

Jameela Lares:

Milton and the Preaching Arts

Cambridge, UK: James Clarke & Co., 2001

xvi + 368 pages; bibliography; indices

ISBN: 0-227-67964-4

Price: £40.00 (\$80.00)

Jameela Lares's book *Milton and the Preaching Arts* presents its reader with two main themes that can be seen as separate topics but that are, however, closely connected and interrelated: a solid account of the state and status of the "preaching arts" in Renaissance England (and Europe), on the one hand, and a profound analysis of Milton's poetry, on the other. Lares shows how the discourse of one (preaching) impinges on the other (poetry), and, more importantly, what implications this has for our reading of the latter.

In the post-Reformation era in England (and in all of Europe), one of the most intriguing discourses is surely that of preaching. Especially the more Puritan elements of the Reformation emphasised the power and purpose of the scriptural Word, and the redistribution of this Word was seen as one of the most important functions of the new church. Another highly interesting discourse in the late Renaissance period is that of (religious) poetry, the verse that seeks to make sense of the new forms of doctrine in a new world. Preaching, on the one hand, gives doctrinal directives within a set format whereas poetry, on the other, has always been seen as a more liberal form of didactic and even polemic discourse. Many writers (preacher-poets) developed both genres to their advantage. (Lares mentions e.g. John Donne and George Herbert in this context.)

In her book, Jameela Lares shows how John Milton, who, although not a preacher-poet by the strictest definition of the term, links the discourses of poetry and preaching through the use of a theoretical (rhetorical) and theological framework. Lares demonstrates how Milton, an (almost-)preacher-turned-poet, makes use of his ministerial training in his poetry, and how this transforms his poetry into preaching (and thus maybe almost into a sacrament). That Milton *de facto* abandoned his ministerial career does not, Lares assures us, mean that he would have abandoned his "preacherly ways of thinking and expression" (p. 10). Lares sets out to "demonstrate how Milton's age understood the role of the preacher" as well as to "demonstrate the degree to which Milton does [...] appropriate into his own works the forms and procedures that shaped sermons" (p. 2). Lares accomplishes both aims with success.

* * *

The book opens with a redefinition of preaching as a concept applicable to a text regardless of form – and even a (re)definition of poetry within the scope of the preaching art. This demolishing of the restrictions of genre also implies the understanding of *poesis* and *rhetorica* as equal forms of *artes praedicandi* – and this surely proposes interesting implications for the history of rhetoric. Whereas questions about the limitations and definitions of genre(s) dominate many scholarly studies, Lares chooses to challenge this very mode of thought by

presenting Milton (the poet) primarily as a man of preaching. Moreover, in the Introduction, Lares also primarily places Milton within the context of Renaissance rhetoric (and only secondarily of Renaissance theology), which she defines as “the systematic practice of effective verbal communication, as understood by the classical period and recovered, or at any rate reinterpreted, by the Renaissance” (p. 3).

In Chapter One (“Milton and ‘the Sacred Office of Speaking’”), Lares describes the political and theological circumstances of the time of Milton’s studies and choice of career. Furthermore, in great detail, Lares also describes Milton’s own ministerial training. This minute description is highly relevant in that it ultimately explains Milton’s process of career-choice. Lares sets Milton’s “expanded conception of the ministry”, i.e. that “writing [can] be a form of preaching” (p. 29), as a basis for her analysis of Milton as a ‘preacher’ in his poetical work. Furthermore, in this chapter Lares gives a very close analysis of Milton’s standpoint vis-à-vis placing poetry within the (core) context of preaching.

Here the emphasis is on preaching (and hearing) as main means to salvation. Lares offers a detailed presentation of the debates on the issue, giving close references to the writings of the time. She also shows how Milton, in this context, considers writing in general – and his poetry in particular – an “extraordinary ministry”, i.e. of “foundational apostles and prophets who had heard directly from God”, and a tool for “further reformation” in the church (pp. 35–37).

Lares states that, in Milton’s view, poetic gifts are granted to man by God in order to turn man to virtue (pp. 39–41), and she presents the five “poetic activities” that Milton identifies for the use of these gifts. These activities form a framework for rhetorical “action”, founded in Ciceronian as well as Pauline argumentation. From the rhetorical point of view, Milton’s *ars praedicandi* is a specifically Christian form of the art (as opposed to e.g. Sidney’s perspective).

In Chapter Two (“Milton in the Context of Reformation *Artes Praedicandi*”), Lares discusses in detail the faith/practice dichotomy distinctive of the English Reformation. First, she gives a very comprehensive account of the *sola fide* principle as it arises in the Reformation. Lares shows how, and why, the English church was first influenced by Lutheranism, and how, on account of this, it retained clear traces of Lutheran doctrine even as English Protestantism later turned increasingly towards Calvinism. As a consequence, we can see why the English church ended up “reflecting Lutheran conservatism instead of Calvinist reform” (p. 55).

In the second part of this chapter Lares gives a detailed account of the vast influence of the Flemish Lutheran scholar Andreas Gerardus Hyperius (1511–64) on the development of Protestant preaching in England. Other writers are also presented, and also other preaching manuals, but the emphasis is systematically on presenting ideas in relation to Hyperius. Later Milton is brought into the equation through his Cambridge tutor William Chappell.

In Chapter Three, entitled “The Poet as Polemicist”, Lares concentrates on the controversies within the preaching realm of the late Renaissance period. Again, the main emphasis is (perhaps rightly, but one is left to wonder about other possibilities) on the thoughts of Hyperius. Then Lares moves on to Milton’s own tracts from 1641–42. She points out that, in the 1640s, Milton’s “style” as “an indicator of moral rectitude” is introduced as a “defence of Presbyterianism”; later, Lares claims, Milton “will bring this conviction to his poetry” (p. 109). Milton’s voice is presented in the context of the thoughts of Joseph Hall (and some other writers), which are also amply documented. From the point of view of the history of rhetoric this is a general presentation, but it is also clear enough on Milton’s own ideas to form an introduction to the discussion on his poetry in the following chapter.

In Chapter Four, “*Paradise Lost* and the Sermon Types”, Lares connects the lines of *artes praedicandi* and poetry to present Milton’s poem (and especially its two final books) as forms of corrective and consolatory sermons. The angels are the preachers, and Lares especially points to the angelic discourses of books 5–8 and 11–12 (pp. 151ff.). This angelic discourse shows the elements of *docere*, *delectare* and *movere*, and it includes *exempla* as well as numerous other rhetorical devices. Lares convincingly argues that it makes more sense to view the angels as preachers as opposed to teachers: the text of the poem (thus: the sermon) is closely based on a verse from the Bible (Genesis 3:15), and the preacher “moves Adam’s will and rectifies his emotions” (p. 168).

The fifth and final chapter of the book, “Using the Word and Defending the Word in *Paradise Regained*”, concentrates on views on style and scriptural eloquence, especially in the context of Milton’s poem. Here the analysis is slightly more strictly textual – and to an extent explicitly theological – rather than specifically rhetorical. Lares includes references from a more general point of view, and the discussion also gets more abstract by the end. However, somehow the concept of the “ministerial hero” (p. 214) leaves the reader hungry for a more extensive conclusion to a very comprehensive account of the concept(s) of *artes praedicandi* in the late Renaissance period.

* * *

Lares states as her proposed audience for this book readers interested in the history of rhetoric and English church history as well as more generally specialists in Milton studies or topics in religion or rhetoric (pp. 2–3). This broader potential readership, she claims, is one of the reasons for her detailed presentation in several fields. Her implied concern that this may seem wearisome to some readers is unwarranted.

More practically oriented Miltonists may, of course, find the emphasis of the book heavy on background and on the theological framework, especially as Lares reaches the point of actually discussing Milton’s poetry (and more specially, *Paradise Lost*) as late as Chapter Four (pp. 141ff.) (with the exception of sonnet 7, which is discussed briefly in Chapter One). However, from the point of view of the history of rhetoric, the long introduction into the theme of the concepts of rhetoric (as applied to Milton’s view on theology) and of reading poetry as sermons gives a welcome addition to the (more literary) analysis of the texts. Especially the detailed introductions to the works of Hyperius and Hall are enlightening from a more general textual/rhetorical point of view. Furthermore, Lares gives an exhaustive apparatus of notes, which provides the reader with further information as well as a large number of interesting references to pick up.

The book is written with an apparent fascination with, and closeness to, the topic, and this results in a highly enthralling and reader-friendly text. Lares takes the reader on an exploration into the framework of the mind of the preaching poet, and even in the midst of the richness and depth of historical, rhetorical, and theological detail, she achieves a smooth and confident presentation. As a less successful technical point, it could perhaps be mentioned that especially the first chapter does include some unnecessary repetition of detail – a phenomenon, which persists (although somewhat decreases) throughout the text. (We are, for example informed at least four times that William Chappell was Milton’s first tutor in Cambridge: pp. 12, 80, 86, and 147.)

As a contribution to studies in the history of rhetoric, Lares provides a detailed analysis of sermon manuals as well as some Bible commentaries and works of religious controversy concerning both church government and scriptural style. For those interested in the history of rhetoric and especially in its general relevance, this book, in addition to the abundance of detail, gives a hands-on application of the theory as well as an inspired and novel reading of a well-known text.

Maria Salenius
Department of English
P.O. Box 24 (Unioninkatu 40 B)
FIN-00014 University of Helsinki
Finland
e-mail: maria.salenius@helsinki.fi

Maria Salenius is Lecturer in British Literature at the University of Helsinki. Current research interests include John Donne's poetry and religious prose, the Reformation, Renaissance rhetoric, and aspects of world-view and exploration in Early Modern England.