This excellent monograph is essentially an introduction to Emanuel Swedenborg’s *Secrets of Heaven (Arcana Coelestia)* and its early reception. Hanegraaff begins by rejecting approaches that attempt to situate authors in terms of simplistic dichotomies (e.g., “religion vs. reason” or “the Enlightenment vs. the occult”), in favor of an approach that involves ‘clarification by means of complexification’. Swedenborg is a complex and multifaceted figure who does not easily fit into ready-made categories.

The book moves from the complexities of *Secrets of Heaven*, to a different sort of complexity: the complicated history of Oetinger’s response to Swedenborg. This story is essentially one of a man who was drawn to Swedenborg, struggled with him, and eventually rejected him. The complexity involved in Kant’s reception of Swedenborg, with which the book ends, is of an entirely different order. Kant too struggled with Swedenborg, and like Oetinger was attracted and repulsed by him. Kant’s *Dreams of a Spirit-See* documents this ambivalence. But Hanegraaff’s account of the work leaves the reader with the strong impression that, beneath a great deal of often vulgar ridicule, Kant is telling us that he sees something valuable in Swedenborg, and that he is in fact open to the possibility of “spirit seeing”. In short, Hanegraaff offers us complexities within complexities, but his approach is highly illuminating.

The first “perspective” on *Secrets of Heaven* is provided by Swedenborg himself, with the assistance of Hanegraaff. In 1741 or 1742 Swedenborg wrote a short work entitled *A Hieroglyphic Key to Natural and Spiritual Arcana by way of Representations and Correspondences*. This work, as Hanegraaff points out, is in fact a key to understanding *Secrets of Heaven*. It sets up three “levels of meaning”: the natural, the human, and the divine (this is, in reality, not so much a hermeneutic distinction as it is an ontological one). Swedenborg argues that fundamental concepts pertaining to the natural world have a conceptual (or categorical) analogue in the human world, and another in the divine. For example, in the natural world the concept of *conatus* (motion) is analogous to human will (action), and to divine providence (divine operation). Swedenborg develops twenty further examples to illustrate this analogical relationship between the three “realms”.

Each realm is distinct and irreducible to the others. Further, Swedenborg—in keeping with his strict dualism—argues that knowledge of the natural realm teaches us nothing about the human soul or about God. However, knowledge
of the human realm can provide us with a kind of “second best” knowledge of the divine. Swedenborg believes that there are in fact two ways to know the divine: by direct, mystical contact with the divine itself, and through the interpretation of the Bible, God’s word as expressed to humanity. Needless to say, the former kind of knowledge is the privilege of a small elect. Therefore the second route is the one most accessible to human beings, if they have the patience for it. Swedenborg believes that through the discovery of the inner meaning of each scriptural verse we can achieve through human language an indirect knowledge of the divine. He rejects the Enlightenment approach of reading scripture as allegory. Instead, Swedenborg regards the Bible as a kind of divine “code” in which every word or phrase has a symbolic significance that may be wholly different from its mundane meaning. The bulk of Secrets of Heaven is occupied with this exegesis, which constitutes Swedenborg’s exploration of the second or “human” realm, and indirect exploration of the divine (the natural realm having been thoroughly canvassed by Swedenborg the scientist in his younger days). His direct exploration of the divine realm is represented by the sections of Secrets of Heaven entitled “Accounts of Memorable Occurrences”, in which Swedenborg details the “mystical visions” or unmediated acquaintance with the divine for which he is famous. Hanegraaff points out, correctly, that the real source of Swedenborg’s appeal is these visions, not his extraordinarily detailed Biblical exegesis.

Approximately half of Hanegraaff’s book is devoted to an account of Secrets of Heaven, using the Hieroglyphic Key as a framework. This portion of the book is self-contained and makes an excellent brief introduction to Secrets of Heaven.

Enter Friedrich Christoph Oetinger. A Boehmean and Christian Kabbalist, Oetinger was partly attracted to Swedenborg because he saw in him a fellow opponent of the allegorical school of Biblical exegesis advocated by Leibniz and Wolff. No doubt Oetinger, like many others, was also intrigued by Swedenborg’s visions. However, from the beginning Oetinger’s relationship to Swedenborg was ambivalent, and Hanegraaff’s text explores the twists and turns of their relationship—and the toll it took on Oetinger’s life and reputation. To begin with, Oetinger could not accept Swedenborg’s dualism: his strict separation of the natural and spiritual realms. Oetinger, like Boehme, was a panentheist who believed that nature is a moment of the being of God.

Further, Oetinger came to believe that Swedenborg’s brand of Biblical exegesis, while not as vulgar as that of the rationalist allegorists, was nevertheless fundamentally in error. One of the great merits of Hanegraaff’s book is that it reminds us that in addition to being a theosopher Oetinger was also, oddly enough, a Protestant Biblical literalist who believed that Christ would return