

JOHN MILTON AS A PROTESTANT AUTHORITY IN ALICE MILLIGAN'S
THE DAUGHTER OF DONAGH

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ABSTRACT: Alice Milligan is known for the role she had in revitalizing theatre during the Irish Cultural Revival. Breaking with the hegemony of English forms in Irish drama, she employed her plays as a means of disseminating historical knowledge. Especially in the play *The Daughter of Donagh*, she dramatizes a subject that is essential to understand the religious divide of the Irish society at the turn of the nineteenth century: the establishment of the Cromwellian plantations during the English Revolution. Among her influences, the work of John Milton stands out. Thus, this paper intends to explore the intertextual relations which the play establishes with Milton's work, showing that such a dialogue offers elements for criticism of the biblical trope of the unfaithful wife.

Keywords: Irish Theatre. John Milton. Alice Milligan.

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JOHN MILTON COMO AUTORIDADE PROTESTANTE EM *THE DAUGHTER OF DONAGH* DE ALICE MILLIGAN

RESUMO: Alice Milligan é conhecida pelo papel que desempenhou na revitalização do teatro durante o Irish Cultural Revival. Rompendo com a hegemonia das formas inglesas no drama irlandês, ela buscou usar suas peças como um meio de difundir conhecimento histórico. Em especial na peça *The Daughter of Donagh*, a autora dramatiza um tema essencial para compreender a divisão religiosa da sociedade irlandesa na virada do século XIX: o estabelecimento das chamadas “plantações de Cromwell” durante a Revolução Inglesa. Entre suas influências, a obra de John Milton se sobressai. Este artigo, portanto, busca explorar as relações intertextuais que a peça estabelece com a obra de Milton, mostrando que tal diálogo oferece elementos para a crítica da narrativa bíblica da esposa desleal.

Palavras-chave: Teatro irlandês. John Milton. Alice Milligan.

The solutions at which the playwright Alice Milligan arrived in her attempts to reconcile religious identity with nationalism have made her life a unique chapter in the history of the Irish Cultural Revival. Unlike other revolutionaries who converted to Catholicism in defiance of what they saw as the complicity between Irish Protestants and the colonial powers, Milligan resisted the very logic established in Ireland since the seventeenth century which tended to see Catholics as more entitled to consider themselves as “natives” than Protestants. As Catherine Morris (2013, p. 40) tells us, “Milligan effectively opposed a dualistic regime of national identity.” For her, “culture was not a static concept rooted in colonial stereotypes” but something “that could be shaped by new generations within and outside Ireland regardless of their religious and class affiliations.” Thus, in a sense, an essential aspect of Milligan’s contribution to the project of nation building at the turn of the nineteenth century was her deep-seated hope that Protestantism and engagement in the nationalist cause might not be mutually exclusive.

Her troubling of the crystallization of such religious antagonisms did not hinder her, however, of taking an extremely critical stance towards the harshness with which the colonization of Ireland was carried out. Indeed, she

sensed that paramount to understand the future of Ireland was returning to an evaluation of its colonial past: “as the Protestant ascendancy started its rapid decline in Ireland, women writers such as Emily Lawless, Mary Masks and Lily MacManus began to contemplate how the story would end by looking back into history for its beginnings” (MORRIS, 2013, p. 118). So it was, that especially after her period at King’s College in London, Milligan developed an enduring interest in the history of Irish colonization, which culminated in her unpublished novel, *The Cromwellians*, a prose piece written in seventeenth-century English of which only a few pages have been preserved. Although the prose work unfortunately did not survive, Milligan nonetheless reworked the material and the research she had made for her novel in the composition of the play *The Daughter of Donagh* (1900), significantly subtitled “A Cromwellian Drama in Four Acts”. This melodrama, whose blending of history with romanticized nationalism is reminiscent of Walter Scott, revolves around the character of Onora Cavanaugh, the disinherited daughter of a Catholic landowner who loses his estate to a British soldier after the Cromwellian land confiscation (1652). In an act of despair, she plans to take revenge on her father’s death by marrying the man who had received his land, trusting that, as a union between Protestants and Catholics was considered illegal, the revelation of Gabriel Fairfax’s transgression would bring his fall.

Notably, one of the voices that constantly recurs in the play is that of the seventeenth-century poet John Milton, who, by the end of the nineteenth century, was well established as one of the most authoritative Protestant voices. When Fairfax’s future bride, Unity Kincaid, pays him a visit, she comments on the book she finds him reading: “John Milton on Divorce! Very strange reading for a would-be husband” (MORRIS, 2013, p. 50). Milton’s divorce tracts are mentioned twice in the play, and, on another occasion, there is a reference to his mask play *Comus*. In fact, in a letter to the United Irishman, Milligan says that Milton was one of her influences as she was writing her unpublished novel: “while I was engaged in writing it I read nothing but Elizabethan drama, Milton’s prose works and other books of that sort” (Citado em MORRIS, 2013, p. 120). Moreover, beyond the explicit references to the poet, the relationship between Gabriel and Onora clearly parallels that between Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* in ways that are worth exploring. The narrative voice of the epic poem, in one of its most orthodox or normative moments, says that Adam fell “not against his better judgement but fondly overcome with female *charm*” (HUGHES, 2003, p. 401), and this comment returns with a vengeance in Milligan’s play, as Onora literally uses seduction as a strategic tool. In this light, I intend to explore the passages in *The Daughter of Donagh* in which the text establishes intertextual relations

with Milton, especially as regards the trope of the wife whose “betrayal” leads to her husband’s fall. As I intend to show, we discover Milligan engaging the poet’s text in a way that suggests that she engages in a specific reading or subversion of it.

ALICE MILLIGAN AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

As noted by Catherine Morris, the years Milligan devoted to study the colonial roots of the religious divide in Ireland were formative of her political views and commitment to nationalism. Coming from a middle-class background, Milligan received good education at Methodist College, Belfast and King’s College, London, where she was a distinguished and brilliant student. The political discourses to which she was exposed as she grew up can be seen especially in her early works (such as *Glimpses of Erin* and *A Royal Democrat*), in which the influence of her father’s moderate unionist support for Home Rule is still discernible. Later, as she drew closer to nationalism and saw the demise of the Irish Parliamentary Party, she would increasingly consider such an option impracticable. As was the case with a whole generation of Protestants in the North, the political and social changes of the second half of the nineteenth century made Milligan’s sensibility grapple with the delicate issue of the place Protestants should occupy in the emergent nationalist politics.

Two political events were essential to the reconfiguration of the role of Protestants within Irish society: the first was the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland by Gladstone in 1869, as the separation between church and estate made the clergy lose many of its privileges. The second was a series of measures introduced by the government from the 1870s through the 1890s, known as “Irish Land Acts,” that allowed peasant tenants to buy their own land, leading to the gradual expropriation of the estates possessed by the élites since the seventeenth century. As Milligan herself mentioned in a newspaper, during the 1880s there was a widespread perception that “the land wars” were the just outcome for the misappropriation of land during the Cromwellian plantations, as now the “natives” were receiving their land back. Such a context produced a general sense of nostalgia within the members of the Protestant Ascendancy. Not only Milligan but several women writers resorted to the seventeenth century in order to understand the present, giving rise to the so-called “Big House fiction.” Roy Foster perhaps best summarizes the general atmosphere when he says that “by then [1870s], the folk-memory of banishment from a lost Eden was part of the Irish Ascendancy mind:

vanished demesnes [properties] loomed larger and larger in the mythology” (FOSTER, 1998, p. 3).

Milligan’s position, nonetheless, cannot be easily pinned down. For one thing, she inhabited the margins of the ascendancy: “the prizes of the Ascendancy – political power, wealth, social status – were never really within reach of the Milligan family. Like her contemporary, William Butler Yeats, Milligan was the product of a middle-class upbringing” (MORRIS, 2012, p. 124). Although she initially shared her father’s moderate politics, the more her sympathies bent towards nationalism, the more she became critical of the liberal Unionist discourse and its conciliatory solutions. This, however, does not mean, as we have seen, that she completely refused her past. Instead, her immersion in the history of the seventeenth century settlements was, among other things, an attempt to negotiate her credentials as a nationalist in face of the Irish Cultural Revival. Milligan goes back to the origins of the scission between Catholics and Protestants to understand why political identities are so intertwined with politics in Ireland and also to show the limitations of such a simplistic and naïve understanding:

It is from this idea of an exact datable moment of simultaneous dispossession and occupation, that terms such as “ancestral farm” and ideas about how “the natives would get back their own” derives. But at the distance of 250 years, “ancestral” ownership and claims of one community being more “native” to Ireland than another are extremely complex. (MORRIS, 2012, p. 117)

Although she does not mitigate the cruelty with which colonization happened in her depiction of it in *The Daughter of Donagh*, her willingness to imagine a cultural unification in which the two main religious sects can coexist makes her also emphasize elsewhere the role played by Protestants in contributing to the freedom of Ireland, especially the well-known cases of the United Irishmen in the 1789 rebellion and Charles Stewart Parnell.

Milligan hence becomes a unique case in the Irish Cultural Revival. She defies the stability of the categories by which one tries to understand the different positions prone to be assumed in the political field during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Ireland. At the same time that, for instance, she became estranged from her familial background to the point of “affect[ing] to believe that she learnt far less from her Methodist teachers than from conversations with Irish-speaking country people in rural Ulster” (FOSTER, 2014, p. 32), she nonetheless stressed the importance of winning the people from north to the nationalist cause. As Morris tells us, the watershed in her life was her sudden turning into a “Parnellite” while in a tram

in Dublin, which was the culmination of a process which started with her absorption in Irish early modern history. From that point onward, she felt increasingly alienated within the household of her family. In her diary, for instance, she chronicles that in the evening of Parnell's death she wished to be "among the people who feel as I feel" (MORRIS, 2012, p. 135). During this period, she describes her realization that Belfast was "the enemy's camp"; yet "Milligan chose not to move to Dublin to participate in the emerging revival but instead nurtured the cultural revival from within the more difficult territory of the 'enemy's camp'" (MORRIS, 2012, p. 136). Her heroine in *The Daughter of Donagh* followed the same course of action.

"HAVE I CUNNING? HAVE I BEAUTY?": ONORA AS THE REBELLING WIFE IN *THE DAUGHTER OF DONAGH*

In her period at King's College London, Milligan came across important historians such as S. R. Gardiner, J. P. Prendergast and John T. Gilbert, who, as we have seen, were a major influence in the writing of her first novel. Through their work she became acquainted with details of the stormy decades of 1640s and 1650s. As she learned, the brief experience of republicanism in Britain dramatically changed the role of land and religion in Ireland. Charles I's project of giving lands to English settlers culminated in the outbreak of violence in 1641, as the people of Ulster rose against and massacred the English planters: "Planters' homes were attacked, their goods taken, and the planters themselves were killed or driven off the land [...] by the end of the 1641 rebellion it was estimated that approximately 4000 planters had been killed" (CRONIN; O'COLLAGHAN, 2015, p. 65). In the years leading up to Charles's execution, groups with diverging political and religious interests proliferated, creating a turmoil which was partially quelled with the Cromwellian conquest in 1649. In the summer of that year, the head of the Parliament arrived in Ireland with a 3000 cavalry and wrote one of the most brutal chapters of Irish history with the destruction of the city of Drogheda: "over a thousand of the inhabitants and those who sought refuge lay dead" (CRONIN; O'COLLAGHAN, 2015, p. 66). The battle of Drogheda made Cromwell an enduring enemy of Ireland for centuries, which can be observed in Milligan's negative depiction of him in *Glimpses of Erin*: "In Drogheda, 3000 died by fire and sword; a few survivors were sent to the Barbadoes. The account of this affair is nowhere more horribly told than in Oliver's letters, where calmly and prosaically he sets down his brutalities as if they were great deeds" (MILLIGAN, 1889, p. 169).

The Daughter of Donagh focuses especially on “the day of grace,” May 1st 1654, the last day offered the Irish to leave their lands voluntarily in a mass migration to Connacht. It is in this context of the moment of so-called “colonial sin” that Milligan sets her novel and play, an expression which assumes interesting connotations in our context, given Milton’s own interest on that other important original sin. Indeed, as it is going to be shown, a contrast between a “primordial paradise” and an alienation from it is essential to the imagery that informs Milligan’s play. But before the analysis, it is important to explore further why Milton emerges as one of the central figures associated with the Cromwellian period, so as to understand better why Milligan refers to him as a means of characterizing the culture in which Gabriel Fairfax (called Hosea Greatrex in the novel) is immersed and which he brings to Ireland.

In a sense, to make Gabriel revere Milton as a full-fledged authority in 1654 is an anachronism, though it reflects the nineteenth century context of the author. By the end of the nineteenth century, Milton certainly was held as the quintessential Protestant poet of the English tradition, and in a sense had become the “bogey” which Virginia Woolf speaks of.¹ Yet, if he caused anxiety due to his “authority”, the picture was quite another in the seventeenth century. Milton belonged to the radical, leftist wing in the Puritan revolution (BLOOM, 2004, p. 2). A polemic pamphleteer, he wrote at various occasions on taboo topics such as the right of the people to behead their king and their right to divorce. His stringent commitment to republicanism would become a matter of discomfort in the centuries to come in a country which had restored monarchic rule. Thus, Milton represented the most iconoclast tendencies of Protestantism, and that he came to stand for the broad understanding of the Puritan as repressive and self-righteous is a historical irony.

As already mentioned, Milligan says that Milton’s prose was one of the sources she read to become acquainted with seventeenth-century English. Given that, in the drama, there are explicit references to the divorce tracts, we can surmise that she was specifically reading Milton on divorce during that period. The so-called divorce tracts consist in four treatises that Milton wrote between 1643 and 1645, in which he forcefully defended a man’s right to divorce on the grounds of intellectual incompatibility. In some senses this was a novel position: previous defenses of divorce tended to focus on adultery (the “carnal” aspect), while Milton was setting a precedent by defending the superiority of the “spiritual” character of the “sweet society” that he considered marriage to be. As he says in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*: “this therefore shall be the task and period of this discourse to prove, first, that other reasons of divorce besides adultery were by the law of Moses, and are yet to be allowed by the Christian magistrate as a piece of justice, and that the

words of Christ are not hereby contraried” (HUGHES, 2003, p. 704). Drawing on the authority of Gn 2:18 (“I will make a help meet for him”), he defended that “in God’s intention a meet and happy conversation² is the chiefest and noblest end of marriage” (HUGHES, 2003, p. 707).

In *The Daughter of Donagh*, as already mentioned, Gabriel is found reading one of the divorce tracts: “John Milton on Divorce!” exclaims Unity Kincaid, “very strange reading for a would-be husband” (MILLIGAN, 2012, p. 50). And in the scene that precedes this comment, Milligan establishes other explicit intertextual relations with Milton’s work, which are worth analysing. In Act III, scene I, the audience is given a glimpse of the life of the Puritan household, and special emphasis is given to the hierarchical nature of the relations between the English and the natives. The moment Gabriel enters the scene, nonetheless, we are told that “he walks with an abstract air into the middle of the room” (MILLIGAN, 2012, p. 44). He immediately sends his Puritan servant on an errand, and confides to Teig, an Irishman, that he has been dazzled by a woman (a “fairy”) whom he has seen in the woods, and whom he knows to be of Irish descent. His language triggers off many references to Milton:

The lady in *Comus* that John Milton writes of. The innocent lady wandering the wood. Yes, that is what was hovering in my mind as I looked at her. The memory of her as she appeared at first is forever before me like a picture. She came through the branches, gliding softly, looking warily around. Parting the thorns with those white, shapely hands. Then, thinking herself alone, I being closely hidden, she sang softly, sang then more clearly, like a blackbird in the thicket. (MILLIGAN, 2012, p. 47)

The reference here is to Milton’s mask play *Comus* (1634), an allegorical rendition of the classic subject of the “ordeal of virtue.” In a pastoral setting, the drama describes the temptations a young woman called “the Lady” has to resist as she is abducted by the demon spirit Comus, after being left alone by her brothers. The image of the innocent, immature person (a virgin) wandering alone in a threatening wood is, of course, a traditional literary *topos* that has marked the Western tradition from Dante to Hardy’s *Tess*. As Northrop Frye (1976, p. 81) tells us: “the human sacrifice, usually of a virginal female, is astonishingly persistent as the crucial episode of romance” and “the theme of a heroine exposed to a sacrificial situation by a foolish or inattentive father (in our case, brothers) has run all through fiction.” In Milligan’s play the evocation of the Lady in *Comus* at this point thus becomes extremely apposite, as in a sense Onora Cavanagh herself is the woman who has been bereft of a male

protector (her father) and sacrifices herself by marrying the enemy, even though she gives a twist to the traditional narrative by marrying as a means of revenge.

The intertextuality continues as the text describes this first encounter between Gabriel and Onora in terms reminiscent of the opening scene of the mask, in which Comus secretly watches the Lady in search for her brothers. It is noteworthy that both women are singing when they are spotted by their observers, and both are similarly compared to birds. For instance, the attendant spirit who has seen Comus observing the Lady reports to the brothers: “Solemn-breathing sounds / Rose like a stream of rich distilled Perfume [...] but O ere long / Too well did I perceive it was the voice / Of my most honour’d Lady, your dear sister ... / ‘O poor hapless Nightingale’, thought I / How sweet thou sing’st, how near the deadly snare” (HUGHES, 2003, p. 103). Furthermore, the innocent lady wandering the wood and being observed by an enemy brings immediately to mind the most important scene of *Paradise Lost*, that in which Satan spies Eve and eventually lures her to transgress God’s command. In this scene, as it can be seen from the following quote, the poet clearly reworks some ideas from *Comus*: “Eve separate he [Satan] spies / Veil’d in a cloud of Fragrance, where she stood, / Half spied, so thick the Roses bushing round / About her glowed ... From her best prop so far / and storm so nigh” (HUGHES, 2003, p. 388). Both scenes create a sense of anxiety as the women, being away from their protection (“the best prop”), approach danger (“the deadly snare”, the “storm so nigh”). Milligan, in a similar vein, constructs a voyeuristic scene in which the Puritan enemy observes whom he deems an innocent lady, though in fact she is employing her power of attraction to ensnare him. As Onora herself says earlier in the text: “That could be my way of vengeance. Have I courage for it? Have I cunning? Have I beauty? I have been praised for my beauty” (MILLIGAN, 2012, p. 37). Thus, when setting these scenes side by side, *The Daughter of Donagh* establishes a relation with Milton’s text, in its linking Gabriel to Comus, that suggests that we should read the Puritan settler as the true danger, at the same time that it ironizes the image of the woman as innocent and fragile.

Yet, the fact that Gabriel takes himself to be Adam adds complexity to this already dense scene. In words which bear a faint resemblance to the latter’s description of his first encounter with Eve, he says: “the memory of her as she appeared at first is forever before me like a picture” (MILLIGAN, 2012, p. 47). And later he adds: “What has come over me? In these past few days, ever since I saw the lady in the wood, this savage realm of Ireland appears to me like the Garden of Paradise. A month ago, no more, I bewailed my lot as an exile in the wilderness – Eden was never rightly paradise until woman was

created” (MILLIGAN, 2012, p. 47). The idea that paradise was not completely perfect until the creation of woman is only implied in Genesis, and was left to be emphasized by the more female friendly rabbis and interpreters. However, this is a feeling to which Milton’s Adam eloquently gives voice in his dialogue with the angel Raphael in book VIII, to the point that the angel chastises him for his devotion to his wife. We can see Adam’s sense of completion after the creation of Eve in these words: “Under his [God’s] forming hands a Creature grew / Manlike, but different sex, so lovely fair / That what seem’d fair in all the World, seem’d now / Mean, or in her summ’d up, in her contain’d / And in her looks” (HUGHES, 2003, p. 373). Likewise, later, in a much darker context he will say in an address to Eve: “O fairest of all creation, last and best.” In *Paradise Lost* Eve’s body becomes a synecdoche for Eden, so that the loss of paradise in a sense implies a certain estrangement from Eve. The moment of the fall, which not insignificantly means Adam’s expulsion to a barren world, is described in terms which also imply a certain breaking apart of the union between the first couple: their symbolic *divorce* (even though later they reconcile). Without paradise, Adam finds himself exiled in the wilderness, which is precisely the way Gabriel expresses his relation to Ireland before his falling in love with Onora and after he discovers her revenge plan.

The most important way in which *The Daughter of Donagh* dialogues with Milton, however, is perhaps in its reworking of the Biblical motif of the wife whose unfaithfulness causes her husband’s fall. Especially after Christianity became a hegemonic religion, the fact that our mortal condition was assigned to the original sin of Eve stigmatized women as unreliable and other such misogynist stereotypes. As I mentioned, for instance, the archangel Raphael warns Adam not to let himself be overruled by his wife, and indeed one tradition of interpretations of the Genesis narrative had that Adam’s fall was caused by his putting his love for Eve above his respect for God. In such a reading Eve becomes a “sorceress” (not unlike Circe) who lures Adam into his fall with her appearance. (Note that in the passage quoted above Adam concludes saying “and in her looks”). Thus, in one of the most mean-spirited comments of the poem, we are told that Adam was not so much “deceived” as “fondly overcome with Female charm” (HUGHES, 2003, p. 401), in which the word “charm” means both “attraction” and “a magic spell.”

Milligan appropriates this literary *topos* and gives a feminist shape to it by making Onora use her power of attraction as a strategy for her revenge plan. Gabriel himself, as he attempts to justify what had befallen him, alludes to this recurrent Biblical motif (or “type”) and compares Onora to Dalilah and Bathsheeba: “I have been ruined by a weakness common to greater men. Samson and David were tempted, as I have been, and *fell* as I did” (MILLIGAN,

2012, p. 65). Indeed, his reaction during the climactic scene is worth analysing as it interestingly explores the same impasses that are posed to Adam and Eve. For example, once Adam has discovered his wife's trespass, he faces the difficult decision of whether standing by her side or abandoning her. The same question is posed to Gabriel in Milligan's play; however, his reaction becomes almost a parody (given the text's bias) of Adam's much more nuanced reaction. In Milton's poem, Adam's responses go from a chivalric declaration of his love: "with thee / Certain my resolution is to Die: / How can I live without thee, how forgo / Thy sweet Converse and Love so dearly join'd / To live again in these wild Woods forlorn?" (HUGHES, 2003, p. 399), to his famous misogynist outburst many speeches later: "out of my sight, thou Serpent, that name best / Befits thee" (HUGHES, 2003, p. 427), to finally a reconciliation.

In the play, the reactions are reversed. Gabriel's first impulse as he faces the condemnation of his fellowmen is to forsake his wife, showing more zeal for his land: "I have no defence, except to ask your mercy. If divorce is possible between us – John Milton, as you know, has urged in favour of it – I will submit", to which Onora comments: "if he had stood by me, I would have pitied him a little, in parting from him" (MILLIGAN, 2013 p. 63). Only later, when he is already conformed, Gabriel says "I go as Adam went with sinning Eve, out into the wilderness", while we are told that the "condemned pair [...] stand hand in hand" (MILLIGAN, 2013, p. 65), a possible reference to the concluding lines of the poem: "hand in hand through Eden they took their solitary way" (that is, into the wilderness).

The fact that Gabriel tries to resort to divorce is important. First, it shows that Milligan uses her acquaintance with the divorce tracts to enhance the dramatic effect, for, if Gabriel were allowed to divorce, as the Protestant author defended, then Onora's plan would be thwarted. (Of course, whereas Milton defended divorce for a just cause, Gabriel tries to argue for it due to a purely materialistic reason). But besides that, although Milligan might not have known it, actually one of the issues that medieval commentators of Genesis often raised was whether Adam should have divorced his wife. Milton, albeit tacitly, also cannot help giving a hint of such a possibility, as some critics point out. For example, when we are told that Adam "submit[ted] to what seemed remediless", Dennis Burden suggests that the possible "remedy" would have been divorce, although of course the great majority applauds his standing by Eve's side (LEONARD, 2003, p. 415).

In short, we can say that Milligan's immersion in Milton's prose and poetry has left important marks on the development of her play and the intertextual relations it establishes in order to create meaning. As I hope to have shown, especially the way she describes the relationship between Onora

and Gabriel and their fall is strongly reminiscent of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost*, and understanding how the text reworks the traditional Biblical motif of the husband who is betrayed by his wife becomes an essential and perhaps one of the most subversive aspects of *The Daughter of Donagh*.

CONCLUSION

In their seminal work of feminist criticism, *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar dedicate an important section to analyse the relation between nineteenth century women writer and “the shadow” of Milton. As they argue, as the representative of the male, mainstream tradition in English literature, he was an agent of anxiety to women authors who felt they had to fend him off in order to clear a space for their writings. Fortunately, the extent to which this was the fruit of a normative and reducing reading of the poet’s *oeuvre* has increasingly been shown in the second half of the twentieth century, when important work published by writers Peter Herman calls “guerrilla Miltonists” has de-sacralized the image of the poet as the bastion of tradition.

Milligan’s reception of Milton is nonetheless characteristically similar to that of other nineteenth-century women writers, paying attention to the reiteration of female subjection to men in their work. What escapes her is that, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton was trying to reconcile traditional accounts of the story of the fall with his unorthodox, Modern-bent views, so that an ambivalent text emerges. If on the one hand his epic poem gives vent to the most misogynist facets of the Biblical myth, on the other, it is extremely aware of the fact that Eve’s fall is a necessary consequence of the hierarchical structure of Eden. An incipient Modern consciousness of each individual’s freedom constantly struggles with a traditional hierarchical view of the universe and these two contrasting tendencies do not completely find a resolution in the poem. Thus, although some uses of Milton, especially in the nineteenth century, emphasized the male chauvinist facet, so that Milligan has Gabriel say, “The teaching of John Milton has stood me in good stead. The woman must be subject to her husband” (MILLIGAN, 2013, p. 68), some critics (such as Peter Herman and John Rogers) would challenge the homogeneity or coherence of this “teaching” and would counterpose the more liberal side to Milton.

I would then like to conclude pointing out that rather than seeing *Paradise Lost* as the *locus classicus* of an attempt to justify female subjection, the text itself anticipates a female criticism of the normative account of the fall

of men, which is akin to what Milligan pursues. In *The Daughter of Donagh*, the playwright tells us the narrative of the original sin from the point of view of the rebelling woman, who spoils the male's paradise which is bought at cost of subjecting the natives and dominating the land (historically understood as "feminine"). We can say that in a sense she uses the unstable marriage between Onora and Gabriel as an allegory for the forced marriage between England and Ireland. And in the same way that in Milton's poem Eve's subjection nurtures unconsciously in her a desire of being "sometime superior, for inferior who is free?" (HUGHES, 2003, p; 397), so, by the same token, *The Daughter of Donagh* tells us that, confined to such a forced marriage, the wife is always secretly planning to rebel.

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