INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600
CIRCE'S COURT: ITALY AND CULTURAL POLITICS
IN ENGLISH WRITING, 1530-1685

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

By

Thomas George Olsen, B.A., M.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
1997

Dissertation Committee:

Professor John N. King, Adviser

Professor Frank Donoghue

Professor Christopher Highley

Approved by

Adviser
Department of English
Copyright by
Thomas G. Olsen
1997
ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the ideological functions of Italy in early modern English writing. I argue that English authors consistently fashioned a multitude of imaginary locales called “Italy”—imaginary in that none reflected the political or cultural realities of the peninsula, and because they proceeded from a specifically English mixture of admiration and anxiety. Jacobean playwrights perhaps most obviously demonstrate this tendency to make “Italy” a staging ground for questions of national identity, but throughout the period, writers of historical, political, educational, moral and doctrinal works also used versions of “Italy” as convenient (and, I argue, necessary) opposites or analogues.

These “Italies” could function as models for personal conduct or civil society, but also as much darker threats to English political life, Protestantism, or the frequently vaunted capacity of the English to be direct and plain. Chapter One contrasts William Thomas’s Historie of Italie (1549) with Roger Ascham’s The Scholemaster (1570), locating in their differences two divergent traditions of representing Italy. Chapters Two and Three analyze the discourses of diet and of originary myths—the former in a range of imaginative and descriptive works, and the latter in Shakespeare’s Cymbeline. Chapter Four examines Milton’s ideological resistance to Venetian republicanism late in the Interregnum period, inside a tradition that includes, especially, James Harrington’s Oceana.
The final chapter argues that Aphra Behn's *The Rover* (1670) and *The Second Part of the Rover* (1681) construct yet another imaginative Italy in order to reconstitute the royal exile and the interregnum as forms of recreational and educational "grand touring."

As an account of "Italy" in its imaginative and polemical deployments from the first years of the English reformation through the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis, this project analyzes not only works usually considered high art, but also a number of other less-studied genres such as cookery books, herbals and dietaries, educational and historical treatises, political theory, religious polemic, language and conduct manuals, travel writing, and correspondence. I conclude that "Italy" proved not only uniquely useful but also necessary within the decades-long project of English national and cultural self-fashioning.
For Marinella
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project has benefited from the support and encouragement of many individuals and institutions. I would like first to thank my dissertation adviser, John N. King, and my readers, Christopher Highley and Frank Donoghue, for their sustained interest in and careful criticism of my work. All three taught me in graduate seminars in which aspects of this study emerged or evolved, and I owe a real debt to them. David Frantz read and encouraged the project as a fourth reader, and consistently lent his own considerable experience in matters Anglo-Italian, and Albert Mancini of the Ohio State Department of French and Italian offered a wealth of information in connection with Chapter 5. I am very grateful to both. Several other members of the English department offered insightful criticism and welcome support at various points: John Norman, Dorry Noyes, Nancy Miller, and Paul Miller. In addition, friends and colleagues in other institutions read works in progress or offered other assistance: Robert T. Fallon, Peter Lindenbaum, Muriel McClendon, Andrew Mousley, Daryl Ogden, Tanya Pollard, Kristen Poole, and especially Brian Rugg. Steve Pincus allowed me to read one of his works in progress and Nigel Smith offered several helpful suggestions. I am thankful to my cyber-colleagues on the Milton and Ficino discussion lists, who have provided many more ideas than I have offered in return.
More times than I can recall I was helped by librarians and archivists in the United States and Europe. James Bracken, Librarian of the English, Theater and Communication Library and a great resource to all who have the pleasure to work with him, was a constant source of information and advice. Elva Griffith and Geoff Smith of the Ohio State Rare Books Room provided me with many resources, as did Steve Parks of the Osborn Collection of the Beinecke Library and the staffs of the Houghton Library and British Library. The archivists of the University of Padua, especially Emilia Veronese, and of the Venetian State Archive were helpful early in my researches.

I was very significantly aided in this project by a number of generous grants and fellowships: The Ohio State English Department’s Summer Fellowship and Estrich Dissertation Fellowship; the Ohio State Graduate School Alumni Research Award (GSARA) and Presidential Fellowship; and small travel and research grants from the Ohio State Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, which especially under its new director, Nicholas Howe, has been a sanctuary and resource to graduate students—as has the English Department under James Phelan.

Most of all, I thank my wife Marinella and son Alessandro for their patience, and for proving over and again that, enduring stereotypes notwithstanding, ultramontanes and citramontanes can live in happy, productive accord.
VITA

October 31, 1959.................................Born—Milwaukee, Wisconsin

1984.....................................................M.A. Elizabethan and Jacobean Studies,
The University of Kent at Canterbury (U.K.)

1993 - 1997.........................................Graduate Teaching and Research Associate,
The Ohio State University

PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major field: English
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract................................................................................................. ii
Dedication............................................................................................. iv
Acknowledgments................................................................................ v
Vita........................................................................................................ vii
List of Figures....................................................................................... ix
Preface................................................................................................... 1

Chapters:

1 Introduction: Circe’s Court......................................................... 14
2 William Thomas, Roger Ascham, and the Uses of “Italy”........ 32
3 The Italian Sallet: Poison, Vegetables, and the Englishman’s Beef and Mustard................. 97
4 “Drug-Damn’d Italy” and the Problem of British National Character in *Cymbeline*............... 137
5 *Joannes Miltonius Anglus* and the Venetians....................... 182
6 “Amongst Our Dull English”: Aphra Behn’s *Rovers*, Naples, and the Myth of the Interregnum... 227

Bibliography......................................................................................... 263
| Figure 1     | Frontispiece: James Howell, *S. P. Q. V.: A Survey of the Signorie of Venice, Of Her admired policy, and method of government.* 1651. .................. 215 |
A very revealing conjunction of political events occurred in May of 1997, as I was completing this study. First, and perhaps more significant, on May 1, the British electorate returned the Labour Party to power for the first time in eighteen years. Just eight days later, in a city with deep historical connections to England, a small group of radical secessionists drove two vans covered in sheet metal and tricked up to look like armored military vehicles from a barge illegally moored at the edge of Venice's Piazza San Marco, onto the famous piazza itself. Their object, it was soon revealed, was to storm the city's or bell tower, and to rouse the Venetian electorate to support the separation of the "nation" of Padania from the rest of the "nation" of Italy.

I am not sure I can decide which political gesture is most culturally resonant, the collective voice of 44 million British voters or the faintly absurd, faintly anachronistic actions of a radical splinter group of Italy's Lega Nord, or Northern League, a movement that has over the last decade acquired more than a modicum of political significance by calling for an end to the political union of the Italian peninsula. What is quite clear to me, however, is that these two events that, as far as the international media are concerned, do not bear on each other, actually do converge on the problem I have addressed in the
following pages. For not only do the Venetian separatists speak eloquently to the perpetual fragility of the Italian nation-state, but the single greatest issue before British voters this year was the question of European integration—how to decide the limits and nature of British sovereignty in a Europe (and a world) increasingly tied by economic, political and even cultural bonds. That two regions so historically tied by their styles of political organization and by the many forms of human traffic between them should assert themselves in such different ways within about a week of each other also speaks to the fragility and tenuousness of the nation-state itself. It seemed to me that the broad questions driving this dissertation, concerning English cultural identity and its expressions with respect to Italy, had (once more) asserted themselves, as if to remind us that the matters I discuss in the following pages have something more than just historical interest.

The ebb and flow of state politics aside, Italy has inspired no indifference among Anglo-American writers from Chaucer to the present day, just as it does not each year for hundreds of thousands of American tourists on the Rome-Florence-Venice eight-day forced march that evolved out of the Grand Tour (itself a practice with an evolutionary history), or for hordes of British summer residents of what has come derisively to be called "Chianti-shire." It is one of the objects of this study to explore the ways in which it did not for the writers, readers and travelers of the early modern period, either. Scholars have an increasingly sophisticated picture of English attitudes toward Italy from about the second third of the seventeenth century onward, when recreational travel begins to acquire the institutional hallmarks that still define its present forms, but also when a vogue for connoisseurship, antiquarianism, and cultural adventure contributed to the increasingly
conventionalized belief that Italy somehow held answers that home did not.¹ The previous period, namely “the Age before the Age of the Grand Tour,” is far less completely understood.

The more Italy became a fixture in the social machinery of English, and later Anglo-American, culture, the more writers and other artists exploited the peninsula's literal and imaginative geographies. A paradox emerged from this rich history of encounter because as Italy acquired greater factual tangibility, the expression of its mysteries or imaginative appeal became conventionalized and derivative. To use only one example: Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread* partakes fully of the accretions of literary and social-historical constructions of Italy in positing a sometimes facile binarism between the repressive English bourgeois world of Sawston, with its tedious social codes, and the exuberant Italian one of Monteriano, whose equally oppressive ones have the not insignificant advantage of being *not* English. Though Forster was both a great *amateur* of Italy and came to know it well, like many earlier texts, his first novel uses Italy essentially as a vehicle for an Englishman's self-understanding—Philip Herriton’s fleeting glimpse of a self he can neither abandon nor become. The dichotomies that Forster imagined as the core of the story were already written, part of what Tony Tanner has called “reiterated association” and formed by the literary legacy of Shakespeare and Webster, the Brownings, Ruskin, James and dozens of others from Europe and, later, North America.² It is significant that as a schoolboy, Forster won a prize for an essay entitled “The Influence of Climate and Physical Conditions upon National Character”—a theme that neatly typifies a major strand in the future novelists' work, but also one with very ancient
origins that informed the cultural and ethnographic thought of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as well.\textsuperscript{3}

The following pages analyze the inter-relation of cultural values and literary forms that shaped the early development of the legacy Forster and many others before him inherited. I focus upon an often haphazardly documented period, the years 1530-1685. For a number of reasons, this era has been under-studied and its characteristics over-generalized, and in the following pages I attempt a number of clarifications and revisions. It is also a period with an inherent ideological unity, and that is why I have delimited it as I have: it begins, almost to the year, with Henry VIII's legal break with the Roman church and so coincides with a new phase in Anglo-Italian cultural relations, even as it also antedates the earliest significant literary evidence of “Renaissance” Italophilia by a generation or so: the poems of Wyatt, the linguistic and historical studies by William Thomas, the widespread circulation of Machiavelli's writings in Italian and in manuscript translation, and the social and political vision advanced by Hoby's \textit{The Courtier}, to mention only some salient examples. The period includes not only Shakespeare, of course, but all the dramatists whose plays used Italy as a terrestrial paradise or a site of court intrigues, murder, poisoning, incest and the other stock vices of the Tudor-Stuart stage. As late as 1681 Nahum Tate attempted to circumvent authorities by re-titling his banned adaptation of \textit{Richard II} as \textit{The Sicilian Tyrant}, in an effort to obscure the play's domestic political objectives. As early as 1575, however, George Gascoigne had used the same strategy, reissuing his \textit{The Adventures of Master F.J.} in a second edition that transported the action from topically sensitive Northern England to an imaginatively open Italy. One
of the aims of my study is to explain why Italy was the obvious locus for both Gascoigne and Tate, as it was for Shakespeare, Webster, Behn and a host of other writers, too.

Significantly, these years also coincide with a number of other trends concerning the rationalizing of historical and geographic spaces, all directly related to the national project driving the English representations of Italy during the period. The chronological sweep of my project takes in the new cartography of Ortelius, Mercator and others, English chronicles and county histories, the works of Camden, Drayton, Hakluyt, Ralegh, Spenser, as well as the theatrical histories of Shakespeare, Marlowe and others. The rationalization of Italian history for English readers, as William Thomas did with his *Historie of Italie* (1549), is one significant early stage in the larger European project of mapping, charting, recording and thereby claiming the known world. Italy functioned as a necessary touchstone in the twin projects of forging a national consciousness and extending that cultural distinctiveness across Europe and the Atlantic. Both projects became a national—and nationalist—preoccupation by the last decades of the sixteenth century, as major literary project after project glorified the monarchy, the land, and the people of England as, respectively and for example, Gloriana, Faeryland and the New Israel.

A number of seventeenth-century writers inherited the terms of this late sixteenth-century discourse, and though they all qualified or amended many of its terms, they also assured that the discourse continued into the period of the Grand Tour. The period I delineate in this study ends in the post-Restoration years just after the fiasco of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis, when not only an accommodation between the Roman and
English churches occurred, but also the Grand Tour itself became institutionalized and consequently changed forever the ways in which Italy could serve English creative and polemical writers as an imaginative space. A new era of literary representation evolved, and with it a new tension between realistic reporting and imaginative exploitation of Italian spaces.

And indeed, what sort of space was “Italy” during the period 1530-1685? For more than a millennium before the sixteenth century, the peninsula had experienced no political unity and even during the rare times in which something like unification was attempted or called for, as by Machiavelli in the early sixteenth century or Frederick Barbarossa in the twelfth, nothing like England’s national unity was ever achieved during the early modern period.® Even today that question remains among the most fiercely debated across the Italian peninsula. As the contemporary Lega Lombarda and Lega Nord movements continue to call for a complete restructuring of the Italian political state along federalist lines, or their splinter groups stage assaults on “national” landmarks such as Venice’s belltower, it is apt to recall the aphorism of Massimo d’Azeglio upon Italian unification in 1861: “we have made Italy; now we have to make Italians” 7

Was the Italian peninsula even a geographical unit? This question implies a political one: the centuries-long Spanish domination in the south, the numerous incursions of the French in the north, and the almost perpetual conflict among the petty states (including Rome) raise questions about even the geographical fixity of the land. Could the Italian peninsula rightly be claimed to be “Italian” territory, if there was neither a geographically or politically specific “Italy” to protect from foreign powers? Again and
again, historians and cartographers of the period distinguish “Italy” from Sicily, from Lombardy, from Rome, from Piedmont. It is no mere oversight that Machiavelli’s famous call for expelling foreign princes from Italy makes no mention of lands south of Naples and no appeal for uniting the whole peninsula against foreign aggressors. Instead, his “Exhortation to Liberate Italy from the Barbarians” is a direct consequence of the great Renaissance political theorist’s inability to conceive of a truly national Italy that occupied the same geographical space as the ancient Romans had.

Implicit in the extremely vexed question of early modern nationalism are fundamental changes in the ways writers of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries conceived of their place in time and space. European historiography was undergoing rapid shifts during this period; the annalistic, universalizing tradition of history-writing slowly combined with and then was replaced by a new historiography less ambitious in its sweep but more empirically accurate. Not coincidentally, this movement began principally in the Italian states, where the fashion for municipal histories based upon documents and often the experience of personal service to the state was widespread by 1530. As European historians moved away from universal, annalistic narratives linking biblical, ancient and contemporary events into unbroken and comprehensive master narratives, a new emphasis on temporal location began to influence not only historiography but also the allied discourses of geography, chorography and ethnography. “Monogenetic” theories of cultural descent, visible in geographic and ethnographic theory and in travel narratives, came under scrutiny as Europeans extended the limits of their oikumene, or known world. They could not always reconcile the imperatives of a universalizing anthropology such a
system is seen in the “Noachidic” and Macrobian world maps of the late medieval period with reports based upon direct experience.¹²

Likewise, an essentially medieval system of climatic, astral and humoral correspondences persisted among geographers and political scientists well into the seventeenth century. This explanation of human behavior posited that stars, terrestrial latitude and the Galenic system of bodily humors acted in unison to influence both individual and national characteristics. It was a widely held belief throughout the period, and even so skeptical a thinker as Jean Bodin based a large part of his explanation for political and moral behavior on such a system of correspondences. As we shall see, so did John Milton.¹³

The phenomenon John Gillies has recently termed the “Ortelian moment” reminds us that large, even fundamental systems of belief were changing during the period. The complex relationships between land, people, culture and political organization mattered a great deal as parts of Europe such as England and France moved toward forms of national unity, while others—like Italy—did not.¹⁴ In this regard, Italy proved enormously useful to English writers grappling with the range of questions that nationalist impulses forced to the fore: How were culture and political organization to relate to each other? How was the former to serve the latter? What role could lettered men and women play in the process? Of what relevance was England’s past as a province of the Roman empire? What was lost by imitating the modern Italians? What gained?

The central argument of this study is that Italy served English imaginative and polemical writers as a standard against which to measure their own cultural—often highly
nationalist—aspirations and anxieties. For a number of concrete reasons which I discuss 
below, it did so in a way that no other region or culture did or could have. By its very 
unstable nature as cultural, geographic, political and imaginary entity, “Italy” meant a 
complex nexus of codes, and so an equally rich set of tropes underpinned by the 
experiences of humanist education, trade, publishing, diplomacy, banking, and travel 
across a century and a half. Italy remained in the political and cultural consciousness of 
English writers because it offered them not only their paradigms—whether positive or 
negative—for civic organization, law and economic power, but also a vast cluster of social 
models to which the early-modern English attended carefully, even if they sometimes 
fought bitterly over the cultural validity of these models.
NOTES


2 Tanner, 4-5. Tanner’s introductory chapter offers a selective but representative list of other such imaginative writers. Additionally, in writing of Venice’s place in nineteenth and twentieth-century literary imaginations, he arrives at another formulation which I argue can and should be extended to “Italy” and to the period anterior to the early nineteenth century: “Venice became an important, I would say central, site (a topos, a topic) for the European imagination” (vii). See also Michael L. Ross, *Storied Cities: Literary Imaginings of Florence, Venice and Rome* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).


4 In my thinking about literary genres and nationalism, I am indebted to Richard Helgerson’s landmark study *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). One of the contributions I hope to make in the following chapters is to synthesize sound historical analysis with a sensitivity to literary forms, conventions and complexities. To a considerable degree, I have found most previously published research to ignore one or the other, but Helgerson’s sophistication concerning genres is a refreshing exception.

5 For a useful treatment of this phenomenon, though one with whose methods I disagree in some important ways, see Leah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Paths to Modernity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 29-87 and esp. 60-69.

6 On Frederick Barbarossa’s usefulness in the political unification of Italy, see John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*. 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 66, see 96-115 for a succinct account of the larger question of Italian nationalism. On the same topic, I have found Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 60-75, and H. Hearder and D.P. Waley, *A Short History of Italy from Classical Times to the*
Present Day (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 49-101 to be among the most useful.


9 See Hans Kohn, The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 96-100 for a brief but useful discussion of the distinction between cultural and political nationalism. Also of use in theorizing this troubled relationship is Meinecke’s discussion of Kulturnation and Staatsnation (see Alter, 14 and Breuilly, 3-4).

10 No one analyzing the literary dimensions of early modern nationalism, as I do in the following pages, can afford to be naïve about the contentiousness surrounding the definition and historical place of nationalism—what Peter Alter calls “one of the most ambiguous concepts in the present-day vocabulary of political and analytical thought” (4). While Helgerson sidesteps the semantic battles that have engaged political scientists and historians of culture for several decades, I will use nationalism in this study. Though my reasons will be made more clear in the chapters that follow, it seems appropriate to frame the problem here.

Anthony D. Smith’s intelligent and even-handed discussion of the debate seems to me the best survey of the problem: he differentiates the “modernist” position from that of the “primordialists,” suggesting (as I do) that neither extreme adequately describes the mechanisms and tropes of Western ethnic and cultural self-identification. He argues that because of recent work by ethnic historians such as John Armstrong, “While we can no longer regard the nation as a given of social existence, a ‘primordial’ and natural unit of human association outside time, neither can we accept that it is a wholly modern phenomenon, be it the ‘nervous tic of capitalism’, or the necessary form and culture of industrial capitalism”:

Anthony D. Smith, The Ethnic Origins of Nations (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 3, but see also 6-18. Smith points out what a number of other scholars have noted: that modernists tend to value material and especially economic indicators, state bureaucracies, and secular institutions, while primordialists tend to consider mythic and ethnic factors, in effect a kind of collective consciousness, that predates industrial capitalism and secular state apparatuses, but that obviously combines quite effectively with both. I further admire Smith’s analysis because he values symbolic, nostalgic and mythological forms of national self-expression—precisely the topoi that I analyze in the following pages.

Elie Kedourie’s formulation in Nationalism (London: Hutchinson, 1960), 9, represents in starkest terms the extreme modernist position, with that proposition’s characteristic emphasis on overt rather than implicit articulations of
national identity: "Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century." This claim is made by many other theorists, many of whose works are very effectively analyzed by Paul James in an article that explores the rifts in Marxist visions of nationalism: "The Janus Faces of History: Cleaving Marxist Theories of Nation and Nationalism," Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism 18 (1991): 13-24. Miroslav Hroch also offers the useful observation that "Marxist theoreticians agree on this point—albeit in different variations and formulations—that they consider the development of exchange relations and the national market to be the most important and decisive precondition for the formation of the modern nation": Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. Trans. Ben Fowkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 5. I find it oddly inconsistent that three of the theorists of nationalism most favored among early modern scholars, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner and Eric Hobsbawm, are all avowed modernists whose positions deny nationalism to the period in question. I align myself instead with Smith's moderate position, in that he recognizes the unique characteristics of post-enlightenment nationalism but refuses to over-value those characteristics to the extent of denying something essentially similar among the people and institutions of early modern culture.

G. R. Elton's brief discussion, "English National Self-consciousness and the Parliament in the Sixteenth Century." In Nationalismus in Vorindustrieller Zeit, ed. Otto Dann (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1986), 73-82, is a very sensible analysis that avoids the semantic cul de sacs of many other theorists. He refers to a high degree of national self-consciousness and "the specifically English consciousness of national identity" (my italics) and concludes that "By the 16th century...the English were a nation and conscious of the fact" (73-74). Unlike many political scientists, he takes the sixteenth century on its own terms, looking to institutions such as parliament, the monarchy, legislation concerning the Welsh and Scottish borderlands, and the English church as indicators of an English "awareness of their own identity and their difference from other nations" (73). Also useful in this respect are studies by Greenfeld (see 30-35) and E.D. Marcu, Sixteenth Century Nationalism (New York: Abaris Books, 1976), 3-9, both of which argue for specific forms of national self-consciousness in sixteenth-century England.

Finally, the recent debate between Ernest Gellner and Anthony D. Smith, in Nations and Nationalism 2 (1996): 358-70, supports one of the points I will raise in the following chapters. Many of the vehicles of nationalism that even modernists value as evidence of "pure" nationalist ideology—such as economic exchange, bureaucratic government, and print culture—have been undervalued in studies of pre-enlightenment national self-consciousness precisely because they have not been analyzed on their own terms but rather in relation to late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century standards that—obviously—cannot apply.

Denys Hays, Annalists and Historians: Western Historiography from the Eighth to the Eighteenth Centuries (London: Methuen, 1977), chap. 5, passim, and esp. 110.


Gillies, 34.
Let me introduce this study with a representative problem in Tudor-Stuart cultural studies. How might Shakespeare's original audiences have responded to Iachimo's pronouncement late in *Cymbeline* (ca. 1609): "mine Italian brain / Gan in your duller Britain operate / Most vilely" (5.5.196-98)? The glossing of a line such as this implies a whole history of not only literary composition but cultural reception, and Iachimo's role in the traditionally problematic, sometimes denigrated, *Cymbeline* seems to me a particularly fruitful point of departure. The play's formally and morally chaotic qualities (even in defending it, J.M. Nosworthy called the play an "undigested gallimaufery of English, Welsh, French, Ancient Roman, [and] Renaissance Italian") open into questions of cultural self-definition that encompass and epitomize the object guiding this study. How did Italy, the Italian brain, the stage Machiavel, Italianate behavior, and the absolutely fundamental combination of attraction and revulsion that English writers of the early modern period felt for things Italian function within the mytho-poetics of nationhood of *Cymbeline*? What cultural and political implications inhere in terms such as *duller, operate, and vilely*? What does *Britain* connote that *England* would not, and why does Iachimo so confidently refer to his
own "Italian brain" when both "Italy" and "Italian" are elastic, variable and ultimately unstable signifiers in the early seventeenth century?

Like similar questions that have fascinated me in the field of cultural studies, this one's answer demands a supple negotiation of particularity and generality, rhetorical sensitivity and social materiality, the historical imagination and the dust of the archive. It opens rapidly from the relatively narrow textual problem of glossing a stage trope, into a tightly connected series of questions fundamental to our understanding of the period's literature and social history: What qualities did Shakespeare intend to attribute to his villain? To what extent were those qualities understood by his original audience—and to what extent as tropes? How did they condition the increased contact English travelers and writers had with their fellow Europeans in the period, and how did they influence all Europeans' experiences in the margins of their known world? More fundamentally, where did the tropes come from, and why?

And since I have endeavored throughout to be attentive to my own subject position as a late twentieth-century critic, how are we to confront the many layers of cultural experience between the early modern period and the present day? Specifically, to what degree are we bound by the legacies of John Webster's Italianate tragedies, the Italy of the Grand Tour, the Gothic version of Ann Radcliffe, or the Romantic one of Keats and Shelley, Pater and Ruskin, and the Brownings? The Italies of Henry James and Edith Wharton, or of D.H. Lawrence, Norman Douglas and E.M. Forster, though more proximate to our own day, are nonetheless just as powerful cultural constructions as those of Shakespeare and Webster. All of their versions of Italy, and many others too, have
contributed to shaping the cultural and imaginative status of Italy for Anglo-American critics and thinkers, rendering a project such as this one as difficult as it is necessary.

A particular focal point of this study is to determine how Italy functioned within the emergent national discourses of the period 1530-1685—an age that is far from monolithic in its appropriations and representations of Italy as a political and cultural model or anti-model. But my definition of “national discourses” is a broad one, taking in not only obvious works of political or cultural import—William Thomas’s The Historie of Italie (1549) or John Harrington’s Oceana (1656), for example—but also many more modest or less obviously political forms of writing such as cookery books and conduct manuals that also contribute to a full picture of what Italy signified in the period. The incredible dynamism of this century and half (it begins with England’s diplomatic break from the universal Catholic church and ends with a fully developed Age of the Grand Tour) speaks for itself in terms of critical and historical worthiness. A great deal is known about English perceptions and representations of Italy once Englishmen (and sometimes women) began to tour as part of a complex social mechanism that, in the age’s own terms, required the Giro d’Italia, or Grand Tour. Likewise, the social utility of “touring” Italy when England was still within the empire of the Catholic church has been well documented and analyzed.4

What is less well understood is the period between these two great social realities, the years in which fascination for Italy grew along with numerous social sanctions that resisted English society’s near-obsession with Italy on the stage, in ecclesiastical and political polemics, in instructions for travel or comportment, and (as I show below) even
in realms not usually understood to carry significant social identifiers: cooking, gardening, animal husbandry, and so on. As a critic of writing and the ideologies that inform it, my object is to offer an analysis that is both historically specific and sensitive to what Richard Helgerson, alluding to Spenser and aptly encompassing the two great forces in both his and my investigations, calls "the kingdom of our language."5 Moreover, my aim in the following pages is to push beyond travel writing and dramatic representations—the two areas in which literary critics have traditionally devoted most of their attention. In this sense, I hope to expand the documentary basis for the ways in which we analyze the social and cultural utility of Italy in the period.

Since an analysis of Italy's cultural function—its usefulness or utility—for English writers, readers and travelers is the goal of this chapter and also of this study in its broadest outlines, it is worth emphasizing that in the cultural sense in which I employ the concept here, utility implies conventions, forms, and even perceptive categories that cannot exist independently of ideological values. They perform functions that have more to do with the various (and changing) needs of their perceptive agents than with their own inherent status or value. Likewise, their cultural usefulness is more amorphous and unstable than can be explained using conventional economic models, or indeed the once-standard tools of the literary critic. On the level of culture, these ideological biases imbue the different forms of literary representation I examine in this study: history, grammar and cookery books, travel writing, conduct literature, drama, personal correspondence, and of course, political polemic.6
The following argument is revisionist in that it lodges an alternative view of English national self-identity that has been largely overlooked in favor of (perhaps) more exotic locales and peoples inside and outside Britain. Not only Africans and Welsh but also Italians and French served to forge a consciousness of racial and national identity in early modern England, and with a new abundance of studies of the borderlands, Marches and New World in recent years, I believe there is a significant danger that the realities of cultural and national self-identification could become distorted. 

In this way, I hope to fill a gap—even as that gap is still developing—between the realities of early modern nationalist impulses as I see them, and the ways those impulses have tended to be represented in current research. I consider my contribution to be one of extension and nuance rather than wholesale disagreement: clearly the New World, Ireland and the politically troublesome Marches became important sites for the representation of Englishness in confrontation with cultural alterity, and I do not deny the value of research that explicates and analyzes those moments of contact. My revisionism is of a different variety and lodges a different claim: that we not forget the fundamental social fact that most of the writers who advanced English self-identity in literary works knew little of these exotic sites, and still fewer of them had any direct experience in them. The same cannot be said of Italy.

I believe, with Helgerson and others, that the real work of Tudor-Stuart national self-identification was conducted by a relatively small, definable middling class of aspirants to the prestige, wealth and power of an emerging court culture, its secular administration, and its systems of patronage and clientage. Many of this class traveled to Italy, most of
them knew as much about medieval and Renaissance Italy as they did of their own less thoroughly documented history, and by virtue of their educations all of them were well acquainted with Italy's ancient culture and literatures. Allowing for the broader sweep of my own argument, the writers I discuss in the following chapters are essentially of the class Helgerson describes, though some sought advancement outside the court as well. William Thomas and Roger Ascham promulgated versions of Italy to advance their careers at court, neither of them to ultimate success. Webster, Marston and other well educated Jacobean playwrights used another version of Italy to stage a range of frustrations over preferment, power and public morality, while Shakespeare was by 1609 a successful professional dramatist whose *Cymbeline* invoked rival and antithetical versions of Italy in an attempt, we must assume, to please King James and to comment on his fading dream of uniting England and Scotland. Milton craved something higher than mere public recognition, and Aphra Behn had only sporadic popular and financial success as England's first professional female writer, but both sought advancement through the patronage systems of their ages when it was forthcoming; and with a difference too obvious to dwell on, both benefited specifically from the favor of political leaders. All these authors' Italies shared something with previous constructions, and together they formed part of the necessary cultural apparatus that would allow them individually to advance, whether in court circles, the professional theaters, or the short-lived bureaucracy of the interregnum government.

The five chapters that follow are arranged chronologically as topics in a one hundred-fifty year period that follows many traditional literary-historical notions of
periodization but also questions some of those assumptions in important ways. For example, the final chapter argues that Behn's representation of Englishness during the interregnum exile of Charles I has as much to do with the literary and cultural models of the 1640's and before, as it does with the more obvious occasion of Restoration politics and the Popish Plot in particular. I am on the whole comfortable with a chronological approach because the problem I seek to resolve is fundamentally one of understanding the accretions of tradition and representative modes; that process is inherently tied to historical specificity and to historical progression. I am less confident that five incursions into such a broad topic can adequately stand for the entire history, and to counter this inevitable obstacle, I have chosen exemplary topics within the larger problem. By reading historical, travel, polemical, dramatic, and political works, I hope to counter the tendency of past literary studies to rely too narrowly on dramatic or other self-proclaimed literary productions—a distinction which in any case is quite artificial for the period in question. The century and a half of Anglo-Italian relations that I delineate here are complex, dynamic, at times self-contradictory and at times oddly recursive years—especially in their rhetorical qualities. Instead of making a claim to comprehensiveness that cannot ever be fulfilled, I attempt to satisfy the rival demands of historical specificity and historical progression in a way that seems responsible to each. I have tried to mark out significant lines of continuity across the period but I have not ignored lines of discontinuity.

What this project is not, is as important to designate as what it is. My objective is not specifically to analyze anti-Catholic or anti-Roman sentiment or propaganda of the period, though both inevitably figure in my analyses. In the writing of the sixteenth and
seventeenth centuries, historians and ethnographers as often as not considered Rome apart from "Italy," and the bishop of Rome as a political rival to the princes of the other city-states. This distinction matters a good deal for the larger problem of how the English variously constructed "Italy." Likewise, though I do sometimes draw upon political theory, especially on those Italian writers read in England, and on ecclesiastical polemics, my aim is not to propose a comprehensive reading of either. Instead, I focus upon the ways in which "Italy" was useful to the political theorists, apologists, propagandists, and imaginative writers of the period. Finally, this study is not primarily concerned with either influence-study, a field that has been well analyzed for several decades, or with the discourse of travel, which is only a sub-part of the larger problem of cultural utility which drives this study.  

Chapter Two sets out a schematic version of the problem by opposing two largely neglected mid-sixteenth century discussions of Italy, William Thomas's *The Historie of Italie* (1549) and Roger Ascham's *The Scholemaster* (1570). In discussing the texts, I attempt to explain the place Italy held in mid-century English cultural self-definition and so to establish a basis for discussing the attitudes and tropes available to the playwrights and polemicists of the late sixteenth century and after. I conclude that Thomas and Ascham imagined quite opposite Italies, and this fact despite many deep similarities in their personal circumstances and political outlooks. I offer a rationale for the ways in which Ascham's version of Italy as a cultural menace to the English took hold among the polemical and imaginative writers, and tentative as my conclusions must be, I suggest that
taken together, Thomas and Ascham define a spectrum of available Italies for subsequent generations of English writers.

The problem of Italy in the imaginative and polemical writings of the early modern period is a shadowy and recursive chicken-and-egg puzzle for the cultural critic: To what extent did literary representations of Italy condition subsequent treatments? To what extent did nominally objective or first-hand accounts such as Thomas' operate independently of tropes or ideological predispositions? To what extent did the growing corpus of writing about or from Italy during the period change the nature of the problem? Stated even more bluntly, since there was during the period an unstable meaning to the appellation “Italy,” did English writers construct an Italy in or for their own image? This last suggestion, radical as it might in fact be, is indebted to the powerful (and if two and a half decades are sufficient grounds for the claim) enduring thesis of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*.12 Were there no Italy, as there was in Said's analysis no Orient, English writers would have had to invent one. Or put another way, there was no Italy except those often rival versions of it promulgated by diverse voices, for diverse nationalist motives. They are the only “Italy” that most English readers and travelers encountered in the sixteenth century, and that “Italy” was as available to a cosmopolitan such as William Thomas as to a cultural nationalist such as Roger Ascham.

That is the argument I lodge here: because “Italy” was an especially unstable signifier for at least a millennium before Thomas published his *The Historie of Italie*, English writers throughout and well beyond the early modern period attached a mixture of political, cultural and moral meanings to it. “Italy” as a rhetorical site, a constellation of
often inter-dependent tropes, had significant value for and a necessary role in defining English national culture beginning after about 1530. It accrued its multiplicity of meanings through convention and repetition—through polemics, descriptive histories, stage representations, news pamphlets, and treatises devoted to military sciences, political theory, architecture and other disciplines. Its broader cultural relevance in England came from many sources: the Italians states' collective (and often individual) economic, literary and scientific superiority to England's, as well as their advances in areas of endeavor less often figured in literary studies, such as banking, printing, education in the arts and sciences, and political theory. Italy was the source of much of the printed knowledge English readers knew in the middle of the sixteenth century, from the art of warfare to digested forms of ancient Greek philosophy. This status as a fountainhead of learning, reinforced by a long tradition of English scholars studying in Italian universities, intersected momentously with political and ecclesiastical developments in Tudor England to make Italy nothing less than a necessary measure of English political and cultural development: a model and a rival. Because “Italy” could signify so variously, it functioned not as a stable standard but as a shifting register of English cultural standards, ideals, anxieties and opportunities not only in the middle of sixteenth century, but also manifestly for the generations after Ascham.

These latter generations' interest in poisoning as a stage and fictional trope is the subject of the third chapter. I argue for a close relationship between ecclesiastical and state politics, cultural difference, and poison as a perceived Italian import. Why Italian (or Italianate\textsuperscript{13}) scenes of poisoning seized Elizabethan and Jacobean theater with such
force is a question that, to my mind, has never been satisfactorily answered. Chapter 3 takes in more than dramatic representations alone, drawing evidence from a range of medical, dietary and descriptive texts that suggest a broad discursive tradition. Ultimately, I believe that the English Renaissance fascination with poisons as a trope circles back—as so many such tropes do—to issues of national self-identification: in my analysis, poison equates with a Protestant "culture of sincerity" which rigidly distinguished Northern interiority from Southern duplicity and "policy."

Chapter Four, devoted to Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, attempts to answer the problem of Iachimo's "Italian brain" in a direct and specific way, and in so doing offers a new critical perspective on the cultural functions of ancient Rome and modern Italy in Renaissance English historiography. As in Chapter 3, I discuss climatic determinism as part of the *mentalité* that informs James's ideal of a transparent monarch, free from the Italianate guile Iachimo represents. I conclude that current critical consensus erroneously suppresses the modern Italian dimensions of the play, and that far from distorting or diluting Anglo-Roman political meanings, "drug-damn'd Italy" and Iachimo himself contribute quite directly to a set of political alternatives the play holds up for consideration.

Likewise concerned with the intersection of state politics and broader cultural assumptions, the fifth chapter focuses on Milton's attitudes toward Venetian republicanism in the late 1650's. An analysis that encompasses both his literary and political aspirations, this chapter combines a reading of his Italian journey of 1638-39 with an inquiry into the nature of his late republican theory as expressed, particularly, in *The*
Readie and Easie Way (1660). I argue that Milton resists his contemporaries’ considerable enthusiasm for Venetian republican models out of a commitment to a less secular, less material republican ideal whose roots lie deep in a number of sometimes chauvinistic assumptions about the nature of English national character.

The final chapter offers a reading of Behn’s The Rover and its less often considered sequel, The Second Part of the Rover, as interventions into the politics of Englishness and as re-inscriptions of the Interregnum some twenty years after the fact. I ask why, in adapting Thomas Killigrew’s closet drama Thomaso (pub. 1664), Behn shifted the setting from Madrid to Naples, only to return to Madrid in the sequel. In offering an answer to this question, I discuss why Spain and Italy form such natural complements in a play that functions primarily as an anatomy of essential Englishness, but I also suggest ways in which Behn is both invoking the language of the rapidly developing convention of the Giro d’Italia and suppressing the realities of Naples’s political meaning after the popular insurrection of Masaniello of 1649. Her central concern with essential Englishness emerges most clearly in relation to the hybrid Italo-Spanish mores the plays hold up as (at least possible) alternatives to pre-Grand Tour English provincialism.

Taken together, these chapters advance various forms of close historical and cultural evidence that has rarely been combined with equally careful attention to the distinctiveness of literary modes and occasions. A number of important strands have emerged as a result of my research. Among these is a central concern with national identity, whether determined historically, providentially or climatically. With such a concern comes an equally persistent anxiety over the threat of transformation, degradation

25
and metamorphosis—hence my title “Circe’s Court” and what might be taken as the project’s principal leitmotiv. The ability to transform men was Circe’s great art, and as any Renaissance reader knew, her magic was as alluring and enticing as it was ultimately destructive. In English Protestant thought, Circe became spiritualized, made to represent the temptations the soul faces, but in the context of Italy—called “Circe’s court” in Ascham’s *The Scholemaster*—those temptations also entailed the struggles of the body and the soul, the social animal and the inward one, too. Through travel, political theory, educational praxis, sartorial fashions, military theory, trade and all else that makes up the warp and woof of life in any age, her court became too alluring to resist, to important to ignore. Italy provided the pre-eminent models of government, both ancient and modern, and (through printing and educational theory) the foundations of humanist legal, philosophical and social thought. Castiglione’s influence is obvious enough, but the work of now-anonymous Venetian printers and editors, or Paduan fencing masters, or court musicians in Italy or indeed England, cannot be left out of the equation. Indeed, “Italian influence” is a phrase that seems naturally to accompany the material I am working with in this study, but as one of the best critics of Italian cultural studies reminds us, the phrase owes its metaphoric force to an organic conception of human interaction—one that rather neatly corresponds to the metaphor my title is intended to suggest: influence was seen as acting upon the health and well-being of those influenced. Transformations such as Circe was to have wrought on Englishmen were, as we shall see, figured as almost the equivalent of a disease—influence in a sense now almost lost in English.
My study advances an evolutionary model of cultural utility because a number of representative traditions change dramatically over the period 1530-1685. For example, the more or less imaginative, if not fanciful, uses of Italy in Ascham's *The Scholemaster* or Webster's major plays, begin to give way quite markedly during the Interregnum period to a more pragmatic, measured sort of cultural utility. Chapters 5 and 6 reflect this shift in various ways. Both are concerned with the ways in which very precise historical and political events in Italian peninsula were theorized or represented in England; and although it would be an exaggeration to claim that the ideological forces that drive all forms of representation were held in abeyance in Milton and Behn, the free-wheeling, ahistorical approach of Ascham cannot work in an age that had at its disposal very precise news reports, maps, guidebooks and descriptive histories. In short, it becomes increasingly difficult from about the 1640's for Italy to function as a complete cultural cipher, a mostly empty vessel for receiving and containing English anxieties.

Likewise, shifts in English attitudes toward Catholics and the pope, and toward republican models of government, imperial ambitions, and the benefits of travel—to invoke only some of the ideological changes of the period—make the easy, abstracted representation of Italy increasingly problematic. The new science of Bacon and others, as well as the new political science of "reason of state" (Machiavelli was not translated and hardly known in England at the beginning of this period and Locke was only middle-aged at the end of it), also made political judgments such as those of William Thomas or Thomas Elyot a matter of increased complexity.
Some revision is as inevitable as it is desirable in a study such as this, and if the following analyses argue against the grain of contemporary assumptions about the nature of English cultural self-representation, it does so in the spirit of cooperation. My study entails a number of works that have hardly been considered by literary critics or historians, and it offers new readings of some more familiar texts, too. In all cases, my object is to examine the range of utilities "Italy" served English writers, audiences and readers in their collective quest for self-legitimation. Self-identification needs many Others, and while I do not deny the importance of many of the exotic or marginalized groups that now interest critics of early-modern England, I also assert vigorously that regions and peoples much closer to home (in a sense the following pages will make clear) mattered as much or more. Circe's Court is a fascinating place, and one far more germane to English writers' ways of imagining themselves a nation than has hitherto been acknowledged.
NOTES


2 My next chapter discusses the intellectual implications of the epitome tradition as it was applied to cultural, especially national, differences.


6 Mary B. Campbell, referring broadly to Said’s Orientalism, stresses the same point I make here: that cultural biases and chauvinism in literary representation exist for cultural and not purely creative reasons. See her The Witness and the Other World. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 86.


8 Of particular historical relevance is the fact that England pursued a coherent colonial policy in the New World only in the last decades of the sixteenth century, and previous to that period, had had only very limited direct contact with the geography and populations of the Americas.
I feel tradition-bound to offer my rationale for employing the word Renaissance in this study. Though I believe that there is good reason to choose terms carefully and good reason to mistrust the assumptions implied in "Renaissance," I have not perceived its current alternatives to be without problems. "Early modern" implies discontinuity with the fifteenth century and before, one that seems particularly inappropriate in a project that recognizes how important historical continuity was to the writers of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Certainly, they seem not to have noticed living in "early modern" times. Moreover, the term naturally begs a beginning and an end-point, and one of my arguments throughout is that many of the tropes and attitudes I analyze here recur across several centuries and even up to the present day. For that reason alone, "early modern" does not seem to solve more problems than it creates. "Tudor-Stuart" has obvious merit as a historical label, but it implies more about continuity and less about the indifference of culture to dynastic politics than I believe appropriate. I have opted, therefore, for an ideologically neutral mixture of "Renaissance," "early modern" and "Tudor-Stuart"—as much for stylistic variety as anything else. I rely on my readers to smooth over, and perhaps set aside, the very real problems with any of the terms we choose to employ.


Again, Mary B. Campbell asks essentially the same necessary questions in the opening of her study of medieval geographical and travel writing: "How do the pressures of audience expectation and the writer's predispositions transform the language and content of such records? Are they records at all or only literary occasions for compensatory fantasies on the part of the disillusioned, the nostalgic, the bewildered?" (2). I suggest that the writers I consider in the following pages were at least as subject to the same conditions as those she studies.

Reed Way Dasenbrock in *Imitating the Italians: Wyatt, Spenser, Synge, Pound, Joyce* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991) makes this association early in his argument, stating that "Italy was one of the key cultures against which England defined itself, and this differential system of representation is in many ways close to a form of Orientalism as defined by Edward Said" (2). Though I take considerable exception to Dasenbrock's division between "form" and "content" in English Italianism, his basic premise that literary imitation is separable from the uses of
Italy as a setting seems to me an insight (4-5). Instead of a rigid distinction between form and content, I would argue that the two could and often did operate in parallel, and that both ultimately served domestic purposes such as those I discuss below.

By this term I imply something or someone Italian in association, character or cultural tradition, though not necessarily Italian _per se_. As a survey of the drama and polemics of the period shows, English writers were apt to efface the differences between Italians and other Mediterraneans, or to construct a pan-Mediterranean "Proximate Other." In the Renaissance, the concept gave rise to related coinages that suggest the sorts of cultural anxieties I discuss in the following chapters: _Italianize(d), Italianate(d)_ as a verb and participial, and so forth.


Burke, 1-18, esp. 4.
CHAPTER 2

WILLIAM THOMAS, ROGER ASCHAM
AND THE USES OF "ITALY"

To borrow from a statement of Virginia Woolf's to which I refer in the last section of this study: all scholars of early modern culture ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Sir Richard Sackville, for it is he who asked Roger Ascham in December, 1563 to comment on the "common going of English men into Italy." Sackville's invitation provoked one of the most enduring sixteenth-century polemical constructions of Italy, one that resonates throughout—and can in part explain—a culturally resonant image such as Iachimo's "Italian brain."

The conclusion to Book One of Ascham's *The Scholemaster* (1570) is devoted to the problem of mid-century Italian cultural influence, and as one of the most influential sixteenth-century polemics on the subject, it serves as a point of entry into the cultural controversy to which Ascham set his considerable intellectual, argumentative and stylistic powers. But as we shall see, his response to Sackville (now often quoted from as evidence of a pervasive anti-Italian prejudice among English writers) was rather an intervention into a discussion that had gone on for several decades and had by *The*
Scholemaster's composition in the mid-1560's already developed a range and variety of tropes, many of them tied to emerging nationalist discourses that would by the end of the century form a chorus of writings inflected by or devoted to national themes.\(^1\)

Intertextual as well as material factors shape any national self-fashioning, and because Italy served English writers of the late sixteenth century as a source of historical referents and political theory, as well as the period's dominant literary and social models, its nature and qualities are all the more relevant to English nationhood. In order to gain purchase on this topic, I have singled out two exemplary but often overlooked texts for consideration: Ascham's treatise precedes by about a decade a true explosion of imaginative literary representations of, or set in, Italy, but William Thomas's *The Historie of Italie* (1549) comes two decades earlier, at the beginning of a long tradition of representing Italy, a discursive field into which Ascham's text later intervened. Perhaps as many as five hundred Tudor and Stuart plays partook of Italian imaginative or topographical geography in some way\(^2\), while prose works such as Gascoigne's *The Adventures of Master F.J.* (revised second edition 1575), Lyly's *Euphues* (1578) and Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) demonstrate that soon after Ascham's widow brought *The Scholemaster* to press, "Italy" had assumed the crucial place in the literary representation of "Englishness" that it would occupy at least until the beginning of this century, if not in some form to the present day.

Rather than a firm consensus or collective belief, literary (and indeed other artistic) representations of social issues reveal complex associations among representative modes and their actual social realities. Instead of unity, tropes tend to express
multiplicity of meaning and competing implications. In the especially complex case of
English attitudes toward "Italy," there is no dearth of explanation for the mid-century
fascination with things Italian and the deep ambivalence English writers felt toward Italy
as a cultural and political model. Not all these analyses, however, have shown the
necessary appreciation for the rhetorical forms and conventions—the tropes—that the
subject deserves, and many have re-circulated the same broad claims. My own approach
is to treat both texts, like those that came before and after, as rhetorical, situational and
political in nature, rather than transparently "representative" of any particular consensus
of opinion.

The justification for such an approach to *The Historie of Italie* and *The
Scholemaster* is particularly strong: Thomas modeled his treatise on the best of Italian
humanist historiography and sought out England’s most prestigious humanist publisher,
while Ascham framed his comments on the “going into Italy” within a larger humanist
educational program that is itself a rhetorical model of the ideals he advances. He freely
admits that his direct experience with the Italian peninsula amounted to “but nine days”
in Venice, during which time he claims to have seen more “liberty to sin” than he had
heard reported from London in nine years (*Scholemaster* 72). Ascham’s limitations as an
observer of Italian life, when combined with his treatise’s larger aim, demonstrate that his
concern in *The Scholemaster* is not with Italians but “Italianate” Englishmen. It is
fundamentally a moral and domestic object, and as such, deserves attention in these
terms.
Both writers were also so fully involved in a complex system of patronage, court life, educational reform, and publishing that the topical qualities of their works are hard to ignore. According to Ascham's preface, itself a masterful piece of narrative craft, Sackville occasioned not only the now-famous educational treatise itself—Ascham reports that he was asked to “put in some order of writing, the chief points of this our talk”—but it also unleashed Ascham's diatribe against the perils of foreign travel and the Italianate Englishman. Ascham asserts that Sackville's question comes up as tabletalk during an evening's respite from the busy affairs of state: Italian travel, educational reform, service to the state and to the sovereign all combine into a narrative of social and political mobility which can be read from our distant vantage point with a clarity unavailable even to the protagonists. Implicit in Ascham's fashioning of such a social occasion is a complex web of associations and inter-dependencies that marks out the horizons—and also the limits—of the class of courtiers, diplomats and bureaucrats created by the Tudor regimes of the middle sixteenth century onward, members of a trans-national group Denys Hays calls “a new secular administration, the dynamo of government in Europe in the sixteenth century and after.”

Sackville's casual reference to “Italy” as a political entity is itself charged with English presuppositions about national unity and the cultural forms that allow—or inhibit—that unity. Exactly what “Italy” was, whether a geographical, political or imaginative space, to the English and to the inhabitants of the peninsula itself is a problem considerably more fraught than Sackville's query and Ascham's response suggest. Italians themselves entertained parallel, sometimes conflicting definitions of
what “Italy” actually entailed, who its inhabitants were, and what—if anything—held them together as a nation. However, Ascham avoids these very basic questions in favor of quintessentially English ones: what are the moral and social consequences of Italianate influence on the emerging “national” character of the English? What are the political ramifications? The Scholemaster’s concern is with influence and not with Italians per se, and so the problem of Italianate influences is a problem fundamentally in national self-fashioning and in the literary representation of that fashioned entity.

Second only to Thomas Hoby in terms of influence, William Thomas was England’s foremost sixteenth-century Italophile and as fully invested in the system of patronage, service, and literary production as Hoby or Ascham. Almost inexplicably, however, Thomas has hardly been studied by either historians or literary critics, a fact all the more surprising because of his brief but significant career in public service and the variety—and quality—of his published works.

Both The Historie of Italie and The Scholemaster functioned within the larger spheres of English educational theory, the social and economic foundations of that theory, and the cultural imperatives that underlie the more easily documented socio-economic manifestations of educational travel, service to the state, and personal advancement within an increasingly centralized court culture. Ultimately, both had a significant nationalistic—and so in the politics of the sixteenth-century, also a religious—impulse behind them. Even if this nationalist purpose is more apparent from the vantage point of the late twentieth century than it was to the writers I treat in this chapter, it is nonetheless
a significant aspect of the culture into which Thomas’s and Ascham’s treatises intervene, and so one that I intend to treat with appropriate care in the pages that follow.¹⁰

Broadly speaking, William Thomas and Roger Ascham define polar extremes in their uses of Italy, and for the sake of schematic clarity, I present them in these terms. Even given their considerable differences, however, the overlapping and often conflicting ways Italy served these two important English writers and public figures points toward a broader point: representational modes and the objects of that process take on a life of their own and a problem in what is currently called ethnographic description becomes, perforce, a problem of intertextual dynamics, as one writer positions him or herself in relation to earlier works. In Thomas and Ascham, we find that though their senses of Italy’s utility differ considerably, the reservoirs of tropes and assumptions from which they draw are remarkably similar, and in at least one instance, Ascham even draws directly upon Thomas.

In the spring of 1545, William Thomas, then about 38 years old, traveled to the Italian peninsula not as one of the legion of young men to whom Sackville alludes in his question to Ascham. Instead he arrived in Venice as a fugitive, having embezzled money from his patron, Sir Anthony Browne, Master of the Horse to Henry VIII.¹¹ Soon after his arrival, Thomas was apprehended and imprisoned—perhaps only briefly—but by the
end of his stay in Italy four years later, he had traveled to Genoa, Rome, Padua, Bologna, Urbino, Florence, Ferrara and probably other cities as well. If the preface to *The Pilgrim*, his defense of Henry VIII's divorce, is to be taken literally, he was in Bologna in February of 1547. Of his other travels during his exile nothing can be said with certainty, but no doubt he would have had occasion to pass through the regions between each of these major city-states. His *The Historie of Italie* was probably written by April, 1548, and by February of the following year he had also completed his *Principal Rules of the Italian Grammar*. Sometime in the first half of 1548 he stayed briefly with Thomas Hoby in Strasbourg—a chance meeting of the two most influential Italophiles of the mid-century which is recorded, albeit briefly, by Hoby in his diary. After his return to England in the autumn of 1549, his history and grammar were published in 1549 and 1550, respectively. Thomas chose to entrust his works to Thomas Berthelet, who was printer to Henry VIII and arguably the most prestigious humanist publisher of the period, responsible for a range of classical and contemporary texts fully in keeping with Thomas's own literary, political and career objectives.

If Thomas's literary success on his return to England seems remarkable, his political success was even more extraordinary. By the spring of 1550 he was named clerk of Edward VI's Privy Council and made solely responsible for the Council's register. In the following years he wrote a series of "Commonplaces of State," apparently for the personal use of the young king, and sometime in the early 1550's presented him with a translation of Josafat Barbaro's *Travels to Tana and Persia*. He also translated Sacrabosco's *De Sphaera*, in the preface to which he asserts the dignity of English in
ways similar to elsewhere in his oeuvre. During Thomas's association with the young king, he received a number of privileges and favors that made him quite wealthy and well-connected to Venetian merchants and diplomats in London. By March 1553 he was described as "late clerk of the privy council," so must have resigned or been dismissed from his post sometime before then, but his service to the state did not cease. He went on diplomatic missions to Flanders in the summer of that year, but never received the ambassadorship to Venice which he coveted.

King Edward's premature death in June was the initial cause of Thomas's equally spectacular fall. He became involved in Sir Peter Carew's aborted rebellion of late 1553, and according to the charges brought against him the following year, went so far as to advocate murdering Mary I in order to restore the Protestant regime that he rather too openly advocated. He was tried along with 560 others accused of complicity in Wyatt's Rebellion, and within the space of two days in May, 1554 was tried, condemned and executed. John Foxe and Henry Machyn report the circumstances of his death, Foxe alluding to his gruesome dismemberment and to "many fruitful exhortations, letters, and sonnets [written] in the prison before his death" that unfortunately have not survived.

Thomas's 1549 *The Historie of Italie*, the first English descriptive history of the region, was the result of the author's wide reading in contemporary Italian histories and his often keen powers of observation during his period of exile. But it is also a work that fashioned Italy into a sort of *paysage moralisé*—a land whose topography, politics and mores could function as an extended commentary on England's own society. His approach was a time-honored one, for as James S. Romm argues, geography as an
The *Historie* emerged in a period marked by two developments, one social and the other intellectual, that have direct bearing on the text and its reception. First, as George B. Parks explains, from about 1530 onward, "a new obsessive taste for Italian" language and culture began to take hold among English courtiers and diplomats eager to advance socially and politically. By the early 1540's the Italian language had become a conspicuous dimension of court life, and within a few more years, young men began to flock to Padua to study the language and round out their educations at the university and private schools there. Wyatt's *Certain Psalms* and Thomas's *Historie* (both 1549) aptly cap the decade in which Italian had started increasingly to become woven into the texture of diplomatic, literary and court life.

The latter part of the century almost tells its own tale: the queen could greet visitors in fluent Italian when the occasion required it, and Philip Sidney and hundreds of other young aristocrats flocked either to Italy (or more often) to domestic institutions catering to the new Italian fashions, like London's first fencing school, established in 1576 by Rocco Bonetti. English presses churned out all manner of Italian-language texts, Italian publications ranging from cuisine to the art of warfare and novelle to pornography streamed into England, and Italian literary models began to transform English prose, poetic and dramatic writings. The queen employed an Italian as her court musician, sartorial fashions took on an Italianate quality that quickly became the object of
satiric jabs, while language books and travel guides brought “home” experiences that few could afford in reality. Indeed, prose works as different from each other as Nashe’s *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) and *The English Ape, The Italian Imitation, The Footsteppes of Fraunce* (1588, attributed to William Rowley) demonstrate that by the last decades of the century, this “Italy” had become what one historian has aptly suggested was the period’s most important “social escalator” to political and economic power, and so also an obvious target for satire and polemic. With such utility in the social and political spheres, imaginative representations in prose, and especially on the stage, were plentiful.

The second important development had a trans-national dimension, though Italian writers were the most influential in this process. A new historiographical tradition emerged in the decades preceding Thomas’s *Historie*: a civic, topical method that began to change the Ciceronian tradition of rhetorical and annalistic historiography of late medieval writers. Thomas is materially and ideologically indebted to this new generation of Italian historians, particularly to Flavio Biondo, Andrea Fulvio, Platina, and Machiavelli, whose accounts of municipal history he ransacked (often with due acknowledgment) for his own project. So widespread was the practice of writing municipal histories that Thomas had at least one published source for each of his major divisions in *The Historie of Italie*: Machiavelli for Florence, Platina for the papacy, Agostino Guistiniani for Genoa, Fulvio and Biondo for Rome, Corio for Milan, Collenuccio for Naples, and Sabellico for Venice.
Thomas is cautious, modest and self-aware in his reporting of historical authority. His approach is synoptic and skeptical. He compares sources, posing—to take one example—Biondo's account of ancient Roman baths against that of Fulvio. Elsewhere he strategically defers to them, asking rhetorically that if native and learned Romans cannot fully describe that city's antiquities, then “should I, a stranger, that tarried there but a small time, enterprise to do it?” (Historie 31, 45). He acknowledges the authority of the authors from whom he borrows, but often reports and reflects upon fissures in their collective authority. For example: “Of the edification of Genoa be divers opinions, but because no certainty is written thereof, I will omit their sayings that ascribe it Janus, or to Genuus, the son of Saturn...” (Historie 109). Instead of naively confident epitomes, a residual form that persisted at least until The Historie’s publication, Thomas consistently questions his sources, distinguishing between reported and eye-witness information and seriously weighing the authority of classical taxonomies against contemporary realities. In this respect, and like other historians of the period, he falls between traditions: the residual Ciceronian, moralizing and universalizing annalistic historiography on the one hand, and the emergent Machiavellian, skeptical, document- and source-based emergent tradition on the other. These two developments matter a great deal because they illustrate the specific historical situation, in England and across the continent, in which Thomas’s Historie emerged: the pressures of Ciceronian history-as-morality on the one hand, and an emergent form of historical discourse on the other that shaped, conflicted with, and gave meaning to his tropes.

42
Not only moralized, Thomas's "Italy" is politicized, figured repeatedly as a land of opportunity for the nascent diplomat—the person Thomas himself sought to become. Beginning with the dedicatory epistle to the Earl of Warwick, soon to be the Duke of Northumberland, and continuing through the perfunctory but highly revealing conclusion, Thomas's literary and historical efforts converge upon a single pragmatic object: the education of a courtier and career diplomat in a new world order that required his services. He addresses Warwick in the language of the *speculum principium*, making quite exaggerated but *de rigueur* claims for a form of moral utility that is at most only implicit in his work. Significantly, his implied readers are not princes but "wise and learned men" and "noblemen" who may profit from the examples of good and evil rulers, called variously "authorities" and the more conventional "princes" (*Historie* 3-5). The dedication's emphasis partakes openly of the language and forms of the *speculum*, but its object is promoting the benefits of peace and prosperity to the class of advisors and politicians able to advise a prince, and not to a prince.

In his brief conclusion, Thomas justifies his omissions of information partly through an affected modesty that runs throughout the work, and partly because the minor states he neglected—Siena, Lucca, Trent, Piombino, Mirandola, Castel Goffredo are not of such reputation, either for dominion, power, or continuance of years, that they should be numbered among the principal, I have forborne to speak particularly of them, though some indeed notable praise, beseeching all gentle readers to accept my travail and diligence used in this behalf as a thing done for their commodities (*Historie* 131).
His entire frame of reference, like the rationale supporting his hierarchy of Italian states, is diplomatic. Where it is political—as it certainly is—it concerns the world of embassy, negotiation and treaty. Thomas consistently subjects abstract moralism to the imperatives of political pragmatism and career advancement.

Of special relevance is Thomas's use of commodities—as in "the infinite commodities that grow of the reading of histories." It appears in the dedication and the conclusion, and in both instances, the word partakes of two related but separable definitions: ease and convenience on the one hand—the broader sense that the author seems to have intended—and article of exchange on the other.35 This latter sense demands closer inspection: as an emergent concept that would evolve with economic thought in the coming two centuries, commodities here suggests the significant personal rewards that accrued to career diplomats like Thomas who studied the cultural and diplomatic histories of foreign powers. Elsewhere in his dedication, too, Thomas refers to those rewards, instancing the "peace and concord" that have contributed to the edification of Italian cities and to Warwick's own "wonderful knowledge in civil orders" (Historie 4-5).

Thomas's principal use of "Italy" is shaped by an emergent and highly pragmatic political ideology: a diplomatic strategy based, ironically perhaps, upon ideological neutrality, the ability of the observer to empty himself of religious, political and cultural preconceptions. For example and contrary to the example of moralists such as Ascham, he states in the headnote to his "Abridgement of the Lives of the Roman Bishops" that
"because my principal purpose tendeth to describe the states of Italy, I need not to use much circumstance either in matters of religion or yet in writing the lives of the Bishops of Rome" (Historie 53).

The Historie of Italie is a text framed and enclosed by the concept of service to the state, a treatise devoted explicitly to the ideal of civil concord and implicitly to the civic knowledge required to effect such peace and prosperity. Examples of Thomas's resistance to matters of topical, moral or diplomatic controversy are manifold and could here be multiplied, but as often as not his tactics appear as absences rather than presences. His deep antipathy to Queen Mary's marriage negotiations and his highly polemical defense of Henry VIII entitled The Pilgrim indubitably attest to his commitment to English governance and to the reformed English church. He did, after all, lose his life in what he imagined to be the defense of those two interwoven principles. Thus it is significant that Thomas rarely takes the opportunity to censure either of the bogies so central to English anti-Italianism: Catholicism and the de-centered, fragmented political system of the city-states.

His polemics against either occur seldom, and even then typically not against the institutions that sustained them. Even his extended account of the Christmas pageant of Pope Paul III in 1547, far and above the most detailed recital of any aspect of the Catholic Church in the Historie, hardly touches upon matters of faith and practice. Instead, it is a largely factual, even dry account of the Pope's ritual progress that is punctuated only by one rhetorical flourish on the office's inordinate opulence and another on the papal court's pride, vanity and concupiscence (Historie 46-53). Despite the almost
unbelievable pomp of the event, Thomas maintains a studied neutrality in his description: he offers no *ad hominem* attacks on the Pope, nor any sustained censure of the ceremony itself.\(^3\)

Moreover, and equally significant, his history does not construct a unitary “Italy” in the way that subsequent writers such as Ascham would fashion it: only twenty-one of over 220 folios are given to a description of Italy as a whole, and of these, not even three are devoted to anything resembling the ethnographic generalizations and epitomes that are the foundation of the prevailing modes of descriptive writing of the mid-sixteenth century. The other eighteen contain precise geographic and geo-political descriptions, “an abridgment of the state of Italy” based solely upon a chronology of its rulers, and a brief catalogue of the region’s natural and manufactured commodities.\(^3\)

Instead of describing a unitary “Italy,” Thomas devotes some ninety percent of his study to highly individuated descriptions of the principal city-states of a geographical, not political Italy: Rome, Venice, Naples, Florence, Genoa, Milan, Mantua, Ferrara, Piacenza, Parma, and Urbino. He does not ask the same questions nor engage in the same forms of description in all these sections, but rather approaches each city-state via the printed sources available to him, his own personal experience (or lack of it), in all cases addressing a cluster of pragmatic political dividends he expects the reader to gain. Thus the description of Rome is divided into three sections: a physical description of the city, an uncharacteristically polemical survey of its contemporary physical and political conditions, and finally a description and catalogue of the bishops of Rome. His emphasis throughout is upon Rome’s glorious past, its ancient architecture, the splendor of the
papal court, and the subjection of its contemporary citizens. By contrast, Venice is characterized almost wholly in terms of its civic engineering, military might, economic strength, and systems of law and government. In subject matter and in tone, the two descriptions could not be more different because for the pragmatic reader Thomas addresses throughout his Historie, the two city-states presented very different diplomatic and political situations. Venice was the Italian peninsula’s primary safe haven—he writes that “he that dwelleth in Venice may reckon himself exempt from subjection. For no man there marketh another's doings, or that meddleth with another man’s living,” whether papist, “gospeller,” Jew or Turk.39 His descriptive categories, the very taxonomies of his investigation, reflect England’s commercial and diplomatic interests in the Venetian state machinery. By contrast, as the hub of world Catholicism, Rome’s economy and domestic politics were centered in the papal court and so by Thomas’s maturity, largely outside the professional sphere of the career diplomats and men of business he addresses.

Moral landscape and paysage politicisé coexist uneasily in Thomas’s Historie—a consequence of the residual discourses of geographical history-writing in disharmonious relation with the emergent pragmatism of the new historiography. Thomas’s most significant tropes, especially when juxtaposed to Ascham’s very different set of figures, show two distinct “uses” of Italy. As I will later show, Ascham’s diatribe in The Scholemaster operates free of any of the pragmatism Thomas intends in his study: where Ascham confidently constructs a moral landscape that serves to define and restrict domestic social transgression in the name of a idealized England, Thomas is caught
between the desire to form an ideal English diplomat and the necessity of forming an effective one.

From ancient authors such as Pliny and Ptolemy, Thomas inherited numerous conventions concerning climate, topography, diet and moral life. But using his own direct observation, he also focuses upon a range of precise ethnographic descriptions and he repeats images of richness and opulence, associated with but ultimately separable from his frequent laments on the passing of Italy’s former glory on the one hand, and its present oppression of the poor on the other. In fact, throughout the Historie, the often unstable relation between historical authority and present-day applications fractures Thomas’s entire project. At base, such instability is the consequence of Protestant ideologies of self in tension with the realities of the successful political life as he observed and understood it in his own career.

The convention of claiming an ideal climate and bountiful resources predates the Latin authors, like Pliny, who maintained that the Italian peninsula possessed the perfect mixture of elements and climate for human habitation. Just as Pliny’s chief forebear, Hippocrates, had done for his native Greece, Thomas describes Italy as having “a very temperate and wholesome air,” and “fertile fields” that provide an abundance of all produce because the peninsula “is in the midst between the extremities of heat and cold.” It is “one of the most indifferent [i.e. moderate] regions...very pleasant, delicate, and abundant.”

Naturally enough, this ancient trope carried with it a usually ethnocentric moral ratification of the ways of life associated with the region in question, and conventionally
at least, the implication that dangerous forms of immoderation lurked on the peripheries and extreme zones of the known world, or *oikumeme*. Thomas repeats these conventional associations, connecting the civic excellence of the Italians with their climate and agricultural production:

he that hath mean to pay for that he taketh shall have in Italy what he can reasonably desire: fine bread, singular good wines both strong and small, flesh of all sorts both wild and tame, fowl of all kinds both of water and land, fish as well of the sea as of the fresh water, but specially such plenty of delicate fruits as would make a man leave flesh, fowl, and fish to eat them...: pepons, pomegranates, oranges, lemons, citrons and sweet grapes, besides their figs, apples, pears, peaches, plums, olives, with a thousand other of that sort. And it is not to be marveled at though (as the fame goeth) the Italian be a small eater of flesh. (*Historie 9*)

More unusual perhaps is the fact that Thomas uses the principle to chasten English dietary habits and assumptions. In a confessional mode, he continues:

For though herebefore I have commended the temperature of Italy to be comparable with any other country, yet must you understand that in summer the sun is somewhat fervent, and in time of that heat the lightness of those sweet fresh fruits is better to be digested than the heaviness of the flesh or fish, which would not there be so lightly digested. As I myself have proved, that beforetime could in manner brook no fruit, yet after I
had been awhile in Italy I fell so in love withal that as long as I was there I desired no meat more, specially in summer. (*Historie* 9-10)

What is here confessional is elsewhere in the text more generally applied to a moral principle. He credits the peninsula’s temperate climate with providing “many sorts of grain as this sorgo, miglio, segale and twenty such other—which cannot be expressed by any English names because in England there is no such grain. All which serve to make coarse bread for the poor people” (*Historie* 15). Elsewhere he lauds the climate of Naples “for sumptuous buildings and number of commodities, namely, abundance of delicate fruits” and the Florentines themselves for moderation in keeping with their climate:

"The common opinion is that the Florentines are commonly great talkers, covetous, and spare of living, but they be fine and cleanly. Indeed, he that buyeth at the shambles more meat than their manner there alloweth is incontinently noted and spoken of. But for all the lack that is laid to them as a reproach, yet did I never see it so scarce that a reasonable man ought to find fault withal. And if men generally in other places could follow it, the rich should live more healthfully and the more find more plenty. (*Historie* 88, 96)

In the same way, Thomas idealizes the Genovese, crediting them with a zeal that makes the most of their postlapsarian necessity to labor, and a perfect unity of human and natural resources: Genoa “hath no plain country near it but on the one side hills and
mountains and the other sea Mediterraneum on the other. And yet those hills that run along the seacoasts bring forth many kinds of pleasant fruit, with much wine and oil, for the most part not through fertility of the ground but through the inhabitants’ painful diligence” (Historie 106).

Thomas’s Plinean tropes repeatedly reduce to a formula of moderation which the Italians, from Naples to Florence, to the cities of the Po valley, follow in their daily lives and habits. As the next chapter argues in far greater detail, his concern with food consumption assumes an overtly political aspect in the imaginative writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—as an instance of cultural difference and self-definition. In Thomas’s case, however, it also expresses itself as a lament for Italy’s oppressed rural poor, especially in relation to the awesome signs of opulence and temporal power he observes among the region’s urban elite. In surveying the different classes of people “in divers cities of Italy,” Thomas praises the wealthy merchants and ingenious artisans but abruptly changes register when describing the ubiquitous peasant class:

The husbandmen are of all hands oppressed. For in the country there dwelleth no man of substance. All the gentlemen and other that are wealthy dwell in the walled cities and towns, leaving the villages, fields, and pastures in their tenants’ hands, not to farm at certain rent, as we do in England, but to the halves or to the third of all grain and fruit, as the ground is fertile or barren. And the poor tenant is bound to till, sow, and husband the ground at his own cost and charge. So that the landlord’s part
cometh clear without dispersing of a penny. And at the harvest and vintage the landlord sendeth a man of his for his part, who first taking the choice of the grain, wine, oil, and fruit, then leaveth the rest to the tenant as his part ariseth to. And many times, if the landlord be cruel, when he cannot sell his things at his own price, then forceth he his tenant to utter it for him and to pay for it not as he can sell it but as the landlord will. By reason wherof the poor man is brought so low that he is not able sometimes to find bread of sorgo (a very vile grain) to feed his poor children withal. (Historie 14-15)

The idyllic picture of Italy's gentle, yielding climate and a bounteous earth here is thoroughly transformed into a wasteland lacking both "men of substance" and even soil adequate for sustaining a poor man's family. Significantly, the men of substance congregate in the cities and towns, namely in the courts and palazzi Thomas describes elsewhere in his Historie; they send factors to extort the fruits of the peasants' labors, but have no contact—except as consumers at markets—with the products of Italy's mythically bounteous land and climate. In similar fashion, elsewhere he remarks that the Venetian poor go without adequate fresh water and are systematically deprived of access to the generally admired Venetian legal system.⁴¹ Such correctives to the idealized geography Thomas inherited from his classical sources are significant: he opposes the authority of ancient tropes and historical conventions against his personal observations, and even juxtaposes modern historians' accounts in the consistently synoptic manner that
marks his entire Historie. Thomas's divided rhetoric suggests not only that he is caught between two discourses, and the historiographical traditions that sustained them, but also that, like Ascham after him, he patently uses the Italian peninsula as a means of representing English society.

In general, Thomas voices the highest praise for Italian cities and their social institutions, and if anything, he errs in the direction of the superlative. His departures from a typically laudatory mode are thus all the more significant to a literary critic because they signal criticism not so much of Italian social conventions as their English forms refracted in Italy. Early in the Historie and in an uncharacteristic generalization, he writes that "here it is to be noted that every particular prince and commonwealth of Italy within his own dominion accounteth himself absolute lord and king and liveth upon the customs, taxes, and tallages that he raiseth of his subjects" (Historie 19). Imagery of disintegration and separation abounds elsewhere in his accounts of the various city-states, a general lament, it seems, for the passing of the unitary Roman empire and the stability that, he speculates, might accrue from an unbroken line of descent from Noah, through Janus, and down to the founding of Rome. Throughout the Historie he scrupulously details the divisions of Italy since the empire, noting correspondences between ancient and modern provinces and cataloguing Italy's many changes of political dominion. Like others, he offers a highly conventionalized but terse lamentation for the passing of Rome's greater glory: "In effect, the present state of Rome in comparison of the ancient state deserveth not to be spoken of, and yet I believe that in the Roman's most glory was never half so much pomp used as now." And though the purpose of The Historie of
*Italie* is not overtly prescriptive, it is clear from other works by Thomas that he advocated a Machiavellian strategy for avoiding civic instability, even endorsing the judicious use of "policy" where necessary.  

Thomas's discomfort with political fragmentation is a persistent topos in the *Historie*, and one that has a clear domestic valence. And in this respect, he expresses both a concern of immediate political import to any (future) servant of the Tudor dynasty like himself, and a commonplace of the propaganda that circulated in the middle of the century when a minor sat on the throne, fiercely opposed factions vied for dominance during and after Edward’s reign, and the vast question of succession rested on dubious legal foundations. Indeed, the entire Tudor claim was subject to counter-claims, and its very instability was arguably what generated the extraordinary nationalist literary campaign that was waged across the century and probably contributed to England's relative precocity in the formation of national identity.  

Earlier in the period, however, Thomas Elyot had written with much the same anxiety over the fragmentation of the Italian states, holding their example up as a counter to his ideal of unitary governance: "behold the estate of Florence and Gene, noble cities of Italy, what calamity have they both sustained by their own factions, for lack of a continual governor. Ferare and the most excellent city of Venise, having dukes seldom suffer damage, except it happen by outward hostility."  

Thomas's concern with factionalism and political disunity has a practical as well as a broad philosophical dimension. As an aspiring politician, he recognized the need for governmental stability. After all, only a few years later he would lose his life in one of
many domestic political struggles that periodically shook the foundations of the Tudor regime. In Thomas, we see a merger of the philosophical commonplaces of a humanist’s education with their praxis in diplomatic endeavor—the ideal end-product of that humanist curriculum being, of course, not knowledge for its own sake, but for its enlightened application to the commonweal.⁴⁷

Finally, and most important in this context, Thomas engages in ethnographic description of Italians, typically firsthand observations of life made without recourse to printed authority but often against a background of stereotypes and popular beliefs. He never constructs an “Italian” in the manner of an epitome, but instead characterizes Florentines, Venetians, Genoans, Milanese, as culturally distinct peoples, in nearly every case eschewing totalizing language in preference for localized representation. For example, the Florentines are distinguished by their temperance and learning, the Venetians by their delight in courtesans and sexual prowess, while Romans other than members of the clerical bureaucracy are never described at all. His descriptions of Italian women, so central and prejudicial in anti-Italian polemics later in the century, are likewise regionally very specific.⁴⁸

Thomas confronts many of the persistent tropes that constitute the language of cultural Otherness, of this period or any other: the exaggerated or deviant sexuality of Others, especially of women and homosexuals; issues of unfamiliar personal honor and integrity; the heinousness of foreign vices and moral turpitude; the wickedness and arbitrariness of foreign government, and so on.⁴⁹ Instead of merely repeating these claims, however, Thomas approaches them with the same synoptic distance and measured
skepticism that characterizes his accounts of civic architecture or municipal history. He either attributes his reports to sources other than his own empirical knowledge, or he juxtaposes the two forms of authority. Of Italians in general, he claims that like as I could reckon in the Italians' commendation many things more than are here rehearsed, even so on the other side if I were disposed to speak of vice I might happen to find a number as ill as in any other men, which are better untouched than spoken of. For whereas temperance, modesty and other civil virtues excel in the number of the Italian nobility than in the nobility of any other nation that I know, so undoubtedly the fleshly appetite with unnatural heat and other things in them that be vicious do pass all the terms of reason or honesty. (Historie 13)

In the same manner, he dutifully reports that “where [the Florentines] have been much burdened with sodomy in times past, I cannot perceive there is any such thing now” and he swerves from moral judgments when discussing Venetian “private life and customs,” claiming that “I wot not whether it be best to follow the common report or to dissemble the matter. And yet meseemeth I cannot do more indifferently than recite what is used to be said on both sides”—something he proceeds to do, but carefully attributing the judgments he reports to local and foreign observers (Historie 97, 80-1).

Throughout his Historie, Thomas scrutinizes and confronts but ultimately eschews the conventions that sustain the discourse of Otherness, the verbal expression of a human desire to appropriate ethnographic differences for personal benefit or collective
cultural gains. His synoptic approach to historical materials manifests itself as well in his skepticism concerning ethnographic judgment. His “use” of Italy could, therefore, hardly be more different from Ascham’s, whose characteristics and qualities I consider in the following sections. Even so, it cannot be overemphasized how both Thomas and Ascham do in fact employ “Italy” in what ultimately are national, principally domestic projects of self-description and self-understanding. Their points of contact justify their pairing, but their differences are what make their pairing an intellectually fruitful endeavor.

*  

Unlike Thomas, Roger Ascham was foremost a man of letters who found himself in the corridors of power, and a political figure only incidentally. Giorgio Miglior’s neat formulation has a particularly apt resonance: he calls Ascham “l’umanista ai margini del potere politico”—the humanist on the margins of political power. Like Thomas, however, Ascham certainly moved across those margins during most of his adult life, and his account of the post-prandial conversation with Sir Richard Sackville is a significant indication of both his insider status and the tremendous social and financial anxieties he faced as a consequence of those connections. Ascham was an almost perpetual loser for the big stakes in the new system of patronage and advancement that developed around him, a courtier without the temperament for the position but with “intimate and painful experience” of the system. In his own words, he was forced to live his life “in the manner of wayfaring men,” dependent upon a “network of obligations and favors” quite
different from the old aristocratic system in which began his career. Throughout his life, and quite unlike William Thomas, "Ascham was in the court, but not really of the court. He belonged to that interlocking group of friends who made their way from Cambridge to court, yet he never succeeded in making the court a base for establishing himself in land or wealth." As one of the period's leading intellectuals and tutor to both Mary and Elizabeth, he found himself the guest of his patron and friend William Cecil at Windsor, where not for the first time he mingled among a group of privy councilors, personal friends and—later in the evening—waited upon the Queen herself to read Greek, something his biographer asserts he did almost daily. And while there is no particular reason to doubt the historical veracity of the meeting itself, a 1937 article by George B. Parks casts considerable doubt over the meeting's representation and rhetorical deployment in the published preface. In that study, Parks compares a manuscript copy of the first book of the treatise with its 1570 printed version and points out several highly relevant facts about the document's evolution. The manuscript is a complete but somewhat shorter version of the first book. It contains no preface, no mention of either Sackville or a second book, and pointedly differs from the 1570 version with respect to the final section—significantly, in the diatribe against Italianate influences. Internal evidence strongly suggests that the manuscript version was complete by 1563 or 1564, about two years before Sackville's death in April 1566, and external references to the project-in-progress specifically name Ascham's own son—and not Sackville's grandson—as the intended audience of the treatise. The very different published version, Parks concludes, was
complete by autumn 1568, soon before Ascham's own death. Clearly, then, my own discussion of Ascham's construction of Italian influences must be seen not only through the words of the published version, but also in light of the text's considerable evolution between the purported genesis in Sackville's question and the version that Ascham's widow brought to press in 1570.

Given this textual history as argued by Parks and later incorporated into Ryan's analysis, it seems undeniable that Ascham's brief framing narrative is not a punctilious account of events of that December evening but something rhetorically and socially far more interesting: a condensed and almost certainly compensatory fantasy of court life, one which frames the treatise's purported occasion and directly influences the anti-Italian diatribe. That fantasy begins immediately as the narrative opens and Ascham introduces a "company of so many wise and good men together as hardly then could have been picked out of all England" (Scholemaster 5). As William Cecil presides over the company, discussion turns to educational theory and though Ascham does not permit himself a voice at this point, he soon reports that Sir Richard Sackville also had stayed out of the fray, only to take Ascham aside later in the evening.

In contrast to the opinionated William Petre and Walter Haddon, both of whom had robustly condoned beating as an educational practice, the silent but powerful Sackville listens in respectful, reflective awe to the wisdom of the politically powerless narrator. Ascham's construction of the scene and especially the speeches he attributes to Sackville are worth quoting at some length. He writes, "Sir Richard Sackville came up
soon after, and, finding me in Her Majesty's privy chamber, he took me by the hand, and carrying me to a window, said:

Master Ascham, I would not for a good deal of money have been this day absent from dinner, where, though I said nothing, yet I gave as good ear and do consider as well the talk that passed as anyone did there. Master Secretary said very wisely, and most truly, that many young wits be driven to hate learning before they know what learning is. I can be good witness to this myself, for a fond schoolmaster, before I was fourteen year old, drave me with fear of beating from all love of learning.... But seeing it is but vain to lament things past, and also wisdom to look to things to come, surely, God willing, if God lend me life I will make this my mishap some occasion of good hap to little Robert Sackville, my son's son. For whose bringing-up I would gladly, if it so please you, use specially your good advice. I hear say you have a son much of his age; we will deal thus together. Point you out a schoolmaster who, by your order, shall teach my son and yours, and for all the rest I will provide, yea, though they three do cost me a couple of hundred pounds by year; and beside, you shall find me as fast a friend to you and yours as perchance you have.

And after "further talk together of bringing-up of children" and other topics, including "the common going of Englishmen into Italy," Ascham reports that Sackville asked,
because this place and time will not suffer so long talk as these good
matters require, therefore I pray you, at my request and at your leisure, put
in some order of writing the chief points of this our talk concerning the
right order of teaching and honesty of living for the good bringing-up of
children and young men. And surely, beside contenting me, you shall both
please and profit very many others....[Since] God did so bless you to make
you scholar of the best master, and also schoolmaster of the best scholar,
that ever were in our time, 39 surely you should please God, benefit your
country, and honest your own name, if you would take the pains to impart
to others what you have learned of such a master and how ye taught such a
scholar. (Scholemaster 7-9)

Ascham resolves the story (and publicly rationalizes his long delay in acceding to
Sackville’s request) by claiming that he slept little that night, “so mindful somewhat to
satisfy the honest request of so dear a friend.” He claims to have intended “some little
treatise for a New Year’s gift that Christmas. But as it chanceth to busy builders, so in
building this my poor schoolhouse . . . the work rose daily higher and wider than I
thought it would at the beginning” (Scholemaster 9).

Ascham composed The Scholemaster not only to articulate the tenets of a
progressive theory of education, the work’s overt purpose, but also to fantasize about the
role a politically unimportant minor counselor, a courtier malgré lui, might have in
influencing the way the credentials of entire classes of scholars and of courtiers were
valued by the very group assembled at Windsor that December evening. The preface is a carefully constructed moment in the complex social machinery of Elizabethan patronage and clientage. Supplication and command, abstract morality and political reality, mingle with delicacy in the situation Ascham describes: Sackville is figured as both patron and client, Ascham as both (school)master and humble servant, and the Queen herself—an absent but ever-looming authority figure throughout the account—is represented as both "scholar of the best master, and also schoolmaster of the best scholar, that ever were in our time." Ascham understood the language of clientage. He represents his conversation with Sackville deftly, positing a triangulated relationship in which he is both client and schoolmaster, Sackville is client of the queen and both patron and client to Ascham, and the absent-but-ever-present queen herself is patron to both men, yet somehow a client to her tutor's intellectual guidance.

Ascham's construction of the scene (there is of course no way to know whether it was ever played) shows deep and tactful attention to what Frank Whigham has aptly called "the social tropes" of courtly language. Despite his failures, Ascham knew the discourse well and could negotiate the role-playing and posturing required of his position as client and potential patron—even if his momentary power over Sackville and even the Queen was, it seems clear, more fantasy than reality.

Ascham's fantasy shapes and directs the treatise as a whole. I believe that this interpretation of this rhetorical occasion better explains the apparent disjuncture between the general educational program of The Scholemaster and the diatribe against the Italianate Englishman than previous readings have. Seen as parallel rhetorical and
social interventions, the two discourses do in fact complement each other in the way they argue for forthright, plainspoken and honest self-discipline in the face of the glib and subtle language that sustains the court culture he could never fully understand or engage.

Quite contrary to his own experience, that court culture is represented later in *The Scholemaster* as an Italian import and not a material fact of his own life. As Ascham moves into his peroration, he offers a thorough-going English educational and moral opposite to what he constructs as this Italian threat: he avers that “in writing this book, I have had earnest respect to three special points: truth of religion, honesty in living, right order in learning,” and his attack on Italian cultural pollution fits into that general desideratum for the English people (*Scholemaster* 11).

As he develops his case against Italy, like Thomas, Ascham describes a kind of paysage moralisé, an imagined community in which to test the quintessential elements of Englishness:

if wise men will needs send their sons into Italy, let them do it wisely,
under the keep and guard of him who, by his wisdom and honesty, by his example and authority, may be able to keep them safe and sound in the fear of God, in Christ’s true religion, in good order and honesty of living...to avoid all the enchantments of Circe....

I know divers noble personages and many worthy gentlemen of England whom all the Siren songs of Italy could never untwine from the mast of God’s word, nor enchantment of vanity overturn them from the fear of God and love of honesty.
But I know as many, or more, and some sometime my dear friends, for whose sake I hate going into that country the more, who, parting out of England fervent in the love of Christ’s doctrine and well furnished with the fear of God, returned out of Italy worse transformed than ever was any in Circe’s court. (*Scholemaster* 63)

Ascham’s animus toward Italian influence registers in four especially significant ways: a contempt for “quick wits,” a deep suspicion of Italian books, an anxiety over the political fractiousness of Italianized Englishmen, and a fear of religious heterodoxy—whether Catholicism or atheism. He imagines all four to be Italian habits Englishmen find too alluring to resist. These sites of anxiety overlap considerably in their formulation and expression, and show important points in common. But equally, something is gained by examining each one individually, as its own site of cultural tensions.

On the difference between hard and quick wits, Ascham is himself quick to transform what might be regarded as different learning styles into a highly moralized site whose terms derive from national differences elsewhere in *The Scholemaster* made explicit. “Quick wits,” he asserts, “commonly be apt to take, unapt to keep; soon hot and desirous of this and that, as cold and soon weary of the same; more quick to enter speedily than able to pierce far.” They are like “over-sharp tools” that dull the more quickly, and they delight in the superficial mastery that comes of “easy and pleasant studies” (*Scholemaster* 21). By contrast, if educated well, hard wits “both for learning and whole course [sic] of living proveth always the best” because they resist being
“carried either to desire every new thing or else to marvel at every strange thing. Hard
wits do not meddle in others’ affairs, but remain “grave, steadfast, silent of tongue, secret
of heart; not hasty in making, but constant in keeping, any promise; not rash in uttering,
but ware in considering, every matter, and thereby not quick in speaking, but deep of
judgment.”^62

Given the terms of Ascham’s anti-Italian diatribe, it becomes clear that his
definition of quick wits draws from the same set of prejudices that his characterization of
the Italianized Englishman does. That hybrid and sadly transformed individual is a great
discourser, ready with quick answers and too apt to concern himself overly with others’
affairs. He is an imitator and a slave to fashion and newfangledness, just as he is a slave
to mimesis rather than master of inventio. Besotted with his own vanity, “all learning, all
goodness, is soon forgotten” and with learning, judgment and discretion. He holds “more
in reverence the Triumphs of Petrarch than the Genesis of Moses” and “make more
account of Tully’s Offices than St. Paul’s Epistles, of a tale in Boccaccio than a story of
the Bible” (Scholemaster 64, 70).

This contempt for quick wits finds concrete expression in Book Two of The
Scholemaster as well, where Ascham denigrates Latin as a showy, imitative poor relation
to Greek. As in Book One, an anti-Italian sentiment rests at the foundation of his claims.
He attacks the “lewd and rude rhymes” hawked by London’s booksellers, attributing the
fashion for rhyme to Italianate literary influences, which debase the noble literature of
ancient Greece, “when poetry was even at the highest pitch of perfectness.” He rejoices
“that even poor England prevented” Italy, first in spying out, then in seeking to amend
this fault in learning. The entire case against Latin and its Italian proponents rests upon one of Ascham’s most cherished and formative beliefs: that his days at Cambridge constituted a kind of Golden Age, when John Cheke united the aspects of quick and hard wits into an ideal whole, and when both social advancement and political discord were determined not by the quick wits of the royal court but by one’s hard-won scholarly abilities and convictions. The “Athenian tribe” of which Ascham was a part and to which he refers throughout his published works and his personal correspondence constituted one of his most entrenched defenses against not only the incursions of quick wits, but also against the dreaded Italianate Englishman. The two figures are in essence the same “Other” to the idealized Englishman Ascham constructs out of his disillusionment and resentment.

Ascham does not rail against quick wits in the abstract, however. Rather, he claims that the enchantments of Circe brought out of Italy...mar men’s manners in England: much by example of ill life but more by precepts of fond books, of late translated out of Italian into English, sold in every shop in London, commended by honest titles the sooner to corrupt honest manners, dedicated overboldly to virtuous and honorable personages, the easilier to beguile simple and innocent wits. It is a pity that those which have authority and charge to allow and disallow books to be printed be no more circumspect herein than they are. (Scholemaster 67)
His binary of gullible English "wits" in confrontation with corrupting and sophistical Italian authors reifies the well-developed climatic tropes I discussed in my introduction, but it also echoes Ascham's own distinction between quick and hard wits because both binaries divide along national, cultural lines.

If John Lievsay is correct in pointing out that the real flood of Italian publishing within the English market occurred well after Ascham's death in 1568, then we are led to conclude that Ascham must be alluding to a very narrow sample of translations from the Italian issued in the middle years of the 1560's—probably only five or six "bawdy books" issued "within these few months" (significantly, terms used in his final but not previous draft).

Significantly, too, his discussion also circles back to a domestic lament, as he charges that both civil authorities and even the elite of the patronage system itself—"those which have authority" and "virtuous and honorable personages"—are complicitous in such moral decay. As elsewhere, what is apparently trans-national is covertly domestic; if Italian books are the vehicle, then the dangers of unchecked reading habits and a social system that winks at its consequences are his tenor. His diatribe continues at length in this manner, touching also upon the complicity of ecclesiastical authorities:

Yea, I say farther, those books tend not so much to corrupt honest living as they do to subvert true religion. More papists be made by your merry books of Italy than by your earnest books of Louvain. And because our great physicians do wink at the matter and make no count of this sore, I,
though not admitted one of their fellowship, yet having been many years a
prentice to God's true religion, and trust to continue a poor journeyman
therein all days of my life, for the duty I owe and love I bear both to true
document and honest living, though I have no authority to amend the sore
myself, yet I will declare my good will to discover the sore to others.

(Scholemaster 68)

In posing pre-Reformation England against his own age, Ascham's anxieties here
suggest the volatile and unstable nature of the Elizabethan Settlement as much as any
particular threat from outside or from the past. He claims that the work of Italianizing
originates from within the body politic, and so corrupts and destabilizes it:

In our forefathers' time, when papistry as a standing pool covered and
overflowed all England, few books were read in our tongue, saving certain
books of chivalry, as they said, for pastime and pleasure, which, as some
say, were made in monasteries by idle monks or wanton canons; as one for
example, Morte Darthur, the whole pleasure of which book standeth in
two special points—in open manslaughter and bold bawdry....

He continues in this manner, claiming that

yet ten Morte Darthurs do not the tenth part so much harm as one of these
books made in Italy and translated in England. They open, not fond and
common ways to vice, but such subtle, cunning, new, and diverse shifts to
carry young wills to vanity and young wits to mischief, to teach old bawds new school points, as the simple head of an Englishman is not able to invent, nor never was heard of in England before, yea, when papistry overflowed all. Suffer these books to be read, and they shall soon displace all books of godly learning. For they, carrying the will to vanity and marring good manners, shall easily corrupt the mind with ill opinions and false judgment in doctrine, first to think ill of all true religion, and at last to think nothing of God himself, one special point that is to be learned in Italy and Italian books. And because our Englishmen made Italians cannot hurt but certain persons and in certain places, therefore these Italian books are made English to bring mischief enough openly and boldly to all states, great and mean, young and old, everywhere. *(Scholemaster  68-69)*

Previous commentators who have quoted this passage have insufficiently emphasized that Ascham’s emphasis falls not on the nature of Italian literature itself (presumably a foregone conclusion), but rather on the role translators and booksellers play in the moral corruption of “the simple head of an Englishman” thus influenced. Ascham seems to allude to a domestic conspiracy of those who seek to compensate for the fact that “our Englishmen made Italians cannot hurt but certain persons and in certain places.” Their mission, he imagines, is to extend the pernicious influence of Italianate immorality, and he shows a keen interest in the materiality of that endeavor: over and over in the diatribe he refers to booksellers, translators and the reading public as conspirators in a general effort to subvert English morality. The essence of their
conspiracy, he suggests, lies in their posing Italianate "new school points" as an alternative to the sounder, "harder" school that for Ascham was and could only be Cambridge.

At least in hindsight, Italian influence was not particularly pronounced in the English literary fashions of the 1560's: the Italianate works of Sidney, Spenser, Harington and a host of playwrights still lay ahead. Thus if Ascham is not pronouncing on a constant in English-Italian literary relations, but rather on micro-trends in reading habits and literary imitation only beginning to manifest themselves, we ask the necessary question: what made Ascham so sensitive to this emerging trend? I believe that his animus proceeds from two concerns. First, he has a characteristically Protestant fear of the potential antinominism that reading encourages—an issue of no small importance across the tumultuous middle of the century, over the uses of reading and its the spiritual and political effects among a priesthood of all believers. Second, Ascham has a pedant's fear that the habit of careful reading is rightly reserved for serious study of serious texts. In different ways, this latter fear expresses itself repeatedly in The Scholemaster: in Ascham's contempt for quick wits and Italianate verse forms, in the nostalgic longing for Cambridge and the Athenian tribe, and especially in his anxiety over the rising "Italianate" moral influence in the corridors of power in which Ascham came to feel buffeted in the last years of his life. At bottom, this anxiety rests in his career-long recognition that mimesis itself is a powerful shaper of human behavior—a point discussed in more detail below.
If concerns over antinomianism and a pedantic appreciation for the written word are particular anxieties for Ascham, the political and doctrinal corollaries of those fears must have found a wider audience in the sometimes unstable early years of the Elizabeth’s new regime. Indeed, the entire anti-Italian diatribe is imbued with anxious references to Italian factionalism and religious decay, both of them proceeding from a mentalité that saw change as threatening and constancy as highly desirable.

One of Ascham’s most frequent textual strategies is that he totalizes Italy, without regard for geographical or historical distinctions. In constructing an imaginary space, he is free to visit upon it the exaggerated manifestations of his worst fears, much as medieval and even Renaissance cartographers represented monstrous Others on the margins of the known world. Hence Ascham’s central trope throughout the diatribe on Italy: Circe’s court produces the bestial and degraded, the metamorphosed and monstrous. It is a place that resists constancy and its inhabitants are lost souls who know no peace—not unlike the quick wits whose zeal for novelty makes them, in Ascham’s moral scheme, monsters of impermanence and vanity. He avers that

I know divers that went out of England men of innocent life, men of excellent learning, who returned out of Italy not only with worse manners but also with less learning, neither so willing to live orderly nor yet so able to speak learnedly as they were at home before they went abroad. And why? Plato, that wise writer and worthy traveler himself, telleth the cause why. He went into Sicilia, a country no nigher Italy by site of place than Italy that is now is like Sicilia that was then in all corrupt manners and
licentiousness of life. Plato found in Sicilia every city full of vanity, full of factions, even as Italy is now. And as Homer, like a learned poet, doth feign that Circe by pleasant enchantments did turn men into beasts, some into swine, some into asses, some into foxes, some into wolves, etc., even so Plato, like a wise philosopher, doth plainly declare that pleasure, by licentious vanity, that sweet and perilous poison of all youth, doth engender in all those that yield up themselves to her four notorious properties....

Ascham's tale of transformation and degradation leads him to the conclusion that "Homer and Plato have both one meaning, look both to one end. For if a man englut himself with vanity or welter in filthiness like a swine, all learning, all goodness, is soon forgotten."  

This diatribe posits a peculiar cultural dynamic in which Italians are not content to have converted Englishmen to their own ways, but rather that they delight in the successful degradation of their northern neighbor, who becomes a marvelous monster which for filthiness of living, for dullness to learning himself, for wiliness in dealing with others, for malice in hurting without cause, should carry at once in one body the belly of a swine, the head of an ass, the brain of a fox, the womb of a wolf. If you think we judge amiss and write too sore against you, hear what the Italian saith of the Englishman, what the master reporteth of the scholar, who uttereth plainly what is taught by him and what is learned by you, saying, Inglese
italianato è un diavolo incarnato; that is to say, “You remain men in shape and fashion but become devils in life and condition.”

He continues thus, finally shifting from a mixed descriptive-hortatory mode to pure exhortation:

And now choose you, you Italian Englishmen, whether you will be angry with us for calling you monsters, or with the Italians for calling you devils, or else with your own selves, that take so much pains and go so far to make yourselves both. If some yet do not well understand what is an Englishman Italianated, I will plainly tell him: he that by living and traveling in Italy bringeth home into England out of Italy the religion, the learning, the policy, the experience, the manners of Italy. (Scholemaster 66-7)

Ascham’s emphasis in The Scholemaster has little to do with any realities of life on the Italian peninsula. In figuring the entire region as Circe’s court, he emphasizes the perhaps obvious point that it is in fact a court, and a court is where he reluctantly spent his adult life. Hence the allusion to “the brain of a fox” within his catalogue of venereal attributes must be read in light of his contempt for “Machiavellian” political doctrine that counseled the prince to play the fox when playing the lion would prove ineffective. He responds, in effect, to the crass Realpolitik that he witnessed firsthand not in Circe’s but in Protector Somerset’s, Mary’s and Elizabeth’s courts. Circe’s
awesome power to transform and degrade even as she allures can easily enough be read as code for the English sovereigns' (or their deputies') power to effect the same metamorphoses in a simple, honest but hard-witted scholar from St. John's College who reluctantly found himself at court.

While the tendency to flatten historical distinctions and pillage classical texts in order to produce moral exemplars is entirely typical of Ascham's intellectual milieu,72 his direct borrowing from Thomas's *The Historie of Italie* is more overtly tendentious. Where Thomas had written in praise of Venice's policy of religious tolerance, Ascham converts Thomas's point to its opposite, and applies Thomas's observations on Venice to "Italy" at large. In his *Historie* Thomas had written that "he that dwelleth in Venice may reckon himself exempt from subjection. For no man there marketh another's doings, or that meddleth with another man's living. If thou be a papist, there shalt thou want no kind of superstition to feed upon. If thou be a gospeller, no man shall ask why thou comest not to church. If thou be a Jew, a Turk, or believest in the devil (so thou spread not thine opinions abroad), thou art free from all controlment" (*Historie* 83). In Ascham's revision, the sentiments are thus converted and domesticated:

Another property of these our English Italians is to be marvelous singular in all their matters: singular in knowledge, ignorant of nothing; so singular in wisdom (in their own opinion) as scarce they count the best counselor the prince hath comparable with them; common discoursers of all matters; busy searchers of most secret affairs; open flatterers of great men; privy mislikers of good men; fair speakers, with smiling countenances and much
courtesy, openly to all men; ready backbiters, sore nippers, and spiteful reporters privily of good men. And being brought up in Italy, in some free city, as all cities be there, where a man may freely discourse against what he will, against whom he lust—against any prince, against any government, yea, against God himself and his whole religion—where he must be either Guelf or Ghibelline, either French or Spanish, and, always compelled to be of some party, of some faction, he shall never be compelled to be of any religion, and if he meddle not overmuch with Christ's true religion, he shall have free liberty to embrace all religions and become, if he lust, at once, without any let or punishment, Jewish, Turkish, papish, and devilish. (Scholemaster 74-5)

What is especially pertinent in this passage is not only that Ascham generalizes from the Venetian example—in strict contradiction to what Thomas asserts about all other Italian cities—but also that he attaches such a comprehensive form of moral opprobrium to religious and political freedoms. This is “Othering” in the starkest terms: essentializing morality along broad cultural lines, generalizing from scant evidence (whether his own “nine days” or Thomas’s brief description), and conflating a set of purported Italian imports with a more intimately known set of domestic anxieties.

Is there an ultimate source for Ascham’s anti-Italian tirade and his moral-cultural program for the English? Though never a successful courtier in any material sense, he did weather the religio-political changes of the 1550’s with considerably more success
than some of his closest associates such as Thomas Smith and John Cheke. The clarity which he attributes to religious politics—as a struggle between papists and lewd booksellers on the one hand and the godly and serious on the other—bears no resemblance to the infinitely more complex realities of his own life at court and even his earlier days at Cambridge, when, for example, he defended the “new” pronunciation of Greek against the reactionary faction led by Stephen Gardiner.

A combination of frustration and guilt engendered and then gave form to Ascham’s compensatory fantasies in The Scholemaster—not only in the highly crafted preface that frames the enterprise and allows the narrator a voice he never had in real life, but also in the vehement ways he totalizes “Italy” as a moral and social opposite to an English court that could in turn never replicate his Edenic (and so also imaginary) Cambridge. “There is no such quietness in England, nor pleasure in strange countries, as even in St. John’s college, to keep company with the Bible, Plato, Aristotle, Demonsthenes, and Tully,” he wrote late in life when his fortune and his prospects were at a particularly low ebb. In The Scholemaster, Italy became the moral opposite to Edenic St. John’s College, a paysage moralisé—“another country” that had never before been so directly and fully constructed as the opposite of “true” England’s forthright, plainspeaking, Protestant, and politically unified nation of serious readers.

* 

To some degree, Thomas’s and Ascham’s differences proceed from generic differences—the demands of historical survey and educational polemic being quite
distinct. And while these differences should not be elided or ignored, they cannot fully explain why Thomas produces an “Italy” so completely unlike the one Ascham constructs. Generic distinctions that obtain in post-Enlightenment definitions of historiography do not adequately describe either the objects or the forms of the sixteenth century: the intellectual milieu shared by Thomas and Ascham was in a state of flux because an older, Ciceronian and annalistic historiography was slowly being eroded by a new imperative that recognized but was detached from the traditional res gestae or exemplary historiography. The effects of this shift appear throughout Thomas’s work, but Ascham himself was no mean historian of the new movement, either.

Even The Scholemaster, which contains such vigorous diatribes against Italian influences, has many characteristics of the proto-Baconian intellectual history that is otherwise rare in the middle portion of the sixteenth century. Moreover, his Report on the Affairs and State of Germany, nearly contemporary with Thomas’s Historie, has been singled out by several critics as one of the most progressive historical documents of the period, deserving a place alongside More’s Richard III. Ascham was not inherently or necessarily hostile to the skeptical, pragmatic historiography employed by William Thomas. Quite to the contrary: early in his literary (and potentially his diplomatic) career, he was an candid proponent of writing “nothing false” and being “bold to say any truth.” In general terms, Ascham was a proponent of the new historiographical principles—but he seems to have been move devoted to them early in his career, and The Scholemaster was a late composition.
Between Thomas and Ascham there are real and important distinctions that complicate but also justify pairing their works. Two different clusters of social-cultural influences, and two clusters of personal circumstances, contributed to the fashioning and reception of their rival visions of Italy, and the great question we inevitably face is, why Ascham's version of Italy seems to have prevailed over Thomas's. Why did "Italy" as cultural opposite, site of both domestic anxiety and domestic aspiration, emerge in the over-determined, ideologically charged way that it did?

Though no ultimately complete answer is possible, some very specific social, literary and cultural conditions changed markedly between the publication of Thomas's *Historie* and Ascham's *The Scholemaster*, a dynamic is further complicated by the fact that Ascham's treatise evolved over a period of about seven years between the purported conversation with Sackville in 1563 and its publication in 1570. By contrast, Thomas's work appeared at the very beginning of a vogue for educational travel that built steadily during the 1550's and 60's, and by the end of the century was so conspicuous a part of the lives of aristocrats and middling sorts that a kind of proto-pamphlet war developed around the question of its value and risks. Though Thomas himself reports some 1,500 Englishmen in Padua in the late 1540's, the wider social repercussions of this trend, when later in the century Italy could be said to swarm with English travelers, were not yet realized at the century’s mid-point. Likewise, the Marian period, so formative to the rhetorical strategies of English Protestantism, lay ahead of him. Elizabeth was a princess, not a queen, and the fashion for Italianate social interaction articulated in Hoby's immensely popular translation of *The Book of the Courtier* (1561) was unknown to him,

78
as was a profusion of Italian publishing and translation that began soon after. Thomas was a harbinger, a figure at the beginning and not middle of a tradition, who wrote independently of many of the stereotypes and domestic social questions that Sir Richard Sackville implies in his reference to the "common going of Englishmen into Italy."

The same cannot be said for Ascham. By 1563, Hoby's translation had made explicit the social ideal only implicit in Thomas's *Historie*, and it is no wonder that it is named in Ascham's treatise. Nor is it surprising that Ascham held it in such high esteem, because as Hoby's preface alleges, he is not importing the wicked Italianate habits Ascham decries so luridly, but rather Anglicizing and Protestantizing the ideal courtier who "hath long strayed about this realm" in his original Italian-language version. As Ascham worked on his treatise in the years 1564-68, a rash of "bawdy books" from the Italian sharpened and directed his animus toward the darker side of that cultural code: the vacuous discoursing, the political contentiousness, and the religious indifference of the "Italian."

By 1568, the year of Ascham's death, "Italy" signified far more meaningfully in English society, and especially in the ranks he himself occupied, than it ever had in Thomas's own lifetime. If Sackville did in fact ask his question about Italian travel in December of 1563, then he was registering a deep social anxiety of his age and class in the early 1560's. And even if Ascham invented the entire conversation (Sackville died in April of 1566, and dead men tell no tales), then the popularity of *The Scholemaster* indicates that the text speaks to similar concerns, inflected perhaps with Ascham's personal animus, but culturally significant nonetheless.
It would be outrageous to assert that Ascham single-handedly changed English perceptions of Italy, and I make no such claim here. However, personal circumstances—among them Ascham's remarkable learning and his English prose style—did combine materially with cultural conditions prevailing in the early 1570's. The Scholemaster was enormously popular. The first edition was followed by a second in 1571, third in 1573, fourth in 1579, and a fifth in 1589. And while there is reason to suppose that such remarkable popularity was sustained more by the pedagogical than polemical aspects of the text, the result is the same: Ascham's diatribe against Italianate Englishmen was in wide circulation throughout the remainder of the century, obviously meaningful in some way or ways to late Elizabethan readers.

Beginning in 1569 with the Northern Rebellion, English anti-Catholic propaganda began to change radically, making Ascham's representations of the papist and atheistic Italian register socially in ways that they would not have before that date. The Roman Church was represented in new and more menacing ways as the decade unfolded: the Pope was consistently depicted as a monolithic force, the Jesuits and other clerical bodies shown to be far more unified and determined than they actually were, and their combined danger to Protestant English subjects represented as more palpably threatening than ever in the history of the English Reformation.

Perhaps some of this sentiment was justified. Though polemicists hastily assumed on slender or exaggerated evidence that Pius V actively backed the Northern Rebellion with the consent of recusants, there is no denying the Pope's role in the Bull Regnans in Excelsis which excommunicated Elizabeth in early 1570. Nor, indeed, did the
St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre in 1572 or the founding of English College at Rome in 1579 fail to influence anti-Catholic sentiment. Moreover, Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments* reappeared in 1570. In 1571 it was set up in all cathedrals and collegiate churches, making even more widely available the providential struggle between Catholics and Reformers upon which Foxe’s highly nationalized ecclesiastical-political vision rested. Hence, Ascham’s construction of the Italianate Englishman resonated ideologically in the 1570’s because it fit into this cluster of political and spiritual anxieties; his charges of papism, atheism and indifference, in combination with other Italianate anxieties, must have formed a logical and consistent pattern for the imaginative writers of the follow two generations, perhaps most for theatrical audiences that seemed never to weary of the representation of this Italian Other.

Anti-Catholic sentiments explain a great deal about the reception and cultural utility of Ascham’s text in the years following its publication, but they should not be exaggerated when considering the book’s inception. Apart from a few genuine flourishes and many more highly conventional stabs at Catholics, Ascham is generally unconcerned with Catholicism *per se.* Compared with his more strenuous censures of manners, learning and reading habits, social disobedience and political heterodoxy, Catholicism emerges as a relatively insignificant concern. The reasons for these emphases lie in the personal circumstances of Ascham in the middle years of the 1560’s, when *The Scholemaster* was evolving.

Ascham was a consistent loser in the patronage system to which he felt bound. His sense of failure and resentment seems to have multiplied in the last years of his life,
when he was attempting to secure a stable source of income for his family. Though his efforts were not entirely unrewarded, his own accounts of his efforts in Elizabeth's court uniformly invoke the language of despair, nostalgia and frustration. As the decade wore on, he felt less and less able to negotiate the new patronage-clientage system of the queen's court. His frustration manifested itself as anti-Italian polemic because what he saw as deeply threatening to the foundations of social, religious and political life as he understood them fit so neatly within an imagined Italian cultural invasion.

In keeping with Ascham's own preoccupations, too, that encoded picture of the Italianate Englishman threatened his firm belief in the spiritual and ethical efficacy of mimesis. In what is probably Ascham's last letter to his lifelong friend Johann Sturm, he discusses the composition of *The Scholemaster* at great length—significantly, without any mention of the anti-Italian diatribe, but rather within an extended reflection on the value of literary imitation within an ethical program. The nearest thing to a reference to the diatribe of the final version is a brief explanation for the author's decision to write in English: "I am writing to our countrymen, not to aliens, to Englishmen, not to foreigners." Teasingly, he holds his treatise up as a "naked and obviously unattractive" version of Sturm's work-in-progress, *On Oratorical Imitation*, and asks his friend for a glimpse at his greater project so that he may borrow some of its elegance and taste. The long letter, which its author self-deprecatingly calls "a little book," expresses the goals of *The Scholemaster* neatly and candidly. Ascham protests that he is being "too rash" in the letter, intending "to show only the face of my Schoolmaster, but I am not only revealing
and describing his other limbs, but with neither prudence nor modesty I am even uttering his inner thoughts and feelings." 

The letter contains a long analysis of his fundamental beliefs in the efficacy and importance of imitation within his educational program—but in Ascham’s thinking education is entirely coincident with a larger ethical program. He introduces the treatise as being divided into an “ethical” first part and a second concerned with “method,” but as he dilates on the subject, it becomes apparent that method informs ethics and vice-versa. He holds up Cicero and the Greeks as the only worthy models of imitation, and specifically denigrates contemporary Ciceronians and the neo-Latin tradition itself. He elides the concepts of literary imitation and ethical mimesis, fully in the spirit of the Ciceronian pietas literata tradition in which was trained and into which he seems to have sought refuge late in his life amid a post-Castiglione English court. It is significant that Ascham’s well-known praise for this massively influential courtesy book does not endorse the Castiglionian ideal of sprezzatura, but rather reifies the educational program of The Scholemaster as a whole: “Castiglione in his book Cortegiano doth trimly teach” in the same ways that Horace and Plato—both acknowledged in the same context—provide literary models for ethical education. Throughout his treatise, Ascham stresses the moral and social benefits of reading and contemplation; by contrast, and especially in the anti-Italian diatribe, he denigrates the performative uses of that educational process. His praise for Castiglione is in effect restricted to possessing courtly ideals, not to displaying or performing them.
A firm belief in the social efficacy of good literary mimesis imbues the spirit and the form of *The Scholemaster*—Ascham’s little treatise on imitation. And while this fact has not gone unnoticed among literary critics and historians of education, the central place “Italy” plays in the treatise’s general aims has been insufficiently analyzed in light of those objectives. As he closes the letter, Ascham writes that the Queen’s absence from court, “according to her custom at this season” has allowed him “this sweet respite and free time at home away from all court responsibilities” to write a long personal letter. But even so, he confides in his oldest and dearest friend, the damage is irreparable:

now all the fruit of our university leisure, which seemed to you then of some importance, languishes because of the daily business at court, and each day, like wine going flat, it gradually declines, so that I plainly fear that it will seem in your judgment to have in a word, withered.

The critical fashion for discussing the language of self-fashioning is perhaps on the decline relative to a decade ago, but self-fashioning does indeed contribute to a full understanding of Italy’s role in both Thomas’s and Ascham’s constructions of it. “Italy” served two extremes of personal but also social utility in these two representative writers. For Thomas, that utility existed inside a proto-comparative politics that has its payoff in career advancement and national self-definition within a European economy increasingly tied by trade, diplomacy and shared cultural objectives. It is an emergent ethnographic imperative quite different from residual medieval models, in that Thomas seems at pains to avoid accusation, even demonstrating indifference to the moral capital that can accrue
with pointing out the failings of rival cultures. Instead, he levels cultural differences and paints a picture of Italian states in which educated Englishmen like himself could conduct trade, banking, diplomacy, and even the sort of enlightened dialogue made widely accessible in England by Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier*. If he is extreme, it is in his enthusiasm for a land and people that seemed to him to possess the qualities of an earthly paradise.

Ascham, on the other hand, constructed out of his disappointment and resentment (and probably a sense of guilt as well) a rival version of Thomas's more pragmatic and sometimes sanitized picture of Italy. The court culture that sustained and enriched William Thomas until his fatal misjudgments in 1554 was a source of perpetual near-misses and outright failures for Roger Ascham. For both men, "Italy" functioned within that culture as a touchstone for the new system of career diplomats, administrators and court functionaries who, quite unlike Ascham, advanced well beyond what their educations might otherwise have warranted. "New men" such as Thomas and men of older sensibilities such as Ascham registered their aspirations and accomplishments in their representations of Italy, and though the many differences in their versions cannot be ignored, the fact that they measured Italy's personal and national utility with the same instruments should not be overlooked, either. Ascham had attempted what Thomas had accomplished, but he had failed, leaving him with a particular animus toward court culture—for which he found a ready and convenient image in "Italy." He failed for a number of reasons: an inability to adjust to a new system of patronage and clientage, a deep-rooted and finally nostalgic belief in the ethical righteousness and social utility of
Cantabridgean hard wits and Ciceronian *pietas literata*, and an unwillingness (or inability) to fashion himself to fit within what he constructed as an Italianate England.

Since Sir Richard Sackville's role in the evolution of Ascham's *The Scholemaster* is subject to such well-founded suspicion, perhaps we ought instead to "let flowers fall on the tomb" of William Thomas, if indeed his once-disgraced mortal remains were ever so consecrated. An epitome of the middling sort of humanist-civil servant, Thomas played, unsuccessfully in the end, the political game that his age demanded and for which Italy served as an increasingly significant touchstone. Before his unfortunate end at Tyburn, it was he who first opened a window into Italy for a broad English readership: his version of the region was a first and enduring step toward situating Italy in the political, ethnographic and administrative geographies of a new middling class of courtiers and servants of the crown. That vision directly influenced the conventions of travel writing and methods for travel in both print and manuscript for at least seventy years, as it urged pragmatism, self-discipline, and the ultimate goal of service to the state.

For polemical writers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, however, "Italy" could be equally be constructed as a unitary cultural and moral threat to an emergent English nation and its naturally hard-witted but upright citizenry. Italy and things Italianate remained ready, convenient and indeed necessary measures of nationalist, religious and social anxieties, and if with the passing of time they assumed different shapes, these were changes were in manner and not matter.

As the next chapter demonstrates, the period's imaginative and polemical writers manifestly took the path indicated by Ascham and not the more measured, pragmatic and
sober one Thomas pointed out. They constructed an “Italy” based upon his picture of a unitary and hostile cultural opposite, a sometimes “proximate Other” whose value to the English was in showing them what they must not, and yet by Circean transformation and loss of self, sometimes did become. Anti-Catholic sentiments, some of them grounded in pure prejudice and others in events palpably threatening to the English, along with a proliferation of nationally self-conscious texts, worked against but ultimately in tandem with the undeniably vast cultural influence imagined to inhere in an Italian cultural model judged more benign and more worthy of English attempts at imitation. Ambivalence toward “Italy” did not disappear, but its negative elements became, as the following two chapters show, considerably more vivid and extreme.
NOTES


3 A critic such as Edward Said sees in the operation of literary systems a coherent and even conspiratorial representation of difference for a dominant ideology; see in particular his *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 15, 72-73 and 101. I believe that some later revisions of Said’s theories can more accurately describe the situation prevailing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, where no uniform state ideology exists to undergird literary and cultural systems of representation. See in particular Homi K. Bhabha, “‘Signs Taken for Wonders’: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817.” In Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., “Race,” *Writing and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conflict: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 117. Despite revisions or qualifications concerning Said, however, I should add that I believe both his contribution to the study of literary representation and the Foucaultian notion of “discourse” on which his project depends are extremely valuable to the study I have undertaken here.


5 It is worth noting here that the title of the first book is “The First Book for the Youth” and the running head is “The First Book Teaching the Bringing Up of Youth.”

6 George B. Parks argues convincingly that Ascham arrived at the published occasion of *The Scholemaster* late in its composition process. The manuscript version, probably from the winter of 1563-4, makes no mention of Sackville or the professed occasion of the 1570 published version: “The First draft of Ascham’s *The Scholemaster*,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 1 (1937): 313-17. Instead of referring to Sackville’s grandson, as late as October 1567 Ascham seems to have intended the treatise for the use of one or more of his own sons.


8 Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in Its Origins and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), 96-100 and 126-29 has an excellent summary of the relationship between Renaissance Italian patriotism, nationalism and the literary expression of the two. Also important in this respect is Meinecke’s distinction between “culture nations,” which would describe Renaissance Italy, and “political nations,” which would certainly not.


10 By way of analogy, I point to Helgerson’s *Forms of Nationhood*, in which he discusses the nationalist impulses driving cultural productions as different from each other as maps, epic poems, legal and ecclesiastical history-writing, history plays and maritime history. With Helgerson, I believe that differences, especially generic ones, should not be effaced or ignored; and with this caution in mind I am careful not to equate too neatly a form such as Thomas’ encyclopedic *Historie of Italie* with Ascham’s more circumscribed diatribe on Italian travel and manners. At the
same time, however, and I hope to demonstrate in the following analysis, a broad

cultural imperative is indeed being addressed by both writers—and by many others

I mention in less detail. That impulse is too important and even too evident to

ignore.

11 In addition to a brief DNB entry, there are three modern biographical studies of


In Tudor Studies, ed. R.W. Seton-Watson (London: Longmans, 1924), 133-60;
Sergio Rossi, “Un “Italianista” nel Cinquecento Inglese: William Thomas,”
Aevum 40 (1966): 281-314; and Parks’s introduction to The History of Italy

The latter two are distillations of the information given in the first, as is a very

brief note by W. Ll. Davies, “William Thomas, Clerk of the Privy Council,” The

Avventure Linguistiche del Cinquecento (Florence: Felice Le Monnier, 1961)
contains a chapter devoted to Thomas’s dictionary. The following biographical

information is taken from Adair.

12 William Thomas, The Pilgrim: A Dialogue on the Life and Actions of King Henry the

Eighth, ed. J.A. Froude (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861), 3.

13 The Travels and Life of Sir Thomas Hoby, Kt. Of Bisham Abbey, Written by Himself.
1547-1564, ed. Edgar Powell. Camden Miscellany 10 (London: Royal Historical
Society, 1902), 4.

14 In 1549 Berthelet also published Thomas’s The Vanity of this World, a learned

sermon against worldly pleasures, which Thomas dedicated to Anne Herbert of

Wilton.

15 See my article, “Thomas Berthelet” in The Dictionary of Literary Biography 170

16 D. E. Hoak, The King’s Council in the Reign of Edward VI (Cambridge: Cambridge

17 BL Cotton MS Vespasian D XVIII; BL MS Royal 17.c.x, later edited by Lord Stanley

18 BL Egerton MS 837. See also Thomas’s The Pilgrim and his preface to Principal
Rule of the Italian Grammar, ed. R.C. Alston (Menston, Yorks.: Scolar Press,
1968).

19 See Hoak, 333n. and Adair, 140-41.

20 Thomas wrote to Cecil in 1552: “...we talked of Venice... I coulde finde in myne hert
to spende a yere or twoo there (if I were sent). I have not disclosed thus much to
any man but to you, nor entende not to do.” Quoted in Adair, 146.

21 On Wyatt’s rebellion, see especially D.M. Loades, Two Tudor Conspiracies
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), and Adair, 147-49.
At least indirectly, Ascham himself participated in this movement, since his nine days in Venice occurred in June and July 1552, during a brief respite from diplomatic duties while he was accompanying his patron Sir Richard Morison on his extended embassy to the Court of Charles V: see Lawrence V. Ryan, *Roger Ascham* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), 151. In 1545 he gave Princess Elizabeth a gift of an Italian book: see G.A. Giles, ed., *The Whole Works of Roger Ascham* (New York: AMS, 1965), 86-87.


Berners’ translation of Froissart (1523-25 and 1545) is one notable exception to the preeminence of Italian historians during the period: see Hays, 76.


See *Historie*, 138 for bibliographical information.

See OED definitions 2c and d vs. 5 and 6.


Parks’s edition omits the catalogue of rulers, but see William Thomas, *The Historie of Italie* (London, 1549), sigs. a-f for the complete survey of Italy.

Historie, 83. See also the brief discussion by Parks in his introduction, xv-xvi.


Historie, 68; 77-78. On the status of the Venetian political system in England, see Chapter 5, below.


Historie, 47. See also William Hammer, “The Concept of the New or Second Rome in the Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 19 (1944): 50-62, as well as my Chapter 5, below.


See Warneke, 17-18 and chapter 1, passim for a survey of the educational ideals of the humanist class that included both Thomas and Ascham.

Historie, 96, 82, 49-50.


See his letter to Cecil: Giles, 1:342.


Parks, “First Draft.” The manuscript in question is BM Royal B.XXTV, Art. 2, fols. 47-78.


Parks, “First Draft,” 326. See also Ascham’s letter of late 1568 to Johann Sturm for another account of his composition process (Giles, 265-82).

Ryan, esp. 250-67.

I.e. Queen Elizabeth.


See Miglior, 85 on Ascham’s resistance to the new social orders implied in capitalism and the new secular administration.

*Scholemaster*, 24, and see also 21-27, *passim*.

I.e. came before or preceded (see *OED* definition 2a).


See also Chapter 2 and the relevant notes. The image of English character included stereotypes of credulity, barbarism and slow-wittedness. Mediterraneans, of course, were credited with (or blamed for) being quick-witted, lively, impetuous and proud.

Ascham probably had in mind Geoffrey Fenton’s translation of Bandello’s tales (*Certaine Tragicall Discourses*, London, 1567), which like many such English

67 *Scholemaster* 68-9. As far as I have been able to determine, no one has pointed out that in this passage Ascham reworks a nearly identical claim made some twenty years before in the preface to his *Toxophilus* (1545): “English writers by diversity of time, have taken diverse matters in hand. In our fathers’ time nothing was read, but books of feigned chivalry, wherein a man by reading, should be lead to none other end, but only to manslaughter and bawdry. If any man suppose they were good enough to pass the time withal, he is deceived. For surely vain words do work no small thing in vain, ignorant and young minds, specially if they be given any thing therunto of their own nature. These books (as I have heard say) were made for the most part in Abbeys and Monasteries, a very likely and fit fruit of such an idle and blind kind of living” (*Works*, ed. Wright, xiv-xv). I argue below that a significant strand in Ascham’s anti-Italianism derives from this fundamental belief in the mimetic power of texts.


70 *Scholemaster*, 63-64. According to Ryan’s annotations, the four properties are drawn from Plato’s *Epistles to Dionysius* 3.315C: forgetfulness, intellectual laziness, witlessness and insolence.

71 In “The ‘Italianate’ Englishman,” *Month* 11 (1954), H. E. G. Rope argues that Ascham wanted “an iron curtain to keep English subjects from contact with papistry” (96). I believe that his purpose was far more complex than merely separating the two groups: Ascham was concerned with cultural transformations and especially the result of “Italianate” ideals among his compatriots.

72 See the many points raised in this connection by Ferguson and by Hershel, *The Race of Time: Three Lectures on Renaissance Historiography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967).

73 Vos, 8.
Ryan, 35-38.

Giles, 1.350, quoted in part in Vos, 10. See also Giles, 1.342. On Ascham’s nostalgia for a Golden Age associated with Cambridge, see Ferguson, 336-37 and Helgerson, 28ff.

There is a chorus of agreement that Ascham was an exceptionally capable historian of the new school, particularly in his Report on the Affairs and State of Germany. See Ryan, 252-60, Levy, 75-77, and Ferguson, 21-23. Of particular interest is also Walter F. Staton, Jr., “Roger Ascham’s Theory of History Writing,” Studies in Philology 56 (1959): 125-37. On the larger problem of the emergent historiography, see Ferguson, especially chapters 1-2, Levy, and Baker, passim.


Historie 11; on “swarms” of Englishmen in Italy, see Parks, “Decline and Fall,” 343.


Weiner, passim and especially 29-36. The points raised in this paragraph are drawn from Weiner’s researches.

Weiner, 31ff.

There seems to be a very tenuous correlation between extreme Protestantism and anti-Italianism. Hoby’s dedication to Northumberland, Thomas’s to Warwick, Ascham’s to Cecil, all complicate an easy association of Protestantism and anti-Italianism. See also Bartlett, passim, and Clare Howard, English Travellers of the Renaissance (London: John Lane, 1914), 72-100 for the anti-Catholic tropes in the travel literature of the period following 1570.

To my mind, the most comprehensive and insightful discussion of Ascham’s frustrations is included in Alvin Vos’s introduction to The Letters of Roger Ascham. See also Ryan, 228 and Whigham, 175ff.

Vos, 265-82, esp. 267.

Vos, 280.

Vos, 268.

Vos, 271-74.

Scholemaster, 55. See also Whigham, 181-82 for a somewhat similar reading of Ascham’s appraisal of Castiglione. Peter Burke, The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays in Perception and Communication (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 12-13 offers a cogent explanation for the
northern European tradition of viewing Italian society as a performative or façade culture.

Whigham, 175-82, recognizes several of the points I have arrived at independently in the preceding pages: that Italianate behavior is figured as a parallel form to that of "quick wits" (and so as an opposite to the more stable "hard wits"), that Castiglione presented Ascham with an ideological dilemma, and that Ascham's frustration at court had a direct bearing on his anti-Italian diatribe.

Vos, 281-82.
As in this world there are degrees of evils:
So in this world there are degrees of devils.
You're a great Duke; I your poor secretary.
I look now for a Spanish fig, or an Italian sallet daily.

In these lines from John Webster's *The White Devil* (1612) the intelligent but malcontent secretary Flamineo reflects anxiously on the potential of his powerful patron, the Duke of Bracciano, to dispatch him by a "Spanish fig" or "Italian sallet." Both images are contemporary euphemisms for secret poisoning—precisely what the "poor secretary" of the exchange, Flamineo himself, fears as his usefulness to the irascible duke diminishes.

The social and moral tensions suggested in this speech depend upon a tradition of English dramatic representation popular from at least the last decade of the sixteenth
century, in which the “Italian” court, its intrigues for preferment or raw power, public
scandals and private perfidy, overt treachery and deviously concealed poisons are
portrayed as the way of the world. As critics of Webster are fond of pointing out, it is a
“world” (to use Flamineo’s own term) nominally unlike, but in fact disturbingly like, that
of late Tudor and early Stuart England.¹

Flamineo’s emphasis on “this world” invites contemplation not only whether an
“other world” free of treachery, “policy” and unjust distribution of advantages might
realistically be imagined, but also whether Webster’s world of Italian Others constitutes
merely a refracted version of Jacobean England— or, as I believe, something more
complex. My inquiry is framed by two deceptively simple questions I will pursue in this
chapter, as I offer a reading of the cultural assumptions that inform Flamineo’s speech:
why Italian, and why salads? Is “Italy” really only the England of “alienated
intellectuals,”² or does it have its own symbolic, exotic or mysterious status that
transcends the domestic conditions that produced these discontented English souls?
Finally, what can attitudes toward food consumption suggest about early modern English
national self-identification, cultural insecurities and the competing, sometimes
contradictory, strategies of representing difference?

Webster’s placement of poisoned salads within an imagined Italian dramatic space
is characteristic of not only late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century theatrical
conventions, but also of an extensive polemical and imaginative prose tradition that
ambivalently represented Italy as both culturally attractive and repulsive, and one which
(as we have seen in the previous chapter) owes a considerable debt to the cultural
anxieties articulated by Roger Ascham in his anti-Italian diatribe in *The Scholemaster*. Indeed, Ascham's principal anxiety, that Italians can effect deleterious transformations within unwary Englishmen, echo throughout a number of imaginative and polemical writers of the next generations, but they also register consistently in writers on the subject of food-as-cultural marker.

Though Webster refers to Spanish figs along with Italian salads, the association of poisoning and Italian settings, history, narratives and behavior was by far the more dominant cultural assumption on the part of English writers of dramatic and non-dramatic works. Aside from the many late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century plays depicting poisoning in actual Italian locales (or sometimes those merely *Italianate* in spirit)—*The Jew of Malta, The Revenger’s Tragedy, Women Beware Women* to name only three—the stage convention also emerges in less likely settings, but seems always to circle back to an Italian source. Hamlet’s play within the play, for example, enacts an Italian murder by poison, while, improbably and anachronistically, Danish Laertes envenoms his sword with poison procured from a Venetian mountebank. Indeed, by Webster’s time the correlation between poison and Italy, in *The White Devil* figured not once but twice as a deadly salad, was so conventional that “Italian murder” or “the Italian crime” inevitably meant poisoning.

Though an equivalent understanding has come more slowly to early modern studies, cultural anthropologists and scholars other periods have persuasively theorized a relationship between nutrition and cultural identity. A society’s attitudes toward food cultivation, preparation, and consumption are now recognized as valuable indicators of
attitudes toward cultural differences, class boundaries and gender demarcations—and
indeed as indicators of perceived or imagined identity itself. Despite a persistent emphasis
among anthropologists on the developing world, its taboos and ritual forms, certain
fundamental forms of anthropological inquiry can also be profitably applied to early
modern cultural studies. These modes of analysis hold special value for those areas of the
collective imagination where a society’s beliefs and fears are most in evidence, as they
certainly were for early modern English readers and playgoers confronted with a steady
and various supply of stories, plays and arguments concerned with the sort of “Italy”
Webster and others represented.

Perhaps the most influential theorist of food as cultural praxis, Claude Lévi-Strauss
identifies cooking as “a truly universal form of human activity,” terming it “a language in
which [a society] translates its structure” and reveals its inherent contradictions. Even
those who have since contested or revised his claims agree that structures of belief are
imbedded within even the most seemingly universal culinary practices of preparing raw,
boiled or roasted foods, and in the most apparently casual verbal expressions of those
practices—as in, for example, Webster’s reference to an “Italian sallet.” Lévi-Strauss’s
analysis is deeply invested in laying bare the systemic binaries and the units—in his
terminology called gustemes—that constitute a generally oppositional structure of
culinary-social meanings. Of these, the most germane to my purposes is his analysis of a
nature/culture opposition that derives from a basic antithesis between human attitudes
toward food that is raw (representing nature) and food that is cooked (representing
culture). Though structuralist analyses can lose particularity as they strive for
applicability, with sufficient attention to cultural context, a matrix of English beliefs concerning nature and culture emerges quite clearly from Webster's image: a deep suspicion among English writers toward the pole of "culture" as it was figured in the dietary and cultural orthodoxies of Tudor-Stuart discourse. A paradox operates within these discourses, then: while English writers almost without exception resisted salads, vegetables and fruits because of their rawness, which to Lévi-Strauss signify nature, they expressed a more ambivalent attitude toward the cultural identifiers with which they became associated. The "cooked" came to represent nature, honesty and sincerity, while the "raw" expressed culture in an often pejorative and at best ambivalent sense.

When he equates poisoning with salads and figs, Webster invokes a peculiarly English conception of dietary (and so cultural) difference which posits that meat-based diets signify the moral qualities of honesty and forthrightness, while diets of vegetables and fruits express subtlety and insincerity. This widespread orthodoxy constitutes a "sincerity claim" on the part of early modern English writers, a cultural fantasy so deeply imbued in the discourse of the age that it suggests a recurrent form of compensation for the emergent nation and its cultural leaders: the English might not be as politic, cultivated, learned or wealthy as the French, Spaniards or (especially) the Italians, but they could take solace in the belief that they were more honest and more sincere.

Such cultural self-styling depended upon time-honored humoral, climatic and ethnographic theories inherited and modified from medieval and classical authorities, who identified northern peoples as fiercer but less disposed toward civility than those of southern regions. These theories demonstrably influenced the mixed reception that Italian
conduct literature received in early modern England, an issue of no small importance to a
corpus of works so thoroughly indebted to Italian models. In native imaginative and
polemical writing it repeatedly combined with two other important cultural données: the
understanding among certain influential strata of English society—typically those
associated with court, publishing and the theaters—that their own national cultural
renaissance was belated and perhaps inferior to those of continental peoples, and an
Anglo-Protestant emphasis on moral inwardness, often defined in opposition to the visible
signs of cultural renaissance, such as courtly codes of behavior, personal or societal grace,
accomplishment in martial and artistic endeavors, and wider participation in political and
administrative life.® This cluster of beliefs concerning civility and sincerity produced a
discursive tradition that crossed temporal and generic lines with remarkable frequency and
consistency.

"Drug-damn'd Italy"

Why, then, an Italian salad? Peter Burke's carefully nuanced hypothesis that
Italian society was (and perhaps still is) premised upon a lower "sincerity threshold" than
northern European cultures offers an especially apt insight into this English cultural
fantasy.® English imaginative and polemical writers of the period generally lacked Burke's
self-awareness, and promoted the doctrine that their own culture was sincere and their
own people's passions transparent, while Mediterraneans were duplicitous, indirect and as
a consequence, characteristically resorted to poison in order to accomplish their nefarious
revenge and assassinations. This orthodoxy extends well beyond dramatic works alone, but is especially vivid and conventionalized in the many plays that represent scenes or allegations of poisoning. By the first decade of the seventeenth century, the stereotype was so widely in circulation that it is tempting to assume that Imogen's characterization in Cymbeline (ca. 1609) of a "drug-damn'd Italy" had always been part of the intellectual and creative currency of European writings, whatever their generic or occasional qualities.10

In fact, however, the equation of poisoning and Italians was dynamic, not static during the sixteenth century, just as Italian influence in general was subject to very divergent representations. To invoke the principal texts of Chapter One once more: in Thomas's The Historie of Italie, the image of Italianate poisoners was insufficiently in circulation to warrant his defending the Italians from the stereotype, though elsewhere he does indeed exonerate them vigorously from other charges of moral transgression or turpitude.11 However, as the previous chapter asserts, Ascham's The Scholemaster marks a watershed in Anglo-Italian cultural perceptions, and one worth returning to for a moment. In the diatribe concerning educational travel at the end of Book I, he likens Italian influence to a cultural and moral toxin, eschewed or cured only by rigorously adhering to firm Protestant principles. Significantly, he employs images of poison and antidotes:

if wise men will needs send their sons into Italy, let them do it wisely, under the keep and guard of him who, by his wisdom and honesty, by his example and authority, may be able to keep them safe and sound in the fear of God,
in Christ's true religion, in good order and honesty of living, except they will have them run headlong into overmany jeopardies, as Ulysses had done many times if Pallas had not always governed him, if he had not used to stop his ears with wax, to bind himself to the mast of his ship, to feed daily upon that sweet herb moly with the black root and white flower, given unto him by Mercury to avoid all the enchantments of Circe.

For he shall not always, in his absence out of England, light upon a gentle Alcinous and walk in his fair gardens full of all harmless pleasures, but he shall sometimes fall either into the hands of some cruel Cyclops or into the lap of some wanton and dallying Dame Calypso, and so suffer the danger of many a deadly den, not so full of perils to destroy the body as full of vain pleasures to poison the mind. Some Siren shall sing him a song, sweet in tune, but sounding in the end to his utter destruction.... Some Circe shall make him, of a plain Englishman, a right Italian.¹²

Ascham's fanciful imagery of plain Englishness confronted by Circean guile does little, however, to suggest the quiet revolution in herbal and chemical theory not only in England but across the entire European continent from the middle of the sixteenth century. For a number of very concrete historical reasons, these developments—and their literary representations—were almost exclusively associated with the Mediterranean world: with Montpellier because of its famed botanical gardens, but especially with Padua, Venice,
Bologna, Genoa, Florence, Salerno and Rome. Moreover, the Arabic world’s medicinal products and lore entered the West principally through Venice, the most important early modern port to the Levant and also one of the most significant centers of medicinal and chemical publishing. By the end of the sixteenth century, Italians thus came to occupy two related roles in English literary representation: as world leaders in new remedies and as the world’s most egregious poisoners.

Though exaggerated and subject to its author’s highly idiosyncratic world view, Thomas Nashe’s often-quoted description of Italy as “the apothecary shop of poisoners to all nations” and “the storehouse of all murderous inventions” conformed precisely to English popular opinion that Italian Papal and secular petty courts were rife with poisoners such as Lucretia and Alessandro Borgia, and that murder by toxins was merely one of many means these perpetually unstable city-states organized their chaotic political life. He warned that “If thou dost but lend half a look to a Roman’s or Italian’s wife, thy porridge shall be prepared for thee, and cost thee nothing but thy life.”

Classical and medieval histories taught early modern English readers that poison and Italianate political instability fed each other. Jonson’s political upstart Sejanus arranges for the murder of Drusus by poison, while stories of Livia, who dispatched her husband Augustus with figs, and of Calpurnia, who poisoned his wife, provided an ancient Roman foundation for this English fascination with the Borgia’s dreaded cantarella (an arsenic compound) and with the protracted rivalries between Papal and temporal powers. The seasoned Italian traveler Fynes Moryson asserted that “the Italians above all nations, most practice revenge by treasons, and especially are skillful in making and
giving poisons....to the perishing of kings and Emperors by those deadly potions.” He provides a catalogue of such crimes, remarking that “in our time, it seems the Art of Poisoning is reputed in Italy worthy of Princes’ practice” and that “the Italians have been of old, and still are, very factious, and apt to take parts in private murthers and public seditions.”

Factionalism, instability and the threat of absolutism or arbitrary domination were a constant concern among English interpreters of Italian history. In The Governor Elyot remarks with horror at the systemic instability of the Italian petty states. A decade later Thomas Starkey warned that “the country of Italy is in our days most manifest example, whereas by discord and division among themself is brought in much misery and confusion,” while a half century later Thomas Merbury used Italian examples to demonstrate the need for a strong monarch and uncontested succession.

The stock characterizations of Italian internecine warfare between the perpetually unstable petty states and poisonous misgovernment also migrated to the public theater. The drama had its share of such representations. In All's Well that Ends Well (1603-04?), Bertram calls the Italian peninsula “those Italian fields / Where noble fellows strike” (2.3.286-87), while Webster’s Antonio opens The Duchess of Malfi with the well-worn metaphor that “a Prince’s court” is like “a common fountain, whence should flow / Pure silver drops in general.” However, he advises, “if’t chance / Some curs’d example poison’t near the head, / Death and diseases through the whole land spread” (1.1.11-15).

Examples could be further multiplied, but the point emerges: whether in its historical, polemical or imaginative construction, Italy was viewed by early modern
English writers as the wellspring of poison, poisoners, and political faction. Admittedly, this representation often operated in tandem with other more positive characterizations—the fountainhead of modern culture, the center of the West's greatest ancient empire, sometimes even the model for England's own civil society—but it is impossible to ignore the darker picture which informs so much of the writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and which seems so consonant with both the spirit and often the letter of Ascham's *The Scholemaster*.

"Such Beggary Baggage"

My second question demands more detailed investigation: why did salads and figs, and not other foodstuffs, serve Webster as euphemisms for poison? The widespread popular image of the Italian poisoner illuminates and informs, but finally cannot in itself explain, the more complex and interesting ways that the imaginative and polemical writings of the early modern period deploy orthodoxies of diet in the service of national self-definition.

Once again, William Thomas provides an especially apt perspective. In *The Historie of Italie* he dwells considerably on dietary differences, at one point confessing in vigorous first-person to a complete change of attitude concerning food as he renounces "the heaviness of flesh or fish" and reveals that whereas "beforehand [I] could in manner brook no fruit, and yet after I had been awhile in Italy I fell so in love withal that as long as I was there I desired no meat more." Likewise, his defense of Henry VIII entitled
The Pilgrim (ca. 1547), purportedly a dialogue between himself and several Italian nobles, partially defines English and Scottish cultural identity in terms of dietary practices and conventions. Thomas’s persona explains to his interlocutors that while the Italians “exceed us in fruits, we exceed you both in the abundance, and also in the goodness, of flesh, fowl, and fish, whereof the common people there do no less feed than your common people here of fruits and herbs.” He concludes resoundingly with what he identifies as a contemporary proverb: “Give the Englishman his beef and mustard.” Context is especially significant here: Thomas lodges his claim within a highly defensive catalogue of recent English cultural advances, and he fastens upon beef as constituting an essential English identity, a visible sign of English directness that manifests itself in his countrymen’s need to eat “food of more substance, as abundance of flesh and fish.”

John Aylmer’s 1569 defense of the Elizabethan regime also invokes a culturally determined dynamic of food consumption. In arguing for the superiority of the English worker, he scoffs at the lot of their continental counterparts, who are oppressed by misery and tyranny. In Italy, he claims,

the husbandmen be there so rich that the best coate he weareth is sacking, his nether stocks of his hose, be his own skin, his diet and his fare not very costly, for he commeth to the market with a hen or two in hande, and a dozen eggs in a nette in the other, which beynge solde and tolde, be bieth and carrieth home wyth him, no Biefe or Mutton, Veale or sea fishe, as you do: but a quart of oyle to make sallettes of hearbes, wherewith he liveth all the weke followinge.
And he concludes: “we live in paradise and not Italy, as they commonly call it. For they have figges, Oranges, Pomegranates, Grapes, Pepsons, Oyle, and herbes: and we have Shepe, Oxen, Kie, Calves, Conies, Fish, woll, Leade, Clothe, Tinne, Leather, and infinite treasures more, which they lack.”

William Harrison strikes a similarly nationalized note in “Of the Food and Diet of the English,” a section of his *Description of England* (1577). He argues that the English fondness for flesh and milk predates (significantly) the Roman occupation. Even in his day, he claims, “in number of dishes and change of meat the nobility of England (whose cooks are for the most part musical-headed Frenchmen and strangers) do most exceed.”

He continues in this vein, claiming that in their fondness for various meats in all seasons—beef, incidentally, is assumed as a dietary constant—the English eschew the superstitious Lenten practices of the Catholics and the “sundry outlandish confections” of other national cuisines. Harrison represents the English middling sorts and husbandmen with their ample meat-laden tables as essentially different from their continental counterparts: “when they meet, they are so merry without malice, and plain without inward Italian or French craft and subtlety, that it would do a man good to be in company among them.”

The point emerges quite consistently: candor, like the enjoyment of flesh at table, is constructed as a specifically English national trait. Musical-headed Frenchmen and crafty Italians, according to Harrison, are destroying the Englishman’s quintessential open-handedness and open-heartedness. Like their confections and other unusual foodstuffs, foreigners are represented as insubstantial but devious, threats to old English ways and
mores. Though gluttony is often elsewhere criticized as a national embarrassment, even by Harrison himself, 23 freedom to indulge is equated with English political freedoms, and specifically with liberty from tyrannical or arbitrary rule.

Those freedoms are made to stand for an essential English openness and candor, the Englishman's self-vaunted plainness that—to cite one apt example from the drama—is the basis of Christopher Sly's elaborate sincerity claim in the induction to The Taming of the Shrew:

call me not "honor" nor "lordship." I ne'er drank sack in my life; and if you give me any conserves, give me conserves of beef. Ne'er ask me what raiments I'll wear, for I have not more doublets than backs, no more stockings than legs, nor no more shoes than feet—nay, sometimes more feet than shoes, or such shoes as my toes look through the overleather.24

Abundant evidence from herbals, dietaries, cookery books and health regimens of the period also suggests just how deeply orthodoxies of diet-as-culture ran. A number of English writers specifically and categorically nationalize or politicize matters of diet, though it is clear that they were neither unaware nor categorically indisposed towards all fruits and vegetables. These works suggest a range, albeit often a narrow one, of fruit and vegetable foodstuffs available to and used by the English, and they indicate that the knowledge a layperson might have possessed would certainly exceed what lay readers of the late twentieth century know of the digestive and medicinal effects of plants. The point is not that the early-modern English were categorically averse to vegetables and fruits; in
fact, they consumed some that today might be counted exotic: bugloss, isope, capers, burnet, rampion and the like. It is rather that they tended to use both sparingly, often for medicinal rather than dietary benefit, and generally with circumspection in comparison with the animal-based mainstays of their diet. They were medicines, and as medicines, were to be taken cautiously.

Nor could English writers have imagined their own nation to be immune from poisoning. Early-modern life was replete with almost daily struggles against accidental food poisonings and intestinal infections, a problem especially acute in northern European diets which made considerable use of rye and other coarse grains. Whole populations often fell victim to ergotism, produced by alkaloids stored in these grains. Likewise, literary works—*King John and Arden of Feversham, Acts and Monuments* and Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, for example—freely represented intentional, domestic poisonings for some party’s illicit private, political, economic or social gain. The point is not that early modern readers and spectators could reasonably have imagined poisoning as a purely foreign import. Rather, the writings of the period show a clear divergence between actual dietary habits and the real history of criminality on the one hand, and their imaginative representations in the imaginary space “Italy,” where they became almost obsessively applied to national characteristics considered foreign and threatening: subtlety, guile, “policy.” As a site for national self-identification and especially for differentiating an essential Englishness from Italianate Otherness, this conjunction of national character and dietary belief ramified far beyond the drama alone.
The English herbals, cookery books, dietaries and general regimens of health that proliferated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries demonstrate very consistent attitudes toward matters of diet as they intersect with issues of national self-fashioning. In his 1584 *The Haven of Health*, Thomas Cogan asserted that “no man of honour or worship, can be said to have good provision for hospitality, unless there be a good store of beef in readiness” and that “beef of all flesh is most usual among Englishmen.” But English writers had stressed the same point even before. In about 1550 Christopher Langton asserted in *An Introduction into Physicke, with a Universal Dyet* that “there is more nourishment in flesh, than in any other meat” and that “of domestical beasts, beef hath no fellow.” This regard for beef as a sort of national resource (or national fetish) echoes throughout the cookery books, dietaries and health regimens of the age. Even though writers accepted the Galenic belief that beef made men prone to melancholy, they found ways to modify, invert or otherwise appropriate the principle. Elyot accepts the view that beef engenders melancholy, but asserts that “Beef of England to Englishmen, which are in health, bringeth strong nourishment. . . [and]. . . is more convenient, than chickens, and other like fine meats.”

These orthodoxies emerged in other sorts of texts as well. In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Catholic apologist William Forrest declared, despite his religious allegiances to Rome, that

Our English nature cannot live by roots,

By water, herbs, or other such beggary baggage,

That may well serve for vile outlandish Coasts;
Give Englishmen meat after their old usage,
Beef, Mutton, Veal, to cheer their courage;
And then . . .
They shall defend this our noble England.29

Fynes Moryson, a very keen observer of Italian dietary (and other cultural) habits, noted in his own land that English cooks “are most commended for roasted meats.”30 His and Forrest’s observations recall Harrison’s anathematizing of the “sundry outlandish confections” of foreign cooks and his praise for beef as the mainstay of English diet. The national self-styling operating in these examples makes explicit what is in other genres more often implicit: that beef, essential Englishness, and the defense of “this our noble England” are ideologically consonant. This same conjunction explains the beliefs expressed by the French forces in Henry V, when they recognize that with “great meals of beef and iron and steel” the English troops “eat like wolves and fight like devils.”31

The nationalistic tenor of these examples underscores how neatly beef and essential Englishness do in fact fit together in both the ethnographic and medical orthodoxies of the age. These mainly Galenic medical principles, however, did not operate in an ideologically neutral way, but rather were adapted to suit cultural imperatives. Melancholy, while never declared exactly desirable, is constructed by writers as a natural condition the English flesh is heir to—a state of being that, like Hamlet’s version of humanity, accrues a certain nobility and stature in its relation to suffering and ambition. Dullness and melancholy are
in these tracts represented as preferable to the lightness and quickness more subtle fruits and vegetables were widely believed to engender, especially to a hearty populace that, as William Thomas had stressed, could not live on subtle foods. Sir Andrew Aguecheek's confession in *Twelfth Night* that being "a great eater of beef...does harm to [his] wit" is a comic expression of a doctrine that was held quite seriously.\(^{32}\)

This doctrine was held seriously because it fit into a pattern of national self-representation. For example, Cogan declared that, had ancient writers "eaten the beef of England, or if they had dwelt in this our climate, which through coldness (*Ex antiperistasi*) doth fortify digestion, and therefore requireth stronger nourishment, I suppose they would have judged otherwise" than to associate a debilitating threat to wits with beef consumption.\(^{33}\) Christopher Langton is far less concerned with the undesirable effects of melancholy or grossness, than with the potentially harmful medical effects of less substantial fare. He makes an elaborate case for "virtue attractive," that is, correspondence between the qualities of the eater and the properties of the food eaten. He writes that "nourishment is the making like of that which nourisheth, to that which is nourished" and "the power attractive is a virtue which being in every part, serving for nutrition, doth draw unto it things of like qualities, & such as be meet and convenient for it, as adamant stone draweth iron." He asserts that, as a fleshy and gross being, mankind thrives not upon insubstantial foodstuffs—Forrest's "beggary baggage"—such as vegetables and fruits, but upon the flesh of four-footed animals and game birds: "in the lowest kind or form of nourishments, is reckoned all manner of sallets, & whatsoever growtheth in a little stalk, as cucumbers, gourds, or capers, and such like" while "salads that
be sauced with salt and oil" as well as "green figs and dry...do greatly hurt the stomach." Like his predecessors, Robert Burton, who found melancholic potential in virtually every substance (including beef), nonetheless had more strenuous cautions concerning lighter, less substantial fruit and vegetable foodstuffs. He cites a sometimes astounding array of ancient and modern authorities to argue for cautious, measured use of fruits and "herbs."  

"Strange Meats, Though Pleasant"

While meats were judged good and the basis of healthful diet, fruits and vegetables were consistently treated with caution and suspicion in the dietary literature of the period. Again, Elyot articulates the dominant beliefs of writers (like Burton) who followed him. He acknowledges the historical place of vegetarianism but turns that authority to justify contemporary diets:

For as much as before that tillage of corn was invented, and that the devouring of flesh and fish was of mankind used, men undoubtedly lived by fruits, and Nature was therewith contented and satisfied: but by change of the diet of our progenitors, there is caused to be in our bodies, such alteration from the nature, which was in men at the beginning, that now all fruits generally are noisome to man, and do engender ill humours, and be oftimes the cause of putrefied fevers, if they be much and continually eaten.
Chapters 14 through 16 of Book II of *The Castle of Health* catalogue many fruits and vegetables. However, like his myriad successors, Elyot advises their judicious use and appears quite uninterested in their value within a normal as opposed to a therapeutic diet. For Elyot, both “herbs” (i.e. all vegetables) and fruits possess primarily medicinal value: for example, onions “quicken sight” and leeks “do extenuate and cleanse the body, and also make it soluble, and provoketh urine.” Parsnips “do nourish with better juice than the other roots, specially carrots, which are hot and dry, and expelleth wind.” Andrew Borde, another sixteenth-century polymath ethnographer-dietitian declared “a good cook is half a physician” and in fact all writers on the subject of food and health accept the Galenic conceptual frame, attributing highly specific—and potent—physiological effects to plant matter, and so treating fruits and vegetables with a circumspection equal to Galen’s own.

Early modern English wariness toward vegetables, particularly those called “potherbs” or simply “herbs,” was indeed so prevalent that it is a now something of a commonplace among historians of diet and health. Raw salads came in for particular suspicion. According to a well-known (and probably apocryphal) story, Catherine Parr needed a Dutch gardener in order to be provided with an acceptable salad. Even if spurious, the anecdote gives a sense of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century attitudes toward uncooked vegetables. English writers rebelled particularly strenuously against mélanges of raw ingredients, in part because they were mixed and in part because those mixtures appeared to them the way a blend of brightly colored capsules and tablets might to a late twentieth-century consumer raised in a chemical age: as a promiscuous blend of potentially dangerous medicines. Though at least the comfortable classes ate fruits and
vegetables, early modern cookery books and treatises of health suggest that cooking and preserving fresh or raw vegetable matter was by far the preferred method of consumption. Fresh fruits and vegetables ordinarily became preserves, conserves, syrups, pickled preparations and medical recipes. Before a French culinary invasion beginning in earnest about 1670, domestic cookery books contain nothing even approaching a critical mass of recipes calling for fresh greens and fruits.

Just how different these English conceptions of dietary health were from contemporary Italian ones is made clear in the pages of a dietary-cum-cookery book of 1570. La Singolare Dottrina di M. Domenico...Con la dichiaratione della qualità delle carne di tutti gli animali, & pesci, & di tutte le viande circa la sanità, is throughout concerned the preparation and medicinal uses of vegetables and fruits. Like the English writers, Domenico subscribes to the Galenic conceptual framework, but he shows none of the English suspicions toward those foodstuffs, instead listing menus that include seasonally appropriate dishes, most of them based upon raw and cooked vegetables. His emphasis upon salads and vegetables appears immediately in the opening pages and is sustained throughout the work, but nowhere so consistently as in the ninth, tenth and eleventh chapters, devoted specifically to the subjects of herbs, vegetables, pulses, fruits and nuts.30

Orthodoxies of diet operated within England in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in a remarkably consistent way across different discursive traditions: the Galenic suspicion toward fruits and vegetables influenced the domestic writers, even if they chose to argue against or adapt their model. Some of these beliefs functioned independently of
any reference to Italian culinary norms, but quite clearly, many of them did not. The opportunity to enlist dietary orthodoxies in the service of national self-fashioning, specifically in relation to "Italy," was not often lost by polemical and dramatic writers, but it also had a specific historical trajectory that included eye-witness accounts.

As contact between the two cultures increased, travel was one principal way the dietary realities of the Italian peninsula were made known to English writers. From the last decades of the sixteenth century, educational travel began to assume a new social and cultural importance among English aristocrats and middling sorts. With these travelers' increased exposure came new conceptual challenges to the dietary orthodoxies of the age.

In 1562, Thomas Wyndebank anxiously wrote to William Cecil concerning his son's imminent departure for Italy, because "it is to be feared that [young] Mr. Thomas shall not well bear the great heats of that country, and being given also to eat much fruit, may soon fall into sickness, as he did in France by that occasion." The following year another traveler noted the general plenitude of the Italian provinces he visited, but complained that the only flesh he could obtain was chicken and that the people were crafty and deceitful.

In one of the period's most often quoted epistles of travel advice, Cecil also (quite significantly) chooses a dietary metaphor to represent foreign moral and cultural dangers:

> Suffer not thy sons to pass the Alps, for they shall learn nothing but pride, blasphemy, and atheism. And if by travel they attain to some few broken languages, they will profit them no more than to have one meat served in divers dishes.
George Gascoigne’s advice poem of 1572 warns one Bartholomew Withipoll to eschew the three “P’s” of Italian travel: poison, pride and papistry. He counsels the young man to “feed on fish” rather than allow a “Magnifico” to foist a “fico”—a fig, but also both the anus or pudendum—upon his dish. With his dietary metaphor in place, he then catalogues the many ways the subtle Italians might attempt to poison his body and soul, and warns him not to become “bait to set Italian hands on work.” Gascoigne’s admonition depends upon the assumed (and presumably, shared) ideological congruity of diet, poison and cultural purity: the poem’s burden nods to Ascham: the Italians will try to poison England’s youth not only with foodstuffs but with sexual and spiritual pollution.

The travelers of Webster’s generation expressed deep anxieties concerning fruits and vegetables, further sharpening the distinction between the candidness suggested by the English diet, and the dangers of the Italian. They began to load the distinction with ever more overt doctrinal and political weight, as they acknowledged that sometimes forbidden pleasures accompany the well-known medical risks. But this shift in emphasis really only makes explicit what lay implicit in earlier accounts: that the risks of diet are ultimately cultural perils to be avoided. Thomas Coryate in 1611, George Sandys in 1615 and Fynes Moryson in 1617 all describe their encounters with Italian eating habits, coming to the same mixture of admiration for Italian agricultural bounty and fear of its cultural implications for Englishmen abroad. Coryate admires Mantua’s “abundance of delectable fruits” growing in the city and available in the markets. He describes a paradise of foodstuffs in the manner of William Thomas, but immediately subverts his own observations by asserting that he could “spend the remainder of [his] days” in such a
terrestrial paradise, were it not for the “gross idolatry and superstitious ceremonies” of the populace there. Like previous travelers, he rhapsodizes on Italian fruits but urges their moderate consumption for fear of provoking an untimely death. Moryson also lauds the Italians’ agriculture—especially figs—but laments their lack of beef and game and complains that “sallets” seem to sustain the people at large. The suggestion throughout his itinerary is that the Italians’ frequently vaunted moderation at table is in fact a site for hypocrisy: he dwells on how friars maintain public shows of abstinence but he insinuates that secretly “they may easily in private break this vow of not eating flesh.” George Sandys is equally direct, reiterating Ascham’s opposition of poison and moly as he describes the “Circean Promontory” near Feronia, with particular attention to Circe’s resourcefulness in concocting herbal preparations and drugs.

Though “fish days” were part of ordinary English life throughout the period, it is now well understood that these vestiges of Catholic abstinence served primarily economic and political ends. At least as far as ecclesiastical doctrine was concerned, the more than 150 fish days per year had largely lost whatever inward or metaphysical function they might have had in Catholic England, and had instead evolved into an elaborate scheme for victualling soldiers, sustaining fishmongers, and contributing to the maintenance of public order. Hence the Lenten superstitions that Moryson observes, the belief that that the friars may not practice privately what they espouse publicly, registers as suspicion of Italianate outward shows—as one concrete expression of an English contempt for what was imagined to be Italian hypocrisy, of Protestant inwardness discovering Catholic guile.
An unusual manuscript of 1614 now in the British Library, *Racconto Di tutte le Radici, di tutte l’Herbe, et di tutti i Frutti, che crudi o cotti in Italia se mangiano,* suggests that these issues of diet and national identity were indeed a matter of cultural propaganda even outside the sphere of published travel writing and dramatic representation. This elegant little work is entirely in Italian but purports to have been copied in London by a now-anonymous Lombard, for an English audience. The author or copyist expounds upon the dietary and medicinal virtues of roots, herbs, fruits—raw or cooked. What is especially significant is that the manuscript is unabashedly propaganda for a Mediterranean style of eating, a complete and thorough-going inversion of English dietary orthoadoxies. It expounds upon the Italian preference for fruits, vegetables and especially raw salads over meats, in complete contradistinction to the association of carnivorous diet with moral transparency and physical well-being.

The writer makes considerable use of climate theory, noting that English conditions (he had stayed some time in Cambridge) are ill-suited for cultivating many of the fruits and vegetables that possess salutary dietetic or medicinal properties. Figs, so often the subject of anxiety among English writers, are particularly vaunted, along with seasonally appropriate salads, both raw and cooked. In diametric opposition to the dominant English attitudes toward the raw and the cooked, he even refers in one preparation to “una honesta quantità d’herbette buone”—an *honest* quantity of good herbs.

The author stresses over and over that Italy has an abundance of produce that the English “nation” (*questa natione*) does not, and conversely, that Italians eat meats
sparingly. His emphasis throughout is upon national differences that arise from or are otherwise defined by food consumption:

Nor should anyone marvel at hearing that we eat such a diversity of vegetables and fruits little known among the ultramontaines, and which are thus considered entirely without value by them, a belief that comes from two reasons. The first is that Italy the beautiful is not so rich in meats, as are France and this island; however, this makes us very resourceful in finding other viands with which to nourish so many people who find themselves in this little circuit of land.50

"Give the Englishman Beef and Mustard"

Though no national chauvinist himself, even William Thomas loads the proverb "give the Englishman beef and mustard" with the suggestion that beef and Englishness naturally go together, that flesh is somehow "plain" Englishness made manifest. It is a cultural claim that has never gone away. The "Beefeater" Yeoman of the Guard has for centuries been a quintessential symbol of social stability, beef and natural British liberties were routinely yoked together in late eighteenth-century anti-French propaganda, and the motto of the Sublime Society of Beefsteaks ran "beef and liberty." Beef and English national self-definition have enjoyed a long and distinguished, if curiously expressed, cultural symbiosis that shows no signs of diminishing. Quite the contrary: the "mad cow disease" controversy of 1996 immediately became yet another explosive and protracted
test of Britain's perpetually tumultuous relation to the European Union and another example of how beef has over the centuries come to constitute one aspect of what Lauren Berlant, in a different context, calls the "National Symbolic."51

In early modern English ideology, the equation of diet, national identity and personal morality was equally rich. Webster's image of the "Italian sallet" functions as part of a broad analogizing frame because for an audience trained in the medicinal and dietary orthodoxies of Galen, Elyot, the herbalists and diet writers, salads registered as the food of the clever but insubstantial, the gracious but hypocritical opposite to solid, sincere English beef-eaters. Even aside from the mixed (and therefore suspicious) nature of salads, the vegetable ingredients themselves demanded caution. Plant matter was understood within this orthodoxy to exert powerful influences on the body, in many cases to come from or be associated with Southern climates, Mediterraneans, and sometimes the Catholic church itself. Beef, by contrast, was what it seemed: a substantial, forthright and unitary foodstuff. If it engendered melancholic dullness, English writers seem to have accepted that condition as a better alternative to the pernicious and unpredictable effects on the spirit caused by vegetables and fruits. In Lévi-Strauss's terms, they favored nature over culture.

This relationship between diet, national character and "inwardness" has particular relevance to the representation of Italian Otherness in theatrical productions, polemics, and imaginative writing. Classical ethnography and the theories of climatic determinism on which it was based posited that Northerners were courageous and mighty, but were inherently prone to dullness and melancholy, and deficient in the refinements of civilization.
enjoyed by Mediterraneans. This orthodoxy was so widely accepted by English writers throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that it appears without generic specificity, standing at the very basis of the ethnographic theory that sustained national self-perception. For instance, in defiance of the tribute demanded of Cymbeline's court, Cloten declares the ancient British to be "a warlike people," while in his Areopagitica (1644) Milton addresses the "Lords and Commons of England," asking them to "consider what Nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are governors: a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to."}

English Protestantism's emphasis upon inwardness and self-examination exerted a monumental influence on how these cultural stereotypes were adapted and deployed. Whereas Hippocrates, Aristotle, Herodotus and Pliny—the most significant of the ancient writers on the subject—had characterized Northerners as fierce and courageous in odious comparison to the Mediterraneans' "natural" capacity for political life, English writers inverted the equation, transforming Northern valor into Northern sincerity and Meridional policy into Italianate subtlety and craft—a capacity for inwardness devolved into an aptitude for deception. As the translator of A Discovery of the Great Subtiltie and Wonderfull Wisdom of the Italians (1591) frames it: Italy "goeth far beyond all nations bordering Northward, in invention, craft and worldly policy, witness Aristotle, Strabo, Caesar, Pliny, & other approved Authors." He continues, "That which produceth such
effects in Italy, is the moderate temperature of the climate, situate in subtle air near unto
the sea everywhere, without any excess heat or cold.”

Climatic determinism sustained dietary theory. Forrest’s, Elyot’s and Langton’s
beliefs in the English need for dense, nourishing fare rested upon the principle that subtle
foods could sustain only subtle peoples. Throughout the relevant literature, honest, sturdy
Englishmen are constructed in opposition to wily, decadent and idle foreigners who seek
to corrupt this “plain” goodness through diet—the very dynamic at the center of Ascham’s
diatribe against Italian assaults on “plain” Englishness. William Harrison decries the
contemporary trade in foodstuffs, indentifying it as a root cause of “this idleness of ours"
and an untoward desire among English subjects for unwholesome foreign trifles.

Thomas Nashe plays satirically along these very lines in his Pierce Penniless, where his
narrator jibes at the “bursten-bellied” English, who “make our greedy paunches powdering
tubs of beef, and eat more meat at one meal than the Spaniard or Italian in a month.”
Mediterraneans, he claims, are “good thrifty men” who “draw out a dinner with sallets,
like a Swart-rutter’s suit, and make Madonna Nature their best caterer.” What is
particularly apt is that Nashe’s satire opposes the “Plain Dame” Nature of the English
against the Nature of the Spanish and Italians, who make her a “Lady.” The identification
of plainness with “such flesh-eating Saracens that chaste fish may not content us” is
entirely consistent with these climatic theories. Nashe finishes the satire by revealing the
Lenten subtext of his jest: the English are “malissimi piscatores, but bonissimi
carnifices.”

125
Across genres and occasions, these early-modern orthodoxies of climate and diet sustained a broader conception of cultural difference that directly influenced the anti-Italianate, anti-court rhetoric of Webster's *The White Devil*, and indeed of a whole tradition of Italianate drama in which Webster is significant but not alone. As Albert Tricomi points out, by the end of the century “exemplary depictions” of the Italian courtly ideal had given way to ever-varied dramatic depictions of “obsequiousness, ambition, insincerity, apishness, effeminate dress, and general uselessness.” English writers of a moralistic or reforming spirit rebelled against the darker side of Castiglionean grace and subtlety—the very *Italian-ness* of the ideal that made the courtier seem to them a superficial timeserver and subtle hypocrite.

Writers such as Nashe consistently invoked such conventions, as in the lament of the English Earl of *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594):

> “Alas, our Englishmen are the plainest-dealing souls that ever God put life in....Even as Philemon, a comic poet, died with extreme laughter at the conceit of seeing an ass eat figs, so have the Italians no such sport as to see poor English asses, how soberly they swallow Spanish figs, devour any hook baited for them.”

Many other English writers of satire and social commentary expressed the same deep reservations not only about the moral implications of service, but specifically about the premium the Castiglionean ideal placed on grace and deftness in conversation. They worried deeply about the English zeal for cultivating grace and cleverness—the very
qualities that ancient climate theory had traditionally denied them, but also those Ascham
valorized in his defense of English hard-wittedness, honesty and sincerity.

In the tradition of Ascham, Fynes Moryson notes that the Italians have “by nature
and virtue of the Clime under which they are born, sharp and deep-reaching or searching
wits” superior to the less refined, “goutish” peoples of “the nations beyond the Alps.” He
marvels that despite the Italians’ natural superiority in matters of wit and art, they have
“lost the glory of learning, wherein other Northernly and Western nations generally
overtop them to this day.” Throughout Moryson’s observations run laments that the
Italians have grown weak, effeminate, hypocritical and factious—that their natural
advantages of wit, political organization and art have been corrupted and their traditional
strengths reduced to sham appearances.59

The image of an “Italian Sallet”—poisoning in its precise meaning, but also a
constellation of hypocritical or devious forms of behavior—thus participates in a highly
nationalized “sincerity claim” on the part not only of John Webster, but at least three
generations of early modern English writers expressing themselves in dramatic, dietary,
sociological and polemical discourse.60 The facts that vegetable production and
consumption among the English was rising, and that lettuce and herb production was
actually a Dutch and Flemish import61 seem not to have mattered very much for literary
representation in the period: one does not encounter “Dutch sallets” as a euphemism for
subtlety, perfidy or hypocrisy. Instead, it was the imaginary space called “Italy” that
proved both alluring and sufficiently malleable to early modern writers as a negative
example of political factionalism, sham appearance, sexual intrigue, the worst excesses of
a corrupted courtly ideal, and the even more heinous moral flaw: a corrupted and hypocritical inwardness.

One is what one eats. In Webster's play, as in his cultural milieu, vegetables and fruits stand metonymically for English skepticism toward a range of moral and social vices figured as "Italian" imports. The image of poison conveyed in fruits and vegetables operates not only as a spectacular representation of Otherness, but also as a claim for an essential English sincerity, as dictated by co-dependent climate and humoral theories, and—quite consistently—by dietary theory. That claim speaks to a moral hierarchy of imagined national characteristics, and it exists in numerous and generically unrelated prose writings, most of them anything but imaginative, alongside the more lurid dramatic representations of Spanish figs and Italian sallets.
NOTES


5 For general anthropological discussions, see Claude Lévi-Strauss, Le Cru et le Cuit (Paris: Plon, 1964), especially 9-40; Frederick J. Simoons, Eat Not This Flesh: Food Avoidances from Prehistory to the Present, rev. ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 3-11, 297-325; Jack Goody, Cooking, Cuisine and

6 Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Culinary Triangle” trans. Peter Brooks Partisan Review 33 (1966), 587, 595. This essay is reprinted in a slightly expanded form in his The Origin of Table of Manners, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 471-95. See also Goody, 17-24 and 29-33 for a concise critique of the structuralist bias of Lévi-Strauss and a synopsis of the “cultural approaches” favored by revisionists such as Mary Douglas.

7 One of Lévi-Strauss’s most original contributions to the field of ethno-culinary theory is his notion of “raw” and “cooked” as indicators of a society’s ideas toward its place in a “nature”—“culture” continuum. As I argue below, English culinary doctrine of the early modern period runs counter to his general observation that raw food is associated with nature and cooked with culture, for English writers invariably admit that Italian culture exceeded English in matters of social refinement (culture in Lévi-Strauss’s sense).

this generation occurs in John Norden's *Vicissitudo Rerum* (1600), verses 109-157.


10 *Cymbeline* 3.4.15. On the exaggeration of poisoning for dramatic production, see Bowers, *passim*; Tempera, 229-32; and Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance* (London: Phaidon Press, 1944), 276-79.

11 The only mention I find is a very brief allusion on 59v: see William Thomas, *The Historie of Italie* (1549). At about the same time, Andrew Borde does give an example of ingenuously poisoned stirrups in Italy, but even George B. Parks was unable to find others from the period. See his "The First Italiane Englishmen," *Studies in the Renaissance* 8 (1961): 210-11.


16 Charles Hughes, ed., *Shakespeare's Europe: Unpublished Chapters of Fynes Moryson's Itinerary* (London: Sherratt & Hughes, 1903), 405-07; see also 102.


18 William Thomas, *The History of Italy*, ed. George B. Parks, Folger Documents of Tudor and Stuart Civilization (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press for The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1963), 9-10. I have used Parks's modern-spelling edition except where I have referred to sections of the original which his abridgement omits.

19 William Thomas, *The Pilgrim: a Dialogue on the Life and Actions of King Henry the Eighth*, ed. J.A. Froude (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1961), 5-6. The proverb is not in any dictionary on the subject, but there is ample evidence in Shakespeare's works alone that Thomas is correct in identifying it as such. See, for example, *The Taming of the Shrew* 4.3.17-30 and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.1.179.


21 William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. Georges Edelen, Folger Documents of Tudor and Stuart Civilization (Ithaca: Cornell University Press for The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1968), 126. The French dietary invasion feared by Harrison is perhaps also anti-Italian by one remove, since the court of Catherine de Medici was notorious as a center for expatriate Italians and after 1572 considered hostile to Protestantism.

22 Harrison, 129-32.

23 Harrison, 141-44.


25 See also the lengthy list in Thomas Cogan, *The Haven of Health* (1584), 32ff.

26 There is some difficulty in rigidly distinguishing diet from medicine in the period, particularly in the pre-chemical period when general regimens of health and preparations of "simples" served both preventative and curative functions. On the
matter of diet-as-medicine, see Nancy G. Siraisi, Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: an Introduction to Knowledge and Practice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 120-21. Likewise, it is impossible to establish exactly what people at all levels of society actually ate, though the numerous cookery books and health guides do give a picture of some readily available foodstuffs and their preparations.


30 Cited in O’Hara-May, 223.


33 Cited in O’Hara-May, 225.

34 Langton, G8, Hv, Iv, I7.


36 Elyot, G3v-G4.


39 O'Hara-May, 253; Drummond and Wilbraham, 42-43.

40 La Singolare Dottrina di M. Domenico...Con la dichiaratione della qualità delle carne di tutti gli animali, & pesci, & di tutte le viande circa la sanità (Venice, 1570).


49 BL Add. MSS 9282. In English the title would be A Relation of All the Root Vegetables, Vegetables and Fruits which, Raw or Cooked, Are Eaten in Italy.

50 20-21v (my translation); see also 1-1v.

century American context, Berlant offers a valuable general insight into the "tangled cluster" of traditions and multiple meanings that attach to local, personal and collective forms of consciousness, which in turn become national symbols—as, in this case, with British beef. See Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 4-5.


53 *A Discovery of the Great Subtiltie and Wonderfull Wisdome of the Italians* (1591), B1.

54 For arguments supporting this assertion, see Z.S. Fink, "Milton and the Theory of Climatic Influence," *Modern Language Quarterly* 2, 1941: 73-74; Zacharasiewicz, chapter 2.

55 Harrison, 263-64; 269. See also John Tavener, *Certaine Experiments Concerning Fish and Fruite* (1600), 1; 29-30 and "To the Reader" (A4).


58 Nashe, 342-43.

59 Hughes, 418-19. It is worth noting that in the Prologue to the *Jew of Malta*, the Machiavel is said to have flown north across the Alps, an example of the Castiglione-Machiavelli conflation of many dramas of the period. The Alps functioned for early modern Europeans as the *terra vaga* did for the ancients—as a firm line of cultural demarcation between civilized and barbarian, citramontaine and ultramontaine.


61 Margaret Visser, *Much Depends on Dinner: The Extraordinary History and Mythology, Allure and Obsessions, Perils and Taboos, of an Ordinary Meal* (New York: Grove Press, 1987), 204 and chapter six "Lettuce: The Vicissitudes of Salad," *passim*. The best discussion of historical developments in fruit and
CHAPTER 4

"DRUG-DAMN'D ITALY" AND THE PROBLEM OF BRITISH NATIONAL CHARACTER IN CYMBELINE

Under the scrutiny of several later scholars, G. Wilson Knight's highly influential reading of Cymbeline in The Crown of Life (1947) is beginning to show fault lines. Writing in a postwar context whose implications for interpretation cannot be underestimated, Knight departed from the critical traditions of his predecessors by positing that Cymbeline is primarily concerned not with moral regeneration or romance forms and conventions, but rather with explicitly national themes figured in the conflict between Roman imperial forces and Cymbeline's ancient British court. He concluded that the play ultimately portrays the moment at which the "heritage of ancient Rome falls on Britain," in a climactic union of cultural energies whose ideological purpose was to legitimize Jacobean England as the successor to the Roman empire, and celebrate the king, a self-styled rex pacificus, as the heir to the spirit of Caesar Augustus.

Though other recent studies have also questioned Knight's reading of British national destiny, those of Leah Marcus, Jodi Mikalachi and Coppélia Kahn in particular have demonstrated significant shortcomings in his optimistic conclusions concerning the
union of cultural forces that the play seems to represent. Marcus contends that *Cymbeline's* Jacobean topicality stands at odds with its larger "theatrical momentum" and concludes that, though the play offers itself to "local reading," such a reading creates a "labyrinth in which political meanings are simultaneously generated and stalemated."

With a similar emphasis on patterns of discontinuity, Mikalachki argues persuasively for a less-than-stable political interpretation that emerges from reading the play's competing, gender-specific "radical" and "respectable" nationalisms. Like Marcus and several others, she is attentive to the play's topicality, its immediate relevance both to James's quest for a political union of England and Scotland, and to a larger problem of fashioning a national myth for the "British" people. Finally, Kahn's reading points out the ambivalent quality of Roman *virtus* in relation to both feminine influence and British cultural integrity.

What all these analyses lack, however, is sustained attention to a third element in this presumed (or problematic) union of cultures. The Italian wager plot involving Posthumus, Iachimo and Imogen has hitherto been seen as little more than a distraction within of what Knight called (and others seem to agree is) a "purely national play" involving only ancient Romans and Britons. Indeed, if at present there is any critical consensus concerning these issues of national heritage and character, it accounts only for Britain's reconciliation with the vanquished ancient Romans, a reading that does little to account for the play's other significant plot strand and ignores *Cymbeline's* most radical *mélanges* of forms, conventions and source material. Iachimo is no ancient Roman, but rather a scheming Tudor-Stuart stage Italian; likewise, the nominally Roman house to which Posthumus resorts upon fleeing Britain, and where he wagers for Imogen's virtue,
is decidedly not in the city of the ancient empire, but some version of a Renaissance Italian bourgeois household or petty court, inhabited not by senators and centurions, but by merchants and Machiavels. The military defeat of the Romans in Act 5 also involves the downfall of Iachimo, who appears—as he does throughout—principally as a modern Italian villain who is undone, and not a vanquished ancient Roman conqueror.

The uneasy conjunction of the Italian and Roman plots cannot be adequately explained away, as some have tried to do, as merely a consequence of Shakespeare's characteristically imprecise geography and chronology, as proof of the play's artistic inferiority, an effect of romance conventions, or simply as an issue to be ignored altogether. Though neither mythic, historical, British or ancient—the terms used to frame current discussion of the play—the wager plot in which Iachimo and an imagined modern Italy figure so obviously was integral to Cymbeline's representation of the British nation's cultural quintessence and to King James I's ideal of a united British state. Indeed, everything about the "Italian" story's place in the play signals a problem that requires extended analysis.

*  

Shakespeare's juxtapositions of chronologies, histories and societies are not ideologically neutral within the larger historio-mythic scope of Cymbeline. Rather, they operate within an historical milieu bound by the cultural issues discussed in the preceding two chapters. As we shall see, Iachimo and his "Italian brain" owe a considerable debt to the cultural anxieties Ascham articulated in The Scholemaster, and his super-subtle
character corresponds quite naturally to the broad climatic and national stereotypes analyzed in Chapter 3. Almost inexplicably, recent criticism has ignored these framing assumptions in favor of readings that in one way or another exclude questions of modern Italian national characteristics in relation to British character—issues which in fact prove to be the mainsprings of the Roman-British plot and central to the play’s celebration of British identity.

The ancient and contemporary “Italies” function in the romance world of Cymbeline not as a continuous or unitary civilization but as two distinct and opposing cultures against which the emergent British one is measured—in two distinct ways. Ancient Rome operates in the play iconically and proleptically as a sanction for an idealized British union on the Roman imperial model of Caesar Augustus. The transfer of its “spirit” culturally legitimates an indigenous British goodness, a savage but noble aboriginal predisposition to directness that is particularly represented in Belarius, Aviragus and Guiderius. The Welsh port of Milford Haven where the exiles reside, both the historical landing-point of Henry VII’s campaign to retake England and the mythical point of origin for the Tudor dynasty on which, in part, James claimed his own legitimacy, invokes the ancient, hoary Augustan symbology of amity, peace and imperial union which James cultivated for himself from the beginning of his reign. The play’s vision of a Welsh (or British)-Roman opposition, however, also depends upon a contemporary, anti-Italian dimension that imbues the play and complicates easy binaries of cultural definition.

By contrast, everything about Philario’s house indicates contemporaneity, not antiquity. Four European merchants, drawn in the medieval and early modern tradition of
epitomes that define national types, debate the question of women's virtue. It is a living tableau of essential national characteristics, but because two of the four cultural agents are silent, the dynamic specifically concerns Northern European earnestness in the face of Southern subtlety, as Iachimo goads Posthumus into the wager and a particularly Italianate Frenchman reports on the hot-headed Briton's earlier misadventures as a traveler. At least initially, Posthumus resists the specious, ingenious arguments of the Italian, defying him in the highly charged nationalized terms that frame the whole scene: "Your Italy contains none so accomplished a courtier to convince the honour of my mistress, if in the holding or loss of that, you term her frail" (1.5.91-93). With its emphasis on bourgeois trans-European commercial life and distinctive national cultures, the Iachimo-Posthumus-Imogen strand of the story is unambiguously modern in both detail and spirit—an admittedly peculiar analogue to Holinshed's historical accounts of early Britain, upon which Shakespeare drew in an especially haphazard manner (even for Shakespeare). Though it is perhaps tempting to assume that the wager plot, drawn from Boccaccio's *Decameron* and the anonymous prose tale *Frederycke of Jennen* (1516; rpt. 1560), was intended to be subordinate to the Roman plot inspired by several disparate passages in Holinshed, there is considerable evidence that primacy for either plot line is not so easily established.

Iachimo, the wager subplot and Philario's modern Italian household are not merely appended to a story that could function without them. Instead, they point to a civility gone wrong, a world of courtly idleness, intrigue and calculated rhetoric that other elements in the play condemn as unwanted excesses of a civilizing process which,
according to one historiographical tradition in early modern England, the Roman conquerors initiated. This version of Italy as a land of courtesy, false shows and rhetorical skill runs counter to James’s many professions of sincerity and plainness in political life, a point of no small relevance in a play so overtly engaged with the politics of James’s legitimacy as a British ruler. But it also constitutes a leitmotiv within a broader discourse of national self-definition to which James appealed as an alien king on the English throne. The modern Italy of Iachimo contributes to the story a negative moral exemplar that was both thoroughly conventional as a trope in conduct literature and in the historiography of ancient Britain, but also topically relevant in the politically volatile middle years of James I’s reign, when among other problems, the king faced widespread resistance to the ideal of union which he so vigorously advocated from the beginning of his reign.

A tension between representational strategies and historiographical traditions forces us to reconsider the thematic and ideological purposes of Iachimo and his Italy: the Rome-Britain binary which has often been used to explain the play’s central dynamic simply will not adequately account for the central importance of “Italy,” thus understood, in Cymbeline’s topical politics or in its examination of Britain’s mythic origins. Instead, both the mythic British past and the enduring British national character celebrated in the play emerge from comparison with ancient Rome on the one hand, and contemporary Italy on the other. The mythical British court of Cymbeline must encounter, conquer and assimilate both: the truculent Romans and the subtle Italians. Thus, we are confronted with a triangular dramatic and ideological relationship among the ancient Roman empire,
modern Italy, and ancient Britain, with direct consequences both for the play’s historical moment in James’s campaign for union, and for its broader engagement with a mythic British political legacy upon which union could be claimed.

Contrary to what has been assumed about the play’s structure, there is in fact no mixing or overlapping of imperial and Renaissance “Italies,” a claim implicit in the rather offhand suggestion that *Cymbeline* is an “undigested gallimaufry of English, Welsh, French, Ancient Roman, Renaissance Italian.”12 Structurally, the ancient Roman and contemporary Italian worlds occupy apposite but distinct dramatic dimensions of the play, and they are ideologically and thematically volatile in their rare moments of proximity or combination. The ancient Roman story is a structural constant; it is the locus of the play’s most obvious nationalist confrontation and it provides the motive for its celebratory climax, but it is a constant only as a framing narrative, an historical *pre-text*. Ancient Rome is the actual setting for only one short scene (3.8), which employs almost none of the precise local or historical detail of Shakespeare’s earlier Plutarchan plays. The modern Italian setting is the basis of only the Iachimo-Posthumus-Imogen wager plot and combines with the British-Roman story only briefly in 2.4, during the Roman invasion at Milford Haven (5.2) and again in the multiple recognitions of the final scene. With these few exceptions, Shakespeare keeps the worlds ideologically distinct, allowing them to merge only for the thematically significant purposes of waging battle and making peace.

Formally, too, the passage of time—so often modal and ideological signals in the late plays—differs considerably from one plot to the other: none of the legendary, long-time qualities of the Roman plot mark Iachimo’s story. He is constantly rushing, whether
to seal his bargain with Posthumus, seduce Imogen or depart her chamber. By contrast, the Roman plot proceeds within a far broader notion of time's passage, in time out of mind and in events only dimly understood and chaotically reported in the Tudor chronicles. Troop movements, diplomatic envoys, battles, but also the flight of Imogen and the death of the Queen—among other events—are reported or staged as legendary events whose relation to precise stage time matters little.13

Where there is chronological imprecision in the Roman plot, there is cultural imprecision in the Italian one. Certain facts of the wager scene (1.5) indicate quite obviously that Philario's house is located in Rome in name only. Neither a creditable contemporary Rome, in which Shakespeare would have had to acknowledge the influence of the Papacy or at least the institutional framework of the church, nor an ancient Rome, we instead encounter a composite picture of secular Italian petty duchies: a Genoan-Urbine-Florentine-Sienan-Venetian fantasy space defined only by its inhabitants' success in military and commercial ventures, and of course by Iachimo's deceitful wickedness.14 In part this cultural composite is the residue of Shakespeare's sources in Boccaccio and Frederycke of Jennen, but it is also a significant departure from both in that Shakespeare stresses national differences more significantly than does the author of Frederycke. Since Boccaccio's characters are all Italians, his moral purpose emerges as more abstractly philosophical and detached from issues of national character.

In fashioning this "Rome," Shakespeare draws upon a well-developed English discursive tradition of representing Italy as the source, and the Italians as the exemplars, of Europe's most egregious vices—but also as the models of civility, political and scientific
advancement, and humanistic progress. These tropes exist beyond James and his immediate concerns with union. They articulate a fundamental ambivalence in the way English readers and theater-goers received the larger influences of Italian fashions, social exemplars and political models in the cultural milieu of early Stuart England. In fields from bookbinding to military theory, sartorial modes to portraiture, language arts to fencing technique, Italian authors and creative artists provided an extensive and influential range of patterns and examples. Shakespeare, of course, had access to works that could have supplied precise local details with which to shade his picture of Renaissance Rome in the ways that he drew Venice in Othello and The Merchant of Venice or Verona in Romeo and Juliet. In Cymbeline, however, he abandons all pretense to historical accuracy, and instead loads the scene at Philario's house with the well-worn stock images of Italianate corruption and Machiavellian deception popularized in three decades of anti-Italian diatribes in prose, verse and dramatic texts: luxury, idleness, atheism, toleration of whoredom and sodomy, Catholic hypocrisy and hunger for Protestant souls, Machiavellian "policy," political instability, and a host of other personal and civic ills English writers consistently visited upon an Italian Other. Philario's house is one of the least specific and most over-determined Italian scenes in Shakespeare's oeuvre, even accounting for the playwright's generally non-specific representations of Italy. The wager scene amounts to an examination of national essences, as the upright but naive fortitude of Posthumus faces off against the cynicism and guile of the Frenchman and Iachimo. The entire scene serves a different end from that of either Holinshed's or Boccaccio's stories: here, that
purpose is identifying and exploring the psychology of national types in a way that complements the nationalist concerns of the Roman plot.¹⁷

Those representations function very pointedly in staging a modern Italian model of political and social life, distinct from the ancient Roman model in both historical fact and dramatic purpose. Though the play's early performance history remains partially obscure, *Cymbeline* clearly contains enough striking parallels to James I's project of fashioning an Augustan legitimacy for his own reign that a topical reading seems necessary at some level.¹⁸ Indeed, the play's Augustan iconography of resolved conflict, figured especially in the final scene and Cymbeline's promise of "such a peace" that transcends differences of region, nation and social psychology, appeals to James's public image as a maker of amity and accord:

Laud we the gods,

And let our crooked smokes climb to their nostrils

From our blest altars. Publish we this peace

To all our subjects. Set we forward: let

A Roman, and a British ensign wave

Friendly together: so through Lud's Town march,

And in the temple of great Jupiter

Our peace we'll ratify....

(5.5.478-84)
While the official iconography of the king’s political self-styling was indisputably Roman and classical, the king was far from indifferent to contemporary Italian political theories, especially those associated with Florence and Venice, and in particular those that might serve as practical models for conducting the mundane business of state. James showed an early fascination with Venetian republicanism, and early in his reign in England he bestowed particular attention on Venetian emissaries who represented, it appears, a model of civil and material advancement the king enviously sought for his own court. His attraction to the Venetian ideal did not wane. Some years later, in 1606, the Venetian ambassador to the Doge and Senate, Zorzi Guistinian, reported that James declared to him, “God knows how I love and esteem the Republic, and how ready I shall be to prove it, for my feelings are based on an old predilection of mine for that form of government.”¹⁹

While James was no republican per se, numerous accounts of his foreign relations and political thinking nonetheless confirm that he was speaking out of more than only diplomatic convention suited to such occasions. Despite the king’s public declarations of absolutism, he was actively interested in theorizing the relationship between monarchical and republican extremes. Venice and Florence provided the most conspicuous early modern models for the republican part of this complex and changing equation in the early seventeenth century, a theoretical tradition of enormous importance in England throughout the early modern period, but especially in the three decades preceding Cymbeline’s composition. In this sense, James’s role is culturally less important (though by no means insignificant) to the play’s picture of Italian political and moral history as it
was figured in the pages of Guiccardini, Contarini and Botero—all of whom were translated or reprinted in the decade before and the decade after James’s accession.  

This period immediately prior to *Cymbeline* witnessed nothing less than an explosion of interest in Italian political theory, and those ideological pressures register overtly in the play’s picture of an originary myth to legitimate the “British” people James sought to unite politically and culturally. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to claim that political theory in the reign of James was inherently, necessarily Italian. Part of Iachimo’s role as modern pan-Italian “Roman,” then, is to represent the dangers inherent in “Italian” ideological imports. As an overt threat to the union of Posthumus and Imogen, he is a political threat in a narrow sense: the estrangement he seeks to cause between the couple would have significant consequences for the dynastic and moral character of any future British realm. But as an Italian influence among members of the British court, whether present or exiled, he exemplifies moral tendencies, cloaked in considerably rhetorical powers, that the play elsewhere repeatedly condemns and excludes as anti-British. This patterns begins with his coercive treatment of Posthumus in Philario’s house, where he claims that he can seduce Imogen with only “five times as much conversation” as he has in a few moments with Posthumus (1.5.100). His speeches continue in this manner, with his skill in “conference” appearing to Posthumus as a “custom in [his] tongue” that threatens the Briton’s trust in Imogen’s chastity. A similar dynamic marks Iachimo’s interview with Imogen, who in her innocence and trust fears at first that Iachimo is physically unwell, when he is merely delivering his seduction in rhetorical complexities that escape her forthright sensibilities. She urges him to be plain, to “discover” more directly his
meanings, before she realizes his true purpose and declares in national, not moral terms: “My lord, I fear, / Has forgot Britain” (1.7.112-13). King Cymbeline also wearies of the Italian’s rhetorical flights and urges Iachimo to “come to the matter” and “to th’ purpose” (5.5.168 and 178). Indeed, everyone with whom Iachimo has a significant exchange is exposed to a consummate rhetorical prowess that conceals his true intents.

In his public and private declarations, James I had little patience for the sort of verbal dexterity Iachimo exhibits. The king’s discursive mode was the plain style; in the first decade of his reign he repeatedly appealed to an ideal of royal transparency, a plainness in expression that, he claims, reveals a plainness of purpose—a fundamental sincerity, both political and moral, whose opposite Iachimo so ably enacts in his dealings with Britons of both genders. Particularly in arguing for uniting the kingdoms, James figured himself as (in effect) Iachimo’s opposite: a morally transparent ruler whose thoughts and intentions were open for general scrutiny. In his first speech to his parliament in March 1603, he asserts that “it becommeth a King, in my opinion, to use no other Eloquence than plainnesse and sinceritie” and that “as farre as a King is in Honour erected above any of his Subjects, so farre should he strive in sinceritie to be above them all, and that his tongue should be ever the trew Messenger of his heart: and this sort of Eloquence may you ever assuredly looke for at my hands.” Scarcely more than a year later, he wrote to the Commons, again with the object of union in mind: “Ye se with what clearness and sincerity I have behaved myself in this errand through all the process thereof.” The following year he again addressed the members of parliament, claiming, “for my part I would wish with those ancient Philosophers, that there were a Christall
window in my brest, wherein all my people might see the secretest thoughts of my heart,” and two years later spoke of his mission “to deliver unto you matter without curious form, substance without ceremonie, trewth in all sinceritie.” These images of crystalline transparency and unadorned sincerity occur throughout James’s speeches to parliament. Not only does he reuse nearly identical imagery to describe his aversion to obfuscation and deceit, but even in his personal correspondence on the subject of union, he appeals to the same cluster of images to describe his sincerity and to distinguish himself from a tyrant who uses “fair words till he had gotten his turn done.” James’s public declarations on the subject of the union overwhelmingly indicate that he counted on transparency, sincerity and openness—and not the Italianate guile, easy words and psychological manipulation Iachimo uses so well.

Thus not only does Cymbeline enact a specific Jacobean fantasy of imperial union based upon an Augustan ideal, it also bolsters that model by rejecting the contemporary Italian example suggested by Iachimo’s calculating amorality in personal and political life: his deceitfulness, his linguistic obscurity, his desire to sow faction and discord in Britain. He is both the morally reprehensible Italian Other of the tradition set forth by Roger Ascham and including Marston and Webster, and a specific political threat to English (or British) political “transparency” and stability. In the end, Iachimo is no sexual threat to Imogen (or the nation) without his “Italian” subtlety in discourse and behavior. Iachimo’s manipulation of the play’s paragons of Britishness constitutes a Tacitean admonition to beware the influence of clever politicos on the stability of the body politic, a social anxiety figured in the Italian’s threat first to credulous Posthumus and then to the partially naked
body of Imogen, who because of her historical position as the founding mother of Britain represents the nation itself—her chastity not "merely her own," but "a national treasure."^27

Even while the play's larger aim of fashioning a national story based on the continuity of topical politics and legend is served, James and his court are served and admonished. The play's representation of Milford Haven appears alongside a broad and necessarily non-specific attack on the false honors, empty titles and court intrigue of Cymbeline's inner court—characteristics that made James's reign so notorious among some of his contemporaries. Indeed, Iachimo's scheming dishonesty would have registered in ca. 1609-10 as an unflattering image of James's inner court, where dishonesty and falseness were imagined by outsiders and critics to be endemic and where (as with Iachimo) money would buy anything.^28

*  
The mantle of ancient legitimacy that the play seeks (at least in part) to represent was not a preoccupation of James's court alone, but a dominant and pervasive concern of early modern English writers of different ideological persuasions, writing in forms as distinct as epic poetry, legal discourse, antiquarian research, and chorography.^29 Like many other literary endeavors of the age, Cymbeline dramatizes an originary moment—in this case, a simultaneously English and British one—that celebrates the fundamental plainness and the natural liberties so often represented in chronicle accounts of the ancient Britains. Two ideological traditions have direct bearing on Shakespeare's attempt to dramatize essential difference across the triangle of British-Roman-Italian. First, early
modern historiographical interpretations of the Roman invasion and occupation of Britain provide a valuable index to the dramatic strategies at work in *Cymbeline*. Second, and not unrelated to the first, the theory of “climatic determinism,” the belief that qualities of topography, air and placement within climatic “zones” determined national characteristics, offers an important hermeneutic frame for reading the play’s concerns with a national story.

The ideologically charged images of contemporary “Italy” figured in Iachimo accommodate and re-deploy the negative qualities of the ancient Roman conquerors as they were represented by the historians and antiquarians. *Cymbeline* largely suppresses the deprecatory when representing the ancient Romans—a response, it would seem, to James’s Augustan public image and because of broader ideological acceptance of the Romans as the bringers of British unity and civility. In the milieu of *Cymbeline*’s composition and first performances, anti-Roman sentiments made less sense, culturally, than the anti-Italian one Iachimo and the wager plot represent. Though the play sharply minimizes the negative consequences of the Roman invasion and Britain’s position as a vassal state under the Empire, such an unambiguously nationalist historiography is not to be found in all early modern accounts of ancient Britain under the occupation. Quite the contrary: Geoffrey of Monmouth, Polydore Vergil, Holinshed and Camden, the principal line of historiographers recording and interpreting Roman Britain for Shakespeare’s age, expressed considerably more ambivalence and disagreement.

Geoffrey stresses the difficulty of Caesar’s campaign, marveling at the Britons’ noble resistance to Romans. He reflects on the difference between uniting Britons and
Romans, whose "common inheritance of noble blood comes from Aeneas," and attempting to enslave them. Citing a letter of the British king Cassivelaunus to Caesar himself, Geoffrey writes of the Romans' greed and aggression:

The cupidity of the Roman people, my dear Caesar, is really quite beyond belief. They have an insatiable thirst for anything made of gold or silver, to the point that they cannot leave us alone, although we live over the edge of the world and far beyond the perilous seas.... It is friendship which you should have asked of us, not slavery. For our part we are more used to making allies than to enduring the yoke of bondage. We have become so accustomed to the concept of liberty that we are completely ignorant of what is meant by submitting to slavery. If the gods themselves try to take our freedom from us, we shall still do our utmost to resist them with all our strength and effort to preserve that freedom. If you start attacking the island of Britain, as you have threatened, you must clearly understand, Caesar, that we shall fight for our liberty and for our kingdom.  

Polydore Vergil, as perhaps might be expected, differs from Geoffrey in his fundamental attitudes toward the Roman aggressors—though the story is largely the same in its broad strokes. He echoes many of Geoffrey’s paens to British bravery and noble resistance, but indulges in a teleology of colonization that Geoffrey does not, referring to the "comminge of the Romaines into the Ilonde, whoe, as conquerors are accustomed, made exchange of all things, to the bettering of somm things, seeing that the Britons
weare made more civill through them.” The Romans, according to Polydore Vergil “browghte lawes of obeysaunce into the Ile, not so muche mined to vanquishe this weake people (as other nations)” as to bring their subjects into the realm of civility.31

For all his other debts to Polydore Vergil, Holinshed resists his predecessor’s teleology of civilization. In Holinshed the Britons are unified and brave in their resistance, but because of Roman “policie or inequalitie of power they were vanquished.” He continually exposes fissures in the historiography of the Roman period, usually to endorse a nationalist or nativist interpretation of events only dimly understood by Roman and native writers. He warns against “the contrarietie in writers,” generally urging skepticism toward Roman accounts:

Thus according to that which Cesar and other authentike authors have written, was Britaine made tributarie to the Romans by the conduct of the same Cesar. But our histores farre differ from this, affirming that Cesar comming the second time, was by the Britains with valiancie and martiall prowess beaten and repelled, as he was at the first.... And after his comming a land, he was vanquished in battell, and constrained to flee into Gallia with thos ships that remained.

Holinshed does all that he can to stress the brevity and incompleteness of the Roman victory. In assessing the campaigns of Julius Caesar, he concludes that the mighty warrior’s feat was “rather to have shewed Britaine to the Romans, than to have delivered the possession of the same.” He stresses the strength of the British defiance that finally
collapsed only when the traitorous Androgeus allied with the Romans, and he emphasizes the continuity of Brut's direct line, arguing against the "unadvised rashness" of Latin historians such as Tacitus who described dissension and faction as endemic among the pre-Roman and Roman Britons.\textsuperscript{32}

William Camden, the historiographer closest to Shakespeare's own time and the most ideologically consonant with \textit{Cymbeline}, tells a very different sort of story. With Camden we have many of the conventional touchstones of the Roman occupation story in Geoffrey and Holinshed, but with a different interpretation even from Polydore Vergil. Camden characterizes an age "when fortitude and fortune were so agreed, or Gods appointment rather had thus decreed, that Rome should subdue all the earth," sending Julius Caesar to conquer Gaul and then Britain. Instead of united resistance to foreign domination, however, he describes a collection of tribes riven by internecine conflicts, unable to raise a resistance:

\begin{quote}
 Afterwards, the inward parts of Britaine, wasted rather with \textit{Civil} wars and factions, than by the force of the Romans, after sundrie overthrows and slaughters of both sides, came at the length by little and little under the subjection of the Romans. For, while the States fought severally one by one, they were all vanquished: running so one upon anothers destruction, that untill they fell to utter confusion, they had not in grosse, a feeling of the particular losses that each one sustained. And thus farre forth also wrought ambition in them, that many became false and disloyall, yea, and some fled from their countrey-men, making choise of the Romanes
\end{quote}
protection, swearing allegiance unto them, and practicing by all means to subject their native countrey, unto their government.\textsuperscript{33}

Camden’s emphasis is on an external force that imposes unity and peace. A number of the classical authors he cites in his general description of Roman Britain contribute to a teleology in which Romans bring law and civility to Britain, an historiographical tradition essentially absent from the nativist accounts of Geoffrey and Holinshed, but one that gained currency after him. Camden is divided in his allegiances, acknowledging that the Romans imposed a “yoke of subjection” upon those they conquered, but he also records that

This yoke of the Romanes although it were grevious, yet comfortable it proved and a saving health unto them: for that healthsome light of Jesus Christ shone withal upon the Britans, whereof more hereafter, and the brightnesse of that most glorious Empire, chased away all savage barbarisme from the Britans minds, like as from other nations whom it had subdued.”\textsuperscript{34}

Philomel Holland’s—or his editors’—marginal gloss to this section states simply, and in a juxtaposition revelatory of this ambivalence: “The beginning of Cities. The Romane yoke.” The text offers specific evidence of Roman civility bought at the price of cultural and political autonomy: road-building, marsh-clearing, a legal system, the Latin language, and the opportunity to learn “the liberall Arts” elsewhere in the Empire. Finally, the
narrative sounds an elegiac note for the empire’s decline and fall, but that lament combines with a more spirited one for its lasting effects in Britain:

a most wofull and pitious plight to see unto: to see the Empire drooping with extreame age, lay along maimed, dismembered, and it were, benummed in all the limmes and parts thereof....And meet it is we should beleeve, that the Britans and Romans in so many ages, by a blessed and joyfull mutual ingraffing, as it were, have grown into one stocke and nation. (86-88)

The historiographers of Roman Britain return to several key *topoi* in their narratives, but as we have seen, they are hardly represented in the same ways. The image of a yoke, historiographically resonant with the Norman one a millennium later, and the native defense of ancient liberties uneasily shares a space in this cultural narrative with celebrations of the mutual Trojan origins of Britain and Rome. In *Cymbeline*, this basic ambivalence registers differently: the Roman cultural pollution with which the historiographers contend in one way or another, whether Julius Caesar’s subtlety or the invaders’ general love of luxury, attaches instead to Iachimo and “drug-damn’d Italy.” They embody what is omitted from Shakespeare’s account of the Romans because though the general narrative of the occupation was known and (if this line of historiographers is sufficient evidence) the problem of influence from the Italian peninsula a legitimately contested one, James’s Augustan public persona made anti-Roman (and especially anti-Augustan) sentiments highly inopportune. The play is fundamentally concerned with
celebrating, not considering too critically, the Roman past, by dramatizing and neatly resolving the conflicts that bring about union. Those conflicts are contained within the reinvigorated British political order of Cymbeline’s rule, but Iachimo is constituted, in the beginning of the wager plot as at the play’s resolution, from the residue of the anti-Roman historiographical tradition.

This residue is distilled into a modern Italian—not Roman—antagonist, and it is here that Shakespeare complicates his picture of a British originary myth based upon simple liberation from Roman imperial hegemony. Throughout the play and in the words of several different characters, Iachimo is repeatedly identified neither as Roman nor an individual, but as a national type. Even before he is known to Imogen and the British court, he is imagined (anonymously) as a predatory, subtle Italian poised to prey upon Posthumus, a complete innocent in face of such consummate rhetorical and psychological skills. What is striking about Iachimo’s place in the play is that he is rarely allowed any of the individuality of the other characters: “false Italian,” “Italian fiend,” “slight thing of Italy,” or simply, starkly “the Italian.” He is indirectly characterized as a subtle and “accomplished courtier” of Renaissance Italy, the male equivalent of the country’s painted women and “Jays.” Everything about his characterization by others stereotypes him as the hollow, calculating, hypocritical monster of popular anti-Italian polemics. He is entirely over-determined even before he appears on-stage in 1.5. In only one significant place in the play is Iachimo identified principally as a Roman, rather than an Italian, and this in the context of the play’s final British-Roman reconciliation, when a general mood of amity points the way toward cultural union (5.5.112). But even this moment is fleeting and in
all other instances, though he sometimes identifies himself as Roman and certainly associates with Romans, Iachimo is called and understood to be an Italian. Simon Forman, who saw an early production of the play, also describes two roles. He recognized Iachimo as "the Italian" in his role as seducer, but as part of the invading force, he is called not Italian but as one of "the Romains." Forman's double-apprehension of Iachimo as, in effect, playing two roles (and representing two cultural threats) suggests that Shakespeare's contemporaries might have responded in precisely this way to Iachimo's problematic identity. 35

Whether Imogen and Posthumus consummated their marriage is a problem of basic importance to the play's representation of early modern marriage and relations between the sexes. But because the lovers signify beyond themselves, this question can be politicized to ask a larger one, too: does Iachimo's sexual prowess—whether voyeuristic or more than merely ocular, potential or actual—constitute a symbolic threat of cultural miscegenation to the ancient Britons? 36 Since the entire play treats the question of the purity or hybridity of British national character, the Italian's assault on Imogen's person also constitutes an assault on British-ness by its moral and political opposite—Italian-ness. Imogen, whose name derives from Innogen, the legendary wife of Brut, faces a challenge to Britain's cultural integrity: even the sham victory the "false Italian" claims in order to win his wager with the unsuspecting Posthumus signals an assault on British national character because of the symbolic value of the couple's intended (and eventual) union. Iachimo is thus a moral, sexual and cultural threat to Britain in his subtle, scheming penetration of Imogen's bedchamber: in one of his rare speeches suggesting
cultural continuity between his age and the ancient Roman era, Iachimo invokes “Our Tarquin” as he approaches the sleeping Imogen (2.2.12). Considered in relation to the whole of the play, however, his allusion suggests not so much a literal line of continuity as a conflated image of vicious modern and decadent ancient Rome that serves the larger purpose of characterizing Iachimo as a cultural predator who consistently draws the worst from the ancient world and mixes it with his own modern depravity.  

This rare moment of conflation between modern Italian and ancient Roman is particularly significant for understanding Iachimo’s threat because it seems to posit an essential Italian-ness that can, when dramatically necessary, be summoned for effect. The wager scene in Philario’s house, where this threat to Imogen’s personal and symbolic chastity originates, rests upon a broad ideological opposition between fundamental characteristics believed to reside in national types: the crafty Italian and the forthright Briton. Shakespeare’s juxtaposition of such cultural essences derives quite clearly from ancient theories of climatic determinism. According to this cluster of theories, broad national characteristics such as honesty, skill in battle, the capacity for political life or the predisposition to deceive derive from facts of longitude and latitude, the quality of air and topography, and even the dietary habits of a particular people. Examples from the historical, ethnographic and psychological literature of the period are plentiful. For example, William Harrison in the Description of Britain (1587) considers the “courage and strength of body” of the British in opposition to the “skillfulness or wisdom” of equinoctial peoples, who are naturally “less of stature, weaker of body, more nice, delicate, fearful by nature.” He avers that
if it be a virtue to deal uprightly, with singleness of mind, sincerely and
plainly, without any such suspicious fetches in all our dealings as they
commonly practice in their affairs, then are our countrymen to be
accounted wise and virtuous. But if it be a vice to color craftiness, subtle
practices, doubleness, and hollow behavior with a cloak of policy, amity,
and wisdom, then are Comines and his countrymen to be reputed vicious.

He closes with a remark as tantalizing as it is relevant to the analysis of Cymbeline: “How
these later points take hold in Italy I mean not to discuss.”

Harrison, does, however, take up the issue of Italian character in many other
places in the Description: “Italy, which in my time is called the paradise of the world,
although by reason of the wickedness of such as dwell therein it may be called the sink and
drain of hell.” He offers a conventional—and climate-based—excoriation of Italian
hypocrisy, saying that whereas the Italians “were wont to say of us that our land is good
but our people evil, they did only speak it, whereas we know by experience that the soil of
Italy is a noble soil but the dwellers therein far off from any virtue or goodness.” As if
speaking of Posthumus, whose travels through France and Italy derive more from early
modern educational travel polemics than from Roman history, Harrison avers that young
travelers to Italy “bring home nothing but mere atheism, infidelity, vicious conversation,
and ambitious and proud behavior, whereby it cometh to pass that they return far worse
men then they went out.”³⁸
Where Harrison argues for national distinctiveness in social terms, Thomas Wright's *The Passions of the Minde in Generall* (1604) employs the same orthodoxies in constructing a general theory of the mind. He opens his study by musing, "I have divers times weighed with my selfe, whencefrom it should proceed that Italians, and Spaniardes, with other inhabitants beyond the Alpes, should account Flemings, Englishmen, Scots, and other Nations, dwelling on this side, simple, uncircumspect, unwarie, easie to be deceyved, and circumvented by them" and proceeds to explain these differences in terms of natural inclinations, education and physical characteristics—all within the larger category of climatic determinism. Wright even distinguishes grades of "craftinesse and warinesse" among the peoples of the Italian peninsula: "the Lombards are more simple than the Romanes, and these not so craftie as the Neopolitanes, nor these comparable to the Sicilians." The plain-speaking English and Scots, to invoke once more James's notions of effective governance, suffer no such character blights, especially in comparison with Southerners.

*Cymbeline*’s opposition between Italian guile and British transparency (as James might style the latter) derives from precisely these orthodoxies. So do the play’s political oppositions. The momentous reconciliation of Britain and Rome is prophesied in explicitly climatic terms: "Jove's bird, the Roman eagle" flies "from the spongy south to this part of the west." The belief alluded to here, that southern climates produced "spongy" luxury, as well as vice and dishonesty, also prompts Cloten’s earlier curse on Posthumus, who (he imagines) languishes in a climate unsuited to less subtle Northerners—"The south-fog rot him!" (4.2.349; 2.3.130). Indeed, Posthumus’s behavior
in Philario’s house dramatizes such an image of the sturdy Briton innocently making his way across a continent filled with moral and physical dangers, just as reports of his indiscretions in France also frame his conflict with Iachimo and the Frenchman inside a highly nationalized defense of British women’s virtue (see 1.5.53-95). Faced with the subtle, cynical ways of Frenchmen and Italians, Posthumus resorts in both cases to threats of violence: he embroils himself in physical violence while in France, and warns Iachimo that should he fail in his attempt on Imogen: “you shall answer me with your sword” (1.5.160-61). As an innocent abroad, despite or perhaps owing to his innate nobility, Posthumus stands for the proud, warlike people who, Cloten and the Queen assert in 3.1, are ready to defend their island nation.

Iachimo himself also invokes details of climatic determinism. Upon remembering the sleeping Imogen, paragon of British femininity and object of his cultural if not sexual libido, he finds himself unmanned, unfit for battle with the naturally fierce and warlike Britons:

The heaviness and guilt within my bosom
Takes off my manhood. I have belied a lady,
The Princess of this country, and the air on't
Revengingly enfeebles me

(5.2.1-4)

Later in his confession before Cymbeline’s court, he admits that Imogen’s honesty and uprightness divert him from his original plan. It is at this point his “natural” capacity for
policy, guile and craft emerge as his “Italian brain / Gan in your duller Britain operate / Most vilely” (5.5.196-98). His speech is very significant to the play’s triangle of competing cultures, for Iachimo appeals to a depravity (it is difficult to ascertain how much this is confession and how much Italianate boast) that is naturalized within the conceptual framework of climate determinism: crafty, subtle Mediterraneans will perforce “operate most vilely” upon duller peoples, he alleges.

In fact, Iachimo is unique among Shakespeare’s villains in his appeal to essential nation differences as an explanation for his evil. Like Iago, Richard III, Don John and Aaron—those who form Bernard Spivak’s “the Family of Iago”—Iachimo takes no small aesthetic pleasure in the rhetorical occasion of his soliloquy and confession. Whereas aliens such as Aaron and Shylock appeal to race, and other outsiders such as Richard, Iago, Don John and Edmund to their deformed bodies or social positions, Iachimo’s appeal is purely national: his Italian brain, conditioned by the climate in which he was raised and (for the occasion) purportedly different in nature and kind from a British brain, motivates his villainy. Even his success in providing ocular proof of his supposed conquest proceeds from a villainous grasp of how successfully his rhetoric operates upon dull Britons. If his character is in some sense a reversion to the Vice character of the morality tradition that informs Shakespeare’s villains, it is also (as Roger Ascham and others would have it) a highly nationalized one: super-subtle, rhetorically adept, and graceful in a way Castiglione never intended, but in a way he increasingly came to be portrayed in England.

164
Just as the Queen and Cloten's assertions of British independence and Iachimo's
claims for dullness provoked by British air draw upon climate theory, the extended
quibbles and puns concerning air in Act 5 also suggest that the union of Britain and Rome
is also specifically indebted to the doctrine. Iachimo is enfeebled by the bracing air of
Britain, but the unions of Posthumus and Imogen, Britain and Rome, Belarius and
Cymbeline are also figured in terms of a prophesied union of fierceness and tenderness.
The tablet reveals, and later the Soothsayer confirms, that Posthumus, the "lion's whelp,"
will "beembrac'd by a piece of tender air" to enable Britain to "flourish in peace and
plenty." His "constant wife," or mulier, is that tender air that combines with his innate
strength to forge a union on individual and national levels (5.4.138-45; 5.5.437-59).42

The Italian wager plot, in all its social and cultural implications, is far more
significant to the national issues represented in Cymbeline than has hitherto been
recognized by past commentators. Climate theory, so important to reading the cultural
codes of Iachimo and his wager, also has a crucial function in the play's search for a
definition of national character and destiny. The stock juxtaposition between the crafty
Iachimo and forthright but naive Posthumus connects to very specific political and cultural
claims within the Roman plot as well. In the much-discussed outburst of national
sentiment in 3.1, the Queen and Cloten say explicitly what is implicit—and basic—in the
rest of the play. In referring to essential British liberties under threat by a "Roman yoke"
and to "the natural bravery" of the "warlike" British people, they invoke the doctrine of
climatic determinism for national self-legitimation. Though their sometimes eloquent
resistance to foreign domination is finally subsumed by the play's union of Britain and
Rome, and in the last scene they are made to bear the blame for a militant xenophobia, their assertion of an essential British character is necessary in defining the terms or qualities of that idealized reconciliation. They speak what the play seeks to supersede, but the spirit of compromise and unity at its close depends upon their having declared an extreme position that is at least momentarily or tentatively legitimate.

* 

This climactic union of Britain and Rome thus entails both an "embrace" of ancient Roman legitimacy and a rejection of contemporary Italian cultural models as they were understood in the early seventeenth century. The dual binary relationships between Britain and Rome on the one hand, and Britain and "Italy" on the other are constitutive of both a Jacobean myth of origins and a political doctrine of self-legitimation. But the play also negotiates these poles of cultural identity by displacing several stock anti-Italian tropes from the Iachimo-Imogen-Posthumus plot to the actions and structures of the British-Roman story, even down to the final image of reconciliation or union. These transfers considerably complicate the play's presentation of Italian vice and British plain-dealing because they reveal domestic political and moral purposes to Cymbeline's interrogation of national cultural models. In several key ways, stereotypical forms of Italian vice assume a British face—or brain—in the Queen and Cloten.

The "drug-damn'd Italy" that Imogen believes threatens Posthumus was by ca. 1609-10 thoroughly conventionalized as a representation of Italian political and social life,
as suggested by Thomas Nashe's often quoted image of "the apothecary shop of poisoners to all nations" and Fynes Moryson's assertion that "the Italians above all nations, most practice revenge by treasons, and especially are skillful in making and giving poisons."^43

In Cymbeline, however, this aspect of the Machiavel-poisoner attaches not to Iachimo—"as poisonous tongu'd as handed"—but to the thoroughly British Queen: her attempts to enlist an unwilling Cornelius in political assassination transfer Italianate stereotypes of poisoning and political instability to the British court, where she is, after all, one of the most outspoken nationalists. Aside from her many other possible sources and analogues, the Queen is also broadly a Lucretia Borgia and perhaps Catherine de' Medici figure in her poisoning and intriguing. One scholar has argued convincingly that she is drawn from the model of Agrippina, who probably poisoned her husband, Emperor Claudius, in order to advance her own son; another makes a cogent case for Livia, Augustus's wife, on the same grounds of political intriguing. Like Iachimo, the Queen is an over-determined figure whose cultural significances are considerable and complex.44

The Queen also embodies Iachimo's "brainy" aptitude for deception and political intrigue. As personally ambitious time-servers, both she and her son resent Pisanio's loyalty to Posthumus. She knows no allegiances beyond her own objectives, a Machiavel in her ardor for political power, and the moral opposite of old Belarius, who was "beaten for loyalty" and whose simple life at Milford Haven daily recognizes an authority beyond the temporal (1.6.27-29; 5.5.345). She is variously termed a "crafty devil," a woman who "bears all down with her brain," a "mother hourly coining plots," a "tyrant" practiced in the art of "dissembling courtesy" and able to "tickle where she wounds" (2.1.51-
Even more than Iachimo, the Queen is in fact the play's most recognizable stage Machiavel, both the most Italianate character in her political machinations and, problematically, the play's most outspoken British nationalist. The tension is, of course, resolved in the final act when she is made to bear the blame for articulating an unacceptable ideal of British sovereignty without historical legitimation. Her appeal to British insularity runs contrary to James's own vision of a British union and greater integration into European politics, especially with Rome and Venice, but it also runs contrary to the Camdenesque historiographical interpretation of the Roman occupation favored by Shakespeare over the nativist one of Geoffrey and Holinshed.

Though far too silly and coarse for a Machiavel, Cloten nonetheless personifies another specific Italianate vice against which social critics had railed for a generation or more before Cymbeline's first performance. He is the English Ape: his hollow courtliness precedes his own appearance, just as Iachimo's wickedness precedes him, gradually revealing itself throughout the play and becoming his keynote character trait. Though a severe and sometimes articulate nationalist, his true inner self (as James might style it) is hollow and vain, based upon sham appearances and empty honors—stereotypes conventionally associated with Italians, not with the native British culture he so fervently defends in 3.1. Unlike his crafty mother, Cloten is described by Guiderius as having no brains at all (4.2.113-117). The broad anti-Italian polemical tradition on which the play draws consistently opposed native English forthrightness and interiority against Italian sham appearances such as those in which Cloten indulges: in the previous century Roger Ascham had railed against the Italian habits of subterfuge and exaggeration, while closer
to the date of *Cymbeline* Fynes Moryson repeatedly declared that the Italians showed more than they were in fact worth—that hypocrisy and false appearances were a nationally determined vice that Englishmen must eschew.\(^{47}\) Though dull-witted and therefore subjected to Northern climatic influences, Cloten nonetheless obsesses over false appearances in a manner Shakespeare’s contemporaries would have expected of Iachimo and his countrymen, or of those unfortunate Italianate Englishmen who came under their sway.\(^{48}\) The Queen’s dull-witted son is consistently opposed to Posthumus in this regard: he is transfixed (sometimes absurdly) by garments and outward shows, while Posthumus, even before he appears on stage, is described as having inward qualities that his outward appearance does not reveal (see, among many others, examples at 1.1.22-24; 2.3.13-25 and 76-78; 4.2.61-100). Indeed, the distinction between deceptive surfaces and inward qualities becomes one of the play’s most diffused and thematically significant tropes, one shared by many different characters, and one that directly opposes James’s own belief in the transparency of outward signs.\(^{49}\)

Arriving in Britain with “the Italian gentry,” Posthumus dramatizes the play’s systemic distinction between inward quality and outward show in a particularly significant way, especially given Cloten’s obsessive attention to finery and costume. In a gesture of no uncertain value to the project of representing Britain’s national destiny at the critical moment of foreign invasion, Posthumus confides,

*I’ll disrobe me

Of these Italian weeds, and suit myself

As does a Britain peasant. So I’ll fight*
Against the part I come with. . . .

And thus unknown,

Pitied nor hated, to the face of peril

Myself I' ll dedicate. Let me make men know

More valour in me than my habits show.

Gods, put the strength o' th' Leonati in me!

To shame the guise o' th' world, I will begin

The fashion- less without and more within.

(5.1.22-33)

Both the action of removing his “Italian weeds” and the very language of Posthumus’s speech—habits, show, guise, fashion, “without and within”—bristle with the sentiments of anti-Italian polemics against cultural pollution and courtly corruption. The speech operates as a stage device, of course, but it also has a long history as a trope in the historiography of Britain’s relations with the Romans who subdued them: both Geoffrey and Holinshed refer to Hamo’s ruse in disguising himself in order to defeat the Romans, while the story of Aviragus and Guiderius, Cymbeline’s sons, revolves around conflicting chronicle accounts of disguise and deception in order to betray or advance the Britons. In fact, the entire narrative of British-Roman conflicts is intimately bound up with reversals of clothing and national dress in the chronicle accounts. Posthumus returns, it is clear, to rescue his native country from the pernicious forces of not only Roman political
oppression—the principal thematic burden of the disguise scene—but also from the Italian moral pollution in Britain, against which anti-sartorial polemics railed.50

From the perspective of Belarius at Milford Haven, Cymbeline’s court represents and promotes these same sham appearances, and poses the same Italianate threats to an essential British forthrightness and plain-dealing. Much of the conventional pastoral, anti-court rhetoric of the Welsh scenes, that of Belarius especially, constructs the court as a place well suited to the likes of Iachimo, the Queen and Cloten, but not to the indigenous simple piety and goodness of the exiles who find their lives “nobler than attending for a check: / richer than doing nothing for a robe” (3.3.22-23; see also 3.3-3.7). Imogen is affected by her rustication, exclaiming at one point, “Gods, what lies I have heard! / Our courtiers say all’s savage but at court; / Experience, O, thou disprov’st report” (4.2.32-34). The Welsh symbolism of these scenes, with their dual significance as both the Romans’ landing point within the larger frame of the play and the locus of a primitive goodness, depends upon a systemic contrast between the false allures of court—whether Cymbeline’s or Italy’s—and the humble but genuine qualities of an aboriginal British national character defining itself in the hard pastoral of an unambiguously northern clime.51

*  

Far from extraneous to the nationalist concerns of the play as a whole, Iachimo and “drug-damn’d Italy” function as an integral part of Cymbeline’s artistic texture and cultural moment. More than just catalysts to the chain of events leading to the glorious
union of Britain and ancient Rome, Iachimo and his nation serve throughout the play as negative exemplars of “Italian” moral and political behavior. Iachimo’s confession at the end of the play signals a momentous British victory over sham courtliness and Italianate guile; it is a complement to the military victory over the Roman forces in that it symbolizes a displacement and purging of such threatening behavior from the body politic. Iachimo is not executed, but forgiven—and so contained within a new moral order, both culturally accommodating and Christian, that can assimilate him. His British proxies, the Queen and Cloten, are conveniently, romantically dead by the last scene and thus purged from the new regime that will no longer tolerate divisiveness, intrigue, poisoning or guile—a glance toward James’s personal emphasis on rhetorical plainness, moral transparency and cultural reconciliation. Two apparently complementary higher powers, the prophetic authority of the soothsayer interpreting the words of the Leonati, and the implicit Christian authority of forgiveness that frames the play, ensure that the British nation subsumes and assimilates both Roman and Italian rivals in its own legitimate supremacy. “Pardon’s the word to all,” declares Cymbeline, acknowledging that he learns his “freeness of a son-in-law” who has pardoned the false Italian (5.5.418-23).

As I have suggested throughout this discussion, literary critics have for decades understood that the play examines national origins and national character by representing—or testing—the Augustan symbology that James I promoted so zealously. Historians, in turn, have long marshaled evidence for the highly personal character of James’s attempts to promote a legal and cultural union of Britain—and for the many obstacles that stood in the way of union. Leaving aside its other cultural resonances,
Cymbeline represents this ideal of union in terms consistent with James's project of a legal and legitimate union on the one hand, and the English search for native, mythic, originary legitimation within an ancient Roman historical frame on the other.

What is less evident, but equally significant, is that Cymbeline holds up another cultural model for scrutiny in this quest for an essential and timely national story. The modern Italy of Iachimo (and indirectly, aspects of the Queen and Cloten) operates as an independent alternative to the Augustan ideal: though dismissed in the play as a model of treachery, sham appearance, political instability and moral turpitude, it nonetheless participates in the larger quest for national origins and national character by offering a pattern of political and moral behavior to be overcome and appropriated. If G. Wilson Knight is correct in asserting that Cymbeline stages the "heritage of ancient Rome falling on Britain," then one necessary part of that mythic transfer of power and dignity also involves the defeat and symbolic pardoning of Iachimo the Italian, for he and his imagined "nation" are finally contained by a deeper, more august British national destiny that subsumes both the contemporary Italian and the ancient Roman. James needed such a story of amity reconciled to legitimacy, but so did the more diffused discourse of national origins and national character that circulated around and through the king's own quest for personal legitimation.
NOTES


2 As in, for example, Mikalachki, 317.


4 This question, what exactly the function of modern Italy is in the play, was intelligently posed nearly thirty years ago, but as I have been arguing, has not been satisfactorily answered: see J.P. Brockbank, "History and Histrionics in *Cymbeline*," *Shakespeare Survey* 11, 1958: 45. Marcus poses it in another form, again without answering in any detail. She writes, "With the exposure of Iachimo
[in Act 5], the last vestiges of Posthumus's suspicion of Imogen are dispelled and 
the corruption of Italianate Rome is clearly separated from the virtue of its 
Augustan antecedent” (135). What exactly is exposed and what exactly 
constitutes the nature of such corruption are the critical correctives I hope to offer 
below. As will be made clear, I consider the lack of attention to the Italian wager 
plot a systemic gap in Cymbeline criticism.

5 On James's Augustan iconology, see Graham Parry, The Golden Age Restor'd: The 
Culture of the Stuart Court, 1603-1642 (Manchester: Manchester University 
Press, 1981), chapter 1, and Jonathan Goldberg, James I and the Politics of 
Literature (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 32-51, 74-81, 240-

6 All citations from Cymbeline are from J.M. Nosworthy, ed., Cymbeline, The Arden 
Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 1955). I use the designation Italianate in a 
sense current in the early modern social construction of Italy—that is, only loosely 
linked to the moral, political or cultural realities of the Italian peninsula: its cities, 
its notable (or notorious) personages such as Machiavelli or Alessandro Borgia, its 
religion, and so forth. Thus a Frenchman can be as Italianate as any Italian 
because the adjectival form is applicable beyond national or cultural allegiances.

7 On Shakespeare's treatment of his sources, see especially Joan Warchol Rossi, 
"Cymbeline's Debt to Holinshed: The Richness of III.i," in Shakespeare's 
Romances Reconsidered, ed. Carol McGinnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs (Lincoln: 
The University of Nebraska Press, 1978), 104-12; Kenneth Muir, The Sources of 

8 Knight, 129-30.

9 Rosalie L. Colie aptly observes that “the arts of true courtesy as delineated by 
Castiglione have given way to the artfulness of deceit and contrivance” in the court 
of Cymbeline: see her discussion of courtliness and deception in the “hard 
pastoral” mode, in Shakespeare's Living Art (Princeton: Princeton University 
Press, 1974), 286 and chapter 7, passim. On the historiography of the Roman 
occupation, see below.

10 For theories on the topical relevance of the play, see Jones, 89-95; Yates, 48-50; 
Marcus, 108ff.

11 Thorne, 159 argues for a ritual function to this process of assimilation. Without denying 
the possible validity of this claim, my own reading is based instead on cultural 
assumptions specific to the early years of the Stuart period. Some of those 
assumptions did in fact have a ritualistic or at least legendary aspect to them, but 
as I argue below, they also spoke to topical matters as well.

Shakespeare (London: Routledge, 1955), Ixxviii. See also Robert S. Miola, 
I am grateful to David O. Frantz for suggesting this line of argument.

Miola, 3-17 offers a synopsis of ancient Rome's multiple significances as a dramatic site. See also Miles and Platt, passim.


*Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, and in Other Libraries of Northern Italy*, ed. Hortatio F. Brown (London: HM Stationery Office, 1900), 10:431-32. See also Barroll, 60-63.
For a partial listing of Italian political and moral histories, see Mary Augusta Scott, *Elizabethan Translations from the Italian* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), chapter 10. Guicciardini, as G.K. Hunter has pointed out, provided Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists with their liveliest material for staging the sort of Italian political intrigues we see in Cymbeline's British court, while David McPherson argues persuasively that the republican "myth of Venice" was considerably embellished by translators such as Lewis Lewkenor, whose Englished *The Commonwealth and Government of Venice* (1599) went well beyond his purported original, Contarini's 1543 original, in fashioning a republican ideal. The larger point is that political theory in the age of Shakespeare was deeply, systemically indebted to Italian sources that were variously reinterpreted and reapplied in the English context. See Hunter, 114-22 and David McPherson, "Lewkenor's Venice and its Sources" *Renaissance Quarterly* 41 (1988): 459-66. On the subject of Venetian republicanism, see Chapter 5, below.


The association of Italians and rhetorical hypocrisy was a widely diffused image in the travel and polemical writings of the period. See, for example, Fynes Morison's depiction of the Italians as "by nature false dissemblers": "Touching the manners of the Italians. They are for the out syde by natures guif excellently composed. By sweetness of language, and singular Art in seasoning their talke and behaviour with great ostentation of Courtesy, they make their Conversation sweete and pleasing to all men, easily gayning the good will of those with whome they live. But no trust is to be reposed in their wordes, the flattering heart having small acquaintance with a sincere heart." *Shakespeare's Europe: Unpublished Chapters of Fynes Morison's Itinerary*, ed. Charles Hughes (London: Sherratt & Hughes, 1903), 408, 415. See also Einstein, 140-41, 145.


Mcllwain, 285-86, 290. And see also 292, 306. I have cited only examples from the addresses to parliament, but the same constellation of images occurs in his published writings, including his advice book to his son, *Basilikon Doron* (see Mcllwain, 43, for example).
Italy was notorious for its factionalism and political instability, a point of no small significance in Tudor and Stuart England, where the legitimacy of nearly every monarch from Edward VI onward presented some legal or dynastic problem. Of the Italians' inherent factionalism, Fynes Moryson writes, "The Italians have been of old, and still are very factious" and proceeds to catalogue recent and contemporary instances of this tendency (Hughes, 407-08, and on the political consequences of this cultural tendency, see his 102ff.). See also the discussion in Chapter One, above.


James's court has been the subject of too many studies to enumerate them here. However, those treating the nature of his personal associations and the political effects of those associations are worth special mention: David Harris Willson, King James VI and I (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 190-94; S.J. Houston, James I, 2nd edition (London: Longman, 1995), 108-12, 103, 119; Christopher Durston, James I (London: Routledge, 1993), 14-23; Burgess, 41-42, 61, 104-06; Caroline Bingham, James I of England (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1981), 49. For an argument in favor of anti-court satire in the play, see Simonds, 152 and passim.

On this broad cultural project of establishing an antique history to complement that of the Tudor and Stuart regimes, see Richard Helgerson, Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), esp. 1-18 and 193-245.


Polydore Vergil's English History, ed. Sir Henry Ellis (London: Camden Society, 1846), 49, 58, and see 49-58, passim.

Raphael Holinshed, The First and Second Volumes of Chronicles (London, 1587), "The History of Britain," Book 4: 24-32. The only suggestion of a pro-Roman teleology I can detect occurs on p. 74, when he (grudgingly) admits the Romans' martial strength and ponders upon the possibility of "a celestial kind of influence" that destines them to preside over an empire.

William Camden, Britain, Or a Chorographical Description of the Most Flourishing Kingdomes, England, Scotland, and Ireland, and the Ilands Adjoyning. Trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1610), 34, 40. See also William Camden, Remains

34 Camden, Britain, 62-63. See also Milton’s History of Britain, where he argues that “of the Romans we have cause not to say much worse, then that they beat us into some civilitie; likely else to have continu’d longer in a barbarous and savage manner of life.” Complete Prose Works, general ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82), 5:61. See also 5:127.


36 Anne Barton considers the problem of their consummated or unconsummated marriage in some detail (see 19-30). “Cultural miscegenation,” a term adapted from critical discussions of racial discourse, seems a fitting descriptor for the ambiguously sexual/cultural pollution imagined to surround Iachimo’s attempt on Imogen’s honor and Posthumus’s credulity. The term is not meant, however, to imply a narrowly racial basis for cultural defensiveness— as can be argued in the cases of Othello and Aaron.

37 See Adelman, 206-07 and Kahn, passim for a brief discussion of how sexuality and this conflated ancient-modern cultural threat combine to define British masculine virtue.


40 Whereas subtlety and quick-wittedness were traits associated with Mediterraneans, dullness was a stock characteristic traditionally linked to Northern climatic influences which, as if to compensate those subject to its influence, produced
mightier warriors and plainer dealers. Years later, Milton’s anxious appeal to Parliament in *Areopagitica* rehearsed the same cultural stereotypes Ichimo invokes: “consider what Nation it is wherof ye are, and wherof ye are the governours: a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discours, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to.” John Milton, *Complete Prose Works*, general ed. Don M. Wolfe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82), 2:551. See also Hughes, 417ff.


42 Mikalachki, 320 offers a convincing reading of these scenes as versions of the pseudo-etymology that often accompanied the antiquarian projects of writers such as Camden. My argument is a parallel one: the national distinctiveness asserted here depends upon cultural and historical distinctions that the air quips, dependent upon ethnographic theory as they are, underwrite. See also the supplementary note to Shakespeare’s sonnet 1 in Stephen Booth’s critical edition: *Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 579.


44 Bergel, 214-15; Bergeron, 143-44.

45 Mikalachki argues convincingly for a gendered reading of the Queen as a figure of unacceptable nationalism, 301-22, *passim*, and Adelman, 202ff; discusses the parthenogenetic fantasy that surrounds the death of the Queen and permits Cymbeline to indulge an illusion of fathering his children alone. The perplexing but apparently idiosyncratic error Spenser committed by calling Innogen, the wife of Brut, an Italian (*FQ* 2.9.10) suggests that a certain conflation of cultural signs attached to the historical Imogen/Innogen in the early modern period and that she might stand, even outside Shakespeare’s fiction, for a specifically Italianate form of political and moral corruption.

46 See Warneke, 84-90 and 98-100 for discussion of the English ape stereotype, and among early modern sources, W.R., *The English Ape, the Italian Imitation, the Footesteppes of Fraunce* (London, 1588).


48 On Cloten's fascination with garments and what it suggests about his moral status, see John Scott Colley, "Disguise and New Guise in *Cymbeline*," *Shakespeare Studies* 7, 1974: 251 and *passim*.


50 Both Geoffrey and Holinshed refer to Hamo's ruse in disguising himself in order to defeat the Romans, and the story of Aviragus and Guiderius, Cymbeline's sons, revolves around conflicting accounts of disguise and deception. In fact, the entire narrative of British-Roman conflicts is intimately bound up with reversals of clothing and national dress in the chronicle accounts. On the Italian dimension of anti-sartorial polemics, see Warneke, 229-31 and 247-59; Einstein, 165ff.

51 The Welsh symbolism of Milford Haven was not lost on Simon Forman, who specifically noted the detail in his summary; see Chambers, 2:338-339.

52 Willson, 249-53, 166, 271ff. analyzes the principal obstacles to union. See also Jenny Wormald, "James VI and I: Two Kings or One?" *History* 68 (1983): 205-07.
An inventory of John Milton's references to the state of Venice reveals an unexpected result: across the whole corpus of his verse and his "writings of the left hand," Milton the humanist, Italophile, and political activist said remarkably little about what was probably Europe's most celebrated humanist center, travel destination and modern republic. Despite the opinion of many seventeenth-century historical and political writers, who saw in Venice the pre-eminent model of successful republican governance, Milton is conspicuously cool in his praise for the city-state in precisely those works in which one might reasonably expect him to join with many of his contemporaries. In fact, despite his travels there and his republican politics, he rarely mentions Venice or its government at all.¹
In many respects, Milton ought to have admired Venice’s political organization: its famous resistance to Roman “hirelings,” from the Jesuits to the pope himself, its separation of ecclesiastical and civil authority, its aristocratic stability, its broad political similarities to his own program for the English republic are characteristics not to be underestimated. In addition, his apparent lack of admiration for the city and its system of governance is complicated by many enthusiastic references to Paolo Sarpi, Venice’s most famous early seventeenth-century citizen and a figure whose considerable international reputation intimately connected him with the anti-papalism which so deeply informs Milton’s verse and prose writings. Moreover, and notwithstanding its general renown in intellectual and artistic domains that interested Milton, Venice seems to have mattered comparatively little to him as he reflected upon his Italian travels in *Defensio Secunda* (1654).

There are clear reasons, however, for Milton’s coolness toward Venice as a republican model. Though he admired Sarpi’s and the Venetians’ resistance to Papal hegemony in matters temporal, it is quite clear that his own vision of an English republic of the “well-affected” ran counter to the fundamentally secular, materialistic and pragmatic principles of Venetian republicanism, both as they actually existed and as they were represented (and as often misrepresented) in the seventeenth century. He resisted the prevailing myths and arguments for Venice as a model for English governance that fascinated many of his immediate contemporaries. Unlike them, he instead sought a republicanism premised upon individualism, personal election or grace—a constellation of values that Austin Woolrych has aptly called the attributes of an “aristocracy of virtue.”

183
The few pronouncements—and many silences—concerning Venetian republicanism in the prose works of 1659-60, a time when many other theorists looked to Venice as a suitable model for the English political experiment, offer a window into the nature of Milton's own republican ideals.

But his reticence opens other windows, too, for to understand Milton's apprehension of Venice requires first understanding its range of social and political significances in seventeenth-century Europe, but especially in England. And Milton's attitudes, such as they can be determined or adduced, speak eloquently to larger questions that his generation faced and with which study is fundamentally concerned: Of what cultural utility was the Venetian republic during the period in which its influence was, theoretically at least, most politically viable in England? How did Venice's political character intersect with its other cultural significances, especially its importance as a destination on the Giro d'Italia and the grand tour more generally? What meanings beyond the political and the touristic did the Serenissima convey in English cultural self-definition? Stated perhaps too succinctly, what matters for Milton and his generation of republican theorists matters for the larger designs of this project, for though Venice was not Italy any more than Rome was Italy, no discussion of the English picture of "Italy" would be even remotely complete without a discussion of Venice. And though Milton cannot stand for a unitary English

184
view of Venice, as I hope to make clear, his views—while atypical in some important respects—connect to questions that many English writers, readers and travelers faced.

The *mito di Venezia*, or myth of Venice, began to crystallize in the 1540's, when the works of Giannotti and Contarini reached the press and began their long histories of reprinting and adaptation throughout the rest of the century. Among the principal constants—generally but not always promulgated first by Italian authors—were a belief in Venice's ideal *stato misto*, or mixed government uniting monarchy, aristocracy and democracy; its beauty and material prosperity; its independence or sovereignty, often credited to its patriciate's unique ability to act in the best interests of the state; and its toleration—this latter characteristic sometimes construed by the republic's champions as a healthy secularism.

As the myth evolved in late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century England, so did various claims for Venice's resistance to the Papacy and to Turkish hegemony, and its enviable system of justice. The civic-mindedness of its patricians, its longevity or endurance, and perhaps most germane to Milton, its purported similarities to English society also entered the language of seventeenth-century political discourse with regularity. Venice served as both a blueprint for, and a Platonic ideal of, successful governance. The choruses of encomium available to English readers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries amply testify to a flexible usefulness in English politics, and they explain how these ideals combined to form a Venetian myth that, as a number of historians have pointed out, was so encompassing and ideologically porous that it could be almost anything to anyone, support any political system, or endorse any cultural dogma.
Especially after the period of the Papal Interdict of 1606-07, when Venice resisted Pope Paul V’s attempts to increase Roman authority over the republic, this mythic treatment of Venice entered wholesale into the political dogma of Stuart England. It was at this time that James I and some of his councilors even considered the possibility of entering into a Protestant league with Venice and other reformed states across Europe, an initiative fueled in part by the exaggerated belief of Protestant reformers such as Sir Henry Wotton that Venice and England were spiritually and politically kindred spirits—a crypto-Protestant nation waiting for liberation and its leader Paolo Sarpi a “Protestant in monk’s clothing.”

Unlike Wotton and James, however, Milton’s most approving words and sentiments were not for Venice but for Paolo Sarpi. In *Of Reformation* he conjures up an image of Sarpi as a “great Venetian antagonist of the Pope,” but his emphasis falls upon the broad doctrinal rather than the specifically Venetian qualities of this antagonism. He also cites *The History of the Council of Trent* thirteen times in his Commonplace Book: Sarpi is the eighth most often cited author and the second Italian behind Machiavelli, whose *Discorsi* he studied almost ten years after reading Sarpi in about 1642, during his most active period of commonplacing. Though the Commonplace Book offers certain inherent obstacles to interpretation because of its piecemeal system of citation, a pattern emerges in Milton’s uses of Sarpi: he refers to him quite meticulously on matters of political theory, licensing and marriage law, and attributes to Sarpi the not-unjustified qualities of shrewdness and liberal thought.
Sarpi is far more often cited than Machiavelli in the prose works, and unlike with the Florentine, Milton seems at pains to construct a vivid personality or historical figure. In *Of Reformation* he summons “Padre Paolo” to speak on the deviousness of the pontiff and yokes him with Chaucer, who was in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries enlisted as a proto- or crypto-Protestant textual and spiritual authority. On the broad problem of Papal authority in temporal matters, Milton admonishes the English to heed both:

> a good while the *Pope* sutt'ly acted the *Lamb*, writing to the Emperour, my Lord *Tiberius*, my Lord *Mauritius*, but no sooner did this his Lord pluck at the Images, and Idols, but hee threw off his Sheepes clothing, and started up a Wolfe, laying his pawes upon upon the Emperours right, as forfeited to *Peter*. Why may not wee as well, having been forewarned at home by our renowned *Chaucer*, and from abroad by the great and learned *Padre Paolo*, from the like beginnings, as we see they are, feare the like events?"^{12}

In *Areopagitica*, the justly famous image likening books to dragon’s teeth waiting to spring up as “armed men” is borrowed generally from Ovid, of course, but probably most directly from Sarpi’s *History of the Inquisition*, published in Robert Gentilis’s translation in 1639—by Humphrey Moseley, who six years later brought Milton’s own *Poems* to press. The Areopagitican image of “Indexes that rake through the entrails of many an old good Author” is probably taken from the same source, while a description perhaps intended to conjure up images of both Papal duplicity and the Venetian carnival, Milton calls Sarpi “the great unmasker of the *Trentine Council.*”^{13}
Considered on the basis on his Commonplace Book and published prose, Milton's Sarpi is overwhelmingly the Sarpi of English legend, the presumed crypto-Protestant who stood up to Papal hegemony in defending Venice's time-honored liberties, and who despite his outward allegiance to Rome, continued throughout the seventeenth century to be represented to English readers as a kindred spirit in matters of confessional and ecclesiastical politics—a Protestant clothed as a monk. Though Milton read *The History of the Council of Trent* in the Italian edition, the Sarpi he internalized was decidedly England's "Padre Paolo," the figure tendentiously fashioned in Marcantonio de Dominis's dedication to James I, appended to the 1619 Italian edition, and in the more extensive paratextual matter of Nathaniel Brent’s 1620 English translation. The Italian edition, smuggled out of Italy and published in London by John Bill the previous year, had promised readers a work where "si scoprano tutti gl’artificii della Corte di Roma, per impedire che né la rovità di dogmi si palesasse, né la riforma del Papato & della Chiesa se trattasse." The English edition renders these sentiments quite accurately, albeit idiomatically, promising a treatise that exposes "the practices of the Court of Rome, to hinder the reformation of their errors, and to maintain their greatnesse." Moreover, Brent's translation adds more dedicatory matter, provocative marginal glosses and a sometimes polemical index, all designed, in a general way, to facilitate a controversial use of the work as a Protestant reference work, an *Acts and Monuments* for the seventeenth century.

Sarpi was thus for Milton the "great Venetian antagonist of the Pope," an articulate rival to the Pope and a figure of authority for his own program of press and
spiritual freedoms. Milton gives no indication, however, that he was interested in the particulars of what Sarpi was defending, in the unique status of Venice as a republican bulwark against, as Milton and other reform-minded Protestants would have it, the tyrannical machinations of the Bishop of Rome.

Milton's lack of enthusiasm for Venice as anything more than a testing ground for resisting Papal hegemony echoes his silence on his activities there as a tourist; but it also quite conspicuously avoids or suppresses the ways in which Venice mattered politically in the period. By the time of Milton's return from the continent in 1639, political and historical writing in England was already under the considerable influence of the myth of Venice. Although other European peoples such as the Dutch, Swiss and Genovese also practiced forms of republican government, there is simply no meaningful comparison to be drawn in English thought between the cultural importance of Venice and any other contemporary republic. No other system excited such fervent arguments pro and con, just as no other system entered the language and assumptions of political theory with the same comprehensiveness and potency.

Even the past could offer no equally meaningful prototype: ancient Rome stood preeminent as the exemplar of classical republicanism, the most widely influential theoretical mode of republican thought in the period. But like Sparta, Athens and Renaissance Florence, it too had perished. Venice alone offered a timely, concrete model—or myth—of republican governance, the last great living republic and in some accounts the place where the heritage of Rome itself came to rest. According to no less an author than Edmund Spenser, who contributed commendatory verses to Lewkenor's
translation of Contarini, the city stood ready to receive the mantle that ancient Rome had forfeited by its decline into tyranny:

The antique Babel, Empresse of the East,
Upreard her buildinges to the threatned skie:
And second Babell tyrant of the West,
Her ayry Towers upraised much more high.
But with the weight of their own surquedry,
They both are fallen, that the earth did feare,
And buried now in their own ashes ly,
Yet shewing by their heapes how great they were.
But in their place doth now a third appeare,
Fayre Venice, flower of the last worlds delight,
And next to them in beauty draweth neare,
But farre exceedes in policie of right.
Yet not so fayre her buildinges to behold
As Lewkenors stile that hath her beautie told.¹⁷

Spenser's emphasis upon Venice's "policie of right" and the implication of political immortality aptly characterize Lewkenor's picture of a political and cultural ideal that developed into an almost irresistible desideratum among many English readers and theorists. In the next century, William Shute appended a similar argument to his translation of Thomas de Fougasses's historical survey of Venice. With respect to Rome and Venice, Shute says "Italie is the face of Europe; Venice the Eie of Italie.... In her Wisdome, Fortitude, Justice, and Magnanimitie of Old Rome doe yet stirre. That which now Usurps that name is not Rome, but her Carkasse, or rather Sepulcher. All but her
Ruines, and the Cause of them, (her Vice) is removed to *Venice.* The *Serenissima* had preserved what the Romans could not, and to many that model cried out for study and imitation.

Though Milton claimed to have preferred Sallust over Tacitus as a model historian, there is no question that his political thought was imbued with many of the ideas of the seventeenth-century vogue for Tacitus. In particular, he was fascinated with the Roman historian's attention to Rome's decline from republic to tyranny—a foundational idea that is suffused throughout Milton's brand of republicanism. Thus, the sorts of commonplace sentiments that Spenser articulates in his dedicatory poem and William Shute in his preface seem doubly significant in their absence from Milton's own political theorizing. Granted, he certainly thought deeply about Roman paradigms for the English republic, and took many of its tropes into his own language; but what is missing, *pace* some of Andrew Barnaby's claims, is the apparently usual association between Rome's decline and Venice's political immortality that Spenser and Shute seem to summon up. Though Milton does indeed seem to ally himself in the prose polemics with a republic for preservation rather than increase (the latter leading, he asserts in many different ways, to tyranny), these sentiments are not deployed into any political schema that directly opposes Venice and Rome. Indeed, even in his late tracts, there is a decidedly academic, detached current of thought that elevates the historical over the contemporary, the theoretical over the pragmatic.

After 1649, of course, detached study and imitation, whether of ancient Roman or modern Venetian paradigms had to give way to more pressing concerns, but it is indicative
of England’s political future that even as early as 1644, a group of parliamentarians had requested a copy of the Venetian constitution so that they might scrutinize its principles.\textsuperscript{21} For Milton, however, the foundational text for his conception of the English republic was overwhelmingly Roman in character, even if it was not explicitly Tacitean. His attention to Venice as an exemplary republic, such as it was, came late and had an overwhelmingly conciliatory, compromising and even expedient quality to it.\textsuperscript{22}

Although Harrington’s \textit{Oceana} (1656) is the most famous and fully developed of the works that sought to import or adapt Venetian principles to the English republican experiment, his \textit{magnum opus} by no means tells the full story of Venice’s importance to English political theory. One of the most influential descriptive histories of Venice was published five years before, in 1651, by the committed Italophile James Howell, who had already translated reports of the Neapolitan revolt of Masaniello and written a popular travel guide book. In \textit{S. P. Q. V.: A Survay of the Signorie of Venice, Of Her admired policy, and method of Government}, Howell lauds Venice, consistently gendered feminine, in terms quite consistent with the by-then standard \textit{topoi} of “her” political longevity and perfectly balanced interests, “her” independence, “her” resistance to foreign aggression (figured in the language of sexual assault) and “her” fulfillment of the republican ideal ancient Rome promised but could not sustain.

Howell also asserts the commonplace that England and Venice were politically kindred spirits, but in his terms this relationship is figured as both fraternal and erotic: “\textit{if likenes may beget love, England hath reson to affect Venice more than any other}” nation.\textsuperscript{23} “The republic of Venice,” he states categorically, “were the fittest pattern on
earth both for direction and imitation” because she “hath continued above a thousand hot
Sommers as interemerat Virgin under the same face, and form of Government” despite
numerous attempts to “deflower” her. Howell’s rhapsodizing attention to the city’s purity
and constancy, however, soon blends with a more pragmatic analysis of “the politic frame
of her government in generall” under twelve separate headings. In these, he emphasizes
the qualities of Venetian state polity that could be transferred to his native England and he
emphasizes a dichotomy particularly dear to Milton: the “traverses twixt Saint Peter and
Saint Mark” in which Venice, under the patronage of Saint Mark, is figured as a bulwark
against the hegemony of the Petrine element of the Catholic church.24

Marchamont Nedham, a politically mercurial figure of the tumultuous 1650’s,
saw Venice in a still different light. His The Excellencie of a Free-State (1656) argues
vigorously for a radical democratic polity exactly opposite to Howell’s conservatism, but
also one that goes well beyond Milton’s more staid notions of an aristocracy of virtue.
Nedham asserts that in Venice “the people are free from the Dominion of their Prince or
Duke; but little better than slaves under the power of their Senate.” He concludes that
“the People [are] excluded from all interest in Government” and “the Senators themselves
have Liberty at random, Arbitrarily to ramble, and do what they please with the people:
who excepting the City it self, are so extreamly oppress’d in their territories, living by no
Law, but the Arbitrary Dictates of the Senate, that it seems rather a Junta, than a
Commonwealth.”25 Sir Henry Vane’s A Healing Question (1656) posited otherwise,
arguing for a Venetian-style perpetual senate as a solution to England’s political instability
and invoking the language of godly governance and an aristocracy of virtue.26
Oceana appeared in the same year. More fundamentally Venetian in conception than any other English political proposal before or after, Harrington’s vision drew upon the same sources and cultural predispositions as his many predecessors such as Howell and Nedham, but Oceana offered a new pragmatism that went beyond the language of encomium or vilification alone. What is especially important about Harrington’s political vision is its basis in legalism and systems of justice, the balance of competing interests, land-ownership, and perhaps most of all, a general predisposition to political rationalism that is distinctly un-Miltonic. Indeed, Harrington’s system is fundamentally a materialistic one, based upon land ownership as the sole criterion for social standing and concerned not principally with the moral well-being of its members, but rather the structures and administration of the system itself. At times this fascination for the mechanisms of government operates almost without regard for the kinds of moral ambivalence that Howell had noted in 1651. Harrington asserts early in Oceana that after the fall of the Roman republic,

inundations of Huns, Goths, Vandals, Lombards, Saxons . . . deformed the whole face of the world with those ill features of government which at this time are become far worse in these western parts, except Venice which, escaping the hands of the barbarians by virtue of her impregnable situation, hath had her eye fixed upon ancient prudence and is attained to a perfection even beyond her copy.
Harrington does more than praise Venetian republicanism in these and similarly idealized terms; his object is rather to export and domesticate for the English the key elements of the Venetian state: its proposed senate, its system of rotating public offices, its commitment to Machiavellian "preservation" over "increase," and its reputation for "exquisite justice."

No work as important and timely as *Oceana* could long escape the broils of political controversy, especially after the entire republican project radically shifted emphasis upon the death of Oliver Cromwell in early September 1658. And indeed, even before Cromwell's death, Matthew Wren's *Considerations on Mr. Harrington's Common-wealth of Oceana* (1657) responded to a large section of *Oceana*—a work which, incidentally, Wren found "to be so much the Discourse of good companies, that not to have seen it would expose a man to some shame." Though in general Wren directs his animadversions toward Harrington's practical applications rather than his historical accuracy, he does dispute his claims that Venice enjoyed uninterrupted political harmony and that its oligarchy truly represented the populace. Even more germane to Milton's uneasy relation to Venetian-style political models, Wren disputes the Harringtonian emphasis on legalism as the proper basis of political life, stating instead that "the Government is not in the Law, but in the person whose Will gives a being to that law."

Wren's dispute with Harrington's legalism and his charges of indifference toward moral principles echo in the criticisms of other anti-Harringtonians of the period. Henry Stubbes attacked *Oceana* for its amoral acceptance of Venetian-style oligarchy, while
Richard Baxter assailed Harrington for relying upon legal principles and not personal
goodness or the religious discipline of "better men" to guarantee effective governance:

he thinketh Venice, where Popery Ruleth, and whoredom abounds, is the
perfectest Pattern of Government for us, now existent: therefore he
intendeth not sure that his Model should keep us from the Raign of Popery
(or whoredom.) I doubt not but the same Model among better men, might
do much against them: which doth but shew that it is not the Model, but
the better men that must do most.”

Harrington himself was far from finished with Venice, however, and in the minor
writings after Oceana, he returns over and over to the principles of his great work. Thus
in The Rota (1660), for example, he reiterates the ideas already expressed in Oceana and
again in The Art of Lawgiving (1659), that “overbalance in property” is the basis of the
human need for government, and that no lasting “balance” or “community” is possible
among human beings in constant competition for property. Again and again he calls for a
state religion and beneficed clergy in the interest of preserving national harmony, while at
the same time he extends toleration to all except the seditious, supports the rotation of
political offices for the same object, and asserts his fundamental belief that good laws and
good systems make good government: “Where there is a well-ordered commonwealth,
the people are generally satisfied.”

Obvious though the point may be, it nonetheless bears emphasizing that the
Venetian republican principles such as Harrington, Nedham, Vane, Stubbes and Wren
debated in print fit naturally into a larger discourse of immediate, pressing political possibilities throughout the 1650's. During the entire decade English politicians and theorists anxiously searched through a wide spectrum of plausible models of governance: crowning Cromwell (or somewhat later, and in very different times, crowning General Monck), electing a constitutional monarch, establishing a decentralized federal system or an oligarchy based upon land ownership, rotating elected officials annually or establishing them as permanent members of a Grand Council, installing a Fifth Monarchy of the Saints, or unconditionally recalling Charles from exile. From theocratic to classical republican and monarchist to Leveller, the most basic elements of how to re-constitute English political theory constituted an open question throughout the 1650's.

It should, therefore, come as no surprise that Venice figured so prominently in the more desperate debate into which Milton entered in 1659. Indeed, Harrington's dramatization in the "The Council of Legislators" portion of Oceana is one of the most transparently relevant of the many thinly disguised fictions in the work, and one that almost presciently anticipates the crisis that ensued from 1658 onward. In this section, Lord Archon convenes a council to study suitable republican models, fearing "how unsafe a thing it is to follow fancy in the fabric of a commonwealth, and how necessary that the archives of ancient prudence should be ransacked before any councillor should presume to offer any other matter...upon a model of government." Israel, Athens, Sparta, Carthage are thus ransacked, as are Swiss, Roman, Dutch and Venetian models, as part of Archon's quest for the perfect state. Venice is judged the one manifestly best suited to Oceana.34
Puzzling biographical and ideological discrepancies hang over Milton’s few references to Venice. He went enthusiastically to Italy in 1638, having read extensively among the Italian authors during his studious retirement, and written more than creditable Italian verses in the decade prior to his departure. He toured in an outwardly conventional manner, though with an intellectual and artistic intensity quite unlike that of most travelers of his (or any later) generation. On his return to England, he continued a serious program of reading in, among other areas, Italian literature and history, and in his 1654 Defensio Secunda he gave a spirited account of his travels in every major Italian city—except Venice.

Prior to 1659, Milton’s references to the state of Venice are infrequent and incidental, when they are not entirely absent. With A Letter to Friend and Proposals of Certaine Expedients (1659) but especially in The Readie and Easie Way (1660), however, he started to consider more systematically Venetian and Venetian-inspired Harringtonian principles, but even here he does so in a highly ambivalent way that cannot be construed an endorsement, and more often looks like a pattern of resistance. From internal evidence in the two editions of The Readie and Easie Way, it is apparent that he knew Harrington’s major work well, and might also have had in mind several later works by Harrington and his critics. But although Milton considered Dutch, Athenian, Spartan, Roman and ancient Jewish models as paradigms for the faltering English republican experiment, he was conspicuously out of step with his political culture in not giving
anything more than passing attention to Venice as a worthy example of a successful
republic.

Milton's republicanism is a matter on which there is not likely to be general
consensus for some time. Its *terminus a quo* depends to an unusually high degree upon
how one frames one's questions and establishes one's criteria, and its antecedents,
chronology, development and very nature have in recent years provided the basis for
productive discussion. Though there is justification for trying to determine, as many
have tried to do, when in his political career and in what ways Milton embraced
republicanism, there is another equally legitimate question within the late political writings,
those works a decade or more after *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* in which not
only is Milton an open republican, but also those in which he most systematically theorizes
a workable republican model of governance under the growing threat of the king's
restoration. Milton, of course, was not unaware of the highly pragmatic political debates
that Archon's fictional council enacts; it is clear that he would have understood their
predicament well—for it was the one he faced in 1659 as he took up his pen in defense of
the faltering republic. But the larger question is really why Milton was so resistant to
Harrington's and others' Venetian-inspired models, and why when he did consider some
of them in the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*, he did so half-heartedly and
even grudgingly—possibly as nothing more than a last, desperate expedient to forestall the
Restoration that by April 1660 was a foregone conclusion.

Unlike Harrington, who built a model English political system around a classical
republican legacy welded to a political pragmatism, both of which he believed to inhere in
modern Venice, Milton refused to embrace Venetian political principles for a cluster of reasons, some of them more to do with his own basic resistance to systematic political theorizing and others to do with an over-arching political philosophy that the Venetian model, even in its anglicized and highly idealized form, could never satisfy. These reasons fall into three general patterns. First, as it was represented in English letters and political discourse, Venetian republicanism was too secular, pragmatic and material to merge seamlessly with Milton's own vision of the ideal commonwealth as an aristocracy of virtue. Second, it was too monarchical, too dependent for its legendary perfect balance upon the "one" of the classic Aristotelian formulation, to satisfy Milton's increasingly contemptuous regard for individual political figures. And finally, it was too catholic, in both the confessional and the neutral, adjectival senses of the term—Venice's vaunted "liberty" allowed both moral libertinism and confessional relativism. Together, these objections made Milton unable to square the widely lauded virtues of Venetian republicanism with his own highly idealized prerequisites for a Christian commonwealth in his native England.

From his earliest printed political pamphlets and from the notes he made in his Commonplace Book, Milton conceived of the political sphere in terms quite opposite to the secular, material and pragmatic character of the Venetian state as it was represented in English writing. His political outlook over the whole 1640's, from his antipathy toward clerical abuses and ecclesiastical fees, to those concerning liberty of the press, education and divorce laws, always point upward from the practical business of ordering political life to an idealized emphasis on individual virtue, liberty of the spirit, and a vision of a national
destiny more tangible to him than to nearly all his compatriots. He had some sporadic interest in, but no philosophical commitment to a Machiavellian "reason of state," but instead constantly reached toward the abstractions of liberty, nation, virtue, religious self-discipline and apprehension of God's revealed truths.

The History of Britain, begun in the late 1640's and coming after some of his most impassioned appeals to the English nation, testifies to a political sensibility that drew consistently from moral philosophy. In the Digression, Milton asserts what could well be the two central tenets of his political thought. First, he avers that "the gaining or loosing of libertie is the greatest change to better or worse that may befall a nation under civil government." There is in this proposition none of the Harringtonian interest in preserving property or achieving a workable balance between competing interests, but rather civil government itself is subverted to the twin ideals of nation and liberty—Milton's under is as hierarchical as it is merely relational. Second, he asserts another belief that informs his political thought throughout the following decade: "libertie hath a sharp and double edge fitt onelie to be handl'd by just and vertuous men." This latter sentiment recurs in Defensio Secunda (1654), this time construed as something approaching a political program designed to rouse the English to "true virtue" and allow them to reject "avarice, ambition, and luxury" and seize their promised liberties. But it is hardly a populist appeal, for in terms consistent with his greater political outlook, he says:

nothing is more natural, nothing more just, nothing more useful or more advantageous to the human race than that the lesser obey the greater, not
the lesser number the greater number, but the lesser virtue the greater virtue, the lesser wisdom the greater wisdom.\textsuperscript{42}

"True and substantial liberty," as Milton asserts elsewhere in the defense, consists less of political freedoms than of an internal state of mind, a relationship with revealed wisdom and virtue "which must be sought, not without, but within, and which is best achieved, not by the sword, but by a life rightly undertaken and rightly conducted." Even in his capacity as an agent in its formation, for Milton the English republican experiment mattered less as a test of political organization than as an opportunity for "the discipline arising from religion" to "overflow into the morals and institutions of the state."\textsuperscript{43}

"'There is no power but of God,'" he argued in his first defense in 1651: "that is, no form of state and no legitimate basis for the government of men" that does not proceed from this first principle. This sentiment reverberates throughout his political writings and up to the Restoration itself, as in the assertion in \textit{A Treatise of Civil Power} (1659), that "the will of God & his Holy Spirit within us" is what the English nation must obey, "much rather then any law of man."\textsuperscript{44}

The tonal and conceptual characteristics of the political writings of 1659-60 are on the whole quite consistent with the trajectory of Milton's political pronouncements in the previous decade or more.\textsuperscript{45} Even in these relatively pragmatic writings on the eve of the Restoration, his concerns center less on developing an effective and plausible system of governing the nation, than with adapting such a system to the higher demands of promoting the pursuit of liberty, maintaining the aristocracy of virtue, and ensuring that
the prerogatives of the “well-affected” minority are broadcast through the whole nation. Despite Milton’s attempt to weigh different practical political systems’ virtues and shortcomings, the late writings are “founded on an idealism which could hardly withstand the terribly weakening force of facts.”

Milton’s fascination in *The Readie and Easie Way* with the Sandhedrin and the Areopagus as aristocratic republican models, and his appeals for a perpetual senate, or “Grand Council,” must be seen in light of this idealism. Even within his ostensibly objective discussion of Harringtonian proposals for rotating legislative bodies, Milton’s bias toward the assumed moral fitness of his perpetual senators emerges. Not only—as in the Harringtonian models—does he assume their superior aptitude for secular governance in matters of international relations and the usual functions of governors, regardless of system; he also invokes his characteristic concerns with these leaders’ moral fitness for leading the populace out of spiritual bondage and toward realization of their “native liberty of mankind.” Though he wrote briefly in *Proposalls of Certaine Expedients* that “in Rome, Venice & elsewhere” a perpetual senate insured a stable foundation of government, it is only in the more developed discussions in the two editions of *The Readie and Easie Way* that the ideological basis of his appeal emerges fully. He fears systems of rotation because of their potential for inciting “commotions, changes, novelties and uncertainties” into the serious business of government, disrupting not only administrative but also moral continuity, and “putting out a great number of the best and ablest.”

The nature of his designation “best and ablest” requires some explanation. Though Milton does grudgingly consider the benefits of Harrington’s Venetian-inspired
“successive and transitorie Parlaments,” his appeal in *The Readie and Easie Way* is overwhelmingly anti-populist, elitist and moralistic—he resists all schemes whereby the virtuous could be overlooked or the unregenerate allowed to enter public service. It is also a distinctly English proposal. Any system of rotating legislators has, in his words, “too much affinitie with the wheel of fortune.” He admits that Venice achieved some success by rotating councilors, but qualifies their achievement by asserting that “the true Senat, which upholds and sustains the government, is the whole aristocracy immovable.” Where Venice’s aristocracy was comprised without regard to moral virtue, however, Milton imagines a different set of criteria for the English republican leaders. Their charge, as England’s “true keepers of our libertie,” is to educate and cultivate a populace that needs such enlightenment, but also to deserve their public trust:

To make the people fittest to chuse, and the chosen fittest to govern, will be to mend our corrupt and faulty education, to teach people faith not without vertue, temperance, modestie, sobrietie, parsimonie, justice; to place every one his privat welfare and happiness in the public peace, libertie and safetie.

In the same way, Milton’s vision in *The Readie and Easie Way* of a politically decentralized government seems calculated to extend such educational and political opportunities for virtuous men outside the traditional centers of power, to learn and to exercise enlightened governance throughout the country, as “if every county in the land were made a little commonwealth.” In the second edition, Milton extends this point,
urging that decentralized government and educational opportunities “would soon spread
much more knowledge and civilitie, yea religion through all parts of the land, by
communicating the natural heat of government and culture more distributively to all
extreme parts, which now lie numm and neglected.”

In 1660, as in the two decades before, Milton’s measure of success in government
thus depended upon the virtuous to communicate the “natural heat of government”—
knowledge and civility—to its extremities. His is not a standard that derives from the
traditional necessities of self-defense or empire-creation, nor one that derives its legitimacy
from the emerging exigencies of trade. In this respect, Milton’s emphasis on
government’s ability to inculcate and extend virtue is strikingly at odds with the
commercial and military domination that had long defined a significant part of Venice’s
contemporary reputation as a political model for emulation. As early as 1599, Lewkenor
placed the matter bluntly in the first paragraph of his translation of Contarini’s *The
Commonwealth and Government of Venice*, a kind of keynote gesture that calls attention
to the city’s “wonderful concourse of strange and foreign people, yea of the farthest and
the remotest nations, as though the City of Venice onely were a common and general
market to the world.”

Venice’s success as the world’s “common and general market” was a matter of
legendary status among most English readers by the 1650’s, but it also points up the very
materialism that Milton rejected in his own conception of commonwealth. Coryate’s
description in 1611 of the *Piazza San Marco* draws upon Contarini, but he is even more
enthusiastic than his predecessor in claiming a glory in international commerce. He avers that

The fairest place of the all the citie (which is indeed of that admirable and incomparable beauty, that I thinke no place whatsoever, eyther in Christendome or Paganisme may compare with it) is the Piazza, that is, the Market place of St. Marke.... For here is the greatest magnificence of architecture to be seene, that any place under the sunne doth yeelde. Here you may see all manner of fashions of attire, and heare all the languages of Christendome, besides those that are spoken by the barbarous Ethnickes; the frequencie of people being so great twice a day, betwixt sixe of the clock in the morning and eleven, and againe betwixt five in the afternoon and eight, that (as an elegant writer saith of it) a man may very properly call it rather Orbis then Urbis forum, that is, a market place of the world, not of the citie.\textsuperscript{56}

Four decades later, this image of a commonwealth founded upon mercantile interests recurs in Howell’s \textit{S. P. Q. V}, which includes an engraved visual analogue to Coryate’s enthusiastic paean to Venice’s commercial success (see Figure 1, p. 213). “Free from all Alar’mes” a personified figure of Venice rests “in Neptune’s armes” while clutching a locked strongbox strategically poised over her genital region—an image of chastity in the combined moral-political definition so common in contemporary descriptions of the city, but also quite conspicuously a representation of her considerable
wealth. She holds the “chaste treasure” of her political inviolability, but also a literal
treasure, as suggested by her opulent pearl necklace and lavish headband that complement
the bejeweled strongbox she clutches. Her pseudo-Roman vestments, icons of Venice’s
status as inheritrix of ancient Rome’s classical republican tradition, contrast with the four
gondolas and eight and ocean-going vessels which symbolize Venice’s naval and
commercial domination of the waters that encircle the city. It is, all told, an image that
powerfully represents the city’s commercial, mercantile cultural status among English
readers—and one that underscores the vast gulf between Milton’s and his more pragmatic
contemporaries’ conceptions of the place of commerce in a successful republic.

Indeed, in the peroration to the second edition of The Readie and Easie Way, he
further emphasizes the absolute distinctiveness of the English nation, specifically
condemning the political backsliders who would sell their birthright for a mess of pottage.
“I have no more to say at present: few words will save us, well considered; few and easie
things, now seasonably don,” he begins: “But if the people be so affected, as to prostitute
religion and libertie to the vain and groundless apprehension, that nothing but kingship can
restore trade, not remembering the frequent plagues and pestilences that then wasted this
citie, such as through God’s mercie we never have felt since,” then, he warns in his most
hectoring and scornful tones, “we must forgoe & set to sale religion, libertie, honor,
safetie, all concernments Divine or human to keep up trading.”

A related emphasis in the last pamphlets is a heightened contempt for the very
monarchical institution whose supporters he decries in The Readie and Easie Way. While
Milton’s hostility toward the institution of monarchy developed more slowly than his
antipathy for Charles I personally, by *Eikonoklastes* (1649) he drew authority from Sarpi’s *History* to argue by analogy that just as “a Council is above the Pope, and may judge him, though by them not deni’d to be the Vicar of Christ, we in our clearer light may be asham’d not to discern furder, that a Parlement is, by all equity, and right, above a King, and may judge him.” A decade later, Milton resists the classical, Aristotelian “one-few-many” formulation in a way quite consistent with his earlier position. And though no great lover of the many, either, he specifically remonstrates with the English people not to embrace any system in which “a single person” determines their pursuit of the common weal: “Certainly then that people must needs be madd or strangely infatuated, that build the chief hope of thir common happiness or safetie on a single person.”

Milton’s contempt in *The Readie and Easie Way* for establishing “something like a Duke of Venice” is thus in part motivated by his resistance to that aspect of the *mito di Venezia* that lauded Venice’s perfect and enduring balance of the three estates, as in Coryate’s description:

> the government of this City is a compounded forme of state, contayning in it an Idea of the three principall governements of the auncient Athenians and Romans, namely the Monarchicall, the Oligarchicall, and Democraticall. The duke sitteth at the sterne of the commonweale with glorious ornaments beseeming his place and dignity, adorned with a Diademe and other ensigns of Principality, so that he seemeth a kinde of Monarch.

208
Even Harrington did not categorically exclude the possibility of a monarch during the final period of the English republican experiment. In *The Ways and Means* (1660) he concedes that a “mature” national debate founded upon reason might restore the monarchy, and though he would wish it otherwise: “If it be according unto the wisdom and the interest of the nation, upon mature debate, that there be a king, let there be a king.” Nor did he express anything like Milton’s antipathy toward the outward trappings and pomp of office, for in *The Rota* (1660) he specifically calls for some servants of the state to wear purple robes.\(^{61}\) Despite Howell’s political differences from Harrington, his description of the Duke of Venice also expresses an ambivalence common to the political writing of the period: a desire for the stability of a regal figure with “a kind of Regall, though dependent, power”—one able both to demonstrate monarchical pomp and subjection to constitutional limitations that “keep him from trenching upon the Common Liberty.”\(^{62}\) Milton was outside the mainstream of republican thought in this important respect, for his last political tracts make monarchy and republicanism essentially incompatible in a way that few other theorists, royalist or republican, imagined.\(^{63}\)

Lastly, though most speculative in terms of concrete evidence, it also seems clear that Milton found Venice too Catholic. Always hostile to the purported superstitions of the papists, whom he could never admit into the fold of true Christians, Milton could not approve of the Venetians’ state religion—and the religion in which Sarpi continued to identify himself even to his death. Despite the Interdict, Venice remained solidly Catholic in its own way, and so in Milton’s system, beholden to the superstitions of the false church if not always to its pope. In *A Letter to a Friend*, he noted that the Venetians were kept in
awe by their temporal leaders, but also that they were ignorant of true religion—a situation he contrasts with the then-unrealized potential of the English republicans to yoke reverence toward authority and holy purpose. The Venetians were, finally and despite the hopes of many reform-minded Protestants, a Catholic people. This very basic difference between them and the English is never effaced in Milton's late political writings.

Equally important, perhaps, Venice tested limits of Milton's toleration for morally catholic civil society—that is, catholicism in its doctrinally neutral sense. His toleration never extended to the Turks, Jews and Papists who lived there in relative harmony and, by contemporary standards, more or less unmolested. Venice's was not the sort of liberty that Milton imagined for the English nation, but rather a debased freedom to conduct trade and to mingle among the infidel, impious and unregenerate that must have colored his vision of what a well-affected English political polemicist could profitably learn from its political successes.

With Venice's positive reputation for toleration and ideological openness, often repeated in political theory and descriptive histories throughout the period, came an equally persistent attention to its reputation for vice. William Thomas's amazement, a century before Milton's era, that Venice accommodated Papists, Jews, Turks, "gospelers" and even those who believe "in the devil" could easily become the moral horror Roger Ascham and others (like Milton) felt at a liberty that devolved into license. James Howell's laudatory description of Venice as a place that can easily extinguish "all intestin commotions and tumults" that take hold in her soil similarly becomes an equally vigorous denunciation of the moral sickness that her marshy soil conceals:
‘Tis well known that Venice hath bin allways such a Cittie, yet by her extraordinary prudence She hath and doth still preserve her self from such distempers, notwithstanding that she swimms in wealth and wantones as well as she doth in the waters, notwithstanding that She melts in softnes and sensualitie as much as any other whatsoever; for, ‘tis too well known, ther is no place where ther is lesse Religion from the girdle downward.67

Here, finally, we touch a major chord in Milton's political philosophy—the intersection of a negative anti-myth of Venice as den of vice or sink of hell, with the more positive one posited by Harrington and others. Though Milton said nothing as openly negative about Venice as some of his contemporaries, his own and his early biographers' silence on the matter in general is intriguing.68 Did Milton receive a cold shoulder by the Incogniti, the academy whose reputation for intellectual merits was matched by its reputation for moral degeneracy? Did the city at large show him in a month, à la Ascham's nine days, more vice than his sensibilities could endure? Did he see (or learn) something firsthand about the practical limits of toleration, or about the Venetian commonwealth from the girdle downward? Did he see in Venice a republic founded upon standards of leadership, whether intellectual or political, that ignored questions of moral fitness?69

Furthermore, from the city to which Milton ought to have had the most illustrious entrée through the offices of the former ambassador to Venice Sir Henry Wotton,70 no account of his sojourn there remains to confirm or refute whatever speculations we might
wish to entertain. Both Milton and independent records are silent about what he saw and 
experienced there, and though Howell's claim that Venice "is taxd all the World over for 
the latitud of liberty She gives to carnall plesure" cannot serve as incontrovertible proof of 
anything, it should not be dismissed, either.\textsuperscript{71} The most plausible, if necessarily 
speculative, conclusion is that, apart from books and music purchased there and 
presumably enjoyed later in life, Milton was in some way or ways deeply disappointed by 
Venice. Whether for moral, philosophical or practical reasons, this disappointment might 
have tinged his political outlook when he came to the pragmatics of debating the virtues 
and drawbacks of Venetian republicanism during the commonwealth's final days. His 
political senses, unlike those of Harrington and other mid-century republicans, remained 
solidly idealistic: moral, aristocratic and anti-commercial.

* 

Upon his arrival in Geneva, the Protestant republican bastion where he met and 
according to Aubrey "contracted a great friendship" with Giovanni Diodati, Milton also 
signed the guest book of Camillo Cardoyn (or Cerdogni) with lines from his own \textit{Comus}:

"—if Vertue feeble were / Heaven it selfe would stoope to her," followed by a particularly 
revealing sentence from Horace's \textit{Epistles}: \textit{Coelum non animu muto du trans mare curro}—"I change the sky but not my mind when I cross the sea."\textsuperscript{72} Written a decade and 
half later, a line from his \textit{Defensio Secunda} suggests that, at least in recollection, Milton 
imagined himself finally free of the social vices and perhaps the temptations of Italy and 
possibly Venice in particular: "in all these places, where so much license exists, I lived
Milton the republican theorist of the late 1650's was fundamentally Milton the educational traveler of 1639. *Johannes Miltonius Anglus*, as he signed his entry in Cerdogni's album, was the Englishman in Italy and future historian who changed skies but not his mind. He remained an English Protestant whose idiosyncratic and thoroughly idealistic variety of English republicanism resisted the "exotic" political schemes such as those of Harrington and was at very most grudgingly accepting of Venetian principles of government. Zera S. Fink concluded that "the contemporary reputation of Venice" was "at least a contributing factor" in Milton's political theorizing of 1659-60, and at some fairly insignificant level, this is so. But Fink's hesitation in claiming more than the most general kind of influence betrays an overweening readiness to class Milton among the political rationalists of the republic's latter days, to fit him into the emergent rational republican tradition so interesting to Fink and others who followed.

Instead, Milton's complete lack of enthusiasm for Venetian republicanism reveals a conception of civic freedom derived from a passionately held belief in Christian liberty and the potential of an elect nation to find its own form of political freedom in institutions other than those that English writers characteristically admired in the Venetian experiment. Milton's was not a liberty that derived principally from human laws formulated under the "gaze of men": namely, the pragmatics of state, right reason or even natural law, as understood among the more measured and realistic political thinkers of his era who were drawn to the Venetian republican
model. Not for nothing have Miltonists long commented on the impractical, unsystematic and highly spiritual nature of Milton's republicanism: he was not finally very interested in the delicate, though often as mythical as real, beauties of Venetian statecraft. His conscience and his political senses, working in tight harmony, impelled him instead toward the "sight of God" as it seemed to be receding among a resistant and quickly backsliding but potentially elect nation on the eve of the Restoration.
Figure 1. Frontispiece to James Howell, *S. P. O. V.: A Survey of the Signory of Venice* (1651)
NOTES

1 Venice is very briefly mentioned as part of Milton's paean to Paolo Sarpi as the "great Venetian antagonist of the Pope" and dismissed summarily in his description of his Italian travels in *Defensio Secunda*. It is only in late 1659 that Milton began to refer explicitly to the principles of Venetian government, first in *A Letter to Friend* and then in *Proposals of Certaine Expedients*, before developing his ideas somewhat more fully in the two editions of *The Readie and Easie Way* in early 1660. See Don M. Wolfe, gen. ed., *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82): 1:581; 4:619-20; 7: 327, 336, 436, 446 (hereafter cited as CPW). It is highly significant that he makes no other uses, nor considers no other aspects of, Venetian government in his political writings, even though as Secretary for the Foreign Tongues he was involved in several exchanges with the Duke of Venice (see CPW 5:647-48, 656-57, 715-16, 807-09).


3 Some of the issues that comprise this problem have not, of course, gone wholly unnoticed. *Milton in Italy: Contexts, Images, Contradictions*, ed. Mario A. Di Cesare (Binghamton, NY: MRTS, 1991), selected papers from the Third International Milton Symposium, brought to the fore a range of biographical, artistic and political questions that had long hovered over Milton studies, but as these and other recent studies show, little attention has been accorded to the exact nature of Milton's relation to Venice's political system. Peter Lindenbaum's discussion of Milton's "republican mode of literary production" is generally persuasive, but it too indicates the need for a fuller-scale analysis of Milton, Venice and political theory: "John Milton and the Republican Mode of Literary Production," *YES* 21 (1991): 121-136.

Admittedly, there are valid reasons that Venice has received such limited attention among Miltonists. Fundamentally, of course, it is easier to construct good arguments from presences rather than absences, and Milton's laconic treatment of his own Venetian experiences and his resistance to Venetian-style

4 Austin Woolrych, “Introduction” to volume 7 of CPW, 8, 57. Like many others, I have used this excellent essay for its many insights and depth of research. See also Arthur E. Barker, Milton and the Puritan Dilemma (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), esp. chap. 15; Michael Fixler, Milton and the Kingdoms of God (Evaston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964) and Barbara K. Lewalski, “Milton: Political Beliefs and Polemical Methods,” PMLA 74 (1959): 191-202. For examples of Milton’s ambivalence toward popular sovereignty and an aristocracy of virtue on the other, see CPW 4:636 and 7:178, 186.


6 Franco Gaeta, “Alcune Considerazioni sul Mito di Venezia,” Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance 23 (1961): 59-60 and passim. On the ideological flexibility of the mito, see the discussions by Fink, “Venice,” 159; William Bouwsma, “Venice and the Political Education of Europe” in Renaissance Venice, ed. J.R Hale (London: Faber, 1973), 454; Edward Muir, Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 49. There is no shortage of excellent discussions of the mito di Venezia, a truly vast topic for which I cannot devote even remotely adequate space here. In addition to the works already cited in this and the previous note, I have found the


8 CPW 1:581

9 See the analysis in William Riley Parker, *Milton: A Biography*, ed. Gordon Campbell, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1:802. Of the 86 authors Milton cites, only 34 are cited more than once, and most of those cited more frequently than Sarpi are English historians—Holinshed, Stow, Camden, Speed. Other than those to Machiavelli, there are no references to important contemporary Italian historians (Guiccardini, Giannotti, Contarini, Paruta). This evidence suggests a real prominence for Sarpi in Milton’s thought that no other Italian historical writer enjoyed in the 1640’s. On dating Milton’s reading of Sarpi, see Parker, 2:883; James Holly Hanford, “The Chronology of Milton’s Private Studies,” *PMLA* 36 (1921): 251-71; and the introductory essay by Ruth Mohl in CPW 1:348-49.

10 Milton’s references to Sarpi are contained in CPW 1:396-502, *passim*.

11 On Chaucer as a proto- or crypto-Protestant authority, see John N. King, *English Reformation Literature: The Tudor Origins of the Protestant Tradition* 218

12 CPW 1:595. It is revealing that Milton draws part of this episode from Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* (see CPW 1:595n.) See also *Areopagitica* (CPW 2:516-17), where Spenser and Sarpi are yoked in a similar dynamic of English/Italian opposition to (Papal) censorship.

13 CPW 2:492 and n.28, 2:503, 501. Other borrowings and references abound in *Areopagitica*, as for example at CPW 2:510-11, 2:529. See CPW 2:500 n.54.

14 Sarpi 1619: title page; Brent 1620: title page. The Dedication is marked throughout with de Dominis’s strongly anti-papal appeals to James. He consistently opposes James and the pope, claiming for example, that “la Corte di Roma” attempts to “opprime la vera dottrina Christiana, induce falsità, & menzzone, per articoli di fede.” The spirit of the Dedication is considerably less measured than Sarpi’s work itself. In Brent’s own dedication, the translator goes even further, asserting that the eight popes who oversaw the synod were “the greatest, and most pernicious quackesalving juglers that ever the earth did bear.” Moreover, Brent adds a dedication to the Archbishop of Canterbury and quotes, as evidence of a Catholic complot, Edmond Campion’s endorsement of the Council of Trent. In all, the Brent translation goes further even than de Dominis in mapping out for readers a history of Catholic attempts to suppress true religion and maintain their own temporal powers.

15 *Defensio Secunda* in CPW 4.614-20; Parker, 1:168-82.


17 Lewkenor, Dedication. A useful survey of the *Roma nova* or *Roma secunda* trope in the middle ages is contained in William Hammer, “The Concept of the New or Second Rome in the Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 19 (1944): 50-62. Milton also expressed an association between England and Rome in *The Readie and Easie Way*: “where is this goodly tower of a Common-wealth which the English boasted they would build, to overshaddow kings and be another Rome in the west?” (CPW 7:357).


Andrew Bamaby has written two very provocative analyses that bear on this problem: "Machiavellian Hypotheses: Republican Settlement and the Question of Empire in Milton’s Readie and Easie Way," *Clio* 19 (1990): 251-70, and "'Another Rome in the West?': Milton and the Imperial Republic, 1654-1670," *Milton Studies* 30 (1993): 67-84. While I agree with many of the points asserted in these articles, I also believe that he far too readily assumes that Venice occupied a significant place in Milton’s political thought; see “Machiavellian Hypotheses,” 256, 270. As I argue in this discussion, textual support simply does not exist for some of the assumptions and claims made concerning Milton and Venice.


See 7-8 and also 62-63. The luxuriousness of “Kings, or Grandees” forms a significant theme in Nedham’s writing. In *Mercurius Politicus* 84 (8-15 Jan. 1652), he argues that Venetian “Governers are now inclined to Luxury, being (to speak mildly) of a more soft and delicate demeanour than is usuall in a state that is really free.” He concludes that only the people themselves can secure their own freedom (see 1337-8). I am grateful to Nigel Smith for first suggesting Nedham’s works in this context.


Harrington is a complete subject on his own, and I cannot pretend to do justice even to a highly condensed review of his significance in the political debates I am discussing here. I am, however, especially indebted to Perez Zagorin, *A History of Political Thought in the English Revolution* (New York: Humanities Press, 1966), chap. 11; Charles Blitzer, *An Immortal Commonwealth: The Political Thought of James Harrington* ([Hamden, Connecticut]: Archon Books, 1970); Mark Goldie, “The Civil Religion of James Harrington,” in *The Languages of Political Theory*
in Early-Modern Europe, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 197-224. Pocock’s introduction to The Political Works of James Harrington, and Woolrych’s introduction to CPW 7 also contain very useful discussions.

On the materialism of Harrington’s system, see (in addition to the sources cited above) Jonathan Scott, Algernon Sidney and the Restoration Crisis, 1677-1683 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 14-16 and 109. On “stability” as a Harringtonian preoccupation, see his 30-32. Goldie, “Civil Religion” offers a compelling case for a spiritual basis to Harrington’s political philosophy, but I feel, nonetheless, that a distinction between Harrington’s central values and Milton’s must be acknowledged.

Harrington, Political Works, 161.

Sig. A2.

Wren, Considerations, 8 and see 63-67, 70-71. On Wren’s anti-legalism, see also his Monarchy Asserted, Or the State of Monarchicall and Popular Government. 2nd ed. (London, 1660), 8-9. This work reiterates many of the arguments, in much the same order, which he leveled at Harrington in Considerations.


Harrington, Political Works, 808, 764.

Harrington, Political Works, 208-209.

CPW 1:581; 7:327, 336, 436, 446.

Zera S. Fink’s The Classical Republicans: An Essay in the Recovery of a Pattern of Thought in Seventeenth Century England (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1945), long the critical touchstone for such questions, has come under attack by, among others, Martin Dzelzainis, who argues persuasively that instead of a life-long fascination with mixed government according to a Polybian model, Milton’s republicanism was instead tinged with the thought of Aristotle, Sallust and especially Cicero. He contends, as others have in different ways, that Milton’s very conception of republicanism was premised upon an unusually high degree of individual freedom, and that whatever classical models Milton relied upon were inflected both by a highly idiosyncratic interest in “the moral economy of the commonwealth” and a flexible definition of commonwealth itself. Dzelzainis locates a “republican moment” in May of 1644, with the publication of Of

More than perhaps any other of his political writings, the works in question—*The Letter to a Friend*, *Notes on a Sermon*, *The Readie and Easie Way* 1 and 2 and *Proposals*—are precisely and specifically tied to rapidly emerging political events. I cannot recount the circumstances of their composition here, but they are precisely laid out in Woolrych’s general introduction and in the introductions to each essay in CPW 7.

Milton’s claim in *A Letter to a Friend*, that he is among those “without doors” relative to political insiders seems to be accurate, but this outsider status in no way prevented him (as it had not prevented Harrington and others) from offering the concrete suggestions he proposes in the works of 1659-60 (see CPW 7:327, 336, 436, 446). Barker, *Dilemma*, 266-69 agrees that whatever reluctance Milton had to mention Harrington by name, he certainly knew and invoked his writings.

The details of the two editions of *The Readie and Easie Way* are meticulously discussed in Woolrych’s essay and in the introduction to the second edition, by Robert W. Ayers (CPW 7:396-404). On the question of Milton’s political expediency in *The Readie and Easie Way*, see Lewalski, “Political Beliefs,” passim.

Note, to cite only two examples, the moral rather than economic or administrative emphasis of Milton’s attack on tithing in *Hirelings*, as pointed out by Woolrych (CPW 7:93), and his hope that the army would be subject to “the working of Gods holy spiritt” in *A Letter to a Friend* (CPW 7:324). Thomas Corns’s discussion is very illuminating on this point: “Milton and the Characteristics of a Free

46 Barker, *Dilemma*, 260, and see chap. 15, *passim*.


48 The notion of a perpetual senate is broached in *Proposals of Certaine Expedients* (CPW 7:336) and more fully developed in *The Readie and Easie Way*, as is program of decentralization (CPW 7:338). I quote from the second edition of *The Readie and Easie Way*, which is considerably expanded from the first (compare CPW 7:368ff. and 7:433ff.)

49 CPW 7:434-35.

50 See, for example, CPW 7:437ff.

51 CPW 7:434-36.


53 CPW 7:383. See also 7:338.

54 CPW 7:460.

55 Lewkenor, 1.


57 CPW 7:461-62. Compare with the first edition, CPW 7:385-87. See also CPW 7:420: "the best part of our libertie, which is our religion." On the opposition between virtue and commerce, see also *Defensio Secunda* (CPW 4:680, and 680-84, *passim*). I am deeply indebted to Steve Pincus, who provided me with a copy of his excellent paper "John Milton and Commercial Society: The Making of a Republican Conservative." Pincus argues, as I do, that Milton resisted the rising tide of commercial republicanism, opting instead for a conservative, classical version of the republic and its expectations of its citizenry. He concludes that Milton could never reconcile himself to a political model premised upon interest and rights, rather than virtue—hence Milton's interest in aristocratic solutions to England's political problems. In addition to finding myself in substantial agreement with Pincus, I note also that Woolrych lodges a similar argument about Milton's anti-commercialism—that an "overwhelmingly moral and religious" cluster of concerns motivates Milton's political thought (CPW 7:179).

58 CPW 3:502.


See Worden, “English Republicanism,” 446 on Milton’s status in this regard.

CPW 7:327. For a late attack on papists as idolaters, see *A Treatise of Civil Power* (CPW 7:254). A contemporary traveler’s account of the Easter processions in Venice provides illuminating evidence of the opulence, pomp and (as Milton would have it) idolatrous worship of the Venetians; see Malcolm Letts, ed., *Francis Mortoft: His Book, Being His Travels Through France and Italy 1658-1659* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1925), 181-85.

In his “Sonnet XII” (ca. 1645-46), though written more than a decade before and directed against readers who misconstrued his divorce tracts, Milton opposes ultimate truths against a “senseless freedom,” true liberty against a spiritless “licence.” In a manner quite similar to his arguments for a political aristocracy of virtue, he argues that those who love this higher liberty “must first be wise and good.” John Milton, *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. John Carey (London: Longman, 1971), 293.


Specifically, Milton said nothing about the *Incogniti*, whose reputation for literary greatness and moral degeneracy must, *pace* John Arthos’s more harmonious
suggestion, have caused him a feeling considerably more ambivalent than simply admiration for their artistic preeminence: "Milton in Venice," *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly Review* 65, no. 21 (1959): 341-350. It is strikingly inconsistent with his rapturous enthusiasm for the Neapolitan and Florentine academies that Milton had nothing to say about their Venetian equivalent—nor they about him. I am grateful to Albert Mancini to suggesting this line of discussion concerning the contemporary reputation of the *Incogniti*, of whom see the entry for Loredano in Giuseppe Petronio, gen. ed. *Dizionario Enciclopedico della Letteratura Italiana* (Bari: Laterza, 1967).

69 Salmasius alleged that during his tour, Milton was debauched by the Italians: that the friends there who praised him as a pretty youth also "used him as a woman"—*pro foemina habuerent*. While there is certainly no reason to credit Salmasius with any insider’s knowledge of his adversary’s behavior in 1638-39, the facts that Venice was widely regarded as the most morally corrosive of the Italian cities, and that Milton felt the need to rebut the charge twice, even though he left many other such accusations unanswered, does provoke speculation about what Milton might have seen (perhaps even done) in Venice. See *Ad Johannem Miltonium Responsio* (London, 1660), quoted in J. Milton French, *The Life Records of John Milton* 5 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1949-58), 1: 417, and *Defensio Secunda* (CPW 4:620, 587). In 1591, Wotton himself complained of Venice’s almost irresistible sexual temptations upon his first visit there, even though he loved the Italians at large. He pleaded he was not made of stone that could well resist the charms of Venetian courtesans: "inter foeminas Venetianas non admodum confidam meis viribus, nam non consto ex lapide" (cited in Pearsall Smith, 1:118 n.3).

70 Wotton was certainly more than perfunctorily interested in Milton’s tour, as evidenced by his warm letter of 13 April, 1638, in which he extends advice and good wishes to the young traveler in very endearing terms. Specifically, Wotton recommends Milton to Michael Branthwait, then governor to Lord James Scudamore in Paris, he advises that Milton “may surely receive from him good directions for the shaping of your farther journey into Italy, where he did reside som time for the King, after mine own recess from Venice” (French, 1:362, and reprinted in Milton’s 1645 *Poems*, as well as in Pearsall Smith, 2:381-83). It reasonable to conclude, therefore, that Milton had the finest endorsements a traveler could expect for the remainder of his journey, but especially for the Venetian part of it. He must have had at least opportunities to participate in Venetian society in the ways he did elsewhere in Italy.


As he called them in *The Readie and Easie Way* (CPW 7:445). Harrington’s fascination with the forms of government militates against Milton’s equally intense fascination with the spirit of government as it was derived from (and maintained) Christian liberty. Milton had, as I have argued, little patience for models and forms that proceed from a Machiavellian “reason of state.” See *A Treatise of Civil Power* on his commitment to the primacy of the regenerate man in the political sphere and his faith in the superiority of revealed over political wisdom (CPW 7:255 and 242-43).

CHAPTER 6

“AMONGST OUR DULL ENGLISH”: APHRA BEHN’S ROVERS,
NAPLES, AND THE MYTH OF THE INTERREGNUM

Though John Milton and Aphra Behn seem ideologically worlds apart, in one important way they were proximate in more than years. Even in works as different in scope and effect as *The Readie and Easie Way* (1660) and *The Rover* (1677), they are strikingly similar in their resistance to seeing in Italian politics any direct applications to the domestic controversies of their own ages. Both seem to have recognized the Ascham-esque potential of “Italy” to effect transformations in Englishmen: in *The Readie and Easie Way*, Milton resists the materialism, commercialism and secularism of the Venetian republican myth, in part for fear of what these Italianate temptations might do to his nation’s destiny as a godly republic; Behn both celebrates and mocks the transformation of Englishmen as they interact with a range of Mediterraneans in Spanish-occupied Naples, the setting of *The Rover*. Both ask, in effect: What would happen to Englishmen abroad, as they mingled with their Italian counterparts, whether in Venice or Naples? Would they
change skies but not their minds, as Milton professed he had done, or would they liberate themselves from the climatically and humorally determined dullness that constrained Englishmen sexually and culturally? Both Milton and Behn faced an “Italy” far more circumscribed and defined by a new style of travel writing and descriptive history, as for example, in John Raymond’s *Itinerary Containing a Voyage Through Italy* (1648) or a number of works by the mid-seventeenth century’s foremost Italophile, James Howell.¹

The increasingly documented, rationalized, even routinized Italy of these and other authors severely complicated the imaginative freedoms that Ascham, Webster or Shakespeare enjoyed when representing their Italies.

In the case of Behn’s *The Rover*, this tension manifests itself in particularly interesting ways. Thus far, I have discussed the matter of educational travel only peripherally in the preceding chapters: as one of Roger Ascham’s anxieties concerning the plain-speaking English Protestant ideal he espouses in *The Scholemaster*, as one way that orthodoxies of poison, diet and sincerity were tested in the early modern period; in Posthumus’s reported misfortunes as a continental traveler; and as a factor in Milton’s refusal to espouse Venetian-style republican thought. For Behn’s play, however, the ideology of educational travel stands as one of principal interpretive avenues into the text, even if to date that avenue has not been adequately examined. Not only is the historical exile of Royalists and their sympathizers partially cast as recreational touring, but the play also invokes the language and ideals of self-improvement and cosmopolitanism that travel writers of the period recommended.²
The variety of polemic for and against foreign travel, but especially that concerning
the Giro d'Italia, can hardly fail to register for scholars of early modern English national
sentiments. Historically, English discourses of national self-definition and cultural unity
were peculiarly indebted to overseas travel, whether in New World colonialism or—as I
have been arguing throughout this project—in the range of attitudes and anxieties
expressed in works devoted to continental educational touring. Published and private
arguments antedate Ascham's diatribe in The Scholemaster and remain integral to
English—later, British—cultural self-fashioning at least through the period of thoroughly
conventionalized bourgeois travel that forms the social satire in E.M. Forster's Italian
novels such as Where Angels Fear to Tread and A Room With a View.

The reasons educational travel functioned as such a convenient and necessary
social forum for theorizing and representing national character are hardy difficult to
ascertain. Though specific expressions of approval and disapproval varied over the
period, in general terms, travel challenged English cultural insularity by implicitly
devaluing or rejecting native practices in favor of those imagined by proponents of travel
to be both individually and socially beneficial, and by detractors to be destructive in equal
measure. Polemics and social satires against travelers, as well as more argumentatively
neutral guides to conduct and education, proliferated during the entire period, suggesting
not only the threatening power of foreign travel but also its continued (and increased)
social utility over the decades. Protestantism tended to sharpen English cultural isolation,
providing both a moral and doctrinal basis for claiming native cultural superiority, whether
in rejecting the imagined superstitious trappings of Catholicism, the arbitrary tyranny of

229
the papacy, the political instability of the peninsula's petty secular and Papal states, or the outward "Italian" social graces at odds with a natural English sincerity or plainness that Mediterraneans were imagined to lack. And of course, these moral and doctrinal justifications expressed themselves politically at times throughout the period: for example, in the sometimes justified English dread of the Inquisition, the long and probably less justified campaign against the Jesuits, the traditional association of the Pope with the Whore of Babylon or the great tyrant, and the decades-long conflict with the Spanish and Italian states for economic control in the Mediterranean. Despite an array of reasons both sound and unsound not to become involved in Italian travel, generations of English subjects—almost all of them male and bourgeois or aristocratic—not only did become involved, but also carried their experiences as travelers back to England, where they became part of the fabric of domestic society.

This cultural traffic between home and abroad is the subject of the following discussion, which serves both an argument in its own right and an epilogue of sorts to the preceding chapters. In its first and narrower capacity, it is intended as a corrective to recent criticism of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, which I believe has largely ignored highly relevant problems of English national identity in favor of a now overworked critical fixation with issues of gender, authorship and biography. Virginia Woolf's oft-quoted sentence—"all women together ought to let flowers fall on the tomb of Aphra Behn, for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds"—has been far too often used to justify, whether explicitly or not, the tendency to push Behn criticism into a kind of
feminist essentialism, as if the women’s issues of Behn’s age operated independently of larger political matters.³

In its second capacity, this chapter is intended to offer an instance of how the ideology of educational travel could function politically and dramatically in the period that witnessed both a thorough re-conceptualization of the English monarchy and—not coincidentally—an intensification of interest in educational travel. In this sense, it is an attempt to connect the English uses of Italy between 1530 and 1685, with the so-called Age of the Grand Tour, a period of Anglo-Italian travel that reached its apogee in the next century, and one far better documented than the years I have considered in my first four chapters.⁴

Behn’s vision of exiles bettered by their travels fits quite naturally within the topical domestic politics of the Exclusion Crisis but it also contributes to a changing and increasingly diffused ideology of educational travel. The Rover and The Second Part of the Rover (1681) reconstitute the Royalist exile as an instance of educational travel, not forced displacement, in order to address and compensate for the political inadequacies of Charles II during the Exclusion Crisis. The result is implicitly a re-definition of national character along the lines of the monarch’s own public persona (and his private one, too): the model Englishman is an adaptable, roving cosmopolitan, bound by neither provincial nor puritanical restraints, who amazes even Europe’s most desired females and can overcome their most powerful males.

According to this interpretation, the Interregnum afforded the opportunity for England’s royalty—and royalists—to cultivate these qualities during their exile, or at least
to fantasize about them after their return. But the critical years of internal political strife and factionalism between 1677 and 1681 also had a profound effect on Behn’s two versions of this story, causing her to abandon Naples in *The Rover* for the ideologically safer Madrid of her sequel, a city which afforded both an undifferentiated, pan-Mediterranean setting and an opportunity to imagine a Golden Age of social and sexual freedoms without the topical political risks inherent in her Neapolitan one.

Why, then, did Behn revise her source play, Thomas Killigrew’s ten-act closet drama *Thomasso, Or the Wanderer* (written c. 1654-5, pub. 1664) and shift *The Rover*’s action from Madrid to Spanish-occupied Naples—only to shift it back to Madrid in *The Second Part of the Rover*? Admittedly, changes in setting are not Behn’s only departure from Killigrew, but this added Italian dimension to her revision, especially in light of her return to Madrid in the sequel, does seem to warrant some specific explanation. The prologue to *The Second Part of the Rover* briefly calls attention to this displacement, but does nothing to suggest its rich contemporary cultural resonances:

*T’attempt to play the old Game o’er again:
The scene is only chang’d; for who would lay
A Plot, so hopeful, just the same dull way?*

If not downright coy, Behn’s explanation for changing her setting seems incomplete. Certainly dullness—“the same dull way”—is a significant trope in her anatomy of Englishmen abroad, but because the Naples of *The Rover* is so politically sanitized relative to its contemporary reputation, one rightly suspects motivations other than purely
aesthetic ones. Indeed, in shifting the setting of *The Second Part of the Rover* back to Madrid, Behn is also nostalgically imagining a Golden Age of aristocratic stability coexisting with libertine freedom, as in *The Rover* itself. However, in the sequel she draws away from a setting that carried with it some undesirable associations that the first play seems to suppress. These attempts to sanitize Naples form a fascinating pattern because in both works, Behn is consistently concerned with dissecting and representing Englishness abroad.

*Though considerably more varied than the discussions of even half a generation ago, recent critical studies of *The Rover* have so far failed to produce a comprehensive account of the play's consistent and overt engagement with questions of national character, despite repeated and thematically significant references in the play to essential cultural differences between English and Mediterranean peoples.* Behn’s insistence on distinguishing a core of essential Englishness from its Mediterranean opposite is fundamental to the play’s social dynamic, as for example when Ned Blunt, the most provincial of the Rovers and perhaps not coincidentally the least politically persecuted of them because not a roaylist forced into exile, is first spotted by the whore Lucetta and her pimp Sancho. She remarks, with cool experience that registers opposite to Blunt’s English callowness:

> This is a stranger, I know by his gazing; if he be not brisk he’ll venture to follow me, and then, if I know my trade, he’s mine. He’s English, too, and they say that’s a sort of good-natured loving people, and have generally so
kind an opinion of themselves that a woman with any wit may flatter 'em into any sort of fool she pleases.

At a distance and on cue, Blunt struts, cocks and gazes back on her, saying to himself:

"'Tis so, she is taken; I have beauties which my false glass at home did not discover."^9

The distinctions between "home" and "abroad" are so significant a dimension to the play's thematics that they do far more than merely color the text here. Even down to the play's conclusion, which has traditionally read as a triumph of a somehow depoliticized libertinism, what is at stake is not an abstracted notion of roving for men and liberation for women, but a dynamic constructed (as is the whole play) in specifically national terms. Here and elsewhere, the text bristles with references to the nation, national differences, incompatible social mores, and the cultural distinctiveness of English rovers and Mediterranean Others. Blunt is the play's laughing stock in part because his political sympathies are less clear: he has stayed in England too long, he says in II.i.37-42, a fact that implies a lack of commitment to the royalist cause. His exile is an elective one compared to those of his fellows and he is better supplied with ready money and his estate at home awaits him, but these advantages make him easier prey to the wiles of Lucetta and Sancho.

To take another example from later in the play, as love matches emerge in Act V and Don Pedro steps forth to prevent Florinda's marriage to Belvile, Willmore threatens him with reprisals. There can be no denying that the scene is charged with issues of sexual commodification, especially of women in a strongly patriarchal society, but these issues
are in no way abstracted from the politics of national identity, since Willmore's reference to "a damned Tramontana rover's trick" explicitly invokes the age-old cultural divide between those peoples living below and those above the line of the Alps. His threat proceeds from an individual sense of duty (or machismo), but also from a larger reservoir of cultural pride:

I have a damned surly crew here that will keep you till the next tide, and then clap you on board for prize. My ship lies but a league off the Molo, and we shall show your donship a damned Tramontana rover's trick.

(V.381-85)

The subject matter of both Rover plays is inherently political in this broad cultural sense, and for a number of concrete reasons both are studded with the language and ideological force of national self-styling. At one level, Behn's source, Thomaso, was a patently compensatory fantasy of exile which presents forced ostracism as a series of opportunities for adventure and personal development. It is a completely self-serving version of the events that forced the exile in the first place, but also a modest intervention into the politics of national difference as Killigrew's "wanderers" interact with Spaniards and Italians, and finally triumph over them in a sometimes nearly shapeless flow of sexual, financial and nationalistic adventures. Killigrew subverts the broader questions of national difference to the more immediate ones of his protagonist's escapades, but they are implicit throughout Thomaso.
The potential value of such a flattering historical reinscription of the royal exile must have been clear to Behn: at the Restoration Killigrew was awarded a highly influential theatrical monopoly which gave him considerable artistic control over one of the state theaters, and significant impact on the aesthetic evolution of the Restoration stage. There were rewards for telling history in ways that suited the new regime, a point not lost on Behn, who attempted in her play—subtitled *The Banish 't Cavaliers* to point up its political values rather than *The Wanderer*, which seems to insist upon its protagonist’s individuality—an even broader reassessment of historical circumstance by making the entire exile an occasion for redefining a new version of Englishness and English monarchy. Her plays are an equally compensatory “winner’s history” in which English sex appeal, mores and cultural distinctiveness prove irresistible to Mediterraneans, and so become a self-legitimating discourse in the context of Restoration political ideology.

When Behn’s exiled English rovers encounter Spaniards, Italians and each other in Naples, readers are right to ask how English cultural distinctiveness is held up for examination, and for what domestic social or political ends. Moreover, this problem is complicated and enriched by the fact that *The Second Part of the Rover* was by Behn’s own (apparently accurate) description a response to intense interest at court in the first play. In her dedication to James, Duke of York, she explicitly conjures the Interregnum memory of “the Arbitrary Tyranny of many Pageant Kings” and invokes a parallel between the exile portrayed in *The Rover* and the more recent one of the duke himself, who, tho the Royal Son of a Glorious Father . . . was render’ed unfortunate by the unexemplary ingratitude of his worst of Subjects; and sacrific’d to the
insatiate and cruel Villany of a seeming sanctifi’d Faction, who cou’d never hope to expiate for the unparallel’d sin, but by an entire submission to the Gracious Off-spring of this Royal Martyr; yet You, Great Sir, denying Yourself the rights and Priviledges the meanest Subject Claims, with a Fortitude worthy Your Adorable Vertues, put Yourself upon a voluntary Exile to appease the causeless murmurs of this again gathering Faction, who make their needless and self-created fears, an occasion to Play the old Game o’re again. (Rover II, 113).

Especially for a Royalist elite, long-standing definitions of English character were subject to intense scrutiny and radical revision during and immediately after the period of forced exile represented in these two plays, an ostracism in which many of Charles II’s most trusted members of court and government, Thomas Killigrew included, personally shared. Though Behn draws upon a pool of highly conventional ideas about English national identity (some of which are detailed in Chapters 1-5), her plays also point toward a new conception of English national character by presenting the Interregnum as an opportunity for educational travel and cosmopolitan self-improvement that travel was widely believed to encourage. That Naples contradicts the logic of using any of the more traveled Italian destinations, Venice and Rome especially, begs a series of interconnected questions.

How specific or important is Naples in the travel and descriptive prose of the period? Did the city convey a unique set of social and cultural expectations, or did it
simply register as an undifferentiated, conflated Mediterranean locale of sinful possibilities and attendant perils? Was it even understood as Italian in the way that Venice or Florence were, or was it believed to be culturally Spanish, as indeed politically it had been since 1504? These questions are made even more germane by the facts that in 1647-48 the Italian habitants of Naples revolted against their Spanish aristocratic overlords, and that their popular insurrection was widely acknowledged in the English press and other institutions as a parallel instance of England’s own revolution.

Even aside from these incendiary contemporary events, Naples is in many respects an unusual choice of setting. Charles never stopped there during his exile, and though some of his supporters did, all published evidence suggests that it was never a particularly significant place of sojourn at any point during the period. Nor does Thomaso itself suggest a hidden or overt purpose: though Killigrew made an extended sojourn in northern Italy as Charles II’s ambassador, there is no significant concern with Naples beside a few scattered references to the city—far fewer than to Padua, Angellica Bianca’s home city, or to Venice, the destination of the characters at the end of Killigrew’s play and the implicit standard against which to measure all definitions of prostitution and general social license. The latter city, at least from the perspective of English travelers, playgoers and polemicists would have registered as the Italian peninsula’s most sinful locale—in many respects the more logical or predictable choice than Naples for Behn’s adaptation, both for the notoriety of its courtesans and its carnival. By 1677 Venetian and Roman carnivals were far more enshrined as obligatory stages of the Englishman’s tour than was the Neapolitan celebration.12 Naples was consigned to a different and more restricted
educational purpose in the conventional wisdom of grand touring than the libertine, carnivalesque one of Behn's play.

In reality, *The Rover* invokes a pan-Italian locale of no very specific geographical status, but with the very specific thematic function of revisiting the mythology of the Interregnum and testing what Behn presents as essential Englishness. The two concerns relate closely to one another: a new definition of Englishness is shown to emerge from the educational "opportunity" of the royal Grand Tour. As a point along the increasingly conventionalized *Giro d'Italia*, that segment generally considered the crowning event of the Grand Tour, Naples seldom amounted to much more than a side-trip from Rome. As late as the 1620's it was still a physically demanding and even dangerous journey to undertake, and for a whole constellation of reasons never drew English short-term residents in the ways that Venice, Padua, Florence and later on, Rome did. Not that there was no reason for English travelers to venture this far south: ancient ruins, the rich living evidence of a classical past that travelers had studied from grammar school onward, legendary natural beauties, and Europe's most populous and aristocratic conurbation were reasons enough. By the middle of the century, Naples was both a significant commercial center and a destination on the conventional *Giro*, and it gained from its proximity to Rome, Genoa and Leghorn, all of which became increasingly prominent stops for English travelers from about 1630. But it was not a location they chose for extended sojourns. Unlike Venice and Rome, it had never been particularly noteworthy among English travelers for the quality or abundance of its courtesans, though if George Sandys and others are correct in claiming their number to be 30,000, there must have been
opportunities enough for those Englishmen who remained in Naples longer than the conventional week or so advised by mid-century writers.^{13}

Despite a relative paucity of long-term visitors, in the travel and descriptive writing available in England, Naples had a distinctly positive character as a bounteous, beautiful, ancient and aristocratic city. Edmund Warcupp’s 1660 translation of Franciscus Schottus’s *Itinerarii Italiae* positively rhapsodizes on the region’s ancient nobility that preceded Rome’s, its “proud palaces,” and “the nobility and magnificence of her Citizens & inhabitants.” Even the “places surrounding the City” convey the same sense of grandeur, as they are “very pompous; and adorned by the nobles with magnificent Edifices and fair gardens, well kept, and enriched.” James Howell and Samson Lennard’s 1654 translation of Scipio Mazzella’s descriptive history of Naples puts the matter even more concisely: because of its magnificence in dwellings, habit, civic works and natural advantages, “There is no Country swarms with Nobility more than the kingdom of *Naples.*”^{14} Other mid-century writers formed a chorus of enthusiastic encomium for the city, its natural beauties and situation, and sometimes—though not always—for its noble inhabitants.^{15}

Naples’s reputation for aristocratic, noble character is particularly significant to *The Rover* because with the city’s notoriety came opportunities for political commentary on the problems inherent to aristocratic government—some of which manifested themselves quite spectacularly in the very period the play represents. According to Jean Gailhard’s comprehensive *The Present State of the Princes and Republicks of Italy* (1668), the Neapolitans suffered under the most oppressive, grinding sort of exploitation
by “Garrisons of Natural Spaniards, by whom they are strangely oppressed, as by them they were conquered.” He avers that the Spanish “squeeze and oppress that people with an infinite number of Taxes, and other heavy burthens” and the vice-roy rules “with a despotick Authority,” while the people “must never look for redress.”

This latter view of the city circulated widely in English writings of the period, but it does not impinge upon Behn’s vision of a politically sanitized, abstracted Naples. Rather, as Spanish territory on the Italian peninsula, Naples served Behn as a pan-Mediterranean site in which to juxtapose English cultural practices and their Ultramontane Other, not for a narrower political allegory of oppression and revolution. She uses what she needs from her Neapolitan setting, freely mixing Spanish and Italian social mores as they serve her purpose of defining an essential Englishness, but she also strategically excludes aspects of Naples’ well-known contemporary reputation in order to recuperate an aristocratic Golden Age in which there is no aristocratic oppression, whether economic or sexual, that cannot be overcome by a band of adventurous English rovers.

* *

In the context of the English Interregnum, Naples was far from a neutral or politically innocent choice of setting. Beginning in July 1647, the year following the future Charles II’s flight to France, a popular insurrection against the Spanish viceroy and Neapolitan aristocrats brought widespread destruction of property and loss of life across Naples. Though the Revolt began as a response to food taxes deemed intolerable by the lower strata of Neapolitan society already squeezed by economic pressures and exploitations, it
soon developed into a full-scale populist rebellion with certain striking parallels to the situation in England. Indeed, according to one contemporary account, in the heat of their rioting, Neapolitan commoners even invoked the example of the English Parliamentarians: "Viva il Parlamento d'Inghilterra."\textsuperscript{18}

The Revolt's charismatic early leader, a twenty-four year-old fisherman named Masaniello, was murdered ten days after the riots began, but he became almost instantly a mythic figure not only among Neapolitans but across the continent and in England as well.\textsuperscript{19} In fact, the Revolt was reported in England with more speed and in greater detail than anywhere else outside the Italian peninsula. Translated prose accounts appeared in 1650, 1652 and 1654, all of them emphasizing Masaniello's personal role in the insurrection and reporting miraculous events said to have surrounded his rise and fall. In some cases, too, the Neapolitan revolt was interpreted as a harbinger of other popular uprisings across the Mediterranean. Many of these accounts were reprinted even after the Restoration.\textsuperscript{20}

Just as significant, a five-act dramatic version entitled \textit{The Rebellion of Naples, or the Tragedy of Massenello} appeared in July 1649, setting up the protagonist as an insane tyrant who loses his populist principles as soon as he achieves political supremacy over the oppressive viceroy and his aristocratic minions. After a rapid rise to power, Masaniello abandons the common people and initiates a reign of terror against dishonest bakers and butchers, and finally decimates his own family. In the final act, he has lost all sense of his populist calling and instead begins hubristically to worship monuments to his own power,
declaring, "I begin to be immortall" and announcing in soliloquy that he will out-do even Alexander the Great, who wept when he had no more worlds to conquer:

I'le gee and be merry with the gods, drinke their wine, sing catches with the angells, hunt the Devill, run races with the horses of the Sun, hob-naile my shoos with a couple of old Moons, and so drink a pot at every one of the celestiall signes.21

The play concludes with a brief epilogue, spoken by Masaniello, warning kings to "beware how they provoke / Their Subjects with too hard a Yoke," but its true exhortation falls upon those very subjects, who too easily are led into self-destructive rebellion:

Fond men be rul'd, play not with Kings,
With Lyons clawes, nor Serpents stings.
For Rebellion, and treason;
Rots your name, and outs your reason,
Could all the traytors that are dead,
But rise——they'd say——as I have sed.

Apart from its final exhortation, what is particularly significant about this play in the context of revolutionary English politics is the remarkably evasive, defensive tone of the now-anonymous author's address to the reader, in which he tries, quite disingenuously, to exculpate himself from any charges of political allegorizing. He

243
imagines a critical reader who charges that "though Naples be the Scene" the author
"plasters his bills upon the walls and gates of London." To which charge he responds,

    Truly I know a pick-lock can do no harme to the doore where there is no
key to any locke: and if there be any thing in my booke which points at the
present condition of our affaires, I assure you the times are busie with me,
and not I with the times. Types must agree with antitypes, like a paire of
indentures, which being compared together seem one and the same, so if
you take the whole substance of the Tragedy and compare it with our
transactions, you will find that the same pen-knife went between them.\textsuperscript{22}

Despite its metaphoric ingenuity, this appeal to the reader points up the very issue
that obtains with Behn's \textit{The Rover} some thirty years hence. If Neapolitan rebels invoked
the English parliamentarian revolutionaries in their own struggles, the converse made just
as much sense: Naples was transparently, naturally and logically available as an analogy to
the English revolution. Here the analogy is simultaneously offered and withdrawn, but
several of the period's other authors are less coy. In defense of the Cromwellian regime,
for example, Milton's \textit{The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates} (1649) describes "the
perfidious cruelty which, as a constant maxim of State, hath bin us'd by the Spanish Kings
on thir Subjects that have tak'n Armes...heretofore in \textit{Belgia} it self, and this very yeare in
\textit{Naples."}\textsuperscript{23} Finally, and perhaps most significantly, in \textit{Thomaso} itself', Naples and
Masaniello also appear—this time as bogeys for anti-monarchical revolution, as in
Angellica's characterization of the English:

\textsuperscript{22}
No, faith, never think they should bear respect to their dead King, since they do not do it to their living; the three Christian Kings are so us’d by their vassals; Frondeur, Round-head, and a Massaniellian; which is the worst devil of the three?²⁴

Even late in the Interregnum the Masaniello story continued to serve as a political rallying point for the republican question: three separate Dutch commemorative medals were produced in the late 1650's, each of them placing Masaniello on one face and Oliver Cromwell on the other. Two were apparently designed to discredit Cromwell merely by likening him visually and politically to the fisherman who caused Naples to burn, but another seems to urge the opposite interpretation, for its inscriptions read “vain rebel” for Masaniello and “victorious warrior” for Cromwell.²⁵

Cromwell and Masaniello emerged as a natural pairing in the writings of the period, too. Nigel Smith concluded in his comprehensive study of revolutionary writings that Masaniello proved to be “a notable anti-Cromwellian topos,” as in John Streater’s A Glympse of That Jewel, Judicial, Just, Preserving Libertie (1653).²⁶ Closer to Behn’s own period of writing, Richard Lassels’s enormously popular 1670 The Voyage of Italy invokes the same connection, adding a moral injunction possible in print only after the Restoration:

They shewed me the house of this Fisher-man: But the other houses shewed me his fury. Thousands have not yet recovered those ten days tumults. Thus we see, that ‘when Men are ripe for Rebellion, Cromwells
and Mazanels are cryed up for great Men: Or rather, when God hath a mind to punish, Flies and Gnats are powerful things, even against Princes.\textsuperscript{27}

I do not claim that Behn either read or knew \textit{The Rebellion of Naples}—which was never acted as far as I can determine—or that she came into direct contact with Dutch commemorative medals, Streater's writings or Lassel's \textit{Voyage}. Rather, I wish to underscore the point with which I introduced this section: namely that any yoking of Naples and the English Interregnum could never, in the milieu of the middle and late seventeenth century, be merely circumstantial or politically innocent. The connection was simply too widely diffused, too publicly available to be ignored. Throughout the period represented in Behn's plays, as in the periods of their composition and staging, the Revolt of Naples was a widely available rod for publicly measuring (or chastising) not only the effects of populist revolts in general, but also the actions of the English revolutionaries.

Significantly, though Behn is elsewhere a decidedly political playwright and \textit{The Rover} is imbued with the politics of the Interregnum, there is no allusion anywhere in the play to the incendiary events of 1647-48, nor to their reporting or interpretations in English literary or political institutions—and this despite the fact that \textit{Thomaso} offers the analogy quite explicitly. Given this cultural function of the revolt in England and on the continent, it is, practically speaking, impossible that she would not have been cognizant of Naples's symbolic utility as a bogeyman or a legitimating example in Interregnum and Restoration political discourse; it was used repeatedly as an image of what the mob could do to domestic harmony or as what a "victorious warrior" such as Cromwell would do to
liberate a people oppressed by aristocratic misgovernment. But since Behn does not anywhere invoke Naples as an antitype of England for overt, domestic political purposes in the ways that Killigrew or Lassels do, and indeed seems studiously to avoid doing so, we are bound to look elsewhere for its function in The Rover.

* 

Behn’s fundamental vagueness concerning her symbolic Neapolitan setting suggests that its primary function, or at least its most obvious one, consists not in any topical application to English politics, but rather in contrasting Mediterranean sophistication and license with the Little England-style provincialism represented by Ned Blunt and Nick Fetherfool, the smug, gullible and finally comic scions of Englishness in The Rover and The Second Part of the Rover. Behn’s two works have less to do with accurately representing either Spanish or Italian social mores (as far as we can know, she never visited either Spain or Italy), than with positing a Mediterranean Other against which to compare English cultural values. In other words, neither play is narrowly political in the manner of topical polemics, but rather both posit an essential difference between the English rovers she creates and the Spaniards and Italians with whom they interact, a dynamic inflected by the language and assumptions of educational touring and a belief in a Golden Age of royal exile in which the very qualities that constitute Englishness became subject to revision.
The historian of Grand Touring John Stoye makes a number of germane points concerning both the English ideology of travel as broadening and improving, and the ways that educational travel became increasingly conventionalized both in matter and form after about 1630. The forced exile of Englishmen during the Interregnum proved to be one of the most decisive factors in those developments, but the ideological functions of educational travel were far older than that, a tradition reaching back to at least the generation of Roger Ascham and involving at base an ongoing debate over benefits to be gained from exposure to a wider world, and risks to be avoided in that same process of growth and cultivation. The royal exile, however, forced on two generations the sorts of cosmopolitanism recommended by English advice books of the mid-century and after. This group had far less control over their overseas educations by virtue of their forced or coerced exile, but they could enjoy artistic reinterpretations of it such as Killigrew and Behn provided, knowing that better times had come.

As a number of scholars have argued, the terms of this cultural debate changed significantly in the period represented in Behn’s Rover plays. A new emphasis on personal improvement and self-cultivation, rather than on benefits for the state or commonweal, began to appear in print from the second quarter of the seventeenth century. But to a significant degree, this new ideology of individual gain was also articulated in terms of its benefits to the English as a nation or people—a point of no small significance for the “educational touring” of Charles II which forms the foundation of Behn’s plays. For example, James Howell’s Instructions for Forreine Travell (1642 and 1650) justifies travel as particularly beneficial to the English:
Amongst other people of the Earth, *Islanders* seeme to stand in the most need of *Forraine Travell*, for they being cut off (as it were) from the rest of the Citizens of the World, have not those obvious advantages of society, to mingle with those more refined Nations, whom Learning and Knowledge did first Urbanize and polish.

He juxtaposes English provincial attitudes and continental cosmopolitanism, saying "Amongst other Nations of the World the *English* are observed to have gained much, and improved themselves infinitely by voyaging both by Land and by Sea."^32

Restoration travel and educational writers argued that observation and experience in the larger world could improve a natural English provincialism that often slipped into crassness and boorishness. Richard Lingard admitted that "sincerity of... heart" was a most distinctive and laudable English trait, and one that ought to be prized above all refinements; but he also criticized an Englishman’s predisposition for being "Rough in Address" and "blunt even when he obliges."^33 (It is no coincidence that Behn’s most thoroughly English character is Ned Blunt—a name not taken from Killigrew but invented for the revision.) Similar observations exist in nearly all the travel and courtesy literature of the period immediately preceding *The Rover*’s first production: as in William Higford’s *The Institution of a Gentleman* (1660), Obadiah Walker’s *Of Education Especially of Young Gentlemen* (1673), and Jean Gailhard’s *The Compleat Gentleman: Or Directions for the Education of Youth As to their Breeding at Home and Travelling Abroad* (1678).
In *The Voyage of Italy* Lassels casts self-improvement as a counter to a specifically English brand of smug cultural self-assurance:

Traveling takes my yong nobleman four notches lower, in his self-conceit and pride. For whereas the country Lord that never saw any body but his Fathers tennants, and M. Parson, and never read any thing but John Stow, and Speed; thinks the Lands-end to be the Worlds-end; and that all solid greatness, next unto a great Pasty, consists in a great Fire, and a great estate. Whereas my traveling yong Lord, who hath seen so many greater men, and Estats then his owne, comes home farre more modest and civil to his inferiors, and farre less puffit up with the empty conceit of his own greatness.34

Such expressions of cultural potential combine with such derision (or sometimes defensiveness) throughout the relevant literature. Higford’s *Institution* asserted that “Certainly, upon his dunghill, the English Gentleman is somewhat stubborn and churlish: Travell will sweeten him very much, and imbreed in him Courtesy, Affability, Respect and Reservation.”35 In 1679, the translator of Giacomo Barri’s guide to Italian paintings appended to Barri’s text a particularly defensive address to the reader, in which he argued that through study and emulation, English artists and connoisseurs could attain the level of sophistication already noteworthy in Italy, for “the English Genius is as capable of arriving at the highest pitch of Perfection and Glory in *This* and all other Liberall Sciences, as that of Old Athens, or of modern Rome.”36

250
These less laudable English characteristics of crassness, boorishness, provincialism, doltishness and the inability to distinguish quality from commonness are basic to the cultural dynamics at work in Behn’s two plays. She thoroughly revises Killigrew’s Thomaso in this respect, making far starker lines of demarcation between English and continental cultures, and even between the provincial English characters such as Blunt and Fetherfool and the culturally adaptable ones such as Willmore, Belvile and Beaumont. Particularly in the first part of Thomaso, the protagonist is torn between a longing for his native country and a spirit of adventure; to be sure, much of Willmore’s libertinism draws upon Killigrew’s original, but Behn effectively excises Thomaso’s ambivalence toward England. In both parts of The Rover, unlike in their source play, Willmore is all for “love and gallantry” and never ceases to condemn English “dullness” as a national trait to be superseded. Killigrew’s Thomaso, however, alternates between a wild insouciance and a kind of dull longing for England; some of his homesick and provincial sentiments are transferred directly in The Rover to Blunt, apparently in order to sharpen the contrast between cosmopolitanism and little-Englandism at the basis of her play.\textsuperscript{37}

Behn also dispenses with Killigrew’s panoramic attention to a European diaspora of exiles and expatriates, focusing instead upon a more limited binary between the English and their Mediterranean host-predators, the Spanish and the Italians. In Thomaso, we encounter or hear of Frenchmen, Hollanders, Germans, Swedes, Poles, Mexican Jews, Castillians, Neapolitans, Paduans, and Italians of unspecified origins—only a few of whom are mentioned by Behn. We also encounter in Killigrew a far more nuanced, complicated definition of Englishness than appears in the rover plays, in which Croyden and Essex
serve as the butts of an elaborate scheme of self-mockery, to distinguish Mediterranean cosmopolitanism from the worst of English provincialism. In the first act of *Thomaso*, Killigrew's wanderers encounter a porter with whom they engage in conversation:

*Ferd.* Prithee what Countryman art thou, that put'st so many R's into thy English?

*Porter.* A Britain, Sir, Glamorgan-shire, Sire, and Dam.

*Thomaso.* Take heed, dost thou know what thou hast done, to ask a Welshman what Countryman he is? By this light, 'tis ten to one but he falls into a fit of Heraldry or Geneology, and then you have brought yourself into a fair nooze, to be bound to hear, how many aps, and ap Williams, e're he comes to Adam ap Munmouth. (320)

This scene is excised from *The Rover*. Behn eschews most of the complicating facets of Killigrew's play, as in this quibble between Welshman and Englishman, instead creating rigid lines of demarcation between English and Neapolitan by eliding the differences between Italians and Spanish that *Thomaso* underscores, by eliminating most other national types, and by homogenizing British regional differences into an essential, unitary Englishness that has no place for very real distinctions between the Welsh and English. The result is a streamlined *Thomaso* that—her defensiveness in the postscript to *The Rover* notwithstanding—draws heavily but strategically from Killigrew in order to narrate an exile in which the English can view themselves and their habits of mind more clearly and more readily than any of Killigrew's band of wanderers ever could. Killigrew's play
offers a comic social history of the Interregnum exile, and though Behn does this as well, she also concerns herself much more pointedly with an examination of English mores in comparison with those of the *Mezzogiorno*.

Given this broad purpose, it comes as no surprise that Behn’s Naples in *The Rover* and her Madrid in *The Second Part of the Rover* are not particularly localized, despite a very few guide-book details here and there. Instead, and to some extent in the spirit of *Thomaso*, we find a persistent conflation of languages, historical circumstances and cultural references in both plays: Blunt fears being mocked along the Prado while in Naples, harlequins, scaramouches and mountebanks populate Madrid, and a constant traffic of Spaniards in Naples and Italians in Madrid occasionally speak each other’s languages and seem in many places to merge into a single cultural type. Both rover plays draw from *Thomaso* certain details of local color, but Behn never really loses the flavor and thematic resonances of Madrid, even when in Naples. For example, historical logic dictates that Lucetta, Phillipo and Sancho, the low comic counterparts to Angellica and her *bravi*, should be native Neapolitans. But in fact they delight in robbing Blunt for the same reasons that their Spanish originals in *Thomaso* do:

A rich coat; sword and hat; these breeches, too, are well lined! See here, a gold watch! A purse—Ha! Gold! At least two hundred pistoles! A bunch of diamond rings, and one with his family arms! A gold box, with a medal of his king, and his lady mother’s picture! These were sacred relics, believe me. See, the waistband of his breeches have a mine of gold—old queen Bess’s! We have a quarrel to her ever since eighty-eight, and may
therefore justify the theft: the Inquisition might have committed it.

(III.iii.37-45)

Their attention to an essential Englishness is more specific than in Killigrew's original, which omits the specific reference to the Armada defeat. As elsewhere in The Rover and its sequel, what is precise and sustained is a basic opposition between Mediterraneans and the English who stay among them: it does not seem to matter that characters who ought to be Neapolitan hold the same grudges that their Spanish sources feel for the Armada defeat. The result is the same, because the thematic point of the scene concerns Blunt, the roving Englishman least loyal to the royalist cause, and as a consequence, the most comic in his provincialism. He and Fetherfool pine to return to Essex and Croyden, their overseas adventures being only a way of biding time in, as they say, "a warm climate, where the kind sun has its godlike power still over the wine and women" (I.ii.74-76).

Where Thomaso dwells on this broad climatic orthodoxy only intermittently, in both Behn's plays, Willmore especially is explicit and persistent in constructing a notion of Englishness that depends upon overcoming the influence of a "dull, honest nation" whose mores he seeks to transcend in "a warm climate" where the sun exercises these godlike powers (see Rover II: 203). His character, like the plays themselves, is devoted to an anatomy of Englishness and the social, sexual and cultural restraints that form its inherent but not insurmountable dullness. Early in the play, Willmore admires the Neapolitan tradition of publicly parading cuckolds during carnival because he likes "their sober grave
way; 'tis a kind of legal authorized fornication, where the men are not chid for't, nor the
women despised, as amongst our dull English" (II.i.119-21). And somewhat later Belvile
anatomizes Blunt's Englishness in the least approving terms imaginable. He indicts a
distinctive national character to which all the rovers are in varying degrees subject, that of
an English elder brother's humor, educated in a nursery, with a maid to
tend him till fifteen, and lies with his grandmother till he's of age; one that
knows no pleasure beyond riding to the next fair, or going up to London
with his right worshipful father in parliament-time; wearing gay clothes, or
making honorable love to his lady mother's laundry maid; gets drunk at a
hunting match, and ten to one then gives some proofs of his prowess.

(I.ii.289-95)

Part of the play's comic structure, however, depends upon Blunt, the "dull believing
English country fop" who both realizes and awkwardly tries to supersede the limitations of
this purported humoral determinism, as in his declaration of passion for Lucetta:

What a dog I was to stay in dull England so long! How have I laughed at
the colonel when he sighed for love! But now the little archer has
revenged him! And by this one dart I can guess at all his joys, which then I
took for fancies, mere dreams and fables. Well, I'm resolved to sell all in
Essex and plant here forever. (2.1.37-42)
In this passage, as in *The Rover* generally, Naples functions as a site for testing (and overcoming) a peculiarly English predisposition to dullness, even as the play and its equally nostalgic sequel imply that such a predisposition has, decades after the Interregnum, retaken the English aristocracy and its theater.\(^{39}\)

What is particularly significant about Behn’s Naples, however, is that she presents a politically sanitized version of the city relative to its contemporary reputation for class struggle and popular rebellion. This tension between the historical Naples and the one of Behn’s dramatic representation consists in the fact that she effectively excises the class and political conflicts that defined the Italo-Spanish city in the second half of the seventeenth century. But—and more directly to the point—she also suppresses the root political and social causes of the royalists’ exile that she celebrates in the two plays. Their roving is shown to be a liberation from an ahistorical and specifically English dullness, determined by climate, geography and humoral theory; but not liberation from a nation with its own immediate and divisive political tensions that forced the exile in the first place.\(^{40}\) Her Naples never suggests that the very site of this pursuit has its own tale of popular revolt, one strikingly parallel to the English one, and recognized as such by her contemporaries. Instead, her Naples is de-classed and de-politicized, abstracted to the point that the only indications of class or ideological conflict—as in the Lucetta-Blunt subplot—are subsumed within a larger comic vision that pits Englishmen of varying degrees of dullness or savvy against their Mediterranean rivals and objects of desire.

Behn presents a city premised upon aristocratic governance and—making allowances for century-old English prejudices concerning Mediterranean duplicity and
 subtlety—a generally harmonious body politic under the Spaniards. Just as nostalgia for a Golden Age of libertine roving forms her political theme, so too does a Golden Age of aristocratic rule without class tensions shape her picture of Naples and her English rovers’ experiences there. Instead, *The Rover* defines struggle in terms of broader questions of cultural character and national self-definition; its only overt engagement with class politics occurs not in Naples at carnival time, but outside the play itself, where Behn repeatedly suggests parallels between the Golden Age of roving and “these our blessed times of reformation.” (*The Rover*, epilogue). Even within her quest to revive a Golden Age of aristocratic adventure, Behn reinscribes the political history of Naples for her own ends: not as a city torn by internal class and political differences, as it was in fact, but a city that—like the entire country of England itself—weathered a violent storm that is best left unmentioned.

* 

Because Behn’s object is in part to examine how Englishmen are educated out of their provincialism, we are in both plays never far from the ideological premises of the Grand Tour and the discourses of self-improving travel writing. In *The Rover*, for example, Blunt realizes too late that he could have averted his humiliating cozening by attending to a book of advice to travelers. He says, “Here’s a cursed book, too—a warning to all young travelers—that can instruct me how to prevent such mischiefs now ‘tis too late” (IV.5.16). He seems to refer to the sorts of advice offered in James Howell’s very
influential *Instructions for Forreine Travell*, a work that would indeed have been read by travelers with no more natural savvy than Blunt:

> And being now in Italy that great limbique of working braines, he [the traveler] must be very circumspect in his cariage, for she is able to turne a *Saint* into a *Devill*, and deprave the best natures, if one will abandon himselfe to pleasure, and become a prey to dissolut courses and wantonnesse...nor was the *Spaniard* but a dunce, till he had taken footing in her, and so grew subtilized by co-alition with her people. *She is the prime climat of Complement, which oftentimes puts such a large distance 'twixt the tongue and the heart, that they are seldom relatives, but they often give the lye to another; some will offer to kiss the hands, which they wish were cut off, and would be content to light a candle to the Devill, so they may compasse their owne ends.*

Howell's passage seems, finally, to articulate in topically precise terms Naples's most salient cultural value in Behn's play: a hybrid city where the distillation of Spanish pride and nobility fuses almost imperceptibly with the quintessence of Italian subtlety and hypocrisy to form the most extreme counterpoint to dull Englishness. In this sense, Naples provides the logical, even ideal choice of setting for a play devoted to such an anatomy of Englishness: she draws from Killigrew's Madrid, fashions a sanitized Naples, and so creates a hybrid, pan-Mediterranean locale that offers more than either setting would in isolation.
But this is not, finally, Naples's only available cultural meaning. A short but extremely persuasive study of early Restoration royal panegyrics by David R. Evans provides a particularly relevant perspective on Behn's somewhat later appropriation of travel ideology in casting the Interregnum as a form of educational touring. Evans argues that Charles II's panegyrists were forced to fashion a royal mythology based not on previous Stuart models of innate worthiness or hereditary claims, but rather on "the characteristics he learned during the course of his upbringing,"—especially during his involuntary exile which they rendered as a voluntary grand tour. While Willmore need not have any direct biographical relationship to Charles II, the exile he and the other English nationals endure in The Rover and The Second Part of the Rover represents at some significant level an opportunity for personal growth and national self-examination—a different emphasis from Killigrew's more rollicking version of continental wandering, and the sort of interpretation that the king's panegyrists offered at the Restoration.

Willmore's libertinism operates not only within the conventions of the rakish sex-comedies of the 1670's, but also within a discourse of national self-definition that posits two broad categories of educational traveler. One group, the Blunts and Fetherfools, are rough and unschooled, easily preyed upon by Mediterranean subtlety. A second group, in which Willmore is preeminent for his aptness, synthesizes a native frankness and love of life with the best the Mediterraneans can offer. Naples and Madrid are their classrooms or laboratories, and their growth does not operate only within a discourse of individualism.

The ideology of cosmopolitanism derived from mid-century travel writing and educational theory imbues both plays, but it is more explicitly applied to the situation of
the Stuarts in *The Second Part of the Rover*. In the sequel, Behn's dedication to James, Duke of York, constructs his banishment during the Exclusion Crisis as a form of voluntary touring, arguing that like his father, he will develop and benefit from exile while his enemies, a "Politick self-interested and malitious few," attempt to "Play the old Game o’re again." Behn's mythicizing on behalf of James II and Charles II not only fits within a general pattern of panegyric that constructed the Restoration as a return from a royal Grand Tour, much to the personal benefit of the King but ultimately for his people. But it is also consistent with Behn's Golden Age of freedom-in-exile—a sexual, political and cultural game of winner-take-all that in 1677 but especially in 1681 must have had a compensatory function for the beleaguered Stuart court beset by internal factions brought on by the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis, as well as the dull melancholy which Charles II's biographer describes as endemic at court in the king's declining years.43

In the end, there is no internal evidence that in Behn's play Naples served a more specific political purpose than as a city famed for its cultural hybridity and its general reputation as a city of nobility, pomp and opportunity for educational touring. A considerable dramatic benefit follows this decision, in that while obeying the cultural logic of the mid-seventeenth century, she is able to mix Italian and Spanish cultural codes in order to examine and reform Englishness itself. Her decision to set *The Rover* in Naples can appear at first rather arbitrary, but in the historical context of the period 1647-1681, there is also a pervasive irony, rather than simply an absence *tout court*: a probably willful suppression of facts in representing, but carefully not representing, what was probably the most famed revolutionary city of mid-seventeenth-century continental Europe—and one
that, judging from other cultural productions of the period, was understood to parallel the English revolution in significant ways. This irony suggests a pattern in Behn’s strategy of revision. She returns to Madrid in *The Second Part of the Rover* not because of any obedience to Killigrew’s original, which she was happy to ransack in many other ways, but because Naples was a political lightning rod in Restoration political discourse, and one that attracted unneeded attention to itself even as late as 1681.

Though of course we can never say with absolute certainty why Behn set her first play in Naples, only to reject the setting in the sequel, all evidence suggests that what she needed from a Neapolitan setting she could just as easily, and with far less danger of alienating the Stuarts and fellow royalists, derive from Madrid. Though a more cosmopolitan and in some ways evocative setting than the Spanish capital, the Naples of *The Rover* seems to have been a strategic risk, even a blunder in 1677, and one that she was eager to correct in *The Second Part of the Rover* four years and a political sea-change later.
NOTES

1 John Raymond, *An Itinerary Containing a Voyage Through Italy* (1648). James Howell authored or translated many works in the period, but see esp. his *Instructions for Forreine Travell*, ed. Edward Arber (1869).


6 I am indebted to Robert Markley, “'Be Impudent, Be Saucy, Forward, Bold, Touzing, and Leud': the Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn's Tory Comedies.” In *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century English Theater*, ed. Douglas Canfield and Deborah C. Payne (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 114-40; and to Robert Markley and Molly Rothenberg, “Contestations of Nature: Aphra Behn's 'The Golden Age' and the Sexualizing of Politics.” In *Rereading Aphra Behn: history, theory, and criticism*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 301-321. {Markley and Rothenberg 1993; Markley 1995} for their discussions of the Golden Age topos in Behn’s writing. Though I am here applying their argument with specific regard to state rather than sexual politics, I hope it is clear that in Behn’s dramatic works such a distinction has only limited value. Finally, with Markley and Rothenberg, I agree that sexual license is not an end in and of itself, but rather a part of a more comprehensive vision of freedom that Behn articulates in her dramatic and non-dramatic works.

262


Aphra Behn, *The Rover*, ed. Frederick M. Link (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1967), I.i.207-14. The italics are mine. All other references to *The Rover* will be drawn from this edition and given parenthetically.


I am especially indebted to David Evans, whose discussion of Restoration tropes of travel, exile and personal improvement I have found enlightening and convincing.

My use of *Englishman* where modern usage might seem to demand a gender-neutral term is not intended to ignore the very real problems of gender-specific language, but rather to underscore the fact that in the period educational touring was the preserve of privileged males. I cannot resist suggesting, moreover, that the experience of women in seventeenth-century foreign travel and embassies—whether actively or peripherally—is a subject calling out for sustained study, even if the initial prospects for developing a significant basis for analysis are not terribly promising. On Venice as a carnivalesque destination, see Thomas Killigrew, *Histories and Comedies* (1664), *Thomaso* Part II, 5.7-10, where various English and Spanish characters decide to set out for Italy.

For a discussion of the deep changes in the nature and practice of touring in the middle of the century, see Stoye, 117-133 and for a contemporary example, see Jean Gailhard’s advice to spend about a fortnight *in toto* making a side-trip from Rome to Naples: *The Compleat Gentleman: Or directions for the Education of Youth as to Their Breeding at Home and Travelling Abroad* (1678), 153. On Neapolitan courtesans, see the description by George Sandys in his *A Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom. 1610* (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1973), 202. The *Relation* was very popular, with a seventh edition in 1673. The same figure is reported in Raymond, 142. On the paucity of touring in Naples in the sixteenth century, see Malcom Letts, “Some Sixteenth-Century Travellers in Naples,” *The English Historical Review* 33 (1918): 176-77.


See, for example, Raymond, 139; Sandys, 198, 202; Richard Lassels, *The Voyage of Italy, Or a Compleat Journey through Italy* (Paris, 1670), 171.


19 The historiographical problem of the so-called “myth of Masaniello” is discussed at some length in Burke, passim, and Villari, 153-170.


21 T. B, The Rebellion of Naples or the Tragedy of Massenello Commonly So Called (1649), sigs. E7v-E8; see also F5.

22 Late Rebellion, “To the Reader”


24 Killigrew, 328. See the exchange throughout Part I, 2.1, where Masaniello’s Revolt is again mentioned specifically. I should add here that I disagree with Merriman’s rather offhand statement that the Neapolitan revolt was not politically significant in England. Quite the contrary, all evidence I have seen and in some cases noted here suggests that it was actively discussed for decades. See Merriman, passim and Villari, 181.


27 Lassels, 178. On the popularity of the *Voyage*, both in manuscript and printed forms, see Cheney, especially 140-144 and appendix I.

28 Markley, 137 argues for a careful application of the term *conservative* to Behn’s politics. I concur entirely with his cautious approach to representing either her conservative politics or her liberatory ideals.

29 Pearson, 229.

30 See Stoye, introduction and Part II.


33 Richard Lingard, *A Letter of Advice to a Young Gentleman Leaving the University*. (Dublin, 1670), 18-22.

34 Lassels, “Preface”

35 William Higford, *The Institution of Gentleman* (1660), 84. See also and for example, Gailhard’s seemingly natural assumption that the gentle sons of England, Sweden, Germany and Holland should be the ones to “travell into Foreign parts” (6).


37 See, for example, Thomaso’s claim that “these two are Ten whores in Essex” (317), a sentiment which Blunt articulates in *The Rover* I.ii.20-89. See *Thomaso* Part I, Act I.ii for the protagonist’s mixture of adventurous spirit and dull homesickness.

38 Killigrew, 375.


40 Markley, 116-118 discusses Behn’s anti-Puritan references in *The Second Part of the Rover*, but it is significant that such allusions do not occur in *The Rover*.

41 See *The Rover* IV.v.16-20; Howell, *Instructions*, 41-42.

42 Evans, 53. See also the study of the royal exile’s influence on English letters and arts in Hardacre, *passim*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources (unless otherwise noted, pre-1900 works are published in London)

A True Relation of the Reducing of the City of Naples to the Obedience of the King of Spain. 1648.


Askham, Anthony. A Lytel Herball. 1561.


B., T. *The Rebellion of Naples or the Tragedy of Massenello Commonly So Called.* 1649.


*Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, and in Other Libraries of Northern Italy*. Edited by Hortatio F. Brown. London: HM Stationery Office, 1900.

Camden, William. *Britain, Or a Chorographical Description of the Most Flourishing Kingdomes*. 1610.


268


Giraffi, Alessandro. *An Exact Historie of the Late Revolutions in Naples*. Translated by James Howell. 1650.


*La Singolare Dottrina di M. Domenico...Con la Dichiaratione della Qualità delle Carne di Tutti gli Animali, & Pesci, & di Tutte le Viande circa la Sanità*. Venice, 1570.


Lingard, Richard. *A Letter of Advice to a Young Gentleman Leaving the University*. Dublin, 1670.


271


*Polydore Vergil's English History*. Edited by Sir Henry Ellis. 1846.


R., W. *The English Ape, the Italian Imitation, the Footsteppes of Fraunce* (1588).

"Racconta Degli Herbaggi d'Italia." BL Coxe Papers vol. ccv. 9282.

Raymond, John. *An Itinerary Containing a Voyage Through Italy*. 1648.


[Sarpi, Paolo]. *Isto ria d el Concilia Tridentino*. 1619.


Scott, Thomas. *The Second Part of Vox Populi*, 1624.


Thomas, William. *The Vanitee of this World.* 1549.


Warcupp, Edmund, trans. *Italy, in its Original Glory, Ruine and Revival.* 1660.


Secondary Sources


276


277

Bartlett, Kenneth R. "The English Exile community in Italy and the Political Opposition to Queen Mary I." \textit{Albion} 13 (1981): 223-41.


278


Kimble, George H. T. *Geography in the Middle Ages.* London: Methuen, 1938.


296


303


