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Summa confessorum, 3.3.2; 4.1; 7.2.3, 11 [Broomfield, ed., pp. 62–63, 82, 340, 366]).³⁰ A final example may be found in the tag with which Anima concludes his invective against lollards, hermits, and anchorites in B passus 15: “Fy on faitours and *in fautores suos!*” (B 15.215); a similar phrase frequently appears in the penitential tradition, extending sentences of anathema to all accessories and accomplices in acts which ipso facto incur excommunication. Robert of Flamborough provides the paradigm: “Et cum dico ‘Excommunico Petrum et omnes fautores ejus,’ omnes fautores Petri sunt nominatim excommunicati” (*Liber poenitentialis*, 3.3 [Firth, p. 154]).

The evidence discussed above does not make it possible to claim any one specific penitential text as Langland’s source, but it makes a strong *prima facie* case for his having known some text or texts of the kind here examined. Langland’s immediate source or sources may never come to light; but this is the less important because the penitential tradition was every bit as derivative and repetitive in matters of content and doctrine as we have seen it to have been in matters of terminology and the use of maxims.

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30/Alford (“More Quotations,” p. 280) defines *infamia* and notes some of the ways in which it can be incurred. One of our penitential writers—and to the best of my knowledge only one—explicitly agrees with Langland’s assertion that one who breaks the seal of confession is *infamis*: see Robert of Flamborough, *Liber poenitentialis*, 3.3 (Firth, ed., p. 160), and *Piers* B 5.166–68.

Milton’s Land-Ships and John Wilkins

Sidney Gottlieb

Frank Huntley’s highly informative essay on “Vultures, Chinese Land-Ships, and Milton’s ‘Paradise of Fools’” surveys much of the background for Milton’s quick reference to the wind-driven “cany Waggons light” in *Paradise Lost* 3.437–39.¹ He suggests that subtle wordplay makes these vehicles a particularly apt introduction to the anti-Catholic satire that immediately follows. Though such sailing chariots were actually built by the Dutch mathematician Simon Stevin, pictured in various maps and engravings, and described in works by Grotius and others, Huntley agrees with Allan Gilbert that “the primary source of Milton’s knowledge of the Chinese land-ship was a Spanish friar from Toledo, Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza, whose account of it was published in 1585. . . . Could he be making a pun on Mendoza and the Latin word for prevarication?” (pp. 134–35).

1/Frank L. Huntley, *Essays in Persuasion: On Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Chicago, 1981), pp. 133–41.

Another possible source needs to be added to Huntley's list, though, one much closer in time to Milton and which provides a somewhat different kind of introduction to the "Paradise of Fools" section. The sailing chariot of Simon Stevin, constructed around the turn of the seventeenth century in imitation of the Chinese originals, was popularized by John Wilkins's very successful book *Mathematicall Magick*, of which there were two editions in 1648 and further reprints in 1680 and 1691.² In book 2, chapter 2, Wilkins goes into far greater detail than Mendoza on the history and possible uses of a land-ship (only one of the many inventions he discusses in the volume) and includes two plates.³ But Milton's presentation of this image is witty and ironic and may be read as a rebuttal or parody of Wilkins's praise of technological ingenuity.

Several details support this kind of connection. For example, Wilkins describes the "Champion plains of *China*" where "such Chariots are commonly used" (p. 154), but the scene is much more bleak and lonely in *Paradise Lost*: "the barren Plains / Of *Sericana*, where Chineses drive" (3.437–38). Wilkins repeatedly mentions "the force of wind" as generative, a source of energy that, unlike horses, "costs nothing, and eats nothing" (p. 163) and can be harnessed by the shrewd gentry. As Huntley points out,⁴ wind is a major motif in the "Paradise of Fools" section, but to a much different purpose. Far from being a sign of cosmic vigor tamed by rational husbandry, wind here is a comic sign of intellectual folly, even flatulence: Raphael's advice later in the epic, that the intemperate search for knowledge "soon turns / Wisdom to folly, as Nourishment to Wind" (7.129–130), further clarifies—if we need such a gloss!—why certain kinds of fools "Fly o'er the backside of the World far off / Into a *Limbo* large and broad" (3.494–95). Wilkins sees scientific man in complete control of the forces around him and, at one point, redesigns a land-ship "In which the sails are so contrived, that the wind from any Coast will have a force upon them to turn them about . . . and consequently carry on the Chariot itself to any place . . . whither it shall be directed" (p. 163). Quite the contrary, Milton's flying fools are always "The sport of Winds" (3.493); for them, as

2/ All quotations from John Wilkins's *Mathematicall Magick* will be from the 1648 edition (London; page numbers are in parentheses in text). W. R. Parker notes that there is no evidence of direct contact between Milton and Wilkins or other members of the scientifically inclined "Invisible College" but goes on to say that such contact would have been easy "from 1644 onwards, thanks initially to his friendship with Hartlib" (*Milton: A Biography*, 2 vols. [Oxford, 1968], p. 1046, n. 149). It is difficult to imagine any great congeniality between the two if they had met; Wilkins's brief mention of Milton in *Ecclesiastes* (London, 1646) is uncomplimentary and rude, referring to his position on divorce. Grant McColley argues that Milton was influenced by Wilkins's astronomical speculations in *The Discovery of a World in the Moon* (London, retitled *The Discovery of a New World* in the 1640 edition [London]) and *Discourse That the Earth May Be a Planet* (London; published with the third edition of *Discovery* in 1640), but he makes no mention of *Mathematicall Magick*. See "*Paradise Lost*": *An Account of Its Growth and Major Origins* (Chicago, 1940), esp. pp. 217–44. Interestingly, the "Paradise of Fools" section contains a passing mention of exactly the kind of idea for which Milton is indebted to Wilkins, according to McColley: the speculation in 3.459–62 that other worlds might be populated.

3/ The land-ships pictured in Wilkins's volume do not look "cany," but they do look considerably smaller and less cumbersome than the large, thick-wheeled, magisterial craft pictured in, for example, the engraving by Jacob de Gheyn, reproduced in E. J. Dijksterhuis, *Simon Stevin: Science in the Netherlands around 1600* (The Hague, 1970), opposite p. 103. "Cany," of course, calls to mind the expected building material of the Far East, bamboo, but perhaps also puns on "canny," a relatively new word at this time (see *OED*). Such a pun would further support any argument that Milton uses the land-ship as an emblem of misapplied shrewdness.

4/ Huntley, pp. 138–41.

for Satan (see 2.932 ff.), navigation is difficult, and even as they near their destination, "lo / A violent cross wind from either Coast / Blows them transverse ten thousand Leagues awry / Into the devious Air" (3.486–89).⁵

Though Wilkins can hardly disguise his excitement about what he takes to be the many accomplishments of man's reason and practical skills, the "mathematical magic" portrayed in this section of *Paradise Lost* is no cause for celebration: it signals not human dignity and achievement but rather the almost inescapable vanity that fills "the works of men" (3.447). Though the anti-Catholic satire is prominent, Milton's broader target is intellectual folly in general (a topic he will of course return to in book 8), represented here by, among others, the windblown monks and such vain and prideful technicians as "The builders next of *Babel* on the Plain / Of *Senaar*" (3.466–67), characters effectively introduced by the opening reference to the land-ships on the windy "Plains of *Sericana*."

Perhaps the reader does not need to be aware of any rather obscure allusions at all to understand the significance of the land-ships. Particularly at the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, where Milton so insistently sets up parallel structures to contrast God and Satan, we should note how carefully the wind wagon is framed by Christ's magnificent "flaming Chariot" (3.394) and the "Chariot drawn by fiery Steeds" (3.522), which takes favored visitors to heaven. No other interpretive context is necessary to underscore the frailty of this vehicle, light and by no means self-moving. Still, the unity and breadth of the "Paradise of Fools" section and its critique of man's rational and technological pride are reinforced if the land-ships call to mind a seventeenth-century projector whose entire book praises an attitude that Milton ridicules.⁶

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5/ At this point, the fools are not in a land-ship but flying with their own "Cowsls, Hoods and Habit" (3.490) as sails. Though *Mathematicall Magick* is still relevant here—not only the chapter on sailing chariots but also the lengthy discussion of contrivances that might allow a man to fly under his own power—Milton may be recalling the curious Windrunners in Lucian's *A True Story*, who similarly fly through the air using their long shirts as sails. See *Selected Satires of Lucian*, ed. and trans. Lionel Casson (New York, 1962), p. 19. The entire "Paradise of Fools" section is Lucianic: exaggerated, satiric, and wickedly funny.

6/ *Mathematicall Magick* proved to be an important source for later satirists. Gwin J. Kolb points out that Laurence Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* and Samuel Johnson in *Rasselas* borrow details from Wilkins (particularly from his chapter on the sailing chariot) in writing their cautionary tales—one comic, the other ominous and somber—about the vanity of human reason. See "A Note on *Tristram Shandy*: Some New Sources," *Notes and Queries* 196 (1951): 226–27, and "Johnson's 'Dissertation on Flying' and John Wilkins' *Mathematicall Magick*," *Modern Philology* 47 (1949): 24–30.