WHEN I CONSIDER MILTON'S PATIENCE

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Introduction

What follows is a research paper centered on John Milton's sonnet: *When I Consider.* This, undoubtedly the most widely read and best-loved of Milton's poems, has long been regarded by literary critics as a "problem-child." E.M. Tillyard considered it "an extremely difficult and strange poem."¹ Other critics reinforce this view. Stanley Fish, in *Interpreting the Variorum,* intent on showing "the uneasiness the poem has always inspired," actually misquotes another critic in stating that the poem is considered "almost out of control."² More on this later.

It is my contention that this poem is in near-perfect control, finely tuned to its theme of bearing affliction and serving God under new and restrictive circumstances. The key to understanding the poem's control is in the message of Patience, delivered in reply to the central question posed in the poem. For the blind poet, the most important part of that message is not the passive words of the poem's famous last line; rather, as I intend to show, it is the more dynamic words located three lines above.

In search of understanding, I closely examine the poem and some of its sources, hoping to gain deeper appreciation of the poet's fifty-nine word question and the forty-six word reply of "Patience": his godly emissary. In Patience we have the only example of prosopopoeia to be found in all of Milton's sonnets. To better understand this emissary and her message, I research other work of the poet and his Bible. I use the *Oxford English Dictionary (O.E.D.)* directly and as a guide to other sources, especially those sources yielding Stoic and Christian views of patience and associated virtues.
Let me begin with a prelude, some preliminary thoughts to guide me into the proper spirit to invest that talent given me in this endeavor. To the extent literary criticism is labor of spirit rather than day-labor, it should be approached from a mood of meditation, as on a day of rest from physical labor. Such seems an especially reasonable approach when one's quest is to gain an understanding of patience. In Sabbath rituals there are prayers for entry into a mood of meditation. In Hebrew worship there is the Amidah, which serves to prepare the worshipper for the transition from the pace of the outer world to that of the world within, for thoughts worthy of the deity's attention. The following is one form of the Amidah.

"Slow me down, Inner Spirit,
Ease the pounding of my heart
By the quieting of my mind.
Steady my hurried pace
With a vision of the eternal reach of time...
Slow me down, Inner Spirit;
And inspire me to send my roots deep
Into the soil of life's enduring values
That I may grow toward the stars
Of my greater destiny."

I have no hard evidence that Milton knew of the Amidah but, versed in Hebrew and the Old Testament as he was, likely, he would know the spirit as well as the words of this prayer. Patience does not appear directly in the Amidah, no more so than to blend her quality (virtues are almost always thought of as female) with others in a collective personification. This is fitting and in keeping with Patience's long literary history of service in a supporting role, of blending her qualities with those of others, "for her strength upholds every other virtue." In classical and Christian graphic art she often
appears as a central figure. But in literature, although much has been written of patience, first as a stoic attribute, than as a Christian quality, we rarely encounter her personified, even more rarely do we find her in prosopopoeia - bold enough to speak. Her Christian attributes: silence, meekness, and humility, tend to preclude speech.\(^5\)

In her own right, Patience is neither one of the three Christian virtues: Faith, Hope, Charity, nor one of the Stoic four: Justice, Fortitude, Prudence, Temperance. Patience is often associated with Fortitude; she is sometimes referred to as a Beatitude, although neither this word nor patience herself appear in the sayings of Jesus, Matt.5., which introduce the Sermon on the Mount, from which the term Beatitude originated. As Schiffhorst notes, "more than the long-suffering trials of Job: it [patience] is God's own character which in turn is the source of human patience. The term implies not only physical and spiritual endurance but an expectation for someone to help or for something to happen," (3). This expectation comes into play in our understanding of Patience and her message in Sonnet 19.

As learned a scholar as he was, Milton could not find a precedent for Patience as a virtue in her own right; when needing such a credential in Paradise Lost, he created one. The angel Michael, in his instructions after the Fall, adds Patience to the list of qualities Adam requires," only add deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith, add Virtue, Patience, Temperance, add Love, by name to come call'd Charity, the soul of all the rest," (P.L. 12, 581). Such a Patience, linked with Christian Virtue, forms a major theme for Milton. In his writings he refers to Christus Patiens as a "title or topic for a tragedy that
he did not write. Milton refers to patience or Patience fifteen times in his published poems. Nowhere, however, besides Sonnet 19, do we find Patience personified; nowhere else is Patience allowed to speak, much less to speak for God. From where or whom does the Patience of Sonnet 19 get such authority? After a close reading of the poem and a search into its sources, I suggest an answer to that question.

My attempt to approach this poem systematically is based on a suggestion by Northrop Frye, of applying the scientific method to an analysis of a work of literature: "that sense of systematic progressive consolidation which belongs to a science... The digging up of relevant information about a poet should lead to a steady consolidating progress in the criticism of his poetry," (38). I hope to advance this idea by so analyzing this short but significant literary work. I've chosen Milton's Sonnet 19 because of its extraordinary employment of language, its concrete yet ambiguous images, its aliveness with rich, tight language. This poem has been extensively analyzed and yet still presents major unresolved questions. It is centered on an important theme and alludes to older literature, primarily biblical literature, relating to that theme. The poet has a reputation par excellence for scholarship and powerful use of language.

Perhaps the foremost classical scholar of his age, Milton also has a particular reputation as a master of the sonnet form, this marked by "precision of utterance." From Milton's mind spills forth the aggregate of many others. Milton, the man, was acquainted with the major political figures of 17th century Europe. Milton, the scholar-poet, was acquainted with the major literary figures of previous centuries. With him as our classical
guide, we travel across continents and time, to Eden and heavenly Paradise, to Hell, to regions above and beyond the ken of most others. Because of such depth of knowledge, the critical reader can, if prepared with sufficient metaphoric rope and bucket, lower these into any of Milton's poetic wells, even such a one sized as a sonnet, tap into its sub-surface springs, and draw forth thirst-quenching drink. Milton also offers his readers the pleasure of challenging word puzzles; "He who of those delights can judge and spare To interpose them oft, is not unwise." With lines of such ambiguity from his Sonnet 20, Milton raises as well as quenches literary thirsts: does spare mean afford or forbear? After three hundred and forty years the question remains. Even a relatively simple Miltonic sonnet such as this is worthy of more critical attention.

My critical approach to Sonnet 19 is eclectic: formalist, reader response, historical, deconstruction freplay, looking closely at the poem, then going beyond it to chase the mind of the poet in related areas: Christian theology concerning labor, affliction and faithful service, the Bible as Milton read it, Patience in relation to her Stoic and Christian roots, Milton's contemporary sources (Sir. T. Browne here looms large as one possibility). Milton's life at the time of writing (which introduces the difficult-to-escape thicket of the poem's dating). In chasing Milton's mind, it seems useful to at least acknowledge the physical-metaphysical gulf separating us.

As readers we bring tools of reason to shape our understanding of what the poet puts to paper, but we also bring preexisting structures built from emotion and irrational beliefs. In reading imaginative literature such as a poem, we suspend our prior
reason-based disbeliefs, but we do not easily suspend our irrational beliefs, our emotion-based structures. My "structures" were built on vastly different soil from those of John Milton. Mine were built on the soil of a Jewish inner-city kid in New York during the great depression. Much of my inner and outer worlds appear to be different from those of Milton; their similarities are less apparent. With this awareness I hope to more honestly search for the poet and the poem, and to communicate a more true account of what I find. Milton shows us a reasonable, god-fearing man asking a reasonable god-fearing question. But, what are his preexisting structures? What, relating to Cromwell England and the classical, biblical, medieval, renaissance influences surrounding it? What, relating to religious, political and poetic work, and affliction, family, friends, fears, and dysfunctions, all of which impinge on that work? I intend using all the critical methods available to me in addressing these questions.

Northrop Frye suggests that only by applying scientific methods can we hope to answer larger questions in criticism,¹² this idea gains support from what has taken place in physical science since Galileo (a somewhat contemporary figure whom Milton once met). Instead of focusing on metaphysical questions, hopelessly beyond the possibility of answering, scientists began investigating detailed parts of the world, accumulating bits and pieces of knowledge which, in four hundred years, have been woven into larger tapestries from which we can now see large parts of the cosmos.
Critical Analysis

Having expressed these preliminary thoughts, I proceed with my gathering of bits and pieces of knowledge relating to When I Consider, listed in most collections of Milton's work as Sonnet 19.

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide,
Lodg'd with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
Doth God exact day-labor light denied,
I fondly ask; But Patience to prevent
That murmur soon replies, God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts, who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best; his State
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait.

As I engage in a close reading of this poem, its individual words, phrases, and clauses, a close reading of each of the fourteen lines, I keep in mind Eliot's observation, "Milton's verse is especially refractory to yielding up its secrets to examination of the single line. For his verse is not formed that way. It is the period, the sentence and still more the paragraph, that is the unit of Milton's verse."13

Although I examine individual words (how can the critic avoid this?) I focus on the sentence, of which there are six.14 Eliot's observation has another ramification for the reader; attempting to keep in mind this larger unit of thought forces the reader into Milton's world: forces the reader to view words as Milton, after blindness, was forced to
view them, to consider more words at one time than the eye can hold. Thus, examining an entire Milton sentence forces a deeper engagement of the reader.

The value of Eliot's comment becomes clear in the attempt to present a true account of the poem's first sentence, ending with the question, "Doth God exact day-labor, light denied." Milton undoubtedly means what he asks, yet, he is neither simply asking about that labor which God decrees in Genesis 3:19, nor about that denial of light caused by his blindness. Milton forces this reader, after "Doth God exact" to stretch his mind enough to encompass "that Talent" and "day-labor," blindness, and lack of inner light. a world dark because of ignorance/sin, and dark because of lack of sunlight. He illuminates this world with darkness visible, with sightless light powerful enough to show that which lies deeply buried, including that portion lodg'd with him useless. He gives us this but there is more to consider.

This first sentence of the poem consists of fifty-nine words, filling the entire octave (less four words at the end to "introduce" Patience). In labeling this a complex sentence I make the ultimate understatement regarding Milton's grammar; the sentence is heavily laden with adverbials which take up the first six lines, the first fifty words. The last three words give us the subject and a modified transitive verb expressing the action of the sentence. The six preceding words express the direct object. This describes the working surface, the mechanical parts of the sentence, but, as seen in Milton's sense of *day-labor*, the poet is not primarily concerned here with mechanical work. The heart of Milton's sentence is the independent clause that forms his question, "Doth God exact day-labor,
light denied." The soul of the sentence is scattered among the adverbials and must be pieced together if the sentence is to be understood. "I fondly ask," functions as one adverbial. Searching out why this seemingly reasonable - even wise - question is described as foolish, contributes to a deeper engagement of reader with the author and his significant others.

"Each of Milton's sonnets," Anna Nardo informs us, "is an engagement of self with 'other.'" In Sonnet 19, at center stage, that other is God, but I intend to show that "other" in this sonnet also includes an entourage in the wings of Milton's theater. On the visible stage we are shown a simple to understand, poignant situation; a blind (or becoming blind), god-fearing poet, is considering his dormant, unexpressed talent; he tells us that this talent "is death to hide, Lodg'd with me useless." He says that he wants to serve God, as best he can, as God demands such service, and in the light of all, as he is able see such, he asks a question, "Doth God exact day-labor, light denied." No question mark punctuates this and the poet then labels his asking, "foolish." Immediately, Patience - a personification, or that quality given voice within himself - enters and answers, with words that take up the rest of the poem. (Some critics dispute whether all the words are from her.) She speaks with authority which, if not coming from God, directly, comes from his emissary. She tells him not to fret; God does not need his labor; He has enough; keep your faith; stand and wait.

Off stage, in the wings, we discover an analogy between the poet's talent and another, that other described in the New Testament, St. Matthew, chapter 25, 14-30.
Here we have a story, known as the Parable of the Talents, hereafter, (PT), of a man, a lord, who, as he starts on a long journey, is likened unto the kingdom of heaven. Before departing he gives his three servants money: five talents to the first, two to the second, and one to the third, befitting their abilities to handle these sums. After a period of time he returns and interrogates his servants. The first two have invested the talents, doubled their value, and both servants receive praise and reward, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord," (25:22). The servant who received one talent stands fearfully before the Lord, points to the earth and says, "Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine," (25:24). The Lord answers, with as strong a chide as the Lord has ever given, yet, acknowledging the accuracy of the servant's assessment: "thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him and give it unto him which hath ten talents." (25:26). Then comes the final blow, "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth [eternal damnation]," (25:30). How does this parable relate to the poet as he considers, and then asks his question? Even more, how does it relate to Patience's answer?
The blind-poet's question, central to the poem, "Doth God exact day-labor, light denied," is clear and straightforward. As well as occupying the dramatic center of the poem, I was startled to discover that it occupies the physical center; completing the octave, the question is buried dead center on lines 7 and 8: fifty words on six lines precede the question, fifty words on six lines follow; the nine word question sentence occupies the middle two lines, with four words left to introduce Patience, or rather, to bring her on stage - she is never introduced. Is the question's placement in the sonnet coincidental? I think not. I will present evidence of a purpose Milton had in so dividing the poem, in having the question split the poem apart, in giving Patience as much space as that which came before the central question. Patience immediately takes control of that space; Patience responds to the poet's question with a forty-six word reply culminating in the poem's famous last line, a line which has delighted readers and confounded critics, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

Confounding as the line and the poem may be to critics, readers are not confounded. Readers find that the line, indeed, the entire surface of this poem, is easy to negotiate, lucid, and appealing. The poem appeals to all who have borne affliction, who have been forced to come to terms with their worldly lot and their "Maker" - however perceived. Who then is omitted from such a list? The poem is widely published. It appears in many anthologies, in many languages, in many English school texts, including some in elementary schools. The poem's individual words are easy to understand. Of the poem's one hundred and thirteen words, two have one letter, sixteen have two letters,
twenty-three have three, thirty-four have four, eighteen have five, seven have six, seven
have seven. The average is 4.2 letters per word, less than the average of his twenty-two
other sonnets, all of which are generally acknowledged to center on simpler themes. The
longest words in "When I Consider" have nine letters; there are three such, in sequence:
therewith," "returning," [are] "thousands." There are three eight-letter words, in
sequence: "consider," "day-labor," [with] "patience." Are these Milton's hidden thoughts?
If I seem to play here, forgive me; Milton, punster and player with words, seems to
encourage me in this. I feel him encouraging me to dig deeper. What else might lie
hidden? What else, might lie within my ken? I believe that Milton has cut and polished
this poem as if it were a fine jewel. I believe that he has put such sparkle of energy into
this poem, that thoughts might be reflected from any surface, that below the surface
thoughts might leap out where least expected. There seems something special, even for
Milton, in the care and thought below the surface of this poem. (It is my unsupported
guess that Milton worked on it for some eleven years, between 1644 and 1655.)

As to the surface of this poem, it is quite well-behaved and accessible, even to
elementary school children. Of the poem's one hundred and thirteen words, ninety-five
are single syllable. All 113 words are basic elementary school vocabulary; all the surface
thoughts are equally basic and accessible. Some, such as that contained in "this dark
world and wide," might even cause a 6th grader to think and wonder! The thought
appears mind-stretching. The poem appears user friendly and educational. I venture that
there are thousands of thousands who are acquainted with it, countless more who, on first
meeting, will think themselves acquainted, will read it and nod wisely. I suspect that it is more immediately accessible to the literary lay than to the clergy, more so to uncritical masses than to those of critical mass. I've queried twenty people of widely different backgrounds and persuasions, the youngest twelve, the oldest eighty-six, about their knowledge of the poem. All had heard or thought that they had heard the poem before. When, at my bidding, they expressed thoughts and feelings, they did so without hesitation, all soon replied that they knew the poem and liked it. None, including three who lacked high school education, expressed a difficulty with any of the words. None, including two Ph.Ds, were aware of the reference to the Parable of the Talents. All felt that they understood enough of the blind poet's inner-conflict to say they appreciated the poem; all felt moved.

Anna Nardo, in Milton's Sonnets and the Ideal Community, describes the poem as "the struggle to restore a calm, humble faith that God will allow the individual to serve in His own way and time," (19). Eleanor Gertrude Brown, herself blind, in Milton's Blindness, describes the poem as, "in my opinion a masterpiece both of literature and human experience. To me, the wonders of Paradise Lost, the calm and peace of Paradise Regained, the tragedy of Samson Agonistes have less appeal than this simple but powerful poem. There is, I believe, in English literature no human tragedy so simply depicted," (51).

Not all critics agree. As stated, some consider the poem to be unsuccessful or worse: ineffective. Tillyard, as previously quoted in Variorum commentary, found it, "an
extremely difficult and strange poem. There is in it a tone of self-abasement. . . . Milton crouches in humble expectation, like a beaten dog ready to wag its tail at the smallest token of its master's attention," (452). H. F. Robins ("Milton's First Sonnet on his Blindness," ) quoted in Variorum, says, "The conventional interpretation of the sonnet leads to an impasse: Milton, remembering the fate of the man who hide his talent, finds consolation in the assurance that he may serve God by regarding his blindness as a bar to future endeavour, that he cannot be expected to work; but this would have seemed ignoble to the poet," (445). Stanley Fish quotes Taylor Stoehr as saying that the poem is "almost out of control." Stoehr actually says, "that the syntax of the octave [my emphasis] here seems almost out of control, gives the poem a perilous suspense, which the straightforward structure of the sestet then dispenses and transcends." My thesis on the role of Patience addresses and responds to some of the arguments for these critical descriptions of "difficult," "strange," "impasse" and "perilous suspense."

First, some line by line notes, going through the poem, stopping at gaps: certain words and phrases that cause readers to stop and consider. As a pathologist is aware, cutting apart a once-live body, hoping to gain some understanding of life from the severed organs, we need to be aware that words severed from Milton's sentence represent the cadaver of the sonnet, not the living poem.

[When I consider] Honigmann describes this beginning as traditional, an "opening formula, a well-worn one," and cites "many 'parallels' in Henry Lok's religious sonnet-cycles (1597), never before mentioned, I believe, in this connection" (51).
However true, I believe that there is more to this clause, that Milton shows purpose in beginning the octave with this, and beginning the sestet with "that murmur." Viewed together, this clause and phrase suggest a repetition of the poet's question: "when" here meaning, "at the various times which." From *O.E.D.*, "when" 7c; Indefinitely or generally: at any time or at the several times, at which; on any occasion that. 'When I look upon the tombs of the great, every emotion of envy dies in me.' 1711, Addison, *Spectator* No. 26 P.7." In P.L. we find that Satan, "with inspection deep consider'd every creature," (IX, 83). This is quoted in the *O.E.D.* under an archaic meaning of "consider," "1. to view or contemplate attentively, to survey, examine, inspect, scrutinize." This seems Milton's sense of "consider" in the sonnet.

[how my light] Why this provocative adverb rather than the simpler "that"? Might Milton imply "by what means?"; "for what reason (or cause)?"; an elliptical use? if elliptical, what might be the missing word(s)? "much?" "to what extent?" If either, he emphasizes the degree, the magnitude of his blindness, and hints at information relating to the question of the poem's date. In this, as with other reader stops in this sonnet, I suspect that I satisfy part of Milton's intent: provoking thought, by the questioning process I engage in here. "Light" takes up seven full pages in the *O.E.D.* (including several quotations from Milton's work); in addition to "1. that natural agent or influence which . . . evokes the functional activity of the organ of sight" there is "1.1. The light of God's countenance," and "7.c. Applied to God as the source of divine light, and to men who manifest it." From P.L., "God is Light, And never but in unapproached Light Dwelt
from Eternity," (III. 3.). Together with the dominant meaning of blindness in "my light is spent," there is a suggestion of diminished divine light because of the hidden talent; "my light," for Milton, means much more than his physical sense of sight. In comparing this sonnet with sonnet VII Macon Cheek comments, "it seems rather futile to argue whether the 'light' means the light of the physical eye, the light of the physical sun, the spiritual light within man, or the visible working and manifestation of this inner and spiritual light in a creative life, since as Milton used the word in various other places it carried all these meanings. . . . [his poetry] reveals him to have been almost Greek in his devotion to the sun, that he regarded light either as the primal quality or as the prime creation of God, and that he constantly associated light with his own creative faculty," (131). From Cruden's Concordance, "Light signifies . . . a son or successor who keeps one's name and memory from being extinguished, 1 Kings 11. 36, 2 Chron. 21. 7," (342). After June 16, 1652, Milton might also have in mind the death of his son, had he then been writing, "how my light is spent."

*is spent* The *O.E.D.* gives Milton credit for a definitive quote under "2. past, gone, come to an end; over. . . . P.L. viii 206 Day is not yet spent." The *O.E.D.* also gives, "Deprived of force or strength; tired or worn out by labour, exertion, hardship, etc.; completely exhausted." In this there is a sense of volition, "I had a choice, could better have conserved, but chose to spend my sight more rapidly." Note Milton's thought in sonnet 22: "lost them [my eyes] overplied in liberty's defense, my noble task."

Honigmann, citing various *O.E.D.* meanings for "light" and "spent" asks, "Could it be
that in the sonnet he said no more than this - that his power of vision (light) is worn out (spent), though not yet totally destroyed?" This then, in relation to what follows in the sonnet, would allow an earlier dating.

[Ere half my days] What time span does the poet consider? When was the sonnet written? at what stage of Milton's blindness? He was 35 in 1644, ere half his days as given in his Bible, a book he knew almost by heart. But most critics, believing that the poem must have been written after his sight was gone, opt for 1652, when he was 43, or 1655, when he was 46, these dates implying a life span of 86 or 92. Critics stretch to find biblical support for such. I cannot believe that with all the intrinsically complex ideas that Milton put to words, he would complicate something which the Bible makes clear.

To quote Honigmann, "The critics have taken great pains to explain away these inconvenient words [e're half my days]. In a sonnet so intensely religious, however, one's instinct is to refer them to the Psalmist's 'three score years and ten' - by far the most natural explanation," (172). The full quote from Psalms 90.10, "The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away." Honigmann writes, "We should remember that Milton's eyes failed gradually over a period of eight years (1644-1652), and he would therefore have time to adjust himself to new working-habits," (170). There is nothing in the poem to force the belief that his sight was totally gone.

From Honigmann, "It is a remarkable coincidence: just as Milton was about to complete 'half his days' he perceived that his vision grew weak and dull. Could it be that in the
sonnet he said no more than this -- that his power of vision (light) is worn out (spent), though not yet totally destroyed?" (172). The question of date is, of course, an important one, especially so since, as Smart, Honigmann, and others point out, Milton's sonnets were occasion poems. Yet I ask, fondly perhaps, is the question important enough to exclude so much else in critical thought? Full half of the commentary in A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton, ten pages out of twenty-one plus comments on other pages, is devoted to this question; Honigmann devotes five and a half out of eight pages to this date hunt.

Milton, as early as 1639, shows awareness of impending blindness as a threatening impediment to his creative labor. In Epitaphium Damonis, qualifying a vow to his dear deceased friend, Charles Diodati, "that you shall not turn to dust in the sepulcher unmourned." Milton adds, "nisi me lupus ante videbit" (as translated: unless a wolf first sets eyes upon me). This line, as explained by Hughes in a footnote to the poem, refers "to a superstition that, if a wolf saw a man before the man saw him, the man became blind" (Hughes, 133).

After pondering the evidence for its date, I suspect that the poem may have been started in 1644 (Honigmann, reenforcing Smart, believes this the poem's date), and not completed - to Milton's satisfaction - till 1655 or even later. It was first published in 1673. As to the meaning of "half my days," there is an entirely different possibility, suggested by a line I read, from "On Dreams," by Sir Thomas Browne (1605-1682), as presented in The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations, "Half our days we pass in the shadow
of the earth; and the brother of death exacteth a third part of our lives." I've been unable to determine the date of Browne's writing this. Could Milton have had this thought in mind, in which case, "half" then referring to that dark portion of each day, "When I Consider" could have been written later, at any time, with no constraint as to what might be a life-span. If so, Milton's thought, modifying Browne's, might be, "sighted, I've spent half of my days in the dark wide world; now, all of my days will be so spent." Note that older meanings of half referred to "one of three or more divisions." From the O.E.D., "4. More vaguely: one of two divisions more or less approaching equality ... Formerly, sometimes, one of three or more divisions. ... [a quote from 1300] 'Four halves of his world round.' ... [from 1400] 'The more halfe of my men & my mayn shippis' ... [from 1661] 'The top of it is hollow like the long half of an Egg.'" It might be that Milton had in mind some less than equal division of days.

[In this dark world and wide] Whether "half" is in relation to life, or to each day, Milton here comments that much of the sighted world is dark too; also, perhaps, "the sighted world having been dark, what now awaits me?" Honigmann labels this "a cliche in religious writings for 'this sinful world,'" (174). Note this O.E.D. quote under sense 4.

"The condition of being hidden from view, obscure or unknown, 1643 Sir T. Browne Relig Med ii 4. I am in the dark to all the world, and my nearest friends behold me in a cloud." Dark has the meaning of evil as well as "unseen because of blindness." Note Matt. 6. 23, "if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" Note too, from the O.E.D.
"I.1.b. A dark house or room was formerly considered a proper place of confinement for a madman; hence to keep (a person) dark, to keep him confined to a dark room." Also "10. Void of intellectual light, mentally or spiritually blind; unenlightened, uninformed, destitute of knowledge, ignorant." For this last meaning the O.E.D. quotes Milton, "P.L. I. 22, What in me is dark Illumine, what is low raise and support." The O.E.D. credits Milton with two quotes from Comus: 129; 730.

[And] This seemingly innocuous conjunction suggests that the poet may be considering two matters that are not directly connected, or for which the details of connection are unclear and require further consideration: 1. how my light is spent; 2. how that one Talent which is death to hide [is] lodg'd with me useless.

[that one Talent] This alerts us to the slothful servant in the parable, in contrast to two good and faithful servants, one with five the other with two talents, who each invested what was given them. But, what else might "that one talent" mean here? From Woodhouse,20 "Newton (reported by Todd) . . . commented on Milton's modesty in speaking of himself 'as if he had not five, or two, but only one talent,'" (465). Modesty does not enter here. See the note to spent above; the quote from sonnet 22, seems a fair statement, but hardly modest. This seems a misreading of the parable. Each servant, presumably, was given that which was in his ability to invest. The unfaithful servant might have been the one given five or the one given two, which talents he then buried; it is that act of hiding rather than investing, not the number of talents received, which PT and Milton address. What then is that talent which is hidden? How does the poet
perceive it? his poetic work? his writing on matters touching God and Church? his service to the cause of liberty? What other possibilities here? I suspect "that one talent" refers to the epic poem long occupying Milton's thoughts. Honigmann writes, "Milton claims only a single talent - his literary talent (with a pun on the word). With this a poet could earn immortality, therefore to hide it meant death," (175). A point to bear in mind, in PT it is made unequivocally clear that the talent belongs to God and is given to the servant only to be invested for profit. Milton makes this reference clear by his use of "that one" rather than "my one" talent. Note the contrast: "my" light, "my" days, precede this reference; "my" Soul, "my" Maker, "my" true account, follow; "that" emphasizes the distinction: the talent as God's property.

[which is death to hide] Directly, blindness, not death, is the servant's punishment: "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness," (Matt. 25. 30). Blindness is the poet's initial state, before the Lord's return. "Death" here relates to the judgment in the parable "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth: i.e. eternal damnation. From Variorum, "The phrase death to hide is explained by Matt. 25. 30. . . . death standing for the utmost of punishment, as there the outer darkness," (465). Noteworthy here are the differences, as well as the similarities, between the poem and the parable. The poet speaks of "that talent which is death to hide" but, if he is relating his blindness to that, then the poet did not hide the talent, and, to that extent, it is beyond his ability to control. Further, in the literal sense, the servant's punishment is one the poet already has suffered - is suffering. Death must refer to the last judgment. Only then can it have relevance to
what the poet has done or will do "in this dark world and wide." But "this dark world"
refers to his condition "Ere half my days," the first half of his life, the sighted part. If this
was dark, the poet asks, what now must I expect?

[Lodg'd with me useless] Why "Lodg'd" rather than "buried?" why "with me"
rather than "in me"? This furthers an image of the talent and the poet, as separate entities,
lodged together. It is that talent lodged as a separate entity which is "useless." The image
becomes even more powerful when we consider it is, in effect, God and the poet who
share space here, lodged together but not intimately so.

Masson, in his notes on "useless," assuming 1652 as the poem's date, speaks of
this as a period of relatively little poetic production. This would also be true in 1644. Is
this uninvested poetic ability what the poet has in mind by "useless?" Honigmann quotes
P. Drew on "useless" a pun on use = usury, interest," (175).

[though my Soul more bent] More than when or what? before blindness? more
bent than ever? or, my Soul more bent than my body? my eyes? more bent to serve God
than before my blindness? Here we have the suggested image of the poet's Soul bent as
his back would be bent were it in hard physical labor. The poet's labor, more of soul than
body, is nonetheless, hard. Also, the image of personified Soul bent as the complete
servant would be, out of respect for his Lord. Under bent in the O.E.D., "6.b. esp. Mental
inclination or tendency; disposition; propensity; bias. The usual modern sense." Milton
here, undoubtedly, intends a stronger meaning such as one (or both) of the following two,
now obsolete, "2. braced, nerved, or wound up for action," or "3. determined, resolute,
devoted, inclined, set." Milton is also credited with the following definitive quotes; "6.d. Tendency of motion, course, 'set' of a current. 1648 Milton, Tenure Kings 39, The whole bent of their actions was against the king."; and, "9. Extent to which a bow may be bent or a string wound up, degree of tension; hence, degree of endurance, capacity for taking in or receiving; limit of capacity, etc. Milton Reform I Wks (1851) Suffering to the lowest bent of weaknesse in the Flesh, and presently triumphing to the highest pitch of glory in the Spirit."

[To serve therewith my Maker] The O.E.D. gives as an obsolete meaning of therewith, "1. . . in return for that," as well as the current meanings "2. with that . . . 3. with that as instrument; by means of that." Note, therewith, emphasizes to serve with "that as instrument" rather than I serve. "My maker," close on the heels of "my Soul," also highlights the poet's lack of ownership of that Talent, Lodg'd with me.

[and present My true account] True, here with the sense of faithful as well as accurate; "account, [Honigmann suggests that Milton perhaps associates the parable of the talents with that in Matt. 18. 23f.:']Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servant." Honigmann also quotes a (1597) sonnet by Henry Lok which begins, "I Thee beseech my purpose so to blesse, That I a good account to Thee may make," (51). "Account" in the O.E.D. is shown with obsolete meanings of explanation "upon (obs. since 1750) on account of; a. in consideration of, for the sake of, by reason of, because of," as well as current meanings of
a report, and an accounting of debits and credits. I get a sense in the sonnet of Milton intending an explanation as well as a report.

[lest he returning chide] "Returning," of course, refers to the Second Coming, which event, in the New Testament, is closely connected with Patience. I thought there might be some older, stronger meaning of chide; In searching the O.E.D. I find Milton's "lest he returning chide" as a definitive quote under "chide, i.e. To scold by way of rebuke or reproof; in later usage, often merely, to utter rebuke." "Chide" seems a mild word to use here; certainly so in relation to God's judgment of the slothful servant, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth [death]." Is the blind poet thus distancing himself from this servant? Might he be giving a rebuke, "God, you've already cast me into outer darkness." Is he saying God will chide me but I create my own death sentence by burying my talent? There are other possibilities in this which I will explore. Note in an almost identical story in Luke 19: Parable of the Pounds, that God does "chide" but does not punish the unprofitable servant.

[Doth God exact day-labor, light denied] "Exact" is from L. exactus; the O.E.D. states, "The lit. sense is thus 'to drive or force out'; hence the various derivative senses 'to demand, require': 'to try, weigh accurately'; 'to complete, bring to perfection'; with other significations not retained in the English derivative." "Weigh accurately" as one meaning supports and enriches "true account." The O.E.D. gives this: Milton's question, as a definitive quote; "day-labour. Labour done as a daily task, or for daily wages; labour hired
by the day." Note the sense of laboring for someone else: God, here, rather than self. In John 9, Jesus says, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world," (4). "Light denied," is seen here to mean "without spiritual light" as well as "without sight." Stanley Fish comments on "the extraordinary number of adjustments required of readers who would negotiate these lines. The first adjustment is the result of the expectations created by the second half of line 6 - 'lest he returning chide.' Since there is no full stop after 'chide,' it is natural to assume that this will be an introduction to reported speech, and to assume further that what will be reported is the poet's anticipation of the voice of God as it calls to him, to an unfair accounting. This assumption does not survive line 7 - 'Doth God exact day-labor, light denied' - which rather than chiding the poet for his inactivity seems to rebuke him for having expected that chiding." (180). Fish goes on to show other "necessary" reader adjustments, "in a matter of seconds, then, line 7 has led four experiential lives, one as we anticipate it, another as that anticipation is reversed, a third when we retroactively identify its speaker, and a fourth when that speaker disclaims it." But, this seems a misreading of the sentence on Fish's part. Starting with "when I consider," there is no complete sentence unless we are given a verb in relation to the subject: an action by the poet to complete the thought. Milton gives us that verb: "ask," which is - must be - the poet's action, the poet's asking of the question. Note that as the talent is buried, so too the question: "buried" dead-center in the poem. The question also breaks into two: Doth God exact day-labor? light denied? cf. "and"
notes above. It is not as easy as first appears to relate "day-labor" with "light denied". If, as Milton describes it, the investment of God's talent is a task which "my Soul more bent to serve" could perform, then such labor doesn't require daylight; the soul can labor at night. Further, since day-labor suggests physical work, we discover another aspect of the one-talent servant in PT. By "Thou slothful servant" the Lord does not mean that the servant was not doing day-labor of some sort before, doing his regular labor before being given the talent. The Lord means that he was not "bending soul" to the new employment: the investment of the Lord's talent, his one God-given talent. Doing his previous day-labor, has nothing to do with the sloth the Lord speaks of. Knowing this, why does Milton frame his question ". . . day-labor, light denied"? The answer must be sought in Patience's reply.

[I fondly ask] The question seems reasonable and meaningful; PT doesn't deal with impediments to labor, no more than saying that each servant has a different number of talents - abilities. It seems reasonable for the blind poet to ask for clarification. Why then is the question described as "fondly" meaning "foolish"? Is it because of the hints at repetition: as a child, bewildered or afraid, asks and re-asks, either not understanding or not able to accept the answer? Note, from O.E.D. certain other obsolete meanings for fond as an adjective which might apply to the adverb; "eager for (some object), desirous of." Honigmann and other Variorum critics all give "foolishly" as the meaning.

[But Patience] Who is "she"? this strange personification juxtaposed against PT. Even more strange is her unquestioned acceptance by literary critics; few critics consider
Patience; few ask, what is her pedigree, her authority? This seems an important area of research: Patience in Milton's work; in the Bible; in classical mythology. The Christian virtues are Faith, Hope, and Charity.

[to prevent] The sense here is "anticipate," "forestall," as well as "stop." From the O.E.D. "Theol., etc. To go before with spiritual guidance and help: said of God, or of his grace anticipating human action or need." Variorum gives, "prevent: preclude, check (OED 6)," (466). This would suggest that the question is not really voiced. It is as if Patience knows beforehand that the question is coming; she would know this if the question is recurring.

[That murmur] Note the above discussion of "When I Consider" reinforcing "murmur" in suggesting recurrence; this would then support "fondly" as foolish asking. The O.E.D. gives, "1. Subdued continuous or continuously repeated sound." From Variorum, "Honigmann remarks that the word is biblical, citing Ps. 106. 25, ICor. 10. 10; cf. Exod. 16. 7, Num. 14. 27, Phil. 2. 14." (466). These biblical passages reenforce a sense of murmur as continuous activity, almost always a continuous complaint. The O.E.D. lists "murmurer" as "one who complains against constituted authority."

[soon replies] This modifier supports the above argument; why soon? "Replies" by itself would indicate "without delay." Why, with the need for economy in the sonnet, and Milton's words having, as Honigmann and Richardson point out, "all substance and weight," why the use of this modifier? what weight is there in "soon?" The O.E.D. gives as word history, "O.E. sona had the sense of `at once, immediately.'" Its sense in the
poem is as, "4. In various phrases denoting 'at the very time or moment when.'" Thus, an immediate reply reenforces the suggestion of recurrence. Although the question appears to be a difficult one, Patience does not have to ponder her answer; she has answered the poet before.

["God doth not need Either man's work or his own gifts"] Where does such a message come from? certainly not from PT, where God's message is quite the opposite. We find such a message in the Old Testament: the Hebrew Bible, in the Book of Job.

[who best Bear his mild yoke] This is hardly a fair description of blindness. From whose perspective might blindness be so described? In Matthew 11.29, God says, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest in your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Here too we are reminded of Job: the bearing of affliction as best can be done by a good, god-fearing man.

[they serve him best] Honigmann cites P.R. iii 194, "who best Can suffer, best can do," (176). This clause seems to fly in the face of what God says in PT where those who serve him best have not merely "borne" what was given them but have shown God a profit from it. Here too we seem directed to go beyond PT to answer the question of best service to God.

[his State Is Kingly] Variorum quotes Rudrum (Comus, 101), who gives this line as support for his view that "the ending is triumphant rather than resigned . . . It is as if Milton (and the reader) is identifying with the kingliness of God, enjoying, and sharing His splendour," (466). From P.L., "Who can impair thee, mighty King, or bound Thy
Empire?" (VII. 608). Cf. P.L. III note which follows. Whether or not "triumphant," with this line we are given a shift in the paradigm of service: the relationship between God and the poet changes from that of Lord and servant to that of king and subject. Professor Murphy, in conversation on this point, notes Milton's fondness for such a shift: "for developing one model of relationship and then shifting to another. Patience reminds the poet that God is kingly: He of thousands, not just the Lord of three servants as in Matthew 25." Such a reminder, if the poem was actually completed in 1655, might also serve to connect the poet's God of Sonnet 19 with He of Sonnet 18: the God of thousands of Valdenses. Clearly, the personal God of the octave has now given way to a kingly God with personnel working for Him; the personal pronouns of the octave give way to plural ones. The personal "my maker," of the octave surrounding the poet's "my light," "my days," "my soul," "my true account," now becomes a universal "God" in the sestet, surrounding "thousands," "they serve," "they also serve."

[thousands at his bidding speed And post o'er Land and Ocean without rest] Who might these be? angels? all creatures? "Thousand" is used in the Bible for a multitude or a tribe but "speed and post o'er Land and Ocean without rest" is hardly human activity. Honigmann says, "Some think that Milton compares two classes of angels, the inferior orders that post o'er Land and Ocean with God's messages, and the superior orders that never leave God's presence and enjoy the highest contemplative insight. . . . Others suppose that Milton compares angels and men, since Protestant theologians did not follow Scholastic distinctions concerning the angels (Smart, Pyle, etc.). This, the
traditional view, is the more likely one . . ." (176). Post, "travel with speed or haste" appears redundant, and yet it is not; the O.E.D. shows it to carry many other meanings, including opposite, now obsolete meanings of, "IV. 7. to hand over or transfer (a duty, responsibility, etc.) to another; to shift, delegate, assign. . . b. To put off; to postpone, defer, delay." Post also has meaning relating to a true account, "V.8. "To carry or transfer (an entry) from an auxiliary book to one of more formal character, esp. from the day-book or journal into the ledger, but also from a day-book, waste-book, or cash-book into the journal; to carry (an item or entry) to the proper account." This and more might likely have been in Milton's mind. Post fills over six full pages in the O.E.D.

"Without rest" raises another question here; even God rests on the sabbath: "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made; and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it," (Gen. 2. 2.). "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," (Matt. 11. 28). In P.L., "Author and end of all things, and from work now resting, bless'd and hallow'd the Sev'nth day, as resting on that day from all his work," (VII. 591). Since God rests and sanctifies the day of rest for all, including man and his angels, who labors without rest? To whom might God assign such labor? Satan and his crew in Hell might be considered here, "Of Satan and his peers: . . . with hundreds and with thousands trooping came attended," (P.L. I. 756). Milton describes their irrational mobility as they "Fly to and fro," (I. 772). This description is repeated, "They ferry over this Lethean Sound [of forgetfulness] Both to and fro, thir sorrow to augment."
Thus roving on in confused march forlorn, th' advent'rous Bands with shudd'ring horror pale, and eyes aghast View'd first thir lamentable lot, and found no rest." (II. 604). There is another possibility here. I found this description of a 16th century engraving, Patientiae Triumphus, portraying Christian patience defeating pre-Christian Fortune, "Patientia and Fortuna are placed in eloquent contrast. Patience, whose attribute, the stone, symbolizes solidity, immobility, and impregnable virtue, has vanquished fickle Fortune, who is characterized by her attribute, which is here represented as a broken wheel, indicating irrational mobility."27 Those who "speed and post o'er Land and Ocean without rest" perhaps express the "irrational mobility" of Fortune. But then there is the puzzle of "at his bidding." Would God have Satan or Fortune, "at his bidding," engage in such mobility without rest? There is a possible resolution of "at his bidding" and "without rest" to be found in P.L. III; Milton here describes movement "o'er Land and Ocean" during the latter stages of creation, "at his second bidding" before the day of rest, before God created the Sabbath.28

[They also serve who only stand and wait] "Wait," means "exercise patience," but also "attend," at the ready, as does a servant. From Variorum, "Honigmann cites 'Wait on the Lord' (Ps.27.14) as 'a phrase frequently found in the Bible. Milton may use wait = attend as a servant, to receive orders (O.E.D. 9), but its more common meaning, 'stay in expectation', is surely present too: he reverts to the labourers in the vineyard, some of whom had to wait for work 'standing idle in the marketplace,'" (469). I came across this by Friedrich von Logau29 (1605-1655), "Though with patience He stands waiting, with
exactness grinds he all." "He" here is God, who stands and waits; but it seems possible for Milton to have read von Logau's thought and changed it to "the servant of God," to serve his purpose in the sonnet: exactness relating "true account" to the question, "Doth God exact." Nardo sees this ending as an expression of "a calm, humble faith that God will allow the individual to serve in His own way and time," (19). In Job we find the faithful servant of God waiting in expectation of change: "all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come," (14:14). From all we know of Milton, the activist, "waiting in expectation of change" would be characteristic.

Note too what seems to represent a choice of service: a distinction between Christian and Stoic patience in lines eleven and fourteen: that of Christian patience, "who best bear his mild yoke, they serve him best," that of Stoic patience: those "who only stand and wait" are not described with a superlative, "they also serve." 30

Given this as a choice, where would the blind poet set his sights? Do we imagine a Milton who would content himself with being an "also-server" to his God? Rather, we would expect him to search out how best to bear what he must bear. If he could settle himself as one of those simple, passive souls "who only stand and wait," there would be no murmur; Patience would have to deliver her message only once. But this is not the case. Undoubtedly, it would be that more complex part of Patience's answer, that more difficult path to God's service, which would cause him to evoke Patience a second time, again, and yet again; it would turn an otherwise reasonable question into one "fondly asked," "that murmur," testing Patience's patience, to which she then "soon replies."
Here, it seems most necessary to be guided by Eliot's statement of the Milton sentence, to keep all the preambles to the poet's question in mind. The poet does not simply speak of his affliction, but of that in relation to serving God, and that service, most particularly, by investing "that one talent." One preamble further takes us into the complexity of presenting his true account, important not only because God will demand it at the Second Coming, but because it is important to the poet: he demands it of himself: "my Soul more bent to serve" He is "bent" to use that god-given talent to serve the best of self as well as to best serve God. Somewhere in this must come a balance and harmony of God's demands for service and man's demands for self; with this comes to mind the Greek guideline: moderation in all things. He must balance between the extremes of passionate but mindless service to God and that of too much mind and not enough spirit in service to self. This seems yet another reason why the question itself, "Doth God exact . . . " occupies the center of the sonnet, is balanced in the center. The lessons of Matthew must be tempered with those of Job.

Also note the sequence of thoughts in the sestet: "who best bear . . . they serve him best," logically, should better be followed by, "They also serve . . ." Further, the intervening, "his state is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed," provides support for "God doth not need . . . man's work . . . " and should so follow, which would then connect the thoughts of service: who best and who also serves. Thus: "God doth not need either man's work or his own gifts; his state is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed . . . without rest. Who best bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. They also serve who only
stand and wait" is a more logical sequence. But Milton seems to have greater purpose in keeping the best and the also servers apart.

The poet seems unable to understand what is required of the best servers, this more difficult service to God. This service cannot be immediately understood - either by the poet contemplating himself in Sonnet 19, or, perhaps, he contemplating the Valdenses in Sonnet 18. Milton, political activist as well as biblical scholar, has, perhaps, a greater task of reconciliation of God's word and deed than that of the Bible: that of the real world of the Valdenses. The three servants in PT are dealt with individually, on the basis of their individual service to the Lord. The Valdenses, real-world servants of the Lord, were slaughtered en masse. How is this to be understood? So, in search of answer, as if asleep in a recurring bewildering dream, the poet repeats his question. But reevoked Patience will awaken and enlighten the living poet in best service to God no further than she awakened and enlightened the dead Valdenses.

In *Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton, mourning the loss of his dearest friend, writes, "Ah me! what deities shall I profess in earth or heaven, now that they have torn you mercilessly away in death, O Damon?" (Hughes, 133). This questioning of a God who would allow such untimely death, is similar to that expressed, with more subtlety sixteen years later, in the sonnet for the slaughtered Valdenses, "them who kept thy truth so pure of old/ when all our fathers worship't Stocks and Stones." Even more subtle in this regard is Sonnet 19 where, although there is no given line which establishes it, such questioning seems to be
"lodg'd" with the poet's faith as "that one Talent which is death to hide" is "lodg'd" with the poet himself.

Pondering this, we see why the harder-to-follow instruction for the best-server of God remains buried, while the poem ends clearly - brilliantly so - for the also-server. The also-server does not murmur; he has no need; he has his answer: "stand and wait." He can exit the poem with this, as the poem itself "exits." But he who is to serve best remains lodged with his more difficult answer four lines from the end, as he with the useless talent is lodged four lines from the start. There is nothing that Patience (via the poem) can do to reposition either; to clarify this best service. But that does not stop the aspirant. He murmurs; perhaps not alone. Perhaps, placed together as these sonnets are, he murmurs for and with the muted Valdenses, who can then be heard as overtones. They were actively devout people - what we know of them - not among the also servers who only stand and wait. Had they been among these latter, they would have lived and then the higher-numbered sonnets of Milton would all be diminished by one. Honigmann in describing the unity he finds in these two sonnets, writes, "Both XVIII and XIX celebrate God's terrible way with his chosen."31

As another source, in quest of Milton's mind in Sonnet 19, Sonnet 7, addressing some similar concerns, serves as a precursor and possible guide. In the earlier sonnet, in looking ahead "To that same lot, however mean, or high, Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heav'n," the younger poet ends on a note which invites/evokes a sequel. In Sonnet 19, the older poet, while addressing his then current concerns, seems to respond
to that invitation/evocation. In broad terms, the two sonnets express a similar conflict: that between labor exacted by god, and impediments to that labor. In each sonnet the impediment is explicitly stated, but in a way to suggest other impediments, less clear but more significant. Time is also an element in this conflict, serving, perhaps, as a catylst in the reaction between the poet and his perceived ability to labor. In what is said about the product of that reaction: the investment of the poet's talent, the importance of time: of urgency, of acting or waiting, becomes clear.

The youth of Sonnet 7, bold and enigmatic, with "How soon hath Time" as his title, this repeated in his opening line, and "time" appearing twice again in the body of his poem (once as "timely-happy"), makes the importance of time explicit. He is lavish in his employment of the word but employs it with no sense of urgency: "be it less or more, or soon or slow." He leisurely puts himself in God's hands: "in my great Task-Master's eye." But this resolution to wait patiently for his time seems less a God-mandated resolution, more a matter of time's abundance for him; this youth is not concerned with consequences of the Second Coming. The poet of Sonnet 19, for whom time is not abundant, who speaks of "half my days" gone by (much more than half if he is writing in 1655), is not so bold but he is urgent. The word does not appear but time itself seems to hover over every line - especially does it hang as a cloud over over line six, "lest he returning chide." There is urgency to do what needs doing before the return of his "Maker."

The poet of Sonnet 7 expresses the resolution to wait patiently. He of Sonnet 19 dare not do so; he requires some nuncio from God for such a pronouncement. Can this
contrast in authority be explained by the boldness of youth and the caution of age, or is it a function of the respective impediments to labor in the two sonnets?

In Sonnet 19 the explicit impediment is lack of sight, but the more significant impediment is lack of inner light; "my light is spent" surely contains this meaning. In Sonnet 7 the explicit impediment is "lack of inward ripeness"; but here too there is a lack of inner light impeding the germination of the seed: in "my late spring no bud or blossom show' th." In both poems (directly or implied), impediments and possible dispensations, are acknowledged to be "as ever in my great task-Master's eye."

In "Present my true account," along with other ideas in this, Milton might well have in mind this from Sonnet 7: "my semblance might deceive the truth ... " To the extent "deceive the truth" influences the "true account" of sonnet 19, Milton is contrasting the reality of his blindness with the mere "semblence" of an impediment to service in sonnet 7. There is much to explore in bringing together these two thoughts, contained in sonnets separated by twelve or twenty years (depending on Sonnet 19's date) which both address service to god.

Although the blindness alluded to in Sonnet 19 is real (if it is not yet complete it will be so), is it, in contrast to "'my semblence' and fleeting youth," a sufficient excuse for lack of service to God? Blindness in Sonnet 19, as well as youth in Sonnet 7, may both be considered insufficient excuses - certainly so in relation to best service. Milton's "great task-Master's eye" would not have closed between the sonnets, would see both, would not be deceived.
In the *O.E.D.* "deceive," in the now obsolete sense 3, meant, "to betray." A definitive quote is given from *Whole Duty of Man*, 1658, "He that does not carefully look to his master's profit, deceives his trust." This, most likely what Milton intended, connects Sonnet 7 with the Parable of the Talents, and makes that portion of Sonnet 19's response, a response to Sonnet 7 as well.

To the extent the poet in Sonnet 19 looks back to he in Sonnet 7, he must do so with irony in the hindsight; if time is a thief to the young poet, how much more so to the older poet from whom more than mere youth has been "stolen." In this sense time cannot be considered a mere catylist; it is not neutral. Although unbeknownst to him then, it is on the side of this young and developing poet who bemoans its passing. Time is against the older poet: if he is writing in 1644, blindness was not complete but getting worse; if he is writing later he has that much less time to employ the talent. Whether his blindness is complete or not, the poet in Sonnet 19 is concerned with his narrowing band of time: "ere half my days," time leading to diminishing power and the Second Coming. In looking back to Sonnet 7, adding to all the other meanings of light, "When I consider how my light is spent" looks back to that spent light of youth. To what extent was it spent putting to use that one talent, now lodged useless - whatever such might be in the mind of Milton?

Having run through the words of the poem as they appear, listing some of the modifiers here might prove helpful, offering something of value in the aggregate that would not be apparent in the individual expressions. Milton has so much to say in this
poem, so much of thought to express, and, given the constraints of the form, so few words to express his thoughts, that every modifier must have been very carefully considered, chosen on the basis of its thought-carrying capability. Every noun or verb modified, could have stood by itself. Milton must have chosen each of the following modifiers with great care.

In the octave: dark world; that one talent; more bent; true account; fondly ask. In the sestet: soon replies; mild yoke; without rest;* only stand. [* in effect a modifier of "speed and post."] The above modifiers appear to introduce questions as well as to carry information. In the octave all of the adverbial expressions act as sub-questions, impinge on the major question at the sonnet's center. Dark raises questions of ignorance versus enlightenment, sin versus obedience; that one raises questions of what of ability/labor concerns God; more raises questions of degree of devotion, and of physical labor versus spiritual service; true raises questions of describing and explaining: presenting words rather than deeds; fondly raises questions of what is foolish in the asking, and why. In the sestet the modifiers introduce questions relating to the speaker and to God. Soon raises questions about this seemingly redundant word in relation to the character of Patience (for whom such great haste to respond seems uncharacteristic), as well as in relation to the character of the poet's question; mild raises questions relating to affliction, who and what is being compared; without rest raises questions of who these servants of God might be, who labors without a sabbath, who, without rest; only, with its diverse possibilities in meaning, raises the final question: that of the poem's meaning for the reader.
Here, I attempt to paraphrase the more obvious meanings of the poet's question, sacrificing the poetry to clarity (beauty of language destroyed in the process). Again, I bear in mind Eliot's comment on the importance of the sentence in Milton's writing. "When I consider my diminished sight and faith, at this mid-point of my life, in this world of widespread ignorance and evil, and that god-given ability, damnation to follow if I keep it unproductive, though, more determined to serve God with it, and to explain myself, lest with his Second Coming he judge me harshly, considering all this once again, I foolishly ask, "what does God demand as full investment of my diminished resources?"" I've squeezed the poetic content (however defined) out of the sentence here; what has been gained? What might a study of this sentence in relation to Milton's reveal about his writing and about poetry itself? In this paraphrasing, meaning as well as aesthetic quality may be lost in the process; I squeeze the poet's words into a straightjacket; if they were musical notes, I would be squeezing out the harmonics. Perhaps the very nature of what Milton is attempting in the octave, the breadth and depth of the thoughts, precludes successfully paraphrasing of the poet's thoughts: his thoughts before the entry of Patience.

When I consider - Reinforced by "that murmur" in the sestet, the blind poet begins by thinking/rethinking; 'consider' serves as the poet's landmark action in a sea of seven state of affairs conditions surrounding his blindness and hidden talent.

how my light is spent - "the conditions surrounding my blindness [and, perhaps, my loss of inner light]."

Ere half my days - "a vast time interval of such blindness awaits me."
[In this dark world] - "blindness added to the figurative darkness": ignorance, evil, and sin which affect even the sighted.

[and wide] - "darkness widespread," emphasizing the magnitude of what there is to know and, in relation to the previous, the magnitude of ignorance, evil, and sin.

[And that one Talent which is death to hide] - "that one precious gift of God which, at the peril of my immortal soul, requires investing." A volume of meaning is housed in this line, introducing PT, raising the question of to what extent the blind poet's position, in this world and that to come, resembles that of the "wicked, slothful, unprofitable servant." who hid his Talent. In relation to Patience's response to this, note this from the Book of Job, "the thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light," (28, 11).

[Lodg'd with me useless] - "my blindness [to God's intent?] prevents me from investing that one talent"; this thought begs reader questions: what talent? how does the poet define it? As would be the case with an artist, is it dependant on sight? Not so, why is it then useless rather than, perhaps, diminished? Is it some separate talent that has been useless - even while the poet was sighted? Was he, even before, blind to God's intent?

[Though my Soul more bent To serve therewith my Maker] - "I want, more than ever, to serve God." Why "my soul" rather than I? Is the poet thinking of the theological dichotomy between what is immortal, what returns to dust? Honigmann, in relation to Sonnet 19, writes, "In his Christian Doctrine, parts of which were composed in the 1640's, Milton denied 'that the soul is exempt from death, and that when divested of the body, it wings its way, or is conducted by angels, directly to its appointed place of reward"
or punishment." (136).\textsuperscript{33} Is the poet struggling with the question, "what of my labor serves God? There is here the complexity of two entities: my Soul (self) and my Maker (God); in the best of worlds it would be possible for the poet to serve both, while coming to terms with the two conditions: physical blindness and sloth (blindness to God's intent). What we know of Milton the man, suggests that, in most respects, his personal desires and those perceived for God were compatible. But now, overriding all that good to self and God, there is That One Talent . . . Death To Hide - TOT. DTH. Is this a buried message, a further description? Clearly, from the harvest we gather of Milton's work, and the straws we glean from this one sonnet, TOT DTH could refer to that in connection with his great epic - unwritten, lodged useless.

\[\text{and present My true account}\] - "and present God a true account of myself"; "true account" here (see above) may have deeper meaning than a report or an accounting of the poet's worth: debits and credits, presented to God. It has a sense of explanation, a statement or narrative giving explanation as well as a particular ledger description. It also suggests consideration (of his affliction), "taking into account" his blindness, or, perhaps, other limitations. Note too that the one-talent servant presents his true account which God does not dispute, but this in no way mitigates his judgment. In \textit{The Parable of the Pounds} (Luke 19), God goes a step further; the unprofitable servant's true account is used against him by God, "Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant," (22).

\[\text{lest he returning chide}\] - "lest on God's return he judge me harshly," referring to the return of the Lord in PT, the Final Judgment. Note the poet in saying "present my true
account lest he returning chide," implies presenting his true account before God returns; is he thus asking for a pre-hearing, before the final judgment?

[Doth God exact day-labor, light denied] - "In light of all I consider, how does God's expectation for the unprofitable servant and his judgment of him in PT apply to me?"

[I fondly ask] - "I foolishly ask; the answer should be known to me."

[But Patience to prevent That murmur, soon replies] - These appear as the poet's last words. The entry of Patience changes the direction of the poem, taking it beyond the control of the blind-poet supplicant, who, for the remainder, listens but does not speak. (I will respond to critical remarks concerning the ambiguity of who might be speaking each of the last five lines, that there might be more than one speaker.)
Conclusions

Patience begins her reply with a statement of God's bountiful state, then gives the poet an answer to his question. However, this answer is only as valid as the weight of authority behind it. Who gives Patience that weight of authority? Few critics seem to have addressed this as a question. Many, such as Nardo, assume that somehow, patience belongs in the poem; "patience enables reason to correct the speaker's misconceptions about God." Nardo speaks of patience correcting "the misapplication of the parable of the talent... the reminder that submission to God's will is a sufficient investment of one's talent, whether it yields deeds or not," (147). Did not the slothful servant submit to God's will? He waited for it. From where then comes such a message as Patience brings? Such a message must have authority behind it.

In and out of literature important messages, such as the one Patience delivers, require validation of the message-bearer: credentials establishing the message-bearer's authority, before the message is accepted. Few critics seem to have examined Patience's credentials. Many have puzzled over the message; few have questioned the message-bearer's origins and authority. According to Honigmann, "patience] Christian patience or faith in Providence, could be a saintly virtue. Cf Rev. xiv. 12, and Ps. xxxvii. 7 ff.: 'Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. . . . Cease from anger and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil . . . those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth," (175). But Honigmann does not explain how such "virtue" might relate to Patience's status in the poem. J.F. Huntley identifies Patience as "prevenient grace"
in opposition to "an unhealthy spirit in the octave." F. Pyle, as quoted in Variorum, says, "The sonnet is a record of impatience recollected in a state of patience. E.J. Hinz, also quoted in Variorum, uses L. Kemp "to argue that Milton's theme is not loss of sight but loss of inspiration, and she analyses the sonnet as one of his 'many examinations of the Christian virtue of patience,'" (463). I agree with the "theme" part of this statement but hope to have shown, and further show, that, in her own right, Patience is not one of the Christian virtues; these are Faith, Hope, and Charity). Further, she is "not one of the seven cardinal virtues." Patience, directly, has no such credentials. I hope to show that the credentials Patience has, she reveals by her message. P.R. Baumgartner, quoted in Variorum, also assumes Patience as a Christian virtue which he states, "differs from the Stoic in growing out of faith in Providence which requires willing submission to God's will." (457). Among other questions, God's will from where? PT? Such is not the message Patience brings. J. Pequigney, also quoted from Variorum, says, "the uncapitalized 'patience' that introduces the sestet 'is not a second character brought upon the stage but a new quality of the protagonist,'" (460). In truth, many editors do capitalize Patience. Pequigney, in "Milton's Sonnet xix Reconsidered," TSLL 8, 1967, 485-98, gives a psychological explanation of this, then "concludes by comparing the religious experience here dramatized with that of Samson and that of Job," (461).

It is quite difficult to imagine that the speaker of the octave could so change the "voice" of the sestet without some authority to do so. We must also understand the rarity of Milton, in his non-dramatic poetry, giving any other persona (masked or unmasked) a
voice. Such does not occur in any of his other sonnets - not one other specific voice, human or a personification - not one other spoken word, besides the forty-six words of Patience in Sonnet 19!

Patience enters the sonnet abruptly, disrupting the reader's thought which would otherwise focus on reconciling the blind poet's question with the Parable of the Talents; but now that reconciliation shifts form as Patience bearing a seemingly conflicting message takes center stage and never leaves it. Patience's message flies in the face of that message in PT, creating a rift in the totality of God's word. From where comes her authority to do this, to speak for God and speak a message so at variance with that in PT, a parable in which, whatever its other ambiguities, has none relating to special conditions, no dispensations for one-talent servants with impediments? The message of PT has no weasel clause providing escape for the slothful blind, no escape without Patience.

Patience enters and issues forty-six words. The final three are in direct conflict with PT; "stand and wait." Was this not what the fearful servant did after burying his talent? "I was afraid and went and hid thy talent in the earth," (Matt. 25, 25). Was he not after doing so, standing and waiting? Note too that this servant, when the Lord returns, presents his "true account." The Lord does not dispute it, he confirms its accuracy. "Thou wicked and slothful servant," the Lord "chides" as he returns, "thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury." Although chide might describe these words, it hardly describes
what follows. "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," (Matt, 25, 30). This last, the ultimate death sentence, is hardly a "chide." Why then does Milton write, "lest he returning chide"? Is the poet differentiating himself from the one-talent servant? If so, in what respect? (Note here The Parable of the Pounds, Luke 19, where God does chide but does not punish his unprofitable servant.) The difference between the poet and the unprofitable servant is addressed by Patience. Patience, in the face of God's judgment in PT, gives the blind poet special dispensation. Further, she does so while minimizing his special conditions, telling him to "bear his mild yoke." Who might speak so? Who has suffered such affliction that he or she could then call blindness "a mild yoke?"

We will not find such a one in Christian or classical literature. Indeed, we will not find Patience by herself. She is not one of the seven virtues: Faith, Hope, Charity, Justice, Fortitude, Prudence, Temperance; "the first three are called supernatural, theological or Christian virtues; the remaining four are Plato's Cardinal or Natural virtues," (Brewer, 1131). These are sometimes referred to as "Cardinal Virtues, a phrase used for the principal virtues on which conduct in general depends. Socrates and Plato take these to be Prudence, Courage (or Fortitude), Temperance and Justice. . . . By the Roman Catholic Church these virtues are regarded as natural as opposed to the theological virtues, Faith, Hope and Charity. Some authors combining the two lists, have spoken of the Seven Cardinal Virtues. In English literature the phrase is found as far back as the Cursor Mundi (1300) and the Ayenbite of Inwit (1340)" (Encyclopaedia Britannica 14th ed. v. 4,
Nowhere here do we find *Patience* listed as a virtue in her own right. Milton, in PL, creates that status for Patience; "only add deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add Faith, add Virtue, Patience, Temperance, add Love, by name to come call'd Charity, the soul of all the rest," (P.L. 12, 581). In Comus, he goes even further, changing one of the Christian virtues; much to the shock of some critics. Milton has Lady replace Charity with Chastity; "O welcome pure-eyed Faith, white-handed Hope, Thou hov'ring Angel girt with golden wings, And thou unblemished form of Chastity, I see ye visibly," (213).

Nowhere, besides Sonnet 19, does Milton personify Patience, does he allow her to speak. In Samson Agonistes the Chorus speaks, "extolling Patience as the truest fortitude, and to the bearing well of all calamites, all chances incident to man's frail life" (654); later we discover "patience is more oft the exercise of Saints" (1287), and nine lines further, Samson, "sight bereav'd may chance to number thee with those whom Patience finally must crown." Nowhere else, using Bradshaw as our authority, do we find Patience bold enough to speak, much less to speak for God. From where comes her authority to speak for Him in Sonnet 19?

We need not look far in the Bible to find such a source. There is one book in the Hebrew Bible: Milton's Old Testament, that Patience could come from, bearing such great affliction that she then could label the blindness of the poet as "his mild yoke." Clearly, such a Patience emanates from - Job! Patience, fully named, we know as the Patience of Job. Patience in Sonnet 19 is that: the Patience of Job. Job is a member of the entourage in the wings of Milton's sonnet-theatre. He must remain out of sight. There
are clear reasons why Job cannot enter the sonnet in his own person, and reasons why Patience cannot identify her authority any more clearly than she does. Before elaborating this, consider PT and Job, and their different messages.

The Parable of the Talents begins with God giving his servant something, and ends with God taking it away and afflicting his servant with darkness and death; The Book of Job begins with Satan taking something away from Job and afflicting him (God acquiescing), and it ends with God restoring what was taken away and then removing Job's affliction.

In When I Consider, as in The Book of Job, bearing affliction is the central topic. This is expressed in various ways; not only in Patience's words dominating the sestet but in the poet's words in the octave as well, "how my light is spent, ere half my days, in this dark world and wide . . . light denied." PT does not deal with afflictions as impediments to day-labor: affliction is imposed by God as punishment, it is not considered as a special condition. PT speaks to the first part of the poet's question, gives a harsh answer, but there is nothing in the parable which prepares us for Patience's answer to the second part of the question.

The first-time reader of PT, Milton included, cannot but be shocked at the harshness of God's sentence, "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness." What reader would describe this as a "chide"? Consider the magnitude of this punishment imposed on his servant, with little discussion of why he deserves such a judgment; there are few if any words of guidance or instruction by God or his successful servants. In
contrast, the reader of Job knows at the start that Job's affliction is arbitrary and undeserved; there is great discussion of this, between Job and his friends, and then between Job and God, great and lengthy explorations of how affliction should be borne. Thus, a recently blind poet, especially such a one as Milton, well-versed in the word of God, recognizing the poetic quality as well as the relevance of the Book of Job, could not but turn to Job in his affliction, for guidance. Even if Milton had not directly brought Patience to the poem, the reader might well have thoughts of patience in relation to Job's affliction. Patience' answer to the poet is similar to God's answer to Job. Job's God details his own gifts and rewards Job for his words, "spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath," (Job 42.7.). Job's God is interested in his servant's spoken words: his true account, not his day-labor. Job's God chides Eliphaz for presenting an untrue account, "My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right," (42.7).

Milton pulls off a hat trick here. The poet speaks - accurately, in light of PT - of "that one Talent which is death to hide"; then, ignoring that death, he goes on to describe his fear as, "lest he returning chide"; then ,he thinks to prevent even this chide by presenting his true account - as Job prevented God's chide by presenting his true account.

"And that one Talent which is death to hide . . .
and present my true account lest he returning chide"

How are these lines, the first carrying its sense from PT, the second contrary, giving a lesser consequence, to be reconciled? Towards that end, the poet's question is
cleverly worded, "Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?" Consider. Does the reader, before Patience enters, interpret the question as written: interpret it to mean, "Does God demand that I labor at all, given my blindness?" More likely, before the entry of Patience, the reader's interpretation would be, "What labor does God demand of me?" Only later, when Patience, with "stand and wait," implies that (at least for the also server) labor is not required, would the reader's mind go back to interpret the question as written.

In truth, Patience carries her deeds as past events. All the doing in Job takes place in chapter two, the handiwork of Satan: then a son of God in good standing. The remaining forty chapters are concerned with understanding those deeds. What is required of Job, after a soul-searching of epic proportions, is acceptance, faith, obedience, patient service. Job learns to stand and wait with patience. Patience now comes to give the afflicted poet that message - but buried deeper is the message of best service.

In a deep sense, there is doing required. Patience here is not Stoic; she is Christian. Christian patience "came to mean something other than Stoic fortitude or passive endurance; it was seen as an active virtue, and a positive response to God's will in time of suffering." Job's patience in the Old Testament may be seen as a precursor to such Christian patience. As that rather than a Stoic personification, Patience is not merely calling for passive endurance. Job engages in active struggle to reconcile his affliction with his God. Patience brings that message.

Note too, supporting the "kingly" paradigm shift introduced by Patience in the sestet, Job's God is such a deity. In contrast to the more localized God of Matthew, the
Lord "who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods" (25:14), the Book of Job begins with a God who holds court; "the sons of God came to present themselves before" this kingly deity. In contrast to the master-God of Matthew who returns to exact individual profit from his servants, the kingly-God of Job returns to describe his mighty kingdom and his mighty works to Job who is shown to be but one of a multitude of subjects. The Patience of Job pleases this kingly God.

Patience the virtue, and Job the suffering, godly man, are intertwined in meaning and in literary thought. The root meanings of *patience* and the sufferings of Job are as one. In considering the basic meanings of the word, its synonyms, its expression in literary thought, it is virtually impossible to separate *patience*, as Milton would use the word, from Job: the suffering of Job.

From *Origins*, "the base is L *pati* to suffer, to endure" with presumed Greek variant "*ponos*, pain, punishment: perh cf also L *paenitet*, it causes regret or remorse, and Skt [Sanskrit] *papman*, harm," (475). The *O.E.D.* gives as first meaning "1. The suffering or enduring (of pain, trouble, or evil) with calmness and composure; the quality or capacity of so suffering or enduring," giving the following definitive quote, "1658 *Whole Duty Man* 'Patience..is nothing else but a willing and quiet yielding to whatever afflictions it pleases God to lay upon us.' Then, it gives, "b. Forbearance, longsuffering, longanimity under provocation of any kind." Under *patient*, "1. bearing or enduring (pain, affliction, trouble, or evil of any kind) with composure, without discontent or complaint." Here the *O.E.D.* quotes Milton from "The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce" published in 1643,
"Job the patientest of men." Roget gives "patience of Job" (559) as a synonym for patience, along with "endurance," and "long-suffering."

Milton, in his poetic works, has six direct references to Job, all in Paradise Regained. He has fourteen references to patience in his poetic works. In Comus, the attending Spirit sings of the two brothers and the Lady, "Heav'n hath timely tri'd their youth, Their faith, their patience, and their truth, and sent them here through hard assays," (970). Of his other poetic references to patience, five are in P.L., four in P.R., four in S.A. He refers to patience in his The Defence of the English People, "and render him with patience what he lent," (Concordance, 258); these words written in 1651, seem quite provocative, viewed through the lens of When I Consider.

Patience does not seem relevant to the Parable of the Talents. Patience carries a different and seemingly opposite message. In PT we hear God demand investment and profit from his slothful servant, "Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury," (Matt. 25, 27). In Job we hear that God needs not such profit, "Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable to himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous? or is it gain to him, that thou makest thy ways perfect?" (Job 22, 2). True, the speaker, Eliphaz, a friend of Job, later suffers God's wrath, but that for two different reasons: his failure to understand the (then new) message that suffering need not be the result of sin; his arrogance in presuming to know God's mind, "ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath." (42, 6). Job, in speaking of God,
tells us that He does not require man's works, "what his [God's] soul desireth, even that he
doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are
with him." (23, 13). Job, also considers his true account with God, calling it "an even
balance." "If I have walked with vanity, or if my foot has hasted to deceit; Let me be
weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity," (31, 6). Note, there is
nothing of work in this balance. Also note, that in "To serve therewith my maker and
present my true account" the "and" allows the blind poet to include other qualities such as
"integrity" in that true account.

I found only one statement in the Book of Job that speaks of man's work in relation
to God. Job's young friend Elihu, in speaking of affliction and God's justness, says to
Job, "far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the almighty, that he
should commit iniquity. For the work of a man he shall render unto him, and cause every
man to find according to his own ways."(34, 10). But even this one statement about
labor is merely the thought of a young man. Job's God does not ask for, much less
demand, day-labor. In many statements, God reenforces what Eliphaz said about God not
needing man's works. Indeed, all that God says about work and works, relates to his own:
God's works. In chapters 38-41 God describes "his mighty works," after each description
asking Job, "Canst thou do [that]?" or "Where wast thou [when I did that]?
In terms of
labor, it is as if God has ignored here his words to Adam, "In the sweat of thy face shalt
thou eat bread," (Gen. 3, 19), and is concerned with man's spiritual service rather than his
physical labor. Coming from such a God Patience can believably say to the blind poet, "stand and wait."

God vindicates Job the innocent sufferer, the faithful servant; Job's service is expressed, not by labor, but by his humility, waiting patiently for God to return to him, if not in this life perhaps in some next. In Job, for the first time, we are given a biblical exploration of death and resurrection; "If a man die, shall he live again?" Job asks, (14, 14). "God is beyond my understanding, God is just." God expresses his pleasure in hearing this. "So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning . . ." (42, 12). What follows is a doubling of Job's original wealth, similar to the doubling of the talents of the two "good and faithful" servants in PT. This is in line with the message Patience brings to the blind poet, in effect, bear your affliction as Job bore his, by doing so, you serve as you stand and wait, as did Job.

Why, one might ask, if The Book of Job is the source of Patience's message, is not Job mentioned or at least alluded to? Consider. Limited to fourteen lines, the structure of this poem, laden as it is, could not support the weight of Job, not any more of Job's weight than that carried here by Patience. Indeed, Patience must speak carefully in delivering her Jobism. To go further would require direct reconciliation of God's message in Job with that of PT, a task beyond the sonnet or the sonnet's possibilities. It strikes me as yet another mark of Milton's genius; first, that he conceives of Patience as a messenger here, then that he is able to have her weave her message in and around the
tapestry of the Parable of the Talents, to successfully merge patterns that otherwise could not be merged.

Patience delivers a message from Job's God, who spoke a thousand years before he of Matthew and the parable. Milton, although unlikely to think in such dichotomous terms, would. nonetheless, be keenly aware of the differences and would want to bridge them. Woven into the fabric of Judeo-Christian religious philosophy we find threads of meaning of the other virtues, all of which when woven together form the quality which becomes known as Christian patience. It appears earlier, as some primordial amalgam of faith and obedience, found in Genesis with the patriarchs. It is an obedience to God preceding specific commandments, at Sinai and elsewhere; it is a faith leading the way to obedience, even to a "foreobedience": to obedience to God's will even when such has not been explained in detail, much less justified; this is the obedience of the two "good and faithful" servants in PT; it is the quality seemingly evoked by Milton. It is central to Job but it is found elsewhere, throughout the Bible. It is found at the beginning, at the first revelation of God's will to Adam: God need not explain and justify the edict of Eden in order to exact the punishment for disobedience; it is found at that revelation of God's will in Matthew 25: he need not explain and justify the intended investment of the talent in order to exact the punishment for disobedience.

In P.L., before the Fall, Eve's lack of patience leads to her disobedience. After the Fall, sentenced to death, we find Eve lacking the patience to wait for that death at God's appointed time; instead, she urges Adam: "to free / from what we fear for both, let us
make short, / let us seek death, or he not found, supply / with our own hands his office on ourselves" (X 999). Adam labels such lack of patience as perversion (although God has not given specific commandments in this matter): an act of "wilful barrenness, / that cuts us off from hope, and saviors only / rancor and pride, impatience and despite, / reluctance against God and his just yoke" (1042). Note and compare this "just yoke" with the "mild yoke" in Sonnet 19.

Adam is guilty of disobedience; the blind poet in the sonnet is not (yet) guilty. He has time to understand and to act: to labor as God "exacts" such. Might Milton's Adam, anachronously, echo the blind poet's expression, justifying what God has done? Adam, as first parent, precedes the blind poet by some 5,000 years, but as Milton's literary creation, he has a vantage point of some twelve to twenty-five years (depending on the date one assigns Sonnet 19). In the above exchange with Eve, Adam expresses a glimmer of awareness of that state of eternal damnation which the blind poet knows about and fears. Thus, Adam cautions Eve:

if thou covet death, as utmost end
of misery, so thinking to evade
the penalty pronounc't, doubt not but God
hath wiselier arm'd his vengeful ire than so
to be forestall'd; much more I fear lest Death
so snatcht will not exempt us from the pain
we are by doom to pay; rather such acts
of contumacy will provoke the Highest
to make death in us live (1020).

Adam also says, "with labor I must earn my bread; what harm? Idleness had been worse; my labor will sustain me ... What better can we do ..." (1054). Note the echo
here of the blind poet's concern and question. Milton's Adam seems to reinforce and supplement what the blind poet expressed in the sonnet.

A subtle point of connection between the two can be seen in Adam's struggle to serve God after as well as before the Fall. Having transgressed changes but does not remove his obligation to serve God; he does not consider himself absolved from service. Rather, he considers his newly fallen status to require a rethinking of what that service should be.

The blind poet, although he has not transgressed, also finds himself in a new condition which requires rethinking of what his service to God should be. He has in mind the Second Coming and the need to be prepared. Adam too has in mind the return of God, and a desire to be ready, to be able, in good conscience, to give a true account of himself, his service in his new position.

In P.L., Milton's thoughts on obedience and patience when faced with a new condition are expressed, not only in Adam's relationship with God, but also, in that of Satan with God. Satan, son of God, was God's most faithful servant until a new condition: the emergence of God's son, changed the position from which Satan was to serve. Impatient in his changed position, not waiting for God's instructions: the service God now wished for him, Satan rebelled. Afterwards, defeated but impatient again, he meets Gabriel who asks, "Why hast thou, Satan, broke the bounds prescrib'd to thy transgressions . . ." (II. 877). Satan replies, "Lives there who loves his pain? Who would not, finding way, break loose from Hell, though thither doom'd?" Satan, it might be
argued, is quite unlike the blind poet; he has transgressed - mightily so. But consider, the poet's focus is his new condition; transgression is not the issue. The poet likens himself to the transgressing servant who, by burying that talent, removes it from God's light.

The blind poet and the slothful, unfaithful servant are similar in that each is given a new situation in which to find their way to serve God. Both were faithful servants before; neither is given new instructions. Each needs to discover how to best serve God with what has been newly given to them. The slothful servant failed in this, as Satan failed on a grander scale. But Matthew does not make allowances for different scales; the slothful servant is doomed to eternal damnation. This servant also lacks courage and the quality of thinking ahead. The blind poet intends to learn from this.

His lesson begins at the beginning of Matthew 25: with the parable of the ten virgins, five of whom think ahead and prepare for the coming of the bridegroom (Lord) who then welcomes them; the other five do not prepare and are locked out. In thinking ahead to the presentation of his true account, the poet hopes to learn from the wise virgins who actively wait for their Lord, prepared with oil to light their lamps.

Job too thinks ahead; he patiently struggles to understand his adversity and give his best service to a God who has given him no instruction in his affliction. To understand Job's patience, it is well to begin with affliction: with a study of affliction and suffering in the Bible, of those adverse conditions which call for patience.

Affliction is used passively in Ex. 3:7; "I have surely seen the a. of my people"; it is also used actively, 1 Kg. 22:27 "feed him with bread of a. and with water of a. until I
come in peace." In Ex. 34:6 "And the Lord passed by before him [Moses], and
proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant
in goodness and truth." and in Num. 14:18 "The Lord is longsuffering, and of great
mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression." Patience is shown here as not merely the
asked-for response of humans to affliction, trials and suffering, but as the response of
God himself.

"Patience occurs more frequently in the New Testament, almost always in
connection with the Second Coming" (Schiffhorst p.4). In Matt. 10:22, "he that endureth
to the end shall be saved." Luke 21:19, "In your patience possess ye your souls." James
5:7, "Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the
husbandman waitith for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until
he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the
coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

Note here the superficial similarities and the deep differences when compared with
the Parable of the Talents in Matt. 25. In both stories we are given the second coming of
the Lord against the backdrop of something buried in the ground. In Matthew, the
burying of the talent is shown to be an act of sloth, unprofitable; in James, the burying:
planting of seeds, is a good act which, with patience, will lead to profit. In Matt. it is
human work which leads to profit; in James it is God's work and the workings of nature.
In Matt., what is called for is human investment of talent; in James, it is human patience.
The slothful servant awaits the coming of the Lord with fear; the patient husbandman
awaits with eagerness. The message of James, similar in this respect to that of Job, is, be patient: "establish your hearts" and wait for God's coming.

Of course, Milton's mind would not find James and Matt. incompatible; Milton would find a bridge connecting the texts. However, Milton's Patience, fitting easily into James, does not fit easily into Matthew. The message of James is patience and this message follows that in Job. James 2:10, "Take my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of suffering affliction, and of patience" contains a message which follows and seems to refer to Job.

Milton's Patience would have had an easier task had the octave of Sonnet 19 alluded to the buried seed of James rather than the buried talent of Matthew. But neither Milton nor his inspirational patience are noted for taking on easy tasks. Such is not to be expected of the author of Paradise Lost and his inspirational Urania.

The parables in Matt. 25 are unique: with a message, not only different and seemingly at variance with others in the Christian and Hebrew bibles, but with that in post-biblical literature as well. Hastings summarizes the following parable from the Talmud, which, as that in James above, superficially resembles the Parable of the Talents:

A certain king distributed royal garments among his servants. The wise among these placed the garments in a chest, but the foolish wore them in going about their ordinary work. One day the king asked for his garments. The wise gave them back to him just as they had been when they received them, but the garments returned by the foolish were soiled. Then the king commended the wise, but ordered the foolish to be cast into prison, and their garments were handed over to the fuller.
This story is expressly called a 'a parable of a king,'
and is introduced to illustrate the saying,
`Give it (the soul) back to Him (God)
as he gave it to thee' (v.III 661).

Note here the similar elements in this parable used to express a quite different idea; indeed, one which seems in opposition to that in Matt. 25. Milton, rather than plucking one of the many Bible stories in which bearing affliction and faithful service to God are easily reconciled with patience, hunts out the exception: a story speaking neither of affliction nor the merit of patience, a story in which affliction is irrelevant, and patience is, seemingly, in opposition to the virtues called for in good and faithful service to God. By taking on and reconciling his affliction with this extreme, most difficult example of what God requires from his servants, Milton then reconciles it with every other example of service to God in the Bible. He then bridges Matthew and Job.

The Book of Job had special importance to Milton; he had considered its possibilities as the epic he was to write - perhaps, he was still so considering while writing "When I Consider." It was to offer him source material for Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes. This connection has been recognized by religious commentators as well as literary scholars. From one such commentator "Perhaps the closest parallel in English literature to Job is Milton's Paradise Lost. The common ground of these masterpieces is: intense emotion, sensitiveness to nature, high ideals and an elevated style."
As one of many parallels: in contemplating his suicide, we hear Job say, "I go
whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death; a land of
darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death without any order, and where the
light is as darkness," (10, 21). In PL we encounter that place, "A Dungeon horrible, on all
sides round as one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames no light, but rather
darkness visible," (I, 61).

As was Milton, the poet Job was a writer in defense of God's word; his "friend"
Eliphaz throws this fact in Job's afflicted face, "Behold thou hast instructed many, and
thou hast strengthened the feeble knees. But now it has come upon thee, and thou
faintest; it touches thee and thou art troubled," (4, 3). Both Job and the blind poet,
struggle with affliction, but both are more concerned with understanding this affliction in
relation to their place in God's world. Job also describes artistic frustration, his
equivalent of that hidden talent; "Oh that my words were now written! oh that they were
printed in a book." (19, 23). (I researched "print" in the O.E.D. and learned that it was
used, long before 1452 and presses to mean, "4. To commit (anything) to writing; to
express in written words."

Job, although not directly afflicted with blindness, has many allusions to lost light
and living in darkness, and problems with his eyes. He also expresses fear of God in
ways quite similar to that of poet; "I [am] troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am
afraid of him," (23, 15). Again, note Job 28. 11 in relation to line 3 in the sonnet, "the
thing that is hid bringeth he forth to light." Would Milton not have this in mind with Patience's response to "that one Talent which is death to hide"?

There is much of the Book of Job that finds its way into Milton's poetic works. In the Book of Job we meet Satan for the first time; he tempts God as he tempts the son of God in PR. Satan enters the Book of Job as one of the sons of God, on "a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them" (1. 6); we hear him in repeated conversation with God who says with pride, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (1. 8). Satan answers, "Doth Job fear God for naught?" tempting God to test Job. Satan does this in the first of two long conversations quite similar to those in Paradise Regained involving Satan and another son of god, "his beloved son." In Job, twice, with increasingly dire consequences, Satan moves God to put Job into his power. The first time God says, "Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand," (1. 12). Job holds fast; God, with pride in this, admits that he had been tempted, "he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause," (2. 3). Satan persists, once again tempting God; God again turns Job over to Satan, now giving Satan power to inflict physical suffering, "Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life," (2. 6). Satan barely complies, driving Job to the edge of suicide.

Different as they are in time and matter, there are parallels between O.T. Job and N.T. PT. In both, God returns to deal with his servants, one a just man afflicted, the other
slothful, not making profitable use of his god-given talent. These, separate matters in the Bible, converge in the sonnet, in the blind poet's question. But this question is, in effect, two questions; as such it requires two answers.

"Doth God exact day-labor?" Thou shalt invest thy talent. [see PT]

"light denied?" Bear affliction with faith in God [see Job]

One could so divide the several preambles to the question in Sonnet 19, in terms of such individual answers:

"my light is spent" / affliction [see Job];

"this dark world and wide" / evil and ignorance [see Job];

"that one talent which is death to hide" / invest god-given ability [see PT];

"Lodg'd with me useless" / if from affliction [see Job]; if from sloth [see PT];

"my Soul more bent to serve my maker" / he rewards those who invest their different abilities: the two talent servant as well as he of five talents [see PT]; he rewards the afflicted who serve patiently [see Job];

"my Soul bent to present my true account" / investment account ledger [see PT];

patient service account ledger [see Job];

"lest he returning chide" for sloth [see PT]; for arrogance, pretending to know God [see Job].

A good Christian is allowed to "window-shop" for individual answers this way. Milton's King James Bible of 1611 (Milton also favored The Geneva Bible of 1560), encourages such with its chapter summaries. A Christian is allowed to rearrange the
spiritual furnishings of God's house but not to discard any of it; the Old Testament furnishings of Job must be kept with that of New Testament Matthew; God's house is large enough. It takes the genius and boldness of a Milton to bring both sets of furnishings into his one little room of a sonnet; with patience in decorating, he does so without clutter.

Milton, with his two-part question at the poem's center, gives each part equal weight: serving God by investing His talent, serving God by bearing affliction. PT gives answer to the first part; I suggest that Job's Patience gives answer to the second. It is only by listening to both that the blind poet can find his individual answer, at least for that moment. There is precedence for such duality in the physical world; indeed, we find it in answering the question, "What is light?" In the world of light, so central in Milton's thought, we live successfully with a dual theory: light is both a wave and a quantum. But, these being opposites, how can light be both? The answer lies in dealing with what one is working with at the moment, waves or particles. Each has separate sets of equations which neither conflict nor get in the way of each other. So too with Milton's "light."

How best to employ one's talent in "day-labor"? Use the equations supplied by PT. How best for a just man to reconcile affliction with his faith? Use the equations supplied by Job.

Simple analogy!? But the human equations for light are not as simply applied as those of physics. The human equations supply answers for the moment, not for all time. The awesomeness of the answer for the blind activist poet, in that period of low poetic
production, reasonable answers but unacceptable to his newly blind psyche, demands a re-asking, yet knowing Patience's reply will always be the same. Thus, the question first asked is sound, re-asked it is foolish: fondly asked. (If the poet murmurs, Patience will soon reply.)

Patience as a gossamer emissary from Job, comes with her message that, although best service to God may require actively bearing affliction, the blind poet does serve God, even as he stands and waits. This message serves Milton, beyond the poem, in yet another way. It serves as a reminder to those who would equate his affliction with sin; "we can have no patience unless we are sure that afflictions spring from God's love and are not punishments but fatherly chastisements; our afflictions advance the good of our neighbors; God by afflictions increases in us all those virtues which concern our neighbors and ourselves."43 The Book of Job puts forward the message that a righteous man, one who pleases God, might also be afflicted. Job's message was written three thousand years before but it needed redelivery in Milton's England. Eleanor Brown documents some of "the belief that Milton's affliction was sent as a judgment from God."44 Thus, Job's Patience serves double duty, responding to Milton's detractors as she responds to the blind poet's question.

Under the surface of the blind poet's question I get the sense of a prayer, "Put me to work, O God; show me the way to best serve, to unearth and invest that one talent buried in darkness." I read this as a call for divine poetic inspiration: "Descend from Heav'n Urania," and help me with my epic. Perhaps, as he worked on this sonnet, Job was being
considered as his epic theme. That epic is lodged in him undeveloped, unwritten, useless, "that one talent which is death to hide." The blind poet will not receive special dispensation for that hidden talent; at the root of its burial we do not find blindness; there lies fear, and lack of trust in himself, his God, or both. In this the poet is no more handicapped than the slothful servant, and no less subject to God's judgment.

The slothful servant did not pray or think ahead; in this he shares company with the five foolish virgins who precede him in Matthew chapter 25, who carried lamps without oil to their bridegroom; "the Son of man cometh" and they find themselves in the dark, locked out, the door to heaven closed. The blind poet does pray and think ahead; and, there is yet time. That talent is "lodg'd," thus slumbering as a lodger, dormant, not permanently hidden.

The poet, afflicted, takes Job as his model. He will do as Patience advises those who would best serve God to do, "best bear your mild yoke." The poet, unproductive, takes as his model the good and faithful servants in PT; in matters of "that one talent which is death to hide," "they serve him best."
Epilogue

"And all the wise men, that wrought all the work of the sanctuary, came every man from his work which they made. And they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the Lord commanded to make. And Moses gave commandment, and they caused it to be proclaimed throughout the camp, saying, Let neither man nor woman make any more work for the offering of the sanctuary. So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much" (Ex. 36. 4). The people obey; all quitting their previous labor. "And every wise hearted man among them" sought other service. The others remain in that place and also serve God as they stand in wait of further bidding.
End Notes

1. As quoted in *A Variorum Commentary on The Poems of John Milton*, (452).

2. "It is that uneasiness which the critics inadvertently acknowledge when they argue about the force of the last line, but they are unable to make analytical use of what they acknowledge because they have no way of dealing with or even recognizing experiential (that is temporal) structures," (180).


4. In *The Triumph of Patience*, quoting from a translation of *Psychomachia* by Prudentius "who was influential in the allegorization of the virtues and vices as well as in the personification of most virtues as females. His late fourth-century Christian poem developed Roman tendencies to personify abstract ideas and more significantly, influenced the medieval allegories of virtues and vices in art and literature," (3). Also, quoting from William Cowper's *The Praise of Patience*, 1616, "Cowper says that, just as the vices are linked together, so are the virtues, and patience is never alone," (12).

5. All of what follows here is from *The Triumph of Patience*. Schiffhorst quotes John Florio's 1598 dictionary which "provides some useful Renaissance definitions of patience: 'suffrance, endurance, forbearing, constancie in abiding evil, aptness to suffer or abide.'" (5). "Thomas Wilson's *Christian Dictionary* (1612) provides the following definition: 'it is that gift of God which enableth the Christian soule to endure crosses, quietly, and with ready submission to the will of God, because it is his pleasure to have it so, for our tryall or chastisement.'" (6). Schiffhorst, in giving the viewpoint of the Book of Common Prayer, writes, "Christian patience emphasizes . . . meekness, and humility;" (7). From a 1685 sermon, 'Of Patience,' listing 14 points, '7. a willingness to continue in affliction without weariness; 8. a lowly frame of mind; 9. restraining our tongues from complaints; 10. blessing and praising God in the manner of Job; 11. abstaining from any removal of our crosses but abiding quietly under their pressure,'" (11).

6. A.C. Labriola, in "*Christus Patiens*: The Virtue Patience and Paradise Lost, I-II," writes, "As the brief outline in the Trinity manuscript makes clear, the tragedy would have centered on the New Testament theme of the sufferings of Christ and Christ's endurance of that suffering--his patience, in other words. . . . Although Milton did not write a tragedy on *Christus Patiens*, the theme was never far from his mind. It is, in fact, a central theme in much of his poetry," (138).

7. Who and where are examples in Milton's poetry of prosopopoeia? An answer is beyond the scope of this paper but I raise the question with the belief that such are few and far between. I raise this after reading Rosemond Tuve's "Structural Figures of L'Allegro and II
"Penseroso," in *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*. New York: Oxford U P, 1965, in which Tuve writes, "Milton says outright what he is doing in L'Allegro: 'And if I give thee honour due, Mirth admit me of thy crue'; 115 following lines honor her by showing her nature as it shines through a score of forms of 'unreproved pleasures free,' and his conclusion is an election or statement of allegiance: 'These delights if thou canst give, Mirth with thee I mean to live,'" (59). In the following one hundred and fifteen lines with a Mirth with whom he means to live, young Milton does not give his intended comrade the opportunity to speak one word! A search of his sonnets and other poetry - less than extensive but more than cursory - does not reveal any example of prosopopoeia relating to any of the seven Virtues, three Graces, or any of their "associates." Indeed, in all of Milton's sonnets, there are only two speakers: the poet - and Patience!


9. Burnett writes, "Milton was virtually alone in cultivating the sonnet in the middle of the seventeenth century. Commentators agree that his originality lies in replacing the 'abundance and vague luxuriance' common among the Elizabethans with 'precision of utterance, careful selection of words, [and] the simple and clear expression of definite ideas, and in writing generally with a 'classical restraint' involving 'less ornament,'" (102).

10. The penultimate and last lines of Milton's twentieth sonnet - "Lawrence of virtuous father virtuous son."

11. Perhaps both here. Schiffhorst from Miles Cloverdale's 1550 treatise, "A Spiritual and Most Precious Pearl," quotes, "'to bear and forbear' earthly and spiritual fruits is a token of wisdom," (7).

12. "Thus physics began by taking the immediate sensations of experience, classified as hot, cold, moist, and dry, as fundamental principles. Eventually physics turned inside out and discovered that its real function was to explain what heat and moisture were," (39). The point here is that physics couldn't begin by asking what heat and moisture were; in pre-science eras these questions were hopelessly beyond answering.


14. In punctuation and spelling, Honigmann informs us, "jotting down his poems in the manuscript Milton did not always take care to be consistent" (56). Thus, we find punctuation differences: commas, semi-colons, full stops, in various editions; "I have, like other editors, silently changed some of the punctuation" (57). All but the last four words of the sixty-three word octave comprise one sentence (punctuated in many editions with a semi-colon). The sestet, Patience's reply, breaks into
five independent clauses, which, although separated by semi-colons in some later editions, were separated by commas in the 1673 edition.

God doth not need either man’s work or his own gifts; who best bear his mild yoke, they serve him best; his state is Kingly.

Thousands at his bidding speed and post o’er Land and Ocean without rest: They also serve who only stand and wait.

15. *Milton’s Sonnets & the Ideal Community* (5).

16. Note also *that The Parable of the Pounds*, Luke 19, 12-27 is an almost identical story involving ten servants, each given a pound; the first three do as the three in PT, the last seven remain a mystery. The unprofitable servant kept the pound, "laid up in a napkin," (19, 20). For this God chides him, in much the same words as in PT, takes his pound and gives it to the first servant, but does not punish the unprofitable servant. (But God orders others slain, "mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them.")

17. Stoehr’s full comment as reported in the *Variorum*: “T. Stoehr (‘Syntex,’ ES 45, 1964, 293-4): ‘Whether described in terms of form or meaning, the power of the sonnet [19] plainly lies in the tension between energy and control, a tension only inferable in the highly regular *Sonnet* 7. That the syntex of the octave here seems almost out of control, gives the poem a perilous suspense, which the straightforward structure of the sestet then disperses and transcends.” A *Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, vol. II, part two, page 457.


19. In Genesis "the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years," (6.3). But this was in the era of the patriarchs, with much different time frames. Shawcross, as quoted in Variorum (445) suggests this from Isaiah, "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed," (66.20). "But Carey remarks, this verse of Isaiah ’is taken from a prophecy about the new Jerusalem, and relates to a future, not an actual state of affairs," (445).


21. The O.E.D. credits Milton with three definitive uses of "lodge" as a verb, none of which are his use in "When I Consider": "5. To throw down on the ground, lay flat, Psalm vii 18." "7. To remain or dwell temporarily in a place. P.L. iv.790. . . . Comus 246." The now
obsolete "1.1. To place in tents or other temporary structure," seems best to fit Milton's sense of the talent in the sonnet, as God's, placed temporarily in (or with) his servants.


24. From *The Triumph of Patience,* "Patience occurs more frequently in the New Testament, almost always in connection with the Second Coming. In the Apocalypse (especially 1:9,2:3,2:19,3:10), the word is often repeated," (4).

25. Honigmann notes the possibility of a mild rebuke of God here and in Sonnet 18: "Whether or not this poem followed immediately after *Avenge O Lord* (XVIII) in the sequence of writing, excellent reasons dictated its present position. Both XVIII and XIX celebrate God's terrible way with His chosen, the slaughtered saints and the talented poet deprived of his sight" (65).

26. As with a previous comment linking this poem with Sonnet 18, Honigmann writes: "The yoke imposed by Milton's God appears all the more milde if 'the reader's mind is held in a certain receptive poise' from sonnet XVIII to XIX, and the poet's murmur sounds the more ungrateful if one still hears the moans of the unfortunate mountaineers" (65).

27. *The Triumph of Patience* p.112.

28. In P.L. III we meet Milton's creation, "Th' Arch-Angel Uriel, one of the sev'n who in God's presence, nearest to his throne Stand ready at command, and are his Eyes That run through all the Heav'ns, or down to th' Earth Bear his swift errands over moist and dry, O'er Sea and Land: him Satan thus accosts," (648). What follows here is Satan having "beguil'd Uriel into recounting the activity of creation, God's command of his angels: "his second bidding," "the "wild uproar" and "swift" movement of a multitude of God's host, "I saw when at his Word the formless Mass. This world's material mould, came to a heap: Confusion heard his voice, and wild uproar Stood vast infinitude confin'd; Till at his second bidding darkness fled, Light shone, and order from disorder sprung: Swift to thir several Quarters hasted then The cumbrous Elements, Earth, Flood, Air, Fire, And this Ethereal quintessence of Heav'n Flew upward, spirited with various forms, That roll'd orbicular, and turn'd to Stars Numberless, as thou seest, and how they move; each had his place appointed, each his course, The rest in circuit walls this Universe," (709).

Here we are shown the labor in creating the greatest of "his own gifts," this written some few years after sonnet 19, nicely elaborates that "his State is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed . . . without rest." This movement without rest is quite plausible; rest had not yet been created. Note here a similarity between Uriel description to Satan in P.L. and that of God himself to Job in The Book of Job, chapters 38-41.

30. Although precise distinctions between Christian and Stoic patience are difficult to formulate, there appears a clear difference between the active, "upbeat-sounding" description on lines ten and eleven, and the passive, almost-indifferent one on line fourteen. Milton's contemporaries might well note a distinction here lost on late twentieth century readers.

From Schiffhorst's "Some Prolegomena for the Study of Patience, 1480 - 1680,"
"As the Book of Common Prayer and other works reveal, the Christian should always hope for a happy resolution of his afflictions. Such a viewpoint is in sharp contrast to that of the Stoics, who nevertheless have an important bearing on our understanding of Christian patience. Stoic patience, which humanists in the sixteenth century saw as a valuable supplement to Christian precepts, is generally defined as a controlled, unemotional indifference to the adversities of life, with a contempt for worldly goods (but not for virtue). It is a state of perpetual calm and wise passivity [Marcus Aurelius]. The Stoic ideal of fortitude in adversity gained popularity in the Renaissance, as numerous treatises on the subject indicate; the pagan capacity for virtue is admired along with as regret that Christians are often less capable. But, together with the mildness and gentleness advocated by Marcua Aurelius, Seneca, and others, Christian patience emphasizes charity, forgiveness, meekness, and humility - a quality which, in contrast to the pagan view, recognizes the weekness of the human reasonand will when supported by divine strength. Precise distinctions between Christian and Stoic teachings, however, were largely unsuccessful among philosophers as well as poets of the time. Though Justus Lipsius saw that Stoic indifference precludes Christian hope, he and Erasmus, Elyot, Du Vair, and others were generally unclear in drawing distinctions between the cold, proud, defiant patience of the ancients and the humble, ardent, submissive Christian virtue. One reason may have been the influence of a third factor: the Aristotelian concept of honor, by which one is not subject to passions but which might include anger as a justifiable part of active virtue (in Spenser, for example). Thus the Christian concept of patience could be set aside by a civil or social law which assumed that might makes right." (7).

31. "Whether or not this poem [Sonnet 19] followed immediately after *Avenge O Lord* (XVIII) in the sequence of writing, excellent reasons dictated its present position. Both XVIII and XIX celebrate God's terrible way with His chosen, the slaughtered saints and the talented poet deprived of his sight. And not only is there an important kinship of subject: we should grow conscious also of other resemblences. There is a similar sense of spaciousness in the sonnets. And at the same point in each (1.12) Milton discusses the triple Tyrant and the kingly state of God, and at the same point again (1.14) hopes that generations unborn may fly the one, and proposes to *stand and waite* to serve the other. The yoak imposed by Milton's God appears all the more *milde* if 'the reader's mind is held in a certain receptive poise' from sonnet XVIII to XIX, and the poet's *murmur* sounds the more ungrateful if one still hears the *moans* of the unfortunate mountaineers. Reading XIX after XVIII one finds a new dimension in the self-criticism of the more personal poem" (65).
32. Alternative paraphrasing of the poet's question

A. When I Consider [I have thoughts which are pointing to some action] how my light is spent [relating to the extent, history and consequences of my blindness], ere half my days in this dark world and wide [at a midpoint of my life, in this ignorant, sinful, vast world], and that one Talent which is death to hide [and having that one god-given ability which, at the peril of my immortal Soul, must be invested], lodg'd with me useless [coexisting, in its dormant state, with what is actively mine], though my Soul more bent to serve therewith my Maker [though I am more determined and resolute than ever to invest this talent in God's service], and present my true account [and give this as an accurate accounting and explanation of my state-of-affairs], lest he returning chide [lest on his coming, on judgment day, God judges me as He did his slothful servant], Doth God exact day-labor, light denied [based on all these considerations, does God demand the same investment of ability from his blind servant], I fondly ask; [forewarned of the answer, still, I foolishly ask].

B. "Considering in what manner and to what effect my sight is used up, considering in my mid-life, a wide world that, even with sight, is dark: filled with ignorance, evil, and sin, considering that God-given ability for which abuse and sloth is punished by damnation, considering it has been and is now of no profit to self and God, considering that my Soul is more ready than my body, more ready than it was before, to use that ability in God's service, considering that I am ready to report, give an accounting, and explain myself, I foolishly ask, does God demand enlightened investment of talent by those afflicted with darkness."

C. "When I consider how my sight is used up, midway in my life in a vast world that even sighted appears dark, that god-given talent in my custody, uninvested, God's judgment of eternal damnation for his slothful servant, my greater determination to serve God profitably with that talent, and to present God a faithful and accurate accounting, explain my condition, lest with his Second Coming he chide me for being an unprofitable servant, all this considered, I foolishly ask, Doth God exact day-labor light denied."

33. Corns, in quoting from Of Reformation touching Church-Discipline in England. "... finding the ease she [the soul] had from her visible, and sensuous colleague the body in performance of Religious duties ... [she] shifted off from her selfe, the labour of high soaring any more, forgot her heavenly flight, and left the dull, and droyling carcass to plod on the old rode, and drudging Trade of outward conformity," (48). This supports Honigmann's comment on Milton's view of the soul.

34. Milton's Sonnets & the Ideal Community (147-8).

35. J.F. Huntley (in "The Ecology and Anatomy of Criticism: Milton's Sonnet 19 and the Bee Simile in 'Paradise Lost,'" as quoted in Variorum) is one of the few critics who delves into who Patience might be. "Left to his own meditations, the speaker broods over his 'injured merit' and begins to murmur against God's justice. But prevenient grace anticipates the drift of his thoughts and, long before they harden in his heart, returns them to due subordination, humility, self-respect, and love. The reply of Patience guides the speaker to
embrace a state of mind which may seem to inert to the superficial observer, but is in fact the vital activity of a healthy spirit. An unhealthy spirit in the octave was impatient to perform magnificent tasks in order to render a 'true' account of his worth," (459). But this seems only to defer the question, putting creation over into the next county. Who then created prevenient grace? Where is her connection to Patience described? It hardly seems accurate to describe the poet, unproductive in his poetic work for several years as "impatient," to thus legitimize the entrance of counterbalancing Patience.

36. Schiffhorst (2).

37. In sonnet XI, "On the Detraction Which Followed Upon My Writing Certain Treatises," we find a line ascribed to an amorphous human character,"the stall-reader," who is given to cry, "Bless us! what a word on a title page is this!" In sonnet 23, "Methought I saw my late espoused Saint," Milton's ghostly second wife (or perhaps his first), in the poet's dream, brings her veil'd lips close enough to speak, "But O, as to embrace me she inclin'd, I wak'd, she fled, and day brought back my night." Here, even in a dream, even when yearning for some exchange, it does not come. With the extraordinary exception of Patience, in Milton's sonnets we hear but a single voice.

38. see Hughes, headnote 7 to Comus, page 88.


40. *The Triumph of Patience* p. 2. Schiffhorst paraphrases Cyprian of Antioch's sermon *De Bono,* "true Christian patience is God-like because it follows the example of Christ - and he urges his readers to practice it throughout their lives." That is, patience is an active virtue, acting as Christ acted in his suffering.


42. Book of Job 23, 17; 29, 3; 30, 26. (many others to include here)


44. Brown quotes one Mrs. Sadler writing to Roger Williams, "For this book [Eikonklastes] that he wrote against the late king that you would have me read, you should take notice of God's judgment against him, who stroke him with blindness," (25). Brown gives a number of other examples, including a marvelous story of the Duke of York, afterwards James II, who visited Milton and in "the conversation the Duke asked Milton whether he did not regard the loss of his eyesight as a judgment inflicted on him for what he had written against the late king. Milton's reply was to this effect: 'If your Highness thinks
that the calamities which befall us here are indications of the wrath of Heaven, in what manner are we to account for the fate of the king your father?" (26). Brown also writes, "The prevalence of the belief that Milton's blindness was a punishment from God is further evinced by the denials that he and his biographers made to the charge," (25). She goes on to document some of these denials.
Bibliography


*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 14th ed. 1954.


