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Ben Faber

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Hampton, Bryan Adams.

Fleshly Tabernacles: Milton and the Incarnational Poetics of Revolutionary England.

Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012. Pp. x, 374. ISBN 978-0-268-03096-4 (paperback) \$40.

Bryan Hampton describes how the Incarnation functions as the model for the homiletic rhetoric of Milton's poetry, the hermeneutical role of Milton's reader, and the embodied nature of English radical Protestant theology from 1640 to 1660. The implied narrative of the three parts of this book is more logical than chronological: in part 1, Milton's poet-as-prophet recreates in the poetic event the emptying of the divine and the filling of the human that is the Incarnation; in part 2, Milton's godly reader must become nothing in order to be filled with the meaning of the w/Word; and, in part 3, the filling of the human form with the divine nature is the perfection of the believer in John Everard, Gerard Winstanley, and James Nayler. The "revolutionary England" of the book's subtitle refers to the subversive political implications of Everard's popular hermeneutics, Winstanley's levelling politics, and Nayler's theo-drama. Seen along this trajectory, Nayler's performance as Christ riding into Bristol on a donkey in October 1656 is not a random act of sectarian enthusiasm but a logical extension of heterodox theologies of the Incarnation from Arius onwards. Hampton notes that this book is a demonstration of three modes of incarnational poetics—writing, reading, acting—in Milton, Everard, Winstanley, and Nayler, rather than a history of an idea or a study of sources and influences. However, aligning these three modes chronologically would have produced a stronger account of incarnational poetics in the period. For instance, rather than dealing with Milton's *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* (1673) before Everard, Winstanley, and the Quakers, Hampton could have read the incarnational poetics of Milton's later work in the context of radical Protestant theologies.

Starting with Milton's 1645 poetry about the Incarnation against the backdrop of the alleged Arianism of *De Doctrina Christiana*, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, Hampton proceeds to figurative senses by which "Incarnation" becomes "incarnational poetics." The Incarnation serves as metaphor or analogy for a host of things: for virtue (in which an ideal is realized in a person); for allegory (in which spiritual reality meets literal sense); for parable

(in which the Kingdom of God is expressed in simple narrative form); for metaphor (in which vehicle and tenor coexist); and for language itself (in which signifier and signified enjoy hypostatic union). Not surprisingly, then, Hampton often finds parallels between seventeenth-century incarnational poetics and twentieth-century hermeneutics, notably Wittgenstein, Gadamer, Ricoeur, Steiner, Pickstock, Milbank, and Lindbeck. However, with the exception of a strong chapter on the “night-founder’d Skiff” passage in *Paradise Lost*, *Fleshly Tabernacles* tends to jump too quickly from the seventeenth-century texts to scholastic, structuralist, or poststructuralist ideas about the Incarnation. In a book about fleshly tabernacles, this is going in the wrong direction.

Indeed, there is too little here about the physical body as experienced in the seventeenth century. As a reading of conceptualizations of *kenosis* and *pleroma*, this book offers a superb analysis of incarnational poetics. But it asks to be complemented by a close study of physicality, material history, and the body in England in 1640–60. Tellingly, Hampton makes almost no use of earlier work on the body in the seventeenth century by Lana Cable and James Grantham Turner, nor on material history in more recent work by Laura Knoppers and others. Hampton’s account of the human nature of Milton’s Son of God would have been richer had it included Milton’s ambivalence concerning the fleshly body. When read against the passages on “voluptuous enjoyment” and “carnal coition” in *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, for instance, Milton’s rationalist exegesis of “one flesh” in *Tetrachordon* is clearly only one side of the story of the “fleshly tabernacle” in Milton. The material body was itself increasingly the site of revolutionary change; witness the discoveries of William Harvey, the paintings of Rembrandt, and the anatomical tables that John Evelyn collected in 1640s Padua, now on display at the Hunterian Museum, London. The two chapters on Everard, Winstanley, and Nayler are more at home in the material world of seventeenth-century England, but even then the literal body’s vest is too readily cast aside for figurative bodies in revolutionary theology and politics.

The strength of this book lies in Hampton’s wide interests in literature, theology, and hermeneutics. Moving back from Milton and his contemporaries to the ante- and post-Nicene writers, then forward to Radical Orthodoxy, Hampton involves these seventeenth-century writers in the long, ongoing conversation about the Incarnation of the Son of God and its implications for writing, reading, and representing. The book invites the reader to revisit familiar

sites in the literature of the period and to extend the inquiry to unfamiliar texts. This book is on Milton and radical Protestant theology, but what role does the Incarnation play in lesser-known texts by Laudian, royalist, and recusant writers? How does the Incarnation function in writing by women? To what extent does an incarnational poetics also inform non-religious verse in the period? *Fleshly Tabernacles* sets us well on the way toward discovering new registers of meaning in writing that embodies the complex material, spiritual, and political meanings of the Incarnation in seventeenth-century England.

BEN FABER

Redeemer University College