

Katrin Ettenhuber. *Donne's Augustine: Renaissance Cultures of Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. xii + 268 pp. \$110. ISBN: 978-0-19-960910-9.

This is a book about the spiritual transformations of John Donne, and the role of the textual sphere as the fertile ground that allowed him to cite, understand, and engage what Katrin Ettenhuber calls “other texts” of theological and scriptural tradition (2). Ettenhuber is very careful in her study of the uses of Augustinian texts in Donne’s theological, polemical, and poetic work, noting that the “remarkable process of transformation” that he underwent was “saturated with allusions” to scripture and the work of the Christian theologian. Augustine thus became the key player in a complex game in which Donne fashioned his own religious conscience and used it in the confessional, polemic, and political treatises he wrote between 1615 and 1631.

As the author points out, this book is the “first sustained account of Donne’s reading habits” (3), and is divided into the three successive stages of his collection, digestion, and representation of the “Augustinian material[s],” as well as his

negotiation and reappropriation of the patristic literature. Ettenhuber's study is therefore not merely about Donne, but the intertextual dialogue between Donne and Augustine, where citations become the means for the appropriation of theological utterances. This kind of argument requires a specific method that the author, alas, does not mention in her introduction, but that seems to inform most of her work. Specifically, what Ettenhuber has done with the first half of her book is to develop a sensitivity to what J. G. A. Pocock has called the "presence of diverse idioms" — in Donne's case, idioms that are distinctly Augustinian, and used as a "dynamic set of linguistic and rhetorical tools to be used and manipulated" through "complex processes of cultural transmission" (15).

This process of appropriation of Augustinian texts performed by Donne is closely scrutinized by Ettenhuber, who systematically looks into the "ethics and politics of quotation" adopted by the author in order to acquire knowledge through reading, adapting and transmuting the "information gleaned from various reading regimes" to the "reader's own spheres of intellectual activity" (46). The first two chapters are dedicated to a well-documented study of the "patristic editions that were available to early modern readers" and the "precepts that guided Donne's approach to citation," providing him with the necessary "sensitivity" to the theological lexica present in his works, and allowing him to "get a firmer grasp on the primary and secondary sources" used to "acquire, store, and apply his patristic material" (64).

Within the framework of her discussion of Donne's philosophies of quotation and interpretation, Ettenhuber demonstrates that one of the author's foundational values in defining his textual philosophy was the "conviction that texts cannot traverse historical boundaries unproblematically" (67). This scholarly tenet, perfectly in line with the humanist agenda and their development of a "historical agenda" as Pocock has called it, is presented in Ettenhuber's work as part of a "painful" moment of "realization" in which Donne sees his distance from a series of texts in which he "seeks the comfort of timeless communion or direct revelation" (67).

In the five case studies Ettenhuber performs with the methodological tools developed in the first part of her book, the reader is accompanied through examples of Donne's interpretational strategies, his paradoxical approaches to patristic literature in general, and the Augustinian opus in particular. The efforts invested by Donne throughout the years of his religious career to apply a rigorously philological method in relating to texts of the past inevitably lapsed into a sense that intertextuality led the individual to the "fragmented understanding of fallen existence," pushing him to plod through the "contextual reconstruction" of the text's local significance (54). If Roman Catholic theologians were loyal to their own fictitious versions of a perfect cognition, in which the scholar was part of a traditional mosaic and an active part in the "timeless conversation of authorities" (54), Donne's scriptural — and patristic — method was intended to lead to the perception of the "comforting glimpses of a superior pattern" while working through the "apparent chaos and disorder of life on earth" (55). In the passages

taken from Donne's sermons and prose tracts, Ettenhuber thus demonstrates, with detailed and methodologically compelling readings, how he "move[d] along the horizontal axis of human interpretation," while "sifting evidence, assimilating information, [and] contextualizing sources" (55). The author, however, also insists on the "vertical axis" of "charity and faith," from which he "realize[d] the spirit of the text" and had access to the "animating principle behind all the Scriptures" (55). Together with the rigorously humanist "rhetoric of textual integrity in his attacks on Catholic textual practice" (50), Donne's citational philosophy also revealed a pronounced urge to crack the outer shell of textual formalism and taste the inner kernel of words. Motivated by the need to edify his reader or the audience present at his sermons — a need that grew out of the Augustinian "virtue of charity" — he came to a "hermeneutic principle" that allowed him to "gauge just how much exegetical latitude a given text permit[ted]" (57).

To conclude, Ettenhuber's readings of Donne's theological works never lapse into what Quentin Skinner calls the "mythology of coherence" — a tendency of the historian of utterances to create coherent narratives out of the intellectual complexities, argumentative paradoxes, and starkly incoherent textual strategies of specific authors. Like Donne, Ettenhuber instead sees a man working hard through intertextuality and citational decorum in order "to discover a deeper meaning in the obscure meaning of history," while yearning for what she calls in the last chapter of her book, a "beatific vision" and "superior form of communion" (207). Ettenhuber's Donne sees "divine self-revelation" as the "completion of a life-long hermeneutic quest," seeing God with "bodily eyes" within the very texts he cites and juggles with, transforming and transcending "the activity of interpretation" (207)

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