

Milton and Toleration

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1

Introduction

Sharon Achinstein and Elizabeth Sauer

I

‘What is toleration?’ asked Voltaire, opening his article on that subject in his *Philosophical Dictionary*. There, the *philosophe* offers, not an answer, but a characterization: ‘it is the prerogative of humanity’.¹ Tolerance is the major question of Enlightenment, one that has come back to haunt our modernity that is resurgent with religious activism. This book’s central claim is that a study of the writings of John Milton can contribute to broadening our understanding not only of the history of toleration but also of the links between literature and history. A standard history of ideas approach has long hailed Milton as a hero of toleration, and it is true that Milton defended different kinds of tolerance throughout his writing life. Early writings proposing tolerance include the divorce tracts (1643–5) and *Areopagitica* (1644), where Milton advanced theological arguments with biblical examples, but also came to espouse radically heterodox views of community and personhood. Milton’s *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649) attacked the Presbyterians’ intolerance, while the *Defences of the People of England* (1651, 1654) promoted civil liberties. Serving as an official in the Cromwellian government, Milton allegedly licensed the religiously incendiary *Racovian Catechism* (1652) and other heretical

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¹ Voltaire, ‘C’est l’apanage de l’humanité’, in *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964), 362; tr. *Philosophical Dictionary*, T. Besterman (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2004), 387.

works.² Like many thinkers of his day, he promoted a philo-Hebraic cultural and literary program.³ His shorter poetry expressed outrage at the persecution of religious minorities and his Psalm translations spoke in the voice of the oppressed. Even on the eve of Restoration and facing a re-established national church, his pamphlets *Of Civil Power* and *The Likeliest Means* (1659) urged church disestablishment as a means for achieving a more inclusive political culture. The Preface to his unpublished theological treatise, *De Doctrina Christiana*, is a plea for toleration of unorthodox Christian sects and positions. In defiance of the anti-sectarian climate of the Restoration era, Milton explored and defended individual liberty of conscience in his 1673 edition of his *Poems* as well as in his major poems, *Paradise Lost* (1667, 1674), *Paradise Regained* (1671), and *Samson Agonistes* (1671) and in his final tract, *Of True Religion* (1673), espoused a broad definition of a Protestant church.

There was also an intolerant Milton. This Milton restricted his appeal to civil liberties and freedoms of the press to Protestants, with the Roman church ever vilified for its tyrannies; this Milton was largely silent on the proposed readmission of the Jews in 1655; this Milton championed Cromwell's campaign against the Roman Catholic Irish in the 1649 *Observations*; and this Milton spattered his writings across his career with anti-Catholic satire and invective.⁴ His last pamphlet, *Of True Religion*, protested against the toleration of Roman Catholics when English political leaders were considering a Catholic Indulgence. While the liberal tradition of toleration writing tends to play down this intolerant Milton, it was indeed as a Protestant that the Whig tradition hailed him as a hero. With anti-Popery and anti-priestcraft as its main pillars, Whigs saw Milton's defenses of freedom of conscience and attacks on persecution as vital to their contribution to the history of liberties of the individual, culminating in John Locke.⁵

The essays which follow, however, resist unearthing an 'intolerant' Milton at the expense of the formerly tolerant liberal one. In the early modern period, as Alexandra Walsham and others have shown, 'tolerance and intolerance are

² Stephen B. Dobranski, 'Licensing Milton's Heresy', in Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich, eds., *Milton and Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 143–4; and see Dzelzainis below.

³ See Douglas Brooks, ed., *Milton and the Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

⁴ See Don M. Wolfe, 'Limits of Miltonic Toleration', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 60 (1961), 834–46; and John Illo, 'Areopagiticus Mythic and Real', *Prose Studies* 11.1 (1998), 3–23.

⁵ See, for example, Justin Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696–1722* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 100–5; and on the construction of the 'Whig' Milton, see Nicholas von Maltzahn, 'The Whig Milton, 1667–1700', in David Armitage, Armand Himy and Quentin Skinner, eds., *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 229–53.

better seen as dialectically and symbiotically linked'.⁶ And yet, history does not run backwards: without falling into an easy determinism, one may at least say that once the printing press was in regular, widespread use, the control or dissemination of information had to take on new forms. Perhaps, even more controversially, we might say the same about concepts: once a concept like freedom of thought was espoused and made public, any subsequent battle would have to take that into account.

Some readers may be frustrated at the lack of precision about what is that 'toleration' our contributors have found in Milton. Recent historians have been helpfully clarifying about the important distinctions between toleration, tolerance, freedom of inquiry, and matters to do with ecclesiology: 'comprehension,' rather than toleration, for example.⁷ They have also explored how toleration was a tactical strategy at times rather than a point of principle.⁸ We have hoped to keep the notion of toleration sufficiently broad so as to investigate how one spectacularly sensitive and engaged author constructed visions of community, its spaces, boundaries and textures: ours is a project in the history of the imagination, not simply the reconstruction of legal, ecclesiological and social practices. Milton was a great upholder of boundaries ('fit ... though few') but he was also deeply interested, as our contributors show, in the malleability of boundaries, in the dynamics of mixed communities, and 'brotherly dissimilitudes'. We seek to show how Milton's visions of tolerance intersected with contemporary political discourse and also how they reveal deeper movements in the history of the imagination. Through this study we hope, moreover, to find how modernity's new discourses—liberty of

⁶ Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500–1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 5; and John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Harlow: Longman, 2000).

⁷ In addition to Walsham, *Charitable*, 234, see also Mark Goldie, 'The Theory of Religious Intolerance in Restoration England', 331–68; and John Dunn, 'The Claim to Freedom of Conscience: Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Thought, Freedom of Worship?' 171–93, both in Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel and Nicholas Tyacke, eds., *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Tim Harris, 'Tories and the Rule of Law in The Reign of Charles II', *The Seventeenth Century* 8.1 (1993), 9–27; John Spurr, 'England 1649–1750: Differences Contained?' in Steven N. Zwicker, ed., *English Literature 1650–1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3–32; John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁸ Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy: The Caroline Puritan Movement, 1620–1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), *passim*, and esp. 333–8; Walsham, *Charitable*, 236–7; Gary S. De Krey, *London and the Restoration, 1659–1683* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), *passim*, and esp. 116–40. On the Netherlands, see Andrew Pettegree, 'The Politics of Toleration in the Free Netherlands', in Ole Peter Grell and Robert Scribner, eds., *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 198.

conscience, natural law, equity, materialism, libertinism, rhetoric, secularism, even literature itself—created spaces for toleration. The traditional liberal account of toleration that hails 1688 as the landmark (because through it a toleration was legalized by government) is not the only way of telling the story of toleration.

In so doing, we insist on breaking down the opposition between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ that has shaped revisionist approaches to post-Reformation theology and politics. A number of recent scholars have sought to determine the actual shape of tolerance and intolerance within particular communities in early modern Europe, and their work has been invaluable to the reconstruction of the lives of people who were, at once, removed from the centres of polemic, but at the same time, those most affected by sectarian strife or concord.⁹ At times, this is an invaluable corrective to an idealizing approach; but at others, this seems to restrict understanding by setting ‘practice’ against ‘beliefs,’ actions rather than words, reality against rhetoric. Missed by those who favor functionalist accounts of social change is an explanation of choice, of intention. Throughout the historian David Cressy’s important new study, *England on Edge*, there is however an agency-less narrative: what happened was, variously: a ‘collapse’ (6, 9 and *passim*), a ‘breakdown’, ‘confusions and changes of the times’ (21), a ‘distemper’, a ‘splintering’ (9), and last, an ‘earthquake of cosmic proportions’ (424), without a clear sense of how ideas played a role in relation to these great changes.¹⁰

This rejection of principle or the obscuring of the meaning of beliefs, words, or rhetoric leaves us wondering why sectarian radicalism spread in the first place; and how the people experiencing change felt about it. Walsham points to the ‘distorting’ effects of the persecuting rhetorics: ‘speech, script and print may even have been responsible for creating mirages of dissident movements which did not in fact exist’.¹¹ We question this approach that seeks an underlying ‘reality’ beneath the ‘representations’. Along with our view, rather than rejecting these idealizing representations, the historian Ann Hughes has recently broadened our understanding of the importance of them. Persecutors like Thomas Edwards, she has shown, may have been the fabricator of nightmares, but they were also recording something real: an

⁹ For example, Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines: Confession and Community in Utrecht, 1578–1620* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); Walsham, *Charitable*.

¹⁰ David Cressy, *England on Edge: Crisis and Revolution, 1640–1642* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 6, 9, 21, 9, 424.

¹¹ Walsham, *Charitable*, 28, 27; see also J. C. Davis, *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Hughes takes a subtle approach in *Gangraena*.

awareness of pluralism and its threats to a particular, ideologically charged, vision of commonality.¹²

We think literature has something to offer. In exploring works of literature, we can gain further insight into why *these* fantasies mattered in particular; and in the works of John Milton, we hope to show, we are given a detailed and multi-layered account of the religious, political and literary landscape of the mid-seventeenth century, and a convincing case that we should care about literature and the evidence it has to offer. If some historians all too often seem to want to get behind the ‘representations’ to reach a realm of the ‘real’, our contributors demonstrate that the truth of representations is a valuable truth in itself. The images of literature, rhetoric and poetry present a kind of ‘truth’ of the past that we in the discipline of literature are uniquely skilled to explore. While in some areas of literary study, the topic of toleration seems rather old-fashioned, perhaps supplanted by an interest in ethics, ‘identity’ and ‘difference’, we consider the claims of a liberal political tradition to offer a meaningful engagement with vital—and still unresolved—aspects of human social life.¹³

Our volume resists a distinction between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ of toleration without reducing one to the other. Literary evidence is somewhere between these two poles. As the writer’s engagements with ideas form a kind of practice, as Milton insisted, reading was a kind of action in the world; indeed, discernment was one of the most fundamental actions necessary to a life of virtue and faith. In Milton’s own literary methods, furthermore, practice is indeed the only way you can know theory (or know that you don’t really know it).¹⁴ Milton’s accounts of toleration offer up a more complex picture of the practical and the theoretical, the passions, interests, reasons, than can be found in a traditional history of ideas approach or in the newer anti-intellectual revisionist approach. Milton’s vehement rhetorical style, for instance, does not simply convey ideas, but is itself a particular expressive mode. As Paul Stevens tags it below, Milton’s ‘expressive’ significance is a kind of action that, on the one hand, exceeds the pragmatic aims and, on the other, is also a mode of self-fashioning. We are led to ask about the relation between the literal

¹² Hughes’s *Gangraena* is open to the complex but important ways that representations, including literary representations, need not be set against ‘realities’, but indeed help to constitute the known.

¹³ See the important challenges to the concept of ‘tolerance’ in Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 129.

¹⁴ Though he might not put it that way, this is a claim that might follow upon Stanley Fish’s insights; see, in particular, *Is There a Text in this Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 13, 168; and *How Milton Works* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4.

violence and the rhetorical violences: to ask what are the differences between ‘speech’ and ‘action’.

We find in literature very compelling evidence for historians to use in seeking to understand how people experienced new, or painful, or liberating, ideas. Milton defends the lived experience in the real world, always measured and recalibrated to the wider purpose of serving God. With Milton we can see how closely ethics, epistemology, and personal experience are lodged; and how toleration came about as Milton ‘felt the saving power of interpretive freedom’, as Jason Rosenblatt puts it below. In this volume, we will see Milton as a reader fully engaged with the deep questions of his day, working with natural law theorists Grotius and Selden (Rosenblatt), for example, or libertine writers (Turner), to rethink his own theological commitments in light of his personal experience. With Milton’s habits of reading we can unearth a *de facto* or practical toleration of unorthodox ideas (Achinstein).

Through the history of reading, we can see how Milton’s humanist training—in the methods of Hebrew philology, legal history, classical philosophy, and, most of all, disputation and rhetoric—could lead to new modes of self-understanding and action in the world, what James Turner here provocatively calls ‘libertine reading’, the practice of willingly confronting the scandalous or the contrary. Thomas Hobbes had it right to worry that classical learning had bred a generation of rebels; but that is only part of the story of the legacy of humanism and its penchant for disputation in England. While Milton’s engagements with classical history and rhetoric were always mediated through Reformed concerns, his practical application of humanist principles could lead in strikingly original directions.¹⁵ A deeply religious thinker, Milton saw the aims of his reading as repairing the work of the Fall, as combining liberal knowledge the better to serve God’s purpose, a processual approach to knowledge as open-ended in the human realm.

But if Milton is the conveyor of Reformed humanist thought, with its communitarian and republican traditions, he is also the one to defend singularity, the non-controvertibility of individual experience. His poetry is both defense and exemplum. What tension between equity and the discrepant instance is found by Victoria Silver here to characterize the Satanic, Milton absorbs in the name of faith: faith despite the invisibility, the unseen qualities of the creator. Silver’s subtle and complex case below for Milton’s particularity gives us a reason for attending to the writings of this astonishing author. That

¹⁵ For humanist engagements with toleration, see Ingrid Creppell, *Toleration and Identity: Foundations in Early Modern Thought* (London: Routledge, 2003), 39–64, on Bodin, and 65–90, on Montaigne; Gary Remer, *Humanism and the Rhetoric of Toleration* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

emphasis on individual experience was the starting point, but also the field of action, for a whole new way of conceiving persons, their rights, their political and civic liberties. Milton's admissions of uncertainty in human and divine relations need not be seen as the scepticism that inevitably leads to toleration but rather as a means to reformulate the nature of human obligations.¹⁶

An attention to Milton helps us broaden our view outwards from the English focus of the micropolitical framework of British historians of ecclesiology and controversy.¹⁷ Although Milton's title pages insisted on his Englishness, this was because he sought a European audience, and our contributors situate Milton in that wider context. His reading of the Piedmont crisis in light of English national concerns depends upon a dialogic relation with continental developments, as Elizabeth Sauer here shows; and this international vista is not confined to the spectre of Counter-Reformation Roman Catholicism. Indeed, the lived experience of tolerance, or of multi-confessional coexistence on the continent, had led to refinements in theology, with, as Blair Worden and John Coffey have argued, believers seeking for a new ground upon which to offer the fundamentals of religion.¹⁸ Of course, it was in relation to his own domestic radical contexts—such as those presented by Thomas Corns and David Loewenstein in this volume—that Milton created his vision; but there were wider influences and a wider audience imagined for his work (Martin Dzelzainis's analysis of Milton's grappling with avant-garde Continental thought sheds light on this below). A writer at work, Milton reveals a capacity for 'rapidly synthesizing fresh positions', as Nicholas von Maltzahn states it here, and Dzelzainis shows the political processes by which his ideas emerged. While Milton at times surrendered to a knee-jerk anti-popery fear, he saw in popery not simply Roman Catholicism, but all forms of servitude, dependence, and alienation of reason, as Andrew Hadfield explains in his essay; in this, he sharply and surprisingly differed from his contemporary tolerationists, such as Vane and Williams, who had both

¹⁶ For the importance of distinguishing tolerance from scepticism, see Richard Tuck, 'Scepticism and Toleration in the Seventeenth Century', in Susan Mendus, ed., *Justifying Toleration: Conceptual and Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21–35.

¹⁷ As Jonathan Scott, *England's Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), requires that we do. See also Sharon Achinstein, 'Milton and King Charles', in Thomas Corns, ed., *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 141–61.

¹⁸ Blair Worden, 'The Question of Secularization', in Alan Houston and Steve Pincus, eds., *A Nation Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 20–40. The radically tolerationist Baptist Thomas Helwys is exemplary; see John Coffey, 'Puritanism and Liberty Revisited: The Case for Toleration in the English Revolution', *Historical Journal* 41.4 (1998), 961–85.

argued for toleration of idolators.¹⁹ His multiple commitments, along with his rhetorical and philosophical experimentation, provide a sharp corrective to those who would prefer to take Milton as a hero or anti-hero of tolerant thinking. In Milton, we shall see the contours of early modern ambivalence regarding the very nature of human society and its capacity for tolerance. His calls for tolerance are all the more engaging at a time when we see the resurgence of various fundamentalisms around the globe.

Above all, our contributors insist on a connection between toleration and heterodoxy. There is no necessary correlation, to be sure, and historians of tolerance differ in their assessments about whether the fight against persecution for religion in England was also a fight for freedom of inquiry. In his study of the origins of Enlightenment thinking, Jonathan Israel, for example, has contrasted the continental defenses with those of Britain: on the continent, arguments for tolerance moved towards freedom of thought; in Britain, he claims, they were restricted to attacks on priestcraft.²⁰ However, Margaret Jacob, with her vision of a radical enlightenment in the history of science, and more recently, Justin Champion, in his studies of later seventeenth-century heterodoxy, have sought to reconstruct the underground free-thinking traditions in Britain. Champion charts the English tradition of anti-priestcraft writing, whereby religious leaders can become true legislators with the right approach. Henry Stubbe's and Charles Blount's investigations into comparative religion offered anthropological or proto-secularist frameworks for a civil religion, rather than arguments for atheism. Champion insists that the English attacks on priestcraft preceded the French libertine tradition of freedom of thought, and should be seen as a political engagement with institutional authority.²¹ Nigel Smith's contribution below helps to situate Milton in relation to these avant-garde movements in Continental thought; and Achinstein's essay explores the presence of these international intellectual concerns in Milton's poetry.

¹⁹ Coffey, 'Puritanism and Liberty', 969.

²⁰ Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). See also Michael Hunter, 'The Problem of "Atheism" in Early Modern England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser. (1985), 135–57.

²¹ Justin Champion, *The Pillars of Priestcraft Shaken: The Church of England and its Enemies, 1660–1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); and *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696–1722* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). See also Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment: Pantheists, Freemasons and Republicans* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981). To this must be added studies of English Revolutionary radicalism, particularly Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); James Holstun, *Ehud's Dagger: Class Struggle in the English Revolution* (London: Verso, 2000); and David Wootton, 'Leveller Democracy and the Puritan Revolution', in J. H. Burns and Mark Goldie, eds., *The Cambridge History of Political Thought, 1450–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), ch. 14.

Did Milton's unorthodox views contribute to a theory of toleration? James Turner has powerfully argued that Milton's questioning of prelapsarian sexuality was unorthodox, and as William Poole has recently shown, Milton parted ways with the conservative Puritans of the Westminster Assembly over how much was lost at the Fall.²² According to Poole, in Milton's vision of the Fall, sin has not utterly depraved man; John Rogers has developed the picture of Milton's unorthodox theological commitments for an account of political radicalism. While the implications for the political theory or practice of tolerance are at present unclear, it is sure that Milton's dabbling with or full immersion in radical ideas depended upon his commitment to absolute freedom of inquiry.²³ Although scholars disagree over the extent or presence of these elements in his theology, Milton's engagement with anti-Trinitarianism or Arianism may likewise be seen in a tolerationist context, where even fundamentals of faith might surrender to inquiry.²⁴ In *Areopagitica*, Milton recalls the omnivorous reading of Moses, Daniel and Paul, biblical exemplars, who were 'skilfull in all the learning of the Ægyptians, Caldeans, and Greeks' (YP 2.507–8), giving real value to unchristian sources of learning. To this account, we must add Milton's contribution to the history of freedom of thought, particularly his *Areopagitica*, which invites the consideration of 'all kinde of knowledge whether of good or evill; the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscience be not defil'd' (YP 2.512).

²² James Grantham Turner, *One Flesh: Paradisal Marriage and Sexual Relations in the Age of Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987); William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Norman Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972); and see also Stephen Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Rachel J. Trubowitz on Milton's alleged 'monism' in 'Body Politics in *Paradise Lost*', *PMLA* 21.2 (2006), 388–404.

²³ For the political consequences of the radical vitalism in contemporary scientific discourse, see John Rogers, *Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); John Rogers, 'Milton and the Heretical Priesthood of Christ', in David Loewenstein and John Marshall, eds., *Heresy, Literature and Politics in Early Modern English Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); on Henry Stubbe, see James R. Jacob and Margaret C. Jacob, 'The Anglican Origins of Modern Science: The Metaphysical Foundations of the Whig Constitution', *Isis* 71 (1980), 251–67, esp. pp. 260–1.

²⁴ On this subject, see for example the scholarship on the theological controversies in Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana*: Maurice Kelley, *This Great Argument: A Study of Milton's 'De Doctrina Christiana' as a Gloss upon 'Paradise Lost'* [1941], *Princeton Studies in English*, 22 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1962); Stephen F. Fallon, 'Milton's Arminianism and the Authorship of *De doctrina Christiana*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 41 (1999), 103–27; John P. Rumrich, 'Milton's Arianism and Why It Matters', in Stephen B. Dobranski and John P. Rumrich, eds., *Milton and Heresy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 75–92; Balachandra Rajan, 'The Poetics of Heresy' and 'The Two Creations: *Paradise Lost* and the Treatise on *Christian Doctrine*', in Elizabeth Sauer, ed., *Milton and the Climates of Reading: Essays by Balachandra Rajan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), ch. 2, ch. 7.

With his defense of freedom of inquiry, Milton comes to arrive at a radical ethical position regarding the innocence of the conscience and the will. For God, Milton writes, 'left arbitrary the dyeting and repasting of our minds; as wherein every mature man might have to exercise his owne leading capacity' (YP 2.513). The questions so explosive to Milton—of human sexuality; of regulating marriage; of desires; of social and spiritual hierarchy—warrant a broadening of our notions of toleration. If sexual discontent can be the grounds for a struggle for freedom, as James Turner argues, then, how can the polity, marriage, and even the self be understood? In the essays to come, we shall see whether, and in what ways the narrower question of liberty of conscience or religious liberty broadens out into a wider defense of personal freedoms.

II

As the subsequent essays will also show, Milton's imaginative writings evolved in conjunction with developments in the political and religious spheres. A brief overview of the early modern history of toleration in England is in order.

In the early modern era, toleration was not synonymous with religious freedom, but rather with the concepts of 'permission' and 'endurance', a more passive version of the classical term *tolerantia*.²⁵ England's history of toleration offers no evolutionary narrative toward enlightenment and liberty. The English nation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was less advanced in its tolerationist policies and practices than France and Poland, where, as Milton himself would later acknowledge, 'Protestants enjoy ... *liberty* among Papists' of public speaking, writing, and printing more than do English Protestants in their own land (YP 8.426–7).

In England, repression of dissident religious beliefs and practices was continuous both before and after the Protestant Reformation. As Supreme

²⁵ In addition to Walsham, *Charitable*, and Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*, see: Joseph Lecler, Preface, in *Toleration and the Reformation*, trans. T. L. Westow, 2 vols. (New York: Association Press, 1960), vol. i, p. x; Cary J. Nederman and John Christian Laursen, 'Difference and Dissent: Introduction', in Cary J. Nederman and John Christian Laursen, eds., *Difference and Dissent: Theories of Tolerance in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 9–10; Cary J. Nederman and John Christian Laursen, eds., *Beyond the Persecuting Society: Religious Toleration Before the Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998); Ole Peter Grell and Roy Porter, eds., *Toleration in Enlightenment Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); G. R. Elton, 'Persecution and Toleration in the English Reformation', in W. J. Sheils, ed., *Persecution and Toleration*, Studies in Church History, 21 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 163–77.

Head of the Church of England, Henry authorized the persecution of Catholics and Anabaptists; Edward VI, ascending to the throne in 1547, brought a new campaign of zeal against Catholics, with persecution overseen by Protector Somerset; Mary's brief reign followed with persecution against Protestants, a Counter-Reformation program in line with her international alliances. The Elizabethan settlement re-established Protestantism as the state religion and, following Elizabeth's Act of Supremacy which legislated against Roman primacy, the 1559 Act of Uniformity saw the revival of the liturgy of the Edwardian Prayer Book and the establishment of a national Reformed Church; fines of one shilling were the punishment for failing to attend Protestant services; the 1581 recusancy law raised this to the extortionate sum of £20 per month. Elizabeth promoted Erastianism on the basis that, in William Cecil's words, 'the State could never be in Safety, where there was a Tolleration of two religions',²⁶ or, in her own words, 'There cannot be two religions in one State.'²⁷ The 1563 Thirty-nine Articles served as the English Church's constitution, and despite efforts to accommodate a wide range of Christian beliefs within one church, the number of people succumbing to religious persecution in her day totalled that of Protestant deaths under Mary, with prominent Catholic and Calvinist martyrs among Elizabeth's victims (Edmund Campion, Robert Parson, and Henry Barrow). Recusants and Anabaptists, for example, faced interrogations, fines, seizure of goods, imprisonment, deportation, or banishment.²⁸

While the advancement of tolerance was rarely an aim of governments in England, early political and religious history also reveals that the English people themselves frequently resented the concept and frustrated state-sponsored efforts to grant toleration. The succession of James VI of Scotland (James I) to the throne installed what many believed would be a relatively peaceful, but for Parliament distinctly uncomfortable, period of tolerance. James was favourably disposed to the Roman church and laity; and was in general known for his 'confessional bridge-building'.²⁹ At the same time, politics and public pressure conspired to force the king to take the offensive against Catholicism: in 1605 Parliament demanded the revision and enforcement of penal laws against recusants, and the Gunpowder Plot fueled the nation's outrage against popery. The following year, 1606, saw the passing of bills demanding conformity to the Established Church and outlawing adherence to Catholicism. The main threat to the English Church, however, came not from Catholics but rather

²⁶ Quoted in W. K. Jordan, *The Development of Religious Toleration in England*, 4 vols. (1932–40), 1.88.

²⁷ Lecler, *Toleration and the Reformation*, 2.355, 378.

²⁸ For a good guide to this history, see Walsham, *Charitable*, ch. 2.

²⁹ Scott, *England's Troubles*, 98–9.

from Protestant separatists, who would challenge monarchical jurisdiction, demand disestablishment, and sow the seeds of revolution.³⁰

The discontent with state power over religion intensified with the rise of Laud under Charles I, and with the imposition of the new Prayer Book in Scotland. Puritans and separatists attacked the instruments of royal and ecclesiastical power, leading to the Root and Branch Petition of 1640 and ultimately to execution of the archbishop of Canterbury and the dismantling of episcopacy. The toleration controversies of the 1640s involved Presbyterians and Erastians, who argued for unity through the establishment of a Presbyterian national church, and dissenters who opposed a state church and pressed for liberty of conscience. The outbreak of the first civil war intensified these religious disputes, challenged episcopacy, and curtailed the king's infringement on the liberties and liberty of conscience of his subjects. By the end of the civil wars, Parliament banned the Book of Common Prayer, the office of bishop was abolished, and the stage was prepared for the execution of the king.

Emerging in the 1640s and 1650s into organized groups, Levellers, Fifth Monarchists, Quakers, Diggers, and Ranters were among the radicals who professed fervent beliefs in the universality of grace and human rights that underwrote their defences of political liberty and of popular representation. For these dissenters, the time was ripe for revolutionary ecclesiastical and political programs that challenged not only the authority of the church from which it developed but also that of the state that established the church.³¹ Replacing the monarchy, the republican government frustrated rather than advanced the sectaries' causes.³² Indeed, significant legislative changes were made under the Commonwealth: the 1650 Act for the relief of religious and peaceable people was passed and statutes enforcing church attendance repealed. But the Rump's insistence on maintaining the state church through civil power undermined toleration efforts. The Protector himself assumed a range of different positions on toleration: he supported religious toleration and encouraged learning; he stimulated foreign trade; he promoted the Protestant League in 1654–5 and appealed in 1655 for warring Protestant parties 'by

³⁰ See Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1988); Kenneth Fincham, 'Clerical Conformity from Whitgift to Laud', in Peter Lake and Michael Questier, eds., *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church c. 1560–1660* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2000), 125–58, and Fincham, ed., *The Early Stuart Church: 1603–1642* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).

³¹ See Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1972) and John Coffey, 'Puritanism and Liberty Revisited', *The Historical Journal* 41.4 (1998), 961–85.

³² Blair Worden, 'Toleration and the Cromwellian Protectorate', in W. J. Sheils, ed., *Persecution and Toleration*, Studies in Church History, 21 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), 199–233; J. C. Davis, 'Religion and the Struggle for Liberty', *Historical Journal* 35 (1992), 507–30.

brotherly consent and harmony [to] unite into one' (*YP* 5.2.680); under his authority Irish Catholics were slaughtered or transplanted; he strongly condemned the atrocities committed against the Waldensians in Piedmont; he defended in theory—and occasionally in practice—a culture of dissent; he actively suppressed Catholicism in the European theater; he proposed the readmission of the Jews in the 1655 Whitehall conference; and he declared war against the Spanish. But the Cromwellian period also saw the introduction of the 1650 Blasphemy Act calculated to repress antinomians and Quakers.

If the civil war and interregnum gave rise to debates and proposals on toleration, the Restoration saw the return of forms of religious persecution, victimizing Catholics but especially Protestant sectarians.³³ The era also witnessed an eruption of controversies over conscience, extending from Parliament's imposition of the Westminster Confession on the nation in 1660, to the failures of the Dutch War and Clarendon's fall in 1667, to the disputes over the question of comprehension of dissenters. Confronted by 'a rumour abroad of some Motions or Act to be offered for Comprehension or Indulgence', the Cavalier Parliament voted on 10 February 1668 to enforce laws against nonconformists. A comprehension bill was, however, 'much desired by the greater part of the nation', reported Samuel Pepys.³⁴ Later that year, Charles was again approached about this matter, but the Commons seized the opportunity to legislate, outside of monarchic jurisdiction, adherence to the Act of Uniformity. Persecution in the Restoration became ideology and practice.³⁵

In the early years of the following decade, the crisis over toleration reached other climaxes: Charles's Declaration of Indulgence (1672) and the Popish Plots (1679–81). Shortly before the outbreak of the Second Anglo-Dutch War, in which he allied himself with France, Charles issued the 15 March 1672 Declaration of Indulgence, the first such declaration having failed a decade beforehand. Citing the futility of the twelve-year-long suppression of religious dissent, the 1672 Declaration called for the suspension of 'Penal

³³ Gary S. De Krey, 'Rethinking the Restoration: Dissenting Cases for Conscience, 1667–72', *Historical Journal* 38 (1995), 53–83; N. H. Keeble, *The Literature of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987); Douglas Lacey, *Dissent and Parliamentary Politics in England, 1661–1689: A Study in the Perpetuation and Tempering of Parliamentarianism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1969).

³⁴ Samuel Pepys, 10 February 1668, in Robert Latham and William Matthews, eds., *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, 11 vols. (London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970–83), 9.60, quoted in Elizabeth Sauer, 'Milton's *Of True Religion*, Protestant Nationhood, and the Negotiation of Liberty', *Milton Quarterly* 40.1 (2006), 5.

³⁵ On the ideology of persecution, see Goldie, 'Theory of Religious'; and Gordon Schochet, 'Samuel Parker, Religious Diversity, and the Ideology of Persecution', in Roger D. Lund, ed., *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 119–48.

Laws in matters Ecclesiastical, against whatsoever sort of Non-Conformists or Recusants'.³⁶ In the charged politico-religious climate that seethed with anti-Catholic sentiment, Charles's proposed indulgence failed. In his final original prose work, *Of True Religion, Hæresie, Schism, Toleration*—the product both of a turbulent era and of a particular moment marking a conjunction between fierce anti-Catholic agitation and a proposed indulgence for various nonconformist sects—Milton numbered among the majority in fully supporting in March 1673 the Commons' withdrawal of the Declaration. The Toleration Act of 1689 freed Protestant dissenters from penalty, though still legislated political and social exclusion; toleration of those outside the Protestant church would have to wait until the nineteenth century.

III

The study of the writings of John Milton can help us to see how these dramatic changes concerning persecution and the ideal of uniformity that were in place in Tudor and early Stuart England came about. During Milton's writing life, and in part because of his contribution, religious toleration emerged out of radical Puritanism. Milton scholars have, however, figured toleration only secondarily, instead dwelling on the intellectual contexts of Puritan radicalism, liberalism, nationalism, colonialism, (anti-)imperialism, and republicanism. The foregrounding of toleration in this book is designed to complement, supplement, but also establish a methodological departure from related studies on the subject by offering alternative ways of understanding these movements and Milton's relationship to them.³⁷ Milton has enjoyed a reputation during much of the twentieth century as a champion of liberalism, a reputation bolstered by the 'great Whig tradition', as Nicholas Tyacke characterizes it.³⁸ In histories of Puritanism, Milton 'was to enjoy easily the greatest

³⁶ *His Majesties Declaration to all his Loving Subjects, March 15th 1671/2* (London, 1671/2), 6. See also Mark Knights, *Representation and Misrepresentation in Later Stuart Britain: Partisanship and Political Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁷ Classic 'progressive' analyses include William Haller's *The Rise of Puritanism... from Thomas Cartwright to John Lilburne and John Milton* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), Haller's *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955), A. S. P. Woodhouse's *Puritanism and Liberty* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1938, 1951, 1965), and Arthur Barker's *Milton and the Puritan Dilemma* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1942).

³⁸ Nicholas Tyacke, 'The "Rise of Puritanism" and the Legalizing of Dissent, 1571–1719', in Grell, Israel, and Tyacke, eds., *From Persecution to Toleration*, 17; and see Annabel Patterson, *Early Modern Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

posthumous reputation among later liberals' and become 'the only radical Puritan tolerationist to exercise great influence in the eighteenth century'.³⁹ Recent excellent studies have offered nuanced historical recontextualizations of Milton's political and religious emphases to correct an overdetermined Whig or marxisant approach.⁴⁰ Concentrating on Milton's relationship to radical ideologies, scholars, including Nicholas von Maltzahn, David Norbrook, Nigel Smith and David Loewenstein, have recently explored the political and ecclesiological content of that shared culture, developing a formidable portrait of Milton's republicanism and liberalism but leaving the story of Milton's theories and ethics of toleration and their relation to the radical tradition yet largely untold.⁴¹ Otherwise valuable political and literary histories of Milton's republicanism tend in general to address toleration (and civic rather than religious toleration) only insofar as it functions as a subcategory of republican virtues. The vision of republican toleration, moreover, does not fit well with Milton's own views. Simone Zurbuchen has argued that early modern republican theorists were more committed to a nationally established church, in line with their emphasis on communal virtue and civic responsibility.⁴² James Harrington is illustrative here. Harrington in his *System of Politics* (1661?) supported liberty of conscience, with conscience only capable of

³⁹ Coffey, 'Puritanism and Liberty', 969, 984.

⁴⁰ Among the fine investigations situating Milton's life and work in a culture of dissent during the English revolutionary and Restoration periods are Keeble, *Literature of Nonconformity*; Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); and Nicholas McDowell, *The English Radical Imagination: Culture, Religion, and Revolution, 1630–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003). For investigations of the interrelationship of literature, polemics, and religious politics, see David Loewenstein, *Representing Revolution in Milton and his Contemporaries: Religion, Politics and Polemics in Radical Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), for the Revolutionary period; and Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) for the Restoration. See also John N. King, *Milton and Religious Controversy: Satire and Polemic in 'Paradise Lost'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Kristen Poole, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and Dobranski and Rumrich, eds., *Milton and Heresy*.

⁴¹ See David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Nicholas von Maltzahn, *Milton's 'History of Britain': Republican Historiography in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Quentin Skinner, David Armitage and Armand Himy, eds., *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Janel Mueller, 'Contextualizing Milton's Nascent Republicanism', in P. G. Stanwood, ed., *Of Poetry and Politics: New Essays on Milton and His World* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995); and Graham Parry and Joad Raymond, eds., *Milton and the Terms of Liberty* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002).

⁴² Simone Zurbuchen, 'Republicanism and Toleration', in Quentin Skinner and Martin van Gelderen, eds., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.47–72, at 53.

being protected in a democracy. However, he saw the necessity of a national religion, and excluded from public office in the state those who, for reasons of conscience, dissented from that national religion.⁴³

Tolerance is also a relatively neglected subject of studies on Milton's relationship to empire or anti-imperialism. The exploration of Milton's engagements with imperialism establishes some of the parameters of the conversation in which this book hopes to participate.⁴⁴ To the argument made by David Quint that *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are epics reinforcing and interrogating imperialism we might add an analysis of the negotiations of toleration in Milton's poetics and poetry.⁴⁵ As J. Martin Evans sees *Paradise Lost* as a register of the multiple, contesting attitudes to the colonization of the New World, we can find a model for analysing the equally controversial subject and discourses of toleration.⁴⁶ None of the scholarship on this subject, however, centres on and treats the question of toleration in a robust, thoroughgoing manner. We do not propose here to offer a unified overview of Milton and toleration but hope to open up new possibilities for present and future investigations which reassess the strengths, limits, and contradictions of Milton's position.

IV

The organization of our volume reflects the multi-dimensional approach to the question of Milton and toleration. The contributors in Part I, 'Revising Whig Accounts', resist the liberal paradigms of a chronological progression from a persecuting past to modern-day tolerationism, while reassessing Whig histories of England's leading role in developing and even exporting tolerationist principles. The contributors establish international and national religious and cultural contexts for addressing the key questions on Milton and toleration.

⁴³ James Harrington, *A System of Politics*, in J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *The Commonwealth of Oceana and A System of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 282. For theoretical analyses, see also Zurbuchen, 'Republicanism and Toleration'; and Charles Larmore, 'Liberal and Republican Conceptions of Freedom', in Daniel Weinstock and Christian Nadeau, eds., *Republicanism: History, Theory and Practice* (London: Frank Cass, 2004), 96–119.

⁴⁴ David Armitage, 'John Milton: Poet against Empire', in Armitage, Himy, and Skinner, eds., *Milton and Republicanism*, 206–25; Paul Stevens, 'Paradise Lost and the Colonial Imperative', *Milton Studies* 34 (1996), 3–21, and Balachandra Rajan and Elizabeth Sauer, eds., *Milton and the Imperial Vision* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1999).

⁴⁵ David Quint, *Epic and Empire: Politics and Generic Form from Virgil to Milton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

⁴⁶ J. Martin Evans, *Milton's Imperial Epic: 'Paradise Lost' and the Discourse of Colonization* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

At the same time, they identify some of the polemical stakes and widen the understanding of the ideologies of toleration. The approaches taken here are comparative without collapsing into polarities or binaries. At issue are Milton's engagements with elite groups, dissenting communities, and with key ideas and proponents of toleration whose arguments informed his own thinking on the subject. Nigel Smith productively locates Milton in a broad tradition of intellectual freedom of belief associated with elite groups in Europe, from which are derived Milton's understanding of religious toleration and persecution, of free will and anti-Trinitarian theology. The following three essays locate Milton in the embattled religious cultures of the day: David Loewenstein's 'Toleration and the Specter of Heresy in Milton's England' studies the scare-mongering of the pamphlet wars over religious toleration. While Loewenstein situates Milton in relation to John Goodwin and William Walwyn—two major polemical writers in the English history of toleration—Thomas Corns, in 'John Milton and Roger Williams, and the Limits of Toleration', positions Milton in relation to Williams and in the context of both the new world and the theological aims of civic reform. Advancing the argument of Milton's limited and Williams's absolute toleration which critics have generally maintained, Corns, however, explores the issue more fully, complicating the positions of these two writers on the scale of toleration in terms of their views on church polity, on the relationship between congregational independents and Presbyterianism, on millenarianism, and on questions of civic and spiritual regeneration. Milton's difference from the Whig perspective on tolerance is at the center of Nicholas von Maltzahn's piece, 'Milton, Marvell and Toleration'. This contribution scrutinizes historical accounts of liberalism in analysing questions of religious tolerance in early modern England and the importance of the subject not only for Milton but also for Marvell, whose contributions to the religious origins of the Enlightenment are situated in proximity to Milton's.

Part II, 'Philosophical and Religious Engagements', explores Milton's participation in philosophical debates about questions of toleration. In each case, contributors to Part II analyse a complex of discourses and representations underlying Milton's concept of heterodoxy, brotherly dissimilitudes, and the poetics of toleration. In turn they take toleration to its outer limits—libertinism, natural law, equity, Anti-trinitarianism—and explore the main intolerance, anti-Catholicism. Extending the narrower concerns of 'religious toleration' and the abstract language of toleration to consider the wider ramifications of defenses of freedom of thought and experience, passions, and the ethics of confrontation, James Grantham Turner's 'Libertinism and Toleration: Milton, Bruno and Aretino' applies the question of toleration to a range of erotic classics, as well as to the varied 'tractates' and 'reasons' of

religious controversy. In doing so, he advances the concept of a pan-European movement towards freedom of thought, with a provocative investigation of sexuality as the core of libertine philosophy. Jason Rosenblatt's 'Milton, Natural Law, and Toleration' enhances our understanding of the natural law tradition as well as explaining the significance of Milton's engagement with theorists from Grotius to Selden, Pufendorf, Locke, and Barbeyrac to account for the transformation that occurs between Milton's antiprelatical tracts that 'apotheosize the spiritual aristocrats of the reformation' and the treatises on divorce which emphasize commonality and toleration. Victoria Silver develops the links between epistemology and theology in her essay, "'A Taken Scandal not a Given": Milton's Equitable Grounds of Toleration'. Legal theory, Montaigne, and the extensive treatment of Milton's *Of Civil Power* combine to make a powerful and original case for assessing Milton on questions of equity and toleration, and offer a philosophically nuanced account that challenges as well as complements some of the volume's historicist offerings. Martin Dzelzainis's 'Milton and Antitrinitarianism' explores the outer limit of religious tolerance Milton embraces within reformed Christianity, exploring the political conditions that expose the dimensions of his intellectual engagement with antitrinitarianism. The chapter posits an earlier (mid-1640s) date for Milton's heretical antitrinitarianism, on the basis of his knowledge of religious controversies in Geneva and Poland. Andrew Hadfield's essay on Milton and Catholicism offers an overview of the central intolerance in Milton's writing life: popery, seen less as a political threat than a threat to philosophical freedom.

Milton and Toleration seeks to understand the literary means by which tolerance was questioned, observed, and became an object of meditation. Part III in particular addresses the vital role of literary evidence in a study of toleration. How do the poet, the polemicist, the rhetorician intervene in the debate on the subject? The essays here examine how representations and discourses of toleration figure in the field of the literary, which includes Milton's prose as well as poetry, and how imaginative literature can help enrich our understanding of the engagement with cultural, religious, and ethnic difference. Elizabeth Sauer uses 'Sonnet XV' and the literature on the Irish crisis to investigate the ways that toleration and imperialism operated side by side in Cromwellian England and were integral to the Interregnum government's mission to advance a nationalist agenda. Sharon Achinstein looks for evidence of toleration thinking in the great epics, exploring the contrast between Milton's philosophical commitment to free inquiry and his literary methods of forcing confrontation of different faiths. Paul Stevens's 'Intolerance and the Virtues of Sacred Vehemence' develops these content-based approaches to offer a different vantage point: his historically particular

analysis of Milton's language depends on a distinction between the expressive and the pragmatic functions of the rhetoric of violence, and the defense of emotional, affective rhetoric. This wide-ranging study asks how the bloody nature of Milton's anti-persecution rhetoric is ultimately modulated into a less vehement, more moderate anti-persecution discourse. Our final two essays explore the impact of Milton for later readers as they stretched the outer bounds of tolerance. Lana Cable examines the republican tradition, arguing that a rising secularism led to new concepts of individual agency and virtue, mediated through the poetry of John Milton for later readers. Gerald MacLean, in assessing Arab-Islamic responses to Milton that have focused on the character of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, shows that Milton's unorthodox treatment of ancient sources made him attractive to a variety of Muslim thinkers who recognized in Milton's poetry an attitude toward religious toleration remarkably in line with their own traditions. The viewpoint of the other, which is so crucial in addressing questions of toleration, offers intriguing insights into self constructions generally and the literature—and silences—of Milton and Muslims in particular. The history of Arab-Islamic critical response to Milton is the history of attempts by academics, writers, critics and poets, to make Milton their own. The final section explores, then, a poetics of tolerance, seeing in Milton's work not simply a preoccupation with religious difference, but a literary means of representing and, in many ways, participating in the acceptance of difference.