

(1901-97). In a thoughtful final essay, Sarah Higinbotham describes her experience of teaching Milton to fifteen inmates at Johnson State Prison outside Atlanta. Probing the key terms “repair” and “impair” in *Paradise Lost*, Higinbotham applies those concepts to her students’ personal and aesthetic engagement with Milton’s poem—a reading experience, she observes, that was rooted in a “genuine, fundamental belief that reading great books is transformational” (355). The authors in this volume clearly share that belief, and although they have for the most part avoided Milton’s polemical prose, the wide range of approaches that they have found to illuminate his poetry fruitfully complicates any straightforward distinction between “close reading” and “contextual studies.” As a snapshot of recent work by both junior and senior scholars in the field, *To Repair the Ruins* speaks to the methodological vigor, diversity, and eclecticism of American Milton studies today.

Jonathan Shears. *The Romantic Legacy of Paradise Lost: Reading against the Grain*. Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009. ix + 221 pp. £55.00/\$99.95. Review by DAVID V. URBAN, CALVIN COLLEGE.

In this helpful book, Jonathan Shears focuses on “the relationship between *Paradise Lost* and Romantic literature” and “the legacy that Romantic readings of *Paradise Lost* have held, and still hold, on the critical consciousness” (1). Respecting but consciously setting his argument against Lucy Newlyn’s *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (1993), Shears takes issue with the longstanding Romantic interpretation of Milton’s epic that emphasizes ambiguity and contraction as central to *Paradise Lost*, instead arguing that *Paradise Lost* should be read as a unified whole, with the poem’s component parts interpreted in light Milton’s “great Argument.” In the process, Shears contends that the Romantic reading of Milton’s epic is “a *misreading*—an unsystematic imposition of meaning on to Milton’s text” (6). Shears analyzes not only the Romantic tradition of reading *Paradise Lost* but also how the Romantics’ reading of Milton manifested itself in the literature of six major Romantic poets: Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, and Keats.

Shears' introductory chapter effectively sets up the parameters of his larger study. Over and against the Romantic emphasis on ambiguity and contraction in *Paradise Lost*—an emphasis continued by twentieth century critics Denis Saurat, E. M. W. Tillyard, F. R. Leavis, A. J. A. Waldock, William Empson, Harold Bloom, Katherine Belsey, Stevie Davies, Newlyn, and, more recently, Gordon Teskey—Shears sees the poem as a unified whole that should be understood within the context of Milton's "great Argument" and the authorial intention behind it. Calling the "Romantic aesthetic" "notoriously fragmentary" (8), Shears asserts that the Romantic tendency to emphasize the part over the whole leads to misreading, or "reading against the grain" of Milton's intent. Shears sides with Barbara Lewalski in arguing that Milton's use of multiple genres makes his epic more complex, not indeterminate or inconclusive.

Chapter 2, "Milton in the Eighteenth Century," argues that Romantic misreadings of *Paradise Lost* were preceded by similar misreadings by eighteenth-century authors. Shears contends that Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) anticipates Bloom, Davies, and Teskey in Burke's emphasis upon the reader's imagination's ability to recreate poetry even as Burke downplays the importance of Milton's argument. Burke also emphasizes the sublime magnificence of Satan's character in Book 1 while ignoring *Paradise Lost's* moral purpose. Shears even suggests that Burke ultimately conflates the reader and Satan. And Burke's emphasis on the Satanic sublime was anticipated by John Dennis in *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704). In contrast to Burke and Dennis was Joseph Addison who, in his 1712 *Spectator* essays on *Paradise Lost*, recognized that Satan's artistic grandeur was checked by the poem's larger moral purpose. Shears also sees Samuel Johnson's biography of Milton (1779) anticipating the Romantic view that Milton was of the Devil's party.

Chapters 3 through 8 each devotes a chapter on one of the six major Romantic poets' reading of *Paradise Lost* and incorporation of it in his own writings. Shears portrays Blake as a forerunner to postmodern indeterminacy, one who avoids foreclosure. Shears cautions against reducing Blake's relationship to Milton to a simplistic understanding of the famous "enigmatic assertion" (60) in *The Marriage of Heaven*

*and Hell*—spoken by the voice of the Devil—that “The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil’s party without knowing it.” Shears notes that for Blake, the notion of evil goes beyond the traditional understanding of Christian ethics and contains the “potential for imaginative growth” (61). For Blake, Satan’s choice to rebel was a bold foray into self-authorship; but Blake also reminds his readers that the Satanic “urge towards self-authorship” is both “fraught with difficulties” and “often accompanied by negative connotations” (62), as exemplified by Thel in Blake’s *The Book of Thel*. Shears asserts that Blake was not trying to simply turn *Paradise Lost* upside down; nonetheless, Blake’s emphasis on Satan’s powerful aesthetics focuses on a part of the poem that encourages readers to read against the grain of Milton’s intention and thus misread Milton’s epic.

Shears notes that early in *The Prelude* Wordsworth alludes to *Paradise Lost* to set up his epic poem of the self; but Wordsworth’s focus is not a stated argument but rather the development of his own imagination and its responses to nature. Shears observes that the fragmentary quality of *The Prelude* runs counter to the sustained argument of Milton’s epic. Wordsworth’s and other Romantics’ emphases on lyric poetry are on some level a response against Milton’s developed epic, which both Wordsworth and Coleridge read in a lyrical way. Shears also asserts that the fragmentary nature of Coleridge’s poetry is both inspired by and contrasts substantially with Milton’s great argument. Shears writes: “Coleridge’s inchoate reading of Milton’s epic promotes partial and lyrical experience, where [*Paradise Lost*’s] intelligibility depends on the ordered metaphysics of Milton’s complete story” (115). Shears highlights *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan* as works demonstrating both fragmentary forms and an emphasis on poetic not religious experience, works that reveal Milton’s presence even as their author self-consciously distances himself from Milton’s sustained Christian argument.

Shears argues that Byron, unlike Wordsworth and Coleridge, understood that *Paradise Lost* should be read primarily as a narrative, moral, and religious work and thus did not read against the formal grain of Milton’s epic. What concerned Byron about *Paradise Lost*, Shears suggests, was Byron’s belief that knowledge of God should

remain “beyond human powers” and that Milton’s epic displays presumption in asserting otherwise (123). Consequently, Byron reads against the ethical grain of *Paradise Lost*, particularly in his distaste for the clear-cut manner in which Milton has Satan—who always possessed free will—admit blame for his own transgressions. Such ethical clarity runs contrary to the ambiguous guilt of Byronic heroes like the eponymous protagonist of *Manfred*.

Shears argues that Shelley refashions *Paradise Lost*, undermining “any remaining notions of intentionality” (140). Discussing Milton’s Satan in *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley causes *Paradise Lost*’s argument to be “gradually obscured behind the organizing principle of aesthetic merit” (141). And *Prometheus Unbound* contains “no drama”; rather, Shelley “reconstitutes the motif of Satanic revenge taken from *Paradise Lost* as a single moment in which that motif is rejected” (145). Moreover, Prometheus’ recantation of his curse against Jupiter may, through the work’s own characters, “be held open to multiple readings or interpretations” (145). *Prometheus Bound* thus resembles Blake’s *Milton* in its moral ambiguity, its dismissal of temporality and eschatology, and its anticipation of postmodern perspectives.

Finally, Shears contends that Keats, consistent with his poetic doctrine of “Negative Capability,” in a letter to John Hamilton Reynolds chooses to avoid the rational and ethical purposes of *Paradise Lost*, raising instead “the standard of a primal imaginative immediacy” (160), emphasizing aesthetics and imagination at the expense of Milton’s absolute depictions of good and evil. Similarly, Keats’ marginalia in his copy of *Paradise Lost* reveals a “neglect of Milton’s narrative” (171), and Keats’ own lyrical poetry demonstrates his fragmented reading of *Paradise Lost*, a reading that prevented his own ambition “to write the great post-Miltonic epic” (179).

In his concluding chapter, “Milton in the Twentieth Century,” Shears suggests that most prominent twentieth- and twenty-first-century readings of *Paradise Lost* continue the “interpretive decisions and commitments” of Romantic readings (181), citing Tillyard, Leavis, Waldock, J. B. Broadbent, Empson, Bloom, Newlyn, Christopher Kendrick, and Teskey as critics who, to a significant degree, follow the Romantic interpretive paradigms. Over and against such critics stand C. S. Lewis and Stanley Fish, with Lewis emphasizing Milton’s

epic intention and Fish emphasizing the corrective work of Milton's narrator, who consciously dissuades readers from reading "against the grain."

Shears' book distinguishes itself both in its substantive engagement with prominent Romantic interpretations and appropriations of *Paradise Lost*, and in its sustained tracing of three centuries of reading Milton's epic "against the grain." Significantly, although Shears is more a scholar of Romanticism than of Milton, his discussion of the historical sweep of Milton criticism is impressive, and readers hoping to better understand that sweep will profit from Shears' efforts. My only substantive criticism is that in some of his chapters on individual Romantic poets Shears tries to cover so many different works that in places those chapters risk losing the forest for the trees. And, although Mary Shelley not being a poet legitimately excludes her from Shears' book, I nonetheless mourn her absence and wonder what treasures Shears might have offered regarding her appropriation of *Paradise Lost* in *Frankenstein*. All in all, this study is well worth reading and one whose value extends to students and scholars of Milton, Romanticism, and the long eighteenth century in general.

Laura Lunger Knoppers. *Politicizing Domesticity from Henrietta Maria to Milton's Eve*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 223 pp. + 40 illus. \$95.00. Review by NANCY MOHRLOCK BUNKER, MIDDLE GEORGIA STATE COLLEGE.

*Politicizing Domesticity from Henrietta Maria to Milton's Eve*, by Laura Lunger Knoppers, identifies the Caroline royal family's great interest to the Victorian "cult of domesticity," a period in which "imagining the British past as a prototype of an idealized present" (1) was commonplace. Her investigation, grounded in Frederick Goodall's painting *An Episode in the Happier Days of Charles I* (1853), interprets the leisurely outing of King Charles and his family as similar to portraits of Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, and their children. The Introduction outlines the ways in which visual materials, literary texts, cookery books, and political writings are used as political propaganda in representations of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, Oliver