

Erin M. Henriksen. *Milton and the Reformation Aesthetics of the Passion*. Studies in the History of Christian Tradition 145. Leiden: Brill, 2010. viii + 214 pp. index. bibl. \$147. ISBN: 978-90-04-18032-1.

This book follows the recent critical trend of exploring the silences in Milton's work, considered most eloquently in Noam Reisner's *Milton and the Ineffable* (2009). Erin Henriksen reassesses the common perception that Milton was silent about the Passion, by demonstrating that the Passion is in fact present throughout his canon, albeit in a reconfigured form. The author establishes the critical context of the book by observing that "a thorough study of Milton's writing on the crucifixion has yet to be undertaken" (9). While there have been sporadic considerations of Milton's representation of the sufferings of Christ — most commonly focused on his fragmentary early poem "The Passion" — Henriksen argues that the Passion was far from ignored by the mature Milton.

Chapter 1 considers two opposing traditions of artistic representations of the Passion, and particularly the Crucifixion. One focuses on the tendency of pre-fourteenth-century Christian art to depict the crucified Jesus as upright and alive, anticipating his eternal life. This is set against the Catholic and Counter-Reformation emphasis on the physical agony of the crucified *Christus patiens*. In light of Milton's religious sympathies it is unsurprising to see him reject the Catholic glorification of physical suffering in favor of a Passion understood in terms of life, not death. While Henriksen's observations here provide a solid basis for the rest of her argument, the inclusion of images depicting the two contrasting representations of the crucifixion would have been an illuminating addition to the chapter.

As one might expect, Henriksen devotes considerable space to analysis of "The Passion," and her scrupulous reading connects the poem with the wider themes of post-Reformation representations of the Passion. She rejects the dominant critical opinion that the fragmentary nature of the poem is evidence of its imperfection. Rather, she argues that its unfinished state reflects Milton's belief that the Passion itself was not a closed physical event, but was inherently open due to its anticipation of redemption.

The discussion of the later poems meets with varying degrees of success. The chapter on *Paradise Lost* notes that the Passion is largely absent in the poem, being "replaced — rewritten — by the incarnation" (130). While this observation is astute, the argument of this chapter never really progresses beyond this idea. Considering that the incarnation and exaltation of Jesus is one of the central concerns of Milton's great epic, one might expect that this, arguably the richest of all Milton's works, is deserving of more tenacious analysis.

The chapter on *Paradise Regained* bears greater fruit, as Henriksen explores the absence of death, sacrifice, and suffering in the poem. While it has become a critical commonplace to read Jesus' passivity as Milton's justification of his post-Restoration stoicism, Henriksen convincingly connects this biographical reading to the notion that Milton urges his reader "not to expect redemption through violence" (172).

Redemption and violence are, of course, central to *Samson Agonistes*, which "fulfils one of Milton's earliest recorded intentions to write a passion poem" (173). This chapter suggests that the text never having been intended for performance can be read as another example of Milton's unwillingness to display the Crucifixion. Samson's iconoclastic death thus functions as a coda to Milton's canon by asserting that — as in *Paradise Regained* — redemption is to be achieved through patience, not violence.

In the epilogue, Henriksen challenges Stanley Fish's suggestion that Milton should not be read in polysemic terms, asserting instead that Milton "calls on the theology of brokenness to create an alternative passion that is based on fragmentation, omission, and iconoclasm" (199). It seems peculiar that she would bring in a critic as formidable as Fish at the very end of the book. It would perhaps have been better to mention him in the introduction, as this would have allowed the reader to grasp immediately the intellectual framework within which Henriksen intends her work to be read.

This is, however, only a minor flaw in an otherwise persuasive discussion of Milton's representation of the Passion. Henriksen offers a thoughtful and perceptive study of Milton's reconfiguration of traditional notions of the Passion, as he attempted to console himself in the post-Restoration wilderness with the thought that "they also serve who only stand and wait."

ADAM SWANN

University of Glasgow