JEMS - Journal of
Early Modern Studies

Firenze University Press
www.fupress.com/bsfm-jems

Citation: T. Hare (2025) Book Supports: Disability, Race, and the Labor of Accommodation in Milton's Poetical Works (1855). *Jems*. 14: pp. 91-104. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.36253/JEMS-2279-7149-16520

Copyright: © 2025 T. Hare. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/bsfm-jems) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

Data Availability Statement: All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

Competing Interests: The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Editors: D. Pallotti, P. Pugliatti (University of Florence)

Book Supports Disability, Race, and the Labor of Accommodation in *Milton's Poetical Works* (1855)

Taylor Hare
Baylor University (<taylor_hare@baylor.edu>)

Abstract

This article explores intersections of disability and race embodied in *Milton's Poetical Works* (1855), the first edition of John Milton's poetry published for reading by touch. It describes how Morrison Heady, a blind man from Kentucky, raised funds for the book by traveling extensively across the eastern United States. Heady's commitment to this project speaks to the important position Milton occupied within the culture that developed around the production of tactile books in the nineteenth-century United States. Many blind readers as well as sighted bookmakers found in Milton a model of the intellectual achievement made possible by the advent of raised-letter printing, and the publication of his poems in 1855 was an occasion for key stakeholders to reflect on the state of tactile bookmaking as it stood at the midcentury. But Morrison Heady was also an enslaver, and historical records suggest that his efforts to publish an edition of Milton for blind readers was supported by the work of enslaved individuals. By acknowledging both the remarkable access provided by the 1855 edition of *Milton's Poetical Works* and the coerced labor to which this book owes its existence, this article shows how the study of early modern book history as well as the emerging field of tactile book history can benefit from intersectional approaches.

Keywords: Blindness, Disability, Milton, Race, Reading by Touch

In 1854, a blind man named Morrison Heady traveled the eastern United States to find financing for a raised-letter edition of John Milton's poetry. Heady was himself a writer and a poet, born and raised in the small town of Elk Creek in Spencer County, Kentucky, and educated at both the Kentucky School for the Instruction of the Blind and the Ohio Institution for the Education of the Blind. Later in life, collections of his poetry such as *The Double Night* – a title referencing his blindness as well as the gradual loss of hearing that began to affect him at an early age – would garner Heady minor fame and earn him the

ISSN 2279-7149 (online) | DOI: 10.36253/JEMS-2279-7149-16520

epithet 'The Blind Bard of Kentucky' ('Famous' 1914). But in 1854, at the age of twenty-five, Heady devoted his considerable ingenuity to publishing works in tactile form by the 'sightless but immortal bard of England' (Kentucky Institution for the Education of the Blind 1857, 7).

This essay tells the story of *Milton's Poetical Works, including Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, Lycidas, Sonnets, &c.*, the book that resulted from Heady's extensive fundraising efforts. Published in 1855 in two volumes using raised Roman letters designed specifically to be read by touch, *Milton's Poetical Works* made complete versions of the works listed in its title as well as others gathered under the *&c.*, including *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*, available to blind readers for the first time in print.[1] Brought to press at a time when funding for raised-letter print projects was scarce, the appearance of this edition demonstrates Milton's importance to the culture that developed around the production of books for blind readers of English in the nineteenth-century United States. As both an eminent writer and a visually disabled person, Milton offered bookmakers and blind readers alike a useful example of the intellectual and literary achievement attainable through the practice of reading by touch. Following its publication, the *Poetical Works* also became an inflection point in the history of the tactile book. Contemporary stakeholders found in the 'uncommonly interesting' story (Perkins Institute for the Blind 1856, 7) of one blind poet traveling the country to fund the publication of another blind poet a useful metonym for the larger enterprise of raised-letter printing. In 1855, the printed tactile book was both old and new, recognizably part of the same textual tradition as inked editions of Milton's works but also a remarkable departure from that tradition.

This essay explains the circumstances that led to the publication of *Milton's Poetical Works* and demonstrates this edition's significance for the history of reading by touch, thus shifting the focus of scholarship on Milton and blindness away from Milton himself and onto his readers. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, critics have begun to examine the role of disability in Milton's literary legacy in light of advances in the field of disability studies. Maura Brady takes the fact of Milton's blindness as an occasion for tracing the word 'disabled' across his literary oeuvre, linking denotative shifts in Milton's use of this term to the more general emergence of disability as a category of social exclusion indicative of 'personal weakness, social menace, and moral pollution' (2022, 174). Amrita Dhar charts the effect of visual disability on Milton's poetic style. By examining works composed in the years leading up to and just after 1652, at which point we understand Milton's 'darkling journey' to have reached complete blindness, Dhar finds evidence of a 'blind language' developed by Milton to reckon with 'approaching and final visual loss' (2018, 75). This and other work heeds Pasquale S. Toscano's call for a reevaluation of works like *Paradise Lost* 'through the lens of disability theory' (2019, n.p.) and builds on Angelica Duran's fusion of 'Milton studies and disability studies' in her reading of contemporary references to Milton's vision (2013, 154). But it leaves open questions about how Milton's legacy has informed the practice of printing books themselves intended for blind readers. How were Milton's texts first made available in raised print, and how have they circulated and signified among blind readers? What role did Milton's visual disability play in the development of tactile literacy? In answering these questions, this essay offers a point of departure for scholarship not only on the topic of Milton's uptake by blind readers but also on the interanimation of raised-letter print production and early modern literary history more generally.

[1] Two complete copies from this edition are known to survive. One is housed in the archives of the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, Massachusetts (AG43 Embossed Book Collection), and the other at the rare books collection at Princeton University Library in Princeton, New Jersey (3859.1855q Oversize). A copy including only the first volume is housed at the Museum of the American Printing House for the Blind in Louisville, Kentucky (2018.26).

Focalizing the story of Milton and his blind readerships through the 1855 *Poetical Works* also shows how complex intersections of disability and race become legible in the labor that produced early examples of raised text. Morrison Heady was an enslaver, and records indicate that Heady's visual disability – as well as his efforts to publish an edition of Milton's poetry – were materially supported by the enforced labor, knowledge, and skills of the people he enslaved.[2] The importance of these enslaved individuals to the making of the *Poetical Works* and the elision of their coerced contributions from the record of the book's publication point us back to Milton and the conditions under which he composed many of the poems Heady sought to publish. Milton's textual history is also one of uncredited labor, albeit of a different kind: the labor of scribes and amanuenses who read to Milton and took down his dictation beginning in the 1640s, but even more tangibly the labor of his daughters, Anne, Mary, and Deborah (Masson 1877, 121). Among other tasks, these women enabled their father's scholarship by reading to him in multiple languages, yet the degree to which their work was performed voluntarily or out of familial obligation (or even compulsion) remains unclear (Lewalski 2003, 407-408). The 1855 edition of *Milton's Poetical Works* thus reflects Milton's status among the makers and readers of tactile books in the nineteenth-century United States while also refracting problematic elements of the relationship between disability, literary production, and the labor of accommodation in Milton's textual history.

Ultimately, these findings show that the study of nineteenth-century tactile books, including Miltonic tactile books, can benefit from a critical approach that takes in not only disability but also race and gender as operative categories of identity. Just as the appearance of Milton's work in raised letters catalyzed discussions about the tactile book and its place within the larger history of the material text, so too should the events that led to the publication of *Milton's Poetical Works* in 1855 prompt us to consider the unique political dynamics at play in the production and circulation of raised text in the nineteenth-century United States. As the field of tactile book history continues to assert the agency of blind readers and bookmakers of the past by examining the books they left behind, we must be mindful that these agents and their books were embedded in, and sometimes actively supported by, systems of violence, coercion, and inequality.

James Morrison Heady was born on July 19, 1829, in the agricultural village of Elk Creek in Spencer County, Kentucky, about twenty miles southeast of Louisville ('Morrison' 1915). His father was Dr. James Jackson Heady, a medical doctor and part-time farmer, and his mother was Lois Eastburn Heady, who also came from a family of physicians (Thompson 1996, 1-2). Morrison, or 'Uncle Morry', as he would later be known to friends such as Helen Keller and Samuel Greenleaf Whittier, was not born blind; he experienced two separate traumas to his eyes at the ages of six and sixteen that left him, as he would later describe it in a Miltonic phrase, 'bereft of light' (Heady 1901, *The Double Night*, I, l. 37). Heady's parents remained committed to their son's education despite his visual disability. In 1845, at the age of sixteen, they sent him to be enrolled in the Kentucky School for the Instruction of the Blind in Louisville, founded in 1839, which prided itself on its success in teaching pupils to read by touch (Kentucky Institution for the Education of the Blind 1845, 5). He studied in Louisville for one year before transferring to the Ohio Institution for the Education of the Blind in Columbus (about 200 miles northeast of Louisville) for a further fourteen months. Following his time at the Ohio Institution, Heady moved back to Spencer County, where he would live for most of his life. In the period between his enrollment at the Kentucky School and the Ohio Institution, he suffered a fall from horseback that resulted in gradual hearing loss and, by the 1870s, caused him to become deaf as well as

[2] I am grateful to P. Gabrielle Foreman *et al.* for their work on the community-sourced document 'Writing about Slavery/Teaching About Slavery: This Might Help' (2024).

blind (Thompson 1996, 12). Heady's personal experience of disability and education at schools designed for blind students accounts for his awareness of and interest in raised-letter printing and the practice of reading by touch.

Heady was noted for his entrepreneurial spirit. Biographer Ken D. Thompson describes him as preoccupied with designs and inventions meant to make life on the family farm in Elk Creek more accessible for himself and other visually disabled visitors. There was the gate that could be operated using a series of ropes and beams, allowing access to the house without the need to dismount from a horse (50). There was also the 'talking glove' that Heady invented as his deafness became more acute (49). This glove allowed others to communicate with Heady by pressing their fingers onto metal letters sewn onto different parts of the hand and palm.[3] The design that proved most popular was for a diplograph called the 'Kentucky Point-Writer'. This early tactile typewriter allowed users to emboss text on demand and, most impressively, toggle between a variety of type systems such as New York Point, braille, and Moon Type as well as raised Roman types (American Association of Instructor of the Blind 1880, 17).[4] Heady's penchant for invention also manifested in his work as a writer and poet. His first publication came in 1851, a series of ballads published in a local Louisville paper, and he would go on to produce songs, children's stories, and biographical works in both inked and raised letters.[5] Heady achieved widest acclaim, however, for his collection of biographical poems *The Double Night* (1901). This collection garnered attention from publications like *The New York Times* and earned him the lasting epithet 'The Blind Bard of Kentucky' ('Famous' 1914).

Heady's nickname linked his experiences of visual disability and poetic production with those of John Milton, 'The Blind Bard of England,' and in doing so it illustrated Milton's relevance to literary and intellectual culture in the nineteenth-century United States.[6] Scholars have usefully described Milton's influence on writers in his home country, showing how Victorian as well as Romantic British authors found both inspiration and antagonism in Milton's work (Nelson 1963; Nardo 2003; Gray 2009). In the United States, Milton's reputation was first established through regular reference by a wide range of authors in the early days of the republic. George F. Sensebaugh argues that the many facets of Milton's identity – especially his erudition, his Puritanism, and his poetic abilities – enabled writers of different stipes to call on him to witness, and thus authorize, their work:

> Americans of the early Republic created the complex image of Milton out of specific needs of the time. Scholars called on him to support learning and wisdom; ministers, to witness Christian belief; critics and poets to clarify values and tastes and to strengthen an ambitious American literature. Reiteration of Milton's greatness from so many quarters of the American community so exalted his name that he became a popular idol and a symbol of authority. (1964, 32-33)

The American Revolution and its aftermath burnished Milton's legacy as a political thinker devoted to questions of liberty, such that he, 'long known as a controversialist … now began to appear as a powerful reasoner on civil and ecclesiastical freedom' (12). This reputation as a poet of liberty persisted into the nineteenth century and is especially evident in the work of African American poets, thinkers, and activists. Phillis Wheatley Peters, David Walker, Frederick

[3] For more on this technology, see Mills 2011, 96-99.

[4] For more on the development of tactile typography, see Fretwell 2019 and Hare 2024.

[5] Heady published under his own name as well as the pseudonym 'Uncle Juvinell' (i.e. Juvenal). For representative examples, see Heady 1864 and 1869.

[6] For two contemporary examples of this phrase in use, see Boies 1859, 52-56 and Thompson 1868, 476.

Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, and others drew on Milton's work – *Paradise Lost* in particular – to assert their own literary authority, 'completing and complicating' Milton's legacy in the process (Wilburn 2014, 1).[7] These various affinities and appropriations positioned Milton as 'a man of titanic stature' in the period (Sensebaugh 1964, 3).

Heady's own deep affinity for Milton comes through clearly in *The Double Night*. Heady dedicates the eponymous first poem in the collection 'To the Shades of Milton and Beethoven' (1901, 2) and the same poem contains passages in which the speaker directly addresses 'blind Milton' (*The Double Night*, III, l. 150). 'What of joy I've found in life's dark way', the speaker tells Milton, 'And what of excellence attain I may, / Some part is due thy wondrous rhyme' (III, ll. 156-158). Heady was not alone among blind readers and writers in identifying with Milton on the basis of their mutual pursuit of literary 'excellence' as well as on their shared experience of 'life's dark way'. References to Milton appear regularly in the many poems, autobiographies, and other texts produced by blind writers in the nineteenth century. The memoirist B.B. Bowen positions 'the immortal' Milton as a hero of blind history, a figure 'whose misfortune has only served to stimulate them [blind readers] to greater exertions in the acquisition of knowledge' (1856, 148). For others, such as Mary L. Day Arms, Milton's literary career exemplifies a form of what Hannah Thompson has described as 'blindness gain' (2017, 14), an intellectual preeminence achievable because of, rather than in spite of, visual disability.[8] 'Blindness', Arms argues, 'adds wings to *thought*', which Milton proved by giving 'to the world its "Paradise Lost" and its "Paradise Regained" ' and 'to the blind of all ages the glory and the beacon light of his name' (1878, 279). The kinship that many nineteenth-century blind readers felt with Milton extended even to the particulars of their lived experiences of visual disability. Alfred Hirst, for instance, records his surprise when, on first reading Milton's account of his blindness in the letter 'To Leonard Philaras', he realized that 'the disease which deprived of sight perhaps the greatest man who ever lived was that same atrophy of the optic nerve which has prevented so many of us now living' (1897, 228). Overall, Milton functions in these and other similar texts as an exemplary author whose documented experience of visual disability could interpellate the lives of young blind people as they navigated an inaccessible world.[9]

Milton's example also loomed large for the bookmakers and administrators, many of them sighted, who were involved in the production of tactile books in the nineteenth century. These stakeholders deployed Milton's literary legacy for a variety of reasons, most notably to communicate to a broader sighted audience the possibilities opened for blind readers by the advent of raised text. Valentin Haüy, the founder of the first modern raised-letter press at the Institut national des jeunes aveugles (National Institute for Blind Youth) in Paris,

[7] See also Herron 1987.

[8] Thompson's phrase is a modified form of H-Dirksen L. Bauman and Joseph J. Murray's 'Deaf Gain'. For more, see Bauman and Murray 2014.

[9] Reflecting on the process of requesting disability accommodations from his home institution, Pasquale S. Toscano describes his relationship to Milton as that of 'crip ancestor'; Milton too, Toscano suggests, 'would have had some idea of what it means to receive accommodations', particularly from 'the Commonwealth/Cromwellian governments for which he worked' (Toscano 2021, n.p.). Toscano draws on the concept of crip ancestry developed by Stacey Milbern, which recognizes the importance of kinship relations that exceed the bounds of biological lineage to the lived experience of disability: 'a queered or crippled understanding of ancestorship holds that, such as in flesh, our deepest relationships are with people we choose to be connected to and honor day after day' (Milbern 2019, n.p.). While the affinity that writers like Heady demonstrate for Milton in their work gestures at such a relationship, both Toscano and Milbern make clear the personal and contingent dimensions of crip ancestry and the ethical issues attendant on ascribing it from the outside. While I have chosen not to employ this term in the body of my essay, I want to acknowledge its importance and potential applications in similar situations.

invokes Milton in the very first book produced by the press, the 1786 *Essai sur l'éducation des enfans-aveugles* (*Essay on the Education of Blind Children*). Outlining for his patron, King Louis XVI, his plans for incorporating tactile reading into the curriculum at the Institut, Haüy speculates that 'Homer, Belisarius and Milton, afflicted with blindness, would with pleasure have consecrated to the service of their country those years of their lives which followed their catastrophe' if they had had access to books as could now be printed in raised letters (1894, 17). Other administrators used Milton as an example of blind excellence when shoring up arguments in favor of educating of blind students. 'We still see virtue, innocence, and happiness portrayed in *Paradise Lost*', W.H. Wilkinson wrote in an 1872 address given at the first meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind (AAIB), and for that reason 'it is not necessary at this late day to prove that the blind are capable of great intellectual achievements' (American Association of Instructors of the Blind 1873, 83). Stephen Babcock echoed this sentiment at the same meeting of the AAIB, noting that though 'John Milton's most famous poems were written more than a decade after he became blind … his name stands prominent among English poets' (15). Milton's legacy supported the fundamental claim that blind students could benefit from and deserved access to books printed for their particular sensory needs. Despite never having read by touch himself, Milton helped justify and advertise the project of tactile bookmaking in the nineteenth century.

Heady's personal and professional connection with Milton gave rise to what Ken D. Thompson identifies as his 'dream of providing blind people everywhere with copies of his favorite *Paradise Lost*' (1996, 36). Because Heady himself had found joy in Milton's epic poem, likely when it was read aloud to him at school or at the family home in Elk Creek, he set out to make this title specifically available to a wider blind readership through the emerging medium of raised letters. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, the goal of producing a tactile edition devoted entirely to the work of a single early modern author, even an author as well-known as Milton, would have seemed just what Thompson describes: a dream.[10] Embossing books for reading by touch was a costly endeavor; it required thick paper, specialized type pieces, and press equipment capable of sustaining the pressure of the embossing process (Hare 2024, 12). These economic considerations affected the number and genre of titles available for reading by touch in the 1850s. Nearly three decades after the introduction of raised-letter printing to the Anglophone world, even the most productive presses rarely published more than five new titles in a year, and these consisted primarily of textbooks and academic primers aimed at inexperienced tactile readers.[11] Such books could be easily integrated into the schools for blind students that were beginning to be established not only in metropolitan areas in the United States like Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, but also in more rural places like Staunton, Virginia and Macon, Georgia.[12] The more advanced texts available at the time were nearly all religious or liturgical in nature, since their production was made possible by subsidies from missionary organizations such as the American Bible Society and the British and Foreign

[10] An exception to this rule was an edition of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which was published by the Perkins School in 1836.

[11] For an incomplete but nevertheless useful survey of tactile books available in the early 1850s, see Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 (1852), 415-422.

[12] No demographic analysis of students enrolled in these schools yet exists, and this fact limits our understanding of the readership for books such as the 1855 edition of *Milton's Poetical Works*, especially in terms of race, gender, and class. Anecdotal evidence can be instructive here, however: the first two students enrolled at the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind in Philadelphia (now the Overbrook School) were Abraham and Sarah Marsh, siblings from a white family (Willoughby 2007, 14).

Bible Society (Tilley 2018, 80-81). Heady's proposed edition had the benefit neither of easy classroom application nor of explicitly evangelical content, and so bringing it to press required extraordinary fundraising efforts.

Heady sought funding for his edition of *Paradise Lost* through donations 'solicited', as the president of Kentucky Institution noted in 1857, 'from a few of the benevolent citizens of Kentucky' as well as through subscriptions drawn from the schools for blind students that dotted the eastern United States (Kentucky Institution for the Education of the Blind 1857, 7). While some of this fundraising work could be accomplished via correspondence, it also required Heady to advertise his project beyond his home in Elk Creek. In an address to the AAIB at the beginning of the twentieth century, Benjamin B. Huntoon recalls that Heady 'canvassed central Kentucky and collected funds for printing Paradise Lost' by traveling to other parts of the state (American Association of Instructors of the Blind 1910, 5). And when, as Heady notes in a letter to Samuel Gridley Howe dated August 1854, the 'excessive heat of the weather' in Kentucky caused him to suspend his efforts there, he began 'visiting the northern and eastern institutions for the Blind to see definitely what they are willing to do for the cause in which I am engaged'. His travels would eventually take him to Howe's own city of Boston, where Heady hoped to persuade Howe, who was the director of the Perkins School at the time, to 'give to my cause all the influence in your power' (quoted in Thompson 1996, 36). Most notably, Heady wanted Howe to print his proposed edition at the Perkins School's raised-letter press, the most respected of its kind in the world.[13] Howe eventually agreed to take on the job, and he also supplemented the $595 Heady had raised in the course of his travels with funds from the treasury at the Perkins School.[14] This new, more robust financial backing enabled Heady to expand the scope of his project; together, Heady and Howe were able 'not only to print a larger edition of the Paradise Lost than Mr. Heady's means would warrant, but also to add another volume, with Paradise Regained, Sampson [sic] Agonistes, Lycidas, and most of the poetical works of the great bard' (Perkins Institute for the Blind and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind 1856, 26-27). The result was *Milton's Poetical Works*, copies of which were listed for sale in catalogs appended in the back pages of Perkins School annual reports starting in 1856. It was sold at $3.00 per volume 'unbound, in pasteboard boxes' and at $5.00 per volume 'bound' (Kentucky Institution for the Education of the Blind 1857, 27; Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind 1868, 36).

The publication of *Milton's Poetical Works* materialized the connection that many blind readers, including Heady, felt with Milton, but it was the events leading up to the book's publication that caused this edition to take on a significance in excess of its material impact on the tactile book market. Heady's early correspondence about the project finds him optimistic about its chances of success – 'the prospects I have in the future are such as to lead me to believe, that I will have nothing to fear' (quoted in Thompson 1996, 36) – but in reality *Milton's Poetical Works* met with poor sales when it appeared on the market in 1856. As soon as 1857, Heady was forced to donate 113 unsold copies to the library of the Kentucky Institution (Kentucky Institution for the Education of the Blind 1857, 7). Despite the book's apparent failure as an economic endeavor, however, contemporary stakeholders such as Howe found the case of one blind poet's journey across the eastern United States to raise funds for the work of another blind poet

[13] The jury of the 1851 London exhibition claimed that books printed at the Perkins School 'possess a neatness, clearness, sharpness, and durability all their own' (Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 (1852), 416).

[14] See the $400 added to the Perkins School Treasury in 1855 by 'Mr. Heady, on account of printing' as well as the $195 'received from Mr. Heady' in 1856 (Perkins Institute for the Blind 1856, 29).

> uncommonly interesting … Less than two centuries ago the blind bard wrote his great work, for which he could hardly find a publisher, and his publisher hardly find readers, in the capital of the Old World; and now it has become of such universal repute, that a blind youth goes about a great State, which in Milton's day was a howling wilderness, and asks the inhabitants thereof, not, as blind men in the olden time were wont to do, for alms, but that he and his fellows may possess this poem and enjoy it. He asks, too, that the books may be in such form as to be read without eyesight, which Milton would have said never could be done, except by a miracle as strange as any he sang about. (Perkins Institute for the Blind 1856, 7-8)

Howe argues that Heady's efforts to produce a raised-letter edition of *Paradise Lost* indexed the more general relationship of the tactile book as a technology of literacy to its inked counterparts. On the one hand, Heady's 'ardent desire that his fellows in misfortune should possess this great poem' (7) drove him to mirror in his fundraising Milton's initial search for a publisher for *Paradise Lost*. Howe argues that these two publication efforts, and the material texts that resulted from them, are linked by a shared immaterial object: 'this great poem' (*ibid.*). And yet, Howe also claims that Heady and Milton occupy separate paradigms in the history of blind literacy. Not only was Heady able to travel 'about a great State' in support of his edition, but the purpose of Heady's fundraising activity – an edition of Milton's work 'in such form as to be read without eyesight' (8) – would have seemed a 'miracle' even to Milton himself. Howe reinforces the differences between these two paradigms by drawing attention to differences in geography: Milton, operating in 'the capital of the Old World', could hardly have anticipated the 'universal repute' his poetry would enjoy in a territory that featured in the Anglo-centric imagination of the seventeenth-century only as 'a howling wilderness'. Ultimately, what emerges from Howe's reflection is a definition of the tactile book as both old and new, part of a long history of textual production that included inked editions and at the same time a miraculous new technology of literacy. This assessment of the tactile book and its history was made possible by the 'uncommonly interesting' intersection of past and present embodied in the 1855 edition of *Milton's Poetical Works*.

For Howe, the provocation offered by the *Poetical Works* depended upon the singularity of Heady's achievement in bringing the edition to press. Notably absent from Howe's retelling are the family members, guides, and other agents whose labor would have been necessary for supporting a blind and increasingly deaf man as he traveled extensively in the mid-nineteenth century. Neither does Howe draw attention to the fact that the 'great State' of Kentucky were Heady lived and through which he traveled had codified the practice of chattel slavery in its constitution beginning in 1792 ('A Constitution', art. IX). Thompson's biography of Heady follows a similar pattern of elision, focusing primarily on Heady's endeavor and gesturing only rarely at the systems of care that accommodated his sensory needs. Thompson does, however, attempt to clarify the Heady family's relationship to slavery: 'Morrison's family owned only two slaves and sought to offset the fact by providing them considerable freedom and personal affection as members of an extended (though dependent) family'. In the same passage, Thompson claims that for Morrison Heady himself 'the notion of owning another person was, however, always a problem' (1996, 44). This description of the Heady family's enslaving practices is problematic in many ways, most notably because its characterization of slavery as a form of familial relation hides, as Drew Gilpin Faust describes, 'the reality of raw power and exploitation behind an ideology of paternalistic concern and natural racial hierarchy' (2022, n.p.). Moreover, Thompson's description of Heady as personally concerned with the 'problem' of slavery calls troublingly to mind several other racialized incidents that occur at other points in his account of Heady's life. Describing the event that first damaged Heady's sight, for example, Thompson says that 'he was blinded in his right eye by a wood chip which flew from a log being chopped by a black man working on the Heady farm' (1996, 6). A similar reference occurs in the description of a trip taken by Heady

in the 1860s to raise funds on behalf of the newly-established American Printing House for the Blind: 'Morrison had the model loaded on a wagon and, with the help of a black driver, toured Nelson, Shelby and Spencer counties, giving demonstrations of the model press and soliciting contributions to purchase the full-size press' (42). When combined with the knowledge that the Headys enslaved individuals on their farm in Elk Creek, these references to an unnamed 'black man working on the Heady farm' and a 'black driver' who accompanied Heady on his travels raise larger questions about how Heady himself, and by extension his 1855 edition of *Milton's Poetical Works*, might have benefited from the coerced labor of enslaved individuals.

Comparing Thompson's account with contemporary records provides a more honest picture of the Headys and their status as enslavers. Both the 1850 and 1860 United States federal censuses were accompanied by 'slave schedules', separate documents used to document the number, but not the names, of individuals held captive in the antebellum southern United States. Enslaved individuals are listed alongside the name of their enslaver, and so these documents tell us less about the lived experiences of the enslaved people of African descent than they do about the identities and record-keeping practices of white enslavers. In 1850, for instance, federal slave schedules from Spencer County (2023) include the names of 445 enslavers alongside 2,151 enslaved individuals. James Jackson Heady, Morrison Heady's father, appears on this list accompanied by information relating to seven individuals he is described as enslaving, four of whom are listed as fugitives (US Census 1850, 35). Morrison Heady's own name also appears in the 1850 slave schedule; at that time, he enslaved four individuals: a woman of nineteen years old, a female child of five years old, and a male child of three years old, all three of whom are identified as fugitives, as well as a man of thirty years old (48). Heady resided with his parents at the time the census was taken in 1850, and we can thus assume that the Heady farm in Spencer County housed as many as eleven enslaved individuals in that year, some of whom had managed, at least temporarily, to free themselves. When we move forward to the 1860 census, we find James Jackson Heady once again described as enslaving seven people. Morrison Heady's name is no longer listed among the enslavers of Spencer County, though he continued to reside with his parents on a farm that included at least two 'slave houses' (US Census 1860, 35).

The data contained in these slave schedules strongly imply a connection between the publication of *Milton's Poetical Works* in 1855 and the forced labor of enslaved individuals. And while what Brian Connolly and Marisa Fuentes term 'the violence of the archives of slavery' (Connolly and Fuentes 2016, 105) means that we may never know exactly how the skills and labor of enslaved people may have contributed to this first tactile edition of Milton's work, we can, following Saidiya Hartman, 'imagine what cannot be verified' in our reading of Heady's life and his publication efforts (2008, 12). We can consider, for instance, Thompson's description of Heady as accompanied by a 'black driver' on journeys taken in the 1860s and wonder about Heady's even more extensive travels in the previous decade to raise funds for his edition of *Milton's Poetical Works*. Was Heady's disability accommodated on these journeys by the labor of one or more enslaved individuals, perhaps even someone he is described as enslaving in the 1850 schedules? We might also speculate about the $595 that Heady raised in part from citizens of Kentucky, which served as the bulk of the financing for his print project. Given the importance of coerced labor to the largely agricultural economy of Kentucky in the 1850s, we can be fairly sure that much of this money, and by extension *Milton's Poetical Works* itself, derived from the profits of chattel slavery.

By overlooking Morrison Heady's status as an enslaver – and thus the contributions of enslaved individuals – Heady's contemporaries were able to tell a useful story about *Milton's Poetical Works* and its significance for tactile book history. Howe describes Heady as mirroring Milton's literary legacy while at the same time accomplishing something that Milton himself

would have deemed a 'miracle', and this layering of past and present became the means through which Howe articulated the relationship between books meant to be read by touch and those meant to be read by sight. And yet, the questions about consent and the labor of accommodation opened by knowledge of Heady's enslaving practices also tie the story of the 1855 *Poetical Works* back to Milton's own textual history. Accounts of Milton's life and work stress the importance of outside agents to his literary production in the years following his loss of vision.[15] Milton relied on those around him to accommodate his visual disability by reading to him and writing down his compositions, and in many cases these roles were willingly filled by members of Milton's social circle. One of Milton's nephews, Edward Phillips, recalls that 'he had daily about him one or other to Read to him, some persons of Man's Estate', and that these men 'of their own accord greedily catch'd at the opportunity of being his Readers' (Darbishire 1965, xlviii, 77).[16] Milton's daughters also aided in the production of his most famous works, but the degree to which these women volunteered their labor of accommodation is less clear. For example, Phillips claims that Milton made Deborah, Mary, and Anne 'serviceable to him in that very particular in which he most wanted their Service', namely in 'the performance of Reading, and exactly pronouncing of all the Languages of whatever Book he should at one time or other think fit to peruse', but Phillips also notes that this multilingual accommodation of their father's visual disability was accomplished by them 'without understanding one word' of what they read (*ibid*.).[17] Moreover, Deborah's daughter would later claim that Milton kept his daughters from learning these languages, believing that 'one tongue was enough for a woman!' (l).[18] Scholars such as Barbara Kiefer Lewalski find reasons to be skeptical of this and other similar claims about Milton's relationship with his daughters (2003, 407-408), but the question of whether and to what extent Deborah, Mary, and Anne consented to the labor they performed for their father remains precisely because the voices of these women are almost entirely absent in the historical record. Though certainly different in kind from the labor of enslaved individuals elided from the story of the first edition of Milton in tactile form, the uncertainties around gender, consent, and the labor of accommodation that inflect Miltonic textual history nevertheless resonate with the publication history of the 1855 edition of *Milton's Poetical Works*. For Howe, this book spoke to the unique position occupied by the tactile books within the larger history of the material text. For us, it represents as an opportunity to reflect on the forms of uncredited and sometimes enforced labor that have supported the publication of early modern literature across time.

The new information about Morrison Heady's life and efforts to publish poems by Milton contained in this essay emphasizes the importance of approaching the history of the tactile book, and indeed all research in disability history, with a critical lens. As these records show, Heady was both a disabled person of extraordinary endeavor who defied social expectations and an active participant in systems of institutionalized oppression and racial violence. Likewise, his edition of Milton must be understood through two frames at once: it advanced the project of tactile literacy in the nineteenth century by making the work of an exemplary blind

[15] For more on the timeline of Milton's blindness, see Campbell and Corns 2010, 212-213, and Rumrich 2019.

[16] Phillips describes the process of copying and re-copying that enabled Milton to inscribe and revise *Paradise Lost*. For more on this process, see Campbell and Corns 2010, 271. For more on Edward Phillips himself, see McDowell 2019.

[17] Early biographies emphasize that Milton did not rely on all three of his daughters to the same extent or for the same tasks. John Aubrey notes that Deborah, Milton's youngest daughter, acted as his amanuensis once Milton lost his sight, while Edward Phillips claims that Milton largely excused Anne 'by reason of her bodily infirmity, and difficult utterance of speech' (Darbishire 1965, xlviii and 77).

[18] For more on the origins of this phrase, see Lewalski 2003, 670 n. 39.

man accessible to blind readers who strongly identified with him, and it also appears to owe its existence, at least in part, to conscripted individuals whose contributions to the bookmaking process have been omitted from accounts such as Howe's. These complex intersections of disability and race are not unique to the story of *Milton's Poetical Works*. Scholarship in disability history emphasizes the necessity of utilizing intersectional approaches such as those pioneered by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) to research disability in the nineteenth century. Surveying the field in 2022, Daniel Blackie and Alexia Moncrieff note that 'disability historians must recognize all the positions disabled people have occupied historically', including 'those stemming from unequal power relations that have had oppressive or disadvantageous consequences for other groups' (809). Penny L. Richards exemplifies this approach in her work on Thomas Cameron, a developmentally disabled man living in North Carolina in the early 1800s whose networks of care 'rested upon and included the command of enslaved laborers' (2014, 51).[19] Research examining the history of raised-letter printing has yet to reckon fully with the areas of overlap between this practice and larger systems of oppression. Work by Erica Fretwell and Vanessa Warne demonstrates the critical energy behind the recovery of blind readers' interactions with their books in the nineteenth century, and the recent Bibliographical Society of America 'Touch and See' workshop shows how this energy can drive methodological change in the study of the material text (Warne 2014; Fretwell 2019; Stuckey 2022). At this crucial juncture in the history of the field, the 1855 edition of *Milton's Poetical Works* cautions us lest efforts to recover disabled experiences of the past through the medium of the tactile book become themselves the means of obscuring the voices, contributions, and agencies of other overlooked people and groups.

Finally, the publication history of *Milton's Poetical Works* functions as a cautionary tale for early modern book history. As the field continues to widen its scope to include not only the production of texts in the early modern period but also the ways in which works by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors have made meaning at different times, in different forms, and for different readers, Heady's edition shows the importance of investigating the points at which these stories of reception and reinterpretation intersect with the economics of slavery and other forms of racial oppression. In doing so, this study joins Emma Smith in calling for greater attention to the 'complex economic histories' of the period's most foundational books (2023, xviii-xix). In her revised preface to *Shakespeare's First Folio*, Smith connects the value added to the Folio through sales in the late-eighteenth century with the labor of enslaved people on sugar plantations in the West Indies: 'The profits from the one frequently enabled the purchase of the other', such that 'the more general impact of the economic sugar rush on luxury goods added value to all the copies of this increasingly desirable book' (2023, xviii-xix). Just as Smith defamiliarizes the Folio's 'rise to cultural prominence' by tying this rise to the brutal realities of colonial violence, so too does the story of the 1855 edition of *Milton's Poetical Works* ask us to consider how seemingly emancipatory increases in access to early modern texts might have depended upon the forced labor of enslaved individuals.

Works Cited

'A Constitution, or Form of Government, for the State of Kentucky' (1792), <https://www.wordservice.org/State%20Constitutions/usa1038.htm>, accessed 1 December 2024.

American Association of Instructor of the Blind (1880), *Proceedings of the sixth biennial convention of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind, held at the Kentucky Institution for the Blind at Louisville, KY August 17, 18, and 19, 1880,* Louisville, John P. Morgan and Co.

[19] For other relevant examples, see Cleall 2016 and Nair 2017.

American Association of Instructors of the Blind (1873), *Proceedings of the first meeting of the American Association of Instructors of the Blind: Held at the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, August 20, 21, and 22, 1872*, Boston, Rand, Avery, and Co.

American Association of Instructors of the Blind (1910), *Twentieth Biennial Convention: American Association of Instructors of the Blind,* n.p.

Arms M.L.D. (1878), *The World as I have Found It. Sequel to Incidents in the Life of a Blind Girl,* Baltimore, James Young.

Bauman H-D.L. and J.J. Murray, eds (2014), *Deaf Gain: Raising the Stakes for Human Diversity*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press.

Blackie Daniel and Alexia Moncrieff (2022), 'State of the Field: Disability History', *History* 107, 377, 789-811, doi: 10.1111/1468-229X.13315.

Boies L.A. (1859), *Rural Rhymes*, Saratoga Springs, G.M. Davison.

Bowen B.B. (1856 [1847]), *A Blind Man's Offering,* New York, Published by the Author.

Brady Maura (2022), ' "Disabled" Milton: A Genealogy', *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 16, 2, 161-177.

Campbell Gordon and T.N. Corns (2008), *John Milton: Life, Work, and Thought*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Cleall Esmé (2016), 'Jane Groom and the Deaf Colonists: Empire, Emigration and the Agency of Disabled People in the late Nineteenth-Century British Empire', *History Workshop Journal* 81, 39-61.

Connolly Brian and Marisa Fuentes (2016), 'Introduction: From Archives of Slavery to Liberated Futures?' *History of the Present* 6, 2, 105-116.

Crenshaw Kimberlé (1991), 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review* 43, 6, 1241-1299, <https://blogs.law.columbia.edu/critique1313/files/2020/02/1229039.pdf>, accessed 1 December 2024.

Darbishire Helen, ed. (1965 [1932]),*The Early Lives of Milton*, New York, Barnes and Noble.

Dhar Amrita (2018), 'Toward Blind Language: John Milton Writing, 1648-1656', *Milton Studies* 60, 1-2, 75-107.

Duran Angelica (2013), 'The Blind Bard, According to John Milton and His Contemporaries', *Mosaic* 46, 3, 141-157.

'Famous Deaf-Blind Poet Issues New Books at 84' (1914), *The New York Times*, 4 January.

Faust D.G. (2022), 'The Grimke Sisters and the Indelible Stain of Slavery', *The Atlantic*, December, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/12/the-grimkes-legacy-of-slavery-book-review/671901/>, accessed 1 December 2024.

Foreman P.G. *et al.* (2024), 'Writing about Slavery/Teaching About Slavery: This Might Help', Community-sourced Document, <https://www.pgabrielleforeman.com/writing-about-slavery-guide>, accessed 10 December 2024.

Fretwell Erica (2019), '1833-1923: American Literature's Other Scripts', in C. Marrs and C. Hager, eds, *Timelines of American Literature*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 21-36.

Gray Erik (2009) *Milton and the Victorians*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press.

Hare Taylor (2024), 'Shakespeare by Touch: Tactile Reading and N.B. Kneass Jr'.s *Merchant of Venice* (1870)', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 118, 1, 1-45.

Hartman Saidiya (2008), 'Venus in Two Acts', *Small Axe* 12, 2, 1-14, doi: 10.1215/-12-2-1.

Haüy Valentin (1895 [1786]), *An Essay on the Education of the Blind*, London, Sampson Low, Marston, and Co.

Heady Morrison (1864), *The Farmer Boy, and How He Became Commander-in-chief*, Boston, Walker, Wise, and Co.

Heady Morrison (1869)*, Seen and Heard: Poems or the Like*, Baltimore, Henry C. Turnbull, Jr.

Heady Morrison (1901) *The Double Night, and Other Poems*, Louisville, Courier-Journal Job Printing Co.

Herron Carolivia (1987), 'Milton and Afro-American Literature', in M. Nyquist and M.W. Ferguson, eds, *Re-membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions*, New York, Methuen, 278-300.

Hirst Alfred (1897) 'My Dark World', *Sunday Magazine*, 19 August, 226-231.

Kentucky Institution for the Education of the Blind (1845), *Third Annual Report of the Board of Visiters of the Kentucky Institution for the Education of the Blind*, Forgotten Books, n.p.
Kentucky Institution for the Education of the Blind (1857), *Thirteenth Report of the Board of Visitors for the Kentucky Institution for the Education of the Blind, to the General Assembly of Kentucky for the Years 1856-7*, Frankfort, A.G. Hodges.
Lewalski B.K. (2003), *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography,* Revised Edition, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing.
Masson David (1877), *The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time*, vol. 2, London and New York, Macmillan and Co.
McDowell Nicholas (2019), 'Refining the Sublime: Edward Phillips, a Miltonic Education, and the Sublimity of *Paradise Lost*', *Milton Studies* 61, 2, 239-260.
Milbern Stacy (2019), 'On the Ancestral Plane: Crip Hand Me Downs and the Legacy of Our Movements', *Disability Visibility Project*, 10 March, n.p. <https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2019/03/10 / on-the-ancestral-plane-crip-hand-me-downs-and-the-legacy-of-our-movements/>, accessed 1 December 2024.
Mills Mara (2011), 'On Disability and Cybernetics: Helen Keller, Norbert Wiener, and the Hearing Glove', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 22, 2-3, 74-111.
Milton John (1855), *Milton's Poetical Works, including Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, Samson Agonistes, Lycidas, Sonnets, &c*, Boston, The Perkins Institution.
'Morrison Heady' (1915), death certificate, 20 December 1915, file no. 30422, Commonwealth of Kentucky State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, *Ancestry.com*.
Nair Aparna (2017), ' "They Shall See His Face": Blindness in British India, 1850-1950', *Medical History* 61, 2, 181-199.
Nardo A.K. (2003), *George Eliot's Dialogue with Milton*, Columbia and London, University of Missouri Press.
Nelson J.G. (1963), *The Sublime Puritan: Milton and the Victorians*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press.
Perkins Institute for the Blind and Massachussets Asylum for the Blind (1856), *Twenty-Fourth Annual Report of the Trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind to the Corporation,* Cambridge, Metcalf and Company.
Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind (1868), *Thirty-Sixth annual report of the trustees of the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts Asylum for the Blind. October, 1867*, Boston, White and Potter.
Richards P.L. (2014), 'Thomas Cameron's "Pure and Guileless Life", 1806-1870: Affection and Developmental Disability in a North Carolina Family', in S. Burch and M. Rembis, eds, *Disability Histories*, Urbana, Chicago and Springfield, University of Illinois Press, 35-57.
Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851 (1852), *Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, 1851: Reports by the juries on the subjects in the thirty classes into which the exhibition was divided*, London, Spicer Brothers.
Rumrich John (2019), 'The Cause and Effect of Milton's Blindness', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 61, 2, 95-115.
Sensebaugh G.F. (1964), *Milton in Early America*, Princeton, Princeton University Press.
Smith Emma (2023 [2016]), *Shakespeare's First Folio: Four Centuries of an Iconic Book,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.
'Spencer County (KY) Enslaved, Free Blacks, and Free Mulattoes, 1850-1870', *Notable Kentucky African Americans Database*, <https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/2562>, accessed 1 December 2024.
Stuckey Amanda (2022), 'Access in Book History Methodology and Pedagogy: Report from the "Touch to See" Workshop', *Criticism* 64, 3, 385-396, <https://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/criticism/vol64/iss3/11>, accessed 1 December 2024.
Thompson E.P. (1868), *History of the First Kentucky Brigade,* Cincinnati, Caxton Publishing.
Thompson Hannah (2017), *Reviewing Blindness in French Fiction, 1789-2013*, London, Palgrave Macmillan.

Thompson K.D. (1996), *Beyond the Double Night* Taylorsville, Buggy Whip Press.

Tilley Heather (2018), *Blindness and Writing: From Wordsworth to Gissing*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Toscano P.S. (2019), ' "A Parliament of Monsters": Genre, Disability, and the Revival of Epic Ability in Wordsworth's *Prelude*', *DSQ: Disability Studies Quarterly* 39, 4, n.p. doi: 10.18061/dsq.v39i4.6549.

Toscano P.S. (2021), ' "Let Be Assigned Some Narrow Place Enclosed": Requesting Accommodations Has Always Been Tricky Business', *Synapsis*, <https://medicalhealthhumanities.com/2021/09/19/let-be-assigned-some-narrow-place-requesting-accommodations-has-always-been-tricky-business/>, accessed 1 December 2024.

US Census Bureau (1850), Spencer Co., KY, slave sch., dist. 2, p. 35, James J. Heady, enslaver, NARA Microform Publication M432, Record Group Number 29, *Ancestry.com*.

US Census Bureau (1850), Spencer Co., KY, slave sch., dist. 2, p. 48, Morrison Heady, enslaver, NARA Microform Publication M432, Record Group Number 29, *Ancestry.com*.

US Census Bureau (1860), Spencer Co., KY, slave sch., dist. 2, p. 35, J.J. Heady, enslaver, NARA Microform Publication M653, Record Group Number 29, *Ancestry.com*.

Warne Vanessa (2014), 'Between the Sheets: Contagion, Touch, and Text', *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 19, 1-9.

Wilburn R.A. (2014), *Preaching the Gospel of Black Revolt: Appropriating Milton in Early African American Literature*, Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press.

Willoughby Edith (2007), *The Overbrook School for the Blind*, Chicago, Arcadia.