

*Literature and the encounter with God in post-Reformation England.* By Michael Martin.

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This book explores how seventeenth-century writers such as John Dee, John Donne, Kenelm Digby, Henry and Thomas Vaughn and Jane Lead, sought to represent ‘an experience of God’ (p. 1). Drawing upon phenomenology, Martin characterises his work as an act of contemplation, ‘not in a religious sense, but in the realm of perception and attention’. This approach, he urges, ‘allows one to examine’ a text ‘in an honest way’, one that ‘can open the eventamental nature of what some religious texts disclose in a way that source studies, psychoanalytic criticism, and historical approaches do not’ (p. 17).

Martin persuasively argues that although religion and science are inextricably linked in writers like John Dee, Kenelm Digby and Thomas and Henry Vaughn, scholars have largely failed to consider their writings as a form of ‘mystically inclined’ religious experience. The best chapters of *Literature and the encounter with God* offer such a reading. So, for example, although scholars have traditionally dismissed John Dee as an occult magician, Martin urges that John Dee’s ‘actions’ or conversations with Angels can be best understood both as an attempt to discover a ‘unitary language’ and as a form of ‘divine discourse’ (p. 23). Similarly, in his chapter on the recusant (and chemist) Kenelm Digby, Martin elegantly demonstrates that Digby’s obsession with ‘paligenesis’, or the resurrection of plants, represents, through a form of metalepsis, Digby’s desire for communion with God, grief concerning his deceased wife, and his own relationship to his Catholic father.

The other chapters offer similarly intricate readings, although I think some might have benefitted from a more thoroughgoing historical grounding. For example, Martin convincingly demonstrates that the Philadelphian mystic Jane Lead modelled her life, writings and visionary experience upon the writings of St Paul. Here, though, I would have liked him to have deepened his discussion by considering Lead’s life and writings in the context of other seventeenth-century women writers, like Mary Cary, who similarly used Paul to craft an alternative ecclesiology. Similarly, Martin remarks cogently upon John Donne’s ‘profound humility’, ‘dedication to the curam animam’, and Pauline-inspired mysticism, but he does not address as substantively as he might the extensive scholarship concerning Donne’s relation to Catholic and Protestant traditions of meditation. Further consideration of Lead and Donne within their religious and historical contexts would have deepened Martin’s insights concerning the ‘eventamental nature’ of their texts.

*Literature and the encounter with God* is philosophically sophisticated and often genuinely insightful. Readers interested in seventeenth-century mysticism, the occult, or Continental philosophy will find much of value in this original study.

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