II

RAMISTIC IMPLICATIONS

If what I have said is convincing rather than merely reflexively defensive, there is, as I earlier suggested, more than accidental scholarly interest to account for my prefacing these readings in Milton with a discussion of contemporary critical preoccupations. I propose, then, some further historical inferences before turning from the question of why Milton's epic structure became what it did to address myself to critical definition of that structure.

For two decades Renaissance studies have been swept by confusing crosscurrents from those engaged in delineating the relevance of Ramism for seventeenth-century modes of thought; and nowhere has this interest been more vigorous than among historians of English and American literature. Of particular note in our context is the implicit conflict between those who closely interlace the rise of Metaphysical poetry with Ramistic logic and those who view this logic as a primal organizing factor both in the structure of Puritan thinking and in that of Paradise Lost.¹

¹ To complicate issues further, defenders of each of these positions have been openly attacked by others who deny the relevance of Ramism altogether
Rosemond Tuve’s now-classic *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* proposed overlapping theses. First, that there is a continuing tradition of logically functioning imagery in the “English poetic tradition . . . of a piece from Marlowe (or Wyatt) to Marvell,”2 that the felt difference in Metaphysical poetry results from the images being “more numerous, more consistently of one kind, and (this is the same point as the last) used for a narrower variety of functions.”3 Second, that the increasing popularity in the seventeenth century of the Ramistic reordering of the relations between logic and rhetoric accounts for this shift. The Ramistic insistence upon the axiomatic nature of individual terms or things which in themselves constitute “arguments” insofar as they have a “relatableness,”4 led, argues Tuve, in the Metaphysicals, to a “great stress on the capacity of ‘specials' to state ‘generals’ . . . an emphasis upon the power of an image to convey a concept, the power of a particular to ‘say’ or make manifest a universal.”5 With some caution, she concludes: “I do not suggest that Ramistic attitudes produce none other than Metaphysical poems, but only that in an intellectual world where such attitudes toward imaginative literature became

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3 Ibid., p. 343.
4 On this crucial conception in Ramistic logic, see Tuve, pp. 334-53; Duhamel, “Milton’s Alleged Ramism,” pp. 1042-3; Ong (cited below), pp. 199-205.
5 Ibid., p. 347.
every year more prevalent, no result is more natural than the dialectical toughness of the Metaphysical poem, its substitution of intellectual probing for rhetorical persuasion.”

But in a note contrasting Milton with Donne, Tuve explicitly exempts *Paradise Lost* from the tendency of which she is historian: “The most heightened style the Renaissance knew — the heroic — is not hospitable to images which function dialectically like those here considered, and luckily the greatest poet of the seventeenth century was not above suiting his style to the length of his poem. The slow reader’s pace necessary in poems which emulate the acuteness of dialectic cannot but make us rejoice that Milton was too levelheaded to think that a follower of Ramus must toss out Mazzoni.”

George Watson commented with some wryness that “so far as the poets are concerned, there are only three who have . . . been shown to have been Ramists: Sidney, Ben Jonson, Milton. . . . while there is a deafening silence on the subject of Ramus on the part of Donne, Herbert, and Cowley.” And one can infer a similar misplacement of focus in Tuve’s work from the retrospective vantage offered by Martz’ study, which suggests a non-Ramistic and convincing source in the older meditational tradition for exactly the elements of Metaphysical style which Tuve traces to the impact of Ramism.

Surprisingly, in the course of her argument Tuve again and again pushed toward a conception of Renaissance poetic which seems much more obviously applicable to Milton and Bunyan than to Donne and Herbert. “This easy interchange between things and the meanings of things is subtly different from modern notions of the way images work. . . . One might phrase it carelessly and say that Elizabethans write and read images not like nominalists but like realists”; “Abstract notions of some

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6 Ibid., p. 343.
7 Ibid., p. 372.
degree of profundity enter whenever the language is truly metaphorical, or whenever we can or must read the poem on a figurative rather than a literal level. . . . Elizabethan readers were more habituated to the . . . sort”; “Traditional ties between logic and the poet’s methods take on a new force against the background of the Ramist conception that every unit in every type of discourse must, the moment it is seen in relation to any other unit, inescapably make some minute step toward a true or false disposition or pattern. Logic no longer merely offers the poet helps; he cannot but take part in the universal and natural attempt to trace out the reasonable pattern of reality.” These passages clearly echo when, years later, Tuve turns to that reading of Milton’s minor poems mentioned in the preceding chapter; but there we hear nothing of either Ramus or Paradise Lost.

Perry Miller pioneered the serious analysis of the Ramistic impact upon the Anglo-Saxon world in The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, but seemed largely to miss its more profound literary implications in his insistence upon structural effects, especially in sermon literature (in which genre, however, he argued that the effect was anti-Metaphysical). It remained for Charles Feidelson to explore more profoundly the ambiguities involved in Puritan Ramism, although he too insisted upon invoking the Metaphysical conceit as a touchstone.

Briefly, Feidelson finds the Puritan mind at odds with itself. On the one hand it is “radically metaphoric,” so that past and present coalesce, Anne Hutchinson becomes Sisera, Satan inhabits the Indians; and “the wearisome reiteration of ‘provi-

9 Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery, pp. 290, 156, 346.
10 The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), p. 345: “It was, obviously, impossible to be a Ramist and still preach like John Donne.” Tuve notes but refuses to argue the point (p. 424). Miller’s study was preceded by the discussion in Hardin Craig, The Enchanted Glass (Oxford, 1936), pp. 140-59. Craig, however, saw Ramus merely as a popularizer of a logic simple enough to supply a fashionable jargon for poets and dramatists.
dences' in the Puritan writings is actually a record of symbolic experience that never attained formal literary structure."\textsuperscript{11} What had happened, Feidelson finds, was the incompatible cross-breeding of the Puritans' providential conception "that united the objectivity of history with the meaningfulness of Scripture"\textsuperscript{12} with the Ramistic reorientation toward the primacy of logic: "If the real structure of language and reality was purely logical, aesthetic form was merely an ornament . . . decoration added to and presupposing a logical framework." The result, when the Puritan turned to the world of felt symbols, was the logical "opening" of meanings, which usually merely "produced the bare bones of a metaphysical conceit, a paraphrase of a complex figure that never came into actual existence."\textsuperscript{18} Here we are confronted, then, with a paradoxical antiphony to Tuve's reading of effects, in which Ramism prevents that very fruition of the Metaphysical mode which she had found it fostering.

Meanwhile, Leon Howard also had viewed the Ramistic impact upon Puritan literature from another standpoint altogether. He contended that if we looked into our Ramist logic we could find the structural principles of \textit{Paradise Lost}, arguing that the Ramistic-Miltonic conception of causation was atemporal, and that \textit{Paradise Lost} was precisely a poem dedicated to the causes of man's first disobedience and its fruits. Therefore, we must not seek a temporal structure in this poem of culminating causes — a processive "plot." Rather, we should recognize the poet's structural effort to be that of displaying "independent or parallel efficient causes which were not derived from some

\textsuperscript{11}Charles Feidelson, Jr., \textit{Symbolism and American Literature} (Chicago, 1953), p. 81.

\textsuperscript{12}This conception of the divine "presentness" in contemporary history has been most satisfactorily explored for the Puritan consciousness, of course, in William Haller's \textit{Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution} (New York, 1955), and "John Foxe and the Puritan Revolution" in R. F. Jones, \textit{et al.}, \textit{The Seventeenth Century} (Stanford, 1951), pp. 209-24.

\textsuperscript{18}Symbolism and American Literature, pp. 83-5.
'first cause' in any way perceptible to the human mind." But this interesting explanation of argument and structure dissipated rapidly into a semantic quibble, as Howard abused the Ramistic emphasis upon convincing proof in relation to causation until he found himself maintaining that the development of Satan's character was intended for a piece of proof, and began to speak of "logical character." It remained for Father Walter J. Ong finally to clarify the Renaissance interest (and our own, if I infer correctly from the phenomena discussed in the first chapter of this book) in that shrouded figure, Peter Ramus, by preparing a study which not only explains the divergencies among the historical analyses we have reviewed here, but also forces us to reorient our understanding of late intellectual history in the West. The conclusion of his work can be simply stated: Ramism was the Renaissance manifestation in which Europe saw the Scholastic revolution completed, the revolution converting the ancient aural world into the spatial world of the printed book, into the mechanistic Newtonian universe, into a pattern of dichotomizing diagrams depicting the structure of every science from rhetoric to biography, into — in short — "method," as opposed to dialectic. "Place" logic gradu-

15 Ibid., pp. 159-60, et passim. A less coherent step in the same direction, although one which eschewed any actual application of logic to poem, was Thomas S. K. Scott-Craig's "The Craftsmanship and Theological Significance of Milton's Art of Logic," HLQ, XVII (1953), 1-16. Wilbur Samuel Howell, Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700 (Princeton, 1956), pp. 211-9, reviews Milton's logic and seems indecisively to endorse Howard's view and to reject that of Duhamel. This wide-ranging study discusses Ramism at length, but raises few implications, and is largely irrelevant to the effect of Ramism upon Milton the poet insofar as it explicitly elects not "to give an account of the theories governing the production of Renaissance poetry, fiction, and drama" (p. v); it also fails to discuss the impact of shifting modes upon the practice of poetry.
16 Walter J. Ong, Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue (Cambridge, Mass., 1958); Ramus and Talon Inventory (Cambridge, Mass., 1958). The argument of these books was anticipated in a number of earlier essays,
ally evolved into diagram, and it was the actual making physical of these dichotomies spawned of dichotomies which was the central aspect of the Ramist revolution of logic as it emerges from Ong's rich analysis. Unfortunately, it was this aspect of Ramism which Tuve had chosen explicitly to ignore in her treatment. "I make no attempt," she wrote, "to give a systematic review of Ramus' dialectic; this has been done, and many of the more important differences from peripatetic logic are impertinent to the concerns of this book. The famous 'dichotomies,' for example, I shall scarcely mention." An unhappier misjudgment of proper emphases could scarcely have been made. In commenting upon Tuve's work, Ong observes that the intensified Renaissance concern with particulars is inextricable from the contemporary understanding of just these "dichotomies": "Ramist interest in 'specials' and its emphasis upon disjunction come to much the same thing. 'Specials' are thought of largely as 'generals' cut up into more or less quantitative pieces, and thus as a product of disjunction, effected in concepts more or less openly devised according to visual, spatial analogies." And he proceeds to observe that this spatial orientation led Ramists in a direction diametrically opposite from the typical dialogue structure of the Metaphysical poem, adding that in fact "Ramists did not write metaphysical poetry, or, indeed, much poetry at all."

It is not in logic as a general entity, then, that we are to seek the aesthetic significance of Ramism, but in the particular spatialized form of logic which reduced reality to a visual object, and supplanted dialogue by the monologue of the expositor


17 Tuve, Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery, p. 332 n.
pointing out the connections among parts. Once we understand this, we can perceive that Feidelson was quite right in discovering an antimetaphysical impact in Ramism; indeed, Ong concludes in a similar vein: "When the Puritan mentality, which is here the Ramist mentality, produces poetry, it is at first blatantly didactic, but shades gradually into reflective poetry which does not talk to anyone in particular but meditates upon objects."\textsuperscript{19}

But antimetaphysical is not synonymous with antipoetic, a synonymity which Feidelson and Ong are too ready to permit us to infer. For, as Howard remarked, the greatest poet of the seventeenth century was also the Puritan author of a Ramistic logic. His poem is properly didactic. But it is didactic in a way which speaks to the whole of man. It is a spatial poem, as I have asserted and as I will argue; one might now say, with the historical vocabulary which Father Ong provides from the Renaissance, that it is a diagrammatic poem in which places cut across narrative to become interconnected into the image of this great argument, in which form emerges as continued metaphor. As such it is a poem which rises like a brilliant phoenix from the bitter ashes of the cruelest seventeenth-century dilemma.

Ramism was so protean that it could work in elusive and contradictory directions, and one direction its influence naturally took was not only antipoetic, but costly in the extreme to irenic yearnings to escape the impasse reached in the big wars and coils of religion which marked the Renaissance. As we have remarked, the poet's function is to release, primarily through metaphor, the referential hold of an outer "reality" upon those words with which he performs an impossible feat of creative prestidigitation by making them the world's body of a profounder reality. But in the Ramistic plan of dichotomies, laid out with emphasis upon visual relations, a plan which permits us to "see"

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp. 287-8.
the biography of Cicero at a single glance, it is apparent that the referential bearing of words will have a natural emphasis.

Ramus had developed the habit of regarding everything, mental and physical, as composed of little corpuscular units of "simples." He never seems expressly aware of this habit, but it dominates all his thinking, subconsciously, yet stubbornly and absolutely. Ramus thus tends to view all intellectual operations as a spatial grouping of a number of these corpuscles into a kind of cluster, or as a breaking down of clusters into their corpuscular units.... having decided to call the groupings or clusters genera, Ramus proceeds adamently to the conclusion that individuals and species are exactly the same thing.... the Ramist corpuscular epistemology, supposing that knowledge consists of sets of mental items, thereby implied one-for-one correspondence between terms and things.

**This influence** from the new logic flows into other traditions important to the Renaissance which reinforce the same point of view. We are familiar with Thomas Sprat's comment on the Royal Society's aims for philosophic discourse, published, like *Paradise Lost*, in 1667: "They have ... a constant Resolution ... to return back to the primitive purity, and shortness, when men deliver'd so many things, almost in an equal number of words." Hobbes had earlier warned, "a man that seeketh precise truth, had need to remember what every name he uses stands for; and to place it accordingly"; John Hall "perceived that it was better to grave things in the mindes of children, then

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20 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 30-1, where Freige's biographical table is reproduced.
words"; while Abraham Cowley, more modestly, proposed a school where boys will be "initiated into Things as well as Words." Contemporary versions of the dichotomy might be multiplied over many pages, but they represent simply the flowering (undoubtedly in great part owing to the mercurial rise of experimental method in the natural sciences) of an ancient tradition. For it was Cato who advised, "Rem tene, verba sequuntur," advice which echoed in both Cicero and Seneca, those master voices of the past for Renaissance readers. This combination of old and new attitudes, of Ramistic implication and classical shibboleth, pervasive as it was, was strengthened, in effect, by a religious alliance.

The hexamerist commentators had long insisted that Adam's naming of the animals was a special function of his insight into their essential natures; not only does Milton enter this tradition when Adam tells Raphael that "I nam'd them, as they pass'd, and understood / Thir Nature" (VIII, 352-3), but it is apparently more real belief than hexamerist convention for the pamphleteer who, writing on divorce, could casually comment: "Adam . . . had the wisdom giv'n him to know all creatures, and to name them according to their properties." Francis Bacon

24 An Humble Motion . . . Concerning the Advancement of Learning (London, 1649), p. 34.
26 I have examined the tradition in relation to science more thoroughly in my introductory essay to Thomas Sprat, History of the Royal Society, ed. Jackson I. Cope and Harold Whitmore Jones (St. Louis, 1958), pp. xxv-xxxii.
saw in paradisiacal knowledge the crucial symbol for the end sought by communication: "the true end of knowledge . . . is a restitution and reinvesting (in great part) of man to the sovereignty and power (for whosoever he shall be able to call the creatures by their true names he shall again command them) which he had in his first state of creation."29 And it was Bishop John Wilkins, a good Baconian in many other respects as well, who finally repeated the performance of Adam and repaired the disintegration of Babel by preparing his Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language, where every word was significant in form of that for which it stands. Clearly in such a preoccupation, words are significative of "things" in an almost mystic sense. Most important, I think, are the religious bearings of the tradition. There were many strange results, one of the strangest being the Puritan tendency to make sober funerary anagrams upon the names of departed "Saints" which with unerring pertinence embraced the essential nature of the man; less consciously but scarcely less accurately than Adam, the Puritan parent clearly "saw" the word for the man.30

In George Fox the Quaker we find a blazing consciousness of having been projected into Adam's state which makes the New England anagrammatics pale games played by fallen children. In 1647 Fox attained to an apocalyptic experience: "I saw into that which was without end, and things which cannot be uttered, and of the greatness and infiniteness of the love of God, which cannot be expressed by words."31 But a few months later Fox inevitably translated this experience into its obverse; from a

29 Valerius Terminus, in The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon, ed. Spedding, Ellis, and Heath (London, 1876), III, 222.
vision of the inexpressible nature of God he arrived at a capacity for the perfect expression. And it is notable that both occasions are described in linguistic terms: "being renewed up into the image of God by Jesus Christ, . . . I was come up to the state of Adam which he was in before he fell. The creation was opened to me, and it was showed me how all things had their names given them according to their nature and virtue."32

Not all Quakers perhaps might experience Fox's total mastery of the nature of things, but they all knew the inner value of names. The scriptural passage most germane to Quaker experience, and most frequently cited by witnesses, was the opening of the Johannine Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by him. . . . In him was life; and the life was the light of men. . . . That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. . . . to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:1-12).

It is clear enough that the Quakers did not develop any elaborate dogmatic theology based upon that religion of Protestants, the Bible; an important reason was their insistence upon the power of this Johannine Name, which was in the beginning the Word. Other Protestants seek the voice of God in the ancient Scriptures through "the Tongues, which makes their Divines, the beginning of which was Babel," says Fox. But he warns the Quakers that this is the way to error. Rather they must "feed upon the Milk of the Word, that was before Tongues, and see the ceasing of Tongues, and the beginning of Tongues, Babel, . . . thou must go before Babel and Babylon was . . . up into the Word Christ, whose Name is called the Word of God."33

Luke Howard, the shoemaker-soldier, who was successively

32 Journal (anno 1648), p. 27.
33 A General Epistle To Be Read in All the Christian Meetings in the World (n.p., 1662), pp. 11-2.
Brownist, Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist, and the first Quaker in Kent, summed up the first chapter of John in a great circle: "for the Word of God is the life of God, and the life of God is the light of men, and the light of men is Jesus, the Saviour of all which believe in him, and his Name is called the Word of God, the entrance whereof giveth life."  

34 William Smith, the Nottingham pastor, oriented Scripture around the "name" with even greater economy: "And here Moses and John meet in unity, and their Testimony agrees in one, and all the Dispensations and Administrations did hold forth this excellent Glory which unto John was revealed in the Spirit; and from the beginning to the end of all that is declared and written in so many Words it is but a Testimony of him whose Name is called the Word of God, Rev. 19 (Mark), the WORD is his Name, and it was in the beginning, . . . all the Holy Men of God received it, . . . and they testified that there was not another Name given whereby any could be saved."  

35 Let us examine a typical use of the "Name" in an exhortation to Friends by Fox himself:

And so you that are gathered in the Name of Jesus, who have bowed to the Name of Jesus, whose Name is called the Power of God, and the Word, Light, Life and Truth; and for bowing to his Name, for his Name sake have you suffered all along by many powers; but the Name is a strong Tower: so who is bowed to the Name, and gathered in the Name of the Lord, ye are in the strong Tower, in which is safety and peace; for being gathered in the Name of Christ Jesus, whose Name is above every Name, for all things that was made, was made by Christ, whose Name is above every Name, into his Name are you gathered; so above all other names and gatherings are you gathered, who are gath-


ered in the Name of Jesus Christ, by whom all things were made and created; and being gathered in the Name of Jesus Christ by which salvation is brought, by the Name of Christ, and not by any other Name under Heaven, but by the Name of Jesus Christ is salvation brought, by whom all things were made; for you being gathered in this Name by which salvation is given, here you come to be heirs of salvation, and then to inherit salvation, which is Christ; and by this you come to fathom all other names under the whole Heaven, and to see them, that there is no salvation in them; and so likewise all other gatherings in all other names, no salvation in them; therefore cry people, There is no assurance of salvation upon earth, who are gathered in other names, but not in the Name of Christ, by whom all things were made; and this is the standing gathering in the Name, in the strong Tower, where is the safety, where is the salvation, given and brought. Rejoice ye all that are brought into this gathering, and have bowed to the Name of Jesus.  

The stylistic features of such a repetition are an interesting analogue to the concept of the “Name” itself as a central concept of Quaker theology. We find no varying of viewpoint, no moving about the word to exhaust all of its facets of meaning (as in the repetitions of Scripture words in the sermons of Lancelot Andrewes and his epigoni); rather, the idea is logically static throughout all of its repetitions. As Fox breasts forward on the sound waves of his exhortation, he loses sight of the grammatical structure. “And so you that are gathered in the Name,” he begins, but caught in the effect of his own repetition of the old scriptural logoi, he is drawn away from his intention into the vortex of this divine mystery, until through the word itself he seems to see the light at its center. The “you” addressed does not receive the predication of action implied in the opening. Instead, Fox discovers through this audience’s epithet, “gathered in the Name,” not only the divinity which

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was in the beginning, but even that audience’s participation in a time-conquering *stasis* of Christian perfection. What had begun as warning, instruction or exhortation to act becomes, through the hypnotic utterance of the divine names, a vision of human beatification for the Children of the Light. The incantation of the “Name” has undercut the progression implicit in grammar because it has revealed the heart of a world above time. This world and the other have been embodied in the Word.\(^{37}\)

Paradoxically, it was just such enthusiasm as that of Fox which promoted John Wilkins’ attempt at creating a universal language formally reflective of the real nature of things. Prefacing the *Essay* he explained that

\[\ldots\text{this design will likewise contribute much to the clearing of some of our Modern differences in *Religion*, by unmasking many wild errors, that shelter themselves under the disguise of affected phrases; which being Philosophically unfolded, and rendered according to the genuine and natural importance of Words, will appear to be inconsistencies and contradictions.}\(^{38}\]

Wilkins did not succeed, of course, in clarifying anything at all through his immense labor of supererogation, but his effort points grimly to the dilemma which most effected the disturbances of interregnum and restoration England. No Quaker adapted Wilkins’ linguistic translation of the nature of things because he already knew through his substantial scriptural “names.” He had an Inner Light and stood under the high noon sun of the Day of the Lord. Like Wilkins, he was “come

\(^{37}\)I discuss the nature and development of Quaker thought in this respect more elaborately in my essay “Seventeenth-Century Quaker Style,” *PMLA*, LXXI (1956), 725-54.

\(^{38}\)*An Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (London, 1668), sig. B, f. 1 (p. [ix]).
up to the state of Adam” before Babel to be confirmed in his faith by the new energy sensed in the creative power of the corporeal word.

Reaching desperately out of its hopeless religious polemics toward a universal truth, the seventeenth century tried to substitute metaphor for discursion. The Quakers are a touching example of this, hypnotizing themselves into a sensed grasp of truth by the very means which made them unintelligible to the world. But they were not alone. If they had an Inner Light in which all truth shone clearly forth, Nathaniel Culverwel, the Calvinist, saw as clearly that “There’s scatter’d in the Soul of Man some seeds of light, which fill it with a vigorous pregnancy, with a multiplying fruitfulnesse, so that it brings forth a numerous and sparkling posterity of secondary notions.” These seeds shower from the “heavenly beam which God has darted into the soul of man; from the Candle of the Lord, which God has lighted up for the discovery of his own Lawes.”39 With such a bright source, Culverwel might well wonder that any man could question the principles so clear in his exposition. But so might Benjamin Whichcote when he describes such a plain truth as that “Nothing without Reason is to be proposed; nothing against Reason is to be believed: Scripture is to be taken in a rational sense.” The reasonable principles will again be clear to any man of good will, because “The Spirit of a Man is the Candle of the Lord; Lighted by God, and Lighting us to God. Res illuminata, illuminans.”40 Henry More asserted that “it is sufficient to make a thing true according to the light of Nature, that no man upon a perception of what is propounded & the Reasons of it (if it be not clear at first sight, and need reasons to back it) will ever stick to acknowledge for a Truth.”41 But

in the great circle of explanation, "reason" ever returns ultimately as that which makes things "clear." Indeed, no better index to the problem could be provided than More's language in this little passage. "Perception" authorizes the dangerous quasi-physical sense of the mental world implied in what Ong calls "the Ramist corpuscular epistemology," a sense more firmly implied by More's notion that the idea-as-object may perhaps be immediately "clear at first sight" through the illumination of "the light of Nature." Writing on the most abstract of mental processes, More is ultimately dependent upon a metaphorical vocabulary which implies all of the poetic license of John Smith's Neoplatonic rhapsody: "Divinity indeed is a true Efflux from the Eternal light, which, like the Sun-beams, does not only enlighten, but heat and enliven; and therefore our Saviour hath in his Beatitudes connext Purity of heart with the Beatific Vision. And as the Eye cannot behold the Sun, . . . unless it be Sunlike, and hath the form and resemblance of the Sun drawn in it; so neither can the Soul of man behold God, . . . unless it be Godlike, hath God formed in it."42

If we turn from theology to philosophy, from mid-century to its close, we can see in Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding a similar phenomenon. In the "Epistle to the Reader," Locke makes an effort to escape the metaphoric impasse to which his predecessors had been tending. "Clear and distinct ideas," he warns, "are terms which I have reason to think every one who uses does not perfectly understand. . . . I have therefore in most places chose to put determinate or determined, instead of clear and distinct, as more likely to direct men's thoughts to my meaning in this matter." But even as he proceeds to define his conception he begins to circle back upon the visual metaphor: "By those denominations, I mean some object in the mind, and consequently determined, i.e.,

42 A Discourse Concerning the True Way or Method of Attaining to Divine Knowledge, in Cambridge Platonists, p. 80.
such as it is there seen and perceived to be.” And when he comes to his extended discussion “Of Clear and Obscure, Distinct and Confused Ideas” (II, xxix), Locke’s opening definition is by way of a visual analogy which slips over unconsciously into metaphor once more when he smugly concludes, “This, I suppose, needs no application to make it plainer”:

The perception of the mind being most aptly explained by words relating to the sight, we shall best understand what is meant by clear and obscure in our ideas, by reflecting on what we call clear and obscure in the objects of sight. Light being that which discovers to us visible objects, we give the name of obscure to that which is not placed in a light sufficient to discover minutely to us the figure and colours which are observable in it, and which, in a better light, would be discernible. Later, of course, growing conscious of the limitations of this simplistic psychology, Locke would introduce the “association of ideas,” and hence open the way to a modern sense of the fluid unconscious. But the early version was extremely important in perpetuating for later generations the dilemma of metaphoric epistemology which was Locke’s own inheritance from Ramism and the revolution of which it was the culmination:

... unless we fully understand this matter of simple seeing by a clear light as reasoning, we cannot fully understand in what sense the age that followed Locke, whose philosopher he was, is the “Enlightenment”; ... “To lay the naked ideas on which the force of the argumentation depends in their due order”—in

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44 Ibid., I, 486-7.
45 Ernest Lee Tuveson, “Locke and the ‘Dissolution of the Ego,’” MP, LII (1955), 159-74, brilliantly analyzes the stages of Locke’s Essay for their impact upon later intellectual history, and it is to his analysis that I am largely indebted.
simplest terms, the arrangement of the pictures—this is the essential; once it is done, men can hardly fail to conclude aright.46

Certainly here we have one of the most significant results of Ramus' "habit of regarding everything, mental and physical, as composed of little corpuscular units . . . supposing that knowledge consists of sets of mental items."47

What has been developing is clearly a terrible paradox. It begins with the assumption that words should correspond to things. Ramus' motivation was, of course, like Locke's, clarity. "Now every idea a man has, being visibly what it is," wrote Locke, "and distinct from all other ideas but itself; that which makes it confused, is, when it is such that it may as well be called by another name as that which it is expressed by."48

Were such error to be overcome, the interior world would be-

46 Ibid., p. 165.
47 This corpuscular imagination is certainly the chief factor in that development of Renaissance thought which we are tracing. However, it must be observed that Ramus' influence cross-fertilized that of Christian metaphor even more particularly, that is, in the very matter of insisting upon "clarity" and encouraging the light imagery which that term implies. The 1572 edition of the Dialecticae, much changed from the earlier versions, had a "new accent on 'clarity.' . . . The quest for clarity . . . reveals its rhetorical, rather than logical, inspiration" (Ong, Ramus, p. 251). In brief, what is happening is that Ramus, writing primarily as a teacher, and in defense of his treatment of grammar, finds it safer to shift from the scientists' interest in what is in itself better known (per se notius) to what is more clear (per se clarus). It is difficult to assert that the definition of grammar is better known than the partition of grammar, but a practical teacher may well claim that the latter is "clearer" for pupils in the pedagogical process. Ong indicates that gradually the new term becomes a common factor in Ramistic thinking, and that it also gradually accumulates pretensions which our whole discussion has revealed as factors in the seventeenth-century crisis: "From here one could easily leap to the conclusion that the presentation proceeded from what was 'clearer' of itself [rather than pedagogically] or 'in the nature of things' and thereby 'more known.' To prove this conclusion was a difficult business and best not attempted. One simply supposed that 'clarity' (more or less as measured in the classroom) and intelligibility were one" (Ibid., p. 251). One lesser area into which this use of light imagery permeated to confuse discursive analysis was the vocabulary of the Renaissance aesthetic critic: see Tuve, Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery, pp. 29-32, 67.
48 Essay, I, 488.
come visual, a great diagram mapping an objective reality, and words would be signs of size and relation upon that map, as they become upon the pages of Wilkins' Essay Towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language. But when we turn to Scripture, to matters spiritual, and find a Robert Ferguson saying that even there "under the most stately dress of words, there always lyes a richer quarry of things," the language may be that of Sprat's "so many things, almost in an equal number of words," but the significance is crucially altered. Scripture deals with spiritual matters; Adam did not name the animals from their appearances, but "according to their properties," and "understood / Thir Nature." As one moves from Fox's projection of himself into this state echoed in the related cries from Quakerdom, one can perceive the poetic function of language reasserting itself over the significative, the word itself becoming the "thing." The paradox lies precisely in the origin of this iconoclastic and anticommunicative use of language in a strenuous and dedicated effort to repair the havoc worked by empty terms, sounding rhetoric. The terror lies in the fact that there was a long moment in which this poetic language existed without the re-creative rationale of a poem.

The intuitive experience was projected by the Cambridge Platonists, by the Quakers and enthusiasts like Everard or Muggleton, by John Locke, as "clear" ideas, "plain" truths, "the Light of Reason," "the Light of Nature," "the Inner Light," "the Candle of the Lord, res illuminata, illuminans." These terms, of course, could not be explained discursively if they did not signify beyond themselves. But, as they were spiritual and epistemological metaphors, the only reference they carried was circular, back to that state of inner experience of which they were both creature and creator, a point nowhere more obvious than with the Quakers. So the futile, heartbreakingly sincere

polemic went on throughout the seventeenth century, each earnest champion making his own religious experience in an image invisible to the others, in the most ironic sense "corporealizing" words, and projecting them into a verbal icon for one's own mind's eye alone.50

Milton did not escape this paradox; we find it plaguing him throughout the De doctrina Christiana. His awareness of a problem is indicated obliquely in his insistent apology for scriptural accommodation:

When we speak of knowing God, it must be understood with reference to the imperfect comprehension of man; for to know God as he really is, far transcends the powers of man's thoughts, much more of his perception. I. Tim. vi. 16. "dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto." . . . granting that both in the literal and figurative descriptions of God, he is exhibited not as he really is, but in such a manner as may be within the scope of our comprehensions, yet we ought to entertain such a conception of him, as he, in condescending to accommodate himself to our capacities, has shown that we should conceive.51

It was a stance traditional but acutely difficult in Christian exegetics; the discomfort is poignantly reflected in Calvin's turnings about the communion: "It is a spiritual mystery, which cannot be seen by the eye, nor comprehended by the human understanding. It is therefore symbolized by visible signs, as

50 Cf. the account of Anne Hutchinson's trial in Feidelson, Symbolism and American Literature, pp. 94-5: "Since word, thought, and thing were one, the controversialist could appeal only to immediate apprehension by the 'natural light' of reason and try to convince by demonstrating a necessary meaning. To gain acceptance became increasingly difficult." Cf. also the account of Edwards' attempts to escape the dilemma through symbolizing nature, pp. 99-101. Basil Willey, The Seventeenth Century Background (London, 1934; New York, 1942), pp. 133-69, 245, 254, et passim, on the other hand, seems to consider the seventeenth century to be freeing itself from, rather than intensifying, the dilemma "between pictorial and conceptual thinking."

51 CE, XIV, 31-3.
our infirmity requires, but in such a way that it is not a bare figure, but joined to its reality and substance.

Milton's treatise frequently reflects the difficulty. For instance, when he speaks of "Man's Renovation, including his Calling," he finds "the natural mind and will of man being partially renewed by a divine impulse. . . . Inasmuch as this change is from God, those in whom it takes place are said to be enlightened. . . . As this change is of the nature of an effect produced on man, and an answer, as it were, to the call of God, it is sometimes spoken of under the metaphor of hearing or hearkening." But in his discussion of the Holy Spirit, we discover that these same metaphors act as definition. In Scripture, Milton recalls, the *spiritus sanctus* sometimes "means that impulse or voice of God by which the prophets were inspired"; "Sometimes it means that light of truth, . . . wherewith God enlightens and leads his people"; or it may be defined as "a divine impulse, or light, or voice, or word, transmitted from above." In brief, Milton is not delineating the process of vocation by mere illustrative metaphor, as his statement would suggest, but according to the difficult Calvinist mystique, treating it as "not a bare figure, but joined to its reality and substance." And one can scarcely determine whether it is rhetoric or argument for Milton when he writes:

The very essence of Truth is plainnesse, and brightnes; the darknes and crookednesse is our own. The *wisdome of God created understanding*, fit and proportionable to Truth the object, and end of it, as the eye to the thing visible. If our *understanding*

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53 CE, XV, 353-5.

54 CE, XIV, 361-7.
have a film of ignorance over it, or be blear with gazing on other false glisterings, what is that to Truth? If we will but purge with sovrain eyesalve that intellectual ray which God hath planted in us, then we would beleeeve the Scriptures protesting their own plainnes, and perspicuity . . . 56

The images of his argument are themselves drawn from the argument of the source.

But if metaphor is the clay of poetry, poetry is the inspiration of metaphor. The immediate and intuitive language, which frustrates the religious polemicist in discursive argument is precisely the "corporeal" word out of which the poet reshapes reality. Metaphors of light and darkness, blindness and vision, falling and rising are only the invisible counters of private insight in theology, even for a Milton. Yet, released from meaning into being, from the paths of argument into the patterns of poetry, these topoi became in Milton's voice that great metaphor which we have found the critics of our own age seeking as the ideal culmination of the poet's challenge to the limits of language. I have attempted to disentangle some of the forces which urged Milton's talents toward the making of that ideal poem. In the remainder of this book I will essay to view those structures which justify the epithet "metaphoric" for Paradise Lost with peculiar force.

56 Of Reformation, in Prose Works, I, 566.