Interart Studies from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era: Stylistic Parallels between English Poetry and the Visual Arts

Roberta Aronson

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Interart Studies from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era:
Stylistic Parallels between English Poetry and the Visual Arts

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by

Roberta Chivers Aronson

October 1, 2003
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pearl Poet and International Gothic Art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressionism in Late Medieval Poetry and Art:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Langland the Rohan Master</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Milton: The Garden of Eden and the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baroque Classical Landscape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Milton: Baroque Tenebrism and <em>Paradise Lost</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPILOGUE</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Illustrations

| Plate 1 | Limbourg Brothers: “January” The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, 1413-16. Musée Condé, Chantilly |
| Plate 2 | Limbourg Brothers: “May” The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, 1413-16. Musée Condé, Chantilly |
| Plate 4 | Limbourg Brothers: “February” The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, 1413-16. Musée Condé, Chantilly |
| Plate 5 | The Limbourg Brothers, “August” The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, 1413-16. Musée Condé, Chantilly |
| Plate 7 | The Rohan Master, “Dying Man before Christ” The Rohan Master A Book of Hours, c. 1425. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris |
| Plate 8 | The Rohan Master, “Annunciation to the Shepherds” The Rohan Master A Book of Hours, c. 1425. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris |
| Plate 9 | Limbourg Brothers, “Annunciation to the Shepherds” The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, 1413-16. Musée Condé, Chantilly |
| Plate 11 | Annibale Carracci and Domenichino, “Flight into Egypt,” 1603. Galleria Doria Pamphili, Rome |
| Plate 14 | Giorgione/Titian, “Pastoral Symphony,” c. 1508. Louvre, Paris |
| Plate 15 | Nicolas Poussin, “Et in Arcadia Ego,” 1650-55. Louvre, Paris |
| Plate 17 | Plan and Reconstruction of the Gardens at Theobalds, 1575-85. Outside of London |
| Plate 19 | Caravaggio, “Calling of St. Matthew,” 1599-1600. Contarelli Chapel, S. Luigi dei Francesi, Rome |
| Plate 23 | Rembrandt “Holy Family,” 1640. Louvre, Paris |
| Plate 24 | Carpaccio, “Calling of St. Matthew,” 15th century, Oratorio degli Schiavoni, Venice |
| Plate 26 | Rembrandt, “Supper at Emmaus,” 1648. Statens Museum, Copenhagen |
| Plate 27 | Rembrandt, “Supper at Emmaus,” 1648. Louvre, Paris |
INTRODUCTION

Interart studies constitute a small but ongoing current of literary criticism throughout the twentieth century. The term “interart studies” is broadly used here to identify literary criticism which looks to the visual arts to provide insights about a wide range of literary issues from form, to style, to content. Interart studies are relatively few in number, which may be explained by the relative rarity of interdisciplinary studies in general. But it is curious that throughout the twentieth century, interart studies occupy a distinct category of literary criticism. In this proposal, I would like to provide a brief history of interart scholarship and then to situate my own studies within it.

Interart studies must be carefully delineated and defined as a branch of literary criticism, which is an important point to make relative to the discipline of art history. Jean Seznec recorded his conversation with Gustave Lanson when the former approached the latter for suggestions about undertaking advanced study interrelating the history of literature and the history of art. Lanson commented, "I see," he said; "you want to be a Janus bifrons; but beware. You run the risk of being rejected by both sides. Literary historians will disown you as belonging to the other camp, while the art historians will ignore you as a mere trespasser."¹

Interart studies may be reviewed historically as having gone through three rather distinct stages in the twentieth century. The first stage encompasses the forty years before the outbreak of World War II; the second stage encompasses the work of the post-war years stretching from about 1945 to 1972; and the final stage encompasses the last twenty-five years of the twentieth century. I suggest

¹ Jean Seznec, “Art and Literature: A Plea for Humility,” New Literary History 3 (Spring, 1972): 569. Seznec (d. 1983) reports this conversation and warning as given to him "as a young student." Gustave Lanson’s life from 1857-1934 situates this advice, therefore, around the 1920's.
these historical periods as convenient, if somewhat arbitrary, delineations which can provide a helpful framework for both reviewing the history of interart studies and for situating my own interart studies within a larger context.

The pre-war corpus of interart studies was neatly summarized by René Wellek's influential 1941 article, "Literature and the Arts." Central to this early group of interart studies was Wölfflin's 1915 Principles of Art History, which, in Wellek's words, "soon excited the envy and competition of literary historians." Wölfflin's establishment of broad stylistic categories to characterize Renaissance and Baroque art and to differentiate clearly between the two had an immediate impact on literary historians, who sought to find comparable structural and stylistic categories in English literature. Several German literary historians quickly followed in the wake of Wölfflin and others to participate in the broad scholarly movement of "geistgeschichte." Under the umbrella of looking to the visual arts, music and literature for common thematic and aesthetic patterns, "geistgeschichte" provided an intellectual framework for broad interrelationships between and among the diverse arts.

Though René Wellek highlighted the shortcomings of these early interart studies, he also called for continuing them, though they would be enriched by more disciplined approaches. Wellek does not presume to provide such approaches; rather, he emphasizes the need for them. This early strand of interart studies from about 1900-1940 reads now as highly subjective and uneven. Wellek's call to greater discipline seeds the field of interart studies for the generation of scholars following the war.

René Wellek's scholarly stature imbued his call for greater discipline and precision in interart studies with immediate force. The postwar generation of

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interart scholars almost without exception cite Wellek’s 1941 article and situate their studies in relation to its recommendations. A few examples will suffice to indicate both the impact of Wellek’s article and the emerging patterns for interart studies in the late 1940s and the 1950s and 1960s.

In the late 1940s, Helmut Hatzfeld, a philosopher working on aesthetic theory, opened an article with a reference to Wellek and then proceeded to suggest approaches to interart studies which may better stand up to academic scrutiny. Hatzfeld noted two important types of interart analysis that can yield valuable insights: first, direct parallels between a literary text and an art subject in which an artist and/or a writer is directly and specifically inspired or influenced by the other; and, second, stylistic parallels between a literary text and a work of art. Hatzfeld emphasized that the latter must be restricted to ”epochal parallels in history.” Hatzfeld’s study drew a significant stylistic parallel between Old French poetic syntax and spatial and narrative devices in Gothic painting, an analysis that set the stage for later interart studies emphasizing close comparative stylistic analysis.

One of the most notable shifts in the post-war generation was the turn of some medievalists to interart studies. Most of the pre-war interart studies had followed Wölfflin's emphasis on the contrast between the Renaissance and Baroque styles, so that little thought was given to the potential interplay between medieval literature and medieval art. Indeed, this quickly became one of the most fertile areas of post-war interart studies, as D. W. Robertson, Jr., Charles Muscatine, and other medievalists picked up the interart banner and quickly established new insights into medieval English literature based upon close study of medieval art.

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D. W. Robertson, Jr.’s highly influential *A Preface to Chaucer* (1962) used the visual arts to situate Chaucer's works within the Middle Ages and medieval aesthetics, in stark contrast to the then prevalent approach of interpreting Chaucer as the first modern English writer. Robertson was troubled by the "more or less constant endeavor to see him [i.e., Chaucer] as an anticipator of later tendencies and attitudes."4 Robertson's lengthy study devotes considerable space to tracing Romanesque and Gothic thematic and stylistic traits, most notably a steady integration of classical materials into European culture, the fascination of the Romanesque and Gothic periods for the grotesque, the stylistic tendency towards pattern and the allegorical mode of thought. What emerged in Robertson's work that is significant to interart studies was the very successful use of the visual arts to bring fresh insight to understanding Chaucer's poetry.

Robertson’s work on Chaucer seems to have paved the way for a veritable outpouring of interart medieval studies in the 1960s and the early 1970s, all of which shared a commitment to delineating close stylistic and thematic parallels between medieval art and literature. But unlike prewar studies, the rationale for seeking the parallels was more precisely articulated as a literary issue, rather than a general "spirit of the age" issue. Medieval literary studies was especially in need of analytical tools since the literary forms, such as allegory, epic, romance, and the like, were not readily understood by, and understandable to, modern readers.

Other notable efforts in the 1960s and 1970s were carried out by Elizabeth Salter, Derek Pearsall, Charles Muscatine, and John Leyerle. All of these interart studies share a commitment to the close stylistic analysis of medieval style and narrative mode in the visual arts, which can be discerned, in turn, in medieval

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poetic style and narrative form. Interart studies in general, not only with a medieval emphasis, seemed to reach a height in the late 1960s and early 1970s, evidenced by the birth in 1969 of a new journal, *New Literary History*, out of the University of Virginia, which was particularly interested in "the definition of periods and their uses in interpretation, the evolution of styles, conventions, genres and their relationship to each other and to the periods in which they flourish."5 This same journal dedicated its second issue to "A Symposium on Periods" (1970) to which Meyer Schapiro, H.W. Janson and Ernst H. Gombrich contributed and its third issue to a forum of literary and art historians to discuss the topic, "Literary and Art History" (1972). Notable among the many contributions to both of these issues was a 1972 article by Alastair Fowler entitled, "Periodization and Interart Analogies."6 I cite this as a crucial article because Fowler’s renewed call for the value of interart studies along with the now familiar caution for continued rigor and close textual study did much to fuel and legitimize the final group of interart studies which continue right up to the present.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, interart studies entered an era of both greater discipline and greater self-confidence. Medievalists as well as literary critics of Renaissance and later literature share a common commitment to the value of interart studies. The most notable and prolific among the interart scholars during this era is Murray Roston, whose series of interart publications from 1980 through the present attests to the continued viability and enduring value of interart studies. Roston is sweeping in his coverage of literature, from the late Middle Ages through the twentieth century. His earliest interart book, *Milton and the Baroque*, (1980), established his methodology which has then

been followed up by a trilogy of interart books. The first two, *Renaissance Perspectives in Literature and the Visual Arts* (1987) and *Changing Perspectives in Literature and the Visual Arts 1650-1820* (1990), has just been followed in 2000 with a volume on Modernism.7

Murray Roston articulates his approach to interart studies as synchronic, implying a broad approach to discerning the dominant concerns of an historical period as expressed in the dual art forms of the visual arts and literature. This would be in direct contrast to a diachronic approach, which bases interart studies on the direct and specific contact of an author with identifiable works of the visual arts. But Roston's methodology asserts his position that the most important reason for pursuing such analysis within the field of literary studies is to lend insight to the interpretation of a text that can never be gleaned from the text alone. One example will suffice to illustrate such an approach. Roston's first book, *Milton and the Baroque*, examines a number of issues, one of which is the "heroic" stature of Satan. When Roston shifts this scholarly conversation about whether Satan may indeed be the hero of *Paradise Lost* into the larger context of the seventeenth century and principles of the Baroque as evidenced in the visual arts, Milton can be seen as creating a necessarily powerful and at times even sympathetic foe as an appropriately dramatic counterforce to the awesome and complete power of the Son in his victory over this "heroic" Satan. A Satan of less heroic proportions would diminish the Son and his victory.

My own studies will take a similar approach to Roston's. I propose to work in two major eras, the fourteenth century and the seventeenth century. In the context of art historical periods, these eras would correspond to the International

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Gothic and the Baroque. Four issues will occupy my attention: William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* and its troubling mood and genre, the Pearl Poet’s *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *The Pearl* and their unique artistry, Milton’s idea of the garden in *Paradise Lost*, and Milton’s extraordinary use of light and darkness in *Paradise Lost*. All four of these issues have been subject to considerable textual analysis and interpretation, but some reexamination in relation to the visual arts will yield valuable new insights. My analytical methodology will interrelate literature and visual arts in each of these eras.

The specifics of the methodology will involve four stages of analysis within each of these four topics. First, an interpretive issue within literary criticism that has not elicited critical consensus will be presented. Second, a descriptive analysis of contemporaneous art content and style will be provided, with the understanding that a thorough review of both the theory and of specific examples from the visual arts will establish a larger context from which a fresh examination of the literary question can emerge. Third, an analysis of each poem will follow in which the literary text will be subjected to a rigorous reexamination of style and content in light of the larger context provided by the visual arts. This third and most crucial element of the process will be comparative as specific passages in the poems will be paralleled to specific passages in the visual arts. Fourth, some conclusions will be drawn in each case about the new insight gained from such examination. An epilogue will summarize the conclusions and interrelate these two seemingly disparate eras in order to highlight the validity and value of the comparative analysis that I have outlined above.

The first comparative analysis will focus on the works of the Pearl Poet. The Pearl Poet’s single surviving manuscript preserves our only copy of his poems. As some scholars occupied themselves with questions of the geographic origin of the poet, others focused on close textual analysis in an effort to
determine whether all the poems in the manuscript represent the work of a single or of multiple poets. While these questions have certain merit, they have too long diverted literary critics from focusing on an examination of these poems as outstanding poetic creations which must be understood in a broader context of fourteenth-century cultural and aesthetic sensibilities. Even more to the point, the Pearl Poet's style (assuming a single authorship of the poems in the Pearl manuscript) exhibits an unusually cohesive poetic architecture and artistry which all too often have led literary scholars to separate the Pearl Poet from his fourteenth-century contemporaries rather than to link him to them. As the foremost exemplar of alliterative poetry, the works of the Pearl Poet situated into the broader context of International Gothic art can provide insight about the probable developmental path of alliterative poetry. The poet’s stylistic commonality with fourteenth-century aesthetics and form suggests that these poems are the highly sophisticated and complex manifestations of a late stage of stylistic development.

Fourteenth-century aesthetics can most quickly be discerned in the visual arts in a style designated the International Gothic. This is a style that prevailed, as its name suggests, across England and the Continent during the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Some notable characteristics of the International Gothic style are a density of topical detail, a highly decorative repetition of rich pattern and color, a preoccupation with the evocation and embodiment of light, and a tension (or balance) between a hyper-realism and an all pervasive symbolism. An outstanding example of the International Gothic style in manuscript illumination is the famous The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry. A close analysis of several illuminated leaves in this manuscript, as well as other examples of International Gothic art, will provide an understanding of the
decorative principles and thematic concerns typical of the International Gothic artist.

These same principles can then cast light on a fresh analysis of the stylistic and thematic concerns of the Pearl Poet in the two major poems in the Pearl manuscript, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and The Pearl. Both of these lengthy poems demonstrate a startling engagement of the same decorative and thematic principles as noted in International Gothic art. For instance, the poetic architecture of the poems exhibits an extraordinary devotion to pattern. While most poetry relies on pattern, the dense and sophisticated level of patterning in the Pearl Poet's work is notable for its pervasiveness and complexity. In the Pearl, for example, the poet organizes this lengthy poem into an intricate pattern of stanzas and fits (five stanzas constitute a fit). These fits are clearly distinguishable because each one unfolds around a single key word, such as “spot” in the opening fit. By repeating this key word in both the first and last line of each stanza within the fit, the poet structures a dense and intricate pattern. Noting the similar International Gothic penchants for topical detail, evoking light and balancing a hyper-realism with an all pervading symbolism will situate the Pearl Poet’s work into a broader cultural and stylistic context to bring a fresh understanding of and appreciation for the level of artistry in his works.

The same analytical approach will then be brought to bear on William Langland’s perplexing and intricate poem, Piers Plowman. Several questions come to mind with this poem, one of which is the radically different character of it even though it is contemporary with the Pearl Poet’s works. Where the Pearl Poet’s works are richly evocative of local detail and balance realism with symbolism, Piers Plowman rejects such stylistic norms. Where the Pearl Poet’s poems are models of order and of specific genre, Piers Plowman has resisted critical efforts to situate this poem within medieval genre studies. The poem fails
to comply with the literary norms of the dream vision genre, the romance/quest
genre, or the dialectic after the formal mode of the sermon, though the work
contains elements of all these medieval genres. If, however, the conversation is
extended out into the larger cultural context of the visual arts, this seeming lack
of a comfortable generic category can be rethought. The troubling intricacy of
the poem’s structure and content can find a visual counterpart in the non-
mainstream stylistic undercurrent of the visual arts in the late Middle Ages
characterized as “expressionistic.” The Rohan Master’s *A Book of Hours*
similarly stands well outside the mainstream stylistic characteristics reflected in
*The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry*. The Rohan Master’s
illuminations are as troubling in mood and style as William Langland’s poem is in
content and form. This interesting counterpart to *Piers Plowman* in the visual
arts of the late Middle Ages can yield some valuable insights about situating
*Piers Plowman* within the same period as the Pearl Poet and about gaining a
better grasp of the range and complexity of late medieval culture.

These same principles of analysis can be brought to bear on some
questions related to Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. The leap to the seventeenth century
and to the Baroque era in the visual arts is not as great as may seem at first
glance. A key point to bear in mind is the broad applicability of these analytical
methodologies to any era’s literary and artistic productions. Two issues continue
to emerge in Milton criticism: the sources of Milton’s conception of the Garden of
Eden and Milton’s preoccupation with light and darkness. Each issue has
hitherto been too narrowly investigated. Milton’s conception of the Garden of
Eden cannot be adequately uncovered in poetic sources, particularly not in the
works of Spenser nor in the classical or hexaemeral sources which were often of
such vital influence to Milton. Similarly, Milton’s unusual and prevalent
preoccupation with dramatic effects of light and darkness in *Paradise Lost* has
most often been examined in the context of either the symbolic role it plays in the theme of the poem\textsuperscript{8} or as a function of Milton’s blindness. The famous passage on blindness in Book III of \textit{Paradise Lost} understandably thrusts Milton’s personal situation to the forefront of the reader’s awareness and makes this biographical interpretation tempting,\textsuperscript{9} but such an interpretation defies the larger cultural context of the seventeenth century and the well known innovative handling of light in early seventeenth-century Italian Baroque painting, particularly in the works of Caravaggio and his circle. Furthermore, Milton’s strikingly visual imagination in his descriptive handlings of light and darkness throughout the poem becomes less startling as the work of a blind man when the greater artistic, theological, scientific, and philosophical interests characteristic of seventeenth-century culture are explored for possible inspiration.

The works of such full Baroque painters as Caravaggio and Pietro da Cortona, as well as the architectural and sculptural works of Bernini, provide provocative visual parallels in their shared interest in the expressive possibilities of light and darkness imagery. In all these media, strong contrasts of light and darkness become a defining aesthetic and thematic element in the compositions. Painters and architects exploited as never before the potential for the manipulation of light and darkness to evoke powerful spiritual and political content. Caravaggio, for example, revolutionized the handling of light and dark contrasts by painting with tenebristic effects, i.e., the handling of extreme lights and darks for dramatic effect. Such tenebristic effects had a sweeping and immediate impact on painting throughout Europe, as not only Italian painters of the Counter-Reformation in Italy and Spain seized upon the dramatic potential of

this device but also Protestant painters in the North, such as Rembrandt. In the hands of these diverse artists, tenebristic effects became an ideal tool for expressing the powerful religious tensions characteristic of the seventeenth century.

Milton’s accomplished use of extreme contrasts of light and dark throughout *Paradise Lost* can be examined in this larger context of Baroque tenebrism. Passages abound in *Paradise Lost* which juxtapose a deep, almost impenetrable darkness pregnant with meaning and power against an intense brightness. The dialectic set up between light and darkness is indeed one of the organizing principles of the epic, just as such a dialectic or contrast is an organizing principle of a Caravaggio painting.

A similar analysis of Milton’s Garden of Eden in *Paradise Lost* will underline the poet’s deep affinity for the Baroque idiom, but in this case with the newly emerging Baroque landscape genre. Milton’s trip to Italy in 1638-39 again functions as a suggestive, but unprovable, possible inspirational fount of critical importance in the shaping of a Baroque poet who envisions his universe in terms strikingly unlike his poetic predecessors, such as Spenser, Dante, or Vergil. Garden images abound in classical, medieval and Renaissance poetry, but Milton’s garden cannot be discovered there. A thorough examination of the Baroque landscape genre can provide visual analogues for Milton’s innovative vision of the Garden of Eden.

The vitality of interart studies must be sustained even as the methodologies are continually questioned and reexamined. While language and symbol may become quickly impenetrable to all but a select group of intellectuals, the visual arts can provide significant clues to the common cultural context among the various art forms. These common cultural contexts can be illustrated in a wide range of artistic activity across a wide range of historical
periods. Such diverse poetic forms as the Pearl Poet’s romance, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and the vastly different Piers Plowman by William Langland, can be situated within the same period only when the larger context of the International Gothic in the visual arts is explored. Similarly, a grasp of the Baroque in the visual arts can provide some vital clues to the enigma of a Milton - a blind poet whose Paradise Lost is one of the most visual and dramatic poems in English literature.
The four poems preserved in the B.M. Cotton Nero A.x. manuscript (Pearl, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Cleanness and Patience) constitute four of the significant long poems of the so-called Alliterative Revival of the second half of the fourteenth century. W. P. Ker was the first to posit this notion of an alliterative revival in his 1907 comments in Volume I of the Cambridge History of English Literature, when he remarked that, “Alliterative blank verse came up in the middle of the fourteenth century. . . It must have been hidden away somewhere underground. . . till, at last, there is a striking revival in the reign of Edward III” (325). After this somewhat offhand characterization, the term “revival” quickly gained acceptance when Samuel Moore repeated it in 1913 to be quickly followed by Hulbert and Oakden in the 1930s. The latter began to use “Alliterative Revival” as a formal designation, which continues to hold currency up to the present.²

While we continue to rely on this label to group a significant corpus of alliterative poetry from roughly 1350-1420, the notion that the poetry represents a revival of an Old English poetic tradition remains the subject of considerable scholarly uncertainty. The seemingly sudden outpouring of alliterative poetry in the second half of the fourteenth century, most examples of which are available

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¹ The Pearl is also rhymed as well as alliterated, but the poem is usually grouped with the other poems of this manuscript as part of the Alliterative Revival corpus.
to us as the fortuitous result of the preservation of single manuscript copies, complicates a straightforward historical analysis of developmental roots and paths. Formal similarities to Old English alliterative verse cannot be denied: poetry of the “Alliterative Revival” shares the aa/ax alliterative pattern of Old English verse as well as significant Old English vocabulary. But the intervening years from 1100 to 1350, when dramatic transformations of the English language were occurring under the pressures of Norman influence, provide little documentary evidence of an ongoing tradition of alliterative poetry. The notion of a revival, therefore, matches the documentary trail of physical evidence.

However, the dissimilarities between Old English alliterative poetic style and fourteenth-century alliterative poetic style prompt some doubts. For instance, the very short Old English line becomes the Middle English long line. Twentieth-century critics have offered a variety of theories to explain both these notable similarities and notable differences between the alliterative poetry of these two periods.

The purists of the Alliterative Revival notion suggest that poets of the mid-fourteenth century, responding to the patronage of baronial, anti-Norman/London political fervor, consciously revived the Old English alliterative forms and vocabularies that had been kept alive in an oral tradition. In the absence of preserved texts from the intervening centuries, this transmission via oral traditions may seem plausible, but it is impossible to prove.

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3 R. W. Chambers, On the Continuity of English Prose from Alfred to More and his School, EETS OS 191A (1937), reprinted from his introduction to EETS OS 186 (1932). (1932), p. lxvii. Again, I depend on Pearsall’s article and citation of this work. Pearsall quotes Chambers: "There can be few stranger things in the history of literature than this sudden disappearance and reappearance of a school of poetry. It was kept alive by oral tradition through nine generations, appearing in
In the great outpouring of medieval literary criticism following World War II, this notion of an “Alliterative Revival” underwent continual scrutiny. Dorothy Everett commented that, “that later outpouring of alliterative poetry which has conveniently, though probably inaccurately, been termed the ‘alliterative revival’ occurs . . . Suddenly (so it appears to us), in the middle of the fourteenth century.” Everett suggested that alliterative poetry continued, in both oral and written forms, without break from the time of the Norman Conquest. Elizabeth Salter and Derek Pearsall in the 1970s and 1980s continued to develop this notion of an “Alliterative Survival.” For instance, Derek Pearsall noted that twelve of the fifteen poems of the western and northern revival survive in unique manuscripts, so it is not difficult to surmise that alliterative predecessors from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries existed but have not survived. Elizabeth Salter, on whose scholarship Pearsall often depends, was adamant in her assertion that the notion of an “Alliterative Revival” lacks historical probability and validity. Instead, Salter looked to preserved examples of prose writings before 1350 to discover possible antecedents for an alliterative style. Preserved alliterative material, albeit brief, can be found in thirteenth and fourteenth century prayers, hymns and prose materials; so non-poetic texts can provide helpful evidence of the developmental path along which the alliterative poetic tradition may have proceeded.

writing very rarely, and then usually in a corrupt form, till it suddenly came forth, correct, vigorous, and bearing with it a whole tide of national feeling.”

5 Pearsall 44.
The critic is left, however, with an unfortunate paucity of textual material, particularly secular, poetic material in the vernacular, from the centuries intervening between the Conquest and the time of Edward II in mid-fourteenth century England. Little such material is available, and the weight of the remaining material upholds the preeminence of Latin and Norman as the languages of serious art and activity. Furthermore, the vernacular itself was in an unusually fluid state in England with the confluence of the competing pressures of French, Latin and Anglo-Saxon. But in the midst of such linguistic diversity and pressures, by the mid-fourteenth century a well recognized high art form of alliterative poetry emerged, seemingly fully developed. This is the enigma facing the literary historian. While the alliterative poetry of the late fourteenth century bears some striking similarities to Anglo-Saxon classic forms, we are frustrated in our attempts to explain how the poets accessed these forms and along what possible developmental paths the poets transformed them. Was this a revival or a survival? If it was a survival, how did the survival occur? If it was a revival, how and why did this occur? Lacking documentary evidence, and always uncomfortable with the somewhat glib notion of oral transmission, the literary critic cannot answer the question of revival or survival.

This enigma becomes an ideal question for the student of interart studies. The period in question, from 1066 to 1350, spans the late Romanesque, but largely the Gothic, stylistic eras in the visual arts. Indeed, the dominance of the Gothic aesthetic distinguishes the great bulk of this period (c. 1150/1200-1400/1450). Largely under Norman sponsorship, the Gothic spread quickly throughout Europe and England during the twelfth century. The very lack of
secular, poetic texts in the emerging vernacular in England during this crucial century may be supplemented by the larger context of preserved monuments in the visual arts. The visual arts, then, may provide some insights about the stylistic developments within the Gothic occurring during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; shedding some much needed light on this question of survival or revival in secular alliterative poetry. In order to do this, some close parallels must be discerned between the alliterative poetry of the late fourteenth century and concurrent monuments in the visual arts. If such a link can be reasonably argued, the notion of not only a survival but of an ongoing development through these silent centuries can be posited. Alliterative poetry of the late fourteenth century coincides with a late stylistic phase of the Gothic which is designated the International Gothic, so-called to express its widespread uniformity throughout England and the Continent. Close parallels between the International Gothic visual arts and the poetry of the so-called Alliterative Revival will build a strong case for probable parallel developments of poetry and the visual arts through the earlier Gothic period and give tremendous credence to the notion of an alliterative survival rather than that of a revival.

As the label "International Gothic" suggests, this style in the visual arts may be observed in a wide array of works emerging from all the major European art centers from the period of about 1350-1450. If it may be allowed that commercial, intellectual, and artistic activity throughout the late Middle Ages fostered a commonality of cultural expression that transcended “national” boundaries, examples of International Gothic painting that may inform a stylistic analysis of the Pearl Poet’s works can be drawn from many centers. In the early
fifteenth century, the most creative and productive centers of International Gothic art were located in and around Paris and in the vital commercial cities of the Lowlands. It is to examples from these centers that I shall look to discern stylistic characteristics in painting that elucidate the stylistic patterns of the Pearl Poet.

The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, painted by the Limbourg Brothers from 1413-16, is one of the most well known and widely appreciated illuminated manuscripts produced in the early fifteenth century in Paris. The twelve calendar pages, in particular, offer some of the most outstanding examples of International Gothic painting. Although this stylistic analysis could be applied to any of the pages in the manuscript, the discussion here will be limited to two examples: “January” [Plate 1] and “May.” [Plate 2] The principle of design of these compositions relies first and foremost on the repetition of pattern: patterns of line and patterns of color. The May page is a wonderful example of how effectively the International Gothic painter repeats a pattern of curving lines to unify the composition and to keep the eye moving. The rumps of the horses, each a nearly identical repetition of the others, carry the eye across the surface of the page. These graceful curves are reinforced and repeated in the curving shapes of the female figures and even the curving poses of the male figures. Furthermore, the repetitions of color, particularly the greens and blues in the costumes and the curving lines of the horses’ green harnesses, create a rhythmic patterning that decoratively links the riding party together. A very richly detailed patterning characterizes this entire leaf: even the forest backdrop is decoratively reduced to a dense pattern of identical, curving miniature tree trunks and foliated tops.
The same design schema of calligraphic lines and vivid color characterizes the “January” leaf. Again, the rich blues and vivid green, as well as an intense red, move the eye both horizontally and vertically to unite the very diverse participants in this New Year’s Day festivities, from the Duke at his lavish feast to the jousting knights “out-of-doors” in the “mid-ground.” The fanciful green hills evenly spaced across this “mid-ground” offer a particularly apt example of the International Gothic artist’s penchant for repeating pattern of identical color, line, and shape.

It is, however, not just decorative pattern alone that explains the particular character of International Gothic stylistics, because all art depends on pattern to unify composition. Rather, the repetition of each pattern many times within a small area yields a density to the patterning characteristic of this International Gothic phase. This dense repetition of delicate curving lines and of sumptuous color creates an overall sense of preciousness which is a hallmark of the International Gothic style.

Both leaves, “January” and “May,” also exhibit another notable characteristic of the International Gothic style: a richness and density of detail. Each leaf is literally packed with an incredible number of figures, aspects of the settings and various props, so that almost no inch of the page remains empty. Both this eye for detail and the dense packing of extensive detail reveal on the “January” leaf an array of food and of golden vessels, plates, etc. that overwhelms and delights. But both leaves subject this abundant detail to a rigorous decorative scheme that subverts the realism of the details to the decorative, tapestry-like design. The Limbourg Brothers evoke or suggest the
incredible lavishness of a New Year’s Day feast in their patron’s palace through
rich color, decorative patterning, and abundance of detail much more so than
through any realism of perspective spatial illusion or naturalistic disposition of
figures and objects.

All in all, the International Gothic style at which the Limbourg Brothers
excelled must be considered a highly ornamental art form. The lavish use of
costly materials, such as gold leaf and lapis lazuli blue, endow the pages of this
manuscript with a preciousness and decorative quality that functioned as a virtual
embodiment, or incarnation, of the holy writ contained in the Book of Hours.
Even with these depictions of what may seem highly secularized images, the
upper quadrant of the page grounds the images solidly in the iconographic
tradition involving the medieval labors of the month. But the iconography is only
confirmation of a prevalent mindset similarly reflected in this highly decorative,
ornamental style: the medieval tradition in which the image has iconic power to
invoke or evoke the spiritual dimension. Just as with reliquaries housing sacred
relics or the bindings protecting sacred writings, a very lavish and highly
ornamental style of illustration reflected the late medieval equation of earthly
splendor with celestial. The late medieval, International Gothic artist, as
differentiated from his predecessor in Gothic art, lavished not only extravagant
materials but also extravagant patterning and colors to exhibit a style that can
well be characterized as highly decorative and ornamental.

The Pearl Poet’s poetic style mirrors the patterned and ornamental
color of International Gothic art. Both the Pearl and Sir Gawain and the
Green Knight exhibit the same predilection for patterning noted in the works of
the Limbourg Brothers. This patterning exists at several levels: the overall architecture of the poems, the structure of each fit in the poems, and the structure within each line of the poems. While a painter’s tools are line and color, the poet’s tools are words and sounds. The unusually tight structure of the Pearl is an excellent literary analogue of the visually tight, highly patterned structure of the Limbourg Brothers’ “May” page. Much as the artists repeated select colors and curving lines to move the eye and unite the composition (both the composition of each page and the overall composition of the Book of Hours), so too in comparable fashion did the Pearl Poet tightly unify his two large poems, the Pearl and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.

The Pearl may fairly be considered one of the most tightly organized and patterned poems in English. Twenty fits, each comprised of five stanzas or verses, gives a poetic structure of 1212 lines. A total of 101 stanzas comprise these twenty fits, and John Fleming has noted the possible theological meaning inherent in the number 101.9 Without exploring the various and interesting theological interpretations of these numerological patterns, it is important to note for the sake of the present stylistic analysis that the poet developed a complex and sophisticated pattern for the overall architectonics of the Pearl. Perhaps one of the most interesting and obvious aspects of this overall patterning is the circular pattern achieved when the poet repeats in his final stanza the vocabulary of his opening stanza. The poem opens with, “Perle plesaunte, to prynces paye,” and closes 101 stanzas later with a stanza initiated by “To pay þe Prince, oþer

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7 A “Fit” is a part or section of a poem or a song; a canto. The OED traces the word back to King Alfred’s Boethius.
8 With the exception of Fit XV, which has six stanzas.
sete sa³e" (1201) and closing with “Ande precious perlez vnto His pay” (1212). In the course of the lengthy poem, the meaning of “perle” and “prynce” shifts from the earthly and the physical to the spiritual and the metaphysical, but the shift in meanings remains embedded within a notably decorative and complex pattern in the over-all poetic architecture.

At another level of patterning, the Pearl Poet united the twenty fits and 101 stanzas with twenty concatenated words. This is, I think, the most notable and unusual aspect of patterning in all of alliterative poetry. Each of the words, very carefully selected for its range of meanings and forms, recurs in the last line of a stanza, the first line of the following stanza, and in the opening line of the subsequent fit. A particularly apt example of this concatenation is the poet’s sophisticated use of the word “adubbement” to link the five verses within Fit II. I say particularly apt because the word means “splendor,” and the International Gothic artist and the Pearl Poet share a fascination for the evocation of the splendid. Indeed, the second fit of the Pearl is devoted to a description of the heavenly realm revealed in the poet’s dream vision. It is important to note how the concatenation is structured by the poet: each verse contains the key word, “adubbement,” or its verbal form, “dubbed,” in both the final line of the verse and the opening line of the following verse:

For wern neuer webbez þat wy³ez weuen
Of half so dere adubbemente.

(Dit II, Verse 1, 71-2)

Dubbed wern alle þo downez sydez
With crystal klyffeze so cler of kynde.
.
þe sunne bemez bot blo and blynde

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In respecte of þat adubbement.

(Fit II, Verse 2, 73-4; 83-4)

The adubbemente of þo downez dere
Garten my goste al greffe forþete

... So gracios gle couþe no mon gete
As here and se her adubbement.

(Fit II, Verse 3, 85-6; 95-6)

So al watz dubbet on dere asyse
þat fryth þer Fortwne forth me ferez
þe derþe þerof for to deuyse
Nis no wyʒ worþe þat tonge berez.

... I wan to a water by schore þat scherez;
Lorde, dere watz hit adubbement!

(Fit II, Verse 4, 97-100; 107-8)

þe dubbemente of þo derworth depe
Wern bonkez bene of beryl bryʒt.

... þat alle þe loʒe lemed of lyʒt,
So dere watz hit adubbement.

(Fit II, Verse 5, 109-10; 119-20)

The linking word “adubbement” is then repeated one more time in the opening line of the following Fit: “The dubbement dere of doun and dalez” (121). While some early critics condemned this pattern as forced and artificial,¹⁰ Dorothy Everett, John McGalliard, and many others subsequently celebrated the thematic and stylistic artistry of these linking words.¹¹ While it will not be within the province of this discussion to explore the rich iconographic range to these linking words, it is important in a stylistic analysis to consider the poet’s similar affection for highly repetitive, densely packed and richly varied patterns of words that

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linguistically parallel the patterns of design in the Limbourg Brothers’ calendar leaves.

The dependence on decorative patterning also drives the poetic structure within each fit and stanza. Larry Benson’s studies on the style of the Gawain Poet offer some important insights on alliterative poetic style, in general, and the Gawain Poet’s style, in particular. Benson elucidates this poet’s style within the tradition of high and late medieval rhetoric, a tradition which cultivated “variation” as an aesthetic ideal. “Variation” is defined as the “double or multiple statement of the same concept or idea in different words, with a more or less perceptible shift in stress.” This verbal and literary preference for variation may be likened to the International Gothic painter’s preference for repeating color, calligraphic line and shape. Variation, the alliterative poet’s device of design, occurs in several modes in the Pearl and in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. At one level, the use of synonyms demonstrates the poet’s celebration of pattern. When Pearl first appears, the poet uses nine synonyms within seven stanzas to describe the maiden: “a faunt,” “a mayden,” “þat schene,” “þat gracious gay,” “þat precious piece,” “þat fresch,” “þat gyrle,” “special spyce,” and “þat swete” (157-240). Sir Gawain and the Green Knight employs its famous synonymy around the various archaic words for man: “burne, freke, gome, haþel, haþel,

12 “Pearl Poet” and “Gawain Poet” probably refer to the single poet to whom the works in this B.M. Cotton Nero A.X. manuscript can be attributed. I use the two commonly accepted “names” for this one poet interchangeably.
14 124-5. Benson quotes from the fourteenth-century rhetorician Geoffrey of Vinsauf who advised his students to use: “... multiplice forma/Dissimiletur iden; varius sis et tamen ideam” (Poetria Nova, vv. 224-25). Benson translates this as: “... let the same thing be concealed in a variety of forms; be varied yet always the same.” The highly repetitious alliterative tradition may be the preeminent poetic example of this rhetorical taste.
led, renk, schalk, segge, tulk and wy3e.”

Synonymy such as this is a dominant stylistic pattern in both poems.

Rhetorical “variation” also characterizes this poetry within each verse or stanza. Benson designates this “inner variation” as distinguished from the “outer variation” of the synonymy. “Inner variation,” as its name implies, identifies the formulaic repetitions, with varied word choices, of basic syntactical elements.

For instance, the Pearl Poet repeats basic types of phrases:

The dubbement dere of doun and dalez,
Of wod and water and wlonk playnez,
Bylde in me blys, abated my balez,
Forbidden my stresse, dystryed my paynez.

(Pearl 121-4)

In these illustrative lines, the poet repeats two syntactical patterns: the prepositional phrase, “of doun and dalez,” immediately followed by “Of wod and water and wlonk . . .” and a verbal phrase pattern, “Bylde in me blys,” “abated my balez,” “Forbidden my stresse,” and “dystryed my paynez.” Benson aptly notes that such “inner variations” can create patterns of repeated form, repeated content, or both. Of course, any analysis of pattern and repetition should not fail to note the obvious in this alliterative poetry, i.e., the repetition of sound within an alliterated line and the repetition of sound in the rhyming scheme of each stanza.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight exhibits similar preoccupation with dense patterning, although the overall pattern of the long poem is different and

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15 Marie Borroff, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (New Haven: Yale UP, 1962) 52-59. Borroff provides a very thorough analysis of these ten Old English words and their preeminent position as words of “high alliterative rank” in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. These ten words occur 263 times in the poem.
16 Benson 143.
17 Benson 146.
perhaps more subtle than that of the *Pearl*. The poems share a fascination with the number 101, for both poems have 101 stanzas. However, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* exhibits some narrative freedom in the internal length of each stanza: the stanza is rare in having an unfixed number of alliterative long lines before the consistent five shorter lines of the bob-and-wheel concluding each stanza. Nevertheless, the overall structure of the lengthy poem once again suggests a circle, because the poet deliberately brings his reader full circle with the repetition of the opening verse in the last long alliterative line of the poem: “After þe segge and þe assaute watz sese at Troye,” (2525) which echoes the opening verse, “Siþen þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye” (1). The poet also employs this circular pattern not only as a narrative device to bring structure and closure to the physical form of the poem and Gawain’s physical journey, but also as an index of the complexity of his moral growth which he brings back to the court by the end of his trial. Davenport comments that the 101 stanzas may also suggest the year and a day during which the events of the romance unfold.18

It is worthwhile to note that the overall structure of the poem’s narrative content exhibits the now familiar commitment to pattern. Donald Howard characterized the poem as having an “elaborate and symmetrical structure.”19 The poet builds a narrative around two’s and three’s: two New Year’s days, two “beheading” scenes, two courts, two confessions; and threes – three temptations, three hunts, three kisses, three strokes of the ax. This subtle but fundamental pattern brings an unusual measure of order to this romance, a genre often noted for its rambling and somewhat disorganized nature. *Sir Gawain and the Green

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Knight, like the Pearl, maintains a rigorously disciplined and tightly controlled pattern at multiple levels of style and form.

In contrast to the Pearl, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight does not use concatenated words to link the various stanzas together, though the poetic architectonics exhibit the same commitment to pattern and to the dense repetition thereof. For instance, the poet interweaves stanzas with carefully selected repetitions of sounds and words. The final alliterative long-line of the first stanza of the poem alliterates with the letter “b,” repeats that alliteration in the bob-and-wheel, and then reprises the alliteration in the first two opening alliterative long-lines of the second stanza:

On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settes
   Wyth wynne,
   Where were and wrake and wonder
   Bi syþen hatz wont þerinne
   And oft boþe blysse and blunder
   Ful skete hatz skyfted synne.

   Ande quen þis Bretayn watz bigged bi þis burn rych
   Bolde bredden þerinne, bare þat lofden,
   (SGGK 14-21)

This subtle control of pattern and its exploitation for stylistic and thematic effect reaches a notable high point in Part III of the poem as the poet moves gracefully between the masterfully orchestrated bedroom and hunting scenes. For instance, the poet uses lines alliterating on the letter “L” for transitions in the narrative, moving from the outdoor hunting activities of Bercilak to the starkly contrasting indoor bedroom scenes with Gawain and Bercilak’s lady:

   þe lorde, for blys abloy,
   Ful oft con launce and ly3t,
   And drof þat day with joy
   Thus to þe derk ny3t.
Þus laykez þis lorde by lynde-wodez euez
And Gawayn þe god mon in gay bed lygez,
Lurkkez quyl þe daylyȝt lemed on þe wowes,

(SGGK 1174-80)

Interestingly enough, lines alliterating once again on the letter “L” escort the reader between the second and the third simultaneous, counterpoised events: the Lord’s hunts outside and Gawain’s temptations inside. The second transition is made with the two lines:

þe lede with þe ladyez layked alle day
Bot þe lorde ouer þe londes launced ful ofte,

(SGGK 1560-1)

And the third transition is made with these two lines:

Now hym lenge in þat lee, þer luf hym bityde!
Þet is þe lorde on þe launde ledande his gomnes.

(SGGK 1893-4)20

The third and final dimension along which we are examining the aesthetic predilection for patterning characteristic of the International Gothic in the late Medieval period is at the level of each stanza. Since the poem has markedly different poetic architectonics from the Pearl in its use of a stanza composed of varying numbers of alliterative long-lines and concluded by the unusual bob-and-wheel, the poet’s interest in rhetorical devices takes a somewhat different form in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight than it did in the Pearl. The late medieval cultivation of variation as a rhetorical device certainly includes the synonymy already mentioned above (see p. 25), but the “inner variation” of Sir Gawain can become evident on examination of the function of this unusual and delightful bob-and-wheel device. The poet often uses the brief, rhyming lines of the bob-and-wheel to add emphasis and/or to summarize the lengthy descriptive material set
forth in the preceding alliterative long-lines of each stanza. The second stanza offers a straightforward example of this summarizing type of bob-and-wheel:

If ðe wyl listen þis laye bot on littel quile,
I schal telle hit astit, as I in toun herde,
   With tonge.
As hit is stad and stoken
In stori stif and stronge,
   With lel letteres loken,
In londe so hatz ben lone. 

(SGGK 30-6)

In this example, the wonderful “inner variation” evidences itself in the elaboration and emphasis brought to bear on the poet’s sources of authority for his about-to-unfold tale: the tale has a long heritage that can be traced to distant lands and epic tales (“stori stif and stronge”) of a shadowy, mythic past (“so hatz ben lone”). This bob-and-wheel elaborates on and summarizes the preceding long lines, which are filled with details about Arthur’s court and Britain’s kings to assure the reader/audience that the tale about to unfold is based on reliable, familiar sources. In Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, as in the Pearl, this poet favors a highly elaborate, richly decorative and patterned style that is a poetic analogue to the International Gothic art of the Limbourg Brothers in The Très Riches Heures.

In their similar preoccupation with richly described, realistic detail that strikes an unusual balance between the physically real and the supernatural, the Pearl Poet’s works are also poetic analogues of the calendar pages of The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry. Realism, then, ultimately remains subordinate to and is subverted by a highly patterned poetic structure. For

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20 Davenport 138. Davenport characterizes these transitions as “signs of a careful narrative art” which is characteristic of this poet and this poem, in particular.
instance, in the *Pearl* the dreamer’s vision of the Pearl Maiden describes her
costume in vivid pictorial detail:

> Perlez pyȝte of ryal prys
> þere moȝt mon by grace haf sene,
> Quen þat frech as flor-de-lys
> Doun þe bonke con boȝe bydene.
> Al blysnande whyt watz hir beau biys,
> Vpon at sydez, and bounden bene
> With þe myryeste margarys, at my deuyse,
> Þat euer I seȝet with myn yȝen;
> Wyth lappez large, I wot and I wene,
> Dubbed with double perle and dyȝte;
> Her cortel of self sute schene,
> With precious perlez al vmbeypȝte.

(Pearl 193-204)

If the abundant detail in the “May” leaf supplies a realistic view of contemporary
costume and environment, the handling of such detail remains part of the
elaborate decorative schema. In the above passage from the *Pearl*, the poet
similarly revels in detail, but the details remain rigorously aligned to a poetic
patterning that counters the realism with certain aesthetic demands. The result is
a very meticulously detailed picture of a realm beyond the physical.

In its very specific descriptive detail of the New Year’s Day feast in King
Arthur’s court, a passage from Sir Gawain and the Green Knight affords a striking
parallel to the “January” page from *The Très Riches Heures*:

> When þay had waschen worpyly, þay wenten to sete,
> þe best burne ay abof, as hit best semed;
> Whene Guenore ful gay grayped in þe myydes,
> Dressed on þe dere des, dubbed al aboute:
> Smal sendal bisides, a selure hir ouer
> Of tryed tolouse, of tars tapites innoghe
> þat were enbrawaded and beten with þe best gemmes
> þat myȝt be preued of prys with penyes to bye
> In daye.
> þe comlokes to discrye
> þer glent with yȝen gray;
> A semloker þat euer he siȝe
Much as the minute detail of the “January” page unfolds as part of an elaborate design pattern, so too the descriptive detail quoted above must adhere to a complex and tightly controlled narrative structure and poetic pattern of alliteration and repetition.

The very elaborate and highly ornamental character of International Gothic art finds its poetic counterpart in the complexities and highly stylized artistry of the Pearl Poet. Once again, late medieval tastes as expounded by the rhetoricians provide insight about general stylistic preferences. “Elaboration,” as opposed to “brevity,” was the preferred aesthetic. Both the “inner” and “outer variations” described above are some of the specific poetic and rhetorical means by which linguistic elaboration could be accomplished. The Pearl Poet’s very extensive synonymy, e.g., with twenty-three different synonyms used just for Bercilak’s lady or the nine synonyms for maiden used in the opening stanzas of the Pearl, underlines the aesthetic predilection for a highly ornamental, elaborate style of tremendous artifice. Just as the Limbourg Brothers delighted in the extravagant display of costly pigments to endow their illuminations with a highly decorative nature, so too the Pearl Poet delighted in the multiplicity of historically rich and suggestive words. These words were not chosen for their commonality and familiarity but for the opposite reason: the poet flaunted his words for their very suggestive echoes of distant times and places. For example, in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight the poet often prefers Old English derivatives: “gome,” “burne,” and hātel” for their haunting echo of Old English roots (“guman,”
“beorn,” and “æpelæing”).\textsuperscript{22} What is important about this poetic habit for elaborate, decorative form is the insight it can provide about late medieval literary and artistic aesthetics.

Another parallel artistic goal between International Gothic art and the Pearl Poet’s poetry is to give tangible form to light. This may more naturally seem within the province of the visual arts, but the Pearl Poet’s particularly evocative alliterative style also has formal devices available to achieve this goal. However, before engaging this discussion about the common interests in light and the artistic potential for its expression in the diverse art forms, one must provide some iconographic background to this issue.

Although the theological interest in light as a tangible expression of the divine has its origin in the Bible, this issue became a serious theological and artistic preoccupation in the West in the Gothic Era (twelfth century to fifteenth century). Abbot Suger (1081-1151), in an unusual coincidence of artistic and literary talent, not only conceived the Gothic architectural style but also wrote copiously about his architectural projects and the theology behind them. Abbot Suger, in his uniquely influential position as abbot of the abbey church of St. Denis (patron saint of France and burial place of the French kings since Merovingian times), undertook a very necessary reorganization of the abbey and rebuilding of its decrepit Carolingian church. After completing a renovation of the narthex, Abbot Suger began in earnest to redesign the apse end of the church. The resultant chevet is the first example of gothic architecture with the ogival arches, ribbed vaults and the colorful stained glass windows filling walls newly

\textsuperscript{21} Benson 128. 
\textsuperscript{22} Benson 129.
freed from their role in Romanesque structural support. Almost without exception, the motivation behind a sudden and dramatic stylistic innovation would remain open to interpretation, but in the case of Abbot Suger and the chevet at St. Denis, there is absolutely no uncertainty about the motives underlying the innovation. Abbot Suger composed the following inscription for the dedication of the new chevet in 1144:

Once the new rear part is joined to the part in front,  
The church shines with its middle part brightened.  
For bright is that which is brightly coupled with the bright,  
And bright is the noble edifice which is pervaded by the new light.23

Erwin Panofsky interprets Suger’s inscription in the context of the Abbot’s familiarity with the theological writings of Dionysus the Pseudo-Areopagite and John the Scot, copies of which were in the library at St. Denis. Both theologians were deeply steeped in Neoplatonic metaphysics of light which equated clari
tas (translated above as “bright”) with the radiance or splendor emanating from the Divine.24 Furthermore, Abbot Suger left similar verses about the jeweled chalices and precious objects displayed in the church as well as the new cast and gilded doors consecrated in 1140:

    Whoever thou art, if thou seekest to extol the glory of these doors,  
    Marvel not at the gold and the expense but at the craftsmanship of the work.  
    Bright is the noble work; but, being nobly bright, the work  
    Should brighten the minds, so that they may travel, through the true lights,


    Pars nova posterior dum jungitur anteriori,  
    Aula micat medio clarificata suo.  
    Claret enim claris quod clare concopulatur,  
    Et quot perfundit lux nova, claret opus  
    Nobile . . .

24 Panofsky, Meaning 130.
To the True Light where Christ is the true door.
In what manner it be inherent in this world the golden door defines:
The dull mind rises in truth through that which is material
And, in seeing this light, is resurrected from its former
submersion.\(^{25}\)

This new Gothic style that consciously sought to capture and encase colored,
bright shining light as the incarnation of the Divine and as a mechanism for
moving the worshipper from the earthly to the Divine, dominated the western
architectural and pictorial imagination from the time of Suger until well into the
Renaissance. The High and Late Gothic styles extended Suger’s architectural
technologies ever further in the height and the breadth of the colored windows
that could capture this Divine essence in the house of worship.

International Gothic painting, particularly in the North, is the direct inheritor
of the Suger theological and pictorial tradition that considers light a preeminent
goal of art. An outstanding example of early Flemish panel painting that
functions within this tradition is Robert Campin’s “Merode Altarpiece” from c.1426
[Plate 3]. This is a triptych which depicts the Annunciation in the center panel.
While the Annunciation was one of the most frequently depicted subjects in late
medieval art, Campin’s depiction contains some unusual elements. In a unique
convergence of light imagery, Campin’s interpretation of the Annunciation attests
to the continuing vitality of Suger’s fascination with the role of art and its power to
capture effects of light and to affect thereby sublimation in the spectator. As the

\(^{25}\) Panofsy, \textit{Meaning} 130-31. The Latin reads as follows:
\begin{verbatim}
Portarum quisquis attollere quæris honorem,
Aurum nec sumptus, operas mirare laborem.
Nobile claret opus, sed opus quod nobile claret
Clarificet mentes, ut eant per lumina vera
Ad verum lumen, ubi Christus janua vera.
Quale sit intus in his determinat aurea porta:
Meus hebes ad verum per materialia surgit,
Et demersa prior hac visa luce resurgit.
\end{verbatim}
Angel Gabriel interrupts Mary at her readings, a tiny Christ Child complete with his cross over his shoulder descends headlong down on rays of light streaming in through the glass window in direct line for Mary’s womb. Not only is the imminent incarnation made much more specific than was the common iconographic tradition, but the specificity of the light images prompts several important interpretations. Once again, Erwin Panofsky can be credited with explicating the particular concurrence of the Christ Child flying on rays of light coming through glass as well as the snuffed out candle close to the Virgin. A popular contemporary Nativity hymn likens Mary’s virginity

As the sunbeam through the glass
Passeth but not breaketh,
So the Virgin, as she was,
Virgin still remaineth.26

The snuffed out candle on the table reflects the Marian symbolism of physical illumination “reduced to nothingness” by the radiance of the Light Divine, a notion expressed by St. Bridget.27

But my purpose in exploring this iconographic tradition is to note not only its ongoing prevalence as an important theme in Gothic art but to explore the stylistic means by which both painters and poets may not only include it as a subject but also express its significance with the particular artistic tools at their disposal. For instance, Robert Campin was the first artist to master (perhaps even to invent) a new technique of oil painting utilizing quick-drying oil glazes in which the various pigments were suspended. The power of this new technique enabled a painter to control light and optical effects to a much greater degree than previously possible. Light, and therefore the intensity of color, is reflected
not just off the surface of the painted object but from various layers or depths of the applied oil glazes. A tremendous depth and luminosity became possible. Robert Campin could, in the “Merode Altarpiece” and in the “Annunciation” scene as its center panel, with the advantages of this new technique, bring a greatly increased realism to the depiction of light. The translucence of the glass window and the rays of light streaming in are the characteristic sorts of stunning effects from light that resulted from the power of this technique. But what is important to note here is a continued artistic preoccupation with the effects of light: Suger’s mechanisms were stained glass windows, gilded doors and jeweled chalices; Robert Campin’s mechanisms were translucent oil glazes. And the Limbourg Brothers and other International Gothic manuscript illuminators relied on gold leaf to create a jewel-like, light-filled image; but all artists shared this preoccupation with the effects of shimmering light which could transport the viewer beyond this earth as Abbot Suger had expressed.

The Pearl Poet also had poetic tools at his disposal to effect a similar transport. The Pearl Poet filled the Pearl with light images always placed in a context to suggest other-worldly, divine places and states of being. As the dreamer falls asleep at the end of Fit I, the concatenated word “adubbement” (splendor) links his vision of a paradise to that which the poet describes in Fit II. The images of splendor center on light – bright light and colored light:

\[
\text{Where rych rokkez wer to dyscreuen.}
\text{þe ly3t of hem my3t no mon leuen,}
\text{þe glemande glory þat of hem glent,}
\text{For wern neuer webbez þat wy3ez weven}
\text{Of half so dere adubbemente.}
\]

\[26\] Erwin Panofsy, Early Netherlandish Art (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1953) 144.
\[27\] Panofsky, Netherlandish 143. Panofsky cites St. Bridget’s Speculum Humanae Salvationis.
Dubbed wern alle þo downez sydez
With crystal kylffeze so cler of kynde.
Holtewodez bryȝt aboute hem bydez
Of bollez as blwe as ble of Ynde;
As bornyst sylver þe lef on syldez,
þat þike con trylle on vch a tynde;
Quen glemt of glodez agaynz hem glydez,
Wyth schymeryng schene ful schrylle þay schynde,
þe grauayl þat on grounde con grynde
Wern precious perlez of oryente;
þe sunne bemez bot blo and blynde
In respecte of þat adubbement.

(Pearl 68-84)

The poet ends each stanza with images that contrast his vision to the most splendid earthly phenomena (sunlight in line 83 and tapestries in line 72) in an effort to emphasize the inadequacy of the brightest and most splendid earthly experiences to describe the dreamer's vision of this garden. However, even as the poet bemoans the inadequacy of these images, he has little choice but to refer to the sun, tapestries, jewels, crystal, etc. to express intensely bright, exquisite light effects (“sunne bemez,” “webbez,” “rych rokkez,” and “crystal kylffeze so cler of kynde”).

But beyond the choice of images, the Pearl Poet also employs the tremendous power of the alliterative style to evoke intense, other-worldly light. The “gl” and “sch” sounds still persist in the English language as suggestive of effects of light, on which the Pearl Poet relies heavily in the passage above (e.g., “þe glemande glory þat of hem glent,” “Quen glemt of glodez agaynz hem glydez,” and “Wyth schymeryng schene ful schrylle pay schynde.”). In the last stanza of this same fit, the favored “gl” sound recurs in another image of unearthly light, “In þe founce þer stoden stoney stepe,/ As glente þurȝ glas þat glowed and glyȝt” (113-4). Here this same image from Campin's "Merode Altarpiece" that, in the
painting, has light beams streaming through glass and carrying the Christ Child, recurs in the poetic context as a means of similarly expressing a divine presence. “Light is the fundamental corporeal substance”: its poetic evocation and visual incarnation put light in the forefront of Late Medieval, International Gothic imagery for poets and artists alike.28

Light imagery in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight also plays a role, but not the significant role that it does in the Pearl. Rather than an evocation of the divine or heavenly realm, the poet displays his fascination with effects of light to evoke a fairytale world of romance and myth, but a fairytale world pregnant with Christian meaning. The familiar voice and technique of the Pearl Poet can be noted as the poet describes Gawain in his armor preparing to ride out of Camelot:

Bi þat watz Grynogolet grayth and gurde with a sadel þat glemed ful gayly with mony golde frenges, Ayquere naylet ful nwe, for þat note ryched, þe brydel barred aboute, bryʒt golde bounden.  
. . .  (597-600)  
And al watz, rayled on red, ryche golde naylez, þat al glytered and glent as glem of þe sunne.  
. . .  (603-4)  
þe cercel watz more o pryss  
þat vmbeclpped hys croun,  
Of diamauntez a deuys  
þat bōpe were bryʒt and broun.

Then þay schewed hym þe schelde, þat was of schyr goulez  
Wyth þe pentangle depaynt of pure golde hwez;  
(615-20)  
(SGGK)

The ensuing and lengthy description of the shield emblazoned with the pentangle leads the reader into a realm of Christian faith and the test of faith to which the

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Christian knight will be subjected. The purely magical world of green men with unearthly powers suggested up to this point in the poem begins to shift to a complex tale of Christian faith in the face of otherworldly powers and temptations. But the poet employs the International Gothic penchant for the suggestive powers of light, often as reflected off splendid objects made of gold and jewels, to suggest that this special Christian knight will be ready to face the supreme challenge that lies ahead. Gawain makes a truly splendid sight as his clothing and armor gleam and glitter in the sun.

A third and final dimension of stylistic parallelism between late medieval art and poetry is in the distinctive blend or balance of a hyper-realism with an all pervasive symbolism. J. Huizinga was one of the first to comment on this element when he characterized the late Middle Ages as an era dominated by two factors: “the extreme saturation of the religious atmosphere, and a marked tendency of thought to embody itself in images.” Erwin Panofsky, when describing Flemish art in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, suggested that the burgeoning naturalism appearing in the visual arts had to be reconciled with a thousand years of Christian tradition. The resultant style in the visual arts during this period seems a curious blend to the modern viewer, distanced from this era by the six hundred years during which the western scientific revolution severed the physical and metaphysical realms. However, the late Middle Ages shared none of our modern discomfort with the cheerful blending of these two realms.

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30 Panofsky, Netherlandish 141.
A specific analysis of some illuminations in *The Très Riches Heures*, as well as another look at the “Merode Altarpiece,” will both clarify and specify what this distinctively late medieval balance between an intense realism and an all pervasive symbolism looked like. *The Très Riches Heures* exhibit this “realism” in several ways: the attention to minute details of costume and setting and the incipient interest in spatial illusion. The two pages already discussed above, i.e., “January” and “May,” encompass an array of minutely observed, faithfully rendered settings and costuming. For instance, the elaborate gold saltcellar in the shape of a ship referred to in the Duke’s inventories as, “salière du pavillon.” The costuming is perhaps the most obvious example of the artists’ attention to detail as the Limbourg Brothers represent the lavish fabrics, bright colors and somewhat outlandish aristocratic fashion of the era (including the two men in the front of the table who sport one green-hosed leg and one white-hosed leg!). The “May” page, as with many of these calendar pages, includes a very detailed distant view of contemporary buildings, all of which in this example can be identified as structures in Paris on the Île de la Cité. Beyond the impressive eye for detail, however, the burgeoning realism of these illuminations is most obvious in some of the other calendar pages, particularly the months that feature the seasonal activities of the peasantry as opposed to those of the aristocracy. The “February” [Plate 4] page is an extraordinary example of the International Gothic mastery of detail and spatial illusion. In a palette noticeably devoid of the rich colors that characterized the “January” and “May” pages, the Limbourg Brothers rendered a poignantly detailed vision of the coldest month of the year.

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As the peasants immodestly warm themselves at the fire, a distant vista of a snowy village attests to the artists’ incipient interest in and considerable skill at rendering an illusion of mid and far distance.

In spite of the incredible range of realistic details and impressive spatial illusion, however, these International Gothic illuminations exhibit just as strong a penchant for symbolism. The context in which these deceptively secular activities unfold is firmly grounded in the iconographic tradition of the labors of the months. The Limbourg Brothers reserved one third of each page for a tympanum that contained the signs of the zodiac and the astronomical signs for that month, and the leaf opposite each illumination was a calendar page with the month laid out day-by-day in terms of religious events. The pervasively religious context cannot be mistaken.

The “Merode Altarpiece” and early fifteenth-century Flemish art, in general, provides even more striking examples of this fusion of the realistic and the symbolic. Erwin Panofsky labeled this pervasive symbolism underlying a notable realism as the principle of “disguised symbolism.”33 In the “Merode Altarpiece” this principle demands that the upper middle class domestic interior scene housing the Annunciation is permeated with symbolism: from the Marian symbolism already noted in the light rays and snuffed out candle, to the brass laver (common indoor substitutes for the “fountain of gardens” and “well of living

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32 Meiss 176.
33 Panofsky, Netherlandish 141-2. Panofsky summarizes this balance as follows: “In Early Flemish painting... the method of disguised symbolism was applied to each and every object, man-made or natural. It was employed as a general principle instead of only occasionally just as was the case with the method of naturalism. In fact, these two methods were genuine correlates. The more the painters rejoiced in the discovery and reproduction of the visible world, the more intensely did they feel the need to saturate all of its elements with meaning. Conversely, the harder they strove to express new subtleties and complexities of thought and imagination, the more eagerly did they explore new areas of reality.”
“waters” which are frequent symbols of Mary’s purity), and the very familiar lilies, symbolic once again of the Virgin’s purity, every object undoubtedly refers to the theology of this event. Perhaps the most startling example of this pervasive and complex symbolism “disguised” in the commonplace is the seemingly insignificant mousetrap perched on the sill outside Joseph the Carpenter’s workshop (the right panel of the altarpiece) as well as the second mousetrap on Joseph’s table. Meyer Schapiro interpreted these as references to the then well-known Augustinian doctrine of the muscipula diaboli which considered the marriage of the Virgin and the Incarnation of Christ as devices arranged by God to fool the devil much as mice are fooled by the bait in a mousetrap.

But Robert Campin’s obvious interest in realistic detailing and spatial illusion is just as potent a force in the appearance of this altarpiece. The shimmering effects of light were already discussed, but the minute detail of Joseph’s tools and shop as well as the almost microscopic vista outside his window onto a contemporary city square are testaments to his mastery of visual reality. Robert Campin’s interest in the rendering of space stops short of a fully rationalized perspective, but his “intuitive perspective’s” use of angles, lines, and graduated scale attests to his profound interest in and skill at representing visual reality.

A remarkably similar balance between the realistic and the symbolic also characterizes the poetry of the Pearl Poet. In the Pearl, one of the most obvious examples is the poet’s handling of the pearl, both the central “character” and central symbol in the Pearl. The poet begins his poem by describing in a very

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34 Panofsky, Netherlandish 143.
visual and concrete way a pearl of physical beauty and perfection: “So rounde, so reken I vche array,/ So small, so smoþe her sydez were.” (Pearl 5-6) Here the poet evokes not only the visual appearance of a pearl but also the tactile and even sensuous nature of its beauty and preciousness with the use of the feminine pronoun (“her”). The poet continues to suggest the multi-layered meanings that quickly come to be associated with this pearl, but at every point the many meanings of the symbol are inextricably woven within a context of descriptions that are strikingly vivid and concrete. Without exploring the enormous number of references to pearls throughout this lengthy poem, several examples will suffice to illustrate the poetic blend of descriptive realism with a pervasive symbolism. As the dreamer’s vision unfolds, he describes a girl and her costume in breathtaking detail (emphasis mine):

Wyth lappez large, I wot and I wene,
Dubbed with double perle and dyȝte;
Her cortel of self sute schene,
With precious perlez al vmbepyȝte.

A pyȝt coroune þet wer þat gyrle
Of marjorys and non ȝper ston,
Hiȝe pynakled of cler quyþ perle,
Wyth flurted flowrez perfet vpon.
To hed hade ho non ȝper werle;
Her lere-leke al hyr vmbegon;
Her semblaunt sade for doc ȝper erle,
Her ble more blaȝt þen whallez bon.
As schorne golde schyr her fax þenne schon,
On schylderez þat leghe vnlapped lyȝte.
Her depe colour þet wonted non
Of precious perle in porfyl pyȝte.

(Pearl, 201-16)

Within the next couple of stanzas, the poet moves to address this young woman adorned in pearls on her clothing and on her crown, as “‘O perle,’ quoþ I, ‘in perlez pyṣt./ Art þou my perle þat I haþ playned” (241-2). The poet moves effortlessly throughout this lengthy poem between descriptive realism and complex, multi-layered symbolism until the poem ends as it began with pearl imagery. But by the final line of the poem, “Ande precious perlez vnto His pay” (1212), the pearl symbol has come to its most extensive symbolic reach as it becomes an all-inclusive symbol of God's chosen.

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight also strikes an exquisite balance between descriptive realism and complex symbolism. While there are examples too numerous to cite, a few notable passages in the lengthy poem can demonstrate both the artistry of the poet at striking this balance and the essential nature of this balance as a characteristic shared between the visual and the poetic arts of this late, International Gothic era. Davenport commented that Sir Gawain “occupies a world which is simultaneously real and unreal” in an effort to describe this curious tension between a poem filled with rich and minutely described details of banqueting scenes, clothing, landscape, hunting activities and the like, but a poem that nevertheless conveys a sense of fantasy and symbolism.\(^{36}\) Several key passages from the poem can give some idea of this curious and delightful balance.

The Christmas festivities and banqueting passages early in the poem quickly establish a poetic mode rich in the tangible details of fourteenth-century courtly life. But these realistic details serve a poetic purpose pregnant with

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\(^{36}\) Davenport, 143.
fantasy and symbolism. After extensive descriptive detail about the assembly of
Arthur, Guinevere and the knights of the court, the
poet turns the same eye for detail to a description of the fantastic figure of the
Green Knight:

Ande al grayþed in grene þis gome and his wedes:
A strayt cote ful streþt þat stek on his sides,
A meré mantile abof, mensked withinne
With pelure pured apert, þe pane ful clene
With blyþe blauunner ful bryþt, and his hod boþe,
Þat watz laþt fro his lokkez and layde on his schulderes;
Heme wel-haled hose of þat same grene,
Þat spenet on his sparlyr, and clene spures vnder
Of bryþt golde, vpon silk bordes barred ful ryche,
And scholes vnder schankes þere þe schalk rides.

(SGGK 151-160)

Here is this same eye trained on the smallest detail that Robert Campin brought
to the Merode Altarpiece and the Limbourg Brothers brought to The Très Riches
Heures. But the result of such extensive descriptive detail fails to lead either
viewer or reader to a sense of everyday reality. In the poem, any sense of the
everyday is undermined not only by the elaborately constructed poetic form and
fantastic subject matter, but also by the emerging sense that what meets the eye
is not the significant meaning. In these early verses of the poem when the
Gawain Poet introduces the reader to the detailed appearance of the Green
Knight, the meaning of his appearance and his powers is not yet clear, but the
tension between the real and the symbolic is immediately established.

As the poem unfolds, Gawain finds the castle of the Green Knight, giving
the poet an opportunity to craft an elaborately detailed sequence of descriptive
interior court scenes alternating with exterior hunting scenes. But all these richly
described scenes underline Gawain's escalating psychological tension as the
fearful encounter with the Green Knight approaches and as Bercilak’s Lady
continues to tempt Gawain’s code of chivalry and his moral fiber. The first time
the Lady visits Gawain in his bedchamber, Gawain feigns sleep as he struggles
to think how to handle this situation:

And ho stepped stilly and stel to his bedde,
Kest vp þe cortyn and creped withinne
And set hir ful softly on þe bed-syde
And lenged þere selly longe to loke quen he wakened.
Þe lede lay lurked a ful longe quyle,
Compast in his concience to quat þat cace myȝt
Meue oþer amount. To meruayle hym þo
Bot ȝet he sayde in himself, ‘More semly hit were
To aspye with my spelle in space quat ho wolde.’
Þen he wakenede and wroth to hir warde torned
And vnlouked his yȝe-lyddez and let as hym wondered
And sayned hym, as bi his saȝe þe sauer to worthe,

(SGGK 1191-1202)

This interior level of descriptive detail is exceeded only by the level of descriptive
detail provided about each of the hunts going on simultaneously with the interior
temptation scenes. After the three temptations and three hunts, the richly
patterned symbolism of the poem culminates in the infliction of three blows on
Gawain, each one clearly symbolic of his temptations. This careful blending of
the symbolic and the realistic in the poem becomes a literary analogue to the
carefully balanced blend of symbolism and realism in the “Merode Altarpiece”
and The Très Riches Heures. Just as in the “Merode Altarpiece,” the modern
reader or viewer grasps many of the details of late medieval life, chiefly the late
medieval mindset that the supernatural and the natural are inextricably linked
and celebrated.

The literature and the art of the Late or International Gothic era are an
unusual blend of contrasts: the real and the unreal, the natural and the
supernatural. While the Pearl Poet dwells on minute detail, he seems to provide this detail as a celebration of its evocative power to transport the reader beyond the physical. This transporting power of the particular is realized largely through the creation of beauty: the beauty of poetic structure, pattern, and sound. Both the Pearl and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight revel in the close observation of the physical world, but weave these descriptions into complex, highly ornamental patterns that can be better grasped when compared to the visual arts of the period. Both art forms exhibit the parallel cultural taste for a complex, highly decorative aesthetic that discovers the supernatural in the natural until, as St. Augustine commented, everything becomes, “corporeal metaphors of things spiritual” (*spiritualia sub metaphoris corporalium*).\(^{37}\)

The striking parallels between the poetry of the Pearl Poet and the art of the International Gothic can be discerned along multiple dimensions: their shared predilection for intricate and complex patterning yielding a similar preciousness or sumptuousness, their shared fascination with creating and exploiting effects of light, and their shared creation of a rich and detailed visual reality pregnant with symbolism. Such notable parallels offer a strong argument for situating the alliterative poetry of the Pearl Poet within a similar stylistic continuum as that of the visual arts. This continuum connecting the early, high and late Gothic into a coherent developmental trend in the visual arts provides the tangible trail of surviving examples so notably lacking in Middle English poetry. In the light of these rich and startling parallels between the art and poetry of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the notion of an alliterative

\(^{37}\) Panofsky, *Netherlandish* 142.
survival, of an ongoing tradition of alliterative poetry in England throughout the
twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, becomes more plausible than that of an
alliterative revival. The dynamic of a surviving and evolving style, a central
preoccupation in the visual arts, can be an essential tool to fill the unfortunate
gap in our understanding of certain literary material. In the larger cultural
context, a highly sophisticated late Gothic form of art, architecture, or poetry,
exhibited by International Gothic art and the poetry of the Pearl Poet, will
necessarily share a developmental path and analogues which connect the
various art forms not only to each other but also to common prototypes. In the
case of the visual arts, the Gothic style creates a continuum from the twelfth
through the fifteenth centuries; in the case of English secular poetry, a similar
continuum must be posited to suggest a cultural survival of the alliterative poetic
heritage of pre-Norman England, but a heritage that continues to evolve
throughout the “silent” centuries between the great alliterative poetry of Old
English and the superlative alliterative poetry of the late fourteenth century.
Chapter 2

Expressionism in Late Medieval Poetry and Art:
William Langland and the Rohan Master

_Piers Plowman_ has enjoyed both enormous popularity and been subjected to an almost extraordinary variety and range of interpretations in the 600 years since Langland wrote the poem. Even within the lifetime of the poet, Langland's own contemporaries interpreted the politics of the poem to suit the revolutionary goals of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt, an interpretation which Langland was still alive to rebut with his C Version of _Piers Plowman_. Two centuries later, the poem was a favorite of Protestants as a manifesto of anti-Catholic thought and by the nineteenth century the poem reentered the political arena as a document of social oppression.¹ Only since World War II have scholars begun to approach the poem in a serious critical fashion as the fields of medieval history and medieval literary criticism developed. Huppé and Robertson published a key effort in 1951 when they established the new school of exegetical criticism.² Much post-War criticism focused on analyzing the theological content of Langland's work and on placing the poem in the context of medieval Christian belief and literary genre. By the 1960's, however, some key critical voices began to synthesize exegetical and genre studies with

historical/social/economic/cultural analysis. Morton Bloomfield's *Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse* and Charles Muscatine's *Poetry and Crisis in the Age of Chaucer* were crucial publications in the 1960's and 1970's that redefined *Piers Plowman* studies as multi-layered cultural investigations.³

However, Langland's *Piers Plowman* has defied critical attempts to characterize its genre. Indeed, the exact genre of *Piers* has been one of the most persistent and complex critical issues over the last 50 years. Within just the last decade, Michael Klein's critical efforts with the poem have both summarized and clarified some of the formal issues of *Piers*' stylistic genre. Klein comments that, "In comparison to Dante, for example, or to the Gawain poet, Langland's sense of overall thematic structure or metrical design can hardly be regarded as a model of precision or order."⁴ Klein considered the circular pattern posited by Lawlor as well as the curious mix of genres (dream-vision, quest, and pilgrimage) to characterize *Piers* as a prime example of "fragmentation."⁵ Klein defines fragmentation as

Either a layout or relative position in which parts of a work of art or literature are arranged in a given instant, in particular certain stylistic traits: paratactic shifts of time, place, action, attitude; abrupt changes of point of view, sudden changes in genre, in mode of presentation.

These "sudden shifts in genre" in *Piers* create a sense of confusion, ambiguity and vagueness atypical of most Late Gothic literary genres. Langland seems to draw on any number of medieval genres without clear transitions as he moves from one to another. For instance, the poem seems at different points to be a dream-vision, or a dialectic after the formal mode of the sermon, or a

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³ Klein xx.
⁴ Klein 294.
pilgrimage, or a quest or an allegory. However, it seems virtually impossible to find a single genre that satisfactorily explains the range of components included in the poem. I look primarily to Muscatine's discussion about the critical difficulty of characterizing the literary genre of Piers and will draw on only a few of his points to support the crucial context here that Langland's poem cannot be simply and quickly categorized with most other late medieval literary forms. The quest genre fails as an architecture for the poem since "it is so distorted by digressions and alterations that its literary status is open to doubt. It is a quest that has many beginnings, no middle, and an ambiguous end; the quest leads back to where it started."6 Muscatine proceeds quickly to add that, "We cannot demand a compulsive neatness from medieval poets, nor impeccable theology or logic. But we expect to recognize some form, some control; if the poem is a quest, a spiritual autobiography, it is like none other of its time."7 Similarly, Muscatine rejects the dream-vision genre, the dialectic genre and the allegorical genre as models that can completely embrace all the diverse elements of Piers.

From the early 1960s, a small group of critics began suggesting that some of the analytical constructs of art history might provide insight into understanding the Piers Plowman poem.8 With Charles Muscatine leading the way, Rosemary Woolf, R.W.V. Elliott and Elizabeth Salter joined the effort of looking to the visual arts for critical tools to employ in the search for both a cultural and a stylistic

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5 Klein 295.
7 Muscatine, Crisis 79.
grasp of the enigmatic poem. Muscatine wrestled with the shift in Western art during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the depiction of space. He sought meaningful parallels in literature to note the well-recognized documentation in the visual arts of a radical redefinition of Western peoples' self-awareness as realistically rendered forms were placed in realistically rendered space.

Furthermore, Muscatine attributed the complexities and ambiguities of *Piers Plowman*'s form and content to the cultural tensions characteristic of an historical period of rapid and complex change. Rosemary Woolf also considered the visual arts as a possible tool to analyze *Piers Plowman* but somewhat undermined her approach by devolving into a search for overly specific examples of imagery in the visual arts that may have been known to Langland. She did, however, make some significant observations about the lack of visual qualities in *Piers Plowman* and the similar lack of "a sustained literal level" to Langland's allegory. In "The Langland Country," R.W.V. Elliott built upon Muscatine's study of locus or space in *Piers Plowman*. Elliott sympathetically characterized Langland's landscape as a "visionary terrain" and contrasted Langland's settings to the Pearl Poet's descriptive landscapes in *Sir Gawain*. In "Piers Plowman and the Visual Arts," Elizabeth Salter failed in her search for specific visual analogues of *Piers Plowman* but suggested the most provocative and tantalizing visual parallel of

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10 Woolf 113.  
11 Elliott 229.
any critic: the similarly disturbing and perplexing early sixteenth-century work of Hieronymous Bosch!\textsuperscript{12}

The turn to the visual arts, whether for a stylistic vocabulary or for cultural/intellectual parallels, is an inevitable movement. It is a testament to the intellectual vigor, cultural ambiguity and spiritual complexity of Piers Plowman that literary critics turned to other art forms to seek insights that may illuminate such a perplexing poem. However, I find the interart studies’ efforts both tentative and inadequate in their grasp of art historical vocabulary and the range of stylistic forms available to identify stylistic issues in the visual arts that may provide insights to stylistic issues in literature. Late Gothic literature and art are rife with dichotomies or tensions: highly structured, clear literary genres vs. ambiguous genres; meticulously detailed visual illusionism vs. perplexing expressionism. Some interpretive clues to a baffling and ambiguous literary work like Piers Plowman may find a counterpart in the visual arts among the similarly ambiguous “expressionist”\textsuperscript{13} works of a select group of late fourteenth-century and early fifteenth-century illuminators, particularly the work of such artists as the Rohan Master. I would propose to build on the very seminal interart works of Muscatine, Woolf, Elliott and Salter, all of whom turned to the visual arts to find source material that may bring insight to the dilemma surrounding the enigmatic poem. Piers Plowman, as a literary work, can never be fully grasped and appreciated if critics persist in trying to pigeonhole it as a particular genre

\textsuperscript{12} Elliott 24.

\textsuperscript{13} Erwin Panofsky seems to be the earliest critic to characterize the works of the Rohan Master and a small circle of Parisian illuminators as “expressionistic.” The term alludes to a preference for emotional expression over descriptive realism. Erwin Panofsky, Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1953; New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 74.
reflecting some of the characteristics of the dream vision, the romance, the
sermon, etc. Rather than being backed into the untenable position of trying to
define one of the most popular poems of the fourteenth century only in terms of
literary genre studies, a wider casting of our critical apparatus beyond literary
studies will facilitate a fresh approach to the poem. A new, broader “genre”
entitled “expressionist art,” a genre embracing late medieval works in both
literature and the visual arts, will be recommended.

Since Langland’s *Piers* is acknowledged as standing outside the typical
genre categories of late medieval literature, visual "parallels" or analogues of the
poem will have to be sought in works of artists who similarly stand somewhat
outside the comfortable bounds of mainstream currents in the visual arts. The
dominant tradition in late medieval, International Gothic art was a style that can
be characterized as incipiently illusionistic. However, there is a notable and
fascinating body of non-illusionistic/expressionistic works of artists such as the
Rohan Master that provide a provocative counter-balance to the mainstream
stylistic trends. In scattered centers throughout western Europe, a group of
artists during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries created a variety of artworks
that can best be characterized as highly emotionally charged, and feature
isolated, iconic figures. These *Andachtsbilder*, or “devotional images,” functioned
as meditative vehicles for prayer and mystical experience, and the images of
both the pieta and Christ as the Man of Sorrows arose within this historic
context.\(^{14}\) It will be in the notable stylistic and thematic parallels between *Piers*

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\(^{14}\)Hans Belting traces the emergence of devotional images to the influx of Greek icons into the
West following the sack of Constantinople in 1204. *The Image and its Public: Form and Function
of Early Paintings of the Passion*. Trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle,
Plowman and such efforts as those of the Rohan Master that fresh insights can be brought to bear on situating the Piers Plowman poem within the context of late medieval expression. My method will be comparative: Langland’s Piers Plowman will be contrasted with the Pearl Poet’s Sir Gawain and the Green Knight to establish the dichotomies of style and form in fourteenth-century alliterative poetry; and two early fifteenth-century manuscripts, the Limbourg Brothers’ The Très Riches Heures of the Duc de Berry and Les Très Grandes Heures of the Duc de Berry, will be contrasted with the Rohan Master’s A Book of Hours to note similar dichotomies of style in early fifteenth century Parisian manuscript illumination. At the same time, each alliterative poem will be stylistically paired with a manuscript illumination (Sir Gawain with The Très Riches Heures and Piers with the Rohan Master’s A Book of Hours) to discern some suggestive stylistic parallels that, I think, can situate Piers Plowman more comfortably into its cultural context as not a single and lonely document of religious and cultural attitudes but, rather, as one of a number of artistic efforts whose form and content document the troubling complexity of a transitional epoch in Western history.

Some suggestive parallels emerge between Piers Plowman and the Rohan Master’s Book of Hours in two significant dimensions: in style and in

N.Y.: 1990) 42-43. While this may have been the fount of inspiration for often truncated bodies (as in the Man of Sorrows imagery), these Andachtsbilder emanating from the Rhine area, for instance, were notable for their expression of an almost frantic mood of mysticism and for their focus on the suffering of Christ and of Mary. And privately owned manuscripts such as the Rohan Book of Hours inherited this tradition of providing devotional images for private inspiration. See Jeffrey Hamburger’s “The Visual and Visionary: The Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotions,” Viator xx (1989): 181-82. See also Margaret Marion’s “Art and Devotion: the Prayer-books of Jean de Berry,” for an important discussion of the function of illuminations in the daily religious life of this prominent figure. “Art and Devotion: The Prayer-books of Jean of Berry,”
apocalyptic mood. In order to analyze the first dimension, that of style, some observations about the more "mainstream" stylistic currents of late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century alliterative poetry and manuscript illumination will facilitate a grasp of both the unusual nature of Langland's and the Rohan Master's style but also of some stylistic similarities that may bridge the different art forms of poetry and illumination.

The Pearl Poet's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is an alliterative poem in the quest-romance genre. Two related traits characterize its style for the purposes of this discussion: first, and foremost, the clarity of the poem's structure; and, second, the specificity and descriptive clarity of time and of the "loci" which provide the various settings for the poem's characters. Muscatine notes that "processional form" or "the linear extension of narrative in space and time" is one of the most persistent and dominant characteristics of high and late Gothic art and literature. Muscatine also looks to Panofsky's work on Gothic architecture in which the same processional form can be discerned in the succession of the bays in the Gothic cathedral.

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15 The "locus of action" is an important concept in drawing any stylistic comparisons between the visual arts and poetry. Charles Muscatine coined this phrase in "Locus of Action in Medieval Narrative," in 1963; and Salter, Elliott, Woolf, et al. looked to Muscatine's seminal article in their subsequent explorations of this topic.

16 Muscatine 119-20. Muscatine also looks to Panofsky's work on Gothic architecture in which the same processional form can be discerned in the succession of the bays in the Gothic cathedral.
Poet almost laughingly refers to the typical quest formula of the risk-laden journey as:

At vche warþe oþer water þer þe wyþe passed
He fonde a foo hym byfore, bot ferly hit were,
And þat so foule and so felle þat feȝt hym behode.
So mony meruayl bi mount þer þe mon fyndez
Hit were to tore for to telle of þe tenþe dole.

(GSGK 715-19)

Gawain’s quest does not fail to employ all the requisite elements of the genre: challenge, journey, trials, and triumph. The reader knows the formula well and can delight in both the familiarity of the genre and the Pearl Poet's masterful command of the genre.

Much of the poet’s success in creating such a tightly structured quest can be discovered in the poet’s treatment of time. The Gawain poet spins his tale of the fantastic within a tightly controlled and eminently clear sequence of events which unfold over one short year – from Christmas time at King Arthur’s court to Christmas time the following year at Bercilak’s court. What is more, the poet grounds Gawain’s progress on his quest to specific days of the year: the opening confrontation with the Green Knight occurs on New Year’s Day, “Wyle Nw þer watz so þeþ that his watz new cummen” (60); Gawain departs on his search for the Green Chapel on the day after All Saint’s Day, “Þet quyl Al Hal Day with Arþer he lenges; And he made a fare on þat fest for þe frekez sake, (536-37)... He dwellez þere al þat day and dresses on þe morn” (566); Gawain travels alone until Christmas Eve, “Bi contray caryez þis knyȝt tyl Krystmasse Euen, Alone.” (734-35); Gawain reaches the Green Knight’s castle the following morning on Christmas Day, “Bi a mounte on þe morne merly he rydes” (740); and Gawain
rises the morning of New Year’s Day to meet the Green Knight, “Now neȝez þe Nw ðere and þe nyȝt passeþ, þe day dryuez to þe derk, as Dryȝtyn bidde.” (1998-99).

The specificity of the element of time lends not only the overall structure of the poem a notable degree of clarity, it also provides the poet with a narrative device of tremendous artistic power with which he can organize the complex thematic core of the poem – the counterposing of the three hunts and the three temptations. After the rapid passing of the ten months from New Year’s Day to All Saints’ Day, on which the poet expends only two fits but two of the most famous and most beautiful of the poem -

Forþi þis ȝol ouerȝede, and þe ðere after,  
And vche sesoun serlepes sued after ôþer:  
After Crystenmasse come þe crabbed Lentoun,  
(SGGK 500-02)

the poet masterfully slows down the clock once again from months and seasons to single days. After Gawain rests from Christmas Day when he arrives at the Bercilak’s castle until St. John’s Day, Gawain tells his host that it is time to continue on his way in the hope of finding the Chapel of the Green Knight by New Year’s Day. Gawain’s host immediately explains to Gawain in very specific language controlled by a rhetoric of time, that:

. . . ‘Now leng þe byhoues,  
For l schal teche yow to þat terme bi þe tymeȝ ende.  
Þe Grene Chapayle vpon grounde greue yow no more  
Bot ðe schal be in yowre bed, burne, at þyn ese  
Quyle forth dayez and ferk on þe first of þe ðere  
And cum to þat merk at mydmorn, to make quat yow likez  
In spenne.  
Dowelleþ while New ðeres daye  
And rys and raykeþ þenne.  
Mon schal yow sette in waye;
Hit is not two myle henne.’
(SGGK 1068-78)

Quickly Gawain’s host proposes the exchange of winnings as the narrative slows down to a day-by-day account of four days: the three days of the exchanges and the final New Year’s Day scene at the Green Chapel.

And it is in the poet’s very sophisticated handling of time within these three days of the exchanges that the power of a tightly controlled and masterfully managed clarity of time can be seen as a device that provides the late Gothic poet enormous narrative control. Each day, the Gawain poet employs a very precise language of time to move his narrative forward as he counterposes the Lord’s hunts with the contemporaneous temptations of Gawain. The poet is skillful at guiding his reader during each of the three successive hunts/temptations from the hunt, to the temptation, and then back to the hunt; and much of this facile movement is controlled by this rhetoric of time. For example, the second hunt/temptation sequence opens with,

Bi þat þe coke hade crowen and cakled bot þryse,
þe lorde watz lopen of his bedde, þe leudez vchone,
So þat þe mete and þe masse watz metely delyuered,
þe douthe dressed to þe w od, er any day sprenged,
To chace.
(SGGK1412-16)

The poet spends two fits summarizing the boar hunt, but not giving the detail of it, before redirecting the reader back to the castle and what is happening to Gawain. Transitions in expression provide an eminently clear narrative structure by specifying the timing:

Suande þis wylde swyn til þe sunne schafted.
Þis day with þis ilk dede þay dryuen on þis wyse,
Whyle oure luflych lede lys in his bedde,
After more than three fits of a lengthy description of Gawain’s temptation by the host’s wife, the poet once again employs temporal vocabulary not only to move his reader back to the outdoor boar hunt but also to insinuate a thematic link between the indoor and outdoor activities:

Þe lede with þe ladyez layked alle day  
Bot þe lorde ouer þe londez launced ful ofte,  
Swez his vncely swyn, þat swyngez bi þe bonkkez

The hunt of the boar then unfolds in meticulous and bloody detail. These counterposed hunt and temptation scenes conclude at the end of what seemed like such a long day to the lord - “Til he se3 Sir Gawayne/ In halle, hym þo hþt ful longe” (1619-20) - as he and Gawain come together for the evening feast and exchange of winnings. This narrative paradigm begins each time with the Lord starting out early for the hunt, followed by Gawain still abed and the temptation unfolding and then returning to a meticulous detailing of the hunt. Each of the other two hunt/temptation sequences repeats this pattern with each segment linked by a similarly precise rhetoric of time. The poet’s notable emphasis on the language of time becomes a significant organizing principle of the narrative and a dominant characteristic of this supremely ordered example of a quest.

Time and space are necessary narrative partners. The closely related and crucial stylistic characteristic of Gawain and mainstream Late Gothic literary form is a specificity and descriptive clarity of loci or space. Some locations in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight are detailed with such specificity that many have
tried to situate the poem in exact parts of England. The Pearl Poet’s almost startling command of a language of space emerges in two ways: first, in the meticulous description of specific places, but also, second, in the suggestive nuances of vantage point from which the reader is provided views pregnant with psychological and moral potential.

The Pearl Poet opens his poem at a specific moment and place, the Christmas day feast at King Arthur’s court:

Þis kyng lay at Camylot vpon Krystmasse
With mony luftych lorde, ledez of þe best –
(SGGK 37-38)

Wyle NW þer watz so þep þat hit watz new cummen,
Þat day doubble on þe dece watz þe douth serued.
Fro þe kyng watz cummen with knyþtes into þe halle,
(SGGK 60-63)

When þay had waschen worbyly, þay wenten to sete
Þe best burne ay abof, as hit best semed;
Whene Guenore ful gay grayþed in þe myddes,
Dressed on þe dere des, dubbed al aboute:
Smal sendal besides, a selure hir ouer
Of tried tolouse, of tars tapites inloghe
Þat were enbrawded and beten with þe best gemmes
Þat myþt be preued of prys with penyes to bye
In daye.
þe comlokest to discrye
þer glent with yþen gray;
A semloker þat euer he syþe
Soth moþt no mon say.
(SGGK 72-84)

In this detailed passage, the poet renders a clear image of a medieval hall filled with splendid tapestries and splendid people. The vantage point is that of a

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17 See Ralph Elliott’s “Landscape and Geography,” A Companion to the Gawain-Poet, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997) 104-17. Elliott includes maps of northern Wales and an interesting discussion not only of Gawain’s route but also possible specific locations for the Green Chapel.
distant overview, but an overview that still captures every detail down to the color of Guinivere’s grey eyes.

As Gawain undertakes his perilous journey, the poet situates his hero in a specific geographic location:

\[
\text{Til þat he ne3ed ful neghe into þe Norþe Walez.} \\
\text{Alle þe iles of Anglesay on lyft half he haldez} \\
\text{And farez ouer þe fordez by þe forlondez;} \\
\text{Ouer at þe Holy Hede, til he hade eft bonk} \\
\text{In þe wyldrenesse of Wyrale.} \\
\text{(SGGK 697-701)}
\]

Here the language of known places keeps the reader firmly tied to Gawain’s travels and trials, as the poet describes with notable clarity a part of England notable for its wild and untamed character – Northern Wales, but particularly the wilderness of Wirral.

The Pearl Poet revels in descriptive language that gives his narrative a notable clarity of form and his reader a bird’s eye vantage point on the unfolding action. This issue of vantage point is a central one in situating the Pearl Poet within the mainstream of late Gothic narrative tradition. As Gawain comes to the end of his perilous journey, he suddenly confronts a view of a castle:

\[
\text{Er he watz war in þe wod of a won in a mote,} \\
\text{Abof a launde, on a lawe, loken vnder bo3ez} \\
\text{Of mony borelych bole aboute bi þe diches,} \\
\text{A castel þe comlokest þat euer kny3t a3te,} \\
\text{Pyched on a prayere, a park al aboute,} \\
\text{With a pyked palays pyned ful þik,} \\
\text{Þat vmbete3e mony tre mo þen two myle,} \\
\text{Þat holde on þat on syde þe haþel auysed,} \\
\text{As hit schemered and schon þur3 þe schyre okez.} \\
\text{(SGGK 764-72)}
\]

It is important to note that the poet is meticulous in both his description of the view Gawain has of the castle (“on side þe hathel auysed”) and in his description
of Gawain’s position peering out from the ‘midst of the oak trees of the forest through which he will, presumably, finally emerge: “þur3 the schyre okez.” The physical location of our hero and his vantage point on the castle is clear.

The Pearl Poet reveals himself as poet of even greater skill in the subtle rendition of space and location in his manipulation of vantage point at the climax of the story: the three swings of the ax against Gawain’s neck. On the first blow:

Bot Gawayn on þat giserne glyfte hym bysyde,
As hit com glydande adoun on glode hym to schende,
And schranke a lytel with þe schulderes for þe scharp yrne.

(SGGK 2265-67)

Gawain flinches and moves his shoulders to avoid the blow of the ax. As this terrifying image unfolds, the poet aligns the reader’s vantage point and Gawain’s as one and the same: Gawain glances (“glyfte”) up at the ax descending on him and flinches (“schranke a lytel”). A shared vantage point between the hero and the reader heightens the realism and the terror of the moment. A myriad of additional examples could be given, but the important point in these examples of the Pearl Poet’s use of powerful descriptive language of time and place is that it becomes an important device for structuring a narrative notable for its rigorous clarity of form. While the Pearl Poet’s masterful ability to create a narrative of unerring structural clarity is notable in its artistry, this predilection for narrative structure rendered through a rich account of time, season, and location is the norm of late Gothic secular poetry. The contrast with Langland’s Piers Plowman will be a sharp one, and it was important to look at a more typically structured poem like Sir Gawain and the Green Knight in order to perceive this contrast.
If Gawain is specific and grounded with rich details of location, setting and season, then Piers is vague and ungrounded. The poem opens with one of the few descriptive passages of season and setting in the lengthy poem:

In a somer seson, whan softe was the sonne,
I shoop me into shroudes as I a sheep were, . . .

(PP Prol. 1-2)18

Ac on a May morwenynge on Malverne hilles
Me befel a ferly, of Fairye me thoghte.
I was forwandred and wente me to reste
Under a brood bank by a bourne syde;
And as I lay and lendede and loked on the watres,
I slombred into a slepyng, it sweyed so murye.

(PP Prol. 5-10)

As Langland continues and describes the "tour on a toft" and "a deep dale bynethe," the poet captures his reader with a specificity of language and season which his medieval (and his modern!) reader can immediately recognize and use as spatial and temporal points of reference. However, Langland immediately dissolves his reader's setting. Suddenly, the location switches to Walsyngham (PP Prol. 54) and just as suddenly to London (PP Prol. 91, 160). How the dreamer's vision was transferred from the Malvern hills to Walsynham to London can only be guessed; there is no language of travel along a "road" to move from the one location to another.

When Langland employs any language of travel, the travel is that of an inward, spiritual journey rather than one along a physical road. For instance, when the pilgrims in Passus V encounter Piers and try to hire him to lead them to Truthe, Piers declines to be hired and gives them these “directions”:

While this terrain, like much of the terrain in *Piers Plowman*, is allegorical or spiritual in significance, Langland employs similarly vague visual language when describing scenes which could have comfortably situated his dreamer and his dreamer's visions in more concrete terms. The opening vision of the first dream describes a castle or tower:

I seigh a tour on a toft trieliche ymaked,  
A deep dale bynethe, a dongeon therinne,  
With depe diches and derke and dredfulle of sighte.  
A fair feeld ful of folk fond I ther bitwene –  
Werchynge and wandrynge as the world asketh.  
Somme putten hem to the plough, pleiden ful selde,  
In settynge and sowynge swonken ful harde,  

From what is initially a kind of overview from some considerable “distance,” the dreamer then proceeds to describe various types of people in this large “feeld ful of folk”. But the verses following take a detailed look at the various types of folk, from “japers and jangeleres” to “beggeres,” “pilgrymes and palmers.” The dreamer’s vision assumes no single vantage point, far or near, but rather shifts freely around vague terrains characterized by their complete lack of reference to any identifiable physical locations. This vagueness and spatial ambiguity persist throughout the long poem and apply to the visions of earthly events as well as to obvious other-worldly events like the Harrowing of Hell.

A rhetoric of time is even more notably absent in *Piers*. After the initial
reference to a “somer seson” and “a May morwenynge,” Langland rarely grounds
the poem to a particular time of day or season of the year. The “time” between
each dream may be designated by some of the most interesting passages that
emphasize Langland’s notable resistance to providing any concrete temporal
reference points for his dreamer/narrator. As Passus XVII closes, the dreamer
awakes, “and therwith I awakede” (PP XVII 353). And as Passus XVIII opens,
the dreamer wanders:

Wolleward and weetshoed wente I forth after
As a recchelees renk that [reccheth of no wo],
And yede forth lik a lorel al my lif tyme,
Til I weex wery of the world and wilned eft to slepe,
And lened me to a Lenten – and longe tyme I slepte;
Reste me there and rutte faste til ramis palmarum.

(PP XVIII 1-6)

Notably absent is any mention of location, and elapsed time is just as vague and
unspecified. The dreamer sleeps a “longe tyme” as he snored (“rutte faste”) until
Palm Sunday. But he does not wake up from his dream vision on Palm Sunday;
he sleeps, presumably dreamless, until Palm Sunday, when his next vision of
Christ’s Passion begins. This blend of different levels of reality described with a
language of time promotes a pervasive mood of other-worldliness throughout this
long poem.

Muscatine posits that "any narrative requires some irreducible minimum of
spatial sense."\footnote{Muscatine, “Locus” 116.} Presumably, when a poet fails to provide this minimum, a
sense of "vagueness,"\footnote{Elliott 233.} "ambiguity,"\footnote{Woolf 116.} and "paradox and bewilderment"\footnote{Elliott 233.}
permeate the poem and force the reader to respond on a different level. Elliott
attributes Langland's "vagueness" of locus and time to a deliberate artistry of form in which the poet's very lack of concreteness and specificity simulates the "vagueness" of dreams. Woolf similarly considers Langland's "bewildering indifference to time and place" a powerful literary device that mimics the character of dream experience.\(^\text{23}\) However, Woolf also wonders if Langland's rejection of the explicitness of locus and time of most medieval allegory robs Piers of the ability to be visualized. Salter characterizes Langland's space as "paradoxical" in its bewildering mixture of "landscapes shaped from inner and outer reality."\(^\text{24}\) Indeed, Lawlor attributes the ambiguity and complexity of Piers' over-all poetic structure and failure to provide clear and specific loci and temporal signposts as hallmarks of a poem shaped by an "imaginative unity"\(^\text{25}\) rather than a formal unity. Lawlor stops short of attributing to Langland the self-consciousness of the modern artist who deliberately employs a complex and ambiguous literary form to communicate complexity and ambiguity, but Langland's style certainly exacts an emotional weariness and perplexity that not only simulates the spatially and temporally grey world of dreams but also defies the spatially and temporally concrete delineations characteristic of the great majority of late medieval literary works.

How, then, can Langland's artistic result best be characterized? Perhaps as a style that seeks to express the complexity, the bewilderment, the essentially inward nature of the dreamer's personal emotional/spiritual journey to discover meaning in life and salvation in Christian terms. The inner, spiritual journey was

\(^{22}\) Salter 24.  
\(^{23}\) Woolf 116.  
\(^{24}\) Salter 24.  
\(^{25}\) Salter 24.
most often expressed in late medieval literature by borrowing the spatial and
temporal references of the physical world as structural frameworks to bring order
and coherence to the psychic journey. Langland, however, rejects this model
and, instead, keeps his Dreamer on an unsteady, non-specific spatial and
temporal path that creates a mood of confusion, heightened emotional tension,
and psychic dislocation. Finding a visual parallel to Langland's Piers Plowman
will require discovering a late medieval artist who similarly rejects contemporary
artistic formulae in pursuit of a style that can express the complexity of the inner,
emotional life.

The mainstream or dominant late medieval style in the visual arts is
usually designated the International Gothic style. In one of the most exquisite
and characteristic examples of this style, The Très Riches Heures of the Duc de
Berry, the Limbourg Brothers created around 1413-1416 an extraordinary visual
equivalent of the Pearl Poet's Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. A visual
analogue, as distinguished from an illustration, employs similar stylistic
characteristics. In this case, the stylistic characteristics noted in Sir Gawain are a
specificity and descriptive clarity of loci (space) and time. Several of the famous
calendar pages reflect the clarity and specificity of the Pearl Poet’s descriptions
of time of the year and natural detail of landscape. It is difficult not to discover in
the richly detailed January page [Plate1] a striking depiction of a Christmas/New
Year’s banquet congruent with the Pearl Poet’s description of King Arthur’s court
(see quote above from Sir Gawain on pages 67-68). All the courtly splendor of
the court - "Dressed on þe dere des, dubbed al aboute:/ Smal sendal besides, a

selure hir ouer/ Of tried tolouse, of tars tapites innoghe” (SGGK 75-77) - is realized in a style of illumination that exploits a range of brilliant color effects comparable to the Pearl Poet's richly descriptive language. In the Limbourg Brothers' attention to the most minute details of costume, feast, and setting, there is an analogue to the Pearl Poet's richly embroidered, evocative alliterative poetry. Each artist revels in the very exacting detail of particular settings and characters. The outdoor scenes for most of the months in The Très Riches Heures reveal the extraordinary skill of International Gothic artists in illusionism, i.e., the ability to render an illusion of three-dimensions on a flat surface.

The Limbourg Brothers' tools for creating an illusion of spatial recession are modulated color, variance in scale of figures and objects, and the judicious use of line. For instance, the August page [Plate 5] concentrates all the rich, intense color in the foreground figures and fades the intensity of color to depict the middle and distant grounds. Similarly, the diminishing scales of people (the peasants cutting down the hay and the bathers in the river) and of the trees convey a strong sense of spatial recession. One of the most successful illusionistic devices, however, is the Limbourg Brothers' meticulous use and repetition of curving lines to lead the eye steadily into depth: the curving road in the foreground, the curving river and, particularly, the almost luminous curving pathway up to the castle gate. The curving wall of the castle mimics in color and shape the foreground curve of the road and provides a crucial visual link of foreground to background. The same devices can be noted in any of these calendar pages, but it is important to realize that the Limbourg Brothers' "visual vocabulary" is only one (albeit a particularly accomplished one) example of the
widespread late Gothic interest in the description and representation of the physical world.\textsuperscript{26} Whether in the visual arts or in literature, the arts of this period cheerfully blended the material and the spiritual: the late medieval Pearl Poet grounded his quest with richly embellished descriptions of nature and people just as the Limbourg Brothers grounded the medieval labours of the month or religious scenes in richly illusionistic compositions.

On the other hand, Langland's rejection of the temporal and spatial clarity and specificity of his contemporaries finds a visual counterpart in the Rohan Master's avoidance of the dominant illusionistic trend in the visual arts. And, just as Langland's spatial and temporal "ambiguity" has been suggested to simulate the emotional/spiritual nature of the dream, so too does the expressionist style of the Rohan Master depict a spatially and temporally ambiguous world that evokes a similar spiritual and psychic disquiet.

The Rohan Master A Book of Hours (c. 1425) contains sixty-five major illuminations of which eleven are full-page. However, only three illuminations are widely accepted as exclusively the work of the Rohan Master: the "Madonna" [no plate], the "Lamentation" [Plate 6], and the "Dying Man before Christ" [Plate 7]. About ten additional illuminations are attributed either, in part, to the Rohan Master or to the conception of the design.\textsuperscript{27} For my purposes here, a look at just a couple of the illuminations will be adequate to note the stylistic characteristics that both separate the Rohan Master from the illusionistic style of his contemporaries and stylistically link the Rohan Master to Langland.

\textsuperscript{26} Millard Meiss aptly labels this "pictorial Nominalism" and the Limbourg Brothers as "champions of pictorial Nominalism." Millard Meiss, The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry (New York: George Braziller, 1989) 10.
Annunciation to the Shepherds" [Plate 8], although one of the full-page illuminations designed but only partially illuminated by the Rohan Master, affords an exceptional opportunity for comparison and contrast with the Limbourg Brothers' "Annunciation to the Shepherds" [Plate 9]. All the major illusionistic devices noted above can once again be noted in the Limbourg Brothers' "Annunciation to the Shepherds." The artists establish a clear illusion of spatial recession with fore, middle, and backgrounds delineated sharply by color and scale. Again, line is key to leading the eye inward with the stream slicing the composition from left foreground to middle mid-ground. The shepherds point and stare upward as the angels trumpet and announce the news to the shepherds. The relative location of the shepherds and the fields is logical, clear, and easily "read." The major figures are united by a clearly articulated moment in time and space.

The Rohan Master's "Annunciation to the Shepherds," however, creates a spatial and temporal ambiguity that engenders a mood of emotional disquiet. Any illusion of spatial depth is denied by the precipitous tilt of the grassy/craggy slope, the disregard of scale, and the sky patterned in gold leaf. This composition is a visual equivalent of the "surreal space" that Muscatine attributes to Langland's Piers. The Rohan Master "fragments" with the shifting figural scales. Any temporal unity of an action uniting the figures is missing. Each human figure focuses on a lone activity: the shepherd pipes on his pipe; the shepherdess milks a sheep. As a result, the subject becomes perplexing: are

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28 Muscatine, "Locus" 120.
the angels talking to themselves more than to the obliviously piping shepherd and milking shepherdess? Only the black dog seems distressingly aware of the angels but even his howling fails to arouse the attention of his owners. The Rohan Master's unorthodox handling of the subject prompts any number of interpretations: the celebration of humble simplicity and its elevation to preeminence (hence the gargantuan scale of the shepherd and his disregard of the angels); or, if the converse is true, the obliviousness of people to the divine, even in its most miraculous manifestation (even a dog can't miss it!). Whatever the interpretation, the key point for my purpose here is the ambiguity and uncertainty of the work. The Rohan Master rejected the narrative simplicity and illusionistic clarity of the dominant realistic style to create a work potent with emotional and theological meaning but with an ambiguity subject to a wide range of interpretation.

_Piers Plowman_ and the illuminations of the Rohan Master also share an apocalyptic mood that further reinforces the cultural sympathy between these two unusual artists. Without entering the very extensive and diverse critical debate prompted by Bloomfield's important 1962 _Piers Plowman as a Fourteenth Century Apocalypse_, my goal is to discern common threads of apocalyptic content and form in both Langland and the Rohan Master that communicate similar levels of spiritual/personal distress (perhaps questioning) and evoke similarly high levels of emotional response.

_Piers_ is rich with examples of apocalyptic content that, when portrayed in Langland's unique style, evoke a disturbing mood of spiritual disquiet. The famous reference to the Black Plague early in the poem is one of the most
obvious apocalyptic passages that links Langland’s personal experience of the plague years and the widespread fourteenth-century belief that the Black Plague and other natural events were signs of the imminent end of the world:

He preved that thise pestilences were for pure synne,
And the south-westrene wynd on Saterday at even
Was pertliche for pride and for no point ellis.
Pyries and plum-trees were puffed to the erthe
In ensample, ye segges, ye sholden do the bettre.
Beches and brode okes were blowen to the grounde
And turned upward here tail in tokenynge of drede
That dedly synne er domesday shal fordoon hem alle.

(P P V 10-20)

Langland, however, most consistently and pervasively presents his apocalyptic content with continual exhortations against the Church and its representatives: parsons, monks, bishops, and the Pope. Indeed, descriptions of the Church’s excesses and abuses are often followed immediately by apocalyptic exhortations and prophecies of doom. In Passus X, Clergie details an extensive description of clerical abuse:

Ac now is Religion a rydere, a romere by stretes,
A ledere of lovedayes and a lond buggere,
A prikere on a palfrey from manere to manere,
An heep of houndes at his ers as he a lord were;
And but if his knave knele that shal his coppe brynge,
He loureth on hym and asketh hyum who taughte hym curteisie?
Litel hadde lorde to doon to yyve lond from hire heires
To religious that han no routhe though it reyne on hir auters.
'In many places ther thei persons ben, by hemself at ese,
Of the povere have thei no pite - and that is hir pure charite,
Ac thei leten hem as lorde, hir lond lith so brode.

(PP X 303-313)
Langland has Clergie quickly shift from this account of prevalent clerical abuse into an apocalyptic prophecy of a saviour-king\(^{29}\) who will punish the abusers, institute the needed reforms, and usher in a new time:

> 'Ac ther shal come a kyng and confess yow religiouses,  
> And bete yow, as the Bible telleth, for brekynge of your rule,  
> And amende monyals, monkes and chanons,  
> And puten hem to hir penaunce - Ad pristinum status ire.  
> (PP X 314-317)

...  

> 'And thanne freres in hir fraytour shul fynden akeye  
> Of Costantynys cofres, ikn which [the catel is]  
> That Gregories godchildren [g]an yvele despende.  
> (PP X 320-323)

...  

> 'Ac er that kyng come Caym shal awake,  
> Ac Dowel shal dyngen hym adoun and destruye his myghte.'  
> (PP X 326-327)

In addition to the constant reiterations and elaborations of clerical failure to exemplify Christian life, a situation that creates an apocalyptic sense of the imminent collapse of the current order, Langland also selects certain apocalyptic subjects, such as the Harrowing of Hell and the Antichrist, for particular emphasis. Moreover, Langland concludes his poem on a particularly calamitous, apocalyptic note with the Calamities and Antichrist. This is notable, to Klein, for Langland's failure to follow the Calamities and the Antichrist with the resurrection of the dead, the Judgment, and the Heavenly City, the more common and complete iconographic order in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century apocalypses.\(^{30}\) Such a shift from the traditional pattern prompts a range of critical interpretations from Bloomfield's assertion that the "true end of the poem" is the Harrowing of

\(^{29}\) Morton Bloomfield, *Piers Plowman* as a Fourteenth-Century Apocalypse (New Brunswick,
Hell because it is "the next best thing"\textsuperscript{31} to the Last Judgment to Klein's more recent assertion that Langland deliberately inverted accepted order to express his distress and fear.\textsuperscript{32} Klein's interpretation of the final three passi is more convincing to me: the poet's pervasive distress (not necessarily despair) permeates the concluding scenes of \textit{Piers}. The dreamer awakens the final time, "Hevy chered . . . and elenge in herte" (B XX, 2); but when he soon falls into his tenth and final dream he sees the coming of the Antichrist (B XX, 50-52). Death cuts down all:

\begin{quote}
Deeth cam dryvynge after and al to duste passhed 
Kynges and knyghtes, kaysers and popes. 
Leered ne lewed, he lefte no man stonde 
That he hitte evene, that evere stired after. 
Manye a lovely lady and [hir] lemmans knyghtes 
Swowned and swelted for sorwe of Dethes dyntes. 
\textsuperscript{30} Klein 296. 
\textsuperscript{31} Bloomfield 124. 
\textsuperscript{32} Klein 297.
\end{quote}

An apocalyptic battle follows as Lecherie, Coveitise, Symonye and others join the Antichrist to attack Conscience. Langland's constant refrain against the clergy reappears as Conscience cries out to Clergie:

\begin{quote}
Conscience cryede, 'Help, Clergie, or ellis I falle 
Through inparfite preestes and prelates of Holy Chirche!' 
Freres herden hym crye, and comen hym to helpe - 
Ac for thei kouthe noght wel hir craft, Conscience forsook hem. 
Nede neghede tho neer, and Consicence he tolde 
That thei come for coveitise to have cure of soules. 
\textsuperscript{30} Klein 296. 
\textsuperscript{31} Bloomfield 124. 
\textsuperscript{32} Klein 297.
\end{quote}

Langland ends the passus, and the poem, with no resolution: Conscience will continue his search for Piers Plowman, presumably with no help from the

\textsuperscript{30} Klein 296. 
\textsuperscript{31} Bloomfield 124. 
\textsuperscript{32} Klein 297.
institutional Church. Signs of the Antichrist and the end of the world may be everywhere, but the effort must continue. Distress, uncertainty, and ambiguity remain.

The Rohan Master's illuminations in the Book of Hours also exhibit a pervasively apocalyptic mood. Curiously enough, of the three full-page illuminations that can be confidently attributed to the Rohan Master, two are startling death images. Once again, a comparison of the Rohan Master's treatment of a subject (in this case, "The Lamentation") with a contemporary illuminator's treatment of the same subject affords an opportunity to note both the Rohan Master's divergence from the prevalent International Gothic style and the apocalyptic mood of disquiet that his unique style conveys. I use for this comparison an illumination of "The Lamentation" [Plate 10] from Les Très Grandes Heures of Jean, Duc de Berry, a similarly rich manuscript from the Parisian school of illumination. Les Très Grandes Heures dates about a decade earlier to 1407-09, but its illuminations also fall under the prevalent, illusionistic style discussed earlier in the hands of the Limbourg Brothers (see above, p. 69) and most characteristic of International Gothic painting. This illumination occupies only a small portion of the page but includes the full cast of principals present at the Lamentation: Mary, St. John, Mary (holy woman at the feet), Mary Magdelene (in the characteristic attitude of grief with arms raised overhead), Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. The artist distinguishes a foreground (the Lamentation), a mid-ground (Golgotha) and a distant background. Although lacking the illusionistic skill of the Limbourg Brothers, the artist clearly grounds
the Lamentation in historical time and locus. Christ's body is rendered in detail with some degree of realism: the head and face reflect pain and suffering. The Virgin, however, is noticeably devoid of emotional vigor, as is St. John.

The Rohan Master's powerful and unique rendition of the same subject [Plate 6] radically simplifies the subject. Only three principals appear: the dead Christ, Mary and John. An omniscient, partial figure of God the Father is added. Space and time are unspecific: only a barren piece of earth and an angelic host-filled heaven undergird and surround the principals. With the radical minimalization of character and details of locus, however, the Rohan Master heightens the emotional force in a number of startling ways. First, the three major figures are scaled to fill virtually the entire page: the dead Christ stretches horizontally to fill the entire width of the composition, while John and Mary fill the middle. Second, the Rohan Master carefully varies poses from the stiff rigor mortis of the dead Christ to the collapsed curves of Mary. John's entire body turns left to cradle Mary, but his head unnaturally turns to full profile towards God the Father. This unnatural twist throws his profiled face in distress and bewilderment towards God the Father as if questioning, or even challenging, the need for such suffering and pain. The suffering cannot be doubted: Christ's grayish, bloody body shows all the signs of torture and prolonged suffering. All the characteristic soft curving lines of the mainstream International Gothic style are replaced with sharp angles to suggest the almost unbearable sense of grief. The triangular grouping linking the three principals is an evocation of death, pain, suffering. All descriptive detail of space and time is rejected in favor of emotional

33 Millard Meiss, Rohan 11.
expression. And the pervasive mood is questioning and pessimistic: death and suffering are God's way.

The Rohan Master's only other fully conceived and executed miniature reinforces this apocalyptic mood. The "Dying Man before Christ" [Plate 7], first in the illuminations of the Office of the Dead, similarly simplifies and minimizes the subject down to only two major characters: the deceased and God the Father. Both are expanded in scale to fill the composition almost in its entirety. An emaciated, attenuated expiring man occupies the characteristic Rohan Master non-specific area of greenish-brown earth, while God the Father and the smaller figures (St. Michael, a devil, and the soul of the deceased) fill the non-specific heavenly realm of blue and angelic gold. Here the Rohan Master excels in his use of sharp angles (the diagonal of the corpse, the sharply jutting chin, the sword of God the Father) to link the two principals and to create a jarring sense of emotional distress. The smooth flowing, gently curving lines that pattern the compositions of the Limbourg Brothers and most International Gothic artists are rejected by the Rohan Master in favor of diagonals and angles that replace sensuous delight and spiritual confidence with sensuous distrust and spiritual disquiet. All the memento mori skulls and bones surrounding the expiring man confront the Christian with a startling image of his fleeting grasp of material possessions (the blue and gold fabric) and life.

Certainly every epoch embraces some range and complexity of ideas and forms, but the range and complexity in late fourteenth/early fifteenth century suggest the confusions and tensions of a transitional epoch. While much of the age somewhat cheerfully elaborated and embellished the comfortably familiar
forms of the High Gothic, a smaller group of writers and artists wrestled with forms that expressed the tremendous tensions of an age for which the mainstream forms lacked expressive power. Langland drew freely and knowledgeably on multiple generic forms because he seemed unable to find any one genre that adequately provided a poetic architecture for his dreamer's disjointed journey. This fragmented style and uncertain ending lend the poem an ambiguity that finds a visual counterpart in the similarly stylistically fragmented and ambiguous illuminations of the Rohan Master. While both artists remain equally troubling in their respective critical fields, finding parallels between the two may serve to enrich our grasp of the complexity of this transitional age.

Both Rosemary Woolf and Michael Klein comment on the "modernity" of *Piers*. The Rohan Master garners a similar appreciation among art historians whose awareness of and appreciation for the Rohan Master only occurred from the vantage point of modern expressionist art. The works of both artists seem to suggest an ambiguity and an angst (virtually an existential angst) that strike a responsive chord in twentieth-century viewers. Just as the late medieval momentum towards structured literary form and realistic artistic form was reaching dominance, some few artists struggled to create an alternate, expressionist art that could capture the deep questioning and disquiet of the age. A similar transition occurs in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries as writers and artists rejected the familiarity and comfort of traditional literary genres and realistic art forms to seek forms capable of expressing the inner, psychic life.

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34 Woolf 111; and Klein 300.
This last thought suggests another subcurrent of artistic linkage between Langland and the Rohan Master. Both artists reveal a concern with the individual that both reinforces the modernity of their efforts as well as the complexity of the Late Middle Ages. A number of critics reflect on the unusual presence of Langland’s authorial voice in Piers, and not only the authorial voice but also the social/political content of Piers thrust the poem from the outset into the forefront of political activism for individual rights. Just as the poem elevates the humble plowman and his religious dilemma to center stage, so also the Rohan Master’s unusual illuminations suggest a similar interest. I return to his "Annunciation to the Shepherds" [Plate 8] and the artist’s rejection of traditional representative mode: just what is the meaning of this enormous, highly individualized shepherd who so dominates the scene? Is he a Christ/Piers-figure whose utter obliviousness to extraordinary events highlights his Christian acceptance of his role? I may be reaching here, but the composition is a highly suggestive one.

The pervasive disquiet and apocalyptic angst in the works of both artists can also be linked with proto-protestantism. Piers’ potential for protestant interpretation needs no more proof than that of the reformers who continually cited the poem to document Catholic excesses and failure. But the failure of the clergy so exhaustively documented in Piers and the crisis of an individual for whom the organized Church has failed necessitates that Conscience continue his

35 Rosemary Woolf is just one critic who explores this issue of authorial voice in Piers. Woolf suggests that the vague structure of the poem indicates an authorial presence of the poet “exploring the perplexities of his own mind.” 121. Michael Klein also notes an unusual “authorial presence” at key points in the poem. 29.
moral/spiritual journey independent of the clergy. I would suggest a similar, proto-protestant interpretive potential for some of the Rohan Master's unusual compositions: the dying man in the "Dying Man before Christ" [Plate 7] directly confronts God the Father as he commends his soul over to God in the Latin prayer of the dead ("In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum; redemisti me Domine, Deus veritatis.") But God answers him in the vernacular!: "Pour tes Péchés pénitence feras. Au jour du Jugement avecques moi seras."

What is more, the only stylistic descendants (not necessarily direct) of the Rohan Master that can be cited are a line of expressionistic artists that reach through Rogier van der Weyden (1400-1464) to culminate in the similarly disquieting efforts of Bosch (1453-1516) and the Protestant, Grünewald (1470/75-1528). These links are suggestive only but useful for detecting a strong individualistic and deeply spiritual subcurrent in late medieval life and thought that could only find expression in alternative literary and artistic forms. Langland and the Rohan Master were kindred spirits in their efforts to give artistic expression to this powerful subcurrent.
Chapter 3
Visual Milton: The Garden of Eden
and the
Baroque Classical Landscape

In Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, Milton unfolds a vision of Paradise, the Garden of Eden, as told through the eyes of Satan. Milton's Eden, like many of the images throughout *Paradise Lost*, draws on the poet's encyclopedic knowledge of an impressive range of his poetic predecessors, from the classical and hexameral to the medieval and Renaissance poets of England and the continent. Indeed, Milton scholarship is rife with studies detailing Milton's legacy to specific sources, from Homer, Horace, Vergil and Ovid among classical writers to Augustine and St. Basil among the Church Fathers, to the medieval and Renaissance poets, such as Dante, Ariosto, Tasso and Spenser.¹ However, Milton's Eden cannot be fully understood as simply a creative blending of the literary gardens of his poetic predecessors, albeit an admittedly enormous number of literary predecessors. Rather, Milton's Eden is a garden notably different from its many literary predecessors, and it is different for its striking pictorial qualities.

Elucidations of and possible explanations for these pictorial qualities have been varied, but most Milton scholarship on this issue revolves around the larger

¹ This is a vast and rich field of literary criticism, but a few scholars and works can be singled out for mention. A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966) offers the most comprehensive summary of garden images in literature from ancient and Biblical sources through the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Carol Ann Barthel, "Milton’s Use of Spenser: The Early Poems and *Paradise Lost*," Diss. Yale U, 1974, focuses on Milton's very considerable indebtedness to Spenser.
scholarly conversation about Milton’s 1638-39 trip to Italy and the possible impact this trip had in shaping the visual imagery in his writings. As recently as 1988, the Third International Milton Symposium convened in Vallombrosa and Florence under the theme of “Milton in Italy.” Milton scholars came together to explore from a myriad of thematic angles the profound effect that Milton’s youthful time spent in Italy had on shaping the poet. In spite of Milton’s curious silence about works of art and architecture in Italy, for, indeed, he never mentioned any specific works of art, the belief in Milton’s acute powers of observation and encyclopedic knowledge of classical and Renaissance literatures has led many Miltonists to assert that he must certainly have been more than passively aware of the treasures with which he came into contact. This “Italian Question,” then, has been a fertile topic for interart studies, for if cogent parallels can be discerned between Milton’s poetic images and the images exhibited in Italian art in Rome and elsewhere in the early seventeenth century, a more persuasive argument can be fashioned about the stylistic and thematic parallels between Italian art and Milton’s garden. Though Milton’s Italian trip offers this tantalizing possibility of direct influence, such conclusions must necessarily remain hypothetical due to Milton’s own silence on the subject. However, a synchronic approach to interart studies can serve well to refocus the “Italian Question” away from the need to address questions concerning Milton’s direct experience and turn instead to the investigation of the many rich stylistic and thematic parallels between Milton’s Garden of Eden and the visual arts of Seicento Italy.

The Garden of Eden as depicted in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* will afford an especially rich opportunity to investigate a refocused Italian Question, for early
seventeenth-century Rome was the time and location for the development of the classical landscape genre as a genre in its own right. Milton’s Garden of Eden exhibits a number of characteristics which cannot be found in any literary gardens, not even the literary gardens of Milton’s favored Italian Renaissance poets, such as Tasso, nor in his immediate English epic forefather, Spenser. A close stylistic analysis of Milton’s Garden, with an eye to two of Spenser’s literary gardens from The Faerie Queene (Acrasia’s Bower of Bliss and the Garden of Venus and Adonis), will reveal several notable differences. First, Milton creates a specificity of vantage point and spatial dynamics markedly different from Spenser. Second, Milton employs light effects to enhance the spatial qualities, and, third, Milton rejects Spenser’s preference for detail and shapes a Garden out of large masses – masses of trees, hills, etc.

Milton’s break with his poetic predecessors in such notable ways suggests other possible influences on or sources for this poet. Perhaps both the poet’s own direct experiences of Italian gardens during his trip to Italy in 1638-39, as well as his experience of the new Baroque style in the visual arts, could explain Milton’s rendition of the Garden of Eden. But in the absence of direct evidence of this, a synchronic analysis of Milton’s garden can demonstrate powerful visual analogues in Italian gardens and the new Baroque classical landscape genre. There are also thematic links. A shared reliance on arcadian references and thought further reinforces the link between the gardens depicted in the new Baroque classical landscape genre and Milton’s Garden of Eden in Paradise Lost. Connecting Milton to the Baroque style in the visual arts is a line of inquiry in interart studies that has been pursued in a small number of important studies,
but many images and issues remain outstanding. Milton's Garden of Eden is one such issue.

Before situating this study within the body of interart studies on Milton, Milton’s very substantial borrowings from his poetic predecessors’ literary gardens need to be reviewed. Both the ongoing popularity of garden imagery within the Christian tradition and the accelerating revival of classical, non-Christian garden imagery in the hands of Renaissance poets blended in the seventeenth century to bring garden imagery to a pre-eminent position in both the visual arts and in literature. Milton’s Garden of Eden is a key document in the emergence of the notably more prominent position of garden imagery in this era.

Milton’s debts to the literary gardens of the Judaeo-Christian tradition are extensive, and are of interest here as important background. First and foremost, Milton’s most important source is the book of Genesis:

And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.
And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.
The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;
And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone.
And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia.
And the name of the third river is Hiddekel: that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.
And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

(Genesis 2:8-15)
Although the biblical description of Eden is startling in its brevity, a long and complex tradition of hexameral writings in both the Jewish and Christian traditions provided Milton with a wealth of material.

From the 1940s through the 1960s, several Milton scholars mined these hexameral sources to reveal Milton’s very substantial debt to this corpus of material. Just a few examples of this tradition and this material will suffice to indicate its significance. Grant McColley’s 1940 *Paradise Lost An Account of Its Growth and Major Origins, with a Discussion of Milton’s Use of Sources and Literary Patterns* was an early effort to uncover patristic writings as important source material for Milton. For example, McColley noted that Milton’s details in Eden of situating Paradise high upon a mountain, having the river running southward through Eden passing into or underneath this mountain, and having the subterranean stream rising within Paradise as a fountain that waters the garden are all details that were common to the writings of Basil, Ambrose, Isidore, Abelard and Hugo of St. Victor.\(^2\) In 1945, McColley’s study was quickly followed by Sr. Mary Corcoran’s very focused study of Milton’s *Paradise with Reference to the Hexameral Background*. Although Sr. Corcoran’s focus was primarily theological, she asserted the vital importance of hexameral writings for not only the theological content of Milton’s epic but also for the physical details. The Church Fathers, especially St. Basil, are of chief importance.\(^3\) By the late 1960’s, J.M. Evans published *Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition*. In this thorough study, Evans conducted an historical study of Milton’s core narrative.

\(^2\)Grant McColley, *Paradise Lost: An Account of Its Growth and Major Origins* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1940) 146. McColley’s study identifies a wide variety of sources for Milton’s material, not merely theological and hexameral writings.
material: the Genesis story of the creation of man and his fall. Evans traces, in turn, both the exegetical tradition and the literary tradition in an effort to provide a rich and thorough summary of Milton’s source material, from the Church Fathers to scholastic and dramatic treatments. By the late 1960’s, these scholars had firmly established Milton’s debt to hexameral literature, whether for an analysis of Milton’s garden imagery or for other central themes and images in Paradise Lost.

The classical tradition also offered Milton a long and extensive heritage of garden imagery. This pre-Christian tradition, however, imagined a garden conceived as a locus amoenus or ideal place which existed in a Golden Age, a mythic time before the world as it is currently experienced. A. Bartlett Giamatti’s The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic from 1966 remains the definitive work on the myriad of classical and Christian sources available to the Renaissance poets. Giamatti traces the myth of the Golden Age to a first appearance in classical literature in the Odyssey when Menelaus is promised the Elysian Fields:

\[
\text{. . .the gods intend you for Elysion}
\text{with golden Rhadamanthos at the world’s end,}
\text{where all existence is a dream of ease.}
\text{Snowfall is never known there, nor long}
\text{Frost of winter, nor torrential rain,}
\text{But only mild and lulling airs from Ocean}
\text{Bearing refreshment for the souls of men –}
\text{The West Wind always blowing.}
\]

\[(561-68)\]

Hesiod’s Works and Days is the first mention of the Golden Age, using that precise terminology. While many ancient writers also described a Golden

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Age and developed Hesiod’s concept, Ovid’s treatment of the Golden Age in the *Metamorphoses*, I, 89-112 would become the singularly most influential classical writing on this subject, in terms of medieval and Renaissance writers.

Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, these two traditions, the exegetical and the classical, blended to form a rich complex of garden imagery potent with philosophical and theological meaning. Dante’s blend of the two traditions is perhaps one of the most artistic examples, and certainly one of the most pointed in its self-consciousness about the similarities of the garden concepts in both traditions and also the notable theological and moral differences between the two traditions. As an example, Dante’s pilgrim enters Eden in *Purg.* XXVII and finds a garden with a fountain and four rivers, but two of these rivers are the rivers of classical myth - Lethe and Eunoë. Ancient, pagan notions of the Golden Age and Elysium coalesce with Christian notions of Eden and Paradise, but Dante asserts the distinction by having his Pilgrim take over the lead from Virgil and obstruct Virgil from the path into the true garden, for this path is not open to him as a pagan.

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5 Giamatti 16ff.  
6 The garden may be one of the richest and most complex images in western thought and art, but this vast and rich tradition cannot be explored in any detail here. Many scholars have mined the rich philosophical and theological meanings of this image, from the *hortus conclusus* or enclosed garden to the *hortus mentis* or garden of the mind. Milton’s Garden draws on this long tradition as the poet’s impressive erudition can be gleaned from the richness of the references. Milton’s garden is a walled or enclosed garden, and as such draws on a myriad of enclosed gardens and gardens of the mind. Giamatti gives a succinct summary of Milton’s medieval predecessors, with a particularly detailed discussion of Guillaume de Lorris/Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose* 60-67. See also John V. Fleming’s, *The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969) for a detailed discussion of the enclosed garden and its origins 54-103. Stanley Stewart’s *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and the Image in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin P, 1966) also traces the theological background of the enclosed garden image and notes its derivation from the Song of Songs 3-30. See also Albert C. Labriola’s, “The Aesthetics of Self-Diminution,” *Milton Studies*, VII ed. Albert C. Labriola and Michael Lieb (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1975) 267-311 for a thorough analysis of the many images in Milton’s garden and their complex theological references.  
7 I depend on Giamatti’s very thorough discussion of Dante for this material. 105-07.
Milton drew freely and creatively on this lengthy and complex tradition of exegetical and classical literary gardens, but Spenser was one of the most influential poets of all in the shaping of Milton’s epic, and, in particular, in the shaping of Milton’s garden. Roy Daniells commented that, “Milton told Dryden that he had taken Spenser for a model and his phrase, ‘a better teacher than Aquinas,’ suggests the deep affinity of ideas” between the two poets. It will be important to analyze Spenser’s gardens in comparison to Milton’s to affirm this profound debt, but, more importantly, to identify Milton’s innovations in garden imagery which cannot be found in Spenser or any other poetic predecessor. It is this effort to discern the differences that will bring us to interart studies as a necessary tool to elucidate some very striking innovations by Milton. A number of important interart studies, beginning with Mario Praz in the 1930’s, have worked to link Milton’s poetic style, particularly the style of his late years and of his mature, fully developed poetic abilities embodied in his epic, *Paradise Lost*, to the Baroque style in the visual arts. But among these interart studies, only a few have considered Milton’s image of the garden and its possible indebtedness to Italian art.

In a 1938 article entitled “Milton and Poussin,” Mario Praz was the first Milton scholar to be drawn to the recently formulated theories of Heinrich Wölfflin. Wölfflin had posited five formal, stylistic categories to distinguish the art of the seventeenth century as Baroque, and to clarify its formal differences from

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Renaissance art of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁹ For the purposes of this investigation, Praz’s efforts were significant in two ways: first, as an early effort to look to the visual arts for insights about literary style and a key effort in establishing what would come to be designated interart studies and, second, Praz’s suggestion that Poussin’s classical landscape genre and theory may be useful in analyzing Milton’s style. Unfortunately, Praz’s efforts bear the characteristics of much first-generation interart efforts: correlations between the visual arts and Milton’s style remain vague and unpersuasive. Praz succumbed to the widespread characterization of Milton’s poetry as overly severe and abstruse; T.S. Eliot’s description of Milton’s poetry as primarily aural rather than visual because of Milton’s blindness finds its counterpart, according to Praz, in Poussin’s emphasis on line to the exclusion of color.¹⁰ A brief quote from Praz captures the flights of fancy typical of these early interart forays:

Some have said that Poussin spoke a dead language, just as Mr. Eliot has said of Milton. . . Milton also modeled his verse in wax before working it in English. The wax pattern of Milton was the Latin construction; he handled so to say the classical flesh of the words before dressing it in English attire. His English nobles remembered having been Roman senators once; his sentences marched at the pace of the Roman legions; there was an enchanted air about it all, as in Poussin’s pictures. This was, as Mr. Eliot would say, Milton’s solemn game.¹¹

Much of the article reads with a similar flair for rhetoric and the prejudices of the early twentieth century, but Praz’s singular perception that the art of Poussin and

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⁹ Heinrich Wölflin, Principles of Style, trans. M.D. Hottinger, 6th ed. (New York: Dover, 1950). Wölflin’s Principles of Style, first published in 1915 and translated into English in 1932, posited five formal stylistic principles between the visual arts of the Renaissance and of the Baroque. These are: linear vs. painterly, plane vs. recession, closed vs. open form, multiplicity vs. unity, and clearness vs. unclearness. This was just the beginning of the redemption of seventeenth-century art and the establishment of Baroque art as a formal stylistic category, rather than as degenerated Renaissance art.

the work of Milton may have similarities worthy of being analyzed sets the stage for later interart studies.

In the 1960’s and 1970’s, interart studies flourished and took on a greater discipline and rigor. Hannah Disinger Demaray and Jeffry Spencer contributed some important interart scholarship with regard to Milton’s conception of the Garden of Eden in *Paradise Lost*. Demaray argued in general terms that Milton’s Garden bore striking resemblances to the Italian countryside as it could have been experienced by Milton both in its natural state or as seen depicted in Italian art of the Renaissance and Baroque periods.\(^{12}\) Demaray’s studies were also important in their call for additional work to be done on the overall question of the impact of Milton’s Italian experience, particularly on how his tours of the countryside and of gardens, as well as viewing Italian art that was everywhere visible to the poet, were necessary in order to gain a more complete understanding of Milton’s depiction of his Garden of Eden. Unfortunately, this direct line of inquiry can never be conclusively proven given Milton’s silence on his visual impressions.

Jeffry Spencer’s impressive study, *Heroic Nature: Ideal Landscape in English Poetry from Marvell to Thomson*, is an excellent survey of landscape and garden imagery in English poetry from 1600-1750. Spencer, unlike Demaray, declines to answer the “Italian Question” but notes that the assumption that Milton “absorbed” some of the aesthetics of the period while he traveled in Italy may be inferred from the greater “pictorial tendencies” of his landscape imagery

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\(^{11}\) Praz 204-05.

when compared to earlier English poets such as Spenser. Jeffry Spencer, like Mario Praz forty years earlier, also finds visual analogues to Milton’s Garden in the classical landscapes of Poussin, but brings to his study a much closer textual analysis of Milton as well as the more disciplined formal analysis of Poussin characteristic of interart studies in the 1970s. Wölfflin’s categories are rejected in favor of approaches emphasizing literary analysis. For instance, Spencer relies on the term “literary pictorialism” to frame his comparative analyses of various poets’ garden imagery. Spencer also turns to the lively seventeenth-century scholarly dialogue unfolding around “ut pictura poesis” as a key rationale for the close visual and iconographic parallels that can be discerned between painted images of gardens and literary gardens.

During the last ten years, two scholars have once again turned to the question of Milton’s Garden of Eden and the issue of Italian art seen during Milton’s trip in 1638-39. Under the banner of the International Milton Symposium of 1988, two papers of interest to this conversation were published in the early 1990’s. Interestingly enough, these two scholars revisit the two distinct strands within interart studies – the stylistic strand and the iconographic strand. Michael O’Connell, curious about the general question of whether Milton was visually and stylistically receptive to the flowering of the new Baroque style in Rome and elsewhere in Italy, wrote the provocative “Milton and the Art of Italy: A Revisionist View,” interrogating this question from a fresh perspective. O’Connell, through analysis of the writings of other English seventeenth-century

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travelers to Italy, presents strong evidence that the seventeenth-century English Protestant traveler visiting Italy, and particularly Rome, under the sway of an aggressive Inquisition and in the midst of the fervor of the Counter-Reformation, reacted with a thorough repugnance for the religious art of the period. Instead of being awestruck and dedicated to learning about the art as part of the “grand tour” frame of mind familiar to us from the writings of eighteenth and nineteenth-century English travelers to Italy, seventeenth-century travelers were often, like Milton, silent about the art they saw. However, O’Connell does stop short of suggesting that Milton and other such visitors to Italy were immune to the visual arts and visual landscape of Italy. And O’Connell confirms that landscape, as a subject matter, would be comfortably ecumenical in this era of heightened religious alignments. This suggestion is particularly potent in light of earlier interart investigations into Milton’s garden imagery, because Roland Mushat Frye especially commented that Milton, “refers to ‘landscape’ more often than to any other form of the arts.”15 Indeed, “landscape” was a new word to enter the English language in the seventeenth century, and Milton’s use of the word in “L’Allegro” and Paradise Lost are early records of the word’s appearance in poetry.16

16 Frye notes that the word “lantskip” came to English from the Dutch, who were the early creators of landscape as a genre. Interestingly enough, the Dutch painter Brill was also active in Rome in the late sixteenth century and had some influence on the Carracci and other Italian painters in Rome in the early Seicento. Frye includes the specific quotes from “L’Allegro”: “the lantskip round,” (70) and Paradise Lost: “the darkened lantskip” (PL II 491), “so lovely seem’d/That lantskip,” (PL IV 153); and “Discovering in wide lantskip all the East/Of Paradise and Eden’s happy plains,” (PL V 142).
The second of the two interart articles coming out of the Vallambrosa Symposium turned to iconographic interart studies when Diane Kelsey McColley examined the possible influence of Italian art in shaping Milton’s garden imagery. In *A Gust for Paradise: Milton’s Eden and the Visual Arts*, McColley explores pictorial cycles of the Genesis Creation story while looking for visual clues to a feminist interpretation of Milton’s garden and the fall of man. McColley reads Milton as the creator of a garden unblemished by sin and any foretaste of sin, just as she reads Milton’s Adam and Eve as having shared responsibility for the Fall. And in the mosaic cycles in San Marco, as well as in other such Italian cycles, McColley discovers visual analogues for such an interpretation.

The subject of Milton’s Garden of Eden and its possible literary and visual sources remain subjects of lively interest and engagement in Milton scholarship. It is this multifaceted and ongoing conversation that creates the context for my present analysis of stylistics in interart studies. Milton’s Garden, when subjected to a close comparative analysis with his poetic source material, will emerge convincingly as a Garden which draws not only on the rich tradition of literary gardens but also on the new theories of the Baroque classical landscape genre developed in early seventeenth-century Rome. And the parallels between this genre in the visual arts and Milton’s Eden can provide suggestive links between

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18 Diane McColley’s search for visual iconographic analogues of Milton’s garden comes as the most recent in a long line of such investigations. Among the most important such studies, Frye’s *Milton’s Imagery and the Visual Arts* is notable for its detailed discussion of Milton’s Italian journey and presumption of Milton’s interest in art, although the poet mentioned so little in his writings. Frye even suggests that Milton most likely would have kept a detailed dairy of the sort we have from John Evelyn, but Milton’s diary failed to survive. 23.
the Baroque classical landscape and Milton’s rendering of the Garden of Eden in *Paradise Lost*.

Milton’s use of what can best be characterized as a Baroque visual imagination to fashion his Garden of Eden can be clarified by a close comparison to gardens in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*. This major source and inspiration to Milton offered several literary garden models, but two of the gardens in the *Faerie Queene* can be illustrative for the purposes of this discussion: Acrasia’s Bower of Bliss and the Garden of Venus and Adonis. It will be interesting for us to consider Spenser’s garden imagery compared with Milton’s. The pictorial qualities, or “literary pictorialism” as Knott does say, refer to the visual or descriptive qualities of the poetry. Striking differences will become apparent between the two poets when their gardens are analyzed for the handling of spatial qualities, light effects, and the attention to detail.

Spenser’s gardens are spatially vague and uncertain, largely because neither a specific viewer nor vantage point is ever delineated. As the wanderings of Guyon, the Knight, unfold, Spenser never indicates that the picture of the Bower of Bliss being rendered is from the vantage point of any particular character. Guyon and the Palmer enter an ivory gate and,

> Thus being entred, they behold around  
> A large and spacious plaine, on every side  
> Strowed with pleasauns, whose faire grassy ground  
> Mantled with greene, and goodly beautified  
> With all the ornaments of *Floraes* pride,

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19 Barthel 250-286. Barthel’s dissertation includes a section on Paradise as conceived by both poets. The rich parallels between both the Bower of Bliss and the Garden of Venus and Adonis with Milton’s Garden of Eden are explored in considerable detail, giving ample evidence of the close relationship of garden imagery between these two epic poets.

The description continues eight stanzas later:

There the most daintie Paradise on ground,
It selfe doth offer to his sober eye,
In which all pleasures plenteously abound,
And none does others happiness enuye:
The painted flowers, the trees vpshooting hye,
The trembling groues, the Christall running by;

(F.Q. II, xii, 58)

Although the second line in the passage immediately above indicates that these sights are being “offer[ed]” to Guyon’s “sober eye,” the poet refers to the act of seeing in an allegorical mode – Guyon’s eye is “sober,” so his relationship with the garden is a moral one, not a physical one of vantage point on the scene. His physical position is not of issue; rather, his steadfastness of character as he reacts to what he sees shapes the descriptive mode.

Any suggestion of spatial relationships among the “painted flowers, the trees vpshooting hye,/ The trembling groues, the Christall running by” is noticeably lacking. Knott characterizes Spenser’s garden as “two-dimensional, simple lists of features.”22 And much of this distinct lack of spatial qualities is related to the failure to provide a specific character who is doing the looking as well as a specific position from which the character looks. All the elements of the garden remain somewhat dreamlike.

Spenser’s handling of light and shadow will also be notably different from Milton’s. Certainly, light effects are a correlate of spatial relationships, so the absence of light effects is no surprise in Spenser’s descriptive process. Indeed,

21 All quotes from The Faerie Queene are taken from Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene 1590, 1596, 1609, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. (New York: Penguin, 1987).
22 Knott 40.
there is a distinct lack of light effects as part of the descriptive arsenal. All
Spenser’s gardens may be assumed to be evenly and brightly lit, but I only say
this as an explanation for the clarity of the descriptive detail. For instance, as
Spenser creates an image of the fountain at the center of the Bower of Bliss, a
picture emerges of:

Infinit streames continually did well
Out of this fountaine, sweet and faire to see,
The which into an ample lauer fell,
And shortly grew to so great quantitie,
That like a little lake it seemed to bee;
Whose depth exceeded not three cubits hight,
That through the waues one might the bottom see,
All pau’d beneath with laspar shining bright,
That seemed the fountaine in that sea did sayle vpright.

And all the margent round about was set,
With shady Laurell trees, thence to defend
The sunny beames, which on the billowes bet,
And those which therein bathed, mote offend.

(F.Q.II, xii, 62-63)
The rare light-suggestive adjective, “shady,” is notable in the midst of a
descriptive process, but it is important to observe that the overall process of
description is less pictorial than it is metaphorical.23 The shady area becomes a
welcome shield from the sun for the naked Damzelles whom Guyon will shortly
see, but the shady areas are a part of the necessary imagery of a pleasurable,
ideal bower. No clear picture emerges of spatial relationships nor of objects as
defined by light or shadow.

A third dimension of Spenser’s descriptive process that will be notably
different from that of Milton’s is the poet’s approach to detail. Just as Spenser is
given to cataloguing the attributes of his gardens, so too does he focus on
providing many precise details. In the Garden of Venus and Adonis, Spenser recounts the many flowers adorning the area around the arbor:

And all about grew euery sort of flower
To which sad louers were transformd of yore:
Fresh *Hyacinthus*, *Phoebus* paramoure,
Foolish *Narcisse*, that like the watry shore,
Sad *Amaranthus*, made a flower but late,
Sad *Amaranthus*, in whose purple gore
Me seemes I see *Amintas* wretched fate,

(F.Q. III, vi, 45)

This is merely one example of Spenser's poetic preference for providing meticulous descriptive detail, but this detail unfolds without spatial relationships to other details or to a viewer. Milton will bring a vantage point and a preference for the description of large masses rather than this eye of the miniaturist that Spenser prefers.

If Spenser's spatial descriptions and vantage points are unspecified and vague, Milton's are specific and clear. Milton is highly innovative in his descriptive technique when he unfolds the view of Eden from both a specific vantage point and through the eyes of a particular character. Satan arrives from his lengthy journey to find the Garden of Eden, leaps “At one slight bound” over the wall, and perches on the Tree of Life:

Thence up he flew, and on the Tree of Life,
The middle Tree and highest there that grew,
Sat like a Cormorant; yet not true Life
Thereby regain’d, but sat devising Death
To them who liv’d; nor on the virtue thought
Of that life-giving Plant, but only us’d
For prospect.

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Milton’s Eden will now unfold through the eyes of and from the vantage point of a particular character, Satan. The word “prospect” is of paramount importance here in distinguishing Milton’s pictorial technique from that of Spenser. Jeffry Spencer comments on Milton’s innovation here, for the poet clearly articulates a prospect – a view from a high point looking out over a natural scene. From this prospect Satan can see all of the Garden Eden laid out:

Thus was this place,
A happy rural seat of various view:
Groves whose rich Trees wept odorous Gums and Balm,
Others whose fruit burnisht with Golden Rind
Hung amiable, Hesperian Fables true,
If true, here only, and of delicious taste:
Betwixt them Lawns, or level Downs, and Flocks
Grazing the tender herb, were interpos’d,
Or palmy hillock, or the flow’ry lap
Of some irriguous Valley spread her store,
Flow’rs of all hue, and without Thorn the Rose:
Another side, umbrageous Grots and Caves
Of cool recess, o’er which the mantling Vine
Lays forth her purple Grape, and gently creeps
Luxuriant; meanwhile murmuring waters fall
Down the slope hills, disperst, or in a Lake,
That to the fringed Bank with Myrtle crown’d,
Her crystal mirror hold, unite thir stream.

In this famous passage, Milton describes an Eden of vast spaces seen from the vantage point, or prospect, of the Tree of Life. The poet’s descriptive process implies depths and distant vistas as spatial relationships are suggested with a language of position. For instance, “betwixt” the groves of trees are “Lawns, or level Downs,” “Or palmy hillock” “or . . . some irriguous Valley.” And on “Another

25 Spencer 107.
“side” are “Grots and Caves” making it clear that these elements of the Garden are in positional relationships to each other.

Not only does Milton provide a clearly designated actor (Satan) from whose vantage point the scene unfolds, but Milton also has Satan constantly moving, so his vantage point is dynamic and shifting. After Satan’s first glimpse of the garden from the high prospect of the Tree of Life, Milton positions Satan to come in for a much closer view of the Garden and the “gentle pair”:

Then from his lofty stand on that high Tree  
Down he alights among the sportful Herd  
Of those fourfooted kinds, himself now one,  
Now other, as thir shape serv’d best his end  
Nearer to view his prey, and unespie’d  
To mark what of thir state he more might learn  
By word or action markt: about them round  
A Lion now he stalks with fiery glare.  

(P L IV 395-402)

Milton favors a rhetoric dense with words referencing the act of seeing and the need for various vantage points. After Satan’s jealous rantings when he spies Adam and Eve existing blissfully in their idyllic Garden of Eden, Milton sets Satan in motion once again: “. . .and began Through wood, through waste, o’er hill, o’er dale his roam” (IV, 538-39). As long ago as 1942, Sergei Eisenstein characterized Milton’s continually shifting, but clearly specified, vantage points as “cinematographic.”26 Such a deliberate narrative technique separates Milton very sharply from his poetic predecessors.

An interesting correlate to this dynamic sense of motion is Milton’s innovative introduction of the element of time into his vision of the Garden of Eden. As Milton moves Satan and his other principal actors around the Garden,
the reader is provided with views of the site at various times of the day. Satan, with his initial spying and plotting accomplished, continues his “sly circumspection” as the sun begins to set:

Meanwhile in utmost Longitude, where Heav’n
With Earth and Ocean meets, the setting Sun
Slowly descended.

(PL IV 539-41)

Milton’s description of the Garden becomes visually richer and more tangible than Spenser’s as the different times of day and night provide the poet with opportunities to depict an Eden in a myriad of colors and shifting light conditions:

Now came still Ev’n on, and Twilight gray
Had in her sober Livery all things clad.

(PL IV 598-99)

and,

now glow’d the Firmament
With living Sapphires: Hesperus that led
The starry Host, rode brightest, till the Moon
Rising in clouded Majesty, at length
Apparent Queen unveil’d her peerless light,
And o’er the dark her Silver Mantle threw.

(PL IV 604-09)

Milton’s pictorial imagery reaches a new complexity and subtlety with the unfolding of his drama within an Eden depicted at various times of day and night. And this newly complex and subtle visual imagery of the Garden provides the poet with a narrative tool of tremendous and varied potential, visual as well as thematic.

The last quote above provides an ideal segue to Milton’s use of light compared with that of Spenser’s. Milton, distinctly different from Spenser,
includes a range of light effects to enrich the dramatic and pictorial content of his Garden. As Satan’s view of Eden unfolds, Milton’s rhetoric portrays a Garden of deep and varied spaces defined by contrasts of light and shadow. As the “fresh Fountain” waters the Garden, it “fell Down the steep glade, and met the nether Flood,/ Which from his darksome passage now appears” (PL IV 230-32). Milton continues on to distinguish between the lighting of the open field and the darker shadows of the bowers:

Both where the morning Sun first warmly smote
The open field, and where the unpierc’st shade
Imbrown’d the noontide Bow’rs.

(PL IV 244-46)

With such contrasts specified, Milton’s Garden attains a greater verisimilitude than the less physically realized gardens of Spenser.

Along with the specificity of viewer and vantage point, a description of spatial depths as perceived by an onlooker at particular times of the day and with varying light effects, Milton further enhances the pictorial quality of his Garden by employing a descriptive process focusing on large masses in contrast to Spenser’s cataloguing of a myriad of small details.27 There is a preciosity to Spenser’s rendition of his gardens that is absent in Milton. Rather, Milton depicts a Garden on a greatly increased scale and only rarely brings his reader in for a close-up view of the details. Milton’s garden is vast and includes, “Groves whose rich Trees wept odorous Gums and Balm,” and “Betwixt them Lawns, or level Downs, and Flocks” (PL IV 252). This large overview as taken in by Satan also includes the “palmy hillock,” “the flow’ry lap/ Of some irriguous Valley,”

“umbrageous Grots and Caves,” “murmuring waters fall[ing]/ Down the slope [of] hills,” and “a Lake.” Milton carefully layers components to render a Garden of Eden distinguished by its large masses of natural elements: groves, lawns, hillocks, valleys, grottoes and caves, streams, waterfalls and lakes. It is the exception, rather than the rule, for Milton to catalogue individual flowers – a favorite device of Spenser and other medieval and Renaissance poets.

No satisfactory precedents for the striking pictorial qualities of Milton’s Garden can be found in the literary gardens of Milton’s poetic source material. However, these same pictorial qualities of Milton’s Garden find a notable visual counterpart in the newly emergent Baroque landscape as conceived by the Carracci (Ludovico 1555-1619; Agostino 1557-1602; and Annibale 1560-1609) and their followers, Domenichino, Poussin and Lorrain. During the first few decades of the seventeenth century, Rome was the location of the development of the classical or ideal landscape as a genre in its own right. Some striking parallels between this Baroque classical landscape genre and Milton’s Garden of Eden along the dimensions of vantage point, spatial qualities, handling of light and dark and the preference for mass over detail suggest classical landscapes as visual analogues to Milton’s garden.

The “classical or ideal landscape” distinguishes a particularly Roman, seventeenth-century creation. Annibale Carracci (1560-1609), who came to Rome in 1595 from Bologna, carried with him a thorough familiarity with the landscape tradition of the Venetian Renaissance (Bellini, Giorgione, Titian et al.), as well as a painterly sensitivity to atmospheric effects that he had absorbed from
However, it was only under the influence of the High Renaissance art that he studied in Rome that Annibale created this genre now designated the “classical or ideal landscape.” The essential characteristics of this genre are that the compositions must be created according to the laws of aesthetic harmony rather than be a faithful image of an actual scene and, in A. Richard Turner’s words, be “a contemplative and visionary view of nature in a pictorial space in which depth is created by a series of layers parallel to the picture plane.” The classical or ideal landscape, therefore, is a curious blending of the natural and the intellectual, the real and the ideal, much like Milton’s Garden of Eden in Paradise Lost.

The most famous of Annibale Carracci’s classical landscapes, and, indeed, the compositional template for Annibale’s most accomplished followers, Domenichino, Poussin and Claude, was the “Flight into Egypt” (1603-04) [Plate 11]. Many of the pictorial qualities noted in Milton’s descriptive technique find a visual analogue in Carracci’s work. For instance, just as Milton particularized and personalized the prospect view as that of Satan from a specified location, the Tree of Life, Annibale assumes a vantage point for the viewer of this painting. Here, however, the viewer is positioned somewhat below that of the Holy Family, and the scene unfolds back and up.

The deep pictorial space defined here by Annibale leads the eye

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28 A.W.A. Boschloo, Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent (The Hague: Government Publishing Office, 1974). This study provides extensive detail on Annibale’s earlier career in Bologna and the range of influences that shaped his pre-Rome style.

deliberately from left to right, right to left, and so on, in a series of wedge-like layers carefully structured in a zigzagging pattern. The first wedge captures the eye with the dark and heavy clump of trees and trunks at the left foreground and leads the eye along the diagonal line of the riverbank over to the boy in the boat at the far right. The boy’s gesture in collaboration with the shimmering and contrasting light mass of the river, carries the eye on another diagonal back again towards the left of the canvas. And so a quiet dynamism of visual and spatial movement takes the eye on a steady and predetermined path back and forth across the canvas through the layers.

Just as Milton interjects a powerful sense of time while describing his Garden at various times of the day, so also Annibale’s classical landscape formulation suggests temporal dimensions – both through the light effects of a particular time of day (seemingly early morning when the light is gentle), and also through the suggestiveness of the types of activities going on in each landscape layer. Langerlöf posits that the configurations of planes in the classical landscape can be interpreted as a “time axis”:

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\ldots \text{we could envisage a progression from an eternal or static state in the distance to the unfolding of the ages in the structures of civilization; the near-middle ground then embraces the happenings of every day or every week, and the foreground the decisive turning-points, the fateful decisions, the frontiers between life and death.}^{31}
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Indeed, the middle ground in these classical landscapes typically is populated by shepherds, fishermen, etc., and the center of the further middleground contains

classical buildings which both anchor the composition and provide a backdrop for the foreground action. The far distance contains the timeless, most often in the form of mountains.

Annibale’s and his followers’ handling of light becomes one of the hallmarks of the emergent classical landscape genre. Outdoor light as it plays off various textures and surfaces, from trees to streams and lakes, to stone architecture and distant mountains, imbues these classical landscapes with a characteristic serenity, though often pierced by a poignant melancholy. Here in the “Flight into Egypt,” Annibale employs subtle light effects to create a backdrop and setting of tremendous tranquility against which the Holy Family is caught up in a life and death struggle. The large, dark mass of trees and the outcropping to the left in the foreground are continued in the dark line of the riverbank to undergird the movement of the Holy Family in their flight. But as they move towards this dark mass, away from the brightly lit river and pastoral scene of the midground, their perilous situation is thrown into sharp contrast with the tranquility of the landscape. The manipulation of light and dark becomes a powerful tool in the descriptive arsenal of both Annibale Carracci and Milton.

So, too, does Annibale Carracci build his classical landscape by focusing on the arrangement of large masses in contrast to focusing on minutae and detail. The compositional template established by Annibale Carracci in the “Flight into Egypt” provides four to five wedges or receding parallel planes of components. The mass of trees framing each side becomes a hallmark of this genre, as do the requisite elements of land, water, architecture, and distant

31 Lagerlöf 103.
mountains. As each layer unfolds, it is evident that Annibale builds his composition on a principle of ordering large masses of these elements into a coherent and legible whole. Any individual tree is less significant than a general clump or mass of trees, for the classical landscape genre approaches nature, just as Milton does, on a vast scale rather than zooming in for any close look at a detail.

Annibale Carracci, dead in 1609 at the young age of 48 years, found a widespread following among the next generation of Italian painters, such as Domenichino (1581-1641), but also among the expatriate French artists, Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) and Claude Lorrain (1600-1682). Annibale Carracci’s workshop, at the time of Domenichino’s arrival in Rome in 1602, was a preeminent one in early Seicento Rome and the fertile breeding ground for the continuation and further development of the nascent classical landscape genre introduced by Annibale.32 Domenichino, a fellow Bolognese artist, went immediately to Annibale’s studio upon his arrival in Rome. Indeed, Domenichino, as an assistant to Annibale, had a hand in finishing the “Flight into Egypt” discussed above.33 A quick look at an early and a late classical landscape from Domenichino’s oeuvre can provide a crucial chronological link between the work of Annibale in the early Seicento and the further development and dissemination of this genre through the intellectual circles of the 1620’s and 1630’s in Rome which quickly spread from there to the major art centers of Europe.

Domenichino’s early 1604-05 “The Ford” [Plate 12], as well as one of his

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33 Spear vol II 143.
mature classical landscapes from 1622-23, “Landscape with Hercules Fighting Achelous” [Plate 13], exemplifies the artist’s mastery and propagation of Annibale’s classical landscape genre. In both examples, the preference for an obvious vantage point, the creation of a deeply but clearly articulated pictorial space defined by receding geometric wedges, and an impressive manipulation of the contrasts between light and dark masses, are the hallmarks of the genre. So, too, does Domenichino build his canvases with an attention to large masses, whether the dark masses of tree and tree trunks framing the solitary female figure on the left or the multiple clusters of trees in both compositions. The preference in this genre for large masses rather than small details is notable.

Richard Spear uncovered a pertinent link between Domenichino’s small corpus of classical landscapes and the donors for whom they were painted: “The rise of ideal landscape painting in early Seicento Rome is inseparable from the influence of patronage, in Domenichino’s case from his ongoing association with the Aldobrandini and Agucchi, and later with the Ludovisi.” Spear adds that he traced two-thirds of Domenichino’s easel and fresco landscapes to ownership of these three wealthy and intellectual Roman families. This link is informative for my discussion in two dimensions: first, for the theoretical and intellectual context out of which this genre developed, and, second, for the connection between the classical landscape genre and the country villa gardens of the wealthiest Seicento Roman families (See below, page 119 and following).

Domenichino was invited to reside with the Agucchi brothers from 1603/04 to 1608, and this association became key in many ways to the artist’s

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34 Spear 81. Spear adds that he traced two-thirds of Domenichino’s easel and fresco landscapes to ownership of these three wealthy and intellectual Roman families.
development and success. During the years that Domenichino resided with this patron, Giovanni Battista Agucchi wrote his Trattato della Pittura, in which he articulated, likely with the collaboration of Domenichino, a classicist vision of art and the proper role of the artist. Dennis Mahon sums up Agucchi’s position that an artist’s goal is not to reproduce or imitate nature, but to come intellectually to a vision of a perfect or ideal nature, a nature as it would be if it were perfect. Agucchi’s concept of the “Idea della Bellezza” is not only a Platonic vision of art’s aims, but singles out the work of the High Renaissance artist Raphael as an exemplar of this ideal. This informative treatise is of particular interest as reflective not only of Agucchi, but also of the intellectual milieu in which the young Domenichino worked. Domenichino, under the dual influence of the Carracci workshop and the art theory of Agucchi, rejected the prevalent manneristic style in favor of a new style pulling from the High Renaissance, the antique, and Nature as interpreted through a classical filter.

Nature as conceived and depicted by the Carracci and Domenichino places ideally conceived human beings in an ideally conceived nature, and each reflects the appearance and mood of the other. To return to the paintings cited above, Annibale Carracci’s “Flight into Egypt” is a masterful rendering of a highly intellectualized nature carefully structured to frame and reflect the key figures, Mary, Joseph and the Christ Child, as they move quietly across the central and

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35 Spear 10. The two Agucchi brothers were from Bologna; Giovanni Battista Agucchi (1570-1632) was the Bolognese prelate and the author of a treatise on art theory, Trattato della Pittura. Girolamo Agucchi was a Cardinal, and died in 1605.

36 Dennis Mahon, Studies in Seicento Art and Theory (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1947) 62-64. Mahon provides a copy of the fragment, or partial text, available of this treatise. The treatise is important in the history of art theory as an early articulation of the seventeenth-century classicist vision, which is more widely known from the later Seicento works of Bellori and Charles le Brun.
most frontal plane of the canvas. While the overall mood is seemingly one of quiet and peacefulness, the tree roots, dark and looming, towards which the family move hint at their plight and perhaps, also, the future. The geometric masses of the mid-ground structures repeat the structural forms of the Holy Family directly in front of them, again reinforcing the thematic and compositional relationship between cities made by humans and the humans fleeing therefrom. All is deliberate and carefully balanced.

Milton similarly links nature and human beings by articulating the parallels between his Garden of Eden and its occupants, Adam and Eve:

. . . thus these two
Imparadis’t in one another’s arms
The happier Eden, shall enjoy thir fill
Of bliss on bliss.

(PL IV 505-508)

Milton blends the vision of Adam and Eve with his vision of the Garden of Eden by cleverly turning the noun “paradise” into an adjective, “imparadis’t,” to describe the humans and by using the term “happier” to modify the Garden of Eden, a neat reversal of the “natural” order!

This close sympathy between Milton’s vision of the Garden of Eden and his vision of Adam and Eve sounds as a recurrent and dominant chord. In the manner of the classical landscape genre in the visual arts, poet and painter alike employ subtle visual and verbal clues to emphasize that their protagonists reflect the natural order and that the natural order reflects, in turn, their protagonists’ state. Domenichino’s early “The Ford” can offer another example of this close relationship, after the manner already noted in Annibale Carracci’s “Flight into Egypt.” In “The Ford,” Domenichino’s close dependence on
Carracci’s compositional formula is readily apparent: the use of trees to frame and structure the composition, a layering of wedges to form the pictorial space, the carefully structured inclusion of water to punctuate the layers, and the subtle interrelationship of the figures with the landscape elements. For instance, the poses and movements of the group in the right foreground correspond exactly to the shapes of the riverbank, and the hunched over figure carrying another on his back in the center finds its counterpart in the framing curves of the riverbank that seem to embrace the forms. And the female figure at the left foreground leans towards the river and her approaching companions much as the protruding tree root on which she leans reaches out towards the water.

So, too, does Nature mirror the actions and moods of the protagonists in Milton’s epic. As Adam follows Eve’s path and partakes of the forbidden fruit:

Earth trembl’d from her entrails, as again
In pangs, and Nature gave a second groan,
Sky low’r’d, and muttering Thunder, some sad drops
Wept at completing of the mortal Sin
Original.

(PL IX 1000-1004)

Before this, the original couple had lived in a state of harmony with the Garden in which God had placed them. As Satan plots the destruction of man, the fallen angel rants about the beauty of earth and the injustice of having this magnificent creation be for man, “A creature formed of earth, and him endow,/ Exalted from so base original,/ With heavenly spoils, our spoils” (PL IX 149-151). But an interesting theme within Satan’s lengthy speech is the close reflection of Earth in God’s ultimate creation out of earth, man:

Productive in Herb, Plant, and nobler birth
Of Creatures animate with gradual life
Of Growth, Sense, Reason, all summ’d up in Man.
With what delight could I have walkt thee round,
If I could joy in aught, sweet interchange
Of Hill and Valley, Rivers, Woods and Plains,
Now Land, now Sea, and Shores with Forest crown’d,
Rocks, Dens, and Caves.

(PL IX 111-118)

Just as in the classical landscape, Milton conceives of Nature populated by ideally conceived human beings sympathetically aligned with Nature. Both the pictorial and poetic expressions of the natural sympathy between humanity and nature suggest another important intersection of seventeenth-century Roman landscape art and Milton’s Garden of Eden: their common philosophical foundations in Arcadian thought.

Vergil’s Eclogues were the primary source for the Renaissance concept of Arcadia, a place of natural order, perfect peace and plenty for all. In Arcadia, man lives in complete harmony with nature. This Arcadian tradition variously expressed nostalgia for simpler times and less complex, rural lives as well as an idealism about God’s divine order and man’s rational powers to understand this order. The Arcadian movement found its first Renaissance expression in the visual arts of Giorgione and Titian in sixteenth-century Venetian art.37 Again, this is an important element of the Venetian tradition Annibale Carracci carried with him when he came to Rome in the 1590’s. Annibale’s key raw materials, both conceptual and technical, were the Venetian notion of nature as harmonious with

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37 One of the best known examples is Titian’s (or Giorgione’s) “Pastoral Symphony” [Plate 14], which depicts two men and two nude women creating music in an arcadian image of humans in perfect physical accord with nature. This pastoral image is complete with references to music, shepherds and varieties of landscape images to suggest the complete range of arcadian references, but the accord or harmony between the human forms, particularly the female forms, and nature is particularly noteworthy. For instance, the female dipping the pitcher into the water mimics and continues the lines of the tree, and the seated female’s body masses and lines mirror the shapes and lines of the gently curving hills on which she sits. But also a wistful, perhaps
man, unsullied by urban artificialities, as well as the Venetian painterly approach providing the technical means for capturing the light and color of nature. The new classical landscape genre as conceived and depicted by Annibale Carracci had this vital element of Venetian arcadianism at its center. Similarly, Milton’s arcadian notion of the Garden of Eden reinforces the cultural link between Milton and the classical landscape genre as conceived in Roman art of the Seicento.

As Satan takes on serpent form and prepares to tempt Eve in Book IX, Satan is struck "stupidly good, of enmity disarm'd" (PL IX 465), by the beauty of Eve, whom Milton likens unto a garden. Milton draws directly on the arcadian tradition as his Satan is likened to a city dweller escaping to the country. The poet employs an extended simile to express the enormous impact of Eve's beauty on Satan:

Much hee the Place admir'd, the Person more.  
As one who long in populous City pent,  
Where Houses thick and Sewers annoy the Air,  
Forth issuing on a Summer's Morn to breathe  
Among the pleasant Villages and Farms  
Adjoin'd, from each thing met conceives delight,  
The smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine,  
Or Diary, each rural sight, each rural sound;  
If chance with Nymphlike step fair Virgin pass,  
What pleasing seem'd, for her now pleases more,  
She most, and in her look sums all Delight.  

(PL IX 444-454)

Here is the arcadian escapist impulse employed to describe both the Garden of Eden as well as the incredible beauty of Eve. The Garden and its inhabitant are intricately and inextricably manifest in each other.

elegiac tone pervades the scene, however, as suggested by the distant clouds and late light and perhaps also by the sarcophagus into which the one woman dips her pitcher.
But the Arcadian tradition in literature and the visual arts often also includes an elegiac tone that suggests the unattainability of Arcadia. Milton sounds this note immediately as Satan ironically sits perched on the Tree of Life in order to plot death:

\[
\text{Thence up he flew, and on the Tree of Life,} \\
\text{The middle Tree and highest there that grew,} \\
\text{Sat like a Cormorant; yet not true Life} \\
\text{Thereby regain'd, but sat devising Death} \\
\text{To them who liv'd; nor on the virtue thought} \\
\text{Of that life-giving Plant, but only us'd} \\
\text{For prospect, what well us'd had been the pledge} \\
\text{Of immortality.} \\
\]  

(PL IV 194-201)

By Book X, Death is ready to devour everything in Eden:

\[
\text{The Scythe of Time mows down, devour unspar'd,} \\
\text{Till I in Man residing through the Race,} \\
\text{His thoughts, his looks, words, actions all infect,} \\
\text{And season him thy last and sweetest prey.} \\
\]  

(PL X 606-09)

In Milton’s Pastoral Vision, John Knott employs the arcadian theme and pastoral tradition of Milton’s early poetry as an interpretative lens through which Milton’s masterwork, Paradise Lost, can be understood.\(^{38}\) In Milton’s epic, the poet draws on the classical arcadian and pastoral traditions as a crucial element in shaping his Christian Garden of Eden.

Arcadianism similarly resides at the center of the notion of the classical landscape genre. It is in the work of Poussin, one of the most notable and prolific of Annibale’s followers, however, that this Arcadian impulse finds its most powerful and memorable expression. Poussin, an expatriate French artist,

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arrived in Rome in 1624 at the age of 30. The influence of Annibale Carracci, as transmitted through Annibale’s most important pupil, Domenichino, shaped the young Frenchman. Like these two key influences on him, Poussin also looked to Raphael and the art of the High Renaissance to formulate a vision of classical restraint and balance imposed on both the human form and on landscape. Poussin’s most important patron through the 1620s, ‘30s and 40s was Cassiano dal Pozzo, a close friend of Cardinal Francesco Barberini and a member of the Accademia dei Lincei. This intellectual circle, or academy, counted Galileo among its members. Cassiano dal Pozzo, a friend of Galileo’s, was one of the leading intellectuals, antiquarians and scientists during this era. His long and close association with Poussin, as well as his close association with Cardinal Francesco Barberini, provides the tantalizing possibility of a direct acquaintance between Poussin and the visiting Milton, but a possibility that can probably never be documented. Cassiano dal Pozzo’s commissions demonstrated a consistent and ongoing passion for the recovery and preservation of antiquities, as well as for a landscape vision grounded in a Raphaelesque classicism. Interestingly enough, Pozzo and Milton had in common a friendship with Carlo Dati; and Cardinal Francesco Barberini, a Maecenas widely known in the intellectual/archaeological circles of Rome, invited Milton to a concert at his palazzo. Cardinal Barberini has sometimes been suggested as the possible source of Milton’s introduction to Galileo.

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39 Lagerlöf 53.
41 Lagerlöf 55
42 William Riley Parker, Milton A Biographical Commentary, vol. II (1968; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). Parker’s very detailed notes nos. 42, 44 and 53 summarize both Milton’s own comments as well as the interpretation and/or conjecture of scholars. For instance, Parker draws
Just as Milton’s Eden is the Christianized Arcadia that cannot remain safe from death, Poussin's "Et in Arcadia Ego" (1650-55) [Plate 15] shows three shepherds and a female figure statuesquely grouped around a tombstone on which is engraved the message, "Et in Arcadia Ego." Erwin Panofsky has composed a brilliant essay not only on this painting but also on the engraved message itself, which he traces to the title of a painting by Guercino, a contemporary of Poussin's in early Seicento Rome. Poussin created, in turn, two paintings by this title, and Panofsky finds the origins of the image in the Renaissance intellectual circles stemming initially from the Medici and Politian, who “metaphorically identified the Medici villa at Fiesole with Arcady and their own circle with the Arcadian shepherds.” This poetic revival of Vergil’s Arcadia was widely disseminated, in turn, throughout Italy and Europe after the publication of Jacopo Sannazaro’s very popular Arcadia (Venice, 1502). Sannazaro’s work especially reinforced the elegiac and wistful strain in arcadian poetry, and this mood would characterize sixteenth and seventeenth-century

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43 Erwin Panofsky, “Et in Arcadia Ego: Poussin and the Elegiac Tradition,” Meaning in the Visual Arts (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1955) 295-320. Panofsky’s interpretation and commentary on this painting is only one of a number of interpretations, but Panofsky’s interpretation remains the most influential.

44 Panofsky 303
arcadian poetry.\footnote{45 Jacopo Sannazaro’s \textit{Arcadia} was “one of the most successful novels ever written.” Carol Kidwell’s recent book, \textit{Sannazaro and Arcadia}, notes that it went through more than one hundred editions and spawned imitations throughout Europe until it entered the vocabularies of all the languages of Europe. Carol Kidwell, \textit{Sannazaro and Arcadia} (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., Ltd., 1993) 2.}

Poussin’s painting captures this elegiac and sober reminder of death as three shepherds come upon a large tombstone etched with the epitaph, “Et in Arcadia Ego.” As though Death is speaking, the meaning of the phrase is, “I [i.e., Death] am also in Arcadia.” Panofsky’s discovery of the origin of this phrase in a Guercino work of the same title (1621-23) [Plate 16] removes any doubt that the phrase is uttered by Death; because in the Guercino version, a skull, rather than a tombstone, carries the inscription engraved on a stone wall on which the skull perches. Both the Guercino and the Poussin paintings of this title seem to revive the late medieval \textit{memento mori} convention, but the context and style are updated into a pastoral Arcadian motif, part of the burgeoning classical revival, blended with the strident religious mood of Counter-Reformation Rome. Milton’s Arcadian vision is similarly filtered through a Christian lens as Death becomes a painful element of his Garden of Eden after the Fall. Adam throws in his lot with Eve after he discovers what has happened, and suddenly the Garden becomes “these wild Woods forlorn” (\textit{PL IX} 910):

\begin{quote}
... for with thee  
Certain my resolution is to Die:  
How can I live without thee, how forgo  
They sweet Converse and Love so dearly join’d,  
To live again in these wild Woods forlorn?  
\end{quote}

(\textit{PL IX} 906-910)

This arcadian impulse that found expression in both the classical landscape genre and in Milton’s notion of the Garden of Eden also manifested...
itself most tangibly in the growing Seicento Roman passion for gardens and
country villas. Just as the Medici villa at Fiesole was metaphorically identified as
Arcady, the wealthy and influential Florentine and Roman families of the Seicento
lavished extraordinary resources, both intellectual and economic, on creating
country villas and surrounding gardens that gave physical manifestation to their
arcadian urges. Milton’s experience of such contemporary Italian gardens is
unknown, but his awareness of the principles of garden design may have
provided the poet with important theoretical foundations that shaped his
conception of the Garden of Eden.

In 1981, an interesting article by John Dixon Hunt asserted that Milton
undoubtedly visited Italian gardens during his Italian trip, and, furthermore, that
Italian garden design, transmitted to England by Milton’s depiction of the Garden
of Eden in *Paradise Lost*, was instrumental in shaping eighteenth-century English
principles of garden design. Since English gardens of Milton’s era were still
following the Tudor style of landscaping, a style very different from that of
Milton’s Garden of Eden, the horticulture in *Paradise Lost* certainly could take no
inspiration from the English gardens in the seventeenth century. English
gardens of the Jacobean era of Milton’s youth still followed a Tudor design, a
design characterized by precise, geometric structures and rigid formality. When
he describes a Garden of Eden with “Flow’rs worthy of Paradise which not nice
Art/ In Beds and curious Knots, but Nature boon/ Pour’d forth profuse on Hill and
Dale and Plain” (*PL* IV 241-43), Milton rejects the rigid formality of the Tudor
garden, which was rigorously clipped and arranged in precise parterres and
designs. Milton’s Garden of Eden asserts an order, certainly, but an order carefully balanced with areas of seeming disorder or greater naturalness.

The prevalent Tudor/Stuart garden in Milton’s England was set up along a principle of rigorous, artificial order. The re-creation of Theobalds (1575-85) [Plate 17] gives an example of one of the most influential English Renaissance gardens of this era. Theobalds was a vast garden, enclosed entirely by a wall, exhibiting a preference for geometric precision and the obvious subjugation of nature to man-made order. This garden was on a vast scale: Roy Strong notes that each of the nine knots, or squares, of the Great Garden is “seventy square feet with walks between twenty-two feet wide. Each knot had a hedge around it of whitethorn and privet ’cutt into a handsome fashion with cherry trees planted at the angles’.”

Milton’s possible experiences of gardens in his native England, therefore, could hardly have provided him with analogues of the horticulture in Paradise Lost. The Garden of Eden in Paradise Lost, however, does bear some striking resemblances not only to the classical landscape paintings already described, but also to the gardens of seventeenth-century Florence and Rome as reflected in preserved images of them and in the rhetoric used by many

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47 Roy Strong, The Renaissance Garden in England (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979) 54-55. Theobalds was owned by Sir William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and often visited by Queen Elizabeth. Although neither Theobalds, nor any other English Renaissance garden of this era still remains, Roy Strong cites the extensive contemporary sources from which this reconstruction is drawn. The important issue for our purposes here is to note the precise geometric formality of the garden’s structure: the Great Garden is comprised of nine square knots, or areas, separated by gravel walkways. The entirety is walled, a remnant of the medieval enclosed garden which often carries over into the English gardens of the Renaissance. See Roy Strong’s detailed discussion of this garden, 51-56.
48 Strong 53 quoting Public Record Office 351/3245.
seventeenth-century English travelers as they reacted to these gardens.49

Milton employs a series of phrases suggestive of garden design theory:

God as the "sovran Planter (IV 691)," and, "Thus was this place,/ A happy rural seat of various view" (IV 246-7). Indeed, Satan's approach to the Garden of Eden and his description of the steep wilderness surrounding it, suggest the typical approach to Italian gardens:

So on he fares, and to the border comes
Of Eden, where delicious Paradise,
Now nearer, Crowns with her enclosure green,
As with a rural mound the champaign head
Of a steep widerness, whose hairy sides
With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,
Acces deni'd; and over head up grew
Insuperable highth of loftiest shade,
Cedar, and Pine, and Fir, and branching Palm

A Silvan Scene, and as the ranks ascend
Shade above shade, a woody Theatre
Of stateliest view.

(PL IV 131-40)

Or Adam tells of God's introducing Adam to the Garden:

A Circuit wide, enclos'd, with goodliest Trees
Planted, with Walks, and Bowers, that what I saw
Of Earth before scarce pleasant seem'd.

(PL VIII 304-06)

Italian gardens were designed around principles recounted above. For instance,

49 Milton's contemporary, John Evelyn, is the most frequently quoted English traveler of this era, and his diaries are very extensive and detailed. His visit to the Aldobrandini Villa at Frascati, south of Rome, greatly impressed Evelyn. His language is effusive: "The 5 we tooke Coach and went 15 miles out of the Cittie to Frascati formerly Tusculanum, a villa of Card: Aldobrandini; built for a Country house but for its elegance, situation & accommodation of plentifull water, Groves, Ascents & prospect, surpassing in my opinion the most delicious places that my eyes ever beheld: Just behind the Palace (which is of excellent Architecture) and is in the center of the Inclosure, rises an high hill or mountaine all over clad with tall wood, and so form'd by nature, as if it had ben cut out by Art, from the summit whereof falls a horrid Cascade seeming rather a greate River than a streame, precipitating into a large Theater of Water representing a(n) exact & perfect Raine-bow when the sun shines out." John Evelyn, The Diary of John Evelyn vol II, ed. E.S. de Beer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955) 392. Notice Evelyn's use of the term, "prospect,"
the Italian garden often included steep or rocky approaches and theatres that were carved out within gardens where summer entertainments would take place and bowers were counterposed with open vistas and large trees. Pathways were a particular emphasis. “Marvelous Variety” was a key to the Italian garden concept, and this is a recurrent issue with Milton's Garden of Eden, from the lush variety of fruits, to animals, to shady secluded spots and open vistas, the careful balancing of water, etc. This emerging Italian preference for vast gardens notable for their careful balancing of precisely ordered areas with less obviously structured, more natural areas, characterized the Italian garden aesthetics of the seventeenth century. A glimpse of Pratolino, the Medici Villa in Tuscany (1599) [Plate 18], reveals this garden design principle: a site of varied geographical elements blending hillsides, rocky slopes, level downs, precisely ordered parterres, etc. And this same variety is the hallmark of the descriptive language that English visitors used in the seventeenth century to recount their experiences of Italian gardens and of the language used in English eighteenth century gardening books when the characteristic English garden developed, largely based on the absorption of Italian influence.50 The close link between the Baroque classical landscape genre and principles of garden design becomes clear when Hunt traced the use of the word “picturesque,” the word that gives its name to the English garden movement of the eighteenth century, as a word first used by Pope and Addison to mean “material suitable for inclusion in a

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50 Hunt 86. Koehler's "Milton and the Art of Landscape" also notes that Milton's Garden of Eden asserts garden design principles that will become the norm in eighteenth-century English principles of garden design, what the eighteenth century would call, "the picturesque." 3.
In conclusion, Milton's unusual concept of the Garden of Eden owes a tremendous legacy to a multiplicity of sources, both literary and artistic. Milton's travels through Italy, in particular, tantalize the interart student, but conclusive evidence remains unavailable. However, synchronic analysis of stylistic and thematic analogues provides powerful evidence that Milton conceived his literary landscape in ways that embody the same stylistic vision as those who created the Baroque classical landscape and Italian gardens. Both the gardens and the classical landscape genre gave visual and tangible manifestation to the arcadian tradition as transmitted by ancient and Renaissance writings. In the hands of this syncretist poet, Arcadia becomes Christianized as a prelapsarian Garden of Eden created by a Christian God. An elegaic tone, similarly reinterpreted by Renaissance poets from classical precedents, overshadows an Eden which can have only a brief existence. Contemporary Italian and French classical landscapes provide visual analogues of Milton's space and light-filled arcadian images of wondrous variety and fertility.

From the “utter darkness” (I 72) of Hell, that “void of light” (I 181), described in the opening book of *Paradise Lost*, to the pure light of Heaven, described as “the Precincts of Light” (III 88), Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is an epic structured thematically and stylistically around light and darkness imagery. In an approach notable for its Baroque character, light and darkness become central to the artist. Milton, the blind poet, discovers in such imagery layer upon layer of potent symbolisms never before found in the ancient dialectic between light and darkness. This highly innovative approach focusing on the expressive and symbolic potential of light and darkness reflects how seventeenth-century Baroque artists employed similar dramatic contrasts in painting, architecture, and sculpture. The visual arts of the period offer a key to understanding both the centrality of the imagery of light and darkness and its multi-faceted meanings.

Over the last eighty years, many critics have commented on and explored the light/darkness metaphor that permeates Milton’s epic. This conversation has been a multi-faceted one, as various scholars approached the issue from vantage points of theology, poetic structure, Milton’s biography, and the visual arts. Interestingly, the light/darkness metaphor thrusts Milton’s blindness to the forefront of some of the strands in this conversation, particularly because of the very poignant and unexpected autobiographical element in the famous proem to Book 3 of *Paradise Lost*:

Hail holy Light, offspring of Heav’n first-born,
Or of th’ Eternal Coeternal beam
May I express thee unblam’d? since God is light,  
And never but in unapproached Light  
Dwelt from Eternity, dwelt then in thee,  
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.  
Or hear’st thou rather pure Ethereal stream,  
Whose Fountain who shall tell? before the Sun,  
Before the Heavens thou wert, and at the voice  
Of God, as with a Mantle didst invest  
The rising world of waters dark and deep,  
Won from the void and formless infinite.  
Thee I revisit now with bolder wing,  
Escap’t the Stygian Pool, though long detain’d  
In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight  
Through utter and through middle darkness borne  
With other notes than to th’ Orphean Lyre  
I sung of Chaos and Eternal Night,  
Taught by the heav’nly Muse to venture down  
The dark descent, and up to reascend,  
 Though hard and rare: thee I revisit safe,  
And feel thy Sovran vital Lamp; but thou  
Revisit’st not these eyes, that roll in vain  
To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;  
So thick a drop serene hath quencht thir Orbs,  
Or dim suffusion veil’d. Yet not the more  
Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt  
Clear Spring, or shady Grove, or Sunny Hill,  
Smit with the love of sacred Song; but chief  
Thee Sion and the flow’ry Brooks beneath  
That wash thy hallow’d feet, and warbling flow,  
Nightly I visit: nor sometimes forget  
Those other two equall’d with me in Fate,  
So were I equall’d with them in renown,  
Blind Thamyris and blind Mæonides,  
And Tiresias and Phineus Prophets old.  
Then feed on thoughts, that voluntary move  
Harmonious numbers; as the wakeful Bird  
Sings darling, and in shadiest Covert hid  
Tunes her nocturnal Note. Thus with the Year  
Seasons return, but not to me returns  
Day, or the sweet approach of Ev’n or Morn,  
Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summer’s Rose,  
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;  
But cloud instead, and ever-during dark  
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men  
Cut off, and for the Book of knowledge fair  
Presented with a Universal blanc  
Of Nature’s works to me expung’d and ras’d,  
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.
So much the rather thou Celestial Light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight.

(III 1-55)

In this proem, light and darkness take on an unusual personal meaning as the blind poet, while bemoaning his own loss of physical sight, suggests that a different kind of light and sight, “Celestial Light/ Shine inward” (III 50-51), allows him to “see and tell/ Of things invisible to mortal sight” (III 54-55).

Keeping this proem, as well as other key passages of Paradise Lost readily at hand, I would like to join this conversation from the vantage point of interart studies. Milton’s travel to Italy in 1638-39 thrust the young poet into the very heart of the fully developed Baroque art of Counter-Reformation Rome where Bernini and Borromini were manipulating contrasts of light and darkness in radically new ways in sculpture and architecture. Furthermore, a lively group of young painters were competing during the 1620’s and 30’s to work in the manner of Caravaggio, a revolutionary in the use of dramatic light effects. The visual arts of this strand of the Baroque, as formulated in the Rome of this era and then spread outward throughout the major centers of Europe, employed contrasts of light and darkness to create powerful visual metaphors, pregnant with spiritual and emotional complexities, in much the way Milton does in his epic, Paradise Lost. Indeed, the unusual handling of light and darkness is one of the most innovative and distinctive characteristics of full Baroque art, whether in the architecture or sculpture of Bernini, or in the paintings of Caravaggio and his

close followers in the Protestant Lowlands and the Catholic centers of Spain and France. Unlike Renaissance art which explored the physical properties of light and darkness in order to give architecture and sculpture stability and coherence, and to give the painted image the illusion of three-dimensionality, the Baroque artist grappled with exploiting light and darkness to suggest spiritual and other-worldly qualities and internal, psychic complexity. Light and darkness became the very tangible element of many Baroque compositions that underlay the artist's effort to express the intangible. Dramatic contrasts of light and darkness are at one and the same time both a highly visual and material tool as well as a metaphor for the invisible and immaterial.

First, it will be necessary to situate my study of Milton’s use of light and darkness within the various studies of the last eighty years. In just the last ten years, several scholars have brought new insights to this subject as they have taken a fresh look at Milton’s light/darkness imagery from three widely differing vantage points: the structural/theological, the biographical, and the interart. These most recent efforts provide a context in which the last eighty years of scholarship can be quickly summarized.

In 1991 Kristin McColgan reprised a discussion started in 1925 by Ida Langdon – a discussion focused on the centrality of the light/darkness metaphor as a key to the poetic structure and the theology of Paradise Lost. To Ida Langdon goes the credit for suggesting the importance of this metaphor and opening the long-standing discussion of its complexity. In Milton’s Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, Langdon asserted that the light/darkness metaphor is both the key to Milton’s theory of form and the key to the meaning and structure of
Paradise Lost. Among Langdon’s seminal thoughts, two were of particular significance to future discussions: first, she noted that a concordance will reveal how often terms relating to light and darkness appear in the poem; and, second, she credited Milton with using the metaphor of light/darkness with a sophistication and complexity hitherto never attempted. She made this point relative to Dante because of Dante’s seemingly similar exploitation of light/darkness terms as traditional metaphors for good/evil. But on close examination, Dante’s use of this metaphorical dialectic was theologically and poetically much less complex than Milton’s. Langdon’s most striking example of this was in her contrast of Dante’s and Milton’s concepts of Satan: Lucifer is a hideous monster with three faces and wings suggestive of a bat in Dante, whereas Milton’s highly original concept of Satan is conceived largely around this metaphor of light/darkness. Milton’s Satan is the Prince of Darkness: his form remains beautiful and heroic, but it loses its luster as darkness devours him:

... he, above the rest
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,
Stood like a Tow’r. His form had yet not lost
All her Original brightness, nor appear’d
Less than Arch-Angel ruin’d, and th’ excess
Of glory obscur’d: As when the Sun new-ris’n
Looks through the Horizontal misty Air
Shorn of his Beams, or, from behind the Moon,
In dim Eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds
On half the Nations, and with fear of change
Perplexes Monarchs. Dark’n’d so, yet shone
Above them all th’ Arch-Angel: but his face
Deep scars of Thunder had intrenched, and care
Sat on his faded cheek, but under Brows
Of dauntless courage, and considerate Pride
Waiting revenge

(I 589- 604)

Langdon’s insight about the importance of the light/darkness metaphor to the structure and theology of Paradise Lost fell onto seemingly deaf ears for the next twenty years, partially because of T.S. Eliot’s attacks on Milton during the 1930’s and 1940’s. In 1936, T. S. Eliot damned Milton’s poetry as “aural” rather than visual, and posited that Milton’s blindness was “the most important fact about Milton.” 3 T. S. Eliot commented that, “At no period is the visual imagination conspicuous in Milton’s poetry” and “Milton may be said never to have seen anything.” 4 This biographical and highly negative strand of Milton criticism intersects with our discussion of the light/darkness metaphor in Milton in two ways. First, this biographical approach received substantial attention in the twenty years following Ida Langdon’s work, and second, T.S. Eliot’s biographical approach prompted Milton apologists to consider, in particular, the visual qualities in Milton’s poetry in an effort to redeem a poet whose poetry, according to T.S.Eliot, reflected a “hypertrophy of the auditory imagination at the expense of the visual and tactile.” 5 This issue of how Milton uses images of light and darkness in Paradise Lost suddenly became a prime instrument for countering Eliot’s characterization of the poetry as non-visual, for subtle variations of light and darkness are highly suggestive of visual qualities. Ida Langdon’s languishing observations about the prevalence of this imagery suddenly enjoyed revival in post-War Milton scholarship.

In 1945, Josephine Miles published a very short, but important article that elaborated on Langdon’s notice of the prevalence of “light/darkness” words in

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4 T. S. Eliot 158 and 162.
5 T. S. Eliot 162.
Paradise Lost. Miles quantified the occurrence of the terms “good and bad” in comparison to the terms “light and dark” in the works of many poets. What’s more, she analyzed the manner in which these adjectives were used. She discovered a significant shift in both occurrence, in numeric terms, and in usage, from the Elizabethan poets, particularly Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare, to Milton. The Elizabethans used terms like “good and bad” six times more than they used terms like “light/bright and dark,” whereas Milton used similar terms in a relative ratio of only two times greater for “good and bad.” While this may seem of only incidental and curious interest, the significance is crucial to our investigations, for Milton also changed the manner in which these central adjectives were used. The Elizabethan poets preferred the “good and bad” adjectives because they used them to modify and describe human relationships. Even the much less frequently used “light and dark” adjectives were used as synonyms of good and bad. Miles characterized this shift as a change from the “poetry of human relationships to the poetry of physical array.”6 With this notable shift, Miles used some tantalizing terms for the purposes of this discussion, for she commented on the “increased pictorializing of heaven, earth,” as “heaven and earth began to shine forth pictorially in their depth and height, air and mass, light and shadow.”7 To Miles, in Milton’s poetry, “descriptive detail, sensuous

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6 Josephine Miles, “From Good to Bright: A Note in Poetic History,” PMLA LX (1945) 770. Miles gives the example in Sidney's poetry, as typical of Elizabethan usage, that even when bright/dark appear they are most often used to modify and describe human relationships, such as “dark disdain” or “bright beauty.” 766 In Milton, the bright/light and dark will often be found to describe or modify physical objects and beings. For example, Satan’s appearance “dark’n’d so, yet shone” (I 599) and the angel Uriel as “gloriously bright” (III 655).
7 Miles 774, 770.
scenic detail, became a chief material of poetry." It would be left to other critics to develop this important line of thought.

From 1947 to 1954, two important responses to T.S. Eliot’s position adduced two points important to our discussion: the centrality and meaning of the light/darkness metaphors in *Paradise Lost* and the visual or pictorial qualities of Milton’s poetry. Phyllis MacKenzie’s 1947 article entitled “Milton’s Visual Imagination: An Answer to T.S. Eliot” asserted that Milton had a very powerful visual imagination and that in “his broad handling of light and darkness, not just for their emotional connotations, but as parts of an extended visual pattern” was evidence of the poet’s visual imagination. MacKenzie also noted that Milton’s use of the light/darkness metaphors demanded a much more thorough analysis.

Don Cameron Allen’s studies in 1954 and 1961 similarly refuted T.S. Eliot’s characterization of Milton’s poetry as primarily aural rather than visual. Allen suggested that Eliot misunderstood Milton’s visual imagination because it was so different from the visual imagery of Milton’s Renaissance predecessors, particularly in that Milton used light and motion differently. Allen articulated several important thoughts when he asserted the centrality of the light/darkness metaphors to not only the theology of *Paradise Lost*, but also to the poetic structure of the epic. While most of his focus was on the theology of light, and he devoted most of his attention to scriptural and philosophical sources of light theory, Allen was the first to mention the term “Baroque” during his discussion. Allen connected to the Baroque only in passing as he discussed Milton’s

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8 Miles 770.
descriptive predilection for images of light/darkness and rapid motion, but this suggestion would be an important one for future conversations.\[11\]

In the 1960’s and 1970’s, Ants Oras and Stanley Koehler continued to reaffirm the visual qualities of Milton’s poetry, particularly as evidenced by the poet’s use of light and darkness imagery. Oras, still haunted by the T.S. Eliot critique, even posited that Milton’s blindness may have caused “light and shade in particular . . . to be remembered with special intensity and to be presented with more than usual distinctness.”\[12\] Both of these writers also mentioned the Baroque, although neither developed this reference. Koehler suggested that Milton became increasingly of Baroque temper in his mature years as evidenced by his greater use of light and dark, and Oras suggested that Milton’s use of light and dark reminded him of Rembrandt’s.\[13\]

While this brief survey of the first fifty years of the critical conversation surrounding light and darkness imagery in Milton is hardly all-inclusive, it is meant to summarize highlights of discussions on this issue up to the current time. After the 1970’s, there is little of interest written on this topic until 1989 and beyond when Shirley Sharon-Zisser, Kristin McColgan, R.J. Schork, and Louis L. Martz revisit the light/darkness imagery in \textit{Paradise Lost}, with the first two commentators approaching the issue from the structural/theological point of view, and the second two deveping the biographical and the interart points of view.

\[11\] Allen 105-108.
Both Shirley Sharon-Zisser and Kristin McColgan studied the light/darkness metaphor in *Paradise Lost* and discovered in this extended metaphor both more complexity and greater aesthetic patterning than previous critics. Sharon-Zisser cautioned that Milton described God’s skirts as “dark with excessive bright” (III 380), and Satan as an eclipsed sun, which “Darkened so, yet shone” (I 599): in such cases a straight-forward equating of darkness with evil and light with goodness grossly oversimplifies and precludes an appropriate grasp of the sophistication and subtlety with which Milton employs this metaphor. Sharon-Zisser suggests that a key to the theology underlying the light/darkness metaphor must also be sought in Neoplatonism, which posits that the supreme godhead could only be apprehended through a state of darkness and silence rather than through sense or reason. Darkness, therefore, has beneficial qualities and cannot be simply interpreted by reference to sin and evil. Milton’s poignant lines about his physical blindness in the proem to Book III are not only about the losses associated with physical blindness but also about the advantages of blindness based on the theology of neoplatonic “darkness.”

Kristin McColgan’s work also emphasized the complexity of the light/darkness metaphor in *Paradise Lost*, but McColgan focused on the aesthetic patterning of this central metaphor to celebrate the “artful manner in which the creator has breathed life into the whole.” The light/darkness metaphor brings a

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15 Sharon-Zisser 194.
16 Sharon-Zisser 195.
structural unity to the epic, for the metaphor cements not only the overall pattern of the epic, but of the sub-patterns within each book, as well.\textsuperscript{18}

In 1992, R.J. Schork investigated James Joyce's references to Milton's work in \textit{Finnegans Wake}. Although this may seem to stray from topic, the fascinating link between Schork's interest in Joyce's allusions to Milton come back to T.S. Eliot's 1936 condemnation of Milton's poetry. In his essay, Eliot suggested important parallels between Milton and Joyce, because of their: "musical taste and abilities, . . . wide and curious knowledge, gift for acquiring languages, and remarkable powers of memory perhaps fortified by defective vision."\textsuperscript{19} Schork analyzed "Joyce's recirculation of intertextual artifacts" from Milton with a particular emphasis on images of blindness, and Schork stressed that "The serious ophthalmologic problems of Milton and Joyce have left incontrovertible marks on both their texts."\textsuperscript{20} While Schork's goal is not at all to return to T.S. Eliot's condemnation of Milton's poetry as "non-visual," this recent effort is notable for the on-going interest in a heavily biographical reading of Milton.

The most recent and by far the most pertinent scholarship on the light/darkness metaphor in \textit{Paradise Lost} is an article by Louis Martz delivered as part of the International Symposium on the European Baroque held at the State University of New York, Stony Brook, on April 17-19, 1993. In this marvelous analysis of light and darkness in Milton, Martz discerned tantalizing parallels

\textsuperscript{18} McColgan 90.
\textsuperscript{19} T. S. Eliot 161-62.
between Milton and Rembrandt's handling of light and darkness. Martz finds in the early paintings of Rembrandt from the 1630's and 1640's strong contrasts of light and darkness, a sympathetic dependence on light and darkness imagery to order the composition and to express Protestant theological concepts.

In the last eighty years, although analysis and discussion on the centrality, meaning, and structure of the light/darkness imagery in *Paradise Lost* have laid an impressive groundwork for exploring parallels with the visual arts, interart studies are few in number. The striking parallel between the complex and sophisticated theological and structural handling of light and darkness in *Paradise Lost* and the innovative use of light and darkness by some of the early and leading artists of the Baroque in Rome demands a closer and more detailed examination. None of the scholars who has evinced an interest in this light/darkness imagery in parallels with the visual arts has made any mention of tenebrism, the term for the radically novel exploitation of dramatic light and darkness typical of Caravaggio and his followers. In the tenebristic paintings of Caravaggio and his many emulators, a dialectic between extreme light and darkness can be discerned that has its literary counterpart in *Paradise Lost*. This dialectic became the organizing principle in a tenebrist painting, and it serves the same purpose in Milton's epic.

Striking parallels can be drawn between the visual arts and Milton’s epic along two dimensions: first, in the dependence on light/darkness as a structural or organizing principle; and, second, in the similar exploitation of the suggestive power of light and darkness to express complex theological concepts. Milton’s

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21 Louis Martz, “Hail holy light”: Milton, Rembrandt, and the Protestant Baroque,” *The Image of*
brilliance as a philosophical and theological thinker has never been challenged, but the temptation to overemphasize the impact of blindness on his poetry continues to undercut a strong grasp of Milton as a poet with a vivid visual imagination who found innovative poetic imagery to pictorialize both internal and external “landscapes.” Looking very closely at light and darkness imagery, certainly some of the most difficult and complex in both technical and philosophical terms, offers a particularly persuasive argument for Milton as a highly visual poet. My methodology will be comparative: Baroque artists’ introduction of tenebrism will be examined first to discern how this innovative handling of light and darkness was key to the very compositional structure of the art and also to the expression of complex and new seventeenth-century theological concerns. In each case, striking parallels will be drawn between the visual arts and Paradise Lost, so that additional understanding can be gained of Milton’s epic. It is a seventeenth-century epic, a Baroque epic, and the poet’s handling of light and darkness is its most Baroque and most complex manifestation.

In Baroque tenebrist paintings, startling and dramatic contrasts of light and darkness became an organizing principle around which the entire composition is structured. “Tenebrism,” according to The Dictionary of Art, is a “term of modern origin deriving from tenebroso (It. And Sp.: ‘dark’), used to describe a style of 17th-century painting characterized by much dark shadow and few light areas.”

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the Baroque, ed. Aldo Scaglione (New York: Peter Lang, 1995) 221-240.
22“Tenebrism,” The Dictionary of Art, 1996 ed. Janis Bell provided this entry to The Dictionary of Art, and her article, “Light and Color in Caravaggio’s Supper at Emmaus,” Artibus et Historiae 15 (1991) as well as Maria Rzepińska’s “Tenebrism in Baroque Painting and Its Ideological Background,” Artibus et Historiae 13 (1986) provide important background, discussions of
This is in marked contrast to how Renaissance artists employed light and darkness, and it is a frequent and notable characteristic that often distinguishes Baroque art. Several well-known works can demonstrate this striking feature of Baroque art. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) is usually credited with being the first painter to employ this technique, and he also used the technique with exceptional brilliance.\(^{23}\) In his early canvas depicting the “Calling of St. Matthew” (1599-1600) [Plate 19], Caravaggio introduced an unnatural, sharp diagonal of light that slashes the canvas from upper right to left center. The figure of Christ is largely swallowed by the darkness, while Matthew and his companions are caught in a bright light. The eye is completely controlled and directed by this diagonal line of bright light leading the eye quickly to the startled Matthew. We are forced to retrace our visual path slowly in order to consider and interpret what the source of Matthew’s surprise is, for Christ is much less visible in the deep darkness below the diagonal of light. A window painted into the composition has notably nothing to do with acting as a source of light in the unfolding pictorial space.

This strong diagonal shaft of supernatural light organizes and drives this entire composition: Christ’s outstretched arm and hand reinforce the line, and Matthew’s mimicking gesture completes the visual and thematic path linking Christ to Matthew and the enactment of the calling. The light and darkness are at their greatest points of contrast on the right of the composition where Christ

\(^{23}\) Caravaggio is just the most well known of the artists employing this technique in the late Cinquecento, and as such, he often erroneously receives the credit for its invention. However, several artists, such as Bassano and Geertgen tot San Jins, are usually credited with the first
and Peter are positioned; the extreme contrasts of light and darkness are more modulated in the left half of the composition where Matthew and his four companions are gathered around the table. But without this strong diagonal of light to organize the composition and guide the eye, interpretation would be difficult and the meaning of the moment would be significantly lessened.

Effective use of tenebrism can also be seen in Caravaggio’s “The Conversion of St. Paul” (1601) [Plate 20]. In this painting, light once again becomes the principal element used by the painter to organize an unusual and unorthodox rendering of a subject particularly difficult to express – a conversion experience. Oddly, a very large horse occupies most of the canvas, and both the horse and the servant holding the horse register absolutely no awareness of the unfolding drama. Once again, it is the effective structuring of the canvas with tenebrism that provides the essential key to its organization and interpretation: an intense light from the upper right rakes sharply into the composition, hitting the forehead of the servant, the flank of the horse, and much of the dramatically foreshortened figure of St. Paul. Just as in the “Calling of St. Matthew,” a bright and unnatural light suggests the sudden irruption of the divine into the ordinary. Christ calls Matthew to his ministry in the midst of an undistinguished space; and Paul’s conversion on the road to Damascus seems to be a highly internalized event unnoticed by other creatures. Without tenebrism, Caravaggio would never have been able to suggest the irruption of the divine into the ordinary events of day-to-day life, nor would Caravaggio have been able to brilliantly control the compositional structure.

development of night scenes including bright lights and the foundations of tenebrism. See
The strong and unnatural light may perhaps be the visual element of greatest initial impact, but its obverse, the darkness, is its equal, if not greater, counterpart. In both paintings, darkness occupies about half of the physical space of the composition, and this exploitation of darkness as an organizational tool of tremendous power is an important and notable characteristic of Baroque tenebristic art. While the intense and bright lights on the one side of tenebrism guide the eye and highlight key actors and actions in these two paintings, the darkness is as vital to the overall effect. Curiously, seventeenth-century art criticism was most harsh on this issue of darkness, and Caravaggio and other painters in this manner were condemned as “hiding in shadow [their] defects in drawing.”

But the visual structure of paintings employing tenebrism is dependent on the use of darkness as an active element, not just as the shadow or area of reduced light. The power of active darkness as a structural and expressive tool cannot be overstated: darkness is both a foil to the intense light of these paintings as well as an element pregnant with suggestive meanings. More discussion of these meanings will follow. But as one-half to two-thirds of the overall composition, darkness for the first time in western art became an element of enormous import. Maria Rzepińska has noted the absolute neglect of darkness as a subject of scholarly investigation, so it is vital to this discussion to consider darkness as something more than just the absence of light: darkness in


these innovative Caravaggio tenebristic paintings became an active and crucial part of the compositional structure.25

Many artists emulated Caravaggio’s tenebrism, and this technique was widespread in Rome during the second and third decades of the century, long after Caravaggio’s premature death in 1610. Caravaggio had many enthusiastic emulators, as many as forty according to the assessment of Richard Spear, and he defines the so-called “Caravaggisti” as artists of many nationalities who actually spent a period of time in Rome and who emulated the two major characteristics of Caravaggio’s work – the tenebrism and the realism.26 Among the notable non-Italian artists included in this group were the French painters Vouet and La Tour, the Spanish painter Ribera, and the Dutch painters Terbrugghen, and Honthorst. These last two painters were key members of the Utrecht School of Dutch painting, a school noted for its interest in genre scenes of various types and a fascination for complex contrasts of light and darkness.

Gerard Honthorst’s (1590-1656) “Supper with Lute Player” (c. 1625-30) [Plate 21] employs a favorite device of the French and some of the Utrecht School’s members: a night scene is illuminated by a light source, in this case probably a candle, blocked by a figure, producing brightly lit areas sharply contrasted to deeply shadowed areas. The Utrecht School, and Honthorst in particular, were a significant influence on the young Rembrandt.27

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25 Rzepińska 92. Maria Rzepińska quotes, in particular, the seventeenth-century critic, Francesco Scanelli’s Microcosmo della pittura (Cesena 1657) 115: “Il medesimo pittore de Canto (III) haveva sentito più volte Dolersi coloro, che possedono l dipinti della propria sua prima maniera, per nascondere gli occhi, bocca e alter membra nella soverchia oscurità, e per ciò non havere stimato compite alcune parti, coll’asserire ben spesso non conoscere le faccie e talvolta anco le azioni particolari della figure.”
It is perhaps interesting to follow the line of Caravaggio’s direct and indirect influence into the Protestant centers of Europe, particularly the lively Dutch art centers of Utrecht and Amsterdam. For in these centers it becomes eminently clear that a fascination with the expressive potential of tenebrism was central to many artists’ interests and that this powerful tool transcended the religious strains so characteristic of the seventeenth century. And Milton may have had access to this visual tradition not only through his own trip to Rome in 1638-39 but also from his familiarity with Dutch art.

It was in Rembrandt van Rijn’s (1606-1669) early works of the 1630’s and 1640’s that the artist experimented most often with the strong contrasts of light and darkness undoubtedly gleaned from the painters of the Utrecht School, but the painter continued to employ this technique through much of his long career. Interart studies involving Milton and his use of light and darkness imagery in his poetry have on occasion linked the poet to Rembrandt’s use of light, but the discussion of such parallels has thus far been too limited in its understanding of both the sources and background of Rembrandt’s handling of light and darkness as well as in the notable lack of situating Rembrandt’s interests within the larger context of Baroque tenebrism.28 This is essential for an understanding of the centrality of tenebrism in this important strand of Baroque painting and of the centrality of theories of light and darkness in seventeenth-century thought.

Rembrandt’s early “Supper at Emmaus” (1628 or 1629) [Plate 22] reveals the young artist exploiting dramatic contrasts of light and darkness in an unusual rendering of a traditional subject: Bredius posited that this composition was
based on an Elsheimer painting of “Philemon and Baucis” to account for the absence of the two apostles and the presence only of the elderly couple. Here Rembrandt contrived to supply two seemingly natural light sources, the distant fire outlining the old woman, and the candle or lantern blocked from our view by the bulk of Christ. As in Caravaggio’s “Calling of St. Matthew,” the strong light falls fully on the face of the individual experiencing the impact of Christ, rather than on Christ. A light that may seem to be originating in a candle or lantern takes on decidedly supernatural suggestiveness through both its framing or halo-like effect around the profile of Christ as well as through its strong contrast with the darkness of Christ’s form in the center of the panel. Profound, deep darkness and brilliant, intense light do structure the composition as Rembrandt carefully balanced and organized his figures in relationship to blocks of darkness and light.

Rembrandt’s 1640 “Holy Family” [Plate 23] in the Louvre is another example of fascination with strong contrasts of light and darkness. Here, again in the tradition of many northern painters, Rembrandt prefers to provide the source of illumination with the window. But the painter did not hesitate to let the darkness dominate the composition as a deep and almost impenetrable gloom surrounds the figures. Well over half of the total physical space of the panel belongs to the darkness. The shaft of light, while certainly coming from the window as it cuts diagonally in from the left across the back of the servant, bathes the Christ Child and parts of Mary in a sharp brightness, but the

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28 Louis Martz is the most recent to cite parallels between Rembrandt’s light effects and imagery in Milton’s poetry. Ants Oras, for instance, suggested such a parallel in 1965, but failed to develop the line of inquiry. Oras 143.
brightness intensifies around the Child so that the painter also suggests the Child as a source of light. The distinction between natural and divine light is uncertain.

In the hands of both Catholic and Protestant painters of the first half of the seventeenth century, tenebrism became a powerfully expressive tool. Although I have selected the medium of painting as illustrative of this new compositional strategy, sculptors and architects throughout Europe similarly investigated the expressive potential of strong contrasts of light and darkness. While Rome was the vital center for the arts and the destination for artists from most of the countries of Europe, the interest in these new possibilities with light and darkness were shared by artists throughout Europe – from Italy, to Spain, France, Holland, and England. While Catholic artists focused on subjects of martyrdom and conversion, Protestant painters focused on the Bible, genre, and landscape. But the cross-fertilizations and influences were complex and multi-faceted: artists both traveled widely and the graphic arts circulated throughout the continent. In Milton’s travels of 1638-39 and in his correspondences, the power of this new imagery was everywhere.

Milton’s *Paradise Lost* similarly employs light and darkness imagery to create the very structure and fabric of his epic. The poet does this on both the level of the entire epic as well as within many of the individual books of the epic. Within the first three books, some examples of this infrastructure can reveal the epic poet’s strikingly similar methodology to his counterparts in the visual arts. What is more, Milton also prefers very strong contrasts of light and darkness as he creates a Heaven and Hell defined by brilliant lights and profound darkness.

Nowhere is this more striking than in the first two books of the epic. In these books, Milton explores the subtleties and nuances of darkness not only in ways never before attempted in poetry, but also in ways strikingly similar to the interests of Baroque artists employing tenebrism. In one of the most well-known passages of the epic, Milton depicts a Hell through words suggestive of both the depth of the darkness as well as its contrast to the intense light characteristic of Heaven (emphasis mine):

At once as far as Angels’ ken he views
The dismal Situation waste and wild,
A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
As one great Furnace flam’d, yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Serv’d only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all; but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed
With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum’d:
Such place Eternal Justice had prepar’d
For those rebellious, here thir Prison ordained
In utter darkness, and thir portion set
Far remov’d from God and light of Heav’n
As from the Center thrice to th’ utmost Pole.
(I 60-74)

The “utter darkness” of this hell is a “darkness visible” to the inhabitants and to the reader as Milton provides a furnace with flames that casts just enough light to reveal the total horror and misery of the place without providing any solace or cheer. Hell and damnation, to Milton, are the complete absence of light and hope. In the passage above, the poet shapes his descriptive process on contrast: the flames from the furnace cast, “No light, but rather darkness visible,”
and the result is a Hell “in utter “darkness . . . Far remov’d from God and light of Heav’n.” Darkness is all encompassing, vast, and dominant.

The “utter darkness” of Hell is mirrored in the imagery used to describe Satan, but the fallen angel’s darkness is not yet as total as that of Hell (emphasis mine):

\[
\ldots \text{ he above the rest } \\
\text{In shape and gesture proudly eminent} \\
\text{Stood like a Tow’r; his form had yet not lost} \\
\text{All her Original \textit{brightness}, nor appear’d} \\
\text{Less than Arch-Angel ruin’d, and th’ excess} \\
\text{Of Glory obscur’d: As when the \textit{Sun} new ris’n} \\
\text{Looks through the Horizontal misty Air} \\
\text{\textbf{Shorn of his Beams}, or from behind the Moon} \\
\text{In \textit{dim Eclipse} disastrous \textit{twilight} sheds} \\
\text{On half the Nations, and with fear of change} \\
\text{Perplexes Monarchs.} \textbf{Dark’n’d so, yet \textit{shone}} \\
\text{Above them all th’ Arch-Angel: but his face} \\
\text{Deep scars of Thunder had intrencht, and care} \\
\text{Sat on his faded cheek, but under Brows} \\
\text{Of dauntless courage, and considerate Pride} \\
\text{Waiting revenge:}
\]

(I 589-604)

Images of contrasting light and darkness are used to paint a picture of a Satan in the process of being consumed and overtaken by the darkness, but a Satan who still retains vestiges of his former nature. This former state prior to his rebellion is conveyed solely in terms of these light/darkness images: his earlier relationship with God was a state of “Original brightness” that is now “obscur’d.” Milton then employs an extended simile comparing Satan’s diminished brightness to the dawn sun’s first rays mitigated by morning mists or to the sun’s rays interrupted by the moon in an eclipse. This latter part of the extended simile is particularly latent with threat as a “disastrous twilight” causes “fear of change” and “perplexes Monarchs.” The “dark’n’d” appearance of Satan, just as the
“darkness visible” of Hell, reveals subtle and fine gradations of darkness in both its physical appearance and degree and, of course, in its symbolic suggestiveness. While the symbolism will be considered below, it is important to note the poet’s unusually rich and complex manipulation of various gradations and degrees of darkness. Darkness is not the simple absence of light – it is multifaceted and layered.

But the darkness imagery becomes ever more subtle and complex in Book II when, suddenly, Mammon connects darkness to God (emphasis mine):

. . . This deep world
Of darkness do we dread? How oft amidst
Thick clouds and dark doth Heav’n’s all-ruling Sire
Choose to reside, his Glory unobscur’d,
And with the Majesty of darkness round
Covers his Throne; from whence deep thunders roar
Must’ring thir rage, and Heav’n resembles Hell?
As he our darkness, cannot we his Light
Imitate when we please?

(II 262-270)

Mammon’s words are desperate here, as he counsels the fallen angels to make the best of what they have, but the curious equating of God with “the Majesty of darkness” suggests that darkness cannot have a simplistic correspondence to Hell and damnation. For God, too, can be present in “thick clouds and dark” and use darkness to “cover his Throne.”

Milton concludes the first two books of Paradise Lost as Satan breaks out of Hell and Chaos “Over the dark Abyss, whose boiling Gulf/Tamely endur’d a Bridge of wondrous length/From Hell continu’d reaching th’ utmost Orb/Of this frail World” (II 1027-30). Book III opens with Milton’s encomium to Light:

Hail holy Light, offspring of Heav’n first-born,
Or of th’ Eternal Coeternal beam
May I express thee unblam’d? since God is Light,
And never but in unapproached Light
Dwelt from Eternity, dwelt then in thee,
**Bright** effluence of **bright** essence increate.
(III 1-6)

and the dominant darkness of Hell of the first two books is suddenly replaced by

the intense brightness of the “holy Light” of Heaven. God is the,

Fountain of **Light**, thyself invisible
Amidst the glorious **brightness** where thou sit’st
Thron’d inaccessible, but when thou shad’st
The full **blaze** of thy beams, and through a cloud
Drawn round about thee like a **radiant** Shrine,
Dark with excessive **bright** thy skirts appear,
Yet **dazzle** Heav’n, that **brightest** Seraphim
Approach not, but with both wings veil thir eyes.
(III 374-82)

In the manner of a Baroque artist, Milton carefully creates the strongest contrast possible by selecting words descriptive not just of light, but of intense, otherworldly divine light. The essence of each world is pictorialized through effects of light and darkness. The power of this imagery and the centrality of it to the poetic descriptive process cannot be overstated. Just as the Baroque tenebrist painter depended on the contrasts between profound darkness and intense light to structure and define the composition, so too did Milton the poet utilize this imagery of opposites as a dominant aesthetic principle.

Several additional examples of the light/darkness architectonics of **Paradise Lost** will not only lend greater understanding of this schematic, but will also reveal significant parallels between the epic’s dominant imagery and Baroque tenebrist art. Book IV opens on the exact opposite note from Book III, from the “Hail, holy Light” and the description of God and the Heavenly realm, Book IV finds Satan cursing God and the Sun as the fallen angel looks down with
despair on the glory of Eden (emphasis mine):

Sometimes towards *Eden* which now in his view
Lay pleasant, his griev’d look he fixes sad,
Sometimes towards Heav’n and the **full-blazing Sun**,  
Which now sat high in his Meridian Tow’r:  
Then much revolving, thus in sighs began.
O thou that with surpassing Glory crown’d,  
Look’st from thy sole Dominion like the God  
Of this new World; at whose sight all the Stars
Hide thir diminish’d heads; to thee I call,  
But with no friendly voice, and add thy name  
O **Sun**, to tell thee how I **hate thy beams**  
That bring to my remembrance from what state
I fell, how glorious once above thy Sphere.  

(IV 27-39)

Satan’s arrival at earth and Paradise signifies a transition from the otherworldly realms of Heaven and Hell described in the first three books to the created world for which the sun, moon, and stars provide light. The unfolding description of this world, as seen through the eyes of Satan, continues the imagery of light and darkness but with the extremes modulated to describe an earthly realm. Just as Caravaggio moderated the juxtaposition of extreme light and darkness in the left half of the “Calling of St. Matthew” canvas, so too does Milton moderate his light and darkness images to pictorialize Eden. In the Caravaggio painting, the sharp diagonal of light cutting down from the upper right diffuses somewhat in the left half of the canvas, which contains Matthew prior to his acceptance of Christ’s call to ministry and while he and his friends engage in the worldly activity of counting tax monies. Milton adopts a similar strategy in his lengthy description of Eden in Book IV: Eden is a world defined and described by light and darkness imagery, but a world with many gradations of light and darkness. For instance, Eden is a place of, “Hill and Dale and Plain,/ Both where the morning Sun first warmly
smote/ The open field, and where the unpierc’t shade/ Imbrown’d the noontide

Bow’rs” (IV 243-46) and a place where the darkness of night is softened by the light of the moon and the stars (emphasis mine):

Now came still Ev’ning on, and Twilight gray
Had in her sober Livery all things clad;
Silence accompanied, for Beast and Bird,
They to thir grassy Couch, these to thir Nests
Were slunk, all but the wakeful Nightingale;
She all night long her amorous descant sung;
Silence was pleas’d: now glow’d the Firmament
With living Sapphires: Hesperus that led
The starry Host, rode brightest, till the Moon
Rising in clouded Majesty, at length
Apparent Queen unveil’d her peerless light,
And o’er the dark her Silver Mantle threw.
(IV 598-609)

Milton reinforces the centrality of metaphors of light and darkness to the epic architectonics as Book VI opens with the unusual description of the cave of Light and Darkness (emphasis mine):

All night the dreadless Angel unpursu’d
Through Heav’n’s wide Champaign held his way, till Morn,
Wak’t by the circling Hours, with rosy hand
Unbarr’d the gates of Light. There is a Cave
Within the Mount of God, fast by his Throne,
Where light and darkness in perpetual round
Lodge and dislodge by turns, which makes through Heav’n
Grateful vicissitude, like Day and Night;
Light issues forth, and at the other door
Obsequious darkness enters, till her hour
To veil the Heav’n, though darkness there might well
Seem twilight here; and now went forth the Morn
Such as in highest Heav’n, array’d in Gold
Empyreal, from before her vanisht Night,
Shot through with orient Beams: when all the Plain
Cover’d with thick embattl’d Squadrons bright,
Chariots and flaming Arms, and fiery Steeds
Reflecting blaze on blaze, first met his view.
(VI 1-18)

Joseph Summers perceived this passage with which Milton opened Book VI, and
thereby opens the two books resting at the very center of the epic, as a key to
the aesthetic and thematic structure of the entire epic. To Summers,
understanding the unusual phrase “grateful vicissitude” and its meaning unlocks
much of the significance of Milton’s poem, for constant change is both fortuitous
and characteristic of not only God’s creation but also of the poem. For the
purposes of this discussion, Summers’ notion of change or “grateful vicissitude”
is often exemplified through this imagery of light and darkness. The angel Uriel’s
journey, unfolding in the above quote, is described largely in terms of the
changes from the darkness of night to the “rosy hand” of morning. It is important
to note that Milton’s opening to Book VI, consistent with the openings to the
previous five books, relies on this imagery to construct the setting and tone of
what follows. The battle in Heaven described in Book VI now begins, and the
poet draws again and again on these images of light and darkness, day and
night, to frame the epic battle. God’s wrath is evident as:

    . . . Clouds began
    To darken all the Hill, and smoke to roll
    In dusky wreaths, reluctant flames, the sign
    Of wrath awak’t.
    (VI 56-59)

and Satan, the deceiver, appears surrounded by intense light:

    Th’ Apostate in his Sun-bright Chariot sat
    Idol of Majesty Divine, enclos’d
    With Flaming Cherubim, and golden Shields;
    Then lighted from his gorgeous Throne.
    (VI 100-04)

At the dawn of the third day, the exact mid-point of the epic, God the Father
sends “his Son with Rays direct/ Shone full” (VI 719-20), just as “the third sacred

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Morn began to shine/Dawning through Heav’n” (VI 748-49) to finish the rebellion. Milton, the Baroque poet, relies most heavily on the imagery of light and darkness to create a complex and unified epic structure.

The remaining six books of Paradise Lost continue this pattern as Milton mines this imagery to portray a wide range of physical conditions potent with symbolic meanings. Day and night, as described in terms of light and darkness, are some of the most important and recurrent images in the second half of the epic. For instance, the story of God’s creation in six days told by the angel Raphael to Adam in Book VII unfolds around light as the first act of God’s creation on Day One. Milton employs a refrain-like closing line to the description of each following day of creation as, for instance, “Glad Ev’n’ning and glad Morn crown’d the fourth day” (VII 386), and “So Ev’n and Morn accomplish’d the Sixt day” (VII 550). And in Book IX, when the poet tells of the Fall, Milton opens with Satan using darkness to cover his approach to Eden:

The Sun was sunk, and after him the Star
Of Hesperus, whose Office is to bring
Twilight upon the Earth, short Arbiter
Twixt Day and Night, and now from end to end
Night’s Hemisphere had veil’d the Horizon round:
When Satan who late fled before the threats
Of Gabriel out of Eden, now improv’d
In meditated fraud and malice, bent
On Man’s destruction, maugre what might hap
Of heavier on himself, fearless return’d.
By Night he fled, and at Midnight return’d
From compassing the Earth, cautious of day,
Since Uriel Regent of the Sun descri’d
His entrance, and forewarn’d the Cherubim
That kept thir watch; thence full of anguish driv’n,
The space of seven continu’d Nights he rode
With darkness.

(IX 48-64)
Just as in a tenebrist Baroque painting, so too Milton pursues a compositional strategy with the contrast of light and darkness at its very core.

Artists such as Caravaggio and Rembrandt found in tenebrism a tool of tremendous expressive power, and it is in the analysis of the symbolic meanings expressed through this light/darkness dialectic that we can similarly discover the shared seventeenth-century Baroque temper of tenebrist painters and the poet Milton. One art historian in particular, Maria Rzepińska, has done some very important work in the last twenty years to situate the works of the “tenebristi” into the wider artistic, theological, and philosophical currents of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The sudden and widespread popularity of this technique from about 1600 to 1650 throughout Europe begs the question of discerning possible shared cultural forces underlying these efforts. These broad cultural trends evident in art theory, theology, astronomy, optics, and alchemy also hold important clues to the shared complex symbolisms of light and darkness so fundamental to both tenebristic art and to Milton’s epic poem.

Maria Rzepińska has contributed some important work dealing with the art theory of this era and distinguishes between a medieval and Renaissance “aesthetics of light” and a Baroque “aesthetics of light and darkness.”31 I am dependent on her insights for the following discussion. Rzepińska discusses the art theory of Gian Paolo Lomazzo’s Scritti sulle arti, published in Milan in 1584. In this work, Lomazzo specified three types of light:

*Lume primario* denotes a source of light and can occur in three forms: a) as natural light, of the sky or the sun, b) as lume divino, metaphysical light, emanating from divine persons and angels, and c) as artificial light.

31 Rzepińska 97.
kindled by man, coming from a fire, a torch, or a candle. . . Lomazzo presents numerous examples of pictures familiar to him in which the divine light has been applied, his descriptions indicating that the *lume divino* appears invariably as a condensed light surrounded by darkness. This concept of Lomazzo’s is of essential significance and befits excellently the formal structure of religious paintings, which took shape towards the end of the 16th century. Painters continued and developed this concept by deepening contrasts and intensifying darkness.  

The celebration of darkness, the opposite but necessary complement to light, becomes central to a new aesthetic. One of the most obvious ways in which this is apparent is in the frequent widespread strategy employed by the “tenebristi” of depicting many traditional religious scenes enveloped by darkness, as though occurring at night, even though scripture and pictorial tradition had the events occurring during the daylight. The drive to overwhelm a pictorial surface with darkness elevates this imagery to an active force or presence well beyond its traditional “shadowing” role.

At the same period during the second half of the sixteenth century, some theologies and scientific speculations were converging on similar interests in darkness. Rzepińska notes in particular the theology of darkness introduced by St. John of the Cross in his mystical writings, *Noche oscura* and *Subida del Monte Carmelo* (1582-85). In these writings, the mystic posited darkness as something positive that characterizes the Christian soul's progress in three stages:

It is for three reasons that the progress of the soul towards its union with God is called Night. First, because of the position from which the soul departs, as it must mortify all the lusts regarding the things it has in the world and abandon them. Such an abandonment and the lack of these things are a night for the human sense. Secondly, it is called Night because of the way or the means which the soul must use in order to

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32 Rzepińska 98
33 Rzepińska 100 ff.
achieve the union. That means is faith, which is such a darkness for the mind as the shadows of night. Thirdly, it is called Night owing to the end, this end being God. In life on earth He is also a dark night for the soul.\textsuperscript{34}

This theology created the paradoxical notion of “dark light” whereby it is in darkness that “light” or understanding can be gained.

Kepler’s tremendously influential work on astronomy and optics, \textit{Ad Vitellonem Paralipomena. Astronomia Pars Optica} (published 1604), coincided close in time with the mystical writings of St. John of the Cross, and Kepler similarly celebrated the positive values of darkness, but from a scientific vantage point. Once again, it is from Rzepińska’s discussion that I draw these comments.\textsuperscript{35} Kepler noted that eclipses of the heavenly bodies were vital for astronomical studies and insights, and “that this very darkness is the eyes of astronomers.” It is the astronomer’s observation of shadow from eclipses that enables the scientist to gather vital information about the movement of the planets and the structure of the universe.

But it is in the field of alchemical writings that Rzepińska found one of the most tantalizing of cultural connections to tenebrist art and to Caravaggio, in particular.\textsuperscript{36} It was in the widely popular works of alchemy that Rzepińska notes a particular fascination with light and darkness, as many writers combine a curious mixture of science, magic, philosophy, and theology in efforts to explain the nature of the universe and matter. Many of these writers were also

\textsuperscript{34} Rzepińska is quoting St. John of the Cross’s \textit{Noche oscura}.
\textsuperscript{35} Rzepińska 102ff.
\textsuperscript{36} Rezpińska notes that Cardinal del Monte, an early patron, promoter, and enthusiastic collector of Caravaggio’s paintings, also read and studied the writings of the alchemist Libavius (\textit{Alchymia recognita} published in Frankfurt in 1606). Caravaggio lived for some time in del Monte’s palace near San Luigi dei Francesi. See Howard Hibbard, \textit{Caravaggio} (1983; Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985) 29-31 and Friedlaender, xxiv for more detail on this important relationship. Incidentally, Cardinal del Monte was also friendly with Galileo, for whom Milton’s admiration is well known. Rezpińska 105-06.
fascinated by the Cabbala, mystical Jewish writings of the late Middle Ages. These works were widely circulated in Italy and Europe in the sixteenth century and seventeenth centuries. This strand of alchemical writings sought to interpret the universe largely through the assistance of scripture, and complex layers of meanings around images of light and darkness were of particular interest. Rzepińska goes into substantial detail after a review of many of these alchemical treatises, but for the sake of our discussion the point is that light and darkness were a significant focus of the intellectual speculation of this period and that darkness was considered an essential aspect of divinity and the nature of God.37

In light of this widespread cultural and intellectual fascination with not only light but also with darkness, the paintings of Caravaggio and Rembrandt can again be considered with an eye to how these artists exploited not only bright, supernatural light, but also toward how these artists exploited varying degrees of darkness to suggest complex and subtle religious and philosophical concepts.

Caravaggio’s “Calling of St. Matthew” [Plate 19] depicts the moment when Christ interrupts Matthew, the tax collector, as he counts his money. Gospel accounts of this event are simple and without detail: “Now as Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting in the tax-collector’s place, and said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he arose and followed him” (Matthew 9). Later commentary and tradition, however, expanded on the biblical account with special attention placed on the swiftness with which Matthew obeyed and left all his money and duties behind.38 The Golden Legend is one such example of the

37 Rzepińska 105ff.
widespread popular accounts of the Saint’s life, and this account celebrates this swiftness to obey as one of Matthew’s most worthy attributes: “for as soon as Christ called him, he quit his custom-house, leaving his tax accounts incomplete without fear of his masters, and devoted himself completely to Christ.” The Golden Legend then quotes Jerome’s commentary on the Gospel passage, and Jerome’s words are of particular interest for interpreting the pictorial tradition for rendering this subject:

“But there is no doubt that the apostles, before they believed in Him, had seen the many signs of His power which went before Him. And of a surety, the very splendour and majesty of His hidden godhead, which shone even in His human countenance, were enough to draw them the first time they looked upon him. For if a magnet has power to attract rings and bits of iron, how much the more can the Lord of all creation draw to Himself those whom He will!” Thus Jerome.39

Caravaggio inherited this tradition with its emphasis upon swiftness and immediacy as the theological essence of the narrative, for the original contract for the painting specified that the artist must express this very point.40

Caravaggio’s innovative use of tenebrism lies at the very heart of both his creative strategy for expressing the obligatory theological tradition emphasizing the swiftness of Matthew’s obedience to the call as well as at the heart of his strategy for suggesting complex psychological and personal response to a divine event. Earlier depictions of the event showed Matthew’s departure from the countinghouse and his receipt of Christ’s blessing.41 Caravaggio, however, envisioned the scene at an earlier moment in the narrative. As Christ extends his

40 Hibbard includes an excerpt of the original contract for this painting: “St. Matthew, dressed as seems fitting for that post, rises from the counter with the desire of following Our Lord.” Hibbard 296.
right arm in a gesture borrowed directly from Michelangelo’s Adam in the Sistine Chapel ceiling’s “Creation of Man,” Christ’s form is largely obscured by the figure of Peter and by deep darkness.\textsuperscript{42} However, while Christ’s upper body of chest, profile head and extended arm are pointing towards the table and Matthew, Christ’s feet are posed in the opposite direction of striding away from the men gathered around the counting table. Thomas Puttfarken’s recent analysis of this painting interprets this unusual disposition of Christ’s feet as Caravaggio’s reference to the speed with which Christ’s summons was obeyed. There is no need for Christ to linger and persuade Matthew: the summons is all that is necessary.\textsuperscript{43} Christ is in motion and is already on his way. As darkness envelops most of Christ, leaving only the parts of him most essential to identifying him and his action – his profile face and neck and the outstretched lower arm and hand - the direction of all gestures with these essential identifying parts follows the same diagonal as the unnatural, strong diagonal of light slashing into the room. This same bright light strongly highlights Christ's face, giving material expression to Jerome’s words that, “the very splendour and majesty of His hidden godhead, which shone even in His human countenance, were enough to draw them to the first time they looked upon him.” The spectator’s eye is forced along this strong diagonal line. The darkness, rather than being in any way sinister, envelops Christ and suggests the power and the mystery of the unfolding scene. The brightest light and the deepest darkness share the right side of the panel and play an equal role in describing or

\textsuperscript{41} Friedlander 106. See Plate 24 with Friedlander’s example of an earlier depiction of this subject.
\textsuperscript{42} Hibbard 100.
\textsuperscript{43} Puttfarken 169-70.
suggesting the presence of the divine. The bright light carrying the eye rapidly to Matthew enacts the rapidity for which Matthew’s response was emblematic. Caravaggio’s choice to depict an earlier moment depends completely on his new use of tenebrism to convey the theological heart of the event.

The left side of the canvas, as mentioned earlier, includes five figures seated around the counting table, and the raking diagonal of strong light and dark of the right side abruptly ends. A more moderated darkness dominates this half with the dark, blank wall above occupying a full half of the vertical space over the five figures. Some of the bright light from the shaft raking across the canvas highlights parts of faces, important hands, and the money-counting activity going on. With this more moderated light and darkness, Caravaggio clearly distinguishes between the divine status of Christ to the right and the worldly, profane event of money-counting unfolding on the left. But the sharp highlights of bright light on the face and hands of Matthew express the interjection of the divine into the profane and suggest the transforming nature of the moment.

Caravaggio’s “Conversion of St. Paul” [Plate 20] provides another wonderful example of this innovative painter’s dependence on tenebrism to explore new modes of theological expression. Paul’s, or Saul’s, conversion experience is told in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 9:

And as he went on his journey, it came to pass that he drew near to Damascus, when suddenly a light from heaven shone round about him; and falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me?” And he said, “Who art thou, Lord?” and he said, “I am Jesus, whom thou art persecuting.” And he, trembling and amazed, said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me do?” And the Lord said to him, “Arise and go into the city, and it will be told thee what thou must do.” Now the men who journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing indeed the voice, but seeing no one. And Saul arose from the ground, but when his eyes were opened,
he could see nothing. And leading him by the hand, they brought him into Damascus. And for three days he could not see, and he neither ate nor drank.

The subject had a long pictorial tradition preceding Caravaggio’s depiction, but Caravaggio brings a new approach to the subject that is especially dependent on exploiting tenebrism. Friedlander’s very detailed analysis of this painting remains the definitive one with its detailed citings of the numerous visual precedents, but for the sake of this discussion Michelangelo’s representation of 1545 from the Cappella Paolina [Plate 25], with which Caravaggio was undoubtedly familiar, can summarize the pictorial tradition.44 In Michelangelo’s fresco, as in the majority of these earlier depictions, the artists gave physical form to the divine presence as a figure of Christ emerged from the heavens. Michelangelo’s is noted for its great agitation and action: the drama of the event is expressed through the rearing horse seen rushing away, the other soldiers pulling back and falling over in fright and confusion, and a vast host of angels surrounding the radically foreshortened Christ moving steeply down from the heavens. A bright shaft of light emanates downward from Christ to the earth. Paul, depicted in his elderly, familiar form, has his eyes closed as he is blinded.

Caravaggio’s conception of this subject is radically different: from the mass of people to only two, from the swirling motion to almost stillness, from the physical rendering of Christ to his absence, from a mannerist palette of brilliant color to the preponderance of earth tones, from an old Paul to the young Roman soldier; Caravaggio rethinks this conversion experience in every way. Caravaggio simplifies radically, but the simplicity is deceptive. Surprisingly, a

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44 Friedlander 3-23.
very large horse occupies most of the canvas and dwarfs the blinded and dramatically foreshortened figure of Paul on the ground. The horse and the older man grabbing the bridle are subdued. Just as in the “Calling of St. Matthew,” Caravaggio depends on the rays of light raking in from the upper right corner to throw an intense, bright light on essential elements: the upper head of the old man, much of the horse’s flank, and finally on the prostrate form of Paul. This intense, bright light is in strong contrast to the deep shadows and almost absolute darkness surrounding the three actors in the drama. The result is the expression of a spiritual drama that is largely internal and psychological rather than external and physical. And just as in Milton’s proem to Book III of Paradise Lost, divine light strikes Paul blind so that he may "see and tell/ Of Things invisible to mortal sight" (III 54-55). Caravaggio’s “Conversion of St. Paul” is a curious and coincidental visual parallel to Milton’s blindness and inspiration, for both the Baroque tenebrist painter and Baroque poet were fascinated with the expressive power of metaphors of light and darkness for Christian faith, conversion, and inspiration.

Rembrandt’s religious works constituted the greatest number of all in his vast oeuvre, which is particularly curious for a Protestant painter in a seventeenth-century Holland noted for its lack of religious commissions and its preference for genre scenes, still life, landscape, and portraiture. But Rembrandt’s many religious works share with Caravaggio an interest in bringing a fresh interpretation to religious subjects and depending primarily on stillness and contrasts of light and darkness to express sublime spiritual moments of a
deeply inward and personal nature. In returning to look at Rembrandt’s “Supper at Emmaus” [Plate IV], where I have previously noted the artist’s use of broad areas of deep darkness and intensely bright lights to structure the composition, Rembrandt’s particular brand of genius for using tenebrism can be understood.

The subject of the Supper at Emmaus was of particular fascination to Rembrandt, for he repeated the subject several times during his career. In his earliest rendering of the subject in 1628-30 [Plate 22], the artist employed the Caravaggesque tenebrism he learned from Honthorst and the Utrecht School of painters recently returned from Rome. In an odd twist on the iconography, Rembrandt included an elderly couple rather than the two apostles, and it was mentioned above that this was undoubtedly due to Rembrandt’s dependence on an Elsheimer painting of Philemon and Baucis (see above p.142). Much like Caravaggio in “The Calling of St. Matthew,” Rembrandt employs a broad area of deep darkness to envelop the figure of Christ, leaving only his identifiable profile outlined by an intense, bright light. While the light can rationally be attributed to a candle positioned behind the seated Christ, the light forms a circular halo-like glow around Christ. The elderly man pulls back from Christ in a diagonal line echoing that of Christ’s pose, but the man’s face is caught largely in the light. Recognition, wonder, and even fear are etched on his face. To the far left side of the panel, a distant silhouette of an old woman working at the fireplace is the only interruption of an almost completely darkened left half of the panel. The woman’s illuminated silhouette offers a balance to and a parallel of the similarly silhouetted Christ figure. With the combined force of the startled realization on

45 Rosenberg 169. Rosenberg estimates that Rembrandt did about 500 portraits, but about 850
the old man’s face as his experience of the supernatural is illuminated at the farthest reach of the divine light surrounding Christ and the parallel silhouetting of the distant and oblivious woman, Rembrandt suggests the interjection of the divine into the most humble of circumstances. Ordinary activity and life are calmly enacted by the woman; startled recognition of the extraordinary recorded on the old man’s face confront the spectator head on. Darkness lacks any sinister quality here, much as in Caravaggio’s use of darkness. Rather, darkness swallows the divine and the ordinary alike and seems full of power and mystery.

Rembrandt repeated this subject twice in 1648, and his continuing refinements and variations reinforce his fascination with the expressive potential for light and darkness. His version of the “Supper at Emmaus” in Copenhagen [Plate 26] and the version in the Louvre [Plate 27] indicate some of these variations. In both, Rembrandt drew from Leonardo da Vinci’s Christ figure from the “Last Supper,” and in both works Rembrandt shifted his composition to a more classical, centered format. In the Copenhagen version, Rembrandt reprised his use of tenebrism as light from a candle provides just enough illumination to reveal the calmly centered Christ and the more subtle indications of surprise as one apostle pulls back and the second brings his barely illuminated hands up in an attitude much like prayer. Almost the entire composition is turned over to darkness. In the Louvre version, Rembrandt greatly moderated his extremes of light and darkness even as he kept the attitudes of the two apostles almost identical to those in the Copenhagen version. The halo of light softly

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46 Kenneth Clark, Rembrandt and the Italian Renaissance (New York: NYU Press, 1964) 60. Clark notes that Durer’s “Small Passion” of 1511 was the probable intermediary for bringing this image to Rembrandt, for Rembrandt never traveled to Italy.
surrounding Christ’s head and shoulders has no identifiable source, and a soft light and subtle shadow reveal many more details of the setting than in the other two renditions. Rembrandt’s multiple versions of this subject are an unusual opportunity to examine the range of psychological and spiritual expression possible through varying modulations of tenebrism and chiaroscuro.

This newly found seventeenth-century fascination with the expressive potential of light and darkness finds literary parallel in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Just as in the work of the “tenebristi,” this imagery exists on a multitude of levels: from the seemingly straightforward use of darkness to characterize Hell, Satan, and sin and the use of light to characterize God, the Son, Heaven, and grace; to the exceedingly perplexing use of these images in the obverse - darkness to describe the divine power and mystery of God the Father and the Son or the use of images of light to describe Satan. It is in the very range of use and the dominance of these compelling images that the parallels between Milton and the Baroque “tenebristi” with their shared preference for theological and psychological complexity can be uncovered.

Some of the most perplexing and frequently commented upon passages from *Paradise Lost* are those associating God with darkness. For instance, Mammon desperately recalls “the Majesty of darkness” (II 266) with which God “Covers his Throne” (II 267), and “How oft amidst/Thick clouds and dark doth Heav’n’s all-ruling Sire/Choose to reside” (II 263-65). Perhaps the most important word above is “choose,” for Milton makes it clear that God’s power encompasses light and darkness and all is subject to his choice. With this suggestion, Milton deftly unites this imagery of light and darkness to the central
issue of the epic: humankind’s free will and its subsequent choices to disobey and to seek salvation. Joseph Summers found in this paradoxical equating of darkness with descriptions of God a reflection of the ambiguity confronting the reader and humankind in their search for truth and salvation. Milton, while certainly relying on the long-standing tradition of equating darkness with evil and light with goodness, refuses to let the reader proceed in such simple certainty. Darkness as an unexpected descriptor of God becomes a multi-faceted metaphor for mystery, power, and the complexity of choice.

Don Allen, much as Maria Rezpińska did when searching for cultural contexts for tenebrism, found in Milton’s complex of darkness images abundant evidence of Early Christian theology and mysticism, particularly the philosophies of Dionysus the Pseudo-Areopagite and Gregory of Nyssa, both of whom expounded the notion of the “divine dark.” These early theologians focused on darkness as an aspect of the divine and as a necessary path to understanding. Based in scripture, these interpretations were widely available, and Allen comments that Milton was reading Gregory of Nyssa before he wrote An Apology. The writings of the Pseudo-Dionysus were also widely available through Marsilio Ficino’s translations. In this strand of theology and mysticism, darkness becomes a kind of blindness in which the mystic becomes unaware of the physical world and able to “see” and to understand.

The linking of darkness with blindness in the writings of the mystics becomes a network of powerful, and personal, images for Milton as he

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47 Summers 28.
49 Allen 626.
interweaves such imagery through the lengthy epic. It is another testament to the subtlety and complexity with which Milton uses images of darkness, for his own personal blindness offers the poet the opportunity to consider the theological and philosophical paradoxes of blindness. In addition to the famous proem to Book III with its poignant lament over the poet’s loss of physical sight: “Thus with the Year/Seasons return, but not to me returns/Day, or the sweet approach of Ev’n or Morn,” (III 40-42), Milton reiterates this same image in the proem to Book VII as he tells of his own efforts to survive, “In darkness, and with dangers compast round,/ And solitude; yet not alone” (VII 27-28). But Milton recasts his blindness through the medium of the “theology of darkness” to link physical blindness to spiritual insight and aspects of the divinity. Don Allen, quoting the writings of the Pseudo-Dionysus, tells of the mystic’s efforts “to enter the ‘divine darkness’, where the human handicap of seeing and being seen is removed and all forms of external perception are blinded in the sacred darkness that is inaccessible light.”50 Such mysticism informs the poet Milton’s “ever-during dark” (III 45) that cuts him off from “the cheerful ways of men” (III 46), but also creates the opportunity for him to see with “inward” eyes.

While darkness in Paradise Lost can describe attributes of the divine, and darkness or blindness can be a precondition of certain kinds of knowledge, darkness more pervasively describes Hell, Chaos, Satan, and moral lapse. Hell is the realm of “utter darkness” (I 72), “The seat of desolation, void of light”(I 181), and “this dark and dismal house of pain,” (II 823). Chaos is a “hoary deep, a dark/lIllimitable Ocean without bound,/Without dimension, where length,

50 Allen 637 quoting the Pseudo-Dionysus, Epistolae, 1073.
breadth, and hight,/And time and place are lost; where eldest Night/And Chaos, Ancestors of Nature, hold/Eternal Anarchy” (II 891-96). And Satan, the former Lucifer, is defined by Milton as "the Prince of Darkness" (X 383): “his form had yet not lost/All her Original brightness,” (I 591-92) and the angel Zephon scornfully tells Satan that the archfiend “resembl’st now/Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foul” (IV 839-40) with “His luster visibly impair’d” (IV 850). Satan’s “darkness” is an external manifestation of his fallen nature, and Milton extends the darkness imagery to describe Satan’s evil plans, “his own dark designs” (II 13), as his evil words are voiced through the form of the serpent: “his dark suggestions hide/From sharpest sight” (IX 90-91). And after Adam and Eve ate the apple, “thir Eyes how op’n’d, and thir minds/How dark’n’d” (IX 1053-53). Images of darkness are central to the poet’s dramatic content.

The intense, bright, supernatural light that constitutes the necessary counterpart to darkness in a Baroque tenebrist painting similarly appears in Paradise Lost. This light manifests divinity as light shining from God, the Son, and the angels in their heavenly spheres or light manifesting their divine presence among humankind. Heaven is “the Precincts of light” (III 88), and God is described predominantly in terms of radiant light. He is:

**Eternal King; thee Author of all being, Fountain of Light, thyself invisible Amidst the glorious brightness where thou sit’st Thron’d inaccessible, but when thou shad’st The full blaze of thy beams, and through a cloud Drawn round about thee like a radiant Shrine.**  
(III 374-79)

God the Father encompasses the Son in his radiance:

**So spake the Father, and unfolding bright Toward the right hand his Glory, on the Son**
Blaz’d forth unclouded Deity; he full
Resplendent all his Father manifest
Express’d . . . .

(X 63-67)

God’s angels share in this light; for example, the poet portrays Uriel largely in terms of his brightness: “His back was turn’d, but not his brightness hid;/ Of beaming sunny Rays” (III 624-25), and Satan addresses Uriel as, “gloriously bright” (III 655). When God sends the angel Raphael to visit Adam and Eve and to warn them about Satan, Raphael’s “glorious shape . . . seems another Morn/Ris’n on mid-noon” (V 310-11). In this image, the interjection of the divine into the earthly realm is marked by a brightness as intense as the mid-day sun.

The intense light of the Baroque also carries within it a rich array of images linking light to sight, both physical sight and “inner sight,” just as darkness carried within it a rich array of images connecting darkness to blindness. This array of images seems to hold particular poignancy for the blind Milton, and this epic is filled with such allusions. Milton almost becomes playful with these multi-layered allusions, as when Uriel reports to Gabriel his fear that he had unsuspectingly given directions to Earth to one of the fallen angels:

I describ’d his way
Bent all on speed, and markt his Aery Gait’
But in the Mount that lies from Eden North,
Where he first lighted, soon discern’d his looks
Alien from Heav’n, with passions foul obscur’d:
Mine eye pursu’d him still, but under shade
Lost sight of him.

(IV 567-73)

Here the poet concentrates in a short passage on images of light (and puns on light with its meaning of “landing”) and shadow, the eye and sight, and lost sight. The puns and layered meanings subsume the recurrent nexus of images
interrogating the reliability of physical sight and light: the truth is easily
“obscur’d.” Once Adam and Eve have eaten the forbidden fruit, they “Soon found
thir Eyes how op’n’d, and thir minds/How darkn’n’d; innocence, that as a veil/Had
shadow’d them from knowing ill, was gone” (IX 1053-55). In a deft turn of images
focusing on light, darkness, and sight, Milton reinforces the duality of sight and its
paradoxical and often inverted relationship to knowledge and grace. The blind
poet’s invocation to his muse asking for “thou Celestial Light [to] Shine inward,
and the mind through all her powers/Irradiate, there plant eyes” (III 51-54)
reflects this recurrent imagery of sight in blindness and light in darkness.

The widespread popularity of Baroque tenebrist painting throughout
Europe in the first half of the seventeenth century was a manifestation of a
significant shift in what art historians would label an “aesthetic.” In this case, the
shift was from an “aesthetic of light” to an aesthetic of “light and darkness.”
While this new aesthetic was certainly not the only aesthetic of the multi-faceted
Baroque, it was a popular one as artists from Rome to the Low Countries,
France, and Spain seized upon this new convention of tenebrism to reinterpret
traditional religious subjects and to introduce subjects of current, topical interest.
Darkness and bright, supernatural light define the compositional structure
thereby suggesting new philosophical and theological subtleties. It is within this
cultural context that Milton’s profoundly rich and complex use of metaphors of
light and darkness in Paradise Lost must be understood. The works of the
“tenebristi” are an appropriate cultural context for a grasp of the centrality to and
power of this dialectic in the seventeenth-century mind. As darkness dominates
a full half to three-quarters of the pictorial surface, its potency as a visual
metaphor expands in multiple ways: it can be as simple as a foil for increasing the drama of the more limited brilliance of supernatural light or as complex as suggesting higher states of spiritual awareness possible only to those few who enter the “divine darkness.” Inherent to this latter is also the suggestion of inner psychic states. The new darkness of the “tenebristi” carries with it all the potential necessary for the ultimate poetic expression – a Satan as the Prince of Darkness. For in this fallen angel, formerly Lucifer and “of the light,” Milton could create a dialectic of light and darkness that explains and mimics humankind’s same struggle. The poet Milton and the “tenebristi” share this fascination with the power of this metaphor and the art provides an important clue to both the centrality of this metaphor and its multi-faceted meanings.
EPILOGUE

This collection of essays is my effort to join a small but noteworthy group of scholars working in interart studies, an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of issues in literature. Four essays included in this collection are unified by the use of an interart analytic methodology intended to bring either new insight to an unresolved topic in literary interpretation or to offer an altogether new interpretation of a major poem in English literature. It is worthwhile at this point to consider the exact nature of this methodology, its efficacy in accomplishing the stated goals, and its vitality as an approach to literary studies.

Interart studies, as employed in this collection of essays, take an approach characterized as “synchronic.” This term is borrowed from Murray Roston, who uses the term very broadly to denote relating the visual and literary arts of the same period or historical era. A fundamental aspect of this approach is its positing of a cultural milieu shared by people of any era. While this is hardly a novel thought, the assumption is a vital one to this type of analytical methodology; for shared cultural concerns and stylistic urges can then be accepted without positing a direct, physical link between artistic efforts in different media. It is not an issue of whether William Langland, for instance, saw a particular manuscript, or even any manuscript at all in a late medieval expressionist style, for the “synchronic” methodology to bear fruitful insight about the issue at hand. What is critical for the synchronous approach to achieve validity is twofold: the parallels drawn between the visual arts and the literary work must
be stylistically and thematically clear and convincing, and the analysis of each art form must be well-grounded in the scholarship of each discipline. This latter requirement perhaps offers the greatest hurdle, for the disciplines of art history and literary criticism both demand certain analytical approaches as well as discipline-specific vocabularies. It is in regard to this vocabulary issue that it must be stated that since interart studies reside as an area within literary studies, a shared vocabulary in literary studies can be assumed. However, the same cannot be assumed for the vocabulary of art history. A necessary component of interart studies, therefore, is a rather lengthy and often detailed overview of an artist’s work and the general style of this work as it exemplifies a stylistic period. This is to provide needed background and vocabulary to the reader less familiar with art history. Furthermore, the synchronic approach demands that the issue under examination must be an issue of literary interpretation that thus far defies consensus or understanding, so that the turn to the visual arts becomes justified as a possible larger “text.” The drawing of parallels between the literary text and the visual arts would not be justified in and of itself. The synchronic approach demands that all these elements be provided in order to structure a convincing and satisfying exploration of the issue under scrutiny.

The first essay employs interart studies to approach a long-standing discussion of the fourteenth-century Alliterative Revival. The appearance of significant numbers of highly developed and sophisticated alliterative poems between about 1450 and 1520, poems which have no precedents surviving from the preceding 400 years, seems sudden and difficult to explain. However, these
alliterative poems do share a number of stylistic characteristics with Old English poetry, such as the preference for alliteration and repetition. Lacking any preserved literary precedents, scholars have assumed that poets, for reasons such as renewed national sentiments, consciously looked to their distant poetic heritage and revived the alliterative tradition. In the case of this particular kind of discussion, interart studies supply context by casting a wider cultural net to suggest another possibility: alliterative poetry continued throughout these 400 years and followed a developmental path similar to the path that can still be traced in the preserved monuments of the visual arts of the Gothic period. The argument is that if striking parallels can be found between the style and content of major examples of poetry from this “Alliterative Revival” and the style and content of late medieval, International Gothic art, the demonstrable developmental path well documented in the visual arts can be assumed for the poetry. Using the two major poems of the Pearl Poet as examples of the alliterative poetry of this era, startling parallels can be discerned in the paintings of the late Middle Ages. These similarities are evident in the two art forms exhibiting the same aesthetic commitment to “preciousness” - a dense and meticulous penchant for pattern. And pattern is fused in both art forms with realistic details to exhibit an aesthetic that is a curious blending of these disparate tendencies. Indeed, a notable characteristic in both poetry and the visual arts is the tension or striking balance achieved between two seemingly disparate modes: the densely symbolic and complex with the realistic description of everyday detail. Also, examples from the visual arts and the poems of the
Pearl Poet share the late Gothic fascination with the depiction and evocation of light as the most tangible and physical manifestation and suggestion of the metaphysical. Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and the Pearl share these striking and essential stylistic and thematic concerns with the art of the International Gothic, so that a similar developmental path may be posited. The well-preserved examples of the visual arts documenting the early and high Gothic eras (c. 1150-1350) may function as appropriate “stand-ins” for the presumably missing alliterative poems of the same era. The larger cultural context of the visual arts is an essential and tantalizing path of inquiry for suggesting that the highly sophisticated poetry of the “Alliterative Revival” is really much more likely to be the late flowering of an on-going “Alliterative Survival.”

The second of the four essays seeks to situate William Langland’s Piers Plowman in the larger cultural context of the fourteenth century in order to offer some insight about its complex and ambiguous genre. While others have employed interart studies to analyze Piers Plowman, those efforts have been tentative and unsatisfying. It is only by finding visual parallels in the works of a so-called “expressionist” artist, the Rohan Master, that any close visual analogue can be found to the apparently disjointed, or fragmented, style of genre that William Langland employed in Piers Plowman. Here interart studies following the synchronic method dictate that William Langland and the Rohan Master share notable and defining stylistic characteristics and thematic concerns: Langland’s predilection for a spatially and temporally ambiguous world evoking a mood of
spiritual and psychic disquiet finds its visual counterpart in the spatially ambiguous illuminations of the Rohan Master in whose work figures exist in no spatial relationship to their setting nor to each other. The Rohan Master also shares with William Langland a fascination with apocalyptic themes, and the severe social and spiritual disquiet of the generations immediately following the Black Death similarly permeates the work of both these artists. In Piers Plowman and the illuminations of the Rohan Master a fascination with the solitary man suffering in anguish becomes a focal point of the work – the solitary figure of Piers in the literary work or the exaggerated and large-scale figures of a shepherd or a dying man dominating a composition in the artwork. This late medieval expressionism characterizing the style of the Rohan Master offers a convincing and powerful visual parallel for the Piers Plowman poem. With such a parallel, interart studies can offer the interpreter of this perplexing poem a wider cultural context in which to situate and understand a small, but stylistically and thematically related group of artistic efforts in the late Middle Ages. Piers Plowman is no longer a solitary work that defies definition and genre classification.

The third and fourth essays explore two questions about Milton’s visual imagination as evidenced in the epic poem, Paradise Lost. The first Milton study employs an interart approach to uncover striking parallels between Milton’s Garden of Eden and the classical landscape tradition newly formulated in Rome in the seventeenth century. The classical landscape as developed by Annibale Carracci and his followers shares with Milton’s garden both stylistic and thematic
concerns, suggesting that the poet’s pictorial imagination was forged by common
cultural forces. A comparison of Milton’s Garden of Eden to two of the gardens
from Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* reveals the startling contrasts in the
descriptive process between these two poets: Spenser’s gardens are spatially
vague and uncertain with neither specific viewer nor vantage point delineated,
Spenser uses no light effects in his descriptive repertoire, and the poet prefers
enumerating the minute details of the gardens. Milton, on the other hand,
creates a garden that is described from specified vantage points as perceived by
a dynamic and specified character, and a garden that is depicted in varying and
subtle gradations of light and shade. Milton’s garden is a garden of large masses
instead of minute details. Although this notable shift in the pictorial qualities of
Milton’s garden cannot be found in any poetic predecessors, these same pictorial
qualities can be found in classical landscape. Thematic parallels between the
two art forms can also be discerned in their shared interest in closely linking
nature and its human inhabitants in mood and appearance: Milton’s Adam and
Eve are in close harmony with the Garden of Eden in their prelapsarian state
much as the figures in a classical landscape are inextricably linked in design and
mood with the landscape in which they are situated. The classical landscape
genre also shares with Milton’s Garden of Eden a common philosophical
foundation in Arcadian thought. Interart studies can also consider the celebrated
Italian gardens of the early Seicento as additional visual analogues for Milton’s
garden, for the gardens of this era reflected the same visual and philosophical
principles as the classical landscape genre. In the light of interart investigations, Milton’s Garden of Eden can be better understood.

The final essay in this collection explores Milton’s fascination with images of light and darkness in *Paradise Lost* and suggests that Baroque artists’ innovative uses of tenebrism provide an important key to understanding Milton’s poem. The unusual handling of light and darkness is one of the most distinctive characteristics of full Baroque art, and the tenebristic paintings of Caravaggio and his many emulators use light and darkness as the primary organizing principle around which to structure their compositions. Through the exploration of these structural tenets in a tenebrist painting, striking parallels can be found with Milton’s structural principles in *Paradise Lost*. In this case, interart studies provide an investigative framework for not only drawing these structural parallels between tenebristic painting and Milton’s poem, but interart studies also lead to a greater understanding of the complexity of this imagery. As darkness fills half or more of the total physical space of a tenebrist canvas, darkness takes on an active and complex role in its suggestive power. To the tenebrist painter and to the poet Milton, darkness can be a straightforward image of Hell and evil, or darkness can describe notions about the divine and about the path of the mystic into a darkness wherein transcendental perception is heightened. As tenebristic light effects are a crucial expressive tool for Caravaggio to radically simplify his “Conversion of St. Paul” and interpret the event primarily as an internal, psychic event; so too did Milton use light and darkness to portray Satan as a “Prince of Darkness” whose inner psychic state is constantly explored. Through an interart
approach, Milton’s Satan and his entire epic can be situated into the wider cultural context of the Baroque and this period’s fascination with the power of images of light and darkness.

For the last fifteen years, interart studies have been enjoying a new currency as interdisciplinary analysis and cultural studies thrive. A number of worldwide conferences and the work of several scholars have brought interart studies to a wider group than ever before. The 1988 International Milton Symposium convened in Vallombrosa, Italy, is noteworthy: literary scholars sought to interpret a variety of topics in light of the larger context of Milton’s indebtedness to Italian and classical traditions. This conference and its collection of articles were organized broadly under the subtitles, “Contexts: Artistic, Musical,” and “Contexts: Literary, Linguistic.” From the mosaics and fresco cycles of Italy, to the opera and musical performances current in the early seventeenth century, scholars found important clues to a number of Milton’s images and references. This trend to seek a wider interdisciplinary context in which to situate Milton found its most broad-based manifestation in the International Symposium on the European Baroque held in Stony Brook, New York, in 1993. Under the aegis of the art historical stylistic term, “Baroque,” literary scholars of English, Italian, German, and Spanish literatures came together to identify and discuss stylistic and thematic issues common to the various national literatures of the seventeenth century. Louis Martz’s interart studies on Milton and the Protestant Baroque fit nicely into a symposium dedicated to cultural studies investigating the commonality of seventeenth-
century literary form and style as implied by the term “Baroque.” Literary studies found in the art historical period/style designation, “Baroque,” a term of interdisciplinary currency.

Medieval studies over the last fifteen years reveal a renewed vigor in broad-based cultural studies of which interart studies is an important part. After the early efforts of Robertson and Muscatine in the 1960’s and 70’s, Michael Klein’s 1992 work on Piers Plowman found the stylistic character of this complex poem suggestive of modern style in literature and the visual arts. Klein characterized this style as “fragmented,” but Klein’s work is especially important for its willingness to broaden his investigation beyond the limits not only of a given text and given art form but also beyond the historical period. Stylistic patterns can be crucial interpretative clues to the understanding of a text.

Murray Roston’s recent four-book chronological series exemplifies both the best of contemporary interart efforts as well as the wide ranging potential for this interart approach. From Renaissance Perspectives in Literature and the Visual Arts (1987), to Changing Perspectives in Literature and the Visual Arts 1650-1820 (1990), Victorian Contexts: Literature and the Visual Arts (1996), and Modernist Patterns in Literature and the Visual Arts (2000), Roston has injected new vitality into and established a high standard for effective interart study. These efforts usher interart activity into the new millennium and exemplify the power of literary study ranging comfortably into the discipline of art history. This approach harnesses the power of the stylistic analytical categories of thought characteristic of the art historian into the service of answering unresolved
questions in literary studies. Interart studies can be daunting in this post-modern world of ever shrinking focus and disciplinary specialization characteristic of contemporary intellectual life, but the student and scholar of literature or of art history has much to gain from investigations into the sister discipline. The four interart essays constituting this dissertation represent my effort to participate in this wider interdisciplinary activity.
Plate 1  Limbourg Brothers: “January”   The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, 1413-16.  Musée Condé, Chantilly
Plate 2  Limbourg Brothers: “May” The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, 1413-16. Musée Condé, Chantilly
Plate 4  Limbourg Brothers: “February” The Très Riches Heures of Jean, Duke of Berry, 1413-16. Musée Condé, Chantilly
Plate 11  Annibale Carracci and Domenichino, "Flight into Egypt," 1603. Galleria Doria Pamphili, Rome
Plate 14  Giorgione/Titian, “Pastoral Symphony,” c. 1508.  Louvre, Paris
Plate 15  Nicolas Poussin, “Et in Arcadia Ego,” 1650-55. Louvre, Paris
Plate 19  Caravaggio, “Calling of St. Matthew,” 1599-1600. Contarelli Chapel, S. Luigi dei Francesi, Rome
Plate 23  Rembrandt “Holy Family,” 1640. Louvre, Paris
Plate 24  Carpaccio, “Calling of St. Matthew,” 15th century, Oratorio degli Schiavoni, Venice
Plate 26 Rembrandt, "Supper at Emmaus," 1648. Statens Museum, Copenhagen
Plate 27  Rembrandt, “Supper at Emmaus,” 1648. Louvre, Paris
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