

It is often difficult to follow the thread of Donnelly's argument. Consider the following amazing sentence: "Readers who fail to distinguish between Milton's ontic and epistemic claims will consistently miss his point: every indication of epistemic limitation will be interpreted as an ontic claim regarding the divine need for evil in reality, rather than as a function of either the finitude or the fallen will of the human knower" (75).

Donnelly asserts that Milton assumes that *Paradise Lost* will require a second reading to be understood: "Only in the second reading does genuine understanding begin, once there is some concrete knowledge of all the parts. The poem's structure, in effect, presumes a second reading which keeps in mind the previous reading and thus implies the central importance of memory in the readers' response to its central preoccupations" (185). Moreover, Scripture itself is reduced to a gloss on Milton's poetry: "Milton's mode of engagement with Scripture in his major poems also seems to parallel one of the hermeneutic ambitions of the Miltonic *De Doctrina Christiana*: that his own words would be glossed by the biblical text, rather than vice versa" (1). Such extravagant claims can only discourage readers from taking on the now-monumental task of making sense of *Paradise Lost*.

In sum, only the most dedicated of Milton scholars will attempt to read *Milton's Scriptural Reasoning* and to master its contents. As Milton scholarship becomes more and more particularized, it becomes less and less accessible to the educated reader, even to the specialist in early modern literature. This book is a case in point.

Abraham Stoll. *Milton and Monotheism*. Pittsburg, PA: Duquesne University Press, 2009. xi + 377 pp. \$60.00. Review by LARRY R. ISITT, COLLEGE OF THE OZARKS.

Abraham Stoll's *Milton and Monotheism* is both history and literary criticism of the kind so well exemplified by the likes of Maurice Kelley's *This Great Argument* and Barbara Lewalski's *Milton's Brief Epic*, in that it elegantly and forcefully commands its subject with lucid clarity while avoiding the tenuous and oftentimes opaque postmodern critical lexicon so popular now. Its plentiful and helpful notes add many more

contemporary sources to those he uses in his text, and I can only wish that the publishers had included them all in a full bibliography for convenience of consultation. The book opens a window of light on Milton's unmistakable monotheistic conception of deity in *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, showing how he incorporated polytheistic classical and biblical gods while not endangering his Christian standing with his readership. This standing was the basic general problem to be solved by poets of the seventeenth century wishing at once to honor both the epic traditions they had inherited and the biblical language of monotheism they dared not violate or seem to violate. To cross the biblical divide, named usefully "the Mosaic distinction" (after Egyptologist Jan Assman), was to incorporate gods in the storyworld of the poem and thereby risk a possible misunderstanding by seeming to assert an ontological real existence to those gods which the poet did not intend (34-35). Of less value has been his decision to use Freud's Aton/Jahve (spiritual/materialistic) divide from his *Moses and Monotheism* as an analytic device for showing "the problems that confront Milton as he attempts to narrate God and his ways" (11). This rather mechanical insertion of a device from a twentieth-century atheistic viewpoint to help organize his remarks for a seventeenth-century set of Christian poems seems unnecessary, especially as Stoll has so many other excellent contemporary illustrations of what Freud gives him anyway. Though Stoll joins Maurice Kelley in enlisting Milton in the Arian camp with some affinity with Socinianism as well (189), he prefers the term "monotheism" over "Socinianism or Arianism," for explicating "Milton's Antitrinitarian positions," because the term is less contentious and "more structural and descriptive" (8).

Chapter One, "Polytheism and 'truest Poesie,'" considers John Selden, historian and mythographer of the gods, whose *De diis Syris syntagmata* (1617) was a major source of descriptive information that poets used in trying to stay true to monotheism. "Each time Milton returns to the polytheistic gods, they are drawn with anthropological detail that is identifiably from *De diis*" (32), but he does so in such a way as to avoid the necessity other poets felt to insert actual footnotes from Selden defending their appearance (such as Drayton), or to simply excluded the gods altogether (Davenant's solution).

Chapter Two, “Occult Monotheism and the Abstract Godhead,” features the premise, offered by Lord Herbert of Cherbury in his *De religion gentilium* that God is abstract, not Trinitarian or personal as he is presented in the Bible, and that he is behind all pagan religions as the common and hidden monotheism. “[T]he religion is available without the stories of the Bible and without the doctrines of Christianity” (74). To Henry More this amounted to an apology for paganism (88).

Chapter Three, “God and Genesis 18 in *Paradise Lost*,” turns to the Bible directly to show how Genesis 18 in its ambiguous presentation of three men (angels? or God?) shapes the ambiguous presentation in books 3-8 of the epic: “Father and the Son in book 3, Adam and Raphael in books 5 through 8, and God and Adam in book 8” (107). Having the presence of God in the narrative, or his representative in Raphael, makes the whole narrative exist in “ontological ambiguity” (122) which is only relieved in the strongest assertion of monotheism in the epic in book 8.399-407 when God declares his sole existence “from all eternity.”

Chapter Four, “The War in Heaven and Deism,” “examines how the absoluteness of the monotheistic God—his omniscience and omnipotence—affects the possibility and quality of action in the war in heaven” (143-44). The poetic dilemma is this: if God is omniscient, why is it necessary that Milton present Abdiel hurrying to notify the angels of Satan’s rebellion? And if he is omnipotent, why have a battle in heaven at all since God could without effort destroy Satan’s forces? Stoll solves the dilemma, by asserting that there has to be “consequential action” in a narrative, otherwise there would be no plot to follow; and there must also be a special kind of “local forgetting” in which readers set aside “omniscience and omnipotence [which] disrupt narrative” (152). This forgetting includes overlooking the absurdity of Satan’s “discontinuous wound” (PL 6.328) that heals almost instantaneously and other absurdities that make for laughter. Milton is unmistakably monotheist, as he declares in *De doctrina*, but “his commitments to the rigors of monotheism were read by Leslie, Toland, Collins, Hume, and Defoe, as well as Pope and Bolingbroke, as deist” (168).

Chapter Five, “Socinianism and Deism,” locates Milton’s Antitrinitarianism as being more correctly aligned with Arianism than Socinianism, but expresses some surprise that Miltonists like Maurice Kelley, Michael Bauman, and the authors of *Bright Essence* “give very little consideration to the more radical Antitrinitarian school of Socinianism” (189). Stoll does not say Milton is a Socinian, but wishes to use his “proximity to Socinian thought [which] is palpable” to show how they “share the label of monotheist” (190). The Socinians’ insistence that the Son is not God resulted in him looking “suspiciously like a polytheistic extra” (199). Deism was the cure for this fault of Socinianism in being even more insistent on the supremacy of natural religion over the hated mystery of the Trinity. Its “rejection of religious revelation not only reduces the authority of the Son, it actually makes him inessential” (204). The trouble ultimately with deism is its total abstraction. “God is stripped of theophany and revelation” with the resulting “nothingness and silence” that cannot move “plot, character, and storyworld” necessary to “religious imagination” (213-14).

Chapter Six, “The Son after the Trinity,” depicts *Paradise Regained* as Milton’s “imaginative response to the often persuasive claims of Socinianism” (233). He is not himself Socinian nor is his epic, but Stoll shows that just as Socinians were prime advocates of the toleration of religions, so the epic pictures a tolerationist Christ that in this aspect is a mirror of the heresy. The Son is presented solely in his human, not pre-incarnate, history so that we only find out his pre-existence at the very end of book 4 when “a fiery globe of angels” transports him through the “blithe air.” Milton presents the Son’s “ontology” as “a thing indifferent.” He is the “God-man” and this in the end does separate him from the Socinians with their charge that he is mere man, but in that indifferent presentation Milton moves him closer to their strong advocacy of toleration (256). “In its own indifference” the epic “is at once a radical statement of Antitrinitarianism, and an irenic intervention in the debates over the Trinity” (263).

Chapter Seven, “Revelation and Samson’s Sense of Heaven’s Desertion,” is Milton’s “experiment in theodicy without angels” (308). In Judges 13 an angel appears to Samson’s parents, but in the poem his brief appearance is quickly withdrawn and no angels or divine revelation occurs for the remainder. Milton substitutes for the

“external revelation” he had used in his other poems an “internal inspiration” where Samson has to look to his “intimate impulse,” his “divine impulsion,” and “rousing motions.” Stoll, who until this chapter, has taken a quite strong biblical stance, seems to abandon it for his conclusion that in Samson, Milton is “bullying” his reader into accepting Manoa’s positive observation that his son did not die apart from God. “Samson’s physical bullying comes to stand for an intellectual bullying, a kind of theological imposition, which is at the heart of the poem’s problematic assertion of faith” (305). This is one of very few places where I do not go along with Stoll. Physical bullying, ok. But not the other. Milton may well just be asserting the verdict of Hebrews 11:32 which praises Samson as a man of faith.

In place of a conclusion, Stoll offers a short “Afterword: Monotheism, the Sublime, and Allegory,” a sweeping look ahead to the eighteenth century and also a look before Milton to Spenser. He had made a case earlier in Chapter Four that in *Paradise Lost* “Milton’s monotheistic narrative carries the potential to be read as deist” (309) and here in his afterword he returns to that idea. John Dennis and Edmund Burke both find a sublime, not a deist, Milton in the epic. Spenser crosses the “Mosaic distinction” in his introduction of polytheistic gods yet because he is writing allegory, he gets away with the ploy, whereas “in contrast, Milton struggles mightily with the Mosaic distinction” in that he moves away from allegory that Spenser uses as his defense and is thus left exposed (316).

Norma Landau, ed. *Law, Crime and English Society, 1660-1830*. Cambridge: CambridgeUniversity Press, 2002. xii + 264 pp. \$60.00.

Garthine Walker. *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: CambridgeUniversity Press, 2003. xvi + 310 pp. \$60.00.  
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The tension between postmodern philosophy and historical analysis energizes *Law, Crime and English Society, 1660-1830*, edited by Norma Landau, and *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* by Garthine Walker. While only the latter acknowledges its