

The volume consists of the proceedings of the conference held on the occasion of the Reformation Jubilee in 2017 in Moscow, at the RGGU. The topic of the diffusion (*Ausstrahlung*) of the Reformation recalls immediately the occasional background provided by the Jubilee, which somehow reflects the heterogeneous nature of the contributions and their approach. Therefore, identifying a potential audience might be tricky: the majority of the contribution is dedicated to a proper historical investigation, but the presence of some rather theoretical (but not genuinely theological-political) papers referring to the contemporary German-speaking environment might be unclear for those who are unfamiliar with such context. However, the very choice of publishing an international volume in German instead of English might be a clear indication of the audience itself.

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Early Modern Asceticism: Literature, Religion, and Austerity in the English Renaissance. Patrick J. McGrath.

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Patrick McGrath's monograph argues that in England, age-old forms of asceticism lived on beyond the Reformation. If the monasteries were dissolved in the reign of Henry VIII, the antagonistic relationship between the body and the soul intrinsic to ancient and medieval asceticism persisted well into the seventeenth century. In a carefully wrought introduction, McGrath identifies two types of asceticism: the more corporal form fueled by an Arminian theology of free will and the beauty of holiness, and advocated by Laudians or High Church Protestants, and the more internal, spiritual kind, endorsed by godly Calvinists. Demonstrating an impressive knowledge of the religious literature and a sensitivity to its doctrinal nuances, the book's actual focus is a small selection of writings by four seventeenth-century male authors: John Donne, John Milton, Andrew Marvell, and John Bunyan. Each chapter works as a discrete unit, but the originality of McGrath's project lies in using asceticism to assemble a gallery of portraits more usually hung apart.

The protagonist of chapter 1 is not John Donne but the widower whose voluntary assurance to his children that he will not remarry (an anecdote recounted by Isaak Walton) is taken as evidence of Donne's new commitment to an ascetic renunciation of sexual desire. References to "continence" in three marriage sermons of the 1620s and in sonnet 17 become proof texts for this renunciation. The asceticism of two of Milton's early works—*A Mask* and *Lycidas*—is the focus of the next two chapters. In chapter 3 McGrath insists that by having Comus voice the Protestant defense of sexuality while

the Elder Brother and the Lady advocate virginity, Milton privileges corporal over spiritual virginity, and betrays misgivings about procreative sexuality at the masque's end.

Chapter 4 offers a fresh reading of *Lycidas* by carefully explicating the controversial church ceremony of rogation, or beating the bounds. Deemed superstitious by the godly but retained by the Laudians, rogation allows McGrath to make the case that Edward King's bones and virginal body demarcate sacred space in ways that resonate with Laudian thinking. Chapter 4 turns to Marvell's *Upon Appleton House*, reading its critique of convent life not as an attack on pre-Reformation monasticism but as a jibe at Laudian asceticism and, less convincingly, as testimony that Marvell repudiates physical asceticism as a means to escape sexuality. The final and most persuasive chapter is dedicated to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Christian's renunciation of his family and trajectory through the Valley of Humiliation is explicated in the context of the rich debate about self-denial, a debate that demonstrates the mutual dependency of spiritual and corporal asceticism, and complicates the history of early modern selfhood.

Readers expecting an account of Renaissance asceticism might be disappointed by the narrow focus: McGrath says nothing of the different inflections of late medieval European monasticism, makes no mention of women, and is clearly more interested in sexual renunciation than in attempts to police the belly or the tongue. Nevertheless, McGrath's study is to be commended for amassing abundant evidence for the survival and revival of both corporal and more spiritual ascetic ideals in the religious literature of seventeenth-century England. It is no less praiseworthy in encouraging us to look afresh at canonical literary texts.

Yet the zeal with which McGrath makes the literary texts into evidence or proof for his overarching argument sometimes means wresting these texts: making passing references to sexual continence appear to be the main argument in Donne's marriage sermons, for example, or claiming that Comus's plea for sensual pleasure ventriloquizes Protestant defenses of marriage. It is at times heavy-handed with the poetry, squashing the delicate ambivalence of Donne's "Since she whom I loved" and flattening Marvell's irony and polysemy. In the introduction, McGrath usefully points out that the divide between the godly and Laudian is more a polemical ideal than a practical reality. But he then suggests that asceticism might allow us to identify the authors' confessional allegiances more precisely. *A Mask* and *Lycidas* are thus indicative that in the 1630s Milton had still to make up his mind with regard to the Puritans and the Laudians, a conclusion that risks reinstating the polemical binary he had promised to complicate. More generally, McGrath's insistence on an antagonistic dualism leaves too little room for far more positive Christian humanist attitudes to the body.

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