

**An Encomium for Diane McColley**  
**Honored Scholar of the Milton Society of America**  
**Delivered by Gardner Campbell to the Society at its Annual Meeting**  
**Chicago, Illinois, December 28, 1999**

Loving in truth, and fain in this encomium my love to show, I asked the Muse for assistance. The first answer I received was the one I expected: "Fool, look in thy heart and write." Alas! As do all of you in this room, I recognized the layers of irony within that statement and could not take it as a simple directive.

So I applied to the Muse for another answer. And this time I heard, "work out your encomium with fear and trembling." This command was apt but not helpful. Fear and trembling I could manage on my own.

I decided on a sterner approach. I reminded the Muse that she was not talking to an utter yokel, and that I knew something of her history *and* the efforts of my fellow supplicants. I asked again for her help. This time she drew near, knowing full well what I lacked, took my hand, and said, "There is in McColley a sweetness ready penned. Copy out only that, and save expense."

So I did sit and write.

In her life, Professor Diane Kelsey McColley has planted and tended many gardens: as wife, as mother of six children-four of whom are with us tonight-and now as a grandmother, as musician and poet, as friend and mentor, as teacher and colleague. Her service to her students, to Rutgers University, and to her profession has been generous and multiform, including the Presidency of this Society. But tonight we focus our particular attention and esteem on her career as a distinguished scholar, one whose work has, for nearly thirty years, sought to train our ears to hear the music of the spheres, and our minds to grasp the essential concinnity of the created universe.

She claims as our common human inheritance the power to return to a state of what she calls "Edenic imagination, consciousness, and conscience, a kind of thought and language that is not only linear, binary, dialectical, or vertical/horizontal, but also radiant, global, multispherical, synchronic...." Mark the characteristic note of inclusiveness in her words: instead of "not this, but that" she writes "not only, but also." For Diane McColley participates with grace and élan in both discursive and intuitive intellection, and thus unites the excellences of both ratiocination and poetry.

Of her many published works on Milton, Herbert, Shakespeare, Donne, and in Renaissance studies generally, several of which are listed in your program, some flowerings must be singled out for special praise. Her first book, *Milton's Eve*, immediately effected a fundamental shift in the critical conversation. As an art historian lovingly restores a Vermeer, McColley cleaned the misogynist grime and

critical varnish from Milton's image of Eve. She restored to us a speaking portrait of the woman for whose sake Adam argued with God and angels, the woman whose selfhood both Adam and Raphael experienced as sublime, the woman whom Milton believed the artful, faithful mother of us all. After *Milton's Eve*, never again would Milton's song sound the same-and to do that to us was why Diane McColley came.

Then in *A Gust far Paradise: Milton's Eden and the Visual Arts*, which won the 1993 Hanford Award, Diane McColley revealed that, with no middle flight, she intended to map Edenic consciousness not only through poetry but also through the visual and musical arts. In his review of this book for *Milton Quarterly*, a deeply impressed William Kerrigan called the roll of "the critics who make a difference," who "have taught us their minds ... and taught us, as it were, to think in their minds." At the end of a list including Saurat, Hanford, Tillyard, Le Comte, Barker, Lewalski, Fish, Tayler, Lieb, and Bloom, Kerrigan wrote-prophetically, given tonight's occasion-that "to this list we can now add McColley, a distinct consciousness shaped by the poetic invitations of *Paradise Lost*."

But half yet remained unsung, and in her next book, *Poetry and Music in Seventeenth Century England*, the arts of explication, prosodic analysis, scrupulous historical research, and musicology form a new song of pure concert, one in which the lightest touch on what C. S. Lewis called "the Paradisal Stop" in us might resonate long after it has sounded. Early in the book, for example, McColley observes of Renaissance music that "much word-painting crosses the line, if there is one, between mimetic and rhetorical metaphor." Plunging immediately back into her musical exegesis, McColley leaves us to ponder that "if," to wonder about the nature of language and its relationship to being-in short, to open our imaginations to the very connectedness that resounds throughout her book. And she achieves such effects here with the verbal equivalent of a grace note. Such is the copious matter of her song.

And that song continues. One critic has said that "in the strength with which she inhabits the imaginative position of Eve, McColley has no peer." But we must also say, after McColley's recent essay on "the individuality of creatures in *Paradise Lost*," that she may be peerless in her angelic imagination too, so fully and perceptively does she inhabit the mind and paradisal experience of Raphael in that essay. Her current project, part of which she is carrying out now on a Mellon Postdoctoral fellowship at the Huntington Library, is a study of the language of nature in seventeenth-century poetry and technology, and she has at least five other works in progress, one of which will analyze language and nature in both early modern and twentieth century poetry and prose.

It is customary on these occasions to offer anecdotes about life in the honoree's classroom. I have no such anecdotes, strictly speaking, for I have never

formally enrolled in a class taught by Professor McColley. Yet she has been my teacher from the day I first read her work, over a decade ago. As I got ready, to get ready, to prepare to begin my dissertation, I was increasingly haunted by Wordsworth's complaint that, when it comes to literary criticism, "we murder to dissect." Then one evening I turned a page and began to read "Eve and the Arts of Eden." By the time I finished it, I was both chastened and encouraged; I knew more and knew better. On fire with my discovery, I eagerly telephoned a former student at the University of Virginia. "You must read this essay by Diane McColley," I said. There was a long silence on the line. Then my student replied, "What did you say her name was?" "Diane McColley," I answered. My student laughed: "I'm rooming with one of her daughters!" And so several weeks later my wife Alice and I drove to Charlottesville to meet Diane McColley. I had just re-read Diane's moving descriptions of prelapsarian Eden, and now talking to her I felt anew that some small corner of that Eden had been restored, a corner where one might indeed find, to quote Diane's own words, "conversations of the most felicitous reciprocity, dense with poetic shoots." That conversation helped keep me alive and growing during the labors that followed. I do not believe I would be in this room or this profession tonight if it were not for her.

Indeed, there is in McColley a sweetness ready penned, one to pierce the meeting soul, a sweetness whose origin may be found in this excerpt from the conclusion of Paul's letter to the Philippians: "And now, my friends, all that is true, all that is noble, all that is just and pure, all that is lovable and of good repute, whatever is excellent and admirable-fill your thoughts with these things" (Phil. 4:8, NEB).

For all of her remarkable career, Diane Kelsey McColley has inspired us to do just that. Miraculously, her luminous prose, her abiding sense of what Hopkins called "the dearest freshness deep down things," and her quick-eyed apprehension of the essential connectedness of those depths have in fact made those things present to us, their inscape intact and flourishing, their instress sublimely whole.

Please join me now in applauding the works and days of the newest Honored Scholar of the Milton Society of America, Diane Kelsey McColley.