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Paradise Lost in Eighteenth-Century Zurich: Literary Controversy and Religious Heterodoxy

Johann Jakob Bodmer's prose translation of *Paradise Lost*, published in Zurich in 1732, was not the first German translation of Milton's epic, but its importance cannot be overstated due to the central role which it played in a long and vitriolic literary controversy between literary theorists from Zurich and Leipzig, now known as the *Zürcher Literaturstreit*, which decisively shaped the course of German literature. This essay explores a little-regarded aspect of Milton's reception along with this controversy, which revolves around the charge of religious heterodoxy that was levelled both against Milton and his translator Bodmer. As this essay argues, Milton's and Bodmer's detractors, especially Johann Christoph Gottsched, detected heresy, more specifically pietism, not only in Milton's theology and extra-Biblical subject matter, but also in the formal and linguistic idiosyncrasies of his poem, which offered Bodmer and his allies a model for their rejection of Saxon hegemony in Germanophone literature. The charge of heterodoxy thus highlights the intricate entanglements of religious and aesthetic categories in the mid-eighteenth century, even at a time when aesthetics was becoming an increasingly independent discipline of philosophical inquiry.

Keywords: John Milton; Johann Jakob Bodmer; *Paradise Lost*, Zürcher Literaturstreit; pietism

For eighteenth-century German literature, arguably no English literary work was of greater importance than Milton's *Paradise Lost*.¹ However, its reception was fraught with poetic, linguistic, and religious controversy and crystallised some of the key issues in eighteenth-century German

¹ For a comprehensive overview of Milton's German reception, see Hans-Dieter Kreuder.

literary theory in what is now known as the *Zürcher Literaturstreit*.² Following Johann Jakob Bodmer's publication of *Johann Miltons Verlust des Paradieses* in 1732, the *Literaturstreit*, usually dated from circa 1740-1760, was sparked off by disagreements not only on the merits of Bodmer's translation, but also on Milton's poem as such. The controversy is usually conceptualised in terms of the opposition of two camps that, somewhat misleadingly, are geographically assigned to Zürich, mainly represented by Bodmer and his frequent collaborator Johann Jakob Breitinger, and Leipzig, mainly represented by Johann Christoph Gottsched.³ A proponent of early enlightenment rationalism, Gottsched was committed to an ideal of literary mimesis that should strictly adhere to nature and reason and held up French neo-classicism as a model to be imitated by German literature. Probability, in a rationalist sense that would exclude the supernatural and focus on the realm of human passions and actions instead, was Gottsched's decisive criterion for acceptable poetic subject matter—which evidently ruled out the subject of *Paradise Lost*. Bodmer and Breitinger, on the other hand, advocated the equal rights of a relatively freely roaming imagination, which they legitimised with recourse to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's theory of multiple possible worlds. Filling out the gaps in the Bible, as Christian epics such as *Paradise Lost* did, was therefore acceptable within the realm of the possible, as was "likening spiritual to corporal forms" (line 573), as the Archangel Raphael does in his account of the war in Heaven to Adam in *Paradise Lost*, in order to make spiritual truths imaginatively comprehensible in terms of sensual perception. Opposing Gottsched's secularising rationalism, Bodmer and Breitinger insisted that poetry could still be a vehicle of religious experience.

However, the orthodoxy of the religious experience that poetry could mediate in Bodmer's and Breitinger's view was frequently called into question by their opponents, who smelled a whiff of pietism in the Miltonic enthusiasm emanating from Zurich. Although frequently overshadowed by Puritanism in an anglophone context, pietism was one of the most significant Protestant reform movements since the Reformation. It took its inspiration from a variety of sources, including early modern spiritualism and mysticism, especially the Silesian mystic and philosopher

² For recent overviews of the *Zürcher Literaturstreit* on which the following, brief summary is based, see Detlef Döring and, with particular attention to the role of Milton and Christian epic poetry, Isabel Gunzenhauser (23–88).

³ However, for the extent to which Bodmer also reacted to French literary criticism, see Kevin Hilliard 201–215.

Jacob Boehme, but also Puritan works of edification. Pietism blossomed especially in the first half of the eighteenth century, both in Lutheran and Reformed territories. Although plagued by internal divisions from its beginnings, pietists generally criticised what they perceived as rigid formalism in the doctrines and institutions of the established churches, a reduction of living faith to school knowledge and outward obedience. In turn, they advocated for a more practice-oriented, internalised, and individualised piety, which they sometimes also cultivated in their conventicles, so-called *collegia pietatis*, albeit without necessarily separating from the established churches. Depending on time and place, pietists occasionally also experienced suppression and persecution to varying degrees.⁴

The aim of this essay is to answer the question why exactly Milton, his German translator, and his German followers were dismissed as pietists and whether, at least in the case of Bodmer, there were any substantial grounds for doing so. While there is no evidence that Bodmer actually identified with any current of pietism, the charge was nonetheless not just the product of an arbitrary smear campaign. Not only were there several points of contact between the early German Milton reception before Bodmer and pietist milieus, but the literary ideals that Bodmer championed in *Paradise Lost* also resonated with a number of pietist ideals and practices, as will be demonstrated in particular with regard to Bodmer's reflections on poetic inspiration and linguistic liberty. The religious controversy in the German reception of *Paradise Lost* thus puts a fascinating spotlight on the religious implications of poetics and literary form in the eighteenth century and the complex ways in which they interact with supposedly secular concerns, such as questions of poetic and linguistic authority. In a first step, this essay will therefore briefly situate Bodmer's translation in the previous German reception of *Paradise Lost* and Bodmer's difficulties to have it published in his native Zurich, before moving on to the charge of pietism in the *Literaturstreit* and, finally, focusing more specifically on the questions of poetic and linguistic authority that were bound up with this charge.⁵

⁴ A good overview of scholarship on pietism, on which this brief summary is based, is available in Steven O'Malley, et al.

⁵ In this essay, all English translations from German are my own. The original German and appertaining bibliographical information are provided in footnotes.

1. Translating *Paradise Lost*

The charge of pietism that was levelled against Bodmer should arguably be viewed in light of the pietist associations that *Paradise Lost* may already have acquired in earlier German translations. Christoph Wegleiter, who translated the first 195 verses of *Paradise Lost* in the 1680s, had been in contact with Philipp Jacob Spener, one of the founding fathers of the pietist movement, and reportedly had a habit of preaching in his vein (Magon 76–77). Theodor Haak, who already translated the first three books of *Paradise Lost* in the late 1660s, also made significant contributions to the rich German translation culture of Puritan writings that fell on fertile ground especially among early pietists, and he seems to have been interested in radical Protestant German literature himself.⁶ Finally, Ernst Gottlieb Berg, who revised, completed, and published Haak's translation in 1682, has also been suspected of pietist sympathies, although the evidence is less concrete in his case (Kreuder 85). The extent to which *Paradise Lost* was indeed perceived, or at least marketed, not just as poetry but also theology may be gauged from the fact that Berg's edition was classified among the *libri theologici* at the Leipzig Bookfair in 1682 (Kreuder 82). Although the relationship between pietism and art, especially secular art, was complicated, pietists were certainly open to Christian epic poetry (Wels 190–191), as exemplified by the Biblical epic *Uranias* (1720) by the radical pietist leader Johann Wilhelm Petersen, a poetic theodicy inspired by Petersen's intellectual exchange with Leibniz. Even Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, by far the most important German epic poet of the eighteenth century and temporarily Bodmer's *protégé* in Zürich, had a pietist family background and, in his Miltonic magnum opus *Messias*, occasionally flirts with radical pietist positions, such as the restitution of all things (including the salvation of demons), which Petersen had already espoused enthusiastically (Gunzenhauser 277–292).

Nonetheless, there is little evidence that Bodmer himself could be considered a pietist. Born in 1698, Bodmer was initially meant to follow in his father's footsteps and become a minister, but he eventually found his vocation as professor of Swiss history and politics in Zurich and be-

⁶ For a bibliography of Haak's works and translations, including Daniel Dyke's *The Mystery of Self-Deceiving* (1615) and Henry Scudder's *The Christian's Daily Walk* (1642), see Pamela Barnett 187–188; for the pietist reception of Puritan religious literature more generally, see Peter Damrau; for Haak's own apparent interest in radical Protestant literature, see Sonja Klimek and Kilian Schindler (222n.37).

came one of the most prolific Swiss poets, translators, and literary theorists of the eighteenth century. It was probably Bodmer's friend Laurenz Zellweger who first introduced the young Bodmer to Milton with a copy of Jacob Tonson's 1711 edition of *Paradise Lost* (Kohler 442–443).⁷ Bodmer began his remarkably precise prose translation in autumn 1723 and finished it within a few months—an impressive achievement, considering that he had begun learning English autodidactically only three years earlier and approached Milton armed with nothing but an Anglo-Latin dictionary (Kohler 445).⁸ The decision to translate Milton's blank verse in prose may have been owed to technical difficulties, the lack of an established German metrical equivalent, and, as John Guthrie notes (203), Bodmer's desire to appeal to a wider audience. Nonetheless, Bodmer was keen to replicate Milton's linguistic idiosyncrasies and, as he later recounted, more afraid that he may not be able to replicate Milton's sublime style than to seem un-German due to the faithfulness of his translation to the original.⁹ Aware of Milton's puns and onomatopoetic playfulness, Bodmer even preserves, for instance, Satan's serpentine alliteration in "So talked the spirited sly snake" (IX.613) as "So sagte die begeisterte schlaue Schlange" (*Verlohrnes Paradies*, 1759, 2:125).¹⁰

⁷ The copy is still extant in the Zentralbibliothek Zürich (Sign. 25.626) and accessible in digitised form via e-rara (10.3931/e-rara-58380), but the year number dating Zellweger's donation is no longer visible.

⁸ On the chronological details of Bodmer's Milton-translation, see Hans Bodmer.

⁹ This sentiment is expressed in the following quote from Bodmer's *Sammlung kritischer, poetischer, und andrer geistvollen Schriften, zur Verbesserung des Urtheils und des Wizes in den Wercken der Wolredenheit und der Poesie*: "Meine Furcht ist in wärender Arbeit der Uebersetzung beständig grösser gewesen, dass ich Miltons nachdrückliche, kurze und erhabene Schreibart nicht erreichen mögte, als dass ich durch die genaue Ausdrückung derselben gewissen Sprachlehrern undeutsch scheinen würde" (*Sammlung* 131–132).

¹⁰ A conscious emphasis on replicating Milton's onomatopoetic sibilants is evidently noticeable in this edition from 1759 in comparison to Bodmer's first edition from 1732: "So redete der eingegeistete schlaue Wurm" (*Verlust des Paradieses*, 1732, 92). For a more detailed discussion of this and further examples, see Guthrie, who points out, however, that Bodmer eventually tended to simplify Milton's language and render it more transparent in later versions of his translation (203–207). As Bodmer points out in his 1759 edition of his translation, this tendency is related to his use of prose, whereas he encourages a prospective verse translator of *Paradise Lost* to maintain Milton's stylistic idiosyncrasies (2:19–22), which will be discussed in more detail in the last section of this essay.

When Bodmer first tried to publish his work in Zurich in 1724, he was in for an unpleasant surprise. Subject to pre-publication censorship, the translation was rejected by the censors on the grounds that it was “all too novellike writing on such a holy theme”¹¹—a damning verdict in Zurich, where intellectual life was still deeply pervaded by reformed orthodoxy, including the position that nothing was either to be added or taken away from the divinely inspired Word of God (Meyer 54–55). Milton’s liberties with his Biblical subject matter evidently clashed with this orthodox Reformed position. It was only in 1732 that Bodmer could finally publish *Paradise Lost*, when censorship in Zurich had effectively broken down and proven unable to stem the tide of heterodox publishing.¹²

2. The Charge of Enthusiasm

In contrast to earlier criticism, scholars such as Kevin Hilliard (198–220) and Isabel Gunzenhauser (65–75) have recently stressed the extent to which the *Literaturstreit* was also a “religious war,” which raised not only dogmatic questions, for example concerning the theodicy problem raised by Milton’s attempt to “justify the ways of God to men” (I.26), but also questions concerning the religious origins of poetry (or lack thereof), the legitimacy of taking poetic license with Biblical history and, more generally, of treating Christian truths in a poetic register. I would argue that the *Literaturstreit* also had a confessionally more specific dimension, as is suggested in the repeated invocations of pietism in relation to *Paradise Lost*, which, in fact, precede the *Literaturstreit* itself and can already be traced to Bodmer’s run-in with the censors in Zurich in 1724. As Bodmer writes in his autobiography in the 1770s, “when I handed over some fragments [of *Paradise Lost*] to the ordained censors, they perceived the

¹¹ “[...] es hat sollen hier gedruckt werden, die geistlichen Censores aber sehen es für eine allzu romantische Schrift an in einem so heiligen Themate“ (qtd. in Vetter 349).

¹² For pietist book culture and censorship in Zürich, see Kaspar Bütikofer 92–102. Bodmer returned to this translation again and again throughout his long life: new and in some cases substantially revised editions appeared in 1742, 1754, 1759, 1769, and 1780, three years before his death. For a more detailed discussion of Bodmer’s translation and its different versions, which will not be the focus of this essay, see Guthrie.

style to be Boehmist, and the content to be that of legend and novels.”¹³ The adjective “böhmisch”, which Bodmer uses in the German original, refers to the philosopher and mystic Jacob Boehme, who exerted a considerable influence on pietism. This influence was also palpable in Zürich, even to the extent that non-conformists were often summarily dismissed as “Boehmists” (Hanimann 232–235).

This seemingly harsh reaction to Bodmer’s translation may be related to recent religious and political unrest in Zurich, in particular, the appearance of the radical pietists who called themselves *Werkzeuge Gottes*, that is, divine tools, and who claimed direct divine inspiration when they prophesied God’s judgement and exhorted their listeners to repent and reform. These *Werkzeuge* had caused quite a stir when they repeatedly visited Switzerland in the decade before Bodmer went about translating *Paradise Lost* and thus initiated a period of severe persecution for Swiss pietism (Schneider 128–130). In Zurich, these self-proclaimed prophets also became entangled with attempts at political reform, in which another member of the Bodmer family and an important pietist leader in his own right, Johann Heinrich Bodmer, had played a crucial role (Bütikofer 487–494).¹⁴ Notably, this Bodmer had been Zurich’s leading general in the Second War of Villmergen (1712) and had voiced ambitions to become another Oliver Cromwell (Hottinger 171) before he was eventually banished from Zurich in 1720. It need not surprise us, then, that when Johann Jakob Bodmer submitted his translation of a revolutionary poet-prophet in the service of Cromwell to the censors, they were wary and scanned it for traces of Bodmer’s relative’s radicalism.

Such accusations of Boehmist sympathies were not restricted to Zurich but resurface again in the *Literaturstreit* with Gottsched some thirty years later. In a polemical article from 1752, Gottsched taints not only Milton, but the whole tradition of Biblical epic poetry that took its cue from Milton, with the suspicion of heterodoxy. Gottsched wonders why “our divines are sitting still and do not realise how these mendacious new legends will harm Christianity in these times that are so inclined to

¹³ “Als ich einige Fragmente davon den bestalten Censoren übergab, war die Schreibart ihnen böhmisch, der Inhalt Legende und Roman” (“Persönliche Anekdoten” 103).

¹⁴ On this Bodmer family (originally from Stäfa-Esslingen), which is not to be confused with the more famous Bodmers from Alagna-Sesia who remained one of Zurich’s leading families at least up to the twentieth century, see Stucki 398–409.

free thinking and the derision of religion.”¹⁵ Gottsched compares Christian epics as a whole both to Boehme and to the writings of the pietist church leader and poet Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, arguing that “the same spirit of enthusiasm rules in these new epics, although in a more subtle and not so blunt manner, which makes it all the more harmful and contagious.”¹⁶ The charge of enthusiasm, or *Schwärmerey*, as Gottsched puts it in German, has been a well-established polemical weapon since the early sixteenth century that denigrated prophets and visionaries who claimed direct revelations from God and thereby circumvented and fundamentally challenged the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. Gottsched accordingly characterises Klopstock’s *Messias*, which he identifies as the fruit of Bodmer’s doctrines (*Gedichte* 556), as follows: “A Christian will learn here what neither prophet nor evangelist has seen, and what no apostle has known.”¹⁷ Klopstock, as another ally of Gottsched’s argues, heralded a new-fangled fashion, which, owing to the delusional and excessive imagination of the poet, precipitates its reeling admirers into a dangerous enthusiasm that utterly dishonours Christianity (Hudemann 25). The poetic liberties that Milton and his imitators took with their Biblical subject matter, along with their Christianised pleas for inspiration to the Muses or the Holy Ghost respectively, thus undermined *sola scriptura* in the eyes of their critics and evidently made them vulnerable to charges of heterodoxy.

Whether Gottsched actually *meant* it is a different question. Scholars have tended to view Gottsched’s attack as polemical opportunism, given that Gottsched himself, as an enlightenment rationalist, hardly met the criteria of Lutheran orthodoxy himself (Gunzenhauser 219–220; Kemper 245–246). However, Gottsched’s own tenuous orthodoxy does not mean that he did not really smell a whiff of pietist enthusiasm in Christian epics or that his animosity towards pietism was not genuine. Gottsched’s own

¹⁵ “In Wahrheit, man muss sich gegentheils wundern, wie unsre Gottesgelehrten so still sitzen, und es nicht wahrnehmen, wie viel solche neue geistliche Lügenden in diesen zur Freygeisterey und Religionsspötere y so geneigten Zeiten, dem wahren Christenthume schaden werden” (“Bescheidenes Gutachten” 71).

¹⁶ “Sie verfolgen mit einem löblichen Eifer die zinzendorfschen Schwärmereyen [...] und sehen nicht, dass in diesen neuen Epopeen eben der Geist der Schwärmerey, nur auf eine schlaure und nicht so plumpe Art herrschet; aber eben deswegen noch desto schädlicher und ansteckender ist” (“Bescheidenes Gutachten” 71).

¹⁷ “Was kein Prophet gesehn und kein Evangelist, / Was kein Apostel wusst, das lernst du hier, mein Christ!” (*Gedichte* 556)

wife (Luise Adelgunde Victorie née Kulmus), for instance, had already published a notorious comedy, *Die Pietisterey im Fischbein-Rocke*, in 1736, which controversially satirised pietist hypocrisy and pseudo-learning as well as the credulity of its victims. As Bettina Bannasch has noted (266), the Gottscheds' shared animosities to pietism, which seem to manifest themselves paradoxically in the guise of orthodoxy, may well have been owed to the clash between pietists at the University of Halle and the leading Enlightenment philosopher Christian Wolff, whom Gottsched revered and who had been expelled from the University of Halle in 1723. Gottsched's association of Milton's German followers with pietism was thus arguably fuelled by genuine contempt and likely had a certain degree of plausibility in the eyes of contemporaries, considering that Bodmer's Milton translation had already incurred accusations of pietist sympathies when it failed to find approval with the censors in Zurich in 1524, long before the controversy with Gottsched began.

How, then, did Bodmer position himself with regard to the charge of enthusiasm? Despite viewing *Paradise Lost* as "poetic theology" (Tisch 274), Bodmer downplayed its prophetic dimension and denied that Milton, in his invocation of the Christian muse Urania, was indeed seriously asking for divine inspiration (*Critische Abhandlung von dem Wunderbaren* 217–218). In their early periodical *Discourse der Mahlern* (1721–1723), Bodmer and his collaborator Breitinger actually lightly satirised pietist prophets,¹⁸ and they generally rejected the idea of the divinely inspired *poeta vates*.¹⁹ However, it has been argued that Bodmer and Breitinger *secularised* the notion of pietist inspiration and described the process of literary creation through poetic inspiration in a manner that would have been legible to their contemporaries in terms of the divine pronouncements made by pietist prophets in early-eighteenth century Zurich (Kemper 8; Schneider 145). While dismissing the *furor poeticus* as a mere metaphor, Breitinger nonetheless admits the similarity between the poet's heated imagination and religious fervour and the poetic productivity that such a state may engender (*Critische Dichtkunst* 330–333). As Ulf-Michael Schneider has suggested (141–155), Bodmer and Breitinger

¹⁸ For their satire of religious enthusiasm as a form of mental distraction, see Bodmer and Breitinger, *Discourse der Mahlern*, Dritter Theil, XVI. Discours, 128. On the pietist prophets (*die Inspirierten*), which began to form their communities around 1715, see further Volkhard Wels 187–188.

¹⁹ See Bodmer and Breitinger, *Discourse der Mahlern*, Erster Theil, XIX. Discours (T4v), and the rejection of divine inspiration in the critical *magnum opus* of the Zurich party, Breitinger's *Critische Dichtkunst* (1740), 1:329–333.

could therefore be fruitfully compared to the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, who was equally capable of mocking self-proclaimed prophets in his *Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* (1708), but nonetheless insisted that “[n]o poet [...] can do anything great in his own way without the imagination or supposition of a divine presence” (Shaftesbury 26). Significantly, Shaftesbury’s *Letter* too responded to the presence of French Protestant refugees in London, who had caused a considerable stir with their divine prophecies (Shaftesbury 15–16).

Even though it would arguably go too far to see eighteenth-century theories of poetic inspiration as the outgrowth of a specific religious outlook, it is worth recalling that discussions of poetic inspiration would, in the religious and social life of Bodmer, Shaftesbury, and their contemporaries, still have carried concrete spiritual significance. Christian epic poetry was thus by no means *necessarily* bound up with a pietist spiritual outlook, but neither were theories of poetic inspiration completely secularised. Central as it was not least to Christian epic poetry, poetic inspiration could entail a host of theological questions, from which Bodmer and Breitinger felt a need to distance themselves explicitly, even as they and others still looked to religious inspiration in their characterisations of the act of poetic creation. Radical Protestant enthusiasm thus arguably has a part to play in the eighteenth-century tendency towards conceptions of poetry that prized inspired subjectivity and intuition above the normative regulations of neoclassicism. Even in Edward Young’s seminal *Conjectures on Original Composition* from 1759, which also played a crucial role in the German cult of the original genius, the poet is tellingly still characterised as a “divinely-inspired enthusiast” (25).

3. Milton and the Language of Pietism

As mentioned earlier, when Bodmer submitted his translation to the censors in Zurich, not just the content but also the language of his work was supposedly reminiscent of Jacob Boehme. These charges again resurface in the *Literaturstreit*. In the aforementioned article on Christian epics from 1752, Gottsched complains that the “strange words and hidden, obscure expressions” of these poems under the “semblance of devotion and piety” are deceptive, as was already the case with “the writings of the enthusiastic cobbler, Jacob Boehme, or the divine metaphysics of John

Pordage,” that is, Boehme’s first major English follower.²⁰ Boehme was notorious for the impenetrability of his prose (Smith), and according to Gottsched and his allies, the German epic poets imitating Milton were no better. Christoph Otto von Schönaich’s satirical neological diary, *Die ganze Aesthetik in einer Nuß, oder Neologisches Wörterbuch* (1754), for instance, ridicules the linguistic innovations and the pathos-driven, sublime style of Bodmer and his followers, which can only be understood by angels (17) and therefore requires a dedicated dictionary, which will teach its readers “how to make verses, even if blind, like Milton.”²¹ Notably, Schönaich’s attack is premised on the language as well as the spiritual pretensions that he perceives behind it. He dismisses Klopstock, for instance, as a “seer, new Evangelist, [and] dreamer,” or simply “divine St Klopstock,”²² whose *Messias* he ironically terms “the revelation of St Klopstock.”²³ As Schönaich knows, Bodmer and his followers also played an important role in the promotion of the German cult of *Empfindsamkeit* (sensitivity) (Kemper 242), which at least partly seems to have grown out of pietist interiority.²⁴ Crediting the “seer” Klopstock with the creation of the style of *Empfindung* (117), Schönaich exclaims accordingly: “What are you then, when you are all sensibility? One of the Moravian Brethren!”²⁵—that is, the pietist community founded by the aforementioned Zinzendorf.

Whether Bodmer, Klopstock, and their associates were indeed writing in a pietist register is again a different question. Klopstock’s language in particular has received a good deal of attention, but there is no scholarly consensus on the extent to which it is coloured by pietist linguistic habits.²⁶ While comparable studies for Bodmer, who lacked Klopstock’s

²⁰ “Zudem kann den Pöbel und gemeinen Schlag der Leser nichts mehr blenden, als was man unter dem Scheine der Andacht und Gottseligkeit, hinter seltsamen Worten und versteckten dunkeln Redensarten verbirgt: wie wir an des Schwärmerischen Schusters, Jacob Böhmens Schriften, Pordätschens göttlicher Metaphysica, u. d. m. sehen können” (“Bescheidenes Gutachten” 71).

²¹ “Ich aber versichere, dass, wer mein Buch auswendig weis [sic], der kann allezeit, auch blind, wie Milton, Verse machen” (*Aesthetik* b2r).

²² “dem Seher, dem neuen Evangelisten, dem Träumer, dem göttlichen St. Klopstocken” (*Aesthetik* A2r).

²³ “Offenbarung Sanct Klopstocks” (*Aesthetik* 17).

²⁴ For a survey of the scholarly debate on the pietist roots of *Empfindsamkeit*, see Kemper 3–11.

²⁵ “Was ist man da, wenn man ganz Empfindung ist? Ein Herrenhueter!” (*Aesthetik* 113).

²⁶ For an overview of different scholarly positions on the question of pietist elements in Klopstock’s language, see Gunzenhauser 218–219n.162.

pietist family background, are not available, it is worth asking what aspects of his writing and his linguistic ideals may have incurred the charge of pietist obscurantism. In contrast to Gottsched's rhetorical ideal of perspicuity (Gunzenhauser 27), Bodmer thought that obscurity, or at least a semblance of obscurity, can actually be a poetic virtue (*Sammlung* 100), which may partly account for the charge of Boehmist incomprehensibility. For Bodmer, changes in word order that elevate poetic language from every-day prose have their own affective power (*Sammlung* 99–100), and Milton's use of ellipses, despite their potential obscurity, create a desirable affective immediacy (*Sammlung* 104). Moreover, Bodmer considered Milton an exemplary linguistic innovator, who enriched the English language with his polyglot syncretism, his flexible syntax, his Spenserian archaisms, or his inventive metaphors (*Sammlung* 77–79).

Of course, Milton's frequent terse participial phrases in *Paradise Lost*, for example "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (I.16), cannot always be reproduced in German without recourse to relative clauses and are often spelled out more explicitly by Bodmer, in this case as "Dingen [...] von welchen noch niemand weder in gebundener noch in looser Rede zu schreiben unterstanden hat" (*Verlust des Paradieses*, 1732, 2). In other cases, however, Bodmer comes close to preserving Milton's poetic syntax even in prose, as when he quite faithfully reproduces Milton's tendency to begin his sentences with the verbal object. This is exemplified by the initial invocation of the heavenly Muse in book I:

"Was dunckel in mir ist, erleuchte, und was niedrig, richte auf und stuetze es empor, auf dass ich mit einem hohen Schwung der Rede, wie meine grosse Materie erfordert, die ewige Vorsehung vertheydigen, und den Menschen die Wege Gottes rechtfertigen moege" (*Verlust des Paradieses*, 1732, 2).²⁷

Neither does Bodmer hesitate to reproduce Miltonic Greek and Latin loanwords that were not yet established in German, such as 'limbo', 'myriad', or 'pandemonium' (Guthrie 205), and in his treatise on the style

²⁷ "[...] what in me is dark / Illumine, what is low raise and support; / That to the height of this great argument / I may assert the eternal providence, / and justify the ways of God to men." (I.22–24). However, Bodmer notably diverges from such grammatically precise translation in later editions. Already in the second edition from 1742, for instance, the imperative verb form precedes the object: "Erleuchte, was in mir dunckel ist [...]". Bodmer also moves the subject of the poem's first sentence, which is notoriously delayed until line 6 ("heavenly Muse"), close to the beginning of the poem: "Singe, himmlische

of *Paradise Lost* (*Sammlung* 120), he suggests a number of neologisms that may legitimately be introduced into the German language, such as ‘verparadiest’ (compare with ‘imparadised’ in *Paradise Lost* IV.506), ‘missgeschaffen’ (compare with ‘miscreated’ in *Paradise Lost* II.683), or ‘veredeln’ (compare with ‘ennoble’ in *Paradise Lost* IX.992). Tellingly, von Schönaich’s *Neologisches Wörterbuch* ironically singles out ‘myriad’ as one of Klopstock’s most powerful words—although, regrettably, Luther did not use it in his Bible translation.²⁸ Bodmer equally approves of Milton’s inventive metaphors, which he considers a key trait of his poetic style and the one that can be imitated most easily in another language (*Sammlung* 104–105). Examples that he singles out refer to the Garden of Eden or creation, such as: “[...] underfoot the violet, / Crocus and hyacinth with rich inlay / Broidered the ground” (IV.700–702), or: “The grassy clods now calved, now half appeared / The tawny lion, pawing to get free / His hinder parts” (VII.463–465). Bodmer has a soft spot especially for metaphors that link material to immaterial concepts (*Sammlung* 109–111), such as the fallen angels’ song in Hell: “their song was partial, but the harmony / [...] / Suspended hell” (II.552–554).

This Bodmerian tolerance of linguistic obscurity and originality—although Bodmer is at pains to emphasise that neither should ever amount to incomprehensibility (*Sammlung* 105, 121)—may therefore account for Gottsched’s comparison between the Bodmerian school of epic poetry and the poetry of the pietist Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf largely stood outside of eighteenth-century poetic and linguistic conventions and embraced an aesthetic of divinely inspired improvisation full of daring metaphors, neo-

Muse, von dem ersten Ungehorsam des Menschen [...]” (*Das Verlohrne Paradies*, 1742, 1). As already noted, however, this trend towards greater transparency in his prose translation is not owed to an increasing rejection of Milton’s style as such but to Bodmer’s later insistence on the different stylistic requirements of prose and poetry, respectively. Thus, in the sketches of a metrical translation (in hexameter) in the 1759 edition, Bodmer actually preserves Milton’s original word order and begins the poem with Milton’s forbiddingly extensive verbal object: “Von dem ersten Vergehen des Menschengeschlechts, und dem Obste / Jenes verbotenen Baums, der durch ein toedtlisches essen / mit dem Verlust von Eden den Tod und aeussersten jammer / Auf die Erde so lange gebracht, bis ein groesserer mensch uns / Hylf, und uns wieder den seligen Wohnplaz der Unschuld gewoenne; / Sing o himmlische Muse [...]” (*Verlohrnes Paradies*, 1759, 2:20).

²⁸ “Myriade. Dieses ist eines von den maechtigsten Woertern in der Klopstock-isie; nur ewig schade, dass Luther es nicht gebraucht hat [...] So aber redet leider die Schrift nur von Legionen und Hunderttausend.” (*Aesthetik* 313).

logisms, loanwords, and general multilingualism (Schrader)—all of which are traits that Bodmer appreciated, albeit in less extreme form, in Milton.

This debate about language was arguably not exclusively religious in nature but tied to larger questions of linguistic authority and judgement—more specifically, the question who gets to define what “good” literary German is at a time when written German was still much less standardised than it is today. Gottsched and Bodmer argued not only about the extent to which English, and Milton in particular, could serve as a model for German literature (Gunzenhauser 27–29), the *Literaturstreit* was also a reaction to the increasing reluctance of the Swiss to accept the cultural hegemony of the Saxon variety of German (*Obersächsisch-Meissnisch*) prevalent in Gottsched’s Leipzig and the normative rigidity of Gottsched’s linguistic ideals (Döring 64–81). Notably, Bodmer harboured ambitions to expand the range of the German language as Milton had allegedly expanded the range of English (*Sammlung* 122). For instance, Bodmer’s praise for Milton’s allegedly archaic language—which Gottsched dismissed as old-fashioned (Gottsched, “Joh. Jacob Bodmers Critische Abhandlung” 657)—may well be connected to Bodmer’s own conviction that Swiss German more faithfully represented an older, more pristine stratum of German than the anodyne and courtly Saxon variety (Döring 72–73). In turn, Gottsched attacks not only Milton but also the “strange and loathsome kind of *German* expression” (emphasis added) in Bodmer’s translation,²⁹ an observation that certainly also takes umbrage at Bodmer’s increasing Swiss German self-confidence (Döring 77). Indeed, Gottsched complains elsewhere that Bodmer taught Milton Swiss German (*Gedichte* 555).

The Swiss efforts to propagate their linguistic variety is explicitly connected to pietist missionary activities in the mock-heroic *Bodmerias* (1755) by Christoph Carl Reichel, another one of Gottsched’s allies, who satirically impersonates Zinzendorf and encourages the Swiss as follows: “You have tried in vain in Germany: Go forth! Perhaps the Hottentot will like [your] song”.³⁰ The real Zinzendorf had indeed been a very busy missionary, spreading the Gospel also among the Khoekhoe in South Africa. The protagonist of the poem (that is, Bodmer) even claims Zin-

²⁹ “der seltsamen und widerlichen Art des deutschen Ausdrucks” (“Joh. Jacob Bodmers Critische Abhandlung” 664–665)

³⁰ “Habt ihr in Deutschland euch bisher umsonst bemüht: / Geht fort! Vielleicht gefällt dem Hottentot ein Lied” (Reichels, *Bodmerias* 79).

zendorf as a poet of his own party: “Your song has been aesthetic, picturesque, and new, elevating itself over reason and its sphere, like Bodmer!”³¹ Of course, this is not to say that Swiss German was really considered to be the language of pietist enthusiasm. The point rather seems to be the shared concern of rightful authority: Bodmer’s propagation of Swiss German disregarded the linguistic dominance of the Saxon variety, just as self-declared prophets such as Zinzendorf or Böhme violated the rightful dictates of religious orthodoxy and/or reason, respectively.

4. Conclusion

The charge of religious heterodoxy that was levelled against Bodmer’s Milton-translation and its defendants and imitators is a symptom of a multi-layered conflict between individual expression and authority that played out in various arenas: the divinely inspired prophet versus Scripture-based orthodoxy; the enthusiastic poet versus the normative strictures of neoclassicism; the poet’s right to freely roam the zodiac of possible worlds versus attempts to restrict poetic subject matter to a rational sphere of probability; or linguistic liberty in the service of poetic expression versus linguistic normativity and the cultural hegemony of one particular linguistic variety. Pietist dissent thus became a master trope, as it were, for the threat that Bodmer’s propagation of *Paradise Lost* posed to Gottsched’s enlightenment rationalism and his normative neoclassical poetics. However, more than just tropes, religious categories arguably still provided a highly productive conceptual framework within which linguistic ideals and new poetological principles were formulated and debated, even as aesthetics came into its own as an independent philosoph-

³¹ “[...] Weil du nach unserm Plan’ ein voller Dichter bist. / Aesthetisch, maulerisch, und neu hast du gesungen, / Dich über die Vernunft und ihre Sphär geschwungen. / So Bodmer!” (71)

ical subdiscipline in the mid-eighteenth century.³² The *Zürcher Literaturstreit* was still rooted in its immediate religious lifeworld, as I have shown by situating Bodmer's Milton-translation in the anti-pietist agitation of early-eighteenth-century Zurich and by tracing the continuities between the early charges of pietism levelled against Bodmer's Milton translation and the polemical language that Gottsched and his allies would eventually use against him. The concerns with language and its regulation and the normative authority of form and individual expression, which were raised by the German *Paradise Lost*, were thus arguably not exclusively aesthetic problems but were recognised to be closely entangled with the theological challenges of an age of momentous religious change, in which enlightenment rationalism and the pietist cult of sensibility and inspiration clashed with one another while undermining Protestant orthodoxies.

³² The work most commonly cited as the decisive milestone in the birth of modern aesthetics is Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's *Meditationes philosophicae de nonnullis ad poema pertinentibus* (1735). Martin Fritz has reconstructed the religious and, more specifically, pietist, epistemic modes that still underlie Baumgarten's notion of aesthetic judgement (230-283), a confessional association that is arguably also reflected in Reichel's characterisation of the pietist Zinzendorf as an "aesthetic poet" cited in the previous section. A straightforward narrative of secularisation thus does not do justice to the interplay of religious and aesthetic categories in eighteenth-century German literature.

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