

Euripides and the superior rationality of the heathen.” In this essay, McDowell surveys Milton’s references to Euripides throughout his writing career in order to argue that, contrary to expectation, Milton occasionally elevates classical literature above the Bible. Euripides, Milton’s “favourite Greek dramatist” (86) is the figure who enables this reversal—not through plot or character—but instead as a “textual locus of moral, political, and theological truth” (96). McDowell suggests that Milton turns to classical quotation, and to Euripides in particular, as a “release” from “irresolvable theological debate” (94) such as whether it is justifiable to kill a tyrant (*Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*) or mortalism (*De Doctrina Christiana*). Classical quotations accompany Milton’s most radical moments, an insight that suggests additional avenues of research as scholars continue to uncover the archive of Milton’s engagement with Greek literary tradition.

The five essays in this collection are universally well researched and admirably focused on the intersecting topics of Greek literary tradition, Milton’s drama, and reception theory. This volume, which was originally published as a special issue of *The Seventeenth Century* in 2016 (vol. 31, issue 2), will be primarily of interest to Milton scholars as well as to those interested in questions of reception, adaptation, and humanist tradition, and together these chapters make a compelling argument for an “archival” approach to reception studies.

David Williams. *Milton’s Leveller God*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017. xviii + 494 pp. \$39.95 (paper); \$120.00 (cloth). Review by DENNIS DANIELSON, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

Repeatedly while reading David Williams’s sprawling 400-page discussion of Milton and the Levellers, I found myself reaching for analogies that might convey to others a taste of my experience. Perhaps the most apt (if imperfect) model that struck me was that of the multi-episode series tackling a huge topic or swathe of history—something akin to Ken Burns’s television war documentaries, perhaps. For Williams’s book is indeed a documentary, yet one notable for its effort to bring history into the present, and not in any politically neutral

manner.

Let me begin with *documentary*. As any reader of *Seventeenth-Century News* knows, one of the dominant modes of Milton criticism involves the offering of a new introduction to some historical body of work—be it that of a single author (such as Origen or Augustine or Dante), or of some sweep of literature that forms a potentially helpful background to Milton’s work (such as the Genesis tradition, the Reformation, the cosmological revolution, and so on)—followed by or interwoven with fresh readings of (most often) *Paradise Lost* that emerge from a new awareness of those authors or traditions. Some of these studies are more successful (and more plausible) than others, but Milton studies are hardly imaginable in the absence of this broad genre—and David Williams’s book fits squarely within it. However, researching it in a post-EEBO environment, Williams has transcended some of his predecessors in the genre by acquiring or creating full, searchable electronic texts of his target corpus so that he can apply them to Milton in a way that exceeds the limitations of simply a good memory or careful notes. As Williams explains in his Introduction, it was initially finding an “abundance of Leveller echoes in Milton’s prose” that “drove” him to read the huge corpus of Leveller documents available online and to transcribe his own copies, thus creating a searchable database whereby to “track countless verbal echoes, conceptual links, and summary arguments from Leveller sources in Milton’s prose” (12). This is a truly impressive feat, one that undergirds the principal value and interest of Williams’s book—and one that succeeds frequently in conveying vividly the “you are there” frisson of a good documentary.

And the Levellers—mainly John Lilburne (1614–1667), William Walwyn (1600–1681), and Richard Overton (fl. 1640–1664)—are indeed worth getting to know. They wrote on topics dear to any seventeenth-century scholar’s heart: politics (especially social liberty and equality in the face of monarchy or anything smacking of monarchy), natural rights (including engagement of pre- and post-lapsarian human nature), biblical interpretation, the nature of the human body-and-soul, and so on—and they’re remarkable for the periodical nature of much of their writing. Despite opposition and imprisonment, they were a courageous, if ultimately suppressed, cohort among antiroyal-

ists during the period of the English Civil War. Moreover, the Milton of *Areopagitica* and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* quite credibly displays many affinities with them.

The argument for affinity and/or influence becomes thinner, however, when Williams turns, as he does in chapters 3 through 14 (there being sixteen chapters in all), to interpretations of *Paradise Lost*. I admit I'm regularly put on my critical guard when an author's approach is openly Whiggish. Already on page 3, Williams refers to the Levellers as "the English harbingers of Jefferson, Paine, and Voltaire [who] were three centuries or more ahead of their time," and whom "Cromwell crushed . . . with the same ferocity that he unleashed against Irish Catholics." Which is not to say that egalitarian or human rights readings of Milton's epic poetry can't be valid. On the other hand, it's not always the highest praise to suggest that a particular author is important or valuable because he or she is "like us." Williams is by no means so lacking in subtlety. But still, I worry.

Chapter 3—"The Tyranny of Heaven? Republican Language in Hell"—moves rather quickly to a parallel between Levellers' views of Cromwell and Milton's presentation of Satan in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*: Cromwell "apes" kingship, and so does Satan. "The only difference is in the presentation" (109). In the next paragraph, Williams asserts that Satan's apologia, the one complaining about "the Tyranny of Heaven," "is obviously based on recent British [*sic*] history" (110). I generally take the position that if a claim requires specific evidence, then it's not obvious; and if it's obvious, why bother with specific evidence? Nonetheless, Williams presents a strong and thought-provoking series of parallels between Milton's devils and Cromwell in company with the New Model Army's "Grandees."

One of Williams's most striking theses begins to take shape in Chapter 5—"All power I Give Thee? Kingdom of Grace." In Book 3 of *Paradise Lost* and beyond, "God, it turns out, is less interested in the exercise of power than in its devolution" (151–52). Here is the core of the proposal that Milton's is a Leveller God. He doesn't *want* to be a tyrant, and the Incarnation itself is a levelling act. "In the person of the Son, humankind [is] set on the path of rising into godhead" (163–64). And accordingly, "the old conundrum of why Milton favoured monarchy in Heaven and republican government on earth

is resolved by God himself, who prophesies the end of monarchy. ... God's support for popular sovereignty ... is deeply antithetical to the political thought of Satan and of Cromwell. For Satan merely pretends to be a democrat to seize a throne, while Milton's God poses as a tyrant to test and confirm the commitment of his creatures to good 'Commonwealth principles' (168). It's a bold claim, worth pondering, and nicely complemented by Williams's strong sense of the dramatic (thus dynamic and "evolving") nature of the dialogue of Book 3.

By now no one will be surprised to hear that Milton also presents earthly marriage in a levelling kind of way. Williams offers liberal and often inspiring quotations from the Levellers themselves. John Lilburne wrote in *The Free-Mans Freedom Vindicated* (1646) that all who "ever breathed in the world ... are, and were by nature all equall and alike in power, dignity, authority, and majesty, none of them having (by nature) any authority, dominion or majesteriall power, one over or above another, neither have they, or can they exercise any, but meerely by institution, or donation, that is to say, by mutuall agreement or consent, given, derived, or assumed, by mutuall consent and agreement, for the good benefit and comfort each of other." Thus, as Williams adds, "the story of the Fall is no longer used to justify the law of patriarchy as punishment merited by and from that lapse; instead, it is a founding text in a discourse that claims social and sexual equality from the first moment of creation" (170–71). This egalitarian emphasis is repeated in subsequent chapters focusing on the polity of Eden, which includes the teacher Raphael as a square, hierarchical peg in a round hole (Chapter 7) whom we can read as ironic insofar as he represents the old, feudal status quo of Heaven that is evolving into something more levelled. The picture approaches completion in Book 10, in which the old formulae of "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers" "has been dissolved as the deity now speaks in 'levelling' fashion to a *popular assembly*: 'Assembled Angels ...' (10.34–36). Heaven's feudal polity has evidently evolved into a Commonwealth" (300).

As already hinted, I find Williams's thesis a strong and fascinating one, even if I'm unsure of its plausibility. Other readers will have to judge for themselves. But if I'm not convinced by this book's conclusions, I am convinced at the worthiness of the attempt to present the

Levellers' writings and to examine them and Milton's together, and of Williams's capacity and integrity in making the attempt. I'm wary of reviewers' frequent tendency to ask for a book different from the one an author undertook to write. Still, I did find Williams's final two chapters, on *Paradise Regained*, especially with their (worthwhile) emphasis on Foxe's "Book of Martyrs," an awkward fit for the rest of this already very long volume. And its length is indeed an issue for any reader wishing to grasp the work's thesis in a focused manner. I mentioned earlier the book's main genre: that of documentary and historical presentation of materials that are then argued to be relevant to a reading of Milton. Yet much of this book verges into another valuable but demanding genre: the thematic reception history, most recently and impressively exemplified by John Leonard's *Faithful Labourers* (2013). For me, this aspect of *Milton's Leveller God* occasioned something of a trial of patience, and I often felt that reference to the work of others—instead of being tackled repeatedly, sometimes rather severely, in the body of Williams's text—could have been compacted and deposited decorously in his notes.

Naya Tsentourou. *Milton and the Early Modern Culture of Devotion: Bodies at Prayer*. New York and London: Routledge, 2018. ix + 176 pp. \$149.95. Review by DAVID AINSWORTH, UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA.

Milton and the Early Modern Culture of Devotion: Bodies at Prayer urges scholars to pay closer attention to the ways in which Milton connects bodies to faith, suggesting that the body at prayer both expresses internal devotion and produces and embodies that devotion itself. Tsentourou draws our attention to historical theories of genuine and expressive prayer to demonstrate how Milton locates true faith within the body of the believer.

After contextualizing her argument about embodied prayer in her introduction, Tsentourou considers material culture in its historical context in her first chapter. She takes up clerical garments generally and linen specifically to show how Milton attacks the material idolatry of Laudian liturgical garments. This chapter focuses on Milton's anti-prelatical tracts and *Areopagitica*, while also setting the Lady's