

lems of form that Milton solved in later works, Burbery's close reasoning from probabilities is convincing and enlightening. I find his method less persuasive, however, in his attempts to establish precise sources in plays that Milton may have seen, or to explain physically how Samson's guide could have possibly escaped from the falling pillars of Dagon's temple, or how the generous and civil lords who agreed to a ransom just might have arrived late to the festival, or how the messenger doesn't really mean that "all [Gaza's] sons are fall'n" (*S*All58). The reasoning in these sections depends too heavily on "it may be that . . . might seem . . . is possible . . ." (131-33) to win my full assent.

Nevertheless, theatre historians, as well as Milton scholars, will appreciate Burbery's extensive list of stagings, dramatic readings, and adaptations of *Samson Agonistes* from 1717 to 2003.

John Mulryan and Steven Brown, ed. and trans. *Natale Conti's Mythologiae*. 2 vols. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006. xlvii + 978 pp. + 1 ill. \$110/ £89. Review by STELLA REVARO, SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, EDWARDSVILLE.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century Natale Conti's *Mythologiae* was the most popular myth book for poets, scholars, and general readers alike; in the twentieth century it also long served as an essential book for scholars writing about Renaissance poets and their myth sources. Its Latin was simple and straightforward, its organization helpful, and it came with an index. Now John Mulryan and Steven Brown have made this premier of myth books available for the first time in a complete, modern English translation in a handsome, two-volume edition. The *Mythologiae* passed through twenty-one Latin editions and six French translations in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But it was not the only myth book of its time nor was it the only publication of its author Natale Conti (Natalis Comes), who was known as a prolific translator, principally of Greek works into Latin, and also as a poet and imitator of classical poetry in his own right—both in Greek and Latin. His poetic talents were to serve him well in the *Mythologiae* which includes generous examples of Greek poetry translated into Latin.

The myth book, of which the *Mythologiae* was the most popular

example, was not exclusively a Renaissance invention. Ancient mythographies include Hesiod's eighth-century B.C. *Theogony*, Hyginus' *Book of Fables* (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.), Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*, and Fulgentius' fifth-century A. D. *Mythologiae*. The myth book was popularized in the early Renaissance by Boccaccio's *De Genealogia Deorum gentilium libri* (1472), to be superseded in the sixteenth century by Georgius Pictor's *Theologia Mythologiae* (1532), Lilio Gregorio Giraldi's *De deis gentium . . . historia* (1548), Vincenzo Cartari's *Imagines de I dei de gli antichi* (1548), composed in Italian and illustrated, and finally by Conti's *Mythologiae* (1567). Usefully, all these mythographies are described in the Introduction and their methods compared and contrasted with Conti's *Mythologiae*. Conti approaches myth allegorically, providing ethical or moral, historical and finally natural or "scientific" interpretations. His emphasis is on the ethical and moral interpretations, however, for he looks at classical myth syncretically and attempts to show how the Greek gods anticipate and affirm the Christian God. This approach made Conti acceptable to the Renaissance world. Copies of Conti were to be found in schools and colleges throughout England and in James I's own library, and he was readily cited as an authority by writers such as Chapman, Jonson, Burton and many others. Moreover, when not cited directly, it is often clear from the detail and emphasis when poets are employing Conti. Some merely treat Conti as a source for myth; others draw ethical interpretations of myth from him. Indices of names, places, and events make the *Mythologiae* eminently useful as a reference work, and Mulryan and Brown argue that even from the first edition, this is what it was intended to be. Moreover Conti added to these indices in subsequent editions in which he incorporated notes of classical scholars and other mythographers into his text.

Conti's *Mythologiae* is divided into ten books, with each book subdivided into chapters. His first book attempts to justify myth as not merely a useful study, but also a philosophical one, arguing that the ancients employed myth as a means to disseminate under a secret guise the essential truths about human life. Ancient writers such as Dionysius of Halicarnassus pointed out the usefulness of myth for explaining natural phenomena by allegory, for consoling human beings about the miseries of life, or for freeing the mind from terrors and unsound opinions. Conti traces the Greek mythical system back to the

Egyptians, but he points out that though all civilizations have their gods, it was the Hebrews who first discovered true religion and the true worship of God. After a lengthy consideration of the ancients' order of sacrifice to the different gods in book 1, Conti commences in book 2 an account of the major deities of the Greeks and Romans, beginning with their principal god Jupiter, who, as he explains, may be three distinct "gods," the third being the well-known son of Saturn, who at birth escaped being swallowed by his father once a stone was substituted in his place. Conti's aim in describing the classical deities is to collect as many as possible accounts from ancient sources, accounts that range from simple narrative to philosophical justification. His view is that the gods were originally human beings who exercised great power and so after their death were deified. He is predictably severe about Jupiter's sexual mores, but nonetheless catalogues his three wives and many mistresses.

Readers can approach the *Mythologiae* in several ways. They can use it as a reference work and consult only a pertinent chapter on a deity for the information that Conti has collected from different ancient sources. However, read straight through, the *Mythologiae* is a cultural text from the Renaissance that analyses the ancients' approach to their gods. Conti liberally cites ancient stories together with Plato's, Cicero's, and even the Christian Lactantius' commentaries, which attempt to explain the fables scientifically. However, Conti is often just as critical of these philosophical justifications as of the fables themselves. After the opening books Conti organizes his material on topics, including relevant deities or persons in the chapters that pertain to the topic. For example, book 7—"How Famous Men Sought Glory"—contains an account of Hercules and his labors; book 6—"That We Should Accept God's Decisions Calmly"—recounts the cautionary tale of Phaethon's disastrous borrowing of the Sun's chariot as well as those tales of famous sinners consigned to the underworld. The underworld itself he investigates in book 3. With Christianity, he points out, the ancients believed in the immortality of the soul and that every individual faced judgment after death. The ancients' graphic picture of the underworld, he believed, not only responded to human fears about the afterlife but also encouraged human beings to lead virtuous lives. Conti introduces us to the classical judges—Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus, and also gives us a detailed tour of the underworld, beginning with the rivers Acheron and Styx and continuing with its well-known inhabitants—Charon and Cerberus—as well as a host of monsters, most of them children of

Erebus and Night. However, it is here that we find the Fates and also Diana and the Moon as the terrestrial and extra-terrestrial aspects of Hecate. Readers might have expected to find Diana together with her twin Apollo, but it is not until book 4 that we meet Apollo. Interestingly, Conti cites divergent opinions on the parentage of Apollo and Artemis, noting that Herodotus claimed that the twins were born, not from Jupiter and Latona, but from Isis and Dionysus, with Latona only their nurse.

One of the most useful aspects of Conti's approach is that he regularly presents heterogeneous points of views. Conti is relatively dispassionate about Apollo, recording with interest his different roles as healer, prophet, and poet. In contrast to his outrage at Jupiter's conduct, he refrains from rebuking Apollo for vengefully attacking the Cyclopes, and merely notes that, banished by Jupiter from Olympus, he tended Admetus' cattle, a tale Milton lovingly includes in his poem *Mansus*. It is sometimes difficult to understand why Conti includes certain deities under the certain topics. For example, book 4 begins by discussing how the Moon controls childbirth, but very soon digresses to other topics and other persons, concluding with Venus and the cluster of deities associated with her—Cupid, the Graces, and the Hours. Book 5 begins with chapters on the four principal athletic contests in Greece—the Olympian, Pythian, Nemean, and Isthmian games—but concludes with chapters on several important deities—Mercury, Ceres, and Bacchus. Book 10, the final book, recapitulates briefly myths and figures Conti has dealt with before, reiterating his earlier point that myth is designed to teach human beings moral behavior. From Jupiter's example we learn, Conti succinctly comments, that "anyone who dedicates his life to sexual lust will be changed into all kinds of different beasts" (2.889).

Conti's sources range throughout classical literature. As we would expect, Hesiod's *Theogony* is a standby, as are Homer's epics. Though he refers to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, he does not let Ovid overshadow older Greek sources such as Pindar, the Homeric Hymns, and Callimachus. He sometimes makes mistakes in citing book and line numbers of ancient texts, which our translators helpfully identify and correct. Particularly useful are the footnotes Mulryan and Brown provide that point us to other sources, elucidate or correct Conti's commentary, and generally fill in classical and neo-Latin background. In the

appendix they provide a detailed description of the most important editions of the *Mythologiae* from 1567 to 1653. We must be grateful to them for this clear, correct, and eminently readable translation and for the scholarly apparatus attached to it that makes it all for more useful for early modern scholars.

Jacob Blevins, ed. *Re-Reading Thomas Traherne: A Collection of New Critical Essays*. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval & Renaissance Studies, 2007. xviii + 254pp. \$39.00. Review by A. LEIGH DENEFF, DUKE UNIVERSITY.

For many students of late seventeenth-century literature, Thomas Traherne is readily characterized by an unbridled optimism about man and his potential for recovering the blessed state of Felicity, about the glories of infancy and childhood, and about his own capacity to see God everywhere. While scholars have long recognized that his charming delight in things is not really pre-Romantic, they have generally accepted that Traherne's intellectual lineage can be tracked smoothly through the idealisms of Christian mysticism and Cambridge Platonism. *Re-Reading Thomas Traherne* complicates this relatively serene overview. As Alan Bradford puts it in his excellent Epilogue, the author who emerges from this collection "is an oxymoronic figure more complex, contradictory, and controversial than we had once imagined him to be."

Although Traherne was an indefatigable writer, much of his work remains either unpublished or inaccessible. This material includes Roman Forgeries, the enormous *Commentaries of Heaven*, the notebooks, and, until recently, the newly discovered Lambeth manuscript. Admittedly, the work that is available is not trifling—*Centuries of Meditation*, *Christian Ethics*, *The Church's Yearbook*, *the Dobbell poems*, *Poems of Felicity*, etc.—but any attempt to summarize Traherne's thought or to trace its development is practically impossible. Presumably, completion of the Boydell and Brewer definitive edition of Traherne's works (the first volume of the projected eight appeared in 2005) will provide a basis for a more encompassing survey, although it will still be difficult to trace development over a life we know so little about. As a result, scholars are left in the position of suggesting plausible avenues for further inquiry drawn from re-readings of available texts. The positive side of this state is that virtually all approaches seem promising; the negative side is the difficulty of proving their staying power over the broader stretches of a canon still in the