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Carey's Re-imagining of the Editor's Role***

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John Carey's commentary on *Samson Agonistes*^[1] in his second edition of Milton's *Complete Shorter Poems*^[2] evidences a radical re-imagining of the role of an editor in contextualizing and presenting a scholarly text to an academic readership. Carey's first edition of the *Poems*^[3] had been greeted with acclaim; a review in the *Times Literary Supplement*^[4] remarked that although his notes were, on the whole, "intimidating," the edition should prove "indispensable to both scholars and students."^[5] And indeed, the edition has since become one of the standard texts of Milton's poetry. But even in 1968, it was not without its controversies. Carey's editorial decisions reveal much about the assumptions that went into producing the text and notes of the first edition. Perhaps the most controversial feature of the first edition was Carey and Fowler's decision to use modern spelling, while retaining Milton's (or the printer's) original punctuation. They explain their rationale for this decision in the 1968 preface:

Spelling and punctuation present quite separate problems to an editor for the good reason that they have quite different functions linguistically. Punctuation, like word order, inflection and function words, is a class of grammatical symbols. [...] Consequently we ought to be almost as reluctant to alter the punctuation of an old text as we would be to alter, say, its word order. [...] The linguistic function of spelling is by comparison much cruder and simpler. It is not a grammatical symbol but a vocabulary symbol. [...] It is usually easy to find exact modern equivalents for old spellings, because orthographic signals are essentially simple binary signals.

I quote this at some length to highlight the assumptions and methods which went into the preparation of the text in 1968 – assumptions which necessarily remain present in every line of the 1997 edition, since the text of *SA* remains unchanged between the two. Carey's basis for selecting the copy-text for *SA* is also unchanged between the editions, and remains quite straightforward. He writes that, "*Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Regained* were published together in 1671. This was the only edition in M[ilton]'s lifetime. The present text follows it."^[6] Carey made a few changes to the 1671 text, correcting what he saw as misprints and inserting the changes suggested by the original *Omissa* and *Errata* lists, but he claimed that on the whole he kept the 1671 text, while modernizing the spelling. Implicit in Carey's approach is the idea of an idealized, conceptual 'work' of which the various editions or printings – 1968 being merely one iteration – are imperfect representations. The preparation of *SA* from copy-text seems to be entirely in line with classic New Bibliographic principles.^[7]

So Carey was able to justify modernizing Milton's spelling because he saw the 1968 text as involving two binary associations: the old spellings were (by and large) exact orthographic representations (signifiers) of some conceptualized vocabulary (signified), and this conceptualized vocabulary is in turn represented exactly by equivalent modern orthographic signals. Somewhere in the middle of this tangle of binary associations is Milton's true 'work' – not perfectly captured, perhaps, but presented to a modern academic audience as effectively as possible. Thus, the text of Carey's first edition contains within it the assumption that the modern words of Milton's poem are, as it were, a means through which we experience his enduring artistic work.

In 1968 Carey's critical apparatus to *SA* was appropriate to his text-centered, 'evaluative' view of the poem. His notes glossed difficult or archaic vocabulary, and his explications of evocative, linked episodes in the poem noted Milton's chief influences from classical drama and the Bible. In particular, Carey's introduction was concerned with the operation of Milton's poetic language; he gave considerable attention to verbal and syntactic features and to interlinked

layers of imagery and declared action. Carey also summarized what he saw as the chief strands of criticism about *SA* which, in 1968, “centered round two major questions: its structure and its spirit.”^[8] Thus his introduction summarized several critics’ viewpoints on whether *SA* is Hellenic, Hebraic or Christian, and examined how this categorization affects the poem’s potential status as a tragedy. In his discussion of Milton’s poetic style, Carey quoted from various critics, but did not hesitate to pass judgment on their conclusions. See, for example, Carey’s comments on Ricks: “The rarity of *SA*’s imagery allows it to make connections across areas too large for Ricks’s focus”^[9] or on another critic: “[t]hat the ending [of *SA*] is indeed morally disgusting does not seem to be realised by E. L. Marilla.”^[10] In addition, the bulk of the stylistic judgments were presented as Carey’s own. For example, he asserted that:

Most of M[ilton’s] stylistic mannerisms in *SA* can be illustrated from Samson’s first speech (1-114). Modern readers are likely to be struck first by the insistent disturbances of English word order [...] A common displacement of normal word order in *SA* is the promotion of adverbs or adverbial phrases or clauses to the start of a clause, sentence or, sometimes, speech [...] The speeches gain internal vigour not only from their knotty and unaccustomed syntax but also from the persistent use of rhetorical figures involving repetition.^[11]

And so on. There is a clear sense in Carey’s 1968 introduction of a guiding intelligence in the voice of the editor – a sense of judgment, not simply summary and presentation.

Carey’s 1968 introduction to Milton’s idiosyncratic style and complex use of imagery led to a generalized statement about the operation of the poem on a reader. In Carey’s view,

[T]he imagery does not merely reinforce the drama’s triumphant upward arc. On the contrary, it contributes meanings which threaten to invert this

arc [...] In this way it makes a major contribution to the moral maturity of the work.^[12]

The use of a phrase like “moral maturity” is only possible when an editor is willing and able to put forth specific conclusions according to his own personal readings. But such an approach can be problematic. Some might object to an editor who features his own conclusions; the presence of a strong editorial intelligence in a work is, on its own, a potentially contentious point. Some readers might be ‘mislead’ by this kind of introduction, insofar as they might pay attention to aspects of the work which would not otherwise have caught their attention. So it is interesting that in his 1997 edition Carey seems to have tried deliberately to remove both this personalized intelligence and his 1968 way of reading the poem. This radical depersonalization has deep – and, to my mind, unacknowledged – significance for readers of the second edition of *SA*.

Some clues to Carey’s motivation may be found in his preface to *1997*, where he writes:

The chief purpose of this new edition is to incorporate into the headnotes and footnotes the Milton scholarship and criticism published since the appearance of the first edition in 1968.

This seemingly innocuous and well-intentioned motivation has significant implications for the original structure of the introduction and notes to *SA* because, regardless of whether the two effects were causally related, in incorporating this new scholarship, Carey has more or less removed his own voice from the edition. This effect can be seen most drastically in the introduction to the 1997 *SA*. Gone are the debatable (and debated) points about poetic mechanisms and broad lines of inquiry into the genre and structure of the work. Instead a reader reading through the introduction sees references to and summaries of dozens of articles on a variety of critical cruxes. I do not intend to reproduce Carey’s work here, but these lists appear in roughly the following form:

Other studies which, in the period up to 1986, stressed Samson's positive qualities were M. A. N. Radzinowicz, *PQ* 44 (1965) 454-71 and *MS* 17 (1983) 249-80 (regeneration; exemption from charges of political terrorism), F. R. Baruch, *ELH* 36 (1969) 319-39 (spiritual insight), J. S. Hill, *MS* 2 (1970) 149-74 (spiritual growth, Christian heroism), C. A. Huttar in *Imagination and the Spirit*, ed. C. A. Huttar (Grand Rapids, Mich. 1971) 101-57 (spiritual development paralleling M.'s), A. C. Labriola, *PQ* 50 (1971) 99-107 (mastering of passions by reason) [...].^[13]

This particular list continues for another eighteen articles before moving on to "Critics who, since 1986, have supported Wittreich and/or emphasized negative traits in Samson."^[14] I believe the point is clear enough: in 1997 Carey's role as editor has been self-censored, in that he is no longer offering his own reading of the poem, or his own comments on the poem's effect on a reader. Instead he acts as a remarkably compendious reference – a presenter of debates and disagreements on various facets of the poem.

Carey's 1997 approach is particularly noticeable in the few instances where the introductions to the first and second editions both refer to the same article. For instance, the 1968 edition dated *SA* between 1647 and 1653, a contentious claim which Carey personally argued for in his introduction. In making this argument, Carey rejected A.S.P Woodhouse's "ill-supported plea for a date between the Restoration (May 1660) and the spring of 1661."^[15] In 1997, by contrast, Carey's role as editor has become so de-personalized that he can reference Woodhouse's same "ill-supported plea" as one of several critics who have argued for the 1660-1 dating:

J. S. Hill [...] opts for 1660-1, on general biographical grounds, a date first proposed by William Haley in 1796, and supported by A. S. P. Woodhouse, *TRSC* 13 (1949) 170-1.^[16]

The overt value judgment is gone.

Why would Carey do this? Certainly the change is motivated at least partly by the necessity for deference to the developing field of Miltoncriticism. There is simply much more material to be included, and the number and complexity of debatable issues in *SA* has ballooned far beyond the quaint original two that Carey noted in 1968. But this factor does not explain why Carey would *remove* his own voice from the introduction. If anything it makes this removal even more puzzling, because the field of Milton studies can be far more confusing and intimidating to an uninitiated reader without some strong editorial presence telling us as readers where to look or how to begin – and the 1997 Longman edition is the self-proclaimed “standard edition of Milton’s poetry for students and general readers alike.”^[17] Carey seems to have changed his understanding of what an editor’s role should be in presenting a work to an audience. Publishing or other business concerns probably affected his content and presentation to at least some degree, but the precise effects are unknowable and, for the purposes of this paper, unimportant. As it stands, Carey’s second edition seems to reflect his conversion to a theory-centric method of literary criticism, an approach which had come to dominate the field of literary studies since his first edition was published. This essay is not the suitable place for a broad and detailed discussion of trends in literary criticism, but it is fair to speak of Carey’s own general beliefs about theory because I believe they influenced his editorial decisions in his work on the second edition, which is billed as, “not just an edition, but a clear and succinct guide through the rich but bewildering profusion of modern Milton scholarship.”^[18] As I hope to show, the emphasis in the critical apparatus to the 1997 *Samson Agonistes* has been shifted to the scholarship, almost to the exclusion of the poetry.

In early 1980, Carey contributed a *Viewpoint* segment to the *TLS* in which he remarked – in terms that curiously echo F. R. Leavis’s famous pronouncement about Milton – that the “dislodgement of ‘evaluation’” as the central aim of literary criticism had “been effected with remarkably little fuss.”^[19] Carey argued that ‘evaluation’ had been the dominant idea behind literary studies just twenty or

even ten years previously – when he was editing the first edition – and this idea had had at its core a fundamental belief in the possibility of objective evaluation and the truth of a reading – that you could arrive at a “right” reading and demonstrate the wrongness of others. But Carey argued that by 1980 hardly anyone believed this objectivity anymore, and literary studies had moved on to embrace subjectivity and myriad individual readings, which were valuable precisely because they fomented debate and were fundamentally insoluble. Literature, in Carey’s new view, became a tool for revealing truths about the readers; the readers’ responses made psychological and contextual facts about themselves available to other readers. And Carey praised this advance as the sophistication of literary studies. True, he wrote, “such a programme [of study] would subordinate study of literature to study of people. But then, it is for the sake of people that literature exists.”^[20] It seems that the 1997 edition of *SA*, while it may have been occasioned by Carey’s stated desire to incorporate relevant scholarship into his notes for the poems, also provided a forum for him to apply this new focus for editorial work. This is no minor shift in Carey’s critical outlook; it is a fundamental change in the way that he reads and presents literature. It includes an assumption that value judgments and readings must be articulable and provable, i.e. that the only valuable knowledge for critical purposes comes from pointed arguments that we can express clearly, rather than impressionistic responses to the aesthetic effects of a work. These assumptions were perhaps not as universal as Carey claimed in 1980; the critic George Watson (among others) called Carey’s assumptions the “French disease”^[21] and forcefully critiqued them in several responses to his article. I hope to show that the change in critical theory that Carey championed in 1980 can perhaps explain why his 1997 critical apparatus to *SA* is far more focused on the debate surrounding the poem than in the operation of the poem itself.

Although, as we have seen above, the introduction is by far the most dramatic evidence of Carey’s shift in editorial method, a similar change can be seen in his textual notes to *SA*. A full list of these changes (fifty-two of them) is included in

the appendix, but it is worthwhile to examine some of the more telling changes here. Though the majority of the several hundred notes are unchanged, Carey removed seven for the second edition; an examination of these seven notes will provide the starting point for evaluating what Carey thought was worth changing in his new edition.

Several of the removals are relatively straightforward, and in line with Carey's stated practice. In his preface to *1997* Carey notes that, "the standard of published work on Milton, as on any major author, is uneven, and not all articles, or even books, yield anything of value." He goes on to say that he has, "passed over in silence those that seem to me worthless."^[22] Three of the seven removals from *1997* can be seen as Carey applying this standard retroactively, to remove arguments which in the deepened and strengthened field of Milton studies no longer pass muster for inclusion. These are his original notes to lines 52, 1423-6 and 1665-6, which dealt with contentious, unresolved claims about analogues or potential stylistic tricks by Milton, and which we may assume Carey did not feel were up to his new standard.

But the other removals are not so innocuous. Carey's original note to lines 66-7 (where Samson bewails his loss of sight as his "chief" complaint) had called our attention to line 195, where Samson re-assesses his case and subordinates his physical complaint of blindness to the shame of having been deceived and, "like a foolish pilot have shipwrecked, / My vessel trusted to me from above". The later line asserts that blindness is not the most severe wrack for Samson, because even if he had his sight, he would not be able to lift his head for shame of his condition. In removing this note, Carey has removed a comment on the interlinked, contradictory structure of the poem, and by extension removed mention of an instance of inconsistency in Samson's character. The removal of this note is not a tremendously significant event in itself, but it does fit within a larger pattern of Carey systematically removing mention of the subtle poetic effects to which he had called such attention in his 1968 edition.^[23]

This is made clearer in light of the three other removals from the notes, which systematically expunge the several references Carey had made to Arnold Stein's 1957 collection of essays *Heroic Knowledge*. It is hard to see these removals as anything other than the repudiation of Stein's method, or at least of his conclusions regarding SA,^[24] but the conclusions in the original notes are not particularly contentious or earth-shattering, merely old-fashioned and evaluative. Carey's original note to line 3^[25] cited Stein's remark that, "The opening lines, describing mere physical sensation, also suggest the internal drama to come"; his note to line 10^[26] cited Stein's recognition of that line as, "an early note of the regeneration theme"; and his note to lines 1404-5^[27] cited Stein's observation that Samson, "sums up the whole history of his drama by pretending to deny it [...] In the grimly untrue we hear the true."^[28] Carey removed a further citation of Stein – the only other one – from his note to line 229,^[29] which in 1968 read,

Cp. *Judges* xvi 4: 'He loved a woman in the valley of Sorek.' Stein 146 comments: 'The first feeling for Dalila [...] is to be heard in the softened beauty of the line that announces her.'

In 1997 the note simply reads, "Cp. *Judges* xvi 4: 'He loved a woman in the valley of Sorek.'" Stein's points are all rather general, and refer to perceived trends in the poem as a whole. They are, above all, personalized readings by a single astute reader, presented as "correct" in 1968 because they have both the weight of authorial proclamation (by Stein) and editorial fiat (by Carey) behind them. In 1968 they certainly could have guided the reader of SA, particularly since the first two remarks came within 10 lines of the poem's opening. In Stein's remarks we see, for example, the choice of fortitude or capitulation suggested in the choice between sun and shade, and the theme of regeneration evoked by the "breath of heaven fresh blowing, pure and sweet." Stein presumes a connection between broad themes in the poem and the specific imagery and language of the opening lines, much as Carey's 1968 introduction had presumed the linked (if not always sympathetic) operation of imagery and theme. This is precisely the kind of reading which Carey is seeking to repudiate – or at least de-privilege – in 1997.

However, his clear-cut decision seems more problematic when we consider that Stein's approach, though apparently too 'evaluative' and supposedly objective for Carey, is by no means a truly old-fashioned evaluative declaration; Stein acknowledges that, "there is no one ideal criticism or critical method", though he goes on to qualify this with an observation that Carey probably would object to in 1997:

[T]hough there are many examples of good-better-best and bad-worse-worst [...] I have tried to cultivate objectivity, but I have not tried to train out of the writing my personal response to the developments I describe.^[30]

Although an examination of Stein's method gives some evidence as to why Carey might have excised his readings in 1997, it also reveals that even in 1957 Stein was talking about subjectivity in a sophisticated way, and blending that respect for subjectivity with a belief in the possibility of objective standards for literary evaluation.

But Stein's fundamental philosophy of criticism is at odds with Carey's new approach in the 1997 edition, since Stein's work stems from a belief that criticism,

[S]uggests and opens up; if it gets between the unprepared reader and his individual, immediate response to the work, it does not stay there, but like a capsule gently dissolves to do its intended office.^[31]

Carey, in his 1980 article and his 1997 editorial method for *SA*, seems to believe that it is not an editor's place to offer commentary that could "get between" the reader and the work, because the new function of criticism is to reveal truths about the reader through their responses to the work in question. An interfering editorial intelligence would, as it were, taint those responses.

Carey's new reader-centered critical response shows up in one of his dramatically changed notes in 1997, the one to line 1692.^[32] In 1968, the note simply read, "dragon] huge snake or python (a common meaning from thirteenth century onwards)." The 1997 note retains this definition but is significantly expanded,

and includes S. S. Stollman's remark that Rabbinical tradition associated Samson with a snake.^[33] But here Carey introduces an unexpected bit of personal editorial consciousness when he writes in the note that:

Those who take the 'dragon' to be a winged creature (L. S. Cox, *MLN* 76 (1961) 577-84) or a comet (E. W. Tayler, *MQ* 6 (1972) 7-10, and W. Kerrigan, *MQ* 24 (1990) 40-44) miss the contrastive force of 'but' (1695): Samson came along the ground *but* attacked from above.^[34]

Here we have a microcosm of Carey's editorial revisions in the 1997 edition. He includes Stollman's article to introduce another theme of potential debate into what was previously a simple traditional definition, but in commenting on several critics' observations about the dragon, he also unveils his own capacity for judgment. However, his analysis focuses not on what other critics conclude about the poem, but on how their readings evidence their personal error as readers – they “miss” the contrastive force of one of the key words. Carey's stated theory and implicit practice of honoring subjective responses does not seem to acknowledge that his editorial judgment (like all editorial judgments) has an inherent objectivism about it, but this is a point I will come back to in a moment. In this case, he assumes a single, “correct” consensus about the effect of the word “but,” which overrides the effect of all the winged imagery in the surrounding lines. I do not find the matter so simple; the critics who conclude that the dragon is a winged creature might be forgiven since the immediate context reads:

With inward eyes illuminated
His fiery virtue roused
From under ashes into sudden flame,
And as an evening dragon came,
Assailant on the perched roosts,
And nests in order ranged

Of tame villatic fowl; but as an eagle

His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads.^[35]

Here we have several bird-related images nested together: the ashes-and-fire Phoenix evocation of line 1691, the assailant of “perched roosts / And nests” which could be a snake slithering up the tree branches but could also be an aerial attack, and finally the unequivocal image of Samson as an eagle. The readers who in their mind’s eye see the dragon as winged may be reading in a manner similar to Carey’s own expressed standard from 1968 – the imagery introduces meanings which run counter to the stated narrative of the poem, and threaten to pull it out of shape, because Samson as fiery, haughty phoenix-dragon-eagle (all winged) is a much more coherent sequence than Samson as triumphant phoenix, assailing serpent, and noble eagle. In this case the effect of the series of winged images counteracts the stated association of Samson with the dragon/serpent. The triumphant imagery works to counteract the pejorative terms that are inevitably associated with the serpent image in Milton. As Carey noted in 1968 but declined to mention in 1997, the imagery *SA* can often introduce meanings which run counter to the overt narrative. Judging from the responses that Carey cites from Cox, Tayler and Kerrigan, the leading effect of that imagery is persistent and real.

As I have argued above, Carey’s editorial approach in the 1997 *SA* is to catalog various critics’ worthwhile theoretical, subjective and non-evaluative readings of the poem, and he removes his own and others’ poetically sensitive readings from the reader’s immediate view. This embrace of theory and subjectivity is fair enough, but the unacknowledged problem with this method is that in making the decision to exclude certain critics’ works Carey is still relying on a latent objective understanding of the worth of a critical argument, *and* showing a belief in the objective worth of his new, “non-evaluative” approach to assessing literature. Yet he claims that this type of objective understanding should not exist anymore. The note to line 1692 is a good example of a more insidious effect of Carey’s changed approach. At first, the inclusion of many different critics’

readings seems merely a necessary deference given to the vastly expanded scope of Milton studies. But in placing criticism and subjective critical debates at the forefront of his introduction and notes to the poem, Carey has also de-prioritized the kind of poetic sensitivity he once championed. So he has specifically removed critical opinions that, like Stein's and his own in 1968, approach the poem with an old-fashioned evaluative air. Their formerly privileged position has been completely excluded. The problem with this changed approach is three-fold. First, it is presented as inevitable progress and welcome sophistication, but is as arbitrary as anything critics were doing before 1968; Carey's decision to study the reader rather than (or at least as well as) the work is as much a critical trend as the New Critics who insisted on a rigidly evaluative mode of reading. Secondly, it claims to reject evaluative objectivism, yet it necessarily relies on an experienced editor's judgments about which arguments are worthy of inclusion in the volume. Third, it rejects the convention of presenting a learned explication of the poem's poetic operation on the reader, but of course the poetic effects that Carey described in his 1968 introduction to *SA* still apply. As we have seen in the case of Cox, Tayler and Kerrigan they affect critics' readings of the poem – yet Carey makes no mention of the common motivation for all the disparate critics' readings, choosing instead to focus on the controversies themselves. This is, as I have said above, a radical re-imagining of the editor's role and of the readers' responsibilities, yet Carey does not mention it; he presents the second edition simply as an expanded version of the first.

The problem goes yet one level deeper than the critical debates and editorial method. The 1997 text of *SA* still contains the latent assumptions of evaluative, objective judgment which were involved in preparing the 1968 text along New Bibliographic lines. The disjoint between the editorial method that went into producing the 1968 text and the editorial method that went into re-presenting the critical apparatus in 1997 leads to an internal tension in the second edition, because the terms that Carey uses in his approach to the critical apparatus should

also mean a different mode of presentation of at least certain parts of the text itself.

An example will suffice, because *SA* is one of the less problematic texts in Milton's oeuvre. Carey inserted the changes from the original *Omissa* and *Errata* lists into the body of *SA*. His note to the omitted lines says simply that:

In 1671 ll. 1527-35 and 1537 were omitted, but supplied in the *Omissa*.

Thus in the uncorrected state of 1671 l. 1536 was given to the chorus, not Manoa.

Carey's use of "uncorrected" is telling, since he has made an effort to incorporate a modern embrace of subjectivity into his editorial role, yet the use of such a term indicates the assumptions he still retains in 1997 about the integrity of his text. His treatment of the *Omissa* and *Errata* changes is also evidence of those assumptions, as Stephen Dobranski's article shows.

In February 1996, Dobranski published an article^[36] which would later be incorporated into his book *Milton, Authorship and the Book Trade* (1999). In it he argues that the standard editorial practice of inserting the *Omissa* lines into the body of the text is a disservice to the reader, because it distorts the experience of reading the poem, relative to the state in which Milton originally saw fit to publish it. My point is not that Carey missed out on a particular article on the text of *SA*, since it was published two months after the cutoff date for incorporating publications into his 1997 edition. My point is that his claim to have followed the text of the 1671 printing of *SA* is misleading – in fact, like most modern editors, he has corrected the text according to subjective principles which seem to him objectively inviolable: the preference of one reading over another, the ability to choose between readings with different levels of authority, and the editor's responsibility to present a text which allows the reader as nearly as possible to experience what the editor understands as the idealized concept of the work in question.

In this case Carey's tacit assumption is that Milton's *Omissa* list constitutes a genuine authorial intervention which improves the text and makes it conform to an idealized understanding of what Milton had in mind, but as Dobranski argues this assumption is itself revelatory about the editorial practices that are generally employed in editing canonical texts like Milton's. Carey's decision to retain his 1968 text for the 1997 edition is evidence of the durability of those assumptions.^[37] Several new schools of thought about editorial practices developed between 1968 and 1997, but most important for the purposes of this paper is Jerome McGann's influential work, which argues that each iteration of a text is itself a significant event, and that these iterations arise as the result of interactions between a variety of forces, including the author, the publisher, the method of textual production, etc. Thus to McGann and other recent critics the "work" is not at all the same idealized, ethereal thing that Carey understood in 1968 (and still accepted in his 1997 edition); it is something much more specific. Indeed McGann argues that, "no single editorial procedure – no single 'text' of a particular work – can be imagined or hypothesized as the 'correct' one".^[38] In contrast, Carey's use of terms like "uncorrected state" or "binary associations" shows that he retained this hidden assumption of an objectively true method for preparing his text, and of an idealized "work" which each version of the text seeks to capture. One could argue that McGann's work is perhaps not tremendously applicable to *SA*, but it does not have to be directly; it is more important as a conceptual approach to thinking about literary works and texts. Carey would have had to reject this and other alternative editorial methods in order to re-issue a text that had been constructed according to old-fashioned New Bibliographic assumptions, and in doing so he would tacitly re-affirm precisely those standards – latent objectivity and evaluation – which his 1980 essay and his 1997 edition seemingly sought to debunk. Perhaps the uneasy co-existence in 1997 of these two methods of thinking about the editor's role (i.e. the methods codified in the text and the editorial apparatus, respectively) is evidence of the degree to which the editorial method behind any particular modern text can be overlooked, even as so much attention is paid to the relevant formal, critical and theoretical

approaches. Carey's second edition shows how deeply these methodologies are ingrained in the very words the editor chooses. These ingrained assumptions about editing make for the curious hybrid that is Carey's 1997 edition of *Samson Agonistes*.

So what are we to make of Carey's deliberate neutering of the critical faculty in his role as editor? Largely gone are the asides to the reader, the judgments of a learned guide, the sense of being lead through the work by an experienced, opinionated, judicious consciousness. Above all, we lack an interpretation of the poem's linguistic effects. Instead we get the cacophonous presentation of myriad critical opinions, and are left to judge for ourselves. My own opinion should be clear by now; I feel that Carey's depersonalized approach loses much more than it gains, and that it is very problematic to introduce readers to a welter of critical opinions simply by summarizing conflicting arguments. I feel that removing the operation of the poetic language from the center of our critical attention turns the poem from an appreciated literary object into a field upon which different critics can test their argumentative mettle.^[39] Above all, though, I feel that the ideologies underlying Carey's change (the move towards critical argument as an examination of the reader rather than the work and the belief in subjectivity and dissonance as the inevitable results of sophisticated criticism) undercut his role as the steward of a literary work, *and* contradict his implicit assumptions about the editor's role, which remain in *1997*.

But Carey certainly is no fool, and the reasons he articulated in 1980 to explain his new approach do have a certain allure about them. I do not mean for my analysis of Carey's second edition of *SA* to be an overarching commentary on his development as a critic, or even on the whole of the 1997 edition. As mentioned above, publishing and marketing concerns may well have affected the approach that he took to presenting his *SA* text, and a cursory examination of some of the other poems in *1997* reveals that he has not completely excised his own critical voice from the volume. His other introductions are, on the whole, shorter and more summary than they were in 1968 – he simply has a lot more critical ground

to cover. But he does not remove himself entirely from the volume, indeed, he engages in a lively commentary on other critics' works in the introduction to *Paradise Regained*, and even cites some of his own work on that poem. However, he cut seven full pages of introduction to the poetic style of *PR*, and the 1997 apparatus for *PR* resembles that of *SA* in focusing almost exclusively on the poem as a forum for critical debate.

If anything, Carey's personal presence in some of the other critical apparatus in 1997 makes the sterility of his *SA* presentation all the more puzzling. Perhaps we can glean something from his offhand assertion, in the 1968 introduction to *SA*, that the ending of the poem is "morally disgusting"^[40] – the removal of his personal presence would make sense if he believes that criticism for such a contentious poem should have progressed past the point of poetic evaluation. Perhaps he is right, but for the reasons explored above I believe that this change in editorial emphasis drastically affects the way the text can be perceived by a reader, and undermines the understanding of poetics, which for one of Milton's works should be a necessary and permanent part of the reading process.

Valentine Cunningham has recently argued^[41] that theory – in the modern sense of predisposed notions about reading, the assessment of meaning, the operation of literary mechanisms, the subjectivity of meaning and the problematic nature of genres – is *always* present in the mind of a modern reader, and it's a good thing, too. Pure objectivism, the "routines" of pedantic New Critical explication of minutiae threatened to suffocate reading "in their affectionate but strangulating grip."^[42] The development of different theoretical approaches has been an invigorating addition to literary studies. But if Cunningham's observation is true then I would argue that while Carey's approach is correct to embrace a range of critical opinion, is nonetheless the wrong way to present a poetic text to a modern academic readership. If theory is already present in the readers' minds – that is, if they are already primed to apply some quite sophisticated critical methods to the work in question – then it is all the more important that they understand the old-

fashioned modes of reading and the sensitivity to poetic language which prompted all the sophisticated theoretical methods in the first place.

Carey's summary method of presenting critical arguments is liberating – it does open up new ways of reading *SA*. But this liberation also cuts the reader loose to a degree not seen in the 1968 edition, since these modes of understanding the work are contradictory, or at the very least exclusive – one cannot simultaneously read *SA* with an eye to Dalila's imagery and Samson's rooting in Greek tragedy and the tradition of Christian redemption and Manoa's psychological complexity and on and on. Carey has introduced an array of niche readings and removed an image-and-poetics-based appreciation of the effect of the verse; he has removed his (in my mind) unquestionably true insight that the poetic mechanisms run counter to the stated morality of the poem and result in a complex and compelling "moral maturity." This evaluative kind of appreciation is of a different type than many of the theory-based readings he presents in his 1997 introduction, and the theory-based methods signal a different (and less friendly) attitude towards the reader. Where before the reader was perhaps prejudiced towards a conservative, chummy old-boys reading of the poem, here he or she has no indication of how the poem works *as a poem*, only that it sows these seeds of contention amongst the audience of critics. More insidiously, though, there is no longer any real acknowledgement that *SA* is *supposed* to be read as a poem, it is presented much more as a text to be mined for material to support one or another of the critical camps. This is a crucial point, but it seems to me that Carey is able to judge the worth of these new methods and present them, secure in his own ability to read the poem, precisely because he has such an ingrained understanding of the operation of poetic language, and such a sensitivity to the different ways in which this operation will affect different readers. And yet he does not think it necessary to explain this poetic understanding to a new generation of readers, and in this I believe he does them a disservice. However, regardless of my value judgments, we can think of Carey's new editorial role as a radical change in his understanding of the way literature is to be presented – Carey presents *Samson Agonistes* within

a tradition of critical debate, rather than within an understanding of its operation as a poem.

Appendix: Changes to Carey's footnotes in the first and second Longman editions of *Samson Agonistes* (1968/1997)

1. Changes listed by line number.

The line numbers for the verse are identical in the two editions, although line numbers for the prefatory matter (note on Tragedy and the Argument) are different. This list indicates the type of change (the note was cut, changed or new for the 1997 edition) and a brief summary.^[43]

Notes which were substantially rewritten and include new material, or from which materials was removed, but which reference a line that was referenced in the first edition, appear under the heading "changed".

changed: Introduction 1-9 – adds references to several critical debates (Mueller, *SEL* 6 (1966), Wood, *MS* 29 (1992), and Flower, *SEL* 10 (1970)). Removes personal judgment about Heinsius's and Guarini's theories of catharsis

changed: Introduction 13 – cut reference to Paraeus's work being burned, quotation in A.C. Cook

changed: Introduction 21 – cut sentence explaining which works are ascribed to Seneca

changed: Introduction 34/33 – completely rewritten. Instead of noting where Martial used an epistle, quotes Martial justifying why tragedies and comedies need epistles.

cut: 3 – reference to evocation of the opening lines: Arnold Stein^[44]

cut: 10 – reference to early note of the regeneration theme: Arnold Stein^[45]

cut: 52 – critical judgment (Samson's weak mindedness), by F.M. Krouse^[46]

cut: 66-7 – editorial instruction for reader to contrast with line 195

new: 80-2 – S. Blakemore, *Explicator* 42 (1984) (c.f. Deut. 28:29)

changed: 87-9 – cut editorial judgment (‘pathetically’), replaced description of Milton’s use of ‘vacant’ with an OED definition supporting that usage

changed: 92-3 – reduces evidence from A. Williams article

new: 115 – A. Burnett, *N&Q* 227 (1982) (reference to Du Bartas, contemporary source)

changed: 181 – rewritten for clarity, adds minor note to Joshua 19:41 as well as 15:33.

changed: 203 – adds reference to the Vulgate: *proverbium*

changed: 219-26 – removes detail of variance between Milton’s account and Judges 14:1-4, but thrust of note remains the same

changed: 227 – minor detail removed from summary of Judges 14:5-20

changed: 229 – removes editorial interpretation by Stein^[47]

changed: 312 – simply reworded, no change to sense

changed: 319 – reworded, adds minor detail about when marriage to Gentile became impure

changed: 382-7 adds reference to P. Gallagher, *MS* 18 (1983), who notes *SA – PL* link

new: 473-8 – H. Jacobson, *N&Q* 29 (1982) (notes Biblical comparison (1 Kings 18:20f))

changed: 503-8 – uses Yale version of *DDC* instead of Columbia, thus different translation

changed: 537 – adds reference to Wittreich’s comments on the tradition of Dalila^[48]

new: 621 – A. Burnett, *N&Q* 227 (1982) (reference to Spenser, *Faerie Queene* 2.4.23)

changed: 693-4 – adds that many critics have seen parallel with 30 Jan. 1661 exhumation and display of Cromwell, Bradshaw and Ireton

changed: 714 – rewritten, removes references to G.M Young and R.C. Fox, removes considerable cross-referencing to ship imagery in *SA*. Adds D.P. Collins, *N&Q* 21 (1974), p.95-6.

changed: 748 – condenses arguments regarding the associations of the hyena, mostly

rewording. Adds J.M. Tobin, *MQ* 11 (1977)

changed: 763 – adds J.C. Boswell, *MQ* 8 (1974) and E. LeComte, *MQ* 9 (1975) on bosom-snakes

new: 912-14 – H. Jacobson, *N&Q* 29 (1982) – reference to Horace's *Odes*

new: 954 – D. Haskin *ELH* 38 (1971) – identifies lines as 'Miltonic' divorce

changed: 971-4 – rewording/condensing, adds J.M. Tobin, *N&Q* 14 (1975) on pun

changed: 1020 – cuts Greek Biblical reference (John 3:29), adds Vulgate instead

changed: 1068 – rewritten and condensed, adds J. Goldman *ELN* 12 (1974) and J.J.M Tobin *ELN* 12 (1975), cuts W.R. Parker, J. Leveen.

changed: 1139 – removes example from Selden's *Antiduello*.^[49]

changed: 1224-6 – same example, but condensed

changed: 1231 – adds J. Goldman, *ELN* 12 (1974) and E.A. Dahiyat, *MQ* 16 (1982) on Baal-zebul

changed: 1320 / 1324 – two notes squeezed together on one line – no obvious reason

new: 1350-3 – H. Jacobson, *N&Q* 29 (1982), compares with Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*

changed: 1387-9 – re-writes input by J.C. Maxwell; seemingly not altered significantly

cut: 1404-5 – Stein's interpretation of this line as a summing-up of the drama^[50]

cut: 1423-6 – dubious debate between Flatter and others^[51] regarding messages in *DDC*

changed: 1435-6 – adds minor biblical reference (*Judges* 14:6), no change in sense

changed: 1472 – adds sequence of echoes of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, also applies to *SA* lines 1620, 1640-1 and 1692-6

changed: 1536-7 – reduces editorial explanation of corrected vs. uncorrected states of these lines, which were either attributed to Manoa or the Chorus.

new: 1541 – G. Stacey, *Forum* 14 (1973) suggests Seneca as model, rather than Sophocles

changed: 1637 – rewritten, removes references to Herbert Grierson and Joost van den Vondel, as well as considerable cross-referencing on Milton's handling of Samson's inner conflict and the problem of his suicide. Makes same point, but more briefly.

new: 1643 – D. Gay, *ELN* 27 (1989) cites Wittreich, calls attention to references to John

cut: 1665-6 – removes debate between A.S. Cook and F. Tupper on Greek influence
changed: 1692 – adds S.S. Stollman, *ELN* 7 (1970) on Rabbinical tradition, adds censure to other critics (L.S. Cox, *MLN* 76 (1961); E.W. Tayler, *MQ* 6 (1972); W. Kerrigan, *MQ* 24 (1990)) who "miss" the correct operation of line 1695.

changed: 1699 – completely rewritten, adds A. Low, *MS* 14 (1980) on Christ/phoenix parallel, removes reference to *Damonis*

new: 1725-44 – H. Jacobson, *N&Q* 29 (1982), refers to Euripedes

new: 1758 – note about Milton’s task in “Englishing Aristotle”, cross-reference with Carey’s

new note on lines 1-9 of the introduction

2. Same information as above, but changes listed by type.

New notes for second edition:

80-2 – S. Blakemore, *Explicator* 42 (1984) (c.f. Deut. 28:29)

115 – A. Burnett, *N&Q* 227 (1982) (reference to Du Bartas, contemporary source)

473-8 – H. Jacobson, *N&Q* 29 (1982) (notes Biblical comparison (1 Kings 18:20f))

621 – A. Burnett, *N&Q* 227 (1982) (reference to Spenser, *Faerie Queene* 2.4.23)

912-14 – H. Jacobson, *N&Q* 29 (1982) – reference to Horace’s *Odes*

954 – D. Haskin *ELH* 38 (1971) – identifies lines as ‘Miltonic’ divorce

1350-3 – H. Jacobson, *N&Q* 29 (1982), compares with Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound*

1541 – G. Stacey, *Forum* 14 (1973) suggests Seneca as model, rather than Sophocles

1643 – D. Gay, *ELN* 27 (1989) cites Wittreich, calls attention to references to John

1725-44 – H. Jacobson, *N&Q* 29 (1982), refers to Euripedes

1758 – note about Milton’s task in “Englishing Aristotle”, cross-reference with Carey’s new note on lines 1-9 of the introduction

Notes which appeared in first edition, removed for second edition:

3 – reference to evocation of the opening lines: Arnold Stein^[52]

10 – reference to early note of the regeneration theme: Arnold Stein^[53]

52 – critical judgment (Samson’s weak mindedness), by F.M. Krouse^[54]

66-7 – editorial instruction for reader to contrast with line 195

1404-5 – Stein’s interpretation of this line as a summing-up of the drama^[55]

1423-6 – dubious debate between Flatter and others^[56] regarding messages in *DDC*

1665-6 – removes debate between A.S. Cook and F. Tupper on Greek influence

Notes which were changed for the second edition:

Introduction 1-9 – adds references to several critical debates (Mueller, *SEL* 6 (1966), Wood, *MS* 29 (1992), and Flower, *SEL* 10 (1970)). Removes personal judgment about Heinsius’s and Guarini’s theories of catharsis

Introduction 13 – cut reference to Paraeus’s work being burned, quotation in A.C. Cook

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epistle, quotes Martial justifying why tragedies and comedies need epistles.

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92-3 – reduces evidence from A. Williams article

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219-26 – removes detail of variance between Milton’s account and Judges 14:1-4, but thrust of note remains the same

227 – minor detail removed from summary of Judges 14:5-20

229 – removes editorial interpretation by Stein^[57]

312 – simply reworded, no change to sense

319 – reworded, adds minor detail about when marriage to Gentile became impure

382-7 adds reference to P. Gallagher, *MS* 18 (1983), who notes SA – PL link

503-8 – uses Yale version of *DDC* instead of Columbia, thus different translation

537 – adds reference to Wittreich’s comments on the tradition of Dalila^[58]

693-4 – adds that many critics have seen parallel with 30 Jan. 1661 exhumation and display of Cromwell, Bradshaw and Ireton

714 – rewritten, removes references to G.M Young and R.C. Fox, removes considerable cross-referencing to ship imagery in SA. Adds D.P. Collins, *N&Q* 21 (1974), p.95-6.

748 – condenses arguments regarding the associations of the hyena, mostly rewording. Adds J.M. Tobin, *MQ* 11 (1977)

763 – adds J.C. Boswell, *MQ* 8 (1974) and E. LeComte, *MQ* 9 (1975) on bosom-snakes

971-4 – rewording/condensing, adds J.M. Tobin, *N&Q* 14 (1975) on pun

1020 – cuts Greek Biblical reference (John 3:29), adds Vulgate instead

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(1975), cuts W.R. Parker, J. Leveen.

1139 – removes example from Selden's *Antiduello*.^[59]

1224-6 – same example, but condensed

1231 – adds J. Goldman, *ELN* 12 (1974) and E.A. Dahiyat, *MQ* 16 (1982) on Baal-zebul

1320 / 1324 – two notes squeezed together on one line – no obvious reason

1387-9 – re-writes input by J.C. Maxwell; seemingly not altered significantly

1435-6 – adds minor biblical reference (*Judges* 14:6), no change in sense

1472 – adds sequence of echoes of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, also applies to *SA* lines 1620,

1640-1 and 1692-6

1536-7 – reduces editorial explanation of corrected vs. uncorrected states of these lines, which were either attributed to Manoa or the Chorus.

1637 – rewritten, removes references to Herbert Grierson and Joost van den Vondel, as well as considerable cross-referencing on Milton's handling of Samson's inner conflict and the problem of his suicide. Makes same point, but more briefly.

1692 – adds S.S. Stollman, *ELN* 7 (1970) on Rabbinical tradition, adds censure to other

critics (L.S. Cox, *MLN* 76 (1961); E.W. Tayler, *MQ* 6 (1972); W. Kerrigan, *MQ* 24 (1990)) who “miss” the correct operation of line 1695.

1699 – completely rewritten, adds A. Low, *MS* 14 (1980) on Christ/phoenix parallel, removes reference to *Damonis*

Endnotes

^[1] Hereafter “SA”.

^[2] Published 1997. Hereafter “1997”.

^[3] The first edition of Milton’s shorter poems edited by Carey was published in 1968 in one volume with Alastair Fowler’s *Paradise Lost*. It has since been reprinted separately. Hereafter referred to as “1968”.

^[4] Hereafter “*TLS*”.

^[5] Review by Professor Balachandra Rajan, who contributed nearly 50 reviews of Milton-related books between 1965 and 1973. The review of Carey and Fowler’s work appears in *TLS* 17.4.1969, p. 406.

^[6] Either 1968 or 1997, p. 6. “*Paradise Regained*” will be referred to hereafter as “*PR*.”

^[7] See for example W.W. Greg’s “The Rationale of Copy-Text” wherein he argues that the editor’s role is to select between variants according to an informed judgment about what the author likely wrote – to judge the “intrinsic merit” of a particular reading relative to some conceptualized ideal (Greg, *A Collection of his Writings*, Rosenbaum, ed., (1998), p. 213-228).

^[8] p. 332.

^[9] p. 339.

[\[10\]](#) p. 335.

[\[11\]](#) p. 336-7.

[\[12\]](#) 1968, p. 343.

[\[13\]](#) p. 351.

[\[14\]](#) *ibid.*

[\[15\]](#) p. 332. In this assessment, and others, Carey shows a trait which Professor Balachandra Rajan objected to in the *TLS* review cited above: “if there is a weakness in the introductions, it is the tendency to brush aside the opposition (and sometimes the majority) on matters of scholarship which remain in dispute.”

[\[16\]](#) p. 350.

[\[17\]](#) From the 1997 back cover – this description is also reproduced on the Longman website.

[\[18\]](#) *ibid.*

[\[19\]](#) 22.2.1980, p. 204 – Leavis had, famously, written that “Milton’s dislodgment, in the past decade, after his two centuries of predominance, was effected with remarkably little fuss” (*Revaluation* p. 42). The resemblance cannot be coincidental, though the significance is considerably less clear.

[\[20\]](#) *ibid.*

[\[21\]](#) *TLS* 28.3.1980, p. 367.

[\[22\]](#) p. xiii.

[\[23\]](#) In 1997, Carey also removed a number of cross-references which had pointed out the recurring ship imagery in the poem: see note to line 714

[24] The removal of all references was not due to legal or copyright issues; Carey still cites Stein's book in his notes to *Paradise Regained*. Also see below, p. 18-19 for discussion of Carey's approach to the critical apparatus for *PR*.

[25] Line 3: "For yonder bank hath choice of sun or shade".

[26] Line 10: "The breath of heaven fresh blowing, pure and sweet,"

[27] Lines 1404-5: "Masters' commands come with a power resistless / To such as owe them absolute subjection;"

[28] Compare "power resistless" to the description of Samson destroying the Temple: "As with the force of winds and waters pent" or, more intriguingly, with the Chorus's description of the mourning both of Gaza and of those "that band them to resist / His uncontrollable intent" – where "His" can be taken to mean both Samson and Christ. Stein's reading does seem to make sense here; Samson's cynical comment does hold a significant truth for those who put their trust in God.

[29] Line 229: "Was in the vale of Sorec, Dalila".

[30] Stein, p. viii.

[31] *ibid*, p. vii.

[32] Line 1692: "[Samson] as an evening dragon came".

[33] From *ELN* 7 (1970), p.186-9.

[34] p. 411, note, italics Carey's.

[35] Lines 1689-96.

[36] "Samson and the Omissa" in *Studies in English Literature* 36, no. 1, p. 149-69.

[37] Obviously there may have been practical, financial or scheduling considerations as well, but I have to assume a certain level of academic integrity in Carey and believe that if he felt the disjunct between the text and his new

critical apparatus was unacceptable, he would not have presented the edition in its current form.

^[38] “What is Critical Editing” in *The Textual Condition*, p. 62.

^[39] Precisely as Carey said in 1980, subordinating the study of literature to the study of people.

^[40] See above, n.10. That observation was removed from *1997*. However, several years after publishing *1997*, Carey wrote his famous article in *TLS* comparing Samson to a suicide bomber and characterizing *SA* as “a work in praise of terrorism” (*TLS* 6.9.2002). Tellingly, Carey’s argument in his letters (6 and 20 September) was not primarily about the moral worth *SA* (though all of the responses in *TLS* seemed to make that assumption). Instead, he insisted that the Fishian technique of judging moral actions in Milton solely relative to the standards of the poem’s characters themselves was a false (or at least anachronistic) method of reading. In other words, Carey’s interest had more to do with the act of reading *SA* than the content of *SA* itself, and his censure was reserved for a reading technique which he felt was pernicious. In this way, he was completely consistent with his method in *1997*.

^[41] In *Reading After Theory* (2002).

^[42] p. 38.

^[43] Abbreviations: *SA* (*Samson Agonistes*), *PL* (*Paradise Lost*), *DDC* (*De Doctrina Christiana*), OED (Oxford English Dictionary), *ELH* (English Literary History), *ELN* (English Language Notes), *MLN* (Modern Language Notes), *MS* (Milton Studies), *MQ* (Milton Quarterly), *N&Q* (Notes and Queries), *SEL* (Studies in English Literature 1500-1900).

^[44] Stein, Arnold. *Heroic Knowledge*. Minneapolis, Minn.: 1957, p.139

^[45] *ibid.*

^[46] Krouse, F. M. *Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition*, Princeton: 1949, p.100

^[47] Stein, *Heroic Knowledge*, p.146

^[48] Wittreich, J. *Interpreting Samson Agonistes*, Princeton: 1986, p.170

^[49] This note in *1997* retains a reference to Selden's *Duello* (1610), which also appears in notes to lines 1180 and 1222 (unchanged in both editions).

^[50] *Heroic Knowledge*, p.190

^[51] R.F Flatter, F.F. Farnham-Flower and M. Kelley in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 7 and 21 Aug., 1948

^[52] Stein, Arnold. *Heroic Knowledge*. Minneapolis, Minn.: 1957, p.139

^[53] *ibid.*

^[54] Krouse, F. M. *Milton's Samson and the Christian Tradition*, Princeton: 1949, p.100

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First Response

This is a stimulating article which does an excellent job of assessing in the context of changing trends in editing and critical theory the implications of John Carey's changes, in 1997, to his 1968 edition of Milton's *Samson Agonistes*.