

A review essay of Zachary McLeod Hutchins, *Inventing Eden: Primitivism, Millennialism, and the Making of New England*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 344 pp. \$74.00. ISBN: 9780199998142.

It may seem like one of the oldest stories told of the early days of Anglo-American culture and identity formation: colonial Europeans "discovering" the paradise from which their two supposed ancestors were ejected. Zachary McLeod Hutchins brings this topic to new life in his book, however, both through a style of writing that seems effortless and a remarkable knowledge of the primary material. Linking the fields of religion and literature, this study is part of a larger trend of increasing interest in cross-disciplinary work between the two areas. Moreover, it fills a significant gap in tracing the development of the idea of Eden across two centuries of writings and propounds the significance of Biblical thought in American culture in general. As Hutchins states in his introduction, "despite th[e] recurring critical tendency to frame early American culture in terms of Eden, scholars have yet to systematically articulate the ways in which diverse beliefs underlying this symbol of prelapsarian innocence and perfection shaped colonial life and letters" (6).

The book is divided into seven chapters, each one devoted to a specific theme. Chapter one, "Paradise Explained," endeavours to cover the development of the Edenic idea from the time of Christopher Columbus' landing on the shores of the West Indies to the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony by John Winthrop. Furthermore, it provides a much-needed clarification of the concept of Eden and its distinction from adjacent notions such as Paradise, Arcadia, and Utopia. The foundation of the entire book lies in this definition; it might therefore have been even better placed in the introduction so as to clarify issues on this point from the very beginning. Chapter two charts the first decades of colonization, during which the ecological view of the New World changed from that of abundant paradise to a bleaker vision, as the natural surroundings changed in response to the behaviour of the settlers.

In chapter three, the focus shifts from milieu to the human body. It investigates how medicine and morality are interconnected, specifically in regard to the bodily humours. Furthermore, it looks at the implications of women's association with Eve and her contribution to the Fall. This in itself is a subject on which a lot is left to be said, despite its continuation in chapter four – which otherwise deals with seventeenth-century philosophy of science and its impact on the founders of Harvard – and its recurrence in chapter six. However, it should be pointed out that Hutchins does not claim to make any assumption on the whole as regards writing about gender in colonial New England; the text does what it sets out to do in that it looks at the relation between Edenic thought and specific writers, in this case primarily Anne Bradstreet, whose work is considered in a truly original and thoroughly respectful way. Chapter four digs deep into the details of her writing and finds that, remarkably, her texts propose that women are able to gain wisdom in ways in which men cannot. Bradstreet's oeuvre suggests that even the great Solomon did not have the capacity, apparently inherent in women,

for learning through art. Hutchins argues that this theory stems from Bradstreet's attempt to grapple with the continuing identification of women with Eve and her problematic desire for knowledge: "Eve's failure in the garden forced her to reinvent a woman's approach to wisdom." (131)

The text moves seamlessly from the discussion of the acquisition of knowledge on to chapter five, "Translating Paradise," which investigates the colonialists' plans for linguistic transformation in the new world, where a remodelled English would resemble the language that was spoken in the original garden of Eden—a language that, moreover, was believed to form the key to restoring Adam's Edenic wisdom. Chapter six continues the discussion of Edenic linguistics by exploring a shift in the frequency of the use of certain metaphors for conversion; during the colonial era, the fashion changed from applying the imagery of pilgrimage to that of new birth. This chapter offers a closer look at the conversion story and other writings of the theologian Jonathan Edwards, which will be of use to anyone studying colonial religion in general, and conversion narratives in particular.

The attempt to briefly cover the subject of Native American bodies in relation to humoral medicine – which is brought up in chapter three as one aspect of 'other-fashioning' as opposed to 'self-fashioning' – is allotted a rather limited amount of space and leaves the reader at somewhat of a loss. The topic is perhaps not treated with as much attention as it deserves and it prompts the question of whether or not there is previous research that has already covered the matter. If so, a reference, or two, to other work on the issue, as a suggestion for those who wish to engage in further reading, would not have been amiss. The section on witchcraft is also very interesting, but, again, does not go deep enough to give the reader that sense of attention to detail which is otherwise the hallmark of the book. The intricate relation between medicine and religion is understood but not expanded upon, and the supposed millenarian portent associated with the appearance of witchcraft, which suggests to Hutchins that "feminine bodies became a litmus test for the possibility of recovering paradise" (86), is only fleetingly delineated. While deeper reflections on the hegemonic structure, resulting power struggles, and further implications surrounding these and neighbouring topics may be beyond the scope of the book, it is difficult to read this sequence without wondering whether it would have been best left out until it could be treated fully in a volume of its own.

Chapter seven includes a section on another topic related to social hierarchy: abolitionist argumentation. Hutchins provides a fine overview of various colonial writers, both white and African American, who reasoned that all men are descended from Adam and should, therefore, be free. It is also pointed out that the white population around the time of the American Revolution were still largely in favour of slavery and that some quite illogically attempted to turn around the Edenic narrative argument and claim that the Fall was the very reason for the enslavement of African Americans.

The final chapter goes on to describe the effort to build a new Eden after the Revolutionary War, the related development of the Masonic tradition, and the idea of George Washington as the second Adam. Here, the book brings an interesting angle of America as Eden to light, which simultaneously commemorates and questions the foundations of the state. The independence from the United Kingdom led the inhabitants of the newly formed United

States to envision a paradisiacal future; “citizens remained confident that the war was only a chaotic prelude to impending perfection.” (231) The swiftness with which this dream was shattered is a testament to its naivety.

The author holds that many critics have overlooked the fact that writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would have believed in the verity of Eden’s existence. This assumption still lay as a foundation for the importance and relevance of Edenic narrative in later American culture: “In treating Adam and Eve as mythic archetypes rather than actual people alluded to and reinvented by antebellum writers who often believed in their historicity, critics of nineteenth-century American literature regularly misrepresent Eden.” (249-50) This idea seems more important to Hutchins towards the end of his text than in the introduction, where he remarks that he has written about the topic elsewhere. What could have been one of the main arguments of the book – the suggestion that there has been a widespread misconception of Edenic narrative – is mentioned only briefly at the start of the text and is not fully explicated until the epilogue. While Hutchins otherwise frames his work well with an informative and thought-provoking introduction and epilogue, it could have been even more successful had the author inserted carefully placed reminders of his main tenets throughout the book. In lieu of this, the text as a whole seems far more descriptive than argumentative. However, it is no less a ground-breaking piece of research; the work neatly sums up the history of the Edenic idea in America over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a valuable and stylistically attractive way, and furthermore argues for the importance of religious belief in general and Edenic narrative in particular as a basis on which American culture and identity has been built ever since, which is indeed an admirable accomplishment.

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