

original reads, "These are Remedies wished for against the Brute of a Husband; and good Queen Elizabeth is called in Question for not having had Compassion enough to her own Sex ["self" in Morrison], to prevail upon her Lords and Commons."

This is only a partial litany of Morrison's tamperings with the text. There must be other researchers who now have reason to wonder about the reliability of Morrison documents they have used in their work.

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Chaos in *Paradise Lost*

To the Editor:

John Rumrich's "Milton's God and the Matter of Chaos" (110 [1995]: 1035–46) confirms his role as the spokesperson for the beneficence of Chaos in *Paradise Lost*. However, Rumrich's selective use of textual evidence often obscures the problems with a positive reading of Chaos.

While he protests rigid readings of *Paradise Lost* and urges readers to recognize Milton's "ironic indeterminacy," Rumrich constructs his own narrow reading, describing conflicting viewpoints as unjustifiable (1036). Rumrich writes, "The most memorable edifices in Milton's works—the bridge across chaos, Pandemonium, and Nimrod's tower—are monolithic and tyrannical in aspect and at least implicitly targets of heaven's scorn" (1040–41), and to make this reading consistent, he overlooks another memorable edifice: the wall of heaven (3.503 ff.). Designed to protect and demarcate heaven, this monolithic edifice is surely not a target of heaven's scorn.

In turning heaven against itself, Rumrich creates a more serious problem: downplaying the significance of boundaries and of transgressions, which are central to *Paradise Lost*, as they were to Milton's world. Nevertheless, Rumrich uses postmodern chaos theory to argue that in heaven "ordinary limits are meant to be overcome with ease" and that the "inspired authorial voice of *Paradise Lost* expresses the desire to cross boundaries." Even in Eden, he writes, "Milton traces the dichotomy of clean and unclean . . . to a postlapsarian point of origin, not to the original order" (1038). But "unclean" transgressions of boundaries occur throughout the work. Well before the Fall, Satan "in contempt / At one slight bound high overleaped all bound" (4.180–81) to enter Eden, "as when a prowling wolf / . . . leaps o'er the fence with ease into the fold" (4.183, 4.187). Gabriel, for one, does not see

Satan's arrival in prelapsarian Eden as "productive and dynamic" (1038) or as an intended transgression:

Why hast thou, Satan, broke the bound prescribed
To thy transgressions, and disturbed the charge
Of others, who approve not to transgress
By thy example, but have power and right
To question thy bold entrance on this place. (4.878–82)

Indeed, the notion of the Fall, be it Satan's or humanity's, forces the reader to acknowledge the dire consequences of failing to observe boundaries.

Rumrich assures us that "[e]ven if Milton had not called chaos a womb, its generative capacity would be apparent . . ." (1042). Yet how is chaos generative? Throughout *Paradise Lost*, God is the source of generative energy. In this instance, God merely uses chaos as his raw material. Noting that God forms "good" creation from the particles found in chaos, Rumrich forgets that God follows the same pattern in forming "goodliest" Adam from particles of dust (5.516). Are we then meant to praise the goodness of dust? Simply because matter can be used to construct a good object does not prove the matter's inherent goodness. In fact, the point of God's creation is that ambivalent matter is with his "vital virtue infused" (7.236). Rumrich again quotes selectively: chaos is not just "womb of nature" but also "perhaps her grave" (2.911), just as dust is both alpha and omega of humankind separated from God's generative goodness. "For dust thou art, and shalt to dust return" (10.208).

Rumrich's failure to recognize the significance of boundaries leads to problems in other stages of his argument. Citing 7.168–73 to support his claims, Rumrich contends that since chaos (the place) is "infinite, eternal, and boundless," Chaos (the character) must be the "infinite material dimension of God" (1043). This one passage, however, is problematized by numerous others (2.958–59, 2.1035–40, 10.366–71). More disturbing is Rumrich's quick move from the "infinite, eternal" chaos to "infinite, eternal" Chaos. Milton takes care to describe Night, not Chaos, as "eldest of things" (2.962). If Night is eldest, Chaos must be younger—there having been a time when Night existed and Chaos did not. As for the idea of infinite Chaos, the character sees his realm shrinking from his "Frontiers" (2.998) and mourns "that little which is so left to defend, / Encroached on" (2.1000–01) by hell "beneath" and Earth "o'er my Realm" (2.1005). Furthermore, Satan voyages *through* the realm of Chaos to where its "gloomy bounds / confine with heav'n" (2.976–77). Satan and Chaos both recognize boundaries, frontiers, and places above and below Chaos's realm. Whether or not chaos (the place) is boundless is ambiguous. Chaos

(the character) is certainly finite, and he sees his realm as such.

This conflation of chaos the place and Chaos the character is a serious problem in Rumrich's argument, which begins by insisting on the need to rethink the nature of the character but dedicates greater space to the nature of the place. His last paragraph then makes an awkward leap back to his original concern: "In certain respects, then, Chaos is to God as Eve is to Adam" (1044). The separation between the two is more significant than Rumrich allows. The geographic place chaos is not "evil," for chaos—stray particles scattered throughout vast emptiness—is the epitome of neutrality. Chaos the character, however, who desires creation's ruin, curses God, and aids Satan, seems anything but neutral and must at the least be recognized as ambiguous.

Rumrich argues for indeterminacy but constructs a determinate reading. The chaos he describes is not ambiguous but necessarily and insistently good. Rumrich's desire to problematize Milton and draw attention to the complexities of *Paradise Lost* is to be welcomed, but through selective use of evidence, he often fails to take these complexities into account.

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Reply:

Some of Aaron Santesso's criticisms misrepresent what I wrote and, more important, what Milton wrote. Toward the end of his letter, Santesso complains that only "one passage" substantiates my claim that chaos is infinite. The passage in question is spoken by God, however, who is often considered an impeccable source of cosmological lore ("Boundless the deep because I am who fill / Infinitude" [7.168–69]). Nor is God's measure of chaos unique in the poem. The epic narrator describes it as "the void and formless infinite," Beelzebub as "the dark unbottom'd infinite Abyss," and Uriel as a "vast infinitude" (3.12, 2.405, 3.711).

Santesso rightly notes that boundaries distinguish chaos from creation. Furthermore, like the other rebels and like the epic narrator, Satan passes *through* it. So how can chaos be considered an infinite domain? The answer, I think, is that boundaries in this poem are not inflexible or impermeable. The "Chrystal wall of Heav'n," for example, mistakenly identified by Santesso as the subject of 3.503 ff., exhibits remarkable flexibility as it "op[ens] wide, / Ro[lls] inward" so that the rebels might be expelled through it (6.859–61).

To the extent that creation is still in the process of becoming, it grows out of the infinite chaos that substantiates it. Hence when Satan wants to invent gunpowder, he seeks and finds chaos under the surface of heaven itself: "materials dark and crude, / . . . / These in thir dark Nativitie the Deep / Shall yield us" (6.478–83). "Toucht / With Heav'ns ray," such materials are "temperd" and "shoot forth" to the surface (6.479–80). My essay contends that chaos is the infinite material dimension of God; ubiquitous, it permeates everything. For the monistic materialist Milton, in chaos we live and move and have our being.

Santesso warns that even if we were to concede the infinitude of chaos (the place), such a concession would not mean that Chaos (the character) is also infinite. He then takes me to task for conflating the two. Santesso seems to ignore the essay's lengthy discussion of Miltonic allegory, largely devoted to defining the relation between the character and the realm (1041). In brief, I argue that the character of Chaos expresses God's volitional absence from the first matter and that the infinite realm belongs to "Eldest Night," a talkative God's silent, negative identity.

If the evidence supplied by God, Uriel, and the epic narrator is trustworthy, the infinity of chaos is not as problematic as Santesso says. Nor is its generative power. My essay does not ignore the narrator's suggestion that this infinite and eternal realm may in the end become the "grave" of nature. I discuss this "singular and tentative characterization" in a long note, which remarks that previous scholarship has focused on the mortal and threatening aspect of chaos rather than on its womblike character (1045n15). The essay repeatedly acknowledges the potency for destruction and evil latent in chaos but asks that readers balance that perception with recognition of its erotic and creative potency. Santesso asks how chaos is generative. Evidence and arguments that address this question are adduced throughout my essay. Indeed, the realm of Chaos and Night is referred to as a womb three times in the epic. Like many English speakers of his time and ours, Milton recognized "place of generation" as a primary meaning for *womb*.

Santesso also rejects what my essay says on the subject of boundaries, whose significance he thinks I downplay or fail to appreciate. Yet I claim that boundaries "play a crucial role in Miltonic creation" because "they allow for productive and dynamic disorder within the framework of an evolving, larger order" (1038). They are flexible and permeable, not adamant. I realize that this opinion is unusual among Milton scholars. But arguing for an unc customary significance is not the same thing as a "failure to recognize . . . significance."

In support of the traditional reading of boundaries, as sacrosanct barriers not to be violated, Santesso quotes