

Article

# *Pietas in Patriam*: Milton's Classical Patriotism

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**Abstract:** The subject of this essay is the relation between Milton's classical patriotism and his English nationalism. It has two principal aims. First, it sets out to examine the degree to which the affective or emotional quality of Milton's patriotism was shaped by the classics, especially Cicero and Virgil. For all the energy that has gone into studying Milton's classical republicanism, there has been relatively little interest in that political movement's central concern with patriotism: few, for instance, have shown much interest in David Norbrook's acknowledgment that "English republicanism emerged in part as a vehicle for English nationalism." And second, through this focus on the classical aspect of Milton's patriotism, it argues that far from being neutralized or undercut, Milton's nascent nationalism was actually enabled and intensified by his internationalism, an internationalism that is most graphically illustrated by his engagement with Italy and its role in recovering the classics.

**Keywords:** Milton; Cicero; Virgil; Dati; Buonmattei; Manso; patriotism; nationalism; classics; eloquence; abjection

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Et quae tanta fuit Romam tibi causa videndi ?

Libertas.

Virgil, *Eclogue I* (Virgil 1959)

Whatever [Milton] wrote against the Monarchie was out of no animosity to the King's person, or owt of any faction or interest, but out of a pure Zeale for the Liberty of Mankind, which he thought would be greater under a fre state than under a Monarchiall government. His being so conversant in Livy and the Roman authors, and the greatness he saw donne by the Roman commonwealth, and the virtue their great Commanders induc't him to.

Aubrey, *Brief Lives* (Aubrey 1982)

The increasingly deep engagement with Milton's controversial writings since the publication of the eight-volume Yale edition of his prose between 1953 and 1982 has made it clear just how complex and sometimes intensely conflicted a thinker Milton is—not only in his prose but also in his poetry.<sup>1</sup> At the center of his intellectual struggles are the overlapping but often rival imperatives of two great European movements, the Protestant Reformation, on the one hand, and the *studia humanitatis*, or the rise of humanist education, on the other. While the one has its face set resolutely against the wilderness of the *saeculum* and longs for transcendence, the other is more than willing to imagine how that wilderness is "paradizable", how it might be transformed into a this-worldly garden through what Milton calls the repair of our first parents' ruins (Cf. *Of Education*, Milton 1953–1982, vol. 2, pp. 366–67).<sup>2</sup> While the one insists on the bondage of the will, the other glories in its agency. Milton is both a deeply religious person and at the same time an energetically engaged secular thinker: like so many contemporaries, he appears to live simultaneously in divided



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and distinguished worlds. This central, unremitting opposition, both elements of which are committed to the universal, is complicated in Milton's case by his passionate commitment to the particular, in the specific form of his own national community—"our deare Mother England" (*Of Reformation*, Milton 1953–1982, vol. 1, p. 585). In one of his last pre-Restoration pamphlets, *A Treatise of Civil Power*, for instance, where he insists on the absolute transcendence of religion—that is, the universal need for conscience to make its own way in the world, guided only by Scripture and the Holy Spirit and emphatically unrestrained by the power of the state—he somewhat surprisingly foregrounds his love of country. His treatise is addressed to the Protectorate Parliament of Richard Cromwell in February 1659. Since the treatise's advice belongs to "all Christian magistrates equally", Milton acknowledges, it should have been written in Latin, "the common language of Christendom", but "*natural dutie and affection*" have led him to confine and dedicate it "first to my own nation" and so write it in English (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 7, p. 239, my emphasis).<sup>3</sup> Obviously, there are pragmatic, political reasons for writing this act of persuasion in English. It is Parliament, so he believes, that has the actual power to liberate the invisible church from the force of the all-too-visible state. But what exactly does he mean by "natural dutie and affection" to "my own nation" and why does he expect his imagined audience to recognize an appeal to such obligations as self-evidently reasonable? Is the *pietas in Patriam*, the duty and affection, he and his imagined audience feel for the nation assumed to be of a different order, one that is more natural and, therefore, more immediately pressing or real, than their commitment to Christendom as a whole?

In this essay, I want to discuss two interrelated issues. First, I want to examine the degree to which the deep-rooted, affective or emotional quality of Milton's patriotism was shaped by ancient Rome and the central role of its culture in the early modern *studia humanitatis*. It seems extraordinary that, for all the energy that has gone into studying Milton's classical republicanism over the last 30 years, there has been so little interest in that political movement's central concern with patriotism: few, for instance, have shown much interest in David Norbrook's acknowledgment that "English republicanism emerged in part as a vehicle for English nationalism" (*Writing the English Republic*, Norbrook 1999, p. 20). This, it seems to me, has much to do with the centrifugal orientation of contemporary republican and archipelagic criticism, which I try to explain below. Second, through this focus on the classical aspect of Milton's patriotism, I want to suggest that far from being neutralized or undercut, Milton's nascent nationalism was actually enabled and intensified by his internationalism, especially by his early experience of Italy. The first part of the essay focuses on Milton's internationalism, the second on his classical patriotism itself.

## 1. Part One

### 1.1. *The Impact of Italy*

Italy had an extraordinary impact on Milton's imagination. This is certainly how writers as diverse as scholars like Catherine Gimelli Martin and popular biographers like A. N. Wilson see it. For Martin, Milton's time in Italy was "entirely happy" (Martin 2017, p. 2); it was, in fact, his "adopted homeland" (p. 5). Similarly for Wilson, in his stimulating, if often dramatically unreliable, biography of Milton, the young poet's arrival in Italy was a kind of "homecoming" (Wilson 1984, p. 73). Wilson sees that arrival in the spring of 1638 as an escape from provincialism into the sophisticated international world to which by learning, language, and avocation he really belonged. Italy, in particular, was the land whose humanist traditions and ancient stories had done so much to shape the young Milton's imagination: "The vast divide between the classical Mediterranean world of Virgil and the narrow confines of seventeenth-century England", Wilson explains, had already been bridged "by the wealth of Milton's reading" (p. 72). Although Wilson's Milton, "a somewhat exquisite, infinitely intelligent and very beautiful youth" (p. 16), sounds a bit too much like a character from Evelyn Waugh, his sense of Milton's interest in Italy is not misleading. A decade earlier in a student exercise at Cambridge, Milton had indeed already imagined the excitement of a classics-oriented journey to Italy. When it comes to education,

so the undergraduate Milton had urged his audience, forget Duns Scotus and listen to the eloquent advice of Cicero, forget the arid quibbles of scholastic philosophy and give free rein to your imagination: “how much better were it”, Milton says, “to let your eyes wander as it were over all the lands depicted on the map”, there “to behold the places trodden by the heroes of old, to range over the regions made famous by wars, by triumphs, and even by the tales of poets of renown, now to traverse the stormy Adriatic, now to climb unharmed the slopes of fiery Aetna, then to spy out the customs of mankind and those states which are well ordered” (Prolusion 3, [Milton 1953–1982](#), vol. 1, p. 246). The sense of wonder he experienced on arrival, so Wilson feels, must have been a lot like that of John Evelyn six years later, on first seeing Genoa: “Never was any artificial scene more beautiful to the eye of the beholder” (qtd. [Wilson 1984](#), p. 80).

As if to emphasize the liberating impact of Italy, Milton’s more recent and far more reliable biographers, Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns, call attention to the bleakness of the year preceding Milton’s grand tour. All the anguish and abjection so evident in *Lycidas*, Milton’s elegy for his drowned contemporary, Edward King, appears to have been precipitated by an accumulation of traumatic blows—the death of his mother, the legal troubles of his father, the humiliation of the family implicit in the findings of an episcopal visitation to the local church, and not least the strikingly intolerant, public dismemberment of three godly ministers.<sup>4</sup> As Campbell and Corns describe Milton’s landing at Livorno, they themselves seem to share his sense of liberation: “He had arrived at last in Tuscany . . . [Here in Livorno] the grand dukes had populated the new city by extending invitations to settle to Italians, Armenians, Germans, Greeks, Jews, Moors, Persians, Portuguese, Spaniards, Turks, and ‘other men of the East and West’; Milton had never experienced religious toleration on such a scale” (p. 108). For Martin, Wilson, Campbell and Corns, and many others, both artists and scholars, Milton is nothing if not cosmopolitan; the kind of evidence that makes their case most pointedly are moments like Milton’s reaction to Florence: “In that city”, Milton recalls in 1654, “which I have always admired above all others because of the elegance, not just of its tongue, but also of its wit, I lingered for about two months” (*Defensio Secunda*, [Milton 1953–1982](#), vol. 4, p. 615). If the language and wit, the eloquence and elegance, of the city enthralled him, equally so, it seems, he captivated the city, or at least those Florentine intellectuals who came to know him—so much so that when he returned from Rome the following year, his new friends appeared “as anxious to see me as if it were my native land to which I had returned” ([Milton 1953–1982](#), vol. 4, p. 619). The influence of Italy on Milton was lifelong and the degree to which it produced a form of cultural relativism in him is more than evident in his continuing friendship with Italian intellectuals and his membership of the republic of letters. Nothing captures the depth and liberating force of Milton’s international experience more succinctly than his remarkable correspondence a decade or so later with one of those Italian friends, the young Florentine academician and brilliant student of Galileo, Carlo Dati. But, as it does so, it also opens up other perspectives.

### 1.2. International Milton

Sometime in the early spring of 1647, Milton, who had not heard from Dati since last seeing him in Florence eight years before, was overjoyed to receive a letter from him: “How new and great a joy fills me, my Charles [mi Carole], at the unexpected arrival of your letter”, he wrote back on 21 April ([Milton 1953–1982](#), vol. 2, p.762). Milton’s response is both restrained in its carefully crafted composition and revealing in its emotional intensity—not unlike the kind of letter he would have written to his deceased boyhood friend whose name was so similar, Charles Diodati. He wrote in classical Latin and spoke as one humanist intellectual to another. Freed for a moment from the burdens of domestic life, specifically the wearisome company of his extended family, all those “bound to me, whether by accident or by law” ([Milton 1953–1982](#), vol. 2, p. 762), he enters a different world. Not simply the lost world of Florence itself but a new world through which something of its elegance could be recovered, that is, the network of communication that has come to be

known as the “republic of letters”, a metaphorical polity of free and equal citizens, in which the “only dominion [empire] recognized”, says Pierre Bayle in 1700, “is that of truth and reason” (qtd. Maclean 2008, p. 15). The sinews of this republic were the free circulation and interchange of familiar letters, supplemented by more formal scholarly works that treated largely philological, historical, or literary subjects. So established was this polity by Milton’s day that many of its citizens, international scholars like Erasmus or educators like Johann Sturm, had long since given what amounted to implicit instructions on how to participate in its epistolary forum.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, if the republic of letters had any institutional form or overarching constitution, it was in these manuals of instruction and how they were deployed in schools and private academies. Milton had learned well and felt secure that the Latinity of this communication network would protect him from the vulgar misunderstandings of his countrymen and women: he could say things in this world that he could not say in English. As he explained later to a Dutch correspondent, Leo Van Aizema, he wished he had originally published his divorce tracts in Latin since in English, they were routinely distorted by public opinion or common misapprehension—“the vulgar still receive [them]”, he laments, “according to their wont opinions” (Milton 1931–1938, vol. 12, p. 73). He was so proud of his membership in this elite, international community that shortly before his death, he had his collected letters, his familiar letters as opposed to his state letters, published in one volume in May 1674.<sup>6</sup>

Overjoyed as he was, Milton found himself with two specific problems to negotiate in his response, one social and the other, religious. First, he had to explain why he himself had not written in the last eight years. He had, it is true, sent Dati and other Italian friends copies of his poem, *Epitaphium Damonis*, with its eloquent invocation of their consoling friendship (Milton 2008, ll. 135–38), but there had been no personal correspondence. His excuse is more than a little lame—he could not write to every one of his acquaintances in Florence, he said, and choosing only one might appear insulting to the others. He had originally hoped that the gift of his poem would precipitate a response, but to no avail. Now, however, the completely unexpected appearance of Dati’s letter had happily removed that obstacle. The second problem was more difficult.

Milton desperately wants to revive his life-giving friendship with Dati, but the relationship is dependent more than anything else on the exchange and mutual approbation of each other’s literary efforts; however, the only work not in English that Milton now has to offer is the *Poemata*, that is, the Latin section of his 1645 *Poems*. Unfortunately, many of the works in this section are virulently anti-Catholic and Dati is, of course, a devout Catholic. In one poem, for instance, Milton’s miniature epic, *In Quintum Novembris*, he represents the Pope as a fornicating agent of the Devil and Italian Catholics in general as a superstitious, godless mob. The problem is compounded by the fact that Milton had taken the written encomiums given him years before by Dati and several other admirers, and printed them without permission to endorse the book in which these anti-Catholic poems appeared.<sup>7</sup> In his response to Dati, so intense is Milton’s desire to re-enter the republic of letters, or this particular region of the republic, that he bites the bullet and makes a pre-emptive appeal for understanding: “I should have sent [the *Poemata*] long since”, he says, had they not contained “words spoken rather sharply on some pages against the Roman Pope” (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 2, p. 764). Then, somewhat disingenuously identifying his own Protestant vilification of Catholicism with traditional Florentine criticism of the Papacy, he asks Dati to mediate on his behalf with his other Tuscan friends: “Now I beg you to obtain from my other friends (for of you I am certain) that same indulgence to freedom of speech which, as you know, you have been used to granting in the past with singular kindness—I do not mean to your Dante and Petrarch in this case, but to me”. He now craves this indulgence, he says, whenever mention is made in the poems “of your religion according to our custom” (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 2, p. 764). What, in effect, Milton is doing is appealing to Dati to join him as a citizen of the republic of letters, in allowing the principle of civility or common humanity, “singular kindness” or “singulari humanitate” (Milton 1931–1938, vol. 12, p. 50), to override confessional, national, and even family affiliations. Most importantly, in this

appeal, the crucial difference between English Protestantism and Italian Catholicism is reduced, apparently, to a matter of custom, “nostro more” (Milton 1931–1938, vol. 12, p. 50). Although Dati is reluctant to applaud Milton’s “dispraise [disprezzo]” of his religion, he is, however, willing to excuse it since it is offered on “the lips of a friend” (Milton 1931–1938, vol. 12, p. 311).<sup>8</sup> Milton’s and Dati’s relativism in this correspondence is arresting and, were it not for the anachronism, it could, as so many have felt, be E. M. Forster speaking: get a room with a view and only connect.

Even if this interchange is not quite what it seems, Milton’s civility and expressions of delight in Italian humanist culture, however Catholic, are not unusual. One of the figures he most admired in the humanist republic of letters was Pope Urban VIII’s nephew, Cardinal Francesco Barberini. In a letter written from Florence in March 1639 to the Cardinal’s librarian, the Protestant apostate, Lukas Holste, he praises Barberini with an elaborate trope of what we might call “exalting reduction”: Milton clearly loved meeting the Cardinal and feels himself to have been lifted up by the great man’s affable condescension, his “meek, and if I may say so, submissive loftiness of mind, which alone has taught him to raise himself by self-depression” (Milton 1931–1938, vol. 12, p. 45). This is the same trope that Milton will later use to praise Cromwell in *Defensio Secunda* (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 4, p. 682) and that David Norbrook sees as the most telling indication of Milton’s republicanism in *Paradise Lost*. The excited young Milton seems to feel like his character, God the Son, having been exalted by the Father’s self-reduction (*PL Milton* 2008, 5: 828–31, 842–45).<sup>9</sup> Here in Italy, this enabling condescension seems to transcend national and ideological boundaries and Milton’s passionate internationalism seems incontrovertible. Indeed, the sheer breadth of his international orientation could be developed in any number of ways. Besides travel and the republic of letters, such areas as education and diplomacy immediately come to mind. In his 1644 treatise *Of Education*, for instance, he reflects on his own polyglot learning: we are taught foreign languages—nine in his own case, as John Hale suggests (Hale 1997, pp. 6–8)—because no one nation has a monopoly of knowledge, and, if a student has “not studied the solid things” or particular knowledge contained in these languages, “as well as the words and lexicons”, he could no more be esteemed as a learned man than “any yeoman or tradesman competently wise in his mother dialect only” (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 2, pp. 369–70). Even more pointedly, as the new Commonwealth’s Secretary for Foreign Tongues, not only did Milton mediate or explain the English republic to the nations of Europe in his great Latin defenses, but he took part in detailed negotiations with such ideological enemies of England as Catholic Spain. In September 1652, for instance, it is more than likely that it was he who translated the Spanish ambassador Alphonso de Cardenas’s Latin proposals for a treaty with England for the republic’s Council of State.<sup>10</sup> In order to do this it effectively, he would have had no choice but to imagine the issues under debate from the Spanish point of view. In this way, he would have come to experience the evolving protocols of international law directly, and it may well have been here that he gained an immediate and practical respect for the law of nations that was to last him a lifetime. It is easy to understand, then, why for many, this urbane, international Milton, far-seeing and many-minded, no matter how flawed, is the real Milton.

Indeed, for many of these readers, Milton’s English patriotism or nationalism is largely rhetorical. For A. N. Wilson, it is evidence of the way that even “the greatest minds stoop to silliness in times of national emergency”. For Milton, he concedes, “was not above the absurdity of believing that God reveals himself ‘to his servants and, as his manner is, first to his Englishmen’” (p. 72, my emphasis). For Catherine Martin, following Joad Raymond, Milton’s nationalism is something of a chimera: all expressions of national pride are routinely “undercut”, and the truth is that “he desires to heroize not any one ‘people but civility itself’ and villainize ‘the barbarism . . . spread widely among peoples and nations’” (Martin 2017, p. 42). What seems most striking about these sentiments is their inability or reluctance to acknowledge the role that “progressive” developments like the *studia humanitatis* played in the formation of the early modern nation-state. Writing in the same vein, Thomas Corns returns us to the final letter of Milton’s *Epistolarum Familiarium*. This is

the *locus classicus* of Milton's anti-nationalism, the often-quoted letter of August 1666 to Peter Heimbach, in which the now-blind poet famously abjures his commitment to England. Milton takes the virtues that the unctuous Heimbach attributes to him and focuses on "the one you call *Policy*" but which "I would prefer you call *Patriotism*" (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 8, p. 4), that is, "*Pietatem in Patriam*" (Milton 1931–1938, vol. 12, pp. 114–15). While the other virtues have sustained him, he says, Patriotism has led him astray: "having allured me by her lovely name, [Patriotism] has almost expatriated me, as it were". This leads him to conclude, says Corns, that one's *Patria* is "wherever it is well with him" (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 8, p. 4). For Corns, this "resonant phrase" reveals Milton at his most authentic: what we witness here, he says, is Milton's growing "awareness that national belonging is overridden by a larger allegiance to an international community of *progressive intellectuals*" (p. 215, my emphasis). The problem is, of course, that Milton says different things at different times to different people, in radically different registers; this particular amused and self-ironizing representation of himself being seduced by the siren Patriotism, sent to a less than astute correspondent like Heimbach, is too occasional or conversational to indicate any kind of final, irrevocable shift from nationalism to internationalism. Seven years later, in his 1673 pamphlet, *Of True Religion*, for instance, Milton explicitly returns to his national theme, offering what Annabel Patterson calls "a reprise of the martial metaphors of the antiprelatical tracts" (Patterson 2008, p. 192). Once again, he invokes England's affinity to Israel's exceptionalism and rejoices in the nation's regeneration: "God hath giv'n a heart to the people", he says, invoking Israel's rebirth in Ezekiel's valley of the dry bones (Ezek 36: 26) as the English people reject Charles II's calculating, pro-Catholic Declaration of Indulgence (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 8, p. 417).<sup>11</sup> This is not to suggest that we should not take Milton's international idealism, his love of Florentine civility, or his allegiance to the republic of letters seriously, but it is to suggest that we should also take his nationalism seriously. What is immediately striking about Corns's argument, characteristically eloquent and incisive as it is, is the critic's refusal—unlike Milton himself as he pointedly corrects Heimbach—to acknowledge the authenticity of his classical patriotism, his "*pietas in Patriam*". Whenever Corns refers to Milton's expressions of national belonging or aspiration, it is almost always in terms of "rhetoric", disingenuous manipulation, or policy. Obviously, he says, alluding to Dr. Johnson's scoundrel, when occasion needs, Milton "can play the patriot with brass-necked audacity", but the real Milton is international and far too singular to be subject to "the cultural constraints of mere Englishness" (pp. 214–15). Indeed he is—but then, few would suggest otherwise. Few would suggest that Milton could be explained in terms of what Corns calls "mere Englishness", not least because, as his sly allusion to "mere Irishness" implies, that would be to consign oneself to the company of the most prejudiced and least insightful of early modern English commentators on cultural difference.<sup>12</sup>

What I want to suggest, then, is something different, more balanced or nuanced. In order to better understand how Milton begins the long process of imagining England—that is, how he begins to theorize the "natural duty and affection" he feels for his country—I want to suggest that Milton's nationalism and internationalism are not mutually exclusive, but interdependent; that not only are they both authentic but that they actually provide the enabling conditions for each other; that Milton's enduring patriotism is to a surprising degree, though certainly not entirely, rooted in his international humanism. With this in mind, it is perfectly possible to see how the Milton–Dati correspondence might be read quite differently from the way I have just done. It might be read to emphasize the way in which what stirs both these young friends is certainly an intense idealism but an idealism whose aim is not so much to dismantle their national communities as to recreate each of them as "another *Rome in the west*" (*Readie and Easie Way*, Milton 1953–1982, vol. 7, p. 423)—not necessarily an empire, but a polity or nation that would both recover the "old and elegant humanity" of antiquity (*Areopagitica*, Milton 1953–1982, vol. 2, p. 489) and do so in its own peculiar way. Of those ways, the most distinctive difference would be religion. The truth is that Dati hated Protestantism every bit as much as Milton did Catholicism: Protestantism,

says Dati, is “a shameful Hydra born of the corrupt and depraved mind of the impious Calvin” (qtd. Cinquemani 1998, p. 44). As Nicholas McDowell has recently argued, it is precisely these confessional differences and their complex political ramifications, no matter how diplomatically finessed, that suggest why Milton’s stay in Italy was not an “entirely happy” one.<sup>13</sup> In order to develop this point and come to a better understanding of Milton’s desire to make England another Rome, it is necessary to consider why so many contemporary critics tend to talk past each other on the issue of nations and nationalism, and this raises the problem of presentism.

### 1.3. Centripetal and Centrifugal Biases

All criticism is, of course, culturally situated in the present. This does not mean that we have no access to the very real alterity of the past, but rather that gaining such access requires imagination and a constant effort of self-reflection, for knowledge of the past is always subject, to some degree or other, to the present-day demands of our own culture, to the filters, biases, and pressures of our own contemporary habits of thought, and this seems especially true in the case of nationalism and international relations. One of the major fissures on this issue remains the difference between what we might call centripetal and centrifugal biases, the one most evident in American criticism, the other in British. Despite numerous recent developments, such as the re-emergence of various forms of populist nationalism in both the United States and the United Kingdom, on the one hand, and a closing of what Norbrook calls the “transatlantic gap” in literary criticism, on the other,<sup>14</sup> thinking among American and British critics on early modern nationalism still remains disconcertingly prone to mutual misunderstanding. This is not always the case but there is a pattern. Let me try to explain what I mean by focusing on two unusually influential works.

A few years after Tom Nairn published his 1977 book, *The Break-up of Britain*, his American friend, Benedict Anderson, published *Imagined Communities*. Both books were published by the New Left Review, the “largest independent, radical publishing house in the English-speaking world”, and while they have much in common—both are deeply indebted to the modernization theories of Ernest Gellner (Gellner 1964)<sup>15</sup>—they might be taken to epitomize the contradictory, centripetal and centrifugal pulls in the two countries’ discussion of nations and nationalism. Anderson’s classic book is centripetal or “center-seeking” in the very specific sense of wanting to understand what makes modern nation-states hold together and why, even today, they still “command such profound emotional legitimacy” (p. 4). Most importantly, he wants to know why millions of people are “willing to die for such limited imaginings” (p. 6). At the heart of his project is the experience of trauma. His solution is the now-familiar perception that the national communities that emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries developed a peculiarly intensified way of imagining themselves as a “simultaneity”, that is, a synchronicity or synchronous whole. Through literacy and the agency of a largely vernacular language, market-driven print culture, individual members of national communities came to imagine that community, not in hindsight but at the very moment of imagining, as though it were a single, undivided body or individual, an unmediated mirror-image of themselves, the individual citizen—much like Hobbes’s vision of the nation-state as an “Artificiall Man” (Hobbes 1977, p. 81). This is clearly relevant to the way Milton comes to imagine England in *Areopagitica*—precisely as he attempts to defend the relative freedom of its print culture. When he describes the nation as “not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discours” (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 2, p. 551), he is, of course, describing an idealized version of himself, a northern European whose polity enables him to transcend the dampening restrictions of a cold climate. Citizen and nation mirror each other in an extraordinarily powerful *affective* bond, and it is this bond, so Anderson feels, that later enables the nation-state and its story to produce something like a religious effect in its citizens, to produce “a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning” (p. 11). The meaningfulness of the nation’s narrative becomes

that of its citizen. Immensely suggestive as Anderson's book is, it is also unmistakably an American book of its time.

Written in the immediate aftermath of the trauma of the Vietnam War, Anderson's argument seeks to explain what he will eventually come to call the "goodness of nations". Exotic as Anderson's personal background was, he remained very much an American of his generation. Although he was born in China to Anglo-Irish parents and grew up in various places (California, Ireland, and England), he spent most of his life as a student and then as a professor at Cornell University (1957–2015). It was at Cornell that he experienced the Vietnam War, with all its campus upheavals, and it seems no accident that *Imagined Communities*, which was completed at precisely the same time that the Vietnam War memorial was debated and built in Washington DC, opens with a moving contemplation of cenotaphs and the tombs of unknown soldiers.<sup>16</sup> *Imagined Communities* is, then, from one perspective, part of a healing process, part of a massive national movement in the late 1970s and early 1980s to come to terms with the shame of what Anderson felt to be a brutally ignoble war and the subsequent experience of defeat. While he represents himself as a disinterested analyst of nationalism, there is clearly a degree to which he is also an apologist. He can scarcely contain his irritation at European intellectuals who always tend to see nationalism as a matter of disingenuous manipulation, policy, or something worse: "In an age when it is so common for progressive, cosmopolitan intellectuals (particularly in Europe?)", he says, "to insist on the near-pathological character of nationalism, its roots in fear and hatred of the Other, and its affinities with racism, it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and profoundly self-sacrificing love" (p. 141). In his 1998 essay, entitled "The Goodness of Nations", the commitment to the American nation that is only implicit in *Imagined Communities* becomes explicit: for Anderson, the goodness of his own national community lies in its ability to put aside differences and imagine all its members, the unborn, the dead, and the living, enfolded into a single covenant of faith, all bearing witness to each other's duty to live up to the ideals of the nation. In this way, the imagined community is always capable of redemption—"no matter what crimes a nation's government commits and its passing citizenry endorses", it is always possible to believe that "My Country is ultimately Good" (Anderson 1998, p. 368). Anderson acts out his own argument by putting aside differences and borrowing his central trope of the unborn and the dead admonishing the living from a speech by his ideological enemy but fellow American, General MacArthur—a speech Anderson had originally, somewhat disdainfully, quoted in a footnote at the beginning of *Imagined Communities*: "The long grey line has never failed us", says MacArthur to a gathering of West Point cadets. "Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and grey, would rise up from their white crosses, thundering those magic words: Duty, honour, country" (Anderson 1983, p. 9).

To many modern ears, intellectual or otherwise, MacArthur's words cannot but sound alien and antique. But to most modern British ears, they sound especially disturbing—not moving but faintly ridiculous, like something out of Joan Littlewood's 1963 satire, *Oh, What a Lovely War!* Similarly to British ears, when the intensely center-seeking orientation of Anderson's theory of the nation is applied to early modern English history and literature, even by such brilliant American critics as the late Richard Helgerson or Liah Greenfeld, it is easy to see how it might sound like the old Anglo-centric British nationalism, writ large: Arthur Bryant or A. L. Rowse redux. For most British people, though certainly not all, the "emotional legitimacy" of that expansive Anglo-centric nationalism began its long process of decline in the trauma of the Western Front and became wholly untenable in the poverty and humiliations immediately after the Second World War.<sup>17</sup> At almost exactly the same moment in May 1962 that MacArthur made his speech at West Point, Benjamin Britten produced his *War Requiem* in Coventry. That great oratorio fore-grounded the poetry of Wilfred Owen; it spoke not only of the pity of war but of nationalism's betrayal of the country's young, of Abraham's betrayal of his son Isaac on the altar of its proud but limited imaginations. At the Offertory, Owen's blood-thirsty old nationalist, Abraham, reverses

the biblical story, defies God, and murders his son. As he stretches out his knife, an angel cries out from heaven

Lay not thy hand upon the Lad,  
Neither do anything to him. Behold,  
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;  
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.  
But the old man would not do so,  
But slew his son,  
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.<sup>18</sup>

The influence of Owen in galvanizing the national mood is not to be underestimated. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, as the fiftieth anniversary of the Great War approached, his rejection of classical patriotism—as epitomized specifically in his parody of Horace, *Dulce et Decorum est Pro Patria Mori*—took on a new lease of life. It would have been impossible for a British politician to have attempted anything like President Kennedy’s evocation of Ciceronian patriotism—“ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country”.

For Nairn, the trauma of the Great War itself is far less important than the collapse of empire that it accelerated and what that collapse finally revealed about the British state—that it was a lot like the old nineteenth-century Hapsburg empire, and that the English nationalism that was supposed to be driving it was, in fact, something of a sham. Nairn’s understanding of nationalism is cruder but theoretically not that different from Anderson’s. The critical point is that for him, a Scottish socialist, the English are not a real people. Once the empire had been stripped away, it became clear that the English as a whole people, as opposed to various class and regional sections, had, and still have, no great self-realizing or “mobilizing myth” (Nairn 1977, p. 295), and when they do try to imagine themselves as having one, he says, all they seem capable of producing is the racism of Enoch Powell (pp. 256–90). According to Nairn’s admirer, Krishan Kumar, the emptiness of English nationalism is evident in its inability to hold the center, that is, to maintain its integrity against the three great developments of the last 50 years—devolution, the European Union, and third-world immigration.<sup>19</sup> The de-centering impact of these three forces is immediately relevant to my argument in two specific ways. First, the centrifugal force of these three pressures tends to make Anderson-like analyses of British history, even after Brexit, seem even more irrelevant or out of touch. Second, this is especially true because these pressures have precipitated a spectacular, “center-fleeing” or internationalist renaissance in early modern studies in Britain. Its three most powerful manifestations or paradigms—archipelagic history, European republicanism, and the postcolonial focus on the origins of empire—are clearly rooted in the “three sets of forces” that Kumar sees as “threatening the traditional unity and integrity of the United Kingdom” (p. 240). What is most important to my argument, however, is that while many of the most recent practitioners of these new paradigms have little or no interest in the emergence of the early modern nation-state and its concomitant nationalism, the original formulators of those paradigms were anything but dismissive. According to what Corns calls the “elegant thesis” (Corns 2008, p. 206) of the archipelagic historian, Colin Kidd, for instance, “nationalist thinking” is unequivocally and categorically “alien to the early modern era”.<sup>20</sup> But the original formulator of the archipelagic paradigm in which Kidd finds himself, J. G. A. Pocock, clearly felt otherwise, indeed the reverse.

My point is that while it is easy to see why so much British archipelagic and republican criticism is wary of the English nation and nationalism as a category for analysis, unless it is willing to address that category in a more focused way, its work cannot sustain its original force. Only in this climate can such misleading claims as Kumar’s assertion that the English have “resolutely refused to consider themselves a nation or to define their sense of nationhood” (p. 269) gain credence. Pocock understood this only too well. His

1975 manifesto for a new British history sets him at odds with his followers, Nairn, Kumar, and Kidd, in its insistence on the emergence of a specifically English, as opposed to a British, nation-state.<sup>21</sup> What Pocock offers is a brilliant model of reciprocal transculturation within the Atlantic Archipelago that pre-dates Mary Louise Pratt's post-colonial model by twenty years.<sup>22</sup> But at the center of that system, it needs to be emphasized, lies England: "The pluralist approach which I have been outlining", says Pocock, "has somehow to be reconciled with the evident fact that the pattern of 'British history' is one of the steadily increasing dominance of England as a political and cultural entity" (p. 610). In his 2008 book, *Archipelagic English*, John Kerrigan acknowledges the problem and, much as he wants to de-center things, he comes back to Pocock's point about the emerging power of the English state (Kerrigan 2008). Thirty years after Pocock's manifesto, Kerrigan reminds us that the tendency of the New British History "to under-investigate the dominant, incorporating role of England . . . has left the [very] motor of archipelagic change misunderstood" (p. 30). His caveat is echoed by Willy Maley, in his recognition that if the "recent archipelagic turn entails the recovery of elided ethnicities", such elision was the original result of "relentless Anglicization" in the early modern period (Maley 2010, p. 27).<sup>23</sup>

In a way that is entirely consonant with Anderson's perception of the nation as an imagined community, then, Pocock argues that the coherence of England as a nation is a matter of representation or "means of expression" (p. 611). That is, during the course of the early modern era, he insists, "English administrative, legal, religious, and political consciousness was already and long had been in mass production, and this fact was both an index to and a means of England's superior power" (p. 611). What I am suggesting then is twofold. First, because there is a degree to which American and British centripetal and centrifugal criticism is presentist, driven by domestic agendas, it does not mean that either form cannot perform major work in illuminating the otherness of the past. Second, early modern internationalism, critical as it is, is incomprehensible without a steady focus on the phenomenon of the emergent nation-state and the new forms of nationalism that accompanied it. The rise of the nation-state cannot be separated from innumerable concomitant manifestations of a new, and increasingly popular, sense of national identity without willful obfuscation. With this in mind, we can return to Milton's Italian experience, and what most immediately becomes clear is the way that experience, truly international and cosmopolitan as it was, was mediated through such authorities as Cicero and Virgil and the new principles of civic nationalism that their classical patriotism encouraged.

## 2. Part 2

### 2.1. *Studia Humanitatis*

From an early age, Milton, like innumerable other educated English people, was immersed in the classics, especially in classical Latin, ancient Rome, its history and culture. That is what the *studia humanitatis* that drove his grammar school education meant. At St Paul's School, between the ages of 12 and 15, for instance, Milton studied, among other works, such texts as Sallust's *Histories*, Virgil's *Eclogues* and the *Aeneid*, Cicero's *De Officiis* and the *Orations* (Campbell and Corns 2008, pp. 20–21). Latin preceded Greek and Hebrew, and, in his youthful poem to his father, *Ad Patrem*, he calls Latin and the eloquence it realizes "Romulean" (Milton 2008, p. 79), that is, the language of the founder of the city of Rome. Classical Latin, and the Roman culture it articulates, is not disinterested. It routinely, though certainly not always, identifies universal principles with its own national identity. Rome was not just another city—it was *urbs aeterna*, Tacitus's "res publica aeterna", the "Eternal City" whose walls, as Tibullus and numerous others explain, were first traced by Romulus.<sup>24</sup> Even the manic and relentlessly pessimistic Lucan, the youth who became what Norbrook calls "the central poet of the [English] republican imagination", cannot escape moments of the most intense patriotic nostalgia, moments when nation and defining principle were at one.<sup>25</sup> When describing Rome's corruption, for instance, Lucan, like Milton's Jesus in *Paradise Regained* (4: 133–34), recalls the frugality of the nation's heroic past, a time when fields now owned by the rich and colonized by foreign tenant-farmers were

“once ploughed by the hard share of Camillus and worked by ancient spades of the Curii” (De Bello Civili 1: 168–69, [Lucan 1928](#)).<sup>26</sup> What seems remarkable, as I have mentioned above, is that in over three decades of contemporary Milton criticism and its preoccupation with classical republicanism, there has been so little interest in the latter’s ubiquitous and emphatic patriotism. Nowhere is the Roman identification of principle with nation more evident than in two of young Milton’s most powerful authorities, Cicero and Virgil. These writers are not the same and, like Milton himself, say different things at different times, but there seems little doubt that their idealization of the city’s exceptionalism had an enormous impact on him long before he ever tried thinking through the mechanics of its republicanism. My central point in this essay is that if Milton’s Italian experience is mediated through his reading of classical patriotism, then, at the same time, that patriotism was intensified or amplified by the shock of Italy, the exhilarating experience of the people he met and the conversations he had there. It seems no accident that Milton returned from Italy not only renewed but also consumed with a patriotic new epic taking shape in his mind.

In what follows, I first want to show how Cicero encourages Milton to see the idea of eloquent speech, the *eloquentia* that embraces everything from oratory to poetry, as being integral to the nation’s identity; and second, how this fundamental identification is both complicated and given a new resilience by Virgil. The two Italian conversations that best enable me to make this argument are those between Milton and Benedetto Buonmattei, on the one hand, and Milton and Giovanni Manso, on the other.

## 2.2. Cicero and What the Walls of Rome Protect—Eloquence and Its Political Agency

Any analysis of the Milton–Dati correspondence that is attentive to the issues outlined above might begin with the question: “What exactly do the two, mutually admiring, correspondents want?” The answer is fairly obviously approbation—*amicitia*, mutual respect, enabling appreciation—but what is remarkable is the way approbation for themselves cannot be separated from approbation for their native lands. Both correspondents are completely absorbed in the grand Renaissance project of developing their own vernacular languages and producing a national literature—not a common European literature but a national one whose elegance might be worthy of the ancients.

For both Milton and Dati, the early Renaissance *questione della lingua* had long since been decided in favor of the vernacular: while the quotidian value of Latin, especially its universality, was incontrovertible, the possibilities of one’s own native language, a language that was natural in the sense that it did not have to be learned, were compelling. Spenser’s famous question to Gabriel Harvey, “Why [in] God’s name, may not we, as else the Greeks, have the kingdom of our own language?” increasingly went unanswered because there was no need.<sup>27</sup> In pursuit of this project, both Milton and Dati act out their *pietas in Patriam*. Receiving Milton’s letter, Dati writes to Milton in Italian, was a cause of great joy because he discovered there “in what esteem you held [not only me but] my country which counts among its greatest treasures” the fact that in that great nation of England, it has “one who magnifies our glories, loves our citizens, celebrates our writers, and who writes and speaks in so correct and polished a fashion in our beautiful [Tuscan] idiom” ([Milton 1931–1938](#), vol. 12, p. 297).<sup>28</sup> Milton offers him a mirror in which to see his country in all its glory. The particular purpose Dati has for writing is to persuade Milton, along with several other European scholars, to write a verse encomium in honor of Francesco Rovai, the recently deceased poet Milton had met at gatherings of the Svogliati Academy in Florence years before.<sup>29</sup> To do so, says Dati, would not only “oblige me, but all my nation” (qtd. [Haan 1998](#), p. 67)—“ma tutta la mia Patria” ([Milton 1931–1938](#), vol. 12, p. 298). The imperative that drives both Dati and Milton is the feeling that it is only through a degree of “self-estrangement”, or the gaze of international witnesses, that one can really see one’s own nation’s virtue for what it is—an imperative that will come to fruition for Milton in his much-admired Latin defenses of the English people.<sup>30</sup> Neither Milton nor Dati is E. M. Forster. What they want is not a world without nations but an international

network in which both they as individuals and their nations as communities can flourish and do justice to their own, particular, native genius. By nations, Milton means first and foremost Christian nations, certainly not those of “a Turk, a Sarasin, [or] a Heathen” (*Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, Milton 1953–1982, vol. 3, p. 215). In Italy, in the specific context of conversation or discourse in the Florentine academies, national self-realization seems to have presented itself to Milton more strongly than ever as a matter of language or eloquent speech. In his September 1638 letter to another member of the Svogliati, Dati’s friend, the Catholic priest and learned grammarian, Benedetto Buonmattei, it becomes evident that this focus on language has two principal aspects—not only does the vernacular have to be refined and reduced to rule but also its critical capacity for producing civility in the nation needs to be re-asserted.

In his letter to Buonmattei, Milton uses the second aspect, an account of the civilizing power of language, to urge certain changes in the way Buonmattei seems to be working on the first aspect, the process of bringing polish and order to the Italian language. In this letter, Milton reveals the extraordinary degree to which his humanist education has been shaped by reading Cicero. The immediate point of the letter turns out to be less important than the patriotically classical context it invokes; that context is specifically an appeal to the authority of *De Oratore*—“the best book that ever Tully wrote,” according to Roger Ascham’s highly influential work, *The Schoolmaster*.<sup>31</sup> For A. M. Cinquemani, whose main interest is the originality of Buonmattei’s descriptive analysis of language as usage, this appeal is merely an indication of just how “old-fashioned” Milton’s “notions” were at this time (p. 64), but for Milton himself it registers something of lasting significance.<sup>32</sup> No matter how attracted he may have been to the new science, to the idea of disinterested inquiry or what Bacon calls “the severe inquisition of truth”,<sup>33</sup> Milton never seems to have forgotten Cicero’s idealistic theory of rhetoric and the shaping power of speech acts. The immediate purpose of the letter is to re-iterate in writing what he had probably already urged in conversation (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 1, p. 330): that Buonmattei should enlarge his evolving book on Tuscan grammar—the work that would eventually reach its final form as *Della Lingua Toscana Libri II* in 1643—to include a section on pronunciation and an overview of the best Italian authors. While Milton seems keen to know who, besides such great Florentine writers as Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, “is distinguished in Tragedy, who in Comedy gay and light, who in Epistles or Dialogues witty or grave, [and] who in History noble” (p. 331), he seems strangely unaware that Buonmattei had already written a manuscript treatise on pronunciation.<sup>34</sup> He makes his request in what John Hale considers his most “elegant”, “[f]ull and formal” Latin (pp. 87–88) because the letter is a performance piece that is meant to impress; he writes in Latin because there, in the medium of which he was so obviously a master, his voice could not be ignored or dismissed as easily as it might have been in spoken, and perhaps less than perfectly pronounced, Italian: “I use Latin rather than your Tongue”, the tenacious Milton explains to Buonmattei, so that he will fully understand, first, the relative “awkwardness and ignorance” of Milton’s Italian, and, second, how much “I wish that Tongue [of yours could be] clarified for me by your precepts”(pp. 331–32). These precepts are as important as they are because, according to the Ciceronian logic of the letter, it is out of these rules of language that the walls of the city are erected; that is, it is out of eloquent speech, both the language refined and the elegant use to which it is put, that the very foundations of the true or civic nation are laid. In completing these “new Institutes” of his native language, Buonmattei is demonstrating his patriotism: “you are much more intent on what you may do for your country”, says Milton, anticipating John F. Kennedy, “than what it will, in good right, owe to you” (p. 330). Buonmattei is, in fact, contributing to the protection of his country from the degeneration implicit in barbarous dissonance, effectively enclosing it “within a wall”, one so central to the well-being of the polity that “in order that no one may overstep it, it ought to be secured by a law all but Romulean” (p. 329).

It is this image of Romulus marking out the walls of Rome that controls the argument of the letter. A law all but Romulean is one that comes just short of death and, while this

may seem a somewhat extreme punishment for mispronunciation, it is a test of Milton's oratorical skill to make it finally seem less so. Correct pronunciation was, after all, as Carla Mazzi points out, a critical and "capacious" category of Ciceronian rhetorical theory.<sup>35</sup> The original significance of Romulus's act is freighted with religious overtones. The furrow that prepared the way for the walls marked off the boundaries of the city and delimited a sacred border, the *pomerium*, beyond which auspices could not be taken.<sup>36</sup> The integrity of the walls was essential for the community's access to divine knowledge and prosperity. The walls were sacred. As the story appears in such Augustan texts as Ovid's *Fasti* and Livy's history of Rome, *Ab Urbe Condita*, Rome's divine favor and future greatness is treated with a certain anti-imperial detachment. In Ovid's poem, revised in the bitterness of exile, the descendants of Aeneas, Romulus and his twin brother Remus, decide to gather their pastoral people together and found a city. Romulus is favored by the auspices or watching of birds, wins the kingship, and marks out the line of the walls of the new city with a furrow. The walls themselves are then begun and Remus, now consumed with envy, mocks their lowliness—"Shall these protect the people?" Unaware of his brother's prohibition against transgression, he leaps over them and is immediately slain by the watchman, Celer. Inwardly mortified as he is at his brother's death, Romulus sets an outward example of Roman fortitude: "So fare the foe who shall cross my walls". Thus, from this modest but literally auspicious beginning, "[a] city arose destined to set its victorious foot upon the neck of the whole earth; who at the time could have believed in such a prophecy?" (*Fasti* 4: 807–62, Ovid 1967). In Livy's pro-Republican history, the emphasis falls much more violently on the ruthlessness of Romulus: in this version, Romulus himself "in great anger slew [his brother], and in menacing wise added these words withal, 'So perish whoever else shall leap over my walls!'" (1.7.2–3, Livy 1967). In Cicero's *De Oratore*, however, all the scarcely suppressed ironies in Ovid and Livy are absent: writing a generation earlier, the orator secularizes the religious significance of the city's walls and evokes an idealistic conception of the polis or nation as a community whose fully humanizing civility—the justice, frugality, mildness, and temperance that Milton's Jesus alludes to in *Paradise Regained* (4: 133–34)—is made possible only through the persuasive power of carefully refined and ordered language. In his version of Romulus's story, Cicero's primary aim, as Matthew Fox suggests, is to produce "an account of Roman history that places rhetoric at its centre".<sup>37</sup> This brings Cicero into conflict with Plato and, more than a little significantly, Milton sides with Cicero.

In Cicero's treatise, the traditional Platonic distinction between rhetoric and philosophy is deconstructed. Cicero's orator is not Plato's sophist but a thinker whose knowledge, no matter how technical, can only realize its persuasive, pragmatic end or practical purpose through eloquent speech. That is, wisdom without rhetoric is still-born—it is in fact anything but wise since it has no agency in the world.<sup>38</sup> The dialogue is a very conscious writing-back to such Platonic texts as *Gorgias*. Cicero, according to Ascham, speaks "in the person of Lucius Crassus, whom he maketh his example of eloquence and true judgment in learning" (p. 83) and when another of Cicero's characters, Scaevola, tries to re-erect the boundary between rhetoric and wisdom, he is firmly put in his place by his friend Crassus in a revealingly nationalistic remark: these views are those of the "Greeklings who are fonder of argument than truth" (1.11.47, Cicero 1959). In a *tu quoque* move reminiscent of Milton's own response to Plato in *Areopagitica*, Cicero turns Plato against himself (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 2, pp. 522–23). What strikes Crassus about Plato as the Greek distinguishes the rhetor from the philosopher is just how much his argument, the specific knowledge that he would impart, depends upon his rhetorical skill: "what impressed me most deeply about Plato" in the *Gorgias* was that "it was when making fun of orators that he himself seemed to me to be the consummate orator" (1.11.47). It is difficult not to believe that, from an early age, Milton was deeply moved by Cicero's vision of the orator's grandeur—his power, uniqueness, and the beauty he could create:

[T]here is to my mind no more excellent thing than the power, by means of oratory, to get a hold on assemblies of men, win their good will, direct their inclinations wherever the speaker wishes, or divert them from whatever he wishes . . . For

what is so marvellous as that, out of the innumerable company of mankind, a single being should arise, who either alone or with a few others can make effective a faculty bestowed by nature on every man? Or what so pleasing to the understanding and the ear as a speech adorned and polished with wise reflections and dignified language? (1.8.30–31)

What is critically important to the present argument, however, is that all this grandeur is understood in terms of constructing a civic nation: “In every free nation”, says Crassus, “and most of all in communities which have attained the enjoyment of peace and tranquility, this one art has always flourished above the rest and ever reigned supreme” (1.8.30). The power and glory of the orator has its final outcome in the good of the nation.

What the eloquent speech and the walls of Rome protect is civility, rational discourse, peace, and tranquility. When Scaevola turns to the crucial example of Romulus and asks if Crassus really thinks it was “by eloquence, and not rather by good counsel and singular wisdom, that the great Romulus gathered together his shepherds and refugees?” (1.9.37), Cicero has already given his answer through Crassus: “What other power could have been strong enough to gather scattered humanity into one place, or to lead it out of its brutish existence in the wilderness up to our present condition of civilization?” (1.8.33). Civilization is a function of eloquence. If this is so, if the once and future walls of Rome depend on eloquent speech, then the refinement of the vernacular and the brilliant use to which it is put is not an aesthetic diversion but a cultural imperative of the highest order. Italian or Tuscan is so admired by Milton because it stands as the obvious example of what a contemporary vernacular language can achieve in responding to this imperative, that is, of the degree to which a present-day national language can approach classical status. Italian is no longer the “degenerate” form of Latin Milton had despised in his early poem to his father (*Ad Patrem*, ll. 83–84), but now, he tells Buonmattei, the Arno rivals both Athens’s Ilissus and Rome’s Tiber (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 1, p. 330). One day, the Thames may do the same. The rhetorical skill of Milton’s letter turns on the way he both praises Buonmattei for contributing to this achievement and simultaneously rebukes him for not fully living up to its continuing demands.

Although Buonmattei himself is not imagined as Cicero’s orator-statesman, by placing his work on the Tuscan language in the Ciceronian context of eloquence and its power to rebuild the walls of the nation, his grammatical inquiry is given the highest value and pronunciation itself ceases to be a minor concern. It becomes a matter of the gravest national importance:

For when speech is partly awkward and pedantic, partly inaccurate and badly pronounced, [says Milton] what does it say but that the souls of the people are slothful and gaping and already prepared for servility? On the other hand, not once have we heard of an empire or state not flourishing at least moderately as long as it continued to have pride in its Language, and to cultivate it. (Milton 1953–1982, vo. 1, p. 330).

The refinement of the vernacular is then one of the most obvious means by which the new nation-state will foster the affective, liberty-oriented nationalism essential to its own success. The alleged failure of Buonmattei and “all previous authorities on your speech” (p. 331) to address the issue of pronunciation is, for Milton, a flaw worse than that of Remus. For it means not simply defiling the sacred boundaries but erecting false walls, a counterfeit version of the sacred “pomoeria” (Milton 1931–1938, vol. 12, p. 36)—false walls that make it impossible for an international audience to bear witness to the glory of the Italian language. Suddenly, for a brief moment, when he may have wanted to sound like Crassus to Scaevola, Milton sounds like Ascham at his most suspicious of Italian cultural solipsism: “you Italians might seem to have wished to be wise only within the boundary [pomoeria] of the Alps” (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 1, p. 331). The most deserving of Italy’s international witnesses is, of course, himself, the Englishman John Milton. What leads critics to feel that Milton’s tone is “presumptuous” is rooted in the poet’s sense of his own remarkable exceptionalism:<sup>39</sup> that he is, by his own account, “more flourishing in wit” and

more pleasing in “elegant manners” than any other foreigner, and that there seems to be some kind of “providential design” in the way Italy was sent “as your latest guest from the Ocean for these few days, me, such a lover of your Nation that no other, I think, is a greater” (p. 330). This, however, is not simply egotism, but a specific form of self-realization scripted by Cicero.<sup>40</sup> He can finally play the Ciceronian orator before an audience whom he assumes will understand and appreciate the performance. He represents himself as that “single being” who will arise to sway assemblies of men imagined by Crassus. It is a role he had first rehearsed at Cambridge: “I have learned from the writings and sayings of wise men”, he says, paraphrasing Crassus, probably in the fall of 1630, “that nothing common or mediocre can be tolerated in an orator any more than a poet, and that he who would be an orator in reality as well as by repute must first acquire a thorough knowledge of all the arts and sciences”. Only then can he serve as a guide as the arts and sciences gently draw men “to dwell together within the walls of cities” (Prolusion 7, [Milton 1953–1982](#), vol. 1, pp. 288–89, 299). As he attempts to persuade Buonmattei of the justice of his request, he acts out the role he most admires, and that performance may well be more important than the particular request itself. The letter is an act of epideixis or self-display in which England’s orator, Italy’s guest from the edge of the world, announces himself on the banks of the Arno.

What Milton’s epideictic letter to Buonmattei suggests more than anything else is the degree to which the young poet’s idealistic understanding of eloquent speech, in whatever form, whether oratory or poetry, is, somewhat paradoxically, ultimately instrumental or pragmatic. It is certainly both aesthetic and expressive, but its final legitimizing end, even in an act of the most beautiful or intense self-realization, is always the good of the city. The legacy of Milton’s long-standing and deep immersion in Cicero is civic nationalism: “the supreme purpose of all sciences”, he says in Prolusion 3, is “the honour and profit of our country”. This precept, among others, including the orator’s primary duty to instruct, delight, and persuade, has been “inculcated” into his mind, he says, “by Cicero (with whose name my speech auspiciously begins)” ([Milton 1953–1982](#), vol. 1, pp. 240, 246). If this classical patriotism is not something he learned in Italy, then his Italian experience seems to have liberated him from so many of the personal and public doubts evident in a poem like *Lycidas*. While few critics have failed to notice this refocusing of national feeling in Milton, even fewer have thought it a topic worth pursuing.<sup>41</sup> Far from his most sustained overseas experience having diluted or unmoored his sense of national identity, it seems to have given it new life. If his conversations with Buonmattei enabled him to renew himself in the role of Cicero, those with the Neapolitan nobleman, Giovanni Battista Manso, encouraged him re-imagine himself in terms of an explicitly English or “British” Virgil. The difference between the two roles is, however, considerable, for, with Virgil, Milton inherited a much more conflicted understanding of patriotism.

### 2.3. *Virgil and What the Walls of Rome Exclude—Abjection and the Loss of Identity*

Naples was the southernmost point of Milton’s Italian journey. He arrived in the city from Rome, probably in late December 1638, and seems to have made the acquaintance of Manso, the Marquis of Villa, by accident. Manso, a distinguished seventy-eight-year-old poet and soldier, who had been the friend and protector of the now-deceased poets Tasso and Marino, seems to have taken to the handsome and gifted young Milton as another possible protégé. Milton clearly understood this and, if he represented his relationship with Buonmattei as that of two friends in a Ciceronian dialogue, he saw the script for his friendship with Manso as one of poet and patron, explicitly, though not exclusively, of Virgil and Maecenas.<sup>42</sup> In *Mansus*, the poem addressed to Manso in gratitude for all his kindness, Milton evokes a multitude of Virgilian associations. At one point, he seems to imagine himself as Aeneas thanking Dido for her hospitality ([Milton 2008](#), 1.94),<sup>43</sup> but most pointedly, he promises to commemorate Manso as Virgil had remembered his friend Gallus in *Eclogue X* and his patron Maecenas in the *Georgics*: “If my Muses have breath enough”, he says, “you, like Gallus and Maecenas, will get a seat among the victorious

wreaths of laurel and ivy" (Milton 2008, ll. 5–6).<sup>44</sup> He is, of course, already fulfilling his promise with the present poem and its stirring prospectus of a British national epic. As Estelle Haan has so perceptively observed, the overt patriotism of *Mansus* appears to be a response to the provocation of Manso's elegant but ironic encomium.<sup>45</sup> In the distich that eventually came to open Milton's 1645 *Poemata*, Manso praises everything about Milton but his religion: "Ut mens, forma, decor, facies, mos, si pietas sic,/Non Anglus, verum hercle Angelus ipse fores", that is, "If your religious persuasions were equal to your mind, your handsome figure, your fame, your face, and your manners, then—by Hercules—you would be an angel not an Englishman".<sup>46</sup> Manso's clever reworking of Gregory the Great's famous play on *Angli/Angeli* transforms Englishness from the future Pope's assurance of things hoped for into an impediment to be transcended—the problem, so Manso's poem implies, is that Englishness is inseparable from the heresy of Protestantism.<sup>47</sup> Milton is more than up to the challenge. He ignores the aspersion on his faith and, just as cleverly as Manso, turns his imagined patron's reference to his religious "pietas" into an occasion to demonstrate his "pietas in Patriam". He reminds Manso of his native land's poets, of Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare, of the Druidic tradition, and, most importantly, he offers him the prospect of an epic poem, in which he will sing of British arms and the man: like Virgil's Aeneas, Milton's Arthur and his knights will also be "great-hearted" (Milton 2008, l.82). The counter-irony is that Manso will now be associated with a poet who will certainly sing of "[m]agnanimos heroes" (Milton 2008, l.82) but not only will those heroes be Christian, they will, in all but name, be emphatically Protestant.

The choice of King Arthur breaking the Saxon phalanxes as the subject of Milton's poem is not an obvious one.<sup>48</sup> Although Milton was thoroughly immersed in the matter of Britain and despite the powerful precedent of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, he had never before expressed any overwhelming desire to produce an Arthurian epic. His earliest attempt at a triumphalist Virgilian epic had been the adolescent *In Quintum Novembris* of 1626, but that poem's theme had been the Gunpowder Plot. The choice is especially strange, not so much because Arthur constitutes an explicitly "British" as opposed to English topic, or because so much of its material would have to be drawn from the increasingly controversial history of Geoffrey of Monmouth, but because, unlike the *Aeneid*, the formal end of Arthur's story, specifically the disaster that breaking the Saxon ranks precipitates, is a kind of *Götterdämmerung*: a story of the nation's failure and the collapse of the city's walls. This seems more than a little out of tune with the excited and upbeat register of *Mansus*. The topic may have suggested itself simply because Arthur and the matter of Britain was one that Manso and Milton's Italian audience would have immediately recognized as belonging to his homeland and so serve as a fitting counterpart to the Italianized heroes of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, but it may also say something about the way that Milton read Virgil. If Milton was in no doubt about what the walls of Rome were meant to protect, he seems to have been haunted by the fear of their collapse and what they were meant to exclude.<sup>49</sup> An uncompromising sense of the abjection or waste that had to be purged from the polis stayed with him throughout his life. In the early 1660s, for instance, as he composes *Paradise Lost*, he interprets noises in the night as the sounds of defilement and broken speech within the city walls—"the barbarous dissonance/Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race/Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard/In Rhodope" (7: 32–35). Classical patriotism is intensely dualistic, and few poets have articulated the barbarism its civility strove to define and Milton feared with both such clarity and disturbing ambivalence as Virgil.

In his impressive account of the *Aeneid*'s political ideology, David Quint explains Virgil's perception of all that has to be excluded from the city.<sup>50</sup> What the shield of Aeneas in Book 8 of the poem reveals is a remarkably comprehensive definition of barbarism—political disorder, monstrous deformity, linguistic confusion, heterogeneity in race and gender, and the final loss or disintegration of identity (pp. 21–31). On the splendid surface of the shield, the sheer abjection of barbarism is given an unmistakably orientalist bias, and the battle of Actium is transformed from a civil-war action into the climactic, specifically Apollonian victory of the nation over its ideological, in this case, Asiatic other.<sup>51</sup> What

is surprising about the *Aeneid*, however, is the degree to which barbarism is not simply Eastern or even external. As Quint insists, the poem's formal ideology is not coterminous with its "meaning" (p. 23) nor, as James Zetzel says, does it do justice to the poet's understanding of "the complexity of human affairs" (Zetzel 2006, p. 191). Over and again, what threatens the city is figured in terms of madness, radical incoherence, or what Milton calls "barbarous dissonance". Key moments in both the central sequences of the poem, the curse of the Carthaginian Dido and the wrath of the Rutulian Turnus, are associated with *furor*, Dionysian frenzy, and the threat of dismemberment (cf. 4: 469–70; [Virgil 1959] 7: 385–90). But so, it needs to be emphasized, are numerous other moments of failure *within* the national community.<sup>52</sup> The way barbarism threatens the city from within is most graphically registered in the identification of the sacred grove of the Aventine Hill with the former abode of Cacus. Virgil's contemporary readers are invited to remember that at the heart of their great Apollonian city lies the cave of the half-human, flesh-rending monster, finally purged only with great difficulty by Hercules ([Virgil 1959] 8: 190–305).<sup>53</sup> However sacred to Evander and his Arcadians in the poem, the Aventine Hill in first-century Rome was the home of the poor, the huddled masses, the "ignobile vulgi", as Milton called them in the *Epitaphium Damonis* (Milton 2008, l.193), and the irony in the *Aeneid* may have been deliberate. Virgil's readers are also invited to remember that the fall of the original city, of Troy itself, is a similar matter of darkness at the heart of things. The fall is ascribed to a kind of communal madness. Led on by lies and wild passion, the Trojans drag the wooden horse inside the walls of the city: paying no heed to the tell-tale clanging of the Greeks' armor within the beast, says Aeneas, "we pressed on blindly, madly, and stood the accursed monster on our consecrated citadel". "O Patria", he cries out as he remembers the enormity of the failure from within, "O Ilium, home of the gods! O walls of the people of Dardanus" ([Virgil 2003] 2: 242–45).<sup>54</sup> Throughout the *Aeneid*, despite the grandeur of the national epic, despite Aeneas's eloquence, his power to move his scattered people toward a new city, despite his very real "pietas in Patriam", there is a profound pessimism about the degree to which the nation can realize the ideals by which it defines itself. Although the poem ends in triumph, it also, of course, ends in defeat. The final battle between Aeneas and Turnus belies the ideology so carefully assigned to Actium. Aeneas and Turnus exchange roles: Pater Aeneas loses his identity. He does not vanquish barbarism but becomes its prey. In response to Turnus's eloquent, Aeneas-like plea to show mercy and end hatred, Aeneas stabs him to death in a wild frenzy, "furiis accensus et ira/terribilis" ([Virgil 1959] 12: 946–47). None of this seems to have been lost on Milton.<sup>55</sup>

In his Virgilian elegy *Lycidas*, for instance, composed during the bleak year of 1637, shortly before leaving for Italy, the text is redolent with memories of the Roman poet's uncertainties and doubts—even to the extent of reproducing multiple Virgilian images of abjection. The dismemberment of Lycidas, his bones hurled against the shore, is associated with the failure of both the nation and eloquent speech itself. In his meditation on the death of Edward King, Milton invites his elite English audience to recall their classical education, look homeward, and remember the fate of both the wave-tossed bones of the helmsman Palinurus in the *Aeneid* and the flesh-torn body of the singer Orpheus in the *Georgics*.<sup>56</sup> But young Milton is not the Virgil whose pessimism was such that he finally wanted to have the *Aeneid* destroyed; the presence of Palinurus in Milton's poem is as important as it is because it indicates the artfulness of his response to Virgil. In *Paradise Lost*, so Colin Burrow argues, Milton resists the popular seventeenth-century reception of the *Aeneid* as a warrant for imperial expansion by going back to the work itself and showing how so many triumphalist readings of particular images were partial or misleading: he does this by mining into Virgil's uncertainties, says Burrow, like a "destructive virus".<sup>57</sup> In *Lycidas*, so I want to suggest, the reverse is happening. In deploying Palinurus's story in the midst of England's shipwreck, Milton both comprehends and contests the pervasive pessimism of Virgil's great poem. In doing so, he reveals the resilience of his youthful enthusiasm for the classical patriotism that he had inherited.

In Virgil's story, as it is told in Books 5 and 6 of the *Aeneid*, the fate of Palinurus is refracted through a number of perspectives.<sup>58</sup> First, from Aeneas's this-worldly view, Palinurus's death seems incomprehensible, both accidental and disconcerting. As the helmsman of Aeneas's ship, he guides both the fleet and the new national community on its way from Sicily to Italy. On night watch, despite his experience and a heightened sense of duty, he is overwhelmed by sleep and falls into the sea, taking with him both the tiller and part of the helm. The fleet is adrift, and shipwreck threatens everywhere. Aeneas takes control, but in his grief, as we discover later, he loses faith in divine revelation for, contrary to the predictions of Apollo's oracle, Palinurus appears to have been drowned at sea, his body probably lying "naked on an unknown shore" ([Virgil 1959] 5: 871).<sup>59</sup> Only in the underworld is Aeneas offered a second, more revealing perspective. His pessimism turns out to be unwarranted, for he was not deceived and there is a design at work. Palinurus was not drowned but stabbed to death on the Ausonian shore by its barbarous inhabitants. When the shade of Palinurus approaches Aeneas, he describes his misery as though he were Lycidas prompting Milton—"I am at the mercy of the winds, and the waves are turning my body over on the water's edge", he complains, pleading for rest ([Virgil 2003] 6: 362).<sup>60</sup> Before Aeneas can respond, the Sibyl intervenes to prophesy that Palinurus will have rest: he will be remembered by the inhabitants of the shore with a burial mound and the place will bear his name forever. The unknown shore Aeneas fears will now become known, consecrated to the memory of the overjoyed Palinurus. He will become the genius of the Roman shore, in the very specific sense that his shrine will mark out the beginning of the nation in Italy to all those who wander in the perilous Tyrrhenian flood. According to the third perspective, that of Neptune, the death of Palinurus was never accidental but always intended: it was a sacrifice—Palinurus dies for the nation's destiny: "one life will be given for many", says Neptune ([Virgil 2003] 5: 815).<sup>61</sup> In this, he embodies the sacrificial ethos of Roman patriotism—not thinking about himself but only of the ship, the individual gives his life for the national community.<sup>62</sup> Although the sacrificial aspect of Palinurus's death primarily enables Milton to reinforce Edward King's imitation of Christ, it also allows him to resist Virgil's doubts and the dissonance that the walls of the city need to exclude with one of Virgil's own stories. In doing so, not only does he reassert God's providence to men but also England's British destiny, in terms of the story of Rome. What animates the poem's nationalism is not so much the sense of grievance and resentment on which Lawrence Lipking wants to dwell but a specifically Virgilian form of pietas (Lipking 1996).<sup>63</sup>

As the optimism of *Mansus* suggests, this counter-pessimistic strain in *Lycidas* grows in strength and flourishes the following year, in conversation with his Italian patron, the fatherly Manso. As the Orphic poet deployed all his eloquence to re-member Lycidas, so here, Milton imagines doing the same with Arthur: "if ever I bring back to life in my songs the kings of my native land and Arthur, who set wars raging under the earth, or tell of the great-hearted heroes of the round table, which their fellowship made invincible . . ." (my emphasis, pp. 80–84). Through the power of eloquent speech, he will restore the English nation's once and future British king. Regeneration is clearly on his mind. A few weeks after leaving Manso, in his letter to Holste in Rome, Milton likens the wonderful array of unpublished manuscripts in the Barberini Library to the regenerate souls in *Aeneid* 6 that are about to be reborn and re-enter the world (Milton 1931–1938, vol. 12, p. 41). On his return to England, as he continues this progress in another elegy, this time in memory of his beloved friend Charles Diodati, the conditional tense in *Mansus* gives way to a bold declaration of intent: "I shall tell of Trojan keels" and "I shall tell of Igraine, pregnant with Arthur" (my emphasis, *Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton 2008, ll.162–691).<sup>64</sup> But, as he does this, as Milton moves from elegy to national epic, it becomes clear that he has been through this process before; that his progress, both in *Lycidas* and through *Lycidas* to *Mansus*, rehearses an old paradigm, a process of renewal proclaiming the power of eloquent speech to overcome abjection and restore identity, a process that seems to have been there from his earliest writings. Consider Prolusion 5 and its very explicit concern with defending the walls of Rome.

#### 2.4. Another Rome in the West

Milton's task, in this student exercise of 1628 or 1629, is to follow Aristotle and demonstrate the truth of the proposition that "[t]here are no partial Forms in an Animal in addition to the Whole" (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 1, p. 257). The prolusion turns out to be far more interesting than it sounds. It begins, somewhat surprisingly, not with animals or substantial forms but with the story of Rome and the horror of its fall. It begins with a vision of abjection. The city's collapse before the same migration of barbarians that would later assail Arthur's Britain—the horde that, in 410, swept "in a torrent over the whole of Italy" and "captured the city, captured Rome herself"—is a source of astonishment to him: "No deed in fact or fable could be more remarkable than this", he insists (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 1, p. 258). So remarkable, indeed, that the image is remembered in *Paradise Lost* when all hell breaks loose. When the rebel angels rise off the burning lake and spread out on the brimstone plain, they appear as:

A multitude, like which the populous north  
Poured never from her frozen loins, to pass  
Rhene or the Danaw, when her barbarous sons  
Came like a deluge on the south . . . (PL 1: 351–54)<sup>65</sup>

Here, so much later, the demonic is still figured in terms of Rome's enemies. Milton sees the collapse of the city as a cause of the greatest shame, and he somewhat melodramatically deploys its memory in the prolusion to suggest the life-and-death nature of his own undergraduate struggle with faulty reasoning. As he himself concedes, this is quite a stretch—but in its jejune attempt to identify academic error with the fall of the city, it is profoundly revealing. In a way that anticipates his considerably more subtle use of the specter of the imperiled city in *Areopagitica*, whenever he reflects on the fall of Rome, he says, "I am reminded afresh of the mighty struggle which has been waged to save Truth, and of the universal eagerness and watchfulness with which men are striving to rescue Truth, already tottering and almost overthrown, from the outrages of her foes". The citadel of Truth seems "powerless to check the inroads which the vile horde of errors daily makes on each branch of learning" (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 1, p. 258). What makes error so insidious is the way, like Spenser's Duessa, it has the power to counterfeit truth. But, armed with a formidable combination of *sapientia* and *eloquentia*, Milton presents himself as a young hero, ready "to lay Error bare and strip it of its borrowed plumes, thus reducing it to its native nakedness" (p. 259). Error is, however, no easy antagonist. In its ability to mimic truth and confuse with a multitude of fair-seeming but false claims, it has, as we might expect, the power to tear asunder or dismember. Error "has assailed every particle and fragment of natural philosophy and outraged it with impious claws", Milton says in the preceding prolusion (p. 251). It defiles learning, just as the monstrous harpies tore the food from the tables of Phineus and Aeneas. For Michael Lieb (Lieb 1994), the fear of dismemberment Milton feels throughout his life is literally physical. This may well be true, but here it is epistemological, clearly influenced by Bacon's analysis of false learning, and also, as the presence of the story of Rome makes clear, emphatically pragmatic or political.

For Milton, the young Baconian at Cambridge, error's power to dismember is rooted in the experience of reading scholastic philosophy, a counterfeit wisdom whose "monstrous altercations and barking questions" reduce genuine dialogue to endless quibbling.<sup>66</sup> In scholasticism, Milton feels, "whatever one writer affirmed and believes that he has established by a sufficient argument, another confutes, or at least seems to confute, with the greatest ease, and both are able almost indefinitely the one to find objections, the other replies" (p. 251). The effect on the poor student is not knowledge but *sparagmos*: "[t]he wretched reader meanwhile, continually rent and torn in pieces as if between two wild beasts, and half dead with boredom, is at last left as at a cross-roads, without any idea which way to turn" (p. 251). In Prolusion 5, Milton's response to this "contentious" form of learning is, however, not so much Baconian as Ciceronian and, in a more extended sense, Virgilian. Milton was always more of a poet and rhetor than a philosopher. The oration is

not so much an anatomy or “severe inquisition of truth” as a speech act designed to rescue truth—far from being put to the rack, truth is restored and re-membered. The triumphant eloquence of the piece is evident in the way its form is made to re-enact its meaning. In demonstrating the error of believing that animals, and by extension humankind, have a plurality of potentially competing or contentious souls—that is, “partial forms”—as opposed to one harmonious being, Milton silences the competing and contentious barking of the schoolmen. The implication is that while human beings may have vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual “souls”, these forms are not independent of each other because the higher form, the intellectual soul, contains within itself the functions of the lower one. Thus, in defeating error and silencing its barbarous dissonance, the oration models the way eloquent speech may restore the Rome that Milton invokes at the beginning of the Prologue to the “peace and tranquility” the city’s walls were meant to protect. He effectively turns back the barbarian hordes as his once and future Arthur is meant to do in *Mansus* and the *Epitaphium Damonis*. Building Rome in England, “another Rome in the west” (Readie and Easie Way, Milton 1953–1982, vol. 7, p. 423), was not an ideal to which he came late in life, at the end of the English Republic, and, in its earliest manifestations, it had more to do with *eloquentia* in its most patriotic and expansive Ciceronian sense than with any specifically republican constitutional arrangements or the need to overshadow kings.

On his return to England in the late summer of 1639, although political tensions were rapidly accelerating over the continuing crisis in Scotland, there was neither war nor revolution, and Milton continued in his Italian frame of mind with the composition of his great elegy to Diodati. The Protestant Diodati is a liminal figure, both English and Italian, educated at St. Paul’s and Trinity College, Oxford, his family coming from Lucca just north of Florence. The *amicitia* or enabling personal interaction that Milton enjoyed in Italy had been anticipated and prepared for in his ongoing conversation with Diodati: “To whom [now] shall I open my heart?” he asks on his return (*Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton 2008, l. 45).<sup>67</sup> He soon answers his own question and unburdens himself to both the deceased Diodati and his absent Italian friends, all imagined as being present. As he works through his grief, he questions the value of his Italian experience: “Was it so important for me to see buried Rome?” (l.115).<sup>68</sup> The question is meant to recall that of Virgil in *Eclogue I*, the epigraph with which we began this essay: “Et quae tanta fuit Romam tibi causa videndi?”—“And what was your great reason for seeing Rome?” ([Virgil 1959] l.26). Virgil’s answer, “*Libertas*”, is literally true. What his character, Tityrus, gets from visiting Rome is freedom from serfdom, and what Virgil himself gets is freedom from the confiscation of his farm. What Milton gets from seeing contemporary Rome, buried in all its ruins, is overshadowed by his remorse for being absent when Diodati died (*Epitaphium Damonis*, ll. 116–23). But what he gets from seeing Italy is a different matter: “And yet shall I never be regretful when I remember you, shepherds of Tuscany” (ll. 125–26), he says, switching his address from Diodati to Dati and the others, as if to signal a kind of Tuscan succession.<sup>69</sup> After all, Diodati was a Tuscan too (l. 127)—Diodati is dead but he will live on in Dati, so the text implies.<sup>70</sup> What Milton gets more than anything else from seeing Italy is the freedom or confidence to conceive a great national epic—not an Italian or Latin poem, not even, here, a biblical poem, but a Virgilian *Arthuriad*, a poem whose gravitas is too much for all the previous genres he has pursued (l. 159).<sup>71</sup> Conceived on the banks of the Arno, in the company of his Italian friends, as a story to be told to Diodati on the banks of the Colne, it will be a poem that could not be brought to life without its engaged and elegant listeners. It will be a poem about his native land, and it will be in English—it is of no consequence, he feels, if only the yellow-haired river Ouse reads it (l. 175). Like the *Aeneid*, it will explain the origins of the nation and it will not shrink from difficulties: it will tell of Trojan ships off the coast of Kent, the expansion of the people across the land into Brittany, and even the conception of the hero in an act of *Aeneid*-like deception (ll. 162–69). In this newfound freedom, it is difficult not to see just how Milton’s nationalism finds one of its most potent enabling conditions in his internationalism, that is, in both his immersion in ancient Rome

and his immediate experience of contemporary Italy, each amplifying and affirming the other in a vital dialogue.

In his book on the fate of the poet in modernity, Gordon Teskey argues that Milton turns away from an Arthurian epic because, for him, “secular themes taken from history” lacked sufficient “grandeur” (p. 138). This seems to me less than compelling. First, the attempt to erect any simple binary opposition between the secular and religious in Milton is fairly obviously doomed, but more importantly, the insistent anti-historicism of Teskey’s overarching argument seems completely alien to Milton, a man who from the beginning seems to have been consumed with what David Loewenstein calls “the drama of history” (Loewenstein 1990). While manifestations of grandeur in Milton are complex and almost infinitely various, even a cursory reading of his writings reveals his overwhelming sense that the fate of the nation in history is very much a matter of God’s grandeur. It is true that Milton never wrote his projected *Arthuriad*, but the classical patriotism that does so much to shape the conception of this epic eventually finds triumphant expression in his celebrated Latin defenses of the English people (1651–54).<sup>72</sup> There, he speaks for the new nation-state and sees it as the high point of his career to muster all his eloquence in order to deliberate on “so great a theme” (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 4, p. 549). There, the presence of Cicero and Virgil merge into one. The first defense, *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio*, is modeled on Cicero’s *Philippics* and, at the end of the second defense, *Defensio Secunda*, Milton famously presents the two Latin works in lieu of his long-promised epic poem, a “monument” of sufficient grandeur, he says, to rival those of Homer and Virgil (Milton 1953–1982, vol. 4, pp. 684–86). Over and again, he takes his cue from Cicero and deploys his eloquence to defend liberty not simply as an abstract principle but as the distinguishing mark of his nation’s identity. Imagining himself as “the great Roman consul” and conscious of his international audience, he addresses the English people directly. In executing the king, he says, you, the English people, purged the city of a tyrant and preserved the integrity of its walls: you were not “driven by madness or fury” but by “love of your freedom and your faith, of justice and honor, and above all because of your warm affection for your country” (pp. 535, 536). It could be Anderson speaking: “it is useful to remind ourselves that nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love” (p. 141). Or, one might say, “natural duty and affection”.

My point is that, in early Milton, while classical patriotism was transforming itself into a new species of English nationalism, equally so, English nationalism was presenting itself to an elite international audience not as a revolution but as a return to classical virtue. This is the idea at the heart of John Aubrey’s defense of Milton: that his writing against the monarchy could be condoned by his being immersed in the patriotism of the classics, his being so conversant with “the Rom[an] authors and the greatnes he saw donne by the Rom[an] commonwealth & the virtue of their great Commanders [or] Captaines” (Milton 1953–1982, 18: 374). Classical patriotism and English nationalism are not, of course, coterminous. On this issue, Milton’s case is exemplary, for his classical patriotism is only one strand in a complex skein. To unravel the next most important strand, we would need to go back and explain exactly why an English poet was so preoccupied with what appears to be an archipelagic or “British” theme.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The Yale *Complete Prose Works of John Milton* is cited in the text as Milton (1953–1982), the Columbia *Works of John Milton* as Milton (1931–1938). Milton’s Poetry is quoted from the edition of Orgel and Goldberg (Milton 2008).
- <sup>2</sup> For more on this, see, for instance, (Picciotto 2010, esp. pp. 400–507 and Stevens 2014, “Pre-Secular Politics”, esp. pp. 95–97).
- <sup>3</sup> See Stevens (2021), “Nationalism’s Double Bind.
- <sup>4</sup> See Campbell and Corns, pp. 88–102.
- <sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Erasmus, *De conscribendis epistolis*, and Sturm, *Ciceronis epitolarium*.

- 6 *Epistolarum familiarium liber unus* (London 1674), printed with translations in Milton (1931–1938), vol. 12, pp. 2–115.
- 7 The Latin poems begin with five encomiums from Giovanni Manso, Giovanni Salzilli, Mateo Selvaggi, Antonio Francini, and Carlo Dati. See *Poemata* 4–9 in *Poems of Mr. John Milton* (London 1645) (Milton 1924).
- 8 Dati's response is written in Italian and dated 1 November 1647 (Milton 1931–1938, vol. 12, pp. 297–313).
- 9 See Norbrook (1999), *Writing the English Republic* pp. 97, 472–79. On the relation between reduction and condescension, see Stevens (2016), "Raphael's Condescension."
- 10 See, *Milton in Government* (Fallon 1993, pp. 90–98).
- 11 For more on this, see Stevens (2009), "Milton and National Identity."
- 12 Cf. Milton's own thoughts on Ireland's "merest natives" in *Observations*, Milton (1953–1982), vol. 3, p. 302, pp. 300–5.
- 13 See McDowell (2020), pp. 332–54; Hill (1979), pp. 53–57.
- 14 See Norbrook (2002), *Poetry and Politics* 272. The British decision to leave the European Union and the American election of Donald Trump as President in 2016 seem an obvious markers of this upsurge.
- 15 On the relation of Anderson and Nairn to Gellner, see, for instance, Smith (2000), *The Nation in History* pp. 27–51, and Taylor (1998), pp. 191–218.
- 16 Galvanized by leaders like Daniel Berrigan, the first Roman Catholic chaplain at the university, Cornell became a major focus of resistance to the Vietnam War. See, for instance, Heineman (2001), pp. 89–118.
- 17 See Judt (2005), pp. 292–302, on the devastating impact of the Suez crisis. For a somewhat different view, one emphasizing the resilience of Anglo-centric imperial thinking, see Maley (2017).
- 18 "Text of the War Requiem" (<https://www.its.caltech.edu/~tan/Britte/reqtext.html>). Accessed 17 January 2022.
- 19 See Kumar (2003), esp. pp. 239–49.
- 20 See Kidd (1999), p. 5. For a fuller critique of Kidd's position, see Stevens (2008), "How Milton's Nationalism Works", esp. pp. 273–77.
- 21 See Pocock (1975), "British History: A Plea for a New Subject."
- 22 Cf. Pratt (1992), esp. pp. 1–16.
- 23 See also Stevens (2012a), "Archipelagic Criticism and its Limits."
- 24 Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 3: 6 and Tibullus, *Elegies* 2:23: "Romulus aeterna nondum formaverat urbis/moenia".
- 25 Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*, p. 24. Lucan was only in his early twenties when he wrote his epic poem *De Bello Civili*.
- 26 "quondam duro sulcata Camilli/Vomere et antiques Curiorium" (1: 168–69). There are innumerable other examples, but, in one striking instance, Lucan excitedly points out how Cato's patriotism might serve as a model, his love of country manifesting itself in the principle of duty and self-denial in the cause of liberty: "Behold the true father of his country, a man most worthy to be worshipped by Romans; to swear by his name will never make men blush; and if they ever, now or later, free their necks from the yoke and stand upright, they will make a god of Cato" ("Ecce parens verus patriae, dignissimus aris,/Roma, tuis, per quem numquam iurare pedebit,/Et quem, steteris umquam cervice soluta,/Nunc, olim, factura deum es" [9: 601–4]).
- 27 See Helgerson (1992), esp. pp. 1–2, 21–62.
- 28 That Milton and Dati tend to use the terms "Tuscan" and "Italian" interchangeably suggests the way various forms of courtly, popular, and literary Tuscan were increasingly coming to predominate in the formation of modern Italian.
- 29 The others were the Dutch scholars Nicolas Heinsius and Isaac Vossius. See Haan (1998), pp. 61–71.
- 30 On self-estrangement as "the fundamental condition of national self-representation", see Helgerson (1992), p. 16 and Norbrook, *Poetry and Prose*, p. 302.
- 31 Ascham (1967), p. 119. For an overview of the influence of Cicero in early modern English education, see Jones, *Master Tully* (Jones 1998).
- 32 Cinquemani's argument is that although Milton does not fully understand the "larger modernist significance of Buonmattei's contribution to the study of language" (p. 63) in 1638, it will come to play a major role in influencing Milton's representation of prelapsarian language in *Paradise Lost* (pp. 63–115).
- 33 Bacon (1969), p. 30, *The Advancement of Learning*
- 34 See Cinquemani (1998, pp. 35–36).
- 35 See Mazzi (2009), p. 10.
- 36 See Boyle and Woodward (2000), pp. 251–52.
- 37 See Fox (2007), p.114.
- 38 Despite his celebrated critique of Ascham and the dangers of "Ciceronianism", this is a point that Bacon, as Milton would have known, fully understood: it is a return to sophism or an *excessive* interest in words over matter that Bacon considers "so justly contemptible" (*Advancement of Learning*, p. 31).
- 39 On Milton's presumptuous tone, see Cinquemani (1998), p. 63.

- 40 On the general topic of scripting social relations in letters, see [Magnusson \(1999\)](#), esp. pp. 61–90.
- 41 On the upsurge in Milton’s national feeling, see, for instance, [Lewalski](#), p. 85, and [Campbell and Corns](#), p. 126.
- 42 See [Revard \(1997\)](#), esp. pp. 215–24.
- 43 See [Revard \(1997\)](#), p. 223.
- 44 “Haec quoque Manse tuae meditantur carmina laudi/Pierides, tibi Manse choro notissime Phoebi,/Quandoquidem ille alium haud aequo est dignatus honore,/Post Galli cineres, et Mecaenatis Hetrusci./Tu quoque si nostrae tantum valet aura Camoenae,/Victrices hederas inter, laurosque sedebis” (ll.1–6).
- 45 See [Haan \(1998\)](#), esp. 130–36.
- 46 See [Carey’s](#) headnote to *Mansus* in [Carey and Fowler \(1968\)](#), p. 260.
- 47 On hearing that the slave boys from Britain are called “Angli”, Gregory considers this appropriate since they have the “faces of angels” and “it is right that they should become joint-heirs with the angels in heaven” (*Ecclesiastical History*, [Bede \(1990\)](#), pp. 103–4).
- 48 On Milton’s choice of subject in *Mansus*, see, for instance, [Hale \(1997\)](#), pp. 56–65 and [Teskey \(2006\)](#), pp. 129–47.
- 49 See [Stevens \(2012b\)](#), “Lament for a Nation?”
- 50 See [Quint \(1993\)](#), *Epic and Empire*, pp. 21–96.
- 51 At the climax of the story inscribed on the shield, Virgil offers his Roman readers an extraordinary vision of an Apollonian Augustus entering the walls of the city in triumph: “seated at the white marble threshold of gleaming white Apollo”, he surveys the defeated nations of the East walking in a long procession “in all their different costumes and in all their different armour, speaking all the tongues of the earth [ipse sedens niveo candentis limine Phoebi/dona recognoscit populorum aptatque superbis/postibus; incedunt victae longo ordine gentes,/quam variae linguas, habitu tam vestis et armis]” (8: 720–23). The English translation is quoted from David West’s edition of the *Aeneid* ([Virgil 2003](#)) and the Latin from Frederick Hirtzel’s edition of the works ([Virgil 1959](#)).
- 52 On Sicily, for instance, just before the helmsman Palinurus is lost at sea, the Trojan women behave like Bacchantes and attempt to destroy their own ships: “Driven at last to madness, they began to scream and snatch flames from the innermost hearths of the encampment or rob the altar fires, hurling blazing torches and brushwood and torches [tum vero attonitae mostris actaeque furore/conclamant, rapiuntque focus penetralibus ignem/(pars spoliatur aras), frondem ac virgulta facesque/coniciunt]” ([Virgil 2003, 1959](#)] 5: 59–62).
- 53 On the history of the Aventine Hill, see [Holland \(2004\)](#), esp. pp. 18–19, 22. *Manso’s* intensive, “by Hercules” (“hercle”), suggests that he may well have been thinking of Milton cleansing himself of Protestantism in terms of Hercules cleansing the Aventine Hill of Cacus and his progeny.
- 54 “illa subit mediaeque minans inlabitur urbi./o patria, o divum domus Ilium et incluta bello/moenia Dardanidum! quater ipso in limine portae/substitit atque utero sonitum quarter arma dedere;/instamus tamen immemores caecique furore/et monstrum infelix sacrata sistimus arce” ([Virgil 1959](#)] 2: 240–45).
- 55 See [Kallendorf, The Other Virgil \(Kallendorf 2007\)](#) and [Quint, Virgil’s Double Cross \(Quint 2018\)](#).
- 56 See *Aeneid* 5 and 6 and *Georgics* ([Virgil 1959, 2003](#)) 4: 315–566.
- 57 [Burrow](#), “Virgils, from Dante to Milton”, ([Burrow 2006](#), p. 89).
- 58 On Palinurus, see esp. [Quint, Epic and Empire](#), pp. 83–96. See also [Greenfield \(1998\)](#) and [Brown \(2002\)](#).
- 59 “o nimium caelo et pelago confise sereno,/nudus in ignota, Palinure, iacebis harena” ([Virgil 2003](#)] 5: 871).
- 60 “nunc me fluctus habet versantque in litore venti” ([Virgil 1959](#)] 6: 362).
- 61 “unum pro multis dabitur caput” ([Virgil 1959](#)] 5: 815).
- 62 See [Quint \(1993\)](#), *Epic and Empire*, esp. p. 91.
- 63 On *Lipking*, see [Stevens \(2003\)](#), “Milton’s Nationalism and the Rights of Memory”.
- 64 “Ipse ego Dardanas Rutupina per aequora puppes/Dicam, et Pandrasidos regnum vetus Inogeniae,/Brennumque Arviragumque duces, priscumque Belinum,/Et tandem Armoricos Britonum sub lege colonos;/Tum gravidam Arturo fatali fraude Iogerneen/Mendaces vultus, assumptaque Gorlois arma,/Merlini dolus” (ll. 162–69).
- 65 See [Fowler](#) in [Carey and Fowler \(1968\)](#), pp. 482–83.
- 66 Cf. [Bacon, Advancement of Learning](#), 31–34. For the relation between Bacon’s Scylla and Milton’s Sin, see, for instance, [Stevens \(1985\)](#), *Imagination*, pp. 117–21.
- 67 “Pectora cui credam?” (l.145).
- 68 “Ecquid erat tanti Romam vidisse sepultam?” (l.115)
- 69 “Quamquam etiam vestri nunquam meminisse pigebit/Pastores Thusci” (ll.125–26).
- 70 “et Thuscus tu quoque Damon” (l.127).
- 71 See [Lewalski \(2000\)](#), pp. 111–19.

<sup>72</sup> *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* was revised and republished in October 1658.

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