

The Legal Epic: "Paradise Lost" and the Early Modern Law. Alison A. Chapman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. xii + 292 pp. \$40.

John Milton's experience with the law should be appreciated more fully. We tend to think of Milton and the law in scriptural terms, the Mosaic law. We might think of him in terms of conceptions of sovereignty, of England's ancient constitution. But Milton was entangled in the law in his everyday life as well. Some of the life records of Milton come from the various lawsuits and contracts in which he participated. Milton had at least some personal experience of the law, even if he was not a member of the Inns of Court. All of these aspects of law come into play in Alison Chapman's *The Legal Epic*. Milton certainly thinks of the covenant of law and the covenant of grace in *Paradise Lost*, and he thinks in philosophical terms about justice, but he also makes use of an applied legal understanding and "knows his way around the early modern law" (16), writing for an English audience with an "intense law-mindedness" (24). Chapman makes several compelling points in this study and offers some brilliant insights, though the book is guilty of a few minor errors.

Chapman organizes her book into three main sections. In the first, she traces the language of criminality surrounding Milton's Satan and Adam. In one of her best chapters, Chapman argues that the language of treason, a language that has very much to do with crime rather than with the laws of Moses or Aristotelian ideas about justice, haunts Satan and Adam throughout *Paradise Lost*. In itself, this is not the most revolutionary observation, but Chapman frames this discussion in a particularly helpful way. She argues that although Milton represents God as a monarch, Satan rebels not against the person of God but against the divine sovereignty on which a regal God draws. She suggests that when God "sentences Satan and Adam, God is protecting the legal order of Heaven and Earth more than responding to a personal affront" (79). In other words, without denigrating God's omnipotence, Milton treats God as respecting the significance and impersonal operation of law. Having considered the most serious crime in early modern England, treason, Chapman then turns to the other ways in which the language of crime attaches to Satan. She explores the significance of "malice" as it relates to criminal intent in early modern English criminal proceedings, arguing that Satan's overt malice contributes to the difference between his conviction and the first humans. She argues that at various points, Satan appears as "trespasser, thief, burglar, poacher, and would-be murderer" (120), linking him to a variety of despicable crimes.

Chapman then explores a change in the meaning of "property" Milton may have placed at the center of the epic, before turning her attention to the matter of legal trials and pardons. She makes the compelling argument that Milton represents possession in Eden as communal rather than individual, with the "propriety" of the bond of Adam and Eve signaling this mutuality not focused on commodities and things (131–32) and showing that, ironically, Eve's choice of the kinds of possession Satan offers results in

the loss of legal status women faced before the modern era (182). Chapman then describes early modern legal proceedings, with their assizes, arraignments, and pleadings that differ so much from our modern legal understanding, to show the resemblance between the final books of *Paradise Lost* and the operation of law, including the handing down of pardons, in Milton's England.

Chapman ultimately sees legal language in almost every line of *Paradise Lost*. To some extent, to see legal language everywhere is to locate it nowhere. For instance, when Eve describes her first encounter with Adam, her initial reluctance to remain with him, and that at last she "yielded" when he seized her by the hand, Chapman reminds us that according to the *OED*, "To 'yield' meant not only to submit but also literally to remunerate or repay" (141). That other sense may indeed have been available to Milton's readers, but it seems unlikely that they needed to think in legal terms about Eve's action here. Another distracting error, one that does not undercut the otherwise excellent work of this book, is Chapman's frequent reference to "Adam's conversation with the Son in book 8" to request a helpmate in Eve (139). Adam does not meet the Son there, but rather interacts with God, the "presence divine," his "maker," and "author of this universe." *The Legal Epic* is nevertheless a thorough and deft reading of Milton's engagement with the law, primarily in *Paradise Lost*, but drawing on his sophisticated understanding of abstract and practical issues in his prose and early poetry as well.

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