

LITERATURE AND NATURAL THEOLOGY IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Guiding readers through the diverse forms of natural theology expressed in seventeenth-century English literature, Katherine Calloway reveals how, in ways that have not yet been fully recognized, authors such as Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Cavendish, Hutchinson, Milton, Marvell, and Bunyan describe, promote, challenge, and even practice natural theology in their poetic works. She simultaneously improves our understanding of an important and still-influential intellectual movement and deepens our appreciation of multiple major literary works. “Natural theology,” as it was popularly understood, changed dramatically in England over the seventeenth century, from the application of natural light to divine things to a newer, more brittle, understanding of the enterprise as the exclusive use of reason and observation to prove theological conclusions outside of any context of faith. These poets profoundly complicate the story, collectively demonstrating that some forms of natural theology lend themselves to poetry or imaginative literature rather than prose.

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Baylor University



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For Jeffrey and Daniel

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	x
Introduction	i
PART I METAPHYSICAL POETS	
1 A “Metaphorical God” and the Book of Nature: John Donne on Natural Theology	27
2 “I Summon’d Nature”: George Herbert and Henry Vaughan on Science and Nature	61
3 “Mutters of Assent” or “Lectures for the Eye”: Natural Theology in the Devotional Lyrics of Herbert and Vaughan	84
PART II IMAGINED WORLDS	
4 “Architect of Wonders”: Creation in Cavendish, Du Bartas, Hutchinson, Denham, and Marvell	115
5 “His Footstep Trace”: The Natural Theology of <i>Paradise Lost</i>	149
6 The Misunderstood Spider: John Bunyan Reads the Book of Nature	178
Epilogue: Literature and Natural Theology at the Dawn of the Boyle Lectures	215
<i>Works Cited</i>	219
<i>Index</i>	238

Figures

3.1	Title page and first page from John Ray's <i>Wisdom of God</i> (1691)	<i>page</i> 98
4.1	Title page and "Corona Dedicatoria" from Josuah Sylvester's <i>Divine Weekes and Works</i> (1605)	124
4.2	A comparison of three creation epics	132

Preface

When I first began work on my previous book, *Natural Theology in the Scientific Revolution* (2014), I intended to write literary criticism drawing together early modern English science, theology, and imaginative literature. In the end there proved to be so much to say about natural theology itself that I wrote intellectual history instead, exploring diverse and lively prose works of natural theology penned during the century that gave rise to the modern design argument. In the introduction to that book, I wrote that the metaphysical questions those natural theologians confronted “might prove to be best answered not in prose, but in poetry,” adding that other writers with whom natural theologians were in conversation were trying that experiment. In this book, I come to consider the contribution of poets to this important chapter in the story of natural theology. Like the prose authors I considered in my earlier book, they are a lively and diverse group, with much to say about how the natural world can shed light on its maker. Unlike (most of) those prose authors, these poets are still widely anthologized, taught in undergraduate classrooms, and – in my experience – even more fun to read.

Acknowledgments

Getting to the point where I had something to say about authors spanning the seventeenth century was a group effort: kind colleagues offered feedback on various chapters at various stages of composition. Chapter 1 appeared in an earlier form in *Studies in Philology* 116, no. 1 (2019), pp. 124–58, and Chapter 5 in *Milton Studies* 55 (2014), pp. 53–85. I would like to thank both these journals, as well as Cambridge University Press, for allowing me to publish revised versions of the aforementioned articles in this book. I am also very grateful to the two anonymous readers who gave generous and insightful feedback on the entire book, and to the anonymous readers at *Studies in Philology* and *Milton Studies* for their judicious comments on the earlier versions of Chapters 1 and 5. Beyond these anonymous readers, I want to thank the colleagues whose names I know: Paul Stanwood, Maurice Hunt, Richard Strier, Dennis Danielson, the late Roger Pooley, and the several members of a departmental writing group at Baylor. This book is much better for their constructive criticism, and any shortcomings that remain are in spite of their help. I am grateful to Baylor University for supporting my work with research leave in the fall of 2021, and to Emily Hockley and George Paul Laver at Cambridge University Press and my indexer, Susan Penny, for their indispensable help at the later stages of the project. My cover image was made available by the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, and the facsimile pages appearing in the text are reproduced with the kind permission of the British Library. Finally, I want to acknowledge my husband, Shinjiro Sueda. Shin contributed his expertise to this book's cover and its single bar graph, but that contribution is a small fraction of his gracious and unfailing support of my work.