

punctuated by periods of distrust, jealousy, and anger that unfolds in ‘Pamphilia to Amphilanthus’ is far too protracted and convoluted to unpack here” (49), may wonder, “if not here, where?” And while an early footnote thanks Anne Lake Prescott for calling to the editors’ attention a parallel between Wroth and her Continental counterparts (such as Louise Labé in France and Gaspara Stampa or Veronica Franco in Italy), this is nowhere followed up, which is a pity, as it would have provided illuminating context.

These minor criticisms, though, in no way detract from the enormous, and enormously significant, achievement of this edition. It once and for all affords Mary Wroth her deserved place as a major writer (and not just a major woman writer) in the line—at the end of the line—of English Renaissance sonnet sequences, with sonnets, and perhaps even more, some of the songs, that linger in the memory with the authority of true quality. It is an achievement for which we should all be grateful.

Roger Kuin, *York University, emeritus*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2018.120

Ascent: Philosophy and “Paradise Lost.” Tzachi Zamir.
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. x + 204 pp. \$49.95.

In this challenging and perceptive book, Tzachi Zamir departs from the main, historical stream of Milton studies to offer a serious interdisciplinary inquiry into the distinctive nature of *Paradise Lost*. Zamir focuses on “the differences between philosophy and literature rather than their synergy” (1) through chapters structured as a dialogue between a philosopher and an explicitly religious poet engaged in a figurative climb up the mountain of the poem. Beginning “At the Base Camp” and ending “At the Summit,” Zamir leads readers through five climbs, each with a corresponding crossroad, corresponding to paired religious and philosophical themes. The process is open-ended. As Zamir reminds us at the outset, “Deciding who is right involves first committing to an epistemic paradigm. In the clash we will be visiting, however, it is the very choice of a paradigm that is under dispute” (18).

The “Base Camp” offers an extended discussion of “Imagining,” which enjoys “unique status . . . within religious poetry” (21). In *Paradise Lost*, as to the religious believer, imagining is synchronic, functioning as “a form of knowing” (23); hence, what the philosopher understands as metaphorical, the believer apprehends as literal. This distinction underlies all stages of the climb. The first stage pairs “Wisdom” (the climb) with “Knowledge” (the crossroad), showing how the philosopher understands knowledge as a possession of the mind, while Milton envisions it as hosting, through which the believer makes contact with God. The second juxtaposes “Meaningful Action” with “Purchase.” Meaningful action is experiential and involves vitality,

identified with gardening, through which Adam and Eve, each in a distinctive way, perceive God. Purchase, in contrast, is a feature of the mind: “Knowledge and truth determine the mind’s *purchase* on reality” (102). The third climb explores “Meaningless Action,” which is characteristic of the fallen angels, while the crossroad concerns “Place,” in which the philosopher asks, “what shall I believe in?” while Milton wonders, “what kind of world do I perceive?” (116).

Beginning with the fourth stage, Zamir turns from hosting to focus on gratitude. The climb concerns “Receiving,” and the principle that gratitude makes possible “a close relationship with God” (123). This chapter includes an extensive discussion of gift giving. While Satan sees gratitude as nothing more than part of a transaction, Milton’s God seems to require simply acknowledgment, an idea that leads Zamir to a striking question: “What if, by making us incomplete and weaker than we could have been, God was *giving* us something rather than holding something back?” (145). The crossroad examines “Needs,” contending that the loneliness of Adam before the creation of Eve functions as a sign that human interdependence is one of God’s gifts. From this point, the fifth climb concerns “Gratitude,” with its crossroad “Sin.” The discussion of gratitude leads to the identification of the Son as “the only gift who chose to become one” (156), and a sensitive analysis of Milton’s blindness as it functions within *Paradise Lost*: as an illustration of being “grateful for gifts that can no longer gratify” (161–62), so that in the act of reading the poem, the reader is “quite literally, looking at an act of gratitude” (164). Sin, on the other hand, is for Adam and Eve a detachment from goodness rather than an overt embrace of evil. Arrived at the “Summit,” Zamir argues for the ultimate incompatibility of philosophy and religious poetry. The first is “a reasoned inquiry” while the second is “an offering to its readers” (184). Nevertheless, the interchange between the two perspectives is an essential feature of the poem and one of the sources of its achievement.

It is a testament to the value of the book that it is provocative in the best way. Some readers may take issue with the specific demonstrations of each argument. The discussion of gift giving, for example, would benefit from a recognition of feminist writing on the gift economy, while the insights on Eve occasionally seem somewhat dated, following the arguments of second-wave (but not recent) feminist scholars. Whatever the limitations, however, the book invites active readership and thoughtful response. Because it does so, it should interest not only scholars of seventeenth-century literature and philosophers, but also any readers interested in the religious imagination and its critiques.

Elizabeth Skerpan-Wheeler, *Texas State University*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2018.121