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Review by Andrew Fleck

Kranidas, Thomas. *Milton and the Rhetoric of Zeal*. Medieval and Renaissance Literary Studies. Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2005. 264 pages.

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More than a decade after his participation in the prose controversies of 1641, John Milton would recall that he had cut his excursion to Italy short in order to return to England and add his voice to a zealous chorus calling for change. Although the unhurried pace with which Milton returned home to take up his pen against episcopacy belies the claims he made in these retrospective efforts to give shape to his career, the sense of purpose behind Milton's entries into the polemical arena of the 1640s is certainly manifest. Thomas Kranidas explicates Milton's search for voice and authority in the early prose by carefully and attentively reading the five antiprelatical tracts associated with Milton in the twelve months from May 1641 to April 1642. Focusing on Milton's displays of a "rhetoric of zeal" as a tool in his fashioning a "kerygmatic authority," Kranidas places these tracts into an arc that leads to the emergence of a mature Miltonic author with the publication of *The Reason of Church-Government*.

Starting with a very thorough survey of the complexities of rival views of zeal in Stuart England, Kranidas explores the spectrum of responses to reformation in the Laudian church. On the one hand, some called for more extreme changes to the English Church's hierarchy. On the other, the apologists for the established church condemned this excess of zeal for its tendency to lead to disorder and indecency. The response of the most affronted critics was to claim zeal as a badge of honor and to use it to decry the "lukewarmness," superficial decency, and policing of indifference (the *adiaphora*) of the established church. Into this maelstrom, Milton makes an entry as a titan stung by the gnats of those who upheld episcopacy. In the chapters that follow this introduction, Kranidas offers close readings of the important prose works Milton produced in 1641 and 1642: *Of Reformation, Of Prelatical Episcopacy, Animadversions, An Apology, and Reason of*

*Church-Government*. In the first chapter, Kranidas finds Milton articulating a confident, rapturous vision of England's emergence from incomplete reformation to lead the way to Apocalypse. The next, brief chapter demonstrates Milton's confident, "almost patronizing" (73) dismissal of Ussher's and others' defenses of the traditions upholding episcopacy, casually disregarding the testimony of numerous patristic traditions in order to return to the touchstone of Scripture, and incidentally praising youth and newness over venerable practice. Kranidas here locates an important distinction in Milton's work between the righteous zeal for scriptural authority and the "inconsiderate zeal" of personal loyalty.

The "Smectymnuan" controversy occupies the heart of Kranidas's study. He argues that Milton's advocacy of righteous zeal permits him to enter the controversy by establishing his own rectitude, exemplified in the more focused style Milton here adopts, trumping the curiously ineffective invective of Joseph Hall. From the outset of this exchange, Milton again adopts the pose of one inspired, rather than hired, to take up the cause of reformation. From the fair treatment Milton had afforded Hall in the *Animadversions*, Kranidas then reads in *An Apology* Milton's emergence as an effective hero dismantling the intellectual weaknesses of the opponent in *A Modest Confutation*. Here, Kranidas makes his most interesting argument, one that shows the implications of the rhetoric of zeal he is occasionally at pains to find in other pamphlets. In the close attention he pays to the ways these tracts build towards Milton's emergence as an independent champion of reform, Kranidas traces "these transformations of adversarial persona" (135) that point to Milton's emergence as an author. In his righteous outrage, Milton can claim for himself over the course of these works a "kerygmatic authority"-an obligation to speak "that Truth whose essence is clarity and brightness" (184)-which in turn allows him to make the transition to heroic defender of reformation. In order for Kranidas to pursue these claims, of course, he had to treat the publications slightly out of publication order-arguing that *Reason of Church-Government*, the first of these tracts to appear under Milton's name, was intended to mark that emergence, until Milton was required to tread over old ground to clear his name in *An Apology*. But the case that Kranidas makes

here and throughout for Milton's embrace of a prophet's calling and authoritative voice justifies this slight awkwardness.

Kranidas's work throughout *Milton and the Rhetoric of Zeal* is lively, careful, and assured. In the end, these close readings tend to be a bit safe, and nothing too daring is claimed here. The work is dense, and a brief review can hardly do justice to it. Such careful work is repaid, however, as the reading of these texts in this cumulative fashion-allowing Kranidas to gesture from the moment at hand to Milton's earlier work and to the great poetry to come-shows the breadth of Kranidas's understanding of Milton, gained over nearly forty years of teaching, and provides a fitting capstone to his own academic career. *Milton and the Rhetoric of Zeal* is a very fine piece of scholarship.

*Andrew Fleck*