

# Rhetorical tradition and the argument of separation: Milton's *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*

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The study of the positivist realm of literary history is based upon textual transmissions and the consideration of sources, influences, periods, and what a cognitivist might call the reproduction of schemata. Whenever we read a text, a whole context is needed in order to understand its actual discourse, the flow of cognitive and communicative factors making it relevant to our understanding.

The study of a tradition is precisely the recognition of a certain type of discourse, of a type of social behaviour commonly shared<sup>1</sup>. The consideration of a particular type of tradition has to be analysed in terms of the elements making up that discourse, that context, and the constructs which have made its textual transmission possible.

When John Milton wrote his tract *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* he had in mind a personal situation but his situation also formed part of a larger social and historical framework. He was 32 when he married Mary Powell, a 16 year old girl:

It was Milton's precipitate marriage, probably in the spring of 1642, that helped to move him toward a more independent position in ecclesiastical as in other matters (Daiches 1957: 112).

The tract appeared four times, the first in 1643, with no name or initials; the second edition appeared in 1644 bearing Milton's initials. There were two further editions in 1645<sup>2</sup>. The tract shows three main characteristics of Milton's writing. Firstly, his wide-ranging knowledge is remarkable, covering Biblical scholarship together with legal expertise. Secondly, one should mention his 'literary' capacity to argue on specialized topics related to the idea of progress. As Rorty states:

To sum up, poetic, artistic, philosophical, scientific or political *progress* results from the accidental coincidence of a private obsession with a public need (Rorty 1989: 37, my italics).

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<sup>1</sup> Discourse is social. The statement made, the words used and the meanings of the words used, depends on where and against what the statement is made [...] Different social classes use the same words in different senses and disagree in their interpretations of events and situations. (Macdonnell 1986: 2).

<sup>2</sup> The third is a fairly close reproduction of the second, done apparently by the same printer from a new setting-up of type. The fourth, differing noticeably in typography as well as spelling and punctuation, is unchanged from the second and third in content. None of these editions was licensed or registered. (Preface to *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* by Lowell W. Coolidge in *Complete prose Works of John Milton. Volume II 1643-1648*, New Haven: Yale University Press: MCMLIX, edited by Ernest Sirluck, p. 217). I follow this edition and I will be referring to the tract as DDD. The first page of the 1643 edition contains the following heading *The Doctrine and discipline of divorce: Restored to the good of both sexes, from the bondage of canon law and other mistakes, to Christian charity. Wherein also many places of Scripture, have recover'd their long-lost meaning, seasonable to be now thought on in the Reformation intended.* The 1645 edition is slightly different: *The Doctrine & Discipline of Divorce restored to the good of both sexes, from the bondage of canon law, and other mistakes, to the true meaning of Scripture in the Law and Gospel compar'd. Wherein also are set down the bad consequences of abolishing or condemning of sin, that which the law of God allows, and Christ abolisht not. Now the second time revis'd and much augmented, in two books: To the Parliament of England with the Assembly.*

And, finally, the notable existence of a discursive coherence of beliefs and opinions that stand Milton in good stead in situations of difficulty and need.

DDD is a long document full of Biblical references, legal quotations and reasoning supporting the approval of a divorce that allows remarriage. The tract is addressed to the Parliament of England and the Assembly, the meeting of religious authorities. The whole DDD is an argumentative text, since it is based on a thesis - the necessity of divorce - and this thesis has to be demonstrated, and, what is more difficult, has to convince the addressee (s). Milton starts in a hypothetical fashion:

If it were seriously askt, and it would be no untimely question, Renowned Parliament, select Assembly, who of all Teachers and Maisters that have ever taught, hath drawn the most Disciples after him, both in Religion, and in manners, it might be not untruly answer'd, Custome (DDD 222).

The hypothesis is finished with the double negation of litotes, an obvious rhetorical figure which amplifies the effect of the statement in its positive meaning. Later, he passes on to associate 'Custome' with 'Error' (DDD 223), which leads him to condemn the Law of Marriage:

He who marries, intends as little to conspire his own ruine, as he that swears Allegiance: and as a whole people is in proportion to an ill Government, so is one man to an ill marriage (DDD 229).

His argument establishes a parallelism between good will and perverse circumstances, whether it be married life or constitutional order. Whenever this good will is betrayed the evil must be amended. This is consciously carried out by Milton who is aware of his argumentative task:

I seek not to seduce the simple and illiterate; my errand is to find out the choicest and the learnedest, who have this gift of wisdom to answer solidly, or to be convinc't (DDD 233).

This awareness supports the double foundation of rhetorical argumentation: on one hand, the recognition of an audience, as members of a community of discourse; on the other hand the need to convince completely. It is not a matter of persuading but of showing a high degree of conviction and making the audience partake of that conviction. This sounds highly reasonable: a private obsession, a public need, an audience, and an argument. Apparently, these are the right ingredients for argumentative rhetoric but not everybody holds the same view of the situation. McCready, for instance, argues that Milton's tract "*is the result of "revelation" and relegates reason to a subordinate position*"; the tract is based upon casuistry, though Milton rejects the method:

He must not associate what he does with casuistry, yet, I contend, he interprets texts, primarily the Bible, using a casuistical method (McCready 1992: 393).

It is the interpretive level that marks Milton's DDD as a deep piece of scholarship; the interpretations, however, provide the tract with a dimension of casuistry that undermines its sound reasoning level of argumentation. Besides, the interpretive level also signals Milton's rhetorical awareness to the extent of helping to create an iconism:

What thing more instituted to the solace and delight of man then (sic) marriage, and yet the mis-interpreting of some Scripture directed mainly against the abusers of the Law for divorce giv'n <them> by *Moses*, hath changed the blessing of matrimony not seldome into a familiar and co-inhabiting mischief; at least into a drooping and disconsolate household captivitie, without refuge or redemption (DDD 235).

The reference to Moses is that given in the Gospel by St. Matthew:

They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife except *it be* for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery (KJB, Matthew: 19.7-9).

This is the beginning of the whole textual controversy and the textual support used by Milton in DDD to prove his argument: the law of Moses has been misinterpreted and he wants to put it right. The abuses of the law have made it negative and it cannot be rightly applied. Stanley Fish points out that interpretation contains meaning disengaged from language in the intentions of the members of a community of discourse<sup>3</sup>. Fish goes on to say that Milton interprets the stricture of the rule in terms of supposed intentions: Jesus addresses the words quoted to the Pharisees and the actual fact is that “*the freedom of men who are not Pharisees cannot be properly abrogated by invoking a prohibition that was not addressed to them*” (Fish 1989: 9). There is an implicature in Milton’s argument, in Fish’s understanding and in my own words: the rule is applied to the addressees of the rule, but the members of the audience are not the addressees. This requires a lengthy explanation. In principle, argumentation needs an audience as a recognizable fact of rhetorical understanding<sup>4</sup>. This audience is not monolithic, as is clearly shown in the intricate textuality of Milton’s DDD. The Gospel by St. Matthew tells the story of how Jesus is asked by the Pharisees why Moses ordained that divorce should be set down in writing and the wife put away (Matthew 19: 7). When we read that passage, or the passage is read out to us, we do not participate in the story: it is the Pharisees that are the addressees of Jesus’ hard words, whereas we are just listeners, or mere hearers, or casual eavesdroppers. When Milton introduces the reference in DDD and paraphrases it by commenting upon several Biblical passages (DDD: 242-245), he relies upon the understanding of his own assumption on the part of the audience, the Parliament and the Assembly: the words are addressed to the Pharisees but they are not meant for *us*. The words quoted in Matthew 19: 6-9 have to be understood by any member of the community of discourse as a translocutionary act. A translocutionary act is the linguistic event that sends out a type of force which has to be decoded in terms of the operative levels established between addresser and addressee within a specific context (a play, a sermon, a harangue). In that specific context the ‘audience’ acts as secondary addressee. Thus, the message is understood, comprehended and received, but is not meant to be executed since its illocutionary force remains in the textual addressee. This is my explanation, in a nutshell. Only I wish Milton’s intentions had been better understood by his actual addressees. This translocutionary act establishes an implicature: this is not meant for us; this is meant for those who deserve it. This is precisely Milton’s plight. Milton explains his whole argument in this respect from Chapter XVII on of DDD (p. 329 et seq.).

Besides, Milton’s interpretation shows a close connection with the spirit of the Reformation, as McCready points out:

This interpretation casts the first divorce tract as evidence of a further development in the Reformation’s shift of authority from institutions to individuals. It does not, however, imply that individuals were thought to be disengaged from society, for they were bound with society through conscience and its duties (McCready 1992: 394).

This view of authority rests upon a close reading of the Bible, and a solid argumentation of textual realities. Milton’s argument is based upon the opposition established between the material and the spiritual: ‘carnall performance’, ‘fleshly appetite’ (DDD: 248), ‘irrationall heat’, ‘concupiscence’, ‘nuptiall torch’ (DDD: 249), vs. ‘wisdom and charity’ (DDD: 248), ‘peace and love’ (DDD: 249). Such a dichotomy implies an opposition of values and standards which are soiled by misinterpreting the law, according to Milton and should be seen in the light of Milton’s religious beliefs, of deep Protestant roots. He attacks the observance of Canon Law, which linked the Church of England to the Church of Rome. Besides, this view of the problem entails a further consideration: the acceptance of marriage as a contract, and not as a sacrament (*‘the papists Sacrament’*). Milton opposes the fact of

<sup>3</sup> [A]ny meaning a sentence might be seen to have would be the product of a moment of situated interpretive labor and that labor, would both be constrained by any meanings the words themselves (now nonsense phrase) contain. It is at this point that we see the full implications of the shift by which meaning is disengaged from language and relocated in the (interpreted) intentions of speakers: there are no longer any constraints on interpretation that are not themselves interpretive (Fish 1989: 8).

<sup>4</sup> Lo que conservamos de la retórica tradicional es la idea de *auditorio*, que es evocada inmediatamente en cuanto se piensa en un discurso. Todo discurso se dirige a un auditorio y demasiado frecuentemente, se olvida que esto mismo sucede con cualquier escrito (Perelmann y Olbrechts-Tyteca 1959: 417).

'*carnall coition*' to the idea of '*human society*' present in marriage (DDD. 275). The idea of the contract, however, is also misinterpreted since the contract disappears if there is a material reason; this is Milton's point of contention:

[F]or if it happen that nature hath stopt or extinguisht the veins of sensuality, that marriage is annull'd. But though all the faculties of the understanding and conversing part after trial appeare to be so ill and so aversly met through natures unalterable working, as that neither peace, nor any sociable contentment can follow, tis as nothing, the contract shall stand as firm as ever, betide what will (DDD: 249).

The problem raised by the application of Canon Law in connection with the ideas contained in Matthew 19: 6-9 is double: on the one hand, the annulment of marriage only takes place on the material grounds of 'fornication'; on the other hand, this implies a sacramental view, preventing the parts from further marriages, or legal unions<sup>5</sup>. It is this difficulty that Milton wants to stress. If there is no understanding of the contractual nature of marriage, in legal terms, and there is no consideration of the moral side of the human conflict, the problem of divorce will be neglected and Christians will continue to suffer the absence of a proper understanding of the whole situation. In this particular case, it is Milton's own predicament that is at stake. As Stephen Toulmin noted:

Milton actually shifts marriage into a position quite similar to law, since a marriage that can be broken by the parties involved [is] akin to a civil contract (quoted in McCready 1992: 409).

A secondary element in his point of contention lies in the Christian idea of Charity. It is charity that is neglected, according to Milton, when divorce is not granted:

But never could that be charity to allow a people what they could not use with a pure heart, but with conscience and faith both deceiv'd, or els despis'd (DDD: 288).

This reflection upon charity and 'pure heart' is a clear reference to the principle of individual salvation and individual interpretation, in opposition to a sacramental view based upon Canon Law, which Milton would not accept. According to Daiches, Milton could have applied for an annulment of his marriage under Canon Law (Daiches 1957: 114). But Milton's idea went further: he was not looking for a personal solution at the individual level. What Milton had in mind was the creation of a new system enabling the individual to obtain a divorce without going through the restrictions of Canon Law. This entailed a new consideration of the Scriptures. The problem of divorce has an interpretation of origin, especially in the case of Milton and 17th century England, which is reflected in the interpretation of texts:

In both Catholic and Protestant casuistical texts, prefaces note the ultimate authority for the texts - the pope as "true and legitimate interpeter" for Catholics and Christ as "mediatour" for Protestants - followed by a series of classified cases (McCready 1992: 402).

This Protestant principle of Christ as "mediatour" is translated by Milton in terms of the actual understanding of the Bible he proposes. He goes on to say that divorce is not a mere solution for wives, as some scholars held:

Who can be ignorant that woman was created for man, and not man for woman; and that a husband may be injur'd as insufferably in marriage as a wife (DDD: 324).

Leaving aside problems of current affairs and fashionable views, Milton's idea has a clear 'egalitarian' quality, at least at the level of suffering. The argument is that of negative properties: when there is no divorce life in common ceases to exist:

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<sup>5</sup>As usual, the problem has a linguistic origin. KJB uses the term 'fornication', in the sense of unlawful carnal knowledge, which in Scripture is extended to 'adultery'. This is apparently clear, but the term is translated from the original Greek text using '*me epi porneia*', which means 'prostitution, fornication (cf. 'pornography')' (*Sagrada Escritura* 1961: 236). The Latin edition, the Vulgate, which had been the canonical text throughout the ages renders the version '*nisi ob fornicationem*'.

And inferrs thus much over, that the fit union of their souls be such as may even incorporate them to love and amity; but that can never be where no correspondance is of the minde; nay instead of beeing one flesh, they will be rather two carkasses chain'd unnaturally together (DDD: 326).

The presence of negative properties is enhanced by means of the cognitive field of the metaphor used in this passage; this cognitive field is that of the opposition 'life/death' and the passage precipitates the meaning of the corruption produced: 'carkasses' do not have soul, love, amity, mind, or even flesh. The mention of 'carkasses' triggers the image of death, the absence of life, the corruption of the flesh, and all this erases the previous concepts. This cognitive field is an image metaphor referring to an image-schema<sup>6</sup>. The cognitive metaphor here included is part of Milton's main argument: the opposition between spiritual union, happiness, love and peace, and mere 'carnall coition', which is the cause of the corruption of the flesh - two souls vs. 'two carkasses'.

The establishment of argument through opposition is not restricted to cognitive metaphors, as has been mentioned above. Milton argues by raising different conceptual controversies:

Thus farre by others is already well stept, to inform us that divorce is not a matter of Law but of Charity (DDD: 345).

The opposition between Law [forbidding divorce] and Charity is linked to the distance between the legitimate authority of the pope for Catholics, which is the 'imposition' of Canon Law, and the actual sense of the idea of love instilled in human conscience by the 'mediatour'. The argumentation, a clear case within the English tradition of Common law, is also based upon precedent. Milton resorts to historical cases: King Henry VIII and his divorce from Queen Anne of Cleves (DDD: 347) and his previous divorce from Queen Catherine (ibid.). Milton's conclusion is another interpretation, though in this particular case the interpretive effort is not merely textual but wholly discorsal:

Yet it pleas'd God to make him [Henry VIII] see al the tyranny of *Rome*, by discovering this which they exercis'd over divorce; and to make him the beginner of a reformation to this whole Kingdom by first asserting into his *familiar* power to the right of just divorce (DDD: 348).

Milton's interpretive endeavour goes beyond the textual levels to gain access to a historical perspective, a discorsal interpretation. Milton looks back in order to find historical evidence supporting his own predicament. The case of King Henry VIII was, of all cases, indeed quite remarkable for Milton's purposes. Again, there is a parallelism which shows the search for a solution stemming "*from the accidental coincidence of a private obsession with a public need*".

Rhetorical argumentation, then, is not a single linear evolution but a complex set of intricate elements: textual references, historical precedents, binary oppositions, metaphors<sup>7</sup>. This is clearly seen in DDD by considering the complexities contained therein. Argumentation in DDD is mainly textual, which does not prevent any other levels from being present. This textual level follows a complex pattern, too. Just as the core of the argument is Moses and St. Matthew, the end of the tract, which marks a solid stress upon the argumentation, concentrates upon the other 'end': Charity (St. Paul). Canon Law and strict views have been rejected and, at least in Milton's interpretation, have been proved wrong. It is charity that remains as the definite element required to defend his case. Milton writes the following words as conclusion:

That God the son hath put all other things under his own feet; but his Commandments he hath left all under the feet of Charity (DDD: 356).

<sup>6</sup> This is the explanation given by Mark Turner when writing about images, which are dominated by schemas: An image metaphor maps a source image onto a target image. In doing so, it may map some of the very rich imagistic detail of the image (Turner 1991: 171).

<sup>7</sup> La argumentación retórica no sigue un sistema único y reconocido, como la argumentación lógica. La argumentación retórica se basa en oposiciones (Dobrosielski 1959: 429).

This final remark contains the metaphor of the body as position, as physical relation ('feet'): "*PROPOSITIONS ARE LOCATIONS and ASSERTING A PROPOSITION IS STANDING IN ITS LOCATION*" (Turner 1989: 79). This metaphor contains the basic distinction 'God the Son's feet/Charity's feet'. This distinction continues the line of argumentation in terms of opposition. Milton's DDD contains an argument because there is stasis, and this is the result of understanding the oppositions deployed throughout the tract and the presence of conflict, since there is no argument without conflict<sup>8</sup>. The conflict is summed up at the end of the tract by means of another reference to St. Matthew (9. 13): "*I will have mercy and not sacrifice*" (DDD: 355). Again, there is an opposition which bears out the level of argumentation depending upon that very conflict. The idea of 'mercy' is associated with the granting of a law of divorce, whereas the idea of 'sacrifice' is related to suffering ("*two carcasses*").

The tract starts with a reference to custom and ends with the metaphor of the commandments left at the feet of charity. Custom proved to be unfair and negative, as Canon Law continued to be applied and there was no actual law of divorce. Milton's appeal to charity implies the recognition of love and peace as the right interpreters of the commandments. The whole exposition of facts and principles, and the argumentation relating phenomena and concepts and judging, lead up to this final statement which embodies a classical discourse of petition<sup>9</sup>.

Thus far the ideas of conflict and argumentation, and the principle of opposition as applied through different patterns of interpretation. There is, however, another point worth mentioning in the rhetorical study of DDD. This is the influence exerted by Pierre de la Ramée, Petrus Ramus, in England and the hypothetical connection that may be found in Milton's DDD. In principle, there is controversy over the influence of Ramist ideas on John Milton<sup>10</sup>. The core of Ramist patterns does not seem to affect the controversial and forensic prose of DDD, quite the contrary.

The influence of Pierre de la Ramée was remarkable in England, especially due to the translation of his *Dialectica* into English<sup>11</sup>. Ramus separated the processes known as *inventio* and *dispositio* from *elocutio*, *memoria* and *pronuntiatio*, the former being assigned to logic and the latter to rhetoric (Vickers 1988: 282-283). Ramus, then, concentrated upon logic, dialectics, in terms of the consideration of the phases known as invention and disposition in order to study "*l'art de bien disputer et raisonner de quelque chose que ce soit*" (La Ramée 1555: 18). He elaborates a complex system of application of terms and concepts: from efficient cause to the study of several methods.

<sup>8</sup> The principle of stasis is mentioned by Turner 1989: 101, and taken from Dieter "Stasis", 1950. As to conflict, Turner writes: The core component of our concept of argument is that an argument is constituted by a conflict of claims. No just any two claims conflict, and given two conflicting claims it is not clear just where the argument lies (Turner 1989: 101).

<sup>9</sup> The rhetorical principles of exposition and argumentation are applied to the classification of text types in text grammar: *Exposition* is the type of textual communication which the encoder chooses for presenting either constituent elements which can be synthesized into a composite concept (manifested in a 'term') or a mental construct (manifested in a 'text'), or those constituent elements into which concepts or mental constructs of phenomena can be analysed. [...] This is the text type related to the cognitive process of *comprehension* (Werlich 1976: 39-40). *Argumentation* is the text type of textual communication in which the encoder proposes relations between concepts of phenomena. The encoder makes his propositions in explicit or implicit opposition to deviant or alternative propositions. Argumentation is the text type related to the cognitive process of *judging* in answer to a problem (Werlich 1976: 40).

<sup>10</sup> In connection with Ramus's ideas and English poetry Abbot explains some of the ideas contained in Sloane's *Donne, Milton, and the end of humanist rhetoric* (1985) in the following terms: That is, Donne was a humanist rhetorician because of his affinity for *controversia* and the methods of forensic oratory. On the other hand, Milton, as a Ramist, avoided the judicial genre in in favor of a one sided *elocutio*. The poetry of Milton, therefore, marks the end of humanist rhetoric with its close association with forensic and controversial methods. This intriguing thesis is itself controversial. Sloane's identification of humanism with the judicial oratory is at odds with many scholars who argue for epideictic as the typical Renaissance *genus*. Sloane's argument that Milton, as a Ramist, broke with sixteenth century humanism is equally suggestive, but inconsistent with those who view Milton as both a humanist and a controversialist (Abbot 1990: 97-98).

<sup>11</sup> The edition used by the English translator was the Latin translation by the author himself. Pierre de la Ramée published his *Dialectique* in 1555 and translated it in 1572, the year of his death. It was posthumously published in 1577. This work exerted a great influence in Protestant England. That is why La Ramée is known as Ramus: Only two years after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, Roland MacIlmaine (or M'Kilwein) brought out the first English edition of the *Dialectica*, entitled *The Logike of the Most Excellent Philosopher P. Ramus Martyr* (London, 1574) (Goeglein 1996: 75).

What is remarkable in DDD is the application of *dispositio* and *inventio*, which might suppose the continuity of Ramus's *Dialectica*, though it is difficult to prove. Milton's forensic style is present in DDD. His controversial discourse is obvious. Besides, Milton had had a classical rhetorical Renaissance training (Vickers 1988: 260-261, 283). It was inevitable that this should be reflected in his tract of forensic rhetoric. Milton follows the Renaissance pattern of using *movere* as the most common rhetorical goal<sup>12</sup>. At the same time, the Ramist idea of disputing and reasoning is present in DDD. If there is anything remarkable in this tract it is its combination of reason as 'rational passion': the development and complexity of argumentation.

Ramus had tried to separate every art by stating divisions, definitions, and many particles; this did not imply that though all the arts were separate they were mingled in use (Ong 1958: 30-31, 225-269). Besides, Ramus, according to Ong, encouraged 'logocentrism', or 'corpuscular epistemology', which took the printed text "*as the point of departure and model for thought*" (Ong 1982: 168). Can some of this logocentrism be found in Milton's DDD? Is all that intertextuality (Moses, St. Matthew, St. Paul, Hugo Grotius, Canon Law, Plato, and many others) a projection of 'corpuscular epistemology' within a rational effort to textualize a private obsession or an intimate (lack of) passion?

These questions are difficult to answer. In fact, they are mere metalinguistic interrogations meant to stress the presence of a doubt, the gravity of a solution. Our reflections upon DDD must finish with a further consideration related to Milton's interest in rhetoric, i.e. his own understanding of rhetorics, or rhetorology. Milton can be considered the last English Ramist; he wrote *Artis Logicae Plenior Institutio ad Petri Rami Methodum Concinnata* (London 1672) and he took into account the use of poetry "*from a semiotic approach while preserving the integrity of Ramist Protestant metaphysics*" (Goeglein 1996: 97). The belief in Protestant metaphysics is clearly present in his DDD: the separation of Church and State in terms of Canon Law and the necessity of a Law of Divorce, the separation of carnal knowledge from a spiritual union. Continuing with the separation of parts, there is a further separation of the belief in the Eucharist and its actual (re)presentation, in opposition to Roman Catholicism (which can be the metaphor found in Roman Catholic Consubstantiation vs Lutheran Transubstantiation)<sup>13</sup>.

The use of metaphors by Milton in DDD can be better understood after considering the following remark:

Milton articulates the workings of judgment which, from a semiotic perspective, likewise articulates how Ramist disposition generally operates on metonymies (created in invention) to create metaphors of judgment. Judgment is metaphorical apprehension, metaphorical not in an aesthetic sense alone but in a semiotic sense more generally (Goeglein 1996: 97).

This explanation of the logic and poetics of Ramist origin as articulated by Milton may have a certain realization in DDD, appearing in the 'corpuscular epistemology' of the intertextual construct elaborated by Milton. The understanding of DDD means the consideration of a textual construct and the comprehension of its discourse. This implies the recognition of rhetorical trends, forensic practices, political circumstances and the multifarious ways of social and historical conditions present in that textual reality. The argument deployed by Milton starts an argumentation of an oppositional and metaphorical kind relying upon an intertextual support. The rhetoric of argumentation provides the text with a separation of ideas, concepts, and means which may stand as the metonymy, or the

<sup>12</sup>The increasing stress on the role of the passions in persuasion led, between 1544 and 1640, to an important readjustment of emphasis within rhetoric. Of the three goals of rhetoric, *movere*, *docere* and *delectare*, *movere* became the most sought-after; of the five parts of the compositional process, *elocutio* received the greatest attention (Vickers 1988: 282).

<sup>13</sup>In his article "Liturgical language in a sociolinguistic perspective" David Crystal compares the Roman Catholic order of mass and the Anglican order of Holy Eucharist and remarks: Whether the act of Consecration should be given the status of performative or historical utterance raises, in a novel guise, the classical issue of transubstantiation (Crystal 1990: 145). This may illustrate the view of Milton and his contemporaries carrying out a holistic project of separation.

metaphor, of judgment desired by Milton himself: a solution to his private predicament, a rhetorical argumentation of separation in order to achieve a new state of union, through a law of divorce.

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