

**Milton’s Metamorphosis from a  
Ciceronian Orator to the Pauline Prophet  
in *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Secunda***

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In *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio Secunda* (1654), Milton’s figure, the blind author of this tract, emits the strongest and most brilliant light among other heroic figures like Ceres, Achilles, Ulysses, Heracles, Orestes, Cicero, and Cromwell. His heroic self-portrait integrates the other elements of *Defensio Secunda* from the beginning to the end. The aim of this paper is to emphasize that the core of Christian heroism, patience, is the core of Milton’s heroism and the heroic portrait of himself in *Defensio Secunda*, that this concept is not recognized as the core of his heroism in *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* (1651), and that this mutation of his heroism is closely related with his blindness, and with the metamorphosis of his self-image from a Ciceronian orator to a patient, Pauline prophet.

By writing *Defensio Prima*, Milton completed the task of justifying “the English People” to all of Europe, but through the process, he lost his eyesight. Naturally, his enemies attacked and blamed him for defending the “blasphemous” cause of “parricides” against the Law of God: his blindness was by way of being God’s punishment. But Milton retorts in *Defensio Secunda*, by presenting the portrait of himself and shows his blindness as God’s Providence. The “Apostle is my Authority,” he affirms, “through weakness to the greatest strength . . . in my darkness the light of the divine countenance does but the more brightly shine . . . (CM VIII. 73; my italics)”<sup>1</sup> Milton’s discourse here stands as an amalgamation of St Paul’s words in *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, “For God, who command-

ed the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts . . .” (4:6) and “for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities . . . for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (12:9-10)<sup>2</sup> However, Milton’s words are not a mere compound of Pauline verses. Suffering his blindness and his enemy’s sharp attacks upon “his infirmity,” Milton’s vivid feelings and experiences make the amalgamation into the very words uttered from the bottom of his heart. The passage in *Defensio Secunda* is one of the noblest paragraphs composed by John Milton, a “martyr suffering for Truth’s sake,” based upon the example of St Paul in *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Milton imitates St Paul in suffering as St Paul imitates Christ in suffering. Accordingly, Milton gets consolation in that “the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” (2 Cor. 1:5)

As for his blindness, Milton answers his adversary, saying that he chose it of his own accord in spite of his doctor’s warning against his continuing to write *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*. He takes the case of Achilles in the *Iliad* and compares himself with the demi-god. Milton “heard—not the voice of AEsculapius from the shrine of Epidaurus—but of some diviner monitor within” (69) like Samson in *Samson Agonistes* (1671). Unlike Achilles and Samson, however, Milton “purchased” a greater good, the defence of liberty by reason, “the only defence which is truly and properly human,” (11) with a lesser evil, his blindness: Achilles purchased glory with death, (and Samson also purchased the liberty of his people with death.) Therefore, far from God’s anger, he acknowledges God’s mercy towards him. His blindness results from inter-communication between his own will and God’s providence. Because of this, Milton presents himself as a Christian hero far nobler than Achilles, the Greek martial hero.

By depicting himself as a greater hero than Achilles, Milton defines his heroism in the framework of Christian *virtus* rather than valour in the real battlefield: it is not that he simply estimates wisdom higher than physical strength in the classical framework, but that he estimates “true” wisdom, right reason, in the Christian framework. He says he would like to be like Ulysses, the hero of wisdom, who is often contrasted with Achilles, the hero of strength. But Milton does not forget to add “yet, I covet not the arms of Achilles,” (85) referring to the episode wherein Ajax and Ulysses contended for the arms of the dead Achilles, because Milton has to endeavour “to bear on his shoulders a real not a painted burden, to be felt by himself.” (85) The “real burden” means the task of defending liberty, “God’s birthday gift to us,” from tyranny. Milton’s task is utterly different from that of the mythical hero in the Homeric world. Milton delineates himself as being more heroic than Ulysses.

The core of Milton’s heroism in *Defensio Secunda* is “patience, suffering for Truth’s sake,” which *Defensio Prima* does not seem to discuss to the full extent. In response to the attacks of his antagonist on his blindness, Milton justifies himself one by one, then at last he reaches the problem of his blindness: he confutes all the slanders thrown by his enemy, the supposed Alexander More (Du Mouline in reality), except this. Reluctantly he has to admit that he is blind. “Then,” he says, “let us *bear* it. To be blind is not miserable; not to be able to *bear* blindness, that is miserable....” (63: my italics) In the original Latin corresponding to the translation cited above, Milton uses the Latin word, “ferre,” meaning “endure” three times like a magic spell. Blindness cannot be avoided by any means, and thus he has no choice but endure it. Milton depicts himself as a man of patience, the true *virtus* of a Christian hero. Milton’s heroism, which had been searched and tried since his earliest days, finds its ripest fruit through his severe experience of blindness. From

here on, this Christian *virtus* is to play the predominant role in his later works, especially in *Paradise Lost* (1667), *Paradise Regained* (1671) and *Samson Agonistes*. In *Paradise Lost*, Book 9, the poet-narrator changes the tune of his song and declares that he will sing, “the better fortitude/Of *Patience* and Heroic Martyrdom/Unsung....” (ll. 32-34: my italics) In *Paradise Regained*, the theme is Jobean patience reenacted by Christ the Saviour, who “*patiently* reply’d” (Book 2, l. 432: my italics) to Satan. In *Samson Agonistes*, the chorus sing, “Extolling *Patience* as the truest fortitude;/And to the bearing well of all calamities.” (ll. 652-655: my italics)

The concept of Christian *virtus*, patience, is not fully matured in *Defensio Prima*. It is true that Milton uses the word, *patientia*, several times in the tract, but his way of using it is not the same as that in *Defensio Secunda*.

In civil affairs God has not enjoined such *patience* that the state must submit to the cruelties of tyrants, but not the church... but into the hands of the state and its officers altogether he has entrusted not *patience*, but the sword of the law....  
(CM VII. 211: my italics)

Milton defends the right of people; he asserts that God does not demand people of patience when a king has degenerated into a tyrant. People have the right to defend themselves by force from tyranny. That is the Law of God and Nature, because the “king” is no longer a true king, but a tyrant. In the former citation, Milton slightly touches on Christian *patience*, but it is not developed any further, because the orator’s point is focused on the secular right of people towards tyrants. Of course he does not overlook Christian *patience* exemplified by Christ, but he does not think people must follow and imitate Christ on every point. The heroes, Christ and Milton, in *Defensio Prima* do not

sound like Job suffering patiently for God’s truth, but rather like Ciceronian orators, in their cause for Christian liberty. Milton’s self portrait is likened to the portrait of Christ. It is, as David Loewenstein once maintained, “no meek and submissive figure, but [an] active and unyielding liberator who boldly censures, accuses, reproves, and warns his adversaries.”<sup>3</sup> Milton often justifies the deed of “the English People” by using Ciceronian rhetoric and reasoning, especially of the *Philippics*. One of the most controversial issues between *Defensio Regia* (1649) and *Defensio Prima* lies in the interpretation of the “Law”: Salmasius stands on the “existing” laws, while Milton stands on the ideal laws. Milton bases his authority on Cicero and the Ciceronian concept of “the law, as Cicero says in his twelfth (sic.) *Philippic*, ‘is no other than right reason.’” (*CM* VII, 169).

On the other hand, Milton in *Defensio Secunda* sounds like St Paul rather than Cicero. Milton’s judgement on his blindness is derived from St Paul’s words in *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. In addition to this, many parts in *Defensio Secunda* are pointed out as deriving from *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. *Defensio Secunda* starts with the author’s thanking to God: Milton deeply appreciates God for making him complete the task of writing *Defensio Prima* and conquer his enemies “in words” not “in arms.” Milton says that he will “always be ever thankful to God, and mindful of his benefit,” because to set brave men forth “with becoming dignity and ornament” is God’s will. (3-11) This opening scene overlaps with the beginning of *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, where St Paul prays for God and declares his words to the Corinthians are by the will of God. When Milton confirms that his blindness is not God’s punishment because “God himself is truth; and the more closely any one adheres to truth, in teaching it to mankind, the more nearly must he resemble God, the more acceptable must he be to him,” Milton refers to Chapter 1, Verse 18 of *The*

*Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, “as God is true.”

Answering the reproaches of enemies, Milton commences the proof of his innocence at first by invoking God as his witness and says:

that I have written nothing, which I was not persuaded at the time, and am still persuaded, was right, and true, and pleasing to God; (67)

He imitates the example of St Paul, who establishes his innocence by the witness of God (1:23, 7:2-12). When he concludes “above all, in regard of this calamity, I acquiesce in his [God’s] will, for it is he himself who comforts and upholds my spirit—being ever more mindful of what he shall bestow upon me . . .” (71), it is clear that Milton follows St Paul: “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.” (9:15) When Milton justifies his blindness and retorts to the insult of his enemies, by saying, “As to blindness . . . Yours, immersed in the lowest sense, so blinds your minds, that you can see nothing sound or solid; mine . . . deprives things merely of their colour and surface,” (71) he has in his mind the words of St Paul’s teaching that people should not be deceived by visible things, for “the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which *are* not seen *are* eternal. (4:18)

Thus, we are persuaded that the rhetoric and reasoning of the Apostle in *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* prevails in *Defensio Secunda*. With the Apostle as his supporter and example, Milton succeeds in representing himself as a prophet like Paul.

It is true that, also in *Defensio Secunda*, Milton compares himself with Cicero and adopts the latter’s rhetoric and reasoning, but the influence of Cicero on Milton seems to be weaker than in *Defensio Prima*. In *Defensio Secunda* he compares his

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“battle” between Salmasius and himself with the battle between Catiline and Cicero:

I have diverted from the walls of Rome this new Catiline [Salmasius], though not invested in the consular robe, as of old the consul Tullius, nor was it done in a dream, but in a very different manner: (57-59)

Milton speaks of himself as a “new” Cicero. Milton’s image of himself derives from his confidence in the superiority of *Defensio Prima* above all other orations, because he has been entrusted with *recta ratio* and has defended liberty as God’s prophet:

for, to whatever degree I am surpassed... by the ancient, illustrious orators, not only as an orator, but also as a linguist... I shall surpass no less the orators of all ages in the nobleness and in the instructiveness of my subject. (CM VIII, 13)

Different from the coherent, active, Ciceronian orator in *Defensio Prima*, the portrait of Milton in *Defensio Secunda* undergoes metamorphosis from a Ciceronian orator to a patient, Pauline prophet suffering his infirmity, standing steadfast and believing in God’s providence. The fact that Heracles and Orestes are represented not at their strongest moment, but at their weakest in *Defensio Secunda* is closely related to this self-portrait of Milton. Both of the Greek mythological heroes are relentlessly beaten by the cruelty of their fates, and they are hardly able to walk without the guiding hands of their friends. Milton likens himself to them, the weakest man in need of helping hands. (75)

Towards the end of *Defensio Secunda*, Milton exhorts “the English People” to trust “to the same prayers to God, the same patience [“patientia”], integrity, and skill by which” they “first

(10)

prevailed.” (245; my italics) Those who wish to continue free must “*rectae rationi obtemperare*.” (250) In *Defensio Secunda*, Milton tactically represents himself as an *exemplum* of the Christian heroism, whose core is patience. Then, after succeeding in this difficult task, he exhorts his countrymen to be patient following his example. This is very Miltonic. He follows his conception of *deorum*: one who persuades others to be patient should himself be patient. As Donald A. Roberts once discussed, *Defensio Secunda* consists of “the form of panegyric and diatribe, the style of oratorical argument which was familiar not only from classical models but also... in the standard rhetorics of Milton’s days.”<sup>4</sup> But what makes *Defensio Secunda* most unique, most Miltonic, is the exhortation to “the English People.”<sup>5</sup> It opens with the words, “And as for you, citizens,” (239) and continues to the last of *Defensio Secunda*, which ends with the mention of Milton himself:

... yet, that there was not wanting one, who could give good counsel; who could exhort, encourage; who could adorn, and celebrate, in praises destined to endure forever, the transcendent deeds, and those who performed them. (255)

Milton’s aim is to persuade “the English People” (and Cromwell) to make their “commonwealth” steadier and firmer. In order to accomplish this task, Milton admonishes them to become men of *patience*, believing in God’s providence. Once in *An Apology against a Pamphlet*... (1642) Milton asserted:

He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought him selfe to bee a true Poem... (CM. III, i, 303-304)

Milton has accomplished the task of defending “the English

(11)

People” and true liberty, which is a far nobler subject than any of the subjects classical orators dealt with. He has brought back the seeds of true liberty, which are far more precious than those Ceres introduced into the world. He has chosen a lot which is far nobler than that of Achilles. He has endured his infirmity—blindness—with patience like the Apostle Paul in *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. His faith in God is unshaken by any attack from his enemies. He has “in himself the experience and the practices of all that which is praiseworthy.” Therefore, he is best qualified for a Pauline prophet who must teach and admonish Cromwell and “the English People” to be patient, to obey right reason, the will and providence of God, in order to continue to be free.

Milton’s exhortation in *Defensio Secunda* shows close resemblance to St Paul’s admonition in *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Chapter 6, Verses 4-6.

But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much *patience* [my italics], in afflictions...in distresses.... in tumults.... By pureness, by knowledge, by *longsuffering* [my italics]....

As is seen earlier in this paper, St Paul presents himself as a sufferer for God’s sake in Chapter 12 of *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. He persuades the Corinthians to be patient, then he presents himself as a patient endurer and believer in God, just like Milton presenting himself as a patient Christian hero, and exhorting his people to be patient, while the process of their discourses are reversed.

The core of heroism in *Defensio Prima* was, in short, industry and magnanimity.” Milton admonished “the English People” to keep liberty by *continuing* to use *recta ratio*, “*magnus animus*.” The important *virtus* added to Milton’s heroism in *Defensio*

*Secunda* is patience. This transformation of Milton’s heroism results from his struggle with his blindness. By conquering this inner enemy, he generates the image of a patient, Christian hero in himself. To be patient is to obey right reason. When Milton justifies his blindness, he obeys right reason. His process of justification shows his metamorphosis from a Ciceronian orator to a Pauline prophet. In the first place, he shows his innocence calling God for his witness. He has written only what is pleasing to God. He accumulates and concatenates blind prophets, patriots and deliverers of old as his predecessors and exemplars. Then, he cites Christ’s words witnessing that blindness is not the result of sin. This process is an ordinary way of reasoning even if many of his words reflect those of the Apostle in *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Milton’s way of justification is exceedingly “reasonable and persuasive” in their modern meanings. But, when he declares “May I be one of the weakest... for then [I]... shall be at once blind, and of the most piercing sight,” the average, modern audience will be momentarily confused because his discourse suddenly seems “unreasonable” to modern eyes. But special emphasis should be put on the point that this is the very core of Milton’s “right reason.” He obeys *right reason* and *right-reasoning* of St Paul in *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Then he himself follows and imitates the Apostle’s discourse and justifies his blindness by the process of *right-reasoning*, the Christian way of reasoning. Through the passage cited above, his self-portrait undergoes transformation from an unyielding Ciceronian orator to a patient Pauline Prophet. Milton soars above the classical civic orator like Cicero. Instead, there appears a Pauline prophet patiently suffering for Truth’s sake. At the same time, the foundation of the three great works in his later time, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* is established.

Formulated through political polemics, *Defensio Secunda* fol-

lows the way of *Defensio Prima* in that it deconstructs and reconstructs his heroism by refuting his antagonists and justifying his cause. But his heroism developed in *Defensio Secunda* is not a mere repetition of *Defensio Prima*. It is more deeply elaborated and examined in the real world. It is modelled on St Paul in *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. The core is “patience suffering for Truth’s sake.” This fact should not be explained without his blindness. *Defensio Secunda* is a peculiarly epic-like polemical tract generated by the positive attitude of Milton, who tries to find God’s providence in his blindness and to accept reality with “calm of mind.”

#### NOTES

1. All the citations of Milton’s works are from *The Works of John Milton*, vols. I–XVIII, gen. ed., Frank A. Patterson (New York, 1931–1938). Henceforth, *CM* is used to denote this edition. The numbers in parentheses after the citation show the volume and the page.)
2. All the citations of the Bible are from *The Authorized King James Version*.
3. See my paper, Yuko Noro, “Liberty and Slavery in *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*,” *Milton and Bunyan in the English Revolution* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu Shobo, 1991) 275–301, and Yuko Noro, “Milton’s Heroism in *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*,” *Milton and His Influence in the English Literature: In Commemoration of the 60th Birthday of Professor Akira Arai* (Tokyo: Kinseido, 1992) 72–85.
4. David Loewenstein, “Milton and the Poetics of Defense,” *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton’s Prose* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 178.
5. Don M. Wolfe, gen. ed., *Complete Prose Works of John Milton* vol. iv (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959)

540.

6. The “transitional” rhetoric from praise to exhortation is peculiarly Miltonic. See, Yuko Noro, “Milton’s Heroism,” *The Bulletin of Tokyo Seitoku College* 11 (Tokyo: Tokyo Seitoku College, 1978) 37–44, “Milton’s Heroism: Part Two,” *The Bulletin of Tokyo Seitoku College* 12 (Tokyo: Tokyo Seitoku College, 1979) 35–39, “Milton’s Heroism in *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*,” (1992), and “Milton’s *Ad Patrem, De Idea Platonica, and Naturam non pati sciri*,” *The Bulletin of Tokyo Seitoku College* 26 (Tokyo: Tokyo Seitoku College, 1993) 207–224.

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