underscore the complexities of modern pedagogy in general and the adaptive skills of individual teachers of the epic.


In the blurb he contributed to the jacket, David Norbrook calls *Engendering the Fall* “an ambitious book.” It’s an equivocal phrase that registers my own equivocal response to Miller’s book. Yes, the book is very ambitious: it puts Milton into conversation with writers from almost the entire seventeenth century; it takes on the issue of influence, which is thorny at best; it engages in some of the biggest issues surrounding polity and science in the period; it rightly positions gender, and particularly the gendered narrative of the Garden, at the center of these seventeenth-century discourses. At the heart of the book is Miller’s desire to ascribe—some would say restore—to women a place in the early modern conversation around gender and governance. Filmer, Hobbes, Hooke, Locke: all figure highly in Miller’s discussion of that conversation. But so do Rachel Speght, Aemilia Lanyer, Elizabeth Poole, Lucy Hutchinson, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Chudleigh, Aphra Behn and Mary Astell. And at the center of it all is Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, radiating and refracting (one of the book’s most oft-repeated words) the “sustained cultural power of the figure of Eve” (4) both backwards and forwards from its post-Restoration spot in the seventeenth century.

The book is organized into three sections: Part I, called “Pretexts,” traces, through the early seventeenth-century’s *querelle des femmes* and some of the texts it spawned (Speght’s *Mortalities Memorandum* and Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*), the emergence of innovative thinking about gender as a category of knowledge. Despite a lack of “irrefutable evidence,” Miller argues that because Milton was part of a community of readers in mid-century who read tracts like those in the *querelle*, the defenses of women by writers like Speght and Lanyer “constitute a field of context that Milton appears to have engaged in
his account of women’s relation to the political realm and its relationship to the Fall” (74).

Part II, “Contexts,” offers a thematic discussion of the “political imaginary generated through the events of the Civil War” and puts women into the conversation Milton and others were having about the consequences of the war. Female prophets at mid-century, Lucy Hutchinson during the Protectorate, and Margaret Cavendish during the Restoration all engage Milton (though almost certainly indirectly) in a conversation that revolves around gender, knowledge and governance. The Cavendish chapter, on knowledge and the “new” experimental science in her *Blazing World* (which takes on the Royal Society) and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, is perhaps the best chapter in the book. Miller’s discussion of the ways in which scientific activities were linked to political patronage, activity and disruption is not new, but the justifiably central role she gives to Cavendish’s text convincingly reveals the incontrovertible ways in which gender was also a part of that conversation, and that feels important, even importantly current (it’s hard not to think about the current debates around stem cell research when reading this chapter).

Part III of the book, called “Influences,” is—as its title acknowledges—the only part of the book that can unproblematically assert a standard definition of influence. Mary Chudleigh, Aphra Behn, and Mary Astell had all, without question, read *Paradise Lost*. In their respective treatments of the institution of marriage in the seventeenth century, all three make Milton’s Eve central to their interpretations of the status of women in the period even while they, in conversation with their contemporary John Locke, negotiate a contractarian view of the state that uses marriage as its primary analogy.

“What does observing these women as they are negotiated by or negotiate a republican thinker like Milton expose to our view?” asks Miller in her conclusion. “In part, it exposes the innovative ways these women imagined the structure of political organization and intersected this with improvisations upon gendered categories” (231). One of many critics doing this sort of work in early modern studies (several of whom do not show up in the book’s otherwise extensive “Works Cited”), Miller’s exposure of gender as a category of knowledge is not nearly as innovative as the work of the women innovators who
are her subjects. Yet, the book does do what Miller says it does, and there is no denying the importance of that work in our still-evolving understanding of the prominent role of gender in the cultural and political preoccupations of the English seventeenth century. The question, though, is: does *Engendering the Fall* do that work well?

The answer to that question gets back to the equivocal nature of that word “ambitious.” If one were to read only an individual chapter or two, the verdict might be that, though not particularly earth-shattering, Miller’s argument is sound and interesting, that it is an important contribution to the conversation around gender and politics in the seventeenth century. Taken as a whole, however, the book holds up less well. For, despite an introduction that attempts to rein in the book’s ambitions, it is difficult, once one gets to the end of the book, to say exactly what the book is about. Is this really a book about Milton and seventeenth-century women writers, as the subtitle announces, and as the book tries to insist again and again, or about a cultural narrative that informs the entire seventeenth century and that culminates in Lockean contractarian theory? On their surfaces, of course, the chapters seem centrally concerned with Milton, yet the entire book is haunted by, and concludes, albeit briefly, with Locke’s *Two Treatises*. Despite the length of the book (and the extremely small font), one feels that Miller’s argument is far from complete on the final page.

One might be willing to excuse such “ambition” if not for the fact that the book’s lack of genuine conceptual coherence is paralleled by its almost complete lack of editorial integrity. The examples of this are legion (and indeed far more extensive than any book review could document), and exist at every level. For starters, I do not remember ever being so distracted by lexical repetition in a scholarly book that I have actually started counting the number of times a single word shows up on a page (page 210: “thus”—six times in seventeen lines). As well, despite the fact that all six chapters are very long, only two chapters offer the hospitality provided by sub-headings. And even in those two chapters, the style of the sub-headings is completely and inexplicably different: in Chapter two, the headings are almost undifferentiated from the main text: same font, but in italics; in Chapter six, the headings are in bold (unitalicized) and in a larger font. In Chapter
five, on Margaret Cavendish and the Royal Society, Cavendish is confusingly said to value sense over reason in philosophy (144) despite the fact that Miller’s central argument in the chapter is exactly the opposite: Cavendish values Cartesian reason over sense. Twenty-six pages into the Cavendish chapter, when Miller turns her attention to Milton, the following sentence shows up: “Even Margaret Cavendish, a strong and satirical voice against experimental philosophy and the practices it incorporates, titles her 1666 text Observations upon Experimental Philosophy, a clear indication, according to Judith Moore, that Cavendish perceived the growing market share of experimental philosophy when involving this specific meaning of ‘experiment’” (162). After over twenty pages of learning exactly this about Cavendish, we surely do not need this introduction. One assumes the sentence is an artifact from a stand-alone essay on Milton’s own sense of experiment; why it was not edited out of the book chapter is incomprehensible. Perhaps reviewers are the only ones who read a monograph cover to cover anymore, but surely for that reason alone, a press and an author should place some editorial priority on converting several discrete essays into a book. That there is scarcely any sign of those priorities here is much to the detriment of what might otherwise have been an unequivocally ambitious book.


The first volume to be published in the highly anticipated Oxford edition of Milton’s works bases texts of Paradise Regain’d and Samson Agonistes upon the first printed edition of 1671, though editor Laura Lunger Knoppers asserts that the volume actually was printed in late 1670. Knoppers offers copious explanatory notes, which prove informative without imposing interpretation, and an introduction with an innovative focus on the poems’ print event. Attending to recent critical interests, the editor focuses on political, religious, and bibliographic contexts for the 1671 and 1680 octavo editions, contributing much to our knowledge of publisher John Starkey and printer John