

This conduces gracefully, in the sixth chapter, to a detailed exploration of the Jewish presence in millenarianism while the seventh examines the controversy surrounding the readmission of the Jews into England. A final chapter assesses what happened when the Church and monarchy were restored.

The 18-page bibliography is complemented by a serviceable ten-page index. The main headings give a good idea—at a glance—of some of the important issues covered in this book as well as suggesting how, conceptually, they have been broken down and treated. There is no heading for “Bible,” but instead one for “Hebrew Bible” and another for “New Testament” (with individual books arranged alphabetically rather than canonically). The topical design of the index thus reinforces a principal consideration of this book, namely, how interest in biblical Israel “intensified the problem of Christian-Jewish relations, since ingrained theological anti-Judaism was at odds with the growing English experience of identification with ancient Jews” (13). This is an important book both because of its explicit recognition of the complexity and fluidity of Christian identity and also because of what it reveals about the specific ways the Reformation precipitated a renegotiation of the relations between Christianity and Judaism in the West.

Noam Reisner. *Milton and the Ineffable*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. Xiii + 321 pp. \$95. Review by PETER E. MEDINE, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA.

As the title suggests, Noam Reisner’s book addresses itself to the subjects and critical interests dealt with by Rudolph Otto (*The Idea of the Holy* [1917;1978]), Michael Lieb (*Poetics of the Holy* [1981]), and Stephen M. Fallon (*Milton Among the Philosophers* [1991]). The book moves away from the historicist and political readings of Milton’s poetry which have loomed large over the last several decades. Echoing Lieb, Reisner summarizes his argument when he says that he wishes to examine Milton’s “poetics of the ineffability.” The examination rests on an analysis of the “crisis of mimesis in relation to apophatic discourse which Milton inherits from the humanist-Protestant tradi-

tions" (11), a crisis Milton undertakes to resolve in his poetry. In the first two chapters, Reisner traces the development of speculation about the ineffable and the radical changes in the "intellectual presence of ineffability in Western thought" (9) following the rise of humanism and the advent of the Reformation. In the three succeeding chapters, Reisner discusses Milton's struggle with the ineffability of godhead throughout his poetry.

In chapter 1, Reisner surveys several questions about divine ontology, including: Why is God ineffable? How can we know that which is ineffable? And what terms can be employed in describing human knowledge of the ineffable? The discussion ranges from the Hebrew Scripture (especially Exodus 3-4), through Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, to Aquinas, and Reisner concludes that the answers that emerged led to a relatively unquestioned belief in the philological integrity of the Latin used for the principal theological inquiries. The changes that were to radically affect all this form the subject of chapter 2, which outlines the emergence of Italian Neoplatonism and European humanism along with the beginnings of modern biblical scholarship and philology. These two impulses had radically different outcomes. The first gave rise to the idealist concept of man as a creature of limitless potential, and the second to an undermining of the fixity of God's Word and the concomitant view of man as strictly limited and dependent on God's grace. In Reisner's judgment, Milton struggles with these warring forces. On the one hand, he aspires to a kind of "vatic soaring and privileged vision" (104); on the other, he confronts the dreadful silence accompanying the reformist internalization of "rightly reading the fixed meanings of inspired texts." For Reisner, much of the power of Milton's poetry derives from this struggle.

In chapter 3, Reisner deals with the *Poems 1645* and attends to some fifteen poems, dealing in relatively greater detail with six or seven, including the translation of Psalm 114, the "Nativity Ode," the "Passion," "At a Solemn Music," *A Masque*, "Lycidas," and "Epitaphium Damonis." The poems of the volume can be fairly precisely dated and Reisner proceeds chronologically and traces Milton's coping with the "problem of soaring," in the words of the Chapter's subtitle. The young Milton would appear to be a straightforward Platonist

yearning for escape and God but at the same time impeded by a Protestant, not to say Calvinistic, fear of mystery. Reisner detects a “rational discomfort” at the *mysterium tremendum* of the deity in Psalm 114 and a vacillation in the “Nativity Ode” between a desire to aspire to prophecy and ultimately only a pretence “to soar.” So, in various ways, are the “Passion,” “At a Solemn Music,” and *A Masque* analyzed. Finally in the twinned pastoral poems, “Lycidas” and “Epitaphium Damonis,” Milton adumbrates a “way forward . . . toward his role as a poet-prophet” (158). Reisner sees in the first of these two poems a charged and often anxious meditation on the dilemma confronting an aspiring poet who is also haunted by a fear of the ineffable presence. The resolution occurs in the elegy’s consolation of the beatific vision, where the poet relegates the “unexpressive nuptial song” into the distant apocalyptic future. The far more personal “Epitaphium” concludes in what Reisner describes as the “sedate but highly eroticized realms of pastoral song” which then give way to a “paradoxically virginal Bacchic frenzy amid the ‘hosts of heaven’” (167). To Reisner, Milton grows in “sophistication and vocational confidence” in the last great poems.

In chapter 4, he deals with *Paradise Lost*, a poem in which the ineffable is ubiquitous though variously rendered. While Reisner does not put it this way, he finds Milton’s heroic undertaking in no respect more remarkable than in the ways in which Milton “violently dislocates its [i.e., the ineffable’s] presence away from its natural place with God to rest finally with himself” (179). The four proems exhibit this dislocation most notably, though the invocation to light in Book III is especially relevant to the traditions of ineffability and apophysis. Reisner examines Milton’s raising the question of whether he may “express [the Holy Light] unblamed,” and his alluding to the myth of Philomela and so harnessing and redirecting the myth’s violent energy toward “the object of the ineffable *mysterium*” (187). As a result, the entire invocation is suffused with a “brooding anxiety over the loss and recovery of the powers of representation” (187). The chapter ends with a discussion of the ways in which the dislocation of the ineffable appears “in a wide range of affective registers and where ineffable mystery is not suppressed but carefully displaced and diffused” (217). From this perspective, Reisner analyzes the speech

of God, the Son, Adam and Eve, and Satan, and concludes that the concept of ineffability becomes both the “object of the poem’s loss as well as a final mark of the Fall itself” (233). Ultimately Satan and the devils’ denial of deity results in nihilistic silence.

In chapter 5, Reisner deals with the 1671 volume of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. Reisner approaches the final poems as spiritual meditations on the consequences of individuals submitting to sacred silence in confronting the ineffable God, not as he is but as he reveals himself to his chosen creatures. In the case of *Paradise Regained*, the consequences for Jesus are triumphant and redemptive. Reisner’s discussion of the climactic pinnacle scene is summary. To Satan’s temptation that He should demonstrate His divinity prematurely, Jesus responds with Scripture and so defeats his adversary and prevails. Reisner observes that what happens is that the “ineffable”—that is, the Word made Flesh—speaks, and “it is this final glimpse of the truly miraculous which smites Satan . . . and causes him to fall” (248). Self-effacing silence is linked to redemption as a “form of poetic *mysterium*” (p. 258). In contrast, *Samson Agonistes* illustrates the tragedy of one of God’s chosen who violates the ineffable mystery. Samson divulges the “secret gift of God / To a deceitful woman” (*SA* 201-202) and breaks the “seal of silence” (*SA* 47). On the enduring critical question of whether Samson is regenerate, Reisner is agnostic, claiming unimpeachably that it remains open. His position follows from the argument he pursues throughout: “There is no moment of declarative clarity [in *Samson Agonistes*], only the unsettling presence of mysterious interiority, silently propelling Samson toward the final catastrophe” (272-73). It is a fitting observation on *Samson Agonistes* and well illustrates what Reisner means by the “poetics of the ineffable.”

Reisner has undertaken the formidable task of writing a book that is comprehensive of Milton’s major and minor poetry, and he has done an admirable job. In particular, he engages generously and instructively with other critics, and extends an important line of Milton criticism. The book is complete with a full bibliography, a feature that would almost alone make it valuable. Reisner writes with refreshing clarity. Oxford’s editors should, however, have worked harder with him than they did on chapters 1 and 2, which are unnecessarily dense and difficult to follow. The book is handsomely produced, though I’ve

noted the following mistakes: Mason Lowance's name is misspelled on page 101 and 314; typos occur on page 235 (*than* for *then*) and page 245 (*temp* for *tempt*—twice).

Paul Davis. *Translation and the Poet's Life. The Ethics of Translating in English Culture, 1645-1726*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. xi + 324 pp. Review by ALAN RUDRUM, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY.

Paul Davis begins his impressive book by commenting on the extraordinary amount of academic work on translation in the ten years that preceded it. He adds that two instances of stigmatization still obtain: translation remains discouraged by copyright law and exploited by publishers, corporations, governments and religious organizations. There is certainly evidence to support his case. Michael Henry documents a hair-raising instance of discouragement in the *The London Review of Books* (August 19, 2010). An instance of publishers in effect blocking access to an author's work by being overcautious in commissioning translations is put forth in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* (October 8, 2010) headed "Easy Modiano."

Davis points to the difficulties that editors of anthologies have had in deciding what is and is not a translation. He reports Steiner (1966) as permissive; Tomlinson (1980) as opting against the liberties of the imitation; Poole and Maule (1995) as adopting a rainbow policy, where the term "after" shows up frequently in the annotations. I was glad to be made aware of these. I especially enjoyed Steiner's small volume and would like to see it reprinted. None of these anthologies admitted one of my favorite imitations, Edgell Rickword's "The Encounter," which takes off, loosely but certainly, from Horace, *Satires*, I: ix.

Davis declares at the outset that probably no watertight theoretical distinction between translation and imitation is possible; nevertheless the distinction is important, since if imitations were included a study would become unmanageably vast. He aims to examine translation as a distinctive mode of imaginative conduct for the five principal Augustan poet translators; his concern is what the poets themselves thought they were doing.