

Jessica Junqueira  
Dissertation Abstract

“‘Held by Thy Voice’: Navigating Time in John Milton’s Poetry”

My dissertation, “‘Held by Thy Voice’: Navigating Time in John Milton’s Poetry” explores how and to what extent John Milton uses the formal devices of suspension and synchronicity in “Lycidas,” *Paradise Lost*, and *Paradise Regained*. I argue that these patterns signify Milton’s attempt to negotiate between multiple categories of time. These moments are important because they highlight characters’ perspectives and expose the limitations of their viewpoints. Milton also employs these patterns to introduce potential scenarios that reveal characters to be out of step with a providential framework. The categories of time that I assess are subjective temporality, history, cyclical time, the apocalypse (which I define as a subcategory of providence, since it marks the end of history), eternity, and providence. Milton uses suspension to connect two or more temporal categories and to reveal an individual’s position in relation to his or her moment in time, a relationship that Marshall Grossman in *Authors to Themselves* terms “historical consciousness.” In moments of suspension, temporal categories are often at odds with one another. Moments of synchronicity do not contain such interruptions and bring together multiple categories of time to show their harmony with one another. While some critics have noticed suspension operating in Milton’s poetry, they have not fully considered how it illuminates Milton’s conception of time. In my argument, form is central to understanding the relationship between various temporal constructs and the way Milton makes them his own. Tracing Milton’s pauses provides us the opportunity to understand how form is working to illustrate point of view, how point of view functions within the plot, and the extent to which characters’ perceptions of their roles are often outside the boundaries of right action and good timing.

Chapter 1 demonstrates how Milton’s temporal frameworks in “Lycidas” reflect his transformation of temporal constructs in Edmund Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calender*. In my next two chapters, I examine how Milton even more completely develops a panoramic vision of time and a subject’s point of view in *Paradise Lost*’s epic narrative form. In chapter 2, I illustrate the extent to which these patterns reveal differing points of view: Adam, Satan, the fallen and unfallen angels, the narrator, and Eve. Chapter 3 suggests that suspensions and synchronicity dramatize God’s plan for mankind, Adam and Eve’s perception of their roles, and, after the fall, the human experience. Chapter 4 turns to *Paradise Regained*; there, I offer a reading of the climactic scene when Satan places Jesus on the pinnacle of Jerusalem. I look to Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene*, book II, canto xi, as a crucial influence on Milton’s text. I argue for the extent to which Spenser’s Arthur and Maleger episode is a key source for this decisive moment in the poem.