

Milton as a Royalist: 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' and His Contemporary Christmas Poems

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1

As a Christian poet, John Milton is famously known as a Protestant who supported the Commonwealth of England, reigned over by Oliver Cromwell, and opposed the kings of the House of Stuart. In fact, the poet, when he served as a foreign secretary, wrote *Eikonoklastes* (1649), defending the righteousness of the execution of Charles I. Therefore, tracing back his political statements and career after the end of the 1630s, Milton scholars have had a tendency towards criticisms emphasizing Milton was a radical since his Cambridge years. Under this trend, Milton's critical attitude toward the High Anglican Church conducted by pro-Catholic William Laud has often been discussed along with Milton's hostility to Charles I, who treated the clergyman preferentially. Scholars such as Christopher Hill, Michael Wilding, and Barbara K. Lewalski have foregrounded Milton's revolutionary characteristics.¹ For example, discussing Milton's 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', Lewalski claims Milton's opposition not only to the Laudian Church but also

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¹ See Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber, 1977); Michael Wilding, *Dragons Teeth: Literature in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Barbara K. Lewalski, 'How Radical Was the Young Milton?', in *Milton and Heresy*, ed. by Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 49-72. See also the next note.

to the House of Stuart.

Milton sets Christ's power against what Apollo the Sun-God had come to symbolize as a prominent iconographical symbol of Renaissance popes and aggressive Vatican power and as the self-chosen emblem of the Stuart kings, James I and Charles I. Many images in Milton's descriptions of the several pagan gods... register the heightened concern in 1629 over the 'popish idolatry' which Laud's steadily increasing power was seen to promote.²

It is appropriate to read the emergence of young Milton's radicalism in his early works in terms of his hatred to both idolatry and Catholicism, the latter of which he severely attacks in his early Latin poems about the Gunpowder Plot (1605).

On the contrary, recently some scholars who have revised Milton's early biography suggest his conservative, not a radical one. They emphasize the possibility that he was a pro-Caroline in the 1620s and early 30s. Thomas N. Corns indicates Milton shares many poetic tropes in his early works with contemporary Cavalier poets, for example, and places the young poet around 1630 in a royalist circle.³ Also, Corns and Gordon Campbell, in their biography of the future poet, describe a rather conservative Milton.⁴ Moreover, Anna Beer in her Milton's biography claims Milton grew up among moderate family members.

² Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton*, rev. edn (London: Blackwell, 2003), p. 48.

³ Thomas N. Corns, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity", "Upon the Circumcision", "The Passion", in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. by Thomas N. Corns (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 215-31 (pp. 228-30).

⁴ Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought* (Clarendon: Oxford, 2008).

John [Milton]'s father's involvement with the Chapel of Ease suggests that the Miltons were not an aggressively Protestant household and were comfortable within the mainstream of Laudian Church of England practice. Certainly, John's poetry from these years gives little hint of opposition to the established Church.⁵

It is true that Milton later turns against the Anglican Church, but at that time, he scarcely seems to show his reluctance to serve the institution. Furthermore, as for his royalism, Sarah Knight points out the fact that Milton's two Latin poems, 'Naturam non pati senium' and 'De idea Platonica', were written for a school event to welcome the visit of a French Ambassador to Christ's College in 1629; and there was a possibility that the poet was deeply involved 'in this royalist showcase'.⁶ As these examples show, young Milton around 1630, or when he wrote the aristocratic entertainments like *Arcades* (1633) and *A Mask Presented at the Ludlow Castle* (1634), the poet does not show his hostility to the House of Stuart.⁷

This paper mainly explores some royalist aspects of 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity. Compos'd 1629' with the discussion of its context in a manuscript named Tanner MS 466, which James Dougal Fleming has already argued.⁸ This article studies the manuscript in greater detail and complements his discussion with some examples insinuating Milton's panegyric for Stuart Kings.

⁵ Anna Beer, *Milton: Poet, Pamphleteer & Patriot* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), p. 57.

⁶ Sarah Knight, 'Royal Milton', *TLS*, 5 February 2010, p. 15.

⁷ As for an anti-protestant study on *A Mask*, see Katsuhiko Engetsu, 'A Mask: Tradition and Innovation', in *A Concise Companion to Milton*, ed. by Angelica Duran (London: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 111-27.

⁸ James Dougal Fleming, 'Composing 1629', in *Milton's Legacy*, ed. by Kristin A. Pruitt and Charles W. Durham (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2005), pp. 149-64.

Finally, it also demonstrates the possibility that one of the motifs in Milton's Ode is deeply related to praises of the newly born Charles II, reading the manuscript written by a royalist who transcribed some Christmas poems including Milton's Nativity Ode.

2

One day, a royalist opened *1645 Poems* written by Milton, who was regarded as a pamphleteer due to the fact that he had already published political articles such as *Of Reformation* (1641), *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643), *Areopagitica* (1644) and so on. The royalist would highly regard the author as a reformer who supported the Parliament and later even became a defender of regicide. With regard to Milton's biographical context, several poems in the poetical collection could be perused in a radical way in this period, as many scholars maintain, and Milton's Ode may be no exception.

However, we can read the collection of poems from the same viewpoint as the royalist would have. As Graham Parry claims, *1645 Poems* seems a very royalist book; the poet's frontispiece portrait by William Marshall 'shows us a man of indeterminate age with the air of a jaded Cavalier'.⁹ In addition, the title page tells us the names of two royalists: One is Henry Lawes, who composed music for *A Mask* included in the book, and the other is a royalist publisher, Humphrey Moseley, who wrote a dedication to the book, in which he praises Milton, comparing the new poet with Edmund Waller, a royalist poet. Readers who opened *1645 Poems* could think of its author not only as a revolutionist but also as a Cavalier poet.

There is another unexpected relation of Milton and a royalist, surrounding the poetical work. The reader mentioned in the

⁹ Graham Parry, *Seventeenth-Century Poetry: The Social Context* (London: Hutchinson, 1985), p. 188.

opening of this section is William Sancroft; he refused to accept the 'Engagement' (1649), thereby wandered abroad, but became the 79th Archbishop of Canterbury after the Restoration. The fact that the Archbishop-to-be read the Milton's poetical collection is evident because he added page numbers to his hand-written elaborate table of contents to his anthology of poems, now called Tanner MS 466 in the Bodleian Library, all of which are Christian poems (fig. 1).

Sancroft concludes his transcribed anthology with four Christmas poems celebrating Jesus's nativity. The first nativity poem is 'Caroll, Sung to His Majestie on Christmas Day. 1644' by royalist Martin Lluelyn; Next comes another royalist William Cartwright's 'On the Nativity. For the King's Music', which might have been composed by Lawes. The third piece is 'Caroll, Sung to His Majestie on Christmas Day. 1645' by Lluelyn again. Lastly, there places Milton's Nativity Ode, which also finishes the whole anthology (fig. 2).¹⁰ In order to investigate both literary receptions of the Biblical episode of Jesus's nativity in its historical context and the possibility of Milton's royalism, let us first look into the manuscript transcribed by the royalist.

In the light of Christmas poems, Cartwright's nativity poem follows the traditional pattern. Several motifs can be found such as the music of the spheres, the peace coming to the earth, incarnated little Jesus, his stable with a manger, and so on. The beginning of the poem, for example, describes the heavenly music.

Omnes Heark!

1. 'Tis the Nuptiall day of Heav'n & Earth;

¹⁰ In the table of contents, there places a chapter from Ecclesiastes at the end; but, as the page number tells, Sancroft did not think it should be the conclusion of the manuscript.

2. The Father's Marriage, & the Son's blest Birth:
3. The Spheres are given us as a Ring; that Bliss,
Which we call Grace is but the Deitie's Kiss,
Ch. And what wee now do hear blest Sprits sing,
Is but the happy Po'sie of that Ring.

(1-6) ¹¹

The celestial music, which is said to sound when Jesus was incarnated on earth, has been frequently referred to in nativity poems. Milton's Nativity Ode also refers to the heavenly music from stanza 9 to 15, like that 'such harmony alone / Could hold all Heav'n and Earth in happier union' (107-8) and 'The helmed Cherubim / And sworded Seraphim, / . . . [Harp] in loud and solemn quire' (112-15).¹² The manger where Jesus is sleeping is another common motif of Christmas poems. As Cartwright sings, '1. Blest Babel! Thy Birth makes Heaven in the Stall; / 2. And wee the Manger may Thy Altar call'. In like manner, Milton's Ode also has the manger: 'the heaven-born-child / All meanly wrapped in the rude manger lies' (30-31). This shows he certainly shares traditional poetic idioms with Cartwright.

Lluelyn's 'Caroll, Sung to His Majestie on Christmas Day, 1644', which Sancroft put on paper before Cartwright's offering, is quite unique in the way of using these traditional motifs. He also begins the carol with a description of the music of the spheres.

¹¹ All quotations of Cartwright's 'On the Nativity. For the King's Music' are from William Cartwright, *Plays and Poems*, ed. by G. Blakemore Evans (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), p. 58.

¹² All quotations of Milton's 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' are from John Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by Stella P. Revard, trans. by Lawrence Revard (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), pp. 16-27.

Hark! hark! the Spheares inciting notes!
The Orbs are Strung again.
Intelligences tune the skie;
And make their Journie Harmonie.
The Cherubims exalt their throats,
And all their Music strain:
The Angels cluster,
Their Voices muster:
And in their Severall Orders crowd,
Amaz'd to see
The Deitie.
Disguis'd and mask't in a fraile shroud.

(1-12)¹³

Although readers can confirm again the celestial music was widely employed in Yuletide poems, his carol for the savior's delivery abruptly alters its tone.

See? him a Giddy Rout hath found,
And by his Cradle past,
.....
And this descri'd, they now have bound
Him to his Manger fast:
They fixe and chain
Him to his Inne again.
His Altars sinke, his Temples ly[.]

(25-32)

¹³ All quotations of Lluelyn's carols are from Martin Lluelyn, *Men-Miracles. With Other Poems*, 2nd edn (1656), pp. 106-8. Also Tanner MS 466 is referred.

The violent acts of the 'Giddy Rout' are clearly expressed by the use of such verbs as 'bind', 'fix', and 'chain'. The crowd runs amok and never shows deference to the savior in the manger that Cartwright compares as 'Thy Altar'. In this way, Lluelyn's carol mainly puts emphasis on the ferocious rout rather than the commendation for little Jesus.

Then why is Jesus in the carol ill treated by the royalist hand? The answer is well provided when readers finally read on to the end of the poem.

Assist, assist his Rescue then,
'Gainst Sacrilegious men,
And may those dayes, that have in Clouds been spent,
Clear up, and boast both his and your ascent.

(49-52)

Although the narrator keeps using only the third pronoun to infant Jesus until the final line, the application of both the second and the third singular pronouns to the last line makes the poem's theme comprehensible. Lluelyn's most important and appealing statement to Sancroft and contemporary readers lies here; that is, the royalist poet identifies King Charles I (as the carol is titled 'His Majestie') with the infant Savior.

Then why must little Jesus be given a carol with a thoroughly brutal treatment? The hint is intimated in the year written in the title. It was the year 1644 when Cromwell's army and the King's were waging fatal combat, such as the battle of Marston Moor (2 July), that of Lostwithiel (2 August), and the fighting in Newbury (27 October), all of which led to the defeat of the royalists. Therefore, the expression, 'your ascent', explicitly denotes the poet's desire that

King Charles I may restore his throne and rule England peacefully.

The third piece in Sancroft's Christmas sequence, 'Caroll, Sung to His Majestie on Christmas Day, 1645', conveys far more grievous circumstances. The music of the spheres is no more described nor even mentioned in the song. Moreover, the intrusion on the stable where infant Jesus is lying is highlighted as well as the previous carol when an ungrateful crowd related:

But some into your Pallace gat,
And rear'd a threatening head,
Some, whom your Pastures have made fat,
And your own Cribbe hath fed.

.

The Beasts which to his cradle came,
There at his manger stood;
Not to build triumphs on his shame,
But to receive their food.

(13-22)

No one pays respect to the manger. Those who thrust themselves into the stable, namely, the court of the King, must be the Parliamentary army and are dehumanized as hungry beasts, less rational existences.

Finally, Lluelyn concludes the carol with a well-known pun in order to recognize the kingship of Charles I.

But as the Treasure in the Mine,
Is treasure still though trodde,
So in this Cloud our Sun you shine,
"And God in Flesh was God.

For God and Kings are still beyond us plac't
And Highest still, though ne're so low debas't.

(25-30)

It is true that this sun-son wordplay is too obvious and that the rhetoric of the whole carol does not seem so sophisticated. What is the most indispensable in Lluelyn's two carols, however, lies in their brief announcement of the years 1644 and 1645 suggesting critical situations. Furthermore, placed before and after Cartwright's simple carol, his unconventional nativity poems render their uniqueness and originality more outstanding. Comparing the two writers' Yuletide poems, readers as well as Sancroft would look back on peaceful days when King Charles I reigned England.

Then when did the future ecclesiastic compose his manuscript? According to L. C. Martin, the year when Sancroft wrote Tanner MS 466 in his own hand was estimated at around 1646 to 1651.¹⁴ As the page numbers in the title of contents tell, Sancroft actually transcribed each poem referring to printed matter. Due to the fact that the first Lluelyn's poetical works were published in 1651, he would probably have made the manuscript after 1651, when Sancroft had already experienced the execution of King Charles I. It would be heartbreaking to imagine that he transcribed the poems after the regicide. Thus, Sancroft's anger at the parliamentarians and ardent desire and nostalgia for the Restoration could manifest themselves in the historical context of compiling the poems.

3

Then in this sequence of Christmas poems, what role does the

¹⁴ Richard Crashaw, *The Poems: English, Latin, and Greek of Richard Crashaw*, ed. by L. C. Martin, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. lviii-lxxiii.

Milton's Ode play? There is another distinctive characteristic in Sancroft's Christmas sequence: a contrast of the three years between Llleyn's two carols and Milton's Christmas Ode (fig 3). While the years 1644 and 1645 remind readers of the unforgettably brutal acts during the Civil War, the reference to 1629 offers such peaceful days as ruled by Charles I.

1629 is the year not only of the King's untroubled government but also of the birth of the royal family's long-awaited first child. Charles I, who was crowned on 25 March 1625, was married with Henrietta Maria on 11 May in the same year. The couple could have a longed-for child in 1629, but the little life soon passed away because of the queen's miscarriage, which discouraged the king and his people looking forward to a destined King. However, the sadness was shortly replaced by the delivery of the future King Charles II on 29 May 1630.

In order to celebrate the nativity of children in the royal family, there were published several panegyric collections in 1630s. They include, for example, *Britanniae natalis* (1630), composed among Oxford circles, which commemorated the birth of Charles II, *Solis Britannici perigaem* (1633) for that of James II, *Flos Britannicus veris novissimi, filiola Carlo et Mariae nata* (1637), for that of Anne of England, though she died a premature death because of tuberculosis in 1640, etc. The first anthology includes Cartwright's debut poem, in which addressing Charles I, the poet recognizes newborn Charles II as a God's child just like contemporary Christmas poems: 'Infans dei / Verende genitor, otium logum trahat / Scepri quietum pondus, et cetra fide / Secure regna' ('The respectful begetter of a God's child, may draw long leisure, keep a royal staff's weight, reign with no care etc').¹⁵ The second example also includes Cartwright's piece, and

¹⁵ *Britanniae natalis* (1630), p. 46. Translation is mine.

the third does as well as Lluelyn's. As James Loxley puts it, several anthologies compiled by literary circles from Oxford and Cambridge University contributed to the consolidation of the royal throne.¹⁶

As Cartwright's Latin poem shows, the identification of little Charles II with Jesus is a particularly favored tendency. One obvious example is seen in Robert Herrick's 'Pastoral Upon the Birth of Charles', which is said to be written shortly before he resigned as Dean Prior. While Amintas and Amarillis, two shepherdesses talking with each other, Mirtillro comes to deliver a message from the court:

Mirt. But, dear Amintas and sweet Amarillis,
Rest but a while here, by this bank of lilies,
And lend a gentle ear to one report
The country has.

Amin. From whence ?

Amar. From whence ?

Mirt. The Court.

Three days before the shutting in of May. . .

.

Mirt. And that his birth should be more singular
At noon of day was seen a silver star,
Bright as the wise men's torch, which guided them
To God's sweet babe, when born at Bethlehem;
While golden angels (some have told to me)
Sung out his birth with heavenly minstrelsy.

(9-23)¹⁷

¹⁶ James Loxley, *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars: The Drawn Sword* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

¹⁷ Robert Herrick, *The Poems of Robert Herrick*, ed. by L. C. Martin (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 86.

Herrick also presents the music of the spheres that was universally accepted since 1630, along with a star leading the three magi to the savior.

Cartwright's Latin poem and carol share an emphasis on peace. The narrator hopes that the House of Stuart could rule England peacefully both domestically and abroad. In this sense, the idea that Christ can bring peace would appeal not only to contemporary poets but also to Sancroft. The carol that the transcriber put into his manuscript lays stress on Jesus's role as a peace harbinger.

1. Whiles Glory thus takes Flesh, & th' Heav'ns are bow'd,
 May wee not say God Comes down in a Cloud?

2. Peace dropping thus on Earth, Good will on Men,
 May wee not say that Manna falls agen?

Ch. All Wonders, we confess are his:

 But of these Wonders He the greatest is.

(7-12)

Behind the relation of Christ's birth and the coming of peace, there is a biblical prophesy of Isaiah 2.4, which proclaims all wars will end thanks to the coming of the Savior. Recording Cartwright's poem, Sancroft would express the situation in the 1630s when the Civil War had not yet broken out, while Lluelyn's two carols survey desperate and unprecedented situations befallen to the nation and the King.

In Sancroft's manuscript, Milton's Nativity Ode plays a role of putting peace into words as well as Cartwright's poem, for the word 'peace' is repeated five times throughout Milton's first English poem. The imagery is first emphasized in the third stanza. Christ 'sent down the meek-eyed Peace' (46), who 'crown'd with Olive green' (47) and 'waving wide her myrtle wand' (51), 'strikes a universall

Peace through Sea and Land' (52). The reference to olive and peace would straightforwardly remind contemporary readers not only of the biblical passage but also of Aeneas, who with his wand waving proclaims the end of the Trojan War. Moreover, they could vividly imagine such an allegorical figure of Peace as described in Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*.¹⁸

Second, the symbol is foregrounded by the use of a bird imagery royalists often employed. The description of peaceful sea with it is one example for Milton.

The Windes with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kist,
Whispering new joyes to the mild Ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While Birds of Calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.

(64-68)

As well as the personified Peace, it is not uncommon to use the imagery of halcyon, which is literarily said to derive from Aristotle, Pliny and Ovid. It should be noted that, however, the metaphor is quite political at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Expressing peace by the use of halcyon is an ordinary way to

¹⁸ Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, Padua 1611*, ed. by Stephen Orgel (New York: Garland, 1976), pp. 399-402. Also see Cesare Ripa, *Baroque and Rococo Pictorial Imagery*, ed. by Edward A. Maser (New York: Dover, 1971), p. 79. Some scholars claim 'meek-eyed Peace' conjures up the court masques. See Ann Baynes Coiro, "A ball of strife": Caroline Poetry and Royal Marriage', in *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I*, ed. by Thomas N. Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 26-46 (p. 37); Raymond B. Waddington, 'Milton among the Carolines', in *The Age of Milton: Backgrounds to Seventeenth-Century Literature*, ed. by C. A. Patrides and Raymond B. Waddington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), pp. 338-64 (p. 344).

praise of the House of Stuart for many writers.¹⁹ Richard Fanshawe, a poet born in the same year as Milton, studied in Jesus College, Cambridge and penned 'Ode Upon Occasion of His Majesties Proclamation in the yeare 1630', contrasting peaceful England with continental countries involved in the Thirty Years' War.

Onely the Island which wee sowe
(A world without the world) so farre
From present wounds, it cannot show
An ancient skarre.

White Peace (the beautifl'st of things)
Seems here her everlasting rest
To fix, and spreads her downy wings
Over the nest.

(33-40)²⁰

The connection of peace and halcyon brought to readers' mind the halcyon days of Charles I. Even before Fanshawe, poets often used the mythological bird as a symbol of tranquil sovereignty; Giles Fletcher, for instance, writes in *Christs Triumph After Death*, 'in the mid'st of Neptunes, angrie tide, / Our Britain Island, like the weedie nest / Of true Halcyon, on the waves doth lie' (part 4, stanza 21).²¹ As for Milton's Ode, Karen Edwards claims that his halcyon 'resists the

¹⁹ As for the 1630s' court poems stating 'The Halcyon Days', see C. V. Wedgwood, *Poetry and Politics under the Stuarts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), pp. 34-70.

²⁰ Richard Fanshawe, *Shorter Poems and Translationsof Richard Fanshawe*, 2 vols, ed. by Peter Davidson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), I, p. 56.

²¹ *The Works of the British Poets: With Prefaces, Biographical and Critical*, vol. 4, ed. by Robert Anderson (Arch, 1795), p. 41.

meaning that Caroline court culture had by then claimed for it'.²² If focusing on the role of the three poems with the exception of Milton's, however, readers would be confident that there is no choice but to read Milton's Ode as a praise of the House of Stuart, and in the context, the halcyon in the Ode performs the function of a panegyric as seen in the beginning of the century. Sancroft certainly knew how the bird imagery had been used in royalist poetry.

4

Sancroft's readings may be biased from a royalist viewpoint, or rather it might be assumed that the moderate royalist would turn to account the Nativity Ode by Milton, who was a necessary member of the Commonwealth. The ardent royalist juxtaposes the four Christmas poems with the period of the halcyon days and that of the Civil War. Then would it be that reading Milton's Ode as a royal genethliac was nothing but arbitrary because the title has the year 1629, not 1630 when the infant king was born?

It is possible to estimate some probabilities, however, that Milton's Ode comprises the praise of the royal birth although the title's year is not when the Charles II was born. As stated in the previous section, 1629 was the year when Henrietta Maria bore an abortive child, and also when an olive branch was offered to England and France. According to Fleming, poems circulated in 1629 inscribed the truce between the two countries achieved thanks to the abortive child.²³ That is, the future King's birth in the next year bears close ties with the child's death in the previous year. Therefore, if peace in the House of Stuart mentioned in Sancroft's writing, the year 1629 is not irrelevant to narrate the reminiscence of peace that

²² Karen Edwards, 'Milton's Reformed Animals: An Early Modern Bestiary H-K', *Milton Quarterly* 41 (2007), 79-147 (pp. 81-82).

²³ Fleming, pp. 158-59.

was destroyed during the Civil War.

The year 1629 is highly political in this sense. The year embraced in the title of Milton's Ode has been discussed, in one way, as it presents the poet's mental development from the time when he began to write the first English poem, for the Ode was placed at the beginning of *1645 Poems*. With this understanding, the poem has been considered to express Milton's premature skillfulness as a poet, like Jesus portrayed in the Ode 'lies yet in smiling infancy' (151). In contrast to such biographical reading, nevertheless, the year can be interpreted in a political way. The young poet would know how much political choosing the theme of Christ's nativity could be. Fleming explains the atmosphere of the time when Milton published his poetical collection *1645 Poems*.

It [mid-seventeenth-century Christmas poetry] is a conservative, arch-royalist, nostalgic, and reactionary; it is Laudian, ultra-Caroline, defiant, and anti-Puritan. This is the generic home of Milton's 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity'. Appearing at the bookseller's in January 1646, the poem is a flagrant mote in the eye of Puritan anti-festivalism. Given the nostalgic heading 'Compos'd 1629', it recalls the sycophantic discourse of Caroline Christmas *genethliaca*. . . .²⁴

What is 'conservative, arch-royalist, nostalgic, and reactionary' is distinguished through the juxtaposition of the titles Sancroft transcribed. The years 1644 and 1645 enhance 1629 all the more, only if each title glanced through. Though taking into consideration a royalist view, Stella P. Revard interprets the importance of the year 1629 as the time when Charles I dissolves the parliament

²⁴ Fleming, p. 155.

and began his Personal Rule, which Puritans criticized severely.²⁵ It is also possible for readers to read the poem, however, not from the standpoint of a puritan or parliamentarian, but from one who was familiar with the Anglican Church and was a supporter of the Stuarts. Thus 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity. Compos'd 1629' is a kind of a royal occasional poem like *A Mask*, which celebrates the Earl of Bridgewater's accession to President of the Council of Wales. According to the pro-Stuart reading, 1629 is a symbolic year both when a newly born child was brought and when the peaceful rule began.

Then is it possible to trace another example in the Ode that Milton himself shows sympathy with the newly born king? The hint also lies in the reference to the change in heavenly body, especially to the music of the spheres, as we have already seen. There is, however, another example concerning the heavenly change.

The star which leads the three magi in Herrick's poem is not just a story based on the Bible but also historical fact. There is documented evidence that Charles II was born on 29 May 1629, between which a solar eclipse observed on the 16th and also a lunar one on 29th of May. As we have seen, Herrick identifies the appearance of the celestial wonder in the year as that referred and observed in gospels on the time when Jesus was born. In his 'To the New-Borne Prince Upon the Apparition of a Starr, and the Following Ecclypse', Richard Corbett, a royalist poet, as well as Herrick, congratulates the event as a miracle happening at the birth of the new prince like that of Jesus.

²⁵ Stella P. Revard, *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera's Hair: The Making of the 1645 Poems* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997), p. 79.

And was't that news that made pale Cynthia run
In so great hast to intercept the Sunn;
And enviously, so shee might gaine Thy sight,
Would darken him from whome shee had her light?
Mysterious prodigies, yet sure, they bee,
Prognosticks of a rare prosperity[.]

(11-16)²⁶

Counting on the biblical reference, as Ann Baynes Coiro argues, the two court poets interpreted celestial changes as a fortunate event, the coming of a new King.²⁷

It is important to keep in mind that there are heavenly phenomena at the beginning of Milton's Ode, which would certainly remind readers of the eclipses.

VI.

The Stars with deep amaze
Stand fixt in stedfast gaze,
 Bending one way their pretious influence,
And will not take their flight,
For all the morning light,
 Or *Lucifer* that often warn'd them thence;
But in their glimmering Orbs did glow,
Untill their Lord himself bespake, and bid them go.

VII.

And though the shady gloom

²⁶ Richard Corbett, *The Poems of Richard Corbett*, ed. by J. A. W. Bennett and H. R. Trevor-Roper (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), p. 84.

²⁷ Coiro, p. 37.

Had given day her room,
The Sun himself with-held his wonted speed,
And hid his head for shame,
As his inferiour flame,
The new-enlighten'd world no more should need;
He saw a greater Sun appear
Then his bright Throne, or burning Axletree could bear.

(69-84)

Douglas Bush and A. P. Woodhouse in their commentary point out, on the one hand, that Milton follows precedent literary examples recounting the heavenly occurrence on the birth of Jesus as seen in writing of Edmund Spenser and hagiography.²⁸ On the other hand, Sancroft's reading of Milton's Ode as a 1629's occasional poem proclaiming peace brought by the House of Stuart notifies readers to read the stanzas in such a way as those of Herrick and Corbett. However, there is a contradiction between the year 1629 in the title and the year of the actual eclipses, so Milton scholars have not fairly linked the descriptions of the heavenly body in Milton's Ode with the actual celestial phenomena. This drives readers to the question whether it is possible to build up the hypothesis that Milton himself really wrote in the actual events in the Nativity Ode, like royalist poets and Sancroft, who considered the two years had unbroken continuity between the years of the birth of the abortive child and the future King.

There are two reasons why scholars have not correlated the Ode's delineation of stars and planets with the real eclipses. The first reason lies in, needless to say, the difference in years between

²⁸ Douglas Bush and A. P. Woodhouse, *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, volume 2, part 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 66-68.

the title and the real eclipses. The other is Milton's comment on the Nativity Ode found in *Elegia sexta* addressed to Charles Diodati, one of Milton's closest friends.

I sing of the peace-bringing king of heaven's seed, the lucky ages promised in sacred books, and the infant cries of God, stabled in a poor house, who inhabits the heavenly kingdoms with his father—the new star born in heaven, the throng singing in the air, the gods that instant shattered in their shrines. Indeed we gave these presents for Christ's birth, those ones dawn's first light carried to me.²⁹

The letter has been providing cogent evidence that Milton penned 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' in 1629 Christmas season, and numerous scholars accept this statement as a hard fact that he composed it in that year.

There is a reason, however, why we should reserve our judgment that the year when the poet made up the Ode should be limited only to 1629. For, as the letter tells, he comments on the Ode in the present tense and does not mention that he has completed it anywhere else. Furthermore, the Ode's description of the rainbow in stanza 15 in *1645 Poems* slightly changes in *1673 Poems*. The fact conclusively indicates he revised the poem after *1645 Poems* had published; therefore, Milton could potentially take up his pen sometimes after the Christmastide in 1629. If so, the young poet might have watched the eclipses in 1630 with a sense of wonder and celebrated the advent of the King to come. In *In Quintum Novembris* (1626), Milton certainly anticipates the rule by the House of Stuart

²⁹ Milton, pp. 182-85.

as follows, 'Arriving from the far north, pious James held Teucer's children and the wide-ranging realms of Albion's sons. . . . Peaceful, happy and rich, he sat on his new throne'.³⁰ Even after he started to write pamphlets attacking the Anglican Church in 1640s, he does not always deny the monarchy itself. Around 1629, Milton would take up the position that he is a royalist or rather try to make his first appearance as a poet by showing that he shares the same biblical episode favored by royal poets in his time.

5

The year 1629 recalls every reader during the Civil War to the halcyon days, as Sancroft's transcription convincingly demonstrates. He must have read what Fate foretells in stanza 16 in the Ode as the prophesy of the Restoration; also, he must have identified the pagan gods behind the apocalyptic imagery after stanzas 17 with the rout assaulting Jesus in Lluelyn's carols. One of the precedent models Milton follows is Virgil's *The Fourth Eclogue*, which enigmatically anticipates the birth of a savior.³¹ Just as the Latin poem was read over as a prophetic poem foretelling Jesus's birth in later years, so Milton's 'Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity' as a panegyric to the King by Sancroft, although Milton during the wartime might have thought his first English poem as a coming of a new ruler like Oliver Cromwell. According to the radical way of reading the poem by Revard, even though the year 1629 symbolically expresses the blame for dissolving the parliament, even some royalists earnestly wish for peace in England, as Corbett tells 'That Peace, rich warlick Peace, I

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 210-11.

³¹ John Martin Evans, for example, points out similarities and differences between them, though he reads Milton's Ode from the standpoint of puritan poetry. See John Martin Evans, *The Miltonic Moment* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), pp. 18-34.

meane Consent / Betweene the Closet and the Parliament' (19-20) in his 'On the Birth of Prince Charles'.³² This example does not manifest that all royalists completely approved of Charles I's Personal Rule. Thus, even though Milton held with the parliament around 1629, it has not been established that he was such a radical Protestant as he was after the late 1630s.

There is one important change in the Ode between *1645 Poems* and *1673 Poems*. The later edition does not have 'Compos'd 1629' in the title (fig 4 and 5). If Milton wanted to convey his growth as a poet through writing the year '1629' in the Ode's title arranged at the beginning of his first poetical work, he would not have needed to delete it. As Fleming puts it, Milton must have known how the representation of the nostalgic year reminded readers of the peaceful days during the Personal Rule, so he could have edited it out. Sanicroft's manuscript demonstrates that several royal poets politically employ a biblical episode of Jesus's birth, and Milton belonged to the circle sharing the traditional motif, though the meaning has been reconstructed after 1629.

³² Corbett, p. 85.

- W. Cartwright. *Conception*. p. 1.
 Dr. Donne. a Hymn to G. of Father. p. 1.
 Mr. Wotton. 2. Hymn to G. in's field. 2.
 L. Elz. On of Sacramt. 3.
 Dr B. of Trar. 4.
 Ignato. A Dialogu betw. G. of Soul. 5.
 M. Llewelin. God's love, & power. 6.
 — After Recovery fro a Fever. 6.
 J. Howell. A Hymn to G. of Trinitie. 7.
 S. Augustini Verbo. in Engl. Verse. 7.
 J. Howell. A Hymn to G. of bond of G. Name. 8.
 A. Cowley. The plague of Egypt. 9.
 — of 34 Cap. of Isaiah. 19.
 — Num. XXIV. 5-9. p. 21. Latin. 22.
 — Abraham's Sacrifice in picture. 22.
 — The Separation of Abraham & Lot in picture. 23.
 — Sodom, & Lot's Wife in picture. 23.
 — The Annunciation Luc. 1. in picture. 24.
 Mr. Wotton. The CIV. Ps. translated. 24.
 Dr. Donne. The CXXXVII. psalm. 27.
 Richd. Crathaw. V. CXXXVII. 28.
 Geo. Herbert. V. XXIII. 29.
 Ric. Crathaw. V. XXIII. 30.
 A. Cowley. V. CXIV. 32. & in Latin. p. 33.
 Jo. Milton. V. CXXXVI. 34.
 Tho. Rhoad. V. CIV. 36.
 R. Crathaw. V. 3. 37. Eccl. XII. 1-7. p. 38.
 A. Cowley. The Throw of G. 41. Latin. 42.
 — The voice of Numbers. 43.
 — The Creation. 44. Latin. 45.
 Car. Paschalis Vota. 46.
 115. Cl. paman. The Altar of praise. 47.
 Ignato. A divine Sonnet to G. 47.
 116. Dr. Alabaster. A New-year Gift to G. Saviour. 48.
 117. — upon of Crucifix. 48.
 A. Cowley. Raptus Chic. 49.
 118. Cl. paman. Jud. IX. 34-v. a Dialogu. 50.
 M. Llewelin. 2 Carols for Xpm's Day. 57. 59.
 W. Cartwright. On of Nativity. 58.
 Jo. Milton. A Hymn on X's Nativity. 60.
 Toltenarii metaphrasii Eccl. XII. 1-7. p. 38.

Ms. Tanner.

Fig 1. The table of contents in Tanner MS 466.

M. Lluelyn's 2 Carols for X^ms-day. 57. 59.
W. Cartwright. On y^e Nativity. 48.
Jo. Milton. A Hymn on X^ms Nativity. 60.
Tollerarij metaphrasis Eccl. XII. 1-7. p. 38.

Fig. 2. The table of contents in Tanner MS 466 (detail)

Caroll sung to his Majestie on
Christmas Day. 1644.
Hark! Hark! the Spheres inticing notes!
The Orbs are strong again:
Intelligences tune the Skie,
And make their founne Harmonie.

Caroll. Sung to his Ma^y on Christm^s Day. 1644.
Great Copies of this Solemn Day,
Which you transcribe afresh;
And make Afflictions y^e Array,
As God made his of Flesh.

On the Morning of Christ's Nativity. 1629.
This is the Morn^g, & this the happy Morn,
Wherein the Son of Heavens Eternal King,
Of wedded Maid, & Virgin Mother born,
Our great Redemption from above did bring:

Fig. 3. The beginning of Lluelyn's two carols and Milton's Ode.



On the morning of CHRIST'S
Nativity. Compos'd 1629.

I.

THis is the Month, and this the happy morn
Wherein the Son of Heav'n's eternal King,
Of wedded Maid, and Virgin Mother born,
Our great redemption from above did bring ;
For so the holy Sages once did sing,
That he our deadly forfeit should release,
And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.

5

Fig. 4. The title of 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' in *1645 Poems*.

ON THE
MORNING
OF
Christ's Nativity.

I.

THis is the Month, and this the happy morn
Wherein the Son of Heav'n's eternal King,
Of wedded Maid, and Virgin Mother born,
Our great Redemption from above did bring ;
For so the holy Sages once did sing,
That he our deadly forfeit should release,
And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.

5

Fig. 5. The title of 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' in *1673 Poems*.