ity during the vacancy after the death of Walsingham, sharing the responsibilities of a principal secretary. He was “a senior minister, in service as secretary since the 1560s, and was sworn to the Privy Council on 30 September 1586. He held many positions at court: he was chancellor of the Order of the Garter on 23 April 1589, keeper of the records of the court of augmentations, and clerk of the pipe in the exchequer from 19 February 1592 until his death” in February 1596. Only after Wolley’s death did Cecil secure the official secretaryship.

This book is informative and generally important for anyone working with early modern English State Papers and other collections of government instruments and correspondence; it is a book such as many scholars for many years have imagined in desideration; historians, literary scholars, and editors will find it useful.


This immensely erudite book focuses on Milton’s rich and varied experience with Italy—its art (particularly opera), its people, its theology, its literature, and the myths that surround it in Protestant England. At times, Martin is relentlessly polemical and seems to imply that everything valuable in Milton’s life and thought emerged from Italy, almost to the exclusion of the native tradition. While her enthusiasm for Renaissance Italy is infectious and admirable, an unfortunate byproduct of her Italophile perspective is her tendency to ignore or depreciate other influences and to focus on Milton’s putative Italian sources at the expense of the intrinsic value of his own art and the originality of his thought.

It is difficult to engage with all of the complex and challenging subjects related to the themes of this rich and challenging book, so I have restricted myself to four topics: Milton and Dante, Edmund Spenser, Freedom of Expression, and Italian Opera. I shall conclude with an account of my appreciation of Professor Martin’s contribution to the subject of Milton and the totality of the Italian experience
during the Renaissance.

**Milton and Dante**

There is no shortage of comparisons between Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, but I want to restrict my remarks to Beatrice, Ulysses, the Son, and Satan.

Martin traces Milton’s concept of the beatific vision back to Dante, where it is enshrined in Beatrice, who combines the radiance of the Son and the musical harmonies of God’s angels: “This beatific vision is at once indescribable and summed up in Beatrice, the counterpart of the Son’s light-reflecting face and the angel’s musical harmonies in *Paradise Lost*” (*Paradise Lost* 7.179–91). The comparison of Beatrice and the Son is boldly intriguing, connecting the two poems in a new and startling way.

Martin also explores a parallel between Dante’s Ulysses and Milton’s Satan. According to Martin, “Milton’s Satan is a type of Ulysses as surely as Beelzebub is a type of Diomedes. All are ‘nobly’ dedicated to courageously forging ahead against impossible odds, successfully rousing their troops … but he [Ulysses] leads them only to a miserable death and then to hell. Yet Dante’s hypocritical, self-serving, but also attractive Ulysses seems ‘marked by greatness’ and even as implicitly exalted by his author as Milton’s Satan, creating obvious problems for readers” (252). Of course Milton was free to encounter Ulysses directly in the *Odyssey* without experiencing the ambivalence of Dante’s portrait, or creating problems for his readers.

**Edmund Spenser**

The poetry of Edmund Spenser was obviously important to Milton, but Martin attempts to marginalize and even to trivialize its significance. Milton is said to prefer the dialogic mode of Dante, as opposed to the narrative mode employed by Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser (76). As for Spenser’s characters, his Una and Florimell are taken to task because, unlike Milton’s Lady, “neither can repel lustful intentions without an entire host of helpers” (236). Milton is also praised for his supposed “refusal to follow Spenser in taking entire episodes or characters from a single Italian source [Ariosto]” (236). There is no evidence that Milton made a conscious refusal to follow Spenser’s
example here; it is simply a way of suggesting that Spenser’s practice was inferior to Milton’s. Martin then goes into full polemical mode, praising Milton’s originality over Spenser’s, and claiming that Milton achieved greatness by rejecting the native tradition and embracing the great traditions of Italy: “Milton’s borrowings remain far less obvious than Spenser’s wholesale adaptations because his epic plot is at once more original and more completely blended with classical antecedents.” (245). “Spenser’s appropriation of Ariosto and Tasso may have led the way, but *Paradise Lost* is not in the end a very Spenserian or even terribly English poem. Its greatness lies in transcending its roots by absorbing the vast epic, pastoral, and tragic traditions ultimately inherited from abroad” (260-61). In my view, Martin depreciates Spenser’s influence on Milton to divert the reader from the native to the Italian tradition.

**Freedom of Expression**

Martin’s analysis of Milton’s writings indicates that he was no advocate for freedom of speech or expression, particularly for Catholics. According to his tract *Of True Religion*, “even the private practice of Catholicism should remain illegal” (97). Milton also “agreed with the Italian controversialist Paolo Sarpi that there must be limits to free discourse” (203). He was also in favor of limiting “unbalanced” speech (97). And although Martin does not refer directly to the work, of course, in *Areopagitica* Milton denies the right of free expression for Roman Catholics. Milton also had an almost fanatical obsession with beneficed clergy and the church they represent, coming up with a plan to destroy church and clergy altogether: “Milton simply applied the most extreme solution to clerical malfeasance, denying the church and its clergy state property as well as income” (205). Thus in proposing an extreme solution to alleged “clerical malfeasance,” Milton struck another blow at freedom of expression. There is also Milton’s shameful attack on Alexander More for a work that Milton knew that More had not written (53).

It would appear, then, that Milton was hostile to both personal and institutional freedom of expression. The question of whether anyone was listening or cared about Milton’s religious opinions is not taken up by Martin. Despite objections from some scholars, there is no hard
evidence that Milton ever joined a particular religious community or participated in church services of any Protestant sect. He was, in fact, a church of one. The *De Doctrina Christiana*, even if he did write it, does not in any way prove that Milton was a practicing Christian. He was in the thick of religious controversy, but his poetry, in my view, stands apart from his prose tracts and maintains its enduring value irrespective of his religious opinions.

**Italian Opera**

While Milton was present in Italy when operas and oratorios were extremely popular, their influence on his actual works is highly speculative. We do know that Milton attended one comic opera at the invitation of Cardinal Barberini; in his thank-you note, he “waxes ecstatic over the singing of the Roman ‘swan,’ Leonora Baroni” (49). In a highly subjective analysis of *Samson Agonistes*, Martin connects the poem and Milton himself both to opera (which Milton had seen) and oratorio which, (as far as we know), he hadn’t. Thus Samson is taken to be an operatic victim, perishing to the discordant strains of operatic melodrama. But it is a bit over the top to claim that “Milton’s emphasis on emotion creates [in *Samson Agonistes*] an ‘operatic’ tragedy of human suffering” (271) or indeed to claim that “Milton is also closer to both the Italian opera and oratorio composers since his tragic hero experiences the catharsis that Aristotle thought the audience should undergo” (273).

**Milton and the Italian Experience**

Martin makes it very clear that Milton, from an early age, loved everything about Italy (save Catholicism): its language, its poets, its music, its art and literature, its landscape, and its people. It was in effect his second country, if not his first.

According to Martin, the diehard Protestant Milton separated, in his own mind, his many Italian friends from the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, which he despised (41). Milton also claimed that he always supported Protestantism in the midst of Italy’s Catholic state and people, but we have only his word for that. Martin refers to this situation as “the almost monumental problem of reconciling Milton’s at times virulent anti-Catholicism with his almost equally
astonishing tolerance toward his Italian Catholic hosts and their co-
religionists” (81).

Martin is very perceptive in exploring the connections between
Dante’s Beatrice, Petrarch’s Laura, and Milton’s Eve. She does, how-
ever, place too much significance on Milton’s (perhaps fictionalized)
encounter with Amor in Elegia Septima, turning Milton into a woebe-
gone Petrarchan lover: “Like Dante’s initial vision of Amore, Milton’s
experience—although highly fictionalized—signals a key turning
point in his life. He now recognizes that the onset of manhood does
not mean liberation but submission to the feminine principle” (188).
I can’t fathom how Martin derived such a conclusion from Milton’s
dreamy erotic experience!

Martin speaks eloquently on Reformed and Roman Catholic
document, the Council of Trent, Roman politics, Neoplatonism, and
possible Italian sources for Milton’s Grand Style. She has written
an ambitious, controversial, eloquent study of the relation between
Milton and all phases of Italian culture.

David Marno. *Death Be Not Proud: The Art of Holy Attention*. Chicago:
University of Chicago Press, 2016. xi + 315. $40. Review by Darryl
Tippens, Abilene Christian University.

If literary criticism at its best awakens one to fresh ways of see-
ing old texts, makes insightful connections previously missed, or
broadens the horizon of interpretation, then David Marno’s study
of John Donne’s Holy Sonnets counts as a major new book in the
world of Donne studies, as it delivers admirably on all counts. In this
phenomenological approach to the Holy Sonnets, Professor Marno
takes the reader on a long and historically rich journey through major
philosophical, religious, and literary sources to demonstrate that early
modern philosophers knew something that contemporary scholars
generally do not, namely that religious practices, sacred poems, and
thinking are related matters: “early modern projects of devotion,
devotional poetry, and philosophy had a shared interest in holy at-
tention” (218).