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Teskey, Gordon. The Poetry of John Milton

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subsequent drying up of England's vernacular legal culture in the face of later sixteenth-century printing regulations.

Sobecki's study ultimately succeeds in nuancing our understanding of the ideological and vernacular foundations of English common law with its provocative reading of legal and literary sources. While the book's shifts in focus are occasionally abrupt, the framework set out in the introduction draws together a conceptually diverse study. Enriched by the impressive range of materials Sobecki brings to bear, *Unwritten Verities* contains insights that will challenge and engage scholars across the disciplines of law, literature, history, and politics.

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Teskey, Gordon.

The Poetry of John Milton.

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015. Pp. xxvii, 619. ISBN 978-0-674-41664-2 (hardcover) US\$39.95.

This often compelling account of Milton's poetry presents a substantial series of readings of his poems from his adolescence through the late great works. The sense of critical adventure that distinguished Teskey's *Delirious Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006) informs the present volume too, though it is now an ampler style of wider commentary that prevails, as if some lecture series to a student audience—naïve, not quite prepared for class, but quick on the uptake, such as Harvard undergraduates (340)—now found itself worked into a fuller book. This may account for the mix here of daring new insights and other more time-worn views on Milton's poems and poetic career (and some repetition), the wide learning worn lightly, the freedom of critical assertions made to prompt critical response or even just to give pause. At greater length, Teskey's exalted style is much leavened, his grander claims open out into more extended explanation, and his certainties find accommodation through his wit, with humour and with still more astute perception.

The present volume returns to and offers a more diachronic account of the central insight of Teskey's earlier work: that "Milton is the last major poet in the European literary tradition for whom the act of creation is centred in

God and the first in whom the act of creation begins to find its center in the human” (*Delirious Milton* 5–6; *Poetry of John Milton* 333). That insight now governs a dialectical view of the progress of Milton’s career, the time-honoured three-stage model now characterized in terms of *transcendence*, *engagement*, and *transcendental engagement* (xii, 5–8). That progress is more theorized than historicized, with Teskey’s aperçus having an often Heideggerian colouring (with Walter Benjamin the other chief tutelary spirit). The nub of his own *pensées* he puts simply enough: “It seems to me every work of art strives to make the transition from an event to a thing, ultimately a preserved thing” (111). The premise enriches many of the readings here.

The whole may be less than the sum of its many parts, but there is advantage to working through almost all of Milton’s poetry at length. For example, Teskey is not the first critic from whom Milton’s “Masque” elicits unusually fine work, but he goes some way to explaining why this baroque beauty should so win a response in comparison with Milton’s other early works. The chapter on “Lycidas” concedes Samuel Johnson’s complaints about the artificiality of pastoral elegy (190), even as it goes a long way to answering them, both by reviving pastoral and by reviving elegy. Teskey revealingly shows how Milton draws on the “sweet interchange” to be found in Theocritus, with Milton’s mapping of Doric onto Celtic in the poem’s bravura fusion of myth, geography, and history. Some of these claims develop through more studied analyses, some through more associative riffs. Though more confused, a final section devoted to the twin volume of 1670/71 still has useful things to say about the “radical solution” of *Paradise Regained* addressing the very cause of original sin (513), or, rather differently, about the inimitable rhythms of *Samson Agonistes* (520ff.) or about the harrowing scene of Milton’s Samson with Dalila.

The value of the book rests most, however, on the book within a book that is its account of *Paradise Lost* (ca. 200 pages). This is a bit slow to develop but can be recommended to any reader of the epic curious about a fresh vantage on Milton’s work, especially the chapter “On the Origin in *Paradise Lost*”—the most characteristic and extended instance in this book of Teskey’s own high style. His reflections on the verse and on the sublime in *Paradise Lost* also much illuminate Milton’s achievement as creator of a poetry of creation.

The obvious reservation about the book is that in skirting Milton’s prose it scants his “engagement,” which phase of his career is least realized in this study, with some cost to its dialectical plan. Another concern is the unevenness

of tone, which seems to derive from origins in the classroom, with a lot of critical description in paraphrase or summary of the kind we offer students as we walk through their readings with them before attempting some further critical insight. Such lecturing seems also to lie behind Teskey's reviews of the rudiments of versification; his looser associations of Milton's with other writers' works to encourage recognitions, or fresh inquiries; explanatory asides such as what "equinox" means (42) or noting with reference to Guy Fawkes Day that it "is still celebrated in England" (36); the familiar teacherly advice that *but* is "a word always to watch for in Milton's verse" (39; 80, 92, 253, etc.); or wry counsel to young adults, newly not teenagers, that our choices entering adulthood may be less free than we suppose (78, 95–99); or worldly contextualizations meant to close what might seem a gap between artificialities of Renaissance poetry and current events (170). (The press owed the author more care in type-setting, not least of words in German.)

This book is the fruit of a long engagement with Milton's poetry by a professor with keen curiosity about how poems work and what distinguishes Milton's poems in particular. Time and again, Teskey holds up for us lines from Milton of peculiar beauty—his fine judgment in this regard bears emphasis. His rhapsodic readings and often bold generalizations remain sharply aware of aesthetic change over time. Moreover, he skilfully articulates that historic alteration that may seem to put Milton's achievement at risk, where the "center of creative process has shifted from *ethos* to *pathos*" (190–91). Teskey's own service has been to attest to Milton's power as a poet and to show the abiding ethical value of that great poet's commitment to the liberty so fundamental to his writing.

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Tyard, Pontus de.

Œuvres complètes. Tome III. Mantice, ou Discours de la vérité de Divination par Astrologie. Texte établi, introduit et annoté par Jean Céard.

Paris : Classiques Garnier, 2014. 231 p. ISBN 978-2-8124-2569-1 (relié) 38 €.

La tradition durable, qui a voulu que le XVII^e siècle, l'Âge de la Raison, soit aussi le grand siècle de la littérature française, a nécessairement occulté l'œuvre