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English Identity in the Writings of John Milton

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The University of Southern Mississippi

English Identity in the Writings of John Milton

by

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A Thesis

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Abstract: John Milton is an essential writer to the English canon. Understanding his life and thought is necessary to understanding his corpus. This thesis will examine Milton's nationalism in several major and minor poems as well as in some of Milton's prose. It will argue that Milton's nationalism is difficult to trace chronologically, but that education is always essential to Milton's national vision of England.

Key Terms: Englishness, nationalism, Milton, education

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I. Introduction

John Milton (1608-1674) was a profoundly important English writer. He so influenced the literary imaginations of later writers that William Wordsworth (1770-1850) could exclaim in his poem "London 1802," "Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour; / England hath need of thee" (1-2). A search for Milton citations in the *Oxford English Dictionary* yields almost 14,000 results, and *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, which usually only selects a fraction of a major work, includes Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* in its entirety. According to the late scholar John Shawcross, Milton's influence reaches not only later literature (for instance, Romanticism, eighteenth-century novels about women, the writings of James Joyce), but also the American Revolution (*passim*). Because of his lasting impression on English literature, Milton's life and thought becomes important as well. This thesis will begin to articulate a fundamental aspect of many of Milton's works: his English identity and how this identity led him to choose to write to and for England.

Throughout Milton's body of work, his sense of English identity can seem inconsistent. On one hand, Milton's early sonnets written to his friends in Italy vigorously defend the artistic and intellectual integrity of the English and compares England favorably to the nations of classical antiquity. In his miniature epic about the Gunpowder Plot, *In Quintum Novembris* (1625), the speaker communicates God's special guardianship over the English and celebrates the salvation of England from a Catholic threat. Only two years later, however, in *Elegia Quarta* (1627), Milton harshly criticizes the English for treating their preachers poorly. He deliberately fails to name a famous English landmark (the cliffs of Dover) and even claims the English deserve damnation

for their behavior. But by 1637, when Milton travels to Italy, he returns to defending the English. This conflicted sense of English identity pervades Milton's body of work.

Milton at once sees the English nation as chosen by God and also as stubborn, irreligious, backward, and corrupt.

Regardless of Milton's complex views of the English nation, he always identifies as English, whether by signing his correspondences as "John Milton, Englishman" or by choosing to write in English, a choice he articulates in *A Reason of Church Government: Urg'd against Prelaty* (1642). Whether writing in praise, in defense, or in criticism of the English, Milton always writes to and for the English nation.

Though I will not be able to establish a definitive definition of Englishness in the writings of John Milton (doing so would be beyond the scope of an undergraduate thesis), I have pinpointed several important issues that contribute to an understanding of Milton's English identity, such as Milton's early embrace of his Englishness and the educational and prophetic impulse in many of Milton's later works. I will argue that Milton's attitude toward the English shifts from unreserved national pride early in his life to the need to improve the English nation through education in his later years, and that in spite of Milton's disappointment in the English people, he constantly chooses to maintain his English identity.

In this thesis, a necessary idea for understanding Milton's Englishness will be that of *education*. Nowhere in Milton's corpus does he explicitly define education, but Milton's definition of a good program of study can be inferred through careful reading of some of his texts. In *Of Education* (1644), Milton's only tract to detail a comprehensive curriculum, Milton claims that the purpose of education "is to repair the ruins of our first

parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to imitate Him, to be like Him” (2: 366-67).¹ In *The Christian Doctrine* (ca. 1661), Milton describes spiritual regeneration, which he claims as the end of education, as follows: “The old man is destroyed and that the inner man is regenerated by God through the word and spirit so that *his whole mind* is restored to the image of God [emphasis mine]” (6: 461). Whether improvements of the mind result in knowledge of God or knowledge of God brings about intellectual change, Milton links intellectual improvement with Christian spirituality. Thus, Milton’s educational theories are inherently theological.

In addition to the spiritual purpose in Milton’s proposed curriculum, he also wants to produce good citizens who work “skillfully and magnanimously” (2: 379). Clearly, he wants to form adults that are both competent and virtuous. He also encourages instruction in wrestling, which Milton considers essential to English national identity, as will be discussed below. Milton’s curriculum, while primarily spiritual in purpose, is not entirely so. Milton also wants to benefit the English nation through his pedagogical ideas.

Milton’s definition of education can be described in terms of what it intends to produce—a productive Christian citizen of England. For the purpose of this paper, I define education as any form of instruction that leads a person closer to God and/or benefits the English nation. Whether Milton defends the English to foreigners or corrects the poor behavior of the English, Milton’s works nearly always give some emphasis to education, even if only implicitly.

¹ John Milton wrote in the seventeenth century and spelling was not standardized until the eighteenth century. Following standard practice, I have retained Milton’s original spellings throughout this thesis, even though such orthography may appear incorrect to a twenty-first century reader.

II. John Milton, Englishman

By the time he travelled to Italy in 1637, Milton had noticeably embraced his English origins. The *testimonia*, or prefatory praise of Milton's poetry from his friends in Italy in *Poemata* (1645), Milton's collection of early Latin elegies, clearly suggests his emerging identity as an English poet. As evidenced by the *testimonia*, several of Milton's Italian friends noticed that Milton's poetry represented England itself.² Carlo Dati,³ one of Milton's close Italian friends, describes Milton as "A young man distinguished by his *native land* and by his virtues [emphasis mine]" (Revard 140-41). Giovanni Salzilli, an Italian poet whom Milton met in 1638, describes how the rivers associated with Homer, Vergil and Tasso have been figuratively humbled to the Thames:

Let Meles yield, let Mincius yield with lowered urn,
Let Sebetus cease to speak continuously of Tasso;
But let Thames victorious bear its waves higher than all these,
For through you, Milton, it singly will be a match for all those three.

(Salzilli 1-4; Revard 132)

Salzilli associates Milton with the Thames, and therefore with England. Furthermore, Salzilli claims that Milton not only can compete with Homer, Virgil and Tasso, but that he exceeds them in ability, hence the Thames runs more fiercely than the other rivers. Thus, Salzilli casts England as a superior nation in both poetic and geographic terms, and this superiority results from Milton's presence and poetry. By the time he visits Italy, Milton has become an advocate for England through his poetry.

² Many of the poems of the *testimonia* express similar sentiments, such as "To John Milton, Noble Englishman" by Antonio Francini, which claims that England the place produces heroes (*Complete Shorter Poems*, 15). Giovanni Battista Manso puns on Angle/angel as Bede famously does in *An Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (*Complete Shorter Poems*, 133).

³ Not to be confused with Charles Diodati, a childhood friend of Milton who was also of Italian origin.

Even if Milton promotes England through his poetry, Salzilli's praise for Milton's poetry seems excessive because he writes in praise of John Milton the university student and not John Milton the author of *Paradise Lost*. Stella Revard, in her article "John Milton, *Anglus*: The Quest for an English Identity," explains that the extravagant praise in the *testimonia* "reflect[s] not so much his [Milton's] own virtues, but his friends' generosity" (27). Yet despite Milton's friends' exaggeration of young Milton's poetic abilities, "what remains striking . . . is the degree to which Milton's Italian friends attribute Milton's genius to his Englishness" (27). Salzilli Milton's only friend to associate Englishness with positive attributes. Another of Milton's friends, Antonio Francini, writes that England is

Separated from the world,
Because her valor exceeds the human,
This fecund land knows how to produce heroes
Who with reason are deemed superhuman by us. (15-18)

Even though classical poets have been associated with place, England seems special to Milton's Italian friends, and its insularity reflects its exceptionality, since Francini claims that England's isolation results from its superior inhabitants. So, not only is Milton associated with a place like other poets, he lives in a place that is more special than others. Thus, Milton is not any poet; he is an *English* poet, and since Dati strongly associates poets with the geography of their native lands, England must also nurture Milton's poetic talent more than the native soil of other poets did to their abilities.

While Milton's friends have praised Milton and England, Milton claims his English identity for himself in his poem *Mansus* (1638). Written to one of Milton's hosts,

Giovanni Battista Manso, the poem directly associates England with classical Greece and offers insight into Milton's view of England's intellectual heritage. In the poem, Milton writes of England and attests to the poetic talents of his inhabitants: "I believe I too have heard the swans sing on our river" (30). Translator Laurence Revard identifies these swans as Spenser and Shakespeare. Milton also speaks of Chaucer's time in Italy and says that the English "are not an uncultivated kind" (35). In *Mansus*, Milton defends the poetic abilities of the English in spite of the nation's handicaps.⁴ He also associates the druids, pagan priests in ancient Britain, with classical Greece:

We [the English] nurture Phoebus, too. We have sent Phoebus our gifts:
gold sheaves, the yellow apples in their baskets, fragrant
crocus (assuming that our elders were not boasting)
and dancers chosen from the Druid people.
(The ancient Druid race, skilled in the sacred rites
Of their gods, sang praise of their heroes' model deeds.) (38-43)

Milton subtly defends the intellectual integrity of the English by equating their religion with that of the Greeks, and by choosing Phoebus, the god of music as the English object of worship. By associating the English with similar religious and cultural facets to those of the ancient Greeks, Milton endows England with a classical past. Of course, Milton is not unique in his revival of the classics, as such a practice characterized the Renaissance, but Milton does more here than compare England to a classical nation. He instead deliberately inserts the ancient English into classical history. Furthermore, the Druids bring lavish gifts to the temple of Apollo, thus proving England's affluence. Even though

⁴ Milton claims the English Muse is "barely / weaned in the icy north" (28-29) and makes other references to the poor weather of England.

England's muse was "wean'd in the icy north," (29), she can still compete with the muses of Greece or Italy. In *Mansus*, Milton advocates for England on his own terms. His need to demonstrate England's cultural refinement, however, suggests at once both national pride and insecurity.

Milton further attempts to defend and classicize the English when he discusses his ambitions of writing an Arthurian epic, a goal suggesting that Milton believes it necessary to demonstrate the heroic deeds of the English:

If ever I will recall my native kings to songs
Arthur as yet warring underneath the earth,
or tell of great-souled heroes at their table,
unbeaten in their alliance—O may the spirit be here—
and smash Saxon lines under a British Mars. (80-84)

Milton's reference to King Arthur as a "British Mars" creates a classical pseudo-deity for the English, thus giving them a classical culture, since Mars is the Roman god of war. By writing about King Arthur, Milton intends to create a British mythology, similar to that of Greece and Rome, yet distinctly English.

Later in his career, however, Milton rejects the idea of a specifically English hero. Though Milton had contemplated writing an Arthurian epic in his early career to glorify the English, his ultimate epic project, *Paradise Lost*, does not even have a mortal hero, let alone an English one. Milton's choices can be explained in part by Renaissance discussions of the conflict between the ideals of a classical hero and the values of Christianity. According to John M. Steadman in *Milton and the Renaissance Hero*, Milton rejects "virtually the entire epic tradition" and the conventions of the epic hero

(1). Military prowess was commonly questioned as a virtue in the Renaissance, either because it conflicted with Christian morals or because it did not in itself constitute heroism (Steadman 6). If Milton were to choose King Arthur as an epic hero, he would have to rely on Arthur's tradition of military dominance, a dubious heroic virtue. Furthermore, Milton showed that some of the traditional heroic virtues, such as military prowess and leadership (6), without faith, were useless, since he gave them to Satan (17).

Milton's logical and ethical problems with classical heroism can aid in understanding his hopes for educating the English. Though Milton's goal of writing an epic did not change throughout his career, he shifted from an epic that would glorify the English and place them within the classical epic tradition (*Mansus*) to an educational work that will be "doctrinal and exemplary to the nation" (1: 815). The goal of the epic in classical antiquity was to instruct, delight, and move to virtuous action (Steadman 2), and Milton does not deviate from that goal, but his conception of virtue changes as he matures. In addition to possessing dubious virtues, King Arthur, in Milton's view, was merely legendary. Nor did his deeds accurately reflect the English national character. In *A History of Britain*, Milton insists that the English should examine and know their true selves and not turn to legend as a measure of national virtue. In fact, Milton spends several pages explaining the reasons why King Arthur, arguably Britain's greatest legendary hero, is not factual (5: 128-31). He has particularly strong language for legends being taken as fact: "But he who can accept of Legends for good story, may quickly swell a volume with trash, and had need be furnish'd with two only necessaries, leasure, and belief, whether it be the writer or he that shall read" (5: 128). Milton considers legends "trash" for readers or writers with too much free time (5: 128). Thus, writing an epic

about a legendary figure makes little sense from Milton's perspective. Milton chose not to write an epic with a mortal, military hero both because of his ethical concerns with military prowess as a virtue and because he believed King Arthur, England's greatest legendary war hero, did not have any historical basis. If Milton had chosen to write an Arthurian epic, he would have had to rely on military virtue, which he questioned, and on a hero with no factual existence. Such a hero could not serve the English because his lack of reality cannot instruct the English in real behavior. Instead, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton chooses to glorify God and teach the English to distinguish good from evil in a confusing political period.

Though Milton's mid-career epic aspirations call for a military hero, God is the hero in both *In Quintum Novembris* (1625), an early miniature epic, and in *Paradise Lost*. In his *In Quintum Novembris*, Milton casts God as the ultimate hero and also shows the special relationship between God and the English. *In Quintum Novembris* narrates a fictional version of the Gunpowder Plot, a failed attempt by several English Catholics to blow up Parliament in 1605. Young Milton found the event a worthwhile illustration of England's exceptionality, particularly in spiritual matters. The poem at first puts the English close to God by placing them at a distance from Satan. Satan, after travelling the world, finds England, "alone rebellious to me, / resentful of rule, and stronger than my skill" (41-42). Since Satan later influences the Pope in the poem, the English, by rebelling against Roman Catholicism, by extension rebel against Satan. In the miniature epic, however, Satan singles out England as rebellious and beyond his abilities to manipulate. Satan's choice of England among many other Protestant nations suggests that England is exceptionally Protestant, and therefore, in the speaker's mind, particularly far

from Satan. The distance between the English and Satan logically brings them closer to God and in this way, the English are exceptional.

In addition to portraying English exceptionality, *In Quintum Novembris* portrays the tension between Roman Catholicism and England and even goes as far as to imply that adherence to Roman Catholicism and true Englishness are mutually exclusive. In the poem, the Pope says, “Where oceans flow around it in the west, a race / that’s hateful to me lives” (157-58). The Pope does not say he hates English Protestants, but the English race itself. The Pope’s remark puts special enmity between the English and Rome, since the Pope appears to dislike the English for reasons beyond religious differences. The English people were certainly not alone in separating from the Catholic Church, nor were they the first, since by the early seventeenth century, Protestantism had become an international movement and England had only been Protestant in practice for several decades. The Protestantism of the English was not exceptional in practice.⁵ Because the English were certainly not the only Protestants by the seventeenth century, the Pope in the poem must look beyond religion to find a reason to hate the English. Mere Protestantism is not enough to make England exceptional.

In addition to articulating his animosity toward the English, the Pope later observes that “Careful nature refused / to join this unworthy race [the English] completely to our world” (158-59). In contrast to the view of Milton’s Italian friend Francini⁶ that England’s insularity is a result of its virtue, Milton’s Pope sees England’s

⁵ Despite the Act of Supremacy in 1532 that changed the head of the Church in England, the English laity were reluctant to accept reform and England remained largely Catholic in theology and practice until Elizabeth I. Please see *History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland* by William Cobbett for more information.

⁶Francini writes that England is
Separated from the world,
Because her valor exceeds the human,

insularity as a defect. From Milton's perspective, the Pope's dislike of the English further proves England's fervent Protestantism and exceptionalism. Since the rest of Europe is geographically connected to Rome, Catholicism can more easily influence it, but England's position as an island at the westernmost corner of Europe makes it more difficult for the Pope to infiltrate it. Both the rebelliousness of the English and the physical insularity of Britain contribute to its defense against the forces of Rome.⁷ Thus, in the end both Francini and the Pope associate place and exceptionalism, whether that exceptionalism is positive or negative.

While the speaker of *In Quintum Novembris* implicitly demonstrates English spiritual exceptionalism through his geographical position and relationship with the Pope and Satan, he explicitly puts God on the side of the English when it comes to the actual thwarting of the Gunpowder Plot. The speaker thus sees England's geographical position as a sign of God's providence. When the Pope decides to destroy the English parliament, "the lord / who flashes lightning looks down from heaven's citadel, and laughs . . . / and determines to secure the cause of his own people" (166-69). The speaker sets God on the side of the English and against Rome. According to the poem, oddly, God works through the pagan goddess "Fame" (i.e., Rumor, particularly familiar from Virgil's *Aeneid*). Immediately after describing God laughing at the Pope's plans, the poem features a lengthy digression about Fame and her role in thwarting the Gunpowder Plot. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil does not describe the actions of Fame in a flattering way. The speaker describes Fame's tower as a large place at the center of the world, in which rumors are

This fecund land knows how to produce heroes
Who with reason are deemed superhuman by us. (15-18)

⁷ The Latin poem mentions both "English" and "British," so I also use them interchangeably here. In the rest of the thesis, "English" will refer to inhabitants of England (not Scotland and Ireland) and particularly Southern England, and "British" will refer to the original Celtic inhabitants of England.

collected and spread. Milton does remember that Fame's work is often negative: "Talkative, she gushes random things she has seen and heard / with a thousand tongues to anyone, now shrinking truth / to falsehood, now engrossing it with fabrications" (191-93). Instead of saving the protagonists from a nefarious plot, Fame is described as "unholy" in the *Aeneid* (4. 399). Virgil also describes Fame as a "terrifying / enormous monster" with many eyes and tongues that causes deception and chaos (4.238-39). Despite Fame's potential for destruction, Milton's God uses her skills for good by commissioning her to warn the English about the Gunpowder Plot: "'Are you silent, Fame? Is this unholy force of Papists / plotting against me and *my* British hidden from you?' [emphasis mine]" (201-02). After hearing of the plot, Fame flies to England and warns the English of the conspiracy. God's claim on the British in Milton's *In Quintum Novembris* associates the British with the Israelites because the Israelites are the biblical nation chosen by God.⁸ By having God advocate for the British, the speaker directly claims that the English are chosen by God.

Fame's obedience to God as described above is telling in several ways. First, it offers a commentary on the relationship between the classical and the Christian in the Renaissance. As Isabel Rivers reminds us in *Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry*, the coexistence of classical and Christian ideas in education dates back to the third and fourth century CE, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire but when students still learned from classical Latin (and therefore pagan) literature (23). The appropriation of classical sources to Christianity continued into the Renaissance, when authors employed classical mythology for several reasons, including allegory (24). The episode in which Fame warns of the Gunpowder Plot, which

⁸ See Genesis 12.

is nested within the larger narrative of the poem, provides a means of reading the events of the whole. Since Fame was often seen in a negative light in classical literature, the fact that she helps save the English from the Gunpowder plot suggests that God can use bad or dubious characters to produce positive outcomes.

Just as Fame aids in God's plan despite her pagan origins, so does the Roman Catholic Church, whose worship Milton's poem equates with paganism. He describes the Catholics' singing in a procession as "singing the rites in Echionian Aracynthus / as stunned Asopus trembles under glassy waves / and far off Cithaeron responds by hollow cliffside" (65-67). As editor Stella Revard⁹ observes, Milton's speaker sees Catholic worship and worship of Bacchus as one in the same (214). Though the comparison of Catholic worship to pagan worship in the poem may only have to do with the classical nature of *In Quintum Novembris*, Protestant worship in the poem is clearly monotheistic, and Catholic worship pagan. In the poem, Milton refers to the Catholic canon of saints as "goddesses / and gods" (129-130). When the would-be perpetrators of the Gunpowder Plot are caught, on the other hand, "Holy incense and due respects are offered to God" (223). Though incense may also be a part of pagan worship, Protestants in the poem worship "the heavenly Father" (220), that is, one God. Thus, Milton clearly intends to portray Roman Catholicism as a pagan religion, and Fame is a pagan goddess. If a pagan goddess can aid the Christian British through the workings of God, then so can Roman Catholicism aid the English. The thwarting of the Catholic plot aids in British salvation. *In Quintum Novembris* ultimately communicates the specialness of the English to God,

⁹ Stella Revard's son Laurence Revard appears to have translated the Latin poems in the edition cited in this thesis.

and God's ability to work for their spiritual and temporal salvation, even through pagans and enemies

Thirty years later, Milton still sees Catholicism as a threat to English well-being, as shown in his later sonnet "On the Late Massacher in Piedmont" (1655), which commemorates the massacre of the Waldensians, or followers of Peter Waldo, in 1655. The poem praises this group of people for their early break from Rome. Excommunicated in 1215, the Waldensians existed before any Protestant denomination. As Revard notes, Milton admires the Waldensians for their apparent religious orthodoxy when he describes them as having "kept thy truth so pure of old / When all our Fathers worship't Stocks and Stones" (3-4). The phrase "stocks and stones" also appears in the book of Jeremiah, chapter 3, in which God chastises Israel for idolatry and promises that he will heal the nation. By referencing Scripture, Milton again associates the ancestors of England with Israel, a nation who constantly turns away from God, yet enjoys His Favor.

III. John Milton, Teacher and Prophet

Milton's Educational Philosophy

Milton spent much of his career advocating for the English and teaching them. From informing Giovanni Battista Manso about the classical past of Britain to showing the English nation the providential effect of the Gunpowder Plot, many of John Milton's writings are implicitly educational. *Of Education* is Milton's only text focused exclusively on the value of education¹⁰ though many of his other writings include educational elements. Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*, for example, includes many theological and political concerns, but among other things it combines its elements for the

¹⁰ Milton also wrote textbooks on grammar (*Accidence Commenct Grammar*, 1669) and logic (*Artis Logicae Plenior Institutio*, 1672), but they are not discussed here.

good of the English by offering them practice in discerning true from false rhetoric, as will be further demonstrated below. In fact, Milton's expressed purpose of *Paradise Lost* is "to justify the ways of God to men" (1.26). If readers of *Paradise Lost* are supposed to learn about why God acts as He does, *Paradise Lost* clearly has an educational component. In spite of Milton's strong involvement in political matters and his hopes that education would aid the English politically, Milton believed the ultimate goals of intellectual improvement to be spiritual. After all, in *Of Education* he claims that the purpose of education is to "repair the ruines of our first Parents" (2: 366-67), an idea that remains consistent between *Of Education* and Milton's masterpiece, *Paradise Lost*, in which the Son will "regain the blissful seat" (1.5). Milton's idea of spiritual regeneration, as mentioned earlier, involves a complete renewal that is both spiritual and intellectual. Along with the intended spiritual end of Milton's proposed curriculum, however, comes the betterment of the English nation, both in their internal political struggles and how they are viewed by other nations, especially in artistic and cultural achievements. In this section, I will analyze a selection of Milton's texts that are at least in part educational and show how he intends his pedagogical ideas to benefit primarily the English.

According to Gordon Campbell, Milton began to tutor his nephews in 1640 (68), so he surely had thought about what comprises a good education. Milton's tract *Of Education* (1644) details what he believes should be the content and purpose of a good program of study. Milton published *Of Education* in 1644¹¹ and addressed the tract to Samuel Hartlib (ca. 1600-1662), a Prussian educational theorist whose circle included John Dury, John Amos Comenius, and Thomas Young (who happened to be one of

¹¹ Hartlib had been circulating his educational ideas in England since 1637, and Milton had met him by 1643 at the latest. For more information on Milton's interactions with Hartlib, see the introduction to *Of Education in the Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, Yale UP.

Milton's tutors). Milton met Hartlib no later than 1643, and *Of Education* was a fruit of their discourses. Milton saw proper education as essential to the improvement of the character of the English nation. Indeed, he claims early in *Of Education* that England "for the want thereof [of education] . . . perishes" (2: 363). The content of Milton's proposed curriculum is not terribly innovative, as it involves a heavy emphasis on classics that is consistent with Renaissance humanism, but he designs an otherwise typical curriculum specifically to the betterment of the English people through his plans for the study of agriculture, as well as his visions for England as the seat of education and his views on the purpose of foreign travel.

Before 1643, the year that *Of Education* was probably written, Milton had not articulated his educational philosophy, choosing instead to write tracts concerning issues of church polity. In fact, when he addresses Hartlib, Milton emphasizes that education is not one of his primary concerns: "I have not yet at this time been induc't [to write about education], but by your earnest entreaties and serious conjurements; as having my mind for the present halfe diverted in the persuance of some other assertions" (2: 363). Milton still acquiesces to Hartlib's request that Milton write about education because it will benefit England: "I see those aims, those actions which have won you with me the esteem of a person sent hither by some good providence from a far country to be the occasion and the incitement of a great good to this Iland" (2: 363). Milton's citation of providence in Hartlib's presence in England suggests that God is directing the improvement of the English and the English are special to God. This idea of English "election" is sometimes part of Milton's national consciousness.¹² Thus, writing an educational text becomes part

¹² Milton strongly emphasizes English election throughout *In Quintum Novembris* and in *Areopagitica*, Milton claims that the English will perfect the Protestant Reformation.

of Milton's calling. Milton directs *Of Education* to the English because, Milton claims, "this nation hath extreame need [emphasis mine]" of educational reform (2: 364). Even though Hartlib was from Prussia and even though Milton's educational ideas could be applied elsewhere, Milton still only mentions England in his tract; he claims to write *Of Education* out of concern for England.

Milton's writing on education is both spiritual and national and thus in it, Milton combines the roles of prophet and teacher. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *prophet* in several ways, including as "a divinely inspired interpreter, revealer or *teacher*" (1.a, emphasis mine) and as "an inspired bard or poet" (1.c). Because Milton asks for divine inspiration when writing *Paradise Lost*,¹³ and because, as I have shown, Milton acts as a teacher of Christian virtue, he can be regarded as a prophet in a sense. After all, *Of Education* states that the purpose of study "is to repair the ruines of our first Parents by regaining to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him" (2: 366-367). To Milton, the ultimate end of education is Christian virtue, and to Milton, knowledge is not enough; it must be lived in daily life. Milton also articulates the idea that education should bear practical fruit and restore man's relationship with God at the end of *Paradise Lost*, when Michael advises Adam and Eve to use their knowledge of obedience to God to

add Faith,

Add Virtue, Patience, Temperance, add Love,

.....

then wilt thou not be loath

¹³ In the Invocation in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost*, Milton invokes a "Heav'nly Muse" (PL 1.6), who is understood to be the Holy Spirit.

To leave this paradise, but shall possess

A paradise within thee, happier far. (12.582-587)

Adam and Eve must not only learn to obey God; their knowledge must also be accompanied by virtue, and if they do that, they will have an inner Paradise. Adam and Eve's knowledge application of Michael's advice rectifies some of the results of the Fall by creating a "paradise within" (12.587). Milton's educational vision thus remains consistent between *Of Education* and *Paradise Lost*.

Although the primary purpose of education is to better serve God, Milton's proposed plan of study is not strictly theological. In fact, as noted by Stephen J. Schuler in "Sanctification in Milton's Academy: Reassessing the Purposes in *Of Education* and the Pedagogy of *Paradise Lost*," some critics have argued that Milton's educational plan makes theological studies peripheral to secular subjects (42). He advocates study of the classics, science, the proper handling of weapons, and even wrestling, but all of this study is supposed to lead to the development of one's character. In fact, in *Areopagitica*, Milton argues that exposure to not only secular, but immoral literature can lead to the strengthening of Christian virtue when one resists immorality:

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd,
that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race,
where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.

Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, we bring impurity much
rather: that which purifies us is triall, and triall is by what is contrary. (2:
515)

Milton mixes the spiritual and secular in his argument by showing the effect of the secular on the spiritual. The purification that results from a test of virtue will in part rectify the effects of the Fall, which is the entire purpose of Milton's educational plan. The grace to resist the temptations brought on by exposure to secular and possibly immoral subjects enacts this purification. According to Milton's logic, then, all of his proposed plan of study, even the secular subjects, should lead to an increase in Christian virtue.

Though a good secular and spiritual education will improve a person as a human being, a bad education harms a person's ability to behave virtuously. In *Of Education*, Milton criticizes the current methods of English education, which include tedious drills in Latin that hardly teach the subject. This method of teaching causes English students "for the most part grow into hatred and contempt of learning" (2: 375). Not only do students begin to dislike learning, but they apply their education toward selfish ends that hurt English society. An extensive example of this phenomenon that Milton provides is the legal profession. A poorly educated lawyer, Milton claims, will make his priorities "promising and pleasing thoughts of litigious terms, fat contentions, and flowing fees," rather than "the prudent and heavenly contemplation of justice and equity" (2: 375). Poor education removes the moral component of one's profession and instead encourages personal gain. By critiquing the current English education system, Milton suggests that the moral character of the English nation is adversely affected by poor education. Poor education and morals culminate in the English regarding "tyrannous Aphorisms . . . [as] the highest points of wisdom; instilling their barren hearts with a conscientious slavery" (2: 375-376). Lack of learning, Milton argues, results in capitulation to monarchy and

therefore slavery. Because Milton composed *Of Education* during the English Civil War, his concerns that poor education leads to political bondage is particularly relevant. In order for monarchy to disappear in England and for liberty to prevail, good education is necessary. This association of education and liberty is not new, but the idea has specific political relevance in seventeenth century England. The continuance of a poorly educated populace will result in the return of a king and therefore slavery. By demonstrating the effects of poor education through current political events, Milton shows the specific value of education to the English. Even though the ultimate aims of Milton's proposed educational program are spiritual, education is also necessary for the temporal salvation of the English. Milton links lack of education with contemporary English political risks. Thus, the need for educational reform has specific relevance to the English.

In addition to illuminating the danger of poor education to the English nation, Milton demonstrates the benefits of a proper one. Throughout his tract, Milton reiterates that proper instruction should not only create an intelligent person, but an upstanding Christian citizen. A properly taught person will work "skillfully and magnanimously" (2: 379). Milton's ideal enlightened person is both competent and altruistic. Moral formation is clearly important in Milton's plan of an ideal curriculum. Later in *Of Education*, Milton moves from the general moral benefits of learning to the specific benefits of schooling to the English nation. He cites the study of agriculture, for example, which he claims will "improve the tillage of their Country, to recover the bad Soil" (2: 389). Not only does Milton's curriculum have moral benefits, it has direct economic benefits for England. Furthermore, Milton advocates the study of wrestling, because "English men

were wont to excel” at it (2: 409). Clearly Milton has decided to tailor his pedagogical ideas to the benefit and talents of the English.

Milton extends the benefits of learning to the English from agriculture to politics. At the time the *Of Education* was written, England had experienced significant political unrest, including ongoing wars between king and parliament, so politics was especially relevant. Milton discusses the importance of the study of politics by criticizing Parliamentary leaders, claiming that students must study political science so “that they may not in a dangerous fit of the common-wealth be such poor, shaken, uncertain Reeds, of such a tottering Conscience, as many of our great Councillers have lately shewn themselves, but stedfast pillars of the State” (2: 398). Milton intends for the intellectual formation of his students to make them into consistent leaders, unlike the leaders that currently control England. In an England without monarchy, the formation of adequate political leaders is imperative. Milton’s decision to include politics in his educational program reflects concerns that are particular to England. The effects of Milton’s proposed program of study, while it may seem universal, would especially benefit the English.

By the time *Of Education* concludes, Milton explicitly expresses the nationalistic goals of his curriculum. Milton claims that his program “could not but mightily redound to the good of this Nation and bring into fashion again those old admired Vertues and Excellencies, with far more advantage now in this puritie of Christian knowledge” (2: 414). Not only does Milton’s proposed educational program produce virtuous individuals, it also benefits the English nation as a whole. Milton envisions England as the seat of education, as opposed to Italy. An earlier educational theorist, Roger Ascham, in *The Schoolmaster* (1570) discusses the problems with sending English students to

Italy, claiming that Italy will corrupt them, particularly in matters of religion. After all, Italy is a Catholic country (634-44). When speaking of the grand tour students often took during their university studies, Milton claims that doing so should be “not to learn Principles but to enlarge Experience” (2: 414). By denying the role of foreign countries in shaping the fundamental thoughts of English students, Milton promotes the position of England as the primary place of learning virtue. Furthermore, Milton envisions other nations learning from England: “perhaps then other Nations will be glad to visit us for their Breeding, or else to imitate us in their own Country” (2: 414). Milton hopes that England will become an example for other nations to follow, rather than the other way around. Milton’s desires for the future of the English nation, as expressed in “of Education,” are for a free, educated, virtuous population that serves as a role model to other countries. But it is also clear that England is nowhere near meeting that goal. Milton claims the vocation of the English is to educate others and how this is to be fulfilled, but his plan has to be implemented for any improvement in England’s many flaws.

Even before producing *Of Education*, Milton dedicates his pedagogical abilities solely to the English nation. Though he had taken to writing prose for political purposes, many of Milton’s statements about writing transfer to his poetry. In *The Reason of Church-Government, Urged against Prelaty* (1642), an anti-episcopal tract, Milton includes a digression in which he discusses his reasons for writing in English and the purposes literature can serve. Milton claims that he chooses to write in English for the benefit of the English, rather than to write ornate, vain prose. Instead, Milton prefers “to be an interpreter & relater of the best and sagest things among mine own Citizens

throughout this Iland in the mother dialect” (1: 811-12). Milton claims that he will write in English for pedagogical reasons, so he can instruct the English citizens rather than display his own abilities, just as the Hebrews, Romans, and Greeks also wrote in the vernacular for their people (1: 812). Thus, Milton places himself with both classical and biblical sources of wisdom. According to the digression, Milton does not care if he is known outside of England and instead wants to correct the current view of English history, which has been, according to Milton, “made small by the unskilfull handling of monks and mechanicks” (1: 812). Milton clearly strives to be a specifically English writer, working for the betterment of the English people in the past and in the future. If writing can mar the history of the English, as Milton believed it could, than it should also be able to help them. Milton’s position as a specifically English writer (as opposed to a writer who happens to write in English) will later help him fill what he perceives as his offices of teacher and prophet.

Paradise Lost: An Exercise in Rhetorical Discernment for the English

Milton shows that teaching the English people is one of the purposes of his epic poem *Paradise Lost* when he compares himself to important biblical leaders and poets. During his first invocation of the Muse in *Paradise Lost*, Milton asks to be inspired as the Muse inspired Moses or David:

Sing, Heaven’ly Muse, that on the secret top
Of *Oreb*, or of *Sinai* didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
How in the beginning how the Heav’ns and Earth
Rose out of *Chaos*: Or if *Sion* Hill

Delight thee more, and *Siloe's* Brook that flow'd

Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence

Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song. (1.6-13)

Not only does Milton ask the Muse to inspire him as He did Moses or David but, as Barbara Lewalski points out in her edition of *Paradise Lost*, he also evokes the site of Solomon's temple and the place where Jesus heals a blind man. In the Invocation, Milton presents the choice between Moses and David, and thus the Old Testament, and Siloah, and thus the New Testament. This division represents that transition from the Law to Grace. I would add that by comparing his poetic inspiration to that of Moses, Milton associates himself with the author of the Pentateuch and the deliverer of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The alternative Davidic association casts Milton as a poet and anointed leader. Through both affiliations, Milton recalls the leadership and salvation of a specific nation. Thus, he suggests that at least some of *Paradise Lost*, despite its universal topic, is also directed toward a specific nation and that nation is England.

In the digression to *Reason of Church-Government*, Milton expresses his desire to write for England. He promises an epic with a Christian hero, but wonders whether classical drama would

be found more doctrinal and exemplary to a Nation, the Scripture also affords us a divine pastoral Drama in the Song of *Salomon* consisting of two persons and a double *Chorus*, as *Origen* rightly judges. And the Apocalyps of Saint *John* is the majestick image of a high and stately Tragedy, shutting up and intermingling her solemn Scenes and Acts with a sevenfold *Chorus* of halleluja's and harping symphonies. (1: 814-15)

Though *Paradise Lost* is in the form of an epic, its plot also has dramatic elements, such as its episodic nature defined by place and the large amount of dialogue between the demons, God and His angels, and Adam and Eve. More important than the choice of genre, however, is Milton's purposes for writing an epic and the sources he mentions as inspiration. His goal is to write something "doctrinal and exemplary" for the English (1: 815). Although Milton ended up tabling poetry for political tracts after *Reason of Church Government*, he did not forget about his goal of writing an epic poem, which he finally published twenty-five years later. Such language indicates that Milton wants to provide both theological and ethical instruction to the English that they can apply to their lives. Milton's citation of scripture is also telling. He sees the scripture as an excellent inspiration on both literary and moral grounds, since he speaks of the literary elements of the Song of Solomon and the Book of Revelation. Thus, Milton's choice of a scriptural topic for his epic to the English makes sense.

In addition to aligning himself to biblical figures in the Invocation, Milton also alludes to specific places with symbolic meaning. Solomon's temple, for example, signifies wisdom and worship, while Siloa's brook suggests the healing of blindness, possibly intellectual blindness on the part of the English.¹⁴ All of the images in the invocation are specific to one nation—Israel—and all of them connect nationhood and salvation to literature, since all of the events to which Milton refers are in the Bible and thus can be read.¹⁵ Milton clearly wishes to be associated with national leaders who led Israel to salvation through literature. Since the Israelites enjoyed the status of God's

¹⁴ See John 9:1-41.

¹⁵ It is beyond the scope of this thesis to write a detailed definition of literature. The Bible, however, is commonly considered literature.

chosen people, Milton's deliberate association with the Israelites suggests both a spiritual and national chosenness on the part of the English people.

England was often compared to Israel throughout the seventeenth century, as Achsah Guibbory demonstrates extensively in her award-winning¹⁶ *Christian Identity: Jews and Israel in Seventeenth-Century England*. Guibbory notes that although the relationship between English Christians and Jews could sometimes be strained, English identification with Israel the nation allowed the English to understand their own current situation—particularly the Reformation—in terms of Israelite history. I argue that Milton's self-association with Israelite leaders, the scriptural content of *Paradise Lost*, and the confusing rhetoric of the poem suggest that Milton envisions himself as a spiritual and national leader and aims to write a civic salvation history for the people of England.

Let me define what I mean by “civic salvation history,” which seems oxymoronic. The term “salvation history” is a translation of the German *Heilsgeschichte*, which means, “sacred history, the history of God's saving work among men; history seen as the working out of God's salvation” (*OED*). When I use the term “civic salvation history,” I refer to the perceived work of God in bringing about the spiritual and political salvation of a group of people—in this case, the English. As I have already demonstrated, Milton's work shows that he himself viewed the English people as favored by God. In fact, in his tract *Areopagitica*, Milton claims that “God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church, ev'n to the reforming of Reformation itself: what does he then but reveal Himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his English-men” (2: 553). Milton believes that God has specially chosen the English to perfect the Reformation,

¹⁶ Guibbory won the Milton Society of America's John T. Shawcross Award.

which began elsewhere, and Milton sees it as his role to guide the English through the challenges in fulfilling what he perceives as God's will for them and toward a new English identity. After all, Milton's express purpose in *Paradise Lost* is to "justify the ways of God to men" (1.26). The text functions not only as a theodicy, but, according to critic Sharon Achinstein, also teaches the English about their current situation (*passim*). Through the actions and speeches of the characters, readers of *Paradise Lost* are supposed to negotiate the political complexities of post-Restoration England.

In *Paradise Lost*, the actions of the characters, particularly Satan, allude to events in seventeenth-century England. *Paradise Lost* opens in Hell, and at first, Satan seems to be the main character of the poem. Satan describes God's rule in Heaven as "tyranny" (1.124), which suggests absolute and probably abusive rule (*OED*). Despite the demons' adamant republican views, however, they still attach importance to hierarchy and absolute power. Moloch, one of the fallen angels (who, according to Milton's cosmology, become pagan gods) is referred to a "horrid king" (1.392), and the demons still observe the traditional hierarchy of angels, even though, as editor Barbara Lewalski reminds us,¹⁷ Milton himself does not strictly abide by it in *Paradise Lost*. Despite Milton's disregard for the typical angelic order, Satan still appeals to the absent cosmology to rally other angels to war. Though Satan allegedly abhors kingship, he does not hesitate to invoke a hierarchy that does not otherwise exist in the poem to encourage a rebellion against God. He calls the rebel angels "Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Vertues, Powers" (5.772), even though these titles do not have meaning in the context of *Paradise Lost*. Though Satan appeals to angelic hierarchy, which implies inequality, he also reminds the rebel angels of their equality. Shortly after informing the rebel angels of the threat to their

¹⁷ See the note on *Paradise Lost*, 1.128-29.

positions, Satan declares all the angels “Equally free; for Orders and Degree / Jarr not with liberty” (5.793-94). Clearly, Satan has no political convictions beyond the desire for power. In fact, when the angels have fallen, Satan sits “High on a Throne of Royal State, which far / Outshon the wealth of Ormus and of Ind, . . . by merit rais’d / To that bad eminence” (2.1-6). Once fallen, Satan assumes the leadership role against which he rebelled. In fact, he gains the throne in the same way the Son did—through “merit” (2.5). Though Satan’s rhetoric seems republican in the beginning of his rebellion, careful reading of his pre-battle speech to the rebel angels suggests otherwise, and by the time he falls to Hell, as David Norbrook also observes, Satan is unquestionably a monarch (455). Satan’s transition from republican to monarch shows his inconsistency in his political views.

Satan changes his political views at his convenience, but God runs His kingdom consistently. Milton casts God as a monarch and by doing so, seems to create tension between his republicanism and Christianity. If God, who embodies all perfection, is a king, then a monarchy must be a good form of government. Though Scripture frequently mentions the Kingdom of God,¹⁸ Milton does more than follow scripture when he describes monarchy in heaven. Milton also invokes monarchical imagery in heaven that reflects contemporary political constructions by describing the Son as a “vice-gerent” (5.609). Such language both describes Jesus as having received His authority from God and puts His authority in contemporary terms for seventeenth century readers. The term *vice-gerent* is not biblical (in fact, it is from Medieval Latin) and did not enter the English language until the sixteenth century. It is defined as “A person appointed by a king or other ruler to act in his place or exercise certain of his administrative functions” (*OED*

¹⁸See Matthew 12:28, 19:16, 19:24, and 21:31 for examples.

1.a). By calling the Son a vice-gerent, Milton gives Him political responsibility in addition to His widely accepted spiritual role. Furthermore, Milton associates the Son more closely with monarchy and with the seventeenth century. Though Milton's Heaven is clearly a monarchy, I am not claiming that he disapproves of the government in Heaven or that the spiritual setting of *Paradise Lost* merely serves as an allegory for seventeenth century political concerns. Instead, I am demonstrating the loaded nature of Milton's cosmology. In *Paradise Lost*, the spiritual and the political are not separate, so, in the poem, God and Satan play roles that are political as well as theological.

By casting God as a monarch and Satan as a *quasi*-republican, Milton strategically confuses good and evil. Milton causes more confusion through unclear rhetoric, particularly that of Satan. David Loewenstein has also noticed Satan's erratic rhetoric in *Representing Revolution in Milton and his Contemporaries*. Loewenstein suggests that Satan does not have to serve as a direct symbol for any group or figure in the English Revolution and instead teaches seventeenth-century readers "to discern the treacherous ambiguities and contradictions of political rhetoric and behavior" (203). If we interpret Milton's Satan according to Loewenstein's reading, Satan stands for anyone who confuses and misleads the public through rhetoric. Loewenstein's section about Satan's rebellion and Puritan politics relates the post-Restoration need for Puritans to discern between ideas that are consistent with or contradictory to Puritan values, even if these ideas sound identical (202). For seventeenth-century readers, Milton's Satan provides a perfect example of someone who appears to speak the truth, but is in fact deceptive. By creating such a character, Milton attempts to save seventeenth-century

Puritans from deceivers who appear to speak truth, while leaving enough ambiguity in the text to place the burden of analysis on his audience.

Allowing readers to freely interpret *Paradise Lost* and learn from it is consistent with Milton's conception of *liberty*. As Elizabeth Sauer explains in her article "Milton's *Of True Religion*, Protestant Nationhood, and the Negotiation of Liberty," Milton's conception of liberty does not consist of the right to do whatever one pleases. Instead, true liberty is the right to "[live] as one should" (13). In Milton's eyes, free will plays a large role in proper liberty, since to be truly free, one must be able to choose to live properly (3). Indeed, Satan puts constant emphasis on freedom and liberty in *Paradise Lost*. He declares that he prefers "Hard liberty before the easie yoke / Of servile pomp" (2.256-57) and that even in Hell, the fallen angels value liberty: "here at least / We shall be free" (1.258-59). But because of Satan's inconsistency throughout the poem, we cannot take Satan's definition of liberty for Milton's. By offering clues to readers as to the political meaning of *Paradise Lost*, particularly those of Satan's inconsistency, Milton allows them to freely choose the meaning of the text and its implications for seventeenth-century England. Just as Raphael warns Adam and Eve about Satan and reminds them of their free will (8.633-43). Milton warns his readers of the deception that is rampant in post-Restoration England, but leaves it up to individuals to discern truth from falsehood and to negotiate their political salvation.

Paradise Lost, then, offers its readers warnings about the confusing and misleading rhetoric of post-Restoration England. Though *Paradise Lost* does not explicitly offer a definition of Englishness, the confusing rhetoric throughout the poem suggests that Milton sees his readers as capable—with some practice—of distinguishing

between the truth and empty, attractive rhetoric. Milton's intentional ambiguity teaches the English how to cooperate in their intellectual, political and spiritual salvation. The religious emphasis of *Paradise Lost* and the values it emphasizes makes it a Republican and Christian text.

Self-Knowledge and Discernment in A History of Britain

Milton conveys his intention to educate the English more openly in *A History of Britain* (1670).¹⁹ The text chronicles British history from its beginnings until the Norman Invasion in 1066. Milton tells us that he must rely largely on legend in the earliest parts of the text, since the British lacked record-keeping (5: 1). The lack of a concrete history of early Britain dismays Milton, who concedes that most of the history of ancient Britain is "either wholly unknown, or obscur'd or blemisht with Fables" (5: 1). Milton's negative attitude toward mythology is noted by Nicholas von Maltzahn, a scholar who specializes in John Milton, Andrew Marvell, and religious liberty. Von Maltzahn explains that Milton's attitude toward myth shifts after the English Revolution. Before the Revolution, Von Maltzahn notes, Milton planned to write an epic around a British hero, possibly King Arthur, and he preferred the history of Britain before the Norman Conquest to its history afterwards, even though the earlier history may not be accurate (102-03). Regardless of accuracy, Milton still sees educational value in some myths. After Milton's long introduction to the text, he invokes the help of God and begins the history with the intention that it "redound to [God's] glory, and the good of the British nation" (5: 3). Though Milton holds the legendary nature of Britain's origins in contempt, he believes that they can teach the British. Von Maltzahn claims that by highlighting various

¹⁹ Though *A History of Britain* was published in 1670, its date of composition is debated. For more details, see Nicholas von Maltzahn's *Milton's History of Britain: Republican Historiography in the English Revolution*.

omissions of British legends, Milton encourages readers “to exercise their own judgments” (111). By deliberately calling attention to the failings of British legend, Milton offers a warning to British readers about the truth of what they hear. Thus, his *History of Britain*, as does *Paradise Lost*, offers readers an exercise in discernment.

Milton further emphasizes the educational value of *A History of Britain* to a good reader in book 3 of his history, which describes the invasion of the Saxons and includes his digression about how the political situation of sixth-century Britain is similar to that of Restoration England. Milton considers this chapter of British history important, saying it “may deserve more attention than common, and repay it with like benefit to them that can judiciously read: considering especially that the late civil broils had cast us into a condition not much unlike what the Britain then were in” (5: 103). Milton shows the educational value of book 3 differently than he does in book 1 of *A History of Britain*. While the criticism of myth in book 1 directs readers to discern truth from fables, Milton exhorts readers to treat the contents of book 3 with special concern. Milton’s explicit direction in book 3 versus his subtle direction in book 1 suggests that book 3 of *A History of Britain* is especially important for the English nation. Milton goes further to explain that the particular educational value of book 3 of *A History of Britain* is

to raise knowledg of our selves both great and weighty, by judging hence what kind of men the Britains generally are in matters of so high enterprise. . . for it be a high point of wisdom in every private man, much more is it in a Nation to know it self; rather than puft up with vulgar flatteries, and encomiums, for want of self knowledge, to enterprise rashly and come off miserably in great undertakings. (5: 103)

Milton sees it as essential for the English to know all about the ancient British and not just the legends that glorify them. If the English lack self-knowledge, Milton claims, they will fail in their goals, however admirable. By discrediting the legend of King Arthur, Milton warns against believing things that are not true, even if they boost national pride. In Milton's mind, truth wins against patriotism. Indeed, rather than emphasize England's glorious Arthurian past, Milton chooses to write extensively about the moral failings of the Britons. The England of the sixth century is one constantly subject to invasions, abusive petty rulers (who interestingly become kings at some point), corrupt clergy, and civil wars, and Milton blames much of this turmoil on the Britons, whom he describes as "servile in mind, sloathful in body" (5: 103-04). Until book 3 of *A History of Britain*, the Britons depend solely on the Romans for defense and an orderly society, and when the Romans leave to defend their other territory, the Britons

although at first greedy of change, and to be thought the leading Nation to freedom from the Empire, they seem'd a while to bestirr them with a shew of diligence in their new affairs, some secretly aspiring to rule, others adorning the name of liberty, yet soon as they fell by proof the weight of what it was to govern well themselves, and that what was wanting within them, nor stomach or the love of licence, but the wisdom, the virtue, the labour, to use and maintain true libertie, they soon remitted their heat (5: 104).

While the Britons are at first eager to be free from the Romans, they quickly grow tired of the work required to maintain their freedom and lose interest in their sovereignty. They also, according to Milton lack "the wisdom, the virtue, the labour, to use and maintain

true libertie” (5: 104). Milton continues to express the faults of the Britons throughout book 3 of *A History of Britain*. He contrasts the Britons to the Romans, for whom liberty is “dearer than life” and who instruct the Britons to be valiant and responsible for themselves “rather than basely stretch [their hands] out to receive bonds” (5: 105). Milton’s contrast of the Britons to the Romans, as well of his description of the Britons after the Romans leave, suggests that the Britons are too lazy to rule themselves and that they prefer enslavement to liberty. By making the seventeenth century English aware of the failings of the ancient Britons, helps them know themselves before they attempt any change.

Knowing when *A History of Britain* was written could further illuminate of Milton’s criticism of the ancient Britons. If von Maltzahn is right, Milton wrote most of *A History of Britain* in 1649, the year Charles I was executed (von Maltzahn 23). For Milton the republican, who would later write in defense of the regicide, the collapse of monarchy in England should have lent his *History* a tone of optimism, but instead, Milton issues the English an admonition to know themselves. That Milton needs to make the English self-aware before they undertake any political action suggests that Milton’s attitude about the character of the English has shifted since his early career. While he once defended the poetic talents of the English and considered England culturally equal to the nations of classical antiquity, Milton now shows an ancient Britain that must rely on the aid of a classical empire to care for itself. Milton’s warning and unflattering portrait of the Britons suggests that Milton is apprehensive about the success of the soon-to-be commonwealth because of the Britain of the past. Both *Paradise Lost* and *A History of Britain* suggest that the British need help, whether through grace and/or

learning, to realize the vision that Milton sets forth in *Of Education*. The English may be special, but they do not yet live up to their inherent exceptionality.

The Prophetic Impulse in Lycidas and Elegia Quarta

In spite of emphasizing England's many faults, Milton also tells the English about what he sees as their special relationship with God, similar to that of the nation of Israel. In this way, Milton places himself with the prophets of the Bible. Since the prophets of the Bible served as the voice of God to the Israelites, England can then be associated with Israel.²⁰ Some of Milton's poetry, such as *Lycidas* and *Elegia Quarta*, provides insight into events he considers necessary to the education of the English. In both poems, Milton shows the English what he perceives as their greatest threats—Roman Catholicism and incompetent, greedy preachers.

In addition to the threat of Roman Catholicism, which Milton emphasizes throughout *In Quintum Novembris* and which I discuss earlier in this paper, the lack of competent preachers in England is a perennial concern of Milton's prose and poetry. He mentions this concern toward the end of *Paradise Lost* (PL 12.508-14) and in his tract *The Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings Out of the Church* (1659). He also expresses this anxiety in both *Elegia Quarta* (1627), an early Latin poem, and *Lycidas* (1638), an elegy for a fellow student who drowned.

Though *Lycidas* is concerned directly with death and *Elegia Quarta* merely with self-imposed exile,²¹ both mourn the loss of good preachers in England and employ references to English geography to express frustration with the religious state of England.

²⁰ Please see Isaiah 1:3, 11:15-16, Jeremiah 18:6, Ezekiel 14:11, and 20:40 for a few examples the prophets speaking of Israel's relationship with God. Guibbory also acknowledges Milton's prophetic tone by comparing him to some of the Quaker prophets of the seventeenth century (269).

²¹ Though the speaker of *Elegia Quarta* treats Young's absence as banishment, Young apparently left England of his own accord (Revard 158).

The allusions to English geography in the poems Milton's anxiety on England in particular and takes otherwise universal concerns and makes them specific to England.

Elegia Quarta mourns the absence of Thomas Young, Milton's former tutor who has moved to Hamburg on the Continent. Unlike other poems in the *Poemata*, in which Milton portrays England positively, Milton treats Young's relocation as an exile and harshly criticizes England for its treatment of preachers. *Elegia Quarta* refers to classical geography for most of the poem. The former not only represents the studies that Milton pursued under Young; it also represents the only place Milton and Young can meet during the political tension of the Thirty Years War. For instance, when the speaker reminisces on how Young mentored him, he says "I journeyed by his lead first on Aonian paths, / and the sacred glens of the twined-peaked mountain" (29-30). By relating his and Young's past to classical places, the speaker emphasizes Young's role as tutor, particularly in classical learning. Beyond its educational connotations, the classical world also symbolizes the past itself, since the current political and religious situation did not allow for poetry or for Milton and Young to be together. In contrast to other poems in the *Poemata*, in which Milton describes England as a place conducive to poetic inspiration and therefore attractive to the Muses, he only mentions the Muses in *Elegia Quarta* in their traditional location. In fact, the Muses seem secondary to the problems of the Thirty Years War, as the speaker sends his letter on the provision that "Should you have time for kind muses amid those battles" (30). Though the speaker does not portray poetry in English terms, he portrays the situation of Young in terms of people hostile to England. The speaker associates the city of Hamburg with Hama, a Saxon giant (15). By relating Young's location to the Saxons, a group that often caused havoc in ancient Britain, the

speaker suggests the precariousness of Young's situation. The only time the speaker alludes to English geography, in fact, is at a time when he is criticizing the English people's actions toward preachers. He describes England as "Cruel parent, fatherland, more heartless than the white stones that the foaming waves pound on your shore" (87-88). Though the speaker is probably alluding to the cliffs of Dover, the place at which England is closest to continental Europe, he does not name them specifically. The speaker's refusal to name English places, along with the subsequent criticism of England, suggests the speaker's shame at his native country.

Lycidas, though it also concerns itself with the spiritual state of England, makes much more frequent mention of English geography than does *Elegia Quarta*. The poem mourns the death of Edward King, one of Milton's friends at Cambridge and a newly ordained minister. Milton's geographic references in *Lycidas* cause King's death to symbolize the spiritual troubles of England. Throughout the poem, Milton uses both pre-Christian and Christian images to convey his concerns for England. When wondering how Lycidas's death could have been prevented, he questions the nymphs about their absence at his drowning:

Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep
Clos'd o're the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
For neither were ye playing on the steep,
Where your old *Bards*, the famous *Druids* ly,
Nor on the shaggy top of *Mona* high,
Nor yet where *Deva* spreads her wizard stream

Ay me, I fondly dream!
Had ye bin there—for what could that have done?
What could the Muse her self that Orpheus bore,
The Muse her self, for her enchanting son
Whom Universal nature did lament,
When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His goary visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore. (50-63)

Milton cites the absence of the nymphs at three places: two in British history and another in classical mythology. Both events share the failure of the nymphs to save the people involved, and both involve the dismemberment of human bodies. Mona (also known as Anglesey) was an island on which Druids lived. According to Raymond Wilson Chambers in *England before the Norman Conquest*, Mona served not only a center of paganism, but also “the centre of the national refuge of Britain, and the refuge of all rebels and traitors” (74). In 61 AD, Suetonius Paulinus attempted to invade Mona, an account of which is also included in Milton’s *History of Britain*, where Milton refers to the occupants of Mona as savages. Paulinus, upon his arrival at Mona, encounters a scene of chaos which he calls a “barbarous and lunatic rout” (5: 64). Paulinus and his army then defeat the Druids and desecrate their places of worship, places Milton calls “bloodie superstition” (5: 64). The Druids did, according to *A History of Britain*, commit violent acts of religion: “For whom they took in war they held it lawfull to Sacrifice; and by the entrails of men us’d divination” (5: 64). Interestingly, in *Lycidas*, Milton describes the women who dismembered Orpheus in a similar way to how he described the druids in *A*

History of Britain by calling these women “the rout that made that hideous roar” (5: 61). Through the word *rout*, which can mean anything from “a group of people gathered or assembled together” to “a number of animals grouped together, . . . esp. wolves” or “a disreputable group of people” (*OED* 1.a-d, 3.a), Milton links the Druids with the women who dismembered Orpheus. By calling both groups, the people of Mona and the women who dismembered Orpheus, “routs,” Milton emphasizes the savagery of groups that commit violent acts of religion, whether in classical or British antiquity. Milton’s use of the same word in both situations suggests that the two groups of people are connected. If the Druids and the women who dismembered Orpheus are similar, it seems that Milton has changed his attitudes about the Druids since he wrote about them in *Mansus*. They are no longer educated people who are comparable to the Greeks. Instead, Milton views the Druids as savages.

In addition to the Roman attack at Mona, Milton also refers to the story of Orpheus, who was torn apart by worshippers of Dionysus. When describing the dismemberment of Orpheus, Milton names Orpheus, but not the women who dismembered him. Thus, he draws more attention to Orpheus. In a way, there is a conflict of interests between Orpheus and the Druids, since Orpheus was dismembered by pagans and the Druids dismember people as part of their religious practices. The tension between the best interests of Orpheus and of the Druids implies that the nymphs could not be present at both events. In fact, Milton seems to suggest that the nymphs are entirely incompetent. Both instances of the nymphs’ absence involve dismemberment, but their omissions cause a conflict of interest. If the nymphs save the druids, they save a group of people who dismember others as part of their religious ritual. If the nymphs

were to save Orpheus, they would save a person who is subject to dismemberment. The nymphs cannot act in the interests of both the dismembered and the dismemberers. Not only are the nymphs incompetent, their presence at both the events mentioned in *Lycidas* creates a conflict of interest. The state of Orpheus's body resembles that of King. In *Lycidas*, the speaker describes King's bones as being

Hurl'd,

Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide,
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
Or whether thou to our moist vows deny'd,
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old. (155-60)

Milton places King's body in Scotland (the Hebrides) or in a place where giants once lived, near St. Michael's Mount. In either case, King's bones float through water like Orpheus's head floated down a river. But in the case of King, there is no head to recite poetry and to continue teaching. In this way, King's death has a greater sense of finality than that of Orpheus. England has lost a good poet and minister and nothing remains of him that can speak. Because, as I have shown, Milton believes the English need education, (and King, as a presumably competent minister, can provide it) King's death is, in Milton's eyes, especially tragic.

Edward King's death results in the loss of educational and preaching capacity that could have benefited the English nation. For a nation that is struggling spiritually, King's death does not bode well. Milton alludes to England's spiritual problems from early in the poem, though he does not make his concerns explicit until later. In *Lycidas*, Milton

compares Edward King's death to the effect of decline of nature because of seasonal changes or pests. He compares Edward King's death to the "Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze" (46). As Edward King was a preacher, the association of his death with a parasite that infects sheep suggests that Edward King's death will have negative spiritual consequences on God's flock. Milton extends and makes more explicit the sheep metaphor when Camus (the god of the Cam river) introduces St. Peter, who says, "How well could I have spar'd for thee young swain / Anow of such as for their bellies sake, / Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold" (113-15). Here, St. Peter implies that Edward King, a recently ordained minister (or *pastor*, Latin for shepherd), acts contrary to the behavior of some of the clergy, who enter Christian ministry for self-serving purposes and leave their congregations to either starve spiritually or be converted by the Roman Catholic Church and especially by the Jesuits. By casting Edward King as an Orpheus of sorts, Milton shows the tragedy of his death and by taking away Edward King's ability to speak, suggests the gravity of England's spiritual problems, if the death of one good minister is catastrophic for England.

Milton continues to emphasize the tragedy of King's death at the end of the poem, when he implores St. Michael to "Look homeward, Angel now, and melt with ruth" (163), that is, to briefly take his eyes away from Spain, a bastion of Roman Catholicism. Joad Raymond, a specialist on book history, angels, and Milton, reminds us that St. Michael's Mount takes its name because St. Michael appeared to monks there (141). Anyone familiar with the staunchly Protestant Milton might find it odd that Milton invokes such a myth in *Lycidas*, since it is clearly of Catholic origin, but as Joad Raymond notes, "Milton takes up this vision . . . because it speaks to his idea of

nationhood” (142). St. Michael was traditionally assigned to protect the Israelites and later the Christians (149). Thus, Milton casts England as Israel by assigning St. Michael as a guardian over England (150-151). By asking St. Michael to “look homeward” (163) after the death of Edward King, Milton renders what at first appears to be an elegy for one person into a poem for a nation in trouble.

England’s trouble, according to Milton, stems from the lack of sincere, competent Christian ministers. In *Lycidas*, he shifts from mourning Edward King’s death to criticizing greedy, incompetent ministers in England. In fact, the prevalence of corrupt preachers in *Lycidas* is part of what Milton is mourning in the elegy, where he calls them

Blind mouthes! That scarce themselves know how to hold
A Sheep-hook, or have learn’d ought els the least
That to that faithfull Herdmans art belongs”
What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
And they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel Pipes of wretched straw,
The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly and foul contagion spread:
Besides what the grim Wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing sed. (119-29)

Here, Milton criticizes preachers who are incompetent for ministry and who see no need to tend to their congregations, since the preachers themselves have their own needs met. Meanwhile, Milton claims, the congregations spiritually starve and are victims of the

“grim Woolf with privy paw” (128), the wolf being a symbol of the Jesuits. Spiritual problems in England are not new, however, as Milton sometimes shows through his treatment of the Druids in several texts.

Throughout his corpus, Milton pays noticeable attention—both positive and negative—to the Druids, pagan priests in ancient Britain. Milton’s inconsistent views of the Druids in many of his works, including *Lycidas*, *Mansus*, and particularly in the prose monstrosity²² that is *A History of Britain*, are worth examination, since these texts show how complex Milton’s sense of English identity really is. On one hand, in *History*, Milton celebrates the Druids’ intellectual abilities and innovations. He refutes Caesar’s claim that the Druids forbade the British from recording history, and he claims that the British Druids probably spoke Greek, taught the Druids in France, and were too busy writing other things to write history (5: 2). He also says that the Druids learned all their skills on their own rather than from a non-British entity, citing the fact that no one knew of England before the Romans (5: 35). Moreover, in Milton’s early poem *Mansus*, he compares Druid worship to ancient Greek worship in order to place ancient Britain on even footing with classical Greece.²³ Von Maltzahn observes that Milton’s writings about the Druids often encourage national pride, but that his opinion of the Druids shifts by the second book of *A History of Britain*, in which he discusses their immorality and their practice of human sacrifice (Von Maltzahn 114-15). Though Milton earlier extols the

²² *A History of Britain* is long, dry, clunky, and generally unreadable, and I do not recommend it as beach reading, or as any reading, for that matter.

²³ (The ancient Druid race, skilled in the sacred rites
of their gods, sang praise of their heroes’ model deeds.)
as often as Greek girls by custom ring the altars
of grassy Delos with their festive singing, they
remember Corineidan Loxo. (43-47)

intellectual achievements of the Druids, he later condemns their unethical religious practices:

yet Philosophers I cannot call them, reported men factious and ambitious, contending sometimes about the archpriesthood not without civil Warr and slaughter; nor restrain'd they the people under them from a lew'd adulterous and incestuous life...But the Gospel, not long after preach't heer abolish'd such impurities, and of the Romans we have cause not to say much worse, then that they beate us into some civilitie." (5: 51).

In spite of all that the Druids have achieved, they allow immoral activities and lack Christianity, thus rendering them unable to be called philosophers. Milton believed that immorality nullifies intellectual excellence.²⁴ It seems that Milton still believes in the ancient British intellectual excellence that he speaks of in *Mansus*, but that he now believes tainted by immoral behavior. In addition to showing the immorality of the ancient British, Milton shows the stubborn character of the English nation in his writings about ancient Britain. It takes an invasion from one of the largest empires in history (and even the Romans did not invade successfully on their first attempt) to make the British behave civilly. If only actual occupation by the Roman Empire can improve the actions of the British, the British must be especially stubborn. Whereas Milton criticizes the laziness of the Britons, he reports that the Romans consider liberty "dearer than life" (5: 105). If the British people eventually attain a love of liberty, it is thus gained from the Romans, not from the Druids, who practice human sacrifice and are morally corrupt.

²⁴In *Of Education*, Milton describes the lawyer who lacks moral education. They "[ground] their purposes...on the promising and pleasing thoughts of litigious terms, fat contentions, and flowing fees" (2: 375). Though the lawyer has an education, they use it selfishly, which, in Milton's eyes, makes it useless.

Milton's reasons for writing *A History of Britain* are in a sense are correlated with those of the biblical prophets. He tries to teach the English about themselves by showing their past failures. Nicholas Von Maltzahn claims that "Milton turns to the past to stimulate a simpler national and personal sense of sin: he seeks to generate the will for present political and religious reform through a relatively crude story of national failure and punishment in the past" (167). Though many of the shortcomings of which Milton speaks are political, they always have a moral component as well.

In his discussion about the Druids, Milton attempts to do two things. First, he tries to show that the British have their own intellectual tradition that was as good as those in other classical societies, and second, he shows that intellectuality without ethics or Christianity is useless in enhancing the moral character of a nation. *Lycidas* seems to arrive at the same conclusion. When writing of the ubiquitous classical figures in *Lycidas*, Lawrence Lipking in "The Genius of the Shore: *Lycidas*, Adamastor, and the Poetics of Nationalism," notices that "what all these sentinels and deities have in common is their ineffectualness" (210). Between *Lycidas* and *A History of Britain*, Milton seems to say that paganism, and by extension classicism, cannot save anyone. Milton's Druids embody the English nation as a whole—at once innovative and wise, yet petty and irreligious. The early parts of *A History of Britain* suggest a stubborn English nation, and that that stubbornness is both good and bad. In this way, the English resemble the Israelites, who are described numerous times as a "stiff-necked people."²⁵ Just as the Israelites need guidance from God to be saved, so then do the British. Just as the British were invaded by waves of Saxons and ultimately the Normans, so were the Israelites invaded multiple times.

²⁵ See Exodus, in the New International Version, for numerous examples.

As shown in *A History of Britain*, Milton's criticism of incompetent preachers remains the same, whether he is writing about the sixth or seventeenth centuries. Milton uses alarmingly similar language to *Lycidas* when describing corrupt clergy in *A History of Britain*. Milton describes the ancient British clergy as "Pastors in Name, but indeed Wolves; intent upon all occasions, not to feed the Flock, but to pamper and well line themselves. . . usurping the Chair of Peter, but through the blindness of their own worldly lusts, they stumble upon the Seat of Judas" (5: 134). Milton also describes the sixth-century English clergy as "wolves." Because the wolf was a familiar symbol for the Jesuits, such an image would be threatening to seventeenth-century Protestants. Milton also calls attention to the blindness of the clergy because of their worldly desires, just as he does in *Lycidas*. The similarity in language in both is probably an attempt to draw explicit parallels between the clergy of sixth-century England and the clergy in seventeenth-century England, thus further emphasizing the teaching goals of *A History of Britain* and the prophetic nature of *Lycidas*.

Despite Milton's strong anti-Catholicism, he sees the prevalence of corrupt clergy, exacerbated by Edward King's death, as being more worthy of St. Michael's watchfulness than is an immediate Catholic threat. Milton's request that St. Michael look to England rather than Spain suggests that England has internal spiritual problems that are more significant than the foreign influence of Catholicism. Because St. Michael is watching over England, Milton's invocation of St. Michael also associates England with Israel. Ultimately, the association of Edward King's death with larger historical and cosmological realities lends *Lycidas* a nationalistic tone that asks England to focus on itself, rather than outside enemies.

Though both *Elegia Quarta* and *Lycidas* emphasize the lack of competent preachers in England, the poems differ in their attitudes toward the English people. *Elegia Quarta* blames England for Young's relocation to Hamburg. The speaker asks England,

Is it right to endanger your harmless young? Unfeeling,
to drive them to a foreign country so,
and leave them to seek means on those distant lands—
these whom foresighted God himself had send you,
who carry joyous messages from heaven and teach
what way leads from ashes to stars? (89-95).

The speaker criticizes the English people for failing to support their preachers and even says they deserve damnation. In *Lycidas*, however, the speaker asks St. Michael to “Homeward, angel, now, and melt with ruth” (163). The differences in attitudes toward the English in *Lycidas* and *Elegy IV* reflect Milton's shifting views of the English people. On one hand, they are under the protection of St. Michael, the patron of Israel (and therefore can be compared to Israel) but on the other hand, Milton thinks the English have brought their poor clerical situation on themselves and deserve spiritual death. Milton's support or condemnation of the English varies depending on his work in question.

IV. Conclusion

Throughout John Milton's literary career, his attitude toward the English people shifts from pride to disgust and these views do not necessarily seem to change with time. There seems, instead, to be other factors that affect Milton's sense of English identity.

Milton's dreams for the English and for an ideal English identity do not change, but his attitude toward the progress of the English does. In *Quintum Novembris*, for example, shows Milton praising England for its fervent Protestantism and its complete separation from Rome. Milton later, however, sets up the Waldensians in Piedmont as an example for the English and reminds the English that they are not sufficiently reformed. Milton finally seems to say that the English need to look beyond themselves for improvement. In the digression of *A History of Britain*, Milton claims, "For the sunn, which wee want ripens witts as well as fruits; and as wine and oyle are imported to us from abroad, so must ripe understanding and many civil vertues bee imported into our minds from forren writings & examples of best ages: wee shall else miscarry still and com short in the attempt of any great enterprise" (5: 451). It is not that Milton says that the English cannot undertake great things. Instead, they should look to other nations for examples of virtue before doing so. Ultimately, the English must be aware of their own failings before they attempt anything great, but Milton still sees the possibility of English greatness. The English just have a long way to go.

Regardless of Milton's shifting opinion of the English, Milton always acknowledges himself as an Englishman and works for the betterment of the English nation. His main way of bettering the English is education. He both teaches the English about themselves, their election and their shortcomings, as well as how to improve as a Nation. To Milton, the only way the English will improve is if they keep their failures in mind as they move forward into an age of Empire (a project with which Milton may have disagreed). In Milton's mind, individual discernment and collective self-awareness will be keys to the English working out their own salvation.

In spite of the problems of the English nation, Milton never ceases to acknowledge its election. He compares England to Israel throughout his corpus and tries to encourage the spiritual development of the English, whose spiritual problems only compound their precarious political situation. Milton may be disappointed with how the English truly are, but he still claims his English identity. Perhaps it is because the condition of the English is the human condition.

Because the scope of an undergraduate thesis is limited, there are topics that I have not covered, such as why Milton did not choose Alfred the Great, a historically factual, Christian king and defender of the English, as his epic hero. Milton's ideas about exploration and empire are worth exploring, as they bring his English nationalism and Christianity into conflict. So also is a fuller exploration of the question of corrupt preachers and how they contribute to Milton's constructed English identity. Developing a truly comprehensive concept of Milton's English identity is far beyond the scope of this thesis, but I hope to have provided some idea of Milton's nationalistic values, even though they are complicated and change constantly throughout Milton's corpus.

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