



Gordon Teskey
Professor of English
Harvard University
gordon.teskey@gmail.com

“Snakes and Ladders: Some Problems in Annotating *Paradise Lost*”

The paper has three parts. *First*, on the general subject of annotation in criticism. *Second*, on the distinction between the two axes of annotation: a) reference outside the work by way of allusion, etc.; and b) relationships inside the work, from syntax to narrative. All annotation of Milton is of the first kind. More of the second kind is needed: more grammatical analysis, more paraphrase, more attention to narrative. *Third*, on a problem exposed by this second kind of annotation. There are two serpents: the one Satan discovers first in (probably) India, concluding his search of the earth, and the one he goes in search of in the garden. More interesting is that the great speech Satan delivers after finding the first serpent (“O earth” [99-178]) begins outside the garden, just after he has “found / The serpent” (85-86). Thanks to Doré’s great engraving, we suppose the entire speech is spoken over the serpent. But the speech ends inside the garden with no serpent yet in sight: “So

saying, through each thicket dank or dry, like a black mist low creeping he held on ...” (179-80), seeking the serpent to hide himself in. Milton elides the speech across the two locations so that his narrative can resume with greater urgency.

Taught at Cornell University, 1982-2002

Author of *Allegory and Violence* (1996); *Delirious Milton* (2005, Hanford Prize); *John Milton's Poetry* (2015, Hanford Prize, Christian Gauss Award). Honored Scholar, Milton Society of America. Editor: The Norton Edition of *Paradise Lost* (2005; 2nd edition forthcoming). *Spenserian Moments*: forthcoming.