George McClure. *Doubting the Divine in Early Modern Europe: The Revival of Momus, the Agnostic God*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. 268. ISBN 13-9781108470278.

Besides its thematic and dating-period value, *Doubting the Divine in Early Modern Europe* may not be much of a surprising statement and choice of title for a book such as this one. The history of early modernity is fuelled—among other breeding-grounds—by anti-religious feelings and ideas, which contributed to, and were the harbingers of, major ensuing revolutions in Europe and elsewhere. The subtitle, however, may sound more surprising and even intriguing, *The Revival of Momus, the Agnostic God*. There are several reasons why the subtitle should draw the interest of various types of scholars and even a certain general reader. One principal reason is the mention of ‘agnostic,’ which has once again become a popular attitude along with the revival of religious dogmas, and a second reason is the implied notion that such a metaphysical tradition, or intellectual creed, has a god of its own and that somehow the ‘agnostic’ perspective may be further traced to the creation of Momus, the alleged “Agnostic God.”

McClure neatly structures the material in major literary and historical periods: the Classical tradition of the Greek Pantheon, the Renaissance of Leon Battista Alberti’s *Momus* novel, the Reformation Momus, the “Momus” in the “Execution of Giordano Bruno” chapter, Milton’s Luciferian Momus, the “God of Modern Criticks,” and concludes with a peregrination on the surviving Momus of modernism. As a standard-length work, the book is rich in descriptive content, detailed analysis and references, and includes corpulent bibliography and an index that is chiefly a list of names discussed or cited in the text. In his discussion throughout the book, the author invites the reader to view Western literary history, and particularly the critical tradition, through the lenses of the metaphysical and fictional Momus figure. Such invitation recurs frequently at different points within the periodization discussed in the various sections: “We might ponder whether Socrates himself, as a tireless and annoying critic of his fellow Athenians, was a type of Momus figure” (7). Regarding the Renaissance, he speaks of the antihero figure in Alberti’s eponymous novel, and of Alberti’s silence concerning God, as evidence not only of the resurgence of scepticism, but also of an epiphany and of the maturation of anti-clerical feelings and diatribes, which were fully exposed during later periods such as the Reformation. The elasticity with which the ‘Momus’ meme and epithet is employed becomes colourful in the section devoted

to Niccolò Franco (1515–70) and Anton Francesco Doni (1513–74) on pages 102–122, in which doubts are joined by “cynicism and materialism,” and religious “mysteries” are turned into “paradoxes.” In the chapter entitled after Giordano Bruno—who is said to have “played with fire” by enacting the Momus-like critic—the author concludes that Spinoza’s ideologies of pantheism and naturalism may have been aided by his identification of God’s challenger “as Momus” when studying the Hebrew Bible’s book of Job (143). With writers such as Tomaso Garzoni (1549–89) and Jonathan Swift (1667–1745), the nature of the Momus meme transits to that of a fully developed literary-device, with parallels that see “writers as gods, readers as devotees, critics as priests (or heretics), literary canon as divine pantheon” (181), and in modernism, into the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, as a ‘literary critic’. The author argues that the “evolution” of literary figures from ancient mythologies, like the Greek Momus who went from godship to secular trope, may have a literary, psychological, and even an anthropological function, which attests to the ongoing agnostic and self-affirming character of human nature into modernism. In support of his position, he periodically refers to the “frank speech” (*parrhesia*) of the critics and contrarians of socio-cultural traditions—and in favour of change—as the challenge posed by *logos* to *mythos*, that is, the challenge that rationality poses to authority.

The main proposition of the book has much merit. It offers a sort of hermeneutic key into the significance of the “lesser gods” that have informed the legends and tales of our Western literary canon, and traces back to them the praxis of what is presented as humanity’s intellectual and pragmatic attempt to temper out the vagaries of unbridled authority. The role of “frank speech,” or “free speech”—as we may also refer to the same idea in contemporary times—has never been out of fashion, only under threat. What may be less convincing in the book is the uncritical, or not-quite-agnostic, treatment of levels or categories of falsification. The author appears to forgo occasionally of the Momus’ meme for craftiness and critical analyses of various periods’ literary works. In chapter five, titled “Milton’s Lucifer,” the author writes that “no one to my knowledge has ever suggested the archetype of Momus as a template for Lucifer” (146), whereas the well attested Judeo literary tradition, writings, and exegesis, which precede those of the Greeks, already spoke and wrote of “the Satan” and “falling luciferous” figures—which could have ‘migrated’ and influenced the imagination of later civilizations. Likewise, in chapter one, titled “The Classical Tradition,” the author appears to be willing to overlook an erroneous association and chronological link. McClure makes mention of two

unrelated persons—both named Celsus—for the purpose of drawing a parallel between different historical periods, and between different genres, historical accounts versus fictional tales, due to what are perceived as “some similarities” (27, and note 80). A modern Momus-like arbiter would have probably required greater critical focus and nuance. Among the classic texts listed in the bibliography, the absence of Jaeger’s *The Theology of the Early Greek Philosophers* (Oxford, 1947) may be felt here.

The ‘agnostic’ attitude, which is implied in the book’s title, constitutes a relatively new perspective on the world. ‘Agnostic’ by definition refers to those who claim to not know whether or not God exists. It may also refer to those who abstain from expressing any view on metaphysical and religious matters, and who profess to ‘not know’ that which is beyond what can be apprehended through one’s senses. Tracing such attitudes to a garrulous and occasionally irreverent character of Hesiod’s *Theogonies* may not be exactly the kind of god worshiped by a modern agnostic.

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Josephine Jungic. *Giuliano de’ Medici: Machiavelli’s Prince in Life and Art.* Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018. Pp. xii, 312. ISBN 9780773553200.

In her extensively researched study on Giuliano de’ Medici (1479–1516), Josephine Jungic rehabilitates Clarice Orsini and Lorenzo the Magnificent’s youngest son against the historical tradition that has branded him as “weak, ineffectual, and thoroughly dissolute” (4). She cogently demonstrates Giuliano’s involvement in the politics of Florence to ensure the survival of the republican institutions in opposition to most of his kin. The Medici intended to restore their hereditary rulership after the return from exile in September 1512. Such clashing views of Florence’s destiny are at the heart of the biased portrait of Giuliano in sixteenth-century pro-Medici sources like *Dialogo della Mutazione di Firenze* by Bartolomeo Cerretani. These documents deny Giuliano any personal undertaking in contemporary events, suggesting his compliance with the family’s political objectives at best, and accusing him of the utmost indifference at worst. Due to his