

Angelica Duran. *The Age of Milton and the Scientific Revolution*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007, pp. 349, \$58.00. Review by BOYD M. BERRY, VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY.

One could argue that Angelica Duran has written a book about the advancement of learning in seventeenth-century England, and that hers in effect advances a similar goal today. To put it in that abstract way is of course to occlude the two massive abstractions of her title, *The Age of Milton and the Scientific Revolution*, which on the face of it seems to propose division, while Prof. Duran's effort is to show verbal overlaps among the terms, to focus on particularities, and to synthesize. Prof. Duran advances our learning, among other ways, by reading Milton's writing and those contemporaries who commonly feature in histories of science, through a lens which assumes, for starters, that the education of all these writers was in many ways the same. Like the exponents of the advancement of learning in Milton's time, many of her readings cast new light, while a few seem a bit fanciful. Just as she entertains the unevenness of some arguments in natural philosophy, we acknowledge some unevenness in hers.

Prof. Duran casts valuable light on developing and changing thinking and writing, both in the scientific community and in Milton's texts. For example, the phrase "natural philosopher," which for this reviewer still suggests a person, like Newton, concerned to observe and speculate upon natural events, which for her in contrast often (but not always) signals elements of early naturalistic writing that suffers a "death" in her chapter 2 because it is basically passive, retiring, and behind the times. Thus she shows how writing about natural philosophy came increasingly to emphasize activism and a kind of militancy.

The book unfolds in three movements, headed "teachers, academic subjects, and students," each composed of four chapters (22). At the outset, "Milton among Early Modern Scientists" lays the ground work, pointing to many similarities in education and interest, while demonstrating the verbal difficulties occasioned by words like *scientia*. Examining first "Il Penseroso" and *A Maske*, and then "Elegy IV" and particularly "Lycidas" and *Of Education*, she shows how Milton's writing about teaching progressed toward what she calls "new model" teaching (49).

The teachers she selects, the four archangels in *Paradise Lost*, are dressed in highly militaristic language, a “Vanguard,” although Raphael only sports “feathered maile.” This stress on military gear seems to conflict with Michael’s warning

Dream not of thir fight,
As of a Duel, or the local wounds
Of head or heel: not therefore joynes the Son
Manhood with God-head, with more *strength* to foil
Thyemie, nor so to overcome
Satan. . . (12: 386-391, emphasis mine)

Other evidence suggests that armed blows are repeatedly deferred and martial gear and “force” are ridiculed both in book 6, in *Samson Agonistes*, and in *A Treatise of Civil Power*. That seems part of Milton’s effort to distance his Christian epic from the non-Christian epics. But this militaristic language as employed by advancers of learning, which puzzles this reviewer in *Paradise Lost*, suggests more generally that natural philosophers, focused in many directions, perceived themselves to operate in a culture needing severe blows. Duran traces developing activism even in the sequencing of archangels, as for example her comment that “Raphael’s attire expresses his defensive role as sentry and Michael’s his offensive role as crusader.

The curriculum—the “subjects—retained vestiges of the trivium and quadrivium, yet exploded de facto, with increased emphasis on the quadrivium. “Subjects of Change in ‘L’Allegro,’ ‘Il Penseroso’ and *A Maske*” (ch. 6) show Miltonic changes in writing about education. For example, the brothers in *A Maske* satirize a taste for older, passive, backward-looking activities also visible early in the *Prollusions*, while the Lady engages in a disputation with Comus in which the effort is not rhetorical display but winning. She verbally attacks Comus’ “gay rhetorick” violently. Similarly, Duran argues that ‘L’Allegro’ hearkens back to pastoral poetry while ‘Il Penseroso’ implicitly “extols natural studies” (137).

The second section concludes, in chapter 8 (“The Sexual Mathematics of *Paradise Lost*”); it is centered on two related passages, Eve’s elaborate “Sweet is” song in book 4 and Adam’s conversation with Raphael in book 8. In discussing Eve’s song, Duran makes much of the primarily English invention of calculus, which uniquely accounts for complex relationships, the matter of her song as well as the conclusion of Adam’s astronomical conversation in

book 8. That conversation shows Raphael's tentativeness—developed by serious mathematicians—as well as a kind of cosmic sexuality. Prof. Duran remarks that “Adam’s account to Raphael of his marriage at last implies the answer to Eve’s question, “wherefore all night long shine these?: ‘to light the bridal Lamp” (204).

The third section, on “Students,” is to this reviewer the least compelling of the three. Initially, in chapter 9, “Brave, New Students,” Prof. Duran attempts to say something about early modern students, a difficult task given the archive. She perceives “a crisis of [self]-definition . . . especially conspicuous at the transitional moments of education . . . from young students to older students, and from students to professionals” (214). This crisis sounds something like a “Miltonic Moment,” and J. Martin Evans’ argument, while not cited here, underlies much of Prof. Duran’s reading. The crisis involves an “increased sense of isolation” (126). All of this is tenable, if somewhat speculative in places.

The title of Chapter 10, “From *Philomela* to *luscinia magarhynchose* in *A Maske*” indicates one of the main points concerning the Lady. Philomela’s grueling story of rape, was, late in the scientific revolution, subsumed by botanical classification as part of a genus, wholly abstracted from gender or sexuality. The abstract business of the bird is to sing, as the Lady does early; later, no longer threatened by rape and so moving away from the song-bird tale, she does not speak or sing, but rather dances, showing, as Duran reads it, her “decorative accomplishments” as well as her and her family’s social status. “Lady Alice transforms from the character of the Lady into the family member of the powerful host family . . .” (246).

The final discussion of *Samson Agonistes* seems to ignore the extreme contingency generated by the text, in which character after character searches the “unsearchable dispose/ Of highest wisdom” without success, since it is “unsearchable.” By omitting a conversing deity, the play avoids presenting a *deus ex machina* and a mindless Baconianism—which is precisely the marked, formal difference between *Samson* and Milton’s epic poetry. Duran opens by reading Samson as a type of Christ, following Bucer and Calvin. She proposes that Samson’s rousing motions are “God’s” (280), and reads those “arm’d with deadly stings” as his duplicitous “enemies” (286); that is not to deny the possibility of those readings, but to notice that there is some fairly restrictive interpretive work and some leaps of faith here. For example, when

the Chorus meditates on consolation and patience, they focus on “book-learning” (287), which fits with the Baconian concerns among natural philosophers, though it leaves the issue of consolation behind.

Overall, this reviewer prefers Peter Herman’s handling both of verbal contingency and gender relations in *Destabilizing Milton*. to Prof. Duran’s third section. Finally, Ann Astell was not indexed nor her first name supplied in text, opening for a moment the expectation that Mary Astell’s critique of Milton and Locke would appear in this tale. But it is a guy tale, as Prof. Duran notes candidly when referring to Bathsua Makin and Margaret Cavendish.

Susannah B. Mintz, *Threshold Poetics: Milton and Intersubjectivity*. Newark and London: University of Delaware Press, 2003. 259 pp. \$46.50. Review by SARA VAN DEN BERG, SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

This book represents three important modes of criticism: the relational paradigm of psychoanalytic theory, theories of the body, and disability studies. In bringing these theories to bear on Milton’s poetry, Susannah Mintz offers significant new readings of *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*.

The relational paradigm that now dominates psychoanalytic theory in the United States has not been widely acknowledged or used by literary critics. The first phase of psychoanalytic criticism derived from Freud’s own interpretation of literary texts, and emphasizes the Oedipus complex, instinct, and drive theory. This mode fell out of favor, in part because it often seemed reductive, but survives in Lacanian emphases on the symbolic. Feminist literary critics reinvigorated psychoanalytic criticism by drawing on the object relations theories of Donald W. Winnicott. These critics emphasized the pre-oedipal bond between mother and child as ‘mirroring,’ unlike the subsequent oedipal bond between father and child as ‘contest.’ Susannah Mintz’s book is grounded in object relations theory, but like many contemporary psychoanalytic theorists she focuses on the newer paradigm of “intersubjectivity.” For Mintz, and for such noted psychoanalytic theorists as Jessica Benjamin, relationships are not the product of interior drives but are the primary source of those drives. Self is constructed and reconstructed in relationship. These relationships occur in a “threshold space between, but also of, self and other,” where a person discovers and shapes identity through encountering the other