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**REWRITING DESIRE: MILTON AND THE LATIN LOVE ELEGY**

**by**

**LESLIE H. HODGES**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in  
The Department of English  
to  
The School of Graduate Studies  
of  
The University of Alabama in Huntsville**

**HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA**

**2012**

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Submitted by Leslie H. Hodges in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English and accepted on behalf of the Faculty of the School of Graduate Studies by the thesis committee.

We, the undersigned members of the Graduate Faculty of The University of Alabama in Huntsville, certify that we have advised and/or supervised the candidate on the work described in this thesis. We further certify that we have reviewed the thesis manuscript and approve it in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English.

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**ABSTRACT**  
The School of Graduate Studies  
The University of Alabama in Huntsville

Degree Master of Arts College/Dept. English.

Name of Candidate Leslie H. Hodges.

Title Rewriting Desire: Milton and the Latin Love Elegy.

When John Milton includes his Latin elegies as a part of the 1645 publication of his early verse, he knowingly enters into the rich tradition of Latin elegiac love poetry. However, even as Milton embraces this tradition, he resists fully engaging in the blatant eroticism associated with the works of his ancient predecessors. Demonstrating a marked wariness of physical love, Milton rewrites the love elegy into a form better suited to his more virtuous agenda. In his Latin amatory verse, Milton accomplishes this by both employing the Renaissance May Day/spring poem tradition and carefully establishing physical distance between the poems' speakers and the possibility of fulfilled desire. The result is a collection of Latin love poems that demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the conflict between physical desire and virtue, a subject that Milton continues to develop throughout his later works.

Abstract Approval: Committee Chair

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## CHAPTER I

### Milton the “Smooth Elegiac” Poet

John Milton’s initial foray into amatory verse occurs in the Latin elegiac couplets written in his early youth and during his time at university. The choice of language is unsurprising given both the tradition of Latin love verse and the intellectual climate of the late Renaissance. Milton was educated and wrote during a time when Latin was still the language of academia and authority. The preeminence of Latin in intellectual circles was fostered early in academic life, when students were encouraged to imitate their Latin predecessors in composition exercises. “*Carmina Elegiaca*,” a work unpublished by Milton himself, but written while the poet was in his mid-teens, is an example of such an exercise.<sup>1</sup> In *Of Education*, Milton criticizes the imitation approach to composition as a “preposterous exaction, forcing the empty wits of children to compose themes, verses and orations, which are the acts of ripest judgment and the final work of a head filled by long reading and observing with elegant maxims and copious invention” (631). Yet Milton’s elegies show very little emptiness of wit, despite some claims that they “try for more than they achieve” (Shawcross 349). Rather, a close look at Milton’s Latin love poetry reveals a poet not only aware of the tradition in which he writes, but also willing to engage that tradition on his own terms. Milton successfully limits the amorous potential of his Latin

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas Bush identifies “*Carmina Elegiaca*” as a school exercise written by Milton during his final years at St. Paul’s School, making Milton fifteen or sixteen when he composed this poem. See Bush 333.



love elegies by incorporating the nature-centric approach of the May Day/spring song tradition and by carefully constructing a sense of physical distance between his speaker and the potential for fulfilled desire. The product is a skillful manipulation of Latin elegiac form and subject matter that subverts the erotic force of its predecessors in favor for a more virtuous representation of love and desire. Although the Latin elegies themselves never offer direct statements about virtue and erotic love — this will come later, beginning with the Italian sonnets and culminating in *Paradise Lost* — the love elegies represent Milton's first steps in exploring the complex relationship between morality and sex, a subject that he returns to continually throughout his career.

#### *A Poet of "Both English and Latin"*

When considering Milton's early love elegies, it is important to investigate what Milton tries for when he chooses not only to write in Latin, but also to include his seven Latin elegies in a later publication of poems written in Latin, Italian, English, and Greek. In 1645, Milton published *Poems of Mr. John Milton, Both English and Latin, Compos'd at several times*.<sup>2</sup> Included in this edition is the majority of Milton's Latin poetry, including the four amatory elegies that are the main topic of this study. James Holly Hanford and James G. Taaffe sense a certain pride on Milton's part, a desire to demonstrate "his youthful poetic promise," in Milton's publication of *Poems* (105). The manner of the collection's presentation does bespeak a certain amount of posturing on Milton's part, but this posturing has more to do with identifying Milton as a Latin poet than with proclaiming his young genius. Both John K. Hale and Estelle Haan note the

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<sup>2</sup> Title-page of the 1645 edition of *Poems* as published in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*. See Hughes 2.

significance of Milton's inclusion of "Both English and Latin" to the title page, in what Hale calls "a proclamation of language-flair" (*Milton's Languages* 20).<sup>3</sup> As Hale later points out, the edition is actually multi-lingual, including verses in Italian and Greek alongside the Latin and English (21). Yet in the dramatic moment of the title page, where Milton could have added to his genius by owning poems in four different languages, Milton claims only Latin in addition to his native English. Milton's choice to mark himself as a Latin poet by publication and title shows that he recognizes the power that Latin had to connect the author to active European literary circles as well as a vast tradition of Latin poets.

In the late seventeenth century, the knowledge of Latin was integral to a scholar's ability to be known beyond his immediate environment. As Walter MacKellar observes, "He who wrote in the dialect of his own city could be but imperfectly understood in a city a hundred miles away; he who wrote in Latin wrote not only for his own city but for the world, *urbi et orbi*" (3). Milton shares this very sentiment in *Epitaphium Damonis*, where he writes, notably, in Latin:

O mihi tum si vita supersit,  
 Tu procul annosa pendebis fistula pinu  
 Multum oblita mihi, aut patriis mutata camoenis  
 Brittonicum strides, quid enim? omnia non licet uni  
 Non sperasse uni licet omnia, mi satis ampla  
 Merces, et mihi grande decus (sim ignotus in aevum  
 Tum licet, externo penitusque inglorius orbi)  
 Si me flava comas legat Usa, et potor Alauni  
 Vorticibusque frequens Abra, et nemus omne Treantae,  
 Et Thamesis meus ante omnes, et fusca metallis  
 Tamara, et extremis me discant Orcades undis. (168-78)

Oh, if there is life left for me, you, my old pipe, will hang on a distant tree,  
 much forgotten to me, or, changed by native muses, you will grate out  
 British sounds. Why not? Not everything can be granted to one man;

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<sup>3</sup> See Hale, *Milton's Languages*, 20-23; and Haan, "Both English and Latin," 685-86.

such a thing can't even be hoped for. It would be a great enough reward for me, a great honor as well (then making it acceptable that I be unknown for all time and utterly insignificant in foreign circles) if fair-haired Usa would read me, and the dweller by the Alan, and the Humber, often swirling with whirlpools, and every woodland in Trent, and — above all others — my Thames, and the Tamar, dark with metals, and if the Orkneys in their faraway waters would come to know me.<sup>4</sup>

There is some scholarly discord on how this passage should be interpreted. Some critics, such as MacKellar and Hale, view this passage as what Hale calls a “moment of turning away from Latin” (Hale, *Milton's Languages* 61). MacKellar goes as far as to translate the meaning of lines 169-71 as “I shall abandon Latin for English” (347). Although Milton's production of Latin works does decrease dramatically after *Epitaphium Damonis*, this passage signifies more than a simple dismissal of the language. The poet's claim that it would be enough to be known in English lands, extending only so far as into Scotland (the Orkneys), is suspect, particularly considering the parenthesized reminder that this limitation would mean the poet-speaker will remain “ignotus in aevum” (“unknown for all time” 173) and “externo penitusque inglorius orbi” (“utterly insignificant in foreign circles” 174). Even as he dismisses the need for notoriety, his hyperbolic language reiterates the direness of remaining unknown. It is important to note that this state of obscurity is directly connected to the poet's work being “patriis mutata camoenis” (“changed by native muses” 170). It is only as a translated work, when the poem “Brittonicum strides” (“will grate out British sounds” 171), that poem and poet become unknown and uncelebrated. The poet's use of the verb “stridere,” meaning “to make or utter any harsh, shrill, hissing, whistling, grating, or creaking sound,” only adds to the negative representation of limits of the English language (“strido”). Adding to the

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<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Latin translations are my own. My translations are as literal as possible, while still maintaining readability in English. This translation owes some credit to John Carey's explanation of the Latinized river and place names in this passage. See Carey 280.

conflicting nature of the poet's patriotic bid is the fact that even as he claims to embrace the possibility that his work will only be known in translation, he still writes his epitaph in Latin, not English. Milton struggles with the confines of his vernacular at the same time that he claims it, and the limited notoriety that it affords is enough to satisfy him. Reducing these lines, as MacKellar does, to a simple declarative statement ignores the contradictory tone of the poet's words. The poet's reminder of how much he would be giving up should his work be known only in his native tongue reads less as an embrace of his native language than as a recognition of English's limitations.

Writing in Latin provided more benefits than that of an extended audience, for the language itself tied the author to a long tradition of artists and scholars working within the same language. Douglas Bush suggests Milton was very conscious of his role as successor to the European tradition of great thinkers and writers and notes the importance of Latin in Milton's development: "when Milton did, proudly, gain a European hearing, it was through his controversial Latin prose" (4-5). Likewise, Haan indicates that "it was mainly as a Latin poet that [Milton] promoted himself among the Italian litterati" ("Both English and Latin" 683). Milton actively aligned himself with the rich tradition of Latin poets, dating back to such ancient Roman poets as Ovid, who would continue to influence Milton's writing throughout his career.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The evidence of Ovid's influence on Milton is the subject of a great amount of scholarship. See, for example, DuRocher, *Milton and Ovid*; Revard, "Milton's Dialogue with Ovid"; and Hale, "Milton Playing with Ovid." This thesis will focus less on attempting to prove Ovid's influence and more on how Milton's amatory verse departs from Ovid as well as the significance of these departures.

*The 1645 Latin Poems*

Since its publication in 1645, Milton's Latin poetry has been both dismissed and defended, sometimes in the same breath. For instance, Samuel Johnson writes:

The Latin pieces are lusciously elegant; but the delight which they afford is rather by the exquisite imitation of the ancient writers, by the purity of the diction, and the harmony of the numbers, than by any power of invention or vigour of sentiment. (698)

The majority of modern scholarship, however, disagrees with Johnson's critique, seeing innovation rather than imitation. Richard J. DuRocher terms this innovation "paradigmatic imitation," with Milton's ancient predecessors serving as "respected precedents ... requiring [Milton's] inventive and not apish adaptation" (*Milton Among the Romans* 24). Likewise, many modern Milton scholars note the presence of emotion in the Latin poems, instead of a lack of sentiment. Bush states: "It is a commonplace that [Milton] revealed his own feelings much more fully and intimately in his early Latin than in his early English poems" (9). Gordon Teskey calls the Latin poems "Milton's singing school ... a training ground," where the poet "began to take account of the range of his poetic gifts and to open to himself the depths of his own mind" (9-10). Teskey's approach to the Latin poems is reminiscent of Tillyard's early defense of the poems' worth to scholarship: "they are in integral part of Milton's works, and therefore must be studied when we trace the growth of the poet's mind" (16). The Latin love elegies certainly represent Milton's first step toward erotic love, a subject that he continues to address and develop throughout his career. Within this "training ground," Milton's treatment of physical desire hints at what is to come in his later works. Eventually, Milton addresses the subject of erotic love more directly and with a clear purpose, as in

*Paradise Lost*, when Raphael warns Adam:

In loving thou dost well, in passion not,  
Wherein true love consists not. Love refines  
The thoughts and heart enlarges, hath his seat  
In reason and is judicious, is the scale  
By which to Heav'nly love thou may'st ascend,  
Not sunk in carnal pleasure, for which cause  
Among the beasts no mate for thee was found. (8.588-94)

The distrust of passion, of a love that is grounded in physical desire, is an unmistakable part of Milton's love verse that finds its roots in the early Latin elegies. His treatment of erotic love in "Carmina Elegiaca," *Elegia prima*, *Elegia septima*, *Elegia quinta*. In *adventum veris*, *Elegia sexta*, and even in his later retraction, "Haec ego mente..." reveals a marked wariness towards desire.<sup>6</sup> His manipulation of form and subject matter, though, proves that Milton lacks neither vigor nor sentiment as he joins in the ranks of Latin poets.

### *Milton and the Amatory Elegy*

In his *Apology for Smectymnuus*, Milton writes of his admiration and imitation of the "smooth elegiac poets" as a student, noting that it was in the subject matter and poetic skill of these elegists that he found imitation "most easy and most agreeable" (693). It has long been accepted by critics that Milton here refers to the elegiac poets of ancient Rome, including, but not limited to Tibullus, Propertius, Catullus, and, of course, Ovid.<sup>7</sup> These poets represent a change in the form of elegiac verse. In early ancient times, both

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<sup>6</sup> I have chosen to list the Latin elegies chronologically, following Carey's model in *Milton: The Complete Minor Poems*. However, at times throughout this thesis, I group the love elegies according to similarities in content and form.

<sup>7</sup> For more on Ovid's influence in Milton's works, see DuRocher, *Milton and Ovid*; Hale, "Milton Playing with Ovid"; and Revard, "Milton's Dialogue with Ovid: The Case for the Amatoria." For more on the influence of Propertius and Catullus, see Striar. For a thorough account of Milton's many influences in regard to love poetry, see Revard, *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera's Hair*.

Greek and Roman poets used elegiac meter — couplets composed of one line of dactylic hexameter followed by one line of pentameter — to write about a wide range of topics, including war, political philosophy, lament, commemoration, and amatory complaints. Although diversity of subject matter continues to be a significant feature of the elegy, elegiac poetry became more and more associated with the topic of love during the time that Milton’s “smooth elegiac poets” wrote (Sacks 2-3). *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*’s explanation of the Augustan age elegy is helpful in defining the genre more clearly:

In particular, by early Augustan times elegy emerges as the medium for cycles of first-person (‘subjective’) poems describing the tribulations, mostly erotic, of a male poet who figuratively enslaves himself to a single (pseudonymous) mistress, distances himself from the duties associated with public life, and varies his urban *mise en scène* with escapist appeals to other worlds, mythological (Propertius, Ovid) or rural (Tibullus).  
(“Elegiac poetry, Latin”)

This definition is particularly significant when contrasted to the tamed eroticism and distanced lover of Milton’s elegies. When, in *The Apology for Smectymnuus*, Milton speaks of the elegiac poets that he most loved to imitate, he is talking about the very same poetry this definition describes. Yet when Milton acknowledges the influence of the “smooth elegiac poets,” he also acknowledges his own, more virtuous approach to the love elegy:

I thought with myself by every instinct and presage of nature, which is not wont to be false, that what emboldened them to this task, might with such diligence as they used embolden me; and that what judgment, wit, or elegance was my share, would herein best appear, and best value itself, by how much more wisely, and with more love of virtue I should choose (let rude ears be absent) the object of not unlike praises. (*Apology* 693)

In Milton's amatory elegies, this "love of virtue" prevents a true imitation of the Roman love elegists. But Milton embraces both form and subject matter, offering his own version of the Latin love elegy in a complex blending of virtue and the erotic.

Like the Augustan age, the Renaissance witnessed a shift in the primary subject matter of elegiac verse. According to Morton W. Bloomfield, Renaissance elegies focused more on "lamentation rather than wooing" (152). Two of Milton's Latin elegies certainly fit this mold,<sup>8</sup> as do several of Milton's English verses.<sup>9</sup> However, the majority of Milton's Latin elegies are amatory in some way, indicating the poet's determination to write not just as an elegist, but as a love elegist. The ways in which Milton addresses the subject of love differ throughout his love elegies. At times, Milton approaches the topic of physical desire directly, as is the case with *Elegia septima*, an account of the speaker's fall to Cupid. At other times, such as in "Carmina Elegiaca" and *Elegia quinta*, love is couched within a celebration of spring. *Elegia prima* and *Elegia sexta*, both epistolary in style and addressed to Diodati, include the topic of love both directly (the speaker of *Elegia prima* admires and celebrates the female form) and indirectly (the speaker in *Elegia sexta* broaches the topic of love by disavowing the love elegy tradition). Like *Elegia sexta*, Milton's retraction to his 1645 *Poems*, "Haec ego mente..." is amatory in that it is anti-amatory, and suspiciously so. Hale explains that the "recantation is itself Ovidian, since Ovid has many such 'codas,' passages in elegiac meter but of the length of epigram which round off and revise or recant the longer elegiac poem preceding" ("Milton Playing" 16). Even when Milton appears to reject it then, he is in fact engaging

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<sup>8</sup> *Elegia secunda*. In *Obitum Praeconis Academici Cantabrigiensis* and *Elegia tertia*. In *Obitum Praesulis Wintoniensis* are both laments written upon the deaths of Cambridge Beadle Richard Ridding and Bishop of Winchester Lancelot Andrews, respectively (Carey 25, 50).

<sup>9</sup> Bloomfield lists Milton's *Lycidas* and *Il Penseroso* as the culmination of the early and mid-seventeenth century elegy tradition (152-53).



in the Latin love elegy tradition. His borrowing of the form (even Ovid's stylistic "recantation"), and his consistent return to the topic of physical love in the Latin elegies suggest that Milton is as driven to explore the topic and tradition of erotic love poetry as he is to redefine it in his own terms.

Milton's awareness of the tie between elegiac verse form and the love poetry tradition is evident in *Elegia sexta*, where he writes to Charles Diodati:

Carmine scire velis quam te redamemque colamque,  
Crede mihi vix hoc carmine scire queas.  
Nam neque noster amor modulis includitur arctis,  
Nec venit ad claudos integer ipse pedes. (5-8)

Through my poem, you might wish to know how much I cherish you and love you in return. You could hardly be able to know that from this poem. For neither is my love confined in these brief measures, nor does it come uninjured on limping feet.

Milton's description of the "claudos pedes," or "limping feet," which Carey rightly interprets to mean elegiac couplets, comes directly from Ovid (121). In his *Amores* 1.1, Ovid explains his use of elegiac meter — and thus his work's amatory subject matter — by relating the poet's conflict with Cupid:

Arma gravi numero violentaque bella parabam  
edere, materia conveniente modis.  
par erat inferior versus; risisse Cupido  
dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem. (1-4)

I had prepared to produce arms and violent wars in grave measure, the meter fitting to my subject. The lower verse was on even footing, but they say that Cupid laughed and stole one of my feet.

Ovid claims that the original subject matter of his work was arms and war, in the manner of Virgil's *Aeneid*. However, Cupid interrupts the poet's work by stealing a "pedem" (4), here meaning a poetic foot. Cupid's theft changes Ovid's verse from dactylic hexameter, a mode fitting the grave subject of war, to elegiac couplets. Ovid goes on to describe the

subject matter that suits this new meter as he complains to Cupid: “nec mihi materia est numeris levioribus apta, / aut puer aut longas compta puella comas” (“nor do I have fitting material for this lighter meter: a boy or a girl decked with long hair 19-20”). When Milton describes his own feet (his “pedes” [8] are the plural of Ovid’s “pedem” [4]) as “claudos” (8), or “limping,” he engages in the amatory elegy tradition, borrowing the limitations that Ovid has placed upon the form. Milton’s complaint about the elegy’s restrictions mirrors Ovid’s. Milton’s friendship, like Ovid’s wars, is a topic too great to be contained within a meter better suited to tell a frivolous love story.

Certainly, both Ovid and Milton are playing with form in these lines. Ovid’s *Amores* are hardly simple stories about a boy and a girl. Milton’s claim that “I care about you more than these words, in this meter, can say” is in itself a roundabout statement of love, related in the very meter he deems inadequate for such a task. Hale suggests that the elegy suits the kind of creative manipulation that both poets demonstrate: “in elegiac [poetry] we read for straightforward pleasures like sprightly puzzle-solving and self-renewing inventive play (“Milton Playing” 17). In *The Apology for Smectymnuus*, Milton justifies his early fascination with the Roman elegists by insisting the appeal of these works lay in the poets’ skill rather than subject matter (693). Therefore, Milton’s imitation of these poets is steeped in a desire to develop his own skills further as a poet, and then, in turn, to use his own judgment, wit, and elegance to infuse virtue into a tradition that often celebrated “high perfections” that were less than virtuous. When Milton “plays” (to use Hale’s term [“Milton Playing” 3] ) with the Latin love elegy, incorporating the Renaissance May Day poem into the form of the elegy and creating physical distance between his speakers and their desire, he dampens the erotic force of

his ancient predecessors. The result is “not unlike” the work of the “smooth elegiac poets,” but it is unlike enough to warrant further investigation into the ways that Milton changes the Latin love elegy tradition to suit his more virtuous agenda.

## CHAPTER II

### The Form Transformed: Milton's Love Elegy and the May Day Tradition

Of Milton's six Latin elegies that could be categorized as amatory or having amatory elements,<sup>10</sup> all but two make some reference to spring or the month of May. Leicester Bradner stresses the popularity of the May Day poem in the Renaissance (particularly for students) and indicates the appeal that this form held for Milton: "Here it was proper and traditional to emphasize the manifestations of young love without any of the moral obliquity which he recognized in Ovid" (112). Milton produces May Day poems in both Latin and English. The English poems, "O nightingale" and "Song. On May Morning," are short and lack the sensual tone of their Latin counterparts. Both poems do recognize the month of May as the time for love and lovers. "Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill, / While the jolly hours lead on propitious May," the speaker of "Oh nightingale" proclaims (3-4). Likewise, the speaker of "Song. On May Morning" salutes the spring: "Hail bounteous May that dost inspire / Mirth and youth and warm desire" (5-6). However, Milton's Latin elegies do more than simply state that May is the time for lovers; they express this idea through varying lush images of desire and sex. Hanford and Taaffe posit that Milton used Latin to express himself in a more personal way and to "indulge the sensuous side of his nature more freely than he could

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<sup>10</sup> As argued above, these amatory elegies include "Carmina Elegiaca," *Elegia prima*, *Elegia quinta*, *Elegia sexta*, *Elegia septima*, and "Haec ego mente..."

have in English” (109). This claim certainly seems applicable to Milton’s May Day poems. Nevertheless, it could just as easily be argued that the traditions that Milton engages in, as well as the language itself, are responsible for Milton’s increased sensuality. When Milton combines the amatory elegy with the May Day poem, he creates the opportunity for movement between both forms, drawing on the earthy sensuousness of nature as he explores the subject of physical desire. He combines the two forms in two distinct ways: first, by establishing springtime as Love’s domain, and second, by substituting nature at particularly erotic moments. The resulting product is a heady mingling of nature and desire that tempts the reader with the promise of physical passion even as it avoids becoming blatantly sexual.

*Spring as the Time for Love: The Meeting of Two Traditions*

Milton’s love elegies each use spring both as the poem’s setting and as the marked domain of love, excepting *Elegia sexta* and “Haec ego mente...” As will be discussed later, *Elegia sexta* and “Haec ego mente...,” as anti-love poems, are also anti-spring, although springtime still lingers within the poet’s lines. However, in “Carmina Elegiaca,” *Elegia prima*, *Elegia septima*, and *Elegia quinta*, Milton overtly establishes springtime as the time for love. In “Carmina Elegiaca” and *Elegia quinta. In adventum veris*, spring is not only the poem’s occasion; it is also the poem’s main topic. It is the coming of spring, evident in the return of birds and flowers to the fields, that prompts the speaker of “Carmina Elegiaca” to urge his listener to “Surge” (“Get up!” 1) and join in the renewed beauty of nature. Love is not conspicuous in this poem, but is hinted at by the presence of the bed and by the speaker’s reference to Flora and Philomela (as the

nightingale). By contrast, there is nothing subtle about the presence of love in *Elegia septima*. The poem is filled with highly sexual representations of the Earth and Apollo, as well as a lusty cast of mythological figures. Since the poem's title, "In adventum veris" ("On the coming of spring"), declares it to be a spring song, the tie between spring and love, particularly physical desire, appears clear.

In contradistinction to "Carmina Elegiaca and *Elegia quinta*, May/spring is only mentioned in *Elegia prima* and *Elegia septima* when the poet sets the stage for the story he relates. *Elegia prima*, epistolary in style, begins as a detail of what the young poet has been doing while away from school. The poem's 92 lines are divided exactly in half by a shift in topic and tone. The first 46 lines celebrate the poet's "vacuum curis otia grata" ("carefree, empty leisure" 18) and describe his experiences at the theater. Line 47 marks a turn towards a more amatory tone, as the poet portrays a girl-watching scene and argues for the superior beauty of "virginibus ... Britannis" ("British girls" 71). Milton cleverly links both halves of the poem together by evoking Ovid midway through each section.<sup>11</sup> The first mention of Ovid occurs in what Barbara Lewalski calls a "witty cross-comparison between Ovid's unhappy exile from Rome at Tomis ... and Milton's delightful exile from Cambridge to London" (22). The poet exclaims: "O utinam vates nunquam graviora tulisset / Ille Tomitano flebilis exul agro" ("Oh! if only the poor poet exiled to Tomitan land had never borne more burdensome things" 21-22). Here Milton refers to the Ovid of the *Tristia*, the exiled Ovid, writer of lamentations. But in the second half of the poem, the poet mentions an altogether different Ovid.

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<sup>11</sup> Ovid is first mentioned in line 21 of the first section, just short of the halfway mark of the first 46 lines. The second reference to Ovid, occurring at line 23, is exactly halfway through the second section.

When Ovid shows up again in *Elegia prima*, he is not lamented but dismissed: “Nec Pompeianas Tarpeia Musa columnas / Iactet, et Ausoniis plena theatra stolis” (“Let not the Tarpeian Muse boast of Pompey’s columns and the theatres filled with Ausonian [Italian] gowns” 69-70). However, it is important to note that while Milton dismisses Ovid’s subject (the praise of the Italian women Ovid describes in Pompey’s theatre),<sup>12</sup> he does not dismiss the vehicle itself: Ovid’s amatory verse. In fact, Stella P. Revard notes the heavy influence of Ovid in this second part of the poem, claiming that it is Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*, the Roman poet’s most sexually explicit and controversial work, that prompts Milton to declare the primacy of English female beauty (“Milton’s Dialogue” 79). In *Elegia prima*, the juxtaposition of Ovid the writer of lament and Ovid the writer of bawdy love verse is significant, for it indicates that Milton engages in these two forms as well. Milton adapts these two modes for his own use, transforming Ovid’s lament into an anti-lament and his bawdy love verse into a very hands-off moment of girl-watching. Yet however tame his celebration of British female attributes may appear (at least in comparison to Ovid), Milton the amatory poet is no doubt present in *Elegia prima*.

When Milton the love poet makes his appearance in *Elegia prima*, he does so by first stating: “Sed neque sub tecto semper nec in irbe latemus, / Irrita nec nobis tempora veris eunt” (“But neither do I always skulk about indoors or in the city. Nor have my days been void of spring” 47-48). Interestingly, it is not until the shift to amatory verse that the poet feels the need to introduce the May/spring theme. Prior to the springtime transition, the poet’s focus has been on books and the theatre. With the shift towards love verse and the May Day theme, the poet also moves to a natural setting, abandoning the

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<sup>12</sup> Carey cites scenes from Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* books 1 (67-68, 89-90) and 3 (387-88, 394), where Ovid recommends places, including Pompey’s colonnade and the theatre, for meeting women (22).

manmade world of books and buildings for springtime and nature and the girls that represent both. By immediately establishing the spring setting, Milton ensures that the speaker's subsequent admiration of the female form is not perceived as lascivious ogling. Spring is the time for love, and if the speaker is led to celebrate the beauty of the women he sees walking amidst the glory of springtime, it is springtime's influence that drives him there. After reminding the reader that it is springtime, the poet is now free to indulge in the amorous endeavor of girl-watching.

Milton repeats the girl-watching trope in *Elegia septima*, in which he also employs a springtime setting. However, in *Elegia septima*, spring is not merely the time for amorous diversion. Spring is the domain of the love god, a place where the speaker is susceptible to Love's supreme rule. As Milton portrays the speaker's punishment of unrequited love in return for his arrogant dismissal of both Venus and Cupid, he uses the May Day/spring theme to keep the reader aware that this is a spring song gone wrong. The speaker's inevitable demise is set up at the beginning of *Elegia septima*, where the speaker looks back to a time when he claims, "Nondum blanda tuas leges Amathusia noram" ("I did not yet know your laws, seductive Venus" 1). With the inclusion of "nondum" ("not yet") in this line, the poet informs the reader that the speaker's ignorance will change. So when the speaker continues to describe how he had mocked Cupid, the reader expects Cupid's retaliation. This familiar storyline prompts Hale to identify *Elegia septima* as "in some respects most Ovidian of all [the elegies]" ("Milton Playing" 15). Ovid sets the precedent in the *Amores* 1.1 and the *Metamorphoses* (*Met.*) 1.452-567, where the poet and Apollo, respectively, mock Cupid. Milton follows Ovid's model in



the first twelve lines of the poem, detailing the speaker's mockery of the love god.

However, the poet diverts from Ovid when he introduces the spring setting:

Ver erat, et summae radians per culmina villae  
Attulerat primam lux tibi Maie diem:  
At mihi adhuc refugam quaerebant lumina noctem  
Nec matutinum sustinere iubar. (13-16)

It was spring, and the light radiating across the roofs of the highest villa  
announced your first day, May: but my eyes still sought the receding  
night; nor could they endure the morning sunlight.

The time is not just spring, it is the first of May, May Day itself. Once again Milton uses the May Day poem tradition to mark the poem as love poetry. However, this is not the spring of *Elegia prima*, where springtime serves as the setting for female beauty as well as an excuse for the poet to be out looking at girls. In *Elegia septima*, May Day begins as something to be resisted, the speaker more inclined to linger in the darkness and the bed. As Anthony Low notes, the poet paints a realistic picture of someone waking, while at the same time the scene functions as “a metaphorical indication that the speaker has been blind and is still attached to darkness, but that he is about to confront some new experience and be forced, in some sense, to see” (26). It is at this moment, when the speaker is blinded by the May Day sun, that Cupid enters the scene, promising a rather rude awakening.

The manner of Cupid's appearance in the poem complicates the May Day/spring theme by linking the May morning with desire itself. At first glance, the light shining into the speaker's room represents the May Day morning, but Cupid is also associated with light: the torch he carries to bring amorous fire to lovers' hearts. The speaker will eventually feel the effects of Cupid's flame: “Uror amans intus, flammaque totus eram” (“Loving, I am burned from within, and my whole being was flame” 74). But at the

beginning of the poem, the speaker remains ignorant of Cupid's threat and even struggles to hold onto the darkness of his own ignorance in the face of morning's illumination. Unlike the speaker, Cupid is quite at home in the spring sunlight; he is "Amor impiger" ("untiring Love" 17) with his "pictis ... alis" ("wings painted" 17) in the colors of dawn. The contrast between the night-seeking speaker and Cupid resplendent in the sunlight highlights the differing levels of experience the characters possess. The poet does not yet know love's laws, but Cupid has fought and won these battles before, as he later boasts. It is the speaker's ignorance that makes this version of spring a dangerous place.

Milton's use of the springtime setting in "Carmina Elegiaca," *Elegia prima*, *Elegia septima*, and *Elegia quinta* indicates a certain level of comfort with working within the May/spring theme. The fact that desire and spring consistently appear together in Milton's love elegies suggests that Milton readily turns to the May Day convention whenever his poetry take a more amatory tone. By situating spring as the time for love, and employing the May Day poem tradition, Milton cleverly diverts some of the responsibility for the representation of desire away from the poet and onto the form. Even when Milton closely follows Ovid's previous models in *Elegia septima*, he still finds a way to work the May Day theme into his version of poem. His continued use of the May Day theme indicates Milton's resistance to engage in the sexual explicitness of the Latin love elegy tradition.

#### *Nature's Body: The Physical Manifestation of Spring*

Having established a strong tie between spring and love, Milton takes the May Day/spring convention even further in the love elegies by framing the physical aspects of

erotic love within the bounds of nature. As a celebration of the end of winter and earth's renewal in the return of spring, the May Day tradition affords a ready affiliation with the outdoors. Milton uses this connection to incorporate nature into the language of desire. When Milton writes of physical attraction, he does so in terms of the poems' surrounding natural setting. In each of the amatory elegies, human bodies are replaced by animal, vegetable, and mineral. Whether in the form of birds, or stars, or the earth itself, Milton uses the physical manifestations of spring to dampen the erotic force of his more amatory elegies.

Milton's use of nature to represent the body is evident in *Elegia prima*, when the speaker presents the girl-watching scene as proof to Diodati that his days "have not been void of spring." For the poet, the girls have become spring itself, and Milton emphasizes this connection by interrelating the girls, nature, and spring throughout the poem. As the speaker sets the outdoor scene, the evidence of springtime nature is subtle but present: the "lucus ... vicina consitus ulmo" ("grove planted with neighboring elm" 49); the "nobilis umbra loci" (50), which Carey translates as "magnificently shady spot" (24); the girls' "tremulosque capillos" ("hair blowing in the breeze" 59). But as the speaker turns to a physical description of the young ladies he watches, nature makes a more direct appearance. In addition to hair that is all the more beautiful because it blows in the spring breeze, Milton also describes the girls' eyes as "superantia lumina gemmas, / Atque faces quotquot volvitur uterque polus" ("eyes transcending gemstones and all the stars that each pole turns about" 55-56). Likewise, their necks are more beautiful than "Quaeque fluit puro nectare tincta via," translated by Carey as "that flowing Way which is drenched in pure nectarous milk" (21), or the Milky Way. Finally, the girls are said to

have “Pellacesque genas, ad quas hyacinthina sordet / Purpura, et ipse tui floris, Adoni, rubor” (“seductive cheeks, next to which the hyacinth and the same redness of your flower, Adonis, pale” 61-62).

Milton ties the girls more strongly to nature when they are not just compared to nature, but become embodiments of inanimate nature themselves. The poet calls the girls he watches “blandas spirantia sidera flammās” (“stars breathing out seductive flames” 51). He continues the metaphor later in the poem:

Non tibi tot caelo scintillant astra sereno  
Endymioneae turba ministra deae,  
Quot tibi conspicuae formaque auroque puellae  
Per medias radiant turba videnda vias (77-80)

Compared to you, there are not as many stars shining in the clear heaven — the servant crowd of the Endymion goddess — as those girls, remarkable in both beauty and adornment, who walk through your streets, a crowd worth seeing.

Revard notes that it was a common practice in Latin poetry to compare women to stars, but acknowledges that Milton is consistently “thinking of Ovid” in this passage (“Milton’s Dialogue” 79). Ovid is precisely who Hale sees evidence of in Milton’s comparison of girls to stars. Hale also notes the significant change Milton makes as he imitates the ancient love poet:

Ovid had written that ‘Rome has as many nubile girls as the sky has stars’, as an excited fornicative parenthesis; the tenor is the welcome number of women. But Milton ... appropriates the thought to alter the feeling, into a slower comparison of female beauty to that of the stars; the tenor has become panegyric of London. (*Milton’s Languages* 36)

Hale’s description of Milton’s departure from Ovid points to the poet’s use of nature (in Hale’s example, the stars) to soften the erotic force of the poem. While the poem in its entirety certainly reads as a panegyric of London, the amorous tone of the poem’s second

half should not be dismissed. There is true physical desire in the speaker's admiration of the female form, but Milton draws the attention away from the young women's bodies and onto nature (and, by extent, London) with the incorporation of the spring setting.

Milton returns to the nature/body connection in *Elegia septima*, when the speaker once again presents a scenic picture of girls walking about:

Turba frequens, facieque simillima turba dearum  
Splendida per medias itque reditque vias.  
Auctaque luce dies gemino fulgore coruscat,  
Fallor? an et radios hinc quoque Phoebus habet. (53-56)

A frequent crowd of girls, in appearance resembling a crowd of goddesses, walks back and forth along the paths — a splendid sight! And the day, increased with twice the light, gleams with their splendor. Am I mistaken, or does indeed Phoebus also get his rays from this place?

Following the pattern of *Elegia prima*, the girls in this passage are also described in terms of nature, here beautiful as sunlight instead of stars. However, the nature theme is not as strong in *Elegia septima*. The girls may be sunbeams, but they do not have flowers in their cheeks or spring breezes in their hair like the girls in *Elegia prima*. Likewise, the “turba,” which Low points out is a less than complementary way to say “group,”<sup>13</sup> walks not among groves and shady places, but “qua nostri spatiantur in urbe quirites” (“where our citizens walk about in the city” 51) and the “villarum proxima rura” (“nearest lands of the country houses” 52). Both of these places represent civilized nature, “city promenades,”<sup>14</sup> and country estates that lack the mystique of the spring groves of *Elegia prima*. Besides the presence of the sunbeam girls, there is no hint of spring itself in these walkways.

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<sup>13</sup> Lewis and Short's *A Latin Dictionary* defines “turba” as “a turmoil, hubbub, uproar, disorder, tumult, commotion, disturbance, of a crowd of people” (def. I). A later definition is more general: “a crowd, throng, multitude, mob; a band, train, troop, etc.” (def. II.B). However, as Low suggests, “Milton could have found a more romantic word had he wished” (29).

<sup>14</sup> Carey's translation of “qua nostri spatiantur in urbe quirites” (77).

Interestingly coinciding with nature's reduced role in the poem's setting is the increased lasciviousness of the speaker's attention to the young ladies he watches.

Unlike the speaker of *Elegia prima*, who celebrates female beauty in a removed and even patriotic fashion, the speaker of *Elegia septima* admits to less-than-honorable intentions:

Haec ego non fugi spectacula grata severus,  
Impetus et quo me fert iuvenilis, agor.  
Lumina luminibus male providus obvisa misi  
Neve oculos potui continuisse meos. (57-60)

I am not severe; I did not flee from these pleasing sights. And wherever youthful impulse carried me, I was led. Careless, I let my eyes meet their eyes. Nor was I able to stay my own eyes.

There is no chance to equate admiring girls with admiring springtime in these lines. The speaker boldly stares, his eyes out of control. And it is neither stars, nor flowers, nor the Milky Way that he sees as he watches one particular girl; it is Cupid. The speaker describes the young woman's body in the terms of Cupid's presence: "Nec mora, nunc ciliis haesit, nunc virginis ori, / Insilit hinc labiis, insidet inde genis" ("Without delay, now he clings to her eyelids, now to the girl's mouth. He leaps from here to her lips and from there settles on her cheeks" 69-70). Speaking of the girl's beauty, the poet writes "Principium nostri lux erat illa mali" ("that light was the beginning of my misfortune" 62). But the speaker's inevitable demise is established earlier in the poem, its source a different light, namely, the dawn arrival of Cupid. The speaker's fallacy is twofold: he lustfully watches the girl and then misjudges her, rather than Cupid, as the source of his downfall.

The speaker's lack of judgment that partly accounts for the reduced representation of spring in *Elegia septima*. "Fallor?" ("Am I mistaken?" 56), the speaker asks, as he admires the walking girls. Of this question, Low asserts: "Clearly the answer the

protagonist expects is, No, you are not mistaken; just as clearly, I would argue, the answer the poet expects is, Yes, you are sadly — but very humanly — mistaken” (29). The point of the poem is that the speaker is indeed mistaken in his arrogance toward the love gods, in his lusty perusal of the young ladies, and in his complete disregard of the consequences of both. As a story about the failings of the speaker and his subsequent downfall, the poem has little need for nature’s dulling effect on its erotic undertones.

Of Milton’s elegies that employ the May Day/spring theme, “*Carmina Elegiaca*” and *Elegia quinta. In adventum veris* come the closest to representing true May Day poems. They are also the two poems in which Milton leans most heavily on the May Day/spring theme to temper the sexual tenor of his work. Both *Elegia prima* and *Elegia septima* exemplify Milton’s practice of using spring and nature to represent the female form. In “*Carmina Elegiaca*,” Milton limits his attention solely to depictions of nature; the poet admires not flesh and blood girls, but springtime itself. Milton does blend classical mythology into his account of the coming spring, but this use of mythology is limited to figures representing nature. “*Flammiger Titan*” (“*flaming Titan*” 5) represents the rising sun that “*spargit nitidum laeta per arva iubar*” (“scatters bright light across the happy fields” 6). *Daulias*, identified by Carey as *Philomela* (11), is present in the form of the nightingale singing her “*argutum ... carmen*” (“chirping song” 7) along with the lark. Also in attendance is *Zephyritis*, who Carey recognizes as *Chloris* or *Flora* (11). *Chloris/Flora* appears along with the thriving spring plant life described by the poet:

Iam rosa fragrantēs spirat silvestris odores  
Iam redolent violae luxuriatque seges  
Ecce novo campos Zephyritis gramine vestit  
Fertilis, et vitreo rore madescit humus (9-12)

Now the wild rose exhales its fragrant smell; now violets diffuse their  
scent and the cornfield revels. Behold! Fertile Zephyritis dresses the  
fields with new grass and the ground moistens with glassy dew.

In these lines, Chloris/Flora is both caretaker and the embodiment of fertility (“Zephyritis  
... Fertilis” [“fertile Zephyritis” 11-12]). Neither she nor Philomela appears to function  
beyond the poet’s depiction of the nature’s lushness in springtime.

Despite Milton’s seemingly innocuous use of Philomela and Chloris/Flora, their  
stories as told by Ovid demonstrate the complex implications these mythological  
characters bring to “Carmina Elegiaca.” As Maggie Kilgour asserts, “Flora cannot be  
separated from the darker aspect of her story” (10), and Philomela’s tale is equally grim.  
In *Fasti* 5, Ovid tells of Flora/Chloris, who is raped by and then married to the wind god  
Zephyrus. Philomel’s similar story of rape and subsequent transformation into a  
nightingale is told in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 6.424-674. Thus in Milton’s “Carmina  
Elegiaca,” Philomela and Chloris/Flora represent the nightingale and flowering plants,  
but they equally represent physical desire.<sup>15</sup> The addition of these two myths into the  
poem’s otherwise idyllic scene infuses Milton’s May Day poem with a subtle sexual  
undertone. The expected source of such sexuality is the bed in which Milton’s addressee  
resides. But for the poem’s speaker, the bed is a place that must be abandoned for the  
glory of the coming spring:

Segnes invenias molli vix talia lecto  
Cum premat imbellis lumina fessa sopor  
Illic languentes abrumpunt somnia somnos  
Et turbant animum tristia multa tuum

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<sup>15</sup> This reading of Chloris/Flora is particularly telling considering Milton’s later use of the Flora/Zephyr  
myth in the representation of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* 5.15-17. Tellingly, these lines occur at a  
highly erotic moment in *Paradise Lost*: they introduce Adam’s morning love song, which Stella Revard  
perceives is inspired by dawn and spring. Milton continues to turn to a version of the spring song when  
faced with physical desire. See Revard, *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera’s Hair*, 13. For more on the  
complex representation of Eve as Flora, see Green and Kilgour.



Illic tabifici generantur semina morbi  
Qui pote torpentem posse valere virum  
Surge age surge, leves, iam convenit, excute somnos  
Lux oritur, tepidi fulcra relinque tori. (13-20)

Lazybones, you would hardly find such things in your soft bed, when peaceful sleep presses your tired eyes. There dreams interrupt your exhausted sleep, and many sad things disturb your spirit. There the seeds of infectious disease are spawned. How is it possible that an inactive man can be healthy? Get up! Move! Get up! Now it is time. Shake off this trivial sleep. The sun rises. Leave the posts of the lukewarm bed behind.

The bed may be soft, but it is also lukewarm or tepid (“tepidi” [20]) and a source of lethargy, bad dreams, and even disease. Despite (or maybe even because of) the presence of “semina,” which can mean “germs” (as Carey translates it [11]), but is most likely a play on “seed,” or seminal fluid, the bed is a notably unerotic place. In contrast, nature is new and fresh and bright, and with the addition of Philomela and Chloris/Floris, it is desirable as well. Milton draws the source of sensuality away from the bed and onto nature through the use of the May Day poem’s celebration of spring.

In *Elegia septima*, nature does not direct away from the bed. Rather, nature itself becomes the bed, with anthropomorphic representations of the Earth and Sun serving as lovers. It is in this poem that the substitution of nature for the body is most complete, allowing for the most erotic moments of Milton’s Latin love elegies. The poem begins as a traditional May Day song, celebrating the passing of winter and the return of spring:

In se perpetuo Tempus revolubile gyro  
Iam revocat zephyros vere tepente novos.  
Induiturque brevem Tellus reparata iuventam,  
Iamque soluta gelu dulce virescit humus. (1-4)

Rolling back into itself in a perpetual circle, Time now recalls the fresh western winds to the warming spring. And restored, the Earth is being dressed in her brief youth. And now the land, unfettered from the cold, grows pleasantly green.

Spring warms with the arrival of the sun, represented by Apollo's gradual arrival throughout the first part of the poem. Apollo's initial appearance occurs when the poet exclaims: "Delius ipse venit, video Peneide lauro / Implicitos crines, Delius ipse venit" ("Apollo himself is coming, I see his hair encircled with Penean laurel, Apollo himself is coming" 13-14).<sup>16</sup> Thus, the coming of spring is the coming of Apollo, the restoration of sunlight and all the life it brings to the land. The shepherd is the next to catalog Apollo's approach:

Forte aliquis scopuli recubans in vertice pastor,  
Roscida cum primo sole rubescit humus,  
Hac, ait, hac certe caruisti nocte puella  
Phoebe tua, celeres quae retineret equos. (41-44)

By chance some shepherd reclining on the top of a rock, when the dewy ground reddens with the first sun, "This," he says "certainly this night you have been without your girl, Phoebus,<sup>17</sup> the one who held back your swift horses."

When Apollo meets Aurora, the dawn, the poem's tone takes a decisively erotic turn.

This shift begins with Apollo's rather bawdy comment:

Desere, Phoebus ait, thalamos Aurora seniles,  
Quid iuvat effoeto procubuisse toro?  
Te manet Aeolides viridi venator in herba,  
Surge, tuos ignes altus Hymettus habet. (49-52)

"Aurora, leave your old-man's rooms," Apollo says. "What pleasure is there in lying prostrate on a worn out bed? Aeolides, a hunter, awaits you on the green grass. Get up! The tall Hymettus holds the object of your desires."

Aurora, shamefaced ("verecundo ... ore" [53]), rushes away at Apollo's words, but the Earth rises to meet the Sun's sensual promise. What follows is the most erotic passage in all of Milton's Latin verse.

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<sup>16</sup> "Delius" refers to Apollo's birthplace, Delos, and signifies the sun god himself. See "Delos."

<sup>17</sup> Phoebus is another name for Apollo.

It is at the point where Sun meets Earth, the dawning of a spring morning, that *Elegia quinta* fully enters the realm of erotic verse. The poem's central image of a sexual and seductive Earth attempting to gain Apollo's favor represents the closest that Milton's Latin verse comes to embracing the explicit side of the Roman love verse tradition. The language is sensually alluring. The speaker describes Apollo's effect on the Earth: "Exuit invisam Tellus rediviva senectam, / Et cupit amplexus Phoebe subire tuos" ("Renewed, the Earth strips off detested old age, and longs, Phoebus, to submit to your embraces" 55-56). The Earth is "luxuriosa" ("luxuriant") as she "Pandit ... sinus" ("spreads forth her breasts" 58) and exhales perfumed breath from her lips. She is "faciles ... amores" ("a willing lover" 67) to Apollo, offering gifts as well as herself to buy Apollo's love: "Illa tibi ostentat quascunque sub aequore vasto, / Et superiniectis montibus abdit opes" ("She displays to you whatever treasures she conceals under the vast sea and the scattered about mountains" 76-77). The Earth shows jealousy when Apollo's path ends in the ocean rather than with her. In a beautifully written address, she entices Apollo to join her instead:

Huc ades, et gremio lumina pone meo.  
 Quaque iaces circum mulcebit lene susurrans  
 Aura per humentes corpora fusa rosas.  
 Nec me (crede mihi) terrent Semeleia fata,  
 Nec Phaetonteo fumidus axis equo;  
 Cum tu Phoebe tuo sapientus uteris igni,  
 Huc ades et gremio lumina pone meo. (88-94)

Come here and place your eyes upon my breast. And wherever you lie down, the murmuring wind will caress our bodies spread out across the dewy roses. Neither (believe me!) do Semele's mishaps frighten me. Nor the smoking wheel of Phaeton's horse. I will make wiser use of your

fire, Phoebus. Come here and place your eyes upon my breast.<sup>18</sup>

The Earth's bold advances to Apollo demonstrate an unapologetic carnal awareness, one that contrasts nicely to the description of Nature in the Nativity poem:

It was the winter wild,  
While the heaven-born child  
All meanly wrapped in the rude manger lies;  
Nature in awe to him  
Had doffed her gaudy trim,  
With her great master so to sympathize:  
It was no season then for her  
To wanton with the sun her lusty paramour. (29-36)

The last two lines in this passage hint at the same episode described in *Elegia quinta*.

However, the difference in occasion demands the difference in behavior for Nature/Earth.

The coming of Christ, the "heaven-born child," is a far different event than the coming of spring, and the poet reiterates this by declaring it wintertime. Of course, the traditional Christian story of the birth of Christ requires a winter setting, but the poet makes it clear that the winter is "no season then" for lust and wantonness. But in the springtime setting of *Elegia quinta*, the Earth is free to pursue her amorous desires.

Even as Milton writes such passionate verse, he is sure to ground the eroticism within the realm of nature in springtime. Much of the highly sexual imagery used to describe the Earth's desire for the Sun also depicts the physical manifestation of spring's arrival. The breezes that Earth promises will caress their bodies are "flamina verna" ("spring breezes" 68). Spring is also evident in the Earth's bounty; she is "alma" ("life-giving" 73) and "omniferos" ("all-sustaining" 58). The Earth is marked by greenness. Her "egelida ... herba" ("cool grass" 87) and her "frons ardua" ("high forehead" — a play

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<sup>18</sup> I have followed Carey's model here, translating "humentes" as "dewey" and "lumina" as "eyes" (90). A literal translation of "lumina" would be "lights," just as easily meaning Apollo's sunlight. Milton cleverly plays with light and fire ("igni" 93) when referring to Apollo in this passage.

on the word “frons,” which can also mean “foliage” 61) are adorned with sacred groves (“sacro ... luco” 61). She offers Apollo her “salutiferum ... gramen” (“healing herb” 73). She smells of honey (the spring breezes’ “Mellitas ... preces” [“honey-sweet greetings” 68]) and spice (“Arabum spirat messes” [“she breathes out Arabian harvests” 59]). But perhaps the most telling indicator of spring is the plethora of flowers that appear in the passage. “Mitia cum Paphiis ... amoma rosis” (“fragrant balsam ripened with Paphian roses” 60) falls from the Earth’s lips. Her hair is woven with “vario ... flore” (“various flowers” 63). Milton highlights these flowers by placing them at the beginning of the two lines that follow:

Floribus et visa est posse placere suis.  
 Floribus effusos ut erat redimita capillos  
 Tenario placuit diva Sicana Deo. (64-66)

Flowers of hers, with which she seems able to please. Flowers like those  
 with which the Sicilian goddess had encircled her unbound hair; with  
 which she pleased the Taenarian god.

These flowers are an instrument of seduction, as are the dewy roses of her proffered bed (“humantes ... rosas” 90). Yet they also represent one way in which the poet controls the poem’s sensuality by combining seduction with the lush splendor of spring. Rather than the Earth’s exposed breasts or her bold advances to Apollo, it is the flowers that the poet acknowledges as pleasing and seducing. Even nature’s body has become too erotic for the poet.

The other characters in the poem are not unaffected by the sensual exchange between the Earth and Apollo. At the end of *Elegia quinta*, their lusty episode spills over into the actions of the rest of the poem’s occupants. Young men and women are caught up in the practices of courtship. “Hymenae!” (“Hymen!” 105), the youths shout to the

god of marriage, “io Hymen” (“Hurrah, Hymen!” 106). The young girls gather, drawn towards “amoeni gaudia veris” (“the delights of the delightful spring” 109), to say prayers to Venus, “Ut sibi quem cupiat, det Cytherea virum” (“that Venus might give to them the man they desire” 112). Similarly moved, shepherd and shepherdess play their pipes (113-14), and a sailor soothes his stars with a night song and calls to the dolphins (115-16). But what takes center stage in this part of the poem are the many mythological figures that venture into lustful pursuit of their desires. Cupid chases Diana and Vesta, goddesses known for their chastity (101-102). Jupiter flirts with his wife on Olympus (117). Sylvanus, his satyrs, and the Dryads all seem to wander restlessly about. Pan, traditionally lusty, leaves even Cybele and Ceres “vix ... tuta” (“barely safe” 126) from his revelry. Likewise, one of the Oreads barely escapes a desire-driven Faunus (“cupidus ... Faunus” 127). But the Oread is just as caught up in the passion of the moment: “Iamque latet, latitansque cupit male tecta videri, / Et fugit, et fugiens pervelit ipsa capi” (“And now she hides, and hiding poorly concealed, hopes to be seen; and she flees, and fleeing, she greatly wishes herself to be captured” 129-30). It is likely this part of the poem that prompts MacKellar to say of *Elegia quinta*: “it possesses a rare spontaneity and abandon, and moreover its main emphasis is on love” (31). Such a reading of the poem is tempting and easily done if the reader ignores the boundaries set by the poet. But Milton places a careful preface to this amorous scene: “Sic Tellus lasciva suos suspirat amores; / Matris in exemplum caetera turba ruunt” (“Thus the Earth breathes out her love; the rest of the crowd hastens forth in the example of their mother” 95-96). If the “rest of the crowd” is exuberant in its pursuit of love, it is because it follows the example set by the meeting of the Earth and Apollo. Spontaneity and abandon are

limited to the occasion of spring and do not appear to reach beyond the crowd of traditional lovers and figures of myth. The speaker remains carefully distant from the poem's erotic action, and for him, inspiration takes a much tamer form.

Another way that Milton limits the erotic impact of *Elegia quinta* is by identifying spring as a time for poetic inspiration as well as love. The opening lines describe the effects of spring on the Earth, but the subject jumps quickly to spring's effect on the poet:

Fallor? an et nobis redeunt in carmina vires,  
Ingeniumque mihi munere veris adest?  
Munere veris adest, iterumque vigescit ab illo  
(Quis putet) atque aliquod iam sibi poscit opus. (5-8)

Am I mistaken, or does even my poetic strength return to me? And is my talent at hand because of spring's gift? It is indeed at hand because of spring's gift. And once more my talent flourishes from this (Who would think?) and now it begs for some work.

Two important things happen in this passage. First, the poet parallels the return of his poetic genius to the return of spring, an idea solidified by Apollo's presence. As mentioned previously, Apollo represents the sun, his journey to the Earth signifying the coming of spring. However, Apollo is also the god of poetry, and as he returns to Earth, he carries poetic inspiration with him. It is therefore significant that the poet is the first in the poem to spot Apollo's arrival. Equally telling is the poet's description of the sun god: "video Peneide lauro / Implicitos crines" ("I see his hair encircled with Penean laurel" 13-14). The laurel wreath, often worn by Apollo, is traditionally a prize given to those demonstrating a particular skill, usually in war or in poetry. The poet's notice of the Apollo's laurel wreath reiterates the connection between the sun/spring and poetic genius. But Apollo's wreath is a complex symbol, and the laurel that it is formed by serves as a strong reminder of the sun god's sexual desire.

Ovid tells the story of Apollo and Daphne in *Metamorphoses* 1.452-567, a tale already shown to be a model for Milton's *Elegia septima*. The story tells of Daphne's metamorphosis into a laurel tree as she attempts to escape Apollo's unwanted advances. In the end, Apollo takes the laurel tree as his own: "at, quoniam coniunx mea non potes esse, / arbor eris certe" dixit 'mea! semper habebunt / te coma, te citharae, te nostrae, laure, pharetrae'" ("but since now you cannot be my wife, you certainly will be my tree" he said. 'My hair, my lute, my quiver, always these things will display you'" 557-59). John T. Shawcross claims that "inspiration has strong metaphoric overtones of sexual union for Milton" (345). In *Elegia quinta*, Apollo represents both inspiration and sex. Milton utilizes Apollo's dual nature to parallel Apollo the god of poetry's approach to the poet with Apollo the god of the sun's sensual encounter with the Earth. Edward Le Comte finds a similar connection between poetic inspiration and male potency in *Elegia quinta*, claiming that line eight of the poem "ogles an indecent line" of Ovid's *Amores* (7). In the line that Le Comte cites from Ovid, the poet complains about his misbehaving erection, which only appears once his mistress is gone: "Nunc opus exposcunt" ("now it asks for work" *Amores* 3.7.68). Milton similarly writes "aliquod iam sibi poscit opus" ("now it begs itself for some work" 8). The two lines are certainly similar, but not enough to verify a definitive connection. Milton may have been borrowing from Ovid when he wrote this line; he undoubtedly borrows from Ovid elsewhere. However, the connection between these two particular lines is not necessary to prove Le Comte's astute observation. The proof of the tie lies in Apollo's wreath, a symbol of both poetic achievement and Apollo's untamed desire.



In *Elegia quinta*, inspiration comes at a price, as another look at lines 5-8 reveals. The “opus” (“work” 8) that the poet’s genius begs for is *Elegia quinta* itself. The poet states the poem’s occasion in both the title and the opening four lines, but in this passage, the poet hints at the “why” of the poem. *Elegia quinta* is not just a spring song; it signifies the debt the poet owes to spring’s gift of inspiration. As Hanford explains: “The spring it is which has given [the poet] his genius and the spring shall be celebrated in his song” (28). In so doing, the poet repays his debt to spring: “Profuerint isto reddita dona modo” (“By this measure, the gifts granted will have been put to use” 24). Milton cleverly plays with the noun “modus” in this line. The phrase “isto ... modo” (24) can mean “in this way,” as Carey translates it (89), or “in this measure,” indicating poetic measure, meter, or mode (“modus”). *Elegia quinta* is the “modus,” both the figurative way and the literal measures that offer restitution to spring.

Milton uses the poet’s payment of his debt to spring as a means to excuse the erotic undertones of the poem. If the poet is true to his vow to return spring’s favor, he cannot do so in half measures. Hale explains:

These vernal impulses have been connected in advance to the stirrings of new life in the poet himself [Hale cites lines 5-24]. Particularly if the new imaginative life is that realized in the present poem, he is doubly committed to the sensual inspiration.” (“Milton Playing” 13)

Following Hale’s model, the poet’s own impassioned response to spring’s inspiration — “Concitaque arcano fervent mihi pectora motu” (“My awakened feelings burn with hidden emotion” 11) — is realized metaphorically in the Earth’s desire for Apollo. The “sonitus ... sacer” (“sacred sound” 12) that drives the poet echoes in the youths’ wedding song (“io Hymen” 106). Likewise, the poet’s “furor” (“poetic frenzy” 12) is realized in the lustful frenzy of the assorted gods, goddess, and mythological creatures that are

moved by the Earth's passion. The poem ends with an entreaty for the continued presence of the gods and springtime: "sua quisque diu sibi numina lucus habeto" ("let each sacred grove long house in itself its own deities" 133); "et sensim tempora veris eant" ("and may springtime pass slowly" 138). However, the poet's unspoken request is for the endurance of his own poetic genius. *Elegia quinta* certainly attests to that genius, representing the pinnacle of Milton's complex blending of the May Day and Latin love poetry traditions. Within the same poem, Milton offers both a celebration of spring and a story of desire. However, it is through the intricate tying together of the two traditions in this poem that Milton truly earns his laurel. He fulfills the erotic potential of the Latin love elegy through the physical representation of nature, in the end turning both spring and erotic love into sources of poetic inspiration.

*When Spring Is Not Spring: Elegia Sexta and "Haec ego mente..."*

*Elegia sexta* and "Haec ego mente..." offer a significant variation on Milton's use of the May Day theme. Less conspicuous amidst the frozen landscapes of both poems, springtime lurks, and with it the sensual promise that the poet seems to deny. If spring is the time for nature and love, then in Milton's elegies the winter represents the opposite. And it is winter that Milton presents to the reader in these two works. The groves and rivers that were so much a part of nature's splendor and that supplied the setting of amorous adventures in the previous elegies are replaced in "Haec ego mente..." by the "shady Academy's Socratic streams" ("Socraticos umbrosa Academia rivos / Praebuit" 5-6). The poet's heart, which burned with desire in *Elegia septima*, is now impervious to love's threat: "Protinus extinctis ex illo tempore flammis, / Cincta rigent multo pectora

nostra gelu. / Unde suis frigus metuit puer ipse sagittis” (“Immediately the flames were extinguished from that time on, and my heart, wrapped in abundant frost, grows hard, from which the boy himself fears the effect of the cold on his arrows” 7-9). *Elegia sexta* undergoes a similar wintry transformation. Written in epistolary style and addressed to Charles Diodati, the same recipient of *Elegia prima*, the poem speaks of “hilarem[que] Decembrim” (“merry December” 9) and the “hiberni gaudia ruris” (“joys of the winter countryside” 11) that Diodati has previously related in his own letter. This change of season leads Lewalski to comment:

Elegy VI is a counterstatement to Elegy V, replaying some of its motifs in another key: here the festivities, banquets, wine, dance, love, and song of ‘hilarious December’ counter nature’s erotic pleasures in springtime, and the denizens of the springtime groves are replaced by patrons of winter festivals. (37)

While there is no denying the change of venue that *Elegia sexta* presents, particularly in comparison to *Elegia quinta*, identifying *Elegia sexta* as a counterstatement to *Elegia quinta* ignores the common subject that the two poems address: poetic inspiration. A look into how this inspiration is achieved in *Elegia sexta* shows how the poem parallels, rather than contradicts, Milton’s spring-themed love elegies.

In *Elegia sexta*, the subject of love occurs not in the depiction of amorous adventure, but in the love poet himself, represented by Diodati. It is therefore not surprising that Diodati’s surroundings display evidence of Milton’s other love elegies. For example, the groups of girls that the speakers of *Elegia prima* and *Elegia quinta* watch in the spring outdoors are reflected in the “Virgineos ... pedes” (“virgin feet” 40) that dance to the harp’s music and the “Perque puellares oculos digitumque sonantem / Irruet in totos lapsa Thalia sinus” (“girls’ eyes and fingers through which graceful Thalia

resounding in every curve, invades” 47). Cupid appears alongside the girls of *Elegia prima*, where he drapes their hair with golden nets (60), and *Elegia septima*, where he hangs from the eyelashes, lips, and cheeks of the speaker’s beloved (69-70). But the rules have changed in *Elegia sexta*, for the elegiac poet finds Thalys, the muse, among the catalog of female body parts, rather than Cupid. Likewise, as winter replaces spring, and indoor banquets and feasts replace the outside glories of nature, Bacchus replaces Apollo as the main pagan deity. The cry of “io Hymen” found in *Elegia quinta* (106) is replaced in *Elegia sexta* by “Euoe” (17), a shout to Bacchus, effectively punctuating the shift from spring love song to winter revelry. The gods act accordingly, functioning as patrons of the elegiac poet rather than lovers: inspiration takes the place of desire.

Despite the shift in focus from desire to inspiration in *Elegia sexta*, the familiar hints of spring ensure that desire does not disappear completely from the poem. For example, Milton uses scent as a descriptor for spring in “Carmina Elegiaca,” where the wild rose and violets scent the air (9-10), and in *Elegia quinta*, where the Earth in spring is filled with the scent of flowers, honey, and spices. In *Elegia sexta* these scents are transformed into “odoratos ... tholos” (“sweet-smelling rotundas” 44) filled with dancers. Similarly, light and warmth, elements of spring found consistently in Milton’s love elegies, reappear in the “lepidos ... focus” (“charming hearths” 12) and the feasts that warm the love elegist’s talent: “Iam quoque lauta tibi generoso mensa paratu, / Mentis alit vires, ingeniumque foveat” (“Now also a luxurious table, generously arranged, nourishes your mind’s strength, and warms your talent” 29-30). Likewise, Apollo fittingly contributes his own brand of warmth, as the god of sun and poetry arouses inspiration in the poet: “Percipies tacitum per pectora serpere Phoebum, / Quale

repentinus permeat ossa calor” (“You will feel silent Phoebus creeping through your chest, as a sudden heat passes through your bones” 45-46). It seems that even in the winter world of *Elegia sexta* there is something of spring necessary to stir the love poet. Therefore, Milton presents an indoor version of spring — tamed, transformed, but still playing a key role in the poetic inspiration that *Elegia sexta* describes.

In the latter part of *Elegia sexta*, the speaker shifts his attention from the elegiac poet to the epic poet. From this point on, any hint of spring disappears. Nature emerges only in the austere diet of “herba” (“herbs” 60) and “Sobria[que] e puro pocula fonte” (“sober draughts from a pure spring” 62) that, according to the speaker, best sustains the epic poet and in Orpheus’ “feris” (“wild beasts” 70) and “sola ... antra” (“lonely caves” 70). The speaker appears to align himself with the epic poets he praises, although, as Parker notes, he never directly lists himself among them (69). Yet the speaker’s “non pleno ventre” (“not full stomach” 1) and his muse’s “optatas ... tenebras” (“desired obscurity” 4) certainly echo the ascetic lifestyle he describes as belonging to the epic poet. Similarly, his current project exemplifies the epic’s elevated subject matter: “Paciferum canimus caelesti semine regem” (“I am singing about the peace-bringing king born from heavenly seed” 81). However, critics such as Revard, Shawcross, and DuRocher have argued successfully against reading the speaker’s rejection of elegy in favor of epic as sincere. Revard points out that “for the twenty-one-year-old Milton epic undertakings were long in the future, and ... the lyric mode would hardly be abandoned” (“Milton’s Dialogue” 81-82). Milton’s tone here is decidedly ironic, but the contrasting atmospheres he creates for elegy and epic echo the divided halves of *Elegia prima*. Just as he does in *Elegia prima*, when Milton turns to amatory verse, he finds a way to

incorporate the May Day/spring tradition. Once again, Milton demonstrates how central the spring theme is to his approach to erotic love.

Despite questionable attempts to reject love verse in both *Elegia sexta* and “Haec ego mente...,” where he dismisses his love elegies as examples of youthful folly even as he publishes them, Milton proves himself willing to explore the topic of love. However, the poet’s ready turn to spring as he approaches love and amatory verse indicates that, for Milton, spring — and the nature it implies — is a safe zone, where sensuality and the erotic can be explored with minimal consequence. It is therefore not surprising that the most sexually charged moments of Milton’s writing occur in the most natural of all settings: the Garden of Eden. Yet even here Milton couches the erotic within a form of spring song. Revard notes the sexual promise of Adam’s aubade in Book 5 of *Paradise Lost*: “Adam’s greeting to the dawn leaves us no doubt about its addressee nor its intent. Dawn and spring waken Adam to love, and he turns to the sleeping Eve to share with her the greening of nature” (*Milton and the Tangles* 13). Even when Milton fully engages in the erotic, he does so with caution, employing the May Day/spring convention he mastered earlier in his Latin love elegies.

### CHAPTER III

#### Milton's Distant Lover

There is a trend in Milton scholarship, particularly in that dating in the 1970s and before, to view Milton's early Latin elegies as autobiographical and to look within these lines for hints at the personality of an adolescent Milton. For example, of Milton's *Elegia septima*, Tillyard writes: "There is little doubt that Milton is narrating an actual experience; and one is glad to think that at the age of nineteen he was not in every way unlike other men of that age" (22).<sup>19</sup> This tendency to look for the personal in Milton's early love elegies perhaps stems from the characteristics of the Latin elegy itself. To return to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*'s definition of Latin elegiac poetry, the Augustan love elegy (the period in which Ovid writes) typically boasts a first-person speaker writing about his own personal experience with love ("Elegiac poetry, Latin"). Bolstered also by the idea that the Latin language provided Milton the "opportunity to say some things in a more direct personal way" (Handford and Taffe 109) and the intimate epistolary form of *Elegia prima* and *Elegia sexta*, the temptation to read the Latin elegies as the personal musings of a young Milton is enticing.

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<sup>19</sup> See also Masson vii, 269; MacKellar; and Parker.

More recent scholarship moves away from a strict autobiographical reading of the Latin elegies, instead exploring more thoroughly the effects of influence and the use of persona in the poems.<sup>20</sup> Lewalski exhibits another approach when she writes of *Elegia septima*: “This very literary story may or may not have a basis in life experience, but it casts some light on the young Milton’s imagination of erotic feeling” (26). Lewalski’s model is helpful when approaching the Latin love elegies. A look at the choices Milton makes as a poet, whether writing autobiographically or in persona, reveals that Milton consistently shows a marked wariness toward physical love. In his amatory elegies, Milton demonstrates this by not only shifting the erotic focus towards nature, as discussed in the previous chapter, but he also — more overtly — physically situates the would-be lovers, the poems’ speakers, at varying degrees of distance from the possibility of fulfilled desire.

Distance is a tool also used by the Augustan love elegists, usually employed to show the poet’s devotion to his mistress by removing himself from the responsibilities of public life (“Elegiac poetry, Latin”). For example, in *Amores* 2.17, Ovid’s speaker proclaims, “sim licet infamis, dum me moderatius urat, / quae Paphon et fluctu pulsa Cythera tenet” (3-4), which Diane Arnson Svarlien translates as “I don’t care. I’ll trade my reputation for the warmth of the flames fanned by Paphian Aphrodite / queen of wave-washed Cythera” (116). But Milton’s speakers never reach love in the first place. Instead, the poet distances them from desire before it has the chance to be fully realized. The speakers of “Haec ego mente...,” *Elegia septima*, and *Elegia sexta* remain the

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<sup>20</sup> Brian Striar asserts that it is the influence of the early Roman poets Propertius and Catullus that accounts for the “sense of immediacy and passion — and therefore autobiography” in *Elegia septima*. See Striar 132. For more on influences other than Ovid, see Revard, *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera’s Hair*, 9-13; and Haan, *From Academia to Amicitia: Milton’s Latin Writings and the Italian Academies*. On Milton’s use of persona, see Striar 132; and Hale, *Milton’s Languages*, 15.



furthest removed from love; physical distance prevents even the possibility of love for these speakers. The potential lovers of “Carmina Elegiaca” and *Elegia prima* are given the opportunity to approach love, but ultimately to reject it. The speaker of *Elegia septima* comes closest to fulfilling the role of lover, but physical distance once again prevents this from happening. These speakers all touch upon the topic of erotic love, but they never fully reach a state of acted-upon desire. The resulting image of the poet is not, as MacKellar contends, of a romanticized young Milton exploring his “susceptibility to the tender emotions” (17), but of a Milton writing within the Latin love verse tradition while maintaining a marked distance from the blatant eroticism of his predecessors.

#### *The Lover Removed*

The speaker of “Haec ego mente...” is one of three speakers most affected by Milton’s use of physical space to create distance from erotic love. Situated far from the potential of love, neither he nor the speakers of *Elegia quinta* and *Elegia sexta* have a chance to join the ranks of lover. In “Haec ego mente...,” the speaker’s capacity for desire exists in the past, a time and place harshly described and sternly dismissed:

Haec ego mente olim laeva, studioque supino  
Nequitiae posui vana trophaea meae,  
Scilicet abreptum sic me malus impulit error,  
Indocilisque aetas prava magistra fuit.  
Donec Socraticos umbrosa Academia rivos  
Praebuit, admissum dedocuitque iugum. (1-6)

With eagerness and a backwards mind I set forth these foolish things,  
the vain trophies of my idleness. Undoubtedly having been snuck up on  
so, mischievous error incited me, and that unteachable age was a perverse  
teacher. Until the shady Academy offered its Socratic streams, and taught  
me to discard the former yoke of my faults.

Although it is generally accepted that these lines are meant to be a retraction of sorts, there is some disagreement among scholars about what exactly Milton is retracting. The placement of “Haec ego mente...” directly after *Elegia septima* in the 1645 publication of *Poems* leads some scholars, such as Tillyard and MacKellar, to assign the retraction to *Elegia septima* alone. Tillyard argues for this designation on the grounds that “Haec ego mente...” does not offer “an apposite comment on (for instance) the ascetic resolutions of *Elegia sexta*” (23). However, such a reading accepts Milton’s lines as a sincere dismissal of his own work and the love elegy tradition that inspired him, something that Revard warns against doing in light of the continued presence of amatory influences (particularly Ovid’s) in Milton’s later works (“Milton’s Dialogue” 82). Regardless of whether the “vain trophies of my idleness” refer to all the previous elegies or just the one directly before, the speaker clearly indicates that love, represented by Cupid and Venus, is the “yoke” that led to his “backwards mind” and misplaced “eagerness.” As a remedy to love’s influence, the speaker surrounds his heart in ice to protect himself from any threat posed by the love gods. This is where the untouchable speaker of “Haec ego mente...” resides. His ice-encrusted heart fixes him in a frozen state inaccessible by love, offering him no chance to reprise the role of rejected lover.

Similarly, the speaker of *Elegia sexta* remains separated from the poem’s sensual atmosphere even as he describes it. Although he writes of the sumptuous banquets and parties that Diodati enjoys, the speaker himself resides in an unnamed place. Yet the speaker’s utter separation from the poem’s action is evident in the description of his muse: “At tua quid nostram prolectat musa camoenam, / Nec sinit optatas posse sequi tenebras?” (“But why does your muse entice my muse forth and not let her be able to

pursue her desired obscurity?" 3-4). His muses' desire for obscurity, one that he later links to the ascetic lifestyle of the epic poet, leads the speaker to relegate the role of lover to his friend, Diodati. Both the speaker of *Elegia sexta* and "Haec ego mente..." dismiss love: *Elegia sexta*'s speaker in favor for the high tradition of epic verse, the speaker of "Haec ego mente..." for higher learning. However, both speakers also operate within the Latin love verse tradition. Writing of love (even in its rejection), but never coming close enough for love to register as even a possibility, they represent the most extreme examples of Milton's tendency to place distance between his speakers and the love they describe.

Unlike the speakers of *Elegia sexta* and "Haec ego mente...", the speaker of *Elegia quinta* does not claim to reject love. Although he remains decidedly apart from the sensually charged action of the poem, he offers no negative judgment toward to erotic scenes he describes. While the majority of the poem's action takes place in the groves and fields of a newly awakened, freshly green Earth, Parker astutely notes that "the poem never gets outdoors except in the artificial world of myth and legend" (56). Indeed, the only figure in the poem not associated with myth, legend, or the other written traditions of the pastoral and epithalamium is the speaker, who resides far away from the sylvan scene he describes:

Iam Philomela tuos foliis adoperta novellis  
 Instituis modulos, dum silet omne nemus.  
 Urbe ego, tu sylva simul incipiamus utrique,  
 Et simul adventum veris uterque canat. (25-28)

Buried beneath new foliage, now you arrange your melodies, Philomela, while the entire grove remains silent. I in the city, you in the forest, at the same time let us each begin, and at the same time let each sing the coming of spring.

Even though the speaker implores Philomela to sing along with him “at the same time” (“simul” 27-28), Milton’s repeated use of “uter,” or “each” (“utrique” 27; “uterque” 28), maintains a sense of separation. The two sing together in time, but are separated by space; the speaker sings his song from the city, while Philomela resides in the earthy countryside where satyrs and a bevy of gods and goddess will eventually frolic. Milton’s careful distancing of the speaker away from the poem’s sensually charged action once again shows the poet’s unwillingness to participate fully in the erotic tradition he adopts. Lewalski also notes this reluctance: “Milton’s Muse is awakened by all this new ecstasy of song, the renewal of his creative powers ... such that he joins his voice with the nightingale to welcome spring and invoke Apollo. But he does not imagine himself sharing in the general sexual frenzy” (35). In *Elegia quinta*, there is no entreaty to join in the fleshly fray of the countryside, not for the reader and certainly not for the poem’s urban speaker. Despite the poem’s erotic images, there appears to be no sexual temptation for the speaker. Instead, Milton places his speaker at a distance that is easily traversed by poetic inspiration, but still miles away from the erotic.

### *The Lover Approaching*

Unlike the speakers of *Elegia quinta*, *Elegia sexta*, and “Haec ego mente....,” the speakers of “Carmina Elegiaca” and *Elegia prima* are granted at least the potential for love; both speakers are physically present and involved in the action (or lack of) of the poem. “Carmina Elegia” even begins in the erotically promising setting of the bedroom. “Tepidi fulcra relinque tori” (2), the speaker of “Carmina Elegia” demands, “Leave the posts of the lukewarm bed behind!” As Revard points out, the speaker addresses “an

unidentified person — perhaps a friend or even himself” (*Milton and the Tangles* 11). This ambiguity offers the potential for two possible lovers in the poem: the speaker and the one spoken to. The commanding use of the imperative (“surge” [“get up!” 1,19]; “excute” [“shake off!” 1, 19]; “relinque” [“leave!” 2, 20]) places the speaker in the role of authority as he describes what is missed by lingering in bed. However, Revard also notes a tentativeness lingering behind the speaker’s urgent tone (*Milton and the Tangles* 11). The speaker, after all, does not appear to be any more a part of the outside scene he describes than the “lazybones” (“segnes” 13) he admonishes. Instead, the speaker merely watches and points, “Ecce” (“Look!” 11). Read as a self-address, the speaker’s rebuke is even more highly ironic, his words relaying understanding of what he is missing even as he continues to miss it. Ultimately, both the speaker and the addressee (regardless of whether they are one and the same) remain stranded on the sidelines of the poem’s action, relegated to the roles of passive observer and would-be lover in the face of the mythical lovers hinted at in the poem.

At first glance, “Carmina Elegiaca” is a playful admonition to leave both the comfort and the despondency that the bed represents and to partake in the life that flourishes around the speaker. This life is represented in part by nature: the breaking of the day, the crowing cock, the sun breaking over the fields, roses and violets in bloom. However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the inclusion of the mythological figures Philomela and Chloris/Flora adds an element of desire to the poem. While both female figures serve as representations of the lush nature described by the speaker, they also represent the physical desire of Apollo and Zephyr, and thus serve to infuse a sense of sexual longing into the outdoor scene. So, when the speaker includes Philomela and

Chloris/Flora in the catalog of things not found in the addressee's "soft bed," nature itself is not all that the speaker warns against missing. The erotic undertones are admittedly slight, but exist as a small part of the speaker's general entreaty to experience life.

The Philomela and Chloris/Flora myths become more problematic considering the violent nature of their tales. The two female figures represent desire, but their myths more specifically represent the *pursuit* of desire. As told by Ovid, their stories both follow the same basic pattern, one that is standard in Ovid's repertoire: a male figure sees a female, lusts after her, and pursues her until his desire is fulfilled, most often in violent fashion. Milton's use of Philomela and Chloris/Flora in the poem is an unspoken reminder of the often destructive consequences of unrestrained desire. There is little wonder that the characters never make it out of doors, despite the speaker's repeated entreaties. As to Milton's speaker's demands to leave the bed behind, Hale notes an incongruity with another form of Ovidian model: "Ovid's lovers are more likely to linger in bed" ("Milton Playing" 9). Hale's insight is a reminder that as tales from Ovid's *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*, the stories of Philomela and Chloris/Flora do not belong in the category of love verse. Both females are ultimately victims of rape, not mutual desire. When Ovid does write of lovers, they are indeed often found in bed. Ovid's well-known elegy, *Amores* 1.5, which details an afternoon spent in bed with Corinna, is a perfect example of this tendency. But Milton does not offer lovers, only the unrealized and cautionary potential for love. Nor is the bed in "Carmina Elegiaca" a place for lingering: "Illic tabifici generantur semina moribi" ("There the seeds of infectious disease are spawned" 17).

Although Milton continues to resist the portrayal of lovers in *Elegia prima*, he does move the speaker, quite decisively, out-of-doors and closer to the possibility of a love interest. Once again the turn towards the outside and nature is a part of the speaker's attempt to participate in life, to prove to his friend that "neque sub tecto semper nec in urbe latemus" ("neither do I always skulk about indoors or in the city" 47). In the next few lines, the speaker identifies his own potential as a lover:

Nos quoque lucus habet vicina consitus ulmo  
Atque suburbani nobilis umbra loci.  
Saepius his blandas spirantia sidera flammas  
Virgineos videas praeteriisse choros. (49-52)

The grove planted with neighboring elm has also occupied me, as well as the shady spot of a celebrated suburb. Quite frequently here you may see stars breathing out seductive flames, crowds of maidens passing by.

Unlike the speaker of "Carmina Elegiaca," the speaker of *Elegia prima* is presented with flesh and blood targets of desire. As discussed in the former chapter, the speaker uses nature to temper the physical presence of the young women he describes. He places further limits on the potential for a lover/beloved relationship when he relegates the entire group of girls into a generic catalogue of the ideal female form: jewel-bright eyes; long, white necks; golden hair; blushing cheeks. No one female stands out from the rest in the eyes of the speaker. Instead, the female figures mix and merge into an impersonal model of feminine beauty. Although the speaker proclaims, "Ah quoties dignae stupui miracula formae / Quae posit senium vel reparare Iovis" ("Ah how often have I been struck senseless by the marvels of a becoming form, which is able to restore old-aged Jove " 53-54), he remains little more than an impersonal observer to the scene spread out before him. He speaks of "seeing" these young women: "Virgineos videas praeteriisse choros" ("you may see crowds of maidens passing by" 52); "Ah quoties vidi superantia lumina

gemmas” (“Ah, how often I have seen eyes transcending gemstones” 55). He calls them a “turba videnda,” (“a crowd worth seeing” 80). But he never appears to interact with the girls; he merely watches. The speaker’s lack of action is a prime example of the “chaste resistance against the model of Ovid” that Lewalski suggests offers “an experience more literary than passionate” in *Elegia prima* (22). The speaker watches the “seductive flames” in the park. He writes about them. But he does not move beyond the role of scribe into the role of lover.

Just as quickly as the speaker praises the beauty of the women he observes, he relays his intention to withdraw from them completely. This decision is in direct contrast to the Ovidian model found in the first book of the *Ars Amatoria*. Hale explains: “Ovid had declared that Rome has as many nubile girls as the sky has stars ... so let the man who is being addressed get amongst them, let him give chase!” (“Milton Playing” 9). Yet the speaker in *Elegia prima* runs in the opposite direction:

Ast ego, dum pueri sinit indulgentia caeci,  
Moenia quam subito linquere fausta paro;  
Et vitare procul malefidae infamia Circes  
Atria, fivini Molyos usus ope.  
Stat quoque iuncosas Cami remeare paludes,  
Atque iterum raucae murmur adire Scholae. (85-90)

But as for me, while the indulgence of the blind boy allows, I am  
arranging to leave these fortunate walls as soon as possible and, having  
employed the help of a divine Moly, to shun from afar the infamous halls  
of faithless Circe. It stands as well that I go again to the rush-filled  
swamps of the Cam, and approach once more the roar of the noisy School.

With these lines, the speaker does not just reject the role of lover, he transforms the females he has previously praised into Circean temptresses. Their intent to trap the speaker propels him to make a hasty retreat back to Cambridge. The speaker’s initial intent not to hide away indoors, to experience the life that teems in all its feminine beauty



in the groves and shades around him, is quashed as quickly as it is implied. Revard suggests that Milton employs an ironic tone in the ultimate dismissal of female temptation, asserting that “When he tells his friend Diodati in ‘Elegia 1’ that he is fleeing from London before the god Cupid can take him captive, his audience, well-versed in love elegy, knows that he is really flying toward love and love poetry” (*Milton and the Tangles* 11). Revard may be right. Milton is certainly well attuned to the use of irony and is no stranger to its place in the love poetry tradition (Ovid was a master of irony, after all). However, if Milton does fly toward love and love poetry, in the Latin amatory elegies he does so on the wings of would-be lovers who never quite reach their destination.

### *The Lover Denied*

Compared to the other speakers of Milton’s love elegies, the speaker of *Elegia septima* comes the closest to fulfilling the role of lover. Unlike the speakers of the rest of the love elegies, *Elegia septima*’s speaker exhibits a marked desire for one particular girl. However, the speaker is denied the chance for love’s fruition when his beloved leaves the poem before physical contact is ever made. *Elegia septima* is much more dramatic than the other Latin love elegies, presenting a substantially different speaker, as the bravado of the opening lines indicate:

Nondum blanda tuas leges Amathusia noram,  
Et Paphio vacuum pectus ab igne fuit.  
Saepe cupidineas, puerilia tela, sagittas,  
Atque tuum spreui maxime, numen, Amor. (1-4)

I was not yet acquainted with your laws, seductive Venus,<sup>21</sup> and my chest was empty of Paphian fire. Often I scorned Cupid's arrows as childish weapons, also rejecting your divinity, O mightiest Love.

The irony of the speaker's words suggest the possibility of a tragic outcome, his use of the past tense hinting that his ignorance and scorn has been remedied already. Within the first four lines the speaker is identified as one who will have an active, intimate encounter with love.

Like the speaker of *Elegia prima*, when *Elegia septima*'s speaker first comes in contact with his potential love, he does so as an observer. The girl-watching scenes in both elegies correspond. Both speakers watch groups of young ladies walking outdoors. Both speakers use nature imagery to describe them. But while the speaker of *Elegia prima* ultimately offers his girl-watching scene as proof to his friend of the glories of London and the superior beauty of English women, the speaker of *Elegia septima* watches his females for the sheer pleasure of seeing them: "Et modo qua nostri spatiantur in urbe quirites / Et modo villarum proxima rura placent" ("Sometimes the places where our citizens walk about in the city and sometimes the nearest lands of the country houses are pleasing" 51-52). The places he describes please the speaker because of the opportunities for girl-watching that they provide. Therefore, unlike the speaker in *Elegia prima*, who ultimately flees the females he watches, the speaker in *Elegia septima* embraces his role as observer. "Ego non fugi spectacula grata" ("I did not flee from such agreeable sights" 57), he claims: "Impetus et quo me fert iuvenilis, agor. / Lumina luminibus male providus obvia misi / Neve oculos potui continuisse meos" ("And wherever youthful impulse carried me, I was led. Careless, I let my eyes meet their

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<sup>21</sup> Another name for Venus, "Amathusia" refers to the city of Amathus in Cyprus, where Venus was worshipped. See "Amathusia."

eyes” 58-60). This speaker is, after all, different, bolder, his carefree observation stemming from his disregard of love and his belief in his own immunity: “At mihi risuro tonuit ferus ore minaci, / Et mihi de puero non metus ullus erat” (“Yet the savage guy [Cupid] thundered at me with a threatening voice, making me laugh; Indeed, in regard to the boy, I had not even a little fear” 49-50). In retaliation for the speaker’s disrespect, Cupid causes the speaker to fall in love. The speaker relates, “Unam forte aliis supereminuisse notabam” (“By chance, I noted one girl that far outshone the others” 61). The result is immediate: “Protinus insoliti subierunt corda furores, / Uror amans intus, flammaque totus eram” (“Instantly unfamiliar passions entered my heart; Loving, I am burned within, and I am all flame” 73-74).

The speaker’s passion for the girl marks the biggest departure from *Elegia prima*, where the speaker gives no indication that he feels any emotional connection to the women he watches. In *Elegia prima*, the speaker seems determined to remain aloof and unaffected, but in *Elegia septima*, the speaker claims to be consumed (“Uror,” [“I am burned” 74]) by a desire that is only compounded when the girl departs: “Interea misero quae iam mihi sola placebat, / Ablata est oculis non reditura meis” (“Meanwhile, she — the only one who now pleased wretched me — she is carried away from my eyes, not to return” 75-76). The object of the speaker’s desire is one specific young woman, instead of the amalgamation of the most desirable female parts of *Elegia prima*, but she remains unnamed and unattainable. Her swift removal from both the speaker’s life and the poem ensures that she is as unidentifiable as the British girls of *Elegia prima*. Milton tempts the speaker (and the reader) with the potential for love. But just when Milton allows the

speaker to approach the realization of lover and beloved, he once again imposes distance, effectively quashing the possibility.

Further inhibiting the fulfillment of love is the speaker's lack of action in the face of his loss:

Ast ego progredior tacite querebundus, et excors,  
Et dubius volui saepe referre pedem.  
Findor, et haec remanet, sequitur pars altera votum,  
Raptaque tam subito gaudia flere iuvat (75-80)

But I go on, silently complaining; both senseless and uncertain, I often wished to return there. I am divided, and one half of me remains here; the other half follows my desire, and delights in lamenting joys ripped away so suddenly.

The speaker is overwhelmed, deeply affected by the conflicting needs both to stay where he is and to follow the object of his desire. Yet even as the speaker claims the pain of uncertainty and indecision, he revels in the experience of loving and losing and continues to reside firmly on the sidelines. In the speaker's recount of the episode, no interaction takes place between the speaker and his beloved. The speaker continues to play the role of observer, his participation in the love affair completely one-sided. Lewalski identifies the speaker's lack of action as another example of Milton's use of irony: "Throughout, the speaker directs lighthearted irony against himself: he loses the girl because he is too love-struck to make contact with her" (26). This irony becomes even more pronounced when considering one of Milton's models for *Elegia septima*: Ovid's story of Apollo and Daphne.

Unlike the speaker of *Elegia septima*, when Ovid's Apollo finds himself in the same situation as Milton's speaker — pierced with Cupid's golden arrow and consumed with desire for a particular female. He does not stand by idly and watch the girl leave.

When he leaves his speaker frozen in his steps, Milton departs from his Ovidian model. In his discussion of *Elegia septima*, Hales states that “the story is not altogether like Ovid, in that Ovid would not have had his lover give up the chase so early and pusillanimously” (“Milton Playing” 15). Or as E.K. Rand puts it, “Ovid is often tantalizing, but never to this extent” (112). Indeed, when Ovid’s Apollo finds Daphne running away from him, he immediately gives chase. In the end, Apollo claims Daphne for his own, if not as a lover then as a possession: “‘at, quoniam coniunx mea non potes esse, / arbor eris certe’ dixit ‘mea!’” (“‘but since you are not able to be my wife, you will certainly be my tree,’ he said” *Met.* 1.557). Notably, when Milton returns again to this myth in *Paradise Lost*, his Apollo, Adam, follows the Ovidian model more closely. Filled with “The spirit of love and amorous delight” (*PL* 8.477) that a trancelike vision of Eve evokes, Adam, like Apollo, is filled with a sexual passion that can be quenched only by the one he desires: “I waked / To find her or for ever to deplore / Her loss and other pleasures all abjure” (*PL* 8.478-80). Like a true Ovidian lover, Adam searches for Eve, and when he finds her and she turns away, he gives chase and calls out to her, his cries a direct imitation of Ovid. “Nescis, temeraria, nescis, quem fugias” (“You do not know, timid one, you do not know whom you flee!” *Met.* 1.515), Ovid’s Apollo shouts to Daphne. Adam echoes, “Whom fli’st thou? Whom thou fli’st, of him thou art, / His flesh, his bone” (*PL* 4.482).

Adam’s persistence is rewarded with one of the most erotic scenes in *Paradise Lost*, where sexual desire is met and fulfilled:

Half her swelling breast  
Naked met his under the flowing gold  
Of her loose tresses hid. He in delight  
Both of her beauty and submissive charms

Smiled with superior love as Jupiter  
On Juno smiles when he impregns the clouds  
That shed May flow'rs, and pressed her matron lip  
With kisses pure. (PL 4.495-502)

In his later version of Ovid's tale, Milton redefines the nature of the myth's male/female relationship. In this passionate scene, Eve has become the "matron," and is compared to Juno, goddess of marriage.<sup>22</sup> In Eve, Adam finds the wife that Apollo's unchecked desire for Daphne would not grant. But *Elegia septima*'s lusty speaker is a long way from the "conjugal attraction" (PL 4.493) of Eden. And the poet's wariness of this unchecked form of physical desire shows in his speaker's lack of action. Instead of calling out to the woman he desires, the slow-footed speaker of *Elegia septima* is left to plead only to Cupid:

Deme meos tandem, verum nec deme furores,  
Nescio cur, miser est suaviter omnis amans:  
Tu modo da facilis, posthaec mea siqua future est,  
Cuspis amatueros figat ut una duos. (99-102)

Take away at last my passions! But on the other hand don't take them away! I don't know why, but every lover is pleasantly wretched. Good-natured boy, grant only this: hereafter, if anyone is mine in the future, let one arrow transfix us both as lovers.

Rather than chase after love, the speaker chooses to revel in the misery caused by his short-lived love affair. His look toward the future, his plea to Cupid for another shot at love via a more generous arrow, is ironically hopeful, as Revard explains:

Milton prays to Cupid to be gracious, that a single dart of love might transfix two lovers. In the idealized portrait of Adam and Eve's lovemaking in *Paradise Lost* that wish has its fruition.  
(*"Milton's Dialogue"* 85)

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<sup>22</sup> Note that in this erotically charged moment, Milton returns again to the May/spring theme. Jupiter "impregns the clouds / that shed May flow'rs" (PL 4.500-01). Even in Eden sex and spring correlate for Milton.

However, when separated from the promise of *Paradise Lost*, the image of two hearts pierced as one in *Elegia prima* highlights the fact that the speaker falls short of a fully realized encounter with love. Although the speaker of *Elegia septima* comes the closest to love fulfilled, he, like the speakers of “Carmina Elegiaca,” *Elegia prima*, and *Elegia quinta*, fails to traverse that final distance. Milton will eventually reach a full poetic representation of erotic love, but in the Latin love elegies he remains hesitant to do so. It is not until physical desire couples with a more virtuous form of conjugal affection that Milton becomes comfortable enough to depict erotic love at its most explicit — prelapsarian sex in the Garden of Eden. In the Latin love elegies, the poet is unprepared or unwilling (or both) to make an overt judgment about virtue and physical desire. Instead, Milton hints at but ultimately avoids both topics. As a result, he rewrites the Latin love elegy into a complex form that bespeaks the poet’s discomfort with the subject of erotic love at the same time that he actively explores it.

## CONCLUSION

Even in his youth, Milton displays an acute awareness of tradition, language, and form, all of which he would continue to consider and manipulate when writing about physical love. Proving a readiness to engage in the topic of erotic love in his repeated returns to the subject, Milton equally demonstrates a decided wariness of sexual desire. His love verse is marked with conflict, a sense of push and pull, of ebb and flow, as the poet approaches the erotic only to withdraw again. The Latin love elegies mark the beginning of his journey into amatory verse, but they prove that Milton is conscientious in his approach to love and desire from the outset. While he meets the Latin amatory elegy tradition in its own language and form, he creates distance from the erotic by limiting sex to the realm of spring and nature and by removing his speakers far away from the possible fulfillment of physical desire. Thus, Milton redefines the Latin love elegy into a modified form better suited to his agenda of writing “more wisely, and with more love of virtue” than the “smooth elegiac poets” he emulates (*Apology* 693).

Milton continues the trend of approach and withdrawal as he enters the rich tradition of the Italian love sonnet. Although his speaker addresses the topic of love in the early English sonnet “O nightingale,” he does so as a petitioner to the nightingale to “Now timely sing” (9), promising his future “success in love” (7). As he tells the nightingale in the final two lines of the sonnet, the speaker is not a lover himself, but a servant to both the Muse and Love. It is not until Milton meets Petrarch’s form in its



own language that his sonnets' speakers play the role of lover. Moving past the vague, unnamed female figures of *Elegia prima* and *Elegia septima*, the speakers of Milton's Italian sonnets directly address or describe specific ladies with passionate language. For example, the speaker of "Per certo i bei vostr'occhi" tells his beloved: "Believe me, lady, your beautiful eyes cannot help but be my sun" (Carey 98). Yet even in these Italian love sonnets, Milton's speaker remains at a distance, broaching but never fully engaging in a more physical manifestation of desire. Mary Ann Radzinowicz best summarizes what she refers to as "a particularly Miltonic form of amorousness" in the Italian sonnets:

The poet loves the *Donna leggiadra* because she is lofty; he wishes his slow heart were as good soil for heavenly plants as for the flower of love; he does not mention the lady's hair, lips, or cheek except to confess to his confidant, Diodati, that it is not these but her incarnation of an ideal which moves him; and when he offers her his heart he commends not her value but rather that heart, describing it as faithful, dauntless, and loyal, fair, wise, and good in its thoughts. (131-32)

Never desiring for the sake of physical desire alone, the lovers of the Italian sonnets resist entering into a purely physical love affair. This resistance culminates in the image of the closed-off lover in both "Per certo i bei vostr'occhi" and "Giovane piano." Like the speaker of "Haec ego mente..." with his ice-encrusted heart, the speakers in both of these Italian sonnets also remain encased in a hard substance. The speaker of "Giovane piano" has a heart that has turned itself into stone: "my heart arms itself in itself, in perfect adamant" (Carey 99). Similarly, the speaker of "Per certo i bei vostr'occhi" is surrounded by his exhaled sigh, which is frozen and congealed in the air around him. In both poems it is the beloved who holds the key to break through the speaker's hard exterior, offering some hope for fulfilled love. However, at the end of these poems each speaker still remains separated from the object of his desire.

It is not until *Paradise Lost* that Milton finally enters fully into the realm of the erotic. In Adam and Eve, Milton offers a complete picture of lovers, physical desire, and sex. However, even this newfound level of eroticism is tempered by the didactic quality of the poet's representations of the sexual act. With one scene situated before the Fall, and one scene situated after, sex in the Garden of Eden is a lesson in the contrast between love that refines and carnal pleasure, a dichotomy set up by Raphael in Book 8.588-94. Interestingly, just as he does in *Elegia quinta*, Milton employs anthropomorphized versions of nature as he sets the sensual scene. But in the Garden of Eden, the figures of Earth and Nature function not as stand-in lovers, but as teachers. As Adam leads Eve to the prelapsarian marriage bed, the Earth shows its approval: "The earth / Gave sign of gratulation, and each hill" (*PL* 8.513-14). But when Eve eats the forbidden fruit, both Earth and Nature respond negatively: "Earth felt the wound and Nature from her seat / Sighing through all her works gave signs of woe / That all was lost" (*PL* 9.782-84). This disapproval is repeated when Adam eats the fruit: "Earth trembled from her entrails again / In pangs and Nature gave a second groan" (*PL* 9.1000-01). This second groan prefaces the sexual frenzy incited in Adam and Eve after eating the fruit. The placement of these lines encourages a reading that Earth and Nature's negative response applies not only to what has just happened (the eating of the fruit), but also to what is to come: the representation of Adam and Eve's uncontrolled lust. This is the good kind of sex, the Earth seems to say as it approves of Adam and Eve's "nuptial bow'r" (*PL* 8.510). And this is the bad kind of sex, Nature groans, when Adam and Eve give in to "Carnal desire inflaming" (*PL* 9.1013). Sex in the Garden of Eden is not for the sake of sex alone; it is a lesson in the right and wrong forms of sexual passion.

When Milton writes about physical desire, he returns again and again to the distancing tools he utilizes in the Latin love elegies. Bradner astutely recognizes the significance of Milton's early Latin elegies to his overall approach to love. "It would seem, therefore, that the Latin elegies should not be taken to represent a youthful enthusiasm for pagan sensuousness which he later rejected," Bradner claims, "but should be recognized as the first appearance in his work of an attitude which he retained throughout his life" (113). The Latin love elegies certainly resound with the distinct wariness toward physical love that continues to characterize Milton's later works. If they do not show Milton's "youthful enthusiasm," they do show a poet hesitant to meet the erotic potential of the tradition in which he works, but yet unready to assert his ideas about virtue openly. The speakers of Milton's Latin love elegies act only for themselves, offering no sweeping judgment about love to the reader. It cannot be coincidence that it is not until Milton writes to "assert Eternal Providence / And justify the ways of God to men" (*PL* 1.25-26) that he offers a sexual manifestation of desire. It is only then, when sex serves as a way to distinguish good from bad, that Milton comfortably fulfills the erotic promise of his early love elegies.

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