

*Italia Conquistata*: The Role of Italy in Milton's Early  
Poetic Development

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## Abstract

My thesis explores the way in which the Italian language and literary culture contributed to John Milton's early development as a poet (over the period up to 1639 and the composition of *Epitaphium Damonis*). I begin by investigating the nature of the cultural relationship between England and Italy in the late medieval and early modern periods. I then examine how Milton's own engagement with the Italian language and its literature evolved in the context of his family background, his personal contacts with the London Italian community and modern language teaching in the early seventeenth century as he grew to become a 'multilingual' poet. My study then turns to his first published collection of verse, *Poems 1645*. Here, I reconsider the Italian elements in Milton's early poetry, beginning with the six poems he wrote in Italian, identifying their place and significance in the overall structure of the volume, and their status and place within the Italian Petrarchan verse tradition. After considering the significance of the Italian titles of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, I assess the impact of Italian verse forms (and particularly the *canzone*) upon Milton's early poetry in English and the question of the nature of the relationship between Milton's *Mask presented at Ludlow Castle* and Tasso's 'favola boschereccia', *Aminta*. Finally, I consider the place in Milton's career of his journey to Italy in 1638-9 and its importance to him as a personal 'conquest' of Italy. I suggest that, far from setting him upon the path toward poetic glory, as is often claimed, his return England marked the beginning of a lengthy hiatus in his poetic career.

My argument is that Milton was much more Italianate, by background, accident of birth and personal bent, than has usually been recognised and that an appreciation of how this Italian aspect of his cultural identity contributed to his poetic development is central to an understanding of his poetry.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks first to my supervisor Professor Karen Edwards for her unfailing support, advice and wisdom in guiding me through the research for this thesis. Dr Mark Davie was kind enough to read and discuss with me Milton's poems in Italian. His advice on Italian versification in general, and on Petrarch and the Petrarchan tradition was invaluable. In Italy, at the University of Trieste, Professore Giuseppe Trebbi took me under his wing during the semester I spent there and was always ready to advise, share knowledge, suggest contacts and lines of enquiry about Milton's time in Italy. It was Professor Trebbi who put me in contact with Dott.ssa Michela Dal Borgo, *Archivista* at the Archivio di Stato di Venezia, whose suggestions led to my research in the records of the Council of Ten. I am also grateful to Prof.ssa Laura Tosi and Prof.ssa Daria Perocco of the Università Ca' Foscari who both gave me their time to discuss avenues of enquiry during my stays in Venice. Thanks too to Professor Neil Harris with whom I spent a pleasant afternoon in Udine discussing Milton and other matters (and who was punished for his kindness by being appointed one of my PhD examiners).

I was also very fortunate in having two fellow students, Philippa Earl and Dr Esther Van Raamsdonk, who began their Milton-related PhD's at Exeter in 2013 with me and were happy to share problems, ideas, advice and support. They were also kind enough to treat me as a peer rather than a grandfather.

I should also perhaps mention my long-suffering family whose eyes now begin to close when the 'M' word is mentioned.

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# Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page	6
<i>Abbreviations</i>		7
<i>A note on texts</i>		8
<b>Preface</b>		9
<b>Introduction</b>		12
1	<b>‘The great subtiltie and wonderful wisdome of the Italians’ – Anglo-Italian cultural relations in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods</b>	18
2	<b>Milton’s Italian Acculturation</b>	42
3	<b>‘Poems of John Milton, Both English and Latin’ - the place and time of the Italian verse</b>	72
4	<b>The Italian Poems – Genesis and Execution</b>	99
5	<b>Italian Verse Forms in ‘Poems 1645’ – the <i>canzone</i></b>	137
6	<b>Tasso’s <i>Aminta</i> and Milton’s <i>Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle</i> – model relationships</b>	157
7	<b>The Italian Journey</b>	182
<b>Conclusion</b>		236
<i>Appendix 1</i>		243
<i>Bibliography</i>		251

## List of Illustrations

- |  |     |
|--|-----|
| 1. Excerpt from ‘The Trinity Manuscript’                           | 185 |
| 2. Milton’s Entry in Count Camillo Cedogni’s <i>Album Amicorum</i> | 198 |
| 3. Malatesti’s Dedication to Milton                                | 212 |

## Abbreviations

<i>CSP</i>	<i>Complete Shorter Poems</i> , ed. by John Carey (Harlow: Pearson, 2007).
EEBO	Early English Books Online, <a href="http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home">http://eebo.chadwyck.com/home</a> .
ESTC	English Short Title Catalogue, <a href="http://estc.bl.uk">http://estc.bl.uk</a> .
NLS	National Library of Scotland
<i>OCW III</i>	<i>The Complete Works of John Milton, Volume III: The Shorter Poems</i> , ed. by B. Lewalski and E. Haan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2004; online edition, January 2008).
<i>OED</i>	Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017) online edition, <a href="http://www.oed.com/">http://www.oed.com/</a>
RFCTS	The Registers of the French Church of Threadneedle Street
SBN	Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale (Italia)

## A Note on Texts

For the texts of the early poems, I have relied upon Lewalski and Haan's revised 2014 Oxford edition:

*The Complete Works of John Milton*, Volume III, *The Shorter Poems*, ed. by Barbara Lewalski and Estelle Haan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

I have also referred extensively to John Carey's edition: *The Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Harlow: Pearson, 2007).

My single quotation from *Paradise Regained* is also taken from the new Oxford *Complete Works of John Milton*, Vol II, *The 1671 Poems: Paradise Regain'd and Samson Agonistes*, ed. by Laura Lunger Knoppers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

For the prose, I have used *The Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. by W. Kerrigan, J. Rumrich and S. Fallon (New York: Random House, 2007) as my main source, after some debate. The texts I wished to cite were almost all included in this collection and the translations from Milton's Latin were, I felt, more reliable and less prone to 'poeticisation' than those found in older editions. However, for the *Commonplace Book*, I have used Volume 18 of *The Works of John Milton*, ed. by F.A. Patterson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940). I have used this edition in preference to the Yale edition of the *Complete Prose Works* because the Columbia edition contains an untranslated text. Therefore, for the sake of consistency, in the one other instance when I have quoted a prose passage not included in *The Essential Prose* (from 'The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce', p. 145), I have also used the Columbia edition.

I have also referred to the introduction to the Camden Society's edition, *A Commonplace Book of John Milton, and a Latin Essay and Latin Verses presumed to be by Milton*, ed. by Alfred J Horwood (London: Camden Society, 1876).



## Preface

I arrived at the topic of this thesis via the rather improbable route of writing an MA dissertation about Samuel Beckett's 'bilingualism'. Beckett came to his distinctive later style (and stepped out of James Joyce's shadow) partly by re-creating in English the texts he had originally written in French just after World War II. This led me to ponder the significance of this form of literary 'bilingualism' – involving the construction of the things signified through two different systems of 'signification'. When I began to consider a PhD topic, this led me to Milton. I was intrigued by the fact that Milton had written six poems in Italian early in his career. Milton's command of Italian was not as complete as Beckett's command of French (although some would perhaps claim this for him). Beckett spent more than fifty years living and writing in France, whilst Milton spent about fifteen months travelling in Italy where, as far as we know, he wrote only in Latin. In fact, a more exact parallel with Beckett's French would have been Milton's relationship with Latin, no one's native tongue in the seventeenth century, but a *lingua franca* from Poland to Portugal. Latin was Milton's first 'second language'. I suspect it was also the language he used on a day to day basis when he first arrived in Italy. Milton's relationship with Italian was, therefore, very different from Beckett's relationship with French. Nonetheless, during one short period of his life, almost certainly before he ever set foot on Tuscan soil, he wrote six poems in Italian, a 'lingua ignota e strana.'<sup>1</sup> I then realised that there were other Italian features in his English verse and, as I began to research the topic, I came to see that what had seemed initially a minor facet of Milton's poetic make-up, almost a temporary aberration, was fundamental to his poetic development. Hence the ninety thousand-odd words that follow this preface.

I have a lot more French than Italian. I studied French for my first degree and have spent many happy hours, over many years, speaking French in the company of (now very old) French friends. Italian is a far more recent acquisition, a language I have picked up in bits and pieces since the turn of the century, although I was attempting the *Inferno* with difficulty in 1968. I felt the need, therefore, to become more Italian during the course of my research.

I had my first formal lessons in Italian at the Foreign Language School at Exeter in 2014/15. Then, I had the good fortune to be able to spend the first semester of 2015/16 at the *Università degli Studi di Trieste*. This enabled me to improve both my Italian and my understanding of Italy. It also gave me access to the very extensive resources of the *Polo SBN dell'Università di*

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<sup>1</sup> *Canzone*, l. 3. (OCW III, p. 40.)

*Trieste e del Friuli Venezia Giulia*,<sup>2</sup> a network of libraries extending across the whole region of Friuli Venezia Giulia. There was no Italian text relevant to my interests so obscure that it could not be found somewhere locally. I was also able to spend a couple of weeks in the beautiful *Archivio di Stato di Venezia*, researching Milton's activities in the Venice of the late 1630s, poring through dusty and, sometimes, disintegrating folders of documents that had been compressed together for so long and so tightly that it was a dangerous enterprise to attempt to peel them apart. I spent quite a lot of the following two summers back in Trieste where I finally completed the first full draft of this thesis. It seemed important to me, in addressing my topic, to develop my personal sense of 'Italian-ness', to gain better access to primary Italian texts and to the views of Italian critics and historians on Milton and his (Italian) times. I have tried to represent at least some of these views here. I should perhaps also refer to my knowledge of Latin which I studied up to 'A' level long ago, in the mid-twentieth century, but in which I have always retained an interest. I am able to interpret Latin texts – albeit with the aid of a 'crib'. I have therefore presumed to comment on Milton's Latin work, his use of Latin and his relationship with the ancient as well as the early modern inhabitants of the Italian peninsula, and occasionally to translate the odd Latin passage (or amend the translations of others).

I should perhaps admit that I began my researches in the expectation that I would include *Paradise Lost* in my explorations. In the event, the complexity and richness of the Italian elements in the earlier poetry forced me to curb the ambition to deal with Milton's great epic. There is a certain consistency in Milton's use of Italy in his work up until 1639, the year when this thesis effectively comes to its end.<sup>3</sup> Milton had, by then, written all the poems that were to be included six years later in *Poems 1645* and it was at this point, after his return from Italy, that in my view he effectively set aside his poetic ambitions and committed himself to the humdrum business of making a living, and establishing himself (late, and not without difficulty) in the world as a professional and family man. Along came his pamphleteering and then the Civil War intervened. For a number of years, the work of his 'left hand' became his work.

As regards the originality of this thesis, I would make some small claims. I have taken a rather different overall approach from previous writers to the question of Milton's Italian aspects, looking at his cultural appropriation of Italy in a more holistic way than has hitherto been the case. Whilst my focus has been largely upon the impact of Italy upon Milton's verse, I have also considered how his interest in Italy and Italian developed, and discussed the impact and significance of his journey of 1638–9. As regards previous scholarship, I think my

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<sup>2</sup> SBN: Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale.

<sup>3</sup> There is a small excursion into the 1640s – the correspondence between Milton and Carlo Dati.

challenges to John Smart,<sup>4</sup> although similar to those of E.A.J Honigmann,<sup>5</sup> are better grounded than Honigmann's in that I have explored some of Smart's sources and references in detail and found them wanting in various respects. I believe that I have adopted a fresh approach to the issue of what I argue was Milton's very early grounding in Italian culture, taking into account both the Italian elements of John Milton senior's musical life and the way in which influences from the small early 17<sup>th</sup> century London Italian community may have impinged upon the young Milton. I think that my consideration of the musical significance of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* is different from the previous approaches taken to this issue. The research I have done in seeking out traces of Milton's stay in Venice has not been attempted before, as far as I am aware. Indeed, the state of some of the documents I examined suggested that they had not been handled for many decades, even centuries. Although this research proved inconclusive, there are some results of minor interest which may be capable of further development. I believe also that the way in which I have dealt with Milton's Italian journey (despite the fact that it has been picked over in biography after biography), brings a somewhat different perspective to this episode in Milton's life. Then, of course, there is the question I raise in Appendix 1 as to the Lady's name in *Sonnet II* ... who has previously dared to suggest that 'Emilia' is an imposter?

I have tried to look at the issues I have addressed through 'innocent' eyes, neither passively accepting received opinions nor rejecting them carelessly. I have tried as best I could to take a bi-cultural approach to my themes. There is so much 'stuff' in the virtual academic world that I am bound to have missed someone's contribution to Miltonic Italian scholarship, but I have done my best to include and respect the best of what I have found.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Sonnets of John Milton*, ed. by J.S. Smart (Glasgow: Maclehose, Jackson and Co., 1921)

<sup>5</sup> *Milton's Sonnets*, ed. by E.A.J. Honigmann (London: Macmillan, 1966)

## Introduction

Seeing every nation affords not experience and tradition enough for all kind of learning, therefore we are chiefly taught the languages of those people who have at any time been most industrious after wisdom; so that language is but the instrument conveying to us things useful to be known.<sup>6</sup>

(John Milton, *Of Education*)

John Milton, the great linguist, wrote these words in 1644, defining the purpose of language learning as being practical and utilitarian: a means to the end of gaining access to ‘things useful to be known’, of achieving wisdom. He also acknowledged, towards the end of his short tract, the virtues of travel at ‘three or four and twenty years of age, not to learn principles, but to enlarge experience and make wise observation.’<sup>7</sup> Five years earlier, he had returned from his European journey, more than a year of which he spent in Italy where he used his language skills, enlarged his experience and, no doubt, made wise observations. He does not, however, hint at any of this personal experience in *Of Education*. Neither does he suggest that language learning might enable direct communication with people from other lands and provide a means of access to their culture, something from which he had certainly benefited personally in ‘the private Academies of Italy whither [he] was favoured to resort’.<sup>8</sup> Nor does *Of Education* make much of poetry which is listed third among ‘the organic arts’, after the study of politics and logic.<sup>9</sup> To be fair, he does describe poetry as being ‘sensuous and passionate’, although it is not entirely clear whether this is a good thing. On the other hand, he urges that students should attend to:

that sublime art which in Aristotle’s *Poetics*, in Horace, and the Italian commentaries of Castelvetro, Tasso, Mazzoni, and others, teaches what the laws are of a true epic poem, what of a dramatic, what of a lyric, what decorum is, which is the grand masterpiece to observe.<sup>10</sup>

After which, they will be in position to see ‘what despicable creatures our common rhymers and playwrights be.’<sup>11</sup> This seems almost to privilege artistic theory above artistic creation. You would

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<sup>6</sup> John Milton, *Essential Prose*, ed. by William Kerrigan et al. (New York: Random House, 2007), p. 219.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225–6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

not guess that, at the end of the following year, Milton the rhymer was to publish an edition of his own collected poems.

The personal experiences that lie behind the precepts of *Of Education* are well hidden. The status Milton's ascribes to foreign language learning surely derived directly from his own education and later travels. His own enthusiasm for languages went well beyond the strictly utilitarian – 'things useful to be known.' He may have viewed Petrarch, Dante, Della Casa, Bembo, Varchi, Tasso and Marino as 'sages' but his interest in them was not simply a function of their sagacity. The precepts of *Of Education* reflect Milton's own education and experience, but in a distorting mirror. The Milton who wrote verse from his early teens, who made a daring trip across Europe and who made close Italian friends during that journey is hidden from direct view.

That is the problem with Milton. There are so many of him. He presents himself so very differently in different contexts. There is Milton the Latin poet, Milton the English poet, Milton the Italian poet, and even a tiny instance of Milton the Ancient Greek poet. There is Milton the friend; Milton the polemicist; Milton the vulgarian; Milton the theoretician; Milton the historian; Milton the educationalist; Milton the Divorcer; Milton the traveller; Milton the defender of the faith; Milton the radical; Milton the servant of the Commonwealth; Milton the defender of regicide; Milton the theologian; Milton the blind man; Milton the handsome man; Milton, the refugee from the Restoration; Milton the epic poet; Milton the dramatist. I could go on. His personae change with time, role, circumstance and, of course, with the language he is using. It is with his Italian linguistic, cultural and literary personae that I am concerned in this thesis though no doubt other Miltons will intrude.

In his now standard study, *Milton's Languages: The Impact of Multilingualism on Style*, John K. Hale argues:

Languages in use release the speaker or writer into new roles, and a modified self. Milton relished this release, at times for its own sake, often later to play a series of humanist roles. Surveying the number of his languages and of the genres in which he wrote (and not forgetting sub-genres like satire and insult within his major work), I infer that he relished the entering by his languages into as many personae as possible. They show he shared the renaissance eagerness for versatility.<sup>12</sup>

Hale is, I think, right to see linguistic versatility as a means of access to new versions of the self, but his particular emphasis tends to pose Milton as trans-lingual virtuoso. One cannot analyse Milton's linguistic re-construction of self from the evidence of his speech acts for obvious

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<sup>12</sup> John K. Hale, *Milton's Languages: The Impact of Multilingualism on Style* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 15.

reasons, but it seems to me that it is in speech acts, above all, that what Hale calls a ‘modified self’ is created by people who speak more than one language. With Milton, we are reliant on his writing. Limitations of ‘genre’ and of linguistic fluency mark the boundaries of Milton’s literary performance. I do not think it is possible to speak of a ‘Greek’ Milton on the basis of his two poems written in that language, but it is clearly possible to speak of a ‘Latin’ Milton. There is no accessible ‘French’ Milton, ‘Hebrew’ Milton, or ‘Aramaic’ Milton, as he left nothing behind him in any of those languages. There is an ‘Italian’ Milton, though, and my aim in this thesis is to go some way towards pinning down this identity (although this persona is itself multi-faceted).

At the very beginning of his book, Hale quotes selectively from the definition of multilingualism given in the *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*:

Multilingualism: the ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing ... different languages are used for different purposes, competence in each varying according to such factors as register, occupation, and education.<sup>13</sup>

The full definition runs:

The ability to use three or more languages, either separately or in various degrees of code-mixing. There is no general agreement as to the degree of competence in each language necessary before someone can be considered multilingual; according to some, a native-like fluency is necessary in at least three languages; according to others, different languages are used for different purposes, competence in each varying according to such factors as register, occupation, and education. Where an individual has been exposed to several languages, as for example in India, Nigeria, or Singapore, one language may be used in the home, another professionally, another passively for listening or reading, another spoken but not written or read, and so forth.<sup>14</sup>

The full quotation provides a better quick guide to understanding Milton’s linguistic situation than Hale’s shortened version. Although claims for ‘native speaker fluency’ have been made for Milton’s Italian<sup>15</sup> (and Barbara Lewalski claims that he could speak French well)<sup>16</sup>, it is, I think, self-evident that his written and spoken linguistic fluency varied, both between languages and over time. He was more like the Indian, Nigerian or Singaporean of today than the fairly rare individual who is raised from infancy to speak two or more ‘mother tongues’. In *Bilingual: Life and Reality*, Francois Grosjean, founder of the Language and Speech Processing Laboratory at

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<sup>13</sup> Hale, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> *Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language*, ed. by Tom McArthur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Oxford Reference: <http://bit.ly/2x2aBQY>.

<sup>15</sup> See Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns, *John Milton: Life, Work and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 45.

<sup>16</sup> Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of Milton - a Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 87.

Neuchâtel University, offers an even simpler definition of what he refers to as ‘bilingualism’: ‘Bilinguals are those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their everyday lives.’<sup>17</sup> Grosjean also emphasises the nature of ‘bilingualism’ as a function needed in particular communities, involving varying levels of proficiency based on communication need as opposed to the achievement of ‘fluency’ across the four linguistic skill domains (speaking, listening, reading, writing). He states that that ‘[bilinguals]’ proficiency will rarely be equal across languages’<sup>18</sup> (because it is rare for this to be functionally required).

Milton’s relationships with his ‘second’ languages varied substantially and significantly in the way Grosjean describes. ‘Bilingualism’ has indeed sometimes been defined as the achievement of native-speaker fluency in two languages which become interchangeable from the speaker’s point of view. Now, the term is more usually employed to denote a particular relationship between a ‘home’ language and second ‘acquired’ language and its cultural associations. It is the practical rather than performative aspects of Milton’s relationship with Italian that I will consider in this thesis – not so much how he developed his Italian persona of the late 1630s, a persona which is now almost beyond our reach, nor his extraordinary linguistic abilities, but how his poetic identity, in particular, was changed as a result of his immersion in the language and culture of Italy during the first period of his poetic career.

Hence, this thesis is focused on Milton’s poetry. I have used some of his prose work to shed light on his attitude to Italy, Italians and Italian culture, but I have not sought to analyse in detail the part Italy played in Milton’s wider intellectual development. My main precursor in this area is Frank Templeton Prince (1912–2003), poet and academic, who published *The Italian Element in Milton’s Verse* in 1954.<sup>19</sup> Prince’s book inevitably seems slightly old-fashioned sixty-odd years on. It is irritatingly sparse as regards references, and sometimes rather primly written, but Prince laid down a strong scholarly foundation and his poet’s ear gave him a particular advantage in assessing the Italian contribution to Milton’s verse. There were moments when it seemed to me that each time I thought I had broken new ground, I found that Prince had been there before me. In the end, though, I think that I have made a little progress, in some areas, upon his work of the early fifties and the very fact that the most helpful previous work on my topic was written so long ago (and is so short) is, I believe, indicative that there is a gap in scholarship to be filled.

I was also aware that, whilst I was working on my PhD, Professor Catherine Gimelli Martin of the University of Memphis was also writing about Milton and Italy. Her book, *Milton’s*

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<sup>17</sup> Francois Grosjean, *Bilingual: Life and Reality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Grosjean, p. 26.

<sup>19</sup> F.T. Prince, *The Italian Element in Milton’s Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954). Prince is best known as a World War II poet, and particularly for the poem, ‘Soldiers Bathing’ (1942). See: F.T. Prince, *Collected Poems 1935-1992* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2012), p. 55.

*Italy: Anglo-Italian Literature, Travel and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England*, was published, conveniently for me, in December 2016.<sup>20</sup> I have therefore been able to incorporate some of her views into my thesis where relevant (and challenge them, where appropriate). Among other works that I have used frequently are John K Hale's *Milton's Languages* (to which I have already referred) and Mario di Cesare's collection, *Milton in Italy: Contexts, Images, Contradictions*.<sup>21</sup> With the exception, though, of Martin's recent book (which ranges widely and is not principally focused on the poetry), little has been written recently, in an extended form, about the Italian aspects of Milton's poetry. There are, of course, many articles and chapters in books, reports of conferences and conference papers, but there are very few full-length studies. The same is true of scholarship in Italy. Filippo Falcone's overview of Italian Milton scholarship, 'Milton in Italy: A Survey of Scholarship, 1700-2014'<sup>22</sup> shows that the most recent full-length book published in Italy (of 200 pages), is *L'illusione Perduta* by Marisa Sestito published in 1987, thirty years ago,<sup>23</sup> plus Baldi's work from the same period which consists of a series of fairly short articles.<sup>24</sup>

I begin my thesis with a short overview of the state of Anglo-Italian cultural relations up to the early seventeenth century. I then consider how what I have termed Milton's 'Italianisation' occurred, arguing that this began well before his father started paying for his Italian lessons. At various points, I look at the role that music played in this process. (Everyone knows that the Miltons were a musical family<sup>25</sup> but the Italian element in their musicianship and, therefore, in their daily lives has, I think, been under-estimated.) My broad contention is that John Milton's Italian-ness was not a mere question of acquired learning and scholarship but was 'bred in the bone.'

My analysis thereafter addresses *Poems 1645*, and what Prince termed 'the Italian element' in these poems. I have considered the Italian sonnets in detail and have revisited (and revised) the very influential views of John Smart, as set out in his introduction to the Italian poems in his edition of Milton's sonnets published almost a century ago.<sup>26</sup> Moving to the verse in English, I discuss whether *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* have Italian features in addition to their Italian titles. I examine how Italian verse forms, and particularly the *canzone*, impacted upon Milton's verse in English right up to *Lycidas* and, from a different, intertextual perspective, I attempt to clarify the

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<sup>20</sup> Catherine Gimelli Martin, *Milton's Italy - Anglo-Italian Literature, Travel and Religion in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> *Milton in Italy: Contexts, Images, Contradictions*, ed. by Mario di Cesare (New York: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1991). Sometimes criticised for its almost entirely Anglophone perspective.

<sup>22</sup> Filippo Falcone, 'Milton in Italy: A Survey of Scholarship' *Milton Quarterly*, 50, 3 (2016), 172–88.

<sup>23</sup> Marisa Sestito, *L'illusione perduta* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> Sergio Baldi, *Studi Miltoniani* (Firenze: Università degli Studi di Firenze, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> See (for example) Helen Darbishire, *Early Lives of Milton* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1932), p. 51.

<sup>26</sup> *The Sonnets of John Milton*, ed. by J.S. Smart (Glasgow: Maclehose, Jackson and Co., 1921), pp. 133–44.



vexed question of the relationship between Milton's masque, usually known as *Comus*, and Tasso's 'favole pastorale', *Aminta*.

Finally, I deal with Milton's European (but mainly Italian) journey of 1638–9 and his self-representation as 'Milton in Italy' in his letters and later prose. This chapter includes the results of the research I carried out in the *Archivio di Stato di Venezia* in the autumn of 2015. I argue that this great adventure marked the end of what I have termed the first 'Italian period' of his poetry and was not the immediate springboard to further poetic development and ambition often claimed by his biographers.

My argument is, in short, that Milton was exposed to, and absorbed Italian culture from a very early age, a much earlier age than has been previously recognised. He read very widely in Italian literature in his youth. His early poetry in English incorporated Italian models in conscious and painstaking ways. His Italian poetry is equally painstaking and more Petrarchan than has usually been suggested. He developed other types of Italo–English transcultural relationships in his work – particularly in *Comus*, but also in *Lycidas*. The Italian journey then figured as a confrontation with the reality of Italy itself which he presents, both at the time and later in his life, as a personal cultural and ideological conquest. However, contrary to conventional wisdom, this conquest had very few immediate consequences for his poetic career after his return to England when he finally knuckled down to the mundane realities of adult life – although there was, of course, more Italian fruit to come in his later sonnets and, most importantly, in *Paradise Lost*. In my conclusion, I outline some of the directions which a future Italian examination of *Paradise Lost* might take, recognising, of course, that some important work has already been done in this area. But as far as the present discussion is concerned, as I have suggested, Milton's return from Italy and the composition of *Epitaphium Damonis* forms a good boundary to the first stage of his poetic career, often termed 'early', although he was in fact middle-aged in the terms of his own time when it came to its end.

## Chapter 1

### The great subtiltie and wonderful wisdome of the Italians': Anglo-Italian cultural relations in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods

proud Italy,  
Whose manners still our tardy apish nation  
Limps after in base imitation.  
Where doth the world thrust forth a vanity –  
So it be new, there's no respect how vile –  
That is not quickly buzzed into his ears.  
(*Richard II* Act II, sc. i, 21-6.)

The Duke of York's reference to Anglo-Italian cultural relations at the beginning of Act II of Shakespeare's *Richard II* is characterised by contradiction. Italy is 'proud,' but the attempts of Richard's courtiers to imitate her 'manners' are unworthy. Italy, by implication, plays a role in 'thrust(ing) forth (new) vanities', some of which are 'vile'. Shakespeare's play recounts events that took place in the last three years of the fourteenth century, but the lines reflect an early modern view of Italy rather than a medieval one. They reflect a paradoxical construction of Italy, mixing admiration with distrust, and awe with disdain. In this opening chapter, I will explore this construct and its historical origins with the aim of describing the problematic context in which John Milton, most Italophile of early modern English poets, came to be 'Italianised'.

#### I. Banking and Trade

Cultural and artistic interchange between Italy and England was fairly limited prior to the sixteenth century. England was relatively culturally isolated from Italy despite the economic and mercantile links between the two countries stretching back at least to the thirteenth century. This economic relationship derived from Italy's dual status as the hub of the banking industry and of international trade. By the mid-thirteenth century, Italy (or parts of it) had already begun to play an important role in English financial affairs.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: Michael Wyatt, *The Italian Encounter with Tudor England: a Cultural Politics of Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 18–20.

The Bardi family, founders of one of the largest Florentine banks, both traded and provided loans in England from 1267. Edwin S. Hunt describes how the Bardi began their English business with fairly small loans to Edward I. The bank's activities extended during the reign of Edward II and peaked in the reign of Edward III when, according to Hunt, 'the Bardi effectively became banker to the (English) Crown.'<sup>2</sup> Edward's default on his Italian debts subsequently contributed to the collapse of both the Bardi and the Peruzzi banks in 1345,<sup>3</sup> an undoubted blow to Anglo-Italian (or, more accurately, Anglo-Florentine) financial relations. However, unreliability in financial dealings was inherent in the medieval financial system. Deceit and dishonesty, Hunt argues, lay at the very heart of banking and trade:

The Bardi and Peruzzi ... appear to have been involved, directly or indirectly, in large scale swindles, and ... were frequently found guilty of commercial and legal abuses in Florence.<sup>4</sup>

England's uncomfortable dependence upon Italian financial services and trade laid the foundations of a long relationship based upon mutual need, mutual interest and a mutual suspicion that verged, at times, upon mutual contempt. We should bear in mind, of course, that 'Italy' represented a geographical, not a political entity, a network of interdependent, often-warring city states, not even united by a common language.<sup>5</sup> Italian city states varied greatly in power, status, economic make-up and culture. Rome had a unifying function in religious (and sometimes in military) terms but, as its conflict with Venice in the early seventeenth century demonstrated, even Rome's religious authority could be challenged when state sovereignty was at stake.<sup>6</sup>

From an economic point of view, the role of Italy as a financial power, as represented particularly by its two great banking centres, Venice and Florence, was problematic in its very essence, since banking profits relied on forbidden usury. Wayne Visser and Alistair McIntosh describe the roots of religious opposition to usury:

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<sup>2</sup> Edwin S. Hunt, 'A New Look at the Dealings of the Bardi and Peruzzi with Edward III', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (March 1990), 149-162 (p. 151).

<sup>3</sup> Edward's default has been seen as *the* cause of the bank's collapse, but Hunt suggests that his level of indebtedness was not, in fact, as high as has been claimed (Hunt E, p. 161.)

<sup>4</sup> Hunt E, p. 159.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Burke quotes Tullio di Mauro's estimate that even in 1860 less than 3 per cent of the Italian population spoke 'Tuscan' Italian. (Peter Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 167.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example: David Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi - Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 48-52.

Despite its Judaic roots, the critique of usury was most fervently taken up as a cause by the institutions of the Christian Church where the debate prevailed with great intensity for well over a thousand years. The Old Testament decrees were resurrected and a New Testament reference to usury added to fuel the case. Building on the authority of these texts, the Roman Catholic Church had by the fourth century AD prohibited the taking of interest by the clergy, a rule which they extended in the fifth century to the laity. In the eighth century under Charlemagne, they pressed further and declared usury to be a general criminal offence. This anti-usury movement continued to gain momentum during the early Middle Ages and perhaps reached its zenith in 1311 when Pope Clement V made the ban on usury absolute and declared all secular legislation in its favour, null and void.<sup>7</sup>

However, as Visser and McIntosh observe, after this time an uncomfortable but important ‘pro-usury counter movement began to grow.’<sup>8</sup>

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare portrays usury as the business of the Venetian Jewish community, contrasting the grasping and vindictive Jew Shylock, who lends his ducats at interest, with the virtuous and ‘disinterested’ Christian Antonio. But this Judaeo-Christian divide was a myth. Banking in Venice, as in Florence, was a mainstream Christian activity with biblical strictures against usury being addressed through a variety of bureaucratic devices, half-truths and workarounds. Biblical teaching was taken seriously but, nonetheless, for practical reasons had to be circumvented. Ideological means were found for gentiles to carry on a profitable banking business.<sup>9</sup> The Italian setting of Shakespeare’s play (so common in early modern English drama), has a particular significance here. John W. Draper (author of a rare article on usury in *The Merchant of Venice*), described the figure of the usurer in early modern literature thus: ‘Partly classical, partly medieval in origin, he is often, like Vice in the old Morality plays, both wicked and comic: Shylock is clearly in this tradition and follows directly upon Marlowe’s Barabas, who also combines moneylender and *Italianate Jew*<sup>10</sup> (emphasis added.) How ‘Italianate’ Shakespeare’s portrayal of Shylock may be, is debatable but, in distancing the problem of usury in pre-capitalist society by placing it in an Italian context, the play associates usury with Italian, as well as with Jewish identity. The Prologue to

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<sup>7</sup> Wayne A.M. Visser and Alastair McIntosh, ‘A Short Review of the Historical Critique of Usury’, *Accounting, Business & Financial History*, Vol. 8, No. 2, July 1998 (London: Routledge, 1998), 175–189 (p. 178).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.179.

<sup>9</sup> R. de Roover, *The Medici Bank 1397-1494* (Washington: Beard Books, 1999), p.10.

<sup>10</sup> John W. Draper, ‘Usury in “The Merchant of Venice”’, *Modern Philology*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (August 1935), p. 39. More recently, Graham Holderness cites William Thomas’ account of the typical Venetian as ‘proud, disdainful, covetous, a great niggard, a more lecher, spare of living, tyrant to his tenant, finally never satisfied with hoarding up of money.’ (Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare and Venice* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2002), p. 29.

Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* is delivered by a resurrected Machiavelli who promises 'to present the tragedy of a Jew,/ Who smiles to see how full his bags are cramm'd;/ Which money was not got without my means.'<sup>11</sup> The curtain rises to reveal Barabas surrounded by heaps of gold. Even more clearly than Shakespeare, Marlowe associates the dark side of Italy, as personified by Machiavelli, with usury.

Envy may also have played its part in the complexities of the English relationship with Italy. As I have noted, Italy was the dominant European trading power from the fourteenth century well into the early modern period. Shakespeare's version of Venice may stand for contemporary London but, in choosing Venice, he also acknowledges the reality of Italy's status in the pre-capitalist world. Raymond de Roover argues:

Modern capitalism based on private ownership has its roots in Italy during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. From the Crusades to the Great Discoveries, Italy was the dominant economic power in the western world, and its merchants were the leading businessmen. They were the middlemen whose trade relations linked the Levant to the shores of the North Sea.<sup>12</sup>

Trade and banking were inextricably linked. The Bardi family combined money-lending with the wool trade from the earliest days of its activity in England.<sup>13</sup> In the early fifteenth century, the Medici family founded a *bottega* (workshop) in Florence for the production of woollen cloth, nominally managed by the thirteen-year-old Cosimo di Medici.<sup>14</sup> This was followed by a second workshop set up in 1408.<sup>15</sup> The Medici bank itself came into existence only shortly before these business enterprises in 1397. Its London branch was established in 1446.<sup>16</sup> The interconnectedness of the financial and mercantile arms of the Medici empire can be seen from the fact that, in 1455, Damiano Ruffini (a Milanese) sued the Bruges branch of the bank for damages resulting from defective packing of nine bales of wool he had bought from the Medici bank's London manager.<sup>17</sup>

The first volume of the *Calendar of State Papers Relating to English Affairs in the Archives of Venice* (1202-1509) is almost entirely devoted to matters of trade and shipping as far as civil affairs are concerned.<sup>18</sup> Venice was an important trading port, the centre of

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<sup>11</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, Prologue, ll. 30-32 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

<sup>12</sup> De Roover, p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Hunt, p.151.

<sup>14</sup> De Roover, p.42.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> *Calendar of State Papers, Venice*, 38 Volumes, various eds. and translators (London: Public Record Office, 1864-1947). <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/search/series/cal-state-papers--venice> . Rawdon Brown

an extensive empire and also a stepping-stone for those making the pilgrimage (or, sometimes, crusade) to the Holy Land. Prior to the historical events described in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, Henry Bolingbroke passed through Venice in 1390 and 1392 on crusade. Thomas Mowbray arrived there on a journey to the Holy Land after his banishment by Richard II in 1398, but died of the plague before he could continue his onward journey. The presence of both English Lords was recorded by the Venetian state, since both sought her assistance in their travels.<sup>19</sup>

The *Calendar* shows that the sixteenth century saw a very significant increase in the level and variety (possibly also in the recording) of interaction between Italy and England. The first volume of the *Calendar* covers a period of three centuries from 1202 to 1509 (most of the records dating from the fifteenth century). The records for the next ninety-four years (1509-1603) occupy eight separate volumes.<sup>20</sup>

I would argue, therefore, that the ambivalent nature of the important economic and trading relationship between England and Italy prior to the early modern period, formed the backdrop to a problematic and contradictory cultural exchange between them. The tensions in this relationship reached a peak, as we shall see, in the last decade of the sixteenth century. England played an uncomfortably subservient role in both economic and cultural affairs right up to Milton's time, providing raw materials for Italian manufacturing and using Italian credit on the economic side, whilst borrowing Italian models and forms in literature, music and 'fashion' in its widest sense.

## II. Early Cultural Interchange

Although cultural interchange was limited in the Middle Ages, as I have said, there was one very important Anglo-Italian literary relationship. This derived from Geoffrey Chaucer's poetic encounter with the 'three crowns of Florence' (Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio). Chaucer's diplomatic visits to Italy led to his close engagement with vernacular Italian texts. Michael Wyatt argues that Chaucer's 'experience of the actual

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(1806-1883) who lived in Venice, edited and translated the first seven volumes of the *Calendar* using documents in the *Archivio di Stato* at the *Frari*, the *Biblioteca Marciana* and other archives in Northern Italy. His work took the *Calendar* up to 1580. There followed eight decades of scholarly exploration of Venetian and other North Italian archives pertaining to English affairs which only ended in 1947 when Allen B. Hinds published volume 38 of the *Calendar* covering the period 1673-1675.

<sup>19</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Vol I*, pp. lxxxi - lxxxii.

<sup>20</sup> Of course, this will also represent increased bureaucratic activity by the Venetian state and perhaps also more careful preservation of bureaucratic records.

political communities from which [these poets] work emerged<sup>21</sup> during his two missions to Italy on behalf of Richard II in the 1370s changed the character of his later work. Both Petrarch (1304-1374) and Boccaccio (1313-1375) were alive at the time of Chaucer's first visit to Italy in 1373, and both writers are presences in *The Canterbury Tales* with Boccaccio dominating. The *Decameron* was source for the *Monk's Tale*, the *Knight's Tale* and the *Franklin's Tale* and may also have provided Chaucer with the model for the 'framing' device for his collection of stories.<sup>22</sup> The *Clerk's Tale* owes a debt to both Boccaccio and Petrarch since it is a direct translation of Petrarch's Latin version of Boccaccio's *Griselda*. Chaucer also silently translated one of Petrarch's sonnets ("S'amor non è, che dunque è quel ch'io sento?" [*Rime* 132],) integrating it into the first book of *Troilus and Criseyde* (ll. 400-20).<sup>23</sup> Despite Chaucer's example, however, and despite the fact that illuminated manuscripts of the writings of Dante and Boccaccio were already circulating widely across Europe in the later fourteenth century,<sup>24</sup> there is little other sign in the next one hundred and fifty years of English literature that vernacular Italian texts impinged upon vernacular English writing. The fifteenth century owed much more to French than to Italian sources. (Malory's *La Morte d'Arthur*, probably now the century's best-known work, was based principally on the French Romances from the Vulgate Cycle.) John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, written between 1421 and 1439 is one of the very few contemporary works with Italian origins, based, as it is, on Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*. Even here, Lydgate used an intermediary prose translation, Laurent de Premierfait's *Des cas de nobles hommes et femmes* (1409) as his immediate source. Neither is *Fall of Princes* a straightforward translation of the source text. Lydgate added other material. And it is not, of course, based on a vernacular Italian text. There are few other examples of Italian presences in the literature in this period, although we can add, on J.R. Hale's authority, the *Lucubratiunculæ Tiburtinae* of Robert Flemmyng.<sup>25</sup>

So, when, in 1497, the Venetian aristocrat Andrea Trevisan finally arrived at Henry VII's court as ambassador, he did not come to a court or country that particularly valued Italy as a source of cultural capital, certainly as far as literature was concerned.

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<sup>21</sup> Wyatt, p.18.

<sup>22</sup> Helen Cooper in her discussion of 'The Frame' in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales* argues this. (H. Cooper, 'The Frame' in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002,) pp. 1–23. Mario Praz on the other hand argued that Dante's *Divina Commedia* was Chaucer's model. ('Chaucer e i grandi trecentisti italiani' in *Machiavelli in inghilterra ed altri saggi* (Roma: Tuminelli, 1943), pp. 71-73.

<sup>23</sup> Michael R.G. Spiller, *The Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 64.

<sup>24</sup> M. T. Clanchy, 'Manuscript Culture 1100-1500', in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. by Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 194-206 (p.198).

<sup>25</sup> J.R. Hale, *England and the Italian Renaissance* (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 12. Hereafter, 'Hale JR'.

According to Michael Wyatt, Trevisan, though impressed by the King's wealth and political skills, saw the English as having little interest in letters or learning.<sup>26</sup> This judgement perhaps reflected a low level of awareness of his homeland's culture. Hale argues in *England and the Italian Renaissance* that, even in the first half of the sixteenth century, English appreciation of Italian culture was limited:

Italian influences were ... affecting English learning and customs ... this had led to very little interest in modern Italy. ... A hundred years of interest in Italian learning had only led to one work concerned with contemporary Italy, a Latin poem describing the Papal Court at the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>27</sup>

Even during the 'English Renaissance', England's cultural reception of Italy remained very selective.

However, as Hale implies, things were changing, albeit slowly. Until the beginning of the sixteenth century, cultural exchange relied upon travel and diplomatic missions as much as on the circulation of Italian texts or artefacts. But in the early sixteenth century, Italian sculpture, at least, began to make an impact in England. Pietro Torrigiano (1472-1528) – perhaps best known now for having broken Michelangelo's nose during a youthful dispute whilst they were fellow apprentices in Florence – came to England, probably in 1507, and was commissioned by Henry VIII to design his parents' tomb in Westminster Abbey.<sup>28</sup> He also made a terracotta bust of Henry VII himself, based on his death mask, which is today in the Victoria and Albert Museum.<sup>29</sup> Guido Mazzoni (1445-1518), originally from Modena, but at the time sculptor to the court of Charles VIII of France, also submitted an unsuccessful design for Henry VII's tomb.<sup>30</sup>

These early stirrings of interest ignored Italian pictorial art, however. Michael Wyatt observes that 'few Italian artists were active in later Tudor England. Following Henry VIII's divorce and the ensuing iconoclasm of the early Anglican period, the fashion for Italian Renaissance art, such as it was, seems to have passed.'<sup>31</sup> Italian painting made little impact on the English who did not fully recognise its importance until the reign of the enthusiastic (and doomed) art collector, Charles I. (In the same period, Inigo Jones translated Italian Renaissance architecture into an English context as

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<sup>26</sup> Wyatt, p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Hale JR, p.12. (Hale is referring to the *Lucubratiunculae Tiburtinae* of Robert Flemmyng.) His account somewhat overstates the true position. (See following page.)

<sup>28</sup> <http://westminster-abbey.org/our-history/royals/henry-vii-and-elizabeth-of-york>

<sup>29</sup> <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O8858/king-henry-vii-portrait-bust-torrigiano-pietro/>

<sup>30</sup> Wyatt, p. 44

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.



a result of *his* personal experience of Italy). The most celebrated painter of Henry VIII's court was, of course, the German/Swiss, Hans Holbein, landscape painter turned portrait artist.

It was Henry's arrival on the throne that finally opened up England's cultural relationship with Europe and with Italy.<sup>32</sup> Henry, unlike his father, was the Renaissance humanist *par excellence* and therefore could not but look to mainland Europe. The period from 1530 to 1547 in Henry's troubled court saw the development of an Italo-English literature based on imitation and translation of Petrarch and the adoption and adaptation of Italian verse forms, especially the sonnet. The late transplantation of the sonnet into non-Italian linguistic and poetic traditions is hard to explain, as Michael Spiller observes.<sup>33</sup> It finally came to be adopted in English verse almost one hundred and fifty years after Petrarch's death when Sir Thomas Wyatt, diplomat and poet, and Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, soldier and poet, appropriated the form. Like Chaucer's, Thomas Wyatt's literary contact with Italian poetry was closely linked with his personal experience of the country as a diplomat. He offered his services to Sir John Russell, who had been charged by Henry with an embassy to Pope Clement VII in 1527.<sup>34</sup> Wyatt had little time in his busy and dangerous diplomatic schedule, for cultural tourism, but Susan Brigden in her biography, *Thomas Wyatt – the Heart's Forest*, speculates whether, just as Chaucer could have encountered Petrarch or Boccaccio in the fourteenth century, Wyatt might have met Ludovico Ariosto whilst visiting Alfonso's court at Ferrara one hundred and fifty years later.<sup>35</sup> Michael Spiller suggests that he might also have encountered Pietro Bembo, author of upwards of one hundred Italian sonnets, during his stay in Padova.<sup>36</sup> Both Bembo and Ariosto, not to mention Petrarch, were very significant figures for Milton. Surrey, on the other hand, busy with war rather than diplomacy, never visited Italy. His knowledge of Italian came from his extensive grounding in modern languages (like Milton's).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> One of Henry's early acts as king was to commission Torrigiano to design and construct his parents' funerary monument in Westminster Abbey. (Wyatt, p. 47.)

<sup>33</sup> Michael R.G. Spiller, *The Development of the Sonnet: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> Susan Brigden, *Thomas Wyatt – the Heart's Forest* (London: Faber, 2012), p. 117.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.132.

<sup>36</sup> Spiller, p. 85.

<sup>37</sup> Brigden, in her *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Surrey, describes how '(i)n March 1543 John Clerke, dedicating his translation from French of the narrative *Lamant mal traite de samye* to the earl, praised him for his great efforts in translating from Latin and Italian as well as from Spanish and French.' (Susan Brigden, 'Howard, Henry, Earl of Surrey [1516/17–1547]', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008.)

Both Surrey and Wyatt's sonnets derive from Petrarch's *Rime sparse* but, as far as direct imitation is concerned, from only a very small selection of the poems. Catherine Bates notes that, however wide their actual knowledge of Petrarch's work, English poets, in practice, drew on only a very few of his poems in their writing:

It has often been noted ... that for all their familiarity with Petrarch as the founder of the sonnet tradition, English poets actually refer to only a tiny number of his poems. Of the 366 sonnets and other lyrics that go to make up the *Rime sparse*, a bare ten or twelve turn up as regular objects of imitation or variation, and of these the most popular by far are 'S'amor non è' and 'Pace non trovo' in which the images of living death, delightful pain, fearful hope, icy fire and so on are catalogued with particular density (between them, these two sonnets inspired imitations by Chaucer, Wyatt, Gascoigne, Watson, Sidney, Daniel, Lodge, Spenser and a host of less well-known or anonymous poets).<sup>38</sup>

It is generally agreed that it was Wyatt and Surrey who established the 'English' sonnet, characterised by a final couplet at the end of the sestet, a practice unusual (though not entirely unknown) in the Italian form. Whilst Wyatt adhered to the Italian practice (more difficult to follow in English) of using only two rhymes in the octave (normally abab abab or abba abba), Surrey often ignored this rule, using different rhymes in the two quatrains (usually abab cdcd). He may therefore have the superior claim to be the originator of the English variant of the sonnet form. He can also, incidentally, be regarded as the 'inventor' of blank verse in English. He used unrhymed iambic pentameter in his translations from Virgil's *Aeneid*. This innovation may have derived from his knowledge of Italian poetry. Brigden suggests that he might possibly have taken the line he used in his translations (of Books 2 and 4 of the *Aeneid*), from the hendecasyllabic *versi sciolti* used in a well-known translation of the first six books of the work by six anonymous Italian gentlemen (first published in Venice in 1540).<sup>39</sup> Florence Ridley, on the other hand, basing her view on the work of Rudolf Imelmann, argues that 'Surrey took suggestions for some of his wording from earlier Italian translations of the *Aeneid* by Liburnio and de Molza'.<sup>40</sup> Liburnio's translation was available by 1534,<sup>41</sup> but de Molza's not until 1539,<sup>42</sup> so that it is also possible that these poets may have prompted

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<sup>38</sup> See Catherine Bates, 'Desire, discontent, parody: the love sonnet in early modern England', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Sonnet*, ed. by A.D. Cousins and Peter Howard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 108.

<sup>39</sup> Federico Cinti, 'Sul "Virgilio" di Annibale Caro', *Bibliomanie, Ricerca filologica, storia delle idee e orientamento bibliografico*, No. 41, Gennaio/Giugno 2016, [www.bibliomanie.it](http://www.bibliomanie.it).

<sup>40</sup> Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, *Aeneid*, ed. by Florence H. Ridley (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963), p. 31.

<sup>41</sup> Niccolò Liburnio's translation of Book IV of the *Aeneid* was published in Treviso in 1534.

<sup>42</sup> *Aeneid* (Howard), pp. 3-4.

Surrey's use of blank verse. Surrey's translation was published in full by Tottel in 1557.<sup>43</sup> John Day's edition of the the fourth book only, was published, three years previously, in 1554.<sup>44</sup>

This short period of seventeen years in the sixteenth century thus saw the importation into English literature of the two main poetic forms which John Milton, almost a century later, was to make his own. Was Milton familiar with the work of either Wyatt or Surrey? *Tottel's Miscellany* was the (unfaithful) text through which the Elizabethans knew both these poets. It was first published in 1557 and republished twice in that year. At least seven more editions were published during Elizabeth's reign, the last in 1587.<sup>45</sup> It is possible, therefore, that Milton could have had access to a copy of Tottel's collection. It is also conceivable that he might have come across Surrey's translation of the *Aeneid*. On the other hand, he makes no reference to either poet in any of his prose works. Brigden comments that 'For all their popularity in their own century, the works of both poets entered into genteel obscurity in the next.'<sup>46</sup> Milton had, of course, no need to rely upon sixteenth-century English transmutations of the Italian sonnet form as he had direct access to Petrarch and other Italian sonnet writers from his teens,<sup>47</sup> and, generally speaking, he followed his Italian models far more closely than either Wyatt or Surrey had done. Whether he might have been aware of Surrey's *Aeneid* when choosing the verse form for his own epic is an intriguing but unanswerable question.<sup>48</sup> However this may be, the Italianate verse of Wyatt and Surrey marked an important stage in the relationship between Italian writing and English literature. Their naturalisation of the sonnet form provoked an explosion of English sonnet sequences throughout the remainder of the sixteenth century. Italian literature had definitely arrived on the English cultural scene.

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<sup>43</sup> Virgil, *Certain booke of Vigiles Aeneas turned into English meter by the right honorable lorde, Henry Earle of Surrey* (London: Richard Tottel, 1557).

<sup>44</sup> Virgil, *The fourth booke of Virgill, intreating of the loue betwene Aeneas & Dido, translated into English* (London: John Day, 1554). Florence Ridley, the editor of Surrey's translation, says that Day's edition is undated (Howard, *Aeneid*, p. 5). The ESTC records the date of publication as 1554. (Citation number: S125720.)

<sup>45</sup> There may have been still later editions according to Holton and MacFaul, editors of the current Penguin text, although they accept that the popularity of the *Miscellany* had passed its peak by the 1590's. (*Tottel's Miscellany: Songs and Sonnets of Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, Sir Thomas Wyatt and Others*, ed. by Amanda Holton and Tom MacFaul [London: Penguin/Random House, 2011], p. xxv.)

<sup>46</sup> Brigden, Susan. "Howard, Henry, earl of Surrey (1516/17–1547)" *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004) retrieved 5 Sept. 2016 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13905>>.

<sup>47</sup> Milton purchased the Della Casa text included in the 'Dante-Della Casa-Varchi Volume', now in the New York Public Library, in 1629, when he was probably still only 20. (Maurice Kelley, 'Milton's Dante-Della Casa-Varchi Volume', *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 46 (1962), 502-3.)

<sup>48</sup> The Italian poet and critic Giosuè Carducci argued that he took his blank verse form from Tasso's *Le Sette Giornate del Mondo Creato*. (Giosuè Carducci, *Opere* [Bologna: Zanichelli, 1921], p. 304.)

Edward VI's short reign from 1547 till 1553 saw a new development in Anglo-Italian relations. Henry VIII, despite his personal scepticism about the theology of the reform, had surrounded his son with protestant tutors. During the six years of Edward's reign, England was a radically protestant country. The first impact of the counter-reformation was being felt in Italy, provoking a significant migration of protestant Italian refugees to countries beyond the reach of the Inquisition. During Edward's kingship, England seemed an ideal place in which to seek such asylum. Bernardino Ochino and Pietro Vermigli, men with established positions in the Catholic Church in Italy, fled together from Italy in 1542 and arrived in England, five years later, at the invitation of Thomas Cranmer. Ochino (who had been Vicar-General of the Capuchin order in Siena), established the first Italian 'stranger church' in England in the year he arrived in England. Vermigli (who had been Prior of San Frediano in Lucca), became the second occupant of the Regius chair of Theology at Christ Church College, Oxford in 1548, and was involved in the drafting of both the first and second versions of the *Book of Common Prayer* in 1549 and 1552.<sup>49</sup> Given Cranmer's support, it is perhaps unsurprising that these migrants achieved positions of considerable status in such a short space of time. But they were not alone in this.<sup>50</sup> Michelangelo Florio, father of John Florio, writer of Italian primers, translator of Montaigne and friend of Theodore Diodati,<sup>51</sup> made the same northward journey, and perhaps because of his connections with Ochino and Vermigli, almost immediately became pastor of the Italian Reformed Church in London. After being accused of fornication with an unknown younger member of the congregation, having confessed his sin and left his post, he embarked upon a career as language teacher and Italian grammarian, quickly securing the position of Italian tutor to Lady Jane Grey in the household of the Duke of Suffolk.<sup>52</sup> He, too, according to Giovanna Perrini, developed links with other highly placed English figures - with William Cecil, and later also with Cranmer.<sup>53</sup>

So, during Edward's reign, there was kind of 'underground railroad' from Italy to England for persecuted Italian reformists of high status. This closed down immediately

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<sup>49</sup> Wyatt, pp. 84-97.

<sup>50</sup> It might be argued that they were establishing an Italian reformist tradition. Marco Antonio de Dominis was to make the transition from Archbishop of Spalato (Split) to 'Dean of Windsor' via a temporary conversion to the Church of England with the support of Henry Wotton and James I in 1616. Of course, journeys were also made by English Catholics in the opposite direction.

<sup>51</sup> See Chapter 2, p. 51.

<sup>52</sup> Giovanna Perini, 'Michelangelo Florio', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, <http://www.treccani.it/biografico/> retrieved 14.06.2016.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

after Edward's death. Florio fled to Antwerp (and then Strasbourg) following his pupil's execution and Mary's accession to the throne. In exile, he wrote an account of Lady Jane Grey's brief reign, *Historia de la vita e de la morte de l'Illustrissima Signora Giovanna Graia, già regina eletta e pubblicata in Inghilterra e de le cose accadute in quel regno dopo la morte del re Edoardo*.<sup>54</sup> Ochino and Vermigli fled to Geneva. Michelangelo's son John Florio, who was to be the most important writer of Italian origin in the late Tudor and Jacobean period, was born in England in 1553, but almost immediately was taken to Soglio in Switzerland by his fleeing family and was eventually educated at the University of Tübingen in Württemberg. He returned to England in around 1575, aged twenty-two, by which time Elizabeth I had been on the throne for seventeen years.

### III. The Elizabethan Period

The young Princess Elizabeth had an Italian language tutor, Giovanni Battista Castiglione, who taught her so well that his compatriot, Pietro Bizzarri, wrote of her Italian skills: "Ma in particolare possede ella la nostra più tersa et più elegante favella, di cui suo principal precettore è stato il signor Giovanni Battista Castiglioni."<sup>55</sup> Castiglione was imprisoned and tortured under Mary Tudor but, following Elizabeth's accession to the throne, was named a gentleman of the bedchamber, a position which he held until his death in 1597. Elizabeth herself, as Michael Wyatt notes, despite fundamental religious differences, was an Italophile.<sup>56</sup> Her interest in Italian literature was such that in her youth she translated the first ninety lines of Petrarch's *Il Trionfo dell' Eternità* into English, possibly, Jason Lawrence argues in *Who the Devil taught thee so much Italian? Italian language learning and literary imitation in early modern England*, as a language learning exercise.<sup>57</sup> Her reign was marked, paradoxically, both by an unparalleled enthusiasm for things Italian and by a darkening of the already ambivalent attitude of the English towards Italy and Italians.

Wyatt describes the development of the cultural relationship between Italy and England in the period thus:

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<sup>54</sup> Thought to have been written around 1561 but printed in 1607 in Middelburg in the Netherlands at the instigation of Johan Radermacher.

<sup>55</sup> P. Bizzarri, *Historia della guerra fatta in Ungheria... con la narrazione di tutte quelle cose che sono avvenute in Europa dall'anno 1564 insino all'anno 1568* (Lione: G. Rovillio 1568), p. 206. 'But in particular she has mastered our most clear and elegant language, under her tutor, Signor Giovanni Battista Castiglione.'

<sup>56</sup> Wyatt, p. 117.

<sup>57</sup> Jason Lawrence, *Who the Devil taught thee so much Italian? Italian language learning and literary imitation in early modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 32.

The idea of Italy ... took on a life of its own during the years that Elizabeth 1 occupied the English throne. This process occurred through the agency of members of an actual community, but its result was a fictive spectre of political and cultural authority that contributed to the legitimising rationale for English imperialist ideology.<sup>58</sup>

But, while Italian historical and political writing stood as sources of authority, and Venice, at least, stood as a precursor to England's nascent colonial expansion, the status of the actual Italian migrant community in Elizabethan England was problematic. The attitude of the contemporary 'host' community to outsiders from continental Europe is very familiar:

Despite the high degree of enthusiasm on the part of the Tudor monarchy for those 'strangers' who brought with them to England skills that were otherwise in short supply, the reception given them by the wider English public was often blatantly hostile. There was a considerable amount of resentment that much of the skilled labour practice in England in the sixteenth century was undertaken by foreigners; the Tudor middle and lower classes were never favourable to them, and several times these tensions erupted into riots aimed at protesting the presence and prerogatives of 'strangers'.<sup>59</sup>

In reality, the Italian community in London was relatively small in number. The prestige that Italy and things Italian enjoyed at Elizabeth's court was not reflected in the status of the community itself.<sup>60</sup> A huge advance in enthusiasm for Italian literature, learning and language was accompanied by a very ambivalent attitude towards Italians themselves, even towards Italian protestant refugees.

The level of enthusiasm for things Italian can, in part, be gauged by the sudden, though relatively short-lived, increase, in late Tudor times, in the publication of Italian texts and texts by Italians (both in the original and in translation). In her *Bibliographical Catalogue of Italian Books printed in England 1558-1603*, Soko Tomita lists two hundred and ninety-one such works.<sup>61</sup> These include twenty-nine works on grammar and rhetoric (both Italian Grammars and Latin grammars written by Italian authors) and sixteen musical works (usually involving a mixture of Italian and English composers). The scope of these publications suggests a very wide range of motivation and interests on the part of English printers, publishers and readers: a strong vogue for Italian language learning (to which I shall return), a demand for the latest in Italian (and Italianate) music, a desire for access to both 'classical' (by which I mean Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio) and more

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<sup>58</sup> Wyatt p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p. 117.

<sup>61</sup> Soko Tomita, *A Bibliographical Catalogue of Italian Books Printed in England 1558-1603* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2008).

recent Italian literature, both in the original and in translation, alongside an great interest in Italian historical and political writing.

Such was the level of demand for Italian works and works in Italian during this period that some printers came to specialise in publishing Italian texts. One of the best known of these is John Wolfe (1548?-1601). Between 1578 and 1591, Wolfe published ‘twenty-five texts in Italian, fourteen in Latin written by Italian authors, and five English translations from Italian.’<sup>62</sup> The English Short Title Catalogue records a total of two hundred and eighteen works published by Wolfe during this period, so about a fifth of his publications were, in some sense, ‘Italian’.<sup>63</sup> In 1578, he had published Machiavelli’s *Discorsi* and *Il prencipe* with a preface defending its the author from contemporary detractors. He had also published texts by Pietro Aretino (whose pornographic *Sonnetti lussuriosi* remained unpublished in Britain until the nineteenth century), a tri-lingual edition of Castiglione’s *Il cortegiano*, and Guarini’s *Il pastor fido* bound with Tasso’s *Aminta*. Some of Wolfe’s publications purported to have been printed in Italy, in part perhaps because of the risks involved in being directly associated with them in England, but also to make them marketable in Italy. The title page of his edition of Machiavelli’s *Discorsi*, for example, bears the legend ‘IN PALERMO - Apresso gli heredi d’Antoniello degli Antonielli.’<sup>64</sup>

In 1591, however, he published a work whose full title – *A discovery of the great subtiltie and wonderful wisdom of the Italians whereby they beare sway ouer the most part of Christendome, and cunninglie behaue themselues to fetch the quintessence out of the peoples purses: discoursing at large the meanes, howe they prosecute and continue the same: and last of all, conuenient remedies to preuent all their pollicies herein*, by ‘G.B.A.F.’,<sup>65</sup> – reveals its strongly Italo-phobic emphasis. Presumably, market conditions had changed, for, after this, of one hundred and sixteen books recorded in the ESTC as having been published by Wolfe between 1591 and his death ten years later, only four are by Italian authors. Stefano Villani comments on London’s role in Italian publication:

per un ventennio circa, negli anni ’80 e ’90, Londra divenne un centro di pubblicazione di libri in italiano che non potevano essere pubblicati in Italia. Questa nuova stagione è legata ai nomi di tre stampatori, John Wolfe, John Charlewood, Richard Field, che tra il 1580 e il 1599 pubblicarono a

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<sup>62</sup> Wyatt, p. 196.

<sup>63</sup> ESTC, <http://estc.bl.uk/>.

<sup>64</sup> EEBO, <http://tinyurl.com/gmwcmo>.

<sup>65</sup> G.B.A.F., *A discovery of the great subtiltie and wonderful wisdom of the Italians etc* (London: John Wolfe, 1591).

Londra una quarantina di libri in italiano.<sup>66</sup>

(for around two decades in the 1580s and 90s, London became a centre for the publication of books in Italian which could not be published in Italy. This new period is linked with the names of three printers, John Wolfe, John Charlewood, Richard Field, who between 1580 and 1599 published in London about forty books in Italian.)<sup>67</sup>

Villani notes that the vogue for Italian publication in England was a very specific and time-limited phenomenon which came to an almost complete halt at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Against the forty or so texts published in the 1580s and 90s, he counts only twenty Italian texts published in the next hundred years.<sup>68</sup> One of these was of great importance to John Milton, however. The very first edition of Paolo Sarpi's *Istoria del Consilio Trentino* was published in London in 1619 by John Bill ('Giovanni Billio') with the author's name thinly disguised anagrammatically as 'Pietro Soave Polano' (Paolo Sarpi Veneto). Milton refers to Sarpi's work on a number of occasions: in his one surviving Commonplace Book and also in *Areopagitica* where he refers to 'Padre Paolo the great unmasker of the Trentine Council.'<sup>69</sup> The availability of the many Italian texts published in the late sixteenth century in the London of Milton's childhood and adolescence was an important factor in his understanding and awareness of Italy.

The extent of Italian impact on English culture in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century can also be assessed by the sources and models it provided for English works of all kinds. By my count, eleven of Shakespeare's plays have Italian sources, including nine of the sixteen comedies. Real historical Italian figures appeared in the dramatic fictions of late Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights. Famously, as I have already mentioned, Machiavelli appears as the Prologue in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*.<sup>70</sup> More strangely, the Italian historian and statesman Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1540) serves as a chorus figure in Barnabe Barnes' *The Devil's Charter*.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Stefano Villani, 'Libri Pubblicati in Italiano in Inghilterra Nel XVII Secolo : Il Caso Della Traduzione Del Book of Common Prayer Del 1685', in *Le Livre Italien Hors D'Italie Au XVIIe Siècle, Actes Du Colloque Du 23-25 Avril 2009 Réunis Par Delphine Montoliu*, ed. by Delphine Montoliu (Toulouse: University of Toulouse, 2010), pp. 91-120.

<sup>67</sup> My translation.

<sup>68</sup> Villani, p. 96.

<sup>69</sup> *Essential Prose*, p.181.

<sup>70</sup> Felix Raab comments that 'It was through the stage ... that the majority of Englishmen first heard [Machiavelli's] name, and the character of the "politic villian" has stuck to him in the popular imagination to our own day.' (*The English Face of Machiavelli* [London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1964], p. 57.)

<sup>71</sup> See Michael J. Redmond, "'Yet will they read me?": Machiavelli and the Role of Italian Political Authors in *The Jew of Malta* and *the Devil's Charter*' in *Intertestualità Shakespeariane : Il Cinquecento Italiano E Il Rinascimento Inglese*, ed. by Michele Marrapodi (Roma: Bulzoni, 2003).



There were some particularly influential Italian texts. As I have said, *Il Pastor Fido* was published in Italian by Wolfe in 1591 and translated into English (anonymously) in 1602. It provided the model for John Marston's *The Malcontent* and a title for John Fletcher's *The Faithfull Shepherdes*.<sup>72</sup> Tasso's *Aminta* was published by Wolfe in the same volume as *Il Pastor Fido*, almost secretly: Wolfe's title page makes no reference to the inclusion of Tasso's play.<sup>73</sup> *Aminta* had a major impact upon English pastoral including, as I will show later, upon *Comus*. Richard Helgerson argues that the first three books of Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, published in 1590, show a clear debt to Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* (first published in Italy in a pirated edition in 1580, and in 1581 with Tasso's approval), including 'at least one extensive borrowing' from Tasso's epic.<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, no Italian text of the *Gerusalemme* was published in England in this period.<sup>75</sup> Edward Fairfax's translation, upon which Milton draws in extensively in *Paradise Lost*, was, however, published in London in 1600.<sup>76</sup>

This was an extraordinary time, then, in Anglo-Italian cultural history. The Italian scholar Michele Marrapodi comments upon the centrality of the Italian language itself in his introduction to *Intertestualità Shakespeariane – Il Cinquecento italiano e il Rinascimento inglese*:

In area linguistica, l'uso della lingua italiana nella corte di Elisabetta, l'influenza di molti trattati italiani sulla moda, la musica, la danza, e l'arte militare, e il notevole apporto dei vari fuoriusciti e letterati italiani residenti in Inghilterra favoriscono il crescente interesse per la nostra lingua, testimonianza dalle numerose traduzioni di novelle, commedie e manuali di educazione che si succedono sulla scena elisabettiana.<sup>77</sup>

(In the area of language, the use of Italian at the Elizabeth's court, the influence of many Italian treatises on fashion, on music, on dance, and on the art of war, and the remarkable contribution of the various Italian refugees and literary figures living in England encouraged the growing interest in [the Italian] language, as evidenced by the numerous translations of romances, comedies and education manuals which appeared on the Elizabethan scene.)<sup>78</sup>

Italian was *the* modern language to learn at this time. Silvana Sciarrino in her essay in *Intertestualità Shakespeariane* comments that:

<sup>72</sup> Although in my view, *Aminta* is the more significant intertext.

<sup>73</sup> See EBO, <http://tinyurl.com/jkzubmf>.

<sup>74</sup> Richard Helgerson, 'Tasso on Spenser: The Politics of Chivalric Romance', in *Patronage, Politics, and Literary Traditions in England, 1558-1658*, ed. by Cedric Brown (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), p. 177.

<sup>75</sup> See Tomita, *Appendix 5*, pp. 497-529.

<sup>76</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Godfrey of Bulloigne or The Recoverie of Jerusalem*, trans. by Edward Fairfax, Gent. (London: Hatfield, 1600).

<sup>77</sup> *Intertestualità Shakespeariane*, p.13.

<sup>78</sup> My translation.

Lo studio delle lingue moderne durante il Cinquecento ... va collegato con gli ideali educativi che erano alla base della formazione dell'uomo rinascimentale al quale, in particolare se inglese, la familiarità con l'italiano consentiva l'accesso ad un mondo culturale di straordinaria ricchezza; va peraltro ricordato che il latino aveva ormai assolto al compito di servire da lingua universale. Lo studio dell'italiano non ebbe dunque scopi utilitaristici ... ma fu riservato ad una élite, fisionomia che mantenne fino alla prima metà del Seicento.<sup>79</sup>

(Study of modern languages during the sixteenth century ... was linked to ideals about education which underlay the development of 'renaissance man' for whom, particularly if he was English, familiarity with Italian gave access to a cultural world of extraordinary richness; we should remember, though, that Latin had taken on the role of *lingua franca*. The study of Italian did not therefore have utilitarian purposes ... but was reserved for an élite, a characteristic which it retained up to the first half of the seventeenth century.)<sup>80</sup>

Italian music was also seen as advanced, authoritative and trend-setting.<sup>81</sup> I will consider the impact Italian musicians may have had on John Milton's early life in my next chapter.

#### IV. Elizabethan Italophobia

Nonetheless, as I have suggested, the historic sense of ambivalence towards Italy persisted. In the late Elizabethan and Jacobean period, the sheer popularity and topicality of Italy was, in itself, problematic, but there were additional reasons for 'Italophobia' rooted in more recent Italian history.

In his essay, 'Nationalism and Cultural Exchange: Elizabethan Translations of Castiglione and Guazzo',<sup>82</sup> Michael Redmond observes that the 'loss of independence and the humiliation of defeat'<sup>83</sup> which led to the effective division of the Italian peninsula among French, Spanish and Papal forces led both to a reassessment on the part of Italian writers of 'the qualities necessary for effective leadership and courtly statecraft'<sup>84</sup> and also to a particular form of reception of that reassessment when Italian works were read in England. Italy provided 'cautionary lessons for domestic statesmen'<sup>85</sup> in the context of a

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<sup>79</sup> Sciarrino, 'Da John Florio a Giovanni Torriano: l'insegnamento della lingua italiana nel rinascimento inglese', in *Intertestualità Shakespeariane*, p. 31.

<sup>80</sup> My translation.

<sup>81</sup> Elizabeth made her court musician, the Bolognese Alfonso Ferrabosco the Elder (c.1543-1588), a groom of the privy chamber and later refused his eight-year old son (also Alfonso) leave to join his parents after their (hasty) departure to Italy in 1584, presumably because she wished to retain his budding musical talents, though possibly out of spite. See Andrew Ashbee, ODNB, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9352?docPos=1> retrieved 31/08/2017

<sup>82</sup> Michael J. Redmond, 'Nationalism and Cultural Exchange: Elizabethan Translations of Castiglione and Guazzo' in *Intertestualità Shakespeariane*, pp. 47-62.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

‘discourse of Italian humiliation.’<sup>86</sup> There were lessons to be learned from Italy’s fate but these lessons only served to reinforce the legitimacy of the English state. Redmond cites Charles Merbury’s *A Brief Discourse of Royall Monarchie* (1581) which contrasts the benevolent rule of the English Queen with that of Italian princes and popes, who

consume the treasures of the country, dissipating the publike demaines [...] As Guicciardine in his storie of the warres of Italie reporteth that the forenamed Leo the tenth, what with warring against the Duke of Urbyne, and with maintaining the costlinesses of his sister Magdalena and his owne pride and prodigality.<sup>87</sup>

Despite the undoubted respect and admiration in which Italian writers were held, ‘many readers began to question English dependence upon the learning derived from an humiliated people.’<sup>88</sup> This applied most particularly to political writings. Sir Phillip Sidney wrote to his brother Robert:

As for Italy, I know not what we have or can do with them, but for to buy their silks and wines. And as for other provinces (except for Venice, whose good laws and customs we can hardly proportion to ourselves, because they are quite of a contrary government) there is little there but tyrannous oppression and servile yielding.<sup>89</sup>

Additionally, Italy provoked ‘disgust at the sexual licence associated with cities like Venice’<sup>90</sup> (despite Sidney’s praise of *la Serenissima*). Michael Wyatt notes the uncomfortable dissonance that existed between some of the values of the Italian reformist émigrés and those of their ‘hosts’:

While Renaissance philology had provided an indispensable methodology for the innovations of reformed theology, the actual context of Italian Renaissance texts – their polymorphous representations of sexuality, as well as their celebration of ‘pagan’ culture, and their often open disregard for religion – was as problematic for a Protestant culture of containment as it was for increasingly conservative Catholic cultural politics.<sup>91</sup>

It was unsurprising, then, that English eyebrows rose at the knowledge that controversial Italian texts published in England were banned in decadent Italy.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>89</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, Letter to Robert Sidney in *Sir Philip Sidney (Oxford Authors)*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 286.

<sup>90</sup> Redmond, p. 52.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

And alongside all this suspicion, of course, the elephant occupying most of the room was the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Italy was hugely problematic because it was unreformed, dominated by Rome and the Catholic Church, which was, unambiguously in Elizabeth's reign, an enemy. Rome was the seat of the Antichrist in the view of many protestant Englishmen, ever the home of corruption, vice and abuse in religious and political affairs. Pope Pius V had excommunicated Elizabeth on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1570. The bull was renewed by Pope Sixtus V in 1588 in support of Phillip of Spain's invasion attempt. The point of the excommunication was to encourage revolt amongst Elizabeth's subjects.<sup>92</sup> Only the divided and disparate nature of Italy allowed an improbable vogue for things Italian to spring up and prosper alongside this conflict.

A sceptical, scornful and fearful view of an admired, exotic, but corrupted and perfidious peninsula is also seen in the frequently expressed fear that Englishmen who came into direct contact with the country (or with its cultural artefacts) risked contamination, a fear embodied in the idea of the 'Italianate Englishman'. William Rankins in *The English Ape, The Italian Imitation, The Footsteppes of France* expresses the fear that '[the] Italian Englishman [...] prefers the corruption of a forreine nation before the perfection of his own.'<sup>93</sup> Roger Ascham, Redmond notes, recommended reading Thomas Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* as a safer substitute for the risky business of actually visiting the country where it was written:

which book [*Il Cortegiano*], advisedly read and diligently followed but one year at home in England, would do a young gentleman more good, iwis, than three years' travel abroad spent in Italy.<sup>94</sup>

Ascham then goes much further than this. He tells how he was asked for his view of the wisdom of young men going to Italy as part of their education. His reply deserves to be quoted in full:

Syr quoth I, I take goyng thither, and liuing there, for a yonge ientleman, that doth not goe vnder the kepe and garde of such a man, as both, by wisdom can, and authoritie dare rewle him, to be meruelous dangerous. [...] tyme was, whan Italie and Rome, haue bene, to the greate good of vs that now liue, the best breeders and bringers vp, of the worthiest men, not onelie for wise speakinge, but also for well doing, in all Ciuill affaires, that euer was in the worlde. But now,

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<sup>92</sup> See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation – Europe's House Divided* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), pp. 333–4.

<sup>93</sup> William Rankins, *The English Ape, The Italian Imitation, The Footsteppes of France* (London: Robert Robinson, 1588), p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Redmond, p. 57. He also points out that Hoby himself spent 'significantly more than three years abroad to perfect his Italian', *Ibid*.

that tyme is gone, and though the place remayne, yet the olde and present maners, do differ as farre, as blacke and white, as vertue and vice. Vertue once made that contrie Mistres ouer all the worlde. Vice now maketh that contrie slaue to them, that before, were glad to serue it. All men seeth it: They themselues confesse it, namelie soch, as be best and wisest amongst them. For sinne, by lust and vanitie, hath and doth breed vp euery where, common contempt of Gods word, priuate contention in many families, open factions in euery Citie: and so, makyng them selues bonde, to vanitie and vice at home, they are content to beare the yoke of seruyng straungers abroad. *Italie* now, is not that *Italie*, that it was wont to be: and therefore now, not so fitte a place, as some do counte it, for yong men to fetch either wisdome or honestie from thence.<sup>95</sup>

Ascham was writing in the 1560s. It is not entirely clear when the ‘golden age’ he looks back to occurred. When he speaks of ‘that country’ being ‘mistress over all the world’, it seems he is looking back to Roman times. However, the message is clear. Sin, lust and vanity rule in Italy and young men go there at their peril. This risky and risqué reputation continued, without pause, into the seventeenth century. Thomas Coryat (whose travels to Italy took place in 1608) recalls the sinful temptations of Venice in less condemnatory and more ironic tones than those of Ascham fifty years before, but there is still no doubt of the dangers:

I counsaile all my countrimen whatsoever, Gentlemen or others that determine hereafter to see Venice, to beware of the Circaean cups, and the Syrens melody, I meane these seducing and tempting Gondoleers of the Rialto Bridge, least they afterward cry *Peccavi* when it is too late.<sup>96</sup>

As we will see, Milton’s anxiety to assert his immunity to sexual temptation when writing about his Italian journeys in 1654 suggests that Italy’s reputation changed little over the next forty years.<sup>97</sup>

When Milton was born in 1608, therefore, England’s relationship with Italy, contradictory at all times, had probably just passed the apogee of contradiction. The short era of Italian publication in London had come to an almost complete close. Italy was still seen, on the one hand, as a ‘country’ (more accurately, as a region) in decline, misruled, decayed, riven with vice, corruption and Catholicism and, on the other, as a model of the sublime as far as literature, the visual arts, music, history, political theory and natural philosophy were concerned.

## V. The Early Seventeenth Century

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<sup>95</sup> Roger Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, ed. by Edward Arber (Westminster: Constable and Co, 1895), p. 71-2.

<sup>96</sup> Thomas Coryat, *Coryats Crudities* (London: W. Cater, 1776), p. 211.

<sup>97</sup> ‘Defensio Secunda’ in *Essential Prose*, p. 345.

Yet, notwithstanding its continuing reputation for sexual licence and its republican status, Venice, at least, was still seen in the early seventeenth century as a model of good government and remained an important trading, financial, political and even, to an extent,<sup>98</sup> religious ally. In December 1603, just a few months after his accession to the throne, James I named Henry Wotton as England's first permanent ambassador to the Venetian State. Wotton served in this role from 1604 till 1612, from 1616 till 1619 and again from 1621 till 1623. He was to be an important historical and human link between the reformist, interdicted, almost liberal anti-Papal Venice and the twenty-nine-year-old Milton, on the verge of his Italian visit in 1638. Wotton had been close to Paolo Sarpi and Fulgentio Micanzio, his successor. He knew Giovanni Diodati and had even been involved with them all in a short lived (and profoundly unrealistic) plan during the interdict to win Venice over to a form of Anglicanism.<sup>99</sup>

There was a second *frisson* of rebellion, when Milton was aged 8. Marcantonio De Dominis, the Archbishop of Spalato (present-day Split), author of the multi-volume, *De Republica Ecclesiastica* (an attack upon the power of the Pope), 'defected' to England with William Bedell, Wotton's chaplain, in 1616 and converted to Anglicanism. Enrico de Mas describes the significance of his arrival for James and his court:

L'arcivescovo di Spalato, quel Marcantonio De Dominis che alla fine del 1616 si trasferì a Londra con il plauso della corte intera e in mezzo ai pubblici festeggiamenti che per lui vennero indetti, indicando nella Chiesa anglicana (e insieme in quella ortodossa orientale) il modello più vicino alla purezza evangelica...<sup>100</sup>

(The Archbishop of Spalato, Marcantonio De Dominis who at the end of 1616 went to London to the applause of the entire court and with public celebrations dedicated to him, considering the Anglican Church [together with the Eastern Orthodox Church] as the model closest to evangelical purity ...)<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> To the extent that Venice was in an almost continuous state of conflict with the Pope and Rome. In 1606, Wotton proposed that the Doge should consider 'forming a league with other sovereigns' against the Pope. (*Calendar of State Papers*, Volume X, p. 617.) Enrico de Mas comments that 'I contemporanei erano abituati ad associare strettamente la politica di Venezia e di Londra, facendole rientrare insieme entro l'arco concettuale del giurisdizionalismo, che poneva in primo piano la necessità di assoggettare il clero al potere temporale, contro il pensiero e le direttive dei Gesuiti.' (People of the time were used to very tight links between the policies of Venice and of London, aligned to the framework of 'jurisdictionalism' which emphasised the necessity of subjecting the clergy to temporal power, contrary to the views and directives of the Jesuits.) (Enrico De Mas, *Sovranità Politica E Unità Cristiana Nel Seicento Anglo-Veneto* (Ravenna: Longo, 1975).

<sup>99</sup> Gerald Curzon, *Wotton and His Worlds* (Philadelphia: Xlibris Corporation, 2003), p. 136.

<sup>100</sup> De Mas, p. 34.

<sup>101</sup> My translation.

De Dominis' conversion was regarded as a great coup for the Anglican Church, but his stay in England was not a success and when he was lured back to Rome in 1622 with the hint of a cardinal's hat, few tears were shed. (He was thrown into prison by the Roman Inquisition and died there in 1625.) He played an important role in disseminating Sarpi's work during his stay in England. Until the late 1950s, it was thought that he had brought with him the manuscript text of Sarpi's *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino*. In fact, this was not the case. The text had been smuggled out of Venice in instalments at the prompting of George Abbott, Archbishop of Canterbury, with the help of a network of Dutch merchants who disguised sections of the work as musical scores.<sup>102</sup> Nonetheless it was De Dominis who acted as editor for John Bill's 1619 Italian edition of the work which, as noted earlier, was one of the few Italian texts published in England in the seventeenth century. The title of this first edition of Sarpi's text was *Historia del Concilio Tridentino, nella quale si scoprono tutti gl'artificii della Corte di Roma, per impedire che né la verità di dogmi si palesasse, né la riforma del Papato, & della Chiesa si trattasse*.<sup>103</sup> This is very likely to have been De Dominis' choice of (sub)title, certainly not one approved by Sarpi. De Dominis also contributed an inflammatory anti-Papal dedication to King James:

Non mancono in Italia ... ingegni vivaci ... i quali s'accorgono troppo delle frodi & inganni, co'quali, per mantenersi nelle grandezze temporali la Corte di Roma opprime la vera dottrina Christiana, induce falsità, & menzogne, per articoli de fede<sup>104</sup>

(There is no shortage in Italy of lively intellects which are only too well aware of the frauds and deceptions with which, to maintain its temporal magnificence, the Court of Rome bears down on true Christian doctrine and promulgates falsehood and lies as articles of faith)<sup>105</sup>

It was naïve of De Dominis to think that the Papal court would forget his attacks.

Although Venice was the only Italian state in which James thought it worth placing a permanent ambassador, other states also had their attractions. Florence in the first half of the seventeenth century was in relative decline under Duke Cosimo di Medici II (1609-1621) and then Duke Ferdinando III (1621 – 1670). It held little territory, wielded little power and its foreign policy consisted of negotiating a reasonably safe path

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<sup>102</sup> David Wootton, *Paolo Sarpi – Between Renaissance and Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 107.

<sup>103</sup> 'History of the Council of Trent in which are revealed all the tricks of the Court of Rome to prevent either the revelation of the doctrinal truth or discussion of the reform of the Papacy and the Church.'

<sup>104</sup> 'Pietro Soave Polano' (Paolo Sarpi), *Historia del Concilio Tridentino*, ed. by Marcantonio De Dominis (Londra: Giovan. Billio, 1619), pp. ix-x.

<sup>105</sup> My translation.

between the two great interventionist foreign states of the time, France and Spain. However, as the pride Milton later took in his acceptance by the city's *accademie* demonstrates, its cultural status remained almost undiminished. An interesting light is shone upon the city's importance in England by Francis Bacon's determined attempts in 1617 to get his work published there, albeit anonymously.<sup>106</sup> Micanzio, Sarpi's friend and successor as Counsellor to the Venetian Republic was Bacon's intermediary in this enterprise. He wrote to William Cavendish once he had succeeded in getting the essays published:

They were printed in Florence but without ye name of the Author, according to ye orders of the Countrey, being to be printed here as att Florence, the name was putt to by force but without titles of any specifying att all, who or where, for it would have bene impossible to have it passe.<sup>107</sup>

Micanzio also comments wryly on Roman censorship both of Bacon's essays and also of the *History of the Council of Trent*:

The booke and the HISTORY OF THE COUNSELL OF TRENT printed with you hath bene prohibited att Rome simply without other expression. I heare that ye Sorbonne hath given Order to two Sorbonists, one an Englishman, the other a Scotchman to frame a Censure of it, & I think I shall see the Censure before I see the booke.<sup>108</sup>

Here we see another example of the relative liberality of England's censorship and control of print publication, compared with that of the Catholic Italian states, still a significant factor in the cultural relationship between the two countries as previously seen in the publication of 'forbidden' Italian texts in England in the later years of the sixteenth century and something which Milton was later to comment upon. For we see how the belief, at least, in this difference in attitude to free publication persisted in Italy in the late 1630s when Milton writes in *Areopagitica*, referring to events that occurred during his visit to Italy:

I have sat among their learned men, for that honour I had, and been counted happy to be born in such a place of philosophic freedom as they supposed England was, while themselves did nothing but bemoan the servile condition into which learning amongst them was brought; that this was it which had damped

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<sup>106</sup> Anna Maria Hartmann, "'A Little Work of Mine that hath begun to Pass the World': The Italian Translation of Francis Bacon's *De Sapientia Veterum*", *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 14, 3 (2010), 203-17.

<sup>107</sup> Fulgenzio Micanzio, *Lettere a William Cavendish (1615-1628)* Letter XV (Roma: Istituto Storico O.S.M., 1987), p. 97.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 97-8.



the glory of Italian wits; that nothing had been there written now these many years but flattery and fustian.<sup>109</sup>

We begin, then, to see how the complexity of England's relationship with Italy during Milton's youth and early adulthood began to underpin his own construction of Italy. His engagement with Italian culture developed in this vexed context: Italy – a glittering, half-ruined, unreliable treasure in political, religious, moral and artistic decline, beset by duplicity, superstition, oppression and censorship which had, nonetheless, historically outshone English cultural achievements in almost every area. However, as we will see, Milton largely escaped the more negative aspects of this relationship, despite his recognition of the existence of an Italy of 'flattery and fustian', his hatred of 'Popery' and his awareness of the dangers involved in being associated with the home of the Catholic Church and unbridled sexual licence. This happened, as I will show, because he engaged more deeply and earlier in his life with Italian culture, with the Italian language and with Italian people than has been generally recognised. It also happened, as he was not prepared to admit, because he was able to compromise.

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<sup>109</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 198.

## Chapter 2

### Milton's Italian Acculturation

I began by addressing the English cultural relationship with Italy in the late medieval and early modern periods and suggested that Milton would adopt a rather different perspective on Italy from that dominant in the early modern period. In this chapter, I examine the origins of his personal relationship with the Italian language and Italian culture, arguing that his early life experiences played an important part in the way this developed. In *Ad Patrem* Milton wrote, possibly on the eve of his departure for France and Italy,<sup>1</sup> of his gratitude to his father for enabling him to acquire ‘quam degeneri novus Italus ore loquelam/Fundit, barbaricos testatus voce tumultus,’<sup>2</sup> a strange and untypical description of the gift of the Italian language, to which I will return. However, I would argue that, some considerable time before John Milton senior arranged Italian lessons for his son, the young Milton was exposed to Italian influences. Two significant biographical factors in his early life connected the young Milton with Italy. The first (and less discussed) was his father's status as a successful and well-known composer in the Italianate musical environment of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century London. The second was the younger Milton's connections with Charles Diodati and his family, successful Italian migrants to England of fairly recent date with an extensive family network stretching across Europe. I shall go on to consider how Milton was taught Italian and to examine his more mature relationship with the language as evidenced by his Commonplace Book and what Maurice Kelley called ‘Milton's Dante-Della Casa-Varchi Volume.’ My contention is that Milton was ‘Italianised’ much earlier in his life than has been assumed and that the importance of his relationship with the Italian

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<sup>1</sup> Possibly not. The date of the poem is contentious. See John Carey's summary in *The Complete Shorter Poems* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2007), pp. 153-153. Lewalski/Haan suggest March 1638 (John Milton, *The Complete Works, Volume III, The Shorter Poems*, ed. by B. Lewalski and E. Haan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. cxxiii). David Masson, however, suggested that the poem was written in 1632 or thereabouts. (David Masson, *The Life of John Milton narrated in connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical and Literary History of his Time*, 6 vols [Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1859], I, p. 385.)

<sup>2</sup> ‘That language which the modern Italian pours from his degenerate mouth (his speech makes him a living proof of the barbarian invasions).’ (Carey's translation).

language and culture to his overall development as poet and writer has usually been overlooked or underestimated.

### I. 'Pater optimus': John Milton the Elder – Italian Composer

In *Ad Patrem*, his poetic gift to his father, Milton makes no reference to music or to his father's musical gifts. His account of his upbringing in *Defensio Secunda* describes John Milton senior as being 'a man of supreme integrity,'<sup>3</sup> but does not refer either to his occupation as a scrivener, or to his talents as a composer. Neither does Milton's brief account of his education in *Defensio Secunda* make any reference to music. It is Edward Phillips in his *Life of John Milton* who tells us that some of the books Milton shipped back to England<sup>4</sup> whilst in Venice in 1639 were Italian musical scores.<sup>5</sup> Yet John Milton senior (1562-1647) was, as is well known, not only a very successful scrivener but also a respected and successful composer whose surviving works are in print today, recorded and performed.<sup>6</sup> It is strange that Milton, who according to John Aubrey was musically talented himself and had been instructed by his father,<sup>7</sup> makes no mention of his father's musical background.

Milton senior's first published composition was the madrigal, 'Fair Orian in the morn'.<sup>8</sup> His latest surviving works (instrumental consort music) were discovered in part-books in Christ Church College, Oxford, probably copied in the early 1620s. It is certain that other works have been lost.<sup>9</sup> Edward Phillips, for example, says that he composed an *In Nomine* of forty parts.<sup>10</sup> The elder Milton's musical background must have been important in his son's early life. Barbara Lewalski suggests that 'Milton senior's considerable ability and reputation as a composer of madrigals<sup>11</sup> and psalm settings contributed greatly to his son's enduring passion for music and to his development as a

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<sup>3</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 342.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 345.

<sup>5</sup> Darbishire, p. 59.

<sup>6</sup> John Milton the Elder, *Complete Works*, (2 vols.) ed. by Richard Rastall (Salisbury: Antico Editions, Introduction dated 2010). For recordings of Milton's music, see (e.g.) I Fagiolini, *The Triumphs of Oriana*, Chandos, 2002; Fretwork, *Sublime Discourses: John Milton and Martin Peerson - The Complete Instrumental Music*, Regent Records, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Darbishire, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Included in Thomas Morley (ed.), *The Triumphs of Oriana* (London: Thomas Este, 1601).

<sup>9</sup> Rastall, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Darbishire, p. 51. (Lewalski says the source of this information is John Aubrey [*Life*, p. 3]). She seems to be in error here.)

<sup>11</sup> John Milton the elder may well have composed a number of madrigals but, in fact, only one survives: *Fair Orian in the morn*.

poet.<sup>12</sup> She does not attempt to be more specific. My contention is that the contribution to his development was, in part at least, Italianate.

John Milton senior has been represented as an ‘old style’ composer, a traditionalist. Gordon Campbell and Thomas Corns comment:

The music of Milton and of the circle with which he was associated drew on a more conservative tradition and articulated the traditional values of the *prima pratica* in its seriousness, abstraction, deployment of counterpoint, and even choice of instrument.<sup>13</sup>

They argue that, based on this preference, the older Milton inculcated in his son a preference for ‘part-singing, the organ and the viol (as opposed to solo singing, the harpsichord and the violin)’.<sup>14</sup> (This makes it slightly difficult to explain his admiration in later life for the Roman *virtuosa*, Lenora Baroni.) Neither Lewalski nor Campbell and Corns make a direct connection between John Milton the Elder and *Italian* music, although Campbell and Corns do tacitly link Milton senior to the great and innovative Italian composer, Claudio Monteverdi, when they refer to the *prima pratica*. It was Monteverdi who coined the terms *prima pratica* and *seconda pratica* in 1607 when defending his new style of composition against the attacks of Giovanni Artusi, who disapproved of the ‘irregular harmonies, intervals, and melodic progressions ... used to express the meaning of the text.’<sup>15</sup> Tim Carter describes the difference between the two styles thus: ‘in the ‘first practice’ the perfection of the part-writing was more important than the expression of the words, whereas in the ‘second’ the words are made ‘the mistress of the harmony, and not the servant’.<sup>16</sup>

So, Campbell and Corns distance John Milton senior from the new Italian music and suggest that his own tastes and practice belonged to the earlier tradition. We can judge the truth of this from the evidence of his surviving compositions. (I will return to this.) But we do also know a little about his son’s musical tastes. As I have said, Edward Phillips tells us that Milton junior sent back to England in 1639 ‘a Chest of two of Choice Musick-books of the best Masters flourishing about that time in Italy, namely Luca Marenzo [sic], Monte Verde, Horatio Vecchi, Cifa [sic], the Prince of Venosa, and

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<sup>12</sup> Lewalski, *Life*, p. 777.

<sup>13</sup> Campbell Corns, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Artusi’s *L’Artusi, ovvero delle imperfettioni della moderna musica* was published in 1600.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Carter, ‘Prima Pratica’ in *Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199579037.001.0001/acref-9780199579037-e-5350?rskey=3ZkrcE&result=5855> retrieved 31/08/2017.

several others.<sup>17</sup> We have to take on trust Phillips's version of the contents of Milton's Venetian chest(s), but Phillips did live in Milton's home, had daily access to his library and had no reason to lie. Phillips' statement, however, that these composers were all 'flourishing about that time in Italy' (i.e. around 1639) is inaccurate, or, at least, gives a very generous inflection to the expression 'about that time'. Luca Marenzio died in 1599, forty years before Milton's visit to Venice, Orazio Vecchi, in 1605, Carlo Gesualdo, 'the Prince of Venosa', in 1613. Antonio Cifra died nine years before Milton's arrival in Italy, in 1629. Of the composers he mentions, only Claudio Monteverdi was alive in 1638/9. I would suggest that the composers whom Phillips terms the younger Milton's contemporaries belonged in fact to Milton's father's generation. The controversy over Monteverdi's musical style dated back to the early 1600s – before Milton was born – and was inspired by madrigals he composed during the first forty years of his life. Monteverdi (1567-1643) was, in fact, an almost exact contemporary of John Milton senior (c.1562-1647), born about five years after him and dying four years before him. Only Antonio Cifra might be seen as belonging to the later generation of Italian composers (but even he was closely linked musically to the older Gesualdo and was born twenty-four years before John Milton the younger).

What I am suggesting here is that these composers are likely to represent Milton's father's musical tastes as well as Milton's own (which were almost certainly guided by his father) and that his father's musical interests, certainly as far as secular music was concerned, may well have been more 'modern' and more 'Italianate' than has been assumed. When buying Monteverdi's scores, the poet was certainly seeking out the *seconda prattica*. Antonio Cifra (1584-1629) and Carlo Gesualdo (1566-1613) also worked in the new 'baroque' style. Gesualdo is now known for his radical and innovative use of chromaticism, a style which Cifra followed.<sup>18</sup>

Ironically perhaps, it is the older Milton's earliest known work, the madrigal 'Fair Orian in the morn', that most suggests this 'modern' Italianate bent to his music. The work was published in 1601 in Thomas Morley's *The Triumphs of Oriana*.<sup>19</sup> The collection was conceived, according to Ernest Brennecke, by Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, in conjunction with Morley, as a tribute to Elizabeth I.<sup>20</sup> The madrigal was, of course, an Italian form, both poetically and musically. Joseph Kerman compares the state of the

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<sup>17</sup> Darbishire, p. 59.

<sup>18</sup> Denis Arnold and Tim Carter, 'Gesualdo, Carlo, Prince of Venosa' *OCM*.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Morley (ed.), *The Triumphs of Oriana* (London: Thomas Este, 1601).

<sup>20</sup> Ernest Brennecke, *John Milton the Elder and his Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), p. 54.

Italian and English madrigal traditions at the time, pointing out that, whilst Italy had a 'sixty-year tradition of madrigal writing', only 'fourteen real madrigal books' had been printed in England before the 'Triumphs'.<sup>21</sup> The madrigal writers included in Morley's collection were therefore in the avant-garde of English music. Kerman describes Morley himself as 'the most Italianate of English madrigalists'.<sup>22</sup> He (and Howard) took the idea (and part of the title) of their tributary madrigal book from a famous Italian madrigal collection, *Il Trionfo di Dori* published in 1592, 'ordered as a gift for his bride by one Leonardo Sanudo, a wealthy patron of music and a member of an esoteric Venetian academy'.<sup>23</sup> The very idea of publishing a collection of madrigals in praise of a distinguished lady was Italian.

Moreover, the English madrigal tradition of the 1590s was founded mainly upon the work of one of the Italian composers Milton collected whilst in Italy, Luca Marenzio.<sup>24</sup> Marenzio is now regarded as a radical and innovative madrigal composer, particularly because of the works composed during the last decade of his life (the 1590s).<sup>25</sup> It is uncertain whether John Milton senior would have known this later work at the time he wrote 'Fair Oriana'. However, he would certainly have been familiar with Marenzio's work as represented in the collections published in England in 1588 and 1590.<sup>26</sup> There is no doubt, therefore, that there is a relationship between Marenzio and Milton as madrigal writers.

When his work appeared in *The Triumphs of Oriana*, John Milton senior was one of a select band of English madrigal composers chosen by Morely. Brennecke, in his rather fanciful account of the life of John Milton senior, emphasises the significance of this commission:

Morley could hardly have asked him unless he had already given unmistakable evidence of talent and skill in the composition of light secular music. No mere novice could have been permitted to approach the Queen herself, in a public tribute, and in such august company.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph Kerman, 'Morley and "the Triumphs of Oriana"', *Music and Letters*, XXXIV (1953) p. 186.

<sup>22</sup> Kerman, p. 185.

<sup>23</sup> Kerman, p. 186.

<sup>24</sup> Kurt von Fischer, et al., "Madrigal" in *Grove Music Online* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Retrieved 05.09 2017. <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40075>>.

<sup>25</sup> Denis Arnold and Tim Carter, 'Marenzio, Luca', *OCM*.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolas Yonge, *Musica Transalpina*, (London: Thomas East, 1588) and Thomas Watson, *The First Sette of Italian Madrigalls Englished* (London: Thomas Este, 1590).

<sup>27</sup> Brennecke, pp. 55-6.

This seems a fair point. I think, therefore, that we are justified in seeing Milton, the musician of the late 1590s and early 1600s, as being closely engaged with modern Italian-inspired English music, fully capable of holding his own in celebrated company. Apart from Morley himself, the collection contains madrigals by Thomas Weelkes and by John Wilbye who have been regarded as the two greatest English madrigalists.<sup>28</sup> Thus the usual view of Milton senior as a traditionalist composer, using slightly out-dated and dull musical forms is inaccurate. In 1601, at least, he was a musical radical of the Italianate school.

In fact, the connections with Italian music and musicians and his status as a composer are also visible in some of the later contexts in which Milton's surviving music appears. Richard Rastall, the editor of Milton the Elder's *Complete Works* suggests that the esteem in which he was held by musical colleagues 'is demonstrated by his inclusion in *Tristitiae Remedium*, Thomas Myriell's huge manuscript collection from the second decade of the [seventeenth] century and by the invitation to contribute to William Leighton's *The Teares of Lamentations of a Sorrowfull Soule*<sup>29</sup> and Ravenscroft's *Psalmes* (1621).<sup>30</sup> *The Teares of Lamentations of a Sorrowfull Soule* which, as its title suggests, is religious and contemplative in nature, includes works by Italian composers resident in England and Englishmen of Italian origin together with a large number of works by Leighton himself and a selection of the most celebrated English composers, including John Dowland, Orlando Gibbons, William Byrd, John Wilbye and Thomas Weelkes. The 'Italian' composers are Alfonso Ferrabosco the Younger, Thomas Lupo, son of Giuseppe Lupo, a composer and viol player who arrived in England from Venice via Antwerp in around 1563 and worked as a musician in Elizabeth's court for the remainder of her reign, plus the rather strange figure of John Coperaio (a.k.a. Giovanni Coprario, more accurately plain 'John Cooper') who, though he was not Italian, Italianised his name to align himself with Italian music.

I would argue, then, that the younger Milton was brought up in a household with many Italian musical connections. But it is also important to recognised how closely interconnected these musicians were. They were all dependent upon the patronage of the Stuart court, which provided funding for artistic endeavours of all kinds. James was known for his extravagance. The artistic community of early seventeenth-century London was close-knit and cross-fertile, intimate and intricate in the complexity of its

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<sup>28</sup> David Brown, ODNB, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29387?docPos=1> retrieved 27.07.2016.

<sup>29</sup> William Leighton, *The Teares of Lamentations of a Sorrowfull Soule* (London: William Stansby, 1614).

<sup>30</sup> Rastall, I, p. iii.

inter-relationships. John Cooper was the teacher of William and Henry Lawes. Henry Lawes became the Bridgewater family's music teacher and a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal appointed to the King's Musick in 1631 and was most probably the prime mover in commissioning (and later publishing) Milton the younger's *Mask at Ludlow Castle*. Alfonso Ferrabosco (the younger) collaborated with Ben Jonson (on *A Masque of Blacknesse*) and set to music poems by both Thomas Campion and John Donne. He married Ellen Lanier, daughter of Nicholas Lanier, composer and performer of Huguenot descent who visited Italy in the 1620s collecting paintings for Charles I. There he heard music by Monteverdi and changed his composing style on his return to England, adjusting to the *seconda pratica*. The Lanier family tree<sup>31</sup> is a good exemplar of the intersecting artistic family networks typical of the period. It stems originally from Jeronimo Bassano (a sixteenth-century Venetian musician) whose six musician sons (Antonio, Giacomo, Alvisé, Gasparo, Giovanni and Battista) were recruited to the court of Henry VIII. It includes Alfonso Ferrabosco. It also includes Giuseppe Lupo (see above), who married Alvisé Bassano's daughter, Laura. Giuseppe was in turn the father of the composer, Thomas Lupo, one of the contributors to William Leighton's collection. Aemilia Bassano (1569-1645), daughter of Battista Bassano, married her first cousin once removed, Alfonso Lanier, a musician at the court of Elizabeth I, after becoming pregnant by her lover, Henry Carey, 1<sup>st</sup> Baron Hunsdon. She was Aemilia Lanier, the now famous poet (and according to some, the dark lady of Shakespeare's sonnets).<sup>32</sup>

There is no evidence to suggest that the Milton family was very deeply embedded in these networks. There were no Milton musicianly marriages or Italian interbreedings. But, to judge from the company Milton senior kept in his published work, he must surely have been on the edge of these circles. I would suggest, therefore, that the infant John Milton grew up in an environment in which Italian musical culture and Italian musicians were familiar and commonplace. Edward Brennecke speculates (wildly) that the 'donna leggiadra' of Milton's Italian Sonnet II 'was a daughter of one of the many professional Italian musicians with whom the Lawes brothers, the Miltons and the Diodatis were consorting at the time. Her last name may have been Ferrabosco, Bassano, Lupo or Galliardello.'<sup>33</sup> There is no reason to credit this romantic connection but, from early

<sup>31</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lanier\\_family\\_tree](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lanier_family_tree).

<sup>32</sup> See A.L. Rowse, *Shakespeare's Sonnets – the Problems Solved* (London: Macmillan, 1964). John Hudson in *Shakespeare's Dark Lady* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2014), argues that she *was* Shakespeare.

<sup>33</sup> Brennecke, p. 119.



childhood until he went to Cambridge, the younger Milton lived in a milieu in which Italian musical culture and contact with Italians were features of everyday life. Here we find the beginning of the young Milton's long process of Italianisation.

## II. Milton and the Diodatis

The second, more discussed, and better-known Italian related feature of John Milton's early life is his relationship with Charles Diodati and his extended family. According to Barbara Lewalski, Milton met Charles Diodati on his arrival at St Paul's, probably in 1620.<sup>34</sup> Diodati left St Paul's to matriculate at Oxford at the age of 13 in February 1623. Campbell and Corns suggest that it is possible that Milton went to St Paul's as late as December 1622.<sup>35</sup> Their view derives from Edward Phillips's statement that Milton was sent to St Paul's 'together with his brother,' although there seems to me to be no particular reason to think that 'together' in this context need mean 'at the same time'. John Milton was, after all, seven years older than his brother Christopher, who was born in November 1615.<sup>36</sup> Whatever the date Milton started at St Paul's, his school-time acquaintance with Charles Diodati could not have been a long one, at the very most three years. They must, therefore, have remained in close contact during the two years when Diodati was at Trinity College, Oxford (aged 13 to 15), and Milton still at St. Pauls (aged 15 to 17) for their friendship to have become so intense and so important to Milton.

It is worth recalling something of the history, achievements and sheer intellectual and geographic 'reach' of the Diodati family in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in order to get some idea of the network of connections that Milton's contact with the family opened up for him. As protestant refugees from Lucca, members of the family established themselves in London, Paris, Amsterdam, Nuremberg, Lyon and Geneva. One branch of the family even cared to remain in Lucca.<sup>37</sup> Carlo Diodati, Charles Diodati's grandfather, left Tuscany in 1567 'ostensibly to serve an apprenticeship in a banking establishment of the Buonvisi family at Lyons.'<sup>38</sup> Donald Clayton Dorian notes, however, that, by the end of 1567, Carlo was already in Geneva. He was

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<sup>34</sup> Lewalski *Life*, p. 6.

<sup>35</sup> Campbell Corns, p.13.

<sup>36</sup> Parker, p.11.

<sup>37</sup> Stéphane Garcia, *Elie Diodati Et Galilée: Naissance d'un réseau scientifique dans L'Europe du XVIIe siècle* (Florence: Leo S Olschki, 2004), p. 379.

<sup>38</sup> Donald Clayton Dorian, *The English Diodatis* (New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1950), p. 365.

pronounced a heretic by the Luccan authorities a year later.<sup>39</sup> He married twice. (His first wife died in childbirth, shortly followed by her baby son, Teodoro.) Both wives were also Italian protestant refugees. Carlo had five children from his second marriage – two boys and three girls. His eldest son from this second marriage, also named ‘Teodoro’, was Charles Diodati’s father. The younger son was Giovanni Diodati, who lived in Geneva all his life and was the ‘Joannis Deodati’ whom Milton says he met ‘daily’ in Geneva upon his return journey to Italy.<sup>40</sup> A celebrated Calvinist theologian, he translated the Bible into Italian and Paolo Sarpi’s *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino* into French and plotted Venetian religious reform with Sarpi, Micanzio and Wotton during the Papal Interdict.<sup>41</sup> The Diodati family was linked by marriage to two other Luccan families, the Burlamacchi and the Calendrini, also protestant refugees. Carlo Diodati’s brother, Pompeo, married Laura Calendrini after they left Lucca in 1566. Pompeo and Laura’s eldest son, born after their arrival in Geneva, was Elio Diodati, who eventually established himself as a lawyer and diplomat in Paris, became a long-term advocate and friend of Galileo with whom he maintained a long relationship by correspondence after meeting him in 1620. Elio (more commonly known now as ‘Élie’) was Teodoro’s first cousin and, therefore, Charles Diodati’s first cousin once removed.<sup>42</sup> According to Stéphane Garcia, he visited London at some time between July 1632 and June 1633.<sup>43</sup> Charles Diodati had probably returned to London from Geneva by this time.<sup>44</sup> Milton also came down from Cambridge in July 1632. Garcia argues that it is likely, therefore, that Élie met Milton whilst in London. Élie Diodati visited Geneva on two occasions while Charles Diodati was studying theology at the Academy of Geneva (April 1630 – September 1631)<sup>45</sup> and therefore had the opportunity to develop a relationship with his young cousin. Charles therefore could have introduced the twenty-three-year-old graduate, Milton, to Élie, who would have been aged around fifty-six at the time of his visit to London. That year Élie had been the first person in France to receive a copy of Galileo’s *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo tolemeico e copernicano*.<sup>46</sup> His arrival would surely have been an important event for the Diodati family and for the Italian community in London generally. Both Dorian and

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> John Milton, *Defensio Secunda Pro Populo Anglicano* (London: Thomas Newcombe, 1654), p. 87.

<sup>41</sup> Garcia, p. 61. Curzon, p. 136.

<sup>42</sup> Garcia, p. 377, Tableau IV.

<sup>43</sup> Garcia, p. 122.

<sup>44</sup> The latest evidence of his presence in Geneva is dated 15<sup>th</sup> September 1631. (ODNB).

<sup>45</sup> Garcia relies on Dorian for this – see Dorian, p. 173.

<sup>46</sup> Galileo Galilei, *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo tolemeico e copernicano* (Firenze: Giovan Batista Landini, 1632).

Garcia suggest<sup>47</sup> that it was Élie Diodati who provided the letter of introduction which led to Milton's meeting with 'the famous Galileo, grown old, a prisoner of the Inquisition.'<sup>48</sup> (We should recognise however that Milton himself, in his written work, never mentions Élie Diodati and there are other possibilities [see Chapter 7], including that of the meeting being a fiction.)

But to go back in time a little, to the arrival of the Diodati family in England, Theodore Diodati (as he very soon became) arrived in London from Leyden, where he had studied medicine, in about 1598.<sup>49</sup> Like other Italian émigrés before him (see my previous chapter), he quickly found employment in high places. Dorian notes that John Florio's dedicatory epistle to his translation of Montaigne's *Essais* includes a mention of Theodore Diodati in his role as tutor to the Countess of Bedford's brother in the Harington household. (Sir John Harington of Exton was a first cousin of Sir Phillip Sidney so Diodati was doing well for himself.) Dorian suggests that Diodati may well have become their tutor soon after his arrival in England.<sup>50</sup> Diodati married in about 1608. The record of his marriage has not survived. Charles Diodati was probably born in 1609. The exact date of his birth is unknown. (Dorian argues that, as he gave his age upon matriculation at Oxford on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1623 as thirteen, his birth date must have fallen between 7<sup>th</sup> February 1609 and the end of that year.)<sup>51</sup> After 1609, Italian relatives of Diodati, the Calendrinis and Burlamacchis, came to settle permanently in London so that a significant family network grew up around Theodore. Dorian suggests that '[i]n all ... six members of the Burlamacchi and Calandrini families made their homes in England in the first half of the seventeenth century, and four others visited that country, at least once, during the same period.'<sup>52</sup> The records of the French Protestant Church in Threadneedle Street, which was used by a number of these Italian migrant families, frequently record the names of Phillippe, Elisabeth, Renée, and Marie Burlamacchi (in a variety of different spellings) and of Anne Marie, Catherine, Caesar, Jean and Phillippe Calandrini, as well as the more occasional presence of Theodore and Diodato Diodati.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Dorian, p. 172. Garcia, p. 122. Garcia accepts Dorian's view. The assumption is that this happened in Paris, not London.

<sup>48</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 198.

<sup>49</sup> Dorian, p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 35-6.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55.

<sup>53</sup> W. J. C. Moens, *The Registers of the French Church, Threadneedle Street, London* (Lymington: [Printed for the Huguenot Society of London, by C. T. King], 1896), p. 4

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924009239777;view=1up;seq=107> retrieved 03.08.2016. Hereafter, '*The Registers of the French Church*.'

Specifically, I have identified a record of Theodore Diodati and Philippe Burlamachi (sic) acting as witnesses to the baptism of Jean Lulin on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1612.<sup>54</sup> So, although the Italian community in London was not numerous, the Diodatis and their extended family were certainly at the heart of it.

The Diodati family was generally very successful in establishing itself in the countries in which it sought refuge.<sup>55</sup> The pattern of its migration across Europe is very similar to that followed by migrants earlier in the sixteenth century. Theodore Diodati did not have the advantage of prior contact with highly placed English patrons enjoyed by the likes of Michelangelo Florio, Bernardino Ochino and Pietro Vermigli, but, nonetheless, by the time of Charles's birth, he was, as we have seen, well integrated into the upper tiers of London society. He seems to have turned gradually back to medicine from tutoring towards the end of the first decade of the seventeenth century. In 1609, he gained fame (or notoriety) for his part in the recovery of an eighty-year old gardener from whom he had drawn off a pint or more of blood on three successive days. (The gardener must have been very sturdy to have survived the treatment.) At around this time, he became known at court as he 'was in attendance upon Prince Henry and the Lady Elizabeth' (the Prince of Wales and his sister). Dorian records that in 1612, 'he was officially recognised as one of Elizabeth's attendants on a state occasion and was also complimented by name in print for his skill as a physician.'<sup>56</sup> So when the young Milton met Charles Diodati at St Paul's School sometime between 1617 and 1620,<sup>57</sup> it is conceivable that the immigrant Diodati family was of a higher social status than his own.

Milton, in encountering the Diodatis, was, as I have suggested, gaining potential access to an extensive and influential Italian émigré network stretching right across southern Europe. But how Italian were the English Diodatis by this time? Charles was the English-born son of a Swiss-born father. He was surely named after his grandfather, Carlo, who had fled from Lucca to Geneva more than forty years before his birth. Carlo died in Geneva in 1625 when Charles would have been about sixteen, some five years before his journey to the city to study. There is no record of Carlo ever having visited England. It seems to me that, despite his heritage, it is improbable that Charles saw himself as Italian. Dorian suggests that, 'Though Diodati obviously understood Italian (Sonnet IV is addressed to him), he certainly did not consider himself an Italian, but an

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<sup>54</sup> *The Registers of the French Church*, p. 85.

<sup>55</sup> Philip Burlamachi was a highly successful financier who lent the English state £127,000 between 1624 and 1629. (ODNB, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37246>)

<sup>56</sup> Dorian, p. 62.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

Englishman whose Italian grandfather had escaped from the vindictively cruel and intolerant country of his birth.<sup>58</sup> He argues, furthermore, that Theodore began to identify himself as English from the moment he came to England.<sup>59</sup> Despite this, the Diodati family's connections in London and the clear evidence of their involvement in the local Italian community strongly suggest that Milton's friendship with Charles, like his father's musical circle, gave him another means of access to Italians, Italian emigrés and people of Italian descent which certainly led to his meetings with Giovanni Diodati in 1639, and, as I have suggested, possibly with Élie Diodati too, in London in 1632/3 and perhaps also in Paris in 1638.

Dorian argues that Milton did not learn the Italian language, however, by dint of his contact with the Diodatis or other members of the London Italian community.<sup>60</sup> And, apart from the address of Sonnet IV to Diodati, previously noted, there is no other sign of any communication between Milton and Charles Diodati in Italian, or even with some Italianate content. Milton's two surviving letters to Charles Diodati contain absolutely no such references. Letter VI written in September 1637 when Milton was twenty-eight chides Diodati for his failure to reply to previous letters and bids him return (possibly from his medical practice in Chester) to somewhere closer to Milton and to London.<sup>61</sup> Milton contrasts his own 'method of study' (methodical, planned and painstaking) with that of Diodati (sporadic, punctuated by visits to friends, spontaneous). There *is* a reference to Milton's study of Italian history in Letter VII, written later in the same month:

My study of Greek history has brought me, by steady work, to the point at which they ceased to be Greeks. I have spent much time on the obscure history of Italy under the Lombards, Franks and Germans, down to the time when it was set free by Rudolf, King of Germany. What follows, the history of each independent state, will be best studied separately.<sup>62</sup>

In his preface to the Camden Society Edition of Milton's *Commonplace Book*, Alfred J. Horwood comments on this passage:

Anyone would suppose that Milton had been wading through all or most of the writers who treated of that history during the seven centuries indicated. The *Commonplace Book* however shows that we need not conclude more than that he

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<sup>58</sup> Dorian, p. 140.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> John Milton, *Private Correspondence and Academic Exercises*, trans. by Phyllis B. Tillyard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), pp. 11–12.

<sup>62</sup> *Private Correspondence*, p. 15.

had been reading, in a single volume, the *History of Italy* by Sigonius from A.D. 570 to A.D. 1286, the exact space of time referred to by Milton.<sup>63</sup>

Although Carolus Sigonius (Carlo Sigonio c. 1524 -1584) was an Italian historian. the book Horwood refers to, *Historiarum de regno Italiae* is, of course, a Latin text.<sup>64</sup> There is no suggestion in Milton's reference to his studies in Italian and Greek history that Diodati might have any greater personal interest in the latter than the former. On the other hand, Milton does want to borrow one of Diodati's books, Bernardo Giustiniani's *De origine Urbis rebusque ab ipsa gestis historia* (1492), his 'History of Venice' which does suggest, at least, some shared interest in Italian history. Despite this, one still gets no sense of a *linguistic* Italian connection between them. Rather, their common linguistic connection lies in their knowledge of Latin and Greek. Milton sprinkles his letters to Diodati with Greek; Diodati's two surviving letters to Milton are written in Greek. It was classical languages that dominated their multilingual relationship, not modern ones. However, there is a possible reference to Diodati as an Italian speaker (or at least as an Italian reader) in *Elegia sexta*:

Te quoque pressa manent patriis meditata cicutis,  
Tu mihi, cui recitem, iudicis instar eris. (*Elegy VI*, 89-90)

John Carey in his edition of the shorter poems translates these lines: 'Some terse little poems which I have composed on your native country's pipes are also waiting for you. You will serve as judge for me to recite them to.'<sup>65</sup> He argues that the word 'patriis' here refers to Diodati's connection with Italy and, thus, that the poems in question are Milton's Italian ones.<sup>66</sup> (I will return to this in a later chapter.) If Carey is right, this would be the only direct reference in all Milton's work to Diodati as an Italian speaker (or rather, as an Italian reader), other than that implied by the apostrophe of Sonnet IV. Milton acknowledged his friend's origins, of course. In the 'Argumentum' that precedes *Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton's elegy for his dead friend, he describes Diodati as 'ex urbe Hetruriae Luca paterno genere oriundus, caetera Anglus.'<sup>67</sup> He repeats this in the poem

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<sup>63</sup> John Milton, *The Commonplace Book*, ed. by A. J. Horwood, (London: The Camden Society, 1878) p. xii.

<sup>64</sup> Carolus Sigonius, *Historiarum De Regno Italiae –Libri Viginti* (Hanover: Typis Wechelanus apud haeredes Claudii Marnii, 1608). Horwood says that Milton's edition was published in Frankfurt in 1591.

<sup>65</sup> *CSP*, p. 122

<sup>66</sup> John Carey, 'The Date of Milton's Italian Poems', *The Review of English Studies*, XIV (1963), 383-386 <<http://res.oxfordjournals.org/content/XIV/56/383.short>>.

<sup>67</sup> Descended through his father's family from the Tuscan city of Lucca but in other respects English. (Haan's translation) *OCW III*, p. 212.

itself: '& Thuscus tu quoque Damon, / Antiqua genus unde petis Lucumonis ab urbe.'<sup>68</sup>

The emphasis upon Diodati's 'Englishness' in the first quotation is likely to be significant, however.

We are left then with the certainty that Milton's connection with the Diodati family brought him into contact with émigré Italian culture, and with distinguished members of the extended Diodati family, initially in London, later in Geneva and possibly in Paris. Unfortunately, we are left in uncertainty as to the impact his contact with Charles and with his extended family may have had upon his Italian language skills and familiarity with Italian culture more generally. There is no definite evidence of such an impact but, as with the Milton family's connection with the Italian musical circle in London, it is reasonable to expect that Milton's connection with the Diodatis influenced his perception and awareness of things Italian, however English the family was claiming to be.

### III. Milton the Modern Language Student

This brings me now to the issue of Milton's Italian language learning. How (and how well) did he learn Italian? What were his skill levels before and after his visit to Italy in the written and spoken word? In *The Reason of Church Government*, he states:

I had from my first years by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, whom God recompense, been exercised to the tongues and some sciences as my age would suffer, by sundry masters and teachers both at home and at the schools.<sup>69</sup>

He tells us in *Ad Patrem* that he was taught Italian as a result of his father's interest and generosity:

tuo pater optime sumptu  
Cum mihi Romulae patuit facundia linguae,  
Et Latii veneres, et quae Iovis ora decebant  
Grandia magniloquis elata vocabula Graiis,  
Addere suasisti quos iactat Gallia flores,  
Et quam degeneri novus Italus ore loquelam  
Fundit, barbaricos testatus voce tumultus,  
Quoque Palaestinus loquitur mysteria vates.<sup>70</sup>

(Excellent father, when at your expense there became accessible to me the eloquence of the language of Romulus, the charms of Latin and the

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<sup>68</sup> You too, Damon, were Tuscan, deriving your family line from the ancient city of Lucca. (Haan) *OCW III*, p. 223.

<sup>69</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 87.

<sup>70</sup> *OCW III*, p. 196 ll. 78-86.

exalted words of the grandiloquent Greeks – words which would benefit the mighty lips of Jupiter – you persuaded me to add the flowers of which France boasts and the speech which the modern Italian pours from his degenerate mouth, his voice bearing witness to the barbarian invasions, and the mysteries which the prophet of Palestine utters.)<sup>71</sup>

If we take at face value Milton's order of language acquisition, as given in *Ad Patrem*, we will conclude that he began, under his father's guidance, with Latin, then learned Greek, followed by French, Italian, and finally Hebrew.<sup>72</sup> Lewalski suggests that Milton began to learn Latin at the age of seven and that he was learning Greek with Thomas Young between 1618 and 1620.<sup>73</sup> If he then moved on to French and Italian we might surmise that this happened in his very early teens. We know that he bought a copy of Della Casa's *Rime e Prose* in December 1629 when he was just twenty-one years old. By the time he made this purchase (which suggests an advanced ability to read literary Italian, for Della Casa's style is as dense and complex as Italian verse of the period can be), he had been studying Italian for eight or so years. It is generally considered (though I will argue in due course that this still remains open to some doubt), that it was only shortly after this time that he wrote his sonnets in Italian.<sup>74</sup>

As I have already suggested, *Ad Patrem* is the exception that proves the rule as regards Milton's attitude to the Italian language and to Italians. In the above short passage, he seems to label both as debased and degenerate. Critics have paid little attention to this denigration of the 'modern' foreign language that was, on all other evidence, closest to his heart. (John Hale, for example, discusses the passage without making any reference to its anti-Italian content.)<sup>75</sup> But what can we take from our reading of *Ad patrem* other than that, whilst French has flowers to boast of, whilst classical Latin is eloquent and charming, Greek grandiloquent, Hebrew, prophetic and mysterious, Italian is a debased linguistic coinage used by the decadent descendants of the once glorious Romans? This is a puzzling aberration on the face of it. Estelle Haan has demonstrated the close relationship between this poem and Marco Girolamo Vida's *De Arte Poetica*, noting that amongst a number of other similarities, Vida emphasises in his neo-Latin poem 'the gradual degeneration (of the Italian language) as native Italians

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<sup>71</sup> Haan's translation.

<sup>72</sup> *Ad Patrem*, lines 78-85

<sup>73</sup> Lewalski *Ljfe*, pp. 5-6

<sup>74</sup> Della Casa, though still of interest to Italian academic writers as a poet, is now remembered by Italians principally as the writer of a book of etiquette, *Il Galateo overo de' costumi* (1558).

<sup>75</sup> Hale, *ML* p. 52-3.



were forced to assume the language of the invader.<sup>76</sup> It may have been, therefore, that Milton borrowed this characterisation of the Italian language from Vida.<sup>77</sup> In any event, if the poem was indeed written shortly before Milton's departure for Italy, he was soon to express a very different view. By September 1638, he was writing to the Florentine priest and polymath, Benedetto Buonmattei:

there is no [foreigner] with any pretensions to superior intellect or to culture and elegance but counts the Tuscan language among his chief delights, and even considers it an essential part of his serious studies.<sup>78</sup>

He adds that he 'can often partake with eagerness and delight of the feast afforded by the great Dante, by Petrarch, and by many another of your writers.'<sup>79</sup> This is far more representative of his long-term relationship with Italy's language and culture. He returned fairly regularly in later years, in his prose work, to his experiences in Italy, without ever denigrating any individual Italian, the language or the literature, limiting himself to ideological sideswipes at Popery<sup>80</sup> and an acknowledgement of Italy's tendency towards 'license'.<sup>81</sup> In *Ad Patrem* alone, Milton, almost casually, reproduces the negative side of the bi-polar attitude to Italy found almost everywhere in early modern English culture. This may be an argument for considering an earlier date for the poem than 1638 (which seems to be the current consensus). I have already mentioned Masson's view that it may have been written in 1632.

Generally speaking, Milton's Italian language skills have received high praise, mainly on the evidence of his sonnets in Italian. Shaw and Giamatti in their *Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton* claim that 'Milton's mastery of the [Italian] language is amazing!'<sup>82</sup> Campbell and Corns, however, are suspicious of Milton's Italian. They comment that 'the sonnets are chiefly remarkable for their native-speaker fluency, which raises the question of how a young Londoner who had never been to Italy could achieve such a standard,' and suggest that 'the likely answer is that such fluency was unattainable, and that the Italian sonnets are not Milton's unaided work'.<sup>83</sup> Here it may be worth bearing in mind that after his five sonnets and the '*Canzone*', Milton never, as far as I can

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<sup>76</sup> Estelle Haan, 'Milton's Latin Poetry and Vida', *Humanistica Lovaniensia*, Vol XLIV (1995) p. 288.

<sup>77</sup> It is clear (see later in this chapter) that Milton closely associated Latin and Italian.

<sup>78</sup> *Private Correspondence*, p. 17.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Essential Prose*, p.377.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Douglas Bush and J. E. Shaw and A. Bartlett Giamatti, *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1970), p. 373.

<sup>83</sup> Campbell Corns p. 45

see, wrote another word of Italian, so perhaps the Campbell and Corns view that Milton's Italian teacher or some other collaborator in the Italian community may have given him some assistance is not unreasonable. They observe that 'it is not known where or when Milton learned Italian,'<sup>84</sup> referring to the work of Stefano Villani, who has researched the Italian expatriate community in London in the seventeenth century, and identified two Italian teachers working in the early decades of the century.<sup>85</sup> One of these, Pietro Paravicini, moved to London in the second half of the 1620s.<sup>86</sup> The other, Giovanni Torriano, was the son of an Italian priest, Alessandro, who converted to Protestantism and fled to England probably around 1619.<sup>87</sup> Giovanni published Italian primers in London between 1639 and 1659. I have suggested that Milton may have started his Italian studies around 1620. Although his birth and death dates are unknown, Torriano was probably too young to have been Milton's teacher in the 1620s. Paravicini could, however, conceivably have taught Milton. Given that Italian teaching was the most common means of earning a living for expatriate Italians in London at the time, however, there are many other possibilities.

It may be more helpful, then, in assessing the nature and degree of Milton's 'mastery' of Italian to consider *how* and *why* he would have been taught the language. Silvana Sciarrino in her essay, 'Da John Florio a Giovanni Torriano: l'insegnamento della lingua italiana nel rinascimento inglese', argues that the main purpose of Italian studies in the early modern period was not communication with Italians but the accumulation of cultural capital:

Lo studio delle lingue moderne durante il Cinquecento ... va collegato con gli ideali educativi che erano alla base della formazione dell'uomo rinascimentale al quale, in particolare se inglese, la familiarità con l'italiano consentiva l'accesso ad un mondo culturale di straordinaria ricchezza; va peraltro ricordato che il latino aveva ormai assolto al compito di servire da lingua universale. Lo studio dell'italiano non ebbe dunque scopi utilitaristici ... ma fu riservato ad una élite, fisionomia che mantenne fino alla prima metà del Seicento.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Campbell Corns p. 43

<sup>85</sup> Stefano Villani, "The Italian Protestant Church of London in the Seventeenth Century," in Barbara Schaff (ed.), *Exiles, Emigrés and Intermediaries Anglo-Italian Cultural Transactions*, Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, no. 139 (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2010), 217-236.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid. p. 230

<sup>87</sup> Villani indicates that he became the Minister of the London Italian Church at about this time. He is thought to have died in 1639. (Ibid., p. 220 and p. 222)

<sup>88</sup> Silvana Sciarrano, 'Da John Florio a Giovanni Torriano: l'insegnamento della lingua italiana nel rinascimento inglese' in *Interstualità Shakespeariane*, p.31.

(The study of modern languages during the sixteenth century ... was closely linked to the educational ideals that were at the foundations of the development of 'renaissance man' for whom, especially if he were English, familiarity with the Italian language allowed access to a cultural universe of extraordinary richness; it should be remembered that Latin had a long-established purpose as a universal language. The study of Italian therefore had no utilitarian purpose ... it was reserved for an elite, a role it maintained up to the end of the first half of the seventeenth century.)<sup>89</sup>

Jason Lawrence explains that the late sixteenth century saw a proliferation of 'printed grammars and practical dialogue books for learning French and Italian permitting for the first time the possibility of guided self-study.'<sup>90</sup> John Florio's first Italian language manual, *Florio his First Fruites*,<sup>91</sup> published in 1578, is, in fact, one of these, a self-help guide based on a set of parallel English/Italian dialogues. The point of these was not that they would help the reader to *speak* Italian but that they would help him or her to understand the written language and thereby give access to Italian texts. True, there was a pronunciation guide included at the end of the book but Lawrence argues, rightly in my view, that Florio's manual placed 'the ability to speak the language accurately below the successful acquisition of a reading knowledge of it.'<sup>92</sup> This was, in fact, a translation of the methods used for teaching Latin, as exemplified by Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster*, into a modern language context. Indeed 'translation' in the more common meaning of the word was central to this method of language learning. Ascham espoused Johannes Sturm's method of 'double translation' whereby a passage of Latin is translated into English by the student who then translates his English version back into Latin, comparing the result with the original text. Lawrence describes how Philip Sidney wrote to his language tutor who had advised him to adopt this method to improve his Latin. Sidney responded with the rather ambitious proposal that he should translate 'some letter of Cicero's into French, then from French into English and then back into Latin again by an uninterrupted process ... Perhaps I shall also improve my Italian with this exercise.'<sup>93</sup> As I noted in the previous chapter, Elizabeth I's Italian studies included the translation of a short section of *Il Trionfo dell' Eternità* into English, although as far as we know, she was not obliged to translate the result back into Italian for comparison with Petrarch's original.

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<sup>89</sup> My translation.

<sup>90</sup> *Italian Language Learning*, p. 20.

<sup>91</sup> John Florio, *Florio his first Fruites* (London; Thomas Woodcock, 1578).

<sup>92</sup> *Italian Language Learning*, p. 21.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

Italian language learning in the second half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth was, then, for students who were not planning to spend time in Italy (the majority), a literary process with literary aims, similar in teaching method to that used to learn classical languages. English, at the time, had the linguistic status in Europe that Dutch (for example) enjoys now – spoken and understood by few people other than native speakers. Peter Burke comments that in the sixteenth century, ‘No one ... was expected to speak English, not even the perfect ambassador.’<sup>94</sup> Latin remained the European *lingua franca* right up to the mid-seventeenth century. It was crucial to communication abroad for the English, in view of the paucity of (mainland) European English speakers.<sup>95</sup> Latin’s role as an international means of communication tended to reinforce the emphasis upon modern language acquisition as targeting mastery of the *written* rather than the *spoken* word. This is not to say that there were no expert English speakers of foreign languages, of course. Henry Wotton laid claim to fluency not only in Italian (to be expected given the many years he spent in Venice) but also in German. (He studied at the University of Heidelberg.) Writing to his brother he boasted that by spending just ‘one hour of the day upon the German tongue I profited so much that ... there is no German that shall not take me for a German.’<sup>96</sup>

But it is unlikely that Milton’s Italian tutor would have placed great emphasis on learning spoken Italian and, even if he had done, Milton would appear to have had little opportunity to practice speaking Italian before arriving in Italy in 1638. (I am discounting here the possibility that he spoke Italian with Charles Diodati for the reasons given earlier in this chapter.) The skills involved in speaking a foreign language require the opportunity to practice. Milton himself made no claims for his mastery of Italian even as a written language and it was not his habit to undersell himself. In the letter to Buonmattei, written fairly early in his stay in Italy, he explains his reasons for writing to him in Latin:

For the rest, should you ask why, on this occasion, I have made use of Latin rather than of your own tongue, my object was to confess freely, by writing in Latin, my imperfect knowledge and grasp of that language in which I crave your guidance and instruction.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Burke, p. 115.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Logan P. Smith, *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), I, p. 238. Such an outcome sounds improbable, but this does recall Milton’s comment in ‘Of Education’ that ‘... now or before this (his students) may have easily learned at any odd hour the Italian tongue.’ (*Essential Prose*, p. 224.)

<sup>97</sup> *Private Correspondence*, pp. 18-19.

Milton's letter is dated 10<sup>th</sup> September 1638. He had probably been in Italy for four months. On the face of it, it seems rather strange that a man who had undertaken the difficult task of writing verse in Italian was not prepared to commit himself to Italian in prose. It might be that Milton's professed Italian anxiety is, in part, a means of ingratiating himself with Buonmattei – suggesting a gaping hole in Milton's linguistic knowledge that Buonmattei's new grammar would fill. But Milton did not write to any of his Italian acquaintances in Italian at any point in his life. All such surviving correspondence is in Latin. Henry Wotton, on the other hand, though he used Latin in some communications with his foreign correspondents, habitually wrote to Italians in Italian. His four letters of 1618 to Antonio Priuli, Doge of Venice are in Italian<sup>98</sup> as is an earlier letter dating from 1602 to Belisario Vinta, the Florentine politician.<sup>99</sup> Milton, on the other hand, later replied in Latin to letters written to him in Italian by Carlo Dati.

In *From Academia to Amicitia: Milton's Latin Writings and the Italian Academies*, Estelle Haan considers the Milton-Dati correspondence at some length and speculates upon the reasons for Dati replying in Italian (in a letter that is still extant) to Milton's (lost) communication in Latin.<sup>100</sup> I would suggest that this was because the letter to which Milton replied and perhaps the other letters 'lost in the post' which Dati had sent to Milton previously were all written in Italian. Milton had never written Italian prose. He was not about to start in 1647.

The spoken word is a different matter. Dati's letter sheds some light upon Milton's oral skills over the time Dati knew him in Italy. Haan notes that Dati gives his reasons for writing in Italian in his letter. It is in part because of Milton's love of the Italian language but also because of his Italian language skills and the spoken word:

I knew what regard he had for my country; which reckons herself fortunate in having in great England ... one who magnifies her glories, loves her citizens, celebrates her writers, and can himself write and discourse with such propriety and grace in her beautiful idiom. And precisely this it is that moves me to reply in Italian to the exquisite Latin letter of my honoured friend, who has such a very singular faculty of reviving dead tongues and making foreign ones his own; hoping that there may be something agreeable to him in the sound of a language which he speaks and knows so well.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Smith II, pp. 153-54.

<sup>99</sup> Smith I, 314-15.

<sup>100</sup> Haan, pp. 53-80.

<sup>101</sup> Masson's translation. (Masson III, p. 681)

The last phrase translates Dati's 'sperando che le sia per esser grati il suono di quella (lingua) che si ben parla, e possiede.'<sup>102</sup> Here Dati is undoubtedly praising Milton's spoken Italian. Dati also writes 'e nel suo bello Idioma si propriamente e si politamente scrive, e ragiona.' The *Accademia della Crusca's* dictionary of 1623 defines 'ragionare' as 'Favellare, parlare insieme, discorrer parlando.'<sup>103</sup> So here Dati is again praising Milton's oral Italian skills.

Other evidence comes from the encomia written for him during his Italian stay published with the *Poemata*. Milton says his motive in publishing them was 'judicium ... hominum cordatorum atque illustrium quin summon sibi honori ducat, negare non potest,'<sup>104</sup> whilst acknowledging that readers might see them as evidence of vanity. (Surely, he must have solicited these tributes from his new-found acquaintances – Manso in Naples, Salsilli and 'Selvaggi' in Rome, Francini and Dati in Florence.) Francini and Dati (again) both praise his linguistic skills in their verses. Here is Francini:

Nell'altera Babelle  
Per te il parlar confuse Giove in vano,  
Che per varie favelle  
Di se stessa trofeo cadde su'll piano:  
Ch'Ode oltr'all Anglia il suo più degno Idioma  
Spagna, Francia, Toscana, e Grecia e Roma.<sup>105</sup>

For you, Jove multiplied in vain the languages of the lofty (tower of) Babel which collapsed spontaneously onto the plain, a trophy of linguistic confusion: for not only England hears you speak her most worthy language but also of Spain, France, Tuscany, Greece and Rome.

Francini's verse is inelegant and confusing but the reference to 'hearing' does imply that Milton could *speak*<sup>106</sup> Spanish, French, Italian, Greek and Latin. (This, despite the fact that he had had little opportunity to speak French, still less Spanish, and, as Milton himself acknowledged, he had a lot of Latin but less Greek.) Haan says that it is from this source that we 'learn of Milton's knowledge of Spanish, unattested both in the other tributes ... and in Milton's own account in *Ad Patrem* of the languages which he has acquired.'<sup>107</sup> I would suggest that this is because he had not 'acquired' Spanish in the sense that he had 'acquired' other languages – if his father had funded Spanish tuition, he

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<sup>102</sup> Haan, p. 64.

<sup>103</sup> Lessicografia della Crusca in Rete: [www.lessicografia.it](http://www.lessicografia.it)

<sup>104</sup> *OCW III*, p. 106. 'He cannot deny that he regards the judgement of intelligent and famous men as a supreme honour.' (Haan's translation.)

<sup>105</sup> *OCW III*, p. 112. (Translation mine.)

<sup>106</sup> 'Ode' means 'hear' literally – definitely not 'speak'.

<sup>107</sup> Haan, p. 43.

would surely have included it in the list in *Ad Patrem*. Francini may have merely been flattering him or have just been plain wrong but, certainly, someone with a good knowledge of Latin and Italian would not struggle to decipher a text in Spanish (despite having no ability to speak the language). So perhaps Francini was using the word ‘Ode’ (from ‘udire,’ ‘to hear’) loosely to imply ‘understanding’ rather than oral ability. Certainly, Dati himself, in his own encomium, focuses on Milton’s way with ‘dead’ languages rather than with living ones. (‘Polyglotto, in cujus ore linguae jam deperditae sic reuiscunt, ut idiomata omnia sint in ejus laudibus infacunda.’)<sup>108</sup>

To summarise then, as far as Italian is concerned, Dati’s letter suggests that Milton could speak Italian well. This means that he could speak Italian well in 1638/9. What ‘well’ meant to Dati is impossible to know. It seems to me to be highly improbable that Milton arrived in Italy fluent in Italian and he would have got by perfectly well there using Latin. Peter Burke comments of the use of Latin as a *lingua franca* by travellers that ‘at one end of Europe, Elizabethan Englishmen sometimes used the language in their dealings with the Irish, while a Spaniard who landed in Ireland after the wreck of the Armada probably owed his life to his ability to speak Latin.’<sup>109</sup> However, given that Milton knew Italian well as a written language before he visited Italy, it is to be expected that he would quickly have got a command of the spoken word once he had the opportunity to mix with native Italian speakers. And although he is praised by Dati for his written Italian skills, other than this praise and his Italian poems, we have no evidence of such skills in the form of Miltonic texts.

#### IV. Milton’s later relationship with the Italian written word – the Commonplace Book and the Della Casa marginalia

I will leave the younger Milton for the moment and consider here his more ‘mature’ relationship with the Italian language. As I have said, other than the Italian poems, there is not a word of Italian *of his own composition* in his entire surviving output. This may seem strange given his familiarity with the language, particularly during and immediately after his Italian journey, but, in my view, his interest in and command of the language over the course of his life was primarily textual and literary. He had no need to write prose in Italian and, as we have seen, he avoided using it even in letters to his Italian friends.

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<sup>108</sup> *Complete Shorter Poems*, p. 114. Haan’s translation is ‘To a polyglot upon whose lips languages already dead come to life again in such a way that all terms of expression in his praise are lacking in eloquence.’

<sup>109</sup> Burke, p. 46.

His surviving Commonplace Book, believed to have been compiled during a period from the late 1630s up until the mid to late 1660s,<sup>110</sup> gives an important insight into the nature of his relationship with his various languages. Here, other than in quotation, Milton writes only in Latin and English. The additional languages used in quotation are Greek, Italian, and French. The greatest number of quotations in languages other than English or Latin are from Italian sources. Machiavelli is the most frequently cited Italian author with nineteen quotations; in some instances, Milton silently translates Machiavelli's Italian into Latin. Dante is in second place in terms of numbers of quotations, but Boiardo/Berni's *Orlando Innamorato* is probably quoted at greater length. As far as French is concerned, there are sixteen references to Bernard de Girard's *L'Histoire de France*, a text written in the French vernacular and ten to Jean Bodin's *Les Six Livres de la République*.<sup>111</sup> Milton quotes De Girard in French on just three occasions. Bodin is never quoted in French. Milton paraphrases Bodin, either in English or Latin, and does the same with De Girard in the main.

I think this shows that Milton had two languages in which he felt completely at home – English and Latin. Italian was his next most comfortable linguistic medium (but not so comfortable that he was moved to write in it). The silent translation of Italian into Latin suggests that, consciously or unconsciously, as *Ad Patrem* suggests, he saw the modern language as a later version of Latin.

Writing unselfconsciously, without an eye to a readership, Milton roams freely among languages and literatures. For instance, in the section, *DE MENDACIO* (On Lying),<sup>112</sup> he begins by quoting a Greek passage from St Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata*. This is followed by his own Latin paraphrase of the Sophronia episode in Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*.<sup>113</sup> This paraphrase ends, however, with a direct quotation from Tasso's Italian text – *Magnanima menzogna, or quando è il vero si bello che si possa a te preporre?*<sup>114</sup> – which follows the Latin section as part of a continuous paragraph:

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<sup>110</sup> *The Milton Encyclopedia*, ed. by Thomas N. Corns (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 69.

<sup>111</sup> Bernard de Girard, *L'Histoire de France* (Paris: Pierre l'Huillier, 1576). Jean Bodin, *Les six livres de la république* (Paris: Jacques du Puis, 1583).

<sup>112</sup> 'The Commonplace Book', *The Works of John Milton*, 18 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), XVIII, p. 141.

<sup>113</sup> Sophronia accuses herself (untruthfully) of having removed a stolen image of the Virgin Mary from the mosque to avert general punishment of the Christian community.

<sup>114</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Gerusalemme liberata* (Milano: Garzanti, 2011), c. ii st 22, p. 41



Ut tamen populum Christianum ab interneceione liberaret, Magnanima menzogna  
.... etc<sup>115</sup>

There is then a quotation of ten lines (in Italian) from Berni's version of *Orlando  
Innamorato* (II, 20, ii).<sup>116</sup>

Milton's general tendency is to include Italian in Latin sections of his text and  
French in English sections:

By Parliament of three estates, first then found out Charles Martel was chosen  
Prince of the French. Bern de Girard l.2 p.109. and Pepin, King. l. 3 p. 134  
Afterward Charles the Simple, though of the race of Charles the great, depos'd  
and Robert crown'd in his stead by the French aymants mieux, as saith the  
History, avoir un nouveau roy habile homme, qu'un hereitaire sot et idiot Girdard,  
Hist Fran, l.5. p. 298<sup>117</sup>

Here Milton continues in a mixture of French and English for another paragraph and  
then launches into a sentence in Latin: 'Schola Sorbonica in coetu 60 Theologorum  
pronuntiant contra regem pro defensione religionis arma capi posse. Thuan. L. 94.  
391'.<sup>118</sup>

In his silent translation of Italian into Latin, Milton is often (silently) unfaithful.  
In the section *DE RELIGIONE QUATENUS AD REMPUB: SPECTAT*, 'Religion,  
how far has it in view the commonweal', he writes:

Laudatissimos omnium inter mortales, eos esse qui vera Religione hominum  
mentes imbuunt, immo iis etiam laudatiores qui humanis legibus Regna et  
Respub: quamvis egregie fundarunt. Machiavel. Discors i. 1 c. 10<sup>119</sup>

(Machiavelli declares that the most highly praised of all mortals are those who  
imbue the minds of man with true religion; more so even than those who,  
however, admirably, have founded kingdoms and republics by human laws.)

This is a paraphrase of the opening words of chapter ten of the first book of  
Machiavelli's *Discorsi*, 'Intra tutta gli uomini sono i laudatissimi quelli che sono stati capi e  
ordinatori delle religioni. Appresso, dipoi, quelli che hanno fondato o repubbliche o  
regni.'<sup>120</sup> (The most praised among all men are those who have been religious leaders or  
ordinands. After them, (come) those who have founded republics or kingdoms.)

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<sup>115</sup> Works of John Milton (Vol 18), pp. 141-2.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp. 186-7

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 197 (Columbia translation).

<sup>120</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, 'Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio' in *Tutte le opere*, a cura di Mario Martelli (Firenze: Sansoni, 1971), p. 36.

Whether Milton was paraphrasing inaccurately from memory or whether he was deliberately creating a different emphasis is unknowable but the added meaning given to his Latin version is probably not accidental given the precision of his textual references in the *Commonplace Book*.

Evidence of this Latin/Italian linkage can be identified again and again. For instance, in the same section (197), Milton writes:

Opiniones hominum de Religione, oportere in Repub: vel sub bonis principibus liberar esse; quos dum laudat Machiavellus inter caetera bona inquit, videbis sub iis tempore aurea. Dove ciascuno può tenere et difendere quella opinione che vuole discors, l. 1 c. 10<sup>121</sup>

(Machiavelli holds that in a republic the opinions of men about religion should be free, even under good princes. In praising such rulers he says among other good things, “You will see under them the golden age where each man can hold and defend the opinion of his choice.”)

What Machiavelli actually wrote, in the context of a discussion of the superiority of selected (‘per adozione’) leaders over those inheriting the role of ‘Prince’, citing the example of successive Roman Emperors, was:

in quelli governati da’ buoni, vedrà un principe sicuro in mezzo de suoi sicuri cittadini, ripieno di pace e di giustizia il mondo; vedrà il Senato con la sua autorità, i magistrati co’ suoi onori; godersi i cittadini ricchi le loro ricchezze, la nobilità e la virtù esaltata; vedrà ogni quiete ed ogni bene; e d’all’altra parte, ogni rancore, ogni licenza, corruzione e ambizione spenta; vedrà i tempi aurei, dove ciascuno può tenere e difendere quella opinione che vuole. Vedrà, in fine, trionfare il mondo; pieno di riverenza e di gloria il principe, d’amore e sicurtà il populi.<sup>122</sup>

where good princes govern, you will see a secure prince surrounded by secure citizens, a world full of peace and justice; you will see the Senate’s authority, the magistrates’ honours; rich citizens enjoying their riches, nobility and virtue exalted; you will see tranquillity and goodness everywhere; and, on the other hand, rancour, licence, corruption and ambition extinguished; you will see a golden age where everyone can hold and defend his chosen beliefs. In a word, you will see a world in triumph; a prince endowed with glory and reverence and a people endowed with security and love.<sup>123</sup>

Milton takes liberties with Machiavelli’s meaning here. There is no reference to religious belief in the original passage. ‘Quella opinione che vuole’ may possibly have suggested

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<sup>121</sup> Works of John Milton (Vol 18), p. 199. (Columbia translation.)

<sup>122</sup> Discorsi, p. 39.

<sup>123</sup> My translation.

religious opinions to sixteenth-century readers, but, given that the historical examples in question are all from ancient Rome, it is not an obvious interpretation. Machiavelli certainly does *not* say that ‘the opinions of men about religion should be free’. Milton extracts a small section of the passage and uses it out of context. Interestingly, once again, he ‘latinizes’, consciously or otherwise, the first part of the section which he quotes directly: ‘vedrà i tempi aurei’ becomes ‘videbis sub iis tempora aurea’. (‘Sub iis’ is presumably added for context.) Indirect reporting of Machiavelli’s opinion and the direct quotation of his work merge together.

An additional reason for the close association of Italian and Latin in this work, found side by side and sometimes intermingled, other than their linguistic ‘family’ relationship, may be associated similarities in their contemporary pronunciation. Peter Burke suggests that ‘We need to speak and think of ‘Latins’ in the plural’<sup>124</sup> when considering Latin pronunciation in the early modern period. He states that ‘The English ... pronounced their Latin so differently from other people that foreigners had difficulty understanding what they were saying.’<sup>125</sup> The pronunciation of Latin in Italy will have been strongly influenced by the Italian vernacular (and by Church Latin, which was similarly influenced). This may also explain the continuity between Milton’s quotation of Italian and Latin language texts. In the *Commonplace Book*, we see the association of the two languages in Milton’s mind in action as he (or his amanuenses) record passages relevant to the various topics under consideration. We might also bear in mind Milton’s comments on pronunciation in *Of Education*:

First, they should begin with the chief and necessary rules of some good grammar, either that now used or any better; and while this is doing, their speech is to be fashioned to a distinct and clear pronunciation, as near as may be to the Italian, especially in the vowels. For we Englishmen, being far northerly, do not open our mouths in the cold air wide enough to grace a southern tongue, but are observed by all other nations to speak exceeding close and inward—so that to smatter Latin with an English mouth is as ill a-hearing as law-French.<sup>126</sup>

Here the association of Latin and Italian is transparently clear. Milton saw the two languages as very close members of a single family (with Latin in the role of *paterfamilias*, obviously). While this is in a sense a truism – Italian *is* the descendant of Latin – it is instructive to see how closely interwoven they were in his mind. I think this arises from

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<sup>124</sup> Burke, p. 56

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> John Milton, ‘Of Education’, *Essential Prose*, p.253.

the methods by which he was taught both languages as discussed above and to the fact that Latin was as 'living' a language for him as 'Tuscan'.

There is one other direct source of evidence about Milton's knowledge and understanding of Italian. This is the Della Casa text mentioned above (p. 56) described by Maurice Kelley in an article in the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 'Milton's Dante-Della Casa-Varchi Volume.'<sup>127</sup> Kelley's article argues against two views generally held at the time (1962): that

- 1) only the Della Casa portion of the volume can be certainly connected with Milton, and
- 2) the volume indicates that the culmination of Milton's Italian studies 'insofar as mastery of the language and its literature was involved came sometime in 1629'.<sup>128</sup>

Kelley concludes that Milton owned all three parts of the volume on the basis of the presence of his handwriting in the Varchi section and the use of the grave accent as the 'mark of annotation' in the *Convivio* – a usage which Milton also employed in Della Casa's *Rime*, in annotating his copy of *Dionis Chrysostomi Orationes* and in his corrections to *Lycidas*.<sup>129</sup> Kelley argues that the none of the annotations except the record of Milton's purchase can be dated prior to 1637, since he does not use the Greek epsilon character for 'e' in his marginal notes (which was consistently his practice up until late 1637) and uses the grave accent rather than the asterisk as his mark of annotation.<sup>130</sup> Kelley considers it probable that the careful annotations to pages 212-288 of the Varchi volume were carried out 'either shortly before, or during, or soon after his Italian journey' and that other annotations were carried out as late as the period between 1640 and 1652.<sup>131</sup>

The text of Della Casa's *Rime e Prose* which Milton purchased in 1629 was published in Venice in 1563, by Domenico di Farri. Milton's annotations to the *Rime* consist solely of corrections to the printed text. Comparing Milton's annotations/corrections to Farri's 1563 text with the modern Einaudi edition of 1993, one can see that Milton is mainly correcting printing errors. For example, the Farri text of Della Casa's *Sonnet III* 'Affligger chi per voi la vita piagne' has line 4 as 'Che si da voi pietà porta e scompagne?'<sup>132</sup> Milton emends 'porta' (carries) to 'parta' (meaning

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<sup>127</sup> Kelley, pp. 499–504.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p. 499. The quotation is from Harris F. Fletcher's *The Intellectual Development of John Milton, Volume 1* (Illinois: Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1956).

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 502.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 503.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 503.

<sup>132</sup> Giovanni Della Casa, *Rime e Prose di M. Giovanni Della Casa* (Venetia: Farri, 1663), p. 2.

‘separates’ in this context). The Einaudi edition supports Milton’s correction, as do later sixteenth century editions of the text.<sup>133</sup> In the sonnet, ‘Gli occhi sereni e’l dolce sguardo honesto,’ Farri has (line 8) ‘Trovo chi mi contrasta, e’l varco impenna.’ Milton corrects ‘impenna’ (climbs up) to ‘impruna’ (tangles in thorns/briars). The Einaudi edition has ‘impruna’ also (l. 7, p. 5) as does the Zoppini brothers’ 1584 edition. ‘Impruna’ has the great advantage of rhyming with ‘aduna’, ‘bruna’ and ‘digiuna,’ three of the other line ending words in the octet, whereas ‘impenna’ rhymes with nothing. Though Della Casa took many liberties with the sonnet form, abandoning rhyme was not one of them.

Most of Milton’s marginalia are of this sort. Whether he was comparing the Farri text with another edition of the *Rime* or whether he was emending on the basis of his own wisdom is impossible to know, although I would suspect the former. He makes the occasional error. For example, the sonnet ‘Le chiome d’or, ch’Amor solea mostrarmi’ contains the line ‘Qual chiuso in orto suoi purpureo fiore.’ Milton inserts ‘fia’ after ‘chiuso.’ This variation does not occur in any other printed text I have located. Einaudi has ‘Qual chiuso in orto suol purpureo fiore’ – replacing ‘suoi’ (its) with ‘suol’ (‘does’). The Zoppini edition also has ‘suol’ as does a later 1601 edition published by Lucio Spineda.<sup>134</sup> Here Milton seems to have identified a problem but chosen the wrong solution. The inclusion of ‘fia’ in the line, apart from not making much sense, adds an extra syllable to the line, forcing a very inelegant multiple elision of the ‘ia’ of ‘fia’ and the ‘i’ of ‘in’. Similarly, in line 8 of the sonnet ‘Come vago augelletto fuggir sole,’ Milton proposes the replacement of the word ‘for’ with ‘sol.’ Modern texts do emend ‘for’ but replace it with ‘fol’ so that the line reads, ‘e fol, perché ‘l mio mal gioia si chiami.’

Milton’s marginalia, then, represent a careful correction of his Farri text which is, indeed, well sprinkled with printer errors. The vast majority of his corrections are in accordance with those of modern (and early modern) scholarship. This suggests very close attention to detail over a long period, on Milton’s part, using a text which he had originally purchased many years earlier. If he was acting as his own editor in this task of correction, he had a very impressive and extensive grasp of literary Italian. If he was working from another edition of the text, he demonstrates a very close attention to detail. In either case, his emendation activities border on the obsessional. It is obvious, therefore that during this period, possibly of fifteen years, he was paying very close attention to Della Casa and perhaps to other cinquecento Italian sonnet writers – Varchi,

<sup>133</sup> For example, the edition published in Venice in 1584 by Fabio and Agostino Zoppini.

<sup>134</sup> *Rime e prose di M. Giovanni Della Casa: riscontrate con li migliori originali [et] ricorrette con grandissima diligenza* (Venetia: Lucio Spineda, 1601), p. 15.

for example, who is included in the triple volume – but also to Tasso and perhaps Bembo. I will discuss later how this close study impacted upon his own sonnet-writing practice. The Dante-Della Casa-Varchi volume gives a small but privileged insight into Milton's minute attention to an Italian text.

### Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Milton was raised in an Italianate environment and that he was therefore more 'Italian' than is usually recognised. From his earliest youth, he was exposed to things Italian: to people of Italian heritage, to Italian music and musicians, and possibly to the Italian language, though I do not believe that he began to learn Italian before his early teens. This upbringing predisposed him to Italophilia. When he began to study Italian formally using the early modern method of translation and re-translation, his focus could only be upon the written language – understanding and appreciating 'classical' Italian texts and 'imitating' them – rather than upon (at that time) seemingly irrelevant spoken language skills. It is my view, therefore, that up until the time he arrived in Italy in 1638, his knowledge of Italian was textually based. On his arrival in Italy, he probably used Latin as his main means of communication but gradually he came to speak Italian. How well and with what level of 'native speaker fluency' we cannot know, but the praises he received from Dati, in particular, suggest that his skills were at a high level by the time he left Florence for the second time in 1639. Inevitably, he would have gradually lost these oral skills on his return to England for lack of opportunity to practice them. After the Italian sonnets, he was never tempted again to use Italian as a medium of composition.

The Commonplace Book and Milton's annotations to Della Casa's *Rime*, both of which mainly date from the period following his return to England, show Milton's private and personal engagement with Italian in action. It is clear from the former that Italian remained a secondary language to him despite the experience of 1638/9. Latin and English were still his default linguistic tools. He was *bi*-lingual in these languages in the sense that he could use Latin with more or less the same degree of fluency as he could use his mother tongue. The Commonplace Book is strewn with the evidence of this. He was *multi*-lingual in a different sense: he had a good reading knowledge of other languages and an excellent reading knowledge of Italian. He had an academic ability to write exercises in Greek verse. His knowledge of his other languages, French, Hebrew and, possibly, Spanish, was entirely textual (although he may have had a try at speaking

French during his brief sojourn in France in 1638).<sup>135</sup> Italian was obviously the special case. The annotations to the *Rime* demonstrate very close and detailed attention to Della Casa's verse over an extended period of time and are representative of the intense focus Milton brought to Italian verse from the time that he began his formal studies in the 1620s and, I will argue, continued to bring until long after his return to England in 1639.

This leaves the Italian poems as the only demonstration of Milton's *active* engagement with Italian as a writer. But this was an intensely literary engagement. John K. Hale claims:

The Italian poems require different assessment ... for the further reason that they are Milton's only known experiment on a living language. He is playing tunes on a language whose criteria of performance do not come from codified or traditional rules but from the actual practice of its speech community.<sup>136</sup>

But I would have to disagree with Hale's view. Milton's written Italian in the sonnets and *Canzone* is about as far from the actual practice of any historical Italian 'speech community' as it is possible to get. The verse is organised in accordance with rules of prosody not so very far distant from the those applicable to Latin verse in first century Rome. Its linguistic form owes everything to an Italian poetic tradition developed over several centuries. Even the vocabulary is artificial. One might even debate whether the idiom in which he writes his Italian poems is truly describable as 'a living language.' It is to these poems that I will now turn in my next chapter.

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<sup>135</sup> Of course, his brief account of his stay in Paris does not mention any meetings with French people.

<sup>136</sup> Hale, *ML*, p. 46.

## Chapter 3

### 'Poems of John Milton, Both English and Latin' - the place and time of the Italian verse

I would argue that the years between the composition of his Italian poems and his return from Italy in 1639 marked the period when Milton was most directly engaged, as a poetic *practitioner*, with Italian verse and Italian verse forms. Catherine Gimelli Martin in her recent book, *Milton's Italy*, cites Irene Samuels as authority for the view that 'Milton began immersing himself in the Italian language – and especially in Dante – slightly before and during his Cambridge years – 1625-32, or from age sixteen through twenty-three.'<sup>1</sup> I have argued that Milton's gradual 'immersion' in Italian began from his earliest childhood, but I would not disagree with the view that Milton's academic and literary focus upon Italian began in his mid-teenage years (from the moment, in fact, that he had learnt enough Italian to tackle 'classical' Italian texts). I would suggest, however, that his deliberate and conscious use of Italian forms and sources in his poetry continued long after he left Cambridge in 1632. Of course, the most obvious product of his close interest in Italian poetry comes in the guise of his six Italian poems (usually considered to have been written in late 1629), but later poems of the 1630s in English, even including *Lycidas*, also demonstrate the extent to which he continued to draw upon Italian forms and models during his long poetic apprenticeship. By the time Milton began work on his great epic, over a decade after the publication of his first collection of poetry, his engagement with Italian literature was of a different order. He was, by then, blind, and reliant upon others to write for him and read to him. The resources of his prodigious memory now provided an Italian sourcebook from which he drew freely but with different intentions and different outcomes from the more technical engagement with Italian poetry of his earlier work. *Poems 1645* contains the poetic fruit of his first Italian period. This chapter will consider the structure and intentions of that volume and locate the Italian poems in that context. I will also address the somewhat vexed question of when these poems were written.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, p. 3.



## I. Poems 1645: Ambition and Ambiguity

*Poems of Mr. John Milton, both English and Latin, compos'd at several times* was published in 1645<sup>2</sup> when Milton was 37. It was the first time that Milton had stepped into the limelight as a poet. The nearest he had come to 'coming out' in this role previously was to append his initials to *Lycidas* in the volume, *Iusta Edouardo King Naufrago* (1638), and to *On Shakespeare* (or, as it was then titled, *An Epitaph on the admirable Dramaticke Poet, William' Sheakespeare*), one of three poems on Shakespeare's death included in John Benson's volume, *Poems: Written by Wil. Shakespeare, Gent.*<sup>3</sup> The appearance of *Poems 1645* was not, of course, the first time Milton had been published in his own right. Henry Lawes had arranged the printing of Milton's *Mask at Ludlow Castle* in 1637, but informed its readers via his dedicatory letter to John Egerton (Viscount Brackley) that the work was 'not openly acknowledged by the author'. (The variations from the earlier draft in the Bridgewater manuscript suggest that Milton was, nonetheless, very closely involved in preparing the text.)<sup>4</sup> After these limited, more or less anonymous, appearances in print, the publication of *Poems 1645* under his own name was a major step for the, by now, middle-aged poet.<sup>5</sup>

1645 was a turbulent year in English history. It saw William Laud executed for treason on Tower Hill, Fairfax appointed as commander-in-chief of the Parliamentarian army, the sack of Leicester by Prince Rupert, Cromwell's appointment as Lieutenant-General of Cavalry, and Parliamentary victories at the Battle of Naseby, at the siege of Carlisle, the Battle of Langport and the Battle of Rowton Heath. In June, in London at least, Christmas was abolished (along with Whitsun and Easter). For Milton, the year may have marked, as Barbara Lewalski has suggested, a turning point, leading to an attempt to escape the public notoriety occasioned by his divorce tracts and focus upon more personal and domestic matters as an apparent end to civil strife and the prospect of republican victory seemed to be in sight.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, at the beginning of 1645, Milton was best known to the world as 'Milton the Divorcer', Milton the radical (and scandalous) pamphleteer, not as Milton the poet.

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<sup>2</sup> It may be that the book was not, in fact, distributed until 1646. Thomas Corns notes that George Thomason dated his copy 2 January 1646. (*Encyclopedia*, p. 361.)

<sup>3</sup> William Shakespeare, *Poems: Written by Wil. Shakespeare, Gent.* (London: John Benson, 1640), pages unnumbered. (Milton's epitaph immediately follows the Shakespeare poems.) The original publication of this poem, under the same title, in Shakespeare's Second Folio, was anonymous.

<sup>4</sup> See: *OCW III*, pp. cl–cli.

<sup>5</sup> He was to live for (almost) another twenty-eight years.

<sup>6</sup> Lewalski, *Life*, pp. 198-9.

Why did he choose this moment to publish his poetry? He had written little verse in the six-year period between his return to England from Italy in 1639 and the appearance of *Poems 1645*. Carey attributes only Sonnets VIII, IX and X to these years, plus a few short verse translations from his prose works, and, of course, *Epitaphium Damonis*, composed shortly after his return to England from Italy. Other than the aforementioned sonnets, the most recent poems included in the 1645 collection were *Lycidas* (1637) and *Epitaphium Damonis* itself (1639 or possibly 1640).<sup>7</sup> *Poems 1645* was, therefore, much more a compendium of past achievement than of recent creativity. It was undoubtedly designed to make an impression. But whose was the design? Milton's or his publisher's? And what was the intended impression?

The title page and the book's structure convey quite complex messages. It is not entirely clear whether Milton or Humphrey Moseley (the publisher) controlled these. Steven Zwicker has pointed out that, at this time, Moseley was not yet the established figure in the literary world of mid seventeenth-century London he was later to become.<sup>8</sup> The only poetry of note that he had published (earlier in 1645) was a pirated edition of the exiled Royalist poet, Edmund Waller. And, as I have said, Milton was by no means an established poet. Moseley was a near-debutant publisher of poetry, publishing a debutant poet. And, in fact, the collection did not sell well. It was reprinted only in 1673, nearly twenty years later, in the wake of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*. (The Waller collection, on the other hand, was 'an instant success'.)<sup>9</sup>

Significantly, the collection's title page proclaims Milton's English/Latin bilingualism although it also alludes to the lengthy period over which the verse had been written – *Poems ... compos'd at several times*.<sup>10</sup> The claim for the verse's authenticity – 'Printed by his true Copies'<sup>11</sup> – seems to assert the publisher's rather than the author's perspective. The page includes an epigraph from Virgil's seventh eclogue, 'Baccare frontem/Cingite, ne vati noceat mala lingua futuro'. We can almost definitely rely on this being Milton's choice, given the source. These lines occur in the context of a pastoral song contest between Thyrsis and Corydon. They are 'spoken' by Thyrsis who is the

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<sup>7</sup> Carey dates the poem 1639 but also recognises that Sergio Baldi disputed the notion that there are two Tuscan wheat harvests each year. Baldi therefore dated the poem 'as late as autumn 1640'. (CSP, p. 270.)

<sup>8</sup> Steven N. Zwicker, 'The Day that George Thomason Collected his Copy of the *Poems of Mr. John Milton, both English and Latin, Compos'd at Several Times*,' *Review of English Studies* 64, 264 (April 2013), 231–245 (p. 233).

<sup>9</sup> Kay Gilliland Stevenson, 'Reading Milton, 1674-1800' in *A Companion to Milton*, ed. by Thomas Corns (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), p. 447.

<sup>10</sup> OCW III, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> OCW III, p. 3.

more aggressive and confident of the two competitors. E.V. Rieu translates the full passage (lines 25–8) thus:

Bring ivy-leaves to decorate your rising poet, shepherds of Arcady, and so make  
Codrus burst his sides with envy. Or, if he tries to harm me with excessive praise,  
*twine foxglove round my brows, to stop his evil tongue from hurting your predestined bard.*<sup>12</sup>

Here Milton possibly changes Virgil's original meaning by emending the quotation to omit the reference to excessive praise. The significance of the epigraph has been variously interpreted. Hale translates the quotation as 'Circle the forehead with ivy lest an evil tongue harm the future poet' but adds a less literal translation, 'let not the voice of envy ruin this hopeful early work.'<sup>13</sup> The lines, as translated, imply that Milton felt that he would need protection from envious criticism. (Hale argues that the choice of Virgil for the epigraph also signals Milton's aim of emulating non-English authors in his verse.)<sup>14</sup> Barbara Lewalski argues – why is not entirely clear – that in using this epigraph, Milton is 'explicitly refusing the 'Cavalier' construction laid upon him by the title page and some other features of Moseley's apparatus'<sup>15</sup> (although Moseley had not, by 1645, acquired his later reputation for publishing 'Cavalier' poetry).

Louis Martz, like Hale, argues that Milton's intention here is to identify himself directly with Virgil:

it prepares us to watch, as we read the Latin poems, the poet's growth away from the light elegy toward the Vergilian mode in which Milton wrote the most mature and the finest of all the Latin verses in this volume.<sup>16</sup>

This is perhaps consistent with Milton's strong sense of self-worth although, in that case, one might perhaps have expected the epigraph to have introduced the neo-Latin poems

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<sup>12</sup> Virgil, *The Pastoral Poems*, trans by E.V. Rieu (West Drayton: Penguin Books, 1954), p. 82. (Italics indicate the section used as the epigraph.)

<sup>13</sup> Hale, *ML*, p. 23. His translation is odd. 'Baccar' is usually translated as 'foxglove' (see Rieu) considered to have semi-magical properties in warding off harm. 'Ivy' has different connotations and, in fact, the word (*bedera*) has already been used (see Rieu) just two lines earlier in line 25. The 'less literal' translation is even odder.

Alexander Pope used the same quotation in a letter to William Wycherley of 20<sup>th</sup> May 1709, referring to plaudits *he* had received: 'Virgil has taught me that a young Author has not too much reason to be pleased with them, when he considers, that the natural consequence of Praise, is Envy and Calumny. —Si ul[tr]a placitum laudarit, Baccare frontem Cingite, ne Vati noceat mala lingua futur[o]. (Alexander Pope and William Wycherley, *Letters of Mr. Wycherley & Mr. Pope, from the year 1704 to 1710*, Eighteenth Century Collections Online: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/ecco/004809110.0001.001/45:22?page=root;size=100;view=text> retrieved 29.11.16. The square brackets indicate that I have corrected misprints in the text of the quotation.)

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Lewalski, *Life*, p. 227.

<sup>16</sup> Louis Martz, 'The Rising Poet, 1645' in J. H. Summers, ed., *The Lyric and Dramatic Milton: Selected Papers from the English Institute* (New York: Columbia University, 1965), pp. 8–9.

which, of course, have their own title page. The actual location of the epigraph shows that it is intended to have a wider application. We can take two messages from the Virgilian quotation: first, that the poet might indeed need protection from envious detractors (which, given his controversial reputation at the time and his status as a ‘new’ poet, was an understandable concern), second, that Milton was identifying himself as a bilingual poet with classical pretensions.<sup>17</sup> Here I am using ‘bilingual’ in its literal sense. There is no reference in the paratext to Milton’s *multilingualism*.

The timing of the book’s publication may have been, to some degree, fortuitous – on the one hand, a consequence of Moseley’s new-found interest in poetic texts, on the other, a reflection of Milton’s desire to counter what Campbell and Corns call ‘the crude stereotyping by Presbyterians and the like of the tub-thumping fanatic’<sup>18</sup> by exposing the ‘softer’ side of his personal and cultural identity. Barbara Lewalski additionally suggests that, in the false dawn of a soon to be broken peace, Milton’s intention was ‘to fulfil the covenant he had made with his countrymen three years earlier, to produce poetry that might “imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu and public civility.”’<sup>19</sup> (If so, he was relying almost entirely on poetry he had written before he made this statement.) David Masson notes that this moment during the civil war was marked by ‘slightly revived leisure for other kinds of reading than were supplied by Diurnals, Sermons, Pamphlets and books of Polemical Theology and ... a willingness by London booksellers to care for this leisure.’<sup>20</sup> There was a pause in the march of national events that permitted the book’s publication. Milton must have felt in some sense that the time was right. He would certainly have said ‘no’ had he felt the moment was not propitious but nonetheless he was almost bound to be somewhat on the defensive in submitting for publication poetry he had written over a period of many years, beginning in his mid-teens, presenting different states of (im)maturity to the judgement of his peers.

The bilingual nature of Milton’s poetic identity is embodied in the structure of his book, unique in binding together into a single volume two separate bodies of work, vernacular poetry alongside a collection of neo-Latin verse. John K. Hale argues, however, that Milton’s principal aim in his first public volume of poetry was to announce

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<sup>17</sup> This might apply to the longer ‘pastoral’ poems in English, as much as to the neo-Latin work, which, to my relatively untutored eye, is not particularly ‘Virgilian’ before the ‘late’ *Epitaphium Damonis*. Indeed, Hale describes Milton’s Latin poems as ‘playing with Ovid’. (Hale *ML* p. 33.)

<sup>18</sup> Campbell Corns, p. 177.

<sup>19</sup> Lewalski *Life*, p. 226. The quotation is from *Reason of Church Government*.

<sup>20</sup> Masson *I*, p. 446.

himself to the world as a *multilingual* poet.<sup>21</sup> The vernacular section of the work does indeed include the six Italian poems whilst the neo-Latin section includes two poems in classical Greek. Hale argues that the inclusion of Italian poems in an English sonnet sequence was ‘creatively daring’.<sup>22</sup> The two Greek poems in the *Poemata*, he argues, form a sort of structural parallel to the Italian works in the vernacular section. The publication of multilingual verse by a single writer, in a single volume, was unparalleled in England at the time.<sup>23</sup> However one could equally argue that *Poems 1645* simply represents Milton’s ‘Collected Works’ at that particular moment in time. The fact that he had written poems in four different languages meant that, of necessity, the book would have to accommodate them.

Whilst we clearly see an editorial hand behind the book’s *design*, editorial intervention in the *selection* of the verse is much less obvious. Dr Johnson in *Lives of the English Poets* wrote of the collection:

[W]hat he has once written he resolves to preserve, and gives to the public an unfinished poem, which he broke off because ‘he was nothing satisfied with what he had done’, supposing his readers less nice than himself.<sup>24</sup>

It is not quite true to say that Milton published everything he had written up to 1645 in this volume (he added a little more verse from this early period of his life in 1673),<sup>25</sup> but, as Johnson says, he was not particularly selective about what *was* included, certainly as far as the first section of the book is concerned. The earliest vernacular poems date from 1624. *A Paraphrase on Psalm 114* and *Psalm 136* are preceded by the editorial comment that ‘This and the following Psalm were don by the author at fifteen yeers old.’<sup>26</sup> *Psalm 136* resonates now, partly because it provided the words for a famous hymn, but the paraphrase of *Psalm 114* (based on a translation – Milton had no Hebrew at this time) is not particularly elegant or successful, with its clumping end-stopped rhymes. The headnote to the two poems seems to ask us to be tolerant of their shortcomings, given their author’s age (but may also invite us to admire his precocity). *The Passion* (possibly written in March 1630), a companion piece to *On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity*, is

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<sup>21</sup> Hale *ML*, p. 21

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* Zwicker argues the opposite incidentally. (Zwicker, p. 234.)

<sup>24</sup> Samuel Johnson, ‘Lives of the English Poets’ in *Selected Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p.408.

<sup>25</sup> *At a Vacation Exercise in the College* (1628?), *On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of a Cough* (1625-6) and *Apologus De Rustico et Hero* (1624?) were included in 1673 (alongside poems written after 1645) and all were presumably available for publication in 1645. The paratext of the 1673 volume is much less complex in its design.

<sup>26</sup> *OCW III*, p. 14.

included, as Johnson says, even though it is incomplete, and followed by the brief statement that ‘This subject the author finding to be above the years he had, when he wrote it, and nothing satisfied with what was begun, left it unfinished.’<sup>27</sup> This is definitely not ‘the Best of John Milton’ though it *does* include the best.

Perhaps the *Poemata* were selected slightly more critically, for there is some early verse written in Latin that was *not* included in the volume. Carey’s *Complete Shorter Poems* includes *Carmina Elegiaca*, *Ignavus satrapam* and *Apologus De Rustico et Hero*, all of which presumably could have been included in the *Poemata* had Milton wished them to be. (He did add *Apologus De Rustico et Hero* in 1673.) This may be because Milton was more sensitive to the reception of his Latin verse than to that of his verse in English. As we have seen, English was not an international language in the mid-seventeenth century whilst Latin was still an important means of cross-cultural communication. Writing in Latin was a potential avenue to a Europe-wide reputation or Europe-wide criticism. It is significant that the adulatory testimonials Milton had received in Italy preface the *Poemata*, not the English section of his book. Dati’s letter to Milton of 1647 (quoted in Chapter 2) shows that Milton shared only the *Poemata* with his Italian friends. The Latin poems could address an audience of European intellectuals: the English poems, a more heterogeneous and ‘provincial’ native audience. It was also perhaps the case that writing in Latin involved more of a ‘performance’: writing correctly in line with classical models as well as interestingly. The same applies to the Italian and Greek poems, of course (both of which, unlike the poems in Latin, have been sometimes criticised for elements of linguistic inaccuracy).

So, I would suggest that the inclusion of the Italian verse may not so much reflect Milton’s ‘daring creativity’ as Hale has it, but, more prosaically, the simple fact that Milton had written it. The poems were among what Moseley called ‘[Milton’s] papers’ and were therefore grist to his publishing mill. This is not to say that the Italian verse is unimportant or that Milton was not concerned to demonstrate his linguistic versatility, but it seems to me that at least one of his aims in 1645 was to pit into print his output to date.

Here, as elsewhere in his *oeuvre*, there is a sense in which we experience Milton constructing himself in retrospect. So often we hear him describe and justify the events in his life after the event, sometimes long after the event, often in response to external attacks upon his morals, opinions, or behaviour. Almost all of what we rely upon as the

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<sup>27</sup> *OCW III*, p. 19.

story of his experiences in Italy was written thus. *Defensio Secunda*, which provides the most complete account of Milton's journey of 1638–9, was written in 1653, fourteen years after the events it describes, in response to ideological attacks by Salmasius and, as Milton feigned to believe, scurrilous personal assaults from Alexander Morus.<sup>28</sup> *Poems 1645* might be seen as another example of this *vie à rebours*. The volume might almost be described as 'bricolage'. It was formed from the materials that lay to hand and structured to give them a seductive, but perhaps slightly factitious, coherence. The Italian and Greek poems, linguistic 'outliers', had to fit into the volume somehow. In fact, Milton's editors from the eighteenth century onward, from Thomas Warton to John Carey, have felt moved to re-order and revise the poems according to principles that seemed to them to better reflect the process of composition or the chronology through which they came into being, preferring their own logic to that of Milton/Moseley. (Their changes, of course, also deal with the problem of including, in one volume, the additional verse published in 1673.)

## II. The Structural Messages of *Poems 1645*

What messages *are* intended, then, in the way the poems are ordered and structured in the collection in 1645? Fortuitously, Milton had occasion to comment upon his book not very long after its publication, giving an account in *Ad Joannem Rousium* of his own view of his multi-cultural poetic development. The poem was written on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1647 to accompany a copy of the book Milton sent to John Rouse, the Bodleian librarian, to replace the library's lost, or possibly stolen, copy. In the first line of the poem, Milton describes his book as *Gemelle cultu simplici gaudens liber, / Fronde licet gemina*. This has been variously translated as 'a little volume, with twin frontage',<sup>29</sup> as 'twin-born book, rejoicing in a single cover but with a double title page'<sup>30</sup> and as 'Twin membered book rejoicing in a single cover, yet with a double leaf'.<sup>31</sup> In any event, it is quite clear from the opening of the ode that the book's bilingualism and its division into two parts are central to Milton's view of his achievement. (It also confirms, perhaps, that the Italian and Greek poems were incidental to Milton's overall conception of the book.) Hard on the heels of this

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<sup>28</sup> In fact, of course, the offending treatise was written by Peter du Moulin.

<sup>29</sup> Hale *ML*, p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> *CSP*, p. 306.

<sup>31</sup> *CPMP*, p. 146. Merritt Hughes argues that *fronde* might refer either to the two title pages or possibly to 'the double crown deserved by the collection of poems in the two languages.'

comes Milton's apparently self-effacing description of his poetic background and experience:

Munditieque nitens non operose,  
Quam manus attulit

Iuvenilis olim,  
Sedula tamen haud nimii Poetae;  
Dum vagus Ausonias nunc per umbras  
Nunc Britannica per vireta lusit  
Insons populi, barbitoque devius

Indulsit patrio, mox itidem pectine Daunio  
Longinquum intonuit melos  
Vicinis, et humum vix tetigit pede;<sup>32</sup>

(Gleaming with unstudied elegance, applied by a youthful hand, painstaking but not yet the hand of a mature poet; the wandering author sometimes frolicked in Italian glades and sometimes in British meadows, careless of his compatriots, keeping apart, devoted to his native lute, or plucking exotic tunes with his Italian quill, his feet barely touching the ground.)<sup>33</sup>

There is an emphasis upon Milton's Italian experiences here which is not really justified by the Italian elements of his book. He presents his poetic development as a careless tour of the greensward of England ('Britannica per vireta') and the shady groves of Italy ('Ausonias nunc per umbras'). Here he would seem to draw more attention to his bilingual *vernacular* work than to the much more voluminous work in Latin. However, the ode is light-hearted and, in its mock-heroic imitation of Pindar and Ovid, ironic. He does invite his book to look forward to a place alongside the authors of antiquity ('alta nomina/Authorum, Graiae simul et Latinae') in the English seat of the Muses (which turns out to be the Bodleian Library). Also, the classical emphasis of much of his poetry is advertised in the language Milton has chosen for his ode. He is not really downplaying his classical work. Nonetheless, the account in the first strophe confirms the great pride he took in his personal experience of Italy and in his Italian (and Italian-influenced) poetry. It seems, here as elsewhere, that his time in Italy was more important to him than any other experience of his early adult life.

Nothing, though, in the structure or the editorial apparatus of *Poems 1645* draws attention to the Italian poetry – rather the opposite. Let us consider how the book is

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<sup>32</sup> *OCW III*, p. 276.

<sup>33</sup> My translation.



structured and how the Italian poems sit within it. The volume starts with *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* (1629). This early poem begins the book because it is Milton's best early poem. Then immediately we are taken back to juvenile work from 1624. The first group of poems (*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* up to *At a Solemn Music*) are all on solemn religious themes and, apart from the first poem, they are ordered chronologically. Then comes the *Epitaph for the Marchioness of Winchester* (1631), an occasional poem, written two years before and *At a Solemn Music* (which probably dates from 1633). There follows a section of occasional poems, mainly on 'lighter' themes, including two on the death of Hobson, the university carrier (which Milton treats humorously). All these poems date from around the same period in the very early 1630s. They lead up to *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, 'pendant' poems, with Italian titles<sup>34</sup> foreshadowing the poems in Italian that follow as part of the sonnet sequence (which *may* be ordered chronologically).<sup>35</sup> There are ten sonnets, five in Italian, five in English, plus the poem called *Canzone* (which is unnumbered). *Sonnet I*, in English, is followed by the six Italian poems, interposed without any authorial comment (despite the fact that Milton editorialises on other poems in the collection, right up to the final *Epitaphium Damonis*). The sequence reverts to English with *Sonnet VII*. The final section of the book is 'pastoral', consisting of *Arcades*, a masque-like entertainment, again from the early 1630s, *Lycidas* (1637), the latest and greatest of the vernacular poems and finally, *A Mask presented at Ludlow Castle* from three years before. The position of his masque, as the final poem of the first section of the book, can only mean that Milton wanted to give the work pride of place, its importance further reinforced by a separate title page, the reproduction of Lawes' letter to John Egerton from the 1637 edition and the letter of praise to Milton from Sir Henry Wotton.

In summary, the structure of the vernacular section of *Poems 1645* can be seen thus:

'Religious' poetry:

*On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* (1629), *A Paraphrase on Psalm 114* (1624), *Psalm 136* (1624), *The Passion* (1630?), *On Time* (1633), *Upon the Circumcision* (1633), *At a Solemn Musick* (1633?).

Occasional Poetry:

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<sup>34</sup> See my account of these poems in the next chapter.

<sup>35</sup> This depends on one's view of the dating of the Italian poems, of which more later in this chapter.

*An Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester* (1631), *Song on May Morning* (1629?), *On Shakespear* (1630), *On the University Carrier* (1631), *Another on the Same* (1631).

A Contrasting Pair of Set Pieces with Italian titles:

*L'Allegro* (1631?) and *Il Penseroso* (1632).

The Sonnet Sequence (including the *Canzone*):

Sonnet I (1629?), Sonnet II (1629?), Sonnet III (1629?), *Canzone* (1629?), Sonnet IV (1629?), Sonnet V (1629?), Sonnet VI (1629?), Sonnet VII (1631), Sonnet VIII (1642), Sonnet IX (1643?), Sonnet X (1642?).

Pastoral Poems:

*Arcades* (1632), *Lycidas* (1637), and, as a separate text, *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634).<sup>36</sup>

### III. The Poems in Italian – place and time

What are we to make, then, of the short Italian section of *Poems 1645*? The poems are Milton's unacknowledged orphans. He never refers to them in his letters or other prose writing, despite his great pride in his Italian experiences and connections. There are no manuscript copies. The presence of the six 'foreign' poems in the 'English' section of the book is not foreshadowed on the title page. There may be an allusion to them in *Elegia Sexta*, but even this is a matter of debate.<sup>37</sup> There is nothing, structurally or editorially, to draw attention to this aspect of his linguistic versatility other than the fact that the poems *are* in Italian. One could even argue that they are 'camouflaged' from view in a sequence of sonnets that starts in English ('O Nightingale that on yon bloomy spray') and reverts to English with Sonnet VII ('How soon hath Time the suttile thief of youth'). Indeed, some have found this arrangement unsatisfactory. John S. Smart, perhaps the most influential editor of the Italian work, isolated them from the other poems and gave them a separate introduction in his edition of Milton's sonnets.<sup>38</sup> David Masson referred to 'Donna leggiadra' (Sonnet II in Milton's sonnet sequence) as Sonnet I (i.e. the first of his

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<sup>36</sup> I have used Carey's dating throughout.

<sup>37</sup> Carey *Date*, pp. 383-86.

<sup>38</sup> John Milton, *The Sonnets of Milton with Introduction and Notes by John Smart* (Glasgow: Maclehose, Jackson and Co., 1921). To be fair he was 'majoring' on the Italian work.

Italian sonnets).<sup>39</sup> It has been argued, on the other hand, that there is a thematic and stylistic continuity between the Italian sonnets and the English ones which ‘bookend’ them. F.T. Prince sees the creation of the Italian sonnets as part of a developmental process:

The Sonnet to the Nightingale is indeed Italian in its form and manner. It recalls Bembo in its slightly solemn trifling, its very literary tone and even in the epigrammatic turn of its conclusion ... But in the details of its diction it shows none of the minutely applied parallelism found in Milton’s Italian poems.<sup>40</sup>

He suggests that ‘the “three and twentieth year” sonnet, on the other hand, has not only a ring of new-found confidence but shows that this confidence ‘must have come from his Italian exercises.’<sup>41</sup> Prince takes the view that writing the Italian sonnets was the means that enabled Milton to move away from the relative naivety of Sonnet I to a new level of assurance in Sonnet VII.

E.A.J. Honigmann, on the other hand, sees the ‘Nightingale’ sonnet as ‘an introduction to the Italian poems’, noting resemblances between the imagery of Sonnets I and II: ‘*Bloomy* spray’ prefigures ‘*l’herbosa val*’ and ‘*Là, onde l’alta tua virtù s’infiora.*’ ‘The bird’s “soft lay” prepares for the lady’s “*spirto gentil*” and the “amorous power” of its song for the “*disio amoroso*” induced by the lady.’<sup>42</sup> He also argues that Sonnet VI ‘links quite naturally with the second English sonnet (*VII*)’ based on the link between Milton’s poetic aspirations as expressed in *VI* – ‘*d’ingegno, e d’alto valor vago, / E di cetra sonora, e delle muse*’<sup>43</sup> – and ‘his hopes as a poet’ expressed in *VII*.<sup>44</sup>

Some of this depends upon one’s faith that the order of the sonnet sequence reflects the chronology of the works’ composition, an issue which I shall address shortly. Carey, who is strongly in favour of an early date for the Italian poems, dates *Sonnet I* as ‘Spring 1629?’ based on its ‘similarities with *Elegia V*’.<sup>45</sup> *Elegia V* is ‘in adventum veris’ (on the coming of spring). Sonnet I is set in May. *Elegia V* refers to the song of the nightingale (‘*iam Philomela tuos foliis adoperta novellis / instituis modulos*’)<sup>46</sup> and to the renewal of poetic inspiration with the renewal of the year.<sup>47</sup> In point of fact, about two

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<sup>39</sup> Masson I, p. 653.

<sup>40</sup> Prince, p.96.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Honigmann, p. 67.

<sup>43</sup> *OCW III*, p. 42.

<sup>44</sup> I think the latter part of his argument is quite weak. *Sonnet VI* is quite clearly a love poem. *Sonnet VII* is not, and one could well see the *Canzone* as showing greater concern about future poetic achievement.

<sup>45</sup> *CSP*, p. 93n.

<sup>46</sup> *Elegia Sexta* ll. 25–6.

<sup>47</sup> *Elegia Sexta* ll. 24–5.

thirds of *Elegia V* consists of an ecstatic account of the erotic effects of the return of the sun to the earth in spring.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, Sonnet I does refer to the nightingale's song foreshadowing 'success in love' and to the poet serving both the 'Muse' and 'Love'.<sup>49</sup> So there are connections between the two poems and, given that *Elegia Quinta* can be dated as being written in spring 1629, based on its heading in the 1645 collection, 'anno aetatis 20', it is possible that the first sonnet was also written that spring. Sonnet VII can be dated fairly definitely to December 1631.<sup>50</sup> (Milton ended his three and twentieth year on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1631.) It therefore seems a reasonable presumption that there is a gap of about two and a half years between Sonnet I and Sonnet VII. Despite this, Honigmann, who tends towards a later date for the Italian verse, points to thematic links between the first and second, and sixth and seventh sonnets. In fact, the same argument can hold whenever the Italian sonnets were written. If the thematic links are not due to the poems having been written around the same time, they could arise from the fact that the order of the sonnet sequence was determined thematically. Prince's suggestion, however, that the experience of writing the Italian sonnets was the means by which Milton progressed from the style of Sonnet I to that of Sonnet VII does depend entirely on the dating of the intervening works. In the meantime, it is worth pointing out that, based on Carey's view of their dates of composition, not only the Italian works but also Milton's translation of the fifth Ode of Horace, *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, *Elegia Sexta*, *The Passion*, *On Shakespeare*, *On the University Carrier*, *Another on the same*, *An Epitaph to the Marchioness of Winchester*, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* were also written during this period. Of course, these are not sonnets (and the dating of some of these works is uncertain) but there was an uncharacteristic amount of poetic activity on Milton's part during this period of his life quite apart from the putative composition of the Italian poems.<sup>51</sup>

As far as dating the poems is concerned, it was long assumed, understandably, that they were the fruit of Milton's visit to Italy in 1638-9. David Masson in his

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<sup>48</sup> *Elegia Sexta* ll. 55–132.

<sup>49</sup> *OCW III*, p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> Parker argues that 'three and twentieth year' should be interpreted to mean 'the year during which I was twenty-three', i.e. 1632. (William R Parker, *Milton – A Biography*, 2 vols [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968], II, pp. 784–87.) There is also the evidence of Milton's 'Letter to a Friend' (see Chapter 8).

<sup>51</sup> 'Uncharacteristic' – but one should perhaps remark upon Milton's generally low level of productivity. Even here, six short poems in Italian, a quite short Latin elegy, a short translation, a failed attempt at a poem about the Passion, an anonymous tribute to Shakespeare for the Second Folio, an epitaph, two jokey occasional poems, three stunning poems: *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* – nine hundred and forty-six lines of verse in perhaps thirty months does constitute a prolific output. It is as though he had more important fish to fry.

monumental biography, *The Life of John Milton narrated in connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical and Literary History of his Time*, tells us:

it seems to be with [his] transit through Bologna and Ferrara on the way to Venice, rather than with any other portion of his Italian tour that we are bound to connect ... his own attempts in Italian verse.<sup>52</sup>

Masson was dissenting from the prevailing view of the time that the Italian work had been composed in either Florence or Rome early in Milton's Italian travels. He argues (and most modern scholarship agrees with him) that the Reno (the river named in Sonnet II) is the river which 'flows close by Bologna' and 'has to be crossed at a ford or ferry [Milton's '*varco*'] at a town called Malalbergo'.<sup>53</sup> He briefly entertains the possibility, based on the dialogue of the *Canzone*, that the poems may have been written following Milton's return to England, but rejects the hypothesis mainly on the grounds that the poems are too colourfully Italian not to have been written in Italy. He points out that the sonnet (IV) addressed to Diodati could not, in any case, have been written later than 1639 because by that time Milton must have known that Diodati was dead. He does not consider, however, the possibility that the poems could have been written *before* Milton's 'grand tour'.<sup>54</sup>

This was the position until Smart argued in 1921 that the Italian poems must in fact be dated before the time of Milton's journey to Italy and 'probably many years earlier'.<sup>55</sup> His view derived from biographical, interpretive and 'editorial' evidence. From an historic and biographic perspective, Smart agrees with Masson that Milton would not have addressed a sonnet to Charles Diodati after the latter's death and Smart argues that he must have become aware of his demise fairly soon after it occurred. (His faith in seventeenth-century postal communications may not be well founded given Dati's later difficulties in getting his letters from Florence to reach Milton in London.)<sup>56</sup> Against this view, however, it has been noted that *Epitaphium Damonis* was definitely written after Milton's return to England in 1639 and in this poem, Milton refers to having looked forward to showing Diodati two 'cups' given to him by Manso in Naples:

Haec tibi servabam lenta sub cortice lauri,

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<sup>52</sup> Masson *I*, p. 651.

<sup>53</sup> Masson *I*, p. 651. Some thought the river in question was the Rhine. (See Cowper's translation (ref.)) I also think this, as will become clear later in this chapter.

<sup>54</sup> Masson *I*, p. 654. To be fair, he does briefly admit the possibility that the sonnet to Diodati was written before Milton left England, only to dismiss it immediately on the grounds given above.

<sup>55</sup> Smart, p. 134.

<sup>56</sup> Smart, p. 135.

Haec, & plura simul, tum quae mihi pocula Mansus,  
Mansus Chalcidicae non ultima gloria ripae  
Bina dedit ...<sup>57</sup>

(These things I was keeping for you beneath tough laurel-bark; these things and more as well, and also the two cups which Manso gave me, Manso not the least glory of the Chalcidian shore ...)

This seems to preclude the notion that Milton was already aware of Diodati's death at the time of his stay in Naples at the end of 1638. A date as late as June 1639 is possible, at the time when Milton was in Geneva visiting Giovanni Diodati, who must by then surely have been made aware of his nephew's death. Milton's reply to Dati's letter of 1647 may possibly, in my view, contain a hint that Milton had heard the news by the time of his second visit to Florence.<sup>58</sup> However this may be, Smart did not take account of the Manso 'cups' reference.

His dating is mainly based on evidence from the poems themselves. He argues that in Sonnet III, the fragile foreign flower ('*l'erbetta strana e bella*') is the Italian language and the 'colle aspro' is England, which places the setting of the poem at home, not abroad, whilst in the *Canzone*, those making fun of Milton ('*Ridonsi donne e giovani amorosi*') are clearly native English people. The poem is therefore set among the English, not the Italians. Finally, Smart argues that Milton ordered the sonnet sequence chronologically. As I have indicated, this would place the composition of his Italian work between 1629 and 1631.

Smart re-set the scholarly agenda for the Italian poems (and not only as regards their date) and his view remains the dominant one to this day. It is worth noting that almost all his arguments (including the naming of the 'Donna' of Sonnet II, which I deal with in Appendix 1) had been previously made, though in much less detail, by an Italian, Ettore Allodoli, who published a work on Milton and Italy in 1906.<sup>59</sup> Allodoli is not an important Milton scholar, so this particular contribution has been little recognised.<sup>60</sup> It was certainly not recognised by Smart. Allodoli's book is based upon a thesis he submitted to the University of Florence in 1905. There is a short and rather superficial chapter on the Italian sonnets. Allodoli observes that the Italian sonnets have been the subject of '*le ipotesi più disparate*' (the most disparate hypotheses): they were written for

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<sup>57</sup> *OCW III*, p. 226. (Lewalski/Haan translation.)

<sup>58</sup> See Chapter 7.

<sup>59</sup> Ettore Allodoli, *Giovanni Milton e l'Italia* (Prato: C&G Spighi, 1907).

<sup>60</sup> Shaw and Giamatti refer to Allodoli but only to dismiss his low estimation of the Italian work. (*Variarum I*, p. 373.)

Leonora Baroni; they were written for an unknown *Bolognesa* (Masson's view); or for some other Italian woman he met during his travels in Italy. He then goes on to say:

E invece più probabile che siano stati scritti in Inghilterra e siano un lavoro giovanile di Milton: hanno infatti tutta l'apparenza di essere stati dettati sotto quella ispirazione italianeggiante che fece scrivere al Poeta *L'Allegro* e *Il Penseroso*.<sup>61</sup>

(Rather, it is more probable that they were written in England and represent work from Milton's youth. They have all the appearance of having been written from the same Italianising inspiration which made the poet write *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*.)

He goes on to make very similar arguments, based on the texts of Sonnet II, the *Canzone*, and the Sonnet to Diodati, to those later made by Smart. He argues, based on what he sees as the poems' immaturity that they belong to the 'periodo più giovanile del Poeta' (the poet's earliest [most youthful] period),<sup>62</sup> also claiming that the fact that three of the Italian sonnets (III, IV and V) end with a 'rima baciata' (i.e. a couplet), like the English (or rather Scottish) sonnets of William Drummond, also suggests that these are early works. (Milton's later sonnets almost all follow Petrarchan conventions on rhyme.)<sup>63</sup>

What seems to indicate strongly that Smart had some awareness of Allodoli's work is that Allodoli also says, in passing, that the name of the *Donna* in Sonnet II may be 'Emiliana', without giving any reason for his view beyond quoting the first two lines of the poem.<sup>64</sup>

Crucially perhaps, John Carey in 1963 sought to date the Italian verse still more precisely, suggesting that:

Milton himself helps to date the Italian poems in two lines at the end of *Elegy VI*, which was written to Charles Diodati at or just after Christmas 1629:

Te quoque pressa manent patriis meditata cicutis,  
Tu mihi, cui recitem, iudicis instar eris. (*Elegy VI*, 89-90)<sup>65</sup>

The poems in question here are the Italian poems, he argues, translating the lines in accordance with this interpretation as 'Some terse little poems which I have composed on your native country's pipes are also waiting for you. You will serve as judge for me to

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<sup>61</sup> Allodoli, p. 56. My translation.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Carey points out that Petrarch never used a final couplet unless it also rhymed with the first line of the sestet, though later poets (Varchi for example) permitted themselves a final *rima baciata* without this proviso. (*CSP*, p. 92.)

<sup>64</sup> I discuss the issue of the Lady's name in Appendix 1.

<sup>65</sup> John Carey, 'The Date of Milton's Italian Poems', *The Review of English Studies*, XIV (1963), 383-86 (p. 384).

recite them to.<sup>66</sup> Compare Merritt Y. Hughes (in around 1957), who translates these lines as, ‘For you these simple strains that have been meditated on my native pipes are waiting; and you, when I recite them to you, shall be my judge<sup>67</sup> on the assumption that the language in question is English. Prior to Carey’s article, Hughes’ interpretation was the default position. William Cowper’s verse translation is: ‘This theme on reeds of Albion I rehearse:/The dawn of that blest day inspired the verse;/Verse, that reserved in secret, shall attend/Thy candid voice, my critic, and my friend!’<sup>68</sup> David Masson translates: ‘this is the gift which we have presented to Christ’s natal day. On that very morning, at daybreak, it was first conceived. The verses, which are composed in the vernacular, await your criticism; you shall be the judge to whom I shall recite them.’<sup>69</sup> The recent translation in the Lewalski/Haan edition of the *Shorter Poems* slightly blurs the issue of whose ‘patria’ is in question, by translating the lines as ‘There await you too some strains composed upon native pipes. When I recite them to you, you will serve as my adjudicator’,<sup>70</sup> where ‘native’ could possibly refer to Diodati’s ancestral native language (Italian).

Carey’s argument rests on the assertion that the word ‘quoque’ implies that these are poems which have not previously been mentioned in the elegy, ruling out the Nativity Ode as the work in question since it has just been described in the immediately preceding lines. He suggests that, as the only person mentioned in the elegy is Diodati, and, given that ‘te’ (i.e. Diodati) occurs in the same line as ‘patriis cicutis’, it is Diodati’s ‘patria’ that is in question here – Italy – and so the promised poems are the Italian poems (or some of them).<sup>71</sup> Carey has some difficulty, however, in squaring the reference to ‘cicutis’ (shepherd’s pipes, connoting pastoral verse) with the generally ‘un-pastoral’ sonnets, seeking to resolve this problem with recourse to the pastoral element of Sonnet III (‘L’avezza giovinetta pastorella’). If Carey’s argument is accepted, then the poems (or some of them) must have been written before the end of December 1629, the date of the composition of *Elegia Sexta*.

Douglas Bush in the first volume of the *Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton* demurs from Carey’s view, arguing that ‘it involves not only the awkward,

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<sup>66</sup> *CSP*, p. 122.

<sup>67</sup> Hughes, p. 53

<sup>68</sup> William Cowper, *The Poetical Works of William Cowper Esq.*, ed. by G. Standfast (New York: J C Derby, 1856), p. 395.

<sup>69</sup> Masson *I*, p. 194.

<sup>70</sup> *OCW III*, p. 148.

<sup>71</sup> Carey, p. 385.



anticlimactic effect of a brief, vague, concluding reference to other verse but here a very jarring shift from religious to erotic poetry'.<sup>72</sup> John Hale, on the other hand, supports him:

That the recent verses are 'patriis meditata cicutis' points to verses in Diodati's 'ancestral' language, Italian: not to the *Nativity Ode* in Milton's own ancestral language. Carey's logic strikes me as irrefragable.<sup>73</sup>

Irrefragable! This is a key debate, not only for assigning a more precise date to the Italian verse but also for confirming Smart's view, based on different evidence, that the poems are Milton's early work. This position has been almost universally accepted. But, as I have mentioned, there has been at least one dissenting voice. Honigmann argued, in his introduction to his edition of the sonnets of 1966, that Smart's reading of Sonnet III and of the *Canzone* can be challenged. He argues that Milton had no intention, in the first poem, of comparing himself to a shepherdess and that in the *Canzone* the *lingua ignota e strana* may just as well be 'strange' to the poet himself as to his audience.<sup>74</sup> Catherine Gimelli Martin supports Honigmann's view, rehearsing his arguments at some length,<sup>75</sup> suggesting that 'Milton may well have met and briefly loved "Emilia" in Italy, a lady as real as Leonora [Baroni] and as bewitching in person.'<sup>76</sup> She goes so far as to suggest that:

Milton may have entered his Italian poems in the Florentine "singing matches" described in the *Epitaphium*. According to Masson, Francini's ode to Milton and Salzilli's epigram prove that he displayed his Italian literary talents in both Florence and Rome, so why exclude his Italian sonnets?<sup>77</sup>

I think there are some rather good reasons to exclude this hypothesis. To begin with, her assertion that Masson considered that 'he displayed his Italian literary talents in both Florence and Rome' is inaccurate as far as I can determine. Masson actually said (referring to Milton's account of his reception in the academies in *Reason of Church Government*) that 'the "trifles" recited from memory were, doubtless, some of his Latin compositions in prose and verse already known to the reader.'<sup>78</sup> Martin gives as her authority for Masson's view Honigmann's account rather than Masson himself.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> *Variorum* I, p. 126.

<sup>73</sup> John K. Hale, 'The audiences of Milton's Italian Verse', *Renaissance Studies*, 8.1 (March 1994), 76–88 (p. 77).

<sup>74</sup> Honigmann, p. 79.

<sup>75</sup> Martin, pp. 66–8.

<sup>76</sup> Martin, p. 68.

<sup>77</sup> Martin, p. 67.

<sup>78</sup> Masson, I, p. 731.

<sup>79</sup> Martin, p. 79, n87.

Francini's ode (discussed in the previous chapter) makes no reference to Milton's 'Italian literary talents'. Indeed, Lewalski and Haan suggest that it is Milton's Latin elegies that Francini praises.<sup>80</sup> Salzilli's tribute does compare Milton to his advantage with Homer, Virgil and Tasso and refers to him as 'triplici poeseos laurea coronandum' (to be crowned with a threefold laurel-wreath of poetry). This could be taken to indicate that Salzilli was aware that he wrote poetry in Italian. Haan takes the view, however, that Salzilli is referring to Milton as polyglot rather than as poet<sup>81</sup> here, and it seems most unlikely that Salzilli would have been familiar with Milton's very limited poetic output in Greek. Most of all, though, it seems to me that, had Milton's Italian friends been aware of his Italian poetry, they would have made explicit mention of it and, had Milton's Italian verse been praised by them, he would not have failed to refer to this in his accounts of his Italian experiences. Finally, for some reason, Martin makes no reference to Carey's argument.

I agree with Honigmann that Smart's argument from the texts (whether he took it from Allodoli or not) does involve some rather forced readings of the poems. But I think that the deciding factor must be one's interpretation of the final lines of *Elegia Sexta*, the issue that Martin does not address. On balance, and with some reluctance, I incline to Carey's view. Here is the 'neutral' translation provided by Lewalski/Haan:

But if you want to know what I am doing (if, that is, you think it of at least some consequence to know what I am doing) we are singing of the peace-bringing king of heavenly seed and the blessed ages pledged in Holy Writ, God's infant wailings and the stabling in a poor dwelling of one who lives in the highest Kingdom together with his father, a sky giving birth to a star, hosts singing in the air and deities suddenly shattered in their very own shrines. These indeed are the gifts that we have given for Christ's nativity; these the first light brought to me at the approach of dawn. There await you too some strains composed upon native pipes. When I recite them to you, you will serve as my adjudicator.

And here is a translation kindly provided for me by Professor Richard Seaford of Exeter University, who is not a Miltonist and was unaware when translating of the controversy surrounding the significance of 'circuitis patriis':

Those gifts indeed we gave at the birth of Christ, those (gifts) the first light before dawn brought to me. For you too there remain things meditated on paternal (hereditary) pipes, you, for whom I will recite, will be like a judge.

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<sup>80</sup> *OCW III*. p. 419, n78.

<sup>81</sup> *OCW III*. p. 415.

None of this can be absolutely conclusive but the ‘too’ (‘quoque’), as Carey and Hale both argue, surely suggests that he is not referring to the Nativity Ode in the last two lines of the elegy, even though it is possible that the word ‘patriis’ (‘native’, ‘paternal’, ‘hereditary’, depending on one’s chosen translation) refers to Milton’s own ‘father’ tongue, English, in contrast to the Latin in which the Elegy is written. (This would mean of course that he had other verse written in English ready for Diodati to judge.)<sup>82</sup> However, the predominantly light and slightly skittish tone of the Italian poems, which is not perhaps typically Miltonic,<sup>83</sup> also suggests strongly to me that these are early works, resembling, as Allodoli suggested,<sup>84</sup> *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, much more than *Mansus* or the other Latin verse known to have been written during the year in Italy. Martin cites Honigmann’s view that the poems to Leonora Baroni represent Milton’s recovery of his ‘Italian attitude to feminine charms’, resembling the lover’s attitudes in the Italian poetry, suggesting continuity with the emotional world of the Italian poetry. However, to my mind, there is no tinge of romantic emotion in *Ad Leonoram Romae canentem*, and although the second poem, *Ad eandem*, refers to Tasso’s lady, Leonora, and suggests that Leonora Baroni would have had an even greater effect upon the great Italian poet than her namesake from the previous century, Milton puts this romantic emotion at one remove from personal feeling. He does not use the first person singular in either poem as he frequently does in the poems in Italian. The references to ‘torcisset lumina’ (rolling eyes) and the poet ‘becoming senseless and utterly losing his reason’<sup>85</sup> clearly allude to Tasso’s famous descent into madness as the result of his alleged desire for Leonora d’Este. There is no echo of the Petrarchan tone of the Italian poems here, in my view. Therefore, I regard the early sonnets (1–7) as a sequence both chronologically and thematically.

The Italian poems come as a little surprise, then, in the first section of *Poems 1645* but they were probably written sixteen years before they were published. Samuel Johnson continued the section on Milton that I have already quoted from *Lives of the English Poets* thus:

These preludes to his future labours are in Italian, Latin and English. Of the Italian I cannot pretend to speak as a critic, but I have heard them commended by a man well qualified to decide their merit.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> F.W. Bateson argued that the poems in question were *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* in *English Poetry: A Critical Introduction* (London: Longmans, 1950), pp. 155-6.

<sup>83</sup> With the exception of Sonnet VI.

<sup>84</sup> Allodoli, p. 56.

<sup>85</sup> *OCW III*, p. 161.

<sup>86</sup> Samuel Johnson, ‘Lives of the English Poets’, *Selected Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 408.

‘What he has once written he resolves to preserve’<sup>87</sup>: this does seem to be something of a guiding principle of *Poems 1645*. Milton himself makes no claims for the Italian poems. We will see that some critics have seen them as remarkable achievements, others as mere juvenilia.

### *The Poemata*

The ‘linguistic-virtuoso’ impression, perhaps created by the casual intermingling of the Italian verse with the English, is reinforced in the *Poemata*. But we should remember that writing neo-Latin poetry was still a mainstream activity in the mid-seventeenth century. Translating and imitating classical writers was a central part of the curriculum when Milton was at St Pauls and, as I have discussed, the method of translation and re-translation was central to language learning. However, the way the *Poemata* are organised is more straightforward, at first sight at least. The (third) title page simply states Milton’s name and city of residence and indicates (once again emphasising the poet’s youth) that most of the Latin poems were written before Milton reached the age of twenty-one and are printed for the first time. Then come the ‘testimonials’ from Milton’s Italian friends and acquaintances, prefaced by a ‘disclaimer’ from Milton, which manages to imply simultaneously that their praise is excessive and that he is worthy of the honour they do him.<sup>88</sup> As I previously noted, all the tributary poems were written by Italians (or in Selvaggi’s case, a pseudo-Italian) whom Milton had met during his journey to Italy of 1638–9: Manso in Naples,<sup>89</sup> Salzilli and Selvaggi (probably Matthew Savage a.k.a. David Codner)<sup>90</sup> in Rome, Francini and Dati in Florence. They praise his character and literary abilities and, as I have remarked, his language skills. Most of the contributions are in Latin with the exception of Francini’s *Ode* which, appropriately, given its content, is in Italian. With the exception of Manso’s distich, to which I shall return later in this thesis, the tributes fall into two categories: poems of exaggerated praise of Milton as a poet, and poems more focused on his linguistic and intellectual skills. In the former category, we have Salzilli and Selvaggi who rank him alongside Homer and Virgil. (Salzilli includes Tasso for good measure.) It seems odd that both of these tributes praise Milton not for what he has already achieved poetically, but for what he says he intends to achieve in the future. Francini and Dati, on the other hand, praise more generally (and at greater

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<sup>87</sup> Johnson, p. 408.

<sup>88</sup> *OCW III*, p. 107.

<sup>89</sup> In Chapter 8, I shall be discussing the genesis of the Manso distich.

<sup>90</sup> See Edward Chaney, *The Grand Tour and the Great Rebellion* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1985), 244–51.

length), though Francini includes (unspecified) great poetic achievements to come whilst Dati is more focused upon Milton's all round intellectual ability.

The *Poemata* themselves are subdivided into two separate sections. *Elegiarum Liber Primus*<sup>91</sup>, contains the seven elegies written between about 1626 (*Elegia Prima*) and 1629 (*Elegia Sexta*). *Elegia Quinta* and *Sexta* are in reverse chronological order, i.e. their numbers do not represent the order in which they were written. Carey suggests this may be because Milton felt that his rejection of love's wantonness, 'Nequitiae ... vana trophaea mea,'<sup>92</sup> in *Haec ego mente* would sit better after the 'romantic' *Elegia Septima* than after the more chatty and down to earth *Elegia Sexta*.<sup>93</sup> The elegies were indeed all written before Milton reached the age of twenty-one. The section ends, after the renunciation of Eros implied by *Haec ego mente*, with the shorter poems written on the Gunpowder Plot (around 1626) and the poems written in Rome about Leonora Baroni (1638 or 39). I have not identified any obvious reason for their inclusion in this section of the book.

The second section of the *Poemata* is entitled *Sylvarum Liber*. 'Sylva' or 'Silva' is defined by the *OED* as 'A title for a collection of pieces, esp. of poems'.<sup>94</sup> It is not a particularly common usage in classical literature. The title is taken from the *Silvae* of Statius, a group of occasional poems, and was also used by Lucan for a (lost) collection of his poems. There are, however, a number of seventeenth-century precedents for the use of the term for miscellaneous collections of poetry. Ben Jonson entitled his first collection of poems *The Forest* and the second, *The Underwood*, explaining in the preface to the latter that:

the ancients called that kind of body *silva*, or γλη in which there were works of diverse nature and matter congested, as the multitude call timber-trees, promiscuously growing, a wood or forest; so am I bold to entitle these lesser poems of later growth by this of *Underwood*, out of the analogy they hold to *The Forest* in my former book, and no otherwise.<sup>95</sup>

John Barclay published a collection of Latin poems with the title *Sylvae* in 1606<sup>96</sup> and Abraham Cowley entitled one of his collections *Sylva or Divers Copies of Verses made upon*

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<sup>91</sup> One might ask why 'Liber Primus'? The *Silvae* are not labelled, 'Liber secundus'. Was Milton considering writing a second book of elegies?

<sup>92</sup> *OCW III*, p. 156.

<sup>93</sup> *CSP*, p. 72.

<sup>94</sup> *OED* <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/196166?rskey=vvDXnS&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid> (Retrieved 01.09.2014).

<sup>95</sup> Ben Jonson, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 307.

<sup>96</sup> EEBO: <http://tinyurl.com/lcvax9> retrieved 18.04.17.

*Sundry Occasions* (published 1637).<sup>97</sup> (Cowley was one of the three English poets Milton ‘approved most’ according to his widow.)<sup>98</sup> Milton seems to use ‘Sylvae’ as a portmanteau term for the Latin verse that did not fit into the First Book of Elegies, though, in fact, the content of the *Sylvae* overlaps with *Elegiarum Liber Primus*. The first poems pick up the themes of the later non-elegiac poems in the previous section: the Gunpowder Plot, for example. Milton also includes his occasional poetry here: *In obitum Procancellarij medici*, *In obitum Praesulis Eliensis* as well as his early meditations upon natural philosophy, *Naturam non pati senium*, *De Idea Platonica quemadmodum Aristoteles intellexit*. *Ad Patrem* stands out as a personal poem which Carey on balance dates ‘after 1632’. The two poems in Greek follow this, *Psalm 114* from 1634 and *Philosophus ad regem* (perhaps 1634–8 but possibly dating from ten years earlier when Milton was still at St Paul’s). Next are the two poems which Milton wrote whilst he was in Italy addressed to Italian poets/writers, *Ad Salsillum poetam Romanum aegrotantem* and *Mansus*. The section ends with *Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton’s great poem of mourning for Diodati. This poem is frequently termed an elegy and, as such, it might seem to belong in the first part of the *Poemata*. However, it is written in hexameters, whereas the classical elegiac form consists of alternating hexameter and pentameter lines. The poems Milton entitles ‘elegies’, those included in *Elegiarum Liber Primus*, are in this metre. Placing the poem at the conclusion of the *Sylvarum Liber* might have meant that both the vernacular and Latin parts of his twin book ended with a great poem of lament: *Lycidas* on the one hand and *Epitaphium Damonis* on the other. Milton (or his publisher) did not take this opportunity, however. *The Mask*’s climactic position in the vernacular section prevents this. It may not have been a greater work than *Lycidas* but it was a work of higher social status (and of greater length). However, if we regard *Comus* as a ‘stand-alone’ work in the vernacular part of the book, we can perhaps still see *Lycidas* as ending the collection of Milton’s vernacular shorter poems and paralleling *Epitaphium Damonis* in the book’s overall structure.

Lewalski and Haan have suggested other features:

poems with Italian headings (e.g. *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*) or those composed in the Italian language (i.e. the six [*sic*] Italian sonnets) seem to be balanced in the classical section by those poems associated with Milton’s Italian journey (the Leonora epigrams, *Ad Salsillum*, *Mansus*).<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Abraham Cowley, *Sylva or Divers Copies of Verses made upon Sundry Occasions* (London: printed by E.P. for Henry Seile, 1637).

<sup>98</sup> *Encyclopedia*, p. 77.

<sup>99</sup> *OCW III*, p. xcvi.

I am not sure about the strength of this argument. There is no clear relationship between the location of the respective works in the vernacular and classical sections that I can see, and the Latin poetry composed in Italy was bound to be included in the *Poemata* somewhere. It seems slightly odd, on the other hand, that Milton (or Moseley) chose to separate off the *Leonora* epigrams from the rest of the work written in Italy, by including them in the ‘Elegy’ section of the book. But, overall, the structure of the *Poemata* is, in fact, strongly chronological with very few exceptions: the order of the fifth and sixth Elegies, and, possibly, the location of the second Greek poem, *Philosophus ad regem*.

The inclusion of the poems in Greek, whether or not they form a parallel to the Italian poems in the first section of the book, needs a little further comment. Hale argues that the Greek work is analogous, methodologically, to the Latin: ‘[Milton] chooses an ancient exemplar and metre, and pours into that mould thoughts of his own.’<sup>100</sup> He also tells us that ‘[these poems] contain more blunders than the whole of Milton’s Latin.’<sup>101</sup> He nonetheless praises them for their linguistic inventiveness, particularly *Psalm 114* which he describes, referring to the use of Homeric metre to translate the Hebrew original, as ‘a transcultural long-jump of a kind which (albeit sobered) anticipates his mature English style.’<sup>102</sup> Milton had, of course, already worked on Psalm 114 as a fifteen year old.<sup>103</sup> Jeffrey Einboden comments that, in his Greek translation of it, ‘the young Milton inadvertently produces an unresolvable tension, a ‘Hellenistic scripture’ and a ‘Homeric Psalm’ and consequently engenders the resulting ontological paradox which is implicit in such a text’ – i.e. Milton attempts the contradictory task of expressing the absolute theological authority of his scriptural text through the ‘exclusive aesthetic excellence of Hellenic and Latinate poetics.’<sup>104</sup> *Philosophus ad regem*, on the other hand, is a poem of just five lines that was either written while Milton was at St Pauls (c. 1624), or after November 1634, the date of *Psalm 114*. (Milton said in his letter to Gill that the psalm was the first thing he had composed in Greek since he left school.)

Again, it seems to me that there is no very clear rationale to the way these two poems are sited in the *Poemata*. They sit alongside each other, whatever the gap of years between their composition, between *Ad patrem*, possibly one of the last poems Milton wrote before departing for Italy and *Ad Salsillum poetam Romanum aegrotantem*, probably

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<sup>100</sup> Hale, *ML*, p. 43.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> Hale, *ML*, p. 23.

<sup>103</sup> *Poems 1645*, p. 14.

<sup>104</sup> Jeffrey Einboden, ‘The Homeric Psalm: Milton’s translation of Psalm 114 and the problems of ‘Hellenic Scripture’, *Literature and Theology*, 17, 3 (September 2003), 314–332.

one of the first poems Milton wrote after his arrival there. Six Latin poems precede them in the *Sylvarum Liber*. Three Latin poems, longer ones, follow them. There is no obvious thematic reason for their location. If *Philosophus ad regem* was not written while Milton was a pupil at St Paul's, there could be a chronological one.

On the whole, once again, it seems to be a case of *Poems 1645* absorbing the material that Milton had preserved. The Greek poems are much less significant, in my view, for our understanding of Milton than the Italian ones. Milton had learnt ancient Greek at St Paul's and at Cambridge. Hale says that his 'Greek scholarship was extended and high powered' but, though Charles Diodati wrote to him in Greek, his surviving letters to Diodati are in Latin. It would seem that his active use of Greek was, understandably, even more restricted than his active use of Italian. The Greek poems serve as a reminder of the breadth of Milton's scholarship and of his willingness to use it, but they are otherwise of limited interest. It is a stretch to see them justifying Milton's identity as a neo-ancient Greek poet as Salzilli's epigram might seem to imply.<sup>105</sup>

*Poems 1645* contains twenty poems in English plus *Arcades* and *A Mask*, and six short poems in Italian. It contains twenty-five poems in Latin, ranging in length from four lines (*In eandem* and *In inventorem Bombardae*) to two hundred and nineteen lines (*Epitaphium Damonis*). It contains two poems in Greek which together total twenty-seven lines. The Greek and Italian poems account for five and a half pages of Moseley's original volume of eighty-seven pages. So, was Milton presenting himself as a multi-lingual, or as a bilingual, poet at this stage of his career? As I have said, there is no doubt that Milton was multi-lingual – an able reader and citer of at least four foreign languages (Latin, Greek, Italian and French), who also could decipher Spanish and Portuguese, and may, during the Commonwealth, also have acquired some knowledge of Dutch. He was an actively bilingual poet until he almost completely gave up writing verse in Latin after *Epitaphium Damonis*. He briefly (and interestingly) experimented with Italian verse. He really made only one serious attempt to write verse in ancient Greek and admitted to Alexander Gill that this arose from a single dawn-impulse that never appears to have recurred. Like the Italian verse, the Greek poems rather 'hide away' in the collection. They are not trumpeted.

I would argue that the Italian verse (and the Greek) 'sits' rather than 'fits' in Milton's first volume. The Italian poems could only have been located in the sonnet sequence although their location in the sequence may also have a thematic and

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<sup>105</sup> *OCW III*, p. 107.



chronological rationale. (The *Canzone* presumably occurs in the sequence as a reflection of the example of Petrarch and Bembo who both included *canzoni* in their sonnet sequences.) Milton *may* have taken great pride in these poems as a younger and, at the time, virtually unknown English poet who, at the time of their composition, had never visited Italy and whose knowledge of the Italian language at the time was purely ‘academic’. Or he *may* have seen them as youthful curiosities. But the poems do not, in my view, form part of an attempt to claim a general reputation as a multi-lingual poet as Hale suggests. The fact that, *pace* Martin, Milton almost certainly did not expose them to the scrutiny of his Italian friends in 1637/8 suggests that he was not certain of a favourable reception. (He did not always get one from Italian critics in later centuries.) The main claim of *Poems 1645* is expressed quite clearly on its title page: *Poems of Mr. John Milton, both English and Latin*.

Milton was not at all unusual, in his time, as an Englishman writing poetry in Latin, a practice which continued right up to the nineteenth century.<sup>106</sup> L.B.T Houghton and Gesine Manuwald point out in their introductory chapter to *Neo-Latin Poetry in the British Isles* that ‘some of the most accomplished and prolific British writers of neo-Latin poetry [were] also figures of the highest distinction in the field of English literature’ citing Milton alongside George Herbert, Andrew Marvell and Thomas Campion as examples.<sup>107</sup> But, of these, apart from Milton, only Thomas Campion actually published his Latin verse during his lifetime.<sup>108</sup> (Indeed, apart from Milton, only Campion, of these poets, a hard working musician/composer/poet, published *any* verse during his lifetime. Publication for profit was not an entirely respectable thing even later in the seventeenth century.)<sup>109</sup> Both Marvell and Herbert also wrote some verse in Greek. What was unusual about ‘the little twin volume’ among seventeenth-century *publications*, its innovation, was, as Hale suggests, binding together Latin and English poetry in a single collection. Shortly after the publication of *Poems 1645*, Milton abandoned Latin verse more or less completely.<sup>110</sup> His period of Italian poetic creativity had almost certainly ended long before. I do not believe, therefore, that Milton was setting out his stall as a

<sup>106</sup> Walter Savage Landor (1775-1864) wrote over three hundred poems in Latin.

<sup>107</sup> L.B.T Houghton and Gesine Manuwald, ‘Introduction: Musa Britannica’ in *Neo Latin Poetry in the British Isles*, ed. by Houghton and Manuwald (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), p. 3.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas Campion, *Poemata* (London: Richard Field, 1595).

<sup>109</sup> See John Feather, ‘The British Book Market 1600-1800’, in *A Companion to the History of the Book*, ed. by Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose (Chichester: John Wiley, 2007), p. 235.

<sup>110</sup> Carey includes the *Epigram from Defensio Pro Populo Anglicano* (1650), *Verses from Defensio Secunda* (1653) - and a fragment from the title page of ‘The Ready and Easy Way’ (1660) in the *Complete Shorter Poems* but none of these are ‘poems.’

*multi*-lingual prodigy in his first volume of verse, happy though he was to demonstrate his linguistic versatility. The Italian verse is not central but peripheral to the work's ambition

## Chapter 4

### The Italian Poems – Genesis and Execution

In this chapter, I will consider how and why the Italian poems came to be written, their critical reception both in England and Italy, their sources and Milton's poetic control of his adopted 'lingua ignota e strana'. Did they arise from personal experience, the torments of love, or, perhaps more likely, from the ambition to imitate and emulate the Petrarchan tradition stretching from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century?

#### I. Imitatio, Aemulatio, or Amor?

The Italian work was once closely associated with presumed events in Milton's personal life. William Riley Parker, for example ('with wonderfully literal mind', remarks Cedric Brown),<sup>1</sup> regarded these poems as telling the story of Milton's second love affair:

When Milton met Emilia (along with some other girls and some pleasant young men) her beauty, her manner, and her exotic air attracted him at once. She was of Italian origin ... Milton, fascinated, begged her to talk to him in Italian ... Flattered by his attention, she complied.<sup>2</sup>

Masson, believing that the poems were written in Italy, suggests that Sonnet II (which, as I have noted, he calls Sonnet I) was 'a mere sonnet of compliment to a beautiful Bolognese lady casually met, and that the rest were poems of some keen personal affection, the object of which was certainly a foreign, and almost certainly an Italian, lady'.<sup>3</sup> Prince, writing in the early 1950s, although almost entirely preoccupied with the literary ancestry of the Italian work, was also slightly inclined toward a personal interpretation: 'they may confirm that he instinctively preferred the protection of an alien tongue and a literary convention when it was a matter of seeing himself as a young

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<sup>1</sup> Cedric C. Brown, *John Milton – a Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995), p. 24. In Appendix 1, I question the orthodoxy, based on J.S Smart's edition of the Sonnets, that the name of the 'Donna leggiadra' of Sonnet II is, in fact, 'Emilia'.

<sup>2</sup> W. R. Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, 2 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), I, pp. 78-9.

<sup>3</sup> Masson, I. p. 653

lover'.<sup>4</sup> Milton certainly presents himself differently in his different linguistic guises. As I have observed, there is a humorous lightness to some of the Italian verse which is found only rarely in the rest of Milton's poetic output. Rather similarly, in the Latin work, the powerful eroticism of *Elegia Quinta* contrasts markedly with the highly stylised (and rather cold) version of Eros in *Comus*.

More recent criticism, however, has tended to downplay the notion that the poems were inspired by blind Cupid's darts. Brown suggests that the love affair in question is 'a new love affair with Italian culture'.<sup>5</sup> Lewalski admits the possibility that the sonnets could describe an actual individual, but observes that the more important reason for writing in Italian 'was surely literary: having mastered the Ovidian love elegy in Latin, he evidently decided to try out the other major mode of love poetry in the European tradition in *its* original language'.<sup>6</sup> It may well be more accurate to see the Italian poems as Milton using the Italian literary tradition to *imitate* the feelings of a 'young Petrarchan lover' than as evidence for the theory that he was one. As we will never know whether there was a raven-haired, Italian-speaking 'donna leggiadra' in Milton's life, in or around 1629, it seems more productive to focus on the verse itself rather than to seek the source of its 'inspiration'.

There is, as Brown suggests, definitely a sense in which the 'dark lady' of the Italian sonnets can be seen as the Italian language or perhaps, more accurately, the Italian poetic tradition. The Italian critic, Mario Melchionda, has commented:

nelle poesie italiane il tema amoroso è intrecciato, anzi soggiogato dalla riflessione sul poetare, e sul poetare in altra lingua, nella lingua eletta della poesia d'amore: l'incontro con la donna italiana figurerebbe l'incontro con la poesia italiana, e le poesie che lo narrano dunque le poesie che narrano se stesse, il loro farsi (altra convenzione: il sonetto che ha per tema il far sonetti).<sup>7</sup>

(in [Milton's] Italian poetry, the love theme is mingled with, or rather, subordinated to, a reflection on the act of writing poetry, the act of writing poetry in another language, in the chosen language of love poetry: the encounter with the Italian lady represents the encounter with Italian poetry and the poetry that speaks of this encounter is poetry that speaks of itself, that makes itself – (another convention: the sonnet whose subject is writing sonnets).)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Prince, p. 98.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Lewalski, *Life*, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup> M. Melchionda, 'Le poesie italiane di John Milton', in *Eteroglossia e plurilinguismo letterario. I. L'italiano in Europa* (atti del XXI Convegno interuniversitario: Bressanone, 6-9 luglio 2000), a cura di F. Brugnolo e V. Orioles (Roma: Il calamo, 2002), pp. 99–100.

<sup>8</sup> My translation.

As regards the style of these poems, most critics who have addressed the issue consider Giovanni Della Casa to be the Italian poet whom Milton emulates most closely in these sonnets. This is perhaps not entirely unconnected with the happy accident that we know that Milton bought and annotated a copy of Della Casa's sonnets at around the time he is thought to have written his Italian poems.<sup>9</sup> John Smart states as simple fact that 'the poet who most directly influenced Milton was Giovanni Della Casa',<sup>10</sup> adding:

In the composition of the sonnet Della Casa deliberately broke with the Petrarchian [sic] tradition of regularity and smoothness, which had been carried to excess by minor sonneteers.<sup>11</sup>

He argues therefore that Milton was following the example of Della Casa in particular when he deviated from Petrarchan norms:

Petrarch died in 1374; Milton was born in 1608. Between them interposed a vast tract of time, during which countless Italian authors composed and experimented. It is in this direction that we must look for the secret of Milton's departure from Petrarch, and the explanation of his supposed irregularities.<sup>12</sup>

Smart goes on to describe the nature of these innovations. Della Casa regularly uses enjambment both between quatrains and between the octet and the sestet, thus challenging (but also exploiting) the expectation of close identity between sense and verse structure long established in the Petrarchan sonnet tradition. The most extreme example, Smart tells us, of this DellaCasian challenge to traditional expectation comes in this sonnet:

Sì lieta avess' io l'alma, e d'ogni parte  
il cor, Marmitta mio, tranquillo e piano,  
come l'aspra sua doglia al corpo insano,  
poi ch'Adria m'ebbe, è men noiosa in parte.  
Lasso, questa di noi terrena parte  
fia dal tempo distrutta a mano a mano,  
e i cari nomi poco indi lontano,  
(il mio col vulgo, e 'l tuo scelto e 'n disparte),

pur come foglia che col vento sale  
cader vedransi. O fosca, o senza luce  
vista mortal, cui sì del mondo cale,  
come non t'ergi al ciel, che sol produce  
eterni frutti? Ahi vile augel, su l'ale

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<sup>9</sup> New York Public Library, [\\*KB 1529 \(Dante Alighieri. Amorooso convivio\)](#).

<sup>10</sup> Smart, p. 30

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 30

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-30

pronto, ch'a terra pur si riconduce!<sup>13</sup>

(My soul was so joyful and my whole heart calm and untroubled, Dear Marmitta, as (the) unpleasant illness in my unhealthy body [he had gout], after being in Venice, is a little less uncomfortable. Alas, this earthly part of us will be destroyed, little by little, by time; and soon dear names (mine among the crowd, yours among the elect and kept apart) will fall like leaves blown by the wind. Oh benighted, lightless, human sight looking down on the earth beneath, how is that you do not gaze up to heaven which alone yields eternal fruit? Alas, vile bird, quick to take wing, which only takes you back down to earth.)<sup>14</sup>

Here we see the use of enjambment in the opening lines (with the arrival of the second half of the *alma* (soul)/*cor* (heart) pairing postponed to the beginning of line two). Della Casa's 'rhymes' in the octet are consciously perverse – *parte, parte, parte, (dis)parte* – their identical sound and spellings are justified by their different meanings and syntactical functions. (Milton never imitated this.) The sonnet's semantic 'turn' takes place a line and a half into the sestet, rather than at the break between the octave and sestet. Smart argues that the impact of this is to 'set the emphatic *cader vedransi* in relief'.<sup>15</sup> He likens this effect to that which Milton achieves in the sonnet 'On the late Massacher in Piemont' in which the lines, 'Their moans / The vales redoubl'd to the Hills, and they / To Heav'n'<sup>16</sup> include an enjambment between the octet and sestet followed by an enjambment between the first two lines of the sestet itself. He also notes a similar effect in the second sonnet to Cyriack Skinner ('Upon his Blindness').<sup>17</sup> Smart's conclusion is that Milton's departure from Petrarchan norms is explained by the fact that his model was not Petrarch himself, but 'the sonnet-writers, now less famous, of the sixteenth century'.<sup>18</sup> It is very significant, however, that the examples used by Smart to justify his view of Della Casa's impact on the sonnets come from the Milton's later sonnets written in English, not from those in Italian.

Prince, writing thirty years later, broadly accepts Smart's account. Prince speaks of Della Casa's 'loosening of the rhythmic pattern of the sonnet'<sup>19</sup> as a model for Milton who regularly disobeys traditional conventions regarding rhyme schemes and the division in the sonnet's 'argument' between octet and sestet. He too makes the point that Della

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<sup>13</sup> Giovanni Della Casa, *Rime* (Milano: Einaudi, 1993), p. 61.

<sup>14</sup> My translation. I have found no other. The Italian verse was very difficult to decipher even with the assistance of two Italian friends.

<sup>15</sup> Smart, p. 32

<sup>16</sup> John Milton, 'Sonnet on the Late Massacher in Piemont', *OCW III*, p. 245.

<sup>17</sup> *OCW III*, p. 294.

<sup>18</sup> Smart, p. 34

<sup>19</sup> Prince, p. 100.

Casa's innovations in the sonnet form relied upon 'retaining the old underlying equilibrium beneath a surface which is often elaborately irregular'<sup>20</sup> – i.e. that the effect of deviation from the sonnet's traditional 'rules' depend on a shared consciousness of what those 'rules' are. His main point about the Italian sonnets, as a route of poetic development for Milton, relates to the 'structural principle of parallelism in the sonnet [which] may be traced everywhere in the phraseology of Italian examples.'<sup>21</sup> He points to numerous examples of this in Milton's Italian work ('Saette ed arco', 'strana e bella', 'ignota e strana', 'rinchiusa e turbida', 's'agghiacci o s'inghiela')<sup>22</sup> and shows how these 'parallelisms' extend into the wider structure of the poems in the composition of phrases and 'whole sentences and sequences.'<sup>23</sup> Prince argues that Bembo and Della Casa are Milton's main models for the 'difficulty and harshness' of his Italian poems' which he feels Milton would have seen as 'permissible' only in the light of these poets' innovations.<sup>24</sup> He also suggests, revealingly, that some of the distinguishing features of Milton's Italian work, particularly his freedom with the octave/sestet division, 'are due mainly to the inevitable limits of his control of the language.'<sup>25</sup> However, while Milton's *asprezza* (if it exists) may derive from sixteenth-century sources, there is certainly nothing distinctively 'DellaCasan' about the (mainly) adjectival 'parallelisms' he notes.<sup>26</sup>

If Milton had the 'irregularities' of Della Casa or Bembo in his mind when writing his Italian sonnets, this gave him greater latitude as to *form* when writing technically difficult verse in a foreign language. Strict imitation of Petrarchan conventions would, in fact, have been more challenging. I would therefore argue that the 'permission' he had from Della Casa (and Bembo) in the Italian sonnets, to be freer with the form of his Italian verse should be viewed quite separately from the impact Della Casa, in particular, had upon his later work in English in the sonnet form.

Mario Praz made a similar point in a slightly roundabout way:

Ora quando, dopo un periodo in cui il sonetto era stato quasi completamente abbandonato in Inghilterra, Milton lo riesumò, egli non seguì già gli elisabettiani, ma andò direttamente alla fonte, la poesia italiana, per la forma metrica ...La

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<sup>20</sup> Prince, p. 94

<sup>21</sup> Prince, p. 94

<sup>22</sup> Sonnet II, Sonnet III, Canzone, Sonnet V, Sonnet V, respectively.

<sup>23</sup> Prince, p. 95

<sup>24</sup> Prince, p. 100.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101

<sup>26</sup> For example, Petrarch's Ballata I ends, 'Che per mia morte ed al caldo ed al gelo,/ De' be' vostri occhi il dolce lume adombra.' (Francesco Petrarca, *Rime*, ed. by Giacomo Leopardi (Florence: Einaudi, 1886).

forma di sonetto adottava da Milton non era soltanto genericamente italiana, ma coincideva specificamente con quella di Giovanni della Casa.<sup>27</sup>

(So, when, after a period in which the sonnet had been almost completely abandoned in England, Milton took it up again, he did not follow the Elizabethans but went straight back to the source, Italian poetry, for his metrical form ... The form of sonnet Milton adopted, however, was not generically Italian, but closely followed the form used by Giovanni della Casa.)<sup>28</sup>

Praz goes on to point out this approach to the sonnet, based on 'l'uso di trattare il sonetto come un tutto' (the practice of treating the sonnet as a whole) and the use of frequent enjambment, can be seen in the sonnets 'a Cromwell, Vane e Lawrence, di quelli sul massacro in Piemonte, sulla sua cecità, e sulla morte della moglie'. However, he sees the sonnets in *Italian* as being closer to Petrarch (or, more accurately, to the 'Bembista' Petrarchan school). He also remarks upon the direct echoes of Petrarch's sonnets to be found in Milton.<sup>29</sup>

Sergio Baldi, an important Italian Miltonist, writing in 1966, addressed the same issues:

La lingua di queste poesie è una lingua chiaramente petrarchista, cioè un poco arcaica per gli anni in cui furono scritte; ed è il petrarchismo del Cinquecento pieno, nell'arco che va dalle *Rime* del Bembo a quelle del Tasso.<sup>30</sup>

(The language of these poems is clearly Petrarchan, that is a language which was somewhat archaic at the time they were written: and it is the Petrarchanism of the sixteenth century, in the arc which leads from the *Rime* of Bembo to those of Tasso.)<sup>31</sup>

'Poco arcaica' seems an understatement; Baldi is suggesting that Milton is writing in a style which was in common use one hundred years earlier. He sees Milton's 'struttura linguistica' as being closer to Bembo than to Petrarch, but, like Praz, he acknowledges that Milton's vocabulary (he cites 'donna leggiadra', 'spirito gentil', 'atti soavi', 'i bei vostr'occhi', 'mio sole', 'pastorella', 'snella', 'altera', 'guiderdon', 'semplicetto') is Petrarchan.<sup>32</sup>

There is some question, then, among Italian critics, as to whether Milton's Italian sonnets are, in fact, 'Petrarchan' first and 'DellaCasan,' second. This contrasts with the

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<sup>27</sup> Mario Praz, *Machiavelli in Inghilterra ed Altri Saggi sui Rapporti Letterari Anglo-Italiano* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1962), p. 272.

<sup>28</sup> My translation.

<sup>29</sup> Praz, pp. 272-3. (He acknowledges the debt to Smart.)

<sup>30</sup> Baldi, p. 112.

<sup>31</sup> My translation.

<sup>32</sup> Baldi, pp. 112-14.



dominant view of most Anglophone criticism. My own view is that the Italians win this argument. Milton's Italian sonnets and the *Canzone* are much less syntactically clotted and difficult than those of Della Casa (or indeed of Tasso), which at times verge on the impenetrable, not because of the ideas they convey, but because of the 'unnatural' complexity and compression of their syntax – a problem some critics have seen in Milton's later work.

There is no doubt in my mind that a direct exchange with Petrarch existed and may well have been primary. Milton had read Petrarch and had a strong regard for him. In the *Apology for Spectymnuus* (1642), Milton writes:

if I found those authors any where speaking unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before they had extolled; this effect it wrought with me, from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplored; and above them all, preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts, without transgression.<sup>33</sup>

We know that he approved of what he saw as Petrarch's criticism of the Roman Church, in Sonnet 108.<sup>34</sup> We should recognise, however, that the comment on Sonnet 108 dates from 1641 and 'An Apology for Smectymnuus', from 1642. In his letter to Buonmattei of 10<sup>th</sup> September 1638, Milton speaks of 'the feast afforded by the great Dante, by Petrarch and many another of your writers'<sup>35</sup> during his stay in Florence. (Admittedly this is almost ten years after the Italian poetry was probably written.) However, there is no doubt that Petrarch was *the* Italian sonnet writer and poet from the point of view of sixteenth and seventeenth century English writers. (See Chapter 1.)

There is evidence of Milton's artistic relationship with Petrarch in his early verse in English. *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, for example, contains the lines:

Nature in awe to him  
Had doffed her gaudy trim,  
With her great master so to sympathise:<sup>36</sup>

Carey, amongst others, notes a 'striking debt' to Petrarch here.<sup>37</sup> The debt is to Petrarch's Sonnetto III (on a Good Friday eclipse) which begins 'Era il giorno ch'al Sol si scoloraro/Per la pietà del suo Fattore i rai.' ('It was the day when the sun dimmed its rays

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<sup>33</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 98.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Private Correspondence*, p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> *OCW III*, III, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> *CSP*, p. 102.

in pity for its maker.’<sup>38</sup>) Milton’s and Petrarch’s lines are related in their imagery although they contain no direct verbal parallels. Petrarch’s sonnet refers to a rare astronomical event that took place on a particular Good Friday. Milton’s lines simply refer to the fact that Christ was born in the winter. Is the debt so striking? I would be tempted to say not, except for the echo of the rhythm of Petrarch’s lines in Milton’s: the ghost of an internal rhyme in Petrarch’s first *endecasillabo* (‘giorno’ – ‘scoloraro’), reflected in the rhymes in Milton’s split pentameter (‘him’ ..... ‘trim’), and ‘Fattore i rai’ recalling ‘sympathise.’ I recognise, however, that such inter-lingual comparisons are difficult (and rather subjective) things. Henry Todd, in his edition of 1809, identified a number of Petrarchan reflections in *Comus* (lines 38, 95, 479 and 781).<sup>39</sup> Carey recognises only the last of these: Milton’s ‘Against the sun-clad power of chastity’; Petrarch’s ‘Vergine bella, che di sol vestita.’<sup>40</sup> There is a close resemblance here, all the more interesting as this is the *Canzone* which provided the stanza form for *Upon the Circumcision*.<sup>41</sup> In fact, Milton’s familiarity with Petrarch is better evidenced by his translation of the rhyme structure of this *Canzone* into his own verse, in around 1633,<sup>42</sup> than by the fleeting and somewhat debateable direct verbal references to the *Rime* found in his early poetry. (I will return to this issue in the next chapter.)

However, the widely-read Milton could not but have seen Petrarch through the deforming lenses of the Italian poets of the *Cinquecento*. I have already alluded to the copy of Della Casa’s sonnets purchased by Milton in December 1629, now bound with a copy of Benedetto Varchi’s *Sonetti* and Dante’s *Convivio*.<sup>43</sup> Varchi is another possible pretender to the role of Milton’s model. His poetry has been much less examined as a presence in the Italian work by Milton scholars than that of Della Casa. Varchi was a prolific literary figure. His prose output included histories, works on language and literary theory. He composed two hundred and nineteen *sonetti*, one hundred and fifty-four *sonetti spirituali*, fifty-four ‘pastoral’ sonnets and two Eclogues.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> It was on the day when the sun dimmed its rays in pity for its maker. (My translation.)

<sup>39</sup> John Milton, *Poetical Works*, ed. by H.J. Todd, 7 vols (London: J. Johnson, R. Baldwin et al., 1809), VI, pp. 235–405.

<sup>40</sup> *Petrarch*, Canzone VII.

<sup>41</sup> See *Prince*, p. 62. I discuss this in my next chapter.

<sup>42</sup> Carey’s dating.

<sup>43</sup> Maurice Kelley, as I have noted, argues persuasively that all three texts belonged to Milton. (Kelley, p. 502.)

<sup>44</sup> Benedetto Varchi, *Opere*, 2 vols (Trieste: Lloyd Austriaco, 1859).

Lewalski and Haan (after Baldi) draw attention to the relationship between Sonnet II ('Donna leggiadra') and what they call 'sonnet 188.1' by Varchi, (sonnet 190 in the text I am using).<sup>45</sup> This is the text of the sonnet:

*A Mad. Laudomia Forteguerra*

Donna leggiadra, al cui valor divino,  
Che'n tante parti e così chiaro suona,  
Col cor che sol di voi pensa e ragiona,  
Per tanto spazio umilmente inchino :  
Pocchia che l'empio, avaro mio destino  
Lungi mi tien, dove'l disio mi sprona,  
La strada che'l vil secolo abbandona.  
Di costì ne scorgete a'l ver cammino;  
Ond'io, che'n questo uman, cieco e fallace  
Laberinto d'error gran tempo errai,  
Per voi ritruovi il varco, e vegga onde esca:  
Così del fallir mio donna v'incresca,  
Com'io cerco acquistar più, ch'altri mai  
Per Forteguerra dolce, eterna pace.<sup>46</sup>

Milton's 'Donna leggiadra, il cui bel nome onora' is almost a very close replica of Varchi's opening line and there are also resemblances in the use of enjambment ('avaro mio destino/Lungi mi tien') and the construction of the poem as a whole statement with no 'argumental' break between the octet and sestet. However, the tone of this poem is very different from that of Milton's sonnets, with its Dantescan references to 'labyrinthine wanderings' and 'il ver cammino'.

Smart suggests another candidate as the precursor to Sonnet II, a much less well-known sixteenth century sonnet writer. In his introduction, he suggests that

there is another (example) which deserves citation, for it offers the closest verbal parallel to Milton's:

Donna leggiadra, il cui bel nome onora  
L' erbosa val di Reno e il nobil varco.

The lines are by Gandolfo Porrino, a poet of minor note:

O, d' ogni riverenza e d' onor degna,  
Alma mia luce, il cui bel nome onora  
L' aria, la terra, e le campagne infiora,  
E di salir al ciel la via c' insegna,  
Luce gentil.

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<sup>45</sup> *OCW III*, p. 379.

<sup>46</sup> *Opere*, II, p. 860.

Here the name disclosed by the poet is Lucia, or Light, which honours the air and the earth, adorns the meadows, and shows the upward path to Heaven.<sup>47</sup>

It is debateable whether this sonnet offers the ‘closest verbal parallel’. The words ‘il cui bel nome onora’ occur in both sonnets but Varchi’s opening line, ‘Donna leggiadra, al cui valor divino’ is closer to Milton’s first line than Porrino’s. Also, how likely is it that Milton was familiar with Porrino? Today, the latter is a poet of such ‘minor note’ that he is unknown to the Italian version of *Wikipedia* and a search on *google.it* produces only secondary references to him. He *is* mentioned in Edward Phillips’ *Theatrum poetarum*: ‘Gandolpho Porrino, his Rime rank him with some others of the noted Sonnetiers of Italy.’<sup>48</sup> The value of *Theatrum poetarum* as a guide to the literary taste of the seventeenth-century has been questioned, however. Sandford Golding argues that Phillips’s compendium is based almost entirely on regurgitation of secondary sources and is not therefore truly reflective of contemporary canonical understandings.<sup>49</sup> Porrino was unpublished in England and little published in Italy.<sup>50</sup> It is just possible that Milton may have come across his sonnet in one of the many anthologies of Italian verse published in Italy in the sixteenth century which had, like the Dante-Varchi-Della Casa texts, found its way to London.<sup>51</sup> The line, ‘O, d’ ogni riverenza e d’ onor degna’, is, in fact, a direct borrowing from Petrarch’s Sonnet V.<sup>52</sup> but there is the ‘il cui bel nome onora’ phrase and perhaps a (very slight) hint of the ‘erbosa val’ in ‘le campagne infiora.’ Smart also uses the poem to illustrate how Italian sonneteers referred allusively to their ladies’ name (Lucia in this case), something Milton does in Sonnet II.

I would argue, though, that, in the search for the sources of Milton’s Italian poetry, perhaps not too much significance should be attached to Porrino (or to Varchi) for it is not hard to find other candidates for this honour. Alvise Priuli, for example (a Venetian poet who died in 1560), wrote a sonnet which begins, ‘Donna leggiadra e degna d’ogni honore’ and another, the first two lines of which are:

Donna leggiadra in cui sola risplende

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<sup>47</sup> Smart, p. 143 The first part of the sonnet which Smart has not translated means ‘O (my) Soul, my light worthy of all reverence and honour.’

<sup>48</sup> EEBO, <http://bit.ly/2gNrtqE>, retrieved 3/02/2017. Edward Phillips, *Theatrum poetarum* (London: Charles Smith, 1675), p. 223.

<sup>49</sup> S. Golding, ‘The Sources of the *Theatrum Poetarum*’, *PMLA*, 76.1 (March 1961), 48–53.

<sup>50</sup> I have identified only one published collection of his poems – *Rime di Gandolfo Porrino*, (Venetia: Michele Tramezzino, 1551). There is a copy in the Bodleian library. It does not contain the ‘Lucia’ sonnet.

<sup>51</sup> For example, there is a copy of the poem in *Rime de diversi et eccellenti autori*, ed. by Lodovico Dolce (In Vinegia appresso Gabriel Giolito de’ Ferrari et Fratelli, 1556), p. 227.

<sup>52</sup> Petrarch, *Rime*, p. 52.

Ogni beltate honor fama, et virtute.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps the significance of these multiple parallels is that the *cinquecento*'s Petrarchan vocabulary was formulaic to a point where such similarities arose fortuitously as much as imitatively.<sup>54</sup>

What we can conclude with confidence, therefore, is that, when he wrote these poems, Milton was sufficiently immersed in the Petrarchan tradition – from the *trecento*, and Petrarch himself, to the *cinquecento*, Bembo, Varchi, Della Casa, Tasso – to be capable of writing Italian Petrarchan verse with a *cinquecento* flavour (bearing also in mind that if he had some help in his writing as Campbell and Corns suggest, we may also be hearing the ghostly voice of his collaborator.) He drew upon different elements of the long Petrarchan tradition as his theme or the exigencies of his verse form demanded. His Italian poetry consists, then, of an inter-textual dialogue, not so much with an individual text, series of texts, or even a single poet, as with a 'school' of verse writing. The Italian of his verse is 'out of time' (as Baldi implied), the construct of an Englishman in (possibly assisted) dialogue with a particular European literary tradition. He writes in a composite literary language, uninfluenced by the spoken or written Italian of his own day. This language is a construct as 'artificial' as the language of his neo-Latin verse, arguably more so, as, when writing in Latin, he was using established conventions and traditions shared and developed from classical models by contemporary and near-contemporary neo-Latin poets whereas the Italian models he was using belonged to the previous century. Indeed, it might be argued that the Italian that Milton used in these poems was itself an artificial idiom – constructed at Pietro Bembo's diktat in the sixteenth century, with the assistance of the *Accademia della Crusca* in the seventeenth, and formed from archaic Tuscan raw materials first used two centuries earlier by Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio.

## II. The Poems themselves: 'Mastery,'<sup>55</sup> 'daring experiment'<sup>56</sup> or 'scarsissima originalità di pensiero'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> *Le Rime del Magnifico Messer Alvise Prioli Gentilomo Veneto* (Venezia: Aurelio Pinzi, 1533), p.93.

<sup>54</sup> Incidentally, although Petrarch himself used the word 'donna' (of course) and 'leggiadra' (quite often), he never used the phrase 'Donna leggiadra'.

<sup>55</sup> *Variorum* I, p. 373.

<sup>56</sup> Prince, p. 97

<sup>57</sup> Allodoli, p. 57. ('Very little originality of thought.')

As I have mentioned, there has been no little contention among Italian and anglophone critics over the years about the value of Milton's Italian poetry, summed up by Augusto Guidi's scornful comment in his general introduction to Milton for Italian readers published in 1940, 'quei sonnetti in italiano, tanto poco italiani che piaciono soltanto ad alcuni critici inglesi.'<sup>58</sup> Allodoli, like Guidi, took a dim view of the level of poetic maturity Milton demonstrates in his work in Italian. Other Italian critics, however, particularly since the mid-twentieth century have taken a more positive view – Baldi for example.<sup>59</sup> Milton's Anglophone critics have often vigorously defended him against his Italian detractors. Shaw and Giamatti are particularly energetic in their dismissal of Guidi and Allodoli.<sup>60</sup> Prince, on the other hand, concludes that 'the Italian poems as a whole, remarkable though they are, reveal themselves on consideration as a daring experiment rather than as an achieved poetic success.'<sup>61</sup>

No one has questioned the assumption that these poems were all written at around the same time, whenever that time was. They share common themes: primarily the inner struggles associated with romantic love but also Italian-ness and the poetic 'vocation'. They all emulate the Italian Petrarchan literary tradition. They carefully obey the rules of Italian prosody, albeit not without some sense of strain on occasion. On the other hand, the tone of the poems is quite varied. It is not self-evident that they involve a single love object. *Pace Smart*, Milton's lady is not necessarily a single individual (whether named Emilia, Emiliana, or, as I believe, named something else entirely)<sup>62</sup>. Milton does not hymn a *Laura*, a *Beatrice*, or a *Lucia*. He alludes to the name of a particular Lady in Sonnet II but there is no absolute reason to assume that this is the same Lady who appears in Sonnet IV. (Indeed, Masson argued the opposite.) In fact, there is no absolute reason, as I have suggested, to believe that there was a 'Lady' at all.

Is the emotion represented in these poems, personal? Again, this is not easy to assess. In Sonnet II, Milton carefully avoids the first person giving the impression of a poet distanced from the emotions described in the work. He does write, 'Ben è colui d'ogni valore scarco/Qual tuo spirto gentile non innamora.'<sup>63</sup> This might suggest that the poet is himself in love but also implies that everyone who is not 'd'ogni valore scarco'

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<sup>58</sup> Augusto Guidi, *Milton* (Varese: Morcelliana, 1940), p. 17. 'those sonnets in Italian which are so un-Italian that they are pleasing only to certain *English* critics.' This is the view dismissed by Shaw and Giamatti on the grounds that Guidi offers no examples (see below).

<sup>59</sup> Baldi, pp. 103–130.

<sup>60</sup> *Variorum* I, pp. 373–4

<sup>61</sup> Prince, p. 97.

<sup>62</sup> I discuss the question of the forename of the lady of Sonnet II, at some length, in Appendix 1.

<sup>63</sup> 'that man must be utterly worthless who does not fall in love with your noble spirit' (Carey's translation).

will be in love, too. In Sonnet III, he does speak in the first person but only in relation to writing in the Italian language. He suggests, though, that he is doing this because ‘Amore lo volse, ed io a l’altrui peso/Seppi ch’Amor caso mai volse indarno,’<sup>64</sup> which probably implies that ‘he’ *is* in love but still the narrative voice speaks at one remove from the emotions conveyed in the poem. The *Canzone* tells us that his Lady’s ‘dir è il mio cuore.’<sup>65</sup> This is still not a very strong statement: it recalls ‘your wish is my command’ and might be no more than courtly ‘politesse’. Sonnet IV finally discloses (to Charles Diodati) that Milton (I say ‘Milton’ because the poem is addressed to a real person, perhaps by a ‘real’ poet) has fallen into love’s snare (‘gia caddi’). This poem becomes very specific about the woman involved: she has a foreign beauty, ‘a proud but modest bearing’,<sup>66</sup> black eyelashes. She is *bi*-lingual (at the very least) and her singing could draw the moon down to earth from the skies. Rather oddly, her eyes are so fiery that Milton has little faith that stopping up his ears with wax will protect him from her.<sup>67</sup> Here at last the poet lists characteristics of an individual woman rather than a generic ‘lady.’ However, after this, Sonnet V consists of a convoluted (and unsuccessful, in my view) conceit on the climatic and emotional impact of the fire in the Lady’s eyes. This sonnet is little more than an exercise in the use of Petrarchan tropes. And, finally, in Sonnet VI, the poet figure makes the Lady the gift of his heart (‘a voi del mio cuor l’umil dono/Farò divoto’) whilst, at the same time, asserting its invulnerable adamant qualities. Prince comments, ‘This self-portrait is of the true Miltonic temper, and anticipates the “self-esteem grounded on just and right” of many of the English sonnets.’<sup>68</sup> The tone of this poem is at the polar extreme from the light-hearted *Canzone*. There are other flashes of Miltonic seriousness in the poems. Sonnet II contains a (slightly strange) religious reference – ‘Grazio sola di su’ (‘only grace from above’) in relation to protection from the power of the ‘Donna leggiadra’. The sequence does not portray a consistent (or developing) emotional state, real or imagined. It does not have a unified perspective. It does not necessarily refer to one ‘Donna’, whether real or ‘theoretical.’ It does not even represent a single and consistent poetic persona.

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<sup>64</sup> ‘Love willed it, and I knew from the distress of others that Love never willed anything in vain.’ (Carey).

<sup>65</sup> ‘her word is my heart’ (Carey).

<sup>66</sup> Also Carey.

<sup>67</sup> I have not seen much comment on this aesthetic confusion. I suppose it could be argued that Milton means that, even if he stops up his ears against her siren song, he will still be lured into love by her eyes but the line does read strangely. Shaw and Giamatti argue that Milton means that the fire from the lady’s eyes would melt the wax. (*Variorum I*, p. 384.)

<sup>68</sup> Prince, p. 100.

### *Technical Features*

The poems all carefully observe the rules of Italian prosody. A Petrarchan sonnet is constructed from lines of eleven syllables (*endecasillabi*). Syllable counting is not straightforward however. Where a word ending with a vowel precedes a word beginning with a vowel, the two syllables are elided and counted as a single syllable. The Italian language affords many such juxtapositions so that lines may appear frequently to exceed the expected syllable count. Additionally, certain combinations of vowels within a word (especially where ‘i’ precedes or follows another vowel) coalesce into a single syllable for counting purposes. Hence Milton has the line ‘Portamenti alti honesti, e nelle ciglia’ in Sonnet IV. A ‘non-poetic’ syllable count of this line might give it as many as fifteen syllables but the ‘i’ of ‘portamenti’ is elided with the ‘a’ of ‘alti’, the ‘i’ of ‘alti’ is elided with the ‘ho’ of ‘honesti’<sup>69</sup> and the ‘i’ of ‘honesti’ is elided with ‘e’. The ‘glia’ of ‘ciglia’ coalesces into a single syllable. So, the syllable count for the line is:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11  
Portament(i a)lt(i ho)nest(i, e) nelle ciglia

As regards rhyme, most Italian words have a stress on the penultimate syllable. This means that the default Italian rhyme will be ‘feminine’, in English terms.<sup>70</sup> In this particular sonnet, in the octave, Milton rhymes ‘(so)léa’, (r)idéa’, ‘idea’, and ‘bèa’ and ‘(mara)viglia’, ‘(im)piglia’, ‘(ver)miglia’ and ‘ciglia’. To English eyes these are all feminine rhymes. This common stress pattern of Italian words also accounts for most Italian verse lines having an odd number of syllables, particularly eleven and seven, whereas English lines almost always consist of an even number of syllables.<sup>71</sup>

The permitted rhyme schemes for the Petrarchan sonnet are for the octave: two rhymes, either abba abba or abab abab; and for the sestet: either two or three rhymes which must all be different from those of the octave. The most common patterns in Petrarch are cde cde or cdc dcd but cdd cdd, cdd ece and cdd ccd are also possible. A

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<sup>69</sup> Lewalski and Haan, as I have said, follow the Italian spelling of the original text. Modern editions more often emend ‘honesti’ to ‘onesti’ in line with modern Italian spelling. See, for example, Carey’s edition of the shorter poems, p. 97.

<sup>70</sup> Derek Attridge suggests that ‘in Italian the hendecasyllable can have ten, eleven or twelve syllables depending on the stress pattern of the final word.’ (*The Rhythms of English Poetry* (London: Longman, 1982), p. 192.

<sup>71</sup> Four syllable (quaternarii), eight syllable (ottenarii), ten syllable (decasillabi) and twelve syllable (dodecasillabi) lines do exist in Italian however.



final couplet (as in the English sonnet) was normally avoided because of its effect of creating a third quatrain. Petrarch did occasionally end a sonnet in this way but only where the couplet also rhymed with the first line of the sestet.<sup>72</sup> Sixteenth century poets, like Varchi, for example, are freer in their use of the final couplet.

So, Milton was embarking upon a difficult venture in writing Italian verse and as I have noted, he was happy to avail himself of the additional flexibilities permitted to Italian poets of the sixteenth century. In particular, he frequently uses a final couplet in the sestet – in Sonnets III, IV, and V – and in none of these cases does the final couplet rhyme with the first line of the sestet in the Petrarchan fashion. He more often than not uses enjambment between the quatrains and the tercets or carries the sense over from the octave to the sestet (as in Sonnets III, IV, and VI).

As regards the scansion of the verse, and rhyme, sometimes the strain of ‘sticking to the rules’ shows. For example, in Sonnet IV, the rather awkward line, ‘Parole adorne di lingua più d’una’, seems to have been crafted to achieve the rhyme with ‘Luna.’ Baldi noted that Milton chose some tricky rhymes in his sonnets. Of Sonnet II, he notes:

Le rime in *arvo* son poche in italiano, ma si notino: PETRARCA, *Rime* XXXVI, ‘scarco; incarco; varco; varco (vb); BEMBO, *Rime*, CXIX, ‘incarco; scarco; varco; parco’; TASSO, *Rime*, MCXXXIV, ‘incarco; scarco; varco; parco’.<sup>73</sup>

Milton uses ‘varco; scarco; parco; arco’. In fact, Bembo uses exactly these rhymes in one of his sonnets (*Rime*, CIX),<sup>74</sup> although this sonnet is on a religious theme and has no other significant resemblance to ‘Donna leggiadra’. There are more available rhyme words for ‘luna’ (and the number of rhyme words needed is reduced because the word occurs in the sestet of Sonnet IV) but it is interesting to note that Petrarch only uses three words as rhymes for ‘luna’: ‘imbruna’, ‘fortuna’ and ‘una.’

There were as few as six rhyme words on *arvo* available to Milton (the ones he did use plus ‘incarco’ and ‘varco’ as a verb), four of which he had to use in his octave.<sup>75</sup> He must have built the octave around the *arvo* rhyme words. This is an interesting technical limitation to impose upon oneself when writing in a foreign language and might represent Milton seeking to demonstrate his virtuosity. However this may be, it does lead

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<sup>72</sup> The sestet of *Sonnetto LXIII* for example runs, ‘Quinci in duo volti un color morto **appare**,/Perchè ’l vigor che vivi gli mostrava,/Da nessun lato è più là dove stava./E di questo in quel di mi ricordava,/Ch’? vidi duo amanti trasformare/E far quel io mi soglio in vista **fare**.’ (*Petrarca*, pp. 206–7).

<sup>73</sup> Baldi, op. cit. 19.

<sup>74</sup> Pietro Bembo, *Rime* (Torino: Einaudi, 1966) p. 67.

<sup>75</sup> A modern Italian rhyming dictionary website gives nineteen rhyme words including ‘arco’ itself. Four of these are proper nouns. Six are neologisms. Most of the others are not of much use in Petrarchan love poetry. (<http://rima-con.it/>)

to more infelicities. The line ‘Bene è colui d’ogni valore scarco’ smacks of a pressing need to get the rhyming word into its place and ‘E i don, che son d’amor saette ed arco’ creates a similar impression. We should recognise, though, that liberties with word order were routine in Italian poetry of the time. Prince discusses at some length Della Casa’s use of Latinate freedoms in word order to achieve ‘magnificence in style’ in Italian<sup>76</sup> but this is not the effect here. Rather, in line with my comments earlier in this chapter, the advantage of using Della Casa as one of his models for the composition of Italian verse is that the Italian’s freedom with the sonnet form helped Milton negotiate some of the more difficult technical challenges involved in writing poetry in Italian.

As for Milton’s mixed reviews from Italian critics, Baldi notes elements of grammatical incorrectness in his Italian – “mostra si”, “scosso mi”, “al imbrunir”, “bel Arno”, “spreggiar” e “degli occhi” (per “dagli occhi”)<sup>77</sup> and notes that other Italian critics ‘hanno sollevato maggiori obiezioni.’<sup>78</sup> In acknowledging the generally negative view of Milton’s Italian on the part of Italian critics, he takes the view that ‘generalmente la critica italiana ha sentito in queste poesie più asprezze di lingua di quante non ce ne siano.’<sup>79</sup> I have already referred to the view of Allodoli and Augusto Guidi.

On the Anglophone side, as I indicated, Shaw and Giamatti stoutly defend Milton as having been misunderstood by his Italian critics:

The disparaging remarks of Allodoli ... and Guidi (*Milton*, Brescia, 1940, p.7) cannot be valued because they give no examples of Milton’s errors, but Federico Olivero, who does give examples in his *Saggi di letteratura inglese*, (Bari, 191, pp. 7-19) and whose objection to the synaloepha in Sonnet 4, 13, between *suoi* and *avventa* is undeniably sound, misunderstands some of Milton’s constructions and has no inkling of the influence of Della Casa and his school.<sup>80</sup>

I feel their determined commitment to Miltonic virtuosity – ‘Milton’s mastery of the language is amazing!’<sup>81</sup> – blinds them to the quite frequent minor infelicities (and the aforesaid minor grammatical errors) which do occur in the Italian verse. They therefore seek to ‘justify’ the ways of Milton to us, on the grounds that he was ‘inspired by’ Della Casa, rather than admitting the possibility that Milton imitated Della Casa (or Bembo, or Varchi) when it suited him, in part because this allowed more flexibility in writing Italian

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<sup>76</sup> Prince, pp. 22–23.

<sup>77</sup> Baldi, p. 12.

<sup>78</sup> Baldi, p. 12. ‘have raised greater objections.’

<sup>79</sup> Baldi p. 17. ‘Generally Italian criticism has identified more linguistic “roughness” than really exists in them.

<sup>80</sup> *Variorum I*, pp. 373–4.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 373.

verse than closely imitating the great originator of the tradition, Petrarch, would have done.

Prince and Baldi both quote Giosuè Carducci<sup>82</sup> 'who praises Milton's enterprise, but adds 'i più son duri e stentati e talora in onta alle leggi più stretti della sintassi'.<sup>83</sup> Baldi's final judgement, however, is that Milton's Italian sonnets are 'quasi ineccepibili'<sup>84</sup> in their use of the language, justifying a series of what might otherwise appear to be Miltonic solecisms, by pointing to similar usages by his Italian predecessors. He defends some unusual aspects of Milton's versification on the same grounds. In summarising Italian responses to the sonnets individually, he notes that Rolli regarded Sonnet VI ('Giovane piano, e semplicetto amante') as 'il più leggiadro di tutti' ('the most graceful of all'), adding that Carducci felt that Sonnet IV was comparable with Petrarch, and also considered that the last line of the *Canzone* could be ranked with lines from *La Vita Nuova*.<sup>85</sup>

The same sort of controversy, in fact, surrounds the *Canzone* poem. Prince, whilst regarding this poem as 'the most successful of (Milton's) Italian poems', suggests it 'is not without its flaws, among which must be reckoned touches of obscurity and elliptical syntax'.<sup>86</sup> The line, 'Spuntati ad or, ad or a la tua chioma,' seems rather forced perhaps, and the second passage of chafing from the boys and girls (lines 7-12) is slightly clumsy with its repetition of the word 'altri'. The 'rivi' (shores) and 'onde' (waves) metaphor for using other languages in order to achieve full poetic recognition, is perhaps slightly obscure and has caused some confusion, to the point that Carey in his edition of the Shorter Poems felt it necessary to add a clarifying note.<sup>87</sup> Prince also points out that the *Canzone* is not a *canzone*. 'That his technical insight was not yet complete may be gathered from his calling a *canzone* a poem which, however accomplished in achieving its desired effect, is not a *canzone*'.<sup>88</sup> I feel that here Prince does Milton an injustice. It is hard to believe, given the technical understanding demonstrated in the Italian poems, the awareness they imply of the rules of Italian form, prosody and versification, that Milton did not know what a *canzone* was.

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<sup>82</sup> Prince gives only a limited reference – *Opere* (Bologna, 1921). See p. 18.

<sup>83</sup> 'Most are harsh and ponderous, sometimes disobeying the strictest laws of syntax.' (Prince, p. 100)

<sup>84</sup> Sergio Baldi, op. cit., p. 12. ('Almost beyond reproach.')

<sup>85</sup> Baldi, p. 17.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., pp. 101–2.

<sup>87</sup> *CSP*, p. 96

<sup>88</sup> Prince, p. 101.

*Canzone* comprises a single stanza, ending with a truncated *commiato*. It is made up of fourteen *endecasillabi* and a single *settenaro*. Italian *canzoni* used a mixture of *endecasillabi* and *settenari* with *endecasillabi* predominating. Shaw and Giamatti argue that the poem should be seen as a *stanza di canzone*, a separate form, but also compare Milton's work with Della Casa's full *canzone*, *Amor, i' piango*.<sup>89</sup> *Amor, i' piango* has seven stanzas of fifteen lines each (so that each stanza is the length of Milton's complete poem) formed of thirteen *endecasillabi* and two *settenari*, as against Milton's single *settenaro*. Its *commiato* has nine lines. Shaw and Giamatti point out Milton's stanza has 'an additional rhyme'.<sup>90</sup> The rhyme scheme of Della Casa's stanza is abcacbbdd bdeeff. Milton's is abcacbbdd efefgg. The first nine lines do follow the same pattern. Both stanzas finish with a couplet using a new rhyme. Lines 10-13 are different. The resemblance depends upon including Milton's *commiato* as part of the main stanza. In fairness, this is how he had it printed in both the 1645 and 1673 editions of his poems. It is impossible to say whether this is conscious imitation or coincidence. (It may be significant, however, that, in the one indisputable instance of Milton 'borrowing' a specific verse structure from Italian, his imitation of the form of Petrarch's canzone, *Vergine bella, che di Sol vestita* in *Upon the Circumcision*, as we shall see, he followed Petrarch's form exactly.)<sup>91</sup>

This poem seems to me to be another example of Milton working within his limitations. Writing a full *canzone* – using a very complex rhyme scheme and set metrical pattern over a large number of stanzas whilst taking account of the 'rules' about a *verso chiave* linking the *fronte* and *sirima* in each stanza and following the exacting conventions of Italian prosody – would have been a massive technical challenge to a non-native poet. Even imitating exactly the pattern of *Amor, i' piango* for a single stanza would have been difficult. (Milton's English *canzone*, *Upon the Circumcision*, has only two stanzas with no *commiato*.) But there is no reason to think that Milton did not know what the challenge consisted of, as Prince implies. One might also argue that Milton was also well aware that *canzone* in Italian, simply means 'song', so, in a way, the term could be applied loosely to any poem, and particularly to one which had some resemblance to the *canzone* form.

This is perhaps a good point to return to the question of whether Milton had some help with his Italian verse. As I have said, Campbell and Corns find Milton's linguistic ability suspicious. They comment that 'the sonnets are chiefly remarkable for their native-speaker fluency, which raises the question of how a young Londoner who

<sup>89</sup> *Variorum I*, p. 380. (The reference is to Della Casa's *Canzone XLV*, (*Della Casa*, pp. 47-50).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> See Chapter V.

had never been to Italy could achieve such a standard,' and suggest that 'the likely answer is that such fluency was unattainable, and that the Italian sonnets are not Milton's unaided work'.<sup>92</sup> They suggest that Milton's Italian teacher or some other collaborator in the Italian community must have assisted him.

The assertion that the Italian poems show 'native speaker fluency' is a strange one. No native Italian speaker in Milton's time (or indeed, at any time, before or since) spoke the language of Milton's sonnets which, as I have suggested, is highly stylised and literary. This is, of course, equally true of the language of Milton's Italian 'models'. 'Native speaker fluency' was not required. Milton had never visited ancient Rome but spoke Latin and wrote fluent verse and prose despite this lack of contact with native Latin speakers. Milton's command of a particular Italianate literary mode by no means implies mastery of the spoken language. How he obtained his skill, at this early stage of his life, is something of a mystery but, as I have argued earlier, reading a language is one thing, writing it another, particularly writing in a very specialised and formalised literary tradition. Speaking fluently is a different matter – as I have indicated, not something that Italian language learners in seventeenth century necessarily aspired to.

I have agreed that it is conceivable that Milton had some help with his Italian verse writing. What the poems themselves actually demonstrate is that Milton was not a complete master of Italian or Italian verse forms (how could he be?) but made a brilliant job of working within his limitations, whether with or without outside assistance.

### *Vocabulary*

As I have noted, the Italian poems use Petrarchan language although their formal and linguistic structures are also influenced by the post-Petrarchan sonneteers of the sixteenth century and perhaps also by the 'English' sonnet form (which Milton mainly eschews in his work in English). Milton explores what it means for an English poet (who most likely had never set foot on Italian soil) to write in an alien and exotic tongue. The poems refer to Tuscany (the Arno), on the one hand, and to London (the Thames) on the other. There is tough mountain wood (*alpestre legno*). There is Italian as a foreign and exotic language (*strania favella, lingua ignota e strana*) associated with exotic Italian beauty (*pellegrina bellezza*). But it is the Italian of Petrarch which is the strongest linguistic presence in the poems. Baldi's analysis of Sonnet III identifies echoes of Petrarch in almost every line, from 'colle aspro' (Petrarch: 'D'aspri colli mirando il dolce piano') to 'pianta' in the

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<sup>92</sup> Campbell Corns, p. 45.

last line (Petrarch: *Rime CXLVIII*).<sup>93</sup> Across all six poems, he notes about fifty possible references to Petrarch against twenty-seven to Tasso, seventeen to Varchi and a mere twelve to Della Casa and, in fact, many of the lines and phrases which Milton's poems recall from the work of the sixteenth century poets, also have their origins in Petrarch. This is perhaps unsurprising given the nature of Milton's undertaking. Taking a few lexical items from the Milton poems – *leggiadro* and variations thereof, occurs forty-seven times in Petrarch, *varco*, six times, *saetta*, fifteen times, (once actually in the phrase *arco e saette*), *alpestro* occurs eight times, *pastorella* only once but in the phrase 'Ch'a me la pastorella alpestra e cruda' combining two of Milton's usages. *Aspro* occurs forty-three times, once in the expression, 'aspri colli' (see above), once in the expression, 'petra aspra ed alpestra'.<sup>94</sup> Petrarch refers to the river *Reno* on three occasions. In *Sonetti e Canzoni sopra Vari Argomenti*, *Canzone I* contains the lines:

Chiunque alberga tra Garonna e 'l monte  
E 'ntra 'l Rodano e 'l *Reno* e l'onde salse,  
Le 'nsegne cristianissime accompagna;<sup>95</sup>

(Every place between the Garonne and the mountains,  
between Rhone and *Rhine* and the salt waves  
follows the highest ensign of Christ)

Sonnet 98 has:

Non Tesin, Po, Varo, Arno, Adige e Tebro,  
Eufrate, Tigre, Nilo, Ermo, Indo e Gange,  
Tana, Istro, Alfeo, Garonna e 'l mar che frange,  
Rodano, Ibero, *Ren*, Sena, Albia, Era, Ebro,  
Non edra, abete, pin, faggio o ginebro  
Poria 'l foco allentar che 'l cor tristo ange,<sup>96</sup>

(Not Ticino, Po, Varo, Arno, Adige or Tiber  
Euphrates, Tigris, Nile, Erno, Indus, or Ganges,  
Don, Danube, Alpheus, Garonne, or the breaking sea,  
Rhône, Iber, *Rhine*, Seine, Elbe, Loire, Ebro:  
Not ivy, fir, pine, beech, or juniper  
could lessen the fire that vexes my sad heart.)

And Sonnet 119:

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<sup>93</sup> Baldi, pp. 22–3.

<sup>94</sup> Kenneth McKenzie, *Concordanza delle Rime di Francesco Petrarca* (Oxford: Nella Stamperia dell'Università, 1912), passim.

<sup>95</sup> Petrarca, p. 746

<sup>96</sup> Petrarca, p. 288.

Chè poria questa il *Ren*, qualor più agghiaccia  
Arder con gli occhi e rompre ogni aspro scoglio;<sup>97</sup>

(she'd burn the *Rhine* however deeply frozen  
with her eyes, and shatter all its sharp rocks:)

And in every case, it is the German Rhine he is referring to, not the 'Emilian' river Reno.

Milton does, however, use some words which Petrarch never uses. 'Ago', for example, does not occur in any of Petrarch's sonnets or canzoni. Dante, on the other hand, does use the word three times in *La Commedia Divina*: in Canto XX of the *Inferno*, in Canto XXXII of the *Purgatorio*, and in Canto XII of the *Paradiso*. Della Casa does not use it although Tasso does, in Rime 305 and 380: twice in 1,708 poems. Interestingly, Tasso does not use it as a rhyme word. Milton's employment of the word – 'Sol troverete in tal parte men duro/Ove amor mise l'insanabil ago' – slightly suggests a 'foreign' poet searching for a rhyme. The word, 'insanabil(e)' is not used by Dante, Petrarch, Della Casa or Tasso. The first of the few examples of its use recorded in the *Dizionario della Crusca* is from a fourteenth century translation of Seneca.<sup>98</sup> Milton's 'Insanabil' ago' may be his translation into Italian of 'mortal sting' or some such expression. Andrew McNeillie renders it as 'sting that knows no cure' in his verse translation of the sonnet in the Lewalski/Haan edition of *Poems 1645*.<sup>99</sup> 'Ago' literally means 'needle' as in a sewing or compass needle. Tasso uses it in *Rima 305* to mean a bee's 'sting'. Dante uses it just once to mean 'sting' (in *Purgatorio XXXII*). On the other two occasions, he uses it to mean 'needle.' Milton's use of the word, whilst perhaps somewhat unidiomatic, can be justified from classical Italian usage then. 'Insanabile' on the other hand seems to be a word more or less unknown in Italian poetry before Milton used it. Whilst 'ago' could have come to Milton as a fairly obvious rhyme word for 'vago', 'insanabile' seems an improbable choice of word for a young poet, mainly familiar with the 'three crowns', the subsequent Italian sonnet tradition and the epics of Ariosto and Tasso. Similarly, although Sonnet V has been criticised as Milton at his most dully Petrarchan, Petrarch never used the word 'vapor' which is at the heart of Milton's conceit in this poem. Tasso uses the word in Sonnet 112, in a simile with *sospiri*:

Per questi che 'l mio cor ne' miei sospiri  
sparge quasi vapori, un sol turbato

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<sup>97</sup> Petrarca, p. 312.

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.lessicografia.it/>. It is, however, a common modern Italian word.

<sup>99</sup> *OCW III*, p. 43.

veggio ne l'aria del bel viso oscura;<sup>100</sup>

Della Casa never uses it. Perhaps this use of standard Petrarchan vocabulary with the occasional non-standard item suggests again that there was a second person involved in the composition of these poems, as Campbell and Corns suggest. In any event, where Milton does use non-Petrarchan words, there is only a very occasional indication that he might have taken them from the sonneteers of the *cinquecento*.

### *Setting and Perspective*

The setting of three of the poems (II, V and VI) is Italian. In three of the poems (III, *Canzone* and IV), it is Anglo-Italian. Sonnet III is explicitly about an English poet writing in Italian ('strania favella') as is *Canzone*. Although Sonnet IV makes no reference to the poet's trans-lingual undertaking or his nationality and might be seen as purely 'Italian' in perspective therefore, the poem is addressed to Milton's friend, Charles Diodati, a real living Anglo-Italian, who, as suggested earlier, may well have been a critic of Milton's Italian work ('iudicis instar').<sup>101</sup> The poem turns on Diodati's prior knowledge of Milton's attitude towards romantic love. Sonnet II has no English references. Neither does Sonnet V or Sonnet VI. It might be argued that Sonnets III and IV and *Canzone* are 'personal' poems in that they clearly refer to Milton, either as a writer in Italian or in the context of a real personal friendship. Each represents a Miltonic persona: the English 'lover' writing in Italian for his lady in Sonnet III and *Canzone*; the friend confessing his improbable change of heart to a friend in Sonnet IV. However, Sonnet VI, as we have seen, is, according to Prince at least, a 'self portrait ... of the true Miltonic temper.'<sup>102</sup> And, in fact, this poem does seem to reflect quite clearly what we know from other sources to have been Milton's dominant self-image and therefore might be seen as the 'real' poet emerging from his Italian camouflage.

The location (Italy or England) of *Canzone* and 'Qual in colle aspro al imbrunir di sera' has been the subject of a lively debate, as I have said. Smart was quite sure that both were written from an English perspective and are 'set' in England:

In some charming lines in the second sonnet Milton compares himself to a youthful shepherdess dwelling on a rugged spot among the mountains, who tends a plant from some garden on the plain below, which cannot flourish

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<sup>100</sup> Tasso, p. 120.

<sup>101</sup> *Elegia Sexta*, l. 90.

<sup>102</sup> Prince, p. 100. (See p. 37.)



in the bleak air, so far from its native clime: so he cultivates the flower of a foreign speech. Italian verse is the plant thus transported to an alien soil; and the rugged hill is England, where the poet writes. In the *Canzone* also he tells us that he is surrounded by youths and maidens who jest at his labours, and ask why he thus makes verses of love in a strange and unknown tongue – ‘in lingua ignota e strana’. It is unknown to them, for they are English and in England.<sup>103</sup>

As I have indicated, forty-five years later, Ernst Honigmann questioned Smart’s interpretation. He pointed out the improbability of Milton comparing himself to a young shepherdess and suggests that ‘the logic of *Sonnet III* identifies Milton with the *rugged hill*, the *swift tongue*, the *hard bosom*,’ Milton is the hard ground in which this transplanted ‘herbetta strana e bella’ is struggling to grow. It has been transplanted into him, not into England. Honigmann also goes on to make a case for the ‘lingua ignota e strana’ of the *Canzone* being unknown and strange to the poet himself rather than to the bystanders who mock him.<sup>104</sup> This supports Honigmann’s view (to which I have referred previously) that the poems date from 1638/9 and were written in Italy. I have explained why I think Honigmann was probably wrong about this but, in fact, both Honigmann’s and Smart’s interpretations of *Sonnet III* and *Canzone* are sustainable. There *is* something incongruous about Milton posing as a *giovinetta pastorella* but this is not to say that he did not do it. Poets and shepherds were interchangeable. If we assume the poems were written when he was young, there is only a sex change required (and, after all, he was the ‘lady of Christs’ and he did need a rhyme for *bella*). Such confusions, which are beyond final resolution from the internal evidence of the poems themselves, arise from the shifting perspectives from which Milton wrote this verse. This leaves *Sonnets II* and *V*. *Sonnet V*, as I have noted previously, is generally regarded as the least successful of the poems. It reads as a poetic exercise. *Sonnet II*, however, has been well received and has probably attracted more attention than the others because of the puzzle it set about the name of the *donna leggiadra* (see appendix).

There are other possible links between the poems. *Sonnet II* and *Sonnet IV* could be about the same ‘lady’. Both women sing:

Quando tu vaga parli, o lieta canti  
(*Sonnet II*)

E ‘l cantar che di mezzo l’emispero  
Traviar ben può la faticosa luna.

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<sup>103</sup> Smart, pp. 135–6.

<sup>104</sup> Honigmann, p. 79.

(Sonnet IV)

This accounts for the pre-Smart view that the subject of the Italian poems was Leonora Baroni, the singer in whose praise Milton wrote three poems in Latin during his Italian tour of 1638/9.<sup>105</sup> It is still a tempting thought, assuming that Milton actually heard Leonora Baroni sing (see Chapter 7). As I have suggested, other than the singing, there is little if any, overlap of imagery between these two Italian sonnets and the Latin poems to Baroni. There could be the ghost of a connection between the singer in Sonnet IV making the moon wander from its orbit and the reference in *Ad Leonoram Romae canentem* to God leaving heaven to lubricate Leonora's throat<sup>106</sup> or even, in *Ad eandem*, to Leonora's singing being capable of curing Tasso's madness had he been born at a convenient time.<sup>107</sup> This seems to make Sonnet V the odd poem out in the sense that, other than referring to a 'donna' and having a Petrarchan theme, it has no direct relationship with any of the others.

*Reference and Allusion*

Some of Milton's Italian poems inhabit that distinctive early modern realm in which contemporary and classical cultures entwine, the world we find in a more developed form in *Epitaphium Damonis* and *Lycidas*. Sonnet II contains references to Cupid, with the woman's eyes acting as the 'bow' that shoots his darts, a hint of Ovid in its reference to a quasi-metamorphosis of the 'alpestre legno' recalling the legend of Orpheus<sup>108</sup> and a reference to the moment in the Siren episode in the *Odyssey* when Odysseus had his men block their ears with wax to avoid being lured onto the rocks by the Sirens' song. Sonnet III, on the other hand, is almost devoid of such references. The personification of 'Amor' (which can mean 'Cupid' in Latin) in line 12 is the only example and such a personification is so commonplace that the allusion, if it is such, could easily be overlooked. *Canzone* contains the same trope in its final line: "Questa è lingua di cui si vanta Amore." Sonnet IV repeats the reference to the *Odyssey* in its rather strange final couplet to which I referred earlier:

E degli occhi suoi avventa sì gran fuoco  
Che l'incerar gli orecchi mi fia poco.

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<sup>105</sup> *Ad Leonoram Romae canentem, Ad eandem, Ad eandem. OCW III Vol III*, pp. 160-163.

<sup>106</sup> *OCW III*, p.160.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Baldi (p. 20) refers to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, XI, 45-6, "Te rigidi silices, tua carmina saepe secutae,/fleverunt silvae." (The solid rocks and trees that often followed your song wept for you.)

Sonnet V contains no classical reference that I can see. Neither does Sonnet VI. In short, the main classical sources drawn upon in the sequence are the siren episode in the *Odyssey* representing the poet's futile attempts to protect himself from the effects of love and the figure of Cupid/*Amor* as divine cause of those effects. The opportunity to synthesise contemporary and classical Italy which is grasped eagerly in *Epitaphium Damonis*, is largely ignored here which I would say provides further evidence for the poems early composition.

There are also some religious references which sit slightly strangely in the poems. Sonnet II, as I have mentioned, refers to 'grazia ... di su' ('grace from above') as the only effective protection from the effects of the lady's charms (which here are more spiritual than physical). Sonnet III contains a similar reference but, in this case, the poem suggests that erotic love is more easily planted in the heart than the heavenly variety:

Deh! Foss'il mio cuor lento e 'l duro seno  
A chi pianta dal ciel sì buon terreno.

(Ah that my sluggish heart and stony breast were as good a soil for him  
who sows his seed from heaven.)<sup>109</sup>

Baldi identifies biblical references in Sonnet VI <sup>110</sup> and this final sonnet proclaims the 'self-esteem grounded on just and right'<sup>111</sup> which, as I have said, Prince sees as a feature of Milton's mature sonnets in English but here I think Milton is less concerned with the conflict between divine and erotic love than with the conflict between the distracting effects of love and his poetic mission.

The conflict between earthly and heavenly love has been traditionally seen as a central feature of Petrarchanism. Leonard Forster wrote in *The Icy Fire* that Petrarchan love 'rest(s) on one basic convention which sets the woman on a pedestal, and we are introduced to a world in which women dominate, seen through the eyes of men who languish and adore'.<sup>112</sup> This idolatry risks distracting the lover from the salvation of his soul. The same language of worship is used in both a spiritual and an erotic context. Petrarch's Canzone 23 makes the parallel quite explicit. It begins by describing how Love crept up on the poet in his earliest youth but, by stanza seven, is referring to the grace of God:

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<sup>109</sup> Carey's translation.

<sup>110</sup> Baldi, p. 30 – two references to Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians: vi, 12 and vi, 11.

<sup>111</sup> Prince, p. 100.

<sup>112</sup> Leonard Forster, *The Icy Fire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 2.

L'alma, ch'è sol da Dio fatta gentile,  
(Chè già d'altrui non può venir tal grazia)  
Simile al suo Fattor stato ritene:<sup>113</sup>

(The soul whose gentleness is all from God,  
since such grace could come from nowhere else,  
holds a virtue like that of its maker:)<sup>114</sup>

Milton's religious references, however, have a different tone. In both the sonnets in which they occur, they seem more directly antagonistic to Eros. Where Petrarch spiritualises earthly love, Milton sees Eros as an attack on the spirit. Love's attack in Sonnet VI also threatens Milton's, as yet unfulfilled, poetic destiny.

### Conclusion

John K Hale in his brief discussion of these sonnets in *Milton's Languages* argues that Milton's intended 'native-speaker' (i.e. Italian) audience for these poems was 'an ideal Italian audience [based on] his sense of what his greatest predecessors in the Italian love-idiom had achieved. He is trying out the voices of Petrarch, Dante, Tasso, by the very direct method of writing on subjects like theirs and using words and images like theirs.'<sup>115</sup> However, Hale accepts that the poems have been rather differently evaluated by Italian and English-speaking critics and, as I have indicated, the latter have more often been positive about the poems than the former. I think it clear that there *are* some (fairly minor) oddities in Milton's use of Italian and, as Baldi, a pro-Milton Italian critic, notes,<sup>116</sup> some unusual practices in his versification. The textual variations between the 1645 and 1673 versions of the poems may represent (as Baldi suggests<sup>117</sup>) an attempt to 'tidy up' some of these problems. There are inelegant (though not necessarily 'incorrect') lines in most of the poems. For example, the opening lines of Sonnet V,

Per certo i bei vostr'occhi, Donna mia  
Esser non può che non fian lo mio sole

translated by Carey as, 'Believe me, Lady, your beautiful eyes cannot help but be my sun'<sup>118</sup> are almost as inelegant in Italian as they are in English. The second line literally

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<sup>113</sup> Petrarca, p. 82.

<sup>114</sup> Translation by A.S. Kline <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/Petrarchhome.htm> retrieved 9.11.14.

<sup>115</sup> Hale, *ML*, p. 48.

<sup>116</sup> Baldi, p. 13.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>118</sup> *CSP*, p. 98.

says, 'it cannot be that they will not be my sun' with the 'be' ('esser') displaced to the beginning of the line, comprehensible in Italian because of its inflexions, but hardly felicitous. I have found only five examples of such a displacement in the 794 pages of Petrarch's *Rime*. To my ear, the following subordinate clause with its use of the archaic 'fian' ('sian' in the 1645 edition) for 'saranno,' the third person plural of the future tense of 'essere,' compounds the problem. (Della Casa used this word just once in all his verse.) As I have suggested there are also some minor strangenesses to Milton's choice of vocabulary.

However, despite these issues, one cannot but admire Milton's achievement. His knowledge of the Italian poetic tradition, his range of reference, his understanding of the conventions of Italian prosody and his ability to compose in a language of which he can have had only an academic understanding, are very impressive. There is a question as to whether he had some help with his undertaking, but if there was such support, it was certainly corrective rather than creative in nature. On the other hand, one might argue that the skills involved in writing the poems in Italian were directly derived from his early education. He was applying skills he had learnt during his lessons in Latin and Greek to a modern language. Hale refers to neo-Latin poetry as being 'the most intertextual poetry known to Europe. Intertextuality works at such a local level that it is the nuts and bolts of *Imitatio*; in the feeling of palimpsest in individual words, phrases and lines of verse, the poetic texture honours the ancient world and the post-Roman reception.'<sup>119</sup> Is this not at least as true of the tradition of Italian love poetry in which Petrarch and Dante had created a massive 'library' of conventions and structures, both linguistic and formal, which later poets could manipulate but not escape? Milton could not have constructed poetry in the same way from the French literary tradition (supposing he had wished to do so), for he would have forced to 're-imitate' the sixteenth-century poets of *La Pléiade*, themselves imitators of Petrarch. In Italian culture, he found a similar resource to that bequeathed to him by the authors of classical Rome and he reapplied the techniques he had learnt whilst imitating classical authors to compile his small 'neo-Italian' (or perhaps 'archaio-Italian') body of work. It appears to me most likely that Milton, whether afflicted by the pangs of love or not, composed these poems as a form of play: play with language, play with the tradition of Petrarchan love, play with his Italian sources. Certainly, the poems embody an aspect of his lifelong relationship with Italian poetry and culture, of which they are the most direct, but not the most important, manifestation.

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<sup>119</sup> Hale, *ML*, p. 12.

The sonnets of his later period which are much greater works in the main, still owe much to these earlier experiments with the Italian tradition.

#### Coda: The other 'Italian' poems – *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*

Apart from the poems actually written in Italian, we have the far more famous Italian-titled poems, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, believed by some scholars to have been written at around the same time.<sup>120</sup> I will briefly consider what Italian or Italianate elements exist in these poems.

Florio's dictionary defines the word 'allegro' as meaning 'joyfull, merie, iocund, sportful, pleasant, frolike.'<sup>121</sup> The word is, I suspect, more familiar in English now than it was in Milton's time. We understand it as a musical term – a brisk tempo, between 'allegretto' (slower) and 'presto' (faster). Whilst it is seductive to think that this was also the case in the 1630s, as far as I can determine, the term does not occur in English musical scores of the period which had no tempo or expression markings. It was only later in the century, at the time of Purcell (1659–95), that such indications were included and, even then, inconsistently. Purcell's *Sonnata's of iii Parts: Two Viollins and Basse: to the Organ or Harpssecord*, for example, published in 1683<sup>122</sup> does contain tempo markings. The first page of the score is marked 'vivace', the second, 'presto'. *Grove Music Online* suggests this is the first example of the use of the term 'allegro' in an English musical context. I have certainly found no earlier example of a musical score which contains tempo, or indeed, expression markings in Italian (or any other language). I think therefore that we can be certain that Milton did not have a musical connection in mind when he chose his poem's title. A search of *Early English Books Online* for the word 'allegro' occurring between 1608 and 1635 throws up just two hits – both from texts in Italian and both using the word in a non-musical sense. Thomas Morley's *A plaine and easie introduction to practiccall musicke set downe in forme of a dialogue: diuided into three parts*, published in 1608, the year of Milton's birth, makes no reference whatsoever to tempo or expression markings and refers to Italian music only with reference to madrigals, 'ballets', 'vianelle', 'canzoni' and 'vinate' as song forms. He mentions 'Luco Marenzo', Alfonso Ferrabosco, 'Horatio Vecchi, among others, as models for the aspiring English composer but, when it comes

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<sup>120</sup> Carey, p. 134.

<sup>121</sup> *A Worlde of Words*, p. 14.

<sup>122</sup> Henry Purcell, *Sonnata's of iii Parts: Two Viollins and Basse: to the Organ or Harpssecord* (London: J. Playford and J Carr, 1683) (no page numbers).

to musical theory, Morley relies on Latin and Greek sources, not Italian ones.<sup>123</sup> I labour this point because both *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* contain musical allusions which have been interpreted at times as specifically referring to different Italian schools of musical composition and performance.<sup>124</sup> This may or may not be the case but we cannot use *L'Allegro's* title as earnest of the poem's musical content.

Another oddity about Milton's title is that in late medieval and early modern Italian the use of 'allegro' as a substantive is, as far as I have been able to determine, unknown. (It certainly sounds strangely in *modern* Italian.) Indeed, the use of the adjective itself is fairly rare. The word does not occur at all in Petrarch's *Rime* or in Dante's *Divina Commedia*. It occurs once in Tasso's *Rime* (in Sonnet 1646).<sup>125</sup> Bembo never uses the word. Varchi uses it just once in his four hundred and forty-seven sonnets (in Sonnet 317). The use of the verbs 'allegrare' and 'rallegrare', on the other hand, is much more common. *L'Allegro* seems to be Milton's own coinage.

The title, *Il Penseroso* also has its mysteries. Lewalski and Hahn note that 'The correct modern spelling is *pensieroso*,' but point to W.H. David who identified that the spelling Milton uses 'appeared in a French-Italian dictionary published at Geneva in 1644.'<sup>126</sup> I am not sure that this solves the problem. How likely is it that Milton would have been using a Genevan French-Italian dictionary? And supposing that he possessed a copy, why would this lead him to choose a particularly uncommon form of the word? The word 'pensieroso', itself, is not recorded by the Accademia della Crusca until its edition of 1691. It is not included in the two earlier editions (of 1612 and 1623). 'Pensiero' meaning 'thought' as a noun is recorded from the very first edition, however. The word for 'thoughtful' listed in earlier editions of the dictionary is 'pensoso'. 'Penseroso', the Miltonic form, occurs in none of the five editions of the dictionary. (But we should remember that this dictionary is prescriptive rather than descriptive.) The *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*<sup>127</sup> gives 'penseroso' as a possible variant of 'pensieroso', though all examples cited use the former spelling. 'Pensoso' is undoubtedly the poetic form of choice from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century. Petrarch uses this

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<sup>123</sup> Thomas Morley, *A plaine and easie introduction to practicall musicke set downe in forme of a dialogue: diuided into three parts* (London: Humphrey Lownes, 1608), p. 180.

<sup>124</sup> Sandra Corse, 'Old Music and New in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*,' *Milton Quarterly*, 14.4 (December 1980), 109–113. M.N.K. Mander, 'The Music of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*' in *Milton in Italy – Contexts, Images, Contradictions* ed. by Mario A. Di Cesare (New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1991), pp. 281–91.

<sup>125</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Rime*, p. 1874.

<sup>126</sup> *OCW III*, p. 375.

<sup>127</sup> Battaglia, Salvatore., Barberi Squarotti, Giorgio., *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* ([Torino: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1961).

word fourteen times in the *Rime*. Della Casa uses it only once but never uses any other form. Tasso uses ‘pensoso’ and no other form in his *Rime* and in *Gerusalemme liberata*, as does Ariosto in *Orlando Furioso*. There are some examples of the use of ‘penseroso’. Teofilo Folengo (1491-1544) a macaronic poet, uses the word in his part prose, part verse work *Caos del Triperuno* three times.<sup>128</sup> In the seventeenth century, Paolo Sarpi’s friend, colleague and biographer, Fulgenzio Micanzio uses the word in his biography of Sarpi to describe him as a young man.<sup>129</sup> So the word *was* in literary use, though not by any of the Italian writers with whom we associate Milton. Florio’s dictionary has ‘penseroso’ (‘o’ not ‘e’) and ‘pensieroso’ as alternatives to his headword ‘pensoso’, thus offering yet another orthographic variation on Milton’s title word.

Professore Giuseppe Trebbe of the Università degli Studi di Trieste has suggested an explanation for Milton’s usage.<sup>130</sup> He argues that Milton took the word from Micanzio’s aforementioned biography of Sarpi, *Vita del padre Paolo dell’ordine de servi e theologo della serenissima republica di Venetia*. Trebbi’s tells us that, although this book did not appear in print until 1646, it circulated in manuscript from 1623–4. This is the passage in which the young Sarpi is described as ‘penseroso’:

Davano già in quell’età anco i suoi diportamenti segni de’costumi future che chiameremo inclinazioni naturali ... com’era una ritiratezza in sé medesimo, un semiante sempre penseroso, e piùosto malinconico che serio, un silentio quasi continuato, anco co’coetanei, una quiete totale.<sup>131</sup>

(Likewise, his behaviour, even at that time, gave signs of his future habits which we may term natural inclinations ... retirement into himself, an ever-pensive countenance, melancholic rather than grave, almost continually silent, even with people of his own age group, completely calm.)

Trebbe points out Micanzio’s strong English connections and suggests that Milton’s ‘pensive Nun devout and pure’ refers directly to Sarpi (agreeing, however, that he is a rather unlikely ‘Nun’). He also links Milton’s interest in and his claimed meeting with Galileo (which he sees as resulting from Milton’s meeting with Henry Wotton) to Micanzio’s interest own contact and correspondence with the great astronomer.

The idea that *Il Penseroso* is, in part, a tribute to Sarpi is a seductive one. The use

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<sup>128</sup> Teofilo Folengo, ‘Caos di Triperuno,’ *Opere Italiane*, ed. by Umberto Renda (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1911), pp. 68, 110 and 163.

<sup>129</sup> Fulgenzio Micanzio, *Vita del padre Paolo dell’ordine de servi e theologo della serenissima republica di Venetia* (Leiden: J.A. van der Marsce, 1646), p. 7.

<sup>130</sup> Giuseppe Trebbe, ‘John Milton, Paolo Sarpi and *Il Penseroso*,’ *Academia.edu* [https://www.academia.edu/16295570/Milton\\_Paolo\\_Sarpi\\_and\\_Il\\_penseroso](https://www.academia.edu/16295570/Milton_Paolo_Sarpi_and_Il_penseroso) retrieved 10/01/2017.

<sup>131</sup> *Vita del padre Paolo*, p. 7. (My translation.)



of the (fairly uncommon) title word both in Micanzio's biography and in Milton's poem is an interesting coincidence. Unfortunately, however, I cannot see that the dates of the two works can be convincingly linked. First, Milton would have had to have read Micanzio's biography in manuscript while he was at Cambridge, which would mean that he had already taken a strong interest in Sarpi by this time (something for which there is no evidence). Secondly, the potential links Trebbi makes between Milton, Henry Wotton and Galileo, belong to a period seven years after the composition of *Il Penseroso*. Unfortunately, then, I do not think Trebbi's hypothesis is credible. I mention it, however, because Trebbi's article demonstrates that Italian academics are also perplexed by Milton's title.

It seems to me, then, that the 'allegro'/'penseroso' antithetical coupling was Milton's own linguistic creation and a rather idiosyncratic one at that. It has been suggested that, in *L'Allegro*, Milton was evoking Charles Diodati and, in *Il Penseroso*, himself,<sup>132</sup> in line with the contrasts in their personalities which Milton highlighted (perhaps with tongue slightly in cheek) in *Elegia Sexta*. This view is an obvious oversimplification. As Alvin Thaler pointed out, over a hundred years ago,<sup>133</sup> the young Milton had enough 'allegrezza' in him to be capable of writing about cheerfulness from personal experience. But it is nonetheless possible that in adopting these slightly quirky Italian titles for his companion poems, Milton *was* doffing his cap to Diodati and alluding slyly both to their temperamental differences and to Diodati's Italian heritage, at a time when he was including him in his verse on a regular basis (Sonnet IV, *Elegia VI*).

What of the Italian elements in the poems themselves? Carey suggests no Italian sources for the poems other than a possible connection with Orazio Vecchi's *Mascherata della malincolia*, as proposed by Raymond Waddington.<sup>134</sup> The main basis for this claim is that one of the central characters in Vecchi's masque is 'Allegrezza' and Vecchi is one of the composers whose music Milton owned, as we know from Edward Phillips. As Waddington acknowledges, this does suppose that Milton was familiar with Vecchi some years prior to his Italian journey but this is not impossible, given his father's background, and the fact that Vecchi was sufficiently well known to be included in Morley's list of Italian composers worthy of imitation.<sup>135</sup> The reference does also demonstrate that, in

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<sup>132</sup> F. M. Darnall, 'Milton and Diodati', *Modern Language Notes*, 32.6 (June 1917), 377–9.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2915498> Retrieved 07.09.17.

<sup>133</sup> Alvin Thaler, 'Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*', *Modern Language Notes*, 31.7 (1916), 437–8.

[www.jstor.org/stable/2915449](http://www.jstor.org/stable/2915449) (retrieved 30/01/2017).

<sup>134</sup> R. M. Waddington, 'A Musical Source for *L'Allegro*?', *Milton Quarterly*, 7, 2 (May 1993), 72–74.

<sup>135</sup> See p. 155.

sixteenth century Italian, the opposite of ‘malinconia’ was ‘allegrezza,’ paralleling the English (and Miltonic) contrast between ‘melancholy’ and ‘mirth’ and justifying Milton’s use of ‘allegro’ in his title.

Both poems open with what Carey describes as ‘a prelude’ of ten lines rhymed abba ddec, with six and ten syllable lines alternating:<sup>136</sup>

Hence loathed Melancholy  
Of Cerberus and blackest Midnight born  
In Stygian cave forlorn  
‘Mongst horrid shapes and sights unholy,  
Find out some uncouth cell,  
Where brooding Darkness spreads his jealous wings,  
And the night-raven sings;  
There under ebon shades, and low-browed rocks  
As ragged as thy locks,  
In dark Cimmerian desert ever dwell.  
(*L’Allegro* ll. 1-10)

Hence vain deluding Joys  
The brood of Folly without father bred,  
How little you bestead,  
Or fill the fixed mind with all your toys;  
Dwell in some idle brain,  
And fancies fond with gaudy shapes possess,  
As thick and numberless  
As the gay motes that people the sunbeams,  
Or like hovering dreams  
The fickle pensioners of Morpheus’ train.  
(*Il Penseroso* ll. 1-10)

Carey comments that ‘this 6/10 pattern presumably derives from the seven- and eleven-syllable lines of the *canzone* just as the rhyme scheme reflects the Italian sonnet.’<sup>137</sup> It seems likely that Milton’s frequent use of a mix of six and ten syllable lines generally does indeed derive from his knowledge of Italian verse and the *canzone* in particular.<sup>138</sup>

Whether the rhyme scheme here ‘reflects the Italian sonnet’ is debatable, however. If it does, it is a rather distorted reflection, since the octave of a Petrarchan sonnet rhymes abba abba. If Milton’s lines do recall an incomplete sonnet, it is the English variant of Wyatt and Surrey that comes to mind rather than Petrarch. The relationship with the *canzone* is also imperfect, given that the *alternation* of six and ten syllable lines is entirely uncharacteristic of a form in which, despite the many variations in the possible mix of

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<sup>136</sup> *CSP*, p. 134.

<sup>137</sup> *CSP*, p. 134.

<sup>138</sup> See my next chapter.

*endecasillabi* and *settenari*, such regularity is generally avoided, not least because one of the lines, the *endecasillabo*, must predominate.

Prince claimed in fact that ‘Shakespeare, Jonson and Fletcher are Milton’s chief literary inspiration in *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*.’ He argues that ‘the titles are there to remind us of his special leaning towards Italian, but the metre and diction of these poems owe little to Italian verse.’<sup>139</sup> This differs slightly from my own view of the significance (and mysteries) of the Italian titles of these poems and, with Carey, I feel that the opening lines do in fact owe something to Italian verse. This is a limited connection affecting only a few lines of both poems. In any event, the poems clearly owe more to English sources than to Italian ones. In fact, we can add Thomas Warton’s claim, in his edition of *Poems on Several Occasions* of 1785, that ‘Milton seems to have borrowed the subject of *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, together with some particular thoughts, expressions and rhymes ... from a forgotten poem prefixed to the fifth edition of (Robert) Burton’s *Anatomic of Melancholy*.’<sup>140</sup> Warton claims that in Burton’s poem ‘the measure appears to be the same.’ This is not really the case – Burton’s poem is based on an irregular eight-syllable, four stress line – but Warton definitely has a point:

When I goe musing all alone,  
Thinking of diverse things foreknown;  
When I build castles in the ayre,  
Voide of sorrow, voide of fear:  
Pleasing myself with phantasms sweet,  
Methinkes the time runnes very fleet.  
All my joys to this are folly,  
Nought so sweet as Melancholy!<sup>141</sup>

The rhyming couplets do not match either, of course, but, nonetheless, this does sound rather like a doggerel variation upon the companion poems.

The other Italian question about these poems is, as I mentioned earlier, whether the sections about music, which occur in both, refer to different and competing Italian schools of musical composition. Writing in *The Milton Quarterly* in 1980, Sandra Corse argued that ‘There is ... in the latter portion of each of these poems a clear exposition of the most exciting issue in music of the early seventeenth century, the debate which pitted monody against polyphony.’<sup>142</sup> She suggests that, in *L’Allegro*, Milton ‘suggests and

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<sup>139</sup> Prince, p. 66.

<sup>140</sup> John Milton, *Poems on Several Occasions*, ed. by Thomas Warton (London: James Dodsley, 1785), p. 93.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, p. 93.

<sup>142</sup> Corse, p. 109.

describes the typical style employed by the monodists whilst in *Il Penseroso*, he refers to ‘the traditional polyphonic music’.<sup>143</sup> She aligns this contrast with the *prima pratica/seconda pratica* controversy referred to in Chapter 2. The passages from the two poems under discussion are lines 136–50 from *L’Allegro* and lines 151–53 and 161–66 from *Il Penseroso*. Corse considers the evidence from *Il Penseroso* to be less clear-cut than that from *L’Allegro*, where she suggests there are direct verbal echoes of ‘Julio [sic] Caccini’s description of the monadic style in his collection *Le nuove musiche*’.<sup>144</sup> Corse refers to Milton’s connection with Henry Lawes ‘a leading English monodist’ in support of her view that Milton was ‘well aware of these [musical] issues’.<sup>145</sup> (Milton’s collaboration with Lawes on the *Masque* took place some two or three years after the probable composition of these poems, however. When the two first met is not known.) M.N.K. Mander, on the other hand, takes the view that the apparent resemblance between lines 139–44 of *L’Allegro* and Caccini’s preface to the *Nuove musiche* is probably not a ‘verbal echo’, particularly since the ‘echo’ derives from translation of the Italian original. ‘Milton did not need to know Caccini’s words, he just had to use his ears.’<sup>146</sup> She argues that Milton’s familiarity with the works of ‘such as Nicholas Lanier and his friend Henry Lawes’ would have sufficed to enable him to write his description.<sup>147</sup> He did not need to have been studying Italian musical theory.

Corse observes that Caccini’s preface refers to ‘long winding points, simple or double, that redoubled or intertwined one with the other’ and to ‘the long windings and turnings of the voice’.<sup>148</sup> The comparable lines from *L’Allegro* are:

In notes with many a winding bout  
Of linked sweetness long drawn out,  
With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,  
The melting voice through mazes running;  
Untwisting all the chains that ty  
The hidden soul of harmony.

The possible ‘echoes’ occur in the words ‘winding’ and ‘long’ (reflecting Milton’s ‘drawn out’), and ‘simple or double, that redoubled or intertwined with the other’ which is reminiscent of Milton’s ‘the melting voice through mazes running.’ The longer of Corse’s two translated quotations – ‘quei lunghi giri di voci semplici, e doppi, cioè raddopiate,

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Corse, p. 111

<sup>145</sup> Corse, p. 110

<sup>146</sup> Mander, pp. 282–3.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Corse, p. 111.

intrecciate l'una nell'altra.' – is extracted from the following sentence from Caccini's preface:

Ma ora veggendo andare attorno molto di esse lacere, e guaste, in oltre malamente adoperarsi *quei lunghi giri di voci semplici, e doppi, cioè raddoppiate, intrecciate l'una nell'altra* ritrovate da me per isfuggire quella antica maniera di passaggi che già si costumarono, più propria per gli strumenti di fiato, e di corde che per le voci.<sup>149</sup>

But, now seeing many of them [his songs] going around tattered and spoiled, badly making use of those long vocal gyrations simple and double, even redoubled, one twisted up with another, when they were invented by me in order to avoid that antiquated style of *passaggi* formerly the custom, but [which is] more appropriate for wind and string instruments than for [the] voice.<sup>150</sup>

Corse gives Oliver Strunk's 1950 translation of Caccini's preface as the source for her version of the quotation,<sup>151</sup> adding that, here, Caccini argues that 'this type of singing is more likely to work on the passions than music in which the voice merely sings a descant.'<sup>152</sup> However, the full quotation I have given above shows that Corse is in error here. Caccini is *criticising* this style of singing as being appropriate to instrumental rather than vocal music. The much-laboured main point of his preface is that Plato and other philosophers affirm that 'la musica altro non [è] che la favola, e il ritmo, il suono per ultimo, e non per lo contrario.'<sup>153</sup> It seems to me therefore that the verbal similarities, such as they are, between the *L'Allegro* passage and Caccini's preface are almost certainly fortuitous, as Mander suggests, and do not indicate that Milton was aligning himself with Caccini in relation to early modern controversies about musical theory. The English translation of 'giri' as 'windings' originates with John Playford's plagiarisation of Caccini in his *Introduction to the Skill of Musick*.<sup>154</sup> Playford abridged the passage Corse [mis]quotes but later in his text he does use 'windings' for 'giri' which was later taken up by Strunk.<sup>155</sup> This tells us nothing about how Milton would have mentally translated the term had he

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<sup>149</sup> Giulio Caccini, *Le Nuove Musiche* (Firenze: I Marescotti, 1601), 'Ai Lettori,' first (unnumbered) page. My emphasis.

<sup>150</sup> Translation by Sion M. Honea, 'Caccini, *Le Nuove Musiche* (1601)', <https://www.uco.edu/cfad/files/pdfs/historical-performance/Caccini.pdf> retrieved 09/02/2017 and slightly amended by me.

<sup>151</sup> *Le Nuove Musiche*, in *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. by Oliver Strunk (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950).

<sup>152</sup> Corse, p. 111.

<sup>153</sup> Caccini, 'Ai Lettori,' first page. 'Music is nothing other than the text and the rhythm, and the sound last, not the reverse.' Honea's translation.

<sup>154</sup> John Playford, *An Introduction to the Skill of Musick* (London: E. Jones, 1694).

<sup>155</sup> Playford, p. 32.

come across Caccini's musical collection and read its preface. In fact, the type of music alluded to in lines 139–44 of *L'Allegro* seems to me to be quite different from the pure, unadorned, single vocal line advocated by Caccini. Milton's description (which is clearly not focused on musical-theoretical issues), with its reference to 'mazes' and 'untwisting chains', suggests fairly complex contrapuntal music involving a number of voices, not a single singing voice accompanied by a lute.

Mander, having dismissed Corse's 'verbal echoes', argues that there is, in any event, a paradox in making this comparison as far as *L'Allegro* is concerned. She cites a passage from the end of Caccini's preface which asserts that the delight listeners experience in listening to his conception of the musical 'ideal' derives from its resemblance to the 'armonie celesti'.<sup>156</sup> Mander goes on to argue that the passage 'which most clearly reflects Caccini's description of [this delight] is that found at the end of *Il Penseroso*, describing the effect of polyphonic Church music.'<sup>157</sup> The lines in question are:

There let the pealing organ blow  
To the full-voic'd choir below  
In service high and anthems clear  
As may with sweetness through mine ear  
Dissolve me into extasies  
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes.  
(*Il Penseroso*, ll. 161–66)

Mander argues that Milton ascribes this heavenly effect to the 'wrong' sort of music from Caccini's point of view: to polyphony rather than monody. She suggests that this 'mistake' may arise from the fact that Milton had yet to benefit from the 'increased experience and understanding of the new trends originating in Italy' which his journey there in 1638–9 would bring, comparing Milton's (unsound) musical views as represented in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* with those expressed in Sonnet XIII - *To Mr H. Lawes, on his Airs* which 'shows [him] to be well-versed in, and sympathetic towards, those of the aims of the *Camerata* represented by Caccini.'<sup>158</sup> Mander is referring to the sonnet's opening lines:

Harry whose first tuneful and well-measured song  
First taught our English music how to span  
Words with just note and accent, not to scan  
With Midas ears, committing short and long;  
(*Sonnet XIII*, ll. 1–4)

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<sup>156</sup> Mander, p. 283.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* p. 284.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* p. 285.

She quotes MacDonald Emslie's chapter on Milton and Lawes in *Music in Renaissance Drama* (1968).<sup>159</sup> Emslie shows how Milton's revisions to the Lawes sonnet in the Trinity Manuscript help clarify the meaning of the passage above: that Lawes was the 'first'<sup>160</sup> English composer to employ 'a voice-line that respects and is based on the speech movement of the words' and to avoid the fault of earlier composers in not observing 'just accentuation'.<sup>161</sup> This might seem to reflect the tenets of Caccini's school, but it might equally well represent a straightforwardly Anglo-centric view. Lawes, himself, in his forewords to his first and second collections of 'airs' was more concerned with asserting the value of English music written in English compared with the music of Italy in Italian. 'Musick is the same in England as in Italy; the Concorde and Discords, the Passions, Spirits, Majesty and Humours, are all the same they are in England.' Lawes was far more concerned to rebut his contemporaries' (in his view, erroneous) notion that Italy was the be-all and end-all of musical composition, than to engage in theoretical controversy about the *Nuova Musica*. What is more, it is surely likely that Milton was, in part at least, expressing here his appreciation of Lawes' settings of his own songs from *Comus* twelve years earlier.

My belief, then, is that Milton was not preoccupied with the correctness of otherwise of Caccini's musical theories in either of his Italian-titled poems. There is one very important difference between the apparently similar references to 'all heaven' being brought before the thinker's eyes in *Il Penseroso* and Caccini's neo-Platonic reference to celestial harmony. That is the specifically religious context in Milton's case – 'il Penseroso' is obviously in church – compared with the almost entirely secular nature of Caccini's songs whose texts are based on the conventions of courtly love. *Il Penseroso* briefly describes a glimpse of a vision of Heaven evoked by the sound of the organ and the song of the choir in a church. This is quite different from Caccini's theoretical statement that 'correct' musical forms reflect the music of the spheres.

Corse and Mander both, I would argue, try too hard to associate these poems directly with Italian musical debates. Milton may well have had some awareness of these, given his background and interests, but, at the time he was writing, these were old arguments whose main proponents had long been laid to rest. Caccini's preface was

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<sup>159</sup> MacDonald Emslie, 'Milton on Lawes: The Trinity MS Revisions' in *Music in Renaissance Drama*, ed. by John H. Long (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1968), pp. 96-102.

<sup>160</sup> Emslie suggests that this is hyperbole. Nicholas Lanier was, in fact, the first.

<sup>161</sup> Emslie, pp. 97-8.

published in 1601, seven years before Milton was born, and the Florentine *Camerata* from which the new music developed, was at its most active in the late 1570s and early 1580s, nearly fifty years before the earliest estimate of the date of composition of *il Penseroso* and *L'Allegro*. Artusi died in 1613, Caccini in 1618. Whereas we will see Milton addressing Italian poetry painstakingly and with great precision in *Upon the Circumcision*, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, despite their promising titles, have a much less clearly defined relationship with Italy. They do, however, reflect, in a minor way, the close relationship with the Italian language (and with Charles Diodati) that marked this period of Milton's poetic career.



## Chapter 5

### Italian Verse Forms in ‘Poems 1645’ – the *canzone*

I have suggested that Milton’s most intense and direct period of engagement with Italian verse and Italian verse forms as a poetic practitioner was between the time of the composition of the poems in Italian – probably 1627/8 – and his departure for Italy in 1638, a period of ten years or so. By 1628, Milton had already been at Cambridge for three years and he remained there until 1632. The years from 1632 to 1638 he famously spent in ‘studious retirement’<sup>1</sup> at his parents’ homes, first in Hammersmith and then in Horton. Barbara Lewalski argues that during this period of private study and reflection, he ‘committed himself more and more earnestly to poetry’.<sup>2</sup> This is not self-evident from the volume of his output,<sup>3</sup> although he *did* write most of his more celebrated early works during this time. (The two most substantial of these – the *Mask at Ludlow* and *Lycidas* – were commissioned.)<sup>4</sup> Lewalski also argues, with greater justification, that, in these years, ‘he [...] looked to new models: the Italian madrigal and canzone, the English entertainment and masque, and the pastoral funeral elegy’.<sup>5</sup> Prince identified the imprint of both the Italian forms she mentions in Milton’s early work.<sup>6</sup> It is with Milton’s relationship with the *canzone* that I shall be mainly concerned in this chapter. I will argue that this is probably the most important form underlying this phase of his poetic development.

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<sup>1</sup> John Milton, ‘Letter to a friend’ in *Poems Reproduced in Facsimile from the Manuscript in Trinity College, Cambridge* (Ilkley: Scholar Press, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Lewalski *Life*, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> During this decade, as far as we know, he wrote just nineteen poems in English or two thousand three hundred and twenty-eight lines of verse, an average output of less than two hundred and fifty lines a year.

<sup>4</sup> *Arcades*, of course, also resulted from a commission but is not one of Milton’s more celebrated works.

<sup>5</sup> Lewalski, *Life*, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Prince, pp. 58–66.

## *The Canzone*

Even modern Italian dictionaries give ‘song’ only as the second definition of *canzone*.<sup>7</sup> The first edition of the Accademia della Crusca’s Dictionary (1612) defined the word as denoting a verse form: ‘da cantare, poesia lirica di più stanze, che servano il medesimo ordine di rime, che la primiera’<sup>8</sup> and modern Italian dictionaries continue to give this as its first meaning. Dante viewed the *canzone* as *the* defining poetic form, arguing in *De Vulgari eloquentia* that ‘only in canzoni are the technical possibilities of the art fully exploited, so canzoni are most noble, and the noblest of poetic forms.’<sup>9</sup> Dante also prescribed the ‘rules’ of the form.<sup>10</sup>

Each *canzone* stanza has two sections, the *fronte* and the *sirima*. Normally the first part of the stanza (*fronte*) is repeated whilst the second part (*sirima*) may or may not be. The permissible lines are *endecasillabi* and *settenari*. *Endecasillabi* should (and almost always do) predominate as this is the most ‘elevated’ line, according to Dante. There are few set rules about rhyme. However, Dante prescribed that each line-ending in a divided *fronte* or *sirima* must have at least one other line rhyming with it and recommended that a common rhyme (*verso chiave*) should link the two sections with a rhyming couplet completing the stanza. The rhyme scheme and the arrangement of seven- and eleven-syllable lines are repeated in each stanza. However, subject to the limitations above, the poet is free to choose the arrangement of lines and rhymes. The poem ends with a shorter *commiato* or *congedo* stanza usually addressed to the poem itself, commending it to its reading audience, or to the world in general.

For example:

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<sup>7</sup> The *Dizionario italiano* (Milano: Garzanti, 2002) for example.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.lessicografia.it> (retrieved 15.12.16) (from ‘cantare’ (to sing), lyrical poetry of several stanzas which follow the same rhyme scheme throughout – literally ‘as the first’.)

<sup>9</sup> Dante Alighieri, *De vulgari eloquentia*, trans. by Steven Botteril (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 55.

<sup>10</sup> *De vulgari eloquentia*, pp. 69–89.

..... Fronte.....  ..... Sirima.....  .....	Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte	A 11
	Mi guida Amor; ch'ogni segnato calle	B 11
	Provo contrario a la tranquilla vita.	C 11
	Se 'n solitaria spiaggia, rivo o fonte,	A 11
	Se 'n fra duo poggi siede ombrosa valle,	B 11
	Ivi s'acqueta l'alma sbigottita;	C 11
	E, come Amor la 'nvita,	C 7
	Or ride or piagne, or teme or s'assicura:	D 11
	E 'l volto che lei segue, ov'ella il mena,	E 11
	Si turba e rasserena,	E 7
	Ed in un esser picciol tempo dura;	D 11
	Onde a la vista uom di tal vita esparto	F 11
	Diria: questi arde, e di suo stato è incerto.	F 11

(Petrarch, Canzone XIII)

Here, the form of the first three lines of the *fronte* is repeated. There is a *verso chiave*, or more accurately perhaps, two *versi chiave* linking the two sections (the couplet formed by lines 6 and 7). The stanza also ends with a couplet. It consists of thirteen lines, the seventh and tenth lines being *settenari*, the remainder *endecasillabi*. Petrarch's poem has five stanzas in this form followed by a *congedo* or *commiato* of seven lines, consisting of two *settenari* and five *endecasillabi* with a similar rhyme scheme to that of the *sirima*.<sup>11</sup> The *canzone*, then, offers great flexibility of form within its specified constraints. The number of stanzas, the number of lines in a stanza, the specific rhyme scheme, the mix of *endecasillabi* and *settenari* are all for the writer to decide. Petrarch's *canzoni* have stanzas varying in length from seven lines to twenty lines. Fifteen is most common (ten poems). Almost all his *canzoni* end with a couplet. Rhyme schemes vary from poem to poem with hardly any repetitions, even in poems with stanzas of the same length. *Endecasillabi* lines predominate as prescribed but *Canzone IV* ('Italia mia, ben che 'l parlar sia indarno') has seven *settenari* in a stanza of sixteen lines, while *Canzone I* has only two *settenari* in a stanza of fifteen lines. This form is hard to reproduce in English, still harder than the Italian sonnet. The problem is, of course, the same – the short supply of rhyme words in English. The result is that English *canzoni* are either not true *canzoni* (like Milton's Italian one) or are designed as poetic *tours de force* like T.S. Eliot's sestina in *The Dry Salvages*,<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> In this case, the first line of the *congedo* ('Canzone, oltre quell'alpe') has no rhyme. This is unusual.

<sup>12</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber, 1963), pp. 207-8.

W.H. Auden's *Canzone*<sup>13</sup> or the poems from Ezra Pound's 1911 collection, *Canzoni*.<sup>14</sup> Despite this problem, however, Milton *did* write a 'true', albeit short, *canzone* in English.

### *Upon the Circumcision – Milton's English Canzone*

After the passage of sixty years, F.T. Prince still provides an essential touchstone for the impact of Italian poetry upon Milton's writing. He argues that 'Milton's direct recourse to Italian poetry for technical lessons is ... apparent even among the first group of his youthful poems.'<sup>15</sup> *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* demonstrates Italian features, albeit features that have been transmitted via 'Spenser and his school,' but, more dramatically and excitingly, Prince shows how *Upon the Circumcision* (possibly written in 1633)<sup>16</sup> 'reproduce(s) as closely as possible in English the stanza used by Petrarch in his *canzone* to the Blessed Virgin.'<sup>17</sup> Prince 'discovered' that Milton had based the structure of his poem entirely upon this poem. His only divergence, Prince notes, lies in the layout of his lines in the printed text, which obscures Petrarch's 'medial rhyme' by dividing the final line of the stanza into two.<sup>18</sup> Here is Prince's comparison of the opening stanzas of the two poems:

#### Petrarch

Vergine bella, che di Sol vestita,	a
Coronata di stelle, al sommo Sole	b
Piacesti sì che 'n te sua luce ascose;	c
Amor mi spinge a dir di te parole,	b
Ma non so 'ncominciar senza tu' aita	a
E di Colui ch'amando in te si pose.	c
Invoco lei che ben sempre rispose,	c
Chi la chiamò con fede.	d
Vergine, s'a mercede,	d
Miseria extrema de l'umane cose	c
Già mai ti volse, al mio prego t'inchina;	e
Socorri a la mia guerra,	f

<sup>13</sup> W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by E. Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), pp. 328–30. (The lines are all more or less of ten syllables although Auden allows himself a twelve-syllable line for some reason in the penultimate stanza.)

<sup>14</sup> Ezra Pound, *Canzoni* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1911). These are virtuosic. Pound uses the same rhymes (not just the same rhyme scheme) throughout every poem.

<sup>15</sup> Prince, p. 59. Not that youthful – he was only twenty-one when he wrote *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* but probably approaching twenty-five by the time he wrote *Upon the Circumcision*.

<sup>16</sup> Carey suggests this date but adds, 'there is no certain evidence for dating.' (*CSP*, p. 172.)

<sup>17</sup> Prince, p.61.

<sup>18</sup> Both Prince and Ants Oras note that the Trinity manuscript version of the poem, however, preserves the format of Petrarch's and Tasso's poems accentuating the medial rhyme.

Bench'i' sia terra, – e tu del ciel regina. (f)<sup>19</sup>

Milton

Ye flaming Powers and winged Warriours bright	a
That erst with Musick, and triumphant song	b
First heard by happy watchful Shepherds ear,	c
So sweetly sung your Joy the clouds along	b
Through the soft silence of the list'ning night;	a
Now mourn, and if sad share with us to bear	c
Your fiery essence can distill no tear,	c
Burn in your sighs and borrow,	d
Seas wept from our deep sorrow,	d
He who with all Heav'ns heraldry whileare	c
Enter'd the world, now bleeds to give us ease;	e
Alas how soon our sin	f
Sore doth begin	f
His Infancy to sease!	e <sup>20</sup>

Prince observes that whilst Petrarch's *canzone* follows this complex structure over 137 lines, Milton contents himself with just two stanzas (28 lines) commenting that perhaps Milton found the form 'uncongenial'. (Though if it were 'uncongenial', why did he choose to imitate it so precisely?) It might be a question of technical difficulty but it might also be that what Milton wanted to say about the Circumcision could be contained within two stanzas. Prince also notes that Milton does not 'observe the pause at the end of the sixth line which in Petrarch marks the end of the *fronte* of the stanza and the beginning of the *sirima* or *coda*'.<sup>21</sup> There is indeed no break in the argument of Milton's poem between the sixth and seventh lines and no sense of the stanza being structured in two parts. This is true of both stanzas of the poem. Otherwise, apart from the length of the poem, Milton's fidelity to his Italian model is absolute.

Prince's 'discovery' of Milton's Petrarchan 'template' was a real *trouvaille*. No other *canzone* by Petrarch follows this exact rhyme scheme. *Canzone XVI* comes fairly close, rhyming abcbaccddeeff<sup>22</sup> but only the 'Vergine' *canzone* exactly matches Milton's stanza. Furthermore, this *canzone* is one of only two of Petrarch's *canzoni* which have a

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<sup>19</sup> Lovely Virgin, who, clothed in sunlight, crowned with stars, so pleased the high Sun, that he hid his light in you; Love urges me to speak of you: but I cannot begin without your help, and His, who, lovingly, placed himself in you. I call on her who always replies positively to those who call to her with faith: Virgin, if the extreme misery of human life can forever turn to you for mercy, bow down to hear my prayer, and help me in this, my war, though I am but earth, and you the queen of heaven. (My translation.)

<sup>20</sup> Prince, p. 62.

<sup>21</sup> Prince, p. 63.

<sup>22</sup> Petrarca p. 583.

medial rhyme in the last line of the stanza. (The other is number *XIV* in the *Sonetti e Canzoni in Vita di Madonna Laura* series.<sup>23</sup>) It seems strange, then, that Prince does not comment upon the fact that the resemblance between the two poems does not lie solely in their rhyme schemes. There are also exact parallels in the poems' metrical structures. (It may be that Prince thought these similarities so obvious that they did not need to be drawn to the reader's attention.)

Petrarch orders his *endecasillabi* and *settenari*, as follows:

11/11/11/11/11/11/11/7/7/11/11/7/11 (the last line could be seen as 5/6 because of the medial rhyme).

To represent Petrarch's metre in English, Milton uses lines of ten syllables (for the *endecasillabi*) and six syllables (for the *settenari*). He also uses feminine rhyme (f) so that Petrarch's original metric pattern becomes, in Milton's poem:

First Stanza

10/10/10/10/10/10/10/7f/7f/10/10/6/4/6 (or 6/10 reconstituting the final line).

Second Stanza

10/10/10/10/10/10/10(reading 'covenant' as cov'nant)/6/6/10/6/ 4/6 (or 6/10)

The patterns are identical. The basic stanza of each poem consists of seven 'long' lines, two 'short' lines, then two more 'long' lines followed by a final section which, in both poems, could be seen as a 'short' line followed by a 'long' line with a medial rhyme. Milton's fourteen-line poem (as printed in 1645) exactly mirrors Petrarch's thirteen-line structure in Italian. The structural resemblance between the poems, taking account of the exigencies of the change of language, could not be closer, including metre as well as rhyme.

Having established the relationship, Prince does not ask *why* Milton used this particular poem as his structural model. And, indeed, this is not easy to explain. Petrarch's poem takes the form of a long prayer (ten stanzas of thirteen lines plus a seven

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<sup>23</sup> Petrarca, p. 270.

line *congedo*) to the Virgin Mary, asking her to intercede with Christ as the end of the poet's life approaches:

Vergine sola al mondo, senza esempio;  
Che 'l Ciel di tue bellezze innamorasti;  
Cui nè prima fu, simil, nè seconda;  
Santi pensieri, atti pietosi e casti  
Al vero Dio sacro e vivo tempio  
Fecero in tua virginità feconda.  
Per te può la mia vita esser gioconda,  
S'a' tuoi preghi, o Maria,  
Vergine dolce e pia,  
Ove 'l fallo abbondò la grazia abbonda.<sup>24</sup>

(Virgin sole on earth without a peer,  
who enamoured heaven of your beauty,  
whom no other equalled or came near,  
holy thoughts, chaste and merciful actions  
made you sacred to the one true God,  
a living temple, fruitful in virginity.  
You have the power to render my life joyful,  
since with your prayers, O Maria,  
sweet, virtuous Virgin,  
grace abounds where sin abounded.)<sup>25</sup>

In the tone of a litany, each stanza begins with the word, 'Vergine'. Seven of the ten stanzas include an opening epithet of praise ('Vergine bella', 'Vergine saggia', 'Vergine pura', 'Vergine santa', 'Vergine sola', 'Vergine chiara') and in the final stanza, 'Vergine umana e nemica d'orgoglio'. A not-very-personal God figures distantly in the poem. The first stanza refers to God as '[il] sommo Sole'. He is mentioned more or less directly in the third stanza which refers to Christ as both Mary's son and 'quel del sommo Padre'. Stanza 6 refers to the incarnation, 'Ricorditi che fece il peccar nostro/Prender Dio, per scamparne,/Umana carne ...' (This is the first time that the word 'Dio' has been used in the poem.) Stanza 9 refers to man being made in God's image, 'Non guardar me, ma chi degnò crearme;/No 'l mio valor, ma l'alta sua sembianza/Ch'è in me, ti mova a curar d'uom sì basso.' The *congedo* refers to Christ as 'verace/Uomo e verace Dio'.

Christ is the figure with whom the poet must ask Mary to intercede but there is no question of addressing Him directly. Mary is the necessary conduit to Christ, since the

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<sup>24</sup> Petrarca, pp. 586–7

<sup>25</sup> Translation from [http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/PetrarchCanzoniere306-366.htm#\\_Toc12011618](http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/PetrarchCanzoniere306-366.htm#_Toc12011618) retrieved 26.02.14

poet (for reasons explained in the poem) is unworthy to make a direct appeal to his saviour, still less to God his father.

Although Milton's and Petrarch's poems both have a religious theme, they could hardly be more different in tone. The mood of Milton's poem is one of anticipatory mourning, looking forward, in anguish, from the moment of the 'first cut' of the circumcision, towards the eventual sacrifice the Christ child is destined to make to save humankind who, otherwise, is 'lost in death'. Christ

seals obedience first with wounding smart  
This day, but O ere long  
Huge pangs and strong  
Will pierce more near his heart.

Petrarch also refers to Christ's passion:

donna del Re che nostri lacci à sciolti  
e fatto 'l mondo libero et felice,  
ne le cui sante piaghe  
prego ch'appaghe il cor, vera beatrice.

(queen to that King who has loosed our bonds,  
and made the world free and happy,  
I pray you satisfy my heart  
with his sacred wounds, true blessed one.)<sup>26</sup>

However, the Petrarchan context involves a sacrifice already made, a salvation already potentially achieved, in contrast with Milton's anguished vision of the suffering still to come for the newly-circumcised Christ child as he embarks upon his task of redemption. Milton's first stanza topples from the initial joy of the 'flaming Powers and winged Warriours bright' and the shepherds present at the birth of Christ, to an injunction to grieve, as his characteristically extended period reaches its first main verb (after four lines): 'Now mourn ... Burn in your sighs and borrow/Seas wept from our deep sorrow.' This language has nothing of the 'dolce stil novo.' (He reserved this style for his Italian poems and, perhaps, for the two sonnets in English which precede and follow them in *Poems 1645*.) Milton's language is explicit, almost brutal: 'bleeding', 'nakedness,' 'wrath,' 'vengeful justice,' 'wounding smart.' 'Huge pangs and strong/Will pierce more near his heart.' Nor is he 'tidy' like Petrarch. Petrarch's closely circumscribed vocabulary would not have permitted an infelicity equivalent to that of using, for the sake of the rhyme,

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<sup>26</sup> Translation as before.



and therefore in the most prominent position in the line, the clumsy compound adverb, ‘whileare’?<sup>27</sup> Neither is there the least hint of the incantatory repetitions that create the prayer-like quality of Petrarch’s poem, which might easily have featured somewhere in the two stanzas of *Upon the Circumcision*, had Milton wished to provide a faint echo of the tone of his model. So, despite the very close structural resemblance between the two poems, there is no question of Milton’s poem being even a very distant ‘imitation’ of Petrarch in content or tone.

In short, Petrarch’s *content* seems to have no attraction for Milton at all. Barbara Lewalski argues that, ‘idolatry was a central concern for Milton from his first major poem, the "Nativity Ode," through many prose tracts written during the Civil War and Protectorate, to his profound engagement with that issue in his greatest poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*.<sup>28</sup> Speaking of the third section of the ‘Nativity Ode’, in which Milton sets out the work of iconoclasm to be done before perfect bliss can be achieved on earth, she suggests that ‘many images in the descriptions of these idols – "consecrated Earth," "service quaint," "sable-stoled Sorcerers," "Heav'ns Queen and Mother both" (suggesting the cult of the Virgin) –register the heightened anxiety in 1629 over the "popish idolatry" that Laud's steadily increasing influence and power was seen to be promoting in the English Church.<sup>29</sup> The status of Mary as a human link between fallen man and his saviour was (and is) a central feature both of Catholicism and of high church Anglicanism. Though Milton, in his prose writings on the Church, does not specifically attack Mariolatry,<sup>30</sup> Petrarch’s poem must surely have represented an approach to Christian worship which was straightforwardly antithetical to the practices that Milton would have approved, and not far removed from the idolatry he condemned.

It could be that Milton’s poem is a kind of riposte to Petrarch, then. Milton does not much discuss circumcision in his prose writings. However, in ‘The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce’, he does quote St Paul:

Next, none I think will deny, but that they were as much bound to perform the law as any Christian. That severe and rigorous knife not sparing the tender foreskin of any male infant, to carve upon his flesh the mark of that strict and pure covenant whereinto he entered, might give us to understand enough against

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<sup>27</sup> A word which occurs just once in the entire works of Shakespeare – in the mouth of Caliban. (*Tempest* III, ii, 130.)

<sup>28</sup> Barbara K. Lewalski, ‘Milton and Idolatry,’ *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 43.1 (Winter, 2003), 213–232 (p. 213).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 215.

<sup>30</sup> As far as I have been able to determine.

the fancy of dispensing. St. Paul testifies, that every “circumcised man is a debtor to the whole law,” Gal. v., or else “circumcision is in vain,” Rom. ii. 25. How vain then, and how preposterous must it needs be to exact a circumcision of the flesh from an infant into an outward sign of purity, and to dispense an uncircumcision in the soul of a grown man to an inward and real impurity!<sup>31</sup>

The religious significance of circumcision is that the male child has symbolically become a full partaker in the covenant, putting off the sins of the flesh and seeking to live a holy life. In a Christian context, however, circumcision is unnecessary. The complete passage from Romans 2, from which Milton quotes, reads:

- 25 For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.
- 26 Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?
- 27 And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?
- 28 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision which is outward in the flesh:
- 29 But he *is* a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.

(Romans 2. 25–29)

Circumcision is, in Paul’s view, a sign of obedience and submission to the law of God but such obedience does not rely on circumcision. The significance of Christ’s circumcision has been seen as a means whereby the Son of God confirmed his humanity by accepting the traditional masculine ritual of Mosaic law.<sup>32</sup> Milton argues, with Paul, that the essence of circumcision lies in this obedience, not in the fact of circumcision itself. In fact, as David Lieb points out:

If circumcision is sanctified under the law, Milton says, it occasionally ‘signifies sanctification even under the gospel’. But this sacramental outlook ultimately gives way to a view that not only desacramentalizes circumcision but questions what might be called the figural relationship between circumcision and baptism. ‘There is,’ Milton concludes, ‘no necessary analogy between circumcision and

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<sup>31</sup> John Milton, ‘The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,’ *The Works of John Milton*, ed. by F.A. Patterson, 21 vols (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), III, ii, p. 145.  
[http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1209&chapter=78044&layout=html#a\\_1887852](http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=1209&chapter=78044&layout=html#a_1887852) retrieved 12.03.14

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03779a.htm>.

baptism; and it is our duty not to build our belief on vague parallels.’ At most, circumcision is ‘a seal in the flesh [in carne sigillum], indistinctly and obscurely given [et quidem perobscurum], of that grace which was at some distant period to be revealed,’ as opposed to baptism, which is a ‘seal of grace already revealed, of the remission of sins, of sanctification’ and ‘a sign of our death and resurrection with Christ.’<sup>33</sup>

It is conceivable, then, that Milton is drawing a deliberate contrast in *Upon the Circumcision* between his own religious position and that of the Catholic Petrarch who saw forgiveness for sin as being mediated by the intercession of a (once) mortal third party. Milton’s faith, on the other hand, does not require a moral longstop to patrol the boundary of sin. Might we see the tone and content of *Upon the Circumcision* as a conscious challenge to the religious ideology of the poem whose metre and rhyme he has appropriated? If this is so, I can only say that Milton has taken some pains to make his challenge as hermetic as possible. Nonetheless, it is not impossible that he was ‘writing back’ to the Italian poet, particularly if he expected the link between his poem and Petrarch’s to be apparent to the reader.

On balance, I suspect that it is more likely that his use of Petrarch was inspired by a more private and personal desire to test his technical skills by silently, as it were, attempting the *canzone* form in English. The two poems are twins structurally, but they are members of different (and quarrelling) families in their tone and content. This is probably the by-product of the very different historical moments and religious perspectives of the two poets rather than part of an attempt by Milton to ‘take Petrarch on.’ His other writings show that he was a strong admirer of his fourteenth-century predecessor<sup>34</sup> and saw his Catholicism as an unavoidable historical accident modified by what he saw as anti-papal sentiment.<sup>35</sup>

However, Petrarch was not the only candidate put forward by mid twentieth-century scholarship as Milton’s model for *Upon the Circumcision*. Ants Oras, writing very shortly before Prince, in 1952, suggested that a *canzone* by a different and later poet – Torquato Tasso’s *Canzone alla beatissima Vergine in Loreto* – lay behind Milton’s poem.<sup>36</sup> And, but for a minor difference in the rhyme scheme of the first six lines, the Tasso work would fit just as well. This poem again includes a medial rhyme (the only instance

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<sup>33</sup> Michael Lieb, “‘A Thousand Fore-Skins’: Circumcision, Violence, and Selfhood in Milton”, *Milton Studies*, 38 (2000), 198–219 (p. 206).

<sup>34</sup> *Private Correspondence*, p. 17. (Letter to Buonmattei).

<sup>35</sup> See p. 103.

<sup>36</sup> Ants Oras, ‘Milton’s *Upon the Circumcision* and Tasso’, *Notes and Queries*, 197, 2 (1952), 314–315.

of Tasso using such rhyme in his fifty-five *canzoni*).<sup>37</sup> Carey dismisses Oras' claim summarily on the grounds of the rhyme scheme variation (Tasso's opens with abcabc as against Milton's abcbac),<sup>38</sup> but it is interesting and suggestive that such a close match can be found in another Italian poet who was also very important (perhaps more important than Petrarch, indeed) to Milton. My research indicates that this is the *only* Tasso *canzone* bearing such a close structural resemblance to Milton's poem. (Prince, strangely perhaps, seems to be unaware of the competing claim. At least, he makes no reference to Oras' article, which was published a year before *The Italian Element*.)

An obvious explanation for the duplication is that Tasso, in his turn, was imitating Petrarch and, indeed, with the single exception of the rhyme change, he imitated Petrarch's poem even more closely than did Milton. Italian critics confirm this view. Angelo Alberto Piatti comments:

è forse scontato ricordare che il Tasso, per la sua canzone, abbia tenuto presente la petrarchesca *Vergine bella, che di sol vestita*, il cui riflesso si coglie già nell'impianto complessivo del testo, di dieci strofe più congedo, sia nel metro, contrassegnato tuttavia da una singolare – anche se a prima vista marginale – variante nella scansione dei versi: nella fronte, infatti, in luogo dello schema ABC BAC seguito dal Petrarca, si ha ABC ABC.<sup>39</sup>

(it is perhaps superfluous to note that Tasso, in his canzone, had in mind Petrarch's *Vergine bella, che di sol vestita*, which is reflected in the overall structure of his poem consisting of ten stanzas followed by a *congedo*, and in the metrical structure, characterised by a single – albeit at first sight marginal – variation in the rhyme scheme: in the *fronte*, in place of Petrarch's scheme ABC BAC, we have ABC ABC.)

Piatti also points out a verbal similarity between the two poems:

il verso 36 della canzone del Tasso «e di lacrime pie lo cor adempi», esemplato quasi integralmente sul verso «lacrime et pie adempi 'l meo cor lasso» (v. 114), dove una sostanziale corrispondenza lessicale riflette un'uniformità di situazioni e intenti.<sup>40</sup>

(line 36 of Tasso's *canzone* 'the heart full of pious tears,' based almost completely upon line 114, 'fill my weary heart with pious tears', where a significant lexical resemblance reflects similar situations and intentions.)

<sup>37</sup> Fifty-five might be an underestimate. Sometimes it is difficult to know whether a poem is in *canzone* form because Tasso plays fast and loose with the 'rules'.

<sup>38</sup> *CSP* pp. 167–8.

<sup>39</sup> Angelo Alberto Piatti, 'Ecco fra le tempeste e i fieri venti: una canzone del Tasso ai confini tra poesia celebrativa e rime penitenziale,' in *La letteratura degli Italiani 2. Rotte, confini, passaggi*, Atti del XIV Congresso dell'Associazione degli Italianisti, Genova 15-18 settembre 2010, [http://www.italianisti.it/upload/userfiles/files/Piatti%20Alberto%20Angelo\\_1.pdf](http://www.italianisti.it/upload/userfiles/files/Piatti%20Alberto%20Angelo_1.pdf) retrieved 30/01/2017.

9 pages. No page numbers.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

Piatti identifies lexical similarities to other works by Petrarch and comments on the somewhat surprising variation in Tasso's rhyme which certainly tends to undermine Oras' claim that Tasso rather than Petrarch was Milton's direct model. Nonetheless, given Milton's extensive knowledge of, and admiration for Tasso, it is clearly possible that he was at least aware of his sixteenth-century predecessor's use of 'Vergine bella, che di Sol vestita'. He might well have been consciously following his predecessor's path by re-imitating Petrarch. Indeed, there are slight resemblances between the language of *Upon the Circumcision* and *Canzone alla beatissima Vergine in Loreto*.

Here is the opening of Tasso's poem:

Ecco fra le tempeste e i fieri venti  
di questo grande e spazioso mare,  
o santa Stella, il tuo splendor m'ha scorto,  
che illustra e scalda pur l'umane menti.  
Dove il tuo lume scintillando appare,  
e porge al dubbio cor dolce conforto  
in terribil procella, ov'altri è morto;

(Behold amidst the tempest and the wild winds  
Of this great wide sea  
O Holy Star, your radiance came with me  
lighting up and warming the human spirit.  
Where your sparkling light appears  
And brings sweet comfort to the uncertain heart  
In the terrible storm, where others died.)<sup>41</sup>

Petrarch:

Vergine bella, che di Sol vestita,  
Coronata di stelle, al sommo Sole  
Piacesti sì che 'n te sua luce ascose;  
Amor mi spinge a dir di te parole,  
Ma non so 'ncominciar senza tu' aita  
E di Colui ch'amando in te si pose.

(Lovely Virgin, who, clothed in glory,  
crowned with stars, so pleased  
the high Sun, that he hid his light in you,  
love urges me to speak of you:  
but I cannot begin without your help,  
and His, who lovingly was set in you.)<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> My translation.

<sup>42</sup> Translation from: [https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/PetrarchCanzoniere306-366.php#\\_Toc12011618](https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Italian/PetrarchCanzoniere306-366.php#_Toc12011618) retrieved 8.04.18.

And Milton:

Ye flaming powers and winged warriors bright  
That erst with music, and triumphant song  
First heard by happy watchful shepherds ear,  
So sweetly sung your joy the clouds along  
Through the soft silence of the listening night;

All three poems begin with an apostrophe – in Petrarch’s and Tasso’s cases, to the Virgin Mary, in Milton’s to the angels celebrating the birth of Christ.<sup>43</sup> Petrarch and Tasso both refer to light radiating from the Virgin. In Milton’s case, it is sound, ‘music and triumphant song,’ that is emitted by his angels. So, we can find some ‘reflections’ across all three poems’ opening lines. The opening apostrophe to the Virgin in Tasso’s poem obviously comes straight from Petrarch. Tasso is consciously and overtly imitating him and, in a broad sense, ‘borrowing’ his theme. The fact that Milton’s poem opens with an apostrophe could be pure coincidence but is perhaps suggestive of allusion to his Italian model or models. Milton has ‘seas wept from our deep sorrow,’ Tasso has his doubtful pilgrim caught in a terrible storm (‘procella’) and, later in the *canzone*, he has the lines, ‘Ponde/de l’amorose lagrime non scarse’ (waves not lacking loving tears). There are some muffled (and possibly coincidental) similarities to Milton’s poem in these early lines. After his opening, however, Milton is on such different ground that one cannot push this tentative argument any further.

Stylistically, I would argue that that Milton is closer to Tasso than to Petrarch. Firstly, Milton’s regular use of enjambment is much more ‘Tassan’ than Petrarchan. Tasso, like Milton, departs from Petrarchan norms in his vocabulary (but does not use the vivid and explicit language of suffering which Milton employs). This does not mean, of course, that Milton was necessarily imitating Tasso in this specific case. These are features of Milton’s poetic style throughout his work.

There is insufficient evidence then to permit a definitive conclusion on whether Milton had *both* these poems in mind when he wrote *Upon the Circumcision*, but it is clearly possible, even likely, given Milton’s extensive knowledge of the two poets’ work. There is, moreover, a certain logic in the notion: Milton, having observed how Tasso had imitated Petrarch, felt moved to attempt the same exercise.

What all this obscure Italian imitation certainly demonstrates is that Milton *was* still experimenting intensely with the *canzone* form during this period. So that, about four years after his sonnets in both English and Italian and his pseudo-*canzone* in Italian,

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<sup>43</sup> Carey points out that Milton treats the angelic orders loosely: ‘powers’ did not ‘flame’, that privilege belonged to seraphim. (*CSP*, p. 172).

Italian verse forms were still at the forefront of his mind. The specificity of his use of Petrarch/Tasso here serves to demonstrate just how close and intense the level of his engagement was. He set out in writing *Upon the Circumcision* not just to see what he could do with the *canzone* form but what he could do with a particular instance of the form, setting himself the exercise of transmuting a specific *canzone* structure, based on an individual poem, into his own language and style. He drew no attention to his undertaking either in the headnote to the poem or in its title. So discrete was he in this project, that it was to be three hundred and twenty years before the hidden outlines of the Italian originals underlying his poem were brought to light by Oras and Prince.

*The Wider Impact of Italian forms on the Early Verse in English*

The question which now arises is, given that *Upon the Circumcision* is the outstanding example of the presence of the *canzone* form in Milton's early verse in English, can we see a more general impact of the form in poems where there is no direct imitation of a specific Italian original? How much more generalised is the impact of Milton's knowledge of Italian verse forms?

The mixture of six- and ten-syllable lines used by Milton in *Upon the Circumcision* (1633) to represent the *settenari* and *endecasillabi* of Italian prosody features in a number of his other early poems beginning with *Upon the Morning of Christ's Nativity* in 1629, continuing with the opening lines of *Il Penseroso* (1632), and recurring in *On Time* (1633), *At a Solemn Music* (1633) and *Lycidas* (1637). Prince argues, in fact, that *On Time* represents Milton's effort to reproduce in English 'a branch of Italian poetry much cultivated in the later sixteenth century by Tasso, Marino and others: the madrigal used to reproduce the Greek epigram.'<sup>44</sup> This merit a little more discussion. Here is one of Tasso's *madrigali*:

**Madrigale 4**

Voi la bocca rosata  
 e rosate le guance avete ancora  
 come vermiglia Aurora,  
 e dorate le chiome,  
 e bianca sete, com'è 'l vostro nome. 5  
 Dunque aver gloria eguale in voi dovria  
 il purpureo e l'aurato  
 ch'egualmente è lodato  
 dove grazia e bellezza in pregio sia,  
 ma pure ogni altro cede 10  
 al candor de la fede.

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<sup>44</sup> Prince, p. 64.

The poem consists of eleven lines – four of eleven syllables, seven of seven syllables, patterned 7, 11, 7, 7, 11, 11, 7, 7, 11, 7, 7. The rhyme scheme is x aa bb c dd c ee. The stanza ends with a couplet and contains three other couplets. Lines 6 and 9 rhyme. Line 1 has no rhyme though it ends with ‘a’ like the next two lines (though this does not constitute a rhyme in Italian verse).

*On Time* is a poem of twenty-two lines. The lines are patterned almost randomly: 10, 10, 10, 10, 10, 6, 6, 6, 10, 10, 10, 7, 10, 10, 6, 10, 6, 10, 10, 8, 10, 12 (the final alexandrine).<sup>45</sup> The rhyme scheme is: a b a b c d d a (up to end of the first period). Second period: e e f f g g h h i i h j j h. The other poem Prince sees as being based on the Italian madrigal is *At a Solemn Music*. This is a twenty-eight line poem made up of seven ten-syllable lines, a six syllable line, six ten-syllable lines, a seven-syllable line, a six-syllable line, eleven ten-syllable lines and a final ‘alexandrine.’ The rhyme scheme is abab cc dd e ff gg hh e ii jj kk ll mm nn.

Both Milton poems are considerably longer poems than any of Tasso’s *madrigali*. The form originally consisted of two or three tercets of *endecasillabi* usually completed by a couplet though sometimes by a single line. Tasso mixes both *endecasillabi* and *settenari*. I cannot find any example of a madrigal by Tasso that exceeds fourteen lines. Prince argues that ‘[Milton’s] use ... of the form follows [the madrigal’s] essential features. In both these poems, [Milton] builds up a triumphant epigrammatic close, which is marked by an alexandrine.’<sup>46</sup> He suggests that the importance of these poems is that they ‘point forward to *Lycidas* and the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*.’<sup>47</sup> I find it hard, however, to see a significant link with the madrigal form in either of these two poems. As Prince makes no direct comparisons between either poem and specific Italian madrigals, his argument relies on generalities. Nonetheless his view that there is a direct link between the seven-syllable/eleven-syllable patterning of the Italian *madrigal* and *canzone* and the combination of six syllable and ten syllable lines often used by Milton in his earlier verse seems to me to be unquestionable. Let me now turn to *Lycidas*.

### *Lycidas’s Italian Roots*

Prince tells us that, in *Lycidas*, ‘the last poem of Milton’s youth and the most perfect’, the

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<sup>45</sup> Carey splits this line into a ten-syllable line followed by a two-syllable coda – ‘Triumphing over Death, and Chance, and thee/O Time.’ Merritt Hughes does the same thing.

<sup>46</sup> Prince, p. 64.

<sup>47</sup> Prince, p. 65.



poet was 'more conscious than ever of the possibilities of moulding English verse by Italian methods.'<sup>48</sup> He argues, persuasively and boldly in my view, that the poem reflects the structure of an Italian canzone whose regularly rhymed and structured stanzas and final *commiato*, are replaced by 'eleven "verse-paragraphs" of lengths varying from ten to thirty-three lines, closely but irregularly rhymed, and including ten lines, scattered throughout, which do not rhyme at all; the last verse-paragraph is of eight lines, rhymed like an *ottava rima*, and undoubtedly corresponds in its own way to a *commiato*.<sup>49</sup> (Prince is clearly on the defensive here. His use of 'undoubtedly' is undoubtedly intended to pre-empt scepticism.) He suggests that Milton based the structure of his verse on 'the semi-lyrical passages of dialogue found both in [Tasso's] *Aminta* and [Guarini's] *Il Pastor Fido*.<sup>50</sup>

Once again, Prince gives no specific examples, but I would suggest that what he had in mind were passages such as this, from the *Intermedio Secondo* in Act II of *Aminta*:

Sante leggi d'Amore e di Natura;  
 sacro laccio ch'ordio  
 fede sì pura di sì bel desio;  
 tenace nodo e forti e cari stami;  
 soave giogo e dilettevol salma                    5  
 ch fai l'umana compagnia gradita,  
 per cui regge due corpi un core, un alma,  
 e per cui sempre si gioisca ed ami  
 sino a l'amara ed ultima partita;  
 gioia, conforto e pace                                         10  
 de la vita fugace;  
 del mal dolce ristoro ed alto oblio;  
 chi più di voi ne riconduce a Dio?  
 (*Aminta*, Atto II, Intermedio Secondo, lines 1-13)<sup>51</sup>

(Oh, holy laws of nature and of love,/pure faith it was that spread/ and wove of fine desire the linking thread,/tenacious knot, the wool so dear and strong;/O yoke so soft, O burden sweet to bear,/you make companionship a great delight/through you one heart, one soul two bodies share, through you we find our joy and live along/with it until the final bitter night./You – joy, comfort, peace/of lives, which fly and cease,/sweet solace for our ills, oblivion's stead - /who more than you can lead us to godhead?)<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Prince, p. 71. It is not obvious why he terms the poem the last of Milton's youth. Milton was in his twenty-ninth year when he wrote *Lycidas*. He wrote *Epitaphium Damonis* when he was only two years older. The age of thirty might be his dividing line I suppose. (He attained this age whilst in Naples during his Italian journey.)

<sup>49</sup> Prince, pp. 72-3.

<sup>50</sup> Prince, pp. 73-4.

<sup>51</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Aminta*, ed. and trans. by Charles Jernigan and Irene Marchegiani Jones (New York: Italica Press, 2000).

<sup>52</sup> Jernigan and Marchegiani Jones' translation.

This passage consists of ten eleven-syllable lines and three seven-syllable lines. Two of the seven-syllable lines (lines 10 and 11) form a couplet. The other (line 2) rhymes with the following eleven-syllable line. The first line ending in 'Natura' has no rhyme word in the passage (and does not rhyme with lines preceding it either). The opening (weak) rhyme (ordio/desio) recurs nine lines later in lines 12 and 13 (oblio/Dio). There are three rhyming couplets in the passage (2/3; 10/11; 12/13) arranged so that they 'bookend' the intervening lines (4-9) which rhyme B/C/D/C/B/D.

This loose metrical pattern and Tasso's fairly free use of rhyme are, I think, reminiscent of the metre and rhyme patterns Milton adopts in *Lycidas*. Consider this twelve line passage:

Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd  
 Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,  
 We drove a field, and both together heard  
 What time the Gray-fly winds her sultry horn,  
 Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,  
 Oft till the Star that rose at Ev'ning bright  
 Towards Heav'ns descent had slop'd his westering wheel.  
 Mean while the Rural ditties were not mute,  
 Tempered to th'Oaten Flute,  
 Rough *Satyrs* danc'd, and *Fauns* with cloven heel,  
 From the glad sound would not be absent long,  
 And old *Damaetas* lov'd to hear our song.  
 (*Lycidas*, lines 25-36)

This section contains eleven ten-syllable lines and a single six-syllable line as analogues to Tasso's *endecasillabi* and *settenari*, similarly to Milton's practice in *Upon the Circumcision*. Like Tasso's 'verse paragraph', the rhymes have no regular pattern. We should also note a clear difference, however. The shorter line occurs less frequently. Here, there is just a single short line as against eleven long. Overall in fact there are just fourteen six syllable-lines in the first nine verse paragraphs,<sup>53</sup> none in the tenth,<sup>54</sup> and none in the final *ottava rima* section.<sup>55</sup> (lines 186–193). The occurrences of the shorter line are not proportionate to the length of the verse 'paragraphs'. One of the longer 'paragraphs,' number seven (twenty-eight lines long), has three six syllable lines, but the longest 'paragraph' (number nine, of thirty-three lines) has only one, whilst paragraph four (only thirteen lines long) has two. Clearly Milton did not have a regular formal structure in mind (consciously or unconsciously) when constructing his poem. Nonetheless the broad similarities both to

<sup>53</sup> Lines 1–14, 15–24, 25–36, 37–49, 50–63, 64–84, 85–102. 103–131 and 132–164.

<sup>54</sup> Lines 165–185.

<sup>55</sup> Lines 186–193.

the *canzone* form and to Tasso's development of it in his pastoral drama are there to be seen – right down to the unusual occasional use of non-rhyming lines.

Seven of Milton's 'verse-paragraphs' end with a couplet (like Tasso's above), recalling Dante's prescriptions about the stanzas of a *canzone*.<sup>56</sup> Four of them do not, however. The poem's ten unrhymed lines are distributed fairly evenly through the poem but paragraphs three, eight, ten and eleven (the last for obvious reasons in view of its form) contain none, while paragraph five has two in just fourteen lines. Patterned irregularity is a central characteristic of the poem.

Prince argues, 'It is the sense of movement and the habits of rhetoric, deriving from [the] divisions [of the *canzone*] which determine the methods of Milton's poem.'<sup>57</sup> But Tasso's practice in *Aminta* is perhaps as important. Clay Hunt in *Lycidas and the Italian Critics* reinforces this aspect of Prince's argument explaining that Tasso

conceive[d] the verse structure of [*Aminta*] ... in terms of potential lyrical stanzaic units whose patterns of line length and flickering rhyme could at any point be shaped into sustained units of musical phrase.<sup>58</sup>

He suggests that Tasso's familiarity with the *canzone* 'inclined him to think in terms of sizable verse-paragraphs within which he could dispose long rhetorical periods'<sup>59</sup> in the context of his pastoral play. In short, part of what we see in *Lycidas*, from the point of view of verse form, seems to be a further development of Milton's relationship with the *canzone* as modified by his reading of *Aminta*. (I will go on to consider in the next chapter question of the important relationship between *Aminta* and Milton's *Mask*.)

There is another link between *Lycidas* and Italian culture. This is, interestingly, a musical one. Clay Hunt points out that, in his note in the *Trinity Manuscript* (also printed in *Poems 1645*), Milton refers to the poem as a 'monody'<sup>60</sup> which recalls the musical references in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Hunt says that 'in *cinquecento* [literary] criticism ... the monody is most often regarded as a minor and unpretentious literary genre, analogous to the elegy'.<sup>61</sup> He argues that Milton must have selected this term in full awareness of its musical significance. The celebrated Florentine *Camerata*'s used the term

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<sup>56</sup> See *CSP*, p. 239.

<sup>57</sup> Prince, p. 84.

<sup>58</sup> Clay Hunt, *Lycidas and the Italian Critics* (London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 46.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Hunt, p. 159. What Milton wrote was, 'In this Monodie the author bewails a lerned friend unfortunately drown'd in his passage from Chester on the Irish seas.' John Milton, *Trinity Manuscript*, p. 31. This was retained, with a slightly different spelling, in *Poems 1645*. The version published in *Justa Eduardo King* had no headnote. See: *Justa Eduardo King*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939).

<sup>61</sup> Hunt, p. 160.

in the context of the *Musica Nuova*. There was wide European awareness of the *Camerata*'s main underlying theoretical statement, Vincenzo Galilei's *Dialogo della musica antica, et della moderna*.<sup>62</sup> Milton himself had engaged in a 'monodistic' musical collaboration with Henry Lawes.<sup>63</sup> Hunt takes the view that by terming *Lycidas* a 'monody', Milton was consciously aligning the poem with a form

in which a solo voice, singing the formal strophes of the choral odes in Greek tragedies, had wedded music to verse in an elaborate lyric so as to achieve that final catharsis of pity and fear through a reasoned tempering of the passions which was the ethical effect distinctive to tragedy'.<sup>64</sup>

The figure of the 'uncouth Swain' with his 'Quills' and 'Dorick lay', suddenly revealed at the end of the poem, though clearly a conventional figure in pastoral literature, nonetheless reinforces the 'monody'/'elegy' – music/verse – relationship. Although I have my doubts that that this rather complex Italian musical allusion was exactly what Milton intended when he added his introductory note to the Trinity Manuscript in 1637,<sup>65</sup> Hunt's analysis does illustrate the multiplicity and complexity of the cultural strands – poetic, literary, theoretical, philosophical and musical – that are embedded in this early poetry.

There are of course other sources contributing to *Lycidas*. Carey points out for example 'seven or eight echoes of Spenser ... all but one from the *Shepheard's Calendar*,' contrasting Milton's 'Spenserian pastoralism' with the 'metaphysical' diction and imagery of the other contributors to the Edward King collection.<sup>66</sup> Milton's reading of Virgil, Theocritus, Sannazaro, and Rota are also important to the poem. However, as far as his very unusual verse form is concerned, the Italian *canzone* tradition as developed by the poets of the sixteenth century and later translocated into a freer dramatic context by Tasso and Guarini is an important presence in the poem. I do not argue that Milton deliberately and consciously imitated these forms (in the way that he undoubtedly imitated Petrarch/Tasso in *Upon the Circumcision*), but rather that his immersion in Italian literary, musical and intellectual culture provided him with the materials from which to develop a form for *Lycidas* that would not otherwise have been available to him. I would

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<sup>62</sup> Vincenzo Galilei, *Dialogo della musica antica, et della moderna* (Firenze: Giorgio Marescotti, 1581).

<sup>63</sup> Hunt, pp. 162–69.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, p.170.

<sup>65</sup> Literally 'monody' in Greek means 'singing alone'. Milton would, of course, have been well aware of this and one undoubted characteristic of *Lycidas* is that it represents someone (the poet figure) 'singing alone'.

<sup>66</sup> *CSP*, p. 239.

argue that the four years<sup>67</sup> between *Upon the Circumcision* and *Lycidas*, during which Milton also wrote his *Mask*, saw a progression from his technical imitation of Italian forms to a more complete incorporation of them into his poetic method. *Lycidas* marks the fullest extent of Milton's appropriation of Italianate culture and form before the great works of his late period. It is, of course, his last English poem of any length before he came to write *Paradise Lost*. I would argue that it is the last poem of his 'Italian period.'

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<sup>67</sup> Four years is, perhaps, the minimum period. Carey tentatively dates *Upon the Circumcision* as '1633?'. Lewalski and Haan date it '1631–33.' (*OCW III*, p. 368.)

## Chapter 6

### Tasso's *Aminta* and Milton's *Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* – model relationships

Si è molto parlato del carattere spenseriano del *Comus*, ma nessuno sembra essersi accorto che il modello reale è l'*Aminta* del Tasso.<sup>1</sup>

Having discussed Tasso's impact upon the verse form of *Lycidas* and the connection between *Upon the Circumcision* and his *Canzone alla beatissima Vergine in Loreto*, I shall now go back three years in time to consider another facet of the Milton-Tasso literary relationship, that seen in *Aminta* and the *Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* (*Comus*). The nature of this relationship, and indeed its very existence, has been a matter of controversy since Mario Praz claimed almost eighty years ago that it was Tasso's *Aminta* that provided Milton with the literary template for his masque.<sup>2</sup> I will argue, with Praz, that that the relationship between the two works demonstrates another aspect of the 'Italianate' Milton, extending beyond the technical and formal characteristics displayed in his direct imitation of the Petrarchan tradition (in the sonnets in Italian) and his use of Italian verse forms in English (in *Upon the Circumcision* and the English sonnets). I shall argue that *Comus* bears the marks of the direct dialogue with Tasso that was to continue much later in Milton's poetic career when he came to write *Paradise Lost*.

The French critic Gérard Genette coined the term 'hypertext' to describe a new text based on the transformation or imitation of a previous work:

J'appelle ... hypertexte tout texte dérivé d'un texte antérieure par transformation simple (nous dirons désormais *transformation* tout court) ou par une transformation indirecte: nous dirons *imitation*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Praz, 'Rapporti tra la letteratura italiana e la letteratura inglese,' *Letteratura Comparata, Rapporti tra la letteratura italiana e la letteratura inglese* Vol IV: *Problemi ed orientamenti critici di lingua e di letteratura italiana*, collana diretta da A. Momigliano (Milano: Marzorati, 1948) p. 169.

<sup>2</sup> Much has been said about the Spenserian character of *Comus*, but no one seems to have realised that its real model is Tasso's *Aminta*. (My translation).

<sup>3</sup> See note 1.

<sup>3</sup> Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré* (Paris : Editions Du Seuil, 1982), p. 16.

(I use the term ‘hypertext’ of any text derived from a previous text either via simple transformation [which hereafter I will just call ‘transformation’] or via an indirect transformation: which I will call ‘imitation’.)<sup>4</sup>

Genette’s terminology recalls classical notions of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*. Marko Juvan in *The History and Poetics of Intertextuality* suggested that these classical concepts provide the most important historical link with modern conceptions of intertextuality: ‘a pair rooted in the tradition of rhetoric and poetics, together with influence and origin, which figured as key issues of the historicist paradigm in national and comparative literary history.’<sup>5</sup> My question in this chapter is whether *Comus* can be seen as a ‘hypertext’ derived from *Aminta*.

First, I should admit that there were other narratives, closer to home, which may well have been in Milton’s mind, ‘hypertextually’, as he planned his collaboration with Henry Lawes to celebrate the first Earl of Bridgewater’s accession to his seat at Ludlow.<sup>6</sup> John Carey lists as possible ‘influences’ William Browne’s *Inner Temple Masque*, Ben Jonson’s *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (neither of which, as Carey himself recognises, had as yet been printed in 1634), Thomas Carew’s *Coelum Britannicum*, John Fletcher’s *Faithful Shepherdess*, George Peele’s *Old Wives’ Tale* and the Dutch Erycius Puteanus’s neo-Latin *Comus*.<sup>7</sup> Carey suggests that Fletcher’s play in particular ‘shows numerous parallels’ with *Comus*.<sup>8</sup> Ann Baynes Coiro describes reading *The Faithful Shepherdess* as feeling ‘like a phantasmagoric encounter with Milton’s Maske’.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, before considering the *Comus*’s relationship with *Aminta*, I will consider its parallels with Fletcher’s play.

*The Faithful Shepherdess* probably had its first performance in 1608.<sup>10</sup> It was published in quarto in 1609 and reprinted twenty years later by Richard Meighen. It was performed before Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria on Twelfth Night 1634 by the Kings Men, just nine months before the production of *Comus*. The royal performance led to the publication of a third edition of the play, again by Meighen, in the same year.

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<sup>4</sup> My translation.

<sup>5</sup> Marko Juvan, *History and Politics of Intertextuality* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2008), p. 49.

<sup>6</sup> Egerton was appointed president of the Council of the Marches in Wales in June 1631. His move to Ludlow was delayed by the notorious trial of his brother in law, Mervin Touchet, Earl of Castlehaven on charges of incest, rape and sodomy.

<sup>7</sup> *CSP*, p. 175.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* I will use ‘*Comus*’ to refer to Milton’s Ludow masque in this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Ann Baynes Coiro, “‘A Thousand Fantasies’: The Lady and the Masque’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. by Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 95.

<sup>10</sup> See: Philip J. Finkelppearl, ‘John Fletcher as Spenserian Playwright’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 27. 2 (Spring 1987), 285–203 (p. 285).

Fletcher called his work a ‘pastoral tragi-comedy’,<sup>11</sup> explaining this term in his note to the reader:

A tragi-comedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy, which must be a representation of familiar people, with such kind of trouble as no life be questioned; so that a god is as lawful in this as in a tragedy, and mean people as in a comedy.<sup>12</sup>

This reference to genre and the title of the play were clearly intended by Fletcher to recall another very well-known Italian work, Giovanni Battista Guarini’s *Il Pastor Fido*. (The title page of Guarini’s play describes it as a ‘tragicomedia pastorale’.) However, the theme and plot of *The Faithful Shepherdess* are, in fact, much closer to *Aminta* than to *Il Pastor Fido*. Fletcher’s drama features a cast of ill- and well-assorted couples. Some start out with illicit yearnings for extra-marital sex but, by the end of the play, almost all of them have settled for living chastely ever after. (The one unreconstructed rake, the Sullen Shepherd, is punished by being expelled from the forest.) At one extreme Cloe, a lustful nymph who speaks one of the play’s more celebrated lines – ‘from one cause of fear I am most free, / It is impossible to ravish me. / I am so willing’ – has a long way to travel before she finds chaste connubial bliss.<sup>13</sup> At the other, Clorin, the eponymous shepherdess and the play’s guiding light, has, from the outset of the play, been wedded eternally to chastity since the death of her (unnamed) first love. Although the rest of the nymphs and shepherds set out with different levels of commitment to premarital sexual abstinence, purity wins out in the end.

Fletcher’s play does indeed have some strong resemblances to *Comus*. Clorin speaks of virginity in words very reminiscent of those of Milton’s Elder Brother. Having met with a Satyr of frightening aspect but benign intent, who, struck by her godlike beauty, leaves her a basket of fruit, she says:

Sure there is a power  
In that great name of virgin, that binds fast  
All rude uncivil bloods, all appetites  
That break their confines: then strong chastity,  
Be thou my strongest guard, for here I’ll dwell  
In opposition against fate and hell!  
*The Faithful Shepherdess* I. i. 124-129

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<sup>11</sup> John Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, (London: J M Dent and Co, 1897) p. 6. Fletcher is echoing Guarini’s description of *Il Pastor Fido* as a ‘Tragicomedia Pastorale’.

<sup>12</sup> *The Faithful Shepherdess*, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *The Faithful Shepherdess*, III. i. 212-13.



Compare the Elder Brother's speech in *Comus* (lines 421-27):

*Eld. Bro.* She that has [chastity] is clad in compleat steel,  
And like a quiver'd Nymph with Arrows keen  
May trace huge Forests, and unharbour'd Heaths,  
Infamous Hills and sandy perilous wildes,  
Where through the sacred rayes of Chastity,  
No savage fierce Bandite, or mountaneer  
Will dare to soyl her Virgin purity.

Both passages are based on the identical notion that chastity is, in itself, a protection against uncontrolled male lust and both contrast the purity and vulnerability of the virgin with the wildness of her surroundings.

Still closer similarities of detail between the two works can be found. Lewalski and Haan<sup>14</sup> point out the resemblance between Clorin's speech in the first scene of *The Faithful Shepherdess* and lines 432-7 of *Comus*:

Yet I have heard (my mother told it me  
And now I do believe it), if I keep  
My virgin flower uncropt, pure, chaste and fair,  
No Goblin, Wood-god, Faiery, Elfe or Fiend,  
Satyr or other power that haunts the groves  
Shall hurt my body, of by vain illusion  
Draw me to wander after idle fires.

*The Faithful Shepherdess* I. i. 111-7.

Compare:

*Eld. Bro.* Som say no evil thing that walks by night  
In fog, of fire, by lake or moorish fen,  
Blew meager Hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost,  
That breaks his magick chains at *curfeu* time,  
No goblin, or swart Faery of the mine,  
Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity.

*Comus* 432-7.

Although the Elder Brother is considerably more prolix (his speech totals fifty-eight lines), his sentiments are more or less identical to those of Clorin and there are also similarities of expression. In the passages quoted above, both lists of virgin-unfriendly beings in the forest include goblins and 'faeries'. The reference to 'fire' alongside 'fog' in

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<sup>14</sup> *OCW III*, p. 403.

the Milton passage recalls Fletcher's 'idle fires'. Both passages contain the word 'power' and repeat the idea that virginity itself is protective of the virgin.

Another episode in Milton's masque that has been seen as closely related to Fletcher is the Lady's liberation from Comus's magic seat by Sabrina (lines 890-920).<sup>15</sup> In Fletcher's play, Amoret is thrown into a 'fount' by the Sullen Shepherd after she has been stabbed by her deluded lover, Perigot. She is saved by the 'God of the River' who cures her of her wound:

If thou be'st a Virgin pure,  
I can give a present cure:  
Take a drop into thy wound  
From my watry locks more round  
Than Orient Pearl, and far more pure  
Than unchast flesh may endure.  
III. i. 382-7.

The parallel here is rather less precise. Milton has:

Brightest Lady look on me,  
Thus I sprinkle on thy brest  
Drops that from my fountain pure  
I have kept of pretious cure  
Thrice upon thy fingers tip,  
Thrice upon thy rubied lip  
*Comus* 910-15.

Verbally, we have 'drop' in Fletcher and 'drops' in *Comus*<sup>16</sup> and we have Milton's 'pretious cure'<sup>17</sup> as compared with 'present cure' in *The Faithful Shepherdess*. On the other hand, the River God cures Amoret by shaking his watery locks into her wound whereas Sabrina frees the Lady by sprinkling drops from her fountain onto the Lady's 'brest', fingertips and lips and by touching the seat with her 'chaste palms moist and cold'. The 'miracles' do, however, have the use of water drops and supernatural intervention in common. Sabrina in *Comus* and the river god of *The Faithful Shepherdess* are rather different types of semi-divine beings, even leaving their gender aside. Sabrina's song (lines 890-901) alludes to the richness of her chariot and her lightness of foot once she has left her watery realm, so emphasising her amphibious qualities. The River God, on the other hand, is less comfortable out of water, more circumscribed by his aquatic nature.<sup>18</sup> The dual function

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<sup>15</sup> Lewalski and Haan for example note the relationship. *OCW III*, p. 412.

<sup>16</sup> l. 912.

<sup>17</sup> l. 913

<sup>18</sup> *The Faithful Shepherdess*, III. i. 369-373.

of Amoret's 'cure' in *The Faithful Shepherdess* – it is also a virginity test – is, for obvious reasons, absent from *Comus*. Nonetheless, the two episodes are sufficiently similar to suggest, particularly in the light of the other resemblances, that Milton had Fletcher in his mind when devising this aspect of his plot. (There is no similar device in *Aminta* incidentally. Silvia, bound to a tree by the Satyr, is rescued by Aminta by physical force. Aminta later throws himself over a precipice after being rejected for a second or possibly third time by his beloved Silvia. He owes *his* escape from death not to divine intervention but, more prosaically, to his fall being broken by bushes ['macchia'].)<sup>19</sup>

There are very significant links between *The Faithful Shepherdess* and *Comus*, then, but we should also recognise that Fletcher's play also has many parallels with *Aminta*. The pattern of similarities and dissimilarities of plot and characterisation in *The Faithful Shepherdess* and *Comus* could also be attributed to the two writers' use of a common source. Fletcher's wood is home to a Satyr, as is Tasso's. (Comus is the equivalent character in Milton's masque.) Fletcher's plot involves the use of direct physical force upon the unwilling virgin, as does Tasso's. (Comus uses magic rather than muscle.) Erotic love within marriage is the climax of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, as it is of *Aminta*. (Eros is, however, rejected in *Comus*.) The characteristics of Tasso's sylvan pastoral environment recall both Fletcher's and Milton's settings. In both plays, (as in *Comus*) the court is kept off-stage. Clorin's chastity (to which she remains committed throughout the play) parallels Silvia's commitment to Diana during most of the action of *Aminta*. (Milton's lady's chastity is never in question.) *Aminta* surely lies in the background of both works. However, the *verbal* similarities between Fletcher's play and Milton's masque leave little room for doubt that Milton, whether consciously or not, was recalling Fletcher's text as he wrote his masque.

What then of *Comus*'s relationship with *Aminta*? Firstly, do we know that Milton read Tasso's play? There is no direct evidence for this. The references to Tasso in Milton's prose are to his works on poetic theory<sup>20</sup> and to his status as a 'modern' writer of epic poetry (*Gerusalemme liberata*), on a par with Homer and Virgil.<sup>21</sup> I have already demonstrated Tasso's presence in Milton's early poetry and, as I have already observed, *Paradise Lost* is full of references to the *Gerusalemme*. Milton certainly had ample opportunity to read *Aminta*. As I indicated earlier, the work was first published in England in 1591 by John Wolfe, hidden at the back of a volume with the main title *Il*

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<sup>19</sup> *Aminta*, V. i. 66 – 78.

<sup>20</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 257. Milton is referring to the *Discorsi dell'arte poetica e del poema eroico*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 120.

*Pastor Fido*.<sup>22</sup> Abraham Fraunce produced an English version of the work in the same year, generally regarded as inadequate.<sup>23</sup> A better English translation by Henry Reynolds was published in 1628.<sup>24</sup> Given his strong interest in Italian literature and in Tasso, together with the popularity and accessibility of *Aminta* in England, it seems overwhelmingly likely that Milton would have read the play.

The statement by Praz quoted at the head of this chapter, asserting the link between the two works, comes from an Italian multi-volume work on comparative literature published in 1948, but Praz had already made the claim ten years earlier in his paper, 'Milton and Poussin':

Nobody seems to have been aware that Tasso's *Aminta* is the real model. Comus's arguments to persuade the Lady to forsake her virginity are a development of those Dafne uses with Silvia at the beginning of Tasso's pastoral drama; Comus himself acts the part of Tasso's Satyr. *Comus* is a spiritualised *Aminta*; the Satyr binds Silvia naked to a tree and tries to violate her, but Comus's fetters are the invisible work of a spell. Thus sensuality has been carried away from the senses. Tasso's pastoral with its tender atmosphere, its passions and its despairs gushing out so easily, so melodiously, its discreetly introduced mythological background (only Love's prologue has a distinct Hellenistic ring), has been transformed almost beyond recognition into a morality in antique garb.<sup>25</sup>

His claim quickly provoked dissent. Prince described it as 'exaggerated.'<sup>26</sup> The connection was rejected out of hand by the editors of the first volume of *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*:

One must dismiss as wholly untenable Praz's suggestion of Tasso as source ... the theme and tendency of the two pieces are, as nearly as may be, diametrically opposed.<sup>27</sup>

Merritt Hughes, on the other hand, claimed that 'the *Aminta* is a pastoral drama with resemblances to *Comus* so much greater than those of the English play to which it is so often compared, John Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*.'<sup>28</sup>

Anthony Mortimer, writing in 1970, contested Hughes' view partly on the grounds of genre. Mortimer argues that, 'if we accept the traditional status of the *Aminta*

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<sup>22</sup> Tomita, p. 335.

<sup>23</sup> Abraham Fraunce, *The Countess of Pembroke's Yrychurch* (London: T Orwyn for W Ponsonby, 1591).

<sup>24</sup> Henry Reynolds, *Torquato Tasso's Aminta Englished* (London: Avg. Matthews for William Lee, 1628).

<sup>25</sup> Mario Praz, 'Milton and Poussin' in *Seventeenth-Century Studies Presented to Sir Herbert Grierson*, ed. by John Dover Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1938), p. 202.

<sup>26</sup> Prince, p. 59.

<sup>27</sup> *Variorum I*, p. 767.

<sup>28</sup> Hughes, p. 88.

as a model pastoral play, it is difficult to see how *Comus* can be called a pastoral.<sup>29</sup> He notes significant differences between the woodland settings of the two works and the absence of ‘real’ shepherds in Milton’s masque. Mortimer does, however, raise the question of whether Milton is using *Aminta* in *Comus* by ‘deliberately reversing its values’<sup>30</sup> only to dismiss this argument, concluding that there is, in fact, little or no evidence of inter-textual relationships to be found either in the chastity-related arguments contained in the two works or in the characters of Comus and the Satyr in *Aminta*.

In 1988 Robert Entzminger reopened the debate, arguing, in opposition to Mortimer (whom he does not mention), that the opposing ‘themes’ and ‘tendencies’ of the two works evidence a *dialectical* relationship between them.<sup>31</sup> He claims that this dialectic derives from Milton’s ambivalent attitude towards Italy on the one hand, and his increasingly oppositional stance towards the English court on the other.<sup>32</sup> Entzminger suggests that whilst *Comus* and *Aminta* both have an interest in the court, Milton ‘insists upon’ a subversive approach to court life.<sup>33</sup> Whilst Tasso’s work, composed for performance before the court of Duke Alfonso II of Ferrara, contains a lengthy condemnation of court life and morals, attributed in the play to the absent ‘Mopso’ – ‘la gran terra,/ ove gli astuti e scaltri cittadini/e i cortigian malvagi molte volte/predonsi a gabbo, e fanno brutti scherni di noi rustici incauti’<sup>34</sup> – this is immediately countered by a eulogy of the court from Tirsi. Tirsi has already discredited Mopso as ‘quel Mopso ch’ha ne la lingua melate parole, / e ne la labra un amichevol ghigno,/ e la fraude nel seno...’<sup>35</sup> Mopso is presented as a kind of Italian Jacques.<sup>36</sup> Entzminger suggests that Tasso ‘neutralises the pastoral potential for subversion,’ offering with one hand an illusion of iconoclasm which he quickly takes back with the other. He goes on to argue that Milton *does* challenge the morals of the court, by suggesting in his masque that *rus* is superior to *urbs*. We are also intended to see the determined chastity of the Lady of *Comus* as oppositional to indulgent courtly sexual mores. The Lady represents ‘chastity for

<sup>29</sup> Anthony Mortimer, ‘The Italian Influence on *The Mask*’ *Milton Quarterly*, 6. 1 (1972), 8-16 (p. 9).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> Robert L. Entzminger, ‘The Politics of Love in Tasso’s *Aminta*’ in *Milton in Italy*, pp. 463-76. Entzminger’s argument is similar to that which Mortimer toyed with only to reject it.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 469.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 471.

<sup>34</sup> *Aminta*, I. ii. 235-9. (‘the great town where sly and cunning citizens and wicked courtiers mock and pour scorn on unsuspecting countryfolk like us.’ [My translation.]) Mopso himself does not appear as a character in the play.

<sup>35</sup> *Aminta*, I. ii. 215-8. (that Mopso who has honeyed words on his tongue, a friendly smile on his lips and deception in his heart....)

<sup>36</sup> It would be more chronologically accurate to say that Jacques was an English Mopso.

chastity's sake,' not merely 'chastity until the right shepherd comes along' as in *Aminta*. The Lady misplaces her trust when she says to Comus:

Shepherd I take thy word,  
And trust thy honest offer'd courtesy,  
Which is sooner found in lowly sheds  
With smoky rafters, than in tap'stry halls  
And courts of Princes, where it first was named,  
And yet is most pretended.

ll. 321-26.

But Entzminger argues that her view nonetheless reflects the spirit of Milton and his class, valuing and trusting simple 'rustic' life over the court.<sup>37</sup> The Lady's view, Entzminger says, 'reflects a growing schism between the court and the country with virtue being attributed almost exclusively to the latter.'<sup>38</sup>

There is an obvious problem with this argument in that it is impossible to see the Lady and her two brothers, who clearly represent 'the good' in the masque, as proponents of bucolic bliss. Their dearest wish is to get out of the 'drear wood,'<sup>39</sup> haunted by Circe's son and his 'rout of monsters,' corrupted by his dark magic, in order to 'attend their father's state and new entrusted sceptre.'<sup>40</sup> Indeed one can agree with Mortimer that the closest thing to a pastoral character in the masque is Comus himself, but he, of course, is an imposter, an impersonator of pastoral virtues. The Bridgewater themselves were very far from being a family in search of the simple rustic life, even though they found themselves stationed far from Charles's court in 1634. Tasso does, at least, allow in his play direct criticism of the off-stage court by one of his characters. Milton's text does not seriously challenge the values of the aristocratic Bridgewater household. If there is criticism of Charles I's metropolitan excess in *Comus*, it is, in my view, very well hidden. There has been continuing debate about this question. Ann Baynes Coiro in 2004 suggested that we should be sceptical about 'what is currently a critical axiom-that "[i]n all its stages but most emphatically in its final forms (1637/1645), Milton's Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle is a reformed masque," that is, a work critical of court culture and ambitious to offer a higher moral vision.'<sup>41</sup> (Her quotation is

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<sup>37</sup> I must say, on the other hand, that 'Milton the rustic' or even 'Milton the countryman' are improbable personae for the mainly city-dwelling poet.

<sup>38</sup> Entzminger, pp. 471-2.

<sup>39</sup> *Comus*, l. 37.

<sup>40</sup> *Comus*, ll. 35-6.

<sup>41</sup> Ann Baynes Coiro, 'Anonymous Milton, or, "A Maske" Masked', *English Literary History*, 71, 3 (Fall, 2004), 609-29 (p. 613).

from Lewalski's *Life of John Milton*.) Catherine Gimelli Martin, in *Milton Among the Puritans*, argued that Milton's declared debt to Spenser in *Comus* has been wrongly ignored by modern critics who have overlooked 'the lady's Spenserian/Arminian defence of free will' and preferred to turn

her somewhat conventional devotion to chastity into a thoroughly Puritan ethics of abstinence. Her would-be seducer, Comus, thereby becomes the representative of everything that Puritans most detested in the Caroline Court.<sup>42</sup>

Although coded ideological messages to long-dead audiences are notoriously hard to read, there is no historical evidence to suggest a strong antipathy towards the court on Milton's part at this stage of his career. Indeed, his friendship with Lawes the Court Musician and his desire to emphasise this connection in *Poems 1645* suggests the contrary.

Entzminger argues that Milton 'accomplishes a reorientation of the (pastoral) genre'<sup>43</sup> by abandoning the 'pastoral of love' for 'prophetic pastoral,' 'a type which derives from Christian readings of Vergil's Fourth Eclogue.'<sup>44</sup> He sees the Attendant Spirit's epilogue as presenting 'an image of pastoral harmony expressed in terms of sexual concord, but it is presented as a reward for suffering and dedication, and it is located in an unspecified future.'<sup>45</sup> The lines he refers to are 976–1010 in which the Spirit evokes a heavenly world in which Adonis is recovering from his love-wound and where Cupid has been permitted to marry Psyche, who has given birth to the twins Youth and Joy. These celestial resolutions of the amorous entanglements of pagan gods seem to me to be more an impressionistic evocation of a remote heavenly bliss than a direct comment upon the issues raised by the encounters in the wood. The 'moral' of the masque surely lies in its last lines:

Mortals that would follow me,  
Love virtue, she alone is free,  
She can teach ye how to clime  
Higher than the Spheary chime;  
Or if Vertue feeble were,  
Heav'n itself would stoop to her.  
(ll. 1018 – 1023)

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<sup>42</sup> Catherine Gimelli Martin, *Milton among the Puritans* (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 144. (Martin is responding to Leah Marcus's arguments in favour of a 'Puritan' *Comus* in *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the defense of old holiday pastimes* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986).

<sup>43</sup> Entzminger, p. 475.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

The accent here is all upon virtue (here closely associated with chastity) as the sole path to the heavenly world that the Spirit inhabits. Reaching this world is a reward in itself, not a means of achieving eventual 'sexual concord' as Entzminger seems to suggest.<sup>46</sup> As for the question of whether it can be evidenced that Milton may be 'writing back' dialectically to Tasso, this remains undemonstrated in Entzminger's essay, which is, to be fair, more preoccupied with the genres of pastoral than with the relationship between Tasso's play and Milton's masque.

More recently, in 2000, Patrick Cook in his article, 'Eroticism and the Integral Self: Milton's Poems 1645 and the Italian Pastoral Tradition,'<sup>47</sup> challenged the atmosphere of scepticism surrounding Milton's debt to *Aminta*. He argues:

Readers turning from *Aminta* to *Comus* cannot help but notice an abundance of parallels. In both we observe, to name initially only a few of the most obvious, the creative fusion of masque and pastoral drama; a framing heavenly descent; the union of woods and river; a thematics of honor, chastity, and sexual assault; mythological references to Diana and her nymphs, to Bacchus, and to Daphne's metamorphosis.<sup>48</sup>

This short analysis provides a useful framework within which to compare the detail of the two works and I will use it to assist my own account. Do both works represent a 'fusion of masque and pastoral drama'? The title page of Tasso's work describes the work as a 'favola boschereccia,' a 'woodland tale.' There is no doubt that *Aminta's* genre is pastoral drama. It may have some distant connection with the origins of the masque in Italian courtly entertainment, but it has no link to the English form. Although the masque is held to have had Italian roots, these were put down long before *Aminta's* first performance in 1573. The development of the English masque in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries took the genre far away from the Italian entertainments which may have been its early inspiration. Indeed, the author of the entry 'masques' in the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* states that they were *perhaps* of Italian origin, but assumed a distinctive character in England in the 16th and 17th centuries.<sup>49</sup> Pastorally, the two works are related. Dramatically speaking, they are quite distinct.

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<sup>46</sup> To be fair, the end of *Epitaphium Damonis* with its vision of Diodati in a paradise where 'choreisque furi lyra mista beatis,/Festa Sionaeo bacchantur et orgia thyrsos.' (ED ll. 218-19) does seem to suggest a strong connection in Milton's mind between heavenly and erotic bliss which also turns out later to be a feature of the Garden of Eden.

<sup>47</sup> Patrick Cook, "Eroticism and the Integral Self: Milton's Poems, 1645 and the Italian Pastoral Tradition," *The Comparatist*, 24 (May 2000), 123-45.

<sup>48</sup> Cook, p. 130.

<sup>49</sup> *The Oxford Companion to English Literature 7<sup>th</sup> edition*, ed. by Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 628. (My emphasis.)



Explicit Italian dramatic elements are not evident in the Jacobean and Caroline masque genre. (Italian stagecraft and stage design, on the other hand, were integral. Inigo Jones brought these technical skills back with him from his two journeys in Italy, along with his blueprint for the Banqueting House.)<sup>50</sup> It is hard to see, then, how Cook's description of *Aminta* as a 'fusion of masque and pastoral drama' can be justified. It is simply a pastoral drama. Tasso's artistic typology simply did not include the term 'masque'.<sup>51</sup> (The anonymous author of the entry on the masque in the *Oxford Companion* suggests, revealingly, that Milton's masque might be better termed 'a pastoral drama'.)<sup>52</sup> Tasso's pastoral form derived from traditional and classical sources, as the frequent references to Virgil in *Aminta* imply, but was effectively a new development as far as the Italian literary tradition was concerned. Charles Jernigan and Irene Marchegiani Jones note in their introduction to a bilingual edition of *Aminta* published in 2000:

The dialogic pastoral poem with its relatively free structure developed into a stricter five-act format, the metre of which was usually hendecasyllabic ... blank verse punctuated by more lyrical often rhymed, choral songs. Various attempts were made to codify this structure ... but it is only with Torquato Tasso's *Aminta* (1573) and later Battista Guarini's *Il Pastor Fido* (1590) that the pastoral drama acquired a place in the poetic canon, a place between the dialogic eclogue and the developing melodrama.<sup>53</sup>

The genre connection between *Aminta* and Milton's masque does not, then, derive from the 'masque' element of Milton's work but from its similarity to the genre created by Guarini and Tasso in late sixteenth-century Italy.

What the works also have in common, as I have noted, is the fact that they are both dramatic entertainments written for aristocratic patrons whose 'courts' are both alluded to in the texts. The *Dramatis Personae* of *Aminta* were closely identified with specific historical characters at the court of Alfonso II, including Tasso himself.<sup>54</sup> The play was first performed at the Belvedere of Ferrara before Alfonso and his court, and revived at the court of Urbino at the request of Lucrezia d'Este, Alfonso's sister, the following year. In its mission to represent, validate, and honour aristocracy and the established order, *Aminta* fulfilled an equivalent function for the court of Alfonso to that which the English masque supplied to the Stuart court, although Tasso's play did not

<sup>50</sup> See John Newman, 'Inigo Jones', *ODNB*, <https://tinyurl.com/yckep9my> retrieved 12.12.2017.

<sup>51</sup> There is no meaningful Italian translation for the word 'masque' used in this sense.

<sup>52</sup> *Oxford Companion to English Literature*, p. 628.

<sup>53</sup> *Aminta*, p. iv.

<sup>54</sup> See Dante della Terza, 'La corte e il teatro: il mondo del Tasso' in *Il teatro italiano del Rinascimento*, ed. by M. De Panizza Lorch (Milano: Edizioni di Comunità, 1980), pp. 51-63.

involve the technical ‘marvels’ that were part of the masque’s *raison d’être*. But neither did *Comus* which was written for the smaller and more domestic Bridgewater ‘court’ at Ludlow Castle and also sought, in my view, to validate rather than to critique the lifestyle and values of Milton’s patrons.

As regards their pastoral elements, both works have rural and woodland settings though there are significant differences in how these are handled. The wood in *Aminta* is populated by nymphs, shepherds, an evil satyr and the occasional wolf. It is presided over by the quarrelsome and amoral gods of Roman mythology. Aminta is a shepherd. Silvia and Dafne are nymphs who have both, in the past, followed the Roman Goddess of chastity (Diana), though Dafne is now a follower of Cupid. Silvia is pursued by a crude and evil satyr who ties her naked to a tree and is about to rape her. Aminta’s friend, Tirsi, is also a shepherd. Another wise shepherd, Elpino, takes charge of the happy ending of the play. Sheep may be in short supply on stage, but there is no doubt that most of the protagonists have at least theoretical charge of flocks. Love (in the shape of ‘*Amore*’, Cupid, who is fleeing the unwanted supervision of his mother, Venus) descends from the heavens at the beginning of the play, also dressed as a shepherd to oversee events on earth. Thus, *Aminta* presents the traditional characters of pastoral – *pastores* – overseen by Roman gods who remain active in the human world.

The cast of Milton’s *Mask*, on the other hand, is not nearly so uniformly bucolic. The attendant spirit does initially appear in the ‘habit of Thyrsis’ – i.e. as a shepherd. Comus disguises himself as a ‘harmless villager’<sup>55</sup> and is addressed by the Lady as ‘Shepherd.’<sup>56</sup> Sabrina is an (English) water nymph, metamorphosed from her original incarnation as the ‘daughter of Locrine’. The rout of monsters, however, has its origins not in pastoral but in epic – the transformation of Odysseus’s companions on Circe’s island.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the Lady ensnared by Comus is only one divine generation distant from Odysseus himself, who was tempted by Comus’s mother. The link between the ‘moly’ Hermes gives Odysseus to protect him from Circe’s potions and the ‘haemony’ used to protect the brothers when they burst in on Comus is explicitly made in lines 635-6 of the masque. The three human characters in the *Comus* are, as I have said, (‘real’) aristocratic young people who have tumbled out of their safe courtly environment into a sylvan neo-Homeric fantasy. While Tasso presents a pastoral version of aspects of the d’Este court, Milton gives us actual courtly characters (played by themselves) removed, by mischance,

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<sup>55</sup> *Comus*, l. 166.

<sup>56</sup> *Comus*, l. 270.

<sup>57</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans by E. Vieu (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

to a magical pastoral setting. Milton's characters have happened upon a dangerous enchanted world ruled by a daemon, and are saved only as a result of semi-divine intervention. *Aminta*, is more a story of the triumph of romantic and erotic love over violence, jealousy and excessive adherence to the cult of Diana. Additionally, the 'real-life' existence of three of *Comus*'s characters places the masque much more firmly in a Christian frame, quite apart from the clearly Christian references to 'sainted seats' and a 'golden key' that 'opes the palace of eternity.'<sup>58</sup> Sabrina, on the other hand, is an anglicised version of a classical water nymph taken by Milton from English, rather than Greek, mythology.

Cook's common 'framing heavenly descent,' clearly occurs in both works, though it is the mischievous 'Amore' who descends in '*Aminta*' as opposed to the virtuous Attendant Spirit in *Comus*. There is a similarity between *Amore*'s and the Attendant Spirit's attitudes towards donning human garb:

Chi crederia che sotto umane forme  
E sotto queste pastorali spoglie  
Fosse nascosto un Dio?  
*Aminta*, Prologo, 1-3.

but for such,  
I would not soil these pure ambrosial weeds  
With the rank vapours of this sin worn mould.  
*Comus*, ll. 15-17

So, neither 'spirit' is enamoured of their transformation into human form, but the 'heaven' from which each has descended is very different – neo-pagan in *Amore*'s case, clearly Christian, in that of the Attendant Spirit.

*Amore* also has parallels with *Comus* who is armed with a 'charming-rod.' *Amore* for his part, has discarded 'l'ali, la faretra e l'arco,'<sup>59</sup> in order to deceive his mother, and instead bears a 'verga' ('rod' – also a euphemism in Italian for 'penis'). Both *Comus* and *Amore* are thus equipped with a phallic symbol, implying a sexual threat towards the female protagonists.

Cook speaks of 'the union of woods and river' as another common theme. Both works (of their nature) are set in woods. What is more, Silvia is 'figlia di Cidippe, a cui fu padre il Dio di questo nobil fiume'<sup>60</sup> a daughter of the River God and thus distantly

<sup>58</sup> *Comus*, ll. 11 and 13. (Carey makes connections with *Rev.* iv 4 and *Matt.* X vi 19. [CSP, p. 180.]

<sup>59</sup> His wings, quiver and bow', *Aminta*, Prologo, 45.

<sup>60</sup> 'Daughter of Cidippe whose father was the god of this noble river.' *Aminta*, Prologo, 86-7 – so there is a river-god in the background to parallel Fletcher's.

related to Sabrina. Rivers are mentioned six times in *Aminta*,<sup>61</sup> starting from Act I scene i and the references occur regularly throughout the work. The Po (if it is the Po) serves, from a plot point of view, however, only as a means of reaching the off-stage court.

In *Comus*, on the other hand, there is no hint of the presence of a river until line 824 (of 1023) when Sabrina is first mentioned by the Attendant Spirit. The River Severn and Sabrina, however, play a much more important role in *Comus*. Sabrina rises from the waters to free the mute and immobile Lady. The River Severn is an active participant in the masque, an essential agent in its action. As I suggested earlier, this is closer to the plot device of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, than to *Aminta*. One might have some doubts then about the importance of the ‘union of woods and river’ as a strong common theme in both *Comus* and *Aminta* despite the fact that the motif is present in both works.

Finally Cook suggests that there are common ‘thematics of honor, chastity, and sexual assault.’ This is undoubtedly true but it is important also to recognise the ‘uncommon’ aspects here. The ‘message’ of *Aminta* is that virginity should bend to an honest swain’s love in the cause of domestic harmony and sexual reproduction. Rape is portrayed as a quasi-licit weapon in the struggle for sexual and marital fulfilment. The attempt by the Satyr on Silvia’s virginity is condemned (though recounted with loving prurience), mainly, it would seem, because the Satyr is unworthy of her. As the Satyr’s attack is taking place, Tirsi first arouses Aminta with the image of Silvia naked in the grove and then encourages him to rape her himself:

Perché dunque non osi oltra sua voglia  
Prenderne quel che, se ben grava in prima,  
Al fin, al fin le sarà caro e dolce  
Che l’abbi preso?<sup>62</sup>

Act II sc. iii 68-71

Only the Satyr’s prior intervention diverts Aminta from making his own assault on Silvia. The notion that ‘all’s fair in love and war’ (for the male protagonist of course), is very near the surface of Tasso’s tale. Silvia starts the play committed to virginity, but from the outset it is made obvious that she is wrong in keeping to her commitment when a suitably eligible shepherd is at hand. The story is characterised by moral ambivalence as regards lust and erotic love. What are we to make of Amore/Cupid’s prologue? On the one hand, Cupid declares his newly found independence from his mother, Venus. He has

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<sup>61</sup> I.i.43, I.i.87, I.ii. 45, I.ii.233, II.ii.203, II.i.141.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Why then do you not dare to take from her, against her will, something whose loss will seem hard to her at first, but, in the end, will be sweet and dear to her.’

grown up and is now following his own rules. On the other, he asserts his role as an equalising force between the court and the country:

io sono Amore  
ne'pastori non men che ne gli eroi,  
e la disagguaglianza de'sogetti  
come a me piace agguaglio' e questa è pure  
suprema gloria e gran miracolo mio.<sup>63</sup>  
Prologo, 82–86

*Amor omnes vincit* – whether high or low. In fact, Cupid's very arrival, in disguise, in the wood is a symbol of his 'democratising' mission. He says that his mother told him to focus his attentions on the courts of the great ('tra le corti e tra corone e scettri'),<sup>64</sup> whilst she sends his minions ('volgo de'ministro miei') to deal with common hearts ('rozzi petti'). We are asked to see the pastoral of *Aminta* as representing the triumph of sexual desire over selfish abstinence amongst 'the little people,' which presumably reflects an identical process taking place amongst the great. From the opening of his play, Tasso teases his aristocratic audience with a rustic simulacrum of their own desires.

The concentration upon dominant (male) amoral lust confronting (female) sexual vulnerability is at its most extreme in the description of the Satyr's attempted rape of Silvia, which is told in terms of crude male erotic fantasy:

ecco miriamo a un'arbore legata  
la giovinetta ignuda come nacque,  
ed a legarla fune era il suo crine:  
il suo crine medesimo in mille nodi  
a la pianta era avvolto; e 'l suo bel cinto,  
che del sen virginal fu pria custode,  
di quello stupro era ministro, ed ambe  
le mani al duro tronco le stringea;  
e la pianta medesima avea prestati  
legami contra lei; ch'una ritorta  
d'un pieghicole ramo avea a ciascuna  
de le tenere gambe.

III. i. 52–63

(Lo, we saw, tied to a tree, the young girl, naked as she was born; her hair formed the cords that bound her: her own hair wrapped around the tree in a thousand knots; and the lovely band which had once covered her virgin breasts now assisted in her rape, fixing both her hands to the hard tree trunk; even the plant

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<sup>63</sup> 'I am love, among shepherds as much as among the great and, if I wish, I can equalise the inequality of my subjects. This is my great glory and miracle supreme.'

<sup>64</sup> *Aminta*, Prologo, 8.

itself lent ties to bind her: a tendril from a slender branch held fast both her supple legs.)

Once Aminta has put the satyr to flight, it is lust, rather than compassion, which is his dominant emotion:

Come la fuga de l'altro concesse  
Spazio a lui di mirare, egli rivolse  
I cupidi occhi in quelle membra belle,  
Che, come suole tremolare il latte  
Ne' giunchi, sì parean morbide e bianche.  
III. i. 72-76

(As the satyr's flight gave him time to look [at her], he turned his longing eyes upon those lovely limbs, soft and white like milk trembling in rush baskets.)<sup>65</sup>

The word 'cupido' is translated in the dictionary of the *Accademia della Crusca* as 'disordinatamente disideroso' – 'uncontrollably lustful'. Finally, Aminta adds insult to Silvia's injury, dwelling longingly on her nakedness as he unties the cords that bind her to the tree:

'O bella Silvia  
perdona a queste man, se troppo ardire  
è l'appressarsi a le tue dolci membra,  
perché necessità dura le sforza...'  
III. i. 79–82

(O lovely Silvia, forgive my hands if dire necessity makes them dare too much and draw too close to your sweet limbs.)

Tasso is intent upon maximising the (masculine) erotic element in his story. His third-party narration of the incident would be 'pornographic' if actually acted out on stage. Silvia flees, 'ungratefully', from Aminta as soon as she is able to do so. There is no doubt that her flight is viewed as a mark of her lack of proper appreciation of Aminta's rescue and of her failing in her implicit obligation to reward him sexually for saving her from sexual assault:

Or tanto orgoglio alberga in cor di ninfa?  
Ah d'opra graziosa ingrato merto!  
III. i. 107-8

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<sup>65</sup> Translation of 'giunchi' is uncertain.

(Can so much pride be lodged in a nymph's heart?  
What an ungracious reward for a gracious act!)

When, after Aminta's failed suicide attempt, Silvia finally accepts her 'romantic' fate, the Chorus and Elpino comment:

Coro

Or non ritenne adunque la vergogna  
Lei, ch'è tanto severa e schiva tanto.

Elpino

La vergogna ritien debile amore;  
Ma debil freno è di potente amore.

V. i. 106–7

(Chorus: So she did not have any shame at all – she who is so strict and so modest.

Elpino: Shame holds back a feeble love, but it is a weak restraint to a powerful one.)

The Accademia della Crusca defined 'vergogna' as 'dolore, e perturbazione intorno a quelle cose, che pare, che ci apportino disonore ne' mali o passati, o presenti, o futuri.'<sup>66</sup> So Silvia, having first been criticised for lacking or suppressing normal 'human' (i.e. sexual) feelings, is now implicitly criticised for yielding to them. The Chorus's final words suggest that such ado about sexual union is excessive. Though the reward may have made the trials undergone worthwhile, he would prefer an easier path:

Me la mia ninfa accoglia  
Dopo breve preghiere e servir breve:  
E siano i condimenti  
De le nostre dolcezze  
Non sì gravi tormenti  
Ma soavi ripulse,  
Risse e guerre a cui segua,  
Reintegrando i cori, o pace o tregua.

V. i. 150 – 58

(I'd rather win my nymph with short entreaties and brief service. The spice of our happiness should not be torture but gentle rebuffs, sweet quarrels and battles, followed, once our hearts are re-joined, by truce or peace.)

The 'moral' climate of *Aminta* is, then, worldly, male-dominated and highly sexualised.

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<sup>66</sup> *Lessicografia della Crusca in rete*, <http://www.lessicografia.it/> retrieved 3.6.14. 'Pain or disturbance about things which might bring dishonour through past present or future evils.'

*Comus* belongs to a quite different world. It has been claimed that the spiritual context of *Aminta* is a Christian one but, as I have suggested, this is not easy to discern in the action of the drama. The moral climate of *Aminta* is a hazy mixture of the contemporary and the classical, with little in the way of obvious Christian values. Chastity in Milton's masque, on the other hand, is not a provisional barrier to be lowered in the face of the inevitable triumph of Eros, but a continuing commitment. Sex, insofar as it features at all in *Comus*, is not sexy. The Descending Spirit pursues not his own goals, like Amore in *Aminta*, but those of a higher authority – to protect the chaste and the just whose eyes are set upon a Christian heaven:

some there be that by due steps aspire  
To lay their just hands upon that golden key  
That opes the palace of eternity:  
To such my errand is.

*Comus* ll. 12-15

The prologue emphasises this task of protection – to enable the passage of the Bridgewater children into the security of their father's new (rural) domain, escaping the threat posed by Comus and his crew. When the Attendant Spirit says, 'by quick command from sovran Jove/I was despatched for their defence,'<sup>67</sup> we are in no doubt that here 'Jove' stands for a Christian deity.

The obvious parallel to the attempted rape of Silvia in *Aminta* is Comus's capture, immobilisation and threatened petrification of the Lady. His intent is, seemingly, sexual, but his approach to fulfilling his intent is not. Despite the hint of a temptation to goodness in his reaction on first seeing the Lady<sup>68</sup> (recalling Satan's momentary and conflicted lapse in Eden when confronted with Eve's goodness and beauty)<sup>69</sup>, almost immediately his focus is upon sensuality and possession:

Such sober certainty of waking bliss  
I never heard till now. I'll speak to her  
And she shall be my queen.

ll. 262-4

However, Comus proceeds to attempt his conquest by stealth, deception, magic, argument and threat, not by direct assault, and when the Lady is eventually fixed to the magic chair, she is allowed to keep her clothes on.

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<sup>67</sup> lines 41-2.

<sup>68</sup> lines 243-47.

<sup>69</sup> *Paradise Lost*, Bk IX, ll. 463-66.



What follows, in Comus's wood, is a dialogue between lust and chastity, but one which is decorously conducted. Whereas the Satyr and Aminta rely on force, pity (or both) to achieve their sexual ends, Comus eloquently states his theoretical case for sexual enjoyment and freedom to a Lady who is as malleable as stone. His improbable strategy is to attain his lustful ends through reasoned argument. He does have his cordial and tries to persuade the Lady to taste it, but he does not force it upon her. And, once again, in the midst of this, Comus becomes sensible for a second time to the irresistible power of goodness:

She fables not, I feel that I do fear  
Her words set off by some superior power;  
And though not mortal, yet a cold shuddering dew  
Dips me all o'er as when the wrath of Jove  
Speaks thunder .... (ll. 800-803)

What, in *Aminta*, is Silvia's misguided struggle against inevitable sexual conquest, becomes, in Milton's *Maske* a straightforward battle between good (virginity and chastity) and evil (sensuality, lust, self-indulgence, deception), in which the outcome is never in doubt.

Cook also mentions references to Daphne's attempted rape by Apollo and subsequent metamorphosis as a background presence in both works.<sup>70</sup> In Milton's masque, it is Comus himself who makes the comparison with Daphne while he is threatening to paralyse the Lady. The comparison between Silvia and Daphne is not directly made in *Aminta*, but the detail of Tasso's description of Silvia's physical attachment to the tree to which she is bound is surely intended to recall the episode. This is how Ovid describes the metamorphosis:

torpor gravis occupat artus,  
mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro,  
in frondem crines, in ramos bracchia crescut,                    550  
pes modo tam velox pigris radicibus haeret,  
ora cacumen habet: remanet nitor unus in illa.<sup>71</sup>

(a heavy numbness seized her limbs, thin bark closed over her breast, her hair turned into leaves, her arms into branches, her feet so swift a moment ago stuck fast in slow-growing roots, her face was lost in the canopy. Only her shining beauty was left.)<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Cook, p. 130.

<sup>71</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, I, ll. 452–567.

<sup>72</sup> Translation by Arthur Golding.

What happens to Silvia, although she does not actually *become* the tree, is very close to Ovid's depiction. Her hair is joined to the tree. Her arms are bound around the tree. The tree itself appears to grip her legs.<sup>73</sup> Silvia's temporary transformation is much more Daphne-like, in fact, than the Lady's temporary immobilisation.

Other mythological elements common to Milton and Tasso are the presences of Diana and her nymphs and Bacchus in both works. The mythological struggle underlying *Aminta* is between Venus and Diana. Cupid is, of course, a character in the play. Diana is represented by her nymph, Silvia. Venus wins out in the end. Amore (Cupid) makes the first mention of Diana in the role of adversary. He will make, 'cupa e immedicabile ferita/nel duro sen de la più cruda ninfa/che mai seguisse il coro di Diana.'<sup>74</sup> The spring where Silvia bathes naked and is attacked by the Satyr is Diana's spring ('fonte che s'appella di Diana').<sup>75</sup> When Silvia sends Aminta packing after he rescues her, she says, 'Pastor, non mi toccar: son di Diana.'<sup>76</sup> Dafne, Silvia's friend, on the other hand, has renounced Diana after her first night of love, handing back her horn and bow to the goddess.<sup>77</sup> Amore is active and victorious in the drama but Diana is ever-present.

There is only one direct reference to Diana in *Comus*. This is in the Elder Brother's speech (lines 418-474) on the protective power of chastity. He adduces Diana's example as evidence of the 'hidden strength' of chastity. Milton, however, quickly slides via this classical reference into a Christian world, 'So dear to heaven is saintly chastity/That when a soul is found sincerely so,/A thousand liveried angels lackey her.'<sup>78</sup> In this passage, as so often, Milton uses a classical example to make a Christian point. Milton, unlike Tasso, re-casts classical mythology to reflect his contemporary Christian world. Diana is a background presence in the masque as a counterpoint to Comus himself and, by implication, to Circe and Bacchus.

As regards the use of the figure of Bacchus himself in the two works, there is one common reference. In *Aminta*, Dafne refers to earlier times when people 'stimò dolce bevanda e dolce cibo/l'acqua e le ghiande, ed or l'acqua e le ghiande/sono cibo e bevanda d'animali,/poi che s'è posto in uso il grano e l'uva.'<sup>79</sup> In *Comus*, Milton refers to

<sup>73</sup> See *Aminta* ll. Act III sc. I ll. 52-83, quoted above.

<sup>74</sup> *Aminta*, Prologo, ll. 53-5. 'I will make a deep and unhealable wound in the breast of the cruellest nymph who ever followed in Diana's train.'

<sup>75</sup> *Aminta*, II, I, l. 110.

<sup>76</sup> *Aminta*, III, i. 105 'Shepherd, do not touch me. I belong to Diana.' There must surely be a potentially blasphemous reference to John 20.17 here.

<sup>77</sup> *Aminta*, I, i. 76-77.

<sup>78</sup> *Comus*, 452-4. One wonders what '(in)sincere chastity' or indeed '(un)true virginity' (line 436) could be.

<sup>79</sup> *Aminta*, I, i. 23-25. 'regarded acorns and water as good food and drink whereas now they are food and drink for animals because now we have grain and the grape.'

‘Bacchus that first from out the purple grape,/Crushed the sweet poison of misused wine.’<sup>80</sup> Both works seem to deprecate the invention of wine, albeit Milton does this more directly than Tasso. However, other than in respect of this small detail, *Aminta* is not Bacchic. There is only one other reference to his rite in the play. When Silvia falls upon Aminta who seems to be dead, she does so ‘in guisa di baccante gridando e percotendosi il bel petto.’<sup>81</sup> Bacchus is more central to *Comus* – necessarily, as he is Comus’s father. The masque could be read as a prohibitionist tract. The cordial that turns men to beasts when they taste it to ‘quench the drouth of Phoebus’,<sup>82</sup> is surely alcohol-based. I have already referred to the moly/haemony parallel in relation to the link between *Comus* and the Circe episode in *The Odyssey* but, of course, Comus’s ‘cordial julep’ derives from Circe’s ‘potion’<sup>83</sup> (of identical effect) and the wand which I have described as ‘phallic’, is in fact also borrowed from his mother.<sup>84</sup> The Homeric aspect of Milton’s masque owes nothing to Tasso.

There are significant differences of tone and ‘moral’ viewpoint in the two works, then. Despite this, I think the thematic and structural parallels between *Aminta* and *Comus* are clear, as Praz suggested. The outlines of the two works are very similar, even though the two writers treat their common themes very differently. Tasso’s wood belongs to a flawed post golden age Arcadia<sup>85</sup>, which has perhaps become slightly less flawed by the end of the play with the Aminta/Silvia union. Milton’s ‘drear wood’, on the other hand, is a place of danger to be negotiated by the children as they seek the security and social stability of Ludlow Castle. Their experience teaches a different moral lesson.<sup>86</sup> Despite Entzminger’s contention that Milton’s masque is ‘subversive’ by comparison with *Aminta*, it is hard to see how it is designed to do much more than validate the social and aesthetic attitudes of Milton’s aristocratic patrons, accommodating both their children’s performing skills and their parents’ values in its action. Though its accent upon chastity and virginity could be seen as oppositional to the behaviour of the Caroline court, we should perhaps also remember that Lady Alice was fifteen at the time she played her part and that her brothers were eleven and nine respectively. The average age of marriage in

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<sup>80</sup> *Comus*, 46-7.

<sup>81</sup> *Aminta*, V. i. 102-3. ‘Like a bacchante, screaming and beating her lovely breast.’

<sup>82</sup> *Comus* 66.

<sup>83</sup> *Odyssey*, X. 257.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 262.

<sup>85</sup> The satyr says, ‘veramente il secol d’oro è questo,/poiche sol vince l’oro e regna l’oro.’ (‘This truly is the golden age, since gold alone triumphs and rules.’) I. i. 57-8

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, Blaine Greteman, *The Poetics and Politics of Youth in Milton’s England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 113 on the educative aspect of the young Bridgwaters’ experience.

the Stuart period was twenty-five (albeit that the ages at which marriage was permitted were twelve for women and fourteen for men).<sup>87</sup> Alice was at an age when chastity was *de rigueur* and the perfidious Comus, who is not even human, is a far from eligible suitor in any case. (The real Alice eventually married a much older man, in 1652, at the age of thirty-two.) Milton has been seen as responding to scandalous events in the extended Bridgewater family<sup>88</sup> but, really, it seems most likely that, like Prospero, whatever the deep secrets of his 'book', his principal aim was 'to please.' Entzminger argues that differences between the putative performance text as represented by the Bridgewater manuscript<sup>89</sup> and the print editions of 1637 and 1645 represent Milton's desire to make the work more palatable to an aristocratic audience at the time of its first performance, but even the 1645 version was hardly likely to offend them.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, it could be argued that Tasso's work is the more subversive of the two in that it at least admits the possibility (through its account of Mopso's opinion of the court) of direct criticism of court life whilst presenting a pastoral world which verges on the amoral.

In the light of these echoes, oppositions and resemblances, is it possible that Milton was consciously 'writing back' to Tasso? Cook points out that the prologues to the works have strong similarities:

The Attendant Spirit's descent into the pastoral woods, review of the situation's mythological background, declaration of his purpose, and announcement that he will "take the weeds and likeness of a swain" form a prologue to *Comus*, unmistakably reminiscent of Tasso's famous prologue, from which it differs by but one line in length.<sup>91</sup>

The presentation of an assault upon the chastity of an immobilised and an effectively defenceless virgin (who is nonetheless intent upon self-defence) is strikingly similar. Praz also argues that:

Comus's arguments to persuade the Lady to forsake her virginity are a development of those Dafne uses with Silvia at the beginning of Tasso's pastoral drama; Comus himself acts the part of Tasso's Satyr<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> P. 328. Mikolaj Szoltysek, 'Households and Family Systems' in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern European History, 1350-1750*, Vol. I People and Place (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 326–331).

<sup>88</sup> See, for example: R. K. Mundhek, 'Dark Scandal and the Sun-Clad Power of Chastity: The Historical Milieu of Milton's *Comus*', *Studies in English Literature*, 15,1 (Winter 1975), 141–152.

<sup>89</sup> John Milton, *Milton's Comus*, ed. by Alix Egerton (London: J. M. Dent, 1910).

<sup>90</sup> Cedric Brown suggests in *John Milton's Aristocratic Entertainments* that the changes do represent Milton distancing himself somewhat from 'the rites of a social milieu about which more and more questions arose.' (*John Milton's Aristocratic Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p.152.)

<sup>91</sup> Cook, p. 131.

<sup>92</sup> Praz, *Poussin*, p. 202.

Praz concludes that *Comus* is effectively a ‘morality’ based on *Aminta*. Dafne’s main arguments against continuing chastity in Act I scene i of *Aminta* are: ‘carpe diem’ – do not waste nature’s gifts, enjoy love (ll.1–3 and ll.30–40); satisfy your maternal instincts (ll.4–6); a faithful lover should be rewarded (ll. 65–70); sexual pleasure (ll. 71–73); the risk that the frustrated lover will seek affection elsewhere (ll. 90–100); love is as natural to people as to turtledoves and cattle (ll. 122–64). Comus’s arguments reflect at least three of Dafne’s themes: carpe diem, do not waste nature’s gifts and, implicitly, sexual pleasure (lines 667–88 and 709–54). As Comus is trying to persuade the Lady to drink his potion, he also tells her of its wonderful effects (lines 805–12).

Many of the same anti-chastity arguments occur in both works, then, even though the tones of the two episodes and their outcomes are very different. Of course, these are also familiar classical and Renaissance tropes. One cannot ‘prove’ Milton’s *direct* use of *Aminta* from these passages, but the similar way in which Dafne and Comus marshal their arguments suggests that Milton, once again, had *Aminta* in mind as he wrote these passages. The difference, of course is that, whereas Silvia eventually abandons the cult of Diana, the Lady in Milton’s masque remains proof against Comus’s blandishments. It is at least arguable, therefore, that here Milton is ‘correcting’ Tasso.

*Aminta*, in my view, was an essential feature in the cultural landscape behind Milton’s creation of *Comus*. He could not but take account of its existence when he chose (or was asked) to address the theme of imperilled chastity in his masque. Harold Bloom’s assertion in *The Anxiety of Influence* that ‘Milton, with all his strength, yet had to struggle, subtly and crucially, with a major precursor in Spenser,<sup>93</sup> could apply equally to Tasso. The ‘correspondences’ that exist between *Comus* and Tasso’s pastoral play are too close and too numerous to be coincidental. *Aminta* was only one of Milton’s hypertexts in this work, but it was the dominant one. *The Faithful Shepherdess*, another of *Aminta*’s progeny, also played its part. There are, of course, as Bloom suggests also strong echoes of Spenser<sup>94</sup> and of Shakespeare (particularly *Midsummer Night’s Dream* with Comus playing the part of Oberon), but structurally *Aminta* is an insistent presence. *Comus* can therefore be seen, I would argue, as ‘imitation’ of Tasso in Genette’s definition – as literature that relies on a specific earlier text, ‘la littérature au second degré’, to use Genette’s book’s subtitle.

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<sup>93</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 11.

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, William Shullenberger, ‘Girl, Interrupted: Spenserian Bondage and Release in Milton’s Ludlow “Mask”’, *Milton Quarterly*, 37. 4 (2003), 184–204.

This, then, is a quite different kind of Italian ‘influence’ from that seen in the poetry I have considered previously in this thesis. We do not find in *Comus* the close prosodic imitation of Italian verse forms that characterise the works discussed in chapters 5 and 6. Instead we see a different type of creative outcome from Milton’s immersion in Italian culture, an outcome quite unlike the extreme (but concealed) *imitatio* found in *Upon the Circumcision* or the direct imitation of the Petrarch tradition in the Italian sonnets. The theme of ‘chastity-challenge’ selected (or perhaps prescribed) for this ‘entertainment’ immediately evoked *Aminta*. The way Milton subsequently used his raw materials – the form, the rural setting, the way he used his cast of child actors and their tutor – owes more to *Aminta* than it does to the huge number of masques performed at the Stuart court prior to 1634, the majority of which would probably have been entirely unknown to Milton. *The Mask presented at Ludlow Castle* shows him bringing his Italianate literary heritage to bear on the task of writing in this uniquely aristocratic form for a powerful patron.

## Chapter 7

### The Italian Journey

Milton read Italian, wrote poems *in* Italian and poems with carefully crafted Italian features. He spoke Italian and had close relationships with Italians and people of Italian origin. He was familiar with Italian music, Italian thought and Italian history. Later in life he was to write a great epic poem based, in part, upon Italian models. He understood the rules of Italian prosody, absorbed Italian literary theory and devoured Italian poetry from Dante and Petrarch, to Tasso and Marino. And most of his 'Italianisation' happened in England before he set foot in the country itself. His visit to Italy of 1638/9 is an event relatively unknown to non-Miltonists, an almost unseen facet of a life better known, popularly, for its 'Puritanism', the Civil War years, the defence of the Commonwealth, the risks of the Restoration and, most of all, for the late flowering of his greatest poetry. Milton's Italian journey is hidden away in his life, rather as the Italian poems are hidden away in *Poems 1645*.

Locating Milton's fairly short trip in the context of his long Italian inner-life is not straightforward. As I have shown, his poetry and prose, both directly and indirectly, provide rich sources of information about Milton's interactions with Italian culture and show his relationship with Italy 'in action' – the use of Italian forms, the use of Italian texts to shape his work, his wide knowledge and absorption of Italian sources of many kinds, as seen in the *Commonplace Book* and in his prose more generally. We see him working Italian raw material into his artistic life. Our sense of the personal significance of his visit to Italy, however, relies mainly upon his own accounts of it. These accounts are partial (in both senses of the word), retrospective and anecdotal, written for the purposes of the moment, albeit with half an eye on posterity. The story of the one great geographic adventure of Milton's life is told by him mainly for the purpose of self-vindication and from a polemical perspective. We also have, however, the letters he preserved from among those written during his travels and the later correspondence with Carlo Dati, although even these, it seems to me, were written with an eye to their future public reception.

In this final chapter, I will seek to place Milton's journey in the context of his existing relationship with Italy, using the historical records that have survived, his own accounts of the journey, his letters, plus what can be gleaned from the Latin poetry written in 1638-9. I will consider the factors that persuaded him to set off for Italy and the 'myth' he created from his tour following his return. In a rather strange way, his trip to Italy, marked the end of what I have termed his first 'Italian (poetic) period', because, shortly after his return to England and even before the 'work of his left hand' took over, he all but gave up writing poetry until he began working on *Paradise Lost* some time in the mid-1650s. The chapter, therefore, takes the form of an extended analysis of his time in Italy. It is rather long but I feel that its length is justified, given the role of this experience as a pivotal moment in Milton's life and poetic career.

### I. Approaching Italy

Given the young Milton's multiple cultural connections with Italy, his journey there might be seen as a logical, almost necessary, step in his personal development. Nonetheless, his was a bold and uncharacteristic decision given the protected environment he had enjoyed during his six years of 'studious retirement' after leaving Cambridge in 1632 and the general conventionality of his life up till then. Cambridge *had* presented some challenges to him (some of which, much later, led to calumnies about his university career which he was to rebut energetically in *Defensio Secunda*). But Hammersmith and Horton afforded him an even quieter life than the university had done. This is certainly the impression he gave in his own brief account of the period:

At my father's country place, whither he had retired to spend his declining years, I devoted myself entirely to the study of Greek and Latin writers, completely at leisure, not, however, without sometimes exchanging the country for the city, either to purchase books or to become acquainted with some new discovery in mathematics or music, in which I then took the keenest pleasure.<sup>1</sup>

Despite what he wrote in 1654, these years cannot have been without some personal (and perhaps familial) conflict; for it was during this time that Milton gave up his plans to enter the clergy, the career to which he had seemed destined, throwing his future into uncertainty.<sup>2</sup> Early evidence of the difficulties this decision caused him can be seen in the so-called 'Letter to a Friend' from which the phrase 'studious retirement', so often

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<sup>1</sup> *Essential Prose*, pp. 343.

<sup>2</sup> Campbell and Corns argue that 'his representation of Horton answers the polemical needs of the *Defensio* and should not be construed as an authoritative account of the Horton years.' (Campbell Corns, p. 84.)



used to characterise this phase of Milton's life, is taken. The letter has, among other things, provided scholars with some evidence for the dating of Sonnet VII,<sup>3</sup> and biographers with indications of Milton's state of uncertainty, procrastination, or both, about his future. Milton wrote (at least) two drafts of his letter, both of which are preserved in the Trinity Manuscript.<sup>4</sup> Stephen Fallon devotes a short chapter in his book, *Milton's Peculiar Grace: Self-Representation and Authority*, to this letter, describing it as 'remarkable.'<sup>5</sup> It is certainly remarkable for a tortuousness of thought and expression that surely reflects the conflicted state of Milton's mind at the time. The two drafts express the sheer 'effortfulness' of Milton's attempts to get his thoughts into words acceptable to him (and to his friend). Here he is, defending himself, in the first draft, from the friend's criticism of his delay in taking up his expected career in the church because of the priority he was giving to his studies:

if you thinke, as you said, that too much love of learning is in fault, & that I have given up myself to dreame away my yeares ithe armes of studious retirement, like Endymion with the Moone on Latmus hill, yet consider that if it were no more but this to o'ерcome this, there is on the other side both ill more bewitchfull, to entice away & natural cares more swaying & good availelable, to withdraw to that which you wish me as first all the fond hopes which forward youth and vanitie are fledge with, none of which can sort with this Pluto's helmet, as Homer calls it, of obscurity<sup>6</sup>

Milton gropes his way towards self-justification through a thicket of classical allusions and syntactical subordinations. I have not represented in my transcription the numerous corrections that render parts of this section of the *Trinity Manuscript* almost indecipherable:

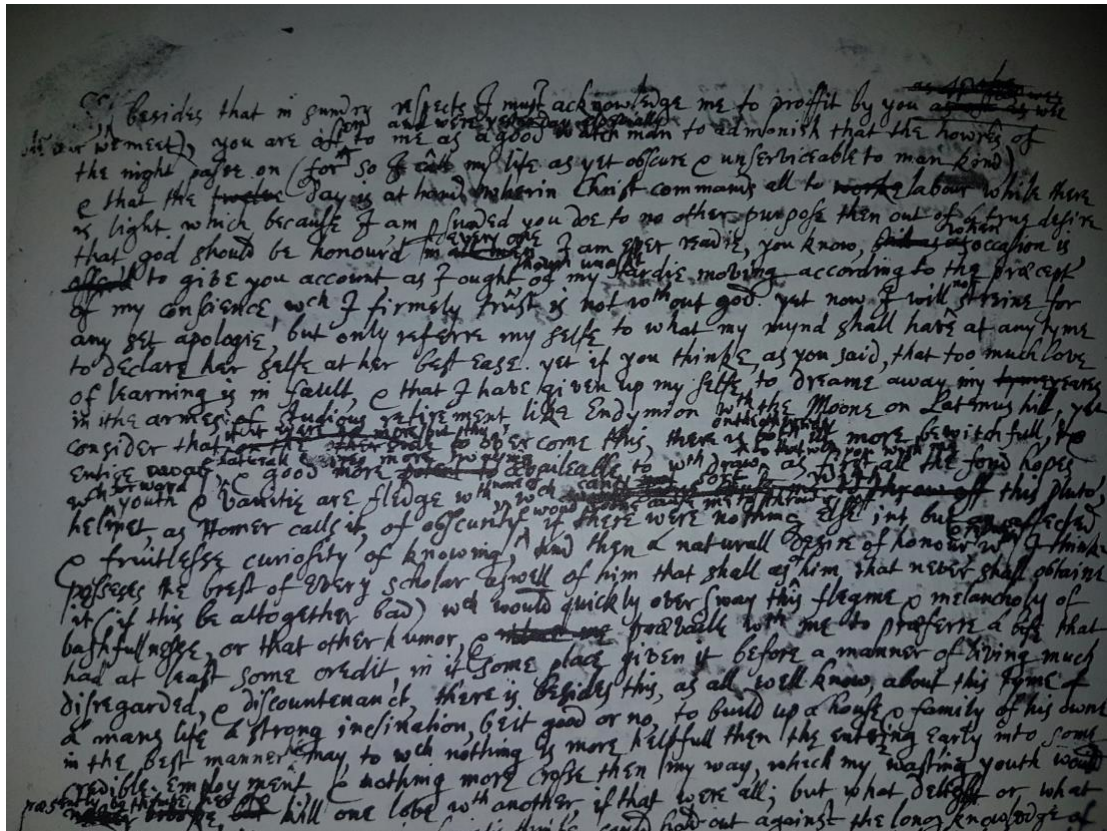
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<sup>3</sup> See Parker, II, pp. 783-787.

<sup>4</sup> *Trinity Manuscript*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace – Self-Representation and Authority* (London: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> *Trinity Manuscript*, p. 6.



In the second draft, Milton amends 'Endymion with the Moone on Latmos hill' to 'Endymion with the Moone of the tale of Latmus goes,'<sup>7</sup> changes the 'this' after 'o'ercome' to 'the mere love of learning' and continues:

whether it proceed from a principle bad, good or natural it could not have held out thus long against so strong opposition on the other side of every kind, for if it be bad why should not all the fond hopes that forward Youth and Vanitie are fledge with together [with] Gaine, pride and ambition call me forward more powerfully, then a poore regardlesse and unprofitable sin of curiosity should be able to withhold me...<sup>8</sup>

There are fewer corrections in the second version of the passage, but the errors and omissions still suggest a state of some mental confusion. Fallon draws attention to Milton's 'syntactic tortuousness' which is 'typical in Milton's self-representations'.<sup>9</sup> But it is not only Milton's syntax that is tortuous. It is his thought process itself. Both drafts evoke uncertainty, anxiety, internal conflict and even distress, as the writer's self-justification contorts itself onto the page. The first draft, in particular, seems almost a

<sup>7</sup> 'of' must be an error. 'as' makes sense of the phrase.

<sup>8</sup> *Trinity Manuscript*, p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Fallon, p. 14.

stream of consciousness. Its third sentence (beginning ‘yet if you thinke’), for example, is twenty-eight lines long in the manuscript. Conjunction follows conjunction. Subordinate clauses are extended to the point that the reader loses sight of the main clause they depend on as Milton’s attempt at self-explanation wends its way ever further into obscurity. What the reader encounters (though, of course, Milton did not expect his draft to have a reader), is the expression of an active thought-process, not a set of reasoned arguments. The second draft, being a second draft, is less extreme in this respect, rather clearer, but still tending towards convolution.

Milton probably wrote this letter in early 1633, more than five years before he set off on his foreign adventure,<sup>10</sup> and not very long after he first became eligible to take the cloth (on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1632, his twenty-fourth birthday). The politico-religious events of the next half-decade had the effect of reducing, and finally resolving, the conflict in his mind about a clerical career. This, at least, is the consensus view of his biographers who differ mainly in the degree of emphasis they place on a possible disagreement with a John Milton senior confronted with his son’s rejection of what might have been a long cherished paternal ambition. Parker suggests that father and son reached a compromise – no church career but no poetic career either.<sup>11</sup> Lewalski suggests that John Milton senior ‘sympathised (in 1638) with his son’s inability to resolve on ordination into the Laudian church’, but ‘was surely voicing concern as to what his son would finally do to support himself, and when.’<sup>12</sup> Masson took the view, based on his reading of *Ad Patrem*, that father and son had come to an amicable agreement in 1632 (his assessment of the date of the poem) that Milton’s ambitions for a poetic career should be fulfilled.<sup>13</sup> However, poetry, then as now, was, for most poets, not a secure way to make a living;<sup>14</sup> so it would seem surprising that the older man who had subordinated his considerable musical talents to the need to provide for his family as a scrivener, would be happy for his son to pursue the fantasy of a poetic ‘career’. (And, of course, this was not, in the end, what his son did.) Milton (junior) was now a grown man, but one almost entirely dependent, financially, upon his father, a state of affairs which continued until after his return from Italy in 1639.

The Hammersmith-Horton years were therefore, I would suggest, years of self-enquiry and soul-searching as well as years of autodidactic self-development. Milton’s

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<sup>10</sup> Parker, II, pp. 786–7.

<sup>11</sup> Parker, I, p. 153.

<sup>12</sup> Lewalski, *Ljfe*, p. 72.

<sup>13</sup> Masson, I, p. 385.

<sup>14</sup> In fact, it was scarcely a respectable way to attempt to make a living.

Commonplace Book (generally believed to have been started in 1637),<sup>15</sup> demonstrates the painstaking and orderly nature of his reading and study. His ‘Letter to a Friend,’ on the other hand, is suggestive of some level of disquiet, at least at the beginning of this period, as he wrestled with his future. Sonnet VII, which was enclosed with the letter, also expressed his sense that time was going to waste.<sup>16</sup> (Ironically and significantly perhaps, he was displaying not very dissimilar emotions in Sonnet XVI, twenty or so years later, after he had become completely blind.)

Despite this, Milton’s *poetic* self-confidence must surely have been boosted by his commission to write first *Arcades* (possibly at around the time of the letter)<sup>17</sup> and, later, by his collaboration with Henry Lawes on the *Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle*. The fact that *Lycidas* was given pride of place in *Justa Edouardo King* must also have been a sign of his rising status. Milton was establishing some kind of reputation. Nonetheless, by the end of the Hammersmith/Horton period, to the wider world, Milton was still a ‘man of no fortune with a name to come.’<sup>18</sup> This gave him the freedom to set out for ‘foreign parts’, but it also makes the reception he was to receive there rather surprising.

So how did he arrive at the decision to undertake his journey? Milton’s account of his twenties in *Defensio Secunda*, tells us that ‘[i]n this manner, [i.e. in studious retirement] I spent five years till my mother’s death. I then became anxious to visit foreign parts and particularly Italy.’<sup>19</sup> Milton took his MA in July 1632. His mother died on 3rd April 1637.<sup>20</sup> He is thought to have left England for France in late April or early May 1638.<sup>21</sup> The direct connection he makes between Sara Milton’s death and his departure for Italy is dubious, then, leaving as it does the last year of his ‘retirement’ unaccounted for. Lewalski suggests that the reference ‘seems intended simply to underscore Milton’s filial piety’ or ‘the phrase may imply that [his mother] had been ill for some time and he felt he could not leave under those circumstances.’<sup>22</sup> I would suggest that the reference is simply misleading, whether by accident or design. He *was*

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<sup>15</sup> Based, for example, on the connection between Milton’s description of his reading about ‘the obscure history of Italy’ in his second letter to Diodati from November 1637 and the reference to the *History of Italy* by Sigonius in the Commonplace Book. (See Chapter 2.)

<sup>16</sup> *Sonnet VII*, ll. 1–2 and 6. Carey dates this poem as being written in December 1631 during the Cambridge years. Parker argues, however, that Milton’s method of dating some of his Latin poems suggests that the poem was in fact written after Milton’s birthday on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1632. (*CSP*, p. 152. *Parker II*, pp. 784–5.)

<sup>17</sup> See *CSP*, p. 161.

<sup>18</sup> Ezra Pound, *Cantos* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), I. p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 375.

<sup>20</sup> Campbell Corns, pp. 86–7.

<sup>21</sup> Lewalski, *Life*, p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> Lewalski, *Life*, p. 74.

writing seventeen years after his mother's death, but it seems strange that he should misplace an entire year of his life –the year of *Lycidas*, which one might have thought a memorable one. In November of that year, six months before he left England and six months after his mother's death, he said, in one of two surviving letters written to Charles Diodati that year, that he was thinking of taking up residence at the Inns of Court.<sup>23</sup> This is an odd prelude to a fifteen-month trip abroad (to which he makes absolutely no reference in his letter). Assuming he was not concealing his intentions from his friend, it seems that, though unsettled at the time, he had as yet no concrete plans for foreign travel. It seems very unlikely, therefore, that Sara's demise was the trigger for his decision to set off to Italy. Perhaps, as Lewalski's comment may imply, he referred to his mother's death in *Defensio Secunda* in connection with his urge to travel abroad because it suggested filial duty in the context of the *self*-defence he was very much engaged upon in that work.

Milton was not a typical seventeenth-century grand tourist (if such a thing existed). Campbell and Corns observe that, 'it was fairly unusual for a Protestant of Milton's class to undertake such a journey; he was neither a merchant nor a pilgrim and he had no particular interest in the visual arts'.<sup>24</sup> He may not have been a merchant, a Catholic pilgrim nor, in any obvious way, an art lover, but he *was*, of course, profoundly interested in Italian writing, poetry and music. Edward Chaney in *The Evolution of the Grand Tour* tells us that during Elizabeth's reign, despite the paradoxical period of Italophilia described in chapter 1, travel to Italy was regarded as subversive. The early seventeenth century, however, saw a surge in Italian 'tourism' as Anglo-Italian relations improved following the accession to the throne of James I. By the time of Milton's journey, things had changed radically:

By 1637, the Venetian ambassador observed that the Pope so appreciated the good treatment of Catholics in England "that whereas Englishmen were previously in great danger in Rome, they are now as safe there as in their own country". During the years of isolation from the Catholic continent, an image of Italy, [...] was ultimately moulded by the variously sophisticated or sensational works of Nashe, Greene, Shakespeare, Jonson, Marston, Fletcher and Webster. However anachronistic or distorted, this image proved irresistible.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Private Correspondence*, p. 14. The 1674 edition of the letters gives the month as September but Campbell and Corns (p.100) suggest, based on evidence from the letters themselves, that this was a printer's error.

<sup>24</sup> Campbell Corns, p. 97. Whether or not Milton had any interest in the visual arts is open to surmise. There is no suggestion of this in his accounts of his Italian travels.

<sup>25</sup> Edward Chaney, *The Evolution of the Grand Tour* (London: Frank Cass, 1998), p. 426.

Milton's own sense of Italy was not primarily based upon the imaginary worlds conjured up by Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. He had more direct sources of information. It is interesting, nonetheless, that the period of *détente* Chaney describes here coincided almost exactly with his decision to head south. So how unusual, in fact, was this *démarche* for the protestant son of a scrivener?

Milton's closest friend, Charles Diodati, travelled in Europe, during Milton's Cambridge years. In 1630, probably aged twenty-one, Diodati went to Switzerland to enrol as a student of theology in the Academy of Geneva where he remained for at least eighteen months.<sup>26</sup> He may well have lodged with his uncle Giovanni Diodati who, as I have noted, had been able in the early years of the century to visit Venice joining Henry Wotton and Paolo Sarpi there to plot the Republic's Protestant future. Milton therefore had an example close to home for European travel. But Diodati had travelled for the purposes of study and had a strong family connection with Geneva. Examining the lives of men of Milton's social class in the period (I have used the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* as a source), I would conclude that it *was* quite rare at the time for someone of Milton's background to travel to Italy for the purposes of what we might now call 'personal development'.

There are quite numerous examples of such travels. John Beale (*bap.* 1608), for example, was the son of a lawyer and 'prominent gentleman farmer' and a Cambridge graduate. He travelled in Europe between 1636 and 1638, just before Milton, but he was 'acting as tutor and guardian to his cousin, Robert Pye'. His reasons for travel were therefore rather different from Milton's and his family was also perhaps slightly better connected. (He was related to Viscount John Scudamore, the then ambassador to Paris whom Milton was later to meet on his outward journey.)<sup>27</sup>

Most interesting is the comparison with John Cook (*bap.* 1608), who was to have the dangerous distinction of being Charles I's prosecutor in 1649. He was the son of a 'landowner'. He left Oxford without a degree in 1624, started his law career at the Inns of Court, but eventually moved his practice to Dublin. He travelled widely in the late 1630's, According to the *ODNB*:

Visits to France and Italy gave him a fund of useful knowledge about the history and institutions of Counter-Reformation Europe, as well as the experience of dining at the English College, Rome, in April 1638 (Chaney, 276). In Geneva he

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<sup>26</sup> Dorian, pp. 130-131.

<sup>27</sup> Patrick Woodland, 'John Beale', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1802?docPos=12731> retrieved 07.03.17.

lodged with the eminent liberal Calvinist theologian Giovanni Diodati, signing the 'Album amicorum' of the Neapolitan protestant noble Camillo Cerdogni in August 1638.<sup>28</sup>

There are some very close parallels here with Milton's own travels. Just a few months after Cook, in October 1638, Milton too dined at the English College.<sup>29</sup> In Geneva, in late May 1639, he 'conversed daily with John Diodati, the learned professor of Theology',<sup>30</sup> and he too signed the 'Album amicorum' of Camillo Cerdogni on 31<sup>st</sup> May (old style) 1639.<sup>31</sup> This surely cannot be mere coincidence. The history of Cook's (or, in this account, *Coke's*) travels is told briefly by Edmund Ludlow, 'army officer and regicide',<sup>32</sup> in his *Memoirs*:

Mr John Coke, late chief-justice of Ireland, had in his younger years seen the best part of Europe and at Rome had spoken with such liberty and ability against the corruptions of that court and church, that great endeavours were used there to bring him into that interest: but he being resolved not to yield to their solicitations, thought it no longer safe to continue among them, and therefore departed to Geneva, where he resided some months in the house of signior Gio. Diodati, minister of the Italian church in that city; after which he returned to England<sup>33</sup>

Ludlow's account adds the intriguing additional detail of Cook/Coke's concerns about the Jesuits in Rome which also parallel those of Milton. It does very much seem that Milton, unusual though he was, was following in predecessors' faint footsteps, treading an already somewhat beaten track rather than blazing his own individual trail. The similarities between his experiences and those of John Cook merit further research and investigation.

Despite this suggestive evidence, Milton-like travellers in this period *were*, as I have suggested, relatively few in number. Many young men travelled abroad specifically to study, like Diodati. Aristocrats (like John Suckling, Richard Fanshawe and Aston Cockayne) travelled in Europe for pleasure and instruction. Catholics (like George Conn, John Huddleston, John Simcocks) travelled to the Continent to become priests or pilgrims. Most young men of Milton's social background, though, did what his brother

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<sup>28</sup> Wilfrid Prest, 'John Cook', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6141?docPos=12783> retrieved 07.03.17.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell Corns, p. 109.

<sup>30</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 377.

<sup>31</sup> Parker, I, p. 181.

<sup>32</sup> C.H. Firth, 'Edmund Ludlow,' *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/17161?docPos=1> retrieved 03.04.2017.

<sup>33</sup> Edmund Ludlow, *Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow Esq; Lieutenant General of Horse* (London: A Millar, D Browne, J Ward, 1751), p. 366.

Christopher did: after leaving university, they embarked upon a career in the law or the church and got married (in a hurry in Christopher's case).

So, Milton *was* somewhat unusual, given his background, in 'seeing foreign parts, especially Italy'. But despite the association of the 'grand tour' with the eighteenth century, such travels were fairly commonplace for members of some social classes by the time Milton set off for France in 1638 as Edward Chaney and Timothy Wilks have shown<sup>34</sup>. Some sense of the numbers of Englishmen in Italy can be gained from records held in Venice, then as now one of the peninsula's main tourist attractions. Details of foreign visitors to the city were not kept routinely at this time,<sup>35</sup> but I was able to examine the records of the Council of Ten in the *Archivio di Stato di Venezia* around the time of Milton's visit to the city in 1639. The Council's permission was required for visitors to Venice to view the armoury and jewels in the Doge's palace, and all such requests and the responses to them, were duly recorded. I searched records between the end of March and early June for any sign that Milton had made such a request. (I will return to this matter later.) Over this period (from 25<sup>th</sup> March to 6<sup>th</sup> June), among seventeen requests to the Council of Ten for viewings, two were from parties of Englishmen: *Guglielmo Pastor, gentiluomo Inglese e sua compagnia* (13<sup>th</sup> May) and *Guglielmo Cochelin gentiluomo Inglese e sua compagnia* (30<sup>th</sup> May).<sup>36</sup> This implies a fairly significant number of English visitors to Venice in that six-week period, given that most English tourists would not have gone to the trouble of making such a formal request and that those who did, would have needed to be in Venice for some time in order to be able to complete the application process. (The wonderful Thomas Coryat, an early grand tourist, never got round to it himself during his visit of 1608, although he recommended that his successors should do so.)<sup>37</sup>

Unusual traveller or not, we do know that, early in 1638, Milton was making firm plans for his departure. The earliest sign of this is usually held to be the financial arrangement his father made in February 1638 to benefit his son: a loan made to Sir John Cope who gave a bond of £300 as security made payable to John Milton junior along with interest of £12 each year as long as the debt was outstanding, also payable to the

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<sup>34</sup> Edward Chaney and Timothy Wilks, *The Jacobean Grand Tour: Early Stuart Travellers in Europe*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013). (Most of the examples here are from a decidedly aristocratic background.)

<sup>35</sup> There are a very few records from the seventeenth century. It was only in the eighteenth century (from 1711) that a more complete record of foreign visitors was compiled. (Archivio di Stato di Venezia: Note di Forestieri (Inquisitori di Stato - bundle 758.)

<sup>36</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Consiglio di dieci, Deliberazioni, Comuni, Registri: 89 (1639). The Englishmen's names have been 'italianised'.

<sup>37</sup> Coryat, I, p. 259.



younger Milton.<sup>38</sup> Milton senior also sold a property near Covent Garden which was in the joint names of father and son.<sup>39</sup> Masson suggests, based on *Instructions for Forreine Travel* published in 1642 by James Howell, that the cost of travel in Europe for ‘a young nobleman’ or ‘rich young squire’ at the time would be in the region of £200 per annum plus £50 for a manservant.<sup>40</sup> This would have made Milton’s expenses for his entire trip around £312.<sup>41</sup>

We know two other things about Milton’s preparations. The first is that Henry Lawes helped to arrange his passport. Campbell and Corns say that ‘[i]n the spring of 1638 Milton applied to the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports for a passport.’<sup>42</sup> They give no source for this claim other than citing the letter from Henry Lawes found inside Milton’s Commonplace Book when it was rediscovered in 1874. The letter is brief and undated:

Sir, I have sent you with this a letter from my Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports under his hand and seale, which wilbe a sufficient warrant to justify your goinge out of the King's Dominions; if you intend to wryte yourselfe you cannot have a safer convoy for both than from Suffolk House, but that I leave to your owne consideration and remaine your  
faithfull friend and servant,  
HENRY LAWES<sup>43</sup>

A.J. Horwood, who edited the Commonplace Book on behalf of the Camden Society, comments that, as Theophilus Howard Earl of Suffolk was Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports in 1638 and his town-house at Charing Cross was known as Suffolk House, ‘it may be safely concluded that the letter was written on the occasion of Milton’s preparation for his continental excursion in 1638.’<sup>44</sup> (Suffolk gave up his post in 1642.) The conclusion that the letter was written in ‘spring’ is based on the facts known about Milton’s departure rather than on any evidence from the letter. But it is a sensible assumption. It appears therefore that Milton needed the support of his more influential and better-connected collaborator, Lawes, to get a passport to leave the Kingdom. Milton’s relationship with Lawes is of uncertain origin, but it continued well into the

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<sup>38</sup> According to Lewalski. Parker says £24 per annum. (Parker, II, p. 816n.)

<sup>39</sup> Parker, I, p. 168.

<sup>40</sup> Masson, I, p. 686.

<sup>41</sup> An online converter makes this worth about £43,400 at today’s ‘standard of living’ values - about £34,800 a year or £95 a day. (<https://www.measuringworth.com/ukcompare/relativevalue.php> retrieved 02.03.2017.) This sounds quite a large sum but it would not keep a young nobleman and his companion in any degree of luxury in Italy, these days.

<sup>42</sup> Campbell Corns, p. 97.

<sup>43</sup> Commonplace Book, p. xvi.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

1640s. Sonnet XIII (*To Mr H. Lawes, on his Airs*) dates from February 1646 during the final year of the first Civil War. Lawes' younger brother William had died the previous September fighting for the Royalist forces during the siege of Chester. (Henry Lawes was also a Royalist.) Milton's sonnet was first published in 1648 in Lawes' *Choice Psalmes Put into Musick for Three Voices* which was in effect a memorial to William and was dedicated to the king.<sup>45</sup> Ian Spink in his *ODNB* entry for Henry Lawes suggests that Milton 'seems to have been unaware of the exact nature of the volume.'<sup>46</sup> However this may be, Milton appears to have been able to put aside his political and, indeed, his religious differences to an extent when it came to matters of personal friendship. This is also evident, as we shall see, in the relationships he formed in Italy.

The other event seen as reflecting Milton's preparations for his departure was his meeting with Henry Wotton in the early spring of 1638. He wrote to Wotton afterwards (the letter is lost) and received a reply that was subsequently published in *Poems 1645* as part of the introductory material to *Comus*. Milton had sent a copy of his masque with his letter. This meeting with Wotton was clearly their first since Wotton's letter refers to it as 'the first taste of your acquaintance'.<sup>47</sup> It also may very well have been their last. There is no indication that they met again, either before Milton left England, or during the short interval between Milton's return from the continent and Wotton's death in December 1639. The Miltons' home (Berkyn Manor) was less than four miles from Eton College where Wotton was Provost. Campbell and Corns suggest that Milton 'may have had access to the college library'.<sup>48</sup> If so, it is rather surprising that he had not met Wotton sooner. In any event, it appears that he made a formal approach to meet with him in the early part of 1638.

Wotton still had an interest in Italian affairs, although perhaps by now a nostalgic one. A year before, he had sent a portrait of 'Padre Paolo, *the Servita*' as a gift to Samuel Collins, Provost of Kings College Cambridge. The accompanying letter contained an admiring character sketch of Sarpi: 'he was one of the humblest things that could be seen within the bounds of humanity; the very pattern of that precept, *quanto doctior tanto submissior*'.<sup>49</sup> He continues with an account of 'a passage between him [Sarpi] and the Prince of Condé', in which Sarpi avoids identifying himself as the author of the *History of*

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<sup>45</sup> Ian Spink, 'Henry Lawes', *ODNB*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16158?docPos=1> (retrieved 08.03.17).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>48</sup> Campbell Corns, p. 82.

<sup>49</sup> Henry Wotton, p. 372.

*the Council of Trent*. Wotton also recalls the experiences of Marcantonio De Dominis on his return to Rome after his years as a ‘defector’ in England.<sup>50</sup> Sarpi had died fourteen years earlier, but the events of those years were still very much in the front of Wotton’s mind.

Wotton’s letter to Milton begins by thanking him for the copy of *Comus* and by effusively praising the masque. Wotton’s most recent biographer, Gerald Curzon (see Chapter 1) suggests that Wotton ‘had the distinction of being the first person of note to recognize Milton’s outstanding poetic gifts.’<sup>51</sup> This perhaps understates the ‘distinction’ of Henry Lawes and the Bridgewater, but Wotton had already read Milton’s masque before he received the copy Milton sent him and regarded the ‘Songs and Odes’ as being without ‘parallel in our Language.’<sup>52</sup> What he had not known until their meeting was that Milton was its author. Wotton’s letter also reads as though he was also not aware at that time of his new acquaintance’s intention to travel abroad, learning of this only from Milton’s lost letter of 6<sup>th</sup> April. The main purposes of this part of Wotton’s letter is to give Milton advice on his travel plans, to provide him with a letter of introduction to Mr *M.B.* in Paris,<sup>53</sup> and to offer some advice as to how he should deal with the difficult matter of being an Englishman in Italy (‘from the interest you have given me in your safety’).<sup>54</sup>

It does not seem, therefore, as is usually assumed, that Milton’s original intention in meeting Wotton was, in fact, to get his assistance or advice on his travel plans<sup>55</sup>. Wotton offered this (seemingly unsolicited) advice only after their meeting. Nonetheless, they are likely to have discussed Italy and, in particular, Wotton’s experiences in Venice as ambassador, the interdict, and Paolo Sarpi in whom Milton may well already have had an interest, given his continuing studies in Italian history.<sup>56</sup> (Sarpi’s *Istoria del Concilio Tridentino* is cited thirteen times in Milton’s Commonplace Book, from as early as page thirteen.)<sup>57</sup> Wotton was a link to the early Jacobean period and, in particular, a witness to,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Curzon, p. 269.

<sup>52</sup> *OCW III*, p. 61.

<sup>53</sup> Michael Branthwaite, ‘Wotton’s assistant when ambassador to Venice.’ (Lewalski Haan, *OCW III*, p. 393.)

<sup>54</sup> *OCW III*, p. 62.

<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Wotton would have been a rather odd choice of advisor despite his extensive experience of Italy. His final return from Venice was in 1624, fourteen years before.

<sup>56</sup> Nigel Smith suggests, on the other hand, that Milton ‘read [Sarpi] most extensively in the second half of 1643’. (‘Milton and the Index’ in *Of Paradise and Light: Essays on Henry Vaughan and John Milton in Honor of Alan Radrum* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004) p. 117.

<sup>57</sup> Commonplace Book, p. 13. ‘Cur Papistae matrimonial clero prohibent, vide rationes astutas, *Concil. Trident.* L. 5, p. 446, et 662, l.7.’ (The page numbers show that Milton was using the original ‘Giovanni Billio’ edition published in London in 1619 incidentally.)

and participant in, the exciting history of England's closest Italian ally in the early years of the century. Milton praised the advice Wotton offered him, based on an aphorism coined by Alberto Scipioni – *'I pensieri stretti e il viso sciolto will go safely over the whole world'* – in the *Defensio Secunda*,<sup>58</sup> but also implied that he had ignored it: 'For I had determined within myself that in those parts I would not indeed begin a conversation about religion, but if questioned about my faith would hide nothing, whatever the consequences.'<sup>59</sup>

This is the last we know of Milton's pre-travel preparations. Wotton's letter provides a clear and dated signpost to his departure and not long after receiving it, in late April or early May 1638, Milton crossed the channel, accompanied by his servant, and headed for Paris.<sup>60</sup>

## II. The Journey Itself

### *i. Marks of Passage – the Historical Record of Milton's Journey*

The historical record of Milton's journey is limited. Nothing remains of his visit to Paris, save his own brief account of it. Milton ignored Wotton's advice about his route across France as he 'took ship at Nice' rather than at Marseille, the port Wotton recommended.<sup>61</sup> There are no independent records of his arrival in 'Leghorn' (Livorno), of his passing through Pisa, or of his arrival in Florence. In fact, as Estelle Haan has shown, the first (probable) historical record of Milton's presence in Italy (or indeed in mainland Europe), is the note in the register of the *Accademia degli Svogliati* on 8 July 1638 recording 'an English man of letters who wished to enter the Academy.'<sup>62</sup> Haan suggests that the minute of the following meeting admitting 'il signor' may well also refer to Milton.<sup>63</sup> The gentleman is unnamed so it is just possible this was not Milton, but, given the later records that do name him, he does seem a very likely candidate. What is certain, however, is that on 16th September 1638, about four months after his arrival in Italy, Milton read a poem in Latin to the members of that Academy: 'A dì 16 di Settembre -

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<sup>58</sup> 'On my departure the celebrated Henry Wootton, who had been King James's ambassador at Venice, gave me a signal proof of his regard, in an elegant letter which he wrote, breathing not only the warmest friendship, but containing some maxims of conduct which I found very useful in my travels.' *Essential Prose*, p. 343.

<sup>59</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 343.

<sup>60</sup> Parker, p. 169; Lewalski, p. 87. Gordon Campbell in *A Milton Chronology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997) p. 59 says 'May'.

<sup>61</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 343.

<sup>62</sup> Haan, p. 13.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

furono lette alcune composizioni e particolarmente il Giovanni Milton Inglese lesse una poesia Latina di versi esametri molto erudita.<sup>64</sup> This is the first definite historical record of Milton's presence on the continent. Haan has identified another, almost certainly reliable, reference to Milton in the 1638 membership list of another Florentine academy, the *Apatisti*:

This proof is provided by the Gori manuscript ... which lists the members of the academy under a given year, together with their respective anagrams/pseudonyms (if indeed they had one). On Folio 53<sup>r</sup> under the year 1638 there does indeed occur the name "Giovanni Milton Inglese" (but with no equivalent anagram or pseudonym).<sup>65</sup>

Haan argues that, although that the Gori manuscript dates from a century after Milton's first visit to Florence, it is a reliable source. So, we have two definite, and two probable records of Milton's presence in Florence at Florentine academies between July and September 1638. Milton also preserved a letter he wrote to Benedetto Buonmattei showing that he was still in Florence on 10<sup>th</sup> September 1638.<sup>66</sup> Buonmattei was a priest and a (very well-connected) grammarian. It was in this latter capacity (as discussed in Chapter 2) that Milton wrote to him. Buonmattei at various times was a member of numerous *Accademie*: the *Apatisti*, the *Crusca*, the *Svogliati*, the *Infiammati*, the *Instancabili*, the *Spensierati*, the *Umoristi* and the *Pazzzi*.<sup>67</sup> I shall return to the significance of Milton's connection with him.

Milton then went to Rome via Siena. There is a single definite record of his first stay in Rome. On 30 October 1638, like John Cook before him, he dined at the English Jesuit College. This is recorded in the College's Traveller's Book.<sup>68</sup> From Rome, he headed for Naples. From his stay there, we have the epigram by Giovanni Battista Manso, which was included among the tributes in the 1645 *Poems*, and Milton's poem, *Mansus*.<sup>69</sup> Milton is believed to have returned to Rome in January 1639.

The surviving record of Milton's second stay in Rome is again of Milton's own creation, but it *is* a more or less contemporaneous record in the form of the letter he

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<sup>64</sup> Haan, p. 19. 'Some compositions were read and, in particular, the Englishman, John Milton, read a very erudite Latin poem in hexameters.' (My translation.)

<sup>65</sup> Haan, p. 36.

<sup>66</sup> *Private Correspondence*, pp. 15–19.

<sup>67</sup> *Dizionario Biografico*, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/benedetto-buonmattei\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/benedetto-buonmattei_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) retrieved 14.05.17. All Florentine academies apart from the *Umoristi* (Rome) and the *Pazzzi* (unknown – not listed by Maylender).

<sup>68</sup> Lewalski, *Life*, p. 96.

<sup>69</sup> We certainly have the poem, *Mansus*. I shall be questioning later in this chapter whether the Manso epigram is, in fact, entirely Manso's work.

wrote (and of which he kept a copy) to Lukas Holste (Lucas Holstenius), librarian and secretary to Cardinal Barberini and the Vatican librarian.<sup>70</sup> Here we can glean some details of Milton's second period in Rome. He visited the Vatican library where he inspected Greek manuscripts annotated by Holste and where Holste made him a gift of copies of some books he had edited and had published. As a result of Holste's recommendation, Milton was personally greeted by Cardinal Barberini at 'his public musical fete' and had a personal audience with him the following day.<sup>71</sup> (Parker suggests that the musical performance in question was the comic opera *Chi soffre spera* by Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi with music by Virgilio Mazzocchi and Marco Marazzuoli and stage design by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. The performance took place on 27 February 1639 with an audience of 3,500.)<sup>72</sup> There are also the three poems Milton wrote in Rome in honour of Leonora Baroni to suggest that he heard her play and sing.

By March, Milton was back in Florence. He is recorded as having been at three successive meetings of the *Svogliati* – on 17<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> of that month. At two of those meetings, the minutes show that he read his Latin verses.<sup>73</sup> He wrote his letter to Holste on 30th March.<sup>74</sup> Milton says in *Defensio Secunda*:

After gladly lingering there [in Florence] for as many months as before (except for an excursion of a few days to Lucca) I crossed the Apennines and hastened to Venice by way of Bologna and Ferrara. When I had spent one month exploring that city and had seen to the shipping of the books which I had acquired throughout Italy, I proceeded to Geneva by way of Verona, Milan, and the Pennine Alps, and then along Lake Lemman.... In Geneva, I conversed daily with John Diodati, the learned Professor of Theology.<sup>75</sup>

There is no clearly identifiable record of Milton's time in Venice.<sup>76</sup> The final piece of concrete evidence we have about his European journey is the entry, made during his stay in Geneva, in the *Album Amicorum* of Count Camillo Cerdogni:

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<sup>70</sup> *Private Correspondence*, pp. 19–21.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

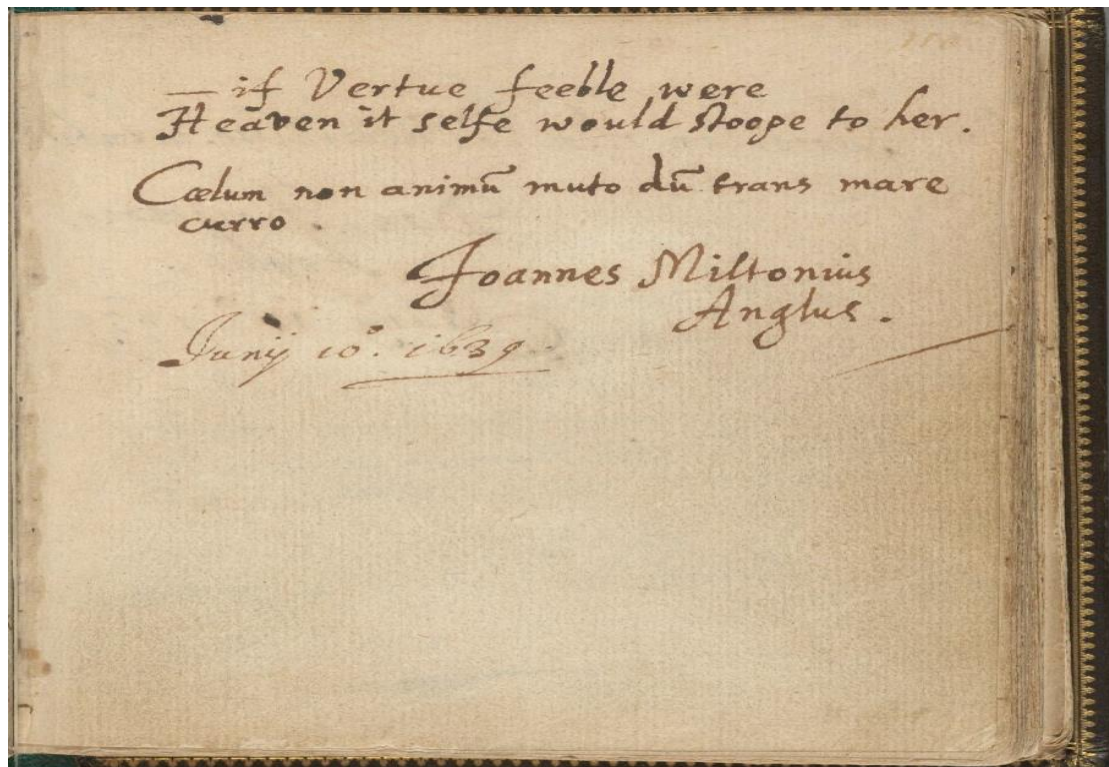
<sup>72</sup> Parker, II, p. 828.

<sup>73</sup> Parker, I, p. 177.

<sup>74</sup> This is the date on the letter. Campbell in *A Milton Chronology* dates it 29<sup>th</sup> March. (*Chronology*, p. 66.)

<sup>75</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 345.

<sup>76</sup> I will return to the question of possible traces of Milton's passage through Venice.



which, as you can see, is dated 10 June 1639.

This is the sum total of the contemporary historical records of Milton's journey. He was a little-known figure at the time in England and completely unknown in Italy. It is therefore unsurprising that there are so few signs of his passage – indeed, it is perhaps surprising that there are so many: a sign of his success in the role of English man of letters abroad.

ii. *Milton's Own Account(s)*

Most of our knowledge of Milton's Italian journey derives from his own accounts of it, but he did not write any of these with the main aim of enlightening his readership about his experiences. The earliest reference, which comes in *The Reason of Church Government* where Milton refers to his reception in 'the private Academies of Italy',<sup>77</sup> dates from 1642, three years after his return. Here he is justifying his own standing as a writer and 'intellectual' when intervening in contemporary controversies about the organisation of the Church. In *Areopagitica* (1644), in which he mentions for the first and only time his meeting with Galileo, his reason for referring to his Italian experiences is to draw attention to England's past reputation as 'a place of philosophic freedom'.<sup>78</sup> The most

<sup>77</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 88.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

comprehensive account of his travels (still only 868 words long), occurs in *Defensio Secunda pro populo Anglicano*, written fourteen years after the events it describes, and is prompted by Milton's wish to defend himself against the attacks of Pierre Du Moulin in *Regii sanguinis clamor ad coelum adversus parricidas Anglicanos*. These are, therefore, all somewhat unreliable narratives in the sense that Milton has a particular polemical purpose for telling his story in each case.

In the second book of *The Reason of Church Government*, Milton champions the cause of telling unpleasant truths even in the face of a hostile audience and reminds his readers of the criticism that would befall him if he failed to speak out. He goes on to allude to his duty to take up arms 'against prelaty' and 'contest with men of high estimation, now while green years are upon my head.'

if I hunted after praise by the ostentation of wit and learning, I should not write thus out of mine own season when I have neither yet completed to my mind the full circle of my private studies, although I complain not of any insufficiency to the matter in hand<sup>79</sup>

He defends himself against the possible accusation of having vainglorious motives in addressing this matter and it is in this passage that he makes his famous reference to prose writing as restricting him, metaphorically, to the use of left hand.<sup>80</sup> (The right being reserved for verse.) This leads him to a description of his upbringing and education and he says of his writing, and particularly of his verse, that his masters and teachers saw that 'the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live.'<sup>81</sup> It is in this context that he refers to his Italian experience of just a few years earlier:

(I)n the private academies of Italy, whither I was favoured to resort – perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout (for the manner is that everyone must give some proof of his wit and reading there) met with acceptance above what was looked for, and other things which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to patch up among them, were received with written encomiums, which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps.<sup>82</sup>

He goes on to cite the examples of Ariosto and Tasso as he sets out his ambition to write an English epic in the English language and describes how he might attempt this, as part of a long digression from his main theme. His brief comments on his reception in the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 118. (Milton's 'green years' were quite extended. He was thirty-three when he wrote these words.)

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 119.



‘private academies of Italy’ express his pride in the access he gained to these institutions and suggest that he experienced the academies as being, in a sense, competitive, involving a test of intellectual mettle (‘everyone must give proof of his wit’). His reference to the ‘trifles that [he] had in memory’ smacks of false modesty; these unconsidered trifles presumably prompted some of the ‘encomiums’ he proudly employed three years later to preface the *Poemata*.

In *Areopagitica*, Milton makes his single reference to having met Galileo, once again in the context of his experiences in the Italian academies:

I have sat among their learned men, for that honour I had, and been counted happy to be born in such a place of philosophic freedom as they supposed England was, while themselves did nothing but bemoan the servile condition into which learning amongst them was brought; that this was it which had damped the glory of Italian wits; that nothing had been there written now these many years but flattery and fustian. There it was that I found and visited the famous Galileo grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition for thinking in astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought.<sup>83</sup>

The purpose of this brief passage is to associate censorship with lack of creativity (as evidenced by Milton’s view of contemporary writing in Italy), using the celebrated Galileo as an example of how the scientific superstitions of the Catholic Church managed to eclipse the brightest star in its intellectual firmament. Once again, Milton emphasises, in passing, the privilege of being accepted into the society of Italian ‘wits’ in Florence, despite the implicit criticism of their literary endeavours.

*Defensio Secunda* contains Milton’s most extended account of his continental travels. The story comes, as I have said, in the context of his defence against claims made in Du Moulin’s *Regii sanguinis clamor ad coelum adversus parricidas Anglicanos* (which Milton insisted was the work of Alexander More).<sup>84</sup> The prime aim of the *Defensio* was, as its full title states, to defend the English people against the attacks of Du Moulin (or, in Milton’s view, More) and his allies. Nonetheless, a more personal defence was also central to Milton’s purpose. Michael Lieb describes Milton’s mission in this section of the text as one of ‘restitution’.<sup>85</sup> Alongside his defence of the English people, Milton defends *himself* against the *Clamor*’s twin personal attacks on him: on the one hand, as spiritually and physically deformed (‘monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens, cui lumen

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 198. Milton’s claim to have visited Galileo has been the subject of some controversy, something which I will consider in more detail later in this chapter.

<sup>84</sup> Pierre Du Moulin, *Regii sanguinis clamor ad coelum adversus parricidas Anglicanos* (The Hague: Adriani Vlac, 1652).

<sup>85</sup> Michael Lieb, *Milton and the Culture of Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 182.

ademptum’),<sup>86</sup> on the other as a sexually deviant renegade (‘impurissimum nebulonem’), driven out of Cambridge because of his vices.<sup>87</sup> Milton’s account of his early life, education and journey to Italy occurs in the context of his defence against the second charge. Du Moulin’s version of the reasons for Milton’s trip to Italy is ‘Ajunt hominem Cantabrigiensi Academia ob flagitia pulsum dedecus et patriam fugisse, et in Italiam commigrasse’.<sup>88</sup> Milton’s method in *Defensio Secunda* is to quote and rebut. He quotes this sentence from the *Clamor* and his rebuttal takes the form of the celebrated passage on his early life and journey to Italy. The rebuttal is considerably longer than Du Moulin’s attack. Milton spends the best part of ten pages dealing with the Cambridge/Italy slur.<sup>89</sup>

I will now look at this narrative in more detail. As I have suggested, one needs to take account of the context. Milton’s version of his experiences is very far from being a ‘neutral’ piece of autobiography (were such a thing possible). It is an *apologia pro vita sua*, and therefore essentially polemical. Despite this, it is noticeable that the tone of Milton’s prose changes completely once he begins his narrative. From invective – ‘But do you, vilest of men, protest about divorce, you who procured the most brutal of all divorces from Pontia, the maidservant engaged to you, after you seduced her under cover of that engagement?’<sup>90</sup> – to a much calmer account of his childhood and early upbringing: ‘I was born in London, of an honourable family. My father was a man of supreme integrity, my mother a woman of purest reputation, celebrated throughout the neighbourhood for her acts of charity.’<sup>91</sup> We should note the strong emphasis upon his status and virtue here which is characteristic of the whole passage: ‘untouched by any reproach, in the good graces of all upright men’; ‘Henry Wotton, a most distinguished gentleman ... gave signal proof of his esteem for me’; ‘the noble Thomas Scudamore’; ‘the friend of many gentlemen eminent in rank and learning’; ‘a man of high rank and influence’; ‘in the very stronghold of the Pope ... I openly defended [the orthodox religion]’; ‘I lived free and untouched by the slightest sin or reproach, reflecting constantly that although I might hide from the gaze of men, I could not elude the sight of God.’<sup>92</sup> This is the foreign journey as both test and exemplar of virtue. Milton dwells once again upon his positive reception in Florence, upon his two stays in Rome (with particular reference to his

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<sup>86</sup> Du Moulin, unnumbered page. (‘Dreadful monster, huge, deformed, deprived of sight.’)

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 162. (‘Most impure timewaster.’)

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, p. 9. ‘The fellow having been expelled from the university of Cambridge, on account of his atrocities, had fled his country in disgrace and travelled into Italy.’

<sup>89</sup> John Milton, *Defensio secunda propopulo Anglicano* (London: Thomas Newcombe, 1654), pp. 77–87.

<sup>90</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 341.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 343–45.

steadfastness in religion), upon Naples (his relationship with Manso and more upon his steadfastness in religion). He gives the briefest of glimpses of his passage through Lucca, Bologna and Ferrara. In Venice, where he spent a whole month, he mentions no social activity at all, merely telling us that he shipped the books he had bought back to England and wandered around the city.<sup>93</sup> He then mentions his route out of Italy and the visit to Geneva and his 'daily conferences' ('quotidianus versabar')<sup>94</sup> with Giovanni Diodati, 'the learned professor of Theology.'

In this, his main account of his journeys around Europe (and particularly Italy), it is clear that Milton's three aims are to demonstrate his social acceptance by highly placed and talented individuals, his commitment to his religion and his immunity to sin. Addressing More/Du Moulin directly, he says, 'I knew beforehand that Italy was not, as you think, a refuge or asylum for criminals, but rather the lodging-place of *humanitas* and of all the arts of civilisation.'<sup>95</sup> Sexual impropriety is at the heart of both Du Moulin's attack on Milton and Milton's attack on the guiltless<sup>96</sup> More whose sexual misdemeanours were well known.<sup>97</sup> The *Defensio Secunda* account of Italy is partial and defensive. But it is Milton's only account of the journey as a whole.

It may be that the polemical context explains, in part, the extremely restricted view of seventeenth-century Italy that Milton gives here. There is no local colour: no description of the cities Milton visited; no reference to art, architecture, climate, food, characteristics of the Italian people, to the conditions of the journey, landscape, local customs, linguistic variations, geography. '*Veni, vici.*' It would appear that he hardly *saw* at all. As a tourist, Milton is most unsatisfactory, but, unlike Thomas Coryat or Richard Lassels,<sup>98</sup> it was no part of his intention to give his readers a sense of what it might be like for them to be in Italy. But for the demands of the 'work of his left hand', Milton might have given no account of his journey at all. His account of Italy is about *him*, not about Italy, necessarily, because it was written as an exercise in self-validation or 'restitution'.

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<sup>93</sup> 'Cui urbi lustrandae' – 'going around the city.' *Defensio secunda*, p.86.

<sup>94</sup> *DS*, p. 87. As far as I can see, 'quotidianus versabar' does not mean much more than 'I was with'. The Fellowes translation: 'daily conferences' sounds rather more formal.

<sup>95</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 341.

<sup>96</sup> Guiltless in respect of being the author of the '*Clamor*'.

<sup>97</sup> *Encyclopedia*, p. 147.

<sup>98</sup> Richard Lassels, *The Voyage Of Italy, Or A Compleat Journey Through Italy* (Paris: 1670).

iii. *The Florentine Correspondence*

Two letters survive written during Milton's stay in Italy: one to Benedetto Buonmattei, written in Florence in September 1638 and the letter, discussed previously, to Lukas Holste, also written in Florence in March 1639 shortly after Milton's arrival from Rome. A much later letter to Carlo Dati, written in London in April 1647, also survives. (This is a reply to a lost letter from Dati. Dati's reply to Milton has also been preserved.)<sup>99</sup> All three were published as part of *Epistolae Familiares* in 1674.<sup>100</sup>

The letter to Buonmattei (also discussed in Chapter 2) casts more light on Milton's relationship with the Florentine academies and academicians. The letter is strangely context-free. Milton launches, without preamble, into praise of the role Buonmattei has adopted as custodian of the Tuscan language, a role which Milton ranks only one degree lower than that of national statesman:

For I [...] would rather believe that the fall of [Athens] and its low and obscure condition followed on the general vitiating of its usage in the matter of speech; for, let the words of a country be in part unhandsome and offensive in themselves, in part debased by wear and wrongly uttered, and what do they declare, but, by no light indication, that the inhabitants of that country are an indolent, idly-yawning race, with minds already long prepared for any amount of servility?<sup>101</sup>

Campbell and Corns describe the letter as 'an encomium to Tuscan, to Buonmattei and to the calling of the grammarian.'<sup>102</sup> Milton claims at the end of his letter to have written in Latin, not only because of his lack of skill in Italian, but also because 'Tuscan Italian's 'venerandam e *Latia* matrem'<sup>103</sup> is more likely to have a persuasive influence upon Buonmattei. Milton addresses Buonmattei at one point in the letter by his first name, as 'Benedicte.'<sup>104</sup> Whatever prompted Milton to write this letter – it has been suggested that it was in elaboration of arguments Milton had previously put to Buonmattei *ad hominem*<sup>105</sup> – it does confirm that, in the two months or so since his arrival in Florence, he had already achieved a remarkable degree of intimacy and familiarity with at least one of the Florentine Academies' most prominent members.

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<sup>99</sup> See Haan, p.57n.

<sup>100</sup> John Milton, *Epistolarum Familiarum Liber Unus* (London: Brabazon Aylmer, 1674).

<sup>101</sup> Masson, I, p. 625.

<sup>102</sup> Campbell Corns, p. 105.

<sup>103</sup> 'venerable mother from Latium' (*Epistolae Familiares*, p. 382)

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* p. 380.

<sup>105</sup> Parker, p. 171. Campbell Corns, p. 105.

Buonmattei was born in Florence in 1581 and was therefore fifty-seven when the twenty-nine year old Milton met him. He was ordained a priest in 1608, the year of Milton's birth. The first edition of his *Introduzione alla lingua Toscana* was published in 1623. He continued to revise it for the next twenty years, right up to the eventual publication in 1643 of the edition Milton was trying to influence. His entry in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* shows how widely connected he was in Florence:

Le numerose accademie patrie se lo contendevano: l'Accademia della Crusca, sotto il reggimento dell'Insaccato (Lorenzo Franceschi), lo ammise tra i suoi membri il 17 marzo 1627; l'Accademia degli Apatisti lo considerò sempre uno dei padri fondatori, perché fu tra i primi letterati che, riunendosi in casa di Agostino Coltellini, le dettero vita, ed ebbe, secondo l'"istituto", un nome anagrammatico, Boemonte Battidente (alla Crusca si chiamò il Ripieno); segnalata fu la sua attività (discorsi, lezioni, ecc.) anche nelle accademie degli Svogliati, degl'Infiammati, degl'Instancabili, degli Spensierati, degli Umoristi, dei Pazzi.<sup>106</sup>

The many different local academies vied for his involvement: the Accademia della Crusca, led by the 'Sausage' (Lorenzo Franceschi), admitted him as a member on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1627; the Accademia degli Apatisti considered him to be one of their founding members because he was among the first men of letters who, meeting at the house of Agostino Coltellini, brought it into existence and he had, according to the 'register' the anagrammatic name, Boemonte Battidente (at the Crusca, he was called 'il Ripieno' [the filling]; his activities (speeches, lectures, etc.) were also recorded at the Academies of the 'Svogliati', the 'Infiammati', the 'Instancabili', the 'Spensierati', the 'Umoristi' and the 'Pazzi'. (My translation.)

We see, then, that the not yet thirty-year-old Milton was on first name terms with a priest and scholar twenty-seven years older than himself, who was one of the most respected academicians in late 1630s Florence. After an acquaintance of a maximum of two months, Milton felt able to flatter him about the importance of the grammatical work he had been engaged upon during the previous two decades and to offer him advice about how it might be revised. Unless he mistook his correspondent completely, Milton was by now completely confident of being accepted more or less as an equal even amongst the most venerable of Florentine academicians.

The letter to Dati (written eight years after his return to England) reinforces this impression and also shows how committed Milton was to his Florentine friends by the time of his final departure in 1639. Dati wrote to Milton three times in vain before a letter finally reached London. Milton's reply is dated 21<sup>st</sup> April 1647. Milton (who at the time was in the midst of family problems to which he alludes indirectly in his letter), says

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<sup>106</sup> Ilio Calabresi, 'Benedetto Buonmattei', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani - Volume 15* (1972), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/benedetto-buonmattei\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/benedetto-buonmattei_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) retrieved 23.03.17.

how much he appreciates Dati's confirmation of his continuing friendship and interest in him. He is also 'flattered' by the concern which Dati expressed in his letter for his 'health'<sup>107</sup> [Latin – *salute*: this might possibly mean 'welfare'], after he left Florence. Milton writes that leaving Florence 'was very sad to me and it planted stings in my heart, which still now rankle deeply, whenever I think of my reluctant parting, of how I was torn away (*divulsum*) from so many excellent and kind companions and friends, living so pleasantly in that distant but, to me, beloved city.'<sup>108</sup> 'Divello', the verb from which 'divulsum' comes, is defined in *Lewis and Short* as 'To rend asunder, to tear in pieces, to separate violently, to tear'.<sup>109</sup> This is powerful language from Milton, suggesting, if taken literally, that he left Florence against his will, even under some form of external pressure. There follows a slightly strange passage (strange because it implies some connection between Dati and Diodati), in which Milton refers to 'Damon's' (i.e. Diodati's) death and to the comfort he drew during his period of mourning from the memory of his Florentine friends. He refers to 'those verses' (the *Epitaphium Damonis*) which Dati had received long before (something which must have been confirmed in Dati's lost letter). Clearly Milton felt that Dati would have been sufficiently struck by his lament for his dead friend to be able to identify personally with his grief, despite the fact that he had never known Diodati. Or is it conceivable that Milton did indeed learn of Diodati's death while he was in Florence? This might better explain the tone of this section of the letter. Being a witness to Milton's grief at his closest friend's death would have a very different emotional impact upon Dati from merely experiencing it at second hand via *Epitaphium Damonis*. The fact that the poem was in Latin made it accessible to Milton's Italian friends and, of course, it contains many Italian references. This could explain, in part, why the poem was written in that language whereas Milton's chose to write his other great elegy, composed for someone who may have been a mere acquaintance (*Lycidas*), in English.

Milton also promised to send on to Dati the Latin section of the 1645 *Poems*. He must, therefore, have previously sent a 'stand-alone' copy of *Epitaphium Damonis* to the *Svogliati*, or perhaps to Dati personally, sometime after 1640.<sup>110</sup> Milton told Dati that he had not sent a copy of the *Poemata* immediately upon their publication because he feared

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<sup>107</sup> Masson's translation.

<sup>108</sup> My translation.

<sup>109</sup> Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short *A Latin Dictionary: Founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin dictionary* (1879), <http://perseus.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/getobject.pl?c.3:2293.lewisandshort> retrieved 11.03.17.

<sup>110</sup> Milton had *Epitaphium Damonis* published privately in 1640. See *Milton Chronology*, pp. 68–9.

his attacks on the Pope (presumably in *In quintum Novembris*), might upset his friends' sensibilities. (If this was really the case, what made him change his mind in 1647? The comment was perhaps intended more as a polite warning now that he *was* sending a copy of the Latin poems to Italy.)

Dati's Italian reply to Milton, dated 1<sup>st</sup> November 1647, is of considerable interest for what it tells us about Dati's high regard for his English friend. Here is his description of his emotions on receiving Milton's letter:

O what feelings of boundless joy that little paper raised in my heart – a paper written by a friend so admirable and so dear; bringing to me after so long a time and from so distant a land, news of the welfare of one about whom I was anxious as I was uncertain, and assuring me that there remains so fresh and so kind a remembrance of myself in the noble soul of Signor John Milton! Already I knew what regard he had for my country; which reckons herself fortunate in having in great England . . . one who magnifies her glories, loves her citizens, celebrates her writers, and can himself write and discourse with such propriety and grace in her beautiful idiom.<sup>111</sup>

Even allowing for a little Italian hyperbole, this is high praise from a man who was by now of some status in his native Florence. Did Italy really feel so fortunate in having Milton as one its admirers in 1647? Dati valued Milton and Milton's friendship highly enough to tell him so. Dati and Milton were in direct contact probably for about three and half months in 1638 and for about a month in 1639. Milton made a big impression in a very short time. Dati was eleven years younger than Milton, only nineteen, when Milton first visited Florence. 'Di nobile e illustre famiglia fiorentina',<sup>112</sup> he had published nothing then, but by 1647 he was a leading light of the *Accademia della Crusca*, a philologist working on the third edition of the Academy's dictionary. The letter clearly shows the esteem in which he still held his English friend on the basis of their short acquaintance.

Haan has discussed Dati's letter at some length in *From Academia to Amicitia*,<sup>113</sup> mainly focusing on the nature of Milton's relationships with the deceased Academy members mentioned in it, Francesco Rovai and Gabriello Chiabrera. Milton had probably known the recently deceased Rovai. (Dati says that he was 'to the best of my belief, very well known to you.')<sup>114</sup> Dati was involved in Rovai's funeral arrangements and

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<sup>111</sup> Masson, III, p.681.

<sup>112</sup> Magda Vigilante, 'Carlo Dati', *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 33, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-roberto-dati\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/carlo-roberto-dati_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) retrieved 22.07.2016.

<sup>113</sup> Haan, pp. 57–80.

<sup>114</sup> Masson's translation. (III, p. 681.)

asked Milton to write a tributary poem to be included in a posthumous anthology of Rovai's verse the Academy was intending to publish. If he ever wrote one, the poem has not survived (and was not included in the eventual publication which emerged five years later).<sup>115</sup> Haan points out that Dati wrote with the same request to the Dutch scholars and neo-Latinists, Nicolas Heinsius and Isaac Vossius 'miei Amici, e Padroni singolarissimi, e Letterati famosi dell'età nostra.'<sup>116</sup> Dati suggests that they had complied with his request, but, if so, their verses are also lost.

Chiabrera was a far more famous poet, who is still in print today. Estelle Haan argues that Milton could not have known Chiabrera 'since [he] had in fact just died by the time of Milton's visit.'<sup>117</sup> This is not in fact quite the case. Chiabrera died on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1638, according to the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, so the two men could have met, although, as Chiabrera died in his home town of Savona more than one hundred and eighty miles from Florence at the advanced age of eighty-seven, it seems likely that Haan is right about the practicability, if not the possibility, of their meeting.<sup>118</sup> Chiabrera is mentioned in the letter, not because of any personal acquaintance between him and Milton, or any connection between the older Italian poet and Rovai's funeral arrangements, but because Dati wanted to 'communicate to [Milton] one of the observations which, in the leisure-hours left me from my mercantile business, I occasionally amuse myself with making on our writers.'<sup>119</sup> Dati goes on to link three lines from Petrarch's *Trionfi* to Horace's Ode 33, 'excellently imitated by the reviver of Pindaric and Anacreontic poesy,' and Gabriello Chiabrera's Canzonetta 18, 'improving on lines from Tibullus Eleg. I. 2.'<sup>120</sup> Masson comments that 'Dati then suggests the reading of *rabido* in the last line and discusses the subject in six folio pages, with passages from Catullus, Ovid, Virgil, Horace, Seneca, Claudian, Homer, Tasso, &c.'<sup>121</sup> Haan sees this excursion as ' [mirroring] on a methodological level the very forum of an academic debate to serve perhaps as a kind of *consolatio* for an English friend who has now lost that Italian paradise.'<sup>122</sup> Masson takes a rather more robust view, unimpressed by what he sees as Dati's preening self-indulgence: 'Circumstanced as Milton was when he received this

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<sup>115</sup> Francesco Rovai, *Poesie di Francesco Rovai* (Firenza: SAS, 1652).

<sup>116</sup> Haan, p. 62.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p. 60. Chiabrera was a much better-known figure than Rovai.

<sup>118</sup> Nicola Merola, 'Gabriello Chiabrera' in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gabriello-chiabrera\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/gabriello-chiabrera_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) retrieved 15.03.17.

<sup>119</sup> Masson, III, p. 681.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 682.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Haan, p. 71.



letter, he can hardly have been in a mood to respond sufficiently to its minute and overflowing *dilettantismo*,<sup>123</sup>. Nonetheless, whatever the nature of Milton's reaction in 1647, there is no doubt that Dati's suggestion that he [Dati] was 'sure of being excused, and kindly advised by your exquisite learning in such matters'<sup>124</sup> was sincerely meant and reflected a genuine regard for both Milton's classical scholarship and his wide knowledge and understanding of Italian poetry. As Masson implies, Dati's letter was perhaps in some respects a strange one to write to a friend he had not seen for over eight years, preoccupied as it was with very local Florentine matters involving people Milton barely knew (Rovai), or probably didn't know at all (Chiabrera), and containing a long digression on abstruse literary matters. However, as Haan says, the content of the letter is suggestive of the types of discussion that Milton would have participated in at the Academies and outside them: literary, learned, sometimes obscure, involving an encyclopaedic knowledge of classical and Italian literature. It is a clear indication of how Milton was still remembered in Florence (or at least in small parts of it) after his departure thence in 1639.

These letters (to Buonmattei and to and from Dati) show, beyond doubt, that Milton's account of his reception in Florence in the 'Gaddian Academy' was not exaggerated. Dati and Buonmattei were, in a way, at polar extremes in the Svogliati firmament: Buonmattei, an established figure, of high status, loaded with honours; Dati, a mere youth, up and coming, with a reputation still to be made. Milton seems to have planted his English flag successfully at both poles although it was only with Dati that there was a continuing relationship, as far as we know.<sup>125</sup>

#### *iv. Other Florentine Friendships*

There is no surviving correspondence with any of the other friends Milton made in Florence. Milton's refers to them in his 1647 letter to Dati: 'give best salutations in my name to Coltellini, Francini, Frescobaldi, Malatesta [sic], Chimentelli the younger, anyone else you know that remembers me with some affection, and, in fine, to the whole Gaddian Academy',<sup>126</sup> and also in *Defensio Secunda*: 'Time will never destroy my

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<sup>123</sup> Masson, III, p. 683. I assume that Masson is referring to both the political and military events of the time, his family difficulties with the Powells and to the continuing attacks on him occasioned by the Divorce tracts.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Buonmattei died in January 1647.

<sup>126</sup> Masson, III, p. 654.

recollection – ever welcome and delightful – of you, Jacopo Gaddi, Carlo Dati, Frescobaldi Coltellini, Buonmattei, Chimentelli, Francini, and many others.<sup>127</sup> His references bear witness to the importance to him of these short-lived and rapidly-formed relationships. It is interesting that the two lists are a little different. Malatesti is not included in *Defensio Secunda*, but the names of Gaddi (as an individual rather than an academy) and Buonmattei are added. Chimentelli (the younger) in the first list, and Clementillo, ('Clementille' [vocative] in the Latin text) in the second, are one and the same.<sup>128</sup> Many of these figures were, like Dati, up and coming rather than established figures at the time he met them.

For example, the Frescobaldi were one of the most distinguished banking families in Florence, but it is not even clear who the particular 'Frescobaldi' mentioned by Milton in his letter to Dati was.<sup>129</sup> Giovanni Antonio Francini was a member of the *Apatisti* who (along with Dati) is mentioned in *Epitaphium Damonis* as having promoted Milton in Italy.<sup>130</sup> Francini is a curiously shadowy figure despite his prominence in Milton's Italian story. (He contributed, as we have seen, a long poem of tribute to the *Poemata*, the only one in Italian.) He has no entry in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. Haan analyses his tributary poem in some detail in *From Academia to Amicitia* without any indication of who he was.<sup>131</sup> All I have found of him is an Epithalamium, nine pages long, published in 1637, celebrating the marriage of Duke Ferdinando II and Vittoria della Rovere, 'Principessa d'Urbino'.<sup>132</sup> Davide Messina in his introduction to Malatesti's *La Tina* refers to 'a poem which [Francini] dedicated to Dati ... entitled *Doversi andare peregrinando il mondo pre acqvisitar fama* ... which clearly draws on his own ode prefaced to Milton's poem.'<sup>133</sup> Michele Maylender in a long entry on the *Accademia degli Apatisti* in his *Storia delle Accademie d'Italia* mentions Dati briefly but makes no reference whatsoever to Francini.<sup>134</sup>

Agostino Coltellini (1613–1693) was the host of the Accademia degli Apatisti. Frescobaldi, according to R.M. Frye, was Piero Frescobaldi, another priest and habitué of

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<sup>127</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 344.

<sup>128</sup> See: Edward Rosen, 'A Friend of John Milton: Valerio Chimentelli.' *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 57 (1953), 159–174.

<sup>129</sup> It would nice to think that he could have been the composer Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583–1643) but, unfortunately, he left Florence for Rome in 1634.

<sup>130</sup> ll. 136–8.

<sup>131</sup> Haan, pp. 38–43.

<sup>132</sup> Gio: Antonio Francini, *Il Tempio Dell'Immortalità: Epitalamio* (Firenze: Sermatelli, 1637).

<sup>133</sup> Antonio Malatesti, *La Tina – Equivoci rusticali*, ed. by Davide Messina, MHRA Critical Texts, 41 (London: MHRA, 2014), p. 8.

<sup>134</sup> Michele Maylender, *Storia delle Accademie d'Italia*, 5 vols (Bologna: Capelli, 1926), I, pp. 219 – 226.

the Apatisti who was to become Bishop of San Miniato in 1654 (and to die in the same year).<sup>135</sup> Valerio Chimentelli (1620–1668) was a youth of eighteen when Milton met him but is also recorded as frequenting the *Apatisti* and *Svogliati* and as being connected with Antonio Malatesti, to one of whose volumes he contributed some introductory verses.<sup>136</sup> (At the age of forty-two, he too became a priest.)

Jacopo Gaddi (1600–after 1658, exact date unknown), upon whose status in Florence I have already commented, is usually regarded as the founder of the *Svogliati*. This Academy existed without a name or constitution from 1620. Maylender includes Gaddi amongst its twenty founding members.<sup>137</sup> (He would have been only twenty at the time.) He was certainly involved in the eventual naming of the Academy in 1637. Maylender does not give him quite the prominence that Milton ('the Gaddian academy') or indeed Estelle Haan<sup>138</sup> does. Nonetheless, he was a major figure in the Florence of the 1630s, from a venerable and wealthy Florentine family. (The Palazzo Gaddi still stands at the corner of the Piazza Madonna degli Aldobrandini and the Via dell'Amorino. It now houses a hotel and a restaurant.) On the other hand, in terms of concrete literary achievement, at the time Milton met him, he had published just one book of fairly undistinguished occasional verse in Latin, *Corollarium poeticum*.<sup>139</sup>

He had, however, another important connection which has not generally been recognised in accounts of Milton's stay in Italy. He was a member of the Venetian *Accademia degli Incogniti* and was eventually included in Giovanni Francesco Loredano's lexicon of illustrious academy members, *Le Glorie degli Incogniti*.<sup>140</sup> Here Gaddi is recorded, nine years after he met Milton, as an important writer both in Latin and 'Tuscan' and as a Florentine beacon of knowledge to whom

... tutti i Virtuosi Italiani, Francesi, Inglesi, Tedeschi, e d'ogni altra nazione  
Oltromontana, che per godere delle bellezze di quella augusta Città concorrono in  
Firenze; ricorrono parimente alla sua Casa per riportare dalla sublimità del suo  
ingegno gli Oracoli della Sapienza.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> R.M. Frye, 'Milton's Florentine Friend, Bishop Frescobaldi: A Biographical Note and Portrait,' *Milton Quarterly*, 7, 3 (1973), 74-76.

<sup>136</sup> Nicola Longo, 'Chimentelli, Valerio,' *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* - Volume 24 (1980), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/valerio-chimentelli\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/valerio-chimentelli_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) retrieved 23.03.17.

<sup>137</sup> Maylender, V, p. 288.

<sup>138</sup> Haan, p. 8.

<sup>139</sup> Jacopo Gaddi, *Corollarium poeticum*, (Florence: Typis Petri Nestei ad Signum Solis, 1636). Campbell and Corns claim (p. 103) that Gaddi 'had an established reputation as a published poet in Latin and Italian' but I can find no sign of any published Italian verse at this point in Gaddi's career (or indeed later).

<sup>140</sup> Giovanni Francesco Loredano, *Le glorie degli incogniti* (Venetia: Francesco Valuasense, 1647), pp. 180–83.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

All the most gifted Italian, French, English, German and those from every other nation beyond the Alps, who to enjoy the beauties of the august city join together in Florence and seek out his house to take from his sublime intellect the oracles of Knowledge. (My translation.)

It is clear from this entry that Gaddi was known for welcoming foreign visitors to Florence. I will return to the possible significance of his Venetian connections later in this chapter.

Malatesti is an interesting case, remembered in Milton's letter to Dati but forgotten in *Defensio Secunda*. The fact that, in the latter work, Milton fails to name the one poet of some note he met in Florence, (and who remains in print to this day), may possibly suggest a certain unease because *Defensio Secunda* was a public document. Malatesti was potentially the most controversial of Milton's Italian acquaintances. He was a member of the *Apatisti* from 1635, joining at the same time as Dati.<sup>142</sup> Campbell and Corns say of him:

In September 1637, the poet Antonio Malatesti had composed an erotic sonnet sequence called *La Tina equivoci rusticali*, and subsequently decided to dedicate the collection *al grande poeta inghilese Giovanni Milton Londra*.<sup>143</sup>

Lewalski says that 'Malatesti presented to Milton a fifty-sonnet sequence he had written the previous summer ... he dedicated it to "the most illustrious Gentleman and Most Worthy Master Signor John Milton, Noble Englishman."<sup>144</sup> It is Parker, however, who gives the least misleading account of what actually happened:

Antonio Malatesti presented him with the manuscript of a sequence of fifty sonnets, entitled *La Tina, Equivoci Rusticali*, and dedicated by the author to 'Signor Giovanni Milton, nobile Inghlese [sic]. This gift put to the test both Milton's linguistic skill and his sense of humour. The poems had somewhat improper double meanings.<sup>145</sup>

Parker suggests this happened on Milton's return visit to Florence in 1639. The point is that Malatesti made Milton a gift of a *manuscript* of his sonnets. The dedication to Milton he included looks like this:

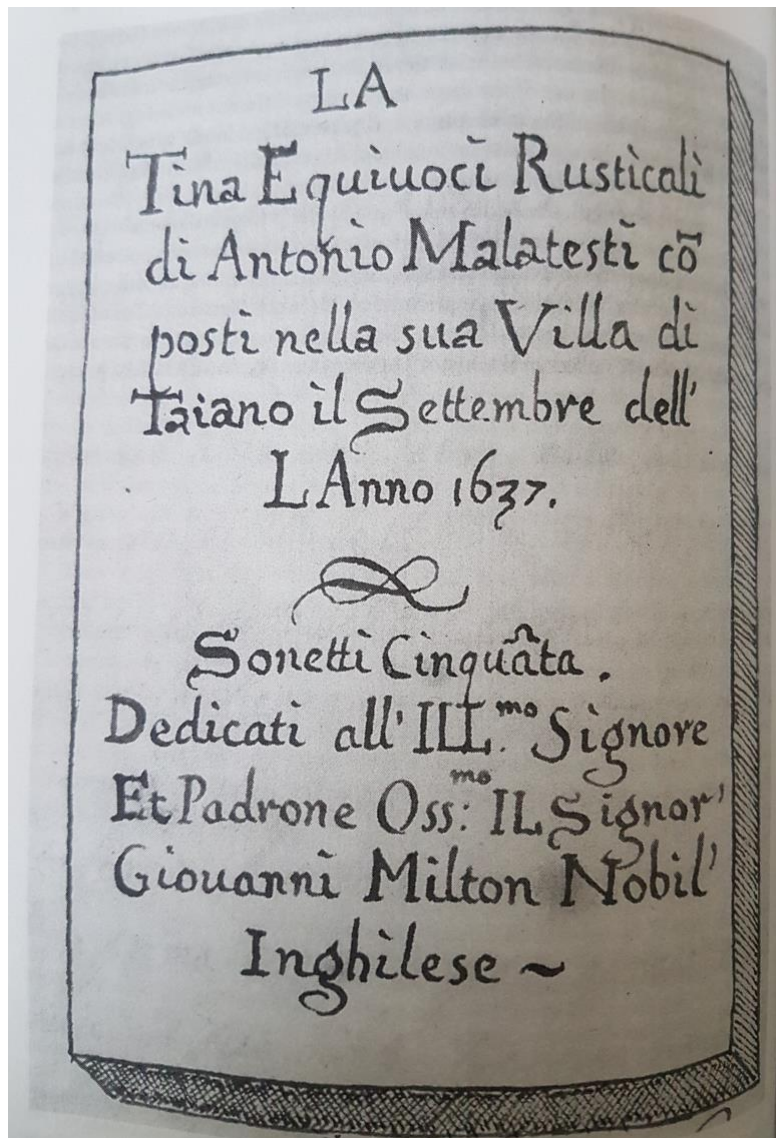
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<sup>142</sup> Antonio Malatesti, *La Tina – equivoci rusticali*, ed. by Davide Messina, MHRA Critical Texts Volume 41 (London: MHRA, 2014), p. 9.

<sup>143</sup> Campbell Corns, p. 104–5.

<sup>144</sup> Lewalski *Life*, p. 93.

<sup>145</sup> Parker, I, p. 178.



The manuscript is now in the National Library of Scotland.<sup>146</sup> Masson believed that Milton kept it right up until the end of his life.<sup>147</sup> The sonnets were probably not published in printed form until 1837 (in Venice).<sup>148</sup> Milton was therefore at no risk of criticism for being associated with them. Malatesti was much better known to his contemporaries as the author of *La Sfinge enimmi*, a collection of one hundred 'puzzle' sonnets published in 1640, a year after Milton's departure from Italy.<sup>149</sup> A second volume followed in 1643.

Malatesti's gift to Milton was, however, a very personal one: fifty *risqué* sonnets written in his own hand with his own rather quirky and amateurish artwork framing his

<sup>146</sup> NLS, Adv. MS 19. 3. 40, fol. 8r.

<sup>147</sup> Masson, I, p. 662.

<sup>148</sup> See *La Tina*, p. 23.

<sup>149</sup> Antonio Malatesta, *La sfinge enimmi* (Venetia: Il Sarzina, 1640).

personal dedication. Parker speculates about Milton's response but says, 'he took the manuscript back to England, and years later sent cordial greetings to Malatesti [in his letter to Dati].'<sup>150</sup> How obscene are the sonnets? Fairly! Messina says that 'his sonnets aim at what Jean Toscan called *equivoque globale*, in which the second level of reading, which carries the bawdy references, is developed to the point of blatancy.'<sup>151</sup> The sonnets joke, among other things, about sodomy (*il vizio fiorentino*), sex, sexual organs (male and female) and homosexuality. Had Milton's enemies known of his connection with these poems and their author, in later years, they would no doubt have seized upon this as further evidence of his sexual impropriety. But he was immune from such attacks as only one copy of the poems existed in England and that was safely in his own possession. The fact that Malatesti felt that Milton would be happy to receive his gift and the fact that, to all appearances, he was not deceived in this, surely tells us something about how Milton presented himself in Florence – certainly not as a po-faced Protestant.<sup>152</sup>

Perhaps the Florentine intellectual climate was propitious for an aspiring English *letterato*. Gaddi's later reputation, as I have noted, suggests that he welcomed people from the other side of the Alps. As I have suggested, quite a number of the academicians with whom Milton became friendly were much younger men: Dati, Chimentelli, Coltellini – even Malatesti was a couple of years younger than Milton. He may have been able to play the role of a slightly exotic elder statesman with his perfect (but English-sounding) Latin, his developing (but perhaps still slightly halting) command of spoken Italian and his wide knowledge of Italian, Greek and Latin literature, philosophy and history, honed in Horton and Hammersmith. Nonetheless, given his rather sheltered previous life history, it was no wonder that he was so gratified by the reception accorded to him by his Italian hosts.

What was the basis of this reception? Haan describes the approach to foreigners taken by the *Svogliati* and *Apatisti* (the two Florentine academies attended by Milton):

(A)dmision depended on merit. The Academy's statutes were very specific in their proviso that only visitors of distinction be admitted. Upon proof of such merit, however, the Svogliati, like its sister Florentine academy, the Apatisti, welcomed foreigners with open arms.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Parker, p. 178.

<sup>151</sup> *La Tina*, p. 39.

<sup>152</sup> Unless Malatesti was deliberately trying to shock Milton with his obscenity, in which case why would Milton have brought the manuscript back with him to England?

<sup>153</sup> Haan, p. 12.

Milton's acceptance by the *Svogliati* and the *Apatisti* was due mainly, it would seem, to the excellence of his Latin verse – the trifles ‘composed at under twenty’ that he first performed to an enthusiastic audience of *svogliati* in September 1638. If we take ‘under twenty’ literally, he is referring to work written before December 1628. Lewalski suggests that the poem in question was *Naturam non pati senium*.<sup>154</sup> Campbell and Corns suggest *Ad patrem* as a second possibility.<sup>155</sup> Masson included *In adventum veris (Elegia Quinta)*, *Elegia Septima*, and *De idea Platonica* alongside *Naturam non pati senium*.

On his return to Florence, in March 1639, as I have said, Milton recited his Latin poetry once more again at two more meetings of the *Svogliati*. It is conceivable that now these were the Latin poems he had written whilst in Italy. The minute of the meeting says:

A dì 17 di Mar.  
Nell' Accademia si trovarono li signori ... *Miltonio* ... Furon portati dal sesto, da X e dall'undecimo, e letti alcune nobili versi latini.<sup>156</sup>

(17<sup>th</sup> March  
At the Academy were Messrs. Milton (etc) ... Some noble verses in Latin were brought and read by the sixth, tenth and eleventh.)

In the light of Milton's lack of international status or fame, his ability to penetrate the most elite intellectual and literary circles of Florentine society from a standing start was a tribute to his determination, self-confidence and to his charm, perhaps, as well as to his ability to impress his hosts with his linguistic and literary knowledge and skills. John Arthos claims that Jacopo Gaddi, the founder and leading light of the *Svogliati* (Milton terms it the ‘Gaddian Academy’<sup>157</sup>) was ‘the intellectual and social arbiter of the city, second in importance only to the Grand Duke himself.’<sup>158</sup> There is a tradition that Milton stayed at Gaddi's house whilst in Florence.<sup>159</sup> Whether this is true or not, it seems that Milton, in the space of a few short months there, became rather better connected in Florence than he was in London.

In fact, as it turned out (and, in some strange way, his Italian acquaintances seem to have been aware of it), when Milton encountered these Florentine academicians, the

<sup>154</sup> Lewalski, *Life*, p.92. Gimelli Martin agrees with her (Martin, p. 59).

<sup>155</sup> p. 103.

<sup>156</sup> Haan, p. 20. (I have slightly revised her translation. She suggests that 6<sup>th</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> refer to the readers' places in the minutes' attendance list.)

<sup>157</sup> Masson, III, p. 654.

<sup>158</sup> John Arthos, *Milton and the Italian Cities* (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1968), p. 6.

<sup>159</sup> See Haan, p. 12, n15.

honour was all theirs. None of academicians he met in Florence approaches the status in European literature that Milton holds today and, despite his pride in their enthusiastic welcome, his more significant artistic and intellectual relationships continued to be with the great Italian writers of the past. There is no evidence of any direct influence upon his work from any of his new Italian friends and acquaintances.

v. *Napoli and Manso*

Giovan Battista Manso was the most distinguished Italian with whom Milton formed a relationship. He was also a living link to two poets who had had (and would continue to have), a direct impact upon Milton's poetic development; for Manso had known and supported at different times the last two giants of early modern Italian poetry (before the era of 'flattery and fustian' set in): Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) and Giambattista Marino (1569-1625). Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata* provided Milton with *the* model for a 'modern' European epic. Marino was also admired by Milton and it has been argued that his *Strage degli Innocenti*, the first book of which, *Sospetto d'Herode*, was translated by Richard Crashaw in 1630, had its own impact on *Paradise Lost*.<sup>160</sup> These two poets came at the very end of the long period during which Italian writers formed the vanguard of European literature. Marino's reputation suffered a long decline after his death from which it is only now beginning to recover. Tasso proved more durable. He stayed at Manso's house in 1592 where he worked on his unending revisions of *Gerusalemme liberata* during its slow metamorphosis into *Gerusalemme conquistata*. He also began his creation story, *Le Sette giornate del mondo creato*, allegedly prompted by Manso's mother. This work has also been linked to *Paradise Lost*,<sup>161</sup> and Milton clearly borrowed from it in *Epitaphium Damonis*.<sup>162</sup> Tasso wrote a dialogue in celebration of his friendship with Manso, *Il Manso, ovvero De l'amicizia*.<sup>163</sup> Manso, in turn, wrote a biography of Tasso which played a significant part in establishing Tasso's life as myth: *La Vita di Torquato Tasso*, first published in an unauthorised edition in Venice in 1621.

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<sup>160</sup> See for example, Claes Schaar, 'The "Sospetto d'Herode" and "Paradise Lost"', *English Studies*, 50:1-6 (1969), 511-516.

<sup>161</sup> See Torquato Tasso, *The Creation of the World*, trans. by Joseph Tusiani (New York: Centre for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), p. ix.

<sup>162</sup> See Rudolf Gottfried, 'Milton, Lactantius, Claudian, and Tasso', *Studies in Philology*, 30, 3 (July 1933), 497-503.

<sup>163</sup> Torquato Tasso, *Dialoghi*, II, ed. by G. Baffetti (Milano: Rizzoli, 1998), pp. 905-55.



Manso had been a soldier,<sup>164</sup> as well as a patron of the arts, and was the most prominent academician in Naples. He had been a co-founder of the short-lived *Accademia degli Svegliati* in 1586. (This Academy was suppressed in 1593 by Phillip II, on the grounds of suspicions of conspiracy against the State.) In 1611, Manso co-founded the *Accademia degli Oziosi* of which he was *Principe* almost continuously until his death in 1645.<sup>165</sup> (There was a short break in 1624-25 when he gave way to Marino). According to Floriana Calitti, the author of his *Dizionario Biografico* entry:

egli partecipò attivamente al dibattito teorico intorno alla scrittura poetica e alla retorica, fu molto attento alle discussioni sull'uso della metafora e dei concetti; una vera e propria disputa testimoniano le lettere che gli inviò Giuseppe Battista.

He actively participated in the theoretical debate about poetic writing and rhetoric, paid great attention to discussions about the use of metaphor and 'concepts'; the letters sent to him by Giuseppe Battista show how closely he was involved in these arguments. (My translation.)

Maylender says of the *Oziosi*, 'Fu, non solo fra le napolitane, ma anche al confronto colle altre Accademie d'Italia, una delle più considerate.'<sup>166</sup> He lists approximately three hundred prominent members.<sup>167</sup>

Manso had important scientific interests and connections across Italy. These have gone largely unnoticed by Anglophone scholars. Pietro Giulio Riga in his recent book, *Giovan Battista Manso e la cultura letteraria a Napoli nel primo Seicento*, describes how Paolo Beni, Doctor of Rhetoric in Padua and a colleague of Galileo, wrote to Manso in 1610 informing him of Galileo's discoveries. Later that year, Manso wrote two letters to Galileo, the first of which included a request for a copy of *Sidereus Nuncius*, which had become unavailable in Neapolitan bookshops.<sup>168</sup>

Still more interestingly Manso was also in touch with Giovan Loredano (see above, founder and *Principe* of the Venetian *Incogniti*). Loredano wrote three undated letters to him.<sup>169</sup> The first of these thanks Manso for his praise of Loredano's *Vita del*

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<sup>164</sup> Milton alludes to Manso's 'bellica virtute' in his headnote to *Mansus* though according to Calitti his military career was a short one.

<sup>165</sup> Floriana Calitti, 'Manso, Giovan Battista', *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovan-battista-manso\\_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/giovan-battista-manso_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/) retrieved 19/06/2017.

<sup>166</sup> Maylender, III, p. 183. (It was one of the most esteemed (Academies) not just in Naples but among Academies across the whole of Italy.)

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184-86.

<sup>168</sup> Pietro Giulio Riga, *Giovan Battista Manso e la cultura letteraria a Napoli nel primo Seicento* (Bologna: I Libri De Emil, 2015) pp. 28-31.

<sup>169</sup> Giovan Francesco Loredano, *Lettere*, 3 vols, ed. by Henrico Giblet (Geneva: Widerhold, 1669), I, pp. 54, 84, 86-7.

*Cavalier Marino* which was published in 1633.<sup>170</sup> The third refers to Loredano's *Scherzi Geniali* published in 1632. Loredano apologises in this letter for the delay in bringing them to Manso's attention.<sup>171</sup> This letter occurs later in the edited volume of Loredano's letters so probably dates from slightly later than the first. It is clear then that Loredano and Manso were in touch in the early part of the 1630s. Haan notes the link, suggesting that 'Manso ... assisted ... Loredano ... with his biography of Marino.'<sup>172</sup> It does not seem to me that the letter suggests this. But here we find a second link between one of Milton's Italian contacts and the celebrated Venetian.

Milton was not in Naples for long, perhaps for six weeks or so. He states in *Defensio Secunda* that:

Here I was introduced by a certain Eremite Friar, with whom I had made the journey from Rome, to Giovanni Battista Manso, Marquis of Villa, a man of high rank and influence, to whom the famous Italian poet, Torquato Tasso, dedicated his work on friendship.<sup>173</sup>

He continues:

As long as I was there I found him a very true friend. He personally conducted me through the various quarters of the city and the Viceregal Court, and more than once came to my lodgings to call. When I was leaving he gravely apologized because even though he had especially wished to show me many more attentions, he could not do so in that city, since I was unwilling to be circumspect in regard to religion.<sup>174</sup>

One suspects that Naples was a tougher nut for Milton to crack than Florence had been. He had the advantage of his acquaintance with Manso, but he was there only for a month or so, too short a time, perhaps, to make a real impression on what Lewalski and Haan term the 'rigorously formal'<sup>175</sup> *Oziosi*. It would seem likely, however, that he attended their meetings. Indeed, Floriana Calitti, in her *Dizionario Biografico* entry, says, 'nel 1638 John Milton nel suo viaggio in Italia fu ospite dell'Accademia degli Oziosi,'<sup>176</sup> upon what evidence is unclear. Had Milton received the welcome from them that he received from the *Svogliati* in Florence, he would certainly not have failed to mention the fact.

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<sup>170</sup> Giovan Francesco Loredano, *Vita del Cavalier Marino* (Venetia: Sarzina, 1633).

<sup>171</sup> *Lettere* I, p. 87.

<sup>172</sup> Haan, p. 175

<sup>173</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 344.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *OCW III*, p. cxxvi.

<sup>176</sup> *Dizionario Biografico*: 'In 1638 John Milton was a guest of the *Oziosi* during his Italian journey.'

What we mainly learn from his short account in *Defensio Secunda* is that he met the distinguished Marquis who would have liked a closer acquaintance with him, had it not been for their religious differences which, Milton says, he (Milton) made no effort to conceal. The tributary poem, *Mansus*, perhaps gives some other clues to their relationship. The poem's headnote alludes to Manso's military, intellectual and literary theoretical talents as well as to his relationship with Tasso. Milton quotes the reference to Manso from Tasso's *Gerusalemme conquistata*, demonstrating his familiarity with Tasso's reworking of his epic (unless Manso had drawn his attention to it). There is no reference in the headnote or in the poem to any religious differences between the two men (though these surely existed). Milton says that the poem was written in Naples just prior to his return journey to Rome. It celebrates Manso as a patron of the arts and friend and protector of both Tasso and Marino. Indeed, Milton implied that Manso's enduring fame would depend upon his relationship with these two great poets:

... ergo quacunq;ue per orbem  
 Torquati decus, & nomen celebrabitur ingens,  
 Claraque perpetui succrescet fama Marini,  
 Tu quoque in ora frequens venies plausumque virorum,  
 et parili carpes iter immortale volatu.<sup>177</sup>

(wherever throughout the world are celebrated the glory and huge name of Torquato, and wherever is augmented the famous reputation of the deathless Marino, you too will frequently be on the lips and in the applause of men, and in a flight such as theirs, will press on along the journey to immortality.)<sup>178</sup>

He goes on to express the hope that, in his own quest for poetic achievement, he might find as good a friend and patron as Manso, one who would raise a monument to him after his death (as Manso did for Marino). Haan points out a number of verbal parallels between *Mansus* and *Ad patrem*. Milton refers to Manso as 'Manse pater' (1.25). Line 6 of *Mansus*, 'Victrices hederas inter, laurosque sedebis' ('You will sit amid the ivies and laurels of victory') is almost identical to line 102 of *Ad patrem*, 'Victrices hederas inter, laurosque sedebo' ('I will sit among the ivies and laurels of victory'). Line 43 'Heroum laudes imitandaque gesta canebant' ('they used to sing the praises of their heroes and their exploits worthy of imitation')<sup>179</sup> very closely resembles line 46 of *Ad patrem*, 'Heroumque actus, imitandaque gesta canebat' ('would sing the deeds of heroes and their exploits

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<sup>177</sup> *OCW III*, p. 208.

<sup>178</sup> Haan's translation.

<sup>179</sup> Haan's translation.

worthy of imitation.’)<sup>180</sup> One explanation of this is that Milton reused lines from the earlier poem to assist in the (perhaps rather rapid) work of composing the poem to Mansus. On the other hand, it is tempting to speculate that the reproduction of these lines might also suggest some similarity in his feelings towards these two older men.

Manso’s tribute to Milton, on the other hand, is one of the briefest of the *Testimonia*:

Ut mens, forma, decor, facies, mos si pietas sic,  
Non Anglus, verum herclè Angelus ipse fores.<sup>181</sup>

It does refer to their religious differences. It takes pride of place in the *Poemata*, despite being the only tribute containing criticism of its subject. There has always seemed to me to be something rather unconvincing about Manso’s epigram. Lewalski and Haan’s commentary suggests that ‘his encomium of Milton contains a witty pun on “Angle” and “Angel”’.<sup>182</sup> The origins of the pun, as they point out, go back to comments attributed to Pope Gregory ‘the Great’ in the sixth century CE. The allusion here seems fairly banal, in truth, in a rather English way. Gregory’s words are found in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of England*,<sup>183</sup> a source with which Milton was very familiar, but which Manso was unlikely to have encountered, despite his erudition. Bede did not coin the pun in the familiar form in which it appears in Manso’s epigram, however. In Bede’s version, Gregory asks, having seen English children at the slave market,

quod esset uocabulum gentis illius. Responsum est, quod Angli uocarentur. At ille: ‘Bene,’ inquit; ‘nam et angelicam habent faciem, et tales angelorum in caelis decet esse coheredes. At ille: ‘Bene,’ inquit; ‘nam et angelicam habent faciem, et tales angelorum in caelis decet esse coheredes. Quod habet nomen ipsa prouincia, de qua isti sunt adlati?’ Responsum est, quod Deiri uocarentur idem prouinciales. At ille: ‘Bene,’ inquit, ‘Deiri; de ira eruti, et ad misericordiam Christi uocati. Rex prouinciae illius quomodo appellatur?’ Responsum est, quod Aelli diceretur. At ille adludens ad nomen ait: ‘Alleluia, laudem Dei Creatoris illis in partibus oportet cantari.’<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> ditto.

<sup>181</sup> ‘If your religious devotion were as your mind, beauty, charm, appearance, character, you would not be an Angle, but by Hercules a very angel.’ (Haan).

<sup>182</sup> *OCW III*, p. c.

<sup>183</sup> *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of England*, trans. by A.M. Sellar (London: George Bell and Sons, 1907), p.82.

<sup>184</sup> Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* II, i. <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/bede.html> retrieved 21.07.2017. He asked ‘what was the name of that people and was told that they were called ‘Angles’. He said: that is well because they have an angelic appearance and should be ‘co-heirs’ of the angels in heaven.’ ‘What is the name of the province from which they have been brought? He was told they came from the province *Deira*. He said’ that is good for they have been plucked from anger (from *Ira*) and brought to the mercy of Christ. What is the name of the king of that province?’ They replied that he was called Aella and

The exact origin of the Non Angli sed Angeli' form is obscure. I have found only one example of the abbreviated pun being used in Italian texts. The anecdote is recorded in the account of Gregory's life in the third book of Gabriel Fiamma's *Le Vite de' Santi*.<sup>185</sup> The three-hundred-page *Istoria della vita e del pontificato di S. Gregorio Magno* by Francesco da Pozzo, Carlo Gregori, Antonio Grecolini and Girolamo Rossi, Gregory's 'authorised' biography of the eighteenth century, does give an account of Pope Gregory's mission to convert the English but makes no reference, however, to the slave market event nor to 'Angles and Angels'.<sup>186</sup> The remark was very well known and very popular in England, on the other hand, from medieval times onwards. Margaret Lamont notes that:

The story of Pope Gregory's witticism became so popular that it was repeated even when changing languages undermined the wordplay entirely, as in the Middle English prose Brut: "wel mow thai bene callede Englissh, for thai haue the visages of Angeles" (96) (well may they be called English, for they have the faces of angels).<sup>187</sup>

Milton was of course familiar with the story. He gives an exact precis of the passage from Bede in the Fourth Book of his *History of Britain*.<sup>188</sup>

Milton describes the composition of *Mansus* as being completed just before he left Naples, possibly in some haste:

When the author was staying in Naples he attended him with the greatest of good will and he conferred on him many kind services. And so that guest before departing from that city, in order that he might not appear ungrateful, sent him this poem.<sup>189</sup>

As I suggested earlier this may explain the borrowings from *Ad patrem*. Milton explains here why he felt moved to write a poem of tribute to Manso. It is much less clear why Manso was moved to write in Milton's praise. He was a very distinguished Neapolitan figure, dignified by his great age and fame, widely respected, now 'resting on his laurels' in late retirement. Milton was a young protestant English visitor whom he very briefly befriended. All the rest of Manso's verse is in Italian.<sup>190</sup> The tone of his Latin epigram is strange; its content, rather surprising; the source, a slightly improbable one. I wonder

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he (Gregory) playing on the name said. 'Alleluia! The praise of the Creator must be sung there.' (My translation.)

<sup>185</sup> Gabriel Fiamma, *Le vite dei santi* (Venetia: Domenico Farri, 1602), 'Libro Terzo', p. 49.

<sup>186</sup> Francesco da Pozzo et al., *Istoria della vita e del pontificato di S. Gregorio Magno* (Roma: Grossi, 1758).

<sup>187</sup> Margaret Lamont, 'Becoming English: Ronwenne's Wassail, Language, and National Identity in the Middle English Prose Brut', *Studies in Philology*, 107, 3 (2010), 283-309, (p. 292n).

<sup>188</sup> John Milton, *The History of Britain* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1695), p. 162.

<sup>189</sup> *OCW III*, p. 206.

<sup>190</sup> *Poesie Nomiche di Gio. Battista Manso* (Venetia: Francesco Baba, 1635).

whether Milton himself may have assisted in its composition. As I have already suggested, he must have solicited at least some of the tributes he brought back from Italy. The message of the distich fits very neatly with his later account of his conduct as a Protestant in Italy.

vi. *Venice – ‘This thrice worthy citie: the fairest Lady, yea the richest Paragon, and Queene of Christendome.’*<sup>191</sup>

transcenso Apennino, per Bononiam et Ferraram, Venetias contendi, cui urbi lustrandae cum mensem unum impendissem, et libros, quos per Italiam conquisiveram, in navem imponendos, curassem ... Genevam delatus sum.<sup>192</sup>

(I crossed the Apennines and hastened to Venice by way of Bologna and Ferrara. When I had spent one month exploring that city and had seen to the shipping of the books which I had acquired throughout Italy ... I proceeded to Geneva.)<sup>193</sup>

As I have suggested, Milton was not interested in writing a travel book. The full extent of his account of his time in Venice is to tell us that he sent his Italian books back to England by ship from there. Edward Phillips gave more information about what some of these books were. We might surmise that Milton’s month in Venice was something of a non-event. By his own account, he met no one of note, did nothing of note, saw nothing of note (and left no trace of his passing). However, he must have had connections in Venice. Milton’s success in Italy so far had been based upon his reception in the Academies and on his connections with Academicians, not only with the Florentines but also with Manso of the *Otiosi* in Naples. Several of the figures he met in Rome were also members of Academies. Cardinal Francesco Barberini and Lucas Holste were members of the *Umoristi*, the largest and most celebrated of Rome’s seventeenth century academies, as had been Gabriele Chiabrera.<sup>194</sup> Salzilli was a member of the *Fantistici*.

Some of the academicians Milton came into close contact with were connected to Venice and, in particular to the most famous of the Venetian academies, the *Incogniti* whose *Principe* was Giovan Francesco Loredano. Gaddi was, as I have already noted, a member of the *Incogniti*. Manso was one of Loredano’s correspondents, suspected by Haan of helping him with his book on Marino.<sup>195</sup> Milton travelled more or less directly from Florence to Venice, straight from Gaddi and the *Svogliati* to Loredano and the

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<sup>191</sup> Coryat I, p. 199.

<sup>192</sup> *Defensio Secunda*, p. 63-64.

<sup>193</sup> Translation from *Essential Prose*.

<sup>194</sup> See Maylender V, pp. 370-81. Holste was also a member of the *Lincei* and the *Basiliana*.

<sup>195</sup> Haan, p. 175.

*Incogniti*. Are we to believe that he did not travel with a letter of introduction from Gaddi or from Manso in his pocket? Given his success in Florence through his contacts in the Academies, surely he would have made some effort to make similar contacts in Venice.

Loredano established the *Incogniti* in 1630. Its meetings were held at his home. There are no surviving ‘minutes’ although the academy was prolific in terms of book publication. The British Library *Database of Italian Academies* lists twenty-four volumes published between 1627 and 1667 by its members.<sup>196</sup> Although, when the English Civil War began, the *Incogniti* membership was consistently pro-Royalist in sympathy, Stefano Villani comments that ‘sembra però indubbio che i principali esponenti del gruppo che si raccolse attorno a Loredano guardassero con nostalgia agli anni in cui la contrapposizione tra Venezia e la curia di Roma aveva fatto sperare esiti clamorosi.’<sup>197</sup> Given Milton’s religious views and his links with Wotton, one would have expected him to seek out and *find* a sympathetic audience in the Venice of the late 1630s.

The other area of obvious interest to Milton in Venice was music. Monteverdi (one or more of whose music books he sent back to England) was alive and active, if not entirely well. His eighth book of madrigals was published in 1638 with a preface defending his invention of a ‘genere concitato’, otherwise the *seconda prattica*. *Il Ritorno d’Ulisse in patria* and *L’Incoronazione di Poppea* were still to come, in 1640 and 1641 respectively. Venice was a place full of music. Coryat described his experience in the Scuola di San Rocco some thirty years earlier, thus:

I heard the best musicke that I ever did in all my life both in the morning and the afternoone, so good that I would willingly goe an hundred miles a foote at any time to heare the like . . . This feast consisted principally of musicke, which was both vocall and instrumental, so good, so delectable, so rare, so admirable, so super excellent, that it did even ravish and stupifie all those strangers that never heard the like . . . For mine own part I can say this, that I was for the time even rapt up with Saint Paul into the third heaven.<sup>198</sup>

Again, although Milton tells us nothing about Venetian music in *Defensio Secunda* (and we learn the little we know about his musical taste from his nephew), is it likely that he would have sent a book of Monteverdi’s music home to London but have made no

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<sup>192</sup> British Library, *Database of Italian Academies*, <http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/ItalianAcademies/AcademyFullDisplay.aspx?RecordId=021-000006242&searchAssocType=> retrieved 05.07.17.

<sup>197</sup> Stefano Villani, ‘Gli Incogniti e l’Inghilterra’ in *Gli Incogniti e l’Europa*, a cura di Davide Conrieri (Bologna: Emil di Odaya, 2011), pp. 242-43. ‘It seems beyond doubt though that the main figures in the group that gathered around Loredano looked back nostalgically upon the years when the confrontation between Venice and the Curia of Rome gave hope of clamorous outcomes.’ (My translation.)

<sup>198</sup> Coryat I, pp. 251–53.

effort to hear the composer's music performed in the city that had been his home since 1613? Milton would only have needed to stroll into San Marco, swallowing his protestant convictions for an hour or two. And of course, we know that he attended concerts in Rome.

So why is Milton's account of his time in Venice so slight and why are there no signs of his stay there? As I mentioned previously, I spent some time in 2015 searching for some evidence of his visit. There has been a view that Milton was of particular interest to the Catholic Church. Leo Miller suggests that 'at all times, Milton had to be aware that he was regarded by the powers at Rome as a pawn in the great game, whose every move was to be watched – a pawn to be captured if possible.'<sup>199</sup> I passed several days in the *Archivio di Stato* in Venice searching for any form of communication between the Papal State, Venice's Papal ambassador and the Venetian Senate about Milton.<sup>200</sup> As far as I can determine, there was none. Milton talks up the level of malign interest he inspired among the English Jesuits in Rome, but, from his own account, this did not affect his behaviour or the length of his stay when he returned there. The *Archivio di Stato* documents do not contain any information to support the view that Milton was of any interest to the Papal State. The notion that he was 'a pawn in the great game' relies upon a fame and status which he did not achieve until long after he left Italy.<sup>201</sup>

My other, slightly more successful investigation was based upon the possibility that Milton sought permission, during his stay, to visit the Armoury and view the jewels in the Doge's palace. As I have already said, there were two such requests from English parties over the period from 25<sup>th</sup> March to 6<sup>th</sup> June, among a total of seventeen requests to the Council of Ten for viewings. Unfortunately, neither of these was from 'Giovanni Milton'. The two requests in question were from *Guglielmo Pastor, gentilhuomo Inglese e sua compagnia* (13<sup>th</sup> May 1639) and *Guglielmo Cochelin gentilhuomo Inglese e sua compagnia* (30<sup>th</sup> May 1639).<sup>202</sup> We know that Milton was in Geneva on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1639 (see p. 197). The later date is therefore most unlikely if Milton were to have been included in one of these parties. But it is conceivable that he was of the *compagnia* of 'Guglielmo Pastor'. Who was Guglielmo Pastor? The most probable translation of this Italianised name is 'William

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<sup>199</sup> Leo Miller, 'Milton Dines at the Jesuit College: Reconstructing the Evening of October 30, 1638', *Milton Quarterly*, 13 (1979), 142-146 <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24462876>>.

<sup>200</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Collegio Esposizioni Roma, Registri: Pezzo 30 (October 1638 – June 1639).

<sup>201</sup> The phrase itself is anachronistic.

<sup>202</sup> Archivio di Stato di Venezia, Consiglio di dieci, Deliberazioni, Comuni, Registri: 89 (1639). The Englishmen's names have been 'italianised'. The documents consulted were: Consiglio di dieci, Deliberazioni, Comuni, Registri: 89 (1639) and Filze 467, 468 and 469 (also 1639).



Shepherd'. I have identified two possible 'Pastors' for the role of party leader. The better (though not particularly probable) candidate is William Sheppard, 'Cromwell's law reformer'.<sup>203</sup> Sheppard lived from 1595 till 1675. It is probable that he and Milton met, as Sheppard was summoned by Cromwell to London from his home in Horsley, Gloucestershire, in 1654 the year Milton completed *Defensio Secunda*, to carry out legal work for the Commonwealth. Nancy Williams' ODNB entry says that:

Sheppard's outstanding achievement and the centrepiece of his contribution to the protectorate was *England's Balme* ... Dedicated to Cromwell 'and your council, by whose care it hath been brought forth', it was the fullest design for the reform of English law published in the seventeenth century ... A number of his recommendations were drafted as bills presented to the parliament of 1656, and the guiding principles and many particular reforms were adopted in the nineteenth century.<sup>204</sup>

Sheppard stayed in London for three years. It would be nice to think that he and Milton reminisced about their meeting in the Doge's palace in 1639. It is not impossible that Sheppard visited Venice then. In August 1637, he married his fourth wife, Alice Coney, and, according to Matthews, 'moved to Hempsted, a parish bordering Gloucester, where his daughter Rebecca was born in 1649. Apart from three years spent in Cromwell's service in London, Hempsted remained his home for the rest of his long life.'<sup>205</sup> However, as his previous child by his previous wife was born in 1628, almost ten years before his fourth marriage, *pax* Matthews, there was plenty of time for an Italian journey and a meeting with John Milton in Venice.

The other Shepherd (again written 'Sheppard') who might have visited the Doge's Palace in 1639 was an English portraitist. This William Sheppard was first heard of in 1641 when he paid his fees to join the London Company of Painter-Stainers. He was definitely in Italy (and in Venice) in 1650 where he painted the portrait of Thomas Killigrew. It is just conceivable that he may have made an earlier trip to Venice in 1639 as part of his apprenticeship as a painter, but little is known about him and he has no known connection with Milton.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> See N. L. Matthews, *William Sheppard, Cromwell's Law Reformer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>204</sup> Nancy L. Matthews, 'William Sheppard', ODNB, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/view/article/25349?docPos=53218> retrieved 05.07.17.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Carol Blackett-Ord, 'William Sheppard', ODNB, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.lib.exeter.ac.uk/view/article/25348> retrieved 05.07.17.

So, Milton in Venice remains, despite my best efforts, an elusive figure. Why might this be? As I noted earlier in this chapter, when Milton revisited his experiences there in *Defensio secunda*, sixteen years after the event, he suddenly felt the need to insist that he had not been tempted to sin during his year in Italy (or, if tempted, had not succumbed):

Geneva, since it reminds me of the slanderer More, impels me once again to call God to witness that in all these places, where so much license exists, I lived free and untouched by the slightest sin or reproach, reflecting constantly that although I might hide from the gaze of men, I could not elude the sight of God.<sup>207</sup>

Clearly when Milton refers to ‘all these places where so much licence exists’, he does not mean Geneva. Venice is the stimulus for this self-justification. As we have seen, merely having visited Italy (and particularly Venice) was a potential stain on an Englishman’s reputation. James McGregor graphically describes the Venetian sex trade:

From the Renaissance onward, the Venetian sex industry—once it escaped from state control—was mythologized by locals and travellers alike. Wide-eyed foreigners reported that thousands of women and girls displayed themselves, rouged and topless, in every part of the city; that seeming princesses lured young noblemen to their doom; that eight-year-old girls were sold in the streets. The paradoxical blend of titillation and outrage that marks these accounts makes it hard to tell just how widespread and assertive prostitution might have been. In the popular imagination, Venice could be a libertine’s paradise or a sex-crazed hell.<sup>208</sup>

Milton’s reference to ‘all these places, where so much license exists’ marks a sudden change of tone in his account of his European travels which, as I indicated earlier, mainly abandons the stream of outraged self-defence which characterises much of the *Defensio*, as his priority shifts away from the *ad hominem* rebuttal of Du Moulin to positive self-presentation to his wider audience. The effect is, in part, rhetorical: he pretends to recall More’s association with Geneva and takes the opportunity therefore to assert his purity whilst in Italy. It may be that he makes so little of Venice for safety’s sake, since dwelling on its delights (albeit aesthetic rather than carnal ones) would draw greater attention to the fact that he had been there. If Rome was the ‘very stronghold of the Pope’, Venice was the very stronghold of Venus. His insistence on ‘living free from sin or reproach’ in Venice parallels his insistence on remaining true to his religious belief in Rome. His

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<sup>207</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 345.

<sup>208</sup> James H. S. McGregor, *Venice from the Ground Up* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006) p. 292.

silence on any social contacts he made in Venice is more puzzling. Perhaps there was no meeting of the *Incogniti* during the month he was there or Loredano may have been away from home.

vii. Rome

I have left Milton's own account of his two stays in Rome till last. I mentioned the historic record, earlier in the chapter. What does Milton want us to take away from his description of his Roman visits? Of the first stay, he says:

When the antiquity and venerable repute of that city had detained me for almost two months and I had been graciously entertained there by Lukas Holste and other men endowed with both learning and wit, I proceeded to Naples.<sup>209</sup>

We also learn that he met the Eremite Friar in Rome with whom he travelled to Naples and who introduced him to Manso.<sup>210</sup> Of his second visit, he says:

As I was on the point of returning to Rome, I was warned by merchants that they had learned through letters of plots laid against me by the English Jesuits, should I return to Rome, because of the freedom with which I had spoken about religion. For I had determined within myself that in those parts I would not indeed begin a conversation about religion but, if questioned about my faith, would hide nothing, whatever the consequences. And so, I nonetheless returned to Rome. What I was, if any man inquired, I concealed from no one. For almost two more months, in the very stronghold of the Pope, if anyone attacked the orthodox religion, I openly, as before, defended it.<sup>211</sup>

So, by this account, Milton's second period in Rome was characterised by his consistent defence of the Reformed Church, over a two-month period, whilst under threat from the English Jesuits. As I indicated earlier, all we definitely know of Milton's first stay in Rome is that he dined at the English Jesuit College, as did John Cook before him. This might seem a slightly odd piece of behaviour for someone who was concerned not long after about potential plots on the part of those same Jesuits against him.<sup>212</sup> But it seems, given that Cook did the same thing, that this was one of the options available to

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<sup>209</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 344.

<sup>210</sup> It has been suggested (on the basis of no evidence at all that I can see) that the Friar was Serafino della Salandra, the author of *Adamo Caduto*, a 'sacred tragedy' on the Fall of Man (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra, 2009) seen by some (e.g. Norman Douglas) as an important source for *Paradise Lost*.

<sup>211</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 344.

<sup>212</sup> The risk was historically speaking the reverse. Thirty-two priests trained at the College had been executed in England by the time of Milton's visit, the last, John Thules, in 1616, more than thirty years earlier. The toll increased in the 1640s, however, when five more executions took place.

Englishmen in Rome.<sup>213</sup> Also, Milton says quite clearly in the first passage I have quoted that he met Luke Holste on his *first* visit to Rome. (The letter Milton sent to him came from Florence after Milton's second visit.) Milton must have misremembered here. His letter of 30<sup>th</sup> March 1639 says, 'Cum enim tui conveniendi causa in Vaticanum ascenderem ignotum prorsus, nisi si quid forte ab Alexandro Cherubino dictum de me prius suerat, summa cum humanitate recepisti.'<sup>214</sup> It seems quite clear, therefore, that the meeting in 1639 was their first. This might be regarded as a small slip; but Milton had a copy of his letter to Holste which he eventually had published in 1674. If he had been particularly concerned about the accuracy of what he was writing, he could easily have checked the date. This is perhaps yet another indication that Milton was writing 'i' th heat'. Campbell and Corns seem to conclude that Milton met Holste on both visits,<sup>215</sup> but the content of his 1639 letter precludes this, I would say. Lewalski does not comment.

It was, in Campbell and Corns' view, also during this first visit that Milton met Giovanni Salzilli and composed his Latin poem, *Ad Salzillum*, most likely in response to Salzilli's fulsome epigram in his own praise which eventually found its way into *Poems 1645*.<sup>216</sup> Salzilli was a member of the Roman *Fantistici* Academy (where perhaps Milton may have met him). Barbara Lewalski describes him as 'a lyric poet of some repute'.<sup>217</sup> (But this repute has not endured. He is now only known for having known Milton.)<sup>218</sup> Samuel Johnson's comment on the exchange of poems was:

Here Selvaggi praised him in a distich, and Salsilli [sic] in a testrastick; neither of them of much value. The Italian were gainers by this literary commerce; for the encomiums with which Milton repaid Salsilli, though not secure against a stern grammarian, turn the balance indisputably in Milton's favour.<sup>219</sup>

In fact, with the exception of *Mansus*, the most substantial of his 'Italian' poems,<sup>220</sup> all the poems Milton wrote whilst in Italy were written in Rome:

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<sup>213</sup> Campbell and Corns note that in 1636 William Harvey had stayed there and that John Evelyn was also to spend a night there in 1644. (Campbell Corns, p. 109.) Neither were known for their Jesuitical sympathies. Richard Crashaw also stayed there in 1646 but, of course, he was a Catholic convert.

<sup>214</sup> *Prose Works of John Milton*, p. 41. 'For when I went to visit you at the Vatican you received me with the utmost cordiality although I was completely unknown to you, except for anything which Cherubini may have told you previously.' (Tillyard's translation.)

<sup>215</sup> Campbell Corns, p. 111.

<sup>216</sup> The epigram which compares Milton (to his advantage) with Homer, Vergil and Tasso seems ludicrously hyperbolic given what Salzilli could have known of what he had achieved as a poet up to that time.

<sup>217</sup> *Lewalski*, p. 95.

<sup>218</sup> There are no texts by Salzilli in print today and no copy of his work is available from the *Biblio Est* portal of the University of Trieste libraries network ([www.biblioest.it/](http://www.biblioest.it/)).

<sup>219</sup> Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets – Milton*, ed. by K. Deighton (London: Macmillan, 1906) p.7.

<sup>220</sup> 'Italian' in the sense that they were written in Italy. They are of course all written in Latin.

*Ad Leonoram Romae canentem* (either October/November 1638 or January/February 1639)

*Ad eandam* (same dates)

*Ad Salsillum poetam Romanum aegrotantem. Scazontes* (probably October/November 1638)<sup>221</sup>

*Mansus* (late 1638 in Naples).

The three short poems in praise of Leonora Baroni cannot be specifically dated, but, as I have said, they do suggest that Milton may have attended her musical performances. (We know in any case, from his letter to Holste, that he attended at least one musical concert).<sup>222</sup> I would argue, however, that he composed the poems for a very specific reason. Baroni was to be the subject of a collection of poems written in her honour by the cream of Roman society, *Applausi poetici alle glorie della signora Leonora Baroni*.<sup>223</sup> Campbell and Corns comment:

Extravagant poems of praise for Leonora were all the rage in Rome in 1639, and later that year a collection of such poems was to be published. Milton's epigrams are his contributions to the genre, and were written for the benefit of Milton's Roman friends, not for the lady herself.<sup>224</sup>

Francesco Ronconi, the editor of the volume, dated his dedicatory letter to *La Signore D. Elionora de Melo, Marchesa di Castel Rodrigo*, 'settembre 1639'. The volume must have been published shortly after this and the poems it contains were presumably written over the year or so before, including the periods when Milton was in Rome. Most of the poems are in Italian, but there are a number in Latin, two in Greek, two in Spanish and one in French, so clearly international contributions were accepted. (As Campbell and Corns note, a poem in Latin by Holste is included.)<sup>225</sup> Ronconi refers in his address to the reader to the poems which 'ti presento raccolte, o per meglio dire, scelte in questo Volume tra infinite che ne sono stato composte.'<sup>226</sup> While Milton was in Rome, then, the

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<sup>221</sup> Carey's dates. He (*CSP*, 260) points out that the Salzilli poem implies that it was written not too long after Milton's arrival in Italy – 'qui suum linquens nidum polique tractum' l. 10.

<sup>222</sup> It is just conceivable that he composed them as an exercise and that he never heard her sing – see my comments on the *Applausi* – but she was living and performing in Rome during both his visits.

<sup>223</sup> *Applausi poetici alle glorie della signora Leonora Baroni* (Rome: Vincenzo Costazuti, 1639). Hereafter *Applausi*. Campbell and Corns make Costazuti the editor of the collection, wrongly I think.

<sup>224</sup> Campbell Corns, pp. 116–17.

<sup>225</sup> *Applausi*, p. 201.

<sup>226</sup> 'I present to you, collected, or rather, chosen, from among an infinite number which have been composed about her.' (*Applausi*, page unnumbered.)

trend for Baroni poetic tributes was in full spate. Surely, his poems were intended for this volume. Perhaps he did not, in the end, have the opportunity to submit them; perhaps they were overlooked; or perhaps they were among those *not* chosen – because he was not famous or Roman enough – but it seems most unlikely to me that they were *not* written with the *Applausi* in mind. (Hence there is just a possibility that they were not ‘inspired’ by Baroni’s singing but by the fashion for writing about her.)

Another interesting thing about Milton’s three ‘Leonora’ poems is their ‘religious’ standpoints. The first alludes to a Christian God, quite possibly a Catholic Christian God,<sup>227</sup> who then becomes enmeshed in neo-platonic and quasi-pantheistic imagery. The second and the third poems contain classical references only. One would have thought the first poem, written on such a secular subject, might have been seen as verging on blasphemy. Its uncritical reference to the very Catholic idea of a guardian angel, ‘Angelus unicuique suus (sic credite gentes),’ despite the parenthetical rider, does also tend to undermine Milton’s claim to unwavering correctness in matters of religion whilst abroad. The poem was written with a Roman audience in mind, one assumes, but Milton had no compunction about publishing it in England in 1645.

This was not the only way in which Milton compromised in Rome. Leonora Baroni was closely linked to (Cardinal) Antonio Barberini, the brother of Cardinal Francesco Barberini who gave Milton an audience probably on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1639, the day after Milton attended his ‘Musicum publice’. The Barberini were the most powerful family in Rome; Maffeo Barberini, Francesco and Antonio’s uncle, was Pope Urban VIII, much criticised for his nepotism from the moment he became Pope in 1623. When he fraternised with the Barberini, Milton was effectively exposing himself to the very heart of the corruption of the Roman Church. And, despite his protestations in *Defensio Secunda*, he does not seem to have turned a hair: perhaps he really did take Wotton’s advice – *pensieri stretti e il viso sciolto* – more seriously than he later claimed. In his letter to Holste, he described Francesco Barberini as ‘praestantissimum’<sup>228</sup> and he kept a copy of this letter which he eventually published (though not until 1674, the year of his death).

It seems to me then that Milton’s claim that he defended orthodox religion (‘orthodoxam religionem’) in ‘ipsa urbe Pontificis’ – the very city of the Pope – is rather undermined by his account of the company he kept. Holste himself was a convert to Catholicism and, presumably, therefore, in Milton’s view, an apostate. In Rome, Milton

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<sup>227</sup> See note on ll. 1–2 of *Ad Leonoram canentem* in *OCW III*, p. 148.

<sup>228</sup> ‘most excellent’. (*Epistolae Familiares*, p. 26.)

was a very small English fish in a large and alien Italian Catholic pond. He appears to have swum successfully with the Italian pike and sharks but at some risk to the integrity of his religious beliefs, despite his later claims.

*viii. Misrepresentations, Wishful thinking, Fabrication?*

I have expressed a certain amount of scepticism about Milton's account(s) of his time in Italy, based on the lapse of time between the experience and his retelling of it, his particular purposes when writing *Defensio Secunda* in particular, and inconsistencies between his later accounts and the content of some of the letters he wrote at the time of his visit. With the exception of the slight question of the absolute 'genuineness' of Manso's tributary distich, Milton's purpose in writing the *Leonora* poems and perhaps his confusion about the date of his meeting with Holste, the issues I have raised are not new. Edward Chaney suggested in 1989:

Little did [Milton] suspect that two centuries later, careful reconstruction of the minutiae of his early life by an expanding Milton industry would expose inconsistencies in his alleged travel schedule and cast doubt on his supposed defence of Protestantism abroad ... and the dangers posed by plotting Jesuits. What bad luck that these wretched Jesuits, who had in reality entertained him and his servant to dinner at the English College in Rome, should keep a visitors' book with his name in it, and how embarrassing that the Barberini and Vatican Archives should have been so scrupulous as to have preserved for hundreds of years those fulsomely flattering thank-you letters he had forwarded via a Catholic convert librarian to the cardinal-nephew.<sup>229</sup>

It is important to bear in mind, as I have repeatedly suggested, the very particular reasons for Milton recounting his version of his tour of Italy, particularly in 1654: not to inform but to defend. I think he is somewhat misleading, partly for this reason, about his absolute religious probity and the associated theme of a Jesuit threat to him, about his relationship with Manso as represented by the perhaps dubious distich, about his reasons for returning to England and, by omission, about his time in Venice. But there is one other matter than needs further discussion before this chapter ends: the question of Milton's meeting with Galileo.

I indicated previously that this has been a matter of some controversy. S.B Liljegren first raised the question of the factual accuracy of this event, a century ago, in

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<sup>229</sup> Edward Chaney, 'Pro se et appendico Anglicano defensio: Response to a Review of *The Grand Tour and the Great Rebellion*', *Milton Quarterly*, 23, 2 (May 1989), 77–81. By 'fulsomely flattering thank-you letters', I presume Chaney is referring to the holograph copy of Milton's letter to Holste found in the Vatican archives in 1952 (Vatican Library, Barb. lat. 2181, ff. 57r-8v.). In fact, of course, the letter had been published in essentially the same form, two hundred and seventy-eight years previously.

1918.<sup>230</sup> Liljegren suggested, rightly in my view, that it is strange that Milton does not mention Galileo's blindness in his account of the visit and that the meeting does not feature in his account of his Italian journeys in *Defensio Secunda* or anywhere else in his writing other than in *Areopagitica*. Neil Harris provided an extensive defence of Milton's veracity in his 1985 article 'Galileo as Symbol: the "Tuscan Artist" in *Paradise Lost*' concluding that 'there is no real reason not to believe Milton' and that Milton had no need to mention Galileo in *Defensio Secunda*, at a time when he was 'at the height of his international fame'.<sup>231</sup> In 2001, Derek Wood rejected Liljegren's view, on similar grounds.<sup>232</sup> Liljegren had argued that, in an attempt to inflate his own importance in the eyes of the English public and of Parliament, Milton fabricated the story. Security around Galileo was too tight, his son Vincenzo, too protective, and the astronomer himself, too unwell for such a visit to have taken place. Wood, like Harris, rejects Liljegren's (and Piero Reboras's)<sup>233</sup> scepticism. Harris and Wood both point to the evidence suggesting that Galileo was treated relatively kindly by the Inquisition, that he was allowed some latitude in receiving visitors and that Milton himself, though he would like to have us think that the Roman Church saw him as a Protestant firebrand, was an unknown English man of letters with no such reputation, who formed a warm relationship with the Catholic Lukas Holste and admired Cardinal Francesco Barberini, the nephew of the notorious Pope Urban VIII. **Wood** points out that Milton had a number of potential routes of access to Galileo: his friendship with Carlo Dati, who was in turn a friend of Vincenzo Galilei, Galileo's adopted (illegitimate) son, and his probable relationship, discussed previously, with Elie Diodati, who was the foremost of Galileo's European champions and a friend and correspondent of very long standing, whom Milton might well have seen during his visit to Paris.<sup>234</sup> (Elie Diodati was closely acquainted with Hugo Grotius whom Milton definitely did visit.)<sup>235</sup> There is no doubt, then, that Milton had the necessary connections to enable a meeting with Galileo. Nonetheless it *is* mysterious that he only mentions such an important meeting only once in all his writings.

In 2005, George F. Butler questioned the accuracy of Milton's account on the basis that 'Milton ... has no reason to be perfectly honest in *Areopagitica*, and his

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<sup>230</sup> S. B Liljegren, *Studies in Milton* (Lund: Gleerup, 1918).

<sup>231</sup> Neil Harris, 'Galileo as Symbol: The "Tuscan Artist" in *Paradise Lost*', *Annali dell'Instituto e Museo di Storia della Scienza di Firenze*, 2,10 (1985), 3-29, p. 9.

<sup>232</sup> Derek N.C. Wood, 'Milton and Galileo', *Milton Quarterly*, 35, 1 (March 2001), 50-52.

<sup>233</sup> Piero Reboras, 'Milton a Firenze', *Nuova Antologia* 3, 88 (1953), 147- 63

<sup>234</sup> Dorian argues that he did indeed meet Elie Diodati. (Dorian, p. 173).

<sup>235</sup> See Garcia, p. 114.



rhetorical strategy welcomes embellishments and misrepresentations.’ Butler argues that Milton’s short description of Galileo’s condemnation by the Inquisition is inaccurate, that there are other inaccuracies in *Areopagitica* and that, therefore, the story that he *met* Galileo may also be inaccurate – included for rhetorical effect. However, this would surely be more than inaccuracy. To twenty-first century minds, this would be an outright lie, whereas the other ‘inaccurate’ examples Butler mentions are merely misleading. Nonetheless, Butler’s conclusion that ‘while there is no conclusive proof that Milton did not meet Galileo, his claim in *Areopagitica* cannot be taken as an autobiographical fact, and his meeting with the astronomer must remain conjecture<sup>236</sup> is not entirely unreasonable in the absence of any external evidence to support the truth of such a meeting.

It is possible that with Galileo, a line might have been crossed between retrospective factual adjustments for polemical reasons, ‘for rhetorical effect’ as Butler would have it, and pure invention. Butler gives a long list of factual errors in *Areopagitica*, some of which Milton must have been aware of, to suggest that his relationship with the truth in this particular work was a slightly casual one.<sup>237</sup> It is clear that Milton, for the reasons cited by Edward Chaney, felt able to bend the truth of this Italian experiences (or of his memory of them), secure in the knowledge that his version of events that took place some while ago, in a distant country, unobserved by English eyes, was not open to question. The reference to a meeting with Holste during his first stay in Rome demonstrates that he was less than rigorous in his fact-checking. The question is whether he could have justified the invention of a meeting with Galileo to himself. (‘Although I could hide from the gaze of men, I could not elude the sight of God.’) Perhaps he could, for ‘rhetorical’ purposes: he was in Florence; Galileo was nearby; he had met people who knew and were even related to Galileo; he had heard people’s talk about Galileo. It might have seemed a small step to invent a meeting with Galileo. The phrase about not ‘avoiding the sight of God’ from *Defensio Secunda* refers to the sins of the flesh. It may be that he had fewer scruples about ‘sins of the mind’. There is no final answer in this debate, but Butler’s position of active scepticism about the Galileo meeting seems a reasonable one to me in the light of the available evidence.

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<sup>236</sup> George F. Butler, ‘Milton’s Meeting with Galileo: A Reconsideration’, *Milton Quarterly*, 39, 3 (2005) 132–39.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 137n.

## Consequences

Campbell and Corns suggest that Milton left England clear in his mind about what he was *not* going to do with his life. When he returned from Italy in the summer of 1639:

he knew he could be—and perhaps only be—a poet, a commitment and a vocation without obvious parallel among the courtly, academic, and clerical writers of his own age, though, in the event, the emerging crises in church and state soon drew him in other directions.<sup>238</sup>

Lewalski suggests that his experiences in the Italian Academies had the greatest effect upon him and prompted his decision to abandon Latin verse and write his great works in English.<sup>239</sup>

Nonetheless, soon after he arrived home, he wrote *Epitaphium Damonis* – in Latin. The poem relates very specifically to his time in Italy. The *Argumentum* refers to Thyrsis’s journey. Lines 9–12 have been taken to refer to the twice-yearly pattern of harvesting in Tuscany. Milton refers to *Thusca urbe* (Florence).<sup>240</sup> Although Milton is writing in England, the poem is mainly set in a classicised Mediterranean landscape inhabited by mythological fauna, including Pan and his nymphs and bedecked with Italian flora. (Innuba neglecto marcescit & uva racemo, Nec myrteta juvant). At line 125, Milton recalls his ‘Pastores Thusci, Muis operata juvenus’, ‘Tuscan shepherds, young men well versed in the Muses’,<sup>241</sup> making specific mention of Dati and of Francini (line 137) whom he credits with teaching their native beech trees his (Milton’s) name (line 136). Haan and Lewalski gloss this as perhaps referring specifically to the tributary poems they wrote for him.<sup>242</sup> At line 160, the poem comes home to a mythological England with references to Merlin, the supposed Trojan origins of Britain and ‘Rutupina’ (Richborough in Kent) followed by allusions to ancient English rulers and the (mythical) establishment of a Christian community by Constantine and the Rivers Ouse, Alne/Alaun, the Humber and the Tamar. At line 181, we are back in Italy, in Naples, with Manso as patron of the arts and a reference to his gift of twin cups (‘pocula’). Finally, Diodati is translated posthumously from his pastoral environment into to what seems to me to be a very pagan and sensual heaven where he ‘will enact for all eternity immortal marriage rites where there is singing and where the lyre, mingled with the dances of the blessed, sounds

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<sup>238</sup> Campbell Corns, p. 120.

<sup>239</sup> *Life*, pp.110-11. Based on *The Reason of Church Government* (1642).

<sup>240</sup> Although, as indicated earlier, whether there were two wheat harvests has been disputed. (See p. 74.)

<sup>241</sup> Haan’s translation.

<sup>242</sup> *OCW III*, p. 495.

ecstatically, and the festive revels rave in bacchic frenzy under the Thyrsus of Zion.<sup>243</sup> Haan refers to ‘this daring fusion of the pagan and the Christian.’<sup>244</sup> The fusion contains rather more of the pagan than of the Christian, I would suggest.

This was the Italian fruit that Milton brought, sadly, back to England. The poem mixes his Italian experiences with his grief at his friend’s death. Though he bewails the fact that he was not at Diodati’s bedside when he died, he also celebrates the exotic and successful life he enjoyed abroad. Perhaps Diodati’s place in heaven contains just a hint of Venetian licence. Other than the *Epitaphium*, however, I would argue that there was no poetic outcome from the Italian journey. Although Campbell and Corns claim that Milton returned with a mission to be a poet, as does, effectively, Lewalski, there is no concrete evidence of this. Milton wrote little in Italy, and little immediately before he went to Italy. (*Lycidas* was probably written in November 1637.) He wrote even less following his return. His entire published output between the completion of *Epitaphium Damonis* and the publication of *Paradise Lost* consists of ten sonnets (including one ‘sonnet caudato’), the translation of Horace’s *Ad Pyrrham*, the seventeen translations from the Psalms, and *Ad Joannum Rousium*.

Campbell and Corns argue that his plans were interrupted by ‘the emerging crises in Church and State’, but he surely *chose* his course from 1639 onward. He *chose* to become a controversial pamphleteer in the early 1640s. Had he been executed as a regicide by Charles II, as he might easily have been, he would now be seen as a poet whose work, of great promise, included some outstanding early poems but gradually dwindled away as he entered his thirties and forties, to almost, but not quite, nothing. The sparse poems of the Civil War and Commonwealth years would be valued for their flashes of greatness but be seen as tantalising glimpses of what might have been.

If the trip to Italy, building upon Milton’s previous knowledge of the Italian language, history and culture, was important to his long-term poetic development (and I believe it was), that development was a long time coming. Of course, affairs of church and state changed the course of Milton’s life after his return to England, but he was in control of his destiny and had embarked upon this new course before history overtook him. His first life decision, after returning home, was to start a teaching career, first with

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<sup>243</sup> *OCW III*, p. 229. This strange phrase has drawn much critical comment. See, for example, John Shawcross, *John Milton: the Self and the World* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), pp. 35–36; John K. Hale, *Milton as Multilingual* (Otago: Department of English, 2005), pp. 14–15; Stephen Guy-Bray, *Homoerotic Space: the Poetics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), pp. 130–131.

<sup>244</sup> *OCW III*, p. 500.

his nephews as pupils and, then, after his move to Aldersgate, with a larger group of students. As regards his writing, after the private publication of *Epitaphium Damonis* in 1640, the next work Milton put before the public was his pamphlet, *Of Reformation*, in May 1641. In July of the same year he probably published *Animadversions* followed by *Reason of Church Government* in January 1642 in which, as I have observed, he reiterates his intention, first declared about three years earlier in *Mansus*, to write an English epic.<sup>245</sup> Despite this intention, during the two and a half years that had passed since his return to England, he had written one neo-Latin poem and that, in 1639.

In April 1642, *An Apology for Smectymnuus*, was published. On 22<sup>nd</sup> August, Charles raised his standard in Nottingham and the civil war began in earnest. Around the same time, Milton's marital troubles began when Mary, his wife of one month, went back to her parents in Oxford for unknown reasons. In November, Milton finally wrote a poem in English, Sonnet VIII, 'Captain or Colonel', his first sonnet since 1633, his first poem in English since 1637. He wrote two more sonnets early the following year, but the most substantial work of 1643 was the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, published in August. By now, it was four years since his return from Italy.

I perhaps labour the point, but this is not the behaviour of a man who has committed himself to writing poetry. Despite his statements in *Mansus* and *Of Reformation*, it is obvious that Milton's priorities lay elsewhere and continued to do so for many years to come. In the period after his return from the continent, far from addressing new poetic challenges, he had all but given up writing verse altogether, dedicating his pen, instead, to pamphleteering.<sup>246</sup> Whatever Italy inspired him to do, it was not to dedicate himself to poetry in the short, or even medium, term. The years of soul-searching and self-development discussed at the beginning of this chapter had now almost certainly ended, but poetry was not in the foreground of his new life. Writing religious and political polemic were his public priorities whilst, privately, he was attempting to set up a family and make a living from private teaching. As I have suggested, Milton stepped out into the public limelight in the 1640s, but, as it turned out, despite the publication of *Poems 1645*,<sup>247</sup> he did not do so primarily as a poet. In fact, *Poems 1645* could almost be seen as a farewell to verse, the summary of his early poetic ambitions. There followed a long hiatus before Urania finally came to call.

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<sup>245</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 88.

<sup>246</sup> Because Milton wrote it, the prose has proved not to be ephemeral. Had it been the work of someone else's 'left hand', it would have met, in the main, a different fate.

<sup>247</sup> See my previous comments on the 'success' of *Poems 1645*.

## Conclusion

I referred in my introduction to Jean Grosjean's functional definition of 'bilingualism':

Most bilinguals use their languages for different purposes, in different situations, with different people. They simply do not need to be equally competent in all their languages. The level of fluency they attain in a language (more specifically in a language skill) will depend on their need for that language and will be domain specific.<sup>1</sup>

So it was with Milton, who did not need to be a fluent writer of Italian prose because Latin served him perfectly well for the purposes of written communication with Italians. Nor did he need to be a fluent speaker of Italian when he was living in England, despite his intensive Italian studies. We can assume, on the other hand, on the basis of the accounts of his acquaintances in Italy, that he spoke Italian well during his visit there and so had a bilingual Italian speech period which may have lasted less than a year. He went through a period of Italian poetic bilingualism when he wrote his Italian sonnets (although he may have had some outside assistance too). He read Italian fluently from his teens. He was also able to read French, Greek, Aramaic, Portuguese and possibly Dutch. (As I said in my introduction, Lewalski claims that he could speak French 'well',<sup>2</sup> but where is the evidence of this?) We do not need to invent a Milton who was the *ultimate* polyglot, consummate linguist though he was. He used his languages each for its own particular purposes, some of which changed over time.

Latin was clearly Milton's second language. There is no doubt, though, that Italian was the most important *modern* language to him (excluding English). Italian was *the* foreign language of the time, not yet superseded by French.<sup>3</sup> It had the status of what Antoine Meillet later termed a 'grande langue de civilisation'.<sup>4</sup> As we have seen, his particularly close intimacy with the language derived from his earliest upbringing as well as from his teenage interests, contacts and inclinations. His family background and early upbringing also explain why his work does not display (barring two lines in *Ad Patrem*) the Italo-scepticism typical of his time. Milton's knowledge of Italian literature, Italian culture and Italian thought and possibly Italian music vastly exceeded what was expected of a well-educated man of the early seventeenth century. I would argue that the musical aspects of Milton's Italian identity have been critically

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<sup>1</sup> Grosjean, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Lewalski, *Life*, p.87.

<sup>3</sup> Although if we take *Ad patrem* literally, we will conclude that he was learning French formally before he started his Italian studies.

<sup>4</sup> Antoine Meillet, *Les Langues dans l'Europe Nouvelle* (Paris: Payot, 1918).

underestimated and, where examined, sometimes inaccurately evaluated. This includes, in particular, past musical analyses of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Milton was not unusual in his interest in Italy and in Italian culture, but he *was* unusual in the degree of his immersion in things Italian and in the depth of his studies, before he took the untypical step of visiting the country itself in 1638.

Milton was, both by accident of birth and by inclination, unusually well placed for long-term creative engagement with Italian culture. His poetic work was partly formed from this engagement. So, we see, in his verse in English, from very early on, the almost constant presence of Italian forms, Italian templates, Italian shadows: at one extreme, used as a formal structural model (as with *Upon the Circumcision* and Petrarch's *Canzone alla Vergine*), at the other, as a background presence (as with *Comus* and Tasso's *Aminta*). Between these extremes, as I have shown, we find the varying influence of Italian verse forms in most of the early poetry in English. The importance of Italian was that it gave access to a living tradition which had long grappled with the integration of classical and vernacular forms and provided useable poetic models for Milton – the sonnet, obviously (which had fallen out of favour in England by Milton's time), the *canzoni* of Petrarch (and Petrarch's successors) and the dramatic verse of Tasso and Guarini. Later he was to follow the epic example of Tasso in *Paradise Lost* and conceivably his precedent for the use of blank verse (*versi sciolti*) to tell the creation story (*Le Sette Giornate del Mondo Creato*). I have concluded that it was Milton's bilingualism in English and Italian that contributed importantly to the course of his development as an English poet (in a way, recalling my preface, that *is* somewhat reminiscent of Samuel Beckett's development through his use of French). Even though Latin was Milton's second language in terms of oral and written fluency and poetic output, Italian was the second modern language of his right hand.

As for the climactic Italian journey, I have argued that this was, or became, a kind of cultural test. Although Italy was in cultural decline in many areas at the time of Milton's visit,<sup>5</sup> the impact of this had not yet perhaps been fully recognised. Italy's prominence was definitely on the wane in literary terms, but Milton does not acknowledge this (except, perhaps, in *Areopagitica*). The more important question for him in 1638-9 was surely whether he could cut a figure in the salons of the Italian intelligentsia. It is impossible to know whether he arrived in Italy with such an ambition. Did he come to Florence *intending* to win over the *Svogliati* and the *Appatisti*? Or did he chance upon them? Did he set off from Rome for Naples with the intention of making Manso's acquaintance? Or was this really just the accidental outcome of travelling with an Eremitic Friar? On his second journey to Rome, was he carrying back from Naples an

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<sup>5</sup> Gimelli Martin denies this (*Milton's Italy*, p. 18).

introduction from Manso to Luke Holste knowing that this would open doors for him in high (Catholic) places? Or did he just knock on the door of the Vatican library? We cannot know how he went about the task of conquering Italy, but there is no doubt that he passed his Italian test with distinction, based not only on his own account but also on the independent testimony of the tributes from his Italian acquaintances, minutes of meetings he attended, and letters he later published. Where things did not go quite so well (as I suspect was the case in Venice), he abbreviated his account of the visit. Also, as I have suggested, occasionally he may have ‘improved’ his experiences to impress his friends, confound his critics and please ‘posterity’.

We should not forget that, during the first part of his poetic career, Milton was an English poet first and a *Neo-Latin* poet second: *Poems of John Milton in English and Latin* was the title of his first volume of verse. *Poems 1645* contains 2,395 lines of English verse and 1,678 lines of Latin verse as against 85 lines in Italian and 27 lines in Greek. Houghton and Manuwald describe how, despite the growing status of vernacular literature:

a proficiency in the production of Virgilian hexameters, Horatian lyrics or Ovidian elegiacs marked the aspiring poet as a man of learning, taste and accomplishment, and the choice of the ancient tongue not only advertised an extensive education and a refined partiality for the classics, but also opened up prospects of patronage and preferment throughout the cultivated circles of Europe.<sup>6</sup>

This precisely summarises one of the things Milton achieved through his *Latin* poetic identity in ‘the cultivated circles of Europe’ – in his case in ‘the private Academies of Italy whither [he] was favoured to resort’.<sup>7</sup> However his Latin poetic persona turned out to be ‘unprogressive’ as far as his development as an English poet was concerned. *Epitaphium Damonis* is acknowledged as the apogee of Milton’s achievement in Latin verse, but it also marked the end of his career as a neo-Latin poet.<sup>8</sup> In fact, by the time he wrote it, he had already concluded that neo-Latin poetry was a dead end. When in lines 161–168 of the *Epitaphium*, he announces the intention to write the Arthurian epic foreshadowed in *Mansus* (lines 80–84), he is effectively bidding farewell to his neo-classical poetic career.<sup>9</sup> Homer and Virgil were the models to be followed when forging an early modern epic, but their example gave no clue as to *how* an early modern epic should be forged. This is why the Tasso of *Gerusalemme liberata* appears in their exalted company in the list of exponents of ‘diffuse’ epic in *The Reason of Church Government*.<sup>10</sup> Milton could go no further,

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<sup>6</sup> *Neo-Latin Poetry*, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> I recognise, of course, that Milton also wrote *Ad Joannem Rousiam* in January 1647.

<sup>9</sup> Lewlaski and Haan suggest that the reference to hanging up his shepherd’s pipe in the next two lines (169–70) ‘may symbolise Milton’s abandonment of Latin verse.’ (*OCW III*, p. 497.)

<sup>10</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 88.

wanted to go no further and needed to go no further in Latin verse. By 1639 his poetic goal was to write a vernacular epic. There was never the slightest hint of an intention to write a neo-Latin one.

The conventional biographical view is that Milton emerged from his 'studious retirement' and the journey to Italy with a firm intention to dedicate himself to poetry and to epic poetry in particular, an intention which was derailed by the events of the 1640s and 50s. I have suggested that this simply was not the case. He returned from Italy and, having written *Epitaphium Damonis* for Diodati, devoted his energies to everything but poetry. Prose had the upper hand long before his life was overtaken by 'events'. He seemed more interested in divorce than decasyllables. He did publish his collected early work in 1645, but this had no real consequences, reputationally, and he was, thereafter, silent, from his public's point of view, until 1667. Between 1639 and 1658 Milton's main poetic achievement (a not inconsiderable one) consists of the seventeen sonnets<sup>11</sup> he wrote during that period (two hundred and forty lines of verse). This is not strong evidence, however, for Italy having spurred him to a new poetic style or a new level of poetic commitment. It is conceivable that this may not represent his entire output.<sup>12</sup> W. R. Parker argued that *Samson Agonistes* had been written in two phases, the first in 1646-7 and the second in 1652-3,<sup>13</sup> although most scholarly opinion continues to incline to a date in the 1660s. John Aubrey said that Edward Phillips remembered Milton beginning a 'Tragedy' 'about 15 or 16 years before his Poem [*Paradise Lost*] was thought of' which contributed 'six verses' to the proem to Book III.<sup>14</sup> However that may be, Milton's literary ambitions were definitely more expansive at the beginning of this period than his subsequent achievements. The seven pages of notes in the Trinity manuscript (from 1639-41) list almost one hundred possible literary projects, mainly dramas, including two extended sketches for a Fall tragedy and one proposal for an epic (based on the reign of King Alfred). At around the same time, in *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), he was still asserting his poetic vocation, but now he famously acknowledged the pressure placed on his poetic ambitions by the 'need' to write prose:

Lastly, I should not choose this manner of writing, wherein knowing myself inferior to myself, led by the genial power of nature to another task, I have the use, as I may account, but of my left hand. And though I shall be foolish in saying more to this purpose, yet, since it will be such a folly, as wisest men go about to commit, having only confessed and so committed, I may trust with more reason, because with more folly, to

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<sup>11</sup> *On the New Enforcers of Conscience* is not strictly speaking a sonnet but a sonnet followed by a rhyming couplet, a sonnet with a tail, *sonnetto caudato* in Italian – Petrarch and Shakespeare commingled.

<sup>12</sup> There were, of course, also the versions of Psalms lxxx–lxxxviii in 1648 and of Psalms i–viii in 1653.

<sup>13</sup> W.R. Parker, 'The Date of *Samson Agonistes*,' *Philological Quarterly* (28 January 1949), 145-66 and 'The Date of *Samson Agonistes* – a Postscript,' *Notes and Queries*, CCIII (May 1958), 201–2.

<sup>14</sup> Darbishire, p. 13.



have courteous pardon. For although a poet, soaring in the high reason of his fancies, with his garland and singing robes about him, might, without apology, speak more of himself than I mean to do; yet for me sitting here below in the cool element of prose, a mortal thing among many readers of no empyreal conceit, to venture and divulge unusual things of myself, I shall petition to the gentler sort, it may not be envy to me.<sup>15</sup>

It must have been a question of priorities. In the event, it was his (and our) good fortune that he survived into old age to write *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, however long these may have been in gestation. Historical hindsight has the effect of conferring a specious inevitability upon the familiar course of his long poetic career.

As I indicated in my introduction, I have not addressed Milton's later and most important work in this thesis. There is much work to be done here. Italian critics have in the past accused Milton of *plagiarising* Italian texts in *Paradise Lost*. Francesco Zigari published an article in Naples in 1834, 'Sulla scoperta dell'originale italiano da cui Milton trasse il suo poema del Paradiso Perduto',<sup>16</sup> which claimed that Milton had based his poem almost entirely on Serafino Della Salandra's 'sacred tragedy', *Adamo Caduto*.<sup>17</sup> Norman Douglas, as I have mentioned, rehashed his arguments ('mischievously', according to Neil Harris<sup>18</sup>) in a chapter in his book, *Old Calabria*.<sup>19</sup> Douglas concluded that 'Without Salandra's *Adamo*, the *Paradise Lost* as we know it, would not be in existence.'<sup>20</sup> Flavio Giacomantonio, on the other hand, in his paper from a 2006 Conference on Italian literary versions of the Fall and *Paradise Lost* argues that:

*Adamo Caduto* was a fruit ... of a period (17th century) in which there was a great production of religious plays, usually tied to the medieval play tradition and principally inspired by the Mysteries. It was this wide diffusion, not only in Italy, of works inspired by the Bible which suggests that in several cases of analogues, concerning *Paradise Lost*, an indirect source may have been involved – not the book of *Genesis* – but not necessarily *Adamo caduto*. I mean certain situations, which have led some to speculating about the *Adamo caduto* – *Paradise Lost* rapport, might, in fact, have their origin in other works on the Fall rather than Padre Serafino's tragedy.<sup>21</sup>

However, despite this, Giacomantonio's eventual conclusion is:

One can discuss, criticise or examine but not deny the existence of a great number of analogues between the two works and, therefore, of an area of study that might prove to

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<sup>15</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 87.

<sup>16</sup> Francesco Zigari, *Lettera al Signor Francesco Ruffa Sulla Scoperta dell'Originale Italiano da cui Milton Trasse il suo Poema del Paradiso Perduto* (Napoli: Borel e Bompard, 1834).

<sup>17</sup> Serafino della Salandra, *Adamo Caduto* (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Neil Harris, 'Milton's Toponomastic epic: the Fontarabbia simile in *Paradise Lost*' in *Il Paradise Lost di John Milton e il tema della caduta nella tradizione letteraria italiana: da Giambattista Andreini a Serafino della Salandra. Atti Milton conference*, Matera, 10-11 novembre 2006, a cura di Flavio Giacomantonio (Pisa: Fabrizio Serra, 2006), 183-204, p. 184.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Douglas, 'Milton in Calabria' in *Old Calabria* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1955), pp. 158-172.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>21</sup> Flavio Giacomantonio, 'Adamo Caduto by P. Serafino della Salandra in the Genesis of *Paradise Lost* by John Milton', Matera Conference, p. 138.

be interesting and rewarding. These analogies exist and should be studied with rigour and scientific method.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from Salandra, Milton has been seen, in Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, as using as intertexts both Giambattista Andreini's *L'Adamo* and Hugo Grotius's *Adamus Exul*. Antonio Fregoso's *Il Dialogo della Fortuna* may have provided Milton with the blueprint for *Pandaemonium*.<sup>23</sup> There is the indisputable presence of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata* – in both Tasso's original and Fairfax's translation – in Milton's epic. The phrase 'things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme', as we all know, is a (fairly) direct translation of Ariosto's 'cosa non detta in prosa mai, né in rima'<sup>24</sup> unless, of course, it comes from Berni's 'Come avvien, che nè in prosa e detta, o in rima/Cosa, che non sia stata detta prima', or reflects Boiardo's reference to the greatest war 'che raccontasse mai prosa ne verso'.<sup>25</sup>

Milton's memory became his inner library of cultural and literary reference once he had lost his sight, and it was full of Italy. Alastair Fowler identifies more than fifty specific references to Italian sources in *Paradise Lost*<sup>26</sup> and this is certain to be an underestimate. When we think of Milton writing *Upon the Circumcision*, we imagine him with Petrarch (or Tasso, or both), in one hand and his manuscript in the other, as he carefully crafted his English *canzone*. The sonnets in Italian demonstrate how far he had gone in absorbing the detail of the Petrarch school's vocabulary and manner. *Lycidas* shows how something of the Italian manner and Italian form was incorporated, perhaps only half-consciously, into his monody for his drowned fellow student. But *Paradise Lost* does not imitate or emulate any previous writer's manner or form in these technical ways. It draws upon resources (not only Italian ones, of course) gained from a lifetime of study of classical, biblical, and contemporary literary sources stored away in the great rag and bone shop of Milton's memory.

I have not been able to include these matters within the compass of this thesis. Instead, I have addressed a discrete and well-defined period of Milton's poetry and a discrete and well-defined part of his life, a kind of extended adolescence during which he was free from the usual pressures and responsibilities of adult life, a period which culminated in the escape to Italy that finally ended a retirement devoted to 'the study of Greek and Latin writers, completely at

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 154–55.

<sup>23</sup> Roy Erikson, 'A Dialogue with the Genres of Italy: John Milton's *Paradise Lost* between Antonio Fregoso and Serafino della Salandra,' *Matera Conference*, 47–63, p. 170.

<sup>24</sup> Ludovico Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso* (Milano: Einaudi, 1964) I. ii.

<sup>25</sup> Neil Harris, Milton's 'Sataneid: the Poet and the Devil in *Paradise Lost*' [unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leicester, 1985], p. 125.

<sup>26</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by A. Fowler (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007).

leisure.<sup>27</sup> His journey neatly ended the early period of his poetry and brought him home to a set of new and unforeseen challenges.

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<sup>27</sup> *Essential Prose*, p. 343.

## Appendix 1

### John Smart and the Lady of Sonnet II

In this appendix, I address a small issue relating to Sonnet II – the *donna leggiadra's* name – which lies outside the main argument of my thesis but which I think, illustrates the way in which Smart's views of the Italian sonnets have overdetermined critical debate during most of the past century.

The lady's name, based on Smart's analysis, is universally accepted as 'Emilia'. But should we continue to accept this long-standing claim? In the main body of my thesis, I have discussed Smart's revision of the dating of the Italian verse and mentioned his 'discovery' of 'Emilia'. In both respects, he may have had some help from Ettore Allodoli, but, as I indicated, Allodoli gives no reason for his selection of 'Emiliana' as the lady's name. The two central assertions upon which Smart's case for 'Emilia' rests are that the river of the poem, the *Reno* (but, in the original text, the *Rbeno*), is the Italian river that flows near Bologna and that the 'nobil varco,' is 'of the Rubicon'. Both references, Smart argues, identify the sonnet's 'location' as being in a region of Italy called 'Emilia.' Hence the *donna's* name, the one which 'honours' or 'pays tribute' to this region is, in turn, 'Emilia'. In the late eighteenth century, however, William Cowper translated the opening lines of the sonnet thus:

Fair lady! Whose harmonious name the Rhine  
Through all his grassy vale delights to hear,  
Base were indeed the wretch who could forbear  
To love a spirit elegant as thine.<sup>1</sup>

Cowper locates *his* Italian lady by a famous *German* river, the Rhine. (He does not translate the phrase 'nobil varco.')

David Masson was presumably referring to Cowper when he wrote:

It is well ... that [the reader] should know... that a river called the Reno flows close by Bologna; ... and that, in going from Bologna to Ferrara, it has to be crossed at a ford or ferry at a town called Malalbergo, twenty miles from Bologna and ten from Ferrara. This information is the more necessary because the Reno, named in the first sonnet, has been supposed to be the German Rhine – a supposition utterly perplexing.<sup>2</sup>

It was, as I indicated earlier, Masson who first substituted the not-so-very-well-known Italian river *Reno* for the much better-known River Rhine, but, in his view, the 'nobil varco' was located

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<sup>1</sup> William Cowper, *The Poetical Works of William Cowper*, ed. by H.F. Carey (London: William Smith, 1839) p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> Masson, I, p. 772.

downriver from Bologna at Malalbergo. (Today the SS64, the old road from Ferrara to Bologna, still crosses the Reno there.) Masson's suggestion was therefore that, since Milton visited Bologna (probably in April 1639)<sup>3</sup> on his return journey to England, Sonnet II, at least, was addressed to a Bolognese.<sup>4</sup> He admits other possibilities for the remaining sonnets and the *Canzone*, including composition in England following Milton's return there in 1639, but in the end, as I have said, he opts for Milton having written the whole sequence in Italy, on the basis that 'the whole series is too full of Italian colour and Italian circumstance'<sup>5</sup> for the poems to have been composed elsewhere.

The presumption that Milton wrote the Italian poems in or around the period of his visit to Italy seemed very reasonable in the absence of any strong evidence to the contrary, but Smart's intervention in 1921 changed that. However, his early dating of the Italian poems also meant that Milton's references to Italy in the verse could not derive from personal experience and left Smart with the problem of explaining how he came by his local knowledge:

in reality Milton's allusion to the flowery vale of Reno has nothing to do with his own Italian travel; as his mention in other poems of Zora's fruitful vale and the flowery dale of Sihma does nothing to suggest a personal visit to Palestine. The meaning of the lines is different: they indicate that the name of the lady was itself identical with that of the district in which the Reno is situated, and hence that she was called Emilia.<sup>6</sup>

Today, the Italian 'regione' in question here is better known as *Emilia-Romagna*. *Emilia* includes the provinces of Piacenza, Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, Bologna and Ferrara; Romagna, the provinces of Ravenna, Forlì-Cesena and Rimini. *Emilia* owes its name to the *Via Aemilia* (known in Italian as the 'Via Emilia'), the Roman road built during the consulship of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus (187 BCE), which linked Piacenza and Rimini. Smart points out that, much later in his career, Milton referred specifically to this road in *Paradise Regain'd*:

Pretors, Proconsuls to their Provinces  
Hasting or on return, in robes of state, . . .  
Or embassies from regions far remote.  
In various habits, on the Appian road,  
Or on the Emilian.

(IV: 69).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Lewalski, *Life*, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> Masson I, pp. 774-5

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 775.

<sup>6</sup> *Smart*, pp 137-8. Smart citing 'Zora' and 'Sihma' as similar poetic topographic references is, of course, entirely tendentious as Milton *did* [eventually] visit Italy, whilst he never went to the Holy Land.

<sup>7</sup> John Milton, *The Complete Works Vol II*, ed. by L Lunger Knoppers, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 49.

However, *Paradise Regained* is set in classical times. There were no Praetors or Proconsuls travelling the area in the seventeenth century. Smart is still left with the problem of explaining how the younger Milton, aged somewhere between 21 and 23, could have been aware of a connection between the river *Reno* and the name *Emilia*. Part of his explanation is that:

More than once the region is mentioned by Martial:

Funde tuo lacrimas orbata Bononia Rufo,  
Et resonet tota planctus in Emilia ; (Bk VI, 85)

(Pour forth, bereaved Bononia, your tears for your Rufus, and let the voice of your wailing be heard throughout the Aemilian Way)<sup>8</sup>

and Milton may have met with its name in many books of Italian geography and history.<sup>9</sup>

In point of fact, Emilia (or rather the Latin equivalent, ‘Aemilia’) is mentioned only twice in the fourteen books of Martial’s epigrams. The other instance is:

ROMAM vade, liber : si, veneris unde, requiret,  
Aemiliae dices de regione viae.

(Go, book, to Rome; if she shall ask whence you came, you will say “From the district of the Aemilian Way.”)<sup>10</sup>

Smart is strictly correct, then, in using the expression, ‘more than once’, but the phrase suggests an uncomfortable awareness of the thinness of his evidence. One would normally take ‘more than once’ to imply ‘more than twice.’ It is only in the lines Smart chooses to quote, that the word ‘Aemilia’ is used on its own (i.e. without qualifying ‘via’) and even here the translator has rendered the word as the ‘Aemilian Way’. It does not seem very likely, therefore, that the young Milton would have gained his alleged familiarity with seventeenth-century Italian regional names from this source.

In support of the existence of ‘many books of Italian geography’ which refer to ‘Emilia’, Smart cites ‘a popular work’ by Leandro Alberti, the *Descrittione di tutta l’Italia*, ‘which was well-known and much consulted in English’, in which, ‘Emilia is described at length, and the Valle di Reno is particularly celebrated.’<sup>11</sup> He then quotes a section, nine lines in length, from this work describing the *Valle di Reno*.

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<sup>8</sup> Translation from *Bohn’s Classical Library* 1897

<sup>9</sup> *Smart*, p. 138.

<sup>10</sup> Full Text of Martial’s Epigrams, Internet Archive

[http://archive.org/stream/martialepigrams01martiala/martialepigrams01martiala\\_djvu.txt](http://archive.org/stream/martialepigrams01martiala/martialepigrams01martiala_djvu.txt), retrieved 12.01.14

<sup>11</sup> *Smart*, p. 138.

It is difficult to locate this passage even with the assistance of modern search technology as there is no reference to the *Valle di Reno* in the work's *tavola* (contents pages). The *Descrizione di tutta l'Italia: et Isole pertinenti ad essa*<sup>12</sup> is a book which contains 500 double pages in the 'Italy' section and 91 pages dedicated to the islands: effectively a work of well over 1000 pages. As far as I have been able to determine, using digital search techniques which are not perfect for the typescript of the sixteenth century, the passage quoted by Smart contains the only reference to the *Valle di Reno* in the entire volume. Additionally, the work almost never refers to a *region* of Italy called 'Emilia'. The word 'Emilia' occurs almost always in the phrase 'Via Emilia' (and there are many such references). When it does refer to a region, it is always in the context of the distant historical past, either the classical Roman period or slightly later. There is a single twelve-line section of the book in which Alberti refers, in passing, to the Emilia Region. This reference *is* included in the *tavola*<sup>13</sup>. In this particular passage, Alberti uses as his authority for the use of the term, Strabo, the Greek geographer, whose lifetime straddled the first century BCE and the first century CE. We are still a long way from the name used for the region in the early part of the seventeenth century.

Both of Smart's supporting authorities for how Milton came to be aware of *Emilia* as an Italian region when he was in his early twenties are unconvincing. There is no doubt that Milton, as a classical scholar, would have been well aware of the *Via Aemiliana*. However, Smart does not adduce any real evidence that Milton placed the river *Reno* in a *contemporary* Italian region called 'Emilia'. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that such a regional name barely existed in Milton's day. I am indebted to an Italian encyclopaedia for the information that:

Il nome Emilia cadde in disuso nell'età medievale e fu ripreso solo nel sec. XIX, mentre il termine Romagna ... e stava a indicare tutto il territorio del dominio romano d'Oriente in Italia; fu aggiunto ufficialmente alla denominazione Emilia solo nel 1947.<sup>14</sup>

(The name Emilia fell into disuse in the Middle Ages and was only taken up again in the nineteenth century, while the term 'Romagna' ... which described the whole area of Eastern Italy under Roman rule, was joined officially to the name, Emilia, only in 1947.)<sup>15</sup>

Smart seeks to reinforce his case by identifying 'il nobil varco' with the river Rubicon, celebrated as the site of Julius Caesar's definitive 'throw of the die'. He makes great play of this 'discovery'. This is partly because, to justify the word 'nobil' (noble or famous), the 'varco' (which Smart, like

<sup>12</sup> Leandro Alberti, *Descrizione di tutta l'Italia* (Venegia: Pietro de i Nicolini da Sabbio, 1550).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. The *Tavola* section is unpaginated.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.sapere.it/enciclopedia/Em%C3%A4lia-Romagna.html> retrieved 08.01.14

<sup>15</sup> My translation.

Masson, translates as ‘ford’) must be well known. Smart clearly felt that the ford at Malabergo was insufficiently famous (indeed not famous at all). He argues that:

In the eastern part of Emilia there is the most famous ford in the world—that of the Rubicon. Leandro Alberti mentions it, as well as the Reno, in his description of Emilia, and recalls the historic crossing of Julius Caesar. Other authorities speak to the same effect. In a work of reference which was familiar in the seventeenth century, the *Novum Lexicon Geographicum* of Ferrari, we find Emilia defined as the district between Rimini and Piacenza, which includes both streams, and the Rubicon itself designated as fluvius Emilius. These definitions are repeated by Forcellini, and are correct according to modern boundaries.<sup>16</sup>

Of course, Ferrari never used the word, ‘Emilia’. He uses the Latin form, ‘Aemilia,’ as his text is in Latin. Smart is correct in saying that Ferrari defines Aemilia as the area between Rimini and Piacenza, but in so doing he is simply describing the route of the Via Aemiliana, not ascribing regional place names:

Aemilia reg. Italiae, partem Longobardiae Cispadanae, & Romandiolam complectens, ab Ariminio Placentiam usque protensa, a via Aemilia, veteribus memorata nomen habens.<sup>17</sup>

(Aemilia: region of Italy including part of Lombardy, Cisalpine Gaul and Romagna, extending from Rimini to Piacenza by the Aemilian Way, remembered as having this name in former times [or maybe ‘by old people’].)<sup>18</sup>

What is also slightly strange is that it turns out that the *Novum Lexicon Geographicum* was not published in Italy until 1674, the year of Milton’s death. I suppose Smart might have argued that the work is nonetheless indicative of broader seventeenth-century understandings of Italian geography, but he did not need to make this argument, having neglected to mention the date of the work’s publication.

As far as the Rubicon is concerned, the alphabetical listing in the *Lexicon* does indeed contain Smart’s *fluvius Emilius* (written *fluvius aemilius*). The relevant section runs as follows:

Rubico, *Pisatello*, & circa ortum *Rugoso*, teste Gaudentio Metula, fluvius Aemiliae, seu Galliae Togatae, apud Caesenam urbem, vix mill. pass. ab ea in ortum Arminium versus distans, olim terminus Italiae, & ubi a populo Romano Caesari interdictum ne ulterius armatus procederet, uti columna marmorea ibi erecta indicat.<sup>19</sup>

(The Rubicon, the Pisatello and nearby the source, the *Rugoso*, according to Gaudencio Metula, a river of Emilia or Cisalpine Gaul, near the town of Cesena, scarcely a mile from

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<sup>16</sup> Smart, pp. 139-40.

<sup>17</sup> Filippo Ferrari, *Lexicon Geographicum*, (Padua: Iacobi de Cadorinis, 1674) p. 12

<sup>18</sup> My translation.

<sup>19</sup> *Lexicon*, I, p. 130.



Rimini, once the border of Italy where Caesar was forbidden by the Roman people to march further in arms or so a marble column erected there indicates.)<sup>20</sup>

The full quotation slightly undermines Smart's case again: Ferrari does refer to the 'fluvius Aemiliae', but goes on to clarify the location further, with 'seu Galliae Togatae,' as though he feels the term *Aemiliae* needs more explanation. And once again, of course, we are dealing with classical times.

But, in any case, what evidence is there that the 'nobil varco' in question *is* on the Rubicon? Masson had proposed the 'ford or ferry at Malalbergo' just downriver from Bologna despite being quite as aware of the existence of the River Rubicon as Smart was. I have suggested that Smart chose the Rubicon because of its fame. There could be no doubt that Milton would have heard of it prior to his visit to Italy. However, I have been unable to find any other reference in Italian literature of the time to the Rubicon, Reno (or any other river in that area) having a 'nobil varco'. As far as the ford over the Rubicon is concerned, one of the main accounts of Caesar's crossing, Suetonius' *The Lives of the Caesars, (De Vita Caesarum)*, describes how Julius Caesar, just before making the decision to cross the Rubicon, said to his troops, 'Etiam nunc regredi possumus; quod si ponticulum transierimus, omnia armis agenda erunt.'<sup>21</sup> ('Even now we could draw back; but once we cross that little bridge, the outcome will be decided by the sword.') There is no reference to a ford. It is unlikely that Milton would not have known such a famous passage. Lucan, on the other hand, describes the crossing as follows:

The ruddy river Rubicon glides through the bottom of the valleys and serves as a fixed landmark to divide the land of Gaul from the farms of Italy. Issuing from a modest spring, it runs with scanty stream in the heat of burning summer; but now it was swollen by winter; and its waters were increased by the third rising of a rainy moon with moisture-laden horn, and by Alpine snows which damp blasts of wind had melted. First the cavalry took station slantwise across the stream, to meet its flow; thus the current was broken, and the rest of the army forded the water with ease.<sup>22</sup>

Here, we do have the army fording the river, but no ford. The cavalry creates one by partially damming the stream. Smart's case for the Rubicon having 'the most famous ford in the world' seems ill-founded.

There is even a question as to what Milton (or the poets he modelled his Italian verse upon) meant by 'varco.' Smart points out (correctly) that Florio's dictionary, *A Worlde of Words*, defines 'varco' as meaning 'any ford, ferry, passage or wading place over a river.'<sup>23</sup> It appears that

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<sup>20</sup> My translation.

<sup>21</sup> Suetonius, 'Divus Julius' in *De Vitis Caesarum*, para. 31, The Latin Library <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com>. Retrieved 07.09.17.

<sup>22</sup> Lucan, *The Civil War*, trans. by J.D. Duff (London: Heineman, 1962), p.19.

<sup>23</sup> Smart, p. 139, referring to John Florio, *A Worlde of Words* (New York: Georg Orms Verlag, 1972) p. 439

Masson got his interpretation, ‘ford or ferry,’ from the same source. In modern Italian, however, ‘varco’ means a narrow passage, not a ford. (A ford is ‘un guado.’) The *Dizionario dell’Accademia della Crusca* (1623) defines the word ‘varco’ as ‘valico.’<sup>24</sup> ‘Valico’ means, geographically speaking, a passage or crossing place, ‘luogo per il quale si passa’.<sup>25</sup> The verb, ‘valicare’ means to cross over (‘oltrepassare’). The *Dizionario della Crusca’s* edition 1623 edition<sup>26</sup> give three examples of ‘varco’s’ use:

Fa ch'io ti truovi al *varco*, Dove senza tornar passò 'l mio core. (Petrarch: Canzone 41.4)

May I find you on the path/passage my heart took without turning aside<sup>27</sup>

[...aperta la via per gli occhi al core])  
Che di lagrime son fatto uscio, e *varco*. (Petrarch: Sonnet 3)

Opened the way to the heart through the eyes  
Which are the passage and exit of tears<sup>28</sup>

[vid'io lo Minotauro far cotale;]  
E quegli accorto gridò: corri al *varco*. (Dante: Inferno, 12)

I saw the Minotaur do likewise, and my Guide realising, cried: Run for the passage.<sup>29</sup>

(The square brackets indicate that I have added the preceding lines for the sake of greater clarity of meaning.)

In not one of these instances does ‘varco’ mean ‘ford’. In my view, scholars have over-relied on Florio. It is far more likely that what Milton, with his wide reading of Italian literature understood by ‘varco,’ was ‘passage’.

So, I would argue that Smart’s ‘Emilia’ argument is based upon flimsy foundations. There *have* been one or two mildly dissenting voices from his theory, particularly, as noted earlier, E.A.J. Honigmann who, in his edition of the Sonnets (1966), argues also against the early date.<sup>30</sup> He also suggests in passing that we might revisit Cowper’s interpretation of Sonnet II, pointing out that modern editors<sup>31</sup> have silently emended the original spelling, *Rheno*, of the 1645 and 1673 editions of the poem, to *Reno*. He suggests that the original spelling suggested ‘the Rhine rather than the insignificant Reno.’<sup>32</sup> Interestingly, Tasso in his *Rime* sometime refers to the

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.lessicografia.it> (retrieved 14.12.16)

<sup>25</sup> *Dizionario italiano*, (Milano: Dizionari Garzanti, 1999)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.lessicografia.it> (retrieved 14.12.16)

<sup>27</sup> My translation.

<sup>28</sup> My translation.

<sup>29</sup> My translation.

<sup>30</sup> Honigmann, pp. 76-81.

<sup>31</sup> Lewalski and Haan in their recent edition of the poem have not done this.

<sup>32</sup> Honigmann, pp. 80-1n.

Italian river as ‘il picciol Reno’ or ‘il nostro Reno’ in contrast to ‘il gran Reno’, the German one,<sup>33</sup> and uses ‘Reno’ more frequently to mean the greater river than the smaller Emilian one. If we were to revert to Cowper’s view, we might take ‘varco’ to mean ‘passage’ in the sense of ‘gorge’ – and the gorges of the Rhine are rather noble and famous.

This, of course, invites a challenge to rename the Lady. I would tentatively offer ‘Renata’ or ‘Renée,’ a name which recalls the German *Rheno* with its famous *varchi*. The records of the French Protestant Church of Threadneedle Street show that Philip (‘Phelippe’ in the record) and Elizabeth Burlamacchi baptised their daughter, ‘Renée’ on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1617.<sup>34</sup> Filippo Burlamacchi was the son of Michele Burlamacchi, from the Protestant branch of the Burlamacchi family. I mentioned earlier that the records of the Threadneedle Street Church show that, in 1612, he and Theodore Diodati, Charles Diodati’s father, were both witnesses at the baptism of Jean Lulin.<sup>35</sup> Burlamacchi also had a sister living in France called Renata/Renea/Renée. She was named after Renata d’Este, Duchess of Ferrara, who was, of course, French (therefore really ‘Renée’). Names were flexible things in the early modern period. *The Registers of the French Church* are full of multiple spellings of both first names and surnames. It is possible that the London Renée herself was the ‘donna leggiadra’? She may be too young; but it is clear that the name was current in the London Italian community with which, as I have shown, Milton certainly had some contact.

Does any of this matter? I would suggest that, whilst the lady’s name is not so very important in itself, scepticism about Smart’s methodology in naming her, which has been rare in the century since he made his claims, might also feed into some of his other assertions about the sonnets, including their date even though, for the moment, Carey’s arguments on the *Elegia Sexta* question do, in my view, support an early date. Additionally, if they had been composed in Italy as Masson and others originally assumed, the near total obscurity in which Milton left these poems and the lack of any reference to his identity as an ‘Italian poet’ by his Italian friends seems to me inexplicable. But it may be that Smart reached the right conclusion about the sonnets’ date from the wrong arguments.

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<sup>33</sup> Rime 885, 889 and 884 for example.

<sup>34</sup> *The Registers of the French Church of Threadneedle Street Vol. IV*, ed. by W.J.C. Moens (London: The Huguenot Society of London, 1896) p.108. Hereafter *RFCTS*.

<sup>35</sup> *RFCTS*, p. 85.

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