

John Milton, Blackfriars Spectator?

“Elegia Prima” and Ben Jonson’s *The Staple of News*

In the spring of 1626 John Milton was temporarily expelled from Cambridge University, perhaps over a quarrel with his tutor William Chappell, and sent home to London, where he remained for at least several weeks. There, the seventeen-year-old poet composed his first elegy, a Latin verse-letter to his closest friend, Charles Diodati. In it, Milton claims to be enjoying his unexpected holiday by reading, girl watching, and attending the theater.¹

Milton scholars have never reached consensus about his alleged playgoing, for while the young man speaks as a spectator, the plots and characters he mentions—these include comic types such as a crafty old man and a spendthrift heir, as well as tragic personages and situations such as the attempt of Creon’s house to atone for its incest—seem more characteristic of classical drama than anything presented in the commercial playhouses. Nevertheless, a significant number of editors take the claim literally, though none has been able to identify any specific play(s) to which Milton could be referring. A second group of editors contends that he was simply imagining scenes based on his play reading.²

The latter group are almost certainly correct about the elegy’s references to tragic figures, for no Greek tragedy was mounted in the period of 1620–1627, either in London or in Cambridge.³ They may also be right about his allusions to comic personages, for New

Comedy abounds in stock characters such as sly geezers and prodigals, and Milton was a passionate reader of such drama from his early youth. Moreover, he wanted to make a good impression on Diodati, and to prevent awkward questions about why he was not in school at a time when his friend was (at Oxford). If he presented himself as a mere bookworm rather than a sophisticated man about town, the letter would have been far less effective. Hence, it is not difficult to believe that Milton simply invented the playgoing scenario, basing it on his reading.

We could leave the matter there were it not for Herbert Berry's remarkable but overlooked discovery that in 1620, when Milton was eleven, his father became one of four trustees of the Blackfriars Theater and probably remained in this capacity for at least a decade. This position might have given the Milton family free admission to productions by the King's Men, who performed daily at the Blackfriars throughout the winter months.⁴ Using Berry's find as a point of departure, I shall argue, first, that there is a good possibility that Milton was telling the truth in "Elegia Prima," and that the theater he refers to was the Blackfriars. Second, at least five of the comic figures catalogued in the poem could have been inspired in part by his attendance at a 1626 presentation by the King's Men of Ben Jonson's *The Staple of News*. Third, this experience may have had a significant influence on the composition of Milton's companion poems "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," as well as his tragedy, *Samson Agonistes*.

2

According to Berry, in 1597 James Burbage, owner of the Blackfriars and father of two sons, Cuthbert, the eldest, and Richard, the eminent Shakespearean actor, willed the property to Cuthbert. Richard, however, became the *de facto* owner of the playhouse, and in 1599 he rented the theater to Henry Evans, who managed a company of child actors. At Richard's death in 1619, the Burbage family decided that his heirs, his widow Winifred and their two children William and Sarah, would be given official ownership of the theater and thus receive the rents paid on the playhouse, while

the King's Men would take the play profits. Berry adds, however, that

[b]ecause Winifred and her children could lose control of their property if she should make an unfortunate marriage, that property had to be conveyed to [her and the children] as a trusteeship. In a three-part contract dated July 4, 1620, the [Burbage] family assigned the playhouse to ... four men who would hold them in trust for Winifred and the children. The parties to the contract were Cuthbert in the first part, Winifred and her children in the second, and the four trustees in the third.⁵

The four trustees were listed as follows: Edward Raymond, gentleman; Henry Hodge, ale brewer; Robert Hunt, ale brewer; and John Milton, gentleman. Berry admits that John Milton was a common name in the period; also, the poet's father was a scrivener, not a gentleman. However, Berry points out that writing and managing trusteeships was a staple component of a scrivener's job in this period. He also states that Milton senior had become wealthy as a scrivener; thus, "the Burbages could have preferred to think of him as a gentleman rather than a man who tended a scrivener's shop."⁶ In a 1999 article, Gordon Campbell corroborates Berry's hunch, declaring that "Milton's father is described as a gentleman in a series of Chancery documents drawn up in 1634 and 1645, so the term is not an obstacle to the identification of this John Milton with the poet's father."⁷ Berry's most telling piece of evidence is the fact that Edward Raymond is listed along with John Milton, for the poet's biographers have long known that Milton's father was associated with a man by this name in another context: he lent Raymond 50 pounds on 9 February 1622.⁸

I would add that certain aspects of the Blackfriars Theater might have made it less objectionable to a sound Puritan like Milton senior. According to Andrew Gurr, it was the most reputable of all the playhouses in this period, in part because it alone was within the city walls.⁹ Two other upscale private theaters, the Whitefriars and the Phoenix (also known as the Cockpit), were situated not far outside the city walls, while the open-air amphitheaters, such as the Globe, were built farther off in the suburbs. Also, the Blackfriars had the highest ticket prices of any playhouse—the cheapest

seat there was the same price as the most expensive one at the Globe. Gurr notes that while these high prices did not prevent lower-class "stinkards" from taking in plays at the Blackfriars, they relegated them to the highest tiers in the house. Moreover, the theater was within walking distance of the Milton home in Bread Street. Hence, any member of the prosperous Milton family who wished to see a play (possibly for free) while avoiding unwelcome contact with lower-class spectators probably could have done so more conveniently at the Blackfriars than anywhere else.¹⁰

In light of his father's connection with this playhouse, its reputation for attracting well-to-do audiences, and its proximity to his family's home, it is possible that Milton witnessed the King's Men's presentations of Shakespeare, Fletcher, Jonson, Massinger, and Middleton, among others. He could have continued to do so throughout the 1620s and into the 1630s; indeed, Campbell speculates that his father's trusteeship could have continued until 1647, the year of Milton senior's death.¹¹

"Elegia Prima," I believe, may allude to at least one such visit. The letter's opening twenty-four lines consist of a brief salutation of Diodati and a sketch of Milton's current situation: he is in London, savoring his time away from Cambridge. In order to show how much he is enjoying himself, he segues into a detailed account of his leisure activities:

Tempora nam licet hic placidis dare libera Musis,
 Et totum rapiunt me mea vita libri.
 Excipit hinc fessum sinuosi pompa theatri,
 Et vocat ad plausus garrula scena suos.
 Seu catus auditur senior, seu prodigus haeres,
 Seu procus, aut posita casside miles adest,
 Sive decennali fecundus lite patronus
 Detonat inculto barbara verba foro,
 Saepe vafer gnato succurrit servus amanti,
 Et nasum rigidi fallit ubique patris;
 Saepe novos illic virgo mirata calores
 Quid sit amor nescit, dum quoque nescit, amat.
 Sive cruentatum furiosa Tragoedia sceptrum
 Quassat, et effusis crinibus ora rotat;
 Et dolet, et specto, iuvat et spectasse dolendo;

Interdum et lacrimis dulcis amaror inest:
 Seu puer infelix indelibata reliquit
 Gaudia, et abrupto flendus amore cadit;
 Seu ferus e tenebris iterat Styga criminis ultor,
 Conscia funereo pectora torre movens;
 Seu maeret Pelopeia domus, seu nobilis Ili,
 Aut luit incestos aula Creontis avos.
 Sed neque sub tecto semper nec in urbe latemus,
 Irrita nec nobis tempora veris eunt.
 Nos quoque lucus habet vicina consitus ulmo
 Atque suburbanis nobilis umbra loci.
 Saepius hic blandas spirantia sidera flammis
 Virgineos videas praeterisse choros....

[H]ere I am permitted to devote my spare hours to the gentle Muses, and books (which are my whole life) completely carry me away. *When I am tired, the splendor of the round theatre draws me out*, and the babbling stage invites my applause. Sometimes I listen to a crafty old man, sometimes a spendthrift heir; sometimes a suitor appears, or a soldier with doffed helm. Sometimes a lawyer, grown rich on a ten-year-old case, thunders out his barbarous jargon to an uncouth court. Often a cunning slave comes to the aid of a love-struck son, and cheats the stern father at every turn—right under his nose. There, often a virgin girl, marvelling at the strange fire within her, does not know what love is, and loves without knowing it.

Sometimes raging Tragedy brandishes her bloodstained sceptre, with dishevelled hair and rolling eyes. The sight pains me, but I look, and there is pleasure in the pain. Sometimes there is sweet bitterness even in tears: as when an unfortunate youth leaves joys untasted, and is torn from his love to perish and be mourned; or when a cruel avenger of crime returns from the shades across the Styx, tormenting guilty souls with a deadly torch; or when the house of Pelops or of noble Ilus mourns, or Creon's palace atones for incestuous forebears.

But I am not always confined under a roof, or in the city. Spring-time does not pass me by in vain. I also frequent a dense grove of elms nearby, and a glorious shady spot *just outside the city.*

Here you may often see groups of maidens passing by—stars breathing out seductive flames.... (25–52; my emphases)¹²

These lines list three distinct activities—reading, playgoing, and girl watching—as well as two apparently physical transitions, which I have italicized: the movement from study to theater when Milton tires of his books, and from the theater, located within the city walls, to a grove outside them.¹³ The fact that the playgoing occurs in London proper suggests that the venue is the Blackfriars, for as we saw, it alone stood within the city limits.

Milton's description of the building is "*sinuosi pompa theatri*" (29), a conflation of Ovid's "*curvis ... theatri*" (*Amores* 1.89), and Propertius' "*sinuosa cavo pendebant vela teatro*," his reference to the flowing curtains in the Roman theaters (4.1.15). Most editors are in agreement about "*pompa*," interpreting it as "splendor" or "magnificence." Translations of "*sinuosi*" vary, and include "the rounded theater" (thus Flannagan, Hosley, and Carey and Fowler) and Leonard's similar "the round theater," "the curved theater" (Gurr, Shawcross), "the serpentine theater" (Perkins), "the winding theater" (Campbell), "the intricate theater" (Berry), "the changing theater" (Orgel and Goldberg), and "the arched theater" (Hughes).¹⁴

His emphasis on the curvature or roundedness of the building might seem to indicate that Milton alludes here to one of the open-air amphitheaters rather than the rectangular Blackfriars; and indeed, Flannagan and Hosley have interpreted it as such, though again, the Globe was in Southwark, not London proper. Yet even if Milton refers to some feature of the Blackfriars, it is not clear which one he meant. That theater offered a curtained discovery space at the back of the stage, but the curtain was not large or grand enough to elicit Milton's description, which is fairly general. Another possibility is that he was pointing out the set of ornate, winding stairs that led up to the Blackfriars' entrance. Such an interpretation would accord with those who interpret "*sinuosi*" as "winding" or "serpentine"; yet although the staircase was a well-known feature of the Blackfriars, it was at the opposite (north) end from where the stage was, and thus not integral to the theater's architecture.

I wish to offer a fourth possibility, namely, that Milton was alluding to the curve of the Blackfriars' auditorium. For years, scholarly reproductions of the auditorium depicted it as rectangular, with galleries parallel to its walls. Yet such reproductions have been challenged by both Gurr and John Orrell. In an essay on the Blackfriars' interior, Orrell declares that theater historians G. Topham Forest, Irwin Smith, Richard Hosley, and Michael Shapiro have all made the mistake of assuming that the seats within the Blackfriars' interior followed the external building's rectangular shape. He contends that this theater, as well as similar halls from this period, might well have been equipped with seats placed in a rounded arrangement, or at least a segmented one imitating a round shape. Orrell examines contemporary references to the actual designs of the private theaters, and concludes, correctly, I think, that

[i]t is time ... to make a fundamental reappraisal of the shape and origins ... of the Blackfriars, [and the other two private theaters] the Phoenix, and the Salisbury Court. The evidence ... positively indicates that they were rounded in plan, and not rectilinear.... While the Phoenix galleries and benches were actually made to a semi-circular plan, those at the Blackfriars appear to have been polygonal.¹⁵

The polygon design, he adds, was chosen for "practical reasons of construction" since it provided a cost-effective illusion of curved galleries. Such a design, it seems to me, could account for Milton's representation of the interior as rounded or curved. While we may never know precisely what he meant by "sinuous," the auditorium is our best guess, for it alone would have been large and striking enough to elicit Milton's response.

3

Still, whether he was representing the Blackfriars' auditorium, its staircase, or some other feature in the hall, it is possible that Milton knew of these items simply from his father's descriptions of them or from glancing inside the building during off-hours. One good look at the interior would have furnished his vivid imagination

with enough material to “see” the drama he was reading on the Blackfriars’ boards. Yet I believe the elegy offers evidence that he witnessed a play there. To explore this possibility, we must consider approximately when and how long Milton was home in London.

According to Leonard, Milton’s suspension from Cambridge began at some point during the Lent term of 1626, which lasted from 13 January to 31 March.¹⁶ As we saw, Milton goes to considerable lengths in the elegy to prove to Diodati how much he is enjoying London, and to avoid awkward questions about why he is at home during term. In fact, Milton prefaces his description of his London activities by claiming that

[a]t present I do not care to revisit the reedy Cam; I do not yearn for my rooms, recently forbidden to me.... Nor is it pleasing constantly to have to put up with the threats of a stern tutor, and other things besides that my spirit cannot bear.... (15–16)

He probably would not speak in this way if school were out of session. Thus, Milton must have read, girl-watched, and attended the theater during term time, that is, somewhere between mid-January and late March. He eventually returned to Cambridge for the Easter term, which in 1626 began on April 19, so the rustication seems to have lasted for at least several weeks, and probably longer. It seems likely that he would have found the Blackfriars a welcome diversion during this unexpected holiday; indeed, it would be peculiar for him not to attend a theater, especially one so near his home.

What was playing at the Blackfriars in Lent 1626, which in that year started on Ash Wednesday, 21 February? Harbage and Schoenbaum indicate that Jonson’s *The Staple of News* began running in February, and Herford and Simpson declare that *Staple* was shown in 1626 “during Lent,” citing internal evidence that indicates that Jonson deliberately sets the play’s action in that season in contemporary London.¹⁷ For instance, at one point, while *Mirth* discusses the play with *Expectation*, *Tattle*, and *Censure*, the other three choric members, *Censure* tells her companions, who have been critical of the drama thus far, that perhaps it will still “prove right, seasonable, salt butter,” and *Mirth* corrects her by

saying "Or to the time of year, in Lent, delicate almond butter" (2 Int. 64–65). Also, at 3.2.84, Dutch eel boats are described as being tied up at Queenhithe, a quay on the bank of the Thames where such boats traditionally moored during Lent.¹⁸

It is possible, of course, that Jonson was being optimistic, hoping for a long run extending throughout the forty days of Lent, that is, from 21 February to 2 April, but which in fact never materialized. And indeed, Anthony Parr, editor of the definitive New Cambridge edition of *Staple*, notes that only two performances of the comedy are certain—a Blackfriars staging at some point in February 1626, and a court production on 19 February 1626.¹⁹ Moreover, Parr recognizes that Jonson's note "To the Readers" in the published version could imply that the play was not successful, for in it Jonson complains that a "sinister" interpretation has been foisted on the work. Parr contends, however,

[t]here may have been further performances during [the 1626] season, for ... the play was a topical one, and registered sufficiently in certain circles to give currency to the "sinister" interpretation of its meaning which Jonson tried to quell in "To the Readers."²⁰

Moreover, Richard Levin has pointed out that "even if *Staple* was unsuccessful, it would still have had a number of performances.... There were no opening night (afternoon) closings in the Jacobean theater." Perhaps most telling is the fact that *Staple* was regarded highly enough to be imitated by at least four other plays—Thomas Randolph's *The Drinking Academy*, William Davenant's *News from Plymouth*, William Cartwright's *The Ordinary*, and John Fletcher's *Rollo, Duke of Normandy*. Moreover, *The Drinking Academy* was composed in the 1620s, well before *Staple* was first published (in 1631), suggesting that Randolph saw a performance of it.²¹

It is plausible, then, that the comedy was shown numerous times throughout Spring 1626, from late February until early April, when its Lenten allusions would still feel current. Milton may have been motivated to see the play in part because he already knew Jonson's work, having first encountered his poetry at St. Paul's School, where he studied *Logonomia Anglica*, an English grammar written by the headmaster Alexander Gill, Sr. The textbook drilled students in translating English to Latin by using examples from

Jonson, Samuel Daniel, Thomas Campion, and others. Moreover, in his 1623 masque *Time Vindicated to Himself and to His Honours*, Jonson satirized the dread felt by students at St. Paul's when confronted with the formidable *Logonomia*. Like the masque, *Staple* is a highly topical satire (it skewers the fledgling news industry); if Milton received any advance notice of its plot, he might have felt compelled to go, perhaps in hopes of hearing his own school roasted on the public stage.

Staple offers a cast of some thirty characters, five of whom may have inspired Milton as he penned the elegy. The protagonist, Pennyboy Junior, and his father, Pennyboy Canter, correspond to the first two personages mentioned in the verse-letter, namely, the "catus senior" and the "prodigus haeres" (29), usually translated, respectively, as "the crafty (or cunning) old man" and "the spendthrift heir." "Crafty old man" is an apt description of Pennyboy Canter. He is often referred to as an old man by the other characters (see, for example, 5.1.101), and before the play starts he fakes his own death, then disguises himself as a beggar to inform his son that he is now come into his inheritance. This disguise enables him to accompany his son to see how he mishandles his fortune, and to reveal himself (in act 4) to mete out judgment on the wastrel. Canter's shrewdness is evidenced throughout the play's first three acts, for no character suspects the truth about him until he unveils his identity.

Pennyboy Junior is described on the drama's original title-page as "the son, the heir, and suitor," and the play's action takes place on his twenty-first birthday when he begins squandering a fortune of £60,000. Hence, he certainly qualifies as a spendthrift heir. He also is a suitor—one of the key episodes in the play is his wooing of the princess Pecunia—so he could be the source of both the "prodigus haeres" and the third figure noted in the elegy, to wit, the "proculus" (30).

Milton delineates the fourth character with the following phrase: *posita casside miles adest*. Most editors translate this literally to suggest that this person is a soldier with a "doffed helmet," or a "helmet set aside," yet the phrase may also be interpreted figuratively, as "one who has set aside, or foregone, warfare itself." Turning to *Staple*, we find a (supposed) military officer named Captain Shunfield, who in fact is one in a group of parasites who

try to gull Pennyboy Junior. Shunfield's name could have elicited Milton's description of one who sets aside, or shuns, the battlefield. His characterization, I would add, accords with his name, for while he is insulted by others throughout the play, he never avenges himself. It is feasible, then, that Milton alludes to this pretender.

Picklock, the comedy's attorney, could have inspired the fifth personage sketched in the elegy, namely, the "lawyer grown rich on a ten-year-old case, [who] thunders out his barbarous jargon to an uncouth court." While there is no suggestion in the play that Picklock has prospered from a decade-long suit, he is a master at spouting legalese. For example, in 4.4, when Pennyboy Junior wonders if Picklock has the ability to "cant," that is, to utilize the language of his profession, the lawyer replies that in fact he can,

In all the languages in Westminster Hall,
Pleas, Bench, or Chancery; fee-farm, fee-tail,
Tenant in dower, at will, for term of life,
By copy of court roll, knights' service, homage,
Fealty, escuage, soccage, or frank almoigne,
Grand sergeanty, or burgage.

(103-8)

Picklock's on-stage audience, which consists of Pennyboy Junior, Captain Shunfield, and three of Shunfield's cronies (Fitton, Almanac, and Madrigal), corresponds to the "uncouth" or "unlearned" court mentioned in the elegy in two ways: All but Pennyboy are parasites, seeking to fleece the young man, and all are ignorant not only of Picklock's jargon, but also of the professions they supposedly represent. (In fact, all are former prodigals.) Furthermore, Picklock's style of delivery throughout the play leads Pennyboy Canter to characterize him as a "stentor" (5.6.49), a phrase that could have suggested to Milton the image of a lawyer "thundering out" his argot.²²

Princess Pecunia is both the comedy's leading lady and a personification of money. When Pennyboy Junior first meets her and tells her how much he has longed to see her, she replies:

And I have my desire, sir, to behold
That youth and shape which in my dreams and wakes

I have so oft contemplated and felt
Warm in my veins and native as my blood.
 When I was told of your arrival here,
 I felt my heart beat as it would leap out
 In speech, and all my face it was a flame,
But how it came to pass I do not know.

(2.5.50–57; my emphases)

Line 53 could have suggested to Milton a girl marveling at “strange fire” within her, and line 57, the image of a maiden loving even though she does not know what love is.

The other figures listed among the comic types are a slave who helps a lovelorn son cheat his father. No such persons appear in *Staple*. They could have been inspired by another comedy staged by the King’s Men at the Blackfriars, though no extant play staged there during the first half of the 1620s offers such personages.²³ They could also be based on a New Comedy such as Terence’s *The Self-Tormentor*, for many of Jonson’s comic figures were inspired by Roman drama. Indeed, it is possible that seeing *Staple* on stage reminded Milton of such characters from his reading.

As noted at the outset, the tragic figures catalogued in the elegy seem to come entirely from Milton’s reading of Greek tragedy, with one possible exception, namely, John Ford’s *The Broken Heart*, which was mounted at the Blackfriars at some point between 1625 and 1633.²⁴ It seems significant that he prefaces his descriptions of the comedies with details that sound like he is in an actual theater: there, the “babbling stage invites [his] applause,” and on it a suitor “appears”; moreover, he “listens to a crafty old man,” and the lawyer “thunders out his barbarous jargon” (28–29; 32). By contrast, while the personification of Tragedy signals a visual transition to his description of tragic plots in lines 37–46, none of these representations is enhanced by sound or sight effects, reinforcing the basic impression that Milton saw comedy on stage, while poring over tragedy alone in his study.

4

While we cannot prove that Milton saw *Staple*, the possibility that he did so is strengthened by passages in his other works. For instance, the companion poems "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," composed sometime in the 1630s, parallel "Elegia Prima" in striking ways. In "L'Allegro" the happy man claims that he goes "to the well-trod stage anon, / If Jonson's learned sock be on" (131–32). He refers here to the dramatist's comedies, of course, and the remark may be based in part on Milton's seeing *Staple*, which would certainly qualify as a learned example of that genre. In like manner, "Il Penseroso" seems indebted to the elegy, for its description of the melancholy man reading tragedy in his study corresponds to the verse-letter's account. In both poems, Tragedy is personified as one who introduces to the reader dramas based on subjects such as Thebes, Pelops, and Troy (97–100), as well as the rare contemporary play that ennobles the stage.

It also seems telling that the happy man attends comedies while his melancholy counterpart reads tragedy. Such a division of labor may be purely coincidental, yet it could well have been based on the two modes of consumption set forth in the elegy.

One of the best-known scenes in Milton's later opera, namely, the entrance of Dalila in *Samson Agonistes* (1671), might owe something to Lady Pecunia's arrival in 2.5 of *Staple*, for both women are compared to lavishly-outfitted ships, both are dressed to the nines, and both are seconded by a retinue. Several scholars of Milton's tragedy have adduced *Staple* in relation to this scene, though for different reasons than the ones I have suggested. In a 1950 article, Pete Ure suggested that Pecunia's entrance could have provided a print inspiration for Milton, who might have read *Staple* in Jonson's Second Folio (1640). Merritt Hughes adduced Ure's note in his own edition of the poet's works, though he did so to emphasize that the ship/woman parallel is part of a long satirical tradition. John Leonard's 1998 edition of Milton cites Hughes's note to make the same point.²⁵ What has yet to be considered is how Milton's experience of seeing Lady Pecunia in performance might have influenced his representation of Dalila's approach.

To explore this possibility it is necessary to quote her entrance as it is described by the Danite Chorus to the blind Samson:

But who is this, what thing of sea or land?
 Female of sex it seems,
 That so bedecked, ornate, and gay,
 Comes this way sailing
 Like a stately ship
 Of Tarsus, bound for th'isles
 Of Javan or Gadier
 With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,
 Sails filled, and streamers waving,
 Courted by all the winds that hold them play,
 An amber scent of odorous perfume
 Her harbinger, a damsel train behind;
 Some rich Philistian matron she may seem,
 And now at nearer view, no other certain
 Than Dalila thy wife.

(710–24)

G. M. Young suggests that certain images here are probably based on John Harrington's 1659 pamphlet, "A Word Concerning the House of Peers," a work that Milton refutes in his own tract written the same year, "The Ready and Easy Way." Harrington personifies the commonwealth entering "with all its tackling, full sail, displaying its streamers, and flourishing with top and top-gallant," lines which seem paralleled by the Chorus' remarks, "With all her bravery on, and tackle trim, / Sails filled, and streamers waving...."²⁶

Yet Harrington does not assign gender to this approaching ship, nor does he explicitly associate it with wealth. Such details could have been provided by Jonson's play. In 2.5 of *Staple*, Pennyboy Junior visits Pennyboy Senior, Pecunia's keeper, and asks to have a look at the lady, who is hiding in the study with her attendants. While the two men wait for her to get ready, Pennyboy Junior remarks, "Your fortunate princess, uncle, is long a-coming" (41), to which Pennyboy Senior replies,

She is not rigg'd, sir. Setting forth some lady
 Will cost as much as furnishing a fleet.
 Here she's come at last, and like a galley
 Gilt i' the prow.

(42–45)

It is not clear how this scene was staged. In the 1640 Folio, a margin note says, "The study is open'd where she sits in state." According to this scenario, the discovery space would have been uncurtained, revealing Pecunia with her entourage. However, the 1640 Folio is regarded by most editors as an inferior version of the 1616 First Folio. Among its drawbacks are the numerous and often obtrusive margin notes, many of which simply restate the action or the dialogue. Scholars are not sure if these annotations are Jonson's, for as Devra Kifer points out, while his "usual practice was to place a few explanatory notes and stage directions in the margins of his plays ... *The Staple of News* [has] a great number of side notes." William Gifford deleted this marginalia in his 1816 edition of Jonson's works, not regarding it as authoritative, and the Third Folio (1692) omitted this particular direction, replacing it with the following: "Enter Pecunia in state, attended by Broker, Statute, Band, Wax, and Mortgage."²⁷

This revision, it seems to me, reflects what actually happened in performance, for it makes better sense of the characters' speeches and actions. For instance, when Pennyboy Senior remarks, "Here she's come at last," he implies that Pecunia and her train actually walk in from the direction of the study. Also, upon her arrival Pennyboy Senior tells her to give the young man her hand. She refuses the command and instead kisses the prodigal, who then returns the favor to her ladies-in-waiting. These actions constitute a piece of stage business that would be much easier if all the actors were already up and about instead of seated. Perhaps most importantly, if Pecunia did indeed come in from the study, with a slow, stately gait, followed by her train, the effect would have been reminiscent of an approaching ship. If she were seated, however, such an image would seem incongruous.

Assuming that the princess did enter from the study, such an effect would have been quite vivid in performance and could have made a lasting impression on the Blackfriars' spectators, particularly on a young man such as Milton. While she appears on stage earlier in the play, 2.5 is the first time the off-stage audience sees Pecunia fully dressed up. In light of Pennyboy Senior's remark that "setting forth" the lady costs as much as "furnishing a fleet," it seems probable that the actor playing her was lavishly cos-

tumed, with her followers perhaps even carrying the princess' train.

Such an image could have influenced Milton, consciously or not, while he composed his tragedy, for as mentioned earlier, Dalila also enters from afar, dressed "with all her bravery on," walking slowly and proudly, and seconded by damsels. It seems significant that her arrival constitutes the single theatrical moment in a play that is otherwise psychological and interior. That theatricality may testify to the scene's origins in an actual stage production.

Scholars have traced Jonsonian elements in Milton's early poetry, especially in his 1630 tribute to Shakespeare, which is modeled on Jonson's offering in the 1623 First Folio, and in "L'Allegro," which, in addition to mentioning the dramatist, employs the same meter (tetrameter couplets) and imagery utilized in his *Haddington Masque* (1608). The general consensus among critics is that Jonson's influence on Milton declined after the 1630s, yet if Milton recounted Pecunia's arrival while composing *Samson Agonistes*, or at least was subconsciously influenced by that scene from Jonson's play, then it would appear that the older writer's impact on him was more lasting than was previously thought.

Marshall University

NOTES

1. For accounts of the episode, see William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 1:29–31, and Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 19.

2. For representative statements of the first group, see Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London, 1576–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 199; Richard Hosley, "Elizabethan Theatres and Audiences," *Renaissance Drama Supplement* 10 (1967): 14; Gordon Campbell, "Shakespeare and the Youth of Milton," *Milton Quarterly* 33 (Dec. 1999): 95–105; Mary Ann Radzinowicz, *Toward Samson Agonistes: The Growth of Milton's Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 12; Roy Flanagan, *The Riverside Milton* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998), 179; Harris Fletcher, *The Intellectual Development of John Milton*, 2 vols. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), 1:431; and Walter MacKellar, *The Latin Poems of John Milton* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 16, 194.

Radzinowicz declares that Milton "saw some tragedies directly through the 'pageantry of the rounded stage,'" though she concedes that "he probably read more than he saw." Flannagan attempts to account for the mixture of classical and contemporary allusions by suggesting that the dramas alluded to were "seen or read at Cambridge, not watched in London," while surmising that the "rounded stage" might constitute a reference to the Globe. MacKellar believes that Milton was thinking of dramas he had witnessed, but was, in effect, allegorizing the references to fit the elegy's classical decorum: "Since Milton clearly means plays seen on stage, and not what he read at home, as in 'Il Penseroso' 99-102 [where the protagonist studies tragedy, alone, late at night], the Terentian attributes are used to signify English plays." He does not, however, specify which plays might be referred to, nor does he account for the fact that Milton does not allegorize anything else in this fashion in the letter; for instance, he calls London, Chester, and the Thames by their own names, albeit in Latinized format.

Opposing views are presented by Douglas Bush, who remarks that "it seems likely that [Milton] is describing plays he has read rather than plays seen in London theatres, though he writes as if he been an actual witness" (*A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton, Volume I* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1970], 50), and John Leonard, who observes that "[a]lthough Milton speaks as a spectator, the details [recounted here] recall Greek and Roman, rather than English, drama" (*John Milton: The Complete Works* [London: Penguin, 1998], 943, note 27).

In like manner, Parker observes that while "[d]rama receives considerable emphasis in the 'Elegia Prima' ... Milton seems not to distinguish between the 'well-trod stage' and the well-thumbed page" (31). See also Jonathan Goldberg and Stephen Orgel, eds., *John Milton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 789; John Shawcross, ed., *The Complete English Poetry of John Milton, Arranged in Chronological Order with an Introduction, Notes, Variants, and Literal Translations of the Foreign Language Poems* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 6-7; and T. H. Howard-Hill, "Milton and the 'Rounded Theatre's Pomp,'" in *Of Poetry and Politics: New Essays on Milton and His World*, ed. P. G. Stanwood (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995), 120.

3. In his revision of Alfred Harbage's *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700: An Analytical Record of All Plays, Extant or Lost, Chronologically Arranged and Indexed by Authors, Titles, Dramatic Companies, &c.*, Samuel Schoenbaum notes that Aeschylus was not staged in England until 1663. Performances of Euripides were given in 1543, 1550, 1558, 1579, and 1602, while Sophocles was mounted in 1543, 1564, 1581, and 1649 (293). It is possible that Milton witnessed Latin comedies at Queen's and/or Trinity College; his own college, Christ's, discontinued these performances in 1568. See Alan

H. Nelson, ed., *Records of Early English Drama: Cambridge*, 2 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), 2:713.

4. See Herbert Berry, "The Miltons and the Blackfriars Playhouse," *Modern Philology* 89 (May 1992): 510–14.

5. *Ibid.*, 511.

6. *Ibid.*, 512.

7. Campbell, 103.

8. Berry, 513.

9. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespearean Stage: 1574–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 85.

10. *Ibid.*, 88.

11. Campbell, 103.

12. Unless otherwise noted, references to Milton's poetry are from *Milton: The Complete Poems*, ed. John Leonard (London: Penguin, 1998).

13. William Cowper translates the lines as follows: "... here my books—my life—absorb me whole. / *Here too* I visit, or to smile or weep / The winding theater's majestic sweep" (*Milton's Earlier Poems* [London: Cassell, 1899], 29; my emphasis). Shawcross believes that Milton does not refer to physical attendance at a theater, pointing out that the opening phrase of line 27, "*Excipit hinc fessum*," need not indicate a literal transition. His translation reads as follows: "For I am permitted to dedicate my free time to the gentle muses, and books—my life—transport me entirely away. Here the display of the curved theater captivates me, when wearied ..." (6–7). The majority of translators, however, interpret "*hinc*" (an adverb meaning "from this," or "hence") as implying an actual move from study to playhouse.

14. For references see Flannagan, 179; Hosley, 14; John Carey and Alastair Fowler, eds., *The Poems of John Milton* (London: Longmans, 1968), 789; Leonard, ed., 515; Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, 199; Shawcross, ed., 6–7; Campbell, 103; Berry, 510; Orgel and Goldberg, eds., 89; and Merritt Y. Hughes, ed., *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 9. Caroline Perkins gave me her translation in an e-mail message of 16 January 2002.

15. John Orrell, "The Private Theatre Auditorium," *Theatre Research International* 9.2 (1984): 79–93. I am indebted to Andrew Gurr for bringing Orrell's article to my attention.

16. Leonard, ed., 943.

17. Schoenbaum, *Annals of English Drama*, 122; C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, eds., "Stage History of the Plays" in *Ben Jonson*, 11 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925–52), 9:251.

18. All references to the play are taken from volume 6 of Herford and Simpson's edition.

19. Anthony Parr, ed., *The Staple of News* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 49.

20. *Ibid.*, 49–50.

21. Levin's remarks were made in an e-mail message to me on 11 March 2002.

22. In his 1791 edition of Milton's poetry, Thomas Warton initiated what became a long-standing editorial tradition of adducing the lawyer in George Ruggle's neo-Latin play *Ignoramus* as the source for the one delineated in "Elegia Prima." Staged in 1615 at Cambridge for King James, *Ignoramus* was first published in 1630 and, as Douglas Bush points out, remained popular in print. Bush also observes, however, that "even if Milton had a manuscript copy, his description does not fit Ruggle's burlesque lawyer, who spouts shreds of legal Latin but does so in his private role of pedantic lover and butt" (51). No classical comedy offers a lawyer who becomes rich on a ten-year case.

23. Tragedies that were staged by the King's Men, possibly at Blackfriars, from the period 1620–1626 include John Fletcher and Philip Massinger's *The Double Marriage* (1620); Massinger's *The Duke of Milan* (1621); Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (1621); *Osmond, the Great Turk* (1622), whose author is unknown, and whose text is no longer extant; and Massinger's *The Roman Actor* (1626). Two other tragedies, now lost, that may have been performed by the King's Men in 1623 include *The Fatal Brothers* and *The Politic Queen, or Murder Will Out*, both by Robert Davenport. See Harbage and Schoenbaum, *Annals of English Drama*, 110–22.

24. Milton's depiction of "an unfortunate youth [who] leaves joys untasted, and is torn from his love to perish and be mourned" could correspond to Orgilus in *The Broken Heart*. His lady-love Penthea is taken from him and given to another. After Orgilus murders her husband (Bassanes), he bleeds himself to death on stage, an action that elicits grief from the on-stage witnesses.

25. Ure's note appeared in *Notes and Queries* 195 (1950): 298. For Hughes's reference, see his *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, 568, note 714. Leonard's note appears in his *Complete Poems*, 930.

26. Young's observation was first printed in *The Times Literary Supplement* (9 February 1937): 31.

27. See Kifer's edition of *Staple* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), xxiii. For notes on Gifford's 1816 edition, see Herford and Simpson, 6:320.