eternal and universal war between liberty and tyranny, between what ennobles and what debases mankind. What urged Milton to fight for liberty was after all his deeply-felt love and respect for life and mankind. His belief that life has meaning and is worth living, that man's idealistic effort to make life and himself better and happier is both meaningful and desirable, found its objective correlative in the Christian doctrine of Creation and Redemption. What an excellent creature man is, that God made him in His own image and has sacrificed His only Son for him! Milton accepts the doctrine of the Fall; for how else could he explain the obvious existence of evil and suffering in life and the actual depravity and perversity in man? But he rejects the Calvinistic doctrine of human depravity, according to which everything human, even idealistic effort, is sinful and ineffectual, and all that man can do is passively pray for God's arbitrary Grace. This is too
degrading a doctrine for Milton to accept. He believes in the value of human effort and in man's capacity to achieve virtue. The purpose of learning is "to repair the ruins of our first parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him, as we may the nearest by possessing our souls of true virtue" (Of Education, p. 631). It is "natural" for man to aspire to godlikeness. Hence his emphasis on study and discipline. Man needs discipline because he is imperfect. But discipline is effective because man has capacity to approach his ideal. When God created man He gave him divine Reason, and left him free to choose, for "reason is but choosing" (Areopagitica, p. 733). It is with this Reason that man can approach his ideals. And in a voluntary obedience to the voice of Reason resides man's true Liberty, "which always with right Reason dwells /Twinn'd, and from her hath no individual being" (Paradise Lost, XII, 11. 84-85). After the Fall true Liberty is lost. Reason is obscured by the tyranny of passion. Man's effort and aspiration should be directed toward the regaining of his true Liberty through faith in God and self-discipline in the use of Reason. His nobility lies in this liberty, or in his effort to regain it. Anything which lies in the way to this goal is against Nature and God. Episcopacy is against the law of God, debasing free man by forcing him to conform to its man-made ceremonial laws and customs. The canon law against divorce is wrong because it reverses the order of things that law was made for man, not man for law, depriving him of his right to enjoy life as God means him to. A licensing requirement for printing is bad because it presupposes that the nature of man is evil and incapable of progress and wisdom, circumscribing the free exercise of man’s thought and reason. Monarchy must be annihilated because it so often assumes the form of tyranny and puts free man under slavish subjection.

Thus beneath Milton's theoretical argument and his actual battle
for liberty lies his basic belief that man has every right to make life happy, that he is capable of approaching what is true, good, right, and beautiful. Everything is built on this basic belief. Without it Milton's whole moral superstructure would crumble down. Up until the end of 1659 Milton as he presents himself in his prose pamphlets was able to maintain a steady faith in man without much effort. It is true that he notices the depravity, laziness, and weakness of many people around him; but he tends to shift the responsibility for their faults to stale customs and institutions, or to a group of Episcopalian or Presbyterian instigators who "bring a numb and chill stupidity of soul, an inactive blindness of mind upon the people by their leaden doctrine" (The Reason of Church Government, p. 657). The zeal of his persuasion comes partly from his declared confidence that once those obstacles are got rid of, then people will be capable of discerning truth. Even these instigators, the target of his censure, are regarded as "naturally abashed" (op. cit., p. 673) of being altogether ignorant of God and his worship (The Reason of Church Government was published in 1642). In Areopagitica (published in 1644) Milton views common people as generally capable of using books properly and rejoices in the general "pious forwardness" (p. 744) with which they explore the possibilities of their capacity. He certainly betrays his disgust at "delinquents" (p. 730) and fools, and is indeed bitter when he says, "a fool will be a fool with the best book" (p. 730). But as can be guessed from his use of "child" imagery in calling those fools "childish men" (p. 731), Milton thinks of fools as deformities, the results of untimely suspension of normal development.

Toward the end of 1640's Milton has a lot of harsh things to say about the general people. He denounces those who follow the backslider-Presbyterians. He admits that the number of "the uprighter sort of" (Tenure of Kings and Magistrates, p. 753) magistrates and people is "less by many" (ibid.), but still tends to excuse them by
blaming those Presbyterians. He still has the upright Parliament and many of its supporters on his side. In the *Second Defence* (published in 1654) Milton reviews with satisfaction the achievement of the English people who with “greatness of soul and vigor of enterprise” (p. 817) have succeeded in obtaining liberty. But it is here, as he glorifies the cause of liberty, that he foresees the dark future of the newly-born commonwealth. He maintains that “a good man only loves and knows how to obtain” “genuine liberty” (p. 837), that ignoble men are slaves in themselves and do not deserve, nor are able to enjoy, true liberty, betraying his awareness of a large number of people who are like so many “unruly horses.”

This prophecy comes true after five years, and Milton has to experience a severe ordeal in his faith in man. The English people rise against the cause of liberty as if they were frantic beasts, clamoring for Charles, without listening to the voice of reason and of God. It is no longer possible for him to excuse them simply by attributing their perversity to faulty education, corrupting customs and institutions, or to a group of instigators. The perversity of man seems to lie more deeply-rooted in his nature than can be explained away as mere misunderstanding or lack of instruction. Man’s nature seems to be irrevocably blighted and man seems incapable of right choice. Thus Milton faces a crisis. It is at once a national crisis for the cause of free commonwealth, a universal crisis for the happiness of mankind, and a personal crisis for Milton the idealist. The terrifying aspect of actuality threatens to smash his personal values and beliefs and reduce all his past efforts to futility. Milton is bewildered at the madness of the people, and does not know how to assimilate it into his system of values. In their infatuated cry for Charles Milton seems to sense the original un-reason, the terror of the irrational, the dark force which threatens to overthrow the whole architecture of human reason and idealism.
What does Milton do, encountering this undeniable and ineluctable fact of man's ungodlikeness, this reality of the Fallen World? What does he do with his idealism which is based upon his faith in man? What he does is write and publish the second edition of *The Ready and Easy Way*, in which he makes his dramatic persona "Milton" speak out for the cause of his ideal commonwealth.

A Commonwealth is a political system in which the sovereignty rests with the people. And the "free commonwealth," according to Milton in one of his prophetic exhilarations, is

not only held by wisest men in all ages, the noblest, manliest, the equallest, the justest government, the most agreeable to all due liberty and proportioned equality, both human, civil, and Christian, most cherishing to virtue and true religion, but also . . . plainly commended, or rather enjoined by our Savior himself to all Christians. (p. 884)

In other words a commonwealth is ideal because it allows man to realize his potentialities as a rational creature better than any other political system, thus enabling him to enjoy real happiness and prosperity. A commonwealth is a state in which man can best fulfil himself.

If Milton is now incapable of trusting the people, then the logical consequence would be that he can no longer maintain his adherence to the ideal of commonwealth. For in *Areopagitica* he says that fools are fools even if they are given the best books. If the people are fools as they seem to be, then it is useless to build a commonwealth. Contrary is the fact, however. Far from giving up his ideal, Milton proposes in *The Ready and Easy Way* a full vision of an ideal commonwealth. Indeed in the *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* where Milton rebukes ignorant people in harsh words, he eagerly defends the cause of commonwealth. And Milton's vision of a free commonwealth seems to culminate in *The Ready and Easy Way* when it is actually no longer possible to realize it then and
there. It is as if his frustrated idealism is now asserting itself with all the energy left against a mighty destructive force of human weakness and corruption. The vision flares up into a glow of a utopian dream.

The trouble is, the announced aim of *The Ready and Easy Way* is to move the people against monarchy and to make them elect republicans in the on-going election campaign. In order to attain this practical end Milton must offer a vision of a commonwealth which is practicable then and there. Whether a plan is practicable or not depends upon whether it is based upon a just analysis and understanding of the *status quo*. Plato’s republic has an air of impracticability because its principle of organization is thorough-going exclusion of elements disturbing to the purity and justice of the republic. But these elements are nevertheless part of the actuality. That Milton is for inclusion has been obvious ever since his Cambridge days. For example, in *Areopagitica*, he states this principle of inclusion as follows:

> Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil. . . . As therefore the state of man now is, what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? (p. 728)

Is indeed Milton’s commonwealth realistic enough to cope with this world of evils? His vision, despite his repeated insistence on its practicability, is essentially utopian. It is not based upon the actual state of affairs as it stood at the beginning of 1660, nor upon the actuality of human nature.

The conflict in *The Ready and Easy Way* is between idealism and actuality, between the idealism based upon faith in man and the terrifying force of human limitations which prevents the realization, even the holding up, of ideals. “Milton” the dramatic persona plays
the role of a tragic hero who clings to his ideals before the crushing force of actuality. His continual posture is that of self-deception. He deliberately or unconsciously shuts his eyes to the actual state of affairs in order to sustain himself in his idealistic effort. Let us look at the preface, which is a miniature picture of "Milton" torn between his wish to reject the actuality in order to sustain hope, and the actuality forcing itself upon his consciousness.

The seemingly indifferent phrase "some changes" (p. 880) points to two events which proved heavily injurious to the republicans: the announcement of general election and the readmission of royalists to the Parliament on Feb. 21. The only thing that gives a faint hope to "Milton" is the "resolution" of the Rump that no royalist will be allowed to be elected. "Milton," "not a little rejoicing" (p. 880), clings to this resolution of the dwarfish Rump as if it were of much help. The aim of the pamphlet, he says, is to "remove . . . this noxious humor of returning to bondage" (p. 880). Note the word "humor." The health-sickness metaphor is in it. Man's "natural" state is health. He is sick of a morbid humor when he does such an absurd thing as crying for a king. And this sickness, "Milton" hopefully declares, is temporary. It is a "humor" of the moment. He tries to believe that his admonition will soon reclaim the people from their present madness for which he blames "some deceivers," "bad principles and false apprehensions" (p. 880). But his suppressed doubt of the success of his attempt comes out in the inserted clause "if it be possible" (p. 880). He persuades himself that the new edition of The Ready and Easy Way will be "of much more use and concernment" (p. 880) to the people and to the new Parliament, than its last edition was— as if to say that the state of affairs is more favorable to his argument than it was before the readmission of royalists to the Parliament! His near despair is camouflaged by the dry humor in the metaphor of Lent and shoving time (p. 880).
The preface manages to maintain the air of serenity. "Milton" achieves it by shutting his eyes to the reality which, if seen in its naked terror, is sure to make him despair and deprive him of all energy to persist in his idealism. The apologetic tone of the preface is the result of his attempt at convincing himself and the public of the significance of his writing The Way.

"Milton's" proposal for the ready and easy way to establish a free commonwealth is that the people should choose in the present election "able men, men not addicted to a single person or house of lords" (p. 888). If they do, then "the work is done; at least the foundation firmly laid of a free commonwealth, and good part also erected of the main structure. For the ground and basis of every just and free government . . . is a general council of ablest men, chosen by the people" (p. 888). The assumptions here are, that a republican who is not addicted to a single person or house of lords is necessarily an able man, fit to sit as one of the "ablest" men of the ideal grand council, that it is possible to find a good number of able republicans, and that the mad rabble is capable of choosing the right men as their representatives. In the first assumption Milton is letting his dramatic persona commit the mistake of over-simplification and lack of common-sense logic. A man's ability does not depend on whether he is a republican or a royalist. But for "Milton" any republican will do, for at least he will not support the Restoration.

We can tolerate this assumption, considering the conditions in which the pamphlet was being written. But its immediate audience would not be convinced by such an argument, especially after witnessing the inability of the republican members of the Rump. Before coming to this proposal "Milton" has taken pains to vindicate the past activities of the Parliament. But, however hard he may try, he cannot evade the fact that the Parliament has failed to build a free commonwealth. He is well aware that people would say, "But we
have all this while... been expecting it, and cannot yet attain it” (p. 887). He admits that a due “care of timely settling a new government” has been “too much neglected” (p. 887). Yet he tries to excuse the Parliament for its inability by attributing its faults to “the frequent disturbances, interruptions, and dissolutions which the parliament hath had, partly from the impatient or disaffected people, partly from some ambitious leaders in the army” (p. 887). But this is far from being a good excuse for the Parliament. It then raises the question, “Then, what is the assurance that this thing will not happen again to the newly elected but substantially the same parliament?” In the mind of the people it is still a fresh memory that the Rump was helpless before the violence of General Lambert. Milton fully expects this retort, so that, in order to let his dramatic speaker continue his argument he permits him to shift the attention of the audience and himself to an earnest plea for immediate action: “Now is the opportunity, now the very season wherein we may obtain a free commonwealth and establish it for ever in the land, without difficulty or much delay” (p. 887). “Milton” cheers himself up by interpreting the actuality in a brighter light: “writs are sent out for elections, and, which is worth observing, in the name, not of any king, but of the keepers of our liberty, to summon a free parliament” (p. 887). This “voice of liberty” to which the dramatic persona clings to sustain his hope consists of two different voices: the reluctant voice of the former members of the Rump and the willing voice of the royalists readmitted from expulsion.

The third assumption that the people are capable of choosing the right men is one that “Milton” himself will contradict later in the pamphlet when proposing a tightly-woven election system for his commonwealth. Indeed, the real enemy of liberty and the commonwealth now is not the king, not even a group of slanderers, but the people themselves. “Milton” cannot allow himself to accept the fact
that they are unable to choose the right representatives, even if he knows they are. In order to keep himself going, he must rely upon this faith in man.

After explaining the function of this grand council, “Milton” offers his second main idea — that “the grand or general council, being well chosen, should be perpetual” (p. 888). From here on “Milton’s” commonwealth takes on the aura of a utopia, losing the seeming immediacy and practicality of the beginning. He tries to justify his idea of a perpetual council by saying that it is indispensable for national stability, that it is necessary to keep the council as a group of experienced wise men. Behind this proposal is “Milton’s” conviction that a group of wise people well chosen will always remain faithful to the common good and obey reason and God, even if they are granted lifelong seats in the council. Now that “Milton” cannot help admitting that most people are irrational and cannot be trusted, he has somehow switched his mentality and has come to put his faith in a limited number of wise men who he believes exist. His faith in man is no longer supported by faith in the people in general but by faith in a small number of wise men. “Milton” is determined to put absolute faith in the integrity of those men. He even rejects the application of “popular remedies against their growing too imperious” (p. 890) on the ground that the “common sort” may easily get corrupt, but not those wise men, and that the application of popular remedies will introduce into the government the element of “lascivious and unbridled democracy” (p. 890). “Milton,” having been disillusioned in the wisdom of people in general, wants to exclude them from the government.

The aristocracy of wise men — this idea itself is not original nor impracticable. But to trust in them so much as to give them perpetual seats in the government without any means to check them seems to be too optimistic. It is human nature that, when one is
placed in the highest position unconditionally and without any stimulus of competition or the need of making a living, one tends to get lazier and does not work to the utmost of one's capability. It seems "Milton" is expecting too much from those wise men who are, however wise they may be, the same human beings we are.

"Milton's" election system (p. 891) is a device to exclude "the noise and shouting of a rude multitude" who are not qualified to choose or to be chosen. Here "Milton" differs greatly from Milton's contemporary utopian, Harrington. In his Oceana Harrington proposes as democratic a method of election as possible, introducing the ballot system. All men of thirty and over gather at a place designated for ballot, and electors are chosen by lot among them. Then each elector recommends his favorite, and if this nominee is accepted by the majority of the people present, then he is chosen as their representative. Though Harrington is an eager exponent of a commonwealth, he seems to imply that if the majority's will is to restore kingship, then that is that. Whatever direction they may swerve to, it cannot be helped since it is the people's will. This difference between Harrington's proposal and "Milton's" indicates how much "Milton" is disillusioned in the general public. He says, "this greatest part have both in reason and the trial of just battle lost the right of their election what the government shall be" (p. 895).

One thing is not at first clear about "Milton's" election system: who chooses "those of them who are rightly qualified to nominate" (p. 890)? In Harrington everybody thirty and over is qualified. Obviously "Milton" thinks otherwise. But he does not make this vital point clear enough. We can only guess what his intention is by gathering materials from elsewhere in the pamphlet. Later when he is describing his plan of civil government in detail, he maintains that each county is to be made

a kind of subordinate commonalty or commonwealth, and one chief town or
more, according as the shire is in circuit, made cities . . . ; where the nobility
and chief gentry from a proportionable compass of territory annexed to each
city may build houses or palaces . . . , may bear part in the government, make
their own judicial laws, or use those that are, and execute them by their own
elected judicatures and judges without appeal, in all things of civil government
between man and man" (p. 896).

It is the nobility and chief gentry, then, that elect the governmental
officers among themselves. "Milton" proceeds, "so they shall have
justice in their own hands, law executed fully and finally in their
own counties and precincts, long wished and spoken of, but never
yet obtained" (p. 896). But this pronoun "they" points, not to the
people in general, but to that part of them who are the nobility and
the chief gentry. As these elected officers prove their worth in
government, "their lot" falls "to be chosen into the grand council,
according as their worth and merit shall be taken notice of by the
people" (p. 897). Now, who are those "people" but the nobility
and the gentry? What "Milton" is doing here is to identify the
"people" with that small part which coexists of nobles and gentlemen.
This is the instinctive solution "Milton" has made in order to sustain
his faith in the people, to protect himself from the ruin of his
system of values.

"Milton" the dramatic speaker seems to know, as Milton himself
knows, that true nobility is that of the mind, so that social class
does not necessarily enable a person to be "noble" or "gentle." There-
fore, right after the description of the election system comes the
argument that an educational reform is necessary "to make the people
fittest to choose, and the chosen fittest to govern." It is necessary
thus to "teach the people faith, not without virtue, temperance,
modesty, sobriety, parsimony, justice; not to admire wealth or honor;
to hate, turbulence and ambition; to place every one his private
welfare and happiness in the public, peace, liberty, and safety" (p.
891). After all an institution is a man-made thing. It is the people
matters—people who make and use it. "Milton" is well aware that people, even that small number of better men, are not sufficiently virtuous, temperate, altruistic, or just. He cannot help admitting that his "ready and easy way" is not so ready and easy. This thought shakes his confident posture for a moment. He says he will "speak more" about the local autonomy "ere the end of this discourse, for it may be referred to time, so we be still going by degrees to perfection" (p. 891, italics mine); the implication being, it will not be referred to time if they are not approaching their desired goal—and it is very likely that they will not be. His uncertainty as to the integrity of grand councilors makes him put the conditional phrase, "if their ends be faithful and for a free commonwealth" (p. 891).

For another short while "Milton" lets himself give utterance to his doubt as to the possibility of realizing his commonwealth:

"Till this be done, I am in doubt whether our state will be ever certainly and thoroughly settled; never likely till then to see an end of our troubles and continual changes, or at least never the true settlement and assurance of our liberty." (p. 891)

"Till this be done"—and this "this" involves a lot of things, even a long-range plan of reforming the educational system! But "Milton" will not be crushed by this doubt. He quickly shakes off his doubt by immersing himself in the imaginary joy and happiness in the commonwealth: "The grand council being thus firmly constituted to perpetuity... there can be no cause alleged why peace, plentiful trade, and all prosperity should not thereupon ensue throughout the whole land" (p. 891). And his dream is extended to the coming of the Milennium: "they shall so continue (if God favor us, and wilful sins provoke him not) even to the coming of our true and rightful and only to be expected King... the Messiah, the Christ" (p. 891). Being propped by this stupendous dream, "Milton" tries once again to spur the public and himself to tread the way he has shown:
"The way propounded is plain, easy, and open before us . . . . I say again, this way lies free and smooth before us" (p. 892).

Regaining some spirit by indulging in the dream mentioned in the preceding paragraph, "Milton" further tries to move the people against monarchy by showing its evils and inconveniences. As he is doing it, his desperate indignation at the folly of the "multitude" (p. 892) bursts out in a series of rhetorical questions: "Can the folly be paralleled, to adore and be the slaves of a single person . . . ? Shall we never grow old enough to be wise to make seasonable use of gravest authorities, experiences, examples? Is it felicity to wear a yoke . . . ?" (p. 893). It is against reason, against the sense of human dignity, that this should be the case. One senses a desperate "Milton" reluctant to say "YES" to these questions. Especially if it were the case that we never grow old enough and are incapable of learning, education and discipline would be useless. "Milton" is not going to allow such a thought to crush him down. And nobody knows whether "YES" is the answer to those questions! In Areopagitica only part of the people are called "childish" and dismissed as fools. Now it seems the multitude is ignorant and perverse children unable to grow older. Still "Milton's" persistent faith in man makes him use the "child" metaphor.\(^{13}\)

"Milton," however, is not going to be lost in that passionate indignation. He calms himself down, and once more tries to persuade the public of their folly, citing Aristotle and the Bible. He has composed himself enough to admit that "monarchy may be convenient to some nations" (p. 893), while maintaining that it will prove disastrous to the English people who have once expelled it from the land. Then after prophesying that Charles will bring a "newgilded yoke" (p. 894) to them, "Milton" turns to those backslider-Presbyterians who are now supporting the restoration. Here his invective reaches its harshest. Those Presbyterians who started as champions that
of liberty at the beginning of the Reformation movement betrayed the cause when Charles I was beheaded, and have weakened the unified power of the Parliament. On the general public "Milton" restrains himself from pouring too bitter invectives. Well may he recognize they are deluded "past reason and recovery" (p. 895), but still he excuses them, unconsciously, for their perversity by calling it "madness," "being infatuated," a temporary contagion, a disease. He finds a safe outlet for his frustrated disgust in inveighing against the Presbyterians. He regards them as yoke-fellows of "these tigers of Bacchus—— these new fanatics of not the preaching-, but the sweating-tub, inspired with nothing holier than the venereal pox," and "those new disgorged atheisms" (p. 894). The Presbyterians are scapegoats for the people and receive the fire of "Milton's" curse which is in fact due also to the people themselves.

Now "Milton" comes to the crux of his argument: an argument against the violence of majority. He asserts that a minority of just people should lead the nation even if a large majority opposes it, for those ignorant people have lost their right to participate in the government. He is aware that his argument will not be accepted nor understood by the majority of the people; he sadly confesses, "Not so much to convince these, which I little hope, as to confirm them who yield not" (p. 895). And if the majority of the people do not accept this premise, they will not accept "Milton's" proposal of a commonwealth which is based upon the theory of sovereignty of better minority over worse majority. Even if he little believes in his power of persuading the public, he proceeds to lay out his convictions before them. He tries, at any rate, though he knows his effort will end in futility. The tone of the passage has changed from the preceding passionately bitter oratory to a calm rational discourse.

With the summary of the virtues of commonwealth and the evils of monarchy in terms of spiritual and civil liberty, which is the very
basis of Milton’s thoughts, the main argument and proposal of the
dramatic speaker “Milton” comes to an end: “I have no more to say
at present. Few words will save us, well considered; few and easy
things, now seasonably done” (p. 898). Under those seemingly
placid, simple words “Milton” has hidden his desperate impatience
at the prospect that even those “few easy things” to do to prevent
the restoration are unlikely to be done.

If... after all this light among us, the same reason shall pass for current to
put our necks again under kingship as was made use of by the Jews to return
back to Egypt... our condition is not sound, but rotten, both in religion
and all civil prudence. (p. 898)

There is a great deal of self-restraint in the speaker which keeps
his air of serenity undisturbed; but all his feeling is condensed in one
word, “rotten.” The “light” in the above-quoted passage is both the
light of enlightenment and of Revolution with which Milton saw Eng-
land filled, especially at the beginning of the Reformation. It is the
“heavenly radiance” which England, after her “long-abused sight,”
gazed at, transported with joy. It is the light of Truth and Reason
which reveals falsehood. Despite the light of Grace granted to them
in the miraculous deliverance out of the Egyptian yoke, the Israelites
ungratefully and stubbornly insisted on returning back to Egypt. So
now the English people, after so much light has been granted, are
blind and perverse enough to “put” their “necks again under kingship”
(p. 898). What a plight our Fallen nature has come to! “Milton” faces
the actuality— but his wish to evade the full shock of the actuality
may still be seen in his use of a conditional structure (“if” sentence).

“Milton” sinks in the thought of the grim inevitability of the
coming Restoration, then plucks up his courage by telling himself that he
has done his “duty to speak” (p. 898), the prophet’s duty which he be-
lieves is given him by God. He interprets the actuality in a brighter
light (“I doubt not but there be many wise men in all places and de-
gres, “p. 898), but his groundless hope cannot sustain him long and he falls back into despondency ("but [I] am sorry the effects of wisdom are so little seen among us"). The confidence in the existence of wise and able men, even if their number is very small, has been "Milton's" last resort all through his speech. He confessed that the aim of writing the pamphlet is "not so much to convince" the rabble "as to confirm them who yield not" (p. 895), persuading himself that these unyielding men are "of a great number" (p. 887). He doubted "not but all ingenious and knowing men will easily agree" (p. 887) with him. But now, after finishing his main body of argument, "Milton" lets himself betray his uncertainty as to the very existence of "able" and wise men who are fit to choose and be chosen for his ideal commonwealth. Now he reluctantly admits the fact that "men who set their minds on main matters and sufficiently urge them, in these most difficult times" (p. 898) are "not many" (ibid.).

A man is not wise enough if he does not practice his wisdom in society for the sake of mankind. The cloistered virtue of the Lady in Comus must be brought out of its nook to the dance of the actual human society. Especially at this national crisis, a wise man should come out and fight to the last. Though "Milton" uses a milder form "not many," he is on the very verge of despair. This desperate tone is carried into the next concluding passage where he identifies himself with Jeremiah and Moses. He knows he has "spoken only to trees and stones" (p. 898) and that the fate of "the sad prophet Jeremiah" (The Reason of Church Government, p. 665) is his. Jeremiah's prophecies are characterized by lament because of the unwillingness of the people to listen to him. Furthermore, he is traditionally regarded as having been stoned to death by the Jews for whom he suffered. Yet "Milton" will not and cannot admit the utter futility of his effort, and shows his resistance in a subjunctive clause ("though I were sure," p. 898). Though he knows his cause of liberty
and republicanism is mocked as "the good old Cause" (ibid.), he re-
asserts "the dignity of the phrase." Yet the pressure of reality is too
overwhelming for him to press back. "Milton" is left alone and
forsaken in the vast expanse of nature which does not respond to his
anguished cry, "O earth, earth, earth!" (p. 898) —a tragic solitude
of a man alone in a hostile world, desperately valiant against the
"perverse" (ibid.) forces of the irrational. Facing the limitation of
human effort in preventing the inevitable, "Milton" turns to divine
aid:

Nay, though what I have spoke should happen (which thou suffer not, who
didst create mankind free! nor thou next, who didst redeem us from being
servants of men!) (p. 898)

This faith—— that God created man free and in His own image, and
that Christ redeemed him of his eternal damnation—— is the theoretical
backbone of Milton's faith in man and life, and the cause of liberty.
When people stoop to folly and desert God and their own natural
dignity, divine justice relentlessly punishes them by subjecting them
to tyranny. The prophet "Milton" tries to intercede between them
and God. He identifies himself with Moses who as the spiritual
leader of his people is nearly crushed down under his burden and
says, "I am not able to carry all this people alone, the burden is
too heavy for me." Yet once again "Milton" musters up his
courage by deceiving himself with a false hope ("But I trust I shall
have spoken persuasion to abundance of sensible and ingenuous men," p. 898), and pretends to have even a slight hope of gaining some
hearing from some of the rabble.

Despite his effort to hold out his hope, "Milton's" speech ends
with terrifying picture of "the deluge of ... epidemic madness"
hurrying the people to "a precipice of destruction" (p. 899), "Milton"
himself being swept down the torrent of inevitability to the gulf of tyr-
anny. It is that archetypal deluge of divine judgment which the
iniquity of man brings upon his own head. It is remarkable, and admirable too, that "Milton," while seeing divine justice in the deluge, still tries to excuse the people for their folly and sin by calling them "misguided and abused" (p. 899). To the very end he tries, almost stubbornly, to believe in them.

Thus "Milton" the dramatic speaker of The Ready and Easy Way is constantly deceiving himself about the actuality in order to sustain himself in his idealism. His ideal commonwealth, though he claims it as immediately practicable, has a strong utopian element, based upon his persistent trust in man. Actuality weakens his argument. The republicans whom he recommends for the grand council historically proved their inability, and the people who are choosing their representatives are unreasonable and unfit to choose. The idea of the perpetual state council is made to seem far from practicality because the actual people, even wiser men, do not come up to "Milton's" ideal philosopher statesmen.

How to live in the Fallen World — this is the ultimate question presented by The Way. If human nature is as it is, if the force of irrational inevitability is to defeat idealistic efforts, what can we do? What "Milton" does is not to give up or compromise but to cling to his idealism to the last moment and beyond, and to assert himself against the chaotic force of the fallen nature threatening to reduce his idealism to self-deception. It is a battle for human dignity, freedom, and the meaning of life. It is a challenge to whatever tries to debase man, to bend him to the yoke of tyranny, superstition, ignorance, meaninglessness, and death. The tragic fact is that "Milton" can persist in his idealism only by shutting his eyes to the actuality. Is "Milton" weak, not being able to confront the reality unflinchingly? Is he therefore a pathetic figure, for self-deception is pathetic? When he proposes his ideal commonwealth, is he merely escaping into reverie as Milton says Plato does, giving to airy nothing a local habita-
tion and a name? One figure in literature comes to my mind as a pertinent reference to this question.

Othello is also an idealist, and his idealism is based upon the refusal or inability to see reality. In Act V, Scene ii he enters Desdemona's chamber to kill her, usurping the role of God who punishes the sinner. He is terribly self-deluded, and can be regarded as a pathetic man refusing to see his own ugliness in order to justify his jealous murder. His self-deception, however, is in fact a result of his earnest wish to conform to his ideals. Iago is not self-deceived because he does not have any ideal in the usual sense of the word. The actuality, the human limitations in Othello frustrate the full realization of his ideals, reducing idealism to self-deception. When the aspiration soars highest, the gap between actuality and the ideal becomes widest, and self-deception most terrible.

We, however, do injustice to Othello and idealism if we only blame him for pathetic self-deception. We must accept the value and sincerity of his idealistic effort. And it is in his effort to conform to his ideals that his nobility lies. The idealitic struggle has its own value undiminished by the inevitable impossibility of its complete realization. Othello's and "Milton's" spirits do not yield even if they are defeated by the inevitability. Adam finally realizes in Paradise Lost, that even if he must die life has meaning, death being only one aspect of the Fallen World which brings an individual life and effort to nothingness. Also Adam realizes that what gives life meaning is, after all, himself, his own "paradise within" (Paradise Lost, XII, 587) which he himself must create by strenuous effort. And, ultimately, what gives man the energy to make an idealistic effort is his instinctive faith in man and love of life.

That the dramatic speaker in The Way is self-deceived does not mean that Milton himself is self-deceived, as Othello's self-deception does not imply that Shakespeare himself is self-deceived. The very
fact that Milton has created a dramatic speaker whose self-deception is clear to us proves that he is not shutting his eyes to the actuality. Indeed, without his sure knowledge of the depth of human depravity and the limitation of human effort, the pamphlet would not have been imbued with such an intense tragic tone. And this knowledge was indispensable to the formation of Milton's last works. In this sense the whole prose period of Milton's may be regarded as the Interregnum waiting for the Millennium of his great epic and tragic achievements.

NOTES

1 All citations from The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth and the other prose works and Paradise Lost are to the Merritt Y. Hughes's edition, John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957). Citations from The Ready and Easy Way are given only page numbers, and those from the other works are given page or line numbers and titles of the works cited.

2 As W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. says, "even a short lyric poem is dramatic, the response of a speaker (no matter how abstractly conceived) to a situation (no matter how universalized)." See The Verbal Icon (New York: Noonday Press, 1964), p. 5.

3 The information is taken from Evert Mordecai Clark's edition of The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth.

Early in 1659—Cromwellian protectorate goes to pieces.

May, 1659—*The army, by resurrecting the ump Parliament, restores the republic as it existed from 1649 to 1653.

*The Rump tries to subordinate the military to the civil power, trying to reorganize the army.

*A general rising of Royalists has been planned to occur on Aug. 1; but only Sir George Booth makes any considerable demonstration, and he is suppressed by the new-modeled army.

*From this achievement General Lambert returns with high notions of his and the army's importance.

September—The Parliament is dumfounded by demands from Lambert and his ambition. The Parliament, sensing a conspiracy that Lambert wants to succeed Cromwell, refuses demands.

October 13—The next morning Lambert throws his troops around West-
minster, and puts an end to the sitting.
*The army-officers assume control of the Parliament.
*Meanwhile the army in Scotland is preparing to march against Lambert. Suddenly Ireland and the fleet declare for the Parliament. The army-regime collapses.

December 26—The triumphant little Rump marches back to Westminster.
*The most potent factor in the overthrow of the Lambert tyranny has been the silent pressure of Cromwell's old lieutenant-general, George Monk, military governor of Scotland. He is a man of decision and vigor, of much shrewdness and common sense. He sticks not at dissimulation, and knows how to think much and say little.
*Monk begins to move toward England immediately upon his hearing of the downfall of the army-regime. His announced intention has been merely to restore the Rump. Mysterious! Every faction chooses to interpret his move as tending to promote its own cause.
*Monk hears all the demands of English people, but says nothing except to reaffirm his championship of the existing Parliament.
*The royalists rejoice at Monk's coming. In spite of Monk's emphatic declarations to the contrary, there is good foundation for the faith that he is, at bottom, for the king.
*Though Commonwealth-men have some misgiving, they in general and Milton decide to accept with good grace Monk's vehement declaration in favor of a commonwealth.

Feb. 6, 1660—Reception of Monk at Westminster: Monk delivers a brief reply, recommending to the astonished Rumpers their early dissolution and the admission of the members secluded before 1648. Monk's speech mystifies the members.

Feb. 8—London votes to pay no more taxes to the odious Rump, in which it does not have a single representative.

Feb. 11—*Monk makes his intention clear of the dissolution of the Rump. He is now a dictator of the Parliament. His ultimatum: "they should issue out Writs to fill up their House by Friday next; and when filled, should rise at their appointed time, to give place to a full and free parliament."
*Samuel Pepys describes the joy of the citizens. There is roasting of rumps.
*If the Royalists exult in the assurance of a free Parliament, and, through this, of an early restoration, the Commonwealth-men are in despair.

Fed. 21—*Actual re-admission of these who have been excluded by Pride's
Purge of 1648. At the same time Monk pledges to make a new Parliament, and a legal dissolution at an early date. The Parliament changes from a republican body to a royalist's.

But Monk as yet dares by no means to renounce his republican pretensions. On the night of Feb. 21, Monk dispatches with all haste letters to the different regiments in England, Scotland, and Ireland to satisfy them "that nothing is intended for Alteration of Government, but that it should continue as a free State and Commonwealth."

March 16—The Long Parliament dissolves after many pangs and groans, for there is a growing inclination among its members to sit on, and bring in the king themselves, and on their own terms.

March 17—Monk receives a private message from Charles.

March 20—The messenger is hurrying back to Charles with Monk's reply, accepting restoration.

*General Election begins soon after the dissolution of the Parliament. From the first the royalists carry all before them. Very soon it becomes clear to every one that the king's return is only a matter of weeks.

April 9—Monk feels so confident of this that he sends Charles an absolute assurance of unconditional restoration.

April 25—The new Parliament assembles.

4 See Arthur E. Barker's Milton and the Puritan Dilemma, 1641-1660 (University of Toronto Press, 1942), Chapter XV, "The Main End of Government."

5 Milton approves of our wish to attain godlikeness, but he would disapprove of any wish to attain godhead as a blasphemy. God is immensurably superior to man, and no man can be a god. Satan tries to be a god and is punished.

6 See The Reason of Church Government.

7 See The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce.

8 See Arsopagitica.


10 See, for example, Milton's Elegy VII where he talks about an experience of love. The speaker, a Hippolytus-like figure, falls in love and suffers. He knows he must get out of it, but when he does he feels his breast "rigid under a thick case of ice" (See Page 61 of the Hughes's edition, John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose). Here is a figure who is in a dilemma between the need of being in love and that of reaching beyond it through study. He is in the dilemma because he wants to have both at once. Also look at Comus where the claims of Comus and the Lady are left unresolved. Milton might be trying to resolve the conflict between Comus-like devotion for virtue. Milton wants to have all. He is against exclusion. Later in
and Satan the principle *Paradise Lost* God is made the principle of inclusion, love of life and the aspiration of exclusion.

11 By "the preface" I mean that beginning section of the pamphlet which ends with "The treatise thus revised and enlarged, is as follows" (p. 881).


13 Elsewhere in the pamphlet Milton makes his dramatic speaker call the multitude "more like boys under age than men" (p. 886), and "sluggards or babies" (ibid.).

14 "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her as an eagle musing her mighty youth, and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam; purging and unscaling her long-abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance." (*Areopagitica*, p. 745)

15 See E. M. Clark's note on the phrase "good old Cause," on Page 159 of his edition of *The Ready and Easy Way*.

16 Numbers XI. 14.

17 In *Areopagitica* where he argues against the licensing requirement for printing, Milton refers to Plato as a utopianist who "fed his fancy with making many edicts to his airy burgomasters" (p. 731), and continues: "To sequester out of the world into Atlantic and Utopian politics, which never can be drawn into use, will not mend our condition; but to ordain wisely as in this world of evil, in the midst whereof God hath placed us unavoidably" (pp. 732–733).

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