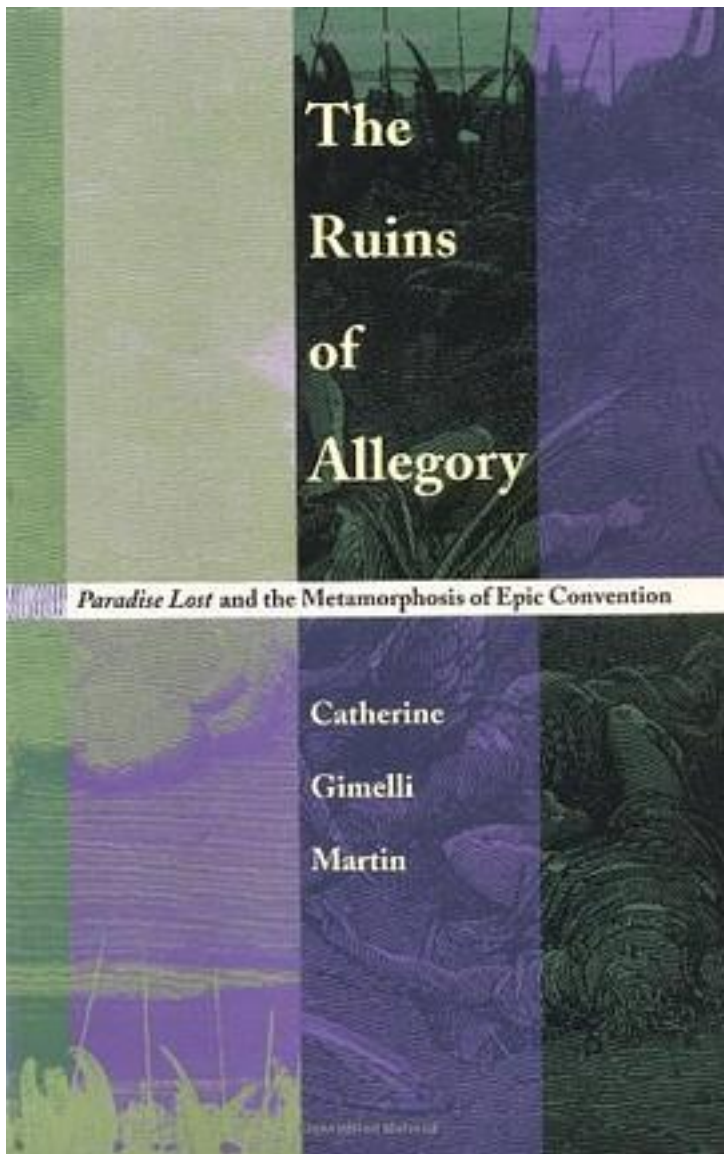


The Ruins of Allegory



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著者:Catherine Gimelli Martin

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In this reexamination of the allegorical dimensions of "Paradise Lost," Catherine Martin presents Milton's poem as a prophecy foretelling the end of one culture and its replacement by another. She argues that rather than merely extending the allegorical tradition as defined by Augustine, Dante, and Spenser, Milton has written a meta-allegory that stages a confrontation with an allegorical formalism that is either dead or no longer philosophically viable. By both critiquing and recasting the traditional form, Milton describes the transition to a new epoch that promises the possibility of human redemption in history.

Martin shows how "Paradise Lost," written at the threshold of the enormous imaginative shift that accompanied the Protestant, scientific, and political revolutions of the seventeenth century, conforms to a prophetic baroque model of allegory similar to that outlined by Walter Benjamin. As she demonstrates, Milton's experimentation with baroque forms radically reformulates classical epic, medieval romance, and Spenserian allegory to allow for both a naturalistic, empirically responsible understanding of the universe and for an infinite and incomprehensible God. In this way, the resulting poetic world of "Paradise Lost" is like Milton's God, an allegorical "ruin" in which the divine is preserved but at the price of a loss of certainty. Also, as Martin suggests, the poem affirmatively anticipates modernity by placing the chief hope of human progress in the fully self-authored subject.

Maintaining a dialogue with a critical tradition that extends from Johnson and Coleridge to the best contemporary Milton scholarship, Martin sets "Paradise Lost" in both the early modern and the postmodern worlds. "Ruins of Allegory" will greatly interest all Milton scholars, as well as students of literary criticism and early modern studies.

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目录:

[The Ruins of Allegory_ 下载链接1](#)

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Milton

Allegory

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