

Mary A. Papazian, ed. *The Sacred and Profane in English Renaissance Literature*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008. 377 pp. \$75.00.  
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The thirteen essays gathered here “seek to reclaim the space where the secular and the sacred overlap” (18), in the words of the editor’s introduction. If it is not clear from whom or from what this space must be reclaimed, the collection may fairly be said to succeed in breathing new vigor into a perennial, sometimes hackneyed, theme. It follows two successful volumes on the interplay of the sacred and the profane—one focused on George Herbert, the other on early-modern British literature—that arose from a conference in the 1990s at the University of Groningen convened by Helen Wilcox and Richard Todd. On the evidence of questions opened and perspectives examined in the present collection, this deep well is by no means dry.

The editor’s introduction suggests that a general or neophyte readership might be expected to pick up this attractive volume, clothed in its handsome jacket’s reproduction of an illuminated miniature that vividly depicts the excruciating pains (and devilish pleasures) of Hell. A potted history of Renaissance and Reformation in England and synopses of essays disclose, for example, that Dr. Johnson was “an eighteenth century man of letters,” that Marvell was “a later seventeenth-century poet,” and that the English Civil War occurred in mid-seventeenth century (25). Yet, in truth, the erudite, scholarly and generally very well-written essays that follow would reward any reader willing to become familiar with the texts discussed. There is very little jargon or stuffiness. The range of the essayists is pleasingly broad, their learning assuredly deployed.

Of the major poets discussed, Milton is the most popular, followed by Donne, Sidney, (principally his *Apology for Poetry*) and Herbert, but others, too, of abiding interest—Southwell, Crashaw, Daniel, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Greene, anon. etc.—appear. This thematic net draws in a rich variety of writing for stage and study, travel and pulpit, liturgy, meditation, civic regulation and advice to monarchs, providing a wealth of the unexpected. Oddly, Jonson is discussed only very briefly, and in one essay. He would not have approved.

The opening essay by Brett Foster, on Tudor reactions to Papal Rome, traces oscillating and divided responses to the antiquities of Rome, and to ecclesiastical displays, including a conclave to elect a pope. Writers from Robert Langton in 1522 to Thomas Hoby, whose travel diary, concluded in 1564—described aptly as a *Bildungsroman* (49)—mirror English uncertainty about religious allegiances. At home, as Robert I. Lublin's essay reveals, stage representations of ecclesiastical apparel are also registers of religious turmoil. An impressive cast of dramatists is invoked in this revision of long-held beliefs that the stage was predominantly a secular site (57). Lublin shows how plays by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Middleton—*A Game at Chess* is central—Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, and lesser playwrights' works, adapted to the vestment controversy. Here Jonson makes his entrance: *Zeal-of-the-land-Busy*'s probable costume is discussed. This essay is a valuable insight into the impact of confessional politics. One may doubt, however, that Queen Mary “converted the country back to Catholicism” (66). She could only wish.

The third essay is a trenchant examination of Marlowe's *Edward II*. Mathew Martin addresses a question that reverberates. How can secular history make any sense of human life and death, of appalling agony, compared to the sacred history of the Crucifixion? Martin, building on the work of Elaine Scarry and others, makes good use of medieval Corpus Christi cycles—especially the York Crucifixion. In probing possible significances of Edward's death agony, that issues only in “meaningless sounds” (104), Ovid's account of Actaeon is brought to bear, to very telling effect.

Robert Kilgore, in his discussion of the *Defence* and the paraphrases of the metrical Psalms, probes Sidney's doubts about the validity of poetry. The author is nicely sensitive to Sidney's ironical paradoxes, and he argues convincingly that the Psalms are “the perfect trial for the *Defence*” (115). It is the encounter with spiritual faith that ultimately allows Sidney to endorse profane poetry (127). This fine essay comes with discursive notes: miniature essays amusing, witty and pertinent, as do some other essays in the collection.

Sean McDowell's excellent essay on sacred and profane modes of transgressive desire points out the fuzziness of the sacred/profane dichotomy (132). Calling up Sidney and Crashaw in their treatments

of “the kiss,” he argues that whether to steal it, or be stolen by it, is the “most meaningful distinction between profane and sacred desire” (134). He also examines the work of Barnaby Barnes—once dismissed by an Oxford Professor of Poetry as “nonsense and nastiness”—and makes good use of contemporary psychology and physiology theory. Here again, good discursive notes.

Editor Mary Papazian’s assured treatment of Donne, in her essay on several Holy Sonnets and the “Nocturnal upon S. Lucies Day,” also calls on Sidney’s *Defence* and Aristotle’s theory of mimesis. In her strongly urged argument against the constrictions of predominantly biographical interpretations of these so intimate-seeming poems, she calls upon Sermons as collateral evidence. Donne, she concludes, provides a “vignette of human pain and misery” as well as a “proper response to suffering” (177). Hannibal Hamlin’s essay also questions long-standing critical positions. The “confessionally motivated tug of war” (183) between followers of Louis Martz and Barbara Lewalski inhibits critical appreciation, especially of the neglected “A Litanie.” Hamlin, in company with Christopher Hill, even doubts that the concepts “sacred” and “secular” are applicable (183). The poem is not a litany he concludes, neither secular nor sacred, but rather—collapsing another old dichotomy—a “representation of Dr. Jack Donne” (204).

Herbert’s church furnishing poems are the focus of David L. Orvis’s inquiry into Herbert’s doctrinal allegiance. A set of dichotomous factions “battling it out . . . struggling to attain hegemony over George Herbert” (G. E. Veith quoted 213) is investigated to reveal the resistance of Herbert’s church to these taxonomies (212). Herbert, the poet, as distinct from the parson, obstructs such definition to remain “virtually free of the constraints” (232) that factions would impose.

“Hard Hearts and Scandal” succinctly announces a searching examination of Petrarchan cruel mistresses and Pharoah’s hardened heart—that theologically vexing nub of the polemical Erasmus-Luther debate on free will. Gregory Kneidel’s crisply written, learned exposition of the matter of Pharoah’s heart leads to the recognition of scandal—also succinctly anatomized—as a “New Testament antitype of Old Testament hard-heartedness” (238). Robert Parsons SJ, a formidable Roman controversialist, saw the analogy between seduction and scandal, and Robert Southwell SJ wove that into the fabric of

*Saint Peter's Complaint*, which Kneidel brilliantly expounds, including a well-judged section on Shakespeare's *Lucrece*.

Another jewel in the collection is Raymond-Jean Frontain's "Silent Signs: Fuller, David, Writing" which he presents as essentially a work of recovery of Thomas Fuller's incomplete epic on David's sin, repentance and punishment. Fuller, the church historian, royalist Civil War chaplain and author of *Worthies*, as poet? Frontain's compelling analysis of Fuller's anticipating Milton's interiorized epic action and appropriation of biblical narrative (253) opens up the application of "silent signs" in a morally, and politically, ambiguous society. But the essay is even more than the work of recovery—it is a balanced and persuasive examination of the complex prelude to the Civil War.

The final three essays, each on *Paradise Lost*, remind us how multifarious the great epic is and how it continues to provide fresh readings. Kent B. Lehnhof's tour de force on Milton's exhaustive deployment of tropes on the digestive tract is likely to cause us to reconsider the relationship of the sublime to the obscene in the poem—and elsewhere, for Lehnhof supplies a literary genealogy from Aesop and Aristophanes via Shakespeare and Topsell. Milton's purpose is not flippant: rather it is to affirm his "materialist monism" (297).

Chuck Keim's erudite essay on Temple imagery and the Sacred Garden shows Milton, not surprisingly, deeply engaged with the biblical accounts of the temple, its construction, and priestly practice. This is frankly perplexing material which continues to exercise biblical scholarship. What Keim achieves is a fine explication of the way Milton's powerful imagination transforms his biblical knowledge into the amazing hybrid garden-temple of the poem and high priests' vestments into the figure of Raphael, who is, of course, as angels are, naked.

Andrew Barnaby's examination of Satan's motivation and ambivalent attitudes—"cringing before the Lord"—leads him to wonder if "Milton is himself fully aware of it" (327). Johnson is invoked on the theme of the uselessness of devotional verse (329), and Marvell's "The Coronet" as an example of a metaphysical devotional poem as a counterweight.

This is a fine collection, certainly of interest to specialists and possibly to general readers.