Review by Carmen Ortiz Henley

Lieb, Michael. *Theological Milton: Deity, Discourse and Heresy in the Miltonic Canon.* Medieval and Renaissance Literary Studies, Pittsburgh: Duquesne UP, 2006. 359 pages.

The recent debate regarding the authorship and provenance of *De Doctrina Christiana* has inspired Michael Lieb to examine the God in Milton's oeuvre, particularly as He is portrayed in the theological treatise generally attributed to the canonical author. Although Lieb is well aware of the problems associated with the production of *De Doctrina*, he declares from the outset that he, for one, believes in Milton's authorship.

Interestingly, Lieb welcomes the controversy surrounding *De Doctrina* because in it he finds the same spirit of contention and uncertainty that, for him, defines Milton: "my Milton is born of conflict, raised of uncertainty, and forever fulfilling all that is meant by the term *agonistes*" (5). This same argumentative and controversial attitude not only defines and invigorates Milton's poetry and prose; it characterizes his God. Milton's God is not the God of traditional theology. He is a God of light and a God of darkness, a God who loves and a God who hates. The example set by Milton's God, then, not only encourages his people to love, it also teaches them to hate. As Lieb argues: "In order to be like God… one must hate like God" (8). Lieb's contention is that the theological Milton exhibits a great many of these disquieting characteristics.

Lieb's book is divided into three parts, *The Discourse of Theology*, *The Poetics of Deity*, and *The Heresies of Godhead*. In Part I, Lieb begins to lay the groundwork that will allow him to prove his belief in Milton's authorship of *De Doctrina*. His contention is that the poetics inherent in *De Doctrina* are a unique characteristic of the methodology employed by the author of *Paradise Lost.* In this section Lieb examines the relationship between Milton's poetic language and his theological language in the treatise. Part II examines the poetry that highlights the poet's definition of himself as a theologian. And the third part moves the

discussion forward from God as an "entity" to God as "godhead" in order to examine the relationship between fathers and sons. To allow the emergence of both the theological God and the poetic God, Lieb limits the portrayal of God in Milton's poetry primarily to *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* (128). The purpose of this limitation, as Lieb explains, is to show how theological language, together with the system that examines the interchange between doctrinal assertion and biblical proof-test, produces the poetics of *De Doctrina*.

Lieb's pedagogical approach to his subject works as well for students of Milton as it does for people who are not very familiar with Milton's work. His organization of the material makes his book very accessible and a pleasure to read. For example, the first three chapters of *Theological Milton* are dedicated to the examination of God in *De Doctrina*. Before he begins this study, however, Lieb describes one of the major sources of controversy regarding this manuscript: its palimpsest-like features. Because several hands appear to have had a hand in its creation, layers of text appear to have been inscribed, effaced, and re-inscribed. The resulting uncertainties not only apply to the work's authorship, they also pertain to the delineation of God in the treatise. Having outlined some of the instabilities of the text, Lieb then proceeds with his exploration of the depiction of God in the treatise.

The first chapter is divided into three sections, with the first section focusing on an examination of Milton's sources for the work, particularly the Ramistically-inspired William Ames and John Wolleb. Ames's *Medula* and Wolleb's *Comprendium Theologiae Christianae* were greatly influenced by the theological dialect created by the sixteenth century French philosopher Pierre de la Ramée. One aspect of Ramistic methodology is that it seeks to lessen Biblical proof-texts and focuses instead on Virgil's poetry and Aristotelian philosophy. Lieb reminds us that Ramistic logic is the basis for Milton's *Art of Logic*. He points out that Gordon Campbell demonstrates how the principles that inform the methodology of *De Doctrina* have the same basis as *Art of Logic*; and there are similarities between the texts, especially the pronounced sense of structure and the Ramist-like systematic theology. But Lieb is very clear about this: *De Doctrina Christiana* is not *Artis Logicae*. *De Doctrina* is *sui generis*; it is unique unto itself and its interpretation cannot be found in another work. *De*

Doctrina, Lieb asserts, is not one of the systematic theologies so popular during the early modern period. As indicated, every section within the book is organized in this fashion making the book suitable for a broad audience.

A thoroughly enjoyable and illuminating work, *Theological Milton* belongs in the collection of anyone interested in the relationship between literature and theology.

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