

William Poole. *Milton and the Idea of the Fall*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xi + 240 pp. \$80.00. Review by JAMES EGAN, THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON.

Milton and the Idea of the Fall is a postmodern intellectual history which examines primarily seventeenth-century theology and literature to recover doctrinal disputes which accompanied both narrative and exegetical treatments of the Fall. As Poole illustrates, such disputes problematized the Fall to an extent unrealized by most readers of *Paradise Lost*. Poole illustrates in satisfactory detail competing Augustinian, Irenaen, and Gnostic explanations of the Fall, all of them complicated by ideological overlap and the internal tensions sometimes found between narrative accounts of the Fall and theological dogmas about it (16). The Reformed theology influential in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England incorporated an Augustinian version of the Fall, a reading which posited at least two falls, one mental and private and the other public. Intense controversy over the Fall, often turning on nuance and fine detail, flared up in the middle of the seventeenth century in England and on the continent. Prominent divines such as Jeremy Taylor departed from prevailing Augustinian doctrines on the Fall, questioning conventional models of original sin and the nature of the unfallen state as well as the kinds of knowledge that could be had about it (53). Skeptical accounts of original sin by German reformers (Spirituals and Anabaptists), for example, Balthasar Hubmaier and Sebastian Franck, are representative specimens of the types of radical thought which permeated mid-century England. The Digger Gerard Winstanley's *Fire in the Bush* (1650) illustrates the revision of the Genesis text of the Fall into a political fable. Other contemporary theories, such as that of the Muggletonians, offered exotic allegorical and verisimilistic accounts of the Fall (80). Chapter Five, "Heresiographers, Messiahs, and Ranters," makes the important claim that heretical accounts of the Fall were often caught up in basic paradoxes of discourse, the first being that refutations of heresy could easily double as calls to conversion; equally problematic is that heresiography (accounts of heresy) is the product of both unorthodox ideas and the mutations of those who record and denounce them—the "paparazzi."

Chapter Six reviews early literary treatments of the Fall: Hugo Grotius' *Adamus exul* (1601), Samuel Pordage's *Mundorum explicatio* (1661) and John

Dryden's *The State of Innocence* (1677). Grotius follows Augustinian assumptions, carrying over the narrative complications inherent in such assumptions. Portage's *Mundorum explicatio*, probably authored with his father, treats two falls, the initial Fall of Adam in his mind and the public Fall in the garden. Dryden, of course, turned *Paradise Lost* into a rhymed epic. His Adam becomes more intellectually agile than Milton's Adam, while Dryden's Eve becomes more predisposed to sin than Milton's.

Chapters Seven to Eleven, the second part of *Milton and the Idea of the Fall*, map the evolution of Milton's treatment of the Genesis narrative. Early Miltonic poetry, especially "At a Solemn Musick," records his interest in the Fall and its metaphysical implications. The polemical prose of the 1640s and 1650s seems to reveal a new emphasis on human freedom, but Milton's thought on the Fall becomes "original" only in 1643-44, in the divorce tracts (133). In *De Doctrina Christiana* he endorses both the "punitive and legalistic consequences" of the Fall, a broadly Calvinist, somewhat Arminian position. *Paradise Lost* acts out the dualism posited by earlier thinkers—a Fall-in-the-will and an actual act of evil. Poole's reading stresses Milton's Augustinian concern with both foregrounding and concealing the phenomenon of causality, particularly the causality of evil. Milton sets epistemological barriers in Eden between Adam and Eve and the reader's understanding of them; between Adam's reported creation and our certainty about it; and between the ways in which Adam and Eve perceive Raphael's narrative about the war in heaven and the reader's perception of the war as comic or even ludicrous. Poole's motif of advancing and retreating, with its narrative and ontological implications, not only organizes his treatment of the epic's central episodes very effectively but also justifies his eventual conclusion—that Milton's "estimate of the Fall and of fallen man clouds his apprehension of truth-in-itself, and so the causality of evil, as in the thought of Augustine, is enshrouded in narrative circularities and rhetorical loops" (189). When Milton presents the Fall in Book IX, it is unequivocally catastrophic for both sexes and even for nature. Eve's departure from Adam to garden alone represents Milton's endorsement of the Augustinian position that Eve's decision to become evil occurred before the actual temptation (184). Moreover, after the Fall, Adam and Eve clearly experience the Augustinian condition of "perturbation" (187). Poole supports the view of Leonard, Ricks, and others that there was indeed a paradise to be lost, that a Fall actually occurred, and that its dark consequences

are a limiting condition of postlapsarian moral identity.

Poole's conclusion separates his argument from both reader response theory and from the received "Christian Tradition" as defined by Patrides and other intellectual historians. Poole reminds us that the Milton presented in *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* is dynamic and "potentially dangerous," even when "located against a background of countless other dynamic, potentially dangerous projects" (195). In measuring Milton against his primarily sectarian religious contemporaries, the book's thesis complicates itself unnecessarily. On the one hand, radical theologies and narrative versions of the Fall frame Milton's own rendering, yet they are also disconnected from it. As Poole notes, "Milton is in general very suspicious of all the types of thinking we earlier surveyed emanating from the 'radical' milieu" (190). That said, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* tries to press into one space what could easily be considered two separate topics, each worthy of book-length study and dependent upon one another only to a limited extent. On the other hand, Poole's position that the "reading of Genesis 1-3 was one of the defining acts of early-modernity" (195) justifies the linking of Milton and his contemporaries yet shifts the argumentative axis of the book as a whole. Structural issues aside, readers will appreciate Poole's sensitivity to radical theologies and to the "paparazzi" which documented these positions, as well as his acute demonstration of Milton's construction of the elusive causality of evil.

Philip Schwyzer. *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xi + 194 pp. \$75.00.
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Philip Schwyzer's fascinating account of British nationalism in early modern England offers historians and literary critics a range of insights about how English identity is predicated on the legacy of a deeply embedded cultural relationship with Wales. Arguing that Englishness is not self-generated but relational instead (3), Schwyzer describes national consciousness in Tudor England as "British" as opposed to "English" in order to expand the parameters of what counts as nationalism during the early modern period. While serving English interests, "Britishness" (6), or British nationalism, "took most