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Maley, Willy, and Swann, Adam (2013) *'Is this the Region ... that we must change for heav'n?': Milton on the margins*. In: Coleman, David (ed.) *Region, Religion and English Renaissance Literature*. Ashgate, Farnham, UK, pp. 139-152. ISBN 9781409449447

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Deposited on: 5 June 2014

Chapter 9

‘Is this the Region ... That we must change for Heav’n?’: Milton on the Margins

Willy Maley and Adam Swann

All the Regions
Do smilingly revolt, and who resist
Are mocked for valiant ignorance.
—Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, 4.6.124–6

According to the *OED*, ‘region’ is a resonant word, with its roots in *regre*, ‘to rule’, making it a term bound up with political realms as well as physical landscapes, with governance as well as geography. Milton was certainly preoccupied with forms of rule and with regions, so much so that in Book V of *Paradise Lost* he alludes to Satan’s forces advancing thus: ‘Regions they pass’d, the mightie Regencies/ Of Seraphim and Potentates and Thrones’ (*PL*, V.748–9). The pun on ‘Regions’ and ‘Regencies’ is revealing.¹ For Milton, regions were tied up with monarchy in ways that meant redrawing the map in order to produce a republican perspective. This preoccupation with place is especially evident in Milton’s depiction of the non-English parts of Britain, and in particular the north of Ireland. While Milton’s *Observations upon the Articles of Peace* (1649) has attracted a steady trickle of critical attention in recent years, it remains a ‘marginalised tract within the Miltonic canon’ (Daems 2012: 1). This essay will begin by surveying some of the ways Miltonists have engaged with ideas of region and religion in *Observations*, and will go on to argue that, in light of previously overlooked texts written by members of the Belfast Presbytery, region and religion are in fact inseparable in the tract.

For Thomas Corns, *Observations* merits attention because ‘Milton’s complicity in this dark chapter of Anglo-Irish relations defines the complexities and limitations of his political radicalism’ (Corns 1990: 123). Milton’s representation of the Irish is informed by the belief that ‘he addresses himself to an audience already convinced – no doubt by the pamphlets and newsbooks of the early 1640s – of the demonic cruelty of the Irish Catholic rebels’ (125). The Irish are irredeemable and so ‘must be controlled, subordinated, transported, or destroyed’, while ‘English interest in Ireland rests on rights of conquest, a conquest provoked by the necessity of suppressing Irish piracy and raids on coastal Britain’ (131, 126). Corns’s reading of *Observations* is echoed by his former supervisee, Jim

¹ For an inventory of Milton’s uses of the word ‘region’, see Lockwood, 404–5.

Daems, who argues that, for Milton, the Irish are ‘inherently rebellious; therefore, they must be kept in check. The civilising bounds of English colonial power must not be relaxed’ (Daems 1999: 52). But Daems tends to stay a little too close to his former supervisor: just as Corns describes *Observations* as ‘a preemptive justification for ... Cromwellian ruthlessness’ (1990: 123) so Daems suggests the tract ‘serve[s] as a preemptive justification of Cromwell’s brutal Irish campaign’ (1999: 52), and so too Corns claims ‘Milton’s Irish tract ... engender[s] the spirit of the new republic’ (1990: 131) while Daems concludes *Observations* ‘reaffirms and naturalises the spirit of the new republic’ (1999: 54).

However, scholarly consensus is far from unanimous regarding Milton’s attitude to the Irish. Joad Raymond argues that, for a tract which, according to Corns and Daems, justifies Drogheda and Wexford, Milton’s anti-Irish invective is actually rather tame. While applying the usual epithets of ‘barbarian,’ ‘savage,’ ‘papist,’ and ‘heathen’ to the Irish, the worst custom Milton mentions is their habit of attaching ploughs to horses’ tails and threshing by toasting oats in cut corn. This is a far cry from the lurid tales of rape, torture and murder that poured from English presses in the aftermath of the Irish rebellion of 1641, and reading *Observations* alongside such tracts, we are struck by Milton’s comparative moderation. But despite Milton’s refusal to ‘retail the usual massacre stories’ (Raymond 2004: 325) he still numbered Protestant casualties at 200,000 (*CPW* 3:308), and John Kerrigan argues – not without merit – that this ‘made atrocities against Irish Catholics more likely’ (‘Anglo’ 227). Milton also desires ‘Justice to avenge the dead’ (*CPW* 3:308). While with historical hindsight we can see Milton was ‘regurgitating impossibly large statistics’ (Kerrigan, ‘Anglo’ 227), *Observations*’ figure is taken from Thomas May’s *A History of the Parliament of England* (1647), ‘a standard political history, perhaps the nearest thing to an official relation, written by a secretary to the Long Parliament’ (Raymond 2004: 326). Milton’s ambivalent support for vengeful violence against the Irish is arguably further evidenced by Raymond’s readings of *Eikonoklastes*: in discussing the Irish rebellion, Milton cites biblical precedent for a ‘just Warr and execution to slay whole Families of them who so barbarously had slaine whole Families before’, but then explicitly states ‘I speak not this that such measure should be meted rigorously to all the Irish’ (*CPW* 3:482). But while ‘all’ of the Irish may not deserve ‘such measure’, with that single word Milton leaves open the possibility that some of them might. There is thus disagreement between critics as to whether Milton’s 1649 writings on Ireland were ‘the theory to which Drogheda was the practice’ (Raymond 2004: 320). Joad Raymond thinks not, John Kerrigan begs to differ.

While *Observations*’ regional concerns have been previously identified by Corns and Raymond, Daems has recently teased out the strands of Ulster and Scotland that are interwoven through the text, arguing that Milton’s differing representations of the two nations must be read in light of ‘Ireland’s status as a dependency, in contrast to Scotland’s more independent status’ (117). For Daems, Milton treats the Ulster Scots more generously than has hitherto been recognised, since although if the ‘Ulster Scots put forward their own interests, forgoing the obligation they owe the English Parliament while in Ireland, ... they

become little better than either Irish Catholic rebels or malignants,' they 'may still be a reasonable people if they learn ... their proper place in the reconfigured relationship between Ireland, Scotland, and England' (28, 27).

No easy distinction between region and religion can be made in *Observations*, since Milton was responding to a text written by Scots in Ireland to England, and 'the actions of the Scots Presbytery in Belfast [had] implications for the political crisis facing the republican government in England' (Corns 1990: 131). The crucible of the relationship between these three countries in *Observations* is Presbyterianism, and as mouthpiece of the Rump Parliament, Milton used *Observations* to 'discredit would-be leaders of Presbyterian opinion in terms calculated to carry weight with the Presbyterian rank and file', and so 'unrestraint, abandon, even a suggestion of immodesty are made to adhere to the Belfast Presbyterians' (Corns 1990: 130).

But the argument that Milton broke with Presbyterianism in the mid-1640s is not to be taken at face value. According to Joad Raymond:

From 1644 onwards Milton was consistent in his anti-Presbyterianism, with its concomitant anti-Scottish sentiment. *The Tenure*, written immediately before *The History* and published before *Observations*, attacked the king less than the Presbyterian faction who were opposed to his trial. Given his suspicion of and antipathy to the Scots, Milton might have felt some sympathy for those who opposed Cromwell's Irish campaigns. (Raymond 2004: 334)

In a similar vein, Corns argues that 'Milton in "On the New Forcers" seems motivated by his recoil from the venom of his Presbyterian attackers, that in 1644–1645 was certainly a major factor in his alienation from Presbyterianism' (Corns 2000: 340). Corns anchors Milton's disaffection in the fallout from the divorce tracts:

Reacting sharply to the censures of his earliest divorce tract, [Milton] develops in the mid-1640s a wholly hostile perspective on Presbyterian clergy, while still accepting that Presbyterianism is itself a tolerable religious form as long as it is stripped of its aspirations towards enforcing its own doctrine and discipline on the consciences of others. Thereafter, his hostility to Presbyterian divines becomes incorporated into a larger anticlericalism and an aversion to a professional clergy of any denomination. (Corns 2000: 353)

The claims of Raymond and Corns appear overhasty when one considers Milton's defence of John Knox and George Buchanan in *Areopagitica* and, more significantly, later in the *Tenure*. In *Areopagitica*, Milton writes:

Nay, which is more lamentable, if the work of any deceased author, though never so famous in his life time, and even to this day, come to their hands for licence to be Printed, or Reprinted, if there be found in his book one sentence of a ventrous edge, utter'd in the height of zeal, and who knows whether it might not be the dictat of a divine Spirit, yet not suiting with every low decrepit humor of their own, though it were *Knox* himself, the Reformer of a Kingdom that spake it, they will not pardon him their dash: the sense of that great man shall to all posterity be lost, for the fearfulness, or the presumptuous rashness of a perfunctory licencer. (*CPW* 2:534)

Corns acknowledges Milton's attachment to Knox but draws that attachment away from its Scottish source, stating that 'Knox serves [Milton] best since he is both the major British resistance-theorist and an icon of Scottish – and hence English – Presbyterianism' (Corns 2000: 347). For Roger Mason, by contrast, it is precisely the Scottish radical and republican roots of Presbyterianism as epitomised by Knox that is at issue, as it was for Charles I's father at the dangerous moment of Anglo-Scottish union: 'James ... responded to the inherent anti-imperialism of Presbyterian thought by embracing whole-heartedly the imperial ideology developed in England to underwrite the Tudor monarchy's assertions of supreme authority over both church and state' (10). As Brian Tierney notes, 'James I of England understood the matter well enough when he said, "A Scotch presbytery agree-eth as well with monarchy as God with the Devil"' (15).

Milton's view of Presbyterianism is more nuanced than Corns or Raymond suggest. This was evident to earlier commentators too. Nathaniel Henry observed that 'Milton is still praising Presbyterian Fairfax in Sonnet XV, in which he refers to Scotland as the "fals North," and he was to praise him again in *The Second Defence*. No doubt when Milton wrote the "divorce sonnets" he had turned against the Scotch Presbyterians, as had other Independents, but he can berate the foolish extremists of his own faction, as he was to do later in his sonnet to Cromwell' (N. Henry 513). In the *Observations*, he notes 'Of this Representation therefore wee can esteem and judge no other then of a slandrous and seditious libell, sent abroad by a sort of Incendiaries, to delude and make the better way under the cunning and plausible name of a Presbytery' (CPW 3:320). That phrase – 'the cunning and plausible name of a Presbytery' – is interestingly barbed. Milton knows the Presbyterians still have credit, and one of his telling points against the Belfast Presbyterians is that in opposing the killing of the king they prove ignorant of their own history, and of the recent history of English Presbyterianism and of English support for the Presbyterian cause:

Thir next impeachment is, *that we oppose the Presbyteriall government, the hedg and bulwark of Religion*. Which all the Land knows to be a most impudent falshood, having established it with all freedom, wherever it hath been desir'd. Nevertheless as we perceave it aspiring to be a compulsive power upon all without exception in Parochiall, Classicall, and Provinciall Hierarchies, or to require the fleshly arm of Magistracy in the execution of a spirituall Discipline, to punish and amerce by any corporall infliction those whose consciences cannot be edifi'd by what authority they are compell'd, we hold it no more to be *the hedg and bulwark of Religion*, than the Popish and Prelaticall Courts, or the *Spanish Inquisition*. (CPW 3:326)

The Belfast Presbytery has forgotten its own credentials in the parliamentary cause:

Thir grand accusation is our Justice don on the King, which that they may prove to be *without rule or example*, they venture all the credit they have in divine and human history ... these blockish Presbyters of *Clandeboy* know not that *John*

Knox, who was the first founder of Presbytery in *Scotland*, taught professedly the doctrine of deposing, and of killing Kings. And thus while they deny that any such rule can be found, the rule is found in their own Country, givn them by thir own first presbyterian institutor. (CPW 3:329)

Milton's support of the Scottish republican tradition extends into his regicidal tracts. In the second edition of *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, which appeared in the autumn of 1649, Milton draws on four Scots – Buchanan, John Craig, Alexander Gibson and Knox – in order to answer Scottish objections to regicide:

These were Scotchmen and Presbyterians; but what measure then have they lately offerd, to think such liberty less beseeming us then themselves, presuming to put him upon us for a Maister whom thir law scarce allows to be thir own equal? (CPW 3:226)

Milton's refrain is that in addressing themselves to the English Parliament the Belfast Presbytery overstep the mark and cross the boundary between master (England) and servant (Ireland), so that 'they talke at random of *servants rainging, servants riding, and wonder how the Earth can beare them*. Either those men imagin themselves to be marvellously high set and exalted in the chaire of *Belfast*, to voutsafe the Parliament of *England* no better stile then *servants*, or els thir high notion, which wee rather beleeve, falls as low as Court parasitism; supposing all men to be servants, but the King' (CPW 3:333).

Observations closes with an analogy between the Scots planters in Ulster and the Saxon settlement of England:

For as *Delight is not seemly for fooles*, much less high words to come from base minds. What they are for Ministers, or how they crept into the fould, whether at the window, or through the wall, or who set them there so haughtie in the Pontificall See of *Belfast*, wee know not. But this wee rather have cause to wonder if the Earth can beare this unsufferable insolency of upstarts; who from a ground which is not thir own dare send such defiance to the sovran Magistracy of *England*, by whose autoritie and in whose right they inhabit there. By thir actions we might rather judge them to be a generation of High-land theevs and Red-shanks, who beeing neighbourly admitted, not as the *Saxons* by merit of thir warfare against our enemies, but by the courtesie of *England* to hold possessions in our Province, a Countrey better then thir own, have, with worse faith then those Heathen, prov'd ingratefull and treacherous guests to thir best friends and entertainers. (CPW 3:333–4)

The Belfast Presbytery has forgotten both its republican principles and its colonial subordinate status. Milton's language throughout – 'dominion', 'feudary kingdom', 'nook', 'province' – is the rhetoric of metropolitan disdain confronted with regional dissent. His contempt for the Belfast Presbytery centres on regional dissent and distinctiveness and on ecclesiastical reach and responsibility:

What means these men? is the Presbytery of *Belfast*, a small Town in *Ulster*, of so large extent that their voyces cannot serve to teach duties in the Congregation which they oversee, without spreading and divulging to all parts farr beyond the Diocesse of *Patrick*, or *Columba*, their writt'n Representation, under the subtle pretence of Feeding their owne Flock? Or doe they think to oversee or undertake to give an accompt for all to whom their paper sends greeting? *St. Paul* to the Elders of *Ephesus* thinks it sufficient to give charge *that they take heed to themselves and to the Flocke*, over which they were made overseers; beyond those bounds hee enlarges not their Commission. And surely when we put down Bishops, and put up Presbyters, which the most of them have made use of to enrich and exalt themselvee, and turn the first heele against their Benefactors, we did not think that one Classick Fraternity so obscure and so remote, should involve us and all State affairs within the Censure and Jurisdiction of *Belfast*, upon pretence of overseeing their own charge. (*CPW* 3:317–18)

Milton was no more being anti-Scottish or even anti-Presbyterian in attacking the *Necessary Representation* of the Belfast Presbytery than he was being anti-English when he told his friend Peter Heimbach in 1666 that the Restoration left him without a country to call his own.²

While scholars have explored some aspects of the context of *Observations*, there is much more to be said on contemporary tracts which joined Milton in denouncing the Ulster Presbytery.³ Raymond touches on *A Necessary Examination of a Dangerous Design and Practice against the Interest and Sovereignty of the Nation and Common-wealth of England, by the Presbytery at Belfast in the Province of Ulster* and Kerrigan mentions the published resistance of two members of the Ulster Presbytery, but these texts deserve more thorough investigation (Raymons 2004; Kerrigan, 'Anglo').

A Necessary Examination was published one month before *Observations* on 17 April 1649, and Joad Raymond implies some parallels between the two texts. Like Milton, the anonymous author of the tract 'attacked the Presbytery's claims to inspiration, accused it of trying to uproot English sovereignty in Ireland, and turned ferociously on the Covenant' (Raymond 2004: 335). But *A Necessary Examination* also conceptualises the intersection between region and religion in a Miltonic manner. While contemporary English tracts commonly represented the Irish as devils, in *A Necessary Examination* it is the Ulster Scots who are the devils. The 'deceiving serpent ... play[s] the ventriloquus in the Presbytery of

² Writing from London to his German friend Heimbach on 15 August 1666, Milton remarked: 'For the virtue you call statesmanship (but which I would rather have you call loyalty to my country), after captivating me with her fair sounding name, has, so to speak, almost left me without a country. However, the chorus of the others makes a fine harmony. One's country is wherever it is well with one' (Milton 1932: 51).

³ Canino's and Harrington's essays outline the anti-Irish polemical context of *Observations*, while Mary C. Fenton explores the continuities between Milton's antiprelatical tracts and *Observations* in 'Milton's View of Ireland: Reform, Reduction, and Nationalist Polity', *Milton Studies* 44 (2005): 203–29.

Belfast,' and Satan speaks through the Ulster Presbyters 'if not *Dragon language*, yet in a very *Deaconicall dialect and accent*' (3). Satan's most effective strategy is 'his *pretension to his first light*: In which *dresse* whensoever he appears, he finds a *ready reception* with those, without discovery, who would stand upon their guard if he assaulted them with his *black Legions*, and the *power of darknesse* (1)', as when he appears to Uriel as 'a stripling Cherube' (*PL* III.636) on his way to

Waste [God's] whole creation, or possess
All as our own, and drive as we were driven,
The punie habitants; or if not drive,
Seduce them to our Party, that thir God
May prove thir foe. (*PL* II.365–9)

While the Ulster Presbyters are 'very zealous in appearing in the *defence* or *embracing* of some *truths*' (8) this is in fact 'the usual course of the Devil' (8) and masks their true intention to 'destroy the interest of *England* in *Ireland*, and root out, if they can, the *Sovereignty* of *England* there, and *transfer it to the Scots*' (16). *A Necessary Examination* reminds the Ulster Presbyters they are 'Inhabitants of *Ireland*, and that subject to the jurisdiction and sovereignty of *England*: in which while they *dwell*, and to any *Possession* there, while they *pretend*, they are *subject* to that jurisdiction and *Sovereignty*' (5), just as Milton is incredulous that those who write from a 'barbarous nook of *Ireland* brand [the English] with the extirpation of laws and liberties.'⁴ These 'Scotch Priests' (5) can only 'pretend' to possess power, in the same way that Milton qualifies the description of Satan's 'fulgent head / And shape Starr bright' with a reminder that he is 'clad / With what permissive glory since his fall / Was left him, or false glitter' (*PL* X.449–52). Hell and Ireland are both rebel regions, yet even during their flashes of insurrection the Ulster Presbyters and Satan remain subjugated, their power revealed as pretence.

The conflation of Satan and the Ulster Presbyters persists in *A Necessary Examination's* representation of Scotland, which draws on the 'traditional association of the Devil with northern regions in folklore' (Stroup 185 n.2). The tract exploits both the Satanic connotations of the north and the idea that men's characteristics were determined by their native climate, just as 'Milton could hardly have assigned his Satan, the violent warrior against right reason, a northern habitat without thinking of its appropriateness to the climatic theory' (Stroup 185 n.2).

⁴ *CPW* 3:327. A nook is a corner or cranny, a regional word, northern English or Scottish. Milton had used it in *Il Penseroso*: 'What Worlds, or what vast Regions hold/ Th'immortal mind that hath forsook/ Her mansion in this fleshly nook. (90–92). In 'Comus' (1634; 1637), 'nook' denotes a remote and risky place – 'this dark sequestered nook' (499); in *Paradise Lost*, Hell's formation involves the filling of 'each hollow nook' (I.705–7); and finally, 'nook' has ominous connotations, as when Eve tells Adam, 'As in a shadie nook I stood behind/ Just then returnd at shut of Ev'ning Flowers' (IX.277–8). But its most telling use had arguably come in an earlier author's allusion to the unruly North of Ireland. Of the elusive Irish rebels, John Derricke declares, 'So do thei kepe in wildest Nokes' (John Derricke, *The Image of Irelande* (London, 1581), Diii).

Climatic theory dictated that northern peoples possessed ‘little wit’ (Bodin 548) and Milton’s *History of Britain* (1670) concurs that ‘the Sun which we want, ripens Wits as well as Fruits.’⁵ *A Necessary Examination* constitutes climatic theory in terms of truth and falsehood, and so the ‘darknesse’ of Scotland has more sinister consequences than mere oafishness (Necessary 5). Due to their unripe wits the Scots are easily led, acting ‘according to the *pattern* that hath been shewed them in *the Mountains of Scotland*’ (5). But we ‘do not hear of any *Moses* amongst them, that hath ascended the Mountain’ (5), so their teacher is not divine but diabolical, he who on ‘the Mount that lies from *Eden* North, / ... first lighted’ (*PL* IV.569–70).

While Satan ‘lighted’ on a mountain north of Eden, he has darkened the mountains north of England, as the author of *A Necessary Examination* ‘know[s] not of much light shining in that darknesse’ (5). Just as the *History* uses climatic theory to explain ‘the “ridiculous frustration” to which [Milton] felt that the Presbyterian leaders had brought the great reformation’ (Fink 75), *A Necessary Examination* will ‘look not for *light* from a *land* of *darknesse*’ because ‘there is not a Nation *under Heaven*, that pretends to Reformation, that are so *lamentably deficient* in it as *your Scots*’ (12, 18). Because Scottish apathy may seep into England, the author opposes the British union ‘lest our *silver* do thereby become *drosse*, and our *wine* be mixed with *water*,’ generously concluding ‘we ... shall never envy the Scottish Nation, the enjoyment of any of their *Arctoan Paradise*; with which if they be not content, but will seek one abroad, we shall be much satisfied, they do it *any where*, rather than in *England* or *Ireland*.’⁶ Both *A Necessary Examination* and *Observations* remind the Belfast Presbytery of their subjection to England, but for different reasons: *A Necessary Examination* emphasises the inferiority of the demonic Ulster Scots to justify severing the union, because ‘*little England* will ever be better then *great Brittain*’ (20). Milton, too, was no unionist. But he feared the Ulster Scots’ separatism would ‘disalliege a whole Feudary Kingdome from the ancient Dominion of *England*’ (*CPW* 3:307), and so *Observations* reasserts English sovereignty through a colonial republicanism that subdues the regions. Indeed, Milton depicts Ireland in its entirety as a mere region that refuses to accept the sovereign magistracy of England: ‘Now let all men judge what this wants of

⁵ *CPW* 5:450. In *A View of the State of Ireland*, Edmund Spenser mocked Richard Stanihurst’s conjecture that the Irish descended from the Egyptians on the grounds that an Irish battlecry and Ulster name, ‘Ferragh’, sounded like ‘Pharaoh’, and for suggesting that the ancient Irish, or Scots, derived from *scotos* (‘darkness’). Andrew Hadfield and Willy Maley (eds), *Edmund Spenser, A View of the State of Ireland (1633): from the first printed edition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 60–61.

⁶ *Necessary Examination*, 20. ‘Arctoan’ had long been associated with climatic theory. Lucan’s *Pharsalia* contrasted ‘Arctois populus’ with their southern counterparts: ‘The people all borne in the Northren cold / Are lovers of the war, hardy, and bold; / But in the East, and Southerne climes, the heat / Of gentle aire makes them effoeminate’ (Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, trans. by Thomas May (London: Aug. Mathewes, 1631), 115.) Samuel Purchas, one of the sources for Milton’s *A Brief History of Moscovia* (1682), also mentions ‘Arctoan Antiquities’ (*Purchas His Pilgrimes in Five Bookes* (London: William Stansby, 1625), 668.

utter alienating and acquitting the whole Province of *Ireland* from all true fealty and obedience to the Common-wealth of *England*' (CPW 3:305). Milton goes out of his way to represent the Belfast Presbytery as a religious body in a remote region governed by England that should be attending to its own local needs and not interfering in matters of state and sovereignty, since 'the least consideration of their Dependance on *England* would have kept them better in their Duty' (CPW 3:321). Declaring himself to be addressing a 'Provincial Synod' (CPW 3:317) guilty of overreaching itself, derides Belfast as 'a place better known by the name of a late Barony, then by the fame of these mens Doctrine or Ecclesiasticall Deeds; whose obscurity till now never came to our hearing', and rails against 'the Sympathy, good Intelligence, and joynt pace which they goe in the North of *Ireland*, with their Copartning Rebels in the South, driving on the same Interest to loose us that Kingdome, that they may gaine it themselves, or at least share in the spoile: though the other be op'n enemies, these pretended Brethren' (CPW 3:317).

Milton tackles the Belfast Presbytery on its own grounds, the grounds of 'necessary representation', by asking who and what they represent:

Wee very well know that Church Censures are limited to Church matters, and these within the compasse of their own Province, or to say more truly of their own Congregation: that affaires of State are not for their Medling, as we could urge ev'n from their own Invectives and Protestations against the Bishops, wherein they tell them with much fervency, that Ministers of the Gospell, neither by that function nor by any other which they ought accept, have the least Warrant to be Pragmaticall in the State. (CPW 3:318–19)

Milton's marginalising of the Belfast Presbytery, his attack on their presumptuousness, is coupled with the accusation that wittingly or unwittingly they are in cahoots with the Catholic Irish in the South:

Nay while we are yet writing these things, and foretelling all men the rebellion which was eevn then design'd in the close purpose of these unhallow'd Priestlings, at the very time when with thir lips they disclaim'd all sowing of sedition, newes is brought, and too true, that the *Scottish* Inhabitants of that Province are actually revolted, and have not only besieg'd in *London-Derry* those Forces which were to have fought against *Ormond*, and the Irish Rebels; but have in a manner declar'd with them, and begun op'n war against the Parliament; and all this by the incitement and illusions of that unchristian Synagogue at *Belfast*. (CPW 3:322)

Milton's spatial metaphors extend into spiritual matters, and even territorialise toleration insofar as it is literally out of bounds, so that the Belfast Presbytery should attend to 'the spirituall execution of Church discipline within thir own congregations ... for the conscience we must have patience till it be within our verge' (CPW 3:324).

John Kerrigan recently noted that 'even as he wrote (though Milton may not have realized this) a body of Ulster Covenanters was resisting the *Necessary Representation*' (Archipelagic 231). Although the exchange between two

dissenting ministers, James Ker and Jeremy O Queen, and their presbytery is remarkably Miltonic in places, it has not yet been examined in any detail. The exchange of letters and proclamations was collected and published in 1650 as *News from Ireland, Concerning the Proceedings of the Presbytery in the County of Antrim in Ireland*, and the partisan nature of the publication is clear from the title page's declaration that it was 'printed from the RELATION made thereof by Mr. James Ker, and by him delivered to Colonel Venables, Commander in chief of the Forces of the Commonwealth of England in the Counties of Down and Antrim,' and 'published for the undeceiving of those who (not knowing what they desire) would have Presbytery Established by Law in this Commonwealth.'⁷

Ker and O Queen outlined their opposition to the *Representation* in ten pithy points, with a Miltonic rationalism resounding in their emphasis on the lack of evidence for the Belfast Presbytery's claims. They begin by complaining that the Presbytery is 'far from true Intelligence', and in each point they 'desire the truth of that Assertion to be proven,' 'desire the truth of that made more manifest,' 'conceive ourselves unable to prove that point,' and claim 'the truth of it is doubtful to us'.⁸ But Milton and the dissenting ministers agree in more than just empiricism: Ker and O Queen doubt 'whether these Members that were removed, were the most worthy Members of the Honorable House of Commons (10)', just as Milton viewed Pride's Purge as an excision of 'rott'n Members out of the House (*CPW* 3:328)'. *Observations* recognises 'the best regulated States and Governments through the World ... have been so prudent as never to imploy the Civill sword further then the edge of it could reach; that is, to Civill offences onely' (*CPW* 3:310–11), and so '[t]o use civil power and the sword in matters of religion and conscience, as both Catholicism and Presbyterianism would do, is tyranny' (McDowell 42). Ker and O Queen write from the other side of the 'Civill sword,' and they mirror Milton's prudence by extending the religious sword to religious offences only: 'we cannot affirm, that the King was tryed by private men, and with cruel hands put to death, because it is a civil question beyond our capacity' (11).

But Miltonic elements are not found only on the anti-Presbytery side of the exchange. Milton was incensed by the Belfast Presbytery because they spoke 'with an eye of Conformity rather to the North, then to that part where they owe thir subjection [i.e., London]' (*CPW* 3:321), but the Belfast Presbyters assert that it is not themselves, but Ker and O Queen, who are guilty of this. Milton insists

⁷ Lest an inattentive reader still suspected the editor of Presbyterian sympathies, two further quotes were added on the title page: one from 2 Tim. 39: 'But they shall proceed no further, for their folly shall be manifest to all men' and the other from Claudian: 'Nil aspersus humili, quum surgit in altum' ['There is nothing as odious as a clown who has risen to power']. On Venables, who played a key role for Cromwell at Drogheda as well as in Ulster, see John Morrill, 'Venables, Robert (1612/1613–1687)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28181>, accessed 10 May 2012].

⁸ *News from Ireland*, 10, 11. For a subtle account of divided loyalties among Presbyterians in the period, see Kirsteen Mackenzie 2005.

that 'the Ulster Scots' allegiance must be directed firmly towards London' (Daems 2012: 27), and the Belfast Presbytery does indeed align itself with the 'worthy Ministers of the Province of *London*', constructing an ideological pale which their dissenting brethren are placed firmly beyond (5). Ker and O Queen are repeatedly reminded that their 'eye of Conformity' has wandered from London, and that they have erred by deviating from the 'laudible examples' (5), of their counterparts in the capital who 'well understand' the situation: 'albeit a question to you, yet it is not a question to the Presbytery; neither yet to the Ministers of the Province of *London*, who are nearer to true intelligence than you are', and 'that the King was by them cruelly put to death, is hence necessarily inferred, and though ye have not capacity to understand such a civil question, yet the Ministers of *London* in their Vindication do well understand it, asserting their abhorrence of that act as fully as the Representation doth' (13, 14). Just as Milton commands the Irish to remember they were 'justly made our vassalls' (*CPW* 3:302) and not threaten the unity of the three kingdoms, so too the Belfast Presbytery asks the dissenters to 'lay aside an obstinate Spirit' and not be 'a cause of a Breach in the Presbyteries Union' (*News* 14). The threat of providential reconquest looms over *Observations* because the Irish 'preferre their own absurd and savage Customes before the most convincing evidence of reason and demonstration' (*CPW* 3:304), and the Belfast Presbytery, although still speaking relatively softly at this point, are carrying a similarly big stick: 'we further wish ... that ye will ... not tenaciously adhere to your former failing, lest you provoke God to blast and desert you, and necessitate the Presbytery to use the Rod of Discipline against you' (*News* 15–16).

In their extended riposte to the Belfast Presbytery, Ker and O Queen adopt an increasingly Miltonic independent (or even Independent) position by proclaiming 'we do not desire to adhere to any error; nor to this error; viz. to believe as the Church believeth, without any further trial of what the Church believeth'.⁹ Milton argued that the Belfast Presbytery had joined 'with their Copartnering Rebels in the South, driving on the same Interest to loose us that Kingdome ... though the other be op'n enemies' (*CPW* 3:317), a claim borne out by Ker's fear that 'our zeal against Sectaries in *England* has joyned with Malignants up and down' (26). Ker insists that the Belfast Presbytery's attack on the London 'Sectaries' has – intentionally or not – created a common cause with 'Malignants,' and so he asks 'Is it time for us to engage War against the Army in *England* ... when we are so inclosed and compassed about with Papists and Malignants' (25). Both Ker and Milton believed the enemy had been misidentified, and that one closer to home posed a greater danger: for Milton, it was not the Irish but the Ulster Scots who potentially posed 'a threat to the revolution' (Kerrigan, *Archipelagic* 232), while for Ker the threat was not the English Army but the Irish 'Papists and Malignants'. Both men recognised that 'Much ado we have been making against these that was far from us, and neglecting these that was in our bosom' (26). The parallels between Ker and Milton are further evident in Ker's conclusion to his peroration

⁹ *News from Ireland*, 17. On Milton, the Independents and Ireland, see Carlin 1993.

against the Belfast Presbytery's censorship: he remembers when 'Bishops did stop honest mens mouthes, but never gat the honor to open them again: I wish that this do not befall our Presbytery' (27), and so we leave Ker with Milton's warning three years earlier that '*New Presbyter* is but *Old Priest* writ Large' ringing in our ears (Milton 2009: 315, l. 20).

The fate of the Belfast Presbyters resembles that of the fallen angels of *Paradise Lost*:

Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
[...] In utter darkness, and thir portion set
As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n
As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole. (l.63–74)

Several critics have argued for the *Observations* as an intertext for *Paradise Lost*: according to David Loewenstein, 'A great poetic text like *Paradise Lost* ... has its specific and localized contexts, historical conditions which illuminate its complex polemical and political meaning' (310). More pointedly, John Kerrigan notes: 'The shape of Milton's thinking here recurs in *Paradise Lost*. If the Irish Rebellion left its mark on the epic, by showing Charles, in league with the rebels, to resemble Satan and the fallen angels, so, rather more obviously, did the corrupted militancy of the Scots' (*Archipelagic* 230). In *Paradise Lost*, the journey of the fallen angels takes them through a changing landscape that includes terrain familiar to readers of English tracts on Ireland:

They pass'd, and many a Region dolorous,
O'er many a Frozen, many a Fierie Alp,
Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of death. (*PL* II.619–21)

Later, Satan, addressing Chaos and his cohort, speaks of passing through 'darksome desert' and 'spacious empire', and asks for directions:

Directed no mean recompence it brings
To your behoof, if I that Region lost,
All usurpation thence expell'd, reduce
To her original darkness and your sway
(Which is my present journey) and once more
Erect the Standard there of *ancient Night*;
Yours be th' advantage all, mine the revenge. (*PL* II.981–7)

But while this follows *Observations* in presenting a picture of Milton as intolerant of the regions at the limits of sovereignty, in his other later works we find reflections on region which offer more positive outlooks on outlying areas. In *The Readie and Easie way to establish a free Commonwealth* (1659; 1660) Milton can be seen rather belatedly and perhaps desperately to welcome those remote parts into the fold:

They should have heer also schools and academies at thir own choice, wherin thir children may be bred up in thir own sight to all learning and noble education not in grammar only, but in all liberal arts and exercises. This would soon spread much more knowledge and civilitie, yea religion through all parts of the land, by communicating the natural heat of government and culture more distributively to all extreme parts, which now lie numm and neglected. (CPW 7:460)

The parallels between *Observations* and *The History of Britain*, although mentioned by a few scholars, have yet to be explored in the necessary depth, as they reveal much about the connections Milton detected between contemporary Ulster and ancient Britain.¹⁰ Throughout the *History*, Milton flits between regions of the mind and the margins of what he sees as the English core of the 'Britain' he is mapping out with meagre sources. Reaching Roman history, he exclaims with relief: 'By this time, like one who had set out on his way by night, and travail'd through a Region of smooth or idle Dreams, our History now arrives on the Confines, where day-light and truth meet us with a cleer dawn, representing to our view, though at a farr distance, true colours and shapes' (CPW 5:37). Later, the region of dreams morphs into a region of druids: 'This is certain, that in a time when most of the Saxon Forces were departed home, the Britans gather'd strength; and either against those who were left remaining, or against thir whole powers, the second time returning obtain'd this Victory. Thus Ambrose as chief Monarch of the Ile succeeded Vortigern; to whose third Son Pascentius he permitted the rule of two Regions in Wales, Buelth, and Guorthigirniaun' (CPW 5:156). According to Harold Jenkins, 'In Book III, and in "The Digression", Milton drastically revises the concept of the "foren yoke". Milton creates a potentially deconstructive paradox: the Britons' natural love of liberty can only be strengthened by foreign ideas about civility, which are essential to maintaining that liberty' (315–16). This

¹⁰ The relationship between the *History* and the *Observations* has been explored briefly in Raymond's 'Complications of Interest'. A parallel reading of the texts is supported by Milton's drafting the early books of the *History* a month before he wrote *Observations*. Nicholas von Maltzahn observes 'if the *Tenure* and the *History* agree on Parliament and Presbyterians, so too does the *Observations Upon the Articles of Peace*' (39) See also Linda Gregerson, 'A Colonial Writes the Commonwealth: Milton's *History of Britain*', *Prose Studies* 19.3 (1996): 247–54. In the *Second Defence* (1654), Milton claims that he began work on the *History* after completing *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* in late January 1649 and 'had already finished four books' when he was summoned by the Council of State on 13 March 1649 (CPW 4:627–8); von Maltzahn concurs with this timeframe (22–3). Blair Worden argues, conversely, that 'by 1649 Milton had written the basic narrative of the first two-thirds or so of the *History*', although he agrees with von Maltzahn that Milton 'took up [the *History*] in the weeks after the regicide' (425; 413). (2007: 425; 413). Worden believes the Digression 'was written, or revised, after the Restoration' (2012: 365 n. 82), while Thomas Fulton suggests the 'eleven weeks between mid-September and December 6 [1648] should be seen as the period of the [Digression's] composition' (129). So although disagreements persist regarding when Milton began the *History* and wrote the Digression, there is a general consensus that he was working on it in the months preceding *Observations*.

climatic theory – a regional theory – is the climax of Milton's *History of Britain*, if only because of its later publication date, though it appears to belong to Book III, where the Britons rather naively invite in the Saxons. If Milton's faith in native wit appears to falter in the *History of Britain*, then he certainly believed in reading foreign books as a way of supplementing any deficiency.

In the *History's* 'Digression' Milton makes a virtue out of region, and gives a twist to his climatic theory by suggesting that if liberty grows best in warmer climes then we can still import the writings as part of the sun-enriched produce of such southern zones:

For *Britain*, to speak a truth not often spoken, as it is a Land fruitful enough of Men stout and courageous in War, so is it naturally not over-fertile of Men able to govern justly and prudently in Peace, trusting only in their Mother-Wit; who consider not justly, that Civility, Prudence, love of the Publick good, more than of Money or vain Honour, are to this Soyl in a manner Outlandish; grow not here, but in minds well implanted with solid and elaborate Breeding, too impolitick else and rude, if not headstrong and intractable to the industry and vertue either of executing or understanding true Civil Government. Valiant indeed, and prosperous to win a field; but to know the end and reason of winning, unjudicious and unwise: in good or bad Success alike unteachable. For the Sun which we want, ripens Wits as well as Fruits; and as Wine and Oyl are imported to us from abroad: so must ripe Understanding, and many civil Vertues, be imported into our minds from foreign Writings, and examples of best Ages, we shall else miscarry still, and come short in the attempts of any great Enterprise. (*CPW* 5:450)

Milton's disparaging of the Belfast Presbytery in *Observations* has to be read against his own growing sense of marginalisation. Exporting tyranny while importing humanist culture is an apt depiction of the British Empire that emerged after the English Revolution (or The War of the Three Kingdoms, as it's more likely to be viewed now). The suppression of regional differences was part of that process. For Marx, the English Revolution was shipwrecked in Ireland.¹¹ Regional rebellion – the so-called 'revolt of the provinces' – was crushed.¹² Colonial republicanism and monarchical imperialism proved complicit. Milton's *Observations* stands as a hinge text, a text whose richness and complexity is far from being exhausted by our reading here, and which ought to be viewed as a pivotal work both for Miltonists and for all those interested in the workings of region and religion in the period.

¹¹ 'As a matter of fact, the English republic under Cromwell met shipwreck in – Ireland'. Marx to Ludwig Kugelmann, 4 December 1869, in Marx and Engels 378–9. For a Marxist reading of the Irish dimension of the English Revolution see Hill 1985.

¹² See Morrill 1976.