

Christopher Bond. *Spenser, Milton, and the Redemption of the Epic Hero*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011. xvii + 242 pp. \$70. ISBN: 978-1-61149-066-4.

Christopher Bond's book articulates a poetics of heroic types in *The Faerie Queene*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Paradise Regained* in which a primary ethically virtuous hero guides a fallible, weaker hero toward redemption. It will appeal to scholars interested in Protestant narrative poetics, the epic hero, and the literary history of Renaissance Christian epic. Bond interprets epics from Lucan's *De Bello Civili* to *Paradise Regained* in order to make an original argument for the relation of literary technique to theological didactic exemplarity.

Whereas Thomas Greene relates a primary "deliberative" hero to a secondary "executive" hero, Bond uses an analogous framework to address instead the actions of virtuous heroes and the "contemplative" (3) aspect of imperfect heroes who change during the course of the narrative. Chapter 1 relates Cato's exemplary stoic devotion to the common good in Lucan's *De Bello Civili* to the more human, wavering, amiable qualities of Pompey. This interpretation of this poem establishes a relation of virtuous to imperfect heroes, but because Lucan's influence on Spenser and Milton is unclear, Bond also analyzes Tasso's *Liberata* and William Langland's

The Vision of Piers Plowman, whose Piers is an important prototype for Arthur and the Son in *The Faerie Queene*.

Chapter 2 relates Aristotle's *Poetics* to Italian Renaissance idealist critics of Tasso and realist critics of Dante. Controversies over whether the hero ought to be perfect animated these writings and illuminate Bond's argument. Some writers argued that the fallible hero serves as a better example for readers than the virtuous one, because, for example, "the voyage of Ulysses or of Aeneas . . . shows the way through the road of our life" and demonstrates "how one achieves true virtue and true happiness by means of their opposites" (53). Others went further to Christianize the hero, making him a more interiorized figure. Bond discerns a "growing critical confidence that Christian teaching, rather than classical tradition" (58) should animate representations of the epic hero, and he argues that in Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and in Milton's *Paradise Lost* one can see both the perfect and the developing hero who guide the reader's process of moral improvement.

Chapter 3 argues further that in the latter two poems interrelations between the ideal model and the fallible human imitator who falls into despair become more psychologically and ethically complex when the poets introduce a flawed heroine whose "loving intercession" resolves the poem's spiritual and moral dilemmas. Unlike English Renaissance lyrics that enact a paradigm of salvation through irresistible grace, these narrative poems represent characters that change because of their own choices, actions, and interactions.

Although critics have focused primarily on Milton's use of book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*, in fact, chapter 4 argues persuasively, book 1 is crucial to understanding the evolution of a Protestant narrative poetics in which the hero works out his own path to salvation. Unlike Renaissance English lyric poems that imitate experiences of God's irresistible grace, Bond argues, Christian epics represent characters who develop through actions and interactions based on a combination of free will and grace. He analyzes Spenser's Legend of Holiness as the basis for the interlocked stories of Adam, Eve, and the Son, which tell of the fall and redemption through divine grace and human love. Even a model hero, like Spenser's Arthur, is imperfect; he begins in power and virtue but grows into yet greater perfection during the poem. Arthur's magnificence, which has been dismissed and attacked from many angles by critics, becomes legible in Bond's argument that magnificence is "the effect achieved by Arthur's various actions over the course of the poem" (147). Arthur's unstable actions in books 3, 4, and 6, for example, become less puzzling if one understands them as moments in the development of his character. The primary hero, according to Bond, undergoes a degree of instructive evolution. Arthur's frustrating quest helps him appreciate the difficulties encountered by Red Crosse and Una.

The last chapter argues that though the Son in *Paradise Lost* and Jesus in *Paradise Regained* are morally perfect, neither fully knows his identity or role at the beginning of the poems. Unlike Cato in *De Bello Civili*, Piers Plowman, or Goffredo in the *Liberata*, who remain largely the same, the Son and Jesus exemplify moral development. Bond argues further that theological ideas in the poems emerge from Spenser and Milton's choices to represent evolving heroes. For example,

Milton's subordinationism follows from his choice as a narrative poet to represent a distinct, continuous, and developing hero. And *Paradise Regained* represents Jesus as learning how to be a hero by withstanding trial and temptation while he teaches the virtues of patience and obedience.

Bond's analysis can be seen as participating in recent studies that trace the literary history of ancient epic patterns in Renaissance epic plots and characters. The relations Bond establishes between character development and exemplarity, on the one hand, and between theology and poetics, on the other, are particularly valuable. He proposes solutions to vexing problems of interpretation of *The Faerie Queene*, *Paradise Lost*, and *Paradise Regained* and builds important bridges between disciplines of theology and poetics that too often remain separate.

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