

myself wishing disconcertingly often that it had been to hand while the *Broadview Anthology* was in preparation. Mastery of material, remarkable narrative skill, and an eye for the telling detail, makes for enjoyable as well as essential reading, the frequent pleasure of “something understood,” which Herbert so rightly saw as the culmination of the passionate engagement that is prayer. Wilcher is passionately engaged in his project as scholar, not as polemicist. Some historical criticism of this period reminds one of those anniversary advertisements which used to appear, perhaps still do, in *The Times*, commemorating Charles I as Martyr, or honoring—or execrating—Cromwell. Wilcher’s concern is not to fight, on either side, the war of words and ideas over again, but to understand it. The clarity of his exposition makes it accessible to ambitious undergraduates, and the details he has uncovered, or set in a fresh light, will engage historians and literary scholars alike. This is an important book, and its author deserves our congratulations and gratitude.

John T. Shawcross. *The Uncertain World of Samson Agonistes*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001. ix + 158 pp. Review by WILLIAM B. HUNTER, MILTON SOCIETY.

Students of Milton begin the new millennium with this major study of *Samson Agonistes*. In no sense thesis driven, it unifies and evaluates the criticism of the past half century and more to open the poem to its readers as the great achievement that it is, not subject, as some would limit it, to feminist, political, or ethnic interpretation. As the author observes of his work, he did “not have an agenda overriding what I read as the substance of the poem, or even a thesis that I seek to ‘prove’ through that reading” (ix).

Especially welcome is its author’s grounding as one of our best bibliographers in the fundamental question of the reliability of the text which only the original edition offered in 1671. An early work? Or, more likely, an early work with some later revi-

sions? Equally welcome, unlike some other critics, he emphasizes the significance of the biblical context in Judges upon which Milton drew. Finally, he relates throughout the ideas in the play to those in Milton's other works, both prose and poetry. In detail, the ten chapters explore "the world" of the play (the ethnic principles within which Samson should have acted), the difficulties of the text, the drama as fundamentally a poem, Samson as type or individual, Dalila's role (at the middle both of the poem and of this book), political issues (Samson failed to free his people from Philistine rule), the question of how much Milton's own blindness and marital troubles permit the play to be read as biographical, its use of irony, a chapter that brings all these issues together into a unified interpretation, and finally the question of how consistent Milton's beliefs remained over the course of his life.

I do not know of any other work, including the fine bibliographies of Huckabay and Klemp, that gives better citations and evaluations of every salient publication about this subject. Without an ax to grind, Shawcross has provided us with an authoritative and dispassionate approach that recognizes the strengths and weaknesses of the great variety of readings that have been argued. For example, can one accept, as some have, Dalila as the repentant, now faithful wife that she claims to be? One of the prime attributes of great literature, of course, is that it can be interpreted in a variety of ways—often ways that reflect more the culture of the interpreter than of the literary work at issue. One must add, however, that without the direction of an all-encompassing thesis *The Uncertain World* quite properly leaves the reader at its completion to develop his own final understanding of the play: such a reader must employ the rich evidence that the book provides to make this uncertain world as certain as he can.

To reflect on a single important insight, one must agree, as Shawcross emphasizes several times, that *Samson* has major affiliations with the companion work with which it first appeared, *Paradise Regained*. But some questions must be raised. Thus he argues that each work has three temptations—in the case of the play those of Manoa, Dalila, and Harapha—just as Jesus has three in the wil-

derness. Both Samson and Jesus refuse them, and so the central episodes of each work parallel one another. But are they so closely analogous as Shawcross implies? For example, Manoa's proposed attempt to buy Samson's freedom is problematical to interpret as a temptation and in any case is not clearly rejected. Or can one equate the third, that of Harapha, with Satan's placing Jesus perilously on the pinnacle of the temple? One must also remember that those of Jesus are responsive in some sense to the triple formula of the baptism which initiates the narrative, an unlikely implication in Samson's case. Furthermore, Samson experiences a fourth, that he give in to the demand of the Officer to come to Dagon's temple as an entertainer. Samson resists it until he experiences inwardly God's direction that he go. On the other hand, all the refusals of Jesus and Samson are consistently based on the requisite that one must act only to execute divine direction, just as Milton without any known external motivation had unexpectedly acted several times—to write and publish the divorce tracts or *Tenure*, for example. One may wonder whether he had impulsively married Mary Powell without having received prior divine approval as Samson had for marrying the woman of Timna but not Dalila.

One of the strongest points about Shawcross's work is his insistence on seeing Milton's character against the biblical source in Judges from which he derives. Accordingly, one discovers with some surprise that he never cites what for Milton must have been a very important single verse from the New Testament. According to Hebrews 11:32, Samson was one of the early leaders of Israel who were "saved by faith." The Chorus calls him God's "faithful champion" (1751). Shawcross mentions Samson's faith several times (e.g., he "does appear to reaffirm faith" [61] and the play "delineates how humankind should turn their depravity . . . into good, to act in obedience because of faith" [88-89]), but not so as to emphasize this Christian interpretation of Samson's life. Coincidentally, as Vickie Hodges pointed out in an essay read at York in July 1999, the *Christian Doctrine*, often assigned to Milton, never mentions Samson as one so saved, even in its chapter 1.20 on sav-

ing faith, a surprising omission had Milton been responsible for the work in that the story of Samson obviously occupied much of his thought early and late.

One closes the book with a troubling question posed by the events of September 11, 2001, and the destruction of our own temple of Dagon with the deaths of thousands of innocent people: Will we now read *Samson Agonistes* in yet a new light? Was Samson indeed a suicidal fanatic? (John Donne raised the issue of his suicide, and the possibility is mentioned in the play.) Or as Shawcross shows, a major issue that it poses is, "Whose god is God?"

Jameela Lares. *Milton and the Preaching Arts*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2001. 352 pp. \$58.00. Review by JAMES EGAN, THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON.

Though Milton claims in *The Reason of Church-Government* that poetry and the pulpit are integrated for him, critics have traditionally preferred to separate the two. Lares sets out to demonstrate Milton's substantial, lifelong connection to what she designates as the "preaching arts," the formal manuals of sermon construction and the pervasive technical or "applied" manuals that embodied them. Preaching manuals typically adopted classical rhetorical theory, invoking Aristotle in matters of argumentation and the deployment of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*. Lares begins by tracing Milton's indebtedness to specific traditions of English Reformation homiletics and then locates applications of these homiletic designs in the anti-prelatical tracts of 1641-42, *Paradise Lost*, and *Paradise Regained*. She attempts the combination of intellectual history and rhetorical analysis undertaken by the editors of the Yale Prose and such distinguished practitioners as Kranidas, Wittreich, and Lieb.

Lares evaluates biographical evidence to show that Milton was not as reluctant about the ministry as scholars, particularly postmodern ones, normally assume. Obviously, there was ample precedent in the seventeenth century for poet-priests: Donne,