

the right to function as year-zero scrutineers of custom. In the case of poems and authors without a critical history, all such pretenses are rendered ineffectual, because we simply do not know how to read without presuppositions and established practices. More importantly, the real, as opposed to the occluded, absence of factual information about the poet compels us to acknowledge how important such information about previous literary incarnations is for the location of our discursive engagement with poems. (xv-xvi)

Perhaps a manuscript reposes in the Bodleian of poems so historically alien as not even to qualify as the other and hence unintelligible without the contextual grounding of a learned commentary. But MS.Don.c.24 is not that: its poems fit easily into our construction of the seventeenth century, and would do so even without Gouws's helpful annotation. Whatever the fate of our present credulities, Oldisworth will not hasten it.

Joad Raymond. *Milton's Angels: The Early Modern Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. xviii + 488 pp. + 8 illus. £30.00. Review by ADAM SWANN, UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

Joad Raymond observes that “very little has been written about early modern angels, particularly in a Protestant context” (8), and *Milton's Angels* aims to address this oversight. While it is often assumed that the importance of angels diminished after the Reformation due to their association with Catholic doctrine, Raymond demonstrates that angels in fact continued to permeate the thought of even the staunchest Protestants. Milton provides an ideal case study because, while he exhibits a typically Reformed providential understanding of the role of angels, his angels also possess a remarkable tangibility, as they “sing, watch, play games and exercise, eat, sleep [and] make love” (272).

Raymond's most eminent predecessor in the field of Miltonic angelology is Robert West, and the latter's *Milton and the Angels* (1955) provides the structural template for *Milton's Angels*. Raymond follows West by dividing the text into two sections, the first discussing early

modern angelology and the second investigating Milton's representations of angels. A scathing reviewer of *Milton and the Angels* described "the first half of Dr. West's book [as] a barely readable 'digest' of 'Christian angelology'" (*Review of English Studies* 8: 348), but Raymond is much more successful in this regard.

While Raymond notes that "angelology, a systematic examination of angel-doctrine (written in isolation from a full theological system) is a rare genre" (45), the first section of his book can certainly be considered as a contribution to this field. He draws on a wealth of sources to trace the development of angelology from the oldest church fathers to contemporary seventeenth-century polemicists, constructing a comprehensive account of the perception of angels in early modern thought.

Of course, early modern accounts of angels were often coloured by sectarian interests, as "one's faith in angels or scepticism of them marked the distinction between the Protestant and Catholic faiths" (94). Raymond aims to provide a more impartial view—he asserts his atheism at the outset (14)—and this is manifested in his exposition of a "synthetic survey of widely held beliefs and knowledge" (65) regarding angels, with little concern for which side of the denominational divide these beliefs originated. Interestingly, the religious roots of angelology persist in the question-and-answer catechistic format adopted by Raymond in his exposition of the characteristics of the early modern angel. Far from undermining the authority of Raymond's argument, this provides an ideal way to accommodate angels, rendering them more palatable for modern secular literary criticism.

The doctrine of accommodation itself is the subject of one of the more illuminating chapters in the book. Raymond explores the development of the doctrine of accommodation, with particular interest paid to the thought of prominent reformers such as Calvin. Instructive parallels are drawn between Calvin's thought and Peter Martyr's rejection of divine anthropomorphism and their shared belief in the doctrine of accommodation. Angels are, of course, a vital manifestation of such accommodation in their role as comprehensible, tangible reifications of God's divinity. Angels occupy the nebulous liminal space between God and man, thus perfectly embodying the doctrine of accommodation through language that "is *neither* figura-

tive *nor* literal” (177).

Accommodation is, of course, the technique which underpins *Paradise Lost* on every level, and Raymond astutely notes that it allows Milton “to justify what would otherwise be an unsustainable, even outrageous, incursion into the unknown” (184). A large portion of the book is justifiably devoted to an investigation of the angels of *Paradise Lost*. Raymond departs from normative critical opinion by suggesting that Milton’s angels are more than mere facilitators of accommodation (although they undoubtedly serve this purpose on occasion), but are in fact real, tangible beings. The fundamental importance of angels to Milton’s great epic is made clear as Raymond demonstrates how they shape, propel, and relate the narrative. The discussion of *Paradise Lost* is strengthened considerably by Raymond’s frequent references to *De Doctrina Christiana*, which provides a vital systematic framework within which to read the angels.

Raymond’s argument really comes alive when he analyses *Paradise Lost* in relation to other Milton texts and contemporary debates, which leads Abdiel’s exchange with Satan to be depicted as an “interpret[ation] and reappropriat[ion of] the debates of the 1650s” (223). However, there are points where Raymond’s readings are somewhat less convincing; for instance, his representation of the Abdiel episode as an example of an unfallen angel telling an untruth is based on rather convoluted reasoning.

The next chapter delineates the characteristics of guardian angels in Milton’s thought, providing a solid foundation for the discussion of *Lycidas*. Raymond offers an intriguing reading of the poem in terms of the guardian angel functioning as “a substitute, or a metonym, for a missing notion of nationhood” (242). While Raymond’s mention of Marvell’s construction of an angelic Cromwell in his *First Anniversary of the Government under O.C.* is far from innovative, it provides interesting support for the *Lycidas* section.

While the discussion of *Lycidas* is competent, it nevertheless seems strange to discuss one of Milton’s earliest poems after one of his latest. It would have perhaps been more logical to arrange the book in a largely chronological fashion, as it would allow the reader to see the birth and gradual maturation of Milton’s angels. *Lycidas* could fruitfully be read as the birth of Milton’s angels, which then came to

maturity in *Paradise Lost* and *De Doctrina Christiana*.

The topic of early modern angels can be rather daunting to those unversed in the intricacies of angelological debates. Yet, an understanding of this topic can shed vital light on much of Milton's canon, and Raymond's work excels in this regard. While *Milton's Angels* draws on an ostensibly dizzying array of sources, Raymond always keeps the narrative fresh and engaging, offering a readable and instructive passage into what is surely one of the most important topics for readers of Milton.

Reid Barbour and Claire Preston, eds. *Sir Thomas Browne: The World Proposed*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. xii + 368 pp. + 3 illus. \$120.00. Review by JOSEPH L. BLACK, UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST.

As the editors note, Thomas Browne is "among the most influential of writers in the history of English literature," with an impressive list of admirers and imitators over the centuries. And yet his works, in "a paradox worthy of one of Browne's own meditations," have for some time been "largely relegated by the academy to the category of literary curiosity" (1). Building on the renewed interest generated by the 2005 quatercentenary celebrations of Browne's birth, this important collection invites us to revisit the achievements of a writer Herman Melville classified among the great "thought-divers": "any fish can swim near the surface," Melville wrote his friend Evert Duyckinck (in an 1849 letter not cited here), "but it takes a great whale to go down stairs five miles or more." Browne, unsurprisingly, could have discoursed at length with Melville on the properties of sperm whales, having not only read all there was to read on the subject but also examined one that had washed up on the Norfolk coast (*Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, book 3, ch. 26).

The revival of interest in Browne follows a willingness to ask new questions of his life and work, and this collection features many of the scholars most actively asking these questions. Of course, Browne's singular style remains central: every essay here illustrates the extent to which after four centuries we continue to learn how to *read* Browne.