Milton in Popular Culture

Edited by Laura Lunger Knoppers and Gregory M. Colón Semenza

Afterword by Stanley Fish
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A Note on the Text

Introduction

Laura Lunger Knoppers and Gregory M. Colón Semenza

As a slightly bewildered Harry Block descends to hell in a slow-moving corporate elevator (see figure I.1) in Woody Allen’s 1998 Deconstructing Harry, an official voice-over explains the layout of the underworld’s nine floors: “Floor six: right-wing extremists, serial killers, lawyers who appear on television. Floor seven: the media. Sorry, that floor is all filled up. Floor eight: escaped war criminals, t.v. evangelists, and the NRA.” The audience is hardly surprised in this film about a neurotic and self-absorbed writer driven largely by his libido when, as Harry (Allen) steps out of the elevator, the camera pans over a surrealistic space characterized not by torture and suffering but by lascivious postures, full frontal nudity, and the playing out of puerile male fantasies. Less predictable is the Miltonic moment that follows. While sharing a tequila toast with Satan (Billy Crystal), Harry suggests that the presence in hell of such amenities as air conditioning, wet bars, and beautiful, sexually available women transforms the fiery underworld into an appealing place: “Better to rule down here than serve in heaven, right? That’s Milton, I think” (see figure I.2). The Miltonic (mis)quote might seem a throwaway line made in passing; but it is central to the point of Allen’s film and useful as a key to understanding Milton’s persistent but largely unrecognized place in popular culture.

Deconstructing Harry appropriates the Mil tonic Satan to authorize its fantasy of an amoral universe of the self. Harry is a famous novelist and short-story writer who happens to be suffering from writer’s block when the film begins. Beleaguered (like Allen himself) by a number of personal scandals, he constructs fictional characters that are thinly veiled caricatures of people in his real life. When his girlfriend, Faye (Elizabeth Shue), falls in love with an old friend, Larry (Crystal), Harry writes a story recasting his friend as a Satanic figure who—in a reworking of the Hades-Persephone myth—kidnaps Faye and takes her to hell. When Harry sets out, Orpheus-like, to find her, he stumbles into Satan / Larry, whose wickedness he claims to outdo and with whom he engages in school-boy bragging about sexual conquests.
Figure I.1  Harry Block (Woody Allen) on the elevator to hell

Figure I.2  Harry discusses Milton with the Devil
When Harry claims that it’s better to rule “down here” than to serve in heaven, his misquote serves to remind the audience that he does not actually believe in either realm. Harry is both a self-proclaimed atheist and a Jew (moments earlier he meets his father, who reminds him that “Jews don’t believe in heaven”). Harry’s hell is clearly a fictional invention, a representation of his own fears and fantasies, a space where right-wing zealots can be punished eternally and where Harry can forever indulge his sexual appetite. Since “heaven” can only be understood as a word for “life”—that is, as the only “up there” of Harry’s cosmos—the hell space must be understood as a figure for Harry’s mind or imagination, which serves as his refuge or safe-haven throughout the film. Ironically, Harry’s reconfiguration of the Miltonic universe subtly invokes another of Milton’s most famous lines: “The mind is its own place, and in it self / Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (PL 1.254–55).

In the course of deconstructing Harry’s/Allen’s inner demons, the film asks whether it is nobler to suffer the rigid moral constraints of the world or to escape into one’s amoral, hedonistic imagination. When Harry is visited by a recently deceased friend who tries to convince him that life is better than death, he admits, “I write well, but that’s a different story because I can manipulate the characters and plots...But I can’t function in the world we have...I’m a failure at life.” His friend encourages him to “make peace with your demons,” stressing that doing so will put an end to the writer’s block. Harry finally confronts those demons in one of the film’s closing scenes; in a dream sequence constructed as a playful homage to Fellini’s 8½, Harry is honored by the characters it has taken him a lifetime to create, who together suggest that the fecundity of the author’s imagination overshadows the self-indulgent and destructive life he has led.

_Deconstructing Harry_ is, for Woody Allen, a dark and even raunchy film, filled with profanity and seemingly uninterested in making its central character likeable. Harry has sex with his sister-in-law at a family barbecue, dumps the sister-in-law for a much younger woman whom he meets on an elevator and immediately beds, and arranges a sado-masochistic tryst with a prostitute; he offends his devout Jewish brother-in-law with his strident atheism and expresses his resentment against his father by depicting a Bar Mitzvah with a Star Wars theme and a revelation of a “dark secret” of murder and cannibalism. Obtrusive jump cuts, flashbacks, and fictional / dream sequences interspersed with “real time” events indicate the chaotic state of Harry’s world and mind. Harry is in the beginning an egocentric and insensitive man, and he is the same at the end. But by learning how to live with the fact, he is able to overcome his writer’s block. As the film concludes, Harry is imagining a new story line about a dysfunctional author who lives through his fiction, and he echoes the earlier words of his own psychotherapist: “his writing had saved his life.”
Does the film, then, let Harry/Allen completely off the moral hook? Returning to the Milton line, seemingly made in passing, can in fact provide a thread of clarification or even critique. Harry’s uncertainty about the source of his preference for reigning in hell / the world of the imagination—“That’s Milton, I think”—is crucial because it suggests how little he knows about the context from which the lines are taken. Specifically, the qualification reminds us that Harry is only partly correct in his attribution, for actually he is quoting Milton’s Satan, not Milton himself. The appropriation works simultaneously, then, to sanction Harry’s rebellious lifestyle by invoking the authority of Milton and to undermine it by suggesting that Harry is misquoting and potentially misreading Milton. In other words, Harry’s particular (mis)reading of Milton is deconstructed by the qualification, “I think,” which allows the audience, in turn, to deconstruct Harry—especially his repeated attempts to use literature, whether of his making or someone else’s, in order to justify the ways of Harry to men.

Woody Allen is by no means the only modern artist to appropriate what has become the most famous line in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. “Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav’n” (*PL* 1.264) appears in a range of texts and media from science fiction to film to heavy metal music. Rock metalist Marilyn Manson cites the lines in his “Better to Reign in Hell” lyrics: “I shall bow no more to the dogs of the lord / Tearing at my carcass heart / . . . Freewill made me better to reign in hell.”

Lucifer in Neil Gaiman’s graphic novel *The Sandman* cites the line only to disavow it: “We didn’t say it. Milton said it. And he was blind.” Steven Brust borrows the line for his 1984 fantasy novel about a series of misunderstandings that lead up to a radically different war in heaven. In the original *Star Trek* television series, Captain Kirk asks a defeated Khan at the end of the episode “Space Seed” whether he prefers to face justice on earth or new exile on an abandoned planet. “Have you ever read Milton, Captain?” Khan questions in return. Even such an oblique allusion is sufficient: Kirk answers, “Yes, I understand.”

What is Milton’s famous line doing in *Star Trek*, comic books, science fiction, and rock music, not to mention Woody Allen’s hell? Why evoke Milton’s Satan? Do the directors, authors, artists, and musicians expect the audience to “get” the Milton quotation? To be familiar with *Paradise Lost*? How and why is the “cultural capital” of Milton evoked? Why quote Milton, instead of Shakespeare or Charles Dickens or Jane Austen? Do “low-brow” texts allude to Milton to demonstrate their own “high-brow” knowledge? With what effect? Is “Milton” an authority to be imitated or challenged, endorsed or refuted, perhaps by using his own materials?

Addressing these and other questions, this volume argues that Milton has an important but overlooked place in popular culture and that this “pop” Milton, in turn, has a place in scholarship and the classroom. *Milton*
in Popular Culture brings together both younger and more senior scholars—specialists in the Renaissance and in popular culture/film—to explore how Milton, canonical writer par excellence, continues to thrive in today's media. Ranging from science fiction (C.S. Lewis, Philip Pullman, Steven Brust), to visual texts (Margaret Hodges, Simon Biggs), to horror films (Something Wicked This Way Comes, Bride of Frankenstein, The Devil's Advocate), to comedic films (The Lady Eve, Sabrina, Animal House), to social activism (Milton Society for the Blind, Malcolm X), to Milton on the web and, most recently, in the news, these rich and varied essays show how Milton plays a crucial role in popular culture and, in turn, how popular culture adapts and transforms Milton.

In addressing the topic of Milton and popular culture, this volume follows the lead of some dozen books on the subject of Shakespeare and film, television, popular music, and the media. Yet in sharp contrast to Shakespeare studies, Miltonists have all but ignored the rich plethora of popular cultural renditions of Paradise Lost, Comus, and other texts. Why this divergence, then, between scholarship on Shakespeare and on Milton? Why have popular appropriations of Milton been so neglected? One factor might be genre and original audience. Unlike Shakespeare—whose plays were performed in the public theaters of Southwark and constituted the equivalent of Renaissance popular entertainment—Milton's complex prose and poetry were geared toward a fit audience, though few. Milton's high epic style and content seem to require an impossibly broad knowledge of the Bible and classical texts. Further, whereas Shakespeare was lauded within ten years of his death as a poet for all time, Milton's extensive prose writings, which explicitly spell out his positions on religious, political, and gender issues, locate him precisely in mid-seventeenth-century conflicts. As a result, Milton becomes seemingly more difficult to dislodge and appropriate for contemporary and popular concerns.

At the same time, factors in contemporary academe seem to drive a wedge between Milton and popular culture. Unlike Shakespeare, whose “negative capability” often seemed to transcend the culture wars, Milton became a lightning rod in the canon debates that rocked and, in some cases, divided English departments in the 1980s and 1990s. For some, safeguarding Milton against the encroachments of cultural studies and theory was tantamount to defending the canon and Western tradition itself. Harold Bloom, for example, began his defense of Milton's place in The Western Canon (1994) with a telling, defiant sentence: “Milton’s place in the canon is permanent, even though he appears to be the major poet at present most deeply resented by feminist literary critics.” Bloom proceeds to reconstruct Milton as the greatest post-Shakespearean creator of character in the entire canon. For some of Bloom's opponents, however, Milton seemed like the
most logical target in an ideological campaign to stamp out distinctions between so-called highbrow and lowbrow art forms. The long-standing myth of “Milton’s bogey” ensured that, for many, Milton seemed to represent everything that theory and cultural studies opposed.8

Our argument is that far from threatening the Miltonic legacy, popular forms give new currency to Milton, making his works a vital, living part of contemporary culture. Detached from their original contexts, Milton texts take on new life and vitality in the images of digital art, the cinematic language of film, the otherworldly setting and cosmic struggles of science fiction, and the politicized media. Such reproductions in mass media, as Walter Benjamin writes, shift the meaning of the work from production to consumption, from a unique existence to a plurality of copies.9 While Milton's texts are detached from their initial authority, or as Benjamin terms it, “aura,” they are open to a plurality of reinterpretations, freed to be used in multiple contexts.

The model of reading Milton in popular culture must necessarily move away from prioritizing authorial intention and original meaning to a more fluid model of production and consumption, in which new meanings are generated in new texts (whether visual, cinematic, digital, or print) and contexts. Our use of the term “popular culture” indicates that our subject will have more breadth than the strictly literary or artistic, although we are suggesting that, as “culture,” popular fiction, digitized images, and music are worthy of aesthetic exploration. While the reproductions of mass media have for some thinkers negative connotations of inferiority, institutional desire for profit, or passive mass consumerism,10 implicit in our use of “culture,” and explicit in the essays in this volume, is the agency of the consumer: the producer of a new and changing “Milton.”

What kind of Milton appears in popular culture? And how is this Milton related to the classical, Christian, republican, epic, and tragic Miltons of previous scholarship? As perhaps is suggested by the blackly comic reversals of the Woody Allen film with which we began, one important lens for Milton in popular culture is that of the Romantics, and in particular, William Blake. That Blake and Percy Shelley have had a long-standing, if varied, impact on Milton scholarship in academe is well known.11 But much less familiar are the ways in which Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley, and especially William Blake powerfully mediate reproductions of Milton in popular culture. In film, comic books, television, science fiction, and the texts of social activism, Blakean reversals, in particular, enable a rewriting of Milton for an increasingly diverse and multicultural world.

As Milton scholars have made clear, the debt of the Romantics to Milton is deep and multiple, as is the nature of their engagement.12 Harold Bloom has influentially posited an antagonistic, oedipal struggle with Milton as
archetypal authority, while other Romantic scholars—as well as some Miltonists—have argued for a more creative and positive engagement. In the wake of the French Revolution, Romantic writers were drawn to Milton’s republicanism and the “sublimity” of his writing as a preeminent national poet, as well as to his role as poet-prophet. Best known is the Romantics’ radical and sympathetic reading of Satan, although neither William Blake nor Percy Shelley unequivocally set out Satan as a hero.

For Shelley, Milton as a true poet both inhabited and confuted the philosophical doctrines of his day; hence Shelley writes in *A Defence of Poetry* that “Milton’s poem contains within itself a philosophical refutation of that system, of which, by a strange and natural antithesis, it has been a chief popular support.” Shelley goes on simultaneously to praise Satan and critique Milton’s God, observing that “Nothing can exceed the energy and magnificence of the character of Satan as expressed in ‘Paradise Lost.’ It is a mistake to suppose that he could ever have been intended for the popular personification of evil.” But in his “Preface” to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley notes the “ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement” that marred Satan in *Paradise Lost* and undercut his claims to heroism.

Similarly, Blake’s early depiction in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* of an energetic and rebellious Satan is complicated in his later works. In his dense prophecy *Milton*, Blake’s Satan is a more negative figure, part of himself that Milton learns to reject. Blake imagines the poet returning from heaven into Eternity, awakened by the bard’s song to recognize his previous error and selfhood (“I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!”). Milton undertakes a journey of purgation (“I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration”), not only to restore and reunite with his female emanation Ololon (his three wives and three daughters, the female characters of his verse), but to inspire Blake as a new poet-prophet, entering into his left foot. Similarly, Blake’s watercolor illustrations to *Comus, Paradise Lost*, and *Paradise Regained* enact a complex engagement with and correction of Miltonic errors to uncover the inspired meaning. But such an engagement does not entail a heroic Satan. Rather, Satan’s postures and expressions reveal the narcissism that he in turn evokes in Eve, transforming the original unity between Adam and Eve into disintegration and disunion; in Blake’s illustrations to *Paradise Lost* and especially *Paradise Regained*, Christ (rather than Satan) becomes the true hero, undergoing the self-sacrifice that for Blake marked the “human lineaments divine.”

Yet to the extent that Milton is bequeathed to popular culture through a Romantic lens, that lens is largely an appropriation of Blakean reversals, such as those in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Here Satan is a figure of
energy who opposes all repression—sexual, religious, political, and philosophical. Blake provides a “devilish” reading of *Paradise Lost* as a history of the restraint of desire:

> Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling. And being restrained it by degrees becomes passive till it is only the shadow of desire. The history of this is written in Paradise Lost. & the Governor or Reason is call’d Messiah.\(^{23}\)

According to this reading, Milton was imprisoned by the narrow dogma of his time and needed liberation through a “Satanic” reading. This “devilish” history of *Paradise Lost* is hence followed by Blake’s most widely quoted line on Milton:

> Note. The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it.\(^{24}\)

The charge that Milton was unconsciously of the devil’s party has resonated in Milton scholarship, with important studies by William Empson extending the Romantic line, Stanley Fish influentially setting out a paradigm by which Milton could know that his devil was tempting as a perfectly orthodox plan of educating (and sometimes trapping and humiliating) the reader, and most recently, Neil Forsyth reiterating that *Paradise Lost* is at its heart a “Satanic” epic.\(^{25}\)

Popular readings of Blake’s famous dictum that Milton was “of the Devils party without knowing it” have also fueled rich and diverse popular cultural renditions of Milton in film, television, fantasy literature, comic books, and music. Perhaps the most articulate of the fantasy literature engagements with Milton via Blake has been that of the contemporary British writer, Philip Pullman, whose award-winning trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, constitutes an extended dialogue with Milton via Blake. Appropriating Blake, Pullman quite cheerfully claims to “be of the devil’s party and know it.”\(^{26}\) Pullman seems to have drawn from Blake not only a sympathy with Satan, but complex and developing gender relations, and a harsh view of God the Father, reflected in the demented, feeble figure of the deity who actually dies in Pullman’s text.\(^{27}\) If Blake and Shelley were described by reviewers of their day as a “Satanist” school, Pullman’s works have evoked a similar outcry, and he comments in an interview that “I have been set upon by Christians, particularly from America” who write to say things like “your book seems to be putting out a Satanist message.”\(^{28}\)
Pullman, however, seems to be deliberately provocative, observing, for instance, that “if there is a God and he is as the Christians describe him, then he deserves to be put down and rebelled against” and attacking the “pernicious” influence of C.S. Lewis in multiple interviews.

For his part, the British writer and Oxford don, C.S. Lewis, placed the blame for the view of Satan as hero, worthy of admiration or sympathy, firmly on Blake and Shelley, writing in *A Preface to “Paradise Lost”* that the idea that Milton’s Satan “is or ought to be an object of admiration and sympathy, conscious or unconscious, on the part of the poet or his readers or both” was “never affirmed before the times of Blake and Shelley.” For Lewis, Milton’s Satan is both detestable and ridiculous: “Mere Christianity commits every Christian to believing that ‘the Devil is (in the long run) an ass.’ ”

Lewis’s antipathy to the Romantic Satan as well as to various aspects of Milton’s own poem (the appeal of Satan, sexuality in Eden) not only prompted his critical *Preface* but helped to shape his extensive mid-twentieth-century fictional writing.

Film and particularly horror films also turn to Milton via Blake for depictions of the infernal and the Satanic. Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*, for example, extensively reworks Miltonic themes of alienation, fallen angels, humanity, and companionship in the hell-like atmosphere of a dark and crowded Los Angeles. Early in the film, the blond Aryan replicant Roy Batty (who will later confront and kill his heartless creator, Eldon Tyrell) explicitly cites Blake: “Fiery the angels fell, deep thunder around their shores roared, burning with the fires of Orc.” But, not unusually, the quotation makes one crucial adjustment—Blake’s angels rise, while the rebellious angels / replicants in this film—and in Milton—fall.

Perhaps not surprisingly, another potent Blakean Milton appears in rock music. The Rolling Stones’ “Sympathy for the Devil,” impossible without Milton, is the first of many rock anthems written in response to the mysterious allure of the Satanic. As the song builds to a crescendo of Sabat-like rhythms and primal human cries, the lyrics introduce an ageless Satan whose sadism is eternally satisfied by human folly: “I watched with glee / While your kings and queens / Fought for ten decades / For the gods they made.” Blake’s assertion in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that the poetic spirit is tapped directly into the energy of human desire, represented in Milton by Satan, finds a contemporary analogue in rock tunes by bands such as the Stones, inextricably linked to sexual desire and bursting with raw human emotion. Mick Jagger’s implication that the devil demands sympathy precisely because he feeds our own primal instincts—“I shouted out, ‘Who Killed the Kennedy’s,’ / When, after all, it was you and me”—works to explain Satan’s appeal, rather than simply acknowledge it. Rock appropriations of Milton by bands such as the Stones, Black Sabbath,
Marilyn Manson, and the aptly named Paradise Lost offer variations on a Blakean Milton in popular music.

How much will a contemporary reader see in current cultural uses of Milton? And how much does that recognition matter? Asked whether it concerns him that readers may not know all of his intertextual references, Philip Pullman replied: “That doesn't matter a bit, because I hope the story is strong enough and rich enough in itself to give them a sort of nourishment. If, following this experience, they think, ‘Well that was interesting... Who was this chap he quotes? Milton? Let me go and read *Paradise Lost.*’ If they do that, well, that’s great, but I don’t require them to submit a reading list at the door before they’re allowed into the first page.”

Pullman’s studied indifference, however, may somewhat disingenuously understate the struggle between Milton and at least some contemporary popular writers and artists. We have seen that Harry Block’s / Woody Allen’s similar indifference to ascertaining the source of the better to reign in hell line (“That’s Milton, I think”) masks the importance of the (mis)quotation in *Deconstructing Harry.* While some evocations of Milton may be largely to signal, in Pierre Bourdieu’s term, “good taste” and hence to enforce class distinctions, not infrequently, Milton is challenged, subverted, or appropriated in radical contexts to support values that reshape or seem to invert those of the historical poet.

Films, young adult literature, comic books, and television series seek out Milton as a mode of legitimacy or as a means of exploring issues of liberty, justice, good and evil, free will, gender roles, companionship, and republicanism. Such texts might allude to Milton, appropriate Miltonic language in surprising or subversive contexts, or evoke, grapple with, or contest Miltonic theodicy or gender hierarchy. Some texts (Robert Graves’s *Wife to Mr. Milton* and Peter Ackroyd’s *Milton in America*) offer highly fictionalized accounts of Milton’s life. Other texts (Anne Rice’s *Memnoch the Devil* and Glen Duncan’s *I, Lucifer*) or films (*Pleasantville*) extensively but implicitly adapt Miltonic motifs. Still others contain a single resonant allusion (“John Milton” listed in the credits to the film *Dogma*). The Miltonic text that appears most often, not surprisingly, is *Paradise Lost,* but *Comus,* *Paradise Regained,* *Samson Agonistes,* and *Areopagitica* also have a presence in popular culture. No single paradigm will cover these multiple and varied uses. But even our brief survey should make clear that “Milton” and “Popular Culture” should no longer be considered antithetical terms.

In the pages that follow, seventeen contributors offer further suggestions about how a serious consideration of popular Milton[s] can enrich our scholarship and teaching. All look at particular generic adaptations of Milton—in the cinematic language of film, the abstract art of digital production, the conventions of science fiction, or the more politically charged
print media of newspaper editorial and magazine feature. None of the contributors asks in the first instance whether these versions of Milton are good or bad because true or unfaithful to the original. Rather, they propose dynamic, if varied, models of appropriation, production and consumption, active engagement, and interaction between writer, artist, social activist, filmmaker, and audience.

Many of the essays in this volume treat not only genre but historical or political context: What does it mean to adapt Milton in Depression-era America? In the 1960s? After September 11, 2001 in America? How does the Milton produced in horror film differ from situation comedy and from fantasy literature? How is Milton variously read outside of the academic community: by filmmakers, rock musicians, illustrators of children’s books, and political activists? What does Milton signify to readers from the blind Helen Keller to Malcolm X, from the Christian allegorist C.S. Lewis to Hollywood directors to political commentators for *Newsweek, The Atlantic Monthly*, and *The New York Times*? While our five sections are organized by genre, it will be clear that a number of recurring questions and themes link the essays in the various parts.

Essays in our first section consider Milton in fantasy literature, by which we mean any “fiction that features elements of magic, wizardry, supernatural feats, and entities that suspend conventions of realism.” The very elements of Milton’s epic—otherworldly settings, grand conflicts of good and evil, heroes who determine the fate of their worlds, space travel, warfare, futuristic visions—have made *Paradise Lost* highly appealing to fantasy and science fiction writers from the genre’s turn of the century origins, through its cold war phase to its current place in postmodern culture.

In the first essay, Sanford Schwartz shows how C.S. Lewis’s *Perelandra* (1943) functions as a kind of fictional counterpart to *A Preface to “Paradise Lost,”* offering a perhaps unsurprising deflation of Milton’s Satan and reassertion of Christian orthodoxy through a tale of space travel, the temptation of a virginal Green Lady in a virginal land, and ultimate triumph by the hero, Ransom. Yet Schwartz also argues that *Perelandra* reveals the struggle of a modern Christian intellectual to refigure paradise for a post-Darwinian audience, as Lewis deploys the very elements of materialist evolution that his villain, Weston, embodies, to make the case for virtue and developing paradise.

While C.S. Lewis’s Ransom trilogy deviates considerably from Milton in its surface plot (space travel, evil scientists, settings on Mars and Venus) only to reaffirm Miltonic orthodoxy, Diana Treviño Benet finds a very different strategy in Steven Brust’s more recent fantasy novel *To Reign in Hell* (1984). In the second essay in part I, Benet shows how *To Reign in Hell* in many ways closely adheres to the text of *Paradise Lost*—using names of
multiple epic characters (Abdiel, Michael, Raphael, Beelzebub, Belial, Uriel) and paraphrased quotations—while inverting its meaning. To Reign in Hell performs, according to Benet, a “dissident” reading of Paradise Lost, rewriting the war in heaven as largely a series of miscommunications and misguided good intentions to expose the faultlines and ultimately erase the moral foundations of Milton’s epic.

The next two essays focus on one of the most popular and critically acclaimed appropriations of Paradise Lost in recent fiction: Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials (1995–2000). Weaving a rich web of intertextuality, Stephen Burt shows how Pullman’s text engages “Satanist” readings of Milton, including William Blake’s, but is ultimately Miltonic in its emphasis on choice and self-sacrifice for a cause. The difficult renunciation that Will and Lyra make at the end of the trilogy complicates our sense of their “fall” as not a simple reversal of Miltonic values, a victory for unrestrained desire, but a sacrifice beyond anything required of Milton’s Adam and Eve.

If Burt stresses the Satanic engagement with Paradise Lost, Lauren Shohet looks at what the multiple genres within Paradise Lost might mean for the multiple genres embedded in fantasy literature. While Milton’s “fit audience though few” sharply contrasts to the multiple audiences and multiple versions of His Dark Materials, Shohet argues that Pullman’s “dissenting” retelling is based on Milton’s own model of dissent. Shohet’s essay also raises questions that resonate out beyond Pullman—or even fantasy itself. How do the allusions work for those who have not read Milton? What are the boundaries of elite and popular? How do we measure with some standard other than originality or fidelity, factoring in canonicity, popularity, and multiple audiences?

Such complex questions also inspire the closing essay of the fantasy section, in which Gregory M. Colón Semenza focuses on what happens when we seek to “retell” Milton’s stories to young children. Looking at Margaret Hodges’s 1996 adaptation of Comus for children aged 4–8 years old, Semenza questions the author’s baffling attribution of the medieval tale of Childe Rowland as the masque’s primary source—a move designed to transform the occasional masque into an archetypal tale. Arguing that Hodges makes Milton palatable for children by stripping him of his historicity, Semenza demonstrates that the process of assimilating Milton for children is diametrically opposed to that of assimilating Shakespeare for children.

The next two sections of the volume explore how the visual language of film structures and produces new “Miltons”: whether in the genre of horror, romantic comedy, or satiric comedy. Part II, “Milton in Horror Film,” features three essays that explore how horror films have engaged Blake’s conception of Milton as being of the devil’s party without knowing it. The
beginnings of horror films in the 1930s, with the introduction of sound and big-budget productions, brought “Milton,” or a version of Milton, to mass-audiences in a genre intended to thrill and frighten, titillate and terrorize, but most definitely not to instruct in the “ways of God to men.” Blake and the Romantics are again a crucial mediating lens, and all three essays show that aspects of the horror film—whether demonic space, the monstrous products of repressed desire, or the deceptive banality of temptation and ethical choice—remain distinctly Miltonic.

In the first essay in this section, Eric C. Brown explores how Milton’s lavish attention to the infernal in *Paradise Lost* has contributed to its appropriation by horror films such as *The Sentinel* and *Seven*. Arguing that the horror effect depends primarily on conditions of spatialization, Brown then considers at length how Jack Clayton’s *Something Wicked This Way Comes* and Taylor Hackford’s *The Devil’s Advocate* achieve their effects largely by remapping Pandaemonium onto their respective landscapes whether in small-town America or New York City (the excess of the latter being shown by setting crucial scenes in the real-life penthouse apartment of Donald Trump).

Laura Lunger Knoppers then explores how James Whale’s blackly comic *Bride of Frankenstein* is an adaptation via Mary Shelley and Blake of multiple Miltonic themes. The effete and crazed scientist creators, the flat-headed, electrode-lobed, if tender-hearted Creature, and the late creation of the Nerfertiti-inspired Bride who rejects her intended groom seem a far cry from Milton’s Eden. Yet a distinctively Miltonic loneliness centrally marks the Creature’s humanity and serves to further Whale’s critique of the oppressive racial, societal, and gender codes of 1930s America.

In the third essay on horror films, Ryan Netzley explores how Hackford’s *The Devil’s Advocate* both holds up “Miltonic free-will”—in lawyer Kevin Lomax’s dream-vision decision to commit suicide rather than father the scion of Satan on his own half-sister—and seemingly undermines it by showing how Lomax’s real-life decision to quit rather then defend a child molester is compromised by pride. Yet Netzley shows that the film provokes an examination of ethical decision and deliberation that is deeply Miltonic, underscoring the need to look for temptation not only in crisis but also in the mundane events of everyday life.

Part III, “Milton in Comedic Film,” examines how the conventions of comedic troubles and happy endings reshape Milton’s *Comus* and *Paradise Lost*. In the opening essay, Lisa Sternlieb explores how Preston Sturges’s *The Lady Eve* (1940) attempts to negotiate the competing narratives of Christian constructionism and Darwinian evolution. The film’s hero, Charles “Hopsy” Pike (Henry Fonda) initially rejects his “Eve” (Barbara Stanwyck) only to (in Miltonic terms) learn to recognize humanity’s fallen
state or (in Darwinian terms) evolve into a lover. In depicting the troubles of true love, from the moment that the card-shark Eve drops an apple on unsuspecting Hopsy’s head, through Eve’s introduction to Hopsy’s snake, to the multiple falls that Hopsy takes on board ship and back home in Connecticut, Sturges transforms Miltonic motifs into screwball comedy.

The next two essays explore how remakes of *Comus*—in 1954 and 1995—turn Milton’s masque about the chastity of a fourteen-year-old girl into a romantic comedy. Catherine Gimelli Martin traces the translation of characters from Milton’s masque into Samuel Taylor’s 1953 stage play *Sabrina Fair* and Billy Wilder’s 1954 comedic film based on the play. Conflating Milton’s heroine, the Lady, with the water-nymph who rescues her, Taylor writes a tale of the transformation of a lowly chauffeur’s daughter, Sabrina (Audrey Hepburn), who leaves the wealthy family among whom she was raised, returns transformed, undoes her “enchanted” infatuation with the playboy younger brother David (William Holden), and finds her virtue rewarded by marriage with an equally transformed older brother, Linus (Humphrey Bogart). In turn, Julie H. Kim explores how Sydney Pollack’s 1995 remake, *Sabrina*, attempts to showcase strong, independent women and twice makes reference to the fact that the heroine is the “savior,” not the virgin in distress. Yet Kim argues that the film takes such an indulgent, comic view of women as capital that “Sabrina” (Julia Ormond) ultimately is the Lady in distress, not from Comus’s lechery but from late-twentieth-century corporate ethics.

In the final essay in this section, Douglas L. Howard’s study of John Landis’s *Animal House* moves away from romantic comedy (far away, given the sexual high jinks, food fights, toga parties, and general crudities of the frat boys centrally featured) to trace another filmic rendering of Milton in (now comic) Blakean terms. Howard shows how the film’s Blakean misreading of *Paradise Lost* in the famous classroom scene sanctions a rebellion against authority that, in the aftermath of Watergate and Vietnam, comes to serve as the film’s moral center.

The first three parts of *Milton in Popular Culture* focus on artistic appropriations of Milton; with part 4: “Milton and Social Justice,” the volume shifts to Milton’s place in the broader social realm. In the section’s opening essay, David Boooker investigates mass media appropriations of Milton, specifically in the context of America after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Beginning with an account of how George W. Bush’s description of an “axis of evil” reintroduces into mainstream discourses a pre-Enlightenment (and pre-Romantic) concept of absolute evil, Boooker assesses the function of the numerous references to Milton and especially Milton’s Satan in major newspapers and magazines after 9/11.

The other two contributors to this section discuss perceptions of Milton as an advocate of freedom for oppressed peoples. Angelica Duran’s essay