Paradise Lost and the Rise of the Novel

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INTRODUCTION

As Ian Johnston aptly puts it, great epics usually depict the end of an era, a dying world view and the origination of a new intellectual and social climate, ready to take over the vacant place of the dominant ideology (1988, n.p.). In this work, *Paradise Lost* will be presented as a perfect illustration and a practical example of the transition between two eras, the revolutionary changes in the way of thinking and "world philosophy" as well as the forces behind those changes. Milton's great epic will be taken as the apex of the epic tradition and as the missing link between the dying epic tradition and the new, novelistic genre, which only proved capable of expressing the spirit and the values of the modern time. In Ian Watt's seminal work *The Rise of the Novel*, the interrelations among the factors he lists as crucial for the origination of the novel and Milton's *Paradise Lost* become apparent, although Watt does not discuss *Paradise Lost* at all. Almost all the issues Watt mentions in his book[1] (the ambiguous nature of the main character, radical individualism, personal morality, changeability of character, the contingent nature of the novel, the transvaluation of values, etc.) are present in Milton's epic and this logic will be the foundation of the research which should prove that *Paradise Lost* represents a kind of bridge between the era which finds its best expression in the epic genre and modernity which is predominantly expressed through the medium of the novel. After Milton, the epic genre, despite numerous attempts, has unsuccessfully tried to encapsulate the modern reality and repeatedly failed because modernity is built on the notions of constant change, relativization of values and the ambivalence of the human psyche, all of which are completely unimaginable for the epic genre.

Watt lists almost all the major factors contributing to the rise of the novel and its ascension to primacy in the literary world. However, one aspect of that odyssey is missing and that is the role of the epic, and above all the role of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in the race for supremacy in the literary world. Namely, no external causes and historico-political changes

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[1] Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* contains far too many notions about the characteristics of early modern novels rendering it impossible to provide exact references here. The individual proofs will be duly referenced in the main body of the text, wherever they are mentioned and used.

could endanger the hegemony of the epic had it not failed to cope with the new reality and displayed numerous evolutionary weaknesses. Almost all dominant state, political, religious or intellectual structures claim at a certain period of time incontrovertible supremacy within their respective range of relevance and influence, but it usually occurs that these structures first display internal weaknesses and incompetence which subsequently enables exterior forces to gain in strength and take over the leading role in a certain field of human activity. History provides an infinite number of illustrative examples. The fall of the Roman Empire had its primary origins within the empire itself (enormous size, decadence, lack of vision, lack of ideals, internal conflicts, Christianity, etc.) and the external forces in the form of barbarian tribes simply finished the already started process. Almost all of these external forces had existed before while the empire was at the height of its power, but the strength of the empire prevented them from even trying to take over supremacy. A very similar scenario was repeated with respect to the influence and the once unquestionable power of the Church. "The Babylonian exile" of popes in France, mutual excommunications of competing popes, the proclivity to scandals and profit, etc. destroyed the image of the Church from within. The first and most eloquent criticism of Church practices came from priests like Luther and Erasmus, followed by "external" attacks in the form of competing faith variants, worldly forces, etc. Just these two examples if applied to the "conflict" between the epic and the novel prove the point to a certain degree. Had the epic been able to cope with the demands of modernity, the novel would have never got an opportunity to take over the hegemony. Pursuing this line of thinking, Milton's *Paradise Lost* will be perceived as the culmination and the last effort of the epic genre to encapsulate the totality of the fast changing and elusive modernity—the battle which the epic will most gracefully lose. The novel will take over the leading role and continue to develop to modern times, and through its extraordinary evolutionary adaptability even create the possibility of integrating the epic genre within itself, but that possibility is out of the scope of this work.

Milton's great epic will prove to contain almost all the characteristics of great epics as well as most of the predominant traits of the early modern novels. The concept, choice and the characterization of the main hero, the stress on individualism and the private sphere, the transvaluation of all values and categories, the contingent and polemic nature of the novel, the investigation of the ambivalence, changeability and fluidity of human psyche are just some of the novelistic topics which find their expression in Milton's great epic. He integrates and combines all these crucial modern traits and by successfully accomplishing that task sets an

inimitable example both for himself and for other authors. The omnipresence of the dominant characteristics of early modern novels in Milton's *Paradise Lost* proves that one of the most important factors for the rise of the novel comes from the epic itself.

One of the main characteristics of the novel is the development of characters, i.e. their evolution or degradation depending on the environment and the corresponding strength of character. Change, as the predominant marker of modernity, is unmistakably present in almost all characters in *Paradise Lost*. Almost none of the main protagonists meet the preliminary expectations of an average reader—a phenomenon impossible and unimaginable in the Homeric epics. God, Satan, Adam and Eve, all of them change and adapt to new circumstances and constantly surprise the reader by their unexpected and "atypical" traits. The most conspicuous character is Satan, who should represent a straightforward embodiment of evil, as in Dante's *Commedia*, but he is far from it. For many people, both eminent critics and average readers, he is the main hero of *Paradise Lost*. Even if one disagrees with this view, Satan is a highly complex and ambivalent character who incites a wide array of feelings in the reader, ranging from utter admiration to sheer contempt. As Miroslav Beker (2002) claims, he is always in a dynamic relationship with life and others, diverging widely from genre conventions in almost all aspects of his behaviour (46-51). Like Defoe's Moll Flanders, Satan possesses no moral consistency and, which is even more conspicuous, Milton's God is also a far cry from that consistency. To use Northrop Frye's terminology, in the course of the epic Satan transforms from a character of a high mimetic mode to the character of low mimetic modality, losing his heroic charisma and destroying every possibility of a solemn and dignified ending and a final resolution of the conflict as it is expected and done in traditional epics or tragedies.

Watt (1970) points out the concept of the ambivalent hero or even antihero as the dominant trademark of the early modern novels (11). Fielding's Tom Jones is often described as a good-natured fornicator, Defoe's Moll Flanders is a trickster and a prostitute, and Richardson's Pamela is highly hypocritical in her "righteousness and justness." This type of characterization of the main "hero" is even "exacerbated" in more modern novels creating a series of ambivalent heroes ranging from Dostoyevsky's Raskolnikov to Kafka's beetle. The problematization of the main hero is, according to Viktor Žmegač (1987), one of the main factors in the development of the novel (28). As Žmegač (1987) points out, the characters created within the schematic triangle made of Plato's philosophy, medieval romances and Christianity do not appear convincing enough in Milton's time, and more complex, more ambivalent or more human

characters take their place (18-26). Beker (2002) stresses the fact that capitalism and science irrevocably change the perception of values because capitalism is founded on human greed, and the desire for wealth, comfort and distinction while science is based on the incessant change and the Cartesian doubt towards everything old (47-55). Milton successfully integrates his (anti)hero into the epic although Satan displays all the ambivalent human traits on which capitalism and science are based.

His achievement is even more remarkable if the main precepts of capitalism and science are analysed in more detail because even a superficial look can suggest that they are in direct opposition to the fixed world picture prevailing in the literary genres of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Capitalism presupposes radical individuality and a firm belief in the possibility of the change of one's destiny. Science entails constant re-evaluation of everything and irreverent questioning of the old ways, and both lines of thinking are heretical towards the traditional world view and social organization. However, most of these heretical and "satanic" notions are so skilfully interwoven into the fabric of Milton's epic that it is unmistakably linked to modernity, which makes Joan Malory Webber's argument, that there are no great epics after Milton because we are still living in Milton's age and have not yet resolved the issues posed in *Paradise Lost* sound very convincing. She claims that until "Miltonic issues" have been resolved there will be no other epic, and it is conspicuous that those very issues coincide with the major trends spotted in the early novels (1979, 11). The heretical nature of *Paradise Lost* and all the contentious and ambivalent questions and characters present in it create a unity which cannot be imitated by others or even by Milton himself. If these "novelistic" elements were taken away, the epic would be impoverished and unable to rise to the heights reached by *Paradise Lost*. Milton himself tried to write a "righteous" and orthodox epic after *Paradise Lost* but he failed because *Paradise Regained*, despite its obvious qualities, never reached the same plane of quality, liveliness and relevance. The highly paradoxical fact is that what ensures the continuous relevance of *Paradise Lost* is its satanic, demonic or heretical part and not the righteous one, and that is the trait shared with almost all early modern novels. Among the early modern novels, the best example of the same phenomenon is Richardson's *Clarissa* where the most successful parts of the novel depict the basest human passions and desires while the "normal" and morally acceptable parts never succeed in matching the morally ambiguous ones. After *Clarissa*, Richardson was attacked by the morally offended reading public, so in an attempt to redeem himself he wrote his *Sir Charles Grandison*, the novel about the righteous behaviour of a righteous character. However, it never

came close to the depth and liveliness of the "problematic" and morally ambiguous sections of *Clarissa*.

A similar argument is advocated by Milivoj Solar (1989), who claims, in Lukács's tradition, that the demonic is the main constitutive part of modern novels and that the novelistic genre is unimaginable without the demonic and the Faustian (160-4). He claims that Don Juan and Faust are the greatest novelistic heroes, despite poetically belonging to another genre, and that the modern novel was made and is still being made by bringing closer the divine and the demonic, by melding them together and forcing them to co-exist in one sphere, which is exactly the leading thought of this book. As it will be explained in more detail in subsequent chapters, Milton does exactly that—he brings his God and his Satan closer to each other by relativizing both of them and turning them into highly surprising and unorthodox "characters."

In a similar fashion, this work will attempt to bring together two separate channels of literary research, the history of the novel and the history of the epic genre. Milton's great epic will be extensively investigated within the epic tradition in order to expose both the common points and the deviations. Subsequently, *Paradise Lost* will be compared to the early modern novels and their respective characters in order to demonstrate how Milton has "novelized" the epic genre and formed his characters, Satan above all, according to the practices of early novelists. Satan's character and life philosophy will be extensively compared to the characters of early novelists, such as Fielding, Richardson, Defoe and Swift. This study does not presume to be a comprehensive source of information on either the great epics or the early modern novels. Its primary aim is to identify the common points between the characters of *Paradise Lost* and the characters delineated in the early modern novels in the attempt to demonstrate that *Paradise Lost* is one of the most decisive factors and stages in the development of the novel as a genre. Following this line of thinking, all other traits and literary qualities of both early novels and of *Paradise Lost*, no matter how important and influential they may be, will be disregarded as much as possible.

It would be presumptuous to claim that this approach to the history of the novel is the only right one or even the best one because the only indisputable fact in relation to both *Paradise Lost* and the origination of the novel is that no single explanation will ever be capable of adequately explaining the complexity of both topics. The immense quantity of criticism advocating numerous, and more often than not completely opposed, points of view related to both *Paradise Lost* and the birth of the novel is the best proof of that. However, this book should reveal that no comprehensive history of the novel could circumnavigate the role of Milton's great epic in

the development of the genre. In order to give credibility to the new genre, Fielding repeatedly claims that novels are nothing but epics in prose (cf. Fielding's introduction to *Joseph Andrews*), and this study argues that it works the other way round as well—that Milton's epic may be to a great extent perceived as a sort of a novel in verse, a precursor of novels and of novelistic characters, as a link without which there will always be a huge vacuous spot in the history of the novel.

This research will analyse individual works of both the epic and early novelistic tradition as well as the works of major theorists of the novel, compare the epic and novelistic characters, and identify all common points in order to demonstrate the evolutionary interconnectedness among these separate fields of investigation. The juxtaposition and contrastive analysis of the common elements between the epic and the novel should reveal a whole much larger and more explicative than its constituent parts. Consequently, the history of the novel will be described as an evolutionary battleground for supremacy in the literary world. The synthesized picture should shed new light on its parts and on the forces behind the individual processes so that each individual field of research should benefit from the larger whole. Although a certain degree of simplification is required in order to create a bird's eye view of the individual processes, it is done in the hope that such a procedure would provide a better understanding of the major trends which, if analysed separately, get too "diluted" and incomprehensible in their respective particularities. The loss of detail in individual fields will hopefully be adequately compensated by the recognition of a larger pattern and a broader field of view.

The book is structured as follows:

The first chapter deals with the historical background of the issues dealt with in Milton's *Paradise Lost* and in the early modern novels. For the purposes of this research, it will be taken as the era between 1450 and 1750 because many critics perceive Milton's own age as the time of the fruition of Renaissance ideals. Once again, the topics will be chosen according to their relevance to Milton and to early novels; all other historical phenomena and personalities will be disregarded no matter how important they may be for the general history of the time. Only the most decisive factors contributing to what Ian Johnston calls the "civilizational moment" (1988, n.p.) which gave rise to the novel will be elaborated in detail.

The next section will depict the interrelations between *Paradise Lost* and other great epics in order to define and identify common points and major differences because many authors claim that every subsequent epic is a sort of criticism and re-evaluation of the preceding ones. This work will argue that Milton's criticism of the preceding works within the genre has not

yet been surpassed, and that it gave way to the development of the novel either as a temporary or permanent replacement of the epic.

Part Three will be dedicated to the analysis of Satan's character, attempting to delineate both the epic and the novelistic elements of his character and the way in which Milton uses them to build a bridge towards the early modern period and beyond. This work argues that Milton has "novelized" his Satan by imbuing his character with numerous traits emblematic of the novelistic genre.

In Part Four, the major characters from the early modern novels will be analysed with respect to their similarity to the protagonists of *Paradise Lost*, primarily Satan, to whose unique personality the previous section was ascribed since he is the direct link to the demonizing influence already indicated in the early modern novels. The contentious nature of the term "hero" when applied to him, the very conundrum whether he is a hero, a "hero" or an antihero is more than enough to break with the epic tradition and to link him more to the novelistic genre than to the traditional epics.

Finally, the last chapter will deal with the theory of the novel and the relevance of the insights of famous novel theorists like Bakhtin, Lukács, Forster, Kundera, Eagleton and others to the issues and characters of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in order to re-evaluate the interconnections between the genres and to prove on the level of theory what has previously been done on the level of "practice," i.e. in the analysis of common points in plot and characters dealt with in preceding chapters.

The conclusion will present a synthesis and a general picture of the research and describe the advantages of this approach to the history of the novel and its relevance to the Milton scholarship. This work should describe the birth of the novel and the stagnation or death of the epic in evolutionary terms. If analysed in this way, the gap between the traditionally accepted genres and the novel is reduced to a minimum and the appearance of the novel is described in a more natural and comprehensible way than if it is explained only on the basis of the external socio-historical phenomena of the time as done by authors like Michael McKeon. This work does not negate such scholarship in any way but hopefully adds to it a relevant contribution which should help to clarify the complexity of the origin of the novel and above all to explain Milton's role in it.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part describes the temporal frame which can, for illustrative purposes, be called "Milton's time." It limits the time frame and positions Milton and his work as the transitional phase between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The second part deals with the process of the weakening of the forces which held together the medieval world while the third section sums up the new unifying factors around which the modern world revolves, like the scientific way of thinking, commerce, individualism, etc.

1.1 The temporal frame

Almost all one-volume general histories of the world, like Marvin Perry's *Western Civilization: A Brief History* or R. G. Grant's *The History Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained*, due to the lack of space, cover the period between 1450 and 1750 within one chapter regarding it as a whole in which the seeds of the modern world were planted and grew to fruition, creating thereby the modern world view. This period can be symbolically described as a journey from the rediscovery of "man" in the Renaissance to the unquestionable belief in his/her Reason in the age known as the Enlightenment.

The Renaissance is usually taken as the turning point in the history of human thought or as a dividing line between the "old" and the "new," or modern world view. It is a widely spread misconception that the term "Renaissance" denotes a short period of time, a few important discoveries, some important and radically new works of art, etc. which constitute this new world vision. As it usually happens, things are never as simple as they appear to be. Denis Lawton and Peter Gordon (2002) stress that the Renaissance should be understood as a gradual process during which the age of Faith is succeeded by the age of Reason. Due to the influence of Humanism the notion of individualism emerges and a uniqueness of personality gains in importance (56). This transition from Faith to Reason

and later to radical individualism, on the basis of which the theory of a modern state will be created, is of paramount importance both for Milton and for other leading minds of the time because the spirit of the age is created out of that transitional process. Norman Davies (1997), the author of the acclaimed book *Europe, A History* stresses that

> When judging the period which followed the Reformations, one must remember what Europeans had been contending with for so long. The consensus between Reason and Faith, as promised by the Renaissance humanists, had not prevailed against the world of religious dogma, magic, and superstition. After the wars of Religion, one can see that the exercise of 'the Light of sweet Reason' was a natural and necessary antidote. Indeed, even the full flood of the Enlightenment may only have washed over the surface of continuing bigotries. (577)

Jeffrey Forgeng (2007) points out that "the Stuart age was a time of significant transitions between a medieval and a modern world." He claims that "Englishmen in 1600 were living in a society still shaped by the inherited culture of the Middle Ages, but, by 1700 that society had become recognizably modern in numerous meaningful ways" (221). The seventeenth century may be understood as the age of fruition of other Renaissance ideals as well. It was the century when classical knowledge was no longer a novelty, nor was it accepted with the utmost reverence, but as something that "had been around for a while" and had to be tested, expanded, and successfully blended with the real, everyday world. The issues raised in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries gained in importance in the seventeenth century due to the shifts in the sources of economic power, the increasingly scientific view of the world and the influence of new geographical discoveries. Peter Watson (2005) explains this phenomenon on the example of Copernicus: "Copernicus' theory never had much direct influence on the thought of the sixteenth century—its theological ramifications would spark controversy only much later" (484).

The same situation happened in philosophical thought. The shy announcements of a new way of thinking articulated by Francis Bacon and Michel Montaigne initiated a current of thought that would produce fully ripened fruits in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, i.e. in the age after Descartes, Hobbes and Locke. According to the editors of *The Cambridge History of the Seventeenth Century Philosophy*, Michael Ayers and Daniel Garber (1998), it is often necessary to go back and forth historically in order to describe the origins, development and the final fruition of certain ideas:

> Contributors have also been encouraged to explicate the meaning and wider significance of seventeenth-century argument by reference to antecedent or, if it seemed appropriate, consequent theory. The former has often meant reference both to mediaeval and Renaissance ideas and to the antiquity directly studied and avidly plundered even by some of the reputedly most 'modern' philosophers. (1)

The common denominator of all changes occurring between the years 1450 and 1750 was the birth and final empowerment of the modern way of thinking, based on doubt, testing, capitalism, and science (Harari 2015, 314). The years 1450 and 1750 are, of course, arbitrary and provisional but can be used as rough orientation points while discussing both real history phenomena of the early modern era and the corresponding changes in the history of literature which closely mirror major historical breakthroughs.

In literature, this time period reveals the fruitful ideas which were first presented in the works of the first humanists, matured in the works of people like Montaigne, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Bacon and Milton and found their final fruition in the novels of Defoe, Swift, Fielding, and Richardson, as well as in the philosophical works of the major Enlightenment thinkers. The list is naturally oversimplified and not comprehensive enough but sufficient to delineate the introduction of a new world view which contained and built on the cautious criticism of the medieval forms of religious practice and beliefs. The early modern works questioned the old forms of thinking, government, and societal organization, and introduced new genres and concepts. This was the time when the essay, the scientific way of thinking, and the novel came into existence.

Milton and his works can rightly be claimed to bridge the Renaissance and the early modern times. Although Milton's *Paradise Lost* is positioned within the period of the Renaissance in *Norton's Anthology of World Masterpieces*, it is one of the most important causes in the process of the origination of early modern novels. *Paradise Lost* represents an interphase between two civilizational eras, providing both a look into the past and a glimpse of the time to come (Johnston 1988, n.p.). Milton's grand style is firmly situated in the Renaissance, but it contains numerous signs of modernity and represents a kind of a bridge between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. P. M. Pasinetti, one of the editors of the mentioned *Norton Anthology*, observes that to the Renaissance writers "references to classical mythology, philosophy, and literature are not ornaments or affectations; along with references to the Scriptures they are part, and a major part, of their mental equipment and way of thinking" (1200). Although not talking about Milton specifically, Pasinetti describes the main characteristics of his style of writing and the way of thinking, i.e. the

conspicuous presence of the Renaissance ideals throughout Milton's work. However, both Milton's personality and works also seem to be pointing in the other direction on the chronological plane—to modernity. While Milton's rootedness in the Renaissance is taken for granted, as his placement in various literary anthologies indubitably suggests, his modernity is not so apparent at first glance. As Michael E. Bryson asserts, Milton's ideas proved to be more influential during the Enlightenment than during his life:

> The important thing to note here is that Milton's ideas were too early for his times, but in many ways bore fruit after his death: What is particularly impressive about these imprecations... is the company into which Milton is put in terms of intellectual, political and social history. Milton, in the eyes of those who would brand him as either a heretic or atheist or both, stands with those whose ideas will take root and come to full flower in the Enlightenment and beyond. Milton's story—even as told by his contemporary opponents—is one of progress, and as unfashionable as it may have been for some time to subscribe to a "Whig" narrative of history. Milton himself subscribed to something very much like a narrative of historical progress, hoping, in fact, that England would take the lead role. (Bryson, qtd. in Murphy (2016), Kindle Locations 2245-8)

The description of Satan, the peculiar and inimitable nature of his (un)heroism, the spirit of doubting and irreverence towards everything traditional, general and authoritative, and Milton's highly personal and idiosyncratic treatment of language, unmistakably point to the modernity expressed in the early modern novels. If perceived in this way, it becomes obvious that in order to understand both Milton and his work, *Paradise Lost* above all, one has to analyse them within the historical context between 1450 and 1750.

Two summaries of the mentioned phase of the historical process provide a general overview of the historico-intellectual changes at the beginning and the end of what might be called "Milton's time." As Paul V. Adams et al. (2000) point out in the book *Experiencing World History*, the early modern world experienced the unprecedented multiplicity of world views and the co-existence of various sources of power:

> Feudalism declined as the basic framework for political administration in Western Europe by the 17th century. Monarchs learned new ways to claim power, beyond the loyalty of their vassals. They used classical language from the Roman Empire, revived by the Renaissance. They talked of a "divine right" of kings to rule. The Protestant Reformation, in weakening the Catholic Church, reduced religious controls on the state; in some Protestant areas, particularly where Lutheranism predominated, the state ran

the new church. Wealth from world trade enriched state treasuries, allowing new activities. Growing use of cannons and gunpowder reduced the power of feudal armies, while a rising middle class provided potential bureaucrats loyal to the state, not to the aristocratic class. Strong remnants of feudalism persisted, but the state took on new dimensions. (285)

What is important with respect to the phenomena Adams et al. mention is the fact that almost all signifiers of the previous age remained in power but in a changed form and with a diminished range of influence. The Reformation irrevocably changed Europe but did not make the whole of it Protestant, "the Counter-Reformation did not reconquer Europe; but the Holy Roman Empire was not destroyed by its Protestant enemies. The Turks did not overrun central Europe; but their empire also survived. The English monarchy was not permanently overthrown" (Pennington 1989, 3). The situation the real world of the seventeenth century found itself in parallels the world of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. A new way of thinking was introduced but the old one had not been overthrown; new powers emerged but the old ones still reigned supreme. New people and/or nations were discovered (Adam, Eve and their descendants as newly created beings) but the world was still decisively shaped by the traditional forces, God, angels, devils, etc.

John Ray, the naturalist from Milton's time, inadvertently provides another summary of all the dubious questions and joys of the transitional time while people were still under the influence of the medieval mind-set but already rejoicing over the exciting new discoveries in almost all fields. He expresses all the accompanying joys, doubts and reservations which are emblematic of the time period and frequently repeated and emphasized throughout Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

It is an age of noble discovery, the weight and elasticity of air, the telescope and microscope, the ceaseless circulation of the blood through veins and arteries, the lacteal glands and the bile duct, the structure of the organs of generation, and of many others—too many to mention: the secrets of Nature have been unsealed and explored: a new Physiology has been introduced.… There are those who condemn the study of Experimental Philosophy as a mere inquisitiveness and denounce the passion for knowledge as a pursuit unpleasing to God, and so quench the zeal of the philosopher. As if Almighty God were jealous of the knowledge of men. As if when He first formed us. He did not clearly perceive how far the light of human intelligence could penetrate, or were it to His glory to do so, could not have confined it within narrower limits. (qtd. in Raven 2009, 251)

1.2 Weakening of the medieval world view

The just mentioned general summaries by Adams and Ray provide useful starting points in the endeavour to explain the process of the weakening of the medieval world view and social structure and the gradual transition to the modern world view. The medieval world view, was, as Žmegač (1987) points out, based on the triangle consisting of Plato's philosophy, Christian morality and the chivalric code (18-26), while the governing and organisational forces of the society were the church and the feudalistic ruling system. If the new forces were ever to gather strength and replace the pillars of European medieval societies, the old ones had to lose strength and vitality and thereby provide a chance for the emergence of modernity. This means that the governing medieval religious, political and intellectual forces themselves unwittingly provided the initial seeds of the modern world view which would assume the primacy in the early modern period. By desiring to reform the Church practices, Luther initiated a series of revolutions which irrevocably changed European society. Descartes wanted to rationally defend the church doctrines and "to justify the ways of God to men" (*PL*, 1. 26) in his own way, but by basing his system of thought on doubt, he unintentionally provided the most destructive weapon to be used against those very practices. In an endeavour to increase the splendour of his court, the Sun King generously supported the thinkers whose ideas would take definite shape in the works of the Enlightenment thinkers like Montesquieu and Voltaire and prove to be the most powerful weapon to be used against the theories of the divine origins of royal power.

Royal power in general was, paradoxically, even stronger in the early modern period than during the late medieval times but the seeds of change were visible everywhere. Even the kings had to "change the old ways" and to invent new ways of ruling and especially new ways of procuring money for their, usually excessive, expenditures. The English monarchy exemplifies one direction of the adjustment of worldly rulers to the changed economic and political situation and the French ruler Louis XIV embodies the other. Since Magna Carta was signed by King John in 1215, the English people started restricting royal power. The process culminated with the regicide in 1649 and practically ended with the Glorious Revolution in 1688 when Parliament was finally recognised as the main governing body of the country. The Bill of Rights ended the possibility of an absolute monarchy in England and it has been a constitutional monarchy ever since. In France, on the other hand, the Sun King strengthened royal power and brought the monarchy to unprecedented heights, but paradoxically new influences and the new way of thinking,

which would irrevocably change the world order, were nurtured and strengthened during his reign.

> It all started in the late seventeen hundreds when France was a prosperous state, and one of the most powerful nations in the world. Louis XIV (1661 to 1715), the Sun King, pushed the boundaries of France to the Rhine River, and the luxury of his court was unmatched in Europe. However, novel ideas were starting to challenge monarchies. The Enlightenment was taking hold of the intellectual minds in Europe, and they questioned everything. Reason was their god, and they knew no other. To these intellectuals, 'reason' consisted of applying empirical methods to all matters (some said apply the 'methods of Newton,' but that was the scientific method), and under this analysis the 'divine right of kings' was suspect. (Daniel 2008, n.p.)

The second pillar of medieval society was the church. Both the world of the Middle Ages and of the Renaissance were decisively marked by the Christian faith. No phenomenon of any relevance in the early modern period, science included, was beyond the reach of religion. As Jacques Barzun (2000) points out, for the first time in recorded history in the year 1900 in England, the number of religious publications did not outnumber all other publications together (10). This surprising fact unequivocally indicates that none of the transitional changes between the medieval and the early modern world view can be analysed without its interconnections with religion and the same principle may be applied to the area of literature in the time period between 1450 and 1750. Due to Milton's encyclopaedic genius and the deliberate choice of a religious topic for his epic, *Paradise Lost* represents the almost perfect embodiment of all major influences on the birth of the modern world.

Its religious background, the traditionally wide epic scope and the ambivalence pervading almost all the characters and values present in it make *Paradise Lost* a perfect bridge between two eras; the one unquestionably in power before 1450 and the one still in power since the seventeenth century. A good epic should always bridge two succeeding eras and *Paradise Lost* is indubitably one of the worthiest representatives of the epic genre. In his lecture "On Milton, *Paradise Lost,*" Johnston depicts the purpose and contents of epics in general and this depiction provides a plausible explanation why a Biblical topic was much more suitable than "an Arthuriad" to create an epic about the transitional time between the Middle Ages and the modernity:

> An epic poem is characteristically a long narrative which, following the tradition established by Homer, is written in twelve or twenty-four books. Its epic quality comes from the scope which the work sets out for itself.

> Typically, epic poems are all-encompassing cultural visions, with a huge scope which explores all aspects of a particular moment of civilization. Such poems explore big questions: the vision of an entire society, the relationship between human beings and the divine, the essential qualities which establish and perpetuate a certain moral vision of life, the historical framework and future destiny of a nation, and so on. Thus, epics are more than just stories; they are celebrations of what makes a particular culture what it is. (1988, n.p.)

Had Milton chosen a topic less coloured by religion neither the initial phase of the civilizational moment nor the post-Miltonic time period would have been appropriately captured because a depiction of the medieval world view which does not have religion in the foreground is anything but all-encompassing. Christian religion permeates both the world prior to *Paradise Lost* and the world after Milton's death. All modern world phenomena ranging from commerce and literature to science have their roots in one of the variants of Christianity, and confirmation of this claim can be found almost in all areas of modern life. R. H. Tawney and Max Weber attribute the birth of capitalism to the teachings about predestination and the protestant work ethic, and Descartes initiated his philosophical ponderings in the endeavour to "rationally justify religious truths" (Marijanović 2014, 47). However, neither science, nor commerce nor any other modern intellectual phenomenon would have ever got a chance to be conceived, developed and articulated, had it not been for the emergence of Protestantism.

Protestantism either directly or indirectly destroyed or brought into question both pillars of the medieval world order, the Pope and the King. Both religious and secular hierarchies were either destroyed or irrevocably altered by the changed world view propagated by Luther and his followers. Luther's attacks on the Pope and the church hierarchy decisively affected the affairs of the internal church organisation while the insistence on radical individualism and the teaching of predestination provided the necessary preconditions for the radically changed perceptions of individual people who are no longer perceived as mere members of a class, or as ignorant members of the believing flock but as autonomous units with a direct access to God. In addition to these two factors, the emergence of Protestantism led to the increased decentralisation of power and the loss of monopoly on "the right way of thinking and worshiping," the phenomenon which was a prerequisite for the survival of both revolutionary ideas and unorthodox people. The new picture of reality, as Arnold Hauser asserts, was "like a panoramic survey, not a one-sided, unified representation, dominated by a single point of view" (8).

However, Luther's revolutionary teachings, reformation designs and open attacks on the papacy would never have taken place with such force and with such far-reaching consequences had it not been for three important factors, the first of which was "the Babylonian exile of the Pope" in Avignon (1309-1376). The second precondition was the influx of new knowledge the church was unwilling and incapable of dealing with and the third was the invention of the printing press in the middle of the fifteenth century. The first brought into question the infallibility and the divine origins of the papal power, the second weakened the authority of the church in secular matters and the third enabled quick spreading and permanent survival of Luther's inflammatory ideas.

The incident from 1077, widely known as "the Humiliation of Canossa," when Pope Gregory VII threatened to permanently excommunicate Henry IV is in stark opposition to the temporary exile of the papacy in Avignon. Fearing the loss of all of his noble subjects, Henry penitently waited for days begging the Pope for forgiveness while "the Babylonian Exile" of the Pope signified a radical change in influence and power between the worldly and religious leaders. Stephen Hause and William Maltby (2004) describe the "exile" in the following way:

> After the brief pontificate of Benedict IX, French influence in the College of Cardinals secured the election of the bishop of Bordeaux, who became pope as Clement V (served 1305 - 14). The Roman populace was outraged. Riot and disorder convinced Clement that Rome would be an unhealthy place for a Frenchman. He decided to establish himself at Avignon, a papal territory in the south of France. The papacy would remain there for seventy-three years. The stay of the popes at Avignon was called the Babylonian Captivity because the church appeared to have been taken captive by the French as the biblical children of Israel had been held at Babylon. It was an international scandal for several reasons. The pope was living outside his diocese, and absenteeism had long been considered an abuse by reformers. Worse yet, the pope seemed to be a mere agent of the French monarchy. (254-5)

However, the exile of the Pope in France was not so derogatory to the papal power and dignity as was the appearance of antipopes in the period between 1378 and 1417. The (co)existence of initially two and then even three Popes at the same time and their mutual accusations, devaluations and excommunications gave birth to a justified and well-founded doubt whether any one of them was worthy of being called the divine representative on earth and the unquestionable successor of St. Peter. The following excerpt illustrates the graveness of the unprecedented situation:

> The magnitude of this problem hardly can be overstated. The pope is the official head of the Catholic Church, the mouthpiece of God on earth, the final authority on matters of spiritual significance and theology. Furthermore, the pope appoints clergy and weighs in on legal and political issues. The people of Europe were forced to make a decision: which pope was the true pope? Most people had no idea how to decide. What might be the consequences should people follow a false pope? (Barber 2006, 15)

Henri Pirenne (2005) points out that the causes of the great schism, besides the coexistence of multiple popes, had origins of a secular and political nature embodied in the kings of France and England (272). This religious conflict, deeply coloured by the political context, brought to the surface the fact that church forces were gradually weakening while the secular world was gaining in strength and challenging the supremacy of the church even in religious matters, to which the case of the English ruler Henry VIII testifies. According to Susan Wise Bauer (2013), the conflict between the worldly and the religious leaders culminated in the fourteenth century and revealed a significant change in the attitude towards the Pope and the awareness of the diminished influence and power of the papacy:

> In December of 1301, Boniface sent the king a papal letter reasserting the arguments of his powerful forerunners, all the way back to Gregory the Great. *Ausculta fili*, it began: 'Listen, son … God has set us over kings and kingdoms… [L]et no one persuade you that you have no superior or that you are not subject to the head of the ecclesiastical hierarchy… Our predecessors deposed three kings of France... and although we are not worthy to tread in the footsteps of our predecessors, if the king committed the same crimes as they committed or greater ones, we would depose him like a servant with grief and great sorrow.' Philip IV read the letter, and then set it on fire. (414)

The irrevocable loss of the aura of a divinely appointed ruler whose range of influence overpowered and transcended individual kingdoms, numerous scandals involving popes and the highest church officials, simony, open nepotism and subservience to various political rulers resulted in numerous cries for the reformation and the return of the church to the origins of Christian faith. This weakening of papal authority from within opened the way for full-blown attacks first from Luther and subsequently from secular rulers.

Apart from the apparent weakening of papal authority, the inability of the church to explain numerous discoveries which challenged the medieval world view additionally shook the once unquestionable belief in its infallibility. As Descartes (2005) points out, if a part of a structure is questioned, then the whole building collapses (12). After the discoveries of

previously unknown continents and people, the whole world perception was brought into question because none of the traditional, supposedly all-knowing authorities had any knowledge of the New World, and, even worse, as Watson (2005) puts it, it was far beyond their expectations (442). The New World had no place in the Scripture or in the works of official creators of church traditions and dogmas, like Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, etc., whose judgments were held as infallible and unquestionable. Watson (2005) sums up all repercussions of the discovery of the New World, and it is worth quoting at length because it shows how the problems formally posed at the time of the Renaissance (e.g. ramifications of Columbus' discoveries) were not properly resolved even in Milton's time:

> But it was not until 1590, a full century after Columbus' discovery, with the publication in Spanish of José de Acosta's great Natural and Moral History of the Indies, that the integration of the New World into the framework of Old World thought was finally cemented. This synthesis was itself the crowning achievement of a century of intellectual transformation, in which three very different aspects of the New World were incorporated into the European mind-set. There was first the American landmass, as a totally unexpected addition to the natural world. There was the American Indian, who had to be incorporated into the European/Christian understanding of humanity. And there was America as an entity in time, whose very existence transformed Europe's understanding of the historical process. All this was, first and foremost, a challenge to classical learning. According to the Bible, and to experience, there were three landmasses in the world – Europe, Asia and Africa—and to change this idea was as fundamental a break with tradition as the idea that there wasn't a torrid zone in the southern hemisphere. Moreover, the Bering Strait was not discovered until 1728. (444)

The third precondition for the immense spread of Luther's thought and influence was the invention of the printing press. Lawton and Gordon (2002) claim that "ideas are, however, often generated or changed as a result of technological advances" (56). New technological equipment extended the reach of human senses, which resulted in major scientific and geographical discoveries (*Millennium* 1999) and the printing press helped disseminate new ideas and revolutionary discoveries with unprecedented speed because people far away suddenly got a chance to "hear and see" what was taking place in Germany. The invention of the press made the development of the modern world possible for two primary reasons. First, it helped spread the news and details of Luther's conflict with the Pope and thereby made way for all the changes instigated, wittingly or unwittingly, by Luther and his followers. As Heather M. Campbell (2011) claims, if there

had been no press, Luther's rebellion would never have been "anything more than a monkish quarrel" and worldwide cooperation which is a prerequisite for science and large-scale international commerce would be unimaginable (205). Cole and Symes (2014) sum up the consequences of Gutenberg's invention:

> Printing not only increased the volume and rapidity of communication, it made it more difficult for those in power to censor dissenting opinions. But at the same time as it created new forms of agency, the printing press also became an indispensable tool of more traditional powers, making it possible for rulers to govern growing empires abroad and increasingly centralized states at home. The "reconquest" of Spain and the extension of Spanish imperialism to the New World were both facilitated by the circulation of printed propaganda…. For these reasons, among others, many historians consider the advent of print to be both the defining event and the driving engine of modernity, and it coincided with another essentially modern development: the discovery of a "New World."
> (390)

Gutenberg's life story is important for other reasons and not only for the invention of the printing press. He represents a new individual who was prepared to change his life and who, inadvertently, managed to influence the lives of billions of people coming after him. Andrew Marr (2012) describes him as "a jobbing engineer—and at cutting precious stones; and he was an ambitious entrepreneur, eager to borrow money to build his business… Gutenberg bought paper from Italy, experimented with metal alloys and hired at least eighteen helpers for his six presses" (275). He believed in himself, in his business success, experimented with new ideas, made use of Europe-wide exchange of ideas and materials, and desired to revolutionize the way he lived and did his job. Gutenberg is a prime example of an entrepreneurial individual, who raises himself in society, and experiences all the hardships and thrills of the individualistic life style based on the belief in constant change and progress. His life story is a paradigmatic example of a swift change in fortune made possible by the rise of private entrepreneurship. Just like many other prominent people of the time, Gutenberg wanted to change "the old ways" and to introduce new technologies and a new way of thinking concerning both individual people and society in general and he succeeded in both endeavours. He proved that the future belonged to fearless, entrepreneurial individuals and to the revolutionary technology he devised. However, the most revolutionary person at the time between the fifteenth and sixteenth century born just two decades after Gutenberg's death was Martin Luther, whose teachings, in a great measure thanks

to Gutenberg's invention, would irrevocably change the world and pave the path to the world as we know it today.

Martin Luther and Goethe's *Faustus* may for illustrative purposes be taken as the start and culmination of "Milton's age." Milton's *Paradise Lost* is one of the best examples of a "Luther-like" rebellion and there is certainly a lot of truth in Johnston's characterization of it as "the first great Protestant epic" (1988, n.p.). This definition of Milton's epic does not reflect only the religion practiced by its author but a lot more. It reflects the complexity of political, philosophical and religious issues stirred by the rise of Protestantism, and the general spirit of challenging traditional authorities. As Barzun (2000) points out, the disruptive influence of Luther's ideas was keenly felt in the religious, intellectual and political areas:

> It did indeed cause millions to change the forms of their worship and the conception of their destiny. But it did much besides. It posed the issue of diversity of opinion as well as of faith. It fostered new feelings of nationhood. It raised the status of the vernacular languages. It changed attitudes toward work, art, and human failings. It deprived the West of its ancestral sense of unity and common descent. Lastly but less immediately, by emigration to the new world overseas, it brought an extraordinary enlargement of the meaning of West and the power of its civilization. (4)

However, Luther's ideas were not organized as a coherent unit and they contained dangerous internal contradictions. This inconsistency led to further fragmentation of Protestantism and to unpredictable social and political outcomes. Watson (2005) sums up the liberating aspects of Luther's revolutionary thinking but also points out the ambiguities and tensions inherent to Luther himself and to the Protestant movement(s) in general:

> Lutheranism destroyed authority, certainly so far as organized religion was concerned. In freeing men from religious authority, Protestantism set men free in other ways as well. The discovery of America, and the scientific revolution, both occurring simultaneously with Protestantism, were the perfect arenas where men who rejected authority, who could let their individuality shine through, would benefit. Luther himself was not over-fond of the growing economic individualism he saw around him—it did not always sit well with the piety he valued. But it was ultimately unreasonable of him to expect religious individualism without all the other forms he had helped set loose. (462)

Almost none of the radical changes which took place due to the direct or indirect influence of Luther's actions and teachings were consciously and systematically planned by Luther. He did not intend to overthrow or

challenge the Pope but only to rectify some practices he deemed wrong. "Luther's initial criticism of the church focused on the sale of indulgences, but he went on to attack the core Catholic teachings of transubstantiation (the belief that bread and wine change into the body and blood of Christ when received during communion), clerical celibacy, and papal supremacy" (Hart-Davis 2007, 256). He ended up excommunicated and in return he proclaimed the Pope to be the devil. He put individualism to the fore and enabled people to search their individual ways both to the Bible and to God. He challenged ossified traditions, stubbornly defied authority and became an unintentional revolutionary, who set the whole of Europe on fire, simultaneously appreciating and despising the common folk. Furthermore, his figure is so full of contrasts and contradictions, of heroism and sin, of progressiveness and backwardness that he represents the full potential of humanity in general. Like with Milton's Satan, any opinion on Luther is highly dependent on the starting attitude one has towards him before familiarizing oneself with his extraordinary life and gigantic work. His biographer Richard Marius (2000) summarizes the ambiguities related to Luther in the following way:

> Another major and obvious difficulty arises in writing about Luther. For centuries devout scholars, evangelical and Catholic, studied Luther to extol or condemn him. Evangelicals made him a colossus and hero who cleansed the gospel and gave light and freedom to the soul. Catholics portrayed him as demon-possessed, a sex-crazed monk of furious temper, a liar and fraud willing to tumble down the great and beautiful edifice of Catholic Christianity for no better motives than lust and pride. The religious indifference of modern secular culture has cooled these passions, and an ecumenical spirit now prevails in studies of Luther and the sixteenth century. (xii)

Reformation and Counterreformation caused unprecedented bloodshed, and the conflict between the warring parties ended inconclusively. There was no acknowledged victor, and all sides involved in the religious wars claimed to have fought for some higher truths. All warring parties were convinced that divine justice was with their cause, which, again unintentionally, resulted in the birth of justified doubt whether any of them were right. As Johnston puts it, "the old certainties" the king and the pope were the actual cause of the bloodshed, suffering, and misery throughout Europe and the rest of the recently discovered world. Due to the Protestant revolution religion stopped being the universal linking factor in Europe. As Barzun (2000) asserts,

The meaning of faith has changed, its native quantity has been divided, its quality diluted. People blithely speak of someone's (or their own) religious preference—as if it were something like a taste in food or sport. The change has come about not simply because, for the majority in the Occident, physical science has usurped the place of "our best hope and trust." It has come about because every believer is surrounded by a host of non-believers, as well as by believers in many different creeds. All being tolerated, all must be worthy of belief, all are in some way "right." (23)

The old picture of the divine order and a perfectly organized world seemed to have no confirmation in the real world at all. Evidence of destruction, violent disagreements among "sacred religious truths," mutual excommunications among religious and worldly leaders resulted in prevailing uncertainty towards the old truths.

The Protestant doctrine of predestination proved to be decisive for the development of European societies and their break from the medieval world view. Both Puritans and Calvinists accepted a variant of teachings about predestination. This theory is based on the opinion that one's salvation has in advance been determined by God and that, basically, the world consists of the elect and the damned. This teaching is inherently paradoxical since it is simultaneously fatalistic and action-promoting. Peter N. Stearns (2007) describes it in the following way:

Calvinism insisted on God's predestination, or prior determination, of those who would be saved; nothing humans did, and certainly no sacraments, could win God's favor. At the same time, those elected to God's grace had the obligation to encourage others to behave morally and seek knowledge of the Bible. (n.p.)

If someone is elected by God, i.e. if God has saved them by his grace, then, in most cases, that divine grace should be visible in this world, too, in the form of wealth, prosperity and good health. One must live in faith, do good deeds, and reject worldly pleasures to justify that grace. Such an attitude seems to be perfect for the development of capitalism and the profit-oriented way of thinking. According to R. H. Tawney (1926), Calvin and his teaching of predestination significantly influenced the process of the making of modern capitalist society:

It is not wholly fanciful to say that, on a narrower stage but with not less formidable weapons, Calvin did for the *bourgeoisie* of the sixteenth century what Marx did for the proletariat of the nineteenth, or that the doctrine of predestination satisfied the same hunger for an assurance that the forces of the universe are on the side of the elect as was to be assuaged in a different age by the theory of historical materialism. He set their virtues at their best

> in sharp antithesis with the vices of the established order at its worst, taught them to feel that they were a chosen people, made them conscious of their great destiny in the Providential plan and resolute to realize it…. The two main elements in this teaching were the insistence on personal responsibility, discipline and asceticism, and the call to fashion for the Christian character an objective embodiment in social institutions. (62)

A God-fearing man, modest, with no costly earthly desires, prepared to reinvest his fortune indefinitely in order to show the presence of God's grace in him, presents a perfect example of a profit maker and the seed of a belief in a private entrepreneur who directly controls his own destiny and is able to raise himself in society by his own effort. This combination of the belief in the power of the individual and in the possibility of a radical change in social status pose a direct challenge to the feudalistic world order and the king, the second pillar of the medieval society. Just as internal conflicts and Luther's attacks weakened the position of the Pope, the new approaches to economy and the new sources of money and power will irrevocably change the feudalistic social structure, the "retarding ways of thinking" (Prosperov-Novak 2010, 145) and doing business, which characterized the medieval world.

In a certain way, capital destroyed the traditional medieval social structure and simultaneously provided the basis for the reconnection of various social strata in new ways. Apart from the "changing power of money," the integrating triangle of the medieval world was irrevocably weakened by internal tensions, the rise of Protestantism and the new self-awareness of individual people which, due to the changed spiritual and social situation, proved fruitful in various fields of human activity. Luther placed the individual in the centre of the spiritual world by proclaiming the possibility of personal access to God. Descartes did a similar thing by placing individual consciousness in the centre of his philosophical musings. A private entrepreneur proved the unprecedented power of commerce and business in (re)shaping one's personal destiny and creating the necessary preconditions for a rise in society by individual effort. All these phenomena placed a challenge before early modern Europe unlike any other since the fall of the Roman Empire. While experiencing the disintegration of the religious, intellectual and political centres of society, it had to find new ways in which independent thinkers, private entrepreneurs and individual believers would be unified on a new plane. New unifying factors had to knit the disintegrated medieval legacy together. The successful mastering of this unprecedented challenge proved to be one of the key factors which contributed to the supremacy of the West after the seventeenth century.

1.3 The integrating elements of the postmediaeval age

While analysing the reasons for the predominance of Europe over the rest of the world in the period between the first major geographical discoveries and the beginning of the twentieth century, Niall Ferguson (2012) sums up the new integrating factors or "killer apps," as he calls them, which Europe had on its side and the rest of the world did not. These triggers of the Western rise to power, according to Ferguson, were competition, science, property, medicine, consumerism and the work ethic (41). Barzun (2000) perceives the same issue in a slightly different way and provides his key terms for the emergence of the modern world view. His list includes concepts like emancipation, primitivism, analysis, specialization, secularization, individualism, and self-awareness (10-89). Cyril Aydon (2011), unintentionally, of course, merges these two lists and creates a succinct summary of the major tendencies which reshaped early modern Europe. Aydon points out the increased linkage among various fields of human activity propelled by commerce, which resulted in numerous scientific and geographical discoveries, individualism, the new attitude to knowledge and the relative freedom from censorship (196). Aydon's summary of modern influences will be used in the rest of this chapter as the foundation for the description of the new unifying factors which connected European and world societies in unprecedented ways and replaced the medieval world picture.

The shift in the dominant economic patterns is emblematic of all corresponding political and intellectual changes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Early modern England experienced a transition from a variant of feudalism, over mercantilism to capitalism. In political and economic terms, this process can be interpreted as a shift from the unquestionable economic power of the monarch and aristocracy to the *laissez-faire* economy completely and unreservedly placed into the hands of private individuals. An analogous procedure could be, although with gross but illustrative simplification, traced in literature. The majestic and noble heroes of the old gave way to "types" representing a whole class or a profession, like the protagonists of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or John Bunyan's characters, which were later transformed into completely individualized persons who transgressed all boundaries and even formed their identity on that transgression. This economy- and profit-based way of thinking eventually brought about a radical shift in societal values as well. As Michael McKeon (2002) asserts, the succession of economic models in the seventeenth-century England closely resembled the political developments of the time: