



Milton and the Parables of Jesus: Self-Representation and the Bible in John Milton's Writings

Jonathan Locke Hart

Volume 42, Number 2, Spring 2019

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065160ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065160ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Hart, J. (2019). Review of [Milton and the Parables of Jesus: Self-Representation and the Bible in John Milton's Writings]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 42 (2), 257–260. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065160ar>

nanced consideration of competing visualities among plural ethnicities in the region engages important Andean issues of materiality and reception.

Two final essays explore the marvellously complex, monumental depictions of the *Postrimerías* (Four Last Things) at the parish churches of Carabuco and Caquiaviri in the Lake Titicaca region. Gabriela Siracusano's analysis of the seventeenth-century series at Carabuco links contemporary texts and sermons with the painted imagery to elucidate narratives that were both local and universal, while Lucía Querejazu Escobari's examination of a similar eighteenth-century series at Caquiaviri locates the paintings within the overall iconographic program of the church and evaluates their political and ideological content in terms of enduring concerns regarding the persistence of Andean "idolatry" and ancestral beliefs.

The second part of the volume offers a series of brief but informative iconographic studies penned by several of the authors that include the Passion of Christ, the Immaculate Conception and other Marian advocations, and images of saints and archangels—as well as the famed examples depicting archangels with guns. As an anthology, this volume makes no claim to trace the complete history and full spectrum of colonial painting in the region, yet it is certainly the most extensive treatment of major themes and issues to date, and reproduces in abundance the stunning visual splendor and range of painting in the region. For these reasons, the volume will appeal to students and general readers and will serve as a major scholarly reference for years to come.

SUSAN VERDI WEBSTER

College of William & Mary

Urban, David V.

Milton and the Parables of Jesus: Self-Representation and the Bible in John Milton's Writings.

University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018. Pp. xii, 316. ISBN 978-0-271-08099-4 (hardcover) \$89.95.

The parables of Jesus are a gift in religion, wisdom, and narrative. John Milton is a poet of religious topics often drawing on or inspired by the Bible. David V. Urban explores the connection between the parables and Milton, particularly

in terms of self-representation and the Bible. Urban discusses the history of the interpretation of parables and texts in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by Reformed biblical commentators such as John Calvin, Matthew Poole, and John Trapp. In this context, he examines Milton's early poetry and prose, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. For Urban, Milton identifies himself with figures in the parables, something that tells us about his attitudes toward God, society, and himself. Urban's book makes a valuable contribution to an understanding of the parables—of Milton's use of them—as well as to a comprehension of a significant aspect of the Renaissance and the Reformation. In acknowledging the origins of his study on Milton and the parables of Jesus, Urban credits, among others, Michael Lieb, who directed the early work on the project and whose presence endures throughout the book (x).

I commend Urban for opening his Introduction with Paul Ricoeur's observation that to listen to the parables is to be open to new possibilities, to how they address our imagination and not our will; we thus avoid seeing them as moralizing allegories rather than dramas of poetic power that play within us (1). Milton did just what Ricoeur recommended: he opened his imagination to the poetic power of the parables and in doing so allowed them to deeply influence his self-presentation and self-conception as well as his art of poetry and prose (1). Milton was following the tradition of Reformed Puritans of finding a place for oneself in the scriptures but also going beyond that tradition by seeing the ideals of the parables and notions of self-presentation (1). Urban sees throughout Milton's career an understanding, through parabolic figures, of "a thoughtful, godly heroism" (2). Urban's brief history of the interpretation of "parables," a term whose range of definitions he discusses, provides a context for Milton and parables, including allegorical approaches, challenges to allegory, restrained allegorical approaches to parables, parables and metaphorical parables, and Milton's use of parables and his self-representation (3–21). Urban's method is to address "one or more textual examples in which I can most convincingly demonstrate Milton's self-identification with a figure or figures from a particular parable or parables" (21).

The structure is ten chapters in three parts. In part 1, Urban discusses Milton's use of the parables of the talents and of the labourers. Part 2 examines Milton's connection to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins. Part 3 looks at the parable of the householder. All of this is related to Urban's concern with Milton's explicit and implicit identification with figures in the parables.

In part 1, Urban considers the two parables of the talents and of the labourers in Sonnet 7, a letter "To a Friend," a Latin verse Epistle *Ad Patrem*, *The Reason of Church-Government*, Sonnet 19, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. Milton's ambivalent attitude toward grace is part of his relation to parables in Sonnets 7 and 19 (51–52). Urban seeks another thread of this discussion: "The Miltonic tension between the parables of the talents and of the laborers continues to manifest itself throughout *Samson Agonistes*" (53). Samson expresses both parables: the resolution for him in his relation with the parable of talents occurs through grace in the parable of the labourers (73–74). Urban observes: "More idealized representations of Milton's relationship with the parable of the talents are seen in his depiction of the loyal angel Abdiel in *Paradise Lost* and the Son in *Paradise Regained*" (74).

Part 2 examines the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Sonnet 9, *Comus*, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*. The wise virgin of Sonnet 9 may be seen as the anticipated union of John Milton and Mary Powell becoming one with Christ, the bridegroom (109). The Lady in *Comus* "represents the ideal of the unmarried wise virgin who looks forward to chaste marriage" (110). The fallen union of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* begins a journey toward the blissful union with God (172–73). The wise virginity of Adam and Eve also leads Urban to that of the Son in *Paradise Regained* and of Samson in *Samson Agonistes* (174). Like Samson, the audience of *Samson Agonistes* may learn to turn from the foolishness of passion to the wisdom of purity (183).

Part 3 involves the parable of the householder or of the master of the house, a story of wisdom gained through learning and self-control that occurs explicitly in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and *De Doctrina Christiana* (185, 191). Milton associates himself with the words of Jesus to identify himself as having a divine calling to interpret the Bible (201). Milton uses the parable of the householder implicitly to identify with his epic narrators and with the Son and Mary in *Paradise Regained* (202). Urban says: "Mary's example as a mediator of God's word shows that she as much as the Son is a figure with whom Milton identifies as a fellow parabolic householder" (220). Less meditative than these instances of the householder is that of Samson in *Samson Agonistes*, a more controversial example (221). Samson becomes God's "faithful champion" (line 1751, *Samson Agonistes*, quoted in Urban 233).

Urban's book brings together the parables of Jesus and the poetry and prose of Milton, both vital to our culture. Christians identify with the figures of the parables. The one caveat is that Milton is also a poet and that his self-representation in relation to parabolic figures is intricate and implicit and not simply a direct biographical equivalence.

JONATHAN LOCKE HART

Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies

University of Toronto

Valois, Marguerite de.

***Correspondance (1569–1614)*, éd. Éliane Viennot.**

Textes de la Renaissance 23. Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2018. 676 p. ISBN 978-2-406-08183-8 (broché) 59 €.

Éliane Viennot offre un ouvrage précieux avec cette édition critique de la correspondance de Marguerite de Valois pour les années 1569–1614. Princesse trop souvent réduite à la reine Margot depuis les romans d'Alexandre Dumas, cette figure historique n'a cessé de descendre « un par un, tous les degrés de la dignité humaine » et « n'a guère quitté la scène historico-fantasmagorique française, ni le registre licencieux » (11). Dévorée par son propre mythe, réduite à une vulgaire prostituée dans le film de Patrice Chéreau (1994), la princesse savante a entièrement disparu derrière la jeune femme aux mœurs légères. Littéralement éteinte dans les années 1920 par son dernier grand biographe, l'historien Jean-Hippolyte Mariéjol, la réputation sulfureuse de Marguerite de Valois se retrouve jusqu'à aujourd'hui dans les travaux de Janine Garrisson et de Jacqueline Boucher (12, note 1). Face à ce constat sans appel et animée par des convictions féministes affichées, l'auteure propose de revenir aux sources afin de reconstituer le visage exact de la princesse (12).

La postérité de Marguerite apparaît en effet comme dramatique du fait de la dispersion de ses écrits et du caractère extrêmement limité des archives dont disposent les chercheurs à son sujet. Seuls trois textes en prose ont traversé les siècles, et non quatre, puisque la *Ruelle mal assortie* n'est pas un ouvrage de la plume de la princesse, mais bien un pamphlet dirigé contre elle (15, note 1). Quelques poésies ont également survécu, une dizaine de sa main et quelques