

the Chorus meditates on consolation and patience, they focus on “book-learning” (287), which fits with the Baconian concerns among natural philosophers, though it leaves the issue of consolation behind.

Overall, this reviewer prefers Peter Herman’s handling both of verbal contingency and gender relations in *Destabilizing Milton* to Prof. Duran’s third section. Finally, Ann Astell was not indexed nor her first name supplied in text, opening for a moment the expectation that Mary Astell’s critique of Milton and Locke would appear in this tale. But it is a guy tale, as Prof. Duran notes candidly when referring to Bathsua Makin and Margaret Cavendish.

Susannah B. Mintz, *Threshold Poetics: Milton and Intersubjectivity*. Newark and London: University of Delaware Press, 2003. 259 pp. \$46.50. Review by SARA VAN DEN BERG, SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY.

This book represents three important modes of criticism: the relational paradigm of psychoanalytic theory, theories of the body, and disability studies. In bringing these theories to bear on Milton’s poetry, Susannah Mintz offers significant new readings of *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*.

The relational paradigm that now dominates psychoanalytic theory in the United States has not been widely acknowledged or used by literary critics. The first phase of psychoanalytic criticism derived from Freud’s own interpretation of literary texts, and emphasizes the Oedipus complex, instinct, and drive theory. This mode fell out of favor, in part because it often seemed reductive, but survives in Lacanian emphases on the symbolic. Feminist literary critics reinvigorated psychoanalytic criticism by drawing on the object relations theories of Donald W. Winnicott. These critics emphasized the pre-oedipal bond between mother and child as ‘mirroring,’ unlike the subsequent oedipal bond between father and child as ‘contest.’ Susannah Mintz’s book is grounded in object relations theory, but like many contemporary psychoanalytic theorists she focuses on the newer paradigm of “intersubjectivity.” For Mintz, and for such noted psychoanalytic theorists as Jessica Benjamin, relationships are not the product of interior drives but are the primary source of those drives. Self is constructed and reconstructed in relationship. These relationships occur in a “threshold space between, but also of, self and other,” where a person discovers and shapes identity through encountering the other

(21). In “intimate transitional space,” characters can perceive objects as subjects and form a relationship of mutuality, “hand in hand” (211-12). Mintz’s primary concern is the relationship between Adam and Eve, and between Samson and Dalilah. By using the paradigm of intersubjectivity, she can enrich our understanding of the complex human relationships Milton portrays in his poetry. Through close readings of specific scenes and conversations, Susannah Mintz makes it possible for us to see the dynamic evolution of the relationship between Adam and Eve, and the complex mutual failure of the relationship between Samson and Dalilah. In Mintz’s close readings, all four characters are subjects who both deserve our sympathy and demand our judgment.

The second mode of literary theory adopted in this book is the “body theory” that has become so prominent in recent years. Susannah Mintz is among the first Miltonists to combine relational psychoanalytic criticism and the mode of criticism familiar today as “body theory.” Rather than focusing on the sexual body, rather than defining the body in terms of the mind’s desire, she draws on the corporeal feminist theory of Elizabeth Grosz and considers all the actions of the body—looking, walking, eating, sleeping—that can foster or impede both identity and relationships. These actions, as threshold moments of encounter, are the focal point of Mintz’s discussion of *Paradise Lost*. Her book emphasizes the “birth” scenes in *Paradise Lost* (chapter 1), the creation and life in unfallen Paradise (chapter 2), transgressive and redemptive eating (chapter 3), and the threshold spaces of talk and touch as Adam and Eve lose and recover their double desire for relationship and self-identity (chapter 4).

Susannah Mintz’s theoretical stance enables her to offer persuasive readings of important topics in *Paradise Lost*. She re-reads the scene of Eve at the pool in ways that counter both the positive moral reading provided by Diane McColley and the negative submission to patriarchy claimed by Christine Froula. She reads the portrayal of abundance in prelapsarian Paradise and the ethic of work before the Fall to suggest that the abundance in Milton’s nature suggests an independence from control, whether divine or human. She offers an especially intricate reading of Adam’s contradictory attitudes about work (98-102). Her reading of what work means for Adam and Eve goes beyond a simple gender dichotomy and suggests that Milton uses each of them to figure a different, valid relationship between human beings and the

natural world. Using the theories of Christopher Bollas, Susannah Mintz can read Paradise as a kind of aesthetic transitional object, a threshold space where Adam and Eve at once encounter themselves and the otherness of nature. Her careful reading of the creation narrative in Book 7 sets up her claim for Milton's ideological revisionism. This reading, while it is often appealing, may not entirely be persuasive to those who see the apparent ease of the narrative as Milton's rigorous effort to reinscribe the traditional biblical narrative in the new language of natural philosophy, even as he challenges that language as a "human measure" of God's creation. In reply, she might suggest that Milton portrays Eve's mode of being attuned to nature rather than controlling it is more morally appropriate to life in Paradise.

Perhaps the most original and important contribution of this book is the final chapter, "Dalila's Touch: Disability and Recognition in *Samson Agonistes*," in which Mintz reads *Samson Agonistes* from the perspective of disability studies. This reading shows how concepts of the disabled body enable us to understand Samson in his blindness and in his physical weakness. Although she is concerned to contrast the relationship between Adam and Eve to that of Samson and Dalila in order to keep the arc of the book clear, in fact the reading of *Samson Agonistes* can stand alone. Using theorists of disability (Nicholas Mirzoeff, Leonnard Davis, Rosemarie Garland Thomson) who argue that disability is a social construct, historically specific in its relation to what is considered "normal," Susannah Mintz reads Samson's body—its blindness and its physical weakness—as a threat to his world. The disabled body "resides in threshold space" (185), defying the hierarchical social structures that exclude it. She reads Dalila's attempt to reconcile with Samson as "authentic—an act of genuine desire for contact, motivated by true affection" (200). Although Mintz focuses entirely on that one relationship, she could have read Manoa's offer to take Samson home in the same way. Both Manoa and Dalila are rejected: Samson chooses his relationship to his own ideal self, however compromised, over a relationship that would diminish him even further and confirm him in an identity of disability.

Threshold Poetics is an important example of the way Milton studies can benefit from engagement with contemporary literary theory. The book is not "theory-driven," but shows how the insights that theories provide can enable us to read Milton's poems with renewed close attention to his complex portrayal of human relationships. Work like this can help keep Milton's

poetry alive for us and for our students. Like other valuable works of criticism, this book leaves us wanting even more, but able to think that “more” for ourselves.

Marsha Urban. *Seventeenth-Century Mother's Advice Books*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. xii + 206pp + 16 illustrations. \$69.95. Review by TIM REINKE-WILLIAMS, KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON.

Scholars of early modern women and gender have long been aware of the importance of parent-child relationships in determining family and household politics. Pioneering historians of the 1970s and 1980s such as Lawrence Stone, Alan MacFarlane and Ralph Houlbrooke found prescriptive advice literature to be a useful source for helping to formulate questions about the nature of domestic life. Many of these sources were problematic as they were male-authored, and as such revealed more about early modern patriarchal ideology than the practices and experiences of daily life. One exception to the rule was a sub-genre of female-authored mother's legacies, published mostly in the first half of the seventeenth century. Authored by women from the gentry and upper middling sorts, these texts were written by expectant mothers for their husbands and their unborn offspring. Fearing they might die in childbirth, some women chose to clarify how they wished their children to be raised in the event of their demise. Varying in tone between passive and pious, forceful and angry, such writings can provide some degree of information as to what women themselves considered the duties of a good parent to be. The responsibilities of motherhood provided women with a rare occasion to publish their own thoughts without occasioning an immediately hostile reaction, and in general contemporaries accepted that women could not be forced to remain silent if by writing or speaking out their desire was to help their children. As Patricia Crawford, Laura Gowing, and Linda Pollock have shown, the exclusively female functions of childbirth and breastfeeding united women as mothers, and gave women a unique natural authority that men could not enjoy. By entering the public discourse through their role as mothers, women sidestepped male disapproval and avoided potential attacks on their authority as women.