are reviewed for their quality and some further tentative attributions made. Ultimately, Pestilli concludes that de Matteis “could oscillate in his drawing style from a very polished, classical technique … to the almost abstract” (284). The author also refutes the previously held belief that de Matteis’s graphic output evolved seamlessly from “an earlier Giordanesque to a later Marattesque style” (284) and rightfully concludes that “the Vasarian organic approach in mapping an artist’s drawing style, from one of vibrant growth to subsequent decline, is as invalid a tool for defining Paolo de Matteis’s draftsmanship as it is for assessing Florentine painting” (292).

Lastly, the “Epilogue” covers a summation of Pestilli’s views of the artist: he was appreciated in his time and then overlooked by subsequent generations due to the “rise of new aesthetic goals in eighteenth-century Europe,” (307) which favored a greater classicism, ushering in the Neoclassical period. While the volume could have been more succinct, one can only marvel at the time and thought that went into this thorough study. Thanks to Pestilli, Paolo de Matteis has been placed back onto the map of early modern Neapolitan art—a region and period worthy of further inquiry, especially by American art historians.


With only one extant copy of her Divine Songs and Meditacions (1653) housed at the Huntington Library and next to nothing known about her life, it is not entirely unsurprising that An Collins has remained in the background for many discussions of seventeenth-century woman poets. W. Scott Howard’s edited collection An Collins and the Historical Imagination does a great deal to remedy this situation, gathering together a wide variety of essays, including updated versions of three previously published articles, into a volume that “celebrates Collins’s writing within her own time and ours through a
comprehensive assessment of her poetics, literary context and reception, and critical tradition” (2).

Following the detailed introduction that provides a careful overview of the publication history of Collins’ poetry, both on its own and in curated anthologies, the subsequent ten chapters are divided thematically. The collection also includes two useful appendices: the first focused on Richard Bishop’s “phantom printing” of Collins’ Divine Songs and Meditacions in 1658, and the second an annotated edition of one of her poems, “Another Song. The Winter of my infancy.”

Chapters 1-3 concern Collins’ place within both English and wider European discussions of meditative verse. Stanley Stewart, editor of the Augustan Reprints text of Divine Songs and Meditacions in 1961, draws parallels between Collins’ work and several contemporary poets including Thomas Traherne, John Taylor, and John Donne, before concluding that Collins, unlike these others, is not promoting one particular doctrine—be it Anglican, Puritan, Quaker, or none of the above—so much as turning her attention inward to a “personal pursuit of ‘Truth’” (37). Lyn Bennet’s subsequent chapter opens with the argument that Collins’ choice to include both songs and meditations in her published volume was a deliberate gesture toward reconciling, or at least juxtaposing, private and public genres, and uses “The Discourse”—which Stewart specifically mentions as a poem he regrets having omitted from his critical edition and now acknowledges to be “the most substantial and revealing in the volume”—to demonstrate that, in spite of her assertions in other poems that she is a private writer, “the Divine Songs and Meditacions is a work more public and rhetorical than its author is willing to admit” (29, 50). The third chapter, by Susannah Mintz, offers a fascinating interpretation of Collins’ invocation of disability in several of her poems within the context of other writers’ treatments of the same, including Traherne and Aemilia Lanyer. Unlike these other two poets, Collins, in Mintz’s argument, “figures disablement less as encumbrance than as an opportunity to rethink the grounds of identity” (68).

The following three chapters extend the analyses from Chapters 1-3 into specific comparative studies between Collins’ works and those of her contemporaries, potential sources, and inspirations. Helen Wilcox’s study of Collins’ debts to George Herbert previously
appeared in print in 2003 and has been revised for this collection, focusing on her place within the so-called “school of Herbert” of the mid-seventeenth century. Although she acknowledges that, in contrast to the strong parallels found in the poems of Henry Colman, Julia Palmer, and Cardell Goodman, there are only a few direct verbal echoes of Herbert within Collins’ work, “the shared devotional mode, the triumphant plainness of style and the interwoven issues of writing and spirituality all suggest that Collins’s poems were indeed a sympathetic ‘Eccho’ complementing and harmonizing the ‘voice’ of The Temple” (83). The fifth chapter by Mary Eleanor Norcliffe concerns Collins’ use of the Song of Songs, particularly when compared to her contemporaries Andrew Marvell, Anne Bradstreet, and Anna Trapnel. Collins, far from being a passive receptacle of divine inspiration, combines “sturdy confidence and a claim to her own role in creating the fruits of her mind” and creates “a nexus of a spiritual fertility that brings the highest kind of joy and personal fulfilment” (100). Patricia Demers’ chapter extends the ambit of the volume by comparing Collins’ spiritual concerns with those of Mère Marie de l’Incarnation, a French Ursuline nun who travelled to Canada to undertake missionary work. Although the two women seem substantially different on the surface—one Catholic, the other Protestant; one writing privately, the other for publication—Demers finds the metaphor of contrasting engravings a useful conceit for approaching “the shared intensity of conviction their language expresses” (116).

Chapters 7-9 concern themselves with the interplay between meditative verse and spiritual autobiography within Collins’ poetry. Sidney Gottlieb’s contribution originally appeared in 2002 in John Donne Journal, but its inclusion in this collection is useful in that it effectively navigates Collins’ interleaving of private and public discourse in what he calls her “poetry of affliction,” which he argues, in spite of the name, is “a poetry of strength and confidence and spiritual buoyancy” (125). Building on Gottlieb’s analysis, Marie Loughlin considers how Collins both follows and departs from trends in sectarian spiritual autobiography, especially in terms of framing. Rather than beginning from her conversion and retrospectively conferring meaning on her prior suffering, Collins instead provides her reader with “some sense of how these sufferings were experienced at the time,” thus offering a
“surprisingly neutral” outlook (145). Loughlin argues that this neutrality is part of why Collins’ own religious affiliation continues to elude scholars, but that it may also explain her appeal to a broader audience. The final chapter in this section is a revision of Bronwen Price’s 2002 article on Collins’ poetry in *Women’s Writing* that explored “how the instability of Collins’ devotional identity overlaps with her position as a feminist subject who, in the process of inscribing her spiritual life, dissents from gender norms” (156). In an effective callback to the first three chapters in the collection, Price identifies one of the most powerful aspects of Collins’ writing in her ability to transform the perceived weaknesses of her gender and disability into “a fertile, self-contained inner life, in which her identity blends with that of the ultimate creator” (169).

Chapter 10 focuses on the publication history of Collins’ works, from *Divine Songs and Meditacions* through various nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthologies, to scholarly and electronic editions available today. Working in parallel with Howard’s introduction, Robert Evans provides extensive bibliographic and contextual details for each successive edition—including excisions, transcription errors, and vagaries of textual editing—thus crafting a complex literary legacy for An Collins that stands in stark contrast to the scant details of her biography. Elaine Hobby’s afterword is similarly technical in approach, concentrating on the wide variety of verse-forms Collins uses—thirteen for songs alone—and making the intriguing suggestion that *Divine Songs and Meditacions*, far from being a youthful effort on Collins’ part, “is a mature selection from writings intended, as she says in ‘The Discourse’, for her ‘private use’” and that “there might have been others that have not survived because they were not selected for publication” (197). The two appendices that conclude the volume utilize images from the 1653 printed edition to illuminate, first, its original context and the career of its printer Richard Bishop; and second, Collins’ poem “Another Song. The Winter of my infancy,” presented first in photographs from the Huntington Library’s copy and followed by a critical edition complete with footnotes and scholarly apparatus. Not only is this poem amongst the most popular in Collins’ oeuvre; it is also the only poem that contains evidence of contemporary annotation in the Huntington’s copy. As W. Scott Howard remarks, this
final appendix “offers a dynamic transmission—from the unique 1653 volume to digital hypertext then back again to the printed page—of on-going critical and scholarly engagement with one of An Collins’ most lyrical and accomplished poems” (216). This description could, in many ways, apply to the collection as a whole.

The greatest strengths of this collection lie not only in its elucidation of the elusive An Collins herself, but also in fleshing out the other poets surrounding her. By placing Collins within this active and vibrant context, even if we still know next to nothing about her life and circumstances, the nature and strength of her writing nonetheless shine through. An Collins and the Historical Imagination succeeds in not only calling attention to this long-obscred writer, but also in laying the groundwork for a great deal of future scholarship.


Careful readers will benefit tremendously from Leif Dixon’s thorough study of late Elizabethan and early Stuart predestinarian pastoral theology. Contrary to many previous treatments of the subject that either assumed or argued for the anxiety inducing potential of predestinarian theology, Dixon compellingly demonstrates that the doctrine of predestination was a source of tremendous comfort in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Along the way, he seeks to answer two key questions. First, why was the doctrine of predestination such a source of comfort? Second, how did predestinarian ministers understand and communicate this message of comfort (3)? The pursuit of these questions leads Dixon to the conclusion that as Protestantism became a matter of settled national identity the doctrine of predestination “was forced to change form” and increasingly became a “means of guiding believers”, of “strengthening their faith”, and of “helping them to interpret—and change—the world in a meaningful way” (7).

Methodologically, the book is oriented less to the reception of predestinarian theology among the religious public and more to the manner in which predestination was preached (8). As a result, Dixon