

Savoury words: Milton and the Consumption of Manna

This article is concerned with the representation of manna as physical and spiritual food in the seventeenth-century literary imagination, and in particular in the works of John Milton. Manna's ubiquitous presence in early modern texts and its centrality in matters of religious controversy, such as the doctrine of the Eucharist and the justification of set forms in devotion, reveal the systematic efforts of seventeenth-century writers to enlist manna as an apt metaphor for prayer and for the appropriate relationship between God and his people. As I argue, the nourishment provided by manna often escapes the physicality of eating and is imagined as creating a bond with the divine. This relationship which manna alludes to in the period is political as much as it is religious. Based on the exegetical tradition according to which Exodus functions as the blueprint for early modern England's plight, the suffering and salvation of Israel via the divine distribution of manna justify England as a nation of the elect. Achsah Guibbory has established that, in the 1640s and 1650s, "the tendency to think about England in terms of biblical Israel was pervasive, complex, and fluid, almost infinitely adaptable".¹ In what follows I seek to examine to what extent the central, and yet critically neglected, image in this story, manna, contributes to the complexity, fluidity, and adaptability of negotiating one's position in relation to God in the period. The questions I want to address begin with mapping the significance of manna in the wider seventeenth century and then proceed to focus this discussion on Milton's works as my case study: how did early modern writers, including Milton, incorporate biblical allusions to manna in their work? Was manna evoked literally or metaphorically in the period? How central was manna in discussions of prayer, and what purposes did it serve in such context? My argument throughout is that

manna occupies a peculiar place in the early modern imagination, constantly suspended between the metaphor and actuality of eating.

Placing Miltonic instances of manna within this tradition offers new insights into his writing and reveals the author's nuanced interpretive strategies, whereby the narrative of manna is not cherished for its typological associations with God's promise but for the role man and his body are required to play in order to establish a healthy and reciprocal relationship with God. As I intend to show Milton's unorthodox reading and application of manna highlights the substance's complexity not only as the result of divine origin and human reception, but also due to its incorporation of nutrition and waste. In other words, manna for Milton can both nourish *and* malnourish, investing man with the responsibility of taking action to ensure the former and avoid the latter. As such, manna participates in ways eating can define one's identity, or else in ways the consumption of manna can shape one's religious self.² The final part of the article applies these findings to Milton's *Eikonoklastes* to examine how manna can serve polemical uses and to offer a new reading of the iconoclastic text as a warning against recycled food and its impact on devotional subjects.

To begin exploring early modern conceptions of manna, it is worth alluding to an example from the mid-seventeenth century visual arts. Although the depiction of biblical topics from Exodus was in decline in this period, the French artist, Nicolas Poussin, chose the distribution of manna in the desert as his subject matter in 1639. His treatment of manna testifies to the substance's opacity and inherent ambivalence. In a letter to his friend and client, Paul de Fréart, Sieur de Chantelou, Poussin declares the completion of the commissioned work, *The Jews Gathering the Manna in the Desert*, and advises his friend to direct his gaze to the corporeal movements of the subjects depicted:

If you can remember the first letter I wrote you concerning the movement of the figures which I promised to depict, and if you consider the picture at the same time, I think you will be able to recognize with ease which figures languish, which ones are astonished, which are filled with pity, perform deeds of charity, are in great need, seek consolation, etc.³

While the subject of the painting is the biblical narrative of divine provision described in Exodus 16, according to which God miraculously nourished the starving Israelites in the desert by dropping manna, Poussin's artistic product is predominantly a study of human reaction to this miracle and less a visual account of godly providence. In the painting the heavenly gift of manna is discernible, yet almost negligible, in the midst of the intense physical activity its assimilation and consumption has provoked and which Poussin captures *in media res*. The gestures and passions of the Israelites, their active and varied responses as they lie scattered in the vast landscape, are visibly prioritized, following the artist's view that "painting is nothing else than the imitation of those human actions which are imitable actions in a proper sense".⁴

<fig.1 about here>

<Figure 1. Nicolas Poussin. *The Jews Gathering the Manna in the Desert*. 1637-39. Musée du Louvre, Paris>

The elusive nature of manna in the painting, which resembles light snow and is mostly visible next to the domestic items produced for its gathering, mirrors the uncertain linguistic provenance of the word from Hebrew for "what is it?".⁵ In the words of the philosopher Louis Marin examining Poussin's painting of the Exodus story, "'man hu' ('what is this?') was the question which the Jews asked when they saw that whitish, sugary,

granulated ‘thing’ falling from Heaven, a question which becomes the name of that ‘thing’, the ‘Manna’, the ‘what-is-this’”.⁶ If we trace the semiotic implications of Marin’s argument, we have to recognise that manna, the foodstuff, and manna, the word, emerge from a signifying system where the material and the abstract converge, where both word and object signal and both word and object are signified in a non-hierarchical relationship. The substance, then, is named after its incomprehensibility, introducing thus a plethora of theoretical perspectives on offer not only for visual artists, but for writers from various reformist backgrounds in the early modern period that look to manna to support their views on the legitimacy or not of set prayers.

As a substance simultaneously divine and material, a gift of divine origin but with the purpose of physical consumption, manna is discussed in the seventeenth century as food yet food which directly nourishes and determines one’s spiritual condition as well, serving thus as a synonym for prayer. Throughout the period the incomprehensibility of manna and its divine origin mark it as a symbol for the gift of prayer in religious lyric, devotional manuals, sermons, and theological treatises of both conformist and non-conformists authors. Manna’s centrality in debates of prayer rests with its amalgamation of divine authorization and inspiration on the one hand, and human effort and labour on the other. Listing synonyms for the practice in “Prayer (I)”, George Herbert celebrates prayer among other things as “Exalted Manna” (l.10), an image that captures the poet’s efforts to approximate prayer despite never fully defining it.⁷ Abuses of the gift of manna are used by Jeremy Taylor to criticise the Directory of Worship and the ineptitude of extempore prayers:

For now adaies men are never edified, unlesse they be pleased ... and the ground of their displeasure is nothing from the thing it selfe, but from themselves onely: they are

wanton with their meat, and long for variety, and then they cry out that *Manna* will not nourish them, but prefer the onions of Egypt before the food of Angels.⁸

For John Wilkins, manna's divine origin does not minimise the human labour prayer involved: "in the Primitive times ... they were extraordinarily inspired with these gifts by immediate infusions, without the usual means of study and labour; but that Manna was only for the Wildernesse God does now expect that we should plow and sowe".⁹

Manna serves as an appropriate metaphor for prayer not only due to its perplexity and resistance to being fully conceived by human reason; the substance's miraculous and suitable nourishment for each famished Israelite as described in Exodus 16.18 mirrors prayer's quality to be performed by, and prove beneficial to, every subject. In a sermon on the Psalms John Donne refers to them as "the Manna of the Church", explaining that "as Manna tasted to every man like that he liked best, so doe the Psalmes minister Instruction, and satisfaction, to every man, in every emergency and occasion".¹⁰ Donne's understanding of the Psalms as food here is characteristic of the post-Reformation religious rhetoric that, according to Kristen Poole, depended for transmission of its message on food imagery: "In seventeenth-century sermons and pamphlets the nature of religious language is given material form through alimentary images.... Scripture is to be eaten."¹¹ Critical attention to the metaphor of manna in Donne's work has emphasized how the materiality attributed by Donne to the Word, the pairing of textual and physical nourishment implied, rendered manna a symbol for the sacrament of the Eucharist, but at the same time relinquished power over its consumption and taste to God: "not as I would but as thou wouldest have it taste, and to conform my tast, and make it agreeable to thy will."¹² Eating manna enters the individual in a power relation with

the divine where the producer of the substance determines its flavour and affective impact on the consumer.

If Donne turns manna into an emblem of Eucharistic typology, Andrew Marvell's appropriation of the Exodus narrative in his country-house poem "Upon Appleton House" rejects such attempts at convenient typological significations, highlighting the literal value of manna as physical nourishment. Following one of the mowers' violent killings of a rail in the countryside surrounding Fairfax's house, the metaphor of the mowers as the Israelites instigated by the poet is radically disrupted and meta-poetically revised by the female figure of "bloody Thestylis", the voice of conflict and obdurate faith in literalization.

But bloody Thestylis, that waits
To bring the mowing camp their cates,
Greedy as kites has trussed it up,
And forthwith means on it to sup:
When on another quick she lights,
And cries, 'He called us Israelites;
But now, to make his saying true,
Rails rain for quails, for manna dew.
("Upon Appleton House", ll.401-8)¹³

The massacre of the rail in the meadows offers Thestylis the occasion to expose the speaker's earlier comment that "the tawny mowers enter next; / Who seem like Israelites to be" (ll. 388-9) as insufficient rhetoric in the face of the violence of war. Posing as another God and substituting actual rails and dew for the biblical quails and manna, Thestylis here reclaims the

politics of biblical exegesis that the Parliament made excessive use of in the 1640s and 1650s. Although Donne and Marvell approach manna from two distinct perspectives and for different purposes, theological and political respectively, the difference between Donne's metaphorical use of the divine gift and Marvell's parody of the metaphor is telling and characteristic of the malleability intrinsic in this image for early modern authors.

Manna's ties to seventeenth-century devotion, therefore, may be attributed to (or may even question as in Marvell's case) its providential role in the narrative of Israel's deliverance from its enemies, its heavenly origins, and its Eucharistic typology. What remains absent from such discussions, and what Milton contributes to early modern representations of manna, is less the role of God in manna's dissemination and the typological associations this encourages, and more its actual nature, the physical and spiritual attributes of manna, and their relationship to the human body. As I show next, Milton uses manna to reflect and advise his readers on eating habits, and to alert them to their own corporeality when reaching out to God. Just as in Poussin's painting manna is discernible -hence valuable- when it involves human labour, in Milton's texts manna is studied in close proximity to physiological activity, implicating man in a material relationship with the divine gift, while transcending it.¹⁴

Although Milton's interest in food, and eating in particular, has sparked critical attention to the ways eating and tasting in his poetry can create particular human, angelic, Christian, moral, and gendered identities, the role of manna in the process of fashioning devotional identity has been largely ignored.¹⁵ This might partly be attributed to the substance's undetermined consistency which resists categorisation and fails to fully convince critics of its materiality. In the banquet scene of Book V in *Paradise Lost*, for instance, Raphael mentions manna alongside nectar and ambrosia as the types of meal he enjoys in heaven: "We brush mellifluous dews, and find the ground / Covered with pearly grain" (V.

429-30).¹⁶ Milton's scriptural basis for manna as food consumed by angels is found in Psalm 78 that praises God for sending it to man on earth, defining manna as "the bread of Angels" in the Geneva Bible, or the "angels' food" in King James Bible. While rendering it celestial, however, the distinct location of manna does not contradict its material nature; after all, Raphael's reference to manna is in the context of his lecture to Adam on how the angels in heaven eat and digest as materially as man. Manna here becomes implicated in what Stephen M. Fallon has identified in Milton as "materialist monism", the philosophy that "treats spirit and matter as manifestations, differing in degree and not qualitatively, of the corporeal substance", and according to which "moral purity is measurable in the degree of rarefaction of body".¹⁷ The "pearly grain" that is manna, therefore, is dissimilar to the "viands" (V. 434) which Adam and Eve offer the archangel straight after these lines, in terms of access only, while they actually serve the same purpose of fulfilling hunger and "corporeal to incorporeal turn" (V. 413).¹⁸ The focus is firmly on the act of eating as bridging the matter of food with the spiritual condition that ensues from food. Milton's engagement with manna does not privilege any heavenly and disembodied state of it other than food, but pays tribute to it as nourishing matter, alluding in this respect to his translation of Psalm 80, where the people are imagined as fed "with the bread of tears / their bread with tears they eat" (ll. 21-2).¹⁹

Milton had previously linked the materiality of manna with that of meats in the metaphor of books as food discussed in *Areopagitica*.

Wholesome meats to a vitiated stomach differ little or nothing from unwholesome;
and best books to a naughty mind are not unapplicable to occasions of evill. Bad meats
will scarce breed good nourishment in the healthiest concoction; but herein the

difference is of bad books, that they to a discreet and judicious Reader serve in many respects to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate (*CPW*, 2:512).²⁰

In this treatise the food imagery highlights how physical and spiritual nourishment are essentially linked in man, how the material food or text cannot be held accountable for spiritual degeneration, and how reading, like eating, depends on a pure and healthy body to be fully beneficial. Yet meats are not the only food Milton enlists to make a case for books as nourishment; a few lines later Milton uses manna to establish man's liberty in exercising temperance and regulating his own diet.

I conceive therefore, that when God did enlarge the universall diet of mans body, saving ever the rules of temperance, he then also, as before, left arbitrary the dyeting and repasting of our minds; as wherein every mature man might have to exercise his owne leading capacity ... And therefore when he himself tabl'd the Jews from heaven, that Omer which was every mans daily portion of Manna, is computed to have bin more then might have well suffic'd the heartiest feeder thrice as many meals. For those actions which enter into a man, rather then issue out of him, and therefore defile not, God uses not to captivat under a perpetuall childhood of prescription, but trusts him with the gift of reason to be his own chooser (*CPW*, 2:513-4).

Manna, like the content of books, does not bear any responsibility for upsetting man's diet since food is external to him, thus innocent from accusations of defilement. Instead, like books, it offers the individuals the opportunity to apply reason and choose nourishment as relevant to their needs, as it happened in the case of the Israelites in the desert. As critics have

argued, the metaphor of meats and manna, in conflating the flesh with the word, could be seen to follow the Eucharistic model and to reimagine it at the same time.²¹ But manna here is more than a metaphor for God's word. Focusing on the omer, Milton is interested in the effect manna has on man, and specifically the matter of physically achieving satisfaction from eating manna. That manna would have "well sufficed the heartiest feeder thrice as many meals" is a declaration of the gratification the substance is capable of providing. The food from heaven, which Raphael lists as part of the celestial diet in *Paradise Lost*, is consumed by those on earth too, creating obligations for the management of appetites which escape the letter of the law ("the perpetual childhood of prescription") and are to be determined by the individual's reason.

The intricate nature of manna as material and spiritual food appear to capture Milton's imagination later in his life, too. In *Paradise Regained* Milton revisits manna and in fact complicates our interpretation of its nature and meaning by having both Jesus and Satan expound on its significance. Against Satan's one-dimensional reading of bread as only physical, Jesus juxtaposes its potentially transcendent nature, evoking Deuteronomy 8.3:

Think'st thou such force in bread? is it not written
(For I discern thee other than thou seem'st)
Man lives not by bread only, but each word
Proceeding from the mouth of God; who fed
Our fathers here with manna; in the mount
Moses was forty days, nor eat nor drank,
And forty days Eliah without food
Wandered this barren waste; the same I now.

(*PR*, I. 346-54)

The crucial word here is *only*; Jesus's reference to manna and the Israelites separates manna from the obstinately physical substance Satan tries to tempt him with, the "bread only", and indicates his faith in God's provision. Jesus is "the same now" with "our fathers", establishing a transhistorical continuity of trust which Satan seeks to undo in his solely literal understanding of bread.²² Manna is more than nutrition; it is a reminder of God's and man's responsibilities in solidifying a relationship of trust.

Jesus's narrative of continuity, however, is disrupted when in Book II the reference to Israelites and manna is found in the mouth of Satan. A shrewd and manipulative listener, Satan re-appropriates Jesus's text eliminating any spiritual concerns of trust and faith, and emphasizing instead material relief from hunger in material time:

With granted leave officious I return,
But much more wonder that the Son of God
In this wild solitude so long should bide
Of all things destitute, and well I know,
Not without hunger. Others of some note,
As story tells, have trod this wilderness;
The fugitive bond-woman with her son
Outcast Nebaioth, yet found he relief
By a providing angel; all the race
Of Israel here had famished, had not God
Rained from Heaven manna; and that prophet bold

Native of Thebez wandering here was fed
Twice by a voice inviting him to eat.
Of thee these forty days none hath regard,
Forty and more deserted here indeed.
(*PR*, II. 302-316)

Manna's complexity is sacrificed at the expense of the physical nourishment it can provide. In recycling Jesus's words, Satan dramatically accentuates their material context: the Israelites "had famished", Elisha is remembered for his human only nature ("native of Thebez"), and God is described as having a fixed testing time of forty days for his subjects, which has now expired in Jesus's case ("forty and more deserted here indeed"). Satan, then, adopts Jesus's reference to manna, but reconfigures it as evidence of material satisfaction only and dissociates it from its spiritual giver and content. Milton's decision to have Satan echo a distorted version of Jesus's argument alerts the reader to the dangers implicit in adhering to scriptural texts without the spirit's enlightenment. At the same time, however, it attests to the interpretative challenges that manna poses, inviting a consideration of the consumption of manna as establishing a particular relationship with God (here of trust) and not as serving purely physical needs.

The debate on manna in *Paradise Regained*, therefore, reflects on and reiterates the substance's essential qualities: the heavenly derivation, the satisfaction of physical needs via employment of temperance, the implicit threat of waste, and the cultivation of a mutual and responsible bond between God and his subjects. It also implicitly gestures towards early modern debates about the status of manna as physical food and its role as an emblem for the Eucharist and the sacrament's controversial interpretation of the consumption of divine

matter. For the remainder of this article I wish to examine how these qualities of manna were put to polemical use in the seventeenth century and in particular how they were adopted by Milton to undermine conformity in worship. Having examined how manna as food epitomizes the bridging of the material with the spiritual, attending to Milton's discussion of manna in *Eikonoklastes* reveals an awareness of prayer as a psychosomatic process, where the physical stimulation of the body meets one's spiritual obligations in speaking to God as an agent.

Man's duty and liability in the consumption of manna are addressed in *Eikonoklastes* in the context of Milton's discussion of the Book of Common Prayer. This chapter of the tract follows the iconoclastic point-by-point pattern Milton uses to refute each of *Eikon Basilike's* twenty-eight sections. Milton's target here is Charles I's Chapter XVI, "Upon the Ordinance against the Book of Common Prayer", which was written as a defence of set forms in prayer and denounced the replacement of the Book of Common Prayer with the Directory of Worship by Parliament's order in 1645. The critical role of prayer in *Eikon Basilike's* success cannot be overstated. Prayer had proven one of *Eikon Basilike's* most effective rhetorical and visual strategies in fashioning Charles I's sufferings as reminiscent of David's supplications and Christ's martyrdom and in eliciting the readers' sympathy.²³ The sense of private prayer was established by the textual apparatus of the work. In the frontispiece by William Marshall, Charles I was seen abandoning his earthly crown for the crown of thorns, becoming another Christ about to suffer for the love of his subjects. The self-sacrificial Christ-like imagery was further enhanced by the semi-enclosed and solitary space depicted and the ray of light illuminating Charles's penitent face evoking Christ's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. The hagiography of the emblem on the cover was supplemented by the prayers at the end of each chapter and the final meditations. The image of the solitary king at prayer alongside the

modelling of his prayers on David's Psalms formed for the reader an instantly recognizable pattern of devotional experience. In a sense readers entered the devotional closet of Charles and partook of his prayers because Charles's text presented them with a petitionary model relevant to the common post-Reformation anxiety about how to approach God. Stripped of his earthly crown, evoking his inner conscience, and speaking in psalms familiar to all, Charles embodied not the king's, but the subject's position in a private address to God.

As Sharon Achinstein has acutely observed, *Eikon Basilike* presents Milton with the problem of having to censor the king's intimate confessions and justifications of his actions while advocating the people's freedom to express and act on their conscience.²⁴ Charles's prayers, in their impression of *His Sacred Majestie in his Solitude and Sufferings* (the subtitle of *Eikon Basilike*), are of course central in this challenge, and Milton takes steps to counter their efficacy. Such steps include well-documented and thoroughly investigated moments in *Eikonoklastes*, such as Milton's condemnation of the frontispiece as "quaint Emblems and devices begg'd from the old Pageantry of some Twelf-nights entertainment at Whitehall" (*CPW*, 3:343), and the accusation that Charles had stolen a prayer from Sidney's *Arcadia* (*CPW*, 3:362). These methods assist Milton in exposing the king's prayers as borrowed, inauthentic, and as aimed at the people and not God. Milton's comment that Charles "should have shut the dore, and pray'd in secret, not heer in the High Street" (*CPW*, 3:456) establishes the king's devotions as theatrical and insincere, and alerts the reader to the open door of the king's closet.

Yet, *Eikonoklastes* does more than react against the representation of Charles's inauthentic prayers. I would like to argue that Chapter XVI offers Milton the opportunity to rehearse his own understanding of prayer and to present an alternative devotional model to that of the king. This is achieved via a neglected strategy employed by Milton, which

involves imagining prayers as edible and constructing an elaborate metaphor of prayers as manna in order to foreground the active devotional duty and the direct physical and spiritual involvement required from the petitioner. The use of manna and food imagery more widely take the reader directly to the source of danger Milton finds with *Eikon Basilike*'s prayer style: reprocessed words, and a 'ready-meal' attitude to devotion.

What is at stake in Chapter XVI is the negotiation of the cause-and-effect relationship between words and passions in prayer. For the author of *Eikon Basilike*, set forms in liturgy are thus justified:

For the manner of using Set and prescribed Forms, there is no doubt but that wholesome words, being known and fitted to men's understandings, are soonest received into their hearts, and aptest to excite and carry along with them judicious and fervent affections.²⁵

Set prayers have the ability to excite particular emotional states in the petitioners, or else pious fervency is stimulated by prescribed words. For Milton cause and effect are reversed: "for the manner of using sett forms, there is no doubt but that, wholesom matter, and good desires rightly conceav'd in the heart, wholesom words will follow of themselves" (*CPW*, 3:504). The cause-and-effect dynamic that Charles and the apologists for liturgy maintained is overturned in *Eikonoklastes*: the devotional disposition of the petitioners predates its oral articulation. "Wholesom words" follow "wholesom matter, and good desires", the former only a palpable symptom of the latter. The two views expressed above occupy the two sides of the extensive debate regarding set forms in worship that dominated the seventeenth century.²⁶ The division between set forms and extempore prayer translated into a division

between those who defended the use of preconceived and established modes of prayer (of which the Book of Common Prayer was the most prominent) and those who rejected set prayers as tyrannical, unlawful, and as devoid of the Spirit of God that existed to aid everyone's petitions separately according to their needs.

The debate on set versus extempore prayers is imagined in alimentary terms initially in *Eikon Basilike*:

Sure we may as well before-hand know what we pray, as to whom we pray; and in what words, as to what sense; when we desire the same things, what hinders we may not use the same words? Our appetite and digestion too may be good when we use, as we pray for, *our daily bread*.²⁷

"Our daily bread" is a phrase borrowed from the Lord's Prayer and it is part of the request to God to "Give us this day our daily bread". The reference here becomes explicit few lines later when Charles defines the Lord's Prayer as "the warrant and original pattern of all set Liturgies, in the Christian Church", a point commonly voiced in defence of liturgical prayers. Apart from serving as justification for the use of set forms in prayer, the phrase "our daily bread" combined with "our appetite and digestion" directly points to bread as the material good of sustenance. Consuming the daily bread simultaneously benefits appetite and digestion. Eating does not have to follow the body's appetites but it can excite them, as much as in prayer words precede affections.

In response to these lines Milton rewrites the idea of prayer as a product for consumption by substituting "our daily bread" with its Old Testament type, the manna God sent to the people of Israel in the desert.

We profess the same truths, but the Liturgie comprehends not all truths: wee read the same Scriptures; but never read that all those Sacred expressions, all benefit and use of Scripture, as to public prayer, should be deny'd us, except what was barreld up in a Common-prayer Book with many mixtures of thir own, and which is worse, without salt. But suppose them savoury words and unmix'd, suppose them Manna it self, yet if they shall be hoarded up and enjoynd us, while God every morning raines down new expressions into our hearts, in stead of being fit to use, they will be found like reserv'd Manna, rather to breed wormes and stink (CPW, 3:505).

That Milton chooses to discuss Jewish law and material bread instead of *Eikon Basilike*'s reference to "our daily bread" is in accordance with his rejection of the typology, which in the *Christian Doctrine* he holds responsible for "turning the Lord's supper into a cannibal feast" (CPW, 6: 554). Yet, this does not obstruct him from articulating his own physiological understanding of prayer based on manna and its relation to appetite and digestion. Manna, hence prayer, as in *Eikon Basilike*, is to be eaten, but for Milton it has to be consumed in accordance with the body's needs and not to precede appetite. Surprisingly, then, manna for Milton bears the potential both for nourishment and for waste. Its very design is to be stale and wasted when not consumed in accordance with the body's rational temperance. The savoury words, or prayers, need to be used when the need for them is felt, as opposed to them being stored and preserved to satisfy an imaginary future hunger: "as if Christians were now in wors famin of words fit for praier, then was of food at the siege of Jerusalem" (CPW, 3:505-6). The allusion here to a historically terrible disaster, the famine in Jerusalem during the siege by Titus in 69-70 A.D. as the editor of *Eikonoklastes* Hughes glosses it, is

juxtaposed to the seventeenth-century English nation who should not be storing what is abundantly supplied, foreshadowing the importance of temperance in food that Milton vividly describes in the banquet scene between Adam, Eve, and Raphael, who finish their meal “when with meats and drinks they had sufficed / Not burdened Nature” (V. 451-2). Human attempts at preserving the divine essence are not only conducted erroneously (“barreld up ... without salt”) but they turn into authoritative prescriptions (“hoarded up and enjoynd us”) of a practice that should only be freely initiated and regulated by the individual. In the Exodus narrative, the result of preserving, instead of eating, what God offered was the stale and foul-smelling “reserved Manna” the Israelites would encounter the day after gathering it. The example of “polemical worm”, as Karen Edwards has called it, highlights the rotten state fostered by recycled food as opposed to the “appetite and digestion” proposed by *Eikon Basilike*.²⁸ In *Eikonoklastes*, the result of recycling prayers, instead of being constantly inspired to new ones, are stale and empty words and in extension apathy on the petitioner’s side.

This apathy is registered physiologically as much as it is mentally and it set up against the physicality of prayer as Milton understands it. Persisting in the model of affections preceding words, *Eikonoklastes* uses humoral language to foreground the responsibility of individuals in their communication with the divine:

Voluntary prayers are less subject to formal and superficial tempers then sett forms: for in those, at least for words & matter, he who prays, must consult first with his heart; which in likelihood may stir up his affections; ... In these, having both words and matter readie made to his lips, which is enough to make up the outward act of prayer, his affections grow lazy, and com not up easily at the call of words not thir

own; the prayer also having less intercourse and sympathy with a heart wherin it was not conceav'd, saves it self the labour of so long a journey downward, and flying up in hast on the specious wings of formalitie, if it fall not back again headlong, in stead of a prayer which was expected, presents God with a sett of stale and empty words (*CPW*, 3:506-7).

Voluntary prayers appear as a somatic process and they entail a sense of bodily depth which contradicts the superficial nature of conformity in worship and the sluggish behaviour fostered by set forms. The corporeal map which registers the passage of prayer from the heart to the mouth and lips, combined with the spatial demarcations of “up”, “downward”, “flying up”, and “back again headlong”, engage God and petitioner in a mutual and active exercise that reconciles man’s affections with the presence of the divine. The collaborative project that Milton envisages for voluntary prayers is one where the addressed and the addressee are not fixed and unique but substitute each other: God both sends and receives, man both receives and sends. Prayer does not stem from man-made artificial expressions, but like manna, it flows from God’s mouth, it is always renewable, and if processed accordingly, it is nourishing for man and God. As such, it participates in the “restricted economy” Denise Gigante finds in Milton’s theory of taste, “in which things circulate smoothly, so that what the consuming organism ingests it sublimates back into expression”.²⁹ Furthermore, the metaphor of manna as a God-sent gift that grows stale if not consumed establishes that divine origin cannot guarantee divine destination. If the right conditions are not adhered to, and if words are found in the lips first, then the address to God is no more than the recycling of words, and his subjects no more than apathetic mouthpieces.

That the distribution of manna, when not processed, leads to perilous passivity informs the moment in *Paradise Lost* where Belial advises his fallen peers to adopt a position of inactivity:

On th' other side up rose
Belial, in act more graceful and humane;
A fairer person lost not heaven; he seemed
For dignity composed and high exploit:
But all was false and hollow; though his tongue
Dropped manna, and could make the worse appear
The better reason, to perplex and dash
Maturest counsels: for his thoughts were low;
To vice industrious, but to nobler deeds
Timorous and slothful: yet he pleased the ear,
And with persuasive accent thus began.

(*PL*, II. 108-118)

The devil, administering manna to an audience of fallen angels, conjures the power of word over a community, which is reminiscent of God's word to Israel. Yet the image of nourishment by the divine has been undoubtedly distorted. Belial's "tongue" is not the organ of taste, where the Word and manna, or else the spirit and the matter meet, but an organ of rhetorical speech without substance. Moreover, Belial's advice for "ignoble ease, and peaceful sloth, / Not peace" (II. 226-7) suggests that if the devils are to follow his instructions and to feed on his deceptive manna, their misjudged actions will exhibit the indolence that the

Israelites who gathered manna and stored it for future use displayed. The passage portrays a doubly distorted image of manna administration: firstly, manna proceeds from the devil to his followers instead of from God to his people, and secondly, the distributed manna urges to sloth and inaction instead of active participation in the consumption of it.

In *Eikonoklastes*, the “set of stale and empty words” that God is presented with in prescribed prayers designates a wider disgust with using devotions already consumed by another, whether it is a priest, a petitioner, or the king. When not referring to manna, Milton still uses imagery of food leftovers to denounce unimaginative repackaging of words. The most memorable and controversial instance of borrowed prayer in the treatise comes at the end of *Eikonoklastes*’s Chapter I, where Milton famously accuses the king of distorting “the very duty of prayer it self, by borrowing to a Christian use Prayers offer’d to a Heathen God” (*CPW*, 3: 362). The prayer in question derives not from godly inspiration, as prayers should, but from an irreligious literary text, Sir Philip Sidney’s romance, *Arcadia*, recycling thus Pamela’s devotions and presenting them as the king’s own. Milton adopts a stance of incredulity in the face of the borrowing, an incredulity exaggerated by the close detail to the actual process of borrowing: “a Prayer stol’n word for word from the mouth of a Heathen fiction praying to a heathen God” (*CPW*, 3: 362). Placing devout words in someone’s mouth had been referenced by Milton just earlier, with the example of *Richard III*, as the usual practice of tyrannical rulers, and it is an idea Milton revisits towards the very end of his polemical tract. Arguing again for an unmediated relationship between believer and God, one that involves no set prayers and not priests, Milton reacts to the king’s complaint that he could not receive his chaplains while in captivity, by reducing Charles’s set prayers to chewing words: “what aild this King then that he could not chew his own Mattins without the Priests *Oretenus*?” (*CPW*, 3: 550). ‘Chew’ in this case could be defined by *OED* as “to take

or retain the mouth; to keep saying or mumbling over”, yet it could also refer to the sense of “masticating for another”, portraying Charles as dependant on his chaplains’ feeding him used prayers. The heathen prayer, however, is an even worse text to consume, and Milton resorts once again to the metaphor of food to denounce the forgery:

If only but to tast wittingly of meat or drink offerd to an Idol, be in the doctrine of St. *Paul* judg’d a pollution, much more must be his sin who takes a prayer, so dedicated, into his mouth, and offers it to God. (*CPW*, 3: 363-4)

Eating what remains after idolatrous offerings is paralleled to praying to God using idolatrous, second-hand, words, such as Pamela’s prayer. Both signal reprocessing of a product not fit for consumption to begin with. Milton’s substitution of what in the Pauline epistle is termed “defilement” for its near synonym “pollution” firmly connects the idolatrous food leftovers with the “polluted orts and refuse of *Arcadia*’s and *Romances*” (*CPW*, 3: 364). As in the case of the accumulated manna and its state of decay, the Pamela prayer cannot be properly consumed and digested by man, but exists in crumbs, in fragments of little nutritional value, reminiscent of the dregs, or else “the lifeless, spiritless waste” John Rogers has shown to interrupt Milton’s monistic universe.³⁰ The danger of these crumbs, of eating fragments of forged texts, is the contamination of manna, and consequently the smearing of the Truth. In *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* (1641) Milton had attacked episcopacy’s legitimacy and its foundation on the writings of Ignatius and Irenaeus. Such arguments are dismissed not only as morally wrong for the spiritual liberty of Protestants, but as based on inauthentic texts which were inherited “in this broken and disjointed plight”. Milton’s polemic style, prefiguring the iconoclasm of *Eikonoklastes*, enlists manna and food imagery to combat false

texts: “We doe injuriously in thinking to tast better the pure Euangelick Manna by seasoning our mouths with the tainted scraps, and fragments of an unknown table” (*CPW*, 1:639).

Leftovers and reprocessed food spoil the pure taste of manna, suggesting the detrimental effect forged texts can have on achieving truth.

Consuming manna, therefore, emerges in Milton’s polemical tract as an exercise in prayer and as a moral duty. In the context of *Eikonoklastes* attention to nourishment by manna, and by prayers in extension, reveals a philosophy of devotion which seeks to replace Charles’s set prayers with a different model based on deep engagement with divine inspiration and reciprocal communication with God. This model is conceived in physiological and spiritual terms: the reader cannot escape the corporeality of the metaphors of manna and food and is instead alert to the demands eating places on the body as much as on the spirit, since extempore prayer materializes from the stirring of affections. Savoury words, reified in manna, create the responsibility for particular eating habits, for wise consumption, and for rejection of stale, recycled substances. They require digestion and consumption, or the individual’s active participation in their use, as opposed to their unquestioning endorsement and exploitation as divine gift. Following Poussin’s visual example, manna as sent by God cannot be automatically comprehended or useful to petitioners, but the interpretative steps begin with the work of the human body. In this respect, man’s active response to the matter and spirit generously bestowed by God emerges as the appropriate way of communicating with the divine.

Concentrating on a substance as elusive as manna contributes to discussions of how early modern writers read the Bible and how they adopt its narratives to stress the literal or metaphorical dimensions of its images. Whereas writers might choose to stress one nature of manna over the other, Milton’s incorporation of manna in his work intricately oscillates

between metaphor and literality, highlighting the danger of privileging matter over spirit and vice versa. Relying on manna as the spiritual gift of God may lead to apathy and the substance's divine origin may lead man to receive it unthinkingly. Conversely, engaging with manna as predominantly physical food may result in waste due to man's irrational efforts to satisfy his bodily needs. Prayer follows analogically the same directions in Milton's thought. The balance that man needs to strike in his performance of prayer, between physicality and spirituality, is encapsulated in the nature of manna, which for Milton bridges the materiality of consumption with the rational spirituality of exercising control over such consumption to avoid waste.

NOTES

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¹ Achsah Guibbory, “Israel and English Protestant Nationalism: ‘Fast Sermons’ during the English Revolution,” in *Early Modern Nationalism and Milton’s England*, ed. David Loewenstein and Paul Stevens (Toronto, 2008), pp. 115-38, 116.

² Eating manna, in this respect, bears strong similarities with what Michael C. Schoenfeldt has called “a particularly literal mode of self-fashioning, one that turns inward as much as outward”, in *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), p. 38.

³ Nicolas Poussin, “Letter to Chantelou, April 28, 1639”, in *A Documentary History of Art, Volume II*, ed. by Elizabeth Gilmore Holt (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958), p. 146. For a detailed analysis of the relationship between this letter and Poussin’s painting see Louis Marin, *Sublime Poussin* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 5-28.

⁴ Poussin, “Observations on Painting”, in *A Documentary History of Art*, pp. 142-46, 142. For different critical responses to Poussin’s painting see Francis H. Dowley, “Thoughts on Poussin, Time, and Narrative: The Israelites Gathering Manna in the Desert”, *Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 25 (1997): 329-48.

⁵ W. R. F. Browning, “manna.” in *A Dictionary of the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009) <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199543984.001.0001/acref-9780199543984-e-1198> [last accessed 8th May 2014]

⁶ Louis Marin, "On Reading Pictures: Poussin's Letter on *Manna*", *Comparative Criticism* 4 (1983): 3-18 (17).

⁷ George Herbert, "Prayer (I)", in *George Herbert and the Seventeenth-Century Religious Poets*, ed. by Mario A. Di Cesare (New York: Norton, 1978), pp. 21-2.

⁸ Jeremy Taylor, *An apology for authorized and set forms of liturgie against the pretence of the spirit 1. For ex tempore prayer 2. Forms of private composition* (London, 1649), pp. 40-1.

⁹ John Wilkins, *A discourse concerning the gift of prayer* (London, 1653), pp. 8-9.

¹⁰ John Donne, "The second of my Prebend Sermons upon my five Psalms", in *Donne's Prebend Sermons*, ed. by Janel M. Mueller (Harvard: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971), p. 91.

¹¹ Kristen Poole, *Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 62-3.

¹² John Donne, *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, ed. by John Sparrow (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1923), p. 40. For criticism on Donne see John S. Pendergast, *Religion, Allegory, and Literacy in Early Modern England, 1560-1640: The Control of the Word* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 119-31, and Louise Noble, *Medicinal Cannibalism in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011), pp. 89-126.

Typological associations between manna and the Eucharist, the round disks in the wilderness and the host, are further sustained by iconographical traditions, see Valerie Hutchinson Pennanen, "Communion", in *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes Depicted in Works of Art*, ed. by Helene E. Roberts (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1998), pp. 179-188, 182, and Rosemund Tuve, *A Reading of George Herbert* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 51.

¹³ Andrew Marvell, "Upon Appleton House", in *Andrew Marvell*, ed. by Frank Kermode and Keith Walker (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 52-77.

¹⁴ For the similarities in the style of Milton and Poussin when treating biblical themes, see also Marjorie B. Garber, "Fallen Landscape: The Art of Milton and Poussin", *ELR* 5 (1975): 96-124.

¹⁵ See, for instance, Anthony Low, "Angels and Food in *Paradise Lost*", *Milton Studies* 1 (1969): 135-45, Schoenfeldt, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England* (cited above), Denise Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2005), Amy L. Tigner, "Eating with Eve", *Milton Quarterly* 44 (2010): 239-53.

¹⁶ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Longman, 2007). All subsequent references to *Paradise Lost* are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

¹⁷ Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 102-3. For Milton's monism see also John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), Regina M. Schwartz, *Remembering and Repeating: Biblical Creation in "Paradise Lost"* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), William Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of "Paradise Lost"* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983), and William B. Hunter, Jr., 'Milton's Power of Matter', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (1952): 551-562.

¹⁸ For discussions of transubstantiation and the Eucharistic in this passage see Regina M. Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism: When God Left the World* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2008), Jamie H. Ferguson, "Satan's Supper: Language and Sacrament in *Paradise Lost*", in *Uncircumscribed Mind: Reading Milton Deeply*, ed. by

Charles W. Durham and Kristin Pruitt (Cranbury, NJ: Associated Univ. Presses, 2008), pp. 129-45, and Sophie Read, *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013).

¹⁹ John Milton, *The Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey (London and NY: Longman, 1997). All subsequent references to Milton's shorter poems, including *Paradise Regained*, are to this edition and are cited parenthetically in the text.

²⁰ *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols., ed. Don M. Wolfe et al. (New Haven, 1953-82), 2:512. All references to Milton's prose are from this edition, hereafter cited as *CPW* and included parenthetically in the text followed by volume and page numbers.

²¹ J.D. Schaeffer, "Metonymies We Read By: Rhetoric, Truth and the Eucharist in Milton's *Areopagitica*", *Milton Quarterly* 34 (2000): 84-92 (88), David Gay, "Prayer and the Sacred Image: Milton, Jeremy Taylor, and the *Eikon Basilike*", *Milton Quarterly* 46 (2012): 1-14 (11-12).

²² See Emilie Babcox, "Physical and Metaphorical Hunger: the Extra-biblical Temptations of *Paradise Regained*", *Milton Quarterly* 26 (1992): 36-42, and Lee Sheridan Cox, "Food-Word Imagery in *Paradise Regained*", *ELH* 28 (1961): 225-43.

²³ Critics on popularity of prayer in *Eikon Basilike* include Elizabeth Skerpan-Wheeler, "Eikon Basilike and the Rhetoric of Self-Representation", in *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I*, ed. by Thomas Corns (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 122-140, David, Loewenstein, *Milton and the Drama of History: Historical Vision, Iconoclasm, and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), Achsah Guibbory, "Charles's Prayers, Idolatrous Images, and True Creation in Milton's *Eikonoklastes*", in *Of Poetry and Politics: New Essays on Milton and His World*,

ed. by P.G. Stanwood (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995), pp. 283-94.

²⁴ Sharon Achinstein, “Milton Catches the Conscience of the King: *Eikonoklastes* and the Engagement Controversy”, *Milton Studies* 29 (1992): 143-63.

²⁵ *Eikon Basilike, with selections from Eikonoklastes*, ed. by Jim Daems and Holly Faith Nelson (Peterborough: Broadview Editions, 2006), p.131.

²⁶ See for instance Christopher Durston, “‘By the Book or with the Spirit’: The Debate over Liturgical Prayer during the English Revolution”, *Historical Research* 79 (2006): 50–73.

²⁷ *Eikon Basilike*, p. 132.

²⁸ Karen Edwards, “Worm”, *Milton’s Reformed Animals: An Early Modern Bestiary*, *Milton Quarterly* 43 (2009): 289-294 (292).

²⁹ Gigante, *Taste: A Literary History*, p. 26.

³⁰ Rogers, *The Matter of the Revolution*, p. 134.