

cially through his exposure to the music and culture of Italy. He is even supposed to have turned to opera. In view especially of “Adam unparadiz’d,” Edmund Gosse, writing in 1900, “interpreted the drafts as materials for ‘choral plays’” (321).

A final comment, not about this excellent edition but about its physical presentation. Oxford retains its familiar format for scholarly and academic volumes though the elegance of the Clarendon Press long ago disappeared; now the digitalized printing, faux binding, and brittle paper stock result in an awkward book whose loose pages refuse to lie flat and continue to spring up, even after sustained use—a disadvantage for a book that must serve essentially as a reference work.

Brendan Prawdzik. *Theatrical Milton: Politics and Poetics of the Staged Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018. xii + 249 pp. Review by ANTHONY WELCH, UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE.

John Milton was a closet dramatist in more than one sense. The author of college orations, a courtly masque, an unstaged biblical tragedy, and a sheaf of unfinished dramatic sketches, Milton felt a lifelong desire to stage dialogue and debate in the public eye. Yet he often contemplated the theater from a wary distance. He produced no dramatic works for London’s playhouses or the royal court. Some of his later writings even seem to share the anti-theatrical prejudice of the godly reformers who closed the public theaters in 1642. In *Theatrical Milton*, Brendan Prawdzik aims to trace Milton’s shifting attitudes toward drama and performance. His goal is not to probe Milton’s outlook on a particular dramatic author or tradition. Instead, Prawdzik explores the concept of “theatricality” in Milton’s poetry and prose. In Prawdzik’s hands, this is a broad, capacious term, incorporating a wide range of rhetorical postures and thematic patterns. At the core of Milton’s theatricality, he contends, are two abiding concerns: the uneasy power dynamics that link performer and audience, and the crucial role of the author’s “staged body” in his rhetorical self-presentation.

Prawdzik claims that Milton’s readers have long neglected the close partnership between rhetoric and theatricality in seventeenth-century culture. With mixed success, he argues that this relationship is rooted

in the Greco-Roman rhetorical canon of *pronuntiatio* (delivery), since classical orators, much like theater actors, were trained in the use of *actio* (voice and gesture) to move their audiences. When Milton presented himself to his readers as a public rhetor, Prawdzik argues, he often framed those writings as quasi-dramatic performances. By “theatricalizing the scene of writing” (219), Milton found powerful new ways to shape his authorial identity, but he was also forced to confront the power that his audiences wielded over him: “Spectators and actor are not simply bound by a negotiated desire; they are also engaged in an agonistic relationship, each seeking a type of dominion over the other” (10). Prawdzik’s secondary claim—always intriguing, not always persuasive—is that Milton came to locate this sense of vulnerability in his own performing body, riskily exposed to public view: its unruly passions, its entanglements in gender and desire, and its susceptibility to the corrupting will of his audience.

In a wide-ranging first chapter, Prawdzik analyzes Milton’s “At a Vacation Exercise” (ca. 1631) alongside the political prose and *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s early poem formed part of a “salting” ceremony at Cambridge, an initiatory ritual that included formal orations (later published by Milton as Prolusion 6) and a comic interlude. Prawdzik points out that scholars too often disregard this poem’s dramatic contexts and concerns. As master of ceremonies, Milton explores his own “ambivalent identity . . . as both an orator and an actor” (23). In these early public writings, he voices anxieties about theatricality and performance that will linger throughout his career. He tries to balance high seriousness with crude farce. He worries aloud that his audience is hostile and will hiss him off the stage, as they compete with him “to control the plane of representation” (23). He is unsure whether or how to expose his private selfhood to public view. He portrays himself by turns as masculine and feminine—a series of gender inversions that speaks to the “constantly oscillating negotiation of authority between desiring bodies” in theatrical space (28). Prawdzik extends these patterns into *Paradise Lost*, notably in the figure of Satan. Milton undermines Satan’s authority by portraying him as an actor who loses control of his own performing body. He can disguise himself as a cherub to deceive Uriel, for example, but the angel later spies Satan’s face contorted with rage and despair on Mount Niphates, “suggesting

through the represented body a counter-influence of passion flowing in from a fleshy field of the visible" (34) that exposes his true nature.

Chapter 2 reads *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle* as Milton's effort to come to grips with the moral threats and affordances of stage drama. Rejecting the hardline anti-theatricalists from Tertullian to William Prynne, Milton sought to reform English drama as a tool of godly instruction. He knew, however, that "the vices and desires of the audience" threatened the author's own identity, torn between his competing roles as a private, chaste man of God and an exposed public figure who "longs to merge" with his readers (52–53). In *A Maske*, the endangered Lady embodies Milton's own plight as a dramatist—and, more broadly, as a moral agent in a fallen world: "as a staged woman, she embodies the vulnerability of the divine poet who would be public yet who also would be chaste" (54). Comus and his wild revelers assault the Lady's emergent selfhood by making her an object of male spectatorship, whether through the lens of anti-theatrical misogyny (as an unchaste female performer) or of Petrarchan idealism (as a passive object of male desire). Imprisoned by the corrupting gaze of these male audiences, the Lady is liberated by the water nymph Sabrina, who represents Milton's own ideal of "a chaste theatre" (53) and enables the Lady to recover her autonomous embodied selfhood. Yet she finally returns home, silent and under male escort, because her public role as a female moral agent must remain provisional or incomplete until the theater audience itself—at Ludlow and across the nation—has also undergone reform.

Prawdzik's third chapter traces motifs of theatricality and performance in Milton's political prose of the early 1640s. The early prose tracts frame Milton's "theological polemic as a type of stage performance within the implied theatre of an invigorated print culture" (90). Milton's *Animadversions*, with its patchwork dialogue between Remonstrant and Answerer, exposes the Laudian clergy to the ridicule of hostile readers who are both a jury and a theater audience. The Answerer adopts a satirical posture that Prawdzik associates with the figure of the stage fool, even as Milton attacks the bishops for imposing rituals of worship that amount to "hypocritical disguise and rigidly scripted performance" (95). When Milton's enemies returned fire in the anonymous *Modest Confutation* (ca. 1642), he learned to

his dismay that his theatrical tropes could be weaponized against him. Now called a “scurrilous mime” and a frequenter of lewd plays (108), Milton anxiously distanced himself from stage performance in his later polemical tracts. In *Eikonoklastes* (1649), for example, he reaches for anti-theatrical discourses when he portrays King Charles I’s ostentatious prayers as “soliloquies,” and he mocks the notorious frontispiece of *Eikon Basilike* as “a Masking Scene” (118). Since Prawdzik provides scant evidence of kinship between stage foolery and Milton’s satirical persona in *Animadversions*, it is hard to agree with him that Milton “had embodied the gesturing fool” (112) or “the overacting comedian” (113) in his public debut. Nonetheless, Milton’s drift toward anti-theatricality over the 1640s is noteworthy. Could this pattern shed light on Milton’s choice to abandon the sketches for a biblical tragedy that he drafted during these years?

Prawdzik briefly discusses Milton’s dramatic sketches in Chapter 4, which explores theatricality and spectatorship in *Paradise Lost*. Many scholars, notably Barbara Lewalski, Helen Gardner, and John G. Demaray, have approached Milton’s epic as a composite of literary forms that strategically evokes dramatic genres and conventions. Prawdzik acknowledges their work but turns instead to the early modern science of optics to explore the dynamics of seeing and being seen in *Paradise Lost*. While Descartes and Hobbes pioneered new models of perception that posited a crisp, clear subject-object relationship between the seer and the seen, Prawdzik argues that Milton relied on older “extramissive” theories of vision, which draw mutual lines of influence between the viewer and the perceived object. Prawdzik highlights key moments in *Paradise Lost* when Adam and Eve are watched, or believe themselves to be watched, by observers whose gaze exerts power over their motives and choices—a pattern that culminates in Satan’s effort to persuade Eve that the stars shine all night only to gaze at her loveliness. Somewhat less compelling is Prawdzik’s claim that “peripheral vision ... proves central to the psychology of the Fall” (142), on the grounds that objects not clearly perceived by the viewer can exert a malign influence below the level of consciousness. Thus, Satan corrupts Eve by “populating the periphery of her visible imaginary with gazing eyes” (146), making Eve unconsciously perceive herself as object rather than subject, and thereby imposing

his demonic will on her theatrical body.

In a concluding chapter on *Samson Agonistes*, Prawdzik argues that Milton's closet drama ponders the ambiguous role of the body and the passions in Christian ethics. Skeptical of the critical view that Milton's Samson undergoes a process of spiritual regeneration, Prawdzik finds instead "a counterplot of exacerbated passions that concludes in the explosion, as it were, of a powder keg" (185). On this reading, the drama's notorious crux—what is the source of the mysterious "rousing motions" that prompt Samson's slaughter of the Philistines?—is deliberately unclear. Milton calls upon his Christian readers to examine their own mysterious inner latticework of flesh and spirit. Samson's "signifying body" is "an ambiguous sign of carnal, spiritual or hybrid passions that encourages the reader . . . to identify with Samson and his passions and, thereby, to work toward discerning and testing those passions within" (203). Citing some intriguing parallels with the Quaker movement, Prawdzik shows how its enemies mocked the histrionic activity of the Quaker body as a symbol of their antinomian theology. This is a thoughtful extension of prior scholarship on Milton and the Quakers, whether or not we agree with Prawdzik's claim (based on a precarious reading of lines 1646–51) that "Samson's body . . . resemble[s] the trembling body of the Quaker" when he pulls down the pillars of Dagon's theater (180).

Readers of *Theatrical Milton* will admire the author's daring synthesis of rhetorical treatises, polemical tracts, scientific discourses, literary intertexts, and performance studies to frame Milton's beliefs about authorship and agency. This study joins a growing corpus of scholarship that locates the body—its experiences, its deficiencies, its negotiations between self and world—at the heart of Milton's life and work, such as *Immortality and the Body in the Age of Milton* (2018), edited by Stephen Fallon and John Rumrich, or Naya Tsentourou's *Milton and the Early Modern Culture of Devotion: Bodies at Prayer* (2017). Prawdzik's ambitious book is full of unexpected insights and nimble close readings. Sometimes, however, he does impose his own will too forcefully upon Milton's textual body. In "At a Vacation Exercise," for example, Milton wittily portrays himself as the father of the ten Aristotelian categories of Substance—a paternal role, he jokes, that hardly accords with his feminine nickname, the Lady of Christ's

College. Milton soon readies himself to express “some naked thoughts that rove about / And loudly knock to have their passage out” (quoted in Prawdzik 27). This stage performance, Prawdzik explains, feminizes the poet (31) and thereby places him in a transsexual subject position (32), one that arises from the “ambiguous intertwining of flesh and the forces [of desire] that move it” (33). The public spectacle of the poet’s transsexual body threatens his identity even as it lends him authorial power:

Milton locates the menace that attends theatricality in the genitals themselves, the epicentre of the possibly exposed. As the source of reproductive power and as the anchor of gendered identity, they are, as well, a sign of poetic authority. In the negotiations of the theatricalised rhetorical situation, the genitals are a locus of shape-shifting and of potential castration. (35)

Those of us who are unable to find any genitals in this early poem might question Prawdzik’s analysis, but we can still learn much from him about Milton’s struggle to negotiate his identity under the “hostile gaze felt to issue from a social body, a panoptic God, or the conscience or superego” (35). This is the work of a bold scholar, willing to take imaginative risks, and eager to bring Milton into new realms of literary criticism and theory that have too often left him behind.

J. Caitlin Finlayson & Amrita Sen, eds. *Civic Performance: Pageantry and Entertainments in Early Modern England*. London & New York: Routledge, 2020. xiv + 254 pp. 8 illustrations. Review by J. P. CONLAN, UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO, RIO PIEDRAS CAMPUS.

Taken on its own terms, J. Caitlin Finlayson’s & Amrita Sen’s edited collection of eleven essays on Civic Performance puts in competition three strategies of organization for volumes on civic pageant: “Civic to Global,” “Material Encounters,” and “Methodologies for Re-Viewing Performance.” The division into three parts implicitly asks the reader, by way of representative samples, which of these schemes of organization produces a collection that hangs together best. From the outset, though, the three-part division of the volume obfuscates that, under the rubric of civil pageantry, the collection treats two very different