

John Leonard. *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of Paradise Lost, 1667-1970*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. xviii + 853 pp. + 6 illus. \$299.00. Review by ELIZABETH SKERPAN-WHEELER, TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY.

At the beginning of his massive undertaking, John Leonard quotes Milton, who declared in *The Reason of Church Government* his ambition to “leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die.” In this engaging study, Leonard constructs a deep acknowledgement of the readers, scholars, and critics who kept *Paradise Lost* alive for its first 303 years. As he explains at the outset, his “aim has been to write a book where readers can trace specific arguments from beginning to end without being sidetracked” (viii). In pursuit of this goal, Leonard presents an extended bibliographical essay, covering nine critical debates in eleven chapters (and two volumes). Limiting himself to “prose works of literary criticism written in English” (ix), he presents each debate with a critical eye, providing his own perspective and comment along the way. The result is a persuasive demonstration of the reasons why the “Milton industry,” as the historian Christopher Hill once called it, was and continues to be highly productive.

The nine debates focus on epic style (in three chapters), the genre of epic, epic similes, Satan, God, innocence, the Fall, sex and the sexes, and Milton’s universe. Each chapter includes prefatory remarks and chronologically presented subsections, divided by dominant theme. Chapters 4 through 11 also have formal conclusions. Through these chapters, Leonard marks the origins of some of the major moments in Milton scholarship, from the first comparison of Milton’s style to “organ music” (editor Daniel Webb in 1762) to the “Milton Controversy” of the first half of the twentieth century, which Leonard refigures as a rebellion against Victorian interpretations of *Paradise Lost*. Leonard also devotes serious attention to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women readers of Milton, and identifies several breakthroughs in interpretation, such as C. S. Lewis’s distinction between primary and secondary epic (1942) and James Whaler’s introduction of the term *homologation* (1931) to describe the character of Milton’s similes, a perception that inaugurated the understanding of *Paradise Lost* as “an astonishingly coherent poem” (354).

Of all of these well-presented chapters, the eleventh—"The Universe"—stands out. It tells the story of a major false trail in Milton scholarship and its consequences up to the present day for our understanding of Milton's intellect and knowledge. As Leonard demonstrates, from Thomas Newton's edition of *Paradise Lost* in 1749 to the Modern Library edition in 2007, most writers on the subject have assumed that Milton's universe was Ptolemaic. Many have reproduced David Masson's 1874 diagrams derived from a 1610 edition of the thirteenth-century *De Sphaera* of Sacrobosco, giving powerful visual sanction to the idea. The assumption rests on only three lines of the poem: lines 481-83 of Book 3. These are the ones that describe persons who became friars on their deathbeds passing through the spheres. Noting that in 1734 the Jonathan Richardsons, father and son, read the lines as part of an extended satire, Leonard explains his overall intent in the chapter: "Much of my effort will be devoted to stripping away the encrustation of three centuries of scholarship to recover Milton's true universe from under all the layers of commentary" (707). This he does by examining three broad periods. In the first, from 1667 to 1749, readers recognized both Milton's satirical intent behind the lines in Book 3 and the scope of his imagination as he envisioned the possibility of multiple worlds. The second period begins with Newton's edition of 1749 and continues until 1855. Newton's mistake, as Leonard explains it, was missing the humor of those lines. Because Newton was "usually trustworthy" (731), many accepted his error. But the real problem begins in 1855 with Thomas Keightley's *An Account of the Life, Opinions, and Writings of John Milton*. From Keightley onwards, generations of critics have struggled to make Milton's poem accord with the Ptolemaic model, and in so doing have established the belief that Milton was anti-intellectual.

The chapter notes the small group of scholars and critics who persisted in seeing the influence of Galileo in *Paradise Lost*, and Leonard elegantly links Milton's lines about "other Suns" to recent discoveries of exoplanets (724). Most important, however, is Leonard's decision to present the chapter as a cautionary tale. Readers will note the number of prominent twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars (Leonard does not exempt himself) who have accepted Newton's assumption without question. There is a moral to this story: scholars and critics are

“never in greater danger of going wrong than when consensus within the discipline convinces them that they are right” (819).

Above all, this is a study of how readers have shaped *Paradise Lost* through their interactions with the poem and each other. Leonard himself exemplifies this point. He filters each section through his own perspective in such a way that his voice distinguishes itself, often with considerable wit. This practice allows him to place his chronological presentation of criticism and scholarship in conversation with later work. In so doing, he keeps each idea in the context of the larger history of Milton studies. Given the length and scope of the project, it is inevitable that some topics were left out, notably political and historical readings and those based in the history of logic and rhetoric. Inclusion of these topics, however, would have detracted from the overall cohesion of the narrative.

The only true problem lies with the physical dimension of the book. It is divided into two volumes, and the publisher has placed the bibliography and index in the second volume only. As a result, readers must be in possession of both volumes when reading the first. This can be clumsy.

Faithful Labourers is a significant contribution to Milton studies. It will reintroduce many to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century editors and critics, and remind current scholars of the debt they owe to previous generations. It will also be invaluable to students, both for the information it presents and as an object lesson in the need for bibliographical research. Leonard plans a sequel to bring the study into the twenty-first century.

Richard J. DuRocher & Margaret Olofson Thickett, eds. *Milton's Rival Hermeneutics: "Reason Is But Choosing."* Duquesne University Press, 2012. xxv + 278 pp. \$58.00. Review by REUBEN SANCHEZ, SAM HOUSTON STATE UNIVERSITY.

In their Introduction to *Milton's Rival Hermeneutics*, Richard J. DuRocher and Margaret Olofson Thickett offer a reason for this collection of essays: To counter the “critics of incertitude,” specifically Michael Bryson’s *The Tyranny of Heaven: The Rejection of God as King*