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*A Review of Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell* by Diane Kelsey McColley

Nicolle M. Jordan

University of Southern Mississippi, [Nicolle.jordan@usm.edu](mailto:Nicolle.jordan@usm.edu)

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1840s, by Michael McCann of Galway and evidently first published under the title, “The Clan Connell War Song” in *The Nation*, January 1843. A copy of the tune in broadsheet format may be viewed at <http://www.nls.uk/broadsides/broadside.cfm/id/15846/criteria/donnell>. This reviewer is grateful to Eoin Shalloo, Curator, Rare Book Collections, National Library of Scotland, for prompt and generous information on this matter.

John McCavitt has further plans for the Flight of the Earls: a play he has recently written, “Destruction by Peace” (the very words of Hugh O’Neill); and a biography of O’Neill timed for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary (2016) of O’Neill’s death. In McCavitt, we have a scholar who has fully claimed his subject. May continuing success attend him.

Diane Kelsey McColley. *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007. 252 pp. + 10 illus. \$99.95. Review by NICOLLE JORDAN, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI.

Diane Kelsey McColley offers an original perspective on seventeenth-century poetry, tracing certain poets’ awareness of the tactile and sonorous quality of language and its capacity to awaken the mind to experience that integrates humanity with the wider world. Her commitment to environmentalism drives her interpretation of the material, and in this sense, our own climatically fragile historical moment is what grants her readings their urgency. She organizes her book around a sequence of threats to the environment, with most chapters integrating discussion of contemporary natural historians that complements or contrasts with the poetry under investigation. Two poets—Marvell and Milton—serve as bookends for the project, and, (as the title suggests), heroes of the story. Thus Chapter One, “Perceiving Habitats: Marvell and the Language of Sensuous Reciprocity,” is a close reading of *Upon Appleton House* that interweaves poetic analysis with the ideas of such men as Robert Hooke (author of *Micrographia*), John Ray (co-author of *Ornithology*), and the sermons of Richard Bentley. Milton matches Marvell in terms of linguistic achievement, and in the final chapter, “Milton’s Prophetic Epics,” McColley suggests that the *Paradise* epics illuminate a path to ecological

harmony that Marvell helped to blaze. Her readings of these poets' innovations in perspective, scale, and prosody are persuasive and often fascinating. The introduction lays out a scenario in which the poets under scrutiny began to shift away from emblematic, allegorical, and typological techniques toward a poetic responsiveness influenced by empiricism. Thus, these poets "increasingly subordinated figurative meanings to observation, questioned or discarded oppressive hierarchical assumptions, and expressed specific and affinitive perception of actual animals, plants, elements, and processes" (5). Between Marvell and Milton, Chapters Two through Six introduce readers to various forms of Baconian, instrumentalist language that violates the (primarily religious) traditions fostering greater harmony between the earth and its inhabitants. McColley draws upon poetry by Henry Vaughan, George Herbert, Anne Finch, Abraham Cowley, and Michael Drayton (among others) to suggest that this politically diverse range of writers registers a collective resistance to modes of thought that conceive of the earth as dead, or at least non-divine, matter.

Monism and vitalism constitute the key categories for McColley's study of poets who, she argues, articulate principles that have coalesced, in our own time, under the banner of environmentalism. Her introduction posits that Marvell, Milton, and others write "monistic poems" (2) that resist the dualism permeating certain strands of early-modern theology and natural philosophy (whose interconnections McColley deftly attends to). Such dualism produces familiar binaries—matter/spirit, body/soul, nature/God—that underwrite the subordination of the natural world to humanity's self-interest. Close readings of these poets' works reveal an abiding refusal to see the natural world as absent of spiritual import or as substantially different from the stuff of human life. Thus, in her reading of *Upon Appleton House*, for example, McColley claims that Marvell's language "offer[s] abundant perceptual experience that enlarges the human continuum of mind, body, and spirit" (14). In keeping with a refusal of such distinctions, vitalists—"who objected to the separation of matter and spirit" and for whom "all matter is living" (6)—elaborate the assumptions of monism by exploring the similarities and continuities between human and non-human life. The linguistic dimension of this endeavor is central to McColley's argument; poets are the crucial players in the

drama of what used to be called the scientific revolution, because poets devise a “language [that is] responsive, in sound and form as well as image and thought, to the lives of plants, animals, elements, and places—which can help the way we speak and the earth we care for heal each other” (7).

Chapter Two, “Earth, Mining, Monotheism, and Mountain Theology,” describes various projectors who, despite their occasional sensitivity to the earth’s fragility, nevertheless perpetuate environmental degradation in their eagerness to extract and profit from mineral ore. Henry Vaughan serves, alongside Lady Anne Conway and Margaret Cavendish, as a counter to the forces threatening the earth’s integrity. These poets give voice to the life of the land, rendering vital—alive—the stones, flowers, and animals that animate their poetry. Chapter Three, “Air, Water, Woods,” uses a similar technique, juxtaposing the work of projectors and poets such that petitioners for fen drainage compete with Michael Drayton and “The Water Poet” John Taylor in a contest over how to manage the “Terraqueous Globe” (85). As McColley attends to the political implications of the environmental issues she addresses, she notes that “It would be tempting but wrong to divide these viewpoints [about nature] politically between royalists, like Cowley and Waller, and supporters of Parliament, like Milton and Marvell” (15). Thus, in her discussion of air pollution in Chapter Three, John Evelyn emerges as the royalist champion of the environment, and analysis of his *Fumifugium* helps to set the scene in which a politically volatile, and resource-depleted, England compelled members of opposing parties to devise solutions to a shared ecological dilemma.

Chapters Four and Five explore theological debates about whether matter is imbued with divinity. The former, entitled “Hylozoic Poetry: The Lives of Plants,” introduces the theological concept of *hylozoism*, building upon its *OED* definition as “the theory that matter is endowed with life.” By tracing the term’s etymological variants, whose Greek root, *hyle*, means both matter and wood, McColley develops an ingenious theory that “Christian vitalist poets retain a hylozoic sense of the origins of matter and the materials of language in their words and forms” (110). In close readings of Vaughan, Milton, and Marvell, she traces the poetic response to physico-theological debates waged among the likes of Catholic priest Pierre Gassendi and the

Platonist Ralph Cudworth. She demonstrates how each poet, in his own way, intimates that the same (divine) matter constitutes both plants—especially trees—and humans. The subsequent chapter, “Zoic Poetry: Animals, Ornithology, and the Ethics of Empathy,” notes the era’s enthusiasm for animal specimen (on view, for example, in John Tradescant’s personal museum) and then explores a poetic tendency to seek inspiration rather than profit in the contemplation of animal life. Milton figures prominently in this section; McColley argues, “He presents Eden not only as a paradise lost by the original sin but as an arena of original righteousness to be renewed” (149). McColley then elaborates empathetic impulses toward animals in Chapter Six, “Animal Ethics and Radical Justice.” Suturing together discussions of Aristotle, Plutarch, the bible, and early-modern theologians such as John Calvin and Godfrey Goodman, she implies that poets articulate the most effective resistance to species abuse because they “awaken human consciences to the effects of violence on other species and its possible relation to violence toward our own” (195).

There is much to sympathize with in McColley’s treatment of the subject at hand. Scholars who are skeptical of a presentist approach may resist her claim that “Seventeenth-century England had the same ‘environmental’ problems we have today” (2). Others might wish for greater synthesis of the lengthy passages quoting various theologians and natural historians and philosophers. Nevertheless, she amply demonstrates that the poets in her study awaken us to aspects of nature and language that we might otherwise never experience. It is unfortunate that her book was not edited more carefully; typos, missing words, and irregularities in font size distract readers from her complex ideas. But curious readers will no doubt be rewarded by McColley’s insights into early-modern sensibilities that commune with nature.

Heather Dubrow. *The Challenges of Orpheus: Lyric Poetry and Early Modern England*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008. x + 293 pp. \$49.95. Review by JANE HEDLEY, BRYN MAWR COLLEGE.

Among scholars of the lyric, and especially of Renaissance lyric poetry, Heather Dubrow is surely the most flexibly-minded. Like her