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Reading Evil In and Out of Milton: A Review Essay

Claire Colebrook. *Milton, Evil, and Literary History*. London and New York: Continuum, 2008. vii + 158pp. ISBN 13: 9780826484925. \$120.00 (cloth).

Thomas Ramey Watson. *Perversions, Originals, and Redemptions in Paradise Lost: The Typological Scheme and Sign Theory That Unify Milton's Epic*. Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2007. xi + 188pp. ISBN 13: 9780761837824. \$36.99 (paper).

Nancy Rosenfeld. *The Human Satan in Seventeenth-Century English Literature: From Milton to Rochester*. Hampshire, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008. vii + 215pp. ISBN 13: 9780754664680. \$114.95 (cloth).

Kirsten Stirling and Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère, eds. *After Satan: Essays in Honour of Neil Forsyth*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010. vii + 199pp. ISBN 13: 9781443823388. \$59.99 (cloth).

Literary history attests to readers' ongoing engagement with Milton's figures of evil, especially the Satan of *Paradise Lost*. Milton's Satan has been valorized, psycho-analyzed, historicized, theologized, and—invariably—demonized for well over three centuries. Most readers find Milton's Satan unsettling in some way, and our read-ings of this figure have been, and are likely to remain, unsettled. But our nature (and perhaps our profession) insists that we persist in our attempts to do just that. And while history demonstrates that no such attempts will be (or perhaps can be) final and determinative, history also shows that some attempts to do this are more instruc-tive and illuminating than others.

Claire Colebrook's *Milton, Evil, and Literary History* proves both illuminating and instructive, and her work merits close attention from the community of Milton schol-ars. The slimness of this volume, with its "mere" 126 pages of text, veils an argu-ment analogous to a "theory of everything" argument in the field of physics. If this book had been published by Duquesne, with its larger type, generous spacing, and wider margins, it would have easily doubled the page count. I certainly could have used more margin for scribbling the many thoughts and responses her cogent argument generates. Anyone who wishes to talk about Milton reading or reading Milton reading will have to engage this book. For this is the implicit thread that weaves together the explicit terms that Colebrook's title identifies as her primary

engagements: the labor or task of *reading* Milton, evil, and literary history. She thor-oughly dis-covers the complexity of this task, which entails not only reading Milton, evil, and literary history, but reading Milton reading evil and literary history, reading literary history reading Milton and evil, and—in a figurative way—reading evil reading Milton and literary history. Her apparent purpose for discriminating among these readings is to find a way to read Milton other than the way(s) in which literary history has read Milton—and ways other than Milton has read literary history—which in her view often turn out to be the same thing, since literary history shares with Milton a penchant for readings grounded in some form of *vitalism*—and indeed Colebrook contends that literary history has been shaped by Milton to do so:

Reading, for Milton, entailed recognition of the eternal laws and forms of the world along with the ways in which those forms produced difference, change, growth and history. Milton's description of evil—as the negation of life, and as having no genuine being—not only underpinned his political theory, his poetics and his presentation of history as progression towards realization and the full actualization of potentiality, it has also governed the critical methods through which we have approached Milton.

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She deftly unpacks this rather encompassing claim in her provocative and rewarding reading of Milton and literary history.

Colebrook introduces her argument by defining her three featured terms. *Milton* is a “rationalist vitalist” whose vitalism determines his understanding of both evil and reading. She identifies vitalism as a philosophical or theological idea that posits an originating force that generates and continues to animate various forms of life, and that connects those forms of life to one another and to a source of universal meaning. Theologically, this is the Spirit of God. Textually, or in literary history, this is the animating intent and purpose of an author. The task of reading for origin applies to the world, history, and texts—all of which are authored and animated by an originating spirit. *Evil* is the absence of good—with good understood as a “well-bounded organism” that is a fully-actualized self. Evil takes two forms: “the completely enclosed, self-absorbed and self-consuming body” and the “unbordered, meaningless and fragmentary night of chaos” (9). Milton figures both of these forms of evil in *Paradise Lost*—“the evil of a Satanic individualism that turned in upon itself and recognized no being other than its own will and force, and the evil of an unbounded and arbitrary circulating system” (9). *Literary History* is constituted by reading practices that, although varying in significant ways, remain commonly predicated on “the capacity to intuit the spirit that remains through time, a spirit that would subtend all the copies of a poem or text” (13). For Milton, such reading is “intrinsically ethical”:

the world must not appear as fully actualized and determined, but as potentially the sign or expression of divine life that remains different. But if this is so, and reading is always the attribution or anticipation of what is *not* present or given, then the text is essentially incomplete at the same time as it calls for completion. What we must confront, then, in our reading of Milton is the way in which his own opposition between good (as expansive life) and evil (as non-relation or absence of sense) underpins our own literary theories.

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To read Milton reading, then, is to read ourselves reading, for we perpetuate his legacy in ways we may not recognize—even those readers who believe they are reading *against* Milton are typically reading Miltonically.

The chapter that follows this introduction, “Milton’s History of Reason and Church Government,” premises a critical binary between spirit (divine creation/initiation) and institution (human system), which often leads to mistaking the mediation for what is mediated, or an external law for internal law. For Milton, reason connects us to the divine law—natural law—already within us. Colebrook convincingly demonstrates Milton’s absolutism, but with the caveat that Milton recognizes that no human system mediates the Absolute absolutely—such mediation is necessarily partial and contingent. But that mediation may also be progressive both in the individual’s regenerate path and in history as it moves toward the end that God calls it to. The difference: God has entrusted his divine spirit/reason to humanity so that humanity can do this work of fulfilling history, work that God gives to humans, not something he will force or impose (as God’s ways are persuasive, not coercive). This is why for Milton there should be no state church which tends to rigidify and deflect a political and spiritual movement toward God that a free church encourages, reflecting the growth of individuals exercising free will in relation to right reason toward God. Individuals must be free to make their way both separately and together—together indeed because they must do so separately, as individuals (recall the early modern meaning of this term as “member of a group”), in and through dialogue/conversation, not in and through common ceremony and sacraments. Thus for Milton reading becomes that dynamic and ethical work required for progress to ultimate fulfillment in the Origin—to continue reading for the spirit while resisting the temptation to institutionalize any particular reading that necessarily falls short of comprehending its Origin.

A corollary opposition appears in Colebrook’s second chapter, “Capital Time, Production, and Generation.” She argues that *Paradise Lost* pits an economy “in which relations are determined by nothing more than competing forces (Satan’s notion of God as one whom ‘thunder hath made greater’)” against “an economy of true weight, in which something bears its own value and proper relation” (47). Of course any economy must work through time, and for Milton time is not simply a sequence of events but a map on which one journeys progressively (or regressively, as in the case of Satan) toward understanding and fulfillment, toward becoming what God designs and desires for his creature. This requires reading signs in a way that places the reader in an ethical relation to the sign: bodies are “signs or expressions of divinity,” and so “one must relate to bodies not as they are in themselves but as expressions of a spirit not yet revealed” (50). This, for example, is how Adam and Eve relate to one another before the Fall, and how they must learn to relate to one another again after the Fall, and their relation sharply contrasts the economy produced in—and by—Sin and Death.

At this point in the chapter, perhaps to keep readers sufficiently tethered to her own destination—Literary History—Colebrook compares Milton’s vitalism, which constitutes the core of his “radical Christianity,” with that of twentieth-century phenomenology: both insist “that full reason and responsibility [can] be achieved not by simply repeating and maintaining the past, but by intuiting the original logic that the past could only dimly perceive” (52). Both share a vitalism that insists “that all signs and systems can be traced back to an animating, original, and retrievable life” (52). For Milton, poetry has purpose grounded in and oriented toward the creator. This is true

not only for individual poets, but also for poetic tradition: “in his repetition of literary history Milton does not simply include or wander through the texts of the past; that past is recreated and activated, oriented towards disclosing its inner condition” (57). Poetry may not be for phenomenologists grounded in and oriented toward a “Creator,” but their pursuit of an originating, animating spirit reflects Milton’s sense of literary history.

Colebrook closes this chapter with an adept reading of *A Maske* that marks the stark contrast between antithetical economies in a way that “foreground[s] the extent to which the moral path towards virtue depends upon a certain interpretation of life, or a certain way of viewing relations” (59), with the Lady viewing relations as reciprocal, rooted in a discourse that reflects natural law and sees “nature as a benevolent guide and cateress, suggesting a dynamism and growth” (68). Of course, the economy of Comus directly opposes this, and prepares us for the economic rhetoric of Satan in *Paradise Lost*.

Milton’s rationalistic vitalism leads him to reject allegory in favor of analogy (except in the one instance where allegory reflects the failure of Satanic reading). In her third chapter, “Allegory, Analogy and the Form of the World,” Colebrook demonstrates that Milton differs from his mentor, Spenser, in that he “does not imagine good and evil as abstractions which might then be given concrete and aesthetic form—eternal verities which might then be placed in time. Rather, good and evil are *modes* of life and time” (73, my emphasis). Let’s start with the *good*. As the creator and source of all things, Milton’s God is ontologically distinct from all created beings—a distinction Satan refuses to see or has become unable to see in his self-entrapment and self-blinding. Milton sets God apart poetically by refusing “allegory, analogy, and figure” as means to represent God, instead “presenting God as the voice of reason”—and the voice of this God “is in accord with the very order of the world.” For Milton, “[t]he one thing God cannot do is *not* be God.” God is the only being who transcends the need for “a process of becoming to arrive at this or that form of being” (79). The result is “a *substantial* distinction between good and evil”: “good or justice is the very logic of the world”—what right reason guides the reader to pursue—and evil is a swerving away from this logic, and what we identify as radical evil is making such a swerve the ordering principle for one’s life and being. Every creature either moves toward its Origin by choosing and becoming the form and being that fulfills its origin in Being, or it moves away from its Origin, effectively rejecting its self-actualization.

This truth has more than theological significance. If we read literary history as just such a process, then “we see all literary productions as figures that stand in for the one creative life” (80). The proliferation of figures around the Miltonic “or”—especially in those extended similes that map Milton’s reading of literary history—reflect not uncertainties but *possibilities*: the ways in which literary history presents truth cannot be relegated to a single instance. Instead, “[t]he use of ‘or’ commits the narrator and the reader to *reading*, and to intuiting the life from which different terms emanate” (81). Such readers do not mistake Satan as an evil, or even an image of evil, but as “one possible historical relation to evil” (84). Indeed, such readers perceive that Milton has joined in the figure of Satan both the Augustinian understanding of evil as a privation or deflection from good and the Kantian understanding of a radical evil that claims an autonomy beyond relation or accountability, and so is answerable only to the self and its desires. Radical evil embraces a principled rejection of the good, or a principle assertion of “evil,” and this is to reject the freedom that makes

self-actualization in the “one living, rational, and vital life” possible (88). The implications for literary history, and for Milton criticism in particular, are manifold. To mark one instance, understanding Milton’s Christian monism in this way implies that the combat myth that Neil Forsyth traces in his magisterial *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* may provide little traction for reading evil in Milton’s epic.

Colebrook develops her thesis in relation to Milton’s gender hierarchy in her next chapter, “Gender and Contrareity.” Milton’s understanding of gender relations reflects his ontology. As self-sufficient form gives shape and meaning (definition) to matter, so the organizing principle (the rational) of the masculine informs the feminine: “thus Eve is not irrational, nor is she equal to Adam; rather her being is complementary and contrary” (91). Despite Milton’s ontological monism, his rational vitalism necessarily propagates such dichotomies, and the inevitable dichotomy between originating, animating Spirit and the matter or substance that it forms or orders grounds the gender hierarchy that privileges the masculine spirit over feminine matter—in a way that is complementary and cooperative, not necessarily antagonistic (that happens only when female matter opts to swerve away from its true being and purpose, as Satan swerves away from his—in which case we have an instance of evil as a mode of being).

This sets up a comparison of Spenser’s and Milton’s uses of allegory, since both “define evil as a mode of male–female relation” (94). The differences in the two poets’ use of allegory reflect a critical difference in their ontological and historical understandings: “Spenser’s use of allegory means that events within history can stand for an opposition between good and evil, whereas Milton will show history as tending either to good or towards evil; evil is not a being we encounter within time, but it occurs as a failure or loss of time” (96). For this reason Milton favors and employs analogy, reserving allegory for Sin and Death to figure a reactive repetition of sameness that identifies an evil or Satanic mode of being. Colebrook lucidly illustrates this difference between Spenser and Milton by examining the style and method in their construction of epic similes. Milton’s repetitions from literary history are not likenesses suggesting sameness, but analogies marking possible similarities, and for Colebrook this reflects the difference of Milton’s ethical stance. Because Milton believes that the world—and God’s relation to the world—can only be “disclosed by relations” over time, the world must be analogical: “just as Adam’s reason does not dominate Eve through force but is rightly recognized as that which will enable Eve to realize her proper potential, so we need to see God not as a force that impedes our reason, but as the very being and life of reason” (99). Thus Milton can anticipate, perceive, and recognize the divine, however provisional and contingent that knowledge may prove to be, in any encounter with texts bequeathed by literary history, biblical or not, and so even in his own poetry and prose.

But an unavoidable problem remains: the distance and difference between an originating subject and the material object created by that subject’s intention and act present a difficulty that must continually be overcome. How to do that? For Milton it begins with an emphasis on relations that “distinguish likeness from identity” (100). Colebrook works this out in a masterful reading of Milton’s epic simile comparing Satan’s first entry into Eden with the sailors who delay their journey off the coast of Mozambique in order to delight longer in its pleasant, spicy odors, a simile made more complex by an embedded allusion to Tobit’s defeat of the devil Asmodeus (*PL* 4.159–71). This culminates in Milton’s insight that “[f]reedom is this delay or ‘zone of indetermination’ [figured in the sailors]: a free being does not merely react but decides

how it might act" (102). In opposition to that freedom, or perhaps swerving away from that freedom, "the cycle of Sin and Death lacks time and decision, mechanically reiterating the same compulsive reactions" (102); the same is true of the character of Satan, who refuses the possibility of becoming other than what he is as a being who has spurned self-actualization in the only self-sufficient, truly independent being, God.

Colebrook begins her final chapter, "History, Becoming, Reason," by proposing "to read Milton's poetics against its governing images of vital rationalism" (106). Before she suggests how we might do this, she consolidates Milton's Christian reading of history and the world in a way that allows for its full rationale and effect. For Milton the question Adam poses to Michael near the epic's end—"how can God with such reside?"—"is *the* question of theodicy and politics: if we are rational, if we are made in God's image, how have we so evidently acted in conflict with reason and our own good?" (109). The answer to Adam's question turns out to be love, or charity. For the Incarnation and sacrificial death of the Son provide "an event that will enable us to develop rationally. . . . Once our reason is redeemed we are capable of determining history for ourselves" (113). Though transcendent, God works immanently within history to make human freedom once again possible. And this paradoxical God, who is at once both transcendent and immanent, perhaps provides Milton's possible answer to what we moderns experience as "the problem of transcendence": "Not only does Milton posit a truth outside historical conflict as the guide and arbiter of historical decisions, he also presents the processes of reading and writing poetry as the means through which the restoration of the transcendental will occur" (116). For seventeenth-century Christians such as Milton, "the restoration of the transcendental" is one of the primary functions of biblical revelation as mediated by the Spirit—the Word now dwelling among humans. Colebrook employs Milton's metaphor of "excremental whiteness" from *Areopagitica* to suggest that there are two ways that "we might think of such an originary whiteness before the moral oppositions between good and evil" (120). For Milton an understanding of good and evil grounded in the Christian God and biblical revelation informs and supports his own rationalistic vitalism, which is both generative of and so analogous to forms of rationalistic vitalism that continue to organize and animate literary history and criticism still. Colebrook suggests a second possible way of imagining an originary whiteness: to see it as "white light" or "white noise"—"not one term in a binary or opposition so much as a plane of differences not yet organized into distinct terms" by any transcendent divinity. This would lead to thinking a freedom quite different from—and yet quite as radical as—Milton's Christian liberty.

So Colebrook opens her conclusion, titled "Excremental Whiteness," by asking "[h]ow might we read Milton today if we try to think of the positivity of evil?" (122). She follows with a reading of several prose passages from Milton, primarily from *Areopagitica*, to show that his "theodicy, elsewhere so insistently dichotomous, places evil here not as the negation or contrary of flourishing life, but as the condition for the possibility of distinguishing between life and non-life" (126). In these moments Milton provides the way to read his texts other than his intention, to effect distance and difference from his originating, animating spirit, and find him in a moment where his text, a material object now differentiated from his animating spirit, affirms the positivity of evil—indeed, evil's utter necessity if choosing virtue is to effect a self-actualization that culminates in becoming all that God purposes. For Colebrook, reading Milton in this way points us toward a more radical freedom, a freedom unlike

that asserted by Satan or that rationalized by Milton. In doing so, Colebrook seems to assume that Milton's paradigm can no longer satisfy readers living in a modern world emptied of transcendence and the Absolute. But as we shall see in the next volume under review, this is not necessarily the case.

Turning from Colebrook's profound and nuanced reading of Milton's monism, semiotics, and relation to literary history to Thomas Ramey Watson's *Perversions, Originals, and Redemptions in Paradise Lost* is like turning from a master theologian's scintillating discourse to that of a thoughtful but less critically informed layman on the same subject. For Watson is also interested in Milton's monism and its implications—particularly for Milton's understanding of evil—and Milton's reading of world and text, or what Watson repeatedly refers to as Milton's "sign theory," which is expressed primarily through his typological scheme. Watson's reading has value—he demonstrates a capable understanding of how biblical texts function in Milton's thinking and in *Paradise Lost*.

To a certain extent Watson pursues Colebrook's thesis in a more limited, simplistic way: knowledge of the typology and sign theory rooted in Augustine's "epic"—*The City of God*—enables readers of *Paradise Lost* to "rightly interpret history and the meaning of things which had their genesis in God in Heaven through a verbal medium"—as creation is effected by the divine *word* (3). For Watson this knowledge constitutes the path to a "true self"—opposing the false self that results from following the Satanic path. But Watson diverges from Colebrook's concerns when he focuses on how precisely Milton's typological system reflects God's monistic universe as Milton understands and represents it in *Paradise Lost* (114).

The structure of Watson's argument is reflected in his nearly seventeenth-century length title: since he discusses Milton's epic linearly, he begins with Satan in hell and thus with perversions of God's sign theory; the originals of that sign theory appear in heaven and Eden before the Fall; and the redemptions promised typologically appear after the Fall, primarily in Michael's revelation to Adam. This structure may initially confuse readers who find themselves dealing with perversions of types before they have been introduced to the originals of those types. The first half of this book reads like a string of annotations to an edition of *Paradise Lost*, interspersed with descriptions of the poem's action, with a general focus on Augustine's *City of God* and the semiotics of typology. For veteran readers of Milton the plot rehearsal will prove wearisome, but if the text is designed to introduce new readers of Milton's epic to his typology, then the extensive plot rehearsal may be excusable.

Perhaps the same may be said for the book's excessive repetition, certainly justified in pedagogical method, but I quickly tired of repeatedly encountering slight variations on the theme: "As usual, all signs must be interpreted by the inspired, fit reader, who appropriately turns upward and inward, going backwards and forwards in time, while remembering the ways and truths of God, thus perceiving the perversions of Satan for what they are" (63). This is no more true for having been said for the twelfth time in 60 pages. And the repetition extends even to citations: Watson quotes the same lengthy passage from Maren-Sofie Røstvig three times to make the same point (4, 107, and 164). The excessive reiteration of points and plot rehearsal extending over 171 pages suggests that this book could have been distilled into a substantial essay for journal publication.

My criticism may be impertinent, however. Watson may not have Milton scholars in mind as his primary audience. Most of the sources he cites are older, before 1990, with only one source after 2000 (Kent Lenhof's "Eve's Aural Conception in

Paradise Lost,” *Milton Studies* 41 [2002]: 38-75), which Watson cites twice to make the same point. But my sense that Watson is not aiming for Milton scholars derives from his final remarks in his introduction:

By ignoring typology, or refusing to see its presence—and the belief that God, and even, more that Christ, is the center of all, for without faith in Christ, and accompanying good works, there can be no salvation—we do not dispatch the anti-semitism and exclusivism that Christianity has too often encouraged. Only by acknowledging these negative aspects of the faith, and dealing with them in a sensible manner, can we move to something better, more ecumenical and humane.

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This explains why Watson’s text sometimes reads like a devotional (Christian) book, and why Milton’s vision in *Paradise Lost* matters to Watson in ways immaterial to the concerns of many professional Milton scholars. Some readers may find Watson’s engagement with *Paradise Lost*—as if the poem matters in a “life or death” kind of way—refreshing. But that will not undo the tedium of the reading experience.

If reading Watson’s book becomes tedious, reading Nancy Rosenfeld’s *The Human Satan in Seventeenth-Century English Literature* often proves downright frustrating. The task she proposes is fascinating and inviting: that Milton and Bunyan create “an archetypal human Satan character” that “serves as a pattern for other characters,” most notably the speaker of the second earl of Rochester’s poems, Rochester’s “public persona,” and the character of Dorimant in Etherege’s *Man of Mode*—although arguably these three are all the same figure, as Rosenfeld notes that Rochester “served as model” for Dorimant (1). Unfortunately, this claim never moves beyond the status of an assertion. However fascinating, Rosenfeld finally does not offer much of an argument for her thesis, relying instead on speculation, possible correlations (which could move in multiple directions—she too often assumes that correlation effects causation), and reader intuition (and so perhaps the failure is mine).

In this case “Seventeenth-Century English Literature” entails three authors publishing texts within a period of two decades. And there is no recognition that the humanization of Satan, while it is one of Milton’s superlative achievements, begins much earlier—arguably as soon as you stage the devil in a mystery cycle or morality play, but certainly by the time Marlowe’s Mephistophilis and Jonson’s Pug appear on the early modern stage, bookending a sociopath like Shakespeare’s Iago, who out-devils the devil. In any case, to credit Milton with initiating Satan’s career as an archetypal human does not strike me as something new—as Rosenfeld herself notes in her chapter on *Paradise Regained*, Arnold Stein suggested this many years ago (94). The interest in Rosenfeld’s task, then, would lie in her making good on her claim that Bunyan shares this stage with Milton, establishing Bunyan as the co-creator of this archetype, and that their readers—say the Romantics—were mistaken to miss that. In this she does not succeed.

To achieve this goal Rosenfeld must demonstrate that Bunyan’s Tempter in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* and Diabolus in *The Holy War* have the stature and significance—and influence—of Milton’s Satan. She does not do this. She indirectly recognizes the particular problem Bunyan’s Tempter poses, since he is not a character in a story but a voice in Bunyan’s head: the Tempter “tak[es] on the role, although not the outward form, of a human; he manipulates the thoughts, feelings,

and dreams of another man, much in the same way as would a political leader or an artist” (52). Perhaps, but the fact remains that Tempter never takes on the attributes of a “character” in a way comparable with Milton’s Satan. As an allegorical character, Diabolus presents a different kind of challenge. He does appear as an acting figure in a story, but his allegorical status—a choice Milton rejects for his Satan—limits his characterization severely. In one of her potentially strongest points Rosenfeld misreads Diabolus’s “comic” letters to his faithful subjects in *Mansoul* as an instance of Diabolus’s childish humor (this “humanizes” him). But the humor is in fact Bunyan’s, as he deliberately sets up Diabolus for the reader’s ridicule, effectively mocking his Satan-figure.

The absence of a strong argument makes encountering other weaknesses even more frustrating than they might otherwise be. Transitions between paragraphs are often lacking, many paragraphs begin with extended block quotations, and too many passages consist of several quotations strung together without mediation or critical engagement. Sources are cited predominantly to articulate her point, almost as prooftexts—Rosenfeld does not put them into dialogue or connect them; they often arrive as islands in the ocean of her discourse, and in many instances there are long stretches of text where the ratio of island to ocean greatly favors islands (typically introduced by “according to,” “in the words of,” and “in [source author’s] words”). Sometimes her supporting logic embarrasses: because Satan takes on the form of beasts in his entry into Eden in *Paradise Lost*, we can identify Rochester’s “theriophilic” speaker in his *Satire upon Mankind* as Satanic, and so they join together to question traditional hierarchy that “us[es] other creatures . . . to achieve one’s own ends” in the universe (135–36). In doing so, she reads Satan’s entry into the lion and the tiger in Milton’s Eden as a “*playful romp* among the animal inhabitants of Eden” (136, my emphasis). One glaring error marks another unfortunate tendency in the argument—for assertions to take on the status of facts. In her discussion of *Paradise Regained*, Rosenfeld claims that “[t]he issue of Christ’s humanity is, moreover, even further complicated by the possibility that Cain, Eve’s son and thus Christ’s ancestor, was fathered by Satan. . . . The hint that Satan, by way of Cain, is an older relative of Christ is significant in any attempt at delineating the fiend’s character” (85). This would certainly surprise Milton, who would have read Luke 3.38 as authoritative on this matter, and which identifies Eve’s third son, Seth, as the ancestor of Jesus. Jesus isn’t in Cain’s line, so the significance Rosenfeld claims simply doesn’t exist. This is only one example of an assumption sliding into “factual” status and yielding a false perception.

My final frustration with Rosenfeld’s argument occurs in those moments when she instances genuine insight but does not follow up. For example, she claims that “Bunyan’s ability to create allegorical characters who are at the same time individuated characters can be explained, however, by means of Bunyan’s own attitude toward Scriptural language” (64). This is an interesting thesis, and she repeats it two paragraphs later: “It would not be far-fetched to claim that Bunyan’s ability to blur the border between allegorical characterization and individual characters was a function of his own relationship to Holy Scripture” (64). Since she does not cite any source (and she is thorough about citing sources), I assume this is her own claim, and I’d like to see her argument for it. One concluding observation: given her project, I was surprised to find so little engagement with Neil Forsyth’s *The Satanic Epic*, except for a few citations that function, like most others, to supply or affirm Rosenfeld’s points.

That Neil Forsyth might suffer such a fate in a festschrift devoted to him may be more inexplicable. Kirsten Stirling's and Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère's *After Satan: Essays in Honour of Neil Forsyth* actually includes one essay that makes no mention of Forsyth (or Milton): John E. Jackson's "The Devil Doesn't Only Wear Prada: Dialectics of Evil in Baudelaire" (in which Baudelaire's French appears untranslated). But if this volume is not consistent in paying homage to its ostensible honoree, the quality of its scholarship is consistently high—and I suspect that may be sufficient for Forsyth to experience the honor each contributor surely intends to offer him.

Three of the essays in this collection are primarily concerned with Milton. Richard Waswo's "Devilish and Divine Economies in (and after) *Paradise Lost*" examines Milton's use of economic terms. He determines that "in Milton's epic the technological creation of wealth is always devilish" while "the financial acquisition of property and regulation of debts are part of the divine dispensation" (93). But the always already fallen nature of language—the inevitable distance between sign and signifier—reflects the alienation of (human) being from (originating) being that Milton dramatizes in his account of the Fall. Here Waswo's argument affirms Colebrook's contention that for Milton the reality of an Absolute Origin must always be in tension with the fallen experience of the distance of that Absolute Origin. The divine economy may effect redemption and close that distance at some point in the future, but until then the devilish economy runs the world, "creating wealth and poverty, buying too dear the knowledge by contrast and comparison that is all our language has to sell us, and that remains necessarily provisional, subject to ceaseless interpretation and reinterpretation," as Milton recognizes in *Areopagitica* (98). For Waswo, Milton's great achievement was to have imagined what a world where this distance and difference do not occur might have looked like.

In the middle of the volume, two essays form a pair of contrasting perspectives on Forsyth's reading of Milton's representation of God and Satan. Roy Flannagan's "Funny as Hell, or Humbaba to the Rescue" is both a funny essay and a "funny" essay; Flannagan writes as if *The Satanic Epic* had never been written, and he only nods toward the book's honoree by mentioning at the start of his essay that he long ago reviewed Forsyth's first book for *MQ*. This essay sits in the middle of the collection as a subversive trickster's ploy, blithely ignoring Forsyth's contentions about Milton's Satan and presenting him as utterly unheroic and even as the butt of Milton's joke. Gordon Campbell's "Godly Reflections" follows Flannagan's essay, and functions as a subversion of the subversive Flannagan, identifying the laughter of Milton's God as cruel. He reads some of the same passages Flannagan reads quite differently. Together they provide yet further confirmation that reading responses to Milton's God and Satan often reveal much more about Milton's readers than about his epic characters. Of course this is also the case with Forsyth's own reading of *Paradise Lost* in *The Satanic Epic*. I remember my own fascination with Forsyth's description of his experience of Milton's Satan, so deeply informed by his reading of Shelley and Byron. Having first encountered Milton's Satan without having read Shelley and Byron, my experience was quite different, and I wondered as I read *The Satanic Epic* how might Satan strike a reader more deeply shaped by Laurence Sterne and James Joyce? The tango danced by Flannagan and Campbell in this volume recalls the wisdom of Forsyth's pervasive qualification in his own reading—the wealth of "perhapses," "mays," "seems," and "appears to" that fill the pages of *The Satanic Epic*.

Two other essays, while not focused on Milton, should also be of interest to readers of *MQ*. Anthony Mortimer's "Domesticating the Devil: Cromwell and His Elegists" examines elegies on the Lord Protector written by four of Milton's contemporaries (Marvell, Dryden, Waller, and Sprat). Mortimer's close reading of Marvell's last poem on Cromwell, "Poem upon the Death of His Late Highnesse," rewards any reader who takes the time to read this essay. In "Mediating Evil: The Editorial and Critical Reception of Shakespeare's Villains," Lukas Erne displays superb scholarship as he investigates answers to these questions: "what is the editorial impact on the mediation of evil in Shakespeare's plays, evil as it is practiced by some of Shakespeare's most famous characters, Richard III, Macbeth, and, perhaps most importantly, Iago? In the face of the ferocious and often gratuitous evil perpetrated by these characters, how do and did editors intervene to mediate such evil to readers?" (69). He narrows his focus to Victorian editors and concludes that "in the nineteenth century, editors were also guided by moral considerations and intervened in the plays so as to make of Shakespeare a teacher who conveyed the right values" (69).

All of the remaining essays in this volume instance strong scholarship, but I wish to close by highlighting three of them. Elaine Pagels extends her own work on the origins of Satan in "The Social History of Satan: John of Patmos and Ignatius of Antioch: Contrasting Visions of 'God's People.'" Kirsten Stirling provides a brilliant reading of James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) in "The Devil in the Printing Press," performing textual analysis very reminiscent of Forsyth's in *The Satanic Epic*. And Adam Piette's nearly mesmerizing "Beckett's Eve: *Ill Seen Ill Said* and the Miltonic Attendance Motif" strikes me as the one essay in the volume that most deeply and extensively engages both Neil Forsyth and John Milton, even as Piette reads a short novel by a modern author.

Milton's dramatic analysis of the nature of evil in a universe created and sustained by a Christian God who wills his creatures the freedom to determine their own historical trajectory will no doubt occupy readers of Milton's texts into the foreseeable future. In my opinion, that future will necessarily entail careful reading of Claire Colebrook's masterful analysis of the relation Milton effects between the representation of evil as a swerving away from an originary goodness and the representation of reading as a task of recovering originary truth. I suspect, however, that the future will supply few readers for Thomas Watson's and Nancy Rosenfeld's arguments. As for Kirsten Stirling's and Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère's festschrift honoring Neil Forsyth, I am confident that Forsyth's own deeply engaging work will ensure some measure of future attention to the many fine essays collected for him in their volume.