Richard J. DuRocher and Margaret Olofson Thickstun, eds. *Milton's Rival Hermeneutics: "Reason is but Choosing."*

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It's a bit hard to discern the frame for this collection of essays. The volume began, Margaret Thickstun tells us, as a celebration of Mary Ann Radzinowicz's contributions to Milton studies. But during the book's gestation, Richard DuRocher passed on, and his coeditor then reconceived *Rival Hermeneutics* as a memorial to his memory and accomplishments. Consequently, the book begins with a tribute to the late Prof. DuRocher that includes a selected chronological bibliography of his work. Fair enough. Except that the contributors evidently continued to think that the original purpose held. Most begin their essays with a salute to their former teacher and colleague, and the contributors regularly situate their work in relation to Radzinowicz's. So there's a weird disconnect between the editor's conception of the book and the contributors'.

But Prof. Thickstun adds two more layers. In the introduction, she states that in addition to memorializing Prof. Durocher, the book means to explore how "Milton's acts of interpretation compel readers to reflect not only on the rival hermeneutics they find within his works but also on their own hermeneutic principles and choices" (xv). But Thickstun also writes that *Rival Hermeneutics* has an additional charge: to engage the group of Miltonists she calls "the heralds of incertitude" (xvi): Michael Bryson, Christopher D'Addario, and (full disclosure) myself. "We believe," Thickstun continues, "both their diagnosis and response to [the problem of coherence] have been too sweeping and dogmatic" (xvi). Fair enough again, and I was prepared to be gratified at having The New Milton Criticism debated by a stellar group of Miltonists such as Barbara Lewalski, Diane McColley, Gordon Teskey, and Joseph Wittreich, among others. Except that nobody in the volume actually "responds to this critical challenge" (xvi).

We "heralds" show up once in the introduction, and that's it. No more. So, once again, there's a disconnect between the description and the book. If *Rival Hermeneutics* engages a critical challenge, it does so without mentioning the challengers.

What makes the absence of footnotes more unfortunate than strange is that a few of the essays really could have benefited from absorbing more of "the critical challenge" posed by "the heralds." For instance, one contributor (whom it would be unkind to name), faced with Samson's problematic assurance that "This day will be remarkable in my life / By some great act, or of my days the last" (SA 1388–89), interprets these lines by altering a key word: "The reader knows to convert the 'or' to 'and' in this famous passage." I am amazed that anyone would consider changing the text an acceptable practice. I am even more amazed that nobody caught this problem.

Even so, most of the essays deal with Milton's "rival hermeneutics" lucidly and responsibly. Space does not allow for a full explication of each essay, so let me give three highlights: Susanne Woods demonstrates how Milton's works use the language of violence to demand "that the reader see and make choices, a process at the heart of Milton's many depictions of liberty" (4). Hugh Jenkins learnedly shows how Milton's Latin *Defenses* of the English people and the *Defensio Pro Se* oscillate between defending the Revolution and his own growing disillusionment with the English people, "leaving both works in a state of ideological tension" (59). And Wittreich provides another chapter in his series on the irresolvable yet productive contradictions of Milton's later works: "competing interpretations are aspects of the intellectual debate at the core of Milton's epics, of their multivocality, multiperspectivism, and counterpointing" (102). In these poems, Wittreich continues, "uncertainty is an aspect of both their experimental exegesis and experimentalist poetics" (102).

Without a doubt, however, the best essay in this collection, indeed, one of the most remarkable essays I have ever read, is Gordon Teskey's "Dead Shepherd: Milton's *Lycidas*." Teskey's overall point is how this poem confronts our deepest fears about death without coming to a definitive answer: "The poem's stance is one of continual, uncertain, and perilous questioning" (47). Teskey describes how this poem seems to overwhelm the reader. "We seem to see too many surfaces at once" (32), he astutely observes. We hear too many speakers saying too many incompatible things, and at the end, "we still feel haunted by the many voices we have heard, and by their questions" (48). What makes this essay so extraordinary is Teskey's "total reaction" (the phrase is William Empson's) to *Lycidas*, his ability to create a stunning reading of the poem that is as personal as scholarly.

If the framing justification for *Rival Hermeneutics* remains cloudy, the essays themselves for the most part illustrate how Milton's poetry and prose raise questions without necessarily answering them. While some of the contributors may not agree, *Rival Hermeneutics* collectively demonstrates how, as Wittreich puts it, "a new Milton criticism" (107) is slowly but surely replacing the

"traditionalist" Milton with "a risk-taker who, making waves, beckons us to make new ones." (133).

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