Challenging the conventional view of John Milton as an iconoclast who spoke only to a “fit audience though few,” Daniel Shore argues that Milton was a far more pragmatic writer than previous scholarship has recognized. Summoning evidence from nearly all of his works—poetry and prose alike—Shore asserts that Milton distanced himself from the prescriptions of classical rhetoric to develop new means of persuasion suited to an age distrustful of traditional eloquence. He demonstrates that Milton’s renunciation of agency, audience, purpose, and effect in the prose tracts leads not to quietism or withdrawal, but rather to a reasserted investment in public debate. Shore reveals a writer who is committed to persuasion and yet profoundly critical of his own persuasive strategies. An innovative contribution to the field, this text will appeal to scholars of Milton, seventeenth-century literature, Renaissance literature, and the history and theory of rhetoric.

Daniel Shore is Assistant Professor of English at Georgetown University. His work has appeared in journals such as *PMLA, Critical Inquiry,* and *Milton Studies.* In 2006, the Milton Society of America awarded him the James Holly Hanford Award for “Most Distinguished Essay” of the year. He earned his Ph.D. and master’s degrees from Harvard University.
MILTON AND THE ART OF RHETORIC

DANIEL SHORE

Georgetown University
To Carolyn
Contents

Acknowledgments page ix
Abbreviations and Editions xi

Introduction: Spoken Only to Trees and Stones 1

PART I THE RENUNCIATION OF RHETORIC
1 Milton in the Public Sphere 21
2 Constraint as a Means of Persuasion 39
3 Becoming a Supplement 62

PART II THE PRESERVATION OF RHETORIC
4 Why Milton Is Not an Iconoclast 85
5 The Uses of Trembling 105
6 Instrumental Reason and Imitatio Christi 125

Epilogue: The Threat of Samson Agonistes 146

Notes 167
Index 197
This book began, to borrow a phrase from Wallace Stevens, as a thesis scrivened in delight. In the scrivening I have incurred many debts, foremost to the doctoral advisers who guided my research from its earliest beginnings. With her endless learning and unflagging good sense Barbara Lewalski supported and improved my writing in more ways than I can know. I cannot imagine a better adviser. Gordon Teskey has been at once a mentor, colleague, friend, and inimitable model. I will continue to look to him for illumination. I am thankful for James Engell’s generosity and wisdom. He has made me a better scholar, teacher, and rhetorician. Considering how much these teachers have given me, I expect that I will never “quit / The debt immense of endless gratitude.”


I wish to thank the two anonymous reviewers at Cambridge University Press for suggesting thoughtful and constructive revisions, as well as Ray Ryan, Louis Gulino, Susan Thornton, Diana Witt, Marielle Poss, and Bindu Vinod for their patience and hard work. The members of the Harvard Renaissance Colloquium, the Intellectual History Reading Group, the Oxford Early Modern Graduate Forum, and the Canada Milton Seminar listened to parts of my argument and helped me to improve them. The Folger Shakespeare Library, the British Library, and
Acknowledgments

Harvard’s Houghton Library allowed me to work in their collections. The impresses of past teachers – William Pritchard, Victoria Kahn, Stephen Booth, and John Parker – remain strong in my mind and, I hope, on the page as well. Although their expertise is in the field of history rather than literature, Edward Baring and Angus Burgin have been both my most incisive readers and the greatest spurs to my continued intellectual development. Conversations with James Simpson and Joseph Koerner helped me to advance my thinking on iconoclasm. I have appreciated the encouragement, advice, and fit conversation of John Rumrich, Steven Fallon, William Kerrigan, Patrick Cheney, Joanna Picciotto, Tom Luxon, Adam Potkay, David Loewenstein, Ken Hiltner, John Rogers, Nigel Smith, Marjorie Garber, Stephen Greenblatt, Leah Price, Richard Stier, Tobias Gregory, Blair Hoxby, Anthony Welch, Sharon Achinstein, Laura Knoppers, Douglas Trevor, Roy Sellars, John Robert Ladd, Maia McAleavy, Julie Oremanski, Katie Deutsch, and Timothy Michael. For generously reading parts of the manuscript and offering the proper mix of criticism, encouragement, and intellectual camaraderie, I thank Nicholas Nace, Jacob Jost, Christopher Warren, Timothy Arner, Steven Hequembourg, Hannah Sullivan, Blaine Greteman, Tobias Gregory, Paul Stevens, and Jason Rosenblatt. This book has benefited from their knowledge and acuity. While I would gladly disown the errors that remain, they are unmistakably mine.

This book would never have been written without the love and support of my family. I dedicate it to my wife, Carolyn, to whom I owe what is best in my life.
Abbreviations and Editions


Passages from the Bible, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version.