

Timelessness in Language: A Rhetorical Study of John Milton's *Areopagitica*

Darío Gómez Escudero
Lingwistyczna Szkoła Wyższa, Warsaw

Abstract

This article seeks to demonstrate that John Milton's political tract is a timeless and universal text that has never belonged to any specific era, and that the *source* of such timelessness and universality is undoubtedly its specific and convoluted language. In the first section, emphasis is given to the historical context of the text and the motives which led Milton to write *Areopagitica*. The second section is more analytical and is devoted to the power of language and to the structure of the tract. Hence, this part is an attempt to analyze and to dissect Milton's style, full of thought-provoking ideas, rich in biblical references, metaphors, personifications, connection to ancient authors, Latin expressions, images, and a number of other literary devices that have made of Milton's *Areopagitica* a timeless and universal text.

Keywords: Milton, *Areopagitica*, language, rhetorical devices, censorship

Abstrakt

Celem poniższego artykułu jest postawienie tezy o tym, że traktat polityczny Johna Milтона jest tekstem ponadczasowym, który nigdy nie należał do żadnej konkretnej epoki, oraz iż źródłem ponadczasowości i uniwersalności weń wpisanych jest niewątpliwie jego specyficzny i zawikłany język. W pierwszej sekcji podkreśla się kontekst historyczny tekstu jak również powody napisania dzieła *Areopagitica* przez Milтона. Część druga jest

bardziej analityczna i poświęcona mocy języka i strukturze traktatu. Toteż zamierzeniem owej części jest analiza stylu Milтона pełnego błyskotliwych pomysłów, odniesień biblijnych, metafor, personifikacji, referencji do dawnych mistrzów, zwrotów Łacińskich, wizerunków, i wielu innych zabiegów literackich czyniących *Areopagitica*ę Milтона tekstem ponadczasowym i uniwersalnym.

Słowa klucze: Milton, *Areopagitica*, język, zabiegi retoryczne, cenzura

When John Milton (1608–1674) wrote in 1644 that “[a] good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life” (27), he would have never imagined that his words, which were taken from one of his most politically influential tracts entitled *Areopagitica: A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing to the Parliament of England*, would welcome visitors to the New York Public Library in the 21st century.

Today, John Milton is still remembered not only because “his literary art places him in the small circle of great epic writers” (Abrams 649), the arch important among them being of course his famous *Paradise Lost*, but also for his entire prose work. In fact, he was a very prolific author who wrote about education, logic, religion, politics, divorce and many other subjects, which makes it no easy task to choose just one of his works for special analysis. However, if there is a reason why I have decided to use his political tract *Areopagitica* as my major source of information is because of its language. Consequently, what I will try to demonstrate in this article is two-fold: that *Areopagitica* is a timeless text that has never belonged to any specific era, and that the *source* of such timelessness is, undoubtedly, the linguistic rhetorical tricks he uses to reach his audience. In this respect, this article will dedicate a great deal of attention to the tract’s structure and to the rhetorical tricks that Milton used while composing *Areopagitica*. Hence, I will attempt to demonstrate that the text’s and its author’s humanistic and universal appeal is achieved by the outstanding use of imagery, by the fact that he knew to perfection for example Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, and that he knew how to use the classical structure to shape his own speech to the Parliament of England.

Moreover, although Milton belittled the importance of his non-poetic work, let us remember that he wrote in his characteristically convoluted way that “this manner of writing [whereby he meant prose] wherein knowing myself inferior to myself [...] I have

the use, as I may account it, but of my left hand” (Moore 23), his approaches to politics, philosophy, economy and other important areas of life still have a great deal of influence in the culture of the Western world.

England, November 1644. A witty 36-year-old man dressed in black and with hair to his shoulders has just published a political pamphlet addressed to the Parliament of England entitled *Areopagitica: A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing to the Parliament of England*. His name: John Milton; and he is the same man who in August 1643, after suffering the consequences of a brief marriage with a 17-year-old girl who had left him a few months after the wedding, addressed, or attacked, the British Parliament with a tract against divorce entitled *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*. John Milton, a man of outstandingly logical reasoning, considered it obvious that if two people did not wish to be together, they should not be together. Although a well established concept in the 21st century, divorce was not as popular then as it is now.

Milton, a man of his time, lived in a very turbulent and agitated period marked by constant political and religious upheavals that would lead to the beginning of a new political era in which Britain became a republic under the command of Cromwell. As the so-called Puritan revolution unfolded, the fight against the Anglican Church became obvious, with Puritans advocating more democracy within it, much to King Charles' dislike. People like John Milton, full of revolutionary ideas, would make very good use of the process of printing that William Caxton had introduced in Britain two centuries earlier. John Milton found in the printing of pamphlets and tracts a very practical vehicle to promote his ideas against certain government policies. However, the Church, represented by Archbishop Laud, who died one year after the publication of *Areopagitica*, and the Government, represented by Charles I, who would end his days in 1649, fought back in unison, setting a very strict censorship system which persecuted people like Milton and many others.

It is in this specific context that *Areopagitica* was written, in a very specific language, in an attempt to stop the Licensing Order, i.e. the censorship measures that Parliament had established in 1643. These new regulations would oblige authors to hand in their works to the local authorities before publication. The new regulation stated that “no [...] Book, Pamphlet, paper, nor part of any such Book, Pamphlet, or paper shall [...] be printed, bound, stitched or put to sale by any person or persons whatsoever, unless the same be first approved of and licensed under the hands of such person [...] appoint[ed] for the licensing by the Houses” (Abraham 498).

A highly significant reason why *Areopagitica* transcends the limits of time is Milton's use of language literary devices. His work “was a masterpiece of double-talk” (Hill 323),

the author sharpening his rhetoric with skill and patience to achieve his goal of convincing his audience that the censorship measures were wrong and must end. Certainly, Milton cultivated language as his weapon, using a peculiar convoluted style full of thought-provoking ideas and rich in biblical references, metaphors, personifications, references to ancient authors, Latin expressions, images, and many more literary tools. It is precisely due to the power of the word and to the accessibility of these literary devices to subsequent generations that *Areopagitica* still has links to the present day because “Milton translates practical problems of the moment into universals” (Parker 55). Referring to this specific aspect of the pamphlet, Professor Cantor stressed the importance of a rhetorical analysis of Milton’s tract to see “what is really going on behind the *complex wandering syntax and elusive allusiveness* of the great poet’s prose” (Dowling 124, italics added). Thus, the major source of the tract’s timelessness is the literary tools Milton uses in its language.

As John Milton’s work is so varied, controversial and provocative, it does not come as a surprise that even those who criticized him held his work in high esteem. For example, the British poet, William Blake, said about Milton’s *Paradise Lost* that “the reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was *a true Poet*” (Keynes 150; italics added). Two centuries later, T. S. Eliot said about John Milton that “of no other poet is it so difficult to consider the poetry simply as poetry”.¹ However, his richness and complexity can be observed not only in his poetry but also in his entire prose work, especially in *Areopagitica*. For Dr. Eliot, it was also an influential prose work worth reading and keeping in high esteem. Actually, in 1909, *The New York Times* printed two books under the section entitled *Ideal Library Selected by Dr. Eliot*, and one of those books was *Areopagitica*. It is the rhetorical tricks Milton uses in this tract that underlie the humanistic and universal appeal of the text and let it cross the boundaries of time and space.

At first sight, it is clear that *Areopagitica* is a complex text. An initial reading presents the audience with what seems to be a mere compilation of historical, religious and political facts from Milton’s times and from other historical moments. Besides, the way the English language has evolved during the last four centuries makes it unlikely that a prospective reader would consider *Areopagitica* an easy read, even with a modernized version at hand. There is no doubt, however, that part of its complexity and difficulty de-

¹ T.S. Elliot described John Milton that way while giving a lecture entitled *Annual Lecture on a Master Mind: Milton, Proceedings of the British Academy* in 1947.

rives from the enormous amount of imagery and rhetorical devices Milton uses in order to force his reader to take an active part in the interpretation of his prose. In this way, the reader is not a passive audience observing what Milton has to say. Certainly, John Milton was right when he described the universality and timelessness of books as “the language of the times” (72), regardless of the generation of people who write and read a book. This “language of the times” unequivocally leads to the universality and humanistic appeal of *Areopagitica*, which can be observed in the constant references to other cultures. Consequently, the more arguments referring to ancient times and foreign cultures, the less British Milton's text becomes and, therefore, more universal. Milton's ability to put down in black and white a text which includes references to a wide variety of cultures (Jewish, Greek, Roman and British, among others) that have shaped ours, and a great deal of different historical moments from Adam and Eve to Moses, Plato and Aristotle up to the political and religious upheavals of the 17th century in England, makes Milton's pamphlet a very universal text.

What is especially important in the tract's structure is the fact that Milton becomes inspired by the structure of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and sets out his speech according to the composition of a classical rhetorical oration. By developing the tract's speech in such a way, he divides its content into four parts, namely, exordium, proposition, confirmation and peroration (Aristotle, “Rhetoric”, III).

Milton's specific division has the unequivocal aim of enabling him to compose an argumentative speech which persuades his audience in a logical way. Let us not forget that Aristotle was also the author of a great deal of philosophical tracts known as *Organon*, where he paves the way to consider logic as a science. In many ways there is of course a profound relationship between rhetoric and logic because the former brings order to the speech and the latter brings clarity to Milton's arguments. Let us take a detailed look into the structure of *Areopagitica*, starting with the title itself, to continue with some of the most important rhetorical devices he uses in the exordium, the proposition, the confirmation and the peroration.

Firstly, *Areopagitica: A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing to the Parliament of England* was a political tract or pamphlet that he addressed to the English Parliament in 1644. Accordingly, some scholars categorize *Areopagitica* just as a pamphlet and Milton is regarded as “the pamphleteer” (Haller 8) during this specific period of his life. Thus, the controversy about Milton's “speech”, or tract, or pamphlet, or whatever we wish to call it, starts at its very beginning. What really categorizes it as a “speech” is a direct reference to the apostle Paul when, in Acts 17:22–23, it is said that,

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the *Areopagus* and declared: ‘Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you’.

It was in this Areopagus or Athenian Supreme Council that the apostle Paul “spoke” or made a fervent defence of the Christian God by referring to him as the “unknown God”.

Moreover, there may have been another reference that influenced Milton when considering *Areopagitica* as the title of his pamphlet-speech. In his *Personal Letters to Leonard Philaras, the Athenian*, he starts by saying that he has “always been devotedly attached to the literature of Greece” (103). Hence, it would not come as a surprise that Milton knew about Isocrates’ *Areopagiticus* and his defence of virtue against corrupted governments where the Greek philosopher wrote,

How can we praise or tolerate “a government which has in the past been the cause of so many evils and which is now year by year ever drifting on from bad to worse?” (Power 628).

The political situation in Milton’s days was not different from that of Isocrates’ because, by censoring books before publishing them and by bringing to life the Licensing Order of 1643, things in England were definitely “drifting on from bad to worse” (as Isocrates put it in the above quote). In this way, the title of the tract transcends time by alluding to, and therefore, connecting Isocrates’ fifth century BC (436–338), the Apostle Paul’s 1st century AD, and the 17th century of its author (1608–1674). However, it can be argued that the text also perfectly applies to our times because governments nowadays “have been the cause of so many evils” (as Isocrates said), and critical voices, like Milton’s, are needed to shake their consciences.

Among all the versions of *Areopagitica* I have checked for the purposes of this work,² there are several versions, namely, Holt White 1819, Bliss Perry 1902, and Lockwood 1911 that include a short poem right below the title. This is another timeless Greek reference, thus backing up the main argument. The poem reads as follows:

This is true Liberty when free born men
Having to advise the public may speak free,

² Some examples are: Blackburne 1780, Holt White 1819, Hales 1848, Arber 1869, Bliss Perry 1902, Crook 1906, Lockwood 1911, Cassell 1950, *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, vol.I by Frank Kermode and John Hollander in 1973, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* by Abrams in 1975, and *Areopagitica* produced by Judith Boss and David Widger in 2006.

Which he who can, and will, deserv's high praise,
 Who neither can nor will, may hold his peace;
 What can be juster in a State then this? (Euripides "The Suppliants" II. 438–441)

In these versions, Milton's voice is introduced in the same way in which the first speaker would open the assembly in Athens. In *The Suppliants*, prior to the above words, Theseus, the king of Athens, affirms that freedom's mark is seen in this,

when the laws are written down, *rich and weak alike have equal justice*, and it is open to the weaker to use the same language to the prosperous [...] if he has justice on his side (Euripides "The Suppliants" II. 434–437, italics added).

Euripides' words in 423 BC were still valid in Milton's 17th century not only because the law did not treat equally the rich and the weak but also because governments were not willing to accept people's advice. However, Milton's voice was to be heard inside Parliament's walls, and its echo would resonate beyond his time starting with an excellent exordium.

Milton's exordium³ or introduction follows the style of the classical introduction. He applies in his *Areopagitica* three important rhetorical tricks taken from Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which are what the philosopher calls *ἡθός* (pronounced /ē-thās/) and may be translated as "*the personality of the speaker*", *πάθη* (pronounced /pā'thōs/ in its singular form) or "*audience reaction*", and *λόγος* (pronounced /'logos/) or "*logical arguments*" (Rosenthal 116). Our author knew to perfection that in order to motivate his audience it was paramount to take into consideration who was going to listen to him, in this case the Parliament of England, as stated in the title of his tract. Also, it was vital to know what they thought, and then tailor the speech to create an unbeatable effect. Milton knew his audience's profile very well, and he was well-known by Parliament for the radical content of the previous pamphlets he had written before, such as *Of Prelatic Episcopacy* (1641), where he bitterly criticized episcopacy, *Of Reformation* (1641), whose main goal was to criticize both Church and the government and, of course, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1644). The parliamentarians knew that dealing with John Milton's proposal would not be an easy task as he would come very well prepared to defend his thesis valiantly and with very logical arguments.

³ "[...]as any set forth by your predecessors" (1–24).

Moreover, the exordium contains other key rhetorical tricks, such as biblical references. In the very first line, Milton directs his tract to “states and governors” (13), in a possible reference to *Deuteronomy* 4:6, when Moses encourages the people of Israel to stick to God’s principles “for this will show your *wisdom and understanding to the nations*” (italics added). It is legitimate to claim that Milton, who referred to Moses on several occasions, may have tried to behave in a similar way by speaking out so that the Parliament represented by the Lords, the Commons and the religious authorities “[would] show [...] wisdom and understanding to the nations” (as quoted in the same biblical reference). Then, Milton uses *personification* to hold that Britain “was beyond the *manhood* of a Roman recovery” (19; italics added), as if Britain had typical male characteristics to overcome the problem of censorship successfully. Milton then goes on to *compliment* the parliamentarians who were going to listen to his message by saying that they do “honourable things”, because they are “good men and worthy magistrates” who do “laudable deeds” (19). In addition, the exordium is filled with *references to ancient authors and their books* that serve to support Milton’s arguments with facts with which his audience was very well familiar. Thus, we encounter references to Euripides’ *The Suppliants* (as mentioned before), to Isocrates and his *Areopagiticus* (24), and to Dion Prusaesus (23).

Moreover, there is a great *visual image* when he expresses that “the joy and gratulation [...] of their country’s liberty is [...] a *trophy*” (18; italics added). Can anybody think of a better trophy for a country than liberty and joy for their inhabitants? Or, in other words, how can a country have the trophy of liberty if there is censorship inside its borders? Subsequently, Milton’s arguments become even stronger by directing the Parliament’s attention to *current historical events of his own time*, for example, when he talks about “a triennial Parliament” (21), referring to an Act passed a few years before the publication of his tract. In line with this strategy, he also refers to *historical events of ancient times*, like those staged by “the barbaric pride of a Hunnish and Norwegian [...] Goths and Jutlanders” (22) and to which England would not like to be compared. And, to wind up this analysis of Milton’s introduction, he uses a vivid metaphor, in which he takes for granted that parliamentarians will “obey the *voice of reason*” (24; italics added), as if Reason had a human voice.

The second part of his speech is called proposition⁴ or statement of the case. Milton once again starts by complimenting his audience when he says “that love of truth which ye eminently profess” (24), and then uses the timeless metaphor quoted in the first lines

⁴ “If ye be thus resolved [...]” (24), “[...]and that caught some of our presbyters” (28).

of this text that can be seen in the New York Public Library, “a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit” (27). Following the same argumentative line, he incorporates a personification when he adds that “books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life” (26). Again, Milton strengthens the arguments of his proposition by referring to ancient authors and their books when he writes about “that ethereal and *fifth essence*” (27; italics added), in clear correspondence to Plato’s understanding of Ideas and the quintessence or the purest part of the soul (Black 911). Also, he mentions “those fabulous dragon’s teeth” (27), as if he were thinking of Cadmus killing the dragon while on his way to Thebes (Buck 46). With that vivid image of a dangerous dragon in the audience’s mind, Milton provokes them with a *comparison* between the killing of the beast and the man “who destroys a book”, because such a man “kills reason itself” and “kills the image of God” (26). And, to exhaust the repertoire of the rhetorical devices used in this part of his “speech”, on one occasion Milton refers to a *historical event of his times* that was well known by his audience: he directs their attention to “quadragesimal and matrimonial” laws (25), alluding in this way to certain religious orders that expired in Milton’s times.

The third part of Milton’s speech is the so-called confirmation⁵, which contains a long list of arguments to support his view. This part contains a very interesting *direct quotation* from ancient poets interconnected with a biblical reference, namely “the sentences of three Greek poets and one of them a tragedian” (43). This refers to what the apostle Paul wrote in *Acts* 17:28 when he added, “As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’” According to some sources, the apostle may have referred to either the poem “Phenomena” by the poet Aratus or to “Hymns to Zeus” by the stoic Cleanthes (Schnabel). Milton, like the apostle Paul, proves to have a deep command of his audience’s beliefs and uses it to show them that he is well prepared and has powerful arguments to put on the table.

Milton also employs a great deal of other biblical references, such as “every man’s daily portion of manna” (43), which we can find in *Exodus* 16:31; “the prophecy of Isaiah was to the eunuch” (54), found in *Isaiah* 39:7; “Truth is compared in scriptures to a streaming fountain” (81), taken from *Proverbs* 13:14; “when He ascended” (87), based on *Matthew* 27:53; and the last biblical expression about “divisions and subdivisions” (95), related to *Numbers* 11:29. By using all these references taken from both the Old and the New Testament, Milton shows an outstanding command of the Holy Scriptures, a timelessness

⁵ “In Athens, where books and wits were ever busier[...]” (29), “[...]above all liberties” (99).

and universal book that has been recognized for generations by believers in God, regardless of their religion and location.

Moreover, the confirmation incorporates many metaphors which enrich its content. As an example, we can consider the expression “such books are not temptations [...] but useful drugs” (56) that people take and thus *need* on a daily basis. Also, we find another Bible-inspired metaphor that describes faith as a solid rock, when, in reference to the apostle Peter regarded by Jesus as the first rock of the Church, Milton echoes *Matthew* 16:18 and implies that the “Church [was] built upon the rock of faith”.

Personification is used to good effect, the most interesting example being: “good and evil [...] grow up together” (48), as if he were talking about Adam and Eve in Paradise. This is so because Milton carries on to say that “It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world” (49). For some scholars, this passage becomes especially enlightening when regarding Milton’s point of view of the origin of sin and good and evil. The conclusion some scholars draw from this statement is that to Milton God created Eve as a symbol that evil exists, and Eve was a seductive object so that Adam knew evil⁶. However, even if one disagrees with this controversial line of interpretation, one cannot but agree with the fact that the themes around original sin, Adam and Eve, the apple and the devil in a snake form have been in people’s minds since the beginning of time; to everybody who has ever meditated on the ideas surrounding this paragraph, it must surely follow that Milton’s theme is not specifically related to any particular historical moment. In addition, a further suggestive personification is used when Milton urges parliamentarians to “see the ingenuity of *Truth* when *she* gets a free and willing hand” (57; italics added). The effect this capitalization and personification produces strengthens the feminine nature of Truth, as if it were a woman who decides on her own but with certain ingenuity.

Once again, in this longest part of his speech, Milton refers to a whole range of *ancient authors and their books*. Some of the most important references are to Cicero (29), Epicurus (30), Homer and Thales (31), “the first Latin comedians” (33), Spencer the poet (50), Moses and the Talmud (51), Aristotle (56), Plato’s “Atlantic” and Thomas Moore’s “Utopia” (61), Francis Bacon (72), and Pythagoras (90). A brief reflection after reading all those famous names is that their work and philosophy have undeniably stood the test of time as they are well-known in the 21st century, too. The second reflection that

⁶ This controversial line was developed by Professor Tadeusz Rachwał in one of his British Civilization lectures at SWPS in 2007.

comes irresistibly in this place is about the deep knowledge of ancient and contemporary history, poetry, religion, philosophy, theatre and much more that John Milton had. He covers here a very broad and varied spectrum of ideas in an extended period of time from Pythagoras in 580 BCE to Milton's times, which gives his tract a timeless effect and a universal appeal.

In addition, we encounter a *direct quotation* from Protagoras when he was accused of doubting "whether there were gods, or whether not" (29). We also see the use of a suggestive *metaphor-simile*, when he describes "the keys of the press" (37), which bring to mind "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" in *Matthew* 16:19. What is more, we see the constant *use of examples*, such as the examples of books that passed the censorship process successfully (37). Moreover, he talks of "the examples of Moses, Daniel and Paul" (42), and mentions Galileo as an example of "a prisoner to the Inquisition" (77). Could we think of a better example than Galileo, "the Father of Science" (Weidhorn 155), to strengthen the universality and timelessness of Milton's *Areopagitica* when the year 2009 was declared the International Year of Astronomy?

Likewise, Milton includes *historical events of his times* when he mentions "Padre Paolo", a man whose liberal ideas were against the "Trentine Council" (35). In line with this argumentation, Milton also describes certain *historical events of ancient times*, like the reference to a "Carthaginian Council where bishops [...] were forbid to read the book of Gentiles" (35). Also, *rhetorical questions* appear in the confirmation, like "do we not see [...] all that licensing can do? (64) or "how can a man teach with authority [...] under the correction of his [...] licenser? (71).

There is another more intriguing rhetorical device, an interesting *Latin expression*, when Milton regards bishops as "*inquisituriens*" (41); the suffix "ent" refers to those who perform the action promoted by the Inquisition. In the same context, Milton includes a new rhetorical trick when he mentions that not even "the satirical sharpness [...] of Lucilius" (33) was censored. Then, Milton makes his own *satirical references*, which are indeed quite humorous, for example when he depicts those censors who "are seen together complimenting and ducking each to other with their shaven reverences" (39), or provides the picturesque description of "two or three glutton friars" (37). In addition, Milton adds many *visual images* with the sole intention of provoking his audience, like, for example, when he mentions that those books that are under scrutiny and have not yet been censored are in the "Purgatory of an Index" (90). Also, when he indicates that in order to be really consistent with the writing purity required by the government, it should be needed to "shut one gate against corruption" (59). Or when Milton regards

England as “the mansion house of liberty” (92), which does not describe a run-down slum but a strong construction with a solid structure, just like the *building of freedom*, Milton helped erect with his ideas and many countries enjoy nowadays. Finally, there comes my favourite visual image of the confirmation, where Milton writes about “liberty, which is *the nurse* of all great wits” (98; italics added), where one cannot but imagine Liberty dressed up in pure white like a hospital nurse willing to help those in need.

However, if there is a trick of all tricks that highlights the universality and timelessness of Milton’s text, it is *the variety of arguments* he uses to prove his core theme. There are very powerful religious arguments to defend his thesis, as for example, when he refers to certain events of the past to conclude that it was no one but the Catholic Church, the creator of the Holy Inquisition, which started real licensing. In his convoluted language, Milton mentions that both, the Church and the government, were very much interested in controlling every single word of every single text before its publication when he says that “it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, *to have a vigilant eye* how books demean” (26, italics added). It does not come as a surprise that Milton indirectly alludes to Archbishop Laud and Charles I representing the Church and the government respectively, because, in those years, the line between religion and politics was too thin to properly demarcate their spheres. Besides, as Professor Fallon indicated, “Milton’s seventeenth-century contemporaries looked upon these two spheres of human concern [religion and politics] as intimately intertwined” (Durán 6). In this respect, let us remember that Laud had been King Charles’ “principal ecclesiastical adviser” (Friedell 457) before the King appointed him as the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Milton uses more purely religious arguments when he talks about the “Christian liberty which Paul so often boasts of” (103), “the golden rule of theology” (180) to find the real Truth and bring harmony to the Church. One also comes across a powerful philosophical argument when Milton stresses that God has given us the ability to decide and to choose what to do or to read. Hence, when referring to Adam, he alleges that “God gave him reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing” (62). We can, therefore, logically conclude that since God has not prescribed our reading matter, why should the governors?

However, there is nothing like commonsensical arguments to convince people. As mentioned before, Aristotle gave great importance to logic, and Milton uses it in a very ingenious way. An interesting rational argument is developed by Milton when he mentions that keeping people away from books does not mean that inhabitants will not do what they wish to. Accordingly, Milton reinforces his argument by indicating that, apart from

books, many other elements should be censored, such as people's manners, for example, or habits, or music (59). Another logical, commonsensical, argument emerges when the author explains that restraining people from doing something will only encourage them to try even harder, and he clarifies his point by giving the example of weak sects that become stronger "and with a reputation" (81) once they are persecuted. Milton may have included the latter argument after considering what Plato wrote in his "Republic"; there, the ancient philosopher mentioned that when people are educated through coercion, they go on "stealing their pleasures and running away like children from the law" (Jowett 383) in order to carry on and indulge in their preferences.

Historical arguments can also be found to highlight his point. For example, when he makes his audience's minds travel thousands of years back with the use of an image that may be considered the most powerful image of his confirmation, as he compares "the temple of the Lord", the temple of Salomon, with what we may call "a new England" (94). Here, he means that each stone of the temple symbolizes an individual, but altogether they form the society, the new society that every good government should be willing to develop and become "an eagle mewing" (97) that changes its feathers and renews its look.

Finally, the last part of *Areopagitica* or peroration⁷ is a sort of an epilogue dedicated to concluding, to summarizing the arguments, and to making clear that there is no point in censoring. Milton, loyal to his prosaic style, makes good use of his *biblical knowledge* to notice that sometimes it is not easy to differentiate between good and evil when he transmits the idea that "it is not possible for a man to sewer the wheat from the tares" (104), in clear reference to the parable of the weeds explained by Jesus in *Matthew 13:24*. Also, he mentions "a check that Moses gave to young Joshua", and another check that "our Saviour gave to young John" (108), referring to *Numbers 11:27–29* and *Luke 9:49–50* where, on both occasions, nobody was stopped from disseminating their knowledge. In addition, there is a great *image* based on Apostle Paul's letter to the *Ephesians*, where Milton talks about "the windes of doctrine" (101) and Paul writes about "every wind of teaching" (*Ephesians 4:14*) that have been travelling freely around the earth since the beginning of time. Milton also uses metaphor to describe vividly "the deep mines of knowledge" (102), and one more personification of the Truth when he declares that "she is strong, needs no policies, nor licensing to make her victorious" (102). Subsequently, as in a perfect ending, Milton diversifies his arguments by both complementing his

⁷ "What would be best advised [...]" (99) until the end of the tract.

audience saying that it is not his role to advise them “better than yourselves” (109) and, on the other hand, regards the Licensing Order as a star “fallen [...] with Lucifer” (103), as if it were a devilish creation.

As a final conclusion to this detailed study of rhetorical devices Milton used, it is apparent that the specific structure of *Areopagitica* resembles a huge puzzle whose pieces have been put in a certain order. This opinion is echoed by many 21st century scholars, including Professor Gay, who wrote about “the writer’s task of linking these aphorisms in prose [referring to *Areopagitica*] for the reader’s interpretive task of gathering up the scattered body of truth” (Gay 220). This, undoubtedly, is the secret of the durability of Milton’s tract and an apt answer to the question that has been occupying me in this work, viz. why there is so much *Areopagitica* after *Areopagitica*.

Works Cited

- Abraham, John Valpy. *The Pamphleteer*. Vol 10. Gale and Fenner. London: Paternoster Row, 1817.
- Abrams, Howard H. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 5th ed. New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company Ltd, 1986.
- Benson, Thomas W. “Landmark essays on rhetorical criticism: The Concept of Ethos and the Structure of Persuasion.” *Paul I. Rosenthal, Speech Monographs* 33 (1966), 114–126.
- Black, Joseph. *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*. Vol 1. Canada: Broadview Press, 2011.
- Blake, William. *Blake: Complete Writings with Variant Reading*. Ed. Geoffrey Keynes. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Buck, Robert. *A History of Boeotia*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1979.
- Dowling, Paul M. *Polite Wisdom: Heathen Rhetoric in Milton’s Areopagitica*. Boston: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995.
- Duran, Angelica. Ed. *A Concise Companion to Milton*. Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.
- Friedell, Egon. *A Cultural History of the Modern Age: Baroque, Rococo and Enlightenment*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009.
- Gay, David. *The Endless Kingdom: Milton’s Scriptural Society*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, Review by John Mulryan, St. Bonaventure University, 2002.

- Haller, William. *Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution, 1638–1647*, vol. I New York: Columbia University Press, 1934.
- Hill, Christopher. *World Turned Upside Down. Radical Ideas during the English Revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975.
- HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION*. International Bible Society, 1973, 1978, 1984.
- Jowett, Benjamin. *Dialogues of Plato*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Keynes, Geoffrey. *William Blake. Complete Writings with Variant Reading*. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Kinzl, Konrad. H. *A Companion to the Classical Greek World*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010.
- Milton, John. *Areopagitica, Letters on Education, Sonnets and Psalms*. London, Paris, New York and Melbourne: Cassell and Company Limited, 1905.
- . *Personal Letters to Leonard Philaras, the Athenian*, Little Masterpieces, ed. by Bliss Percy, New York, Doubleday, Page & Company, 1902.
- Moore, John. *The Prose Works of John Milton: The Reason of Church-Government Urged against Prelaty*, Vol. 2. Philadelphia, 1847.
- Parker, William Riley. *Milton's Contemporary Reputation*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1940.
- Plato. *The Republic*. Trans. Benjamin Jowett. Cosimo, New York: Digireads.com, 2008.
- Power, Edward. *Main Currents in the History of Education*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1970.
- Schnabel, Eckhard, J. *Early Christian Mission: Paul & the Early Church*. Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 2004.