

Apocalyptic Violence and the *Merkabah* Images in *Paradise Lost*❖

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses Milton's concept of apocalyptic violence, focusing on the *Merkabah* images in Books VI and VII of *Paradise Lost*. The author, inspired by Michael Lieb's theory of the dual nature of violence—destruction and regeneration—intends to argue that the two *Merkabah* images can best exemplify the duality of violence. The paper first examines how violence works in apocalyptic narratives and then takes the *Merkabah* image in the war in heaven in Book VI of *Paradise Lost* as a representation of apocalyptic violence, in which justice is served. Then the author delineates the development of Milton's apocalyptic thoughts, pointing out that Milton has relinquished radical apocalypticism by the time he composed *Paradise Lost*. Thus, the author contends that the war in heaven in *Paradise Lost* cannot be interpreted as Milton's invocation of Christ's intervention to terminate the Restoration. Moreover, the *Merkabah* image signifies divine presence that vouchsafes the implementation of violence to serve the cause of justice. The paper then demonstrates that the same chariot vision appears again in the creation scene in Book VII. Milton employed the same *Merkabah* image to concatenate destruction and regeneration. The “chariot of paternal deity” engaged in the

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war in heaven in Book VI represents destruction, and the same chariot of the Son in the creation scene in Book VII denotes regeneration. At the end of the paper, the author links the theme of destruction and regeneration to Milton's concept of justice and mercy. Violence is used to serve the cause of justice, which, according to Milton, must be moderated by mercy.

KEY WORDS: apocalyptic violence, apocalypticism, *Merkabah* images, Milton, *Paradise Lost*, violence

Introduction

Milton's idea of religious/divine/holy/sacred violence has drawn much scholarly attention. Far from being evil, religious violence is justifiable in the name of divine truth. The fundamental question is how far Milton urged religious violence.¹ It is undeniable that Milton advocated religious radicalism during the Civil War (Mohamed 337). However, critics disagree on whether Milton ever had a second thought on such commitments, especially in the last phase of his life (Fowler 42).

Many scholars use *Samson Agonistes* to examine Milton's attitude toward religious extremism after the Restoration, and the 9/11 event has launched a series of discussions on Milton's concepts of violence in that closet drama.² Is the dramatic poem a propaganda for warfare? Is Samson's violence incited by divine will? Can divine will be used as a license to commit violence? Critics either deprecate or endorse Milton's treatment of Samson, comparing

¹ See, for example, Feisal G. Mohamed's "Confronting Religious Violence" and Paul Stevens's "Intolerance and the Virtues of Sacred Vehemence."

² It should be noted that questions about the morality of Samson's violence and his affinities with terrorists existed in Milton studies long before the 9/11 event (Netzley 509). But the event did activate a new wave of discussions.

and contrasting Samson's violence with terrorism.³

This paper discusses Milton's idea of religious violence after 1660 from another perspective. I intend to examine "apocalyptic violence" represented in *Paradise Lost*. A term flourishing in the 1990s, apocalyptic violence has been used to designate astounding atrocity performed to destroy the present evil world.⁴ In other words, apocalyptic violence is a special form of religious violence committed near the end of the world.

The most thorough, systematic study of Milton's concepts of violence in his *oeuvre* is Michael Lieb's *Milton and the Culture of Violence* (1994), which extensively explores "sparagmatic violence" (bodily mutilation and dismemberment) in Milton's works. Lieb, drawing heavily on René Girard's and Carl Jung's anthropological theories of violence, argues that Milton's idea of violence is both "destructive" and "regenerative" (10). I will point out that Lieb's theory of the dual nature of violence can also be found in the *Merkabah*⁵ images in *Paradise Lost*.

This paper first examines how violence works in apocalyptic narratives in general and then analyzes how Milton depicted violence in the war in heaven in Book VI of *Paradise Lost*. After that, I will elaborate on the *Merkabah* vision in the war in heaven, considering it as a representation of apocalyptic violence, in which justice is served. Then I will delineate the development of Milton's apocalyptic thoughts, pointing out that Milton had relinquished radical apocalypticism by the time he composed *Paradise Lost*. Hence, the

³ For a literature review of post-9/11 critiques of violence represented in *Samson Agonistes*, see Chapter Three of Joseph Wittreich's *Why Milton Matters*.

⁴ According to Mark Hamm, the term *apocalyptic violence* was first used to describe the FBI's 1993 raid on the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas (323-24). It was later used by Robert Lifton in his *Destroying the World to Save It* (1999), dealing with the Japanese cult Aum Shinrikyo, which was responsible for the 1995 Tokyo sarin gas attack.

⁵ A loan word from Ugaritic, *Merkabah* originally means "vehicle, cart, chariot" and later is associated with royalty (*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* vol. 2, 847).

apocalyptic violence represented by the *Merkabah* vision should be reevaluated. I will demonstrate that the same *Merkabah* vision appears again in the creation scene in Book VII. I agree with Lieb that destruction and regeneration remains a deep structure in Milton's concepts of violence, for destruction and creation are performed by the same chariot. At the end of the paper, I link the theme of destruction and regeneration to Milton's concept of justice and mercy. Violence is employed to serve justice that must be followed by mercy. The later Milton no longer unconditionally promoted relentless violence.

Apocalyptic Violence

“Apocalypse” is a transliteration of *αποκάλυψις*, the Greek word for “revelation.” It appears several times in the New Testament, referring to a revelation or disclosure of something hidden.⁶ Most significantly, it is the first word of the last book of the New Testament.⁷ The Apocalypse is a sealed book, a scroll with seven wax seals, and cannot be comprehended without a divine guide. For Milton it is a “mysterious” book, “some eye-brightening electuary of knowledge, and foresight” (*Reason of Church-Government* 34). The book reveals what is to come in the future and provides a picture of the last days of the world. The first half of the book, chapters 1 to 11, is fraught with eschatological scenes—impending disasters revealed with the breaking of the seven seals. Chapters 12 to 19 describe a series of cosmic battles between two camps: on the one side, there are a pregnant woman, St. Michael,

⁶ For example, Luke 2.32; Romans 2.5; 8.19; 16.25; 1 Corinthians 14.6, 26; 2 Corinthians 12.7; Ephesians 1.17; 3.3; 1 Peter 4.13. See the fourth edition of the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament* (1994).

⁷ The title of the book is translated into English as either “Apocalypse” or “Revelation.” Milton generally used the Authorized Version in his texts (Fletcher 20), though he might have preferred the Geneva Bible while he retained his sight (Fletcher 93-94). Both versions have the same title: “Revelation.” I use “the Apocalypse” and “the Revelation” interchangeably.

the saints, and the Lamb; on the other side, a red dragon, a sea beast, a land beast, a scarlet beast, and the Whore of Babylon. A brave new world is envisioned in the last three chapters.

“Apocalyptic” has been customarily used as a literary genre. According to John Collins, a member of the Apocalypse Group of the Society of Biblical Literature’s Genres Project, “apocalyptic” is defined as “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (9).

One of the most striking characteristics of apocalyptic literature is the combat motif. An ever-going battle is waged between good and evil, light and darkness, God and Satan, Christ and Antichrist, *et cetera*. The cosmic combat will be resolved with the consummation of human history: the final triumph of God. Obviously, apocalyptic literature is characterized by violence. In order to put an end to the evil-laden world, God or the saints would exert grand-scale violence against the ungodly, removing all the obstacles to God’s justice. The cosmic combat is a holy war. In the biblical holy war tradition, God, as the Lord of the hosts, leads the Israelites to conquer their enemies. The Lord is not only sitting on his throne in heaven, decreeing that enemies be destroyed (as Joshua seizes Jericho by compassing the city), but He also intervenes as a divine warrior leading the battle (e.g. Isa. 19.1; Zech. 9.14).

Driven by the holy war ideology, the seventeenth-century Protestants persistently identified the Roman Catholic papacy with the Antichrist in 1 John 2.18, 22; 4.3 and 2 John 7, which in turn is associated with the man of sin in 2 Thess. 2.3 and the red dragon and the beast in chapters 12 and 13 of

Revelation (Hill 1-40).⁸ In contrast, they regarded themselves as the saints or the holy martyrs warring against the dragon. During the Civil War, the Parliamentarians associated the Church of England with the Roman papacy, the Antichrist. In *Of Reformation* (1641), Milton accused the Church of England of being corrupted by the extravagance of the prelates: “the Idolatrous erection of Temples beautified exquisitely to out-vie the Papists, the costly and deare-bought Scandals, and snares of Images, Pictures, rich Coaps, gorgeous Altar-clothes” (61-62). Milton claimed that “*Antichrist* is *Mammons* Son” (62) and that “Wealth . . . is the Serpents Egge that will hatch an *Antichrist* wheresoever, and ingender the same Monster as big” (62). If the prelacy were not immediately abolished, “wee shall see *Antichrist* shortly wallow here, though his cheife Kennell be at *Rome*” (62).

That holy war ideology was eschatological. Seventeenth-century England witnessed an unprecedented eschatological apocalypticism; English Reformers anticipated the imminence of Christ’s Second Coming, the downfall of the Antichrist, and the reign of the saints with Christ in a holy monarchy (Hill 280; Dobbins 69-70; Popkin 114-27). Irrefutably, Milton at one time embraced the apocalyptic holy war ideology. As a leading pamphleteer during the English Revolution, Milton regarded the Civil War as a holy war and the parliamentarian force as a holy army. In *Eikonoklastes* (1649), Milton justified regicide: “Therefore *To bind thir Kings in chains, and thir Nobles with links of Iron*, is an honour belonging to his Saints . . . and first to overcome those European Kings, which receive thir power; not from God, but from the beast; and are counted no better than his ten hornes . . . untill at last, *joyning thir Armies with the Beast*, whose power first rais’d them, they shall perish with him by the *King of Kings* against whom they have rebell’d; and *the Foules*

⁸ For a discussion of the biblical holy war tradition and its application in seventeenth-century England, see Chapter 11 of Michael Lieb’s *Poetics of the Holy*.

shall eat thir flesh. This is thir doom writt'n, and the utmost that wee find concerning them in these latter days" (239). Milton compared the battle of the true Christians against the princes to the apocalyptic battle of the saints against the ten-horned beast "in these latter days."

The holy war ideology granted Milton a legitimate cause for apocalyptic violence—from a staunch supporter of the root-and-branch petition at the outbreak of the Civil War to a vehement defender of regicide after the decapitation of Charles I. But did Milton change his view on apocalyptic violence after the failure of the Commonwealth?

The *Merkabah* Image in the War in Heaven

The war in heaven between the angels and the red dragon (Rev. 12) receives a graphic depiction in *Paradise Lost*. In Book VI, Raphael relates to Adam the three-day war in heaven before the creation of the earth. Milton divided the war into two parts. On the first two days, the war comes to a stalemate—neither camp is able to deliver a decisive blow to the other. On the third day, the Father intervenes, addressing the Son

Two dayes are therefore past, the third is thine;
 For thee I have ordain'd it, and thus farr
 Have sufferd, that the Glorie may be thine
 Of ending this great Warr, since none but Thou
 Can end it. (VI. 699-703)

The Father asks the Son to ascend His chariot (711). Christ rides on the "chariot of paternal deity" (750), leading twenty thousand "Chariots of God" (770) to fight against the rebellious angels. This image of the chariot has

provoked much scholarly discussion,⁹ and it is even regarded as the “central allegory” of the epic (Fowler 376).

The Chariot of Paternal Deitie,
 Flashing thick flames, Wheele within Wheele, undrawn,
 It self instinct with Spirit, but convoyd
 By four Cherubic shapes, four Faces each
 Had wondrous, as with Starrs thir bodies all
 And Wings were set with Eyes, with Eyes the wheels
 Of Beril, and careering Fires between;
 Over thir heads a chrystal Firmament,
 Whereon a Saphir Throne, inlaid with pure
 Amber, and colours of the showrie Arch. (VI. 750-59)

Milton’s description of the “chariot of paternal deity” recognizably resembles Ezekiel’s *Merkabah* vision (Ezek. 1, 10): four living creatures, wheels within the wheels, the crystal firmament, and the sapphire throne. The four living creatures “spred out thir Starrie wings/ With dreadful shade contiguous,” and the wheels of the “fierce Chariot rowld, as with the sound/ Of torrent Floods, or of a numerous Host” (827-28, 29-30; cf. Ezek. 1.9, 24). The chariot is more than a metonymy of God the Father; it is a battle chariot engaging in war with the rebellious angels’ chariots (ll. 17, 100, 211, 338, 358, 390). When the war begins, the Son changes his countenance into terror “too severe to be beheld” (825), and He, “full of wrauth,” (826) drives the battle chariot to strike “his impious Foes” (831). The Ezekelian chariot serves as a vehicle for Christ to

⁹ For several different perspectives discussing the image, see Michael Lieb’s “Milton’s ‘Chariot of Paternal Deitie’ as a Reformation Conceit” (359 n1).

fight the holy war.¹⁰

But Milton's chariot is more than Ezekelian; it is also apocalyptic. In the fourth chapter of the Apocalypse, the author envisions a heavenly enthroned figure. In the midst of the throne are four living creatures—lion, calf, man, eagle—as in Ezekiel's vision. In fact, the *Merkabah* in Revelation 4 was commonly interpreted as a New Testament counterpart of Ezekiel's in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For example, Heinrich Bullinger (1504-75), a Swiss reformer and the writer of the Second Helvetic Confession (1564), made the association in *A Hundred Sermons upon the Apocalypse* (1573): "The goodliest beastes [in Revelation 4] do drawe the triumphant chariots of Princes. Therefore by a lyke kinde of speache as is used among men, beastes are set to the throne of God. For God in hys Prophetes is caryed upon Cherubin, that is, in hys heavenly chariot. And Ezechiell in the 10. chapt. nameth openly Cherubin, beastes: and the whole texte proveth, that the place must be understoode of Gods chariot, drawn by beastes, in the which he hymselfe was caryed out of the citey of Hierusalem" (68). David Pareus (1548-1622), while annotating the Revelation, also referred the four apocalyptic living creatures to those appearing in Ezekiel (91). Milton himself also integrated the Ezekelian and apocalyptic *Merkabah* images in his description of the chariot of Zeale in *Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642): "Zeale whose substance is ethereal, arming in compleat diamond ascends his fiery Chariot drawn with two blazing Meteors figur'd like beastes . . . resembling two of those four which *Ezechiel* and *S. John* saw" (23).

By introducing Christ in the *Merkabah* to the war in heaven, Milton deliberately changed the biblical narrative. In Revelation 12.7-9, it was Michael and his angels that defeat Satan and his followers, but Milton attributed the

¹⁰ Michael Lieb suggests that the depiction of the chariot is awesome "as though the entire meaning of holy war were consummated in this phrase" (*Poetics of the Holy* 296).

victory to the Son in the chariot of paternal deity. I contend that this deliberate change should be interpreted within the seventeenth-century English Protestant apocalyptic holy war ideology. As mentioned above, the battle between saints and the Antichrist was then interpreted as the penultimate combat in the last days—it heralds Christ’s Second Coming. In fact, it has been pointed out that the *Merkabah* image in Book Six of *Paradise Lost* foreshadows/prefigures Christ’s Second Coming.¹¹ In this sense, the *Merkabah* image signifies apocalyptic violence, and the “triumphal Chariot” (881) denotes Christ’s ultimate victory on Judgment Day. The angels participating in the war in heaven in *Paradise Lost* bear a significant resemblance to the warring saints of pamphlet literature, as Stella Revard observes.¹² If the first two days’ war is interpreted as the Civil War—an “intestine war” (259), as Milton termed it—and the third day as the divine intervention to consummate the divine task, then a conclusion can be reached that Milton still maintained religious radicalism while he was working on *Paradise Lost* after 1660. In other words, Milton regarded the Restoration as the devil’s temporary victory which would soon fail. However, examining the trajectory of Milton’s apocalyptic expectations throws a different light on our understanding of Milton’s view on violence.

Milton’s Apocalyptic Expectations

Scholars have long recognized that Milton held fervent apocalyptic

¹¹ See Adamson 108, Fowler 379, Hunter 123, Knott 71, Lawry 210-12, Lieb, “Milton’s ‘Chariot’” 370, Madsen 111, Revard 124, Summers 135, and Wooten 142.

¹² “Both are engaged in holy wars. . . . Both look to the Son of God as their ultimate commander. . . . [B]oth recognize that Satan’s attack upon them as followers of Messiah is indirectly an attack upon Messiah himself” (116).

expectations of Christ's imminent parousia during the English Revolution.¹³ For example, at the end of *Of Reformation* (1641), Milton anticipated that "the Eternall and shortly-expected King shall open the Clouds to judge the severall Kingdomes of the World, and distributing *Nationall Honours* and *Rewards* to Religious and just *Common-wealths*, shalt put an end to all Earthly *Tyrannies*, proclaiming thy universal and milde *Monarchy* through Heaven and Earth" (89). In *Animadversions* (1642), Milton dedicated a hymn to God, articulating an unequivocal belief in the imminence of a terrestrial millennial kingdom established by Christ's divine intervention: "thy Kingdome is now at hand, and thou standing at the dore. Come forth out of thy Royall Chambers, O Prince of all the Kings of the earth, put on the visible roabes of thy imperiall Majesty, take up that unlimited Scepter which thy Almighty Father hath bequeath'd thee; for now the voice of thy Bride calls thee; and all creatures sigh to bee renew'd" (38-39).

Milton's ardent apocalypticism reached a peak after the defeat of Charles I in 1649. As we have already seen, Milton, in *Eikonoklastes* (1649), deemed regicide as a legitimate act committed "in these latter days" (239). Moreover, in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649), Milton prayed "that only just & rightful kingdom . . . may com soon" (59).

However, Milton never articulated his zealous apocalyptic anticipation of Christ's forthcoming parousia after the regicide tracts. On the contrary, he maintained the importance of waiting for God's time patiently, especially after he completely lost his eyesight in 1652.¹⁴ On the eve of the English Revolution Milton believed that the extirpation of prelacy would bring in

¹³ See, for example, Arthur Barker's *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma* (1942), Michael Fixler's *Milton and the Kingdoms of God* (1964), and Austin Dobbins's *Milton and the Book of Revelation* (1975).

¹⁴ Paul Baumgartner, going over the references to patience in Milton's *corpus*, convincingly proposes that Milton always had a nominal belief in patience as a Christian virtue, but not until after his blindness in 1652 was he able to realize it in terms of experience (204-5).

God's eternal kingdom; in 1649 too, he thought that the beheading of the king would inaugurate Christ's Second Coming. But after his blindness, Milton came to realize that man's actions could not hasten God's appointed time.

Rather than yearning for Christ's imminent coming, Milton seeks an inner spiritual kingdom of God instead. Milton expressed the idea of the paradise within in *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes* (1659): "Christ hath a government of his own . . . that it governs not by outward force . . . because it deals only with the inward man and his actions, which are all spiritual and to outward force not lyable . . . to shew us the divine excellence of his spiritual kingdom" (37-38).

The concept of the paradise within was further developed in *Paradise Lost*. At the end of the epic, before driving Adam out of paradise, Michael exhorts him:

onely add

Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith,
Add vertue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,
By name to come call'd Charitie, the soul
Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
A paradise within thee, happier farr. (XII. 581-87)

A paradise within is a spiritual kingdom, a state of mind. In the paradise within reside faith, virtue, patience, temperance, and love. In the post-lapsarian world, leading a Christian life is tantamount to living in the kingdom of God. Evidently, Milton's apocalyptic expectations subsided when he composed *Paradise Lost*. Therefore, it is questionable to argue that the war in heaven in Book VI reveals Milton's anticipation of Christ's imminent and violent

intervention to end the Restoration.

But the preaching of the importance of the inner spiritual kingdom does not mean Milton abandoned his expectation of the Second Coming. Christ in *Paradise Regained*, while patiently waiting for God's time of providence—"To his due time and providence I leave them" (III. 440)—preaches the spiritual kingdom in man's heart—"he who reigns within himself, and rules/ Passions, Desires, and Fears, is more a King" (II. 466-67). But the patient Christ can be as active as ever: "When that comes think not thou to find me slack/ On my part aught endeavouring" (III. 398-99). In other words, Milton in his last phase of life still believed in the legitimacy of apocalyptic violence but he did not urge its immediacy.

The *Merkabah* Image in the Creation Scene

The analysis of the trajectory of Milton's apocalypticism enables us to reevaluate the apocalyptic violence exhibited in Book VI of *Paradise Lost*. A new understanding of Milton's concept of violence can be derived from the reappearance of the *Merkabah* image in the creation scene in Book VII. According to Genesis 1, it is God the Father who created the heaven and the earth. Nevertheless, in *Paradise Lost*, it is not the Father but the Son in his chariot that leads the heavenly hosts to perform the task of creation:

About his Chariot numberless were pour'd
 Cherub and Seraph, Potentates and Thrones,
 And Vertues, winged Spirits, and Chariots wing'd,
 From the Armoury of God, where stand of old
 Myriads between two brazen Mountains lodg'd
 Against a solemn day, harness at hand,

Celestial Equipage; and now came forth
 Spontaneous, for within them Spirit livd,
 Attendant on thir Lord. . . . (VII. 197-205)

This image of the chariot is a mixture of Zechariah's and Ezekiel's visions. "Myriads between two brazen mountains" (201) echoes "there came four chariots out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass" (Zech. 6. 1); "within them spirit lived" (204) refers to "the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels" (Ezek. 1. 20).

The association of the Book of Zechariah and the Apocalypse is apparent. Zechariah's four chariots are pulled by four kinds of horses: red, black, white, and grisled and bay horses. In Revelation 6, four horses come with the breaking of the first four seals: white, red, black, and pale horses. Thus, it is reasonable to argue that the Son's chariot in the creation scene also bears apocalyptic significance. In this sense, Christ in the *Merkabah* image in Book VII too foreshadows/prefigures His Second Coming.

Yet the *Merkabah* image in the creation scene is anything but violent. Christ in the chariot is radiant with "Sapience and Love" (VII. 195). Milton deliberately revised the creation narrative by attributing the creation task to the Son not the Father. By putting the Son in a chariot that bears apocalyptic significance, Milton revealed another aspect of his idea of apocalyptic violence—generation must follow destruction, otherwise violence would become pointless.

Therefore, we can conclude that the apocalyptic violence represented in the *Merkabah* images in *Paradise Lost* bears a deeper meaning than an expression of God's vindication of His justice near the end of the world. In fact, the images also reveal Milton's aspiration of comprehending God. Again and again, Milton claims that God is invisible (e.g. III. 375, V. 157; VII. 122).

In a sense, God is transcendental, beyond the grasp of human language. But in the depiction of the chariot of paternal deity, Milton attempts to describe the indescribable, for God the Father says:

Effulgence of my Glorie, Son below'd,
 Son in whose face invisible is beheld
 Visibly, what by Deitie I am. . . . (VI. 680-82)

The drive to visualize the invisible exhibits Milton's desire to see God face to face. The mysticism of the *Merkabah*, as J. H. Adamson notes, "typifie[s] the human longing for the sight of the Divine Presence and companionship with it" (108). In other words, the *Merkabah* "was the mystical vehicle which carried the ecstatic worshipper into the realm of essence" (108). Adamson concludes that "[a]ll mystics wished to be *Merkabah* riders" (108). Milton wished to be a *Merkabah* rider. In "The Passion," a short poem published in 1645, he wished to be in the prophet's stead, to ascend to ride in Ezekiel's chariot:¹⁵

See see the Chariot, and those rushing wheels,
 That whirld the Prophet up at *Chebar* flood,
 My spirit som transporting *Cherub* feels,
 To bear me where the Towers of *Salem* stood,
 Once glorious Towers, now sunk in guiltles blood;
 There doth my soul in holy vision sit
 In pensive trance, and anguish, and ecstatick fit. (36-42)

The *Merkabah* images represent Milton's desire to seek God's divine presence.

¹⁵ Ezekiel saw the *Merkabah* vision by the river of Chebar (Ezek. 1.1), and he was sent to Jerusalem that sank in blood (22.1-4).

On the one hand, divine presence assures the legitimacy of violence; on the other hand, divine presence indicates God's mercy, as we have seen that creation follows destruction. It is the Son's chariot that exercises divine violence (justice), and it is the Son's chariot, too, that performs creation (mercy).

Justice and Mercy

One of the key ideas embedded in the idea of divine violence is the belief in *a priori* knowledge of ethics. In other words, morality does not depend on the evidence of observation, experiment, and experience—it can be justified independently of empirical theories. The *a priori* knowledge of ethics, despising all moral relativism, believes in absolute, prescriptive moral criteria. Consequently, the sole criterion is conscience. In seventeenth-century England, conscience was commonly regarded as the “‘deity within us,’ that element of knowledge of God that remained even in fallen man” (Sharpe 78). Milton also referred to conscience as “the best light which God hath planted” in man (*Readie and Easy Way* 87). Conscience in human beings works as ethical competence, which is given, independent from human experience. The conscience-based ethics transcends human law, which appears imperfect in front of the God-given “better cov’nant” (*Paradise Lost* XII. 302) that privileges divine violence above secular ethics.

Nevertheless, man is not infallible: “No man or body of men,” Milton concedes in *Treatise of Civil Power*, “can be the infallible judges or determiners in matters of religion to any other mens consciences but thir own” (6). Milton reasserts the fallibility of man in *Paradise Lost*: “for on Earth/ Who against Faith and Conscience can be heard/ Infallible?” (XII. 528- 30). Since man can be served as an agent to execute divine violence in a holy war, such as the war in heaven in *Paradise Lost*, the divine presence of the

Merkabah image guarantees justice.

Moreover, since no man is infallible, man's execution of divine violence should be supplemented by God's mercy. It is the idea of the fallibility of man that urges Milton to seek divine presence in the *Merkabah* image, which can authenticate divine violence. It is also the idea of the fallibility of man that drives Milton to crave God's mercy, for divine violence, even undertaken in a seemingly just cause, can be used to vindicate one's wishful thinking.

For Milton, God's justice must be tempered by mercy. After Adam and Eve's transgression, God utters to the angels that: "Easie it might be seen that I intend/ Mercie colleague with Justice" (X. 58-59); "I shall temper so/ Justice with Mercie" (77-78). Of the two, mercy is greater and vindicates the other:

[I]n Mercy and Justice both
Through Heav'n and Earth, so shall my glorie excel,
But Mercy first and last shall brightest shine. (III. 132-34)

The pattern of justice-then-mercy parallels that of destruction-then-creation demonstrated in the two *Merkabah* images in *Paradise Lost*. Justice is served by the destructive power of divine violence; mercy is revealed in the regenerative power of divine violence. The very embodiment of mercy is the Son, who is the "greater Man" that can "restore us" (I. 4-5), and who is the "great Intercessor" (XI. 19) bringing man's prayer to God.

Accordingly, based on the above analysis of the *Merkabah* images, I would like to modify Lieb's model of the duality of Milton's violence. I propose that regeneration is more than a counterpart of destruction—the former justifies and completes the latter. After the Restoration, Milton was no longer that combative prose writer who espied Christ's Second Coming on the horizon. The chastened bard turned his attention from zealous apocalypticism

to the idea of the paradise within. The meaning of the *Merkabah* vision lies not so much in apocalyptic violence as in the divine presence whose dwelling is man's heart. Thus, Milton could not care less about apocalyptic violence. As regeneration consummates destruction, mercy accomplishes justice.

Conclusion

Did old Milton ever cast a dubious eye on his former advocacy of religious violence? In this paper I argue that Milton did change his idea of violence at least after his blindness in 1652. In the war in heaven in *Paradise Lost*, the Son in the chariot of paternal deity performs overwhelming violence upon the rebellious fallen angels. I have demonstrated that the *Merkabah* image bore an apocalyptic significance in the seventeenth century and that the Son participating in the war in heaven prefigures/foreshadows His Second Coming. Apocalyptic violence, though characteristically destructive, serves justice and thus is not only unavoidable but desirable.

Yet a survey of the development of Milton's apocalyptic ideas throws a different light on our understanding of Milton's attitude toward violence. After his blindness, Milton never urged Christ's imminent parousia. Instead, he advocated the importance of God's kingdom within man's heart. Accordingly, I contend that the war in heaven in *Paradise Lost* cannot be interpreted as Milton's invocation of Christ's intervention to terminate the Restoration.

In addition to apocalyptic violence—a special kind of religious violence—the *Merkabah* image also signifies divine presence. Religious violence is justified according to the moral standard prescribed by religious faith. Yet no man is infallible; only God's presence can legitimate the use of violence. In this sense, the *Merkabah* vision indicates Milton's desire to ride on the chariot and to see God face to face.

Furthermore, the analysis of the trajectory of Milton's apocalyptic ideas also supports the argument of divine presence. In the last phase of his life, Milton's zest for fanatic apocalypticism was replaced by the doctrine of paradise within. Thus, divine presence represented by the *Merkabah* image fulfills Milton's search for the immanence of God.

The apocalyptic violence in the war in heaven is further modified by the reappearance of the *Merkabah* image in the creation scene. It is the same chariot that performs first the destruction of the fallen angels and then the sacred task of creation. The fact seems to imply that apocalyptic violence is not only destructive but also regenerative, which echoes Lieb's hypothesis. But the pattern of destruction-then-creation indicates that destruction and creation are not the two sides of the same coin of violence—the latter completes the former. The emphasis on the regenerative effects of violence coincides with Milton's attitude toward justice and mercy. Violence is used to serve the cause of justice, which, according to Milton, must be moderated by mercy.

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《失樂園》裡的戰車意象與 天啟末世暴力

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摘 要

本文以《失樂園》第六、第七卷裡的戰車意象為中心文本，討論密爾頓對於天啟末世暴力的概念。麥可·萊布認為密爾頓作品中的暴力具有雙重性質——毀滅與再生。作者藉此主張這兩個戰車意象體現了此雙重性質。本文先研究暴力在天啟文學裡的角色；然後把《失樂園》第六卷天上戰爭這一場景裡的戰車意象，看作是為正義而戰的天啟末世暴力。接下來作者追蹤密爾頓天啟末世思想的發展軌跡，指出在寫《失樂園》之前他便已不再持激進末世論了。因此，作者認為《失樂園》天上戰爭並不能解釋成密爾頓祈求基督速臨以終結英國復辟。此外，戰車意象亦表示神靈同在，也因此才能確保暴力是為正義而服務。本文指出戰車意象再度出現於第七卷的創世場景，表示密爾頓藉由同一個意象把毀滅與再生串聯起來。在第六卷天上戰爭裡，聖子駕著聖父的戰車施行毀滅；在第七卷創世場景裡，聖子再度駕著戰車施行創造。文末，作者把毀滅與再生的主題與密爾頓對正義與憐憫的觀念連接起來。密爾頓認為，暴力為正義服務，但之後必伴隨憐憫。

關鍵詞：天啟末世暴力、末世論、戰車意象、密爾頓、
《失樂園》、暴力

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