The Italian Verse of Milton

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by

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Abstract

The Italian verse of Milton consists of but six poems: five sonnets and the single stanza of a canzone. Though later in life the poet will celebrate conjugal love in Book IV of Paradise Lost (1667) and in Sonnet XXIII Methought I saw my late espousèd saint (1673), in 1645 Milton proffers his lyric of erotic desire in the Italian language alone. His choice is both unusual and entirely fitting. How did Milton, born in Cheapside, acquire Italian at such an elevated level of proficiency? When did he write these poems and where? Is the woman about whom he speaks an historical person or is she merely the poetic trope demanded by the genre? Though relatively few critics have addressed the style of Milton’s Italian verse, an astonishing range of views has nonetheless emerged from their assessments.

Milton’s Italian style illustrates fundamental attributes of the poet’s approach to composition in both his prose and his verse. The Secretary for Foreign Tongues must of necessity function as poet and polemicist, routinely crossing linguistic frontiers whenever the genre requires it. In this respect, the Italian verse of Milton — in which the poet responds in a strania favella [foreign speech] to the demands of love — is an early occurrence of the effort of the Commonwealth rhetor who likewise answers the challenges of European censure by exploiting the plurilingual resources of Renaissance humanism. Most of all, his Italian verse gives us a glimpse of the systematic reformation of Petrarchist poetics that
Milton undertakes in his later verse in English. Perhaps it is because Petrarchan values came to England directly from Italian sources that Milton decides to reform petrarchismo first in Italian. Milton’s Italian verse attempts in miniature a moral reformation of the whole genre of love poetry itself.
This dissertation is dedicated to Fr Christopher Deitz OFMConv,
Fr John Heinz OFMConv and the Friars Minor Conventual
of Saint Joseph of Cupertino Province.
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A chi pianta dal ciel si buon terreno.
The Italian Verse of Milton

Milton was not the only English poet to have written or published verse in the language of Petrarch. Princess Elizabeth allegedly exchanged sonnets in Italian with Mary, Queen of Scots.¹ The polymath physician, Matthew Gwinne (1558-1627), pseudonymously Il Candido, certainly prefaced both Florio’s translation (1603) of the Essais of Montaigne and the later dictionary, A Worlde of Wordes (1611), with commendatory sonnets in Italian, though they are not well regarded. Milton’s deft poetic experimentation in the Tuscan dialect, however, represents an altogether unique instance of the Italian verse of Englishmen. In fact, the sonetti of Milton represent an exceptional case of any non-Italian composing in the language of Dante and Petrarch, though other noteworthy poets include Louise Labé, la Belle Cordière (1524-1566), Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645), Vyacheslav Ivanovich Ivanov (1866-1949), James Joyce (1882-1941) and Ezra Pound (1885-1972).

Both among English-speaking scholars and their counterparts in Italy, Milton’s brief sequence of Italian sonnets has undeniably generated more critical attention than corresponding efforts on the part of his fellow countrymen, whether in his own lifetime or afterwards. Indeed, with a nimble dexterity unmatched by any Englishman, Milton displays precisely the kind of petrarchismo that held in perennial thrall the erudite and accomplished members of the Italian academies whom he regarded so highly. And the most remarkable
feature of his essay into the matter and form of Sixteenth Century *rime,* is that Milton did this in their language, not his own.

While the Elizabethan age certainly marks the apogee of Italian influence upon the development of Renaissance civilization in England, the language of Italy still enjoys some eminence, if only honorific, in the Caroline period as well. In any case, booksellers evidently accepted the inclusion of Italian works, both prose and rhyme, in publications intended primarily for an English-speaking audience, though printers cannot have expected even a rudimentary knowledge of the language from the vast majority of intended readers. The Italian community of London never exceeded but a few hundred souls and even the Italian Protestant Church of London was dissolved in 1598, its members having been encouraged to amalgamate to the Flemish or French parishes. Nor were significant numbers of converts to Protestantism arriving in London from Italy after 1603. What then accounts for the publication of a basically unintelligible continental language for an essentially insular market?

During the Sixteenth Century, Italian acquired an enduring prestige in England principally for having inflamed the national passion to develop its own vernacular eloquence. Tudor poets and scholars eagerly embraced Italian genres and praxis, opening the door to the tremendous impact Italy would have upon English politics, literature, customs, art, music and intellectual life. On the one hand, England perceived in those happy few Italian soldiers, clerics, bureaucrats, artists and merchants who came to her shores the indelible mark of a humanistic
capital vastly exceeding her own native production. On the other hand, English visitors to Italy could not but experience the nobility of her architecture, the splendor of her art, the elegance and attractiveness of her vernacular writing, together with the commercial successes that her booksellers had found in marketing the written works of Italian literature. A notable exception to the general enthusiasm of Elizabethans, Roger Ascham, who travelled in the Veneto during the second session of the Council of Trent (May 1551-April 1552), gives voice to an astonishingly cynical assessment of Italian learning. In *The Scholemaster* (1563), for example, he famously equates Italy with the Homeric enchantress, Circe. Ironically, Ascham’s strident critique nonetheless framed a portal through which an explicitly Englished sort of Italian culture could yet begin to shape his island nation’s own energetic participation in the European Renaissance. Ascham notwithstanding, Italy’s dedicated exposition of intellectual culture through the intoxicating medium of vernacular language infused England with new life and radiance. During this period, English courtiers, scholars, poets, musicians and merchants embarked upon a coherent, if undeclared and unsystematic, conveyance of Italian art, architecture, poetry, oratory and political acumen to the shores of their island nation. Despite palpable xenophobia in English society at large, the Elizabethan élite vigorously and imaginatively exploited the Italian Renaissance in order both to resist continental hegemony and to animate England’s emerging imperial ambitions.
Multilingual collections of poetry served a variety of purposes in intellectual life during Charles I’s reign, display not least among them. Elsewhere in the realm, such polyglot performances, often associated with epideictic anthologies from Cambridge and Oxford, were exercised by young scholars in order to gain ecclesiastical preferment or attract aristocratic patronage. As a young man, however, Milton limited his participation in such activities, even though his Italian, Latin and Greek verse belong to the period of his university years and shortly thereafter. At Cambridge, Milton learned to perform the genres of display. But his multilingualism isn’t simply a matter of showing off. Our poet’s superior apprehension of Latin and Greek give him direct access to the fount of classical Roman republicanism. Moreover, his proficiency in Greek, Hebrew and Syriac authorize his own personalized and unique Biblical exegesis entirely independent of the ecclesial polities he found so vexing.

For all the Italian language’s Elizabethan legacy and occasional inclusion in polyglot collections, Milton’s degree of fluency and his easy dexterity with the Petrarchan idiom would still have been exceptional in Stuart England. Though later scholars have tended to dismiss his essays into petrarchismo as derivative and conventional, Milton’s contemporaries, especially fellow academicians of Florence, appear not at all to have shared the generally lukewarm assessment that predominates in the afterlife of this admittedly slight Italian corpus. While continental humanism regarded the highest standards of proficiency in Latin and Greek as the sine qua non of genuine erudition, Milton’s remarkable mastery of
the Tuscan volgare won for him at least as much admiration among Florentine intellectuals as did his agile command of the classical languages. It set him apart, not only from other lettered Englishmen, but evidently among the great crowd of learned foreigners who traveled so frequently in Seicento Italy. Milton’s knowledge of Italian places him in a privileged relationship to the foremost institutions of learning in the Seventeenth Century, superior perhaps even to the universities on account of their subsidiarity and greater degree of independence.

By the time John Milton (1608-1674) sent his first collection of poetry to the printers in 1645, he had already published five anti-prelatical tracts (1641-1642), five divorce tracts (1643-1645), including two versions of the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, and the *Areopagitica* (1644). The political writings of Milton’s age, across the entire spectrum of English Reformation theologies, took for granted the immanence of God in the history of the realm. Though a particular factional commitment may be influenced by the homiletic interventions of Laudian, Presbyterian or non-conformist divines, its proponents nonetheless anticipated that the will of the Almighty for the English people would come to light precisely in the purification of reprobate customs, whether courtly, parliamentary or clerical. The godly cooperate in bringing about the peace, justice and prosperity that manifests God’s favor upon the land by fervent prayer, yes, but also by contesting the affairs of state from the perspective of explicitly Reformed values. Not surprisingly, then, Milton’s attacks on prelacy sparked tremendous hostility from Laudians. Likewise, in the pulpits of his
Presbyterian adversaries, Milton encountered an intractable opposition to his challenging critique of the principle of the indissolubility of marriage. In part, then, to recover from the virulent common censure heaped upon him in explicitly ecclesiastical circles, Milton publishes verse in English, Italian, Latin and Greek. In the poetic structure of the 1645 collection, Milton deploys a rhetoric of multilingualism as one element of a comprehensive response to the opprobrium precipitated by his earlier forays into Commonwealth polemics. Does Milton believe that Italian sonneteering will further authorize him to intervene in matters of statecraft and ecclesial reform? If so, he’s not alone in wielding lyrical weaponry in the course of rhetorical campaigning. Those Italians whose poetics Milton so carefully emulates, Dante (1265-1321), Pietro Bembo (1470-1547), Giovanni Della Casa (1503-1556) and Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) all attempted strikingly similar projects.

Among Renaissance vernaculars, Milton knew English, Italian, French, Spanish and Dutch well. His classical languages include Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac. He, therefore, has choices to make as to what display of languages he will employ and to what rhetorical purposes. By choice, I mean deliberately to evoke the classical canon of style (τάξις or dispositio) and so to locate my research as much in Renaissance rhetoric as in literary studies. Indeed, since the classical curriculum of humanist education finds very little contrast between poetics and rhetoric, we should be prepared entirely to efface the distinction commonly imagined between Milton’s Commonwealth polemics and
his poetics. While it must by now seem fairly uncontroversial to read *Paradise Lost* as a nation-building epic, the rhetorical display of multilingualism in the 1645 *Poems* implies that his lyrical verse already begins to make such demands upon the first generation of his readers.

In the last two centuries, Italian poetry of Milton has produced critical assessments in English and Italian that differ radically in method, interpretation and evaluation. But unlike the legion of cerebral articles spawned by his English writing, Milton’s Italian has engendered relatively few scholarly investigations. Indeed, the initial appeal of this project lay in the plausibility of taking into account virtually all the published studies, at least in English, Italian and French, that refer explicitly to the eighty-five slender lines which our poet fashioned in the exemplary vernacular of Petrarch. Are there any other such clearly defined subsets of the field of Milton studies about which we may make such an optimistic assertion? This dissertation offers an account of the critical reception of Milton’s Italian verse in order to explore more comprehensively the many dimensions of the poet’s life and convictions for which the Italian verse serves as a nexus. Moreover, because the poet takes pains to foreground Italian as a *lingua ignota e strana* [a tongue unknown and foreign], exploration will pay particular attention to criticism of the language of the five sonnets and the single-stanza *canzone* in order to evaluate both the accolade and the obloquy to which Milton’s efforts have been subjected by native speakers of Italian.

**Was Milton’s Italian Verse Known in Italy?**
Historical issues that arise in the criticism of Milton’s use of the *volgare*, include: (i) whether Milton’s Italian successfully reproduces a native level of fluency; (ii) whether he had help in producing or revising this verse from a native speaker; and (iii) whether his Italian prosody show any predictable traces of a non-native speaker’s use of Italian. While we have no documentary evidence that Milton read his Italian poems in Italy, we may nonetheless ask whether there is any compelling reason to believe that he might have done so and, if he did, under what conditions and in what settings?

Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Italian critics will come to find much fault with the technique and language of Milton’s Italian verse. Nonetheless, as far as we can tell, for indeed their remarks are often scant and lack meaningful detail, Italian critics of earlier centuries — including, it would seem, Milton’s immediate academic peers in Italy — received his poetry in *volgare* enthusiastically. If Milton were aware of what a later Italian critic will call *scorrettezza*, or incorrectness, that might also account for his decision to withhold publication, but it does not make transparent the motivation for choosing to include the Italian poems in his first published collection. Why release the Italian verse together with his English poems in 1645, if not primarily for rhetorical deployment in order to affirm the cultured ethos of the polemicist?

This much is certain, the encomia presented to Milton during his sojourn in Italy and published in the 1645 *Poems* clearly award him the *Laurea Hetrusca*. The Roman poet, Giovanni Salzilli, writes his epigram “*Ad Joannem Miltonem*
Anglum triplici pæseos laura coronandum\textsuperscript{4} Græca nimirum, Latina, atque Hetrusca” [to John Milton, an Englishman, who without doubt merits crowning with the triple laurel of poesy: Greek, Latin, and Italian]. Antonio Francini (1624-1699) offers his poetic accolade precisely in Italian and specifically underscores the Englishman’s in-depth knowledge of Tuscan vernacular eloquence. In another Latin encomium, Carlo Roberto Dati (1619-1676) specifies that, in Milton, dead languages live again. He says,

\begin{quote}
Polyglotto, in cujus ore linguæ jam deperditæ sic reviviscunt, ut idiomata omnia sint in ejus laudibus infacunda; Et jure ea percallet ut admirationes & plausus populorum ab propria sapientia excitatos, intelligat. [To a polyglot, in whose mouth tongues now lost thus revive with such vigor and might that every speech, when it is employed to praise him, loses its power of utterance — he is, himself, thorough master of them all, so that he understands the expressions of admiration and approval called forth from the peoples by his singular wisdom.]
\end{quote}

Though his commendation focuses ostensibly on Milton’s mastery of classical languages, Dati’s use of the expressions, “ut idiomata omnia sint in ejus laudibus infacunda” [that every speech, when it is employed to praise him, loses its power of utterance], together with “ut admirationes & plausus populorum intelligat” [so that he understands the expressions of admiration and approval called forth from the peoples], both convey the impression that Milton possessed comparable dexterity in Italian, the language of the people in Florence.
Moreover, as Dati makes clear, his Italian academic fellows know that Milton speaks French, Spanish and Dutch. Still they do not speak of a *Laurea Gallica* or a *Laurea Hispanica* or a *Laurea Holandensis* his regard because he is not known to have composed verse in those languages. Indeed, any *laurea* requires a textual demonstration, so it would be an empty gesture to award laurels for Tuscan to someone who hadn’t in some way given proof of poetic wit in writing or recitation.

Apart from Charles Diodati, it’s not clear with whom Milton might have shared the Italian verse, but Dati and Francini are mentioned explicitly in the *Epitaphium Damonis* in a setting that suggests Milton’s daring participation in contests of Italian vernacular poetry. The earliest common date for the Italian verse is 1629 and the latest is a decade later, yet there’s no indication that Milton’s *volgare* was circulated before publication in 1645. We ought, therefore, to consider whether Milton might initially have withheld his Italian poetry from circulation because he understood it as merely an imitative exercise? Chapter 1 addresses the matter of dating the Italian poems, allusion to Diodati’s Tuscan ancestry in the *Elegia prima*, and the Horatian admonition to keep a poem for nine years before publishing it. Chapter 2 addresses precisely the question of *imitatio* as a methodology for poetic discovery drawn from classical sources, particularly Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Quintilian. The former discussion offers insight into Milton’s decision to bring forth poems in 1645 that had mostly been written before he was twenty. The latter discussion offers criteria with
which to answer the question, “Would Milton’s academic fellows have found the imitative petrarchismo of the Italian poems cliché?”

The last series of questions to be considered in the matter of whether Milton had made his Italian verse known while in Italy requires a measure of speculation, to be sure, but yields more than satisfactory returns. What does the mature Milton think of his juvenile Italian verse? If it weren’t good enough for him to share in Italy in 1638-39, how could it be suitable for England in 1645? Even if the Italian poems are published for primarily rhetorical purposes, doesn’t Milton always have to satisfy Milton? Indeed, the concluding section of Chapter 2 will address this very cluster of issues.

At present, the matter of the Italian academies constitutes an especially fertile field in Renaissance studies. Moreover, several important monographs that address Milton’s relationship to this pan-peninsular movement have emerged in the last two decades. None of them, however, has anything new to say about Milton’s Italian verse except for further speculation on who might have assisted him to bring them to levels of native fluency. Nor is there any formal discussion of how Seventeenth Century Italian academics might have responded to Milton’s Italian verse, should they have known of it in either manuscript or book form. Estelle Haan discusses their known responses to his Latin verse, but we don’t even know for sure if he read his Italian poetry in Italy. Nonetheless, we do know a lot about the kind of reception that similar efforts received, and on that basis we can theorize productively about Milton’s Italian
verse. Moreover, to speculate, as Campbell and Corns do, that Valerio Chimentelli might have helped him polish the sonnets off assumes that he must have shared them with at least some of his fellow academicians in Italy.

Though some recent monographs have undertaken a presentation of the most common motifs that arise in discussions of the connection between Milton’s poetics and his rhetoric, none sees any particular role at all for his Italian verse to play in the ongoing reconstruction and reinforcement of his ethos by exploiting petrarchismo. Indeed, most studies skip over Milton’s Italian poetry entirely.

While it seems utterly prosaic to say so, Italian critics are better positioned than their English peers to evaluate the Italian criticism of Milton. That critical legacy depends not only upon greater familiarity with Milton’s Italian sources themselves, but with a more complete assimilation of the intertextual layers upon which Milton’s primary sources for Tuscan volgare relied. Moreover, the Italian-language criticism of Milton’s Italian verse offers greater detail in showing Milton’s dependence on Italian petrarchismo, especially his known exemplars: Bembo, Della Casa, Varchi and Tasso. Nonetheless, the English-language variorum of the Italian sonnets have not been updated to include the textual commentary of Italian scholarship since the 1960s. In Chapters 1, 3 and 4, together with the Appendix, this dissertation offers a comprehensive discussion of the whole of the English, Italian and French criticism of Milton’s Italian verse. Moreover, the appendix will compile all the known variorum produced in those languages into one place. Most of the contemporary studies of Milton’s Italian
verse rely entirely on shorter criticism published in Italian between 1907 and 1967. To be sure, there is short shrift for his Italian sonnet cycle, both in the Milton biographies and in a limited number of articles, but not even the most sustained commentaries ever surpass twenty-five pages of text.

**Rhetoric and Poetics in Humanist Education**

More than poetry, it was prose polemics during the Civil Wars and Commonwealth politics thereafter that established Milton’s reputation as a vigorous public intellectual in England and in Europe. But humanist education in the Renaissance had no concept of a disciplinary meat-cleaver sweeping out of the Platonic realm of ideas to hew the flesh of rhetoric and the spirit of poetics asunder. To be a poet, as consciously and deliberately as Milton understood himself to be a poet, is to be a rhetor, for above all, rhetoric externalizes ideas and clothes them in attire that makes them intelligible and appealing.

Milton’s rhetoric represents an exhaustive synthesis deeply rooted in the integrated *studia humanitatis* that dominated his education from roughly 1615 to 1632. Whether we speak of the private tuition arranged by his father from the house on Bread Street, or his institutional schooling at St Paul’s in London and later at Christ’s College in Cambridge, Milton’s early intellectual formation depends entirely on Renaissance appropriations of classical rhetoric. What today we consider the separate disciplines of grammar, logic, history, poetry and ethics came to Milton bundled together, sometimes indistinctly, in the daily scrutiny and imitation of ancient texts, first of the Roman orators, historians and poets.
and then from the founts of Greek epic, drama and lyric to which Cicero, Catullus, Horace, Vergil, Ovid, Livy and Quintilian themselves had had recourse in order further to develop the *ars rhetorica*.

The progymnasmata that guided his step-by-step development in composition drew constantly and discriminately upon classical paradigms in verse and prose, but by alternating from one to the other without always differentiating clearly between them. Thus poetics and rhetoric, treated as facets of the same radical whole, maintain an entirely durable and long-lasting alliance throughout the Renaissance. One might almost say that the knowledge of poetics is so “involv’d and interwoven” with the knowledge of rhetoric, “and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern’d, that those confused seeds which were impos’d on *Psyche* as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixt.”

Early Modern rhetoric, then, is the very stuff of which Renaissance poetry is made. Or is it the other way around? After all, the same Petrarch who promoted the *ad fontes* ethos that governed every aspect of the *studia humanitatis*, also brought forth into the world the vernacular poetry of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* that would decisively alter the course of high culture and, in some respects, inaugurate the Renaissance.

The *Ad patrem* offers a case in point. Though the Latin poem appears first in the 1645 *Poemata*, Milton himself did not date it and the range of scholarly proposals assign it as early as 1631 and as late as 1645. Campbell and Corns detect in it “a valedictory tone and even a sense of reckoning in that
Milton attempts to sum up the gifts that he has received from his father.”10 These biographers speculate that it belongs to the period of his departure for Italy. Haan11 puts forward this work as one of the two most likely to have been read by Milton at the September 1638 session of the Accademia degli Svogliati recorded in Jacopo Gaddi’s own hand.12 The other is the Naturam non pati senium, also undated, but probably belonging to the period of 1628 to 1632. In the Ad patrem, Milton calls upon a diversity of Horatian metrical forms in order to manifest the lyrical virtuosity he has achieved thanks to his father’s attentive and forebearing support. Ostensibly the narrative voice seeks to assuage a father’s anxiety about his son’s decision to seek poetic laurels. Since the elder Milton himself was a poet and madrigalist, the trope need not be taken in any empirical sense as referring to the father’s disapproval of his son’s métier. Instead, as Douglas Bush puts it, the “poetic vocation described and implied in Ad Patrem is... the perfect picture of the Renaissance humanist-poet, classical and largely secular, the scholar artist of the elite.”13 The intent, entirely consistent with classical motifs, is simply to show in what measure the father has always been the great protagonist of his son’s future glory.

To foreground the artistic calling, Milton puts forward his command of poetic technique as the substance of his riches, the generous inheritance he has received from his father. Whereas material possessions normally transfer from father to son post-mortem, the bequest of the elder Milton to the younger is a living intergenerational legacy, the common wealth that the two Miltons share.
Modern translations typically render Milton’s use of the Latin first-person plural as the English singular, a perfectly correct understanding of the rhetorical trope in which the solitary voice nonetheless expresses himself in plural speech. Translation, however, is already an interpretive praxis which suppresses some shades of meaning present in the original tongue, while selecting and reinforcing others. In this case, translators have preferred to foreground a binary and oppositional semantics within the Ad Patrem, which lends itself more readily to an interpretative scheme that seeks to reconstitute empirical circumstances. Thus, Milton’s father, at some determinate point between 1632 and his death in 1647, must have expressed the concern that his son, seeking neither orders nor a profession, had chosen in poetry the wrong course of life. While we cannot exclude such an historical possibility by any means, to read the poem frantically for clues to conversations that Milton may have had with his father on the subject of his vocation as a poet distracts us from the stronger assertion of poetic identity in the text itself.

Rather, Latin offers Milton rhetorical options for developing the thematic material of the Ad Patrem that in English would sound stilted and careless. Milton’s actual choice of verbal inflection implies a mutuality between father and son and the sharing, not of similar, but of the self-same bounty:

*Sed tamen hæc nostros ostendit pagina census,*

*Et quod habemus opum charta numeravimus ista* [12]

[but rather this page shows forth our possessions,
and what we possess in goods we number on this paper]

The diction here further reveals an intertextual lineage of considerable stature. While census, for example, refers ostensibly to the property qualifications of a Roman citizen to serve in the military, Ovid had already recruited the term for poetic copia. In the Metamorphoses (III: 588), he writes, “ars illi sua census erat” [his art was his wealth] and in the Amores (II: 17, xxvii), “sunt mihi pro magno felicia carmina censu” [instead of great wealth, I have fruit-bearing songs]. Petrarch then re-employs the Ovidian trope in his letter to Zoilo collected in the Epistolæ familiares (II:9): “Census honestus est mihi, Musarum studium” [I have honest wealth in zeal for the Muses]. The young Milton’s admiration for and imitation of Ovid and Petrarch needs no further affirmation.

If, as asserted above, Milton’s rhetorical practice synthesizes the whole studia humanitatis he has received as a legacy from his father, we still cannot escape the doubtfulness at this stage of his chosen poetic vocation. But for Milton, ambiguity is the marketplace in which his rhetorical investment yields its greatest poetic dividend. The following serves to illustrate:

Nec tu vatis opus divinum despice carmen,
Quo nihil æthereos ortus, & semina cæli,
Nil magis humanam commendat origine mentem,
Sancta Promethæ retinens vestigia flammæ. [20]
[Do not scorn the prophet’s song, a divine work, which like nothing else is our ethereal rising and the seed of heaven. Nothing in a higher degree commends the human mind to its origin, while retaining holy vestiges of Promethean flame].

Similarly, in line 56, “Nec tu perge precor sacras contemnere Musas” [Do not continue, I pray, to revile the sacred Muses]. But it’s not likely that Milton’s father, who invested so much in cultivating his son’s erudition and æsthetics, ever exhibited the kind of derision for poetic song, much less a serial revulsion for the sacred Muses, that the expressions despiccarmen and sacras contemnere Musas might seem to imply. We’re speaking of Milton’s father, not Kafka’s. To follow too closely either the trope of father-son variance or, for that matter, that of father-son congruence, would detract from the lines’ cardinal property as an apostrophe to future generations in rhetorical defense of poesy according to the spirit of Aristotle, Tasso, Sidney and Puttenham.

Multilingualism is an important theme in the poem as well. In the course of the poem’s 120 lines, Milton lauds the father for bestowing upon him at significant cost the gift of languages. These include the tongues of Romulus and the lofty Greeks, the flowers that Gallia boasts, the degenerate speech of the Italian and the prophetic utterance of Palestine (79-85). The seeming deprecation of Italian is puzzling, especially if he is, in fact, about to embark upon his European grand tour, the central attraction of which will be Italy. Milton’s impressive command of volgare is well attested among native speakers of the language and, in any case, the whole point of the poem is that he thanks his
father for making his acquisition of these languages possible. Perhaps Milton intends simply to underscore the *latinitas* of his work by contrast to the vulgar tongue in which such a eulogy would sound contrived and labored. Alternatively, Milton may just be employing the well-known Petrarchan trope in which the artist protests that vernacular poetry is essentially unbecoming, even though Petrarch himself worked obsessively on the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* for years, revising and reorganizing its contents until his death in 1374.

In much the same way that Milton gained entrance to the Italian academies through the medium of his Latin verse, so Latin prose introduces Milton to courtly and intellectual circles elsewhere in Europe. The *Pro populo anglicano defensio* (1651), a blistering reply to Claudius Salmasius, first brought Milton to the attention of continental humanists and won him renown among the intellectual élites. The elder Milton’s personal supervision of his son’s private tuition, then St Paul’s and later Cambridge, prepared Milton well to vindicate the decision of the Protector’s Privy Council to put Charles I to death. Really, the work is as much a spirited assault upon the character of Salmasius, the Huguenot humanist Claude de Saumaise (1588-1653), as it is the official response of Cromwell’s government to the pan-European condemnation of England for putting its monarch to death.

John K. Hale underscores the role that performing the Cambridge Latin genres plays in preparing Milton for his prominence in Commonwealth letters.20
Hale regards a college-based, rhetorical exercise known as the salting to be of particular importance:

At a salting, held more secularly in the college dining hall, the year’s freshmen were inducted to sophomore-status in front of their immediate seniors, with clownish tests and ordeals. The eponymous dosing with salt was a punishment for poor performance of a ritual test (through the pun on sales, “salts” Latin for Wit). It is therefore of special value to dwell on Milton’s extant participation—not as initiand but as master of ceremonies—in this bilingual ritual. It occasioned his longest single undergraduate text.21

And, indeed, much of the Latin verse exhibited in the 1645 Poemata is the work of the very student who performs the university rhetorical exercises with such extraordinary finesse and confidence. Evidently, the training in Latin grammar and oratory that he received at St Paul’s prepared Milton both to salt and to sing at Cambridge, the environment that equipped him both for his own self-defense, inasmuch as rhetorical analysis may ascribe that function to the 1645 Poems, and for the defense of the English people in the matter of regicide.

In Milton’s case, the poet, as much as the pamphleteer, interposes himself substantially into the rhetorical situation. The anti-prelatical and divorce tracts, and possibly the Areopagitica as well, provoked wild invective from adversaries, who cast Milton as an intellectually derelict radical or worse. When the 1645 Poems appear, they address the exigence, not of Milton’s polemical engagements
favoring divorce or opposing prelacy, but of Milton himself: his character, his learning, his social status, his æsthetics. And, since the rhetor in this instance understands himself foremost to be a poet, the most fitting medium for his intervention is a single-authored book of lyric poetry, both English and Latin, composed at several times and printed by his true copies. Moreover, as the closure of London theaters in 1642 created a prodigious demand for original books of lyric and dramatic verse, Milton would have found his audience precisely among the cultured élite who were buying the latest publications.

The lyric poetry collected for the 1645 volume, much of it juvenilia, discloses Milton’s stature as an intellectual with a longer, more developed cultural history than his detractors can have imagined. Hitherto, studies of the Italian verse have focused primarily on what the sonetti and the canzone are, but we ought also to ask what Italian poetry does for Milton in light of his growing prominence as a polemicist deeply engaged in the issues of his day. Since the poems represent only a small segment of the book, we cannot pretend that the Italian verse of Milton bears greatly the rhetorical heft of the 1645 collection. Milton did, however, orchestrate his compilation quite deliberately in order to deliver a particular effect within a discourse community characterized by strong familiarity with English and Latin versification, though one still unlikely to have possessed a sure grasp of Italian or Greek. Moreover, Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio had long since made of Italian the paradigmatic language of European vernacular eloquence, even as the poetics of Roman antiquity regarded Greek
prosody as its archetype. Thus, the short excursus from English to Italian in the sonnet sequence of the *Poems*, like its counterpart in the brief transition from Latin to Greek in the *Sylvarum liber* of the *Poemata*, demonstrates a kind of symmetry that doubtless appealed to Milton’s sense of what constitutes a fitting and balanced aesthetic display.

A simple, but telling, instance of the strong connection between poetry and polemics in English realpolitik, united in the exigence of John Milton himself, lies in an otherwise unexceptional annotation found in a first edition of the *Defensio* that belonged to John Egerton (1623-1686), the second Earl of Bridgewater. In his personal copy, Bridgewater pens, “*Liber igne, auctor furca dignissima*” [A book for burning; an author for a well-deserved hanging]. While we may find in such vehemence an entirely unremarkable expression not at all atypical of royalist sentiment, Bridgewater, then the young Viscount Brackley, was himself one of the aristocratic children to have performed the *Comus* before his parents in the masque presented at Ludlow Castle on Michaelmas night in 1634. Moreover, the Bridgewater family preserved what must have been a prompt copy of the *Comus*, which antedates the revised version that appears in the 1637 Trinity manuscript. The original publication of the masque, of course, does not name Milton as its author. After Moseley’s 1645 release of the *Poems*, however, the Viscount Brackley would certainly have become aware of the essential part that an author worthy of the stocks had played in an important celebration of his noble family’s stature in Stuart government. Nor, in fact, did
Bridgewater ever burn his copy of the poet’s stellar achievement in Commonwealth rhetoric.\textsuperscript{23}

**Lyric as a Transgressive Genre**

The historical focus of this study centers upon the 1645 publication of the *Poems of Mr John Milton, Both English and Latin, Compos’d at Several Times*. Nonetheless, the rhetorical situation of 1645 — in which Milton finds himself to be the principal exigence to be addressed through the medium of collected verse — has an unmistakable analogue in the serious, immediate peril he faced at the moment of the Restoration and also in the ongoing opprobrium he endured in the years that followed. The appearance of the 1645 publication, in which Milton’s Italian verse plays its minor but precise role, might almost be taken as a rehearsal of that consummate rhetorical re-construction of authority that Milton achieved with the publication of *Paradise Lost*, in its first version of 1667 and then definitively in 1674, in which the Italian element comes to play a much more prominent part indeed, though its performance takes place entirely in English.

The plight of the discredited, but honorable, servant of his republic cautiously investing himself with the moral authority to mediate heavenly values to his reader through a vernacular epic of legitimation ought to remind us instantly of Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), whose *Vita Nuova* (c. 1295) first draws Milton to the genre of Italian love poetry. At the age of twenty, Milton acquired and began to annotate an edition of *Le dolci rime d’amor*, the lengthy moralizing *canzone* from Book IV of the *Convivio* (c. 1307), bound together with the *rime* of
Giovanni Della Casa and the *sonetti* of Benedetto Varchi. Deeply indebted to the *De consolatione philosophiæ* (AD 523) of Boethius (AD 480-524), the *Convivio*, a prosimetrum work like the *Vita Nuova*, constitutes a vernacular compendium of explicitly philosophical topics linked together with the subsidiary fields of grammar, politics and natural history. The text of the *Convivio* alternates between love lyrics and prose criticism fleshing out the moral implications of the verse with a disquisition in morality. In effect, Dante offers in a single, unified effort, a hybridization of poesy and allegory. It comes, therefore, as no surprise to discern in Milton’s own verse, whether English, Italian or Latin, a keen awareness of Dante’s literary and critical legacy. Indeed, Dante looms so large within the complexities of Milton’s intertextual network that the traces he leaves, like the geoglyphs of Nazca, can from ground level remain entirely unnoticed on account of their magnitude and expanse.

Milton admired the honor and respect that Dante’s poetic voice accords to Beatrice. He evidently detects a similar virtue in Petrarch’s attitude toward Laura, and thus holds these two poets of vernacular *rima* together in higher esteem than the morally unfit poets of the classical *carmina* — especially Ovid and Catullus — whom he would nonetheless have read and imitated throughout his early education in Latin grammar. In the *Animadversions* (1641), he declares if I found those [smooth elegiac] authors any where speaking unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before they had extolled; this effect it wrought with me, from that time forward their art I
still applauded, but the men I deplored; and above them all, preferred the
two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but
honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and
pure thoughts, without transgression.26

While the moral probity and integrity of sentiment that he finds in the lyric of
Dante and Petrarch doubtless have more impact on Milton’s versification in
English, these ethical attributes have clearly won him over to the lyrical promise
of Italian as a language for his own verse experimentation as well. Moreover,
though the text of the Animadversions reads ambiguously, Milton seems to
imply that he came to Dante and Petrarch having already cultivated a familiarity
with the Latin elegiac poets. Certainly this would accord with the generally
chronological arrangement of the poems in the 1645 collection and the datum of
having acquired the text from the Convivio in 1629, but it further suggests a kind
of personal development in ethical reasoning that Milton wants to map onto
lyrical genres themselves.

Milton’s lyrical poetry in Italian is one element of his comprehensive
project of ongoing rhetorical intervention in the great matters of his times. But
how can this be, since presumably lyric poetry belongs to a literary genre entirely
distinct from the polemical treatise? Lyric is short and stands alone; the tract,
drawn-out and interconnected. In lyric, the poetic voice speaks to itself; the
orator to an audience. Lyric is essentially non-discursive: show, not tell; polemics
is discourse par excellence. Consequently, whatever is genuinely lyrical will, of
its nature, preclude such things as argument and instead express the spontaneous overflow of emotion recollected in tranquility. My sketch, though flyting, represents what the catechetical formulæ seem to declare quite unproblematically. One may easily mock it, but the protracted “critical hegemony” of Romanticism, so often camouflaged in the methods of the New Criticism, continues to impact our reading of Milton’s lyric poetry and accounts for a substantial measure of the Twentieth Century’s interpretation and evaluation of his experiments in Petrarchan verse.

Jeffrey Walker locates the origins of the mainstream modern view of lyric in Aristotle’s disquiet over Plato’s exclusion of poets from the ideal Republic. In Walker’s view, the Poetics deliberately ignores Plato’s indictment of lyrical poetry for taking advantage of meter, rhythm and harmony in order to achieve persuasion by irrational means. In fact, Aristotle sidesteps the Platonic critique altogether by asserting that the essence of lyric lies not in the mechanics of versification, but in the effects of imitation. But in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Dantesque and Petrarchan legacies routinely break with specifically Aristotelian, and modern, expectations for the genre. When, therefore, the Renaissance poet recruits petrarchismo in a complex network of alliances that, among other things also serve political purposes, this appears to us, at least at first glance, as a transgressive deployment of lyric.

Milton clearly thinks of Dante and Petrarch as representing a superior embodiment of poetic virtue since their work is both artful and reputable. They
are poets without alloy. Nonetheless, as we have seen, one does not today customarily speak of lyric as the kind of literary genre that can embody and transmit moral goodness, so simply to claim that Dante and Petrarch do not transgress morally, is itself a transgression of common expectations for the genre. Ascribing decency and rectitude to Dantesque or Petrarchan lyric sounds, to the modern critic, like a category mistake. But Milton does this and he’s not alone among his contemporaries. We ought, then, to ask, “So what if lyric sometimes transgresses its boundaries?” How would that make the lyrical mode transgressive? Firstly, the very notion that lyric has generic boundaries at all, derives — as Walker has argued — from the Aristotelian view that what the genre is may be determined only on the basis of what the genre does. In the Poetics, lyric imitates; it embodies experience. But Plato, for once, is less essentialist here than Aristotle. For him, the genre is characterized more concretely by meter and music. Irrespective of what lyric does, we recognize lyric by its instrumentation, its rhythmic and melodic qualities. So, on the one hand, since it requires an Aristotelian framework to assert that lyric transgresses generic boundaries, why not avoid transgression simply by dispensing with Aristotle altogether? On the other hand, Plato does not himself offer an entirely satisfactory alternative, since he sees in lyrical modes of poetry other types of implicit and perilous transgressions, namely those that contravene reason itself.

Perhaps there is a way to resolve this impasse by recourse not to the Poetics, but to the Rhetoric, in which Aristotle identifies oratory as the
counterpart to reason and not its adversary, as Plato would have had it. But in order to make the theoretical framework of the *Rhetoric* amenable to our task, we would have to agree to efface entirely the distinction between rhetoric and lyric in our analysis and interpretation of Milton’s poetry and prose. Is this plausible in light of what we know about the general outline of Milton’s humanist education? In his analysis of the impact of Milton’s multilingualism on his prose and poetic style, John K. Hale makes this observation:

[Milton’s] Latin education was largely for the sake of developing proficiency in rhetoric. Rhetoric included both creative writing and dramatic performance in Latin, giving the pupil a command of topics, figures, levels of style, stances, towards subject and audience, and a sense of audience, along with knowledge of a pantheon of exemplary ancient exponents. The lack of division (curricular or theoretical) between poetry and rhetoric, since both alike were persuasive eloquence, enabled poetic speech to be rhetorical and oratory to be poetic, at first in Latin but really in whatever language was being used. All this Milton absorbed — much like everyone who underwent the training.  

Collapsing poetics into rhetoric and vice versa, however, has enormous consequences for what we understand Milton to have been doing during the entire course of his career as a public polemicist. For one thing, we have to abandon the notion that his work as foreign language secretary and apologist for the Council of State before the publication of the first version of *Paradise Lost* in 1667 represents a twenty-year hiatus from his chief calling as a poet. Nor have
we yet settled the question of whether, by refusing to differentiate between rhetoric and poetics, we really can drain all of the perceived transgression out of the lyrical swamp.

Through an apprehension of the genre in light of rhetoric, we allow greater freedom for the lyrical mode of poetry to function in multifaceted ways without diminishing its lyrical qualities, whatever they may turn out to be. Nonetheless, we ought also to consider this judgment offered on the matter by Heather Dubrow.

When Petrarch bequeaths to his English progeny a paradigm for the sonnet, he leaves to them as well a model not of clearly defined lyric characteristics but of problems in studying that mode. Petrarch’s heirs and assigns in the English Renaissance… address such problems in many venues, but above all in two overlapping ones, the mythological narratives and the figurative language associated with poesy in general and lyric in particular.32

Lyric seems to attract too many free radicals and the resulting operational instability spawns multigenerational problems in grasping, explaining and exemplifying the mode. Not surprisingly, then, questions about “mythological narratives and the figurative language associated with poesy in general” — not least of them the eventual identification of the Miltonic Muse with the same Holy Spirit at work in divine revelation33 — arise throughout Milton’s lyric poetry and his English-Italian sonnet cycle, in both its 1645 and 1673 avatars, proves no
exception. But somehow, as thoroughly as it resists definition and classification, Milton’s early lyric has yet enough density and multivalence for him to re-purpose it again and again, according to the ever-fluctuating needs of the rhetorical situation.

The appearance of *Lycidas* in the 1645 collection offers an example of Milton outfitting his 1637 pastoral elegy in an entirely new livery, one cut and tailored in response to an exigence not at all like the commemorative anthology originally dedicated to Edward King (1612-1637), who drowned at sea on his return to Ireland. Campbell and Corns read the first recurrence of *Lycidas* in this way:

In 1645 Milton told his readers that the poem marked his godly puritanism. Though its prophetic perspicacity, from the perspective of 1637, was not apparent, the stirrings of a new direction are there to be seen. The process of ideological relocation was protracted. Indeed, it was also unending, as there is evidence that decade by decade Milton grew more radical. 

In his emendation of the introductory note for the 1645 edition of poetry, Milton puts *Lycidas* to work at a more specifically anti-prelatical and anti-Laudian task. But year by year, growing radicalism demands of Milton a constant revision of the whole rhetorical architecture of his poetics in order to make it all fit in with the ongoing development of ever more sharply defined political and theological commitments. Why? Why shouldn’t Milton’s poetry be one thing and his politics
another? One reason, as I have argued above, is that his training in classical rhetoric mitigates against a fundamental distinction between his poetry and his polemics. Another reason, however, may be that his personal sense of rhetorical consistency requires that his polemics map onto his poetics and that his poetics express some congruence with his ethical commitments. Unlike the Ovid whose smooth elegiac art he admires, but whose unchaste person he deplores, Milton himself aspires to the laurels worn by Dante, the highest exemplar of poetic greatness and moral authority, whose lyric he praises for its “sublime and pure thoughts, without transgression.”

In all this, however, we must never forget that it’s still the same Lycidas throughout the whole of Milton’s “protracted ideological relocation.” The poem always remains an empirical datum with qualities that reside within the text itself, whatever tactical position it comes to occupy as stratagems for its further rhetorical application continue to develop apace. At last, we begin to see that suspending the Poetics in favor of the Rhetoric is not enough, since this move would only provide us with an account of lyric poetry as it is exploited for political purposes, but without explaining other dimensions of the lyrical mode which also require our critical attention in this study of Milton’s Italian verse. We need, therefore, some way to speak of what I have just called the density and multivalence of Milton’s early lyric, that is, the intrinsic characteristics that make this poetry such a durable ally in his ongoing effort to reconstruct and reinforce the authority he needs to intervene politically in the affairs of his country.
In *The Challenges of Orpheus* (2008), Professor Dubrow dedicates the first and last chapters of her book to the rhetoric of lyric in English Renaissance poetry, suggesting that the whole of the work means to explore the interface between the two. Though we have already agreed to wipe away the formal divisions that separate rhetoric from poetics in the early modern period, she invites us nonetheless to tease out the complexities of the remarkable rhetorico-poetic compound we have imagined, and, above all, to mind its inherent volatility. Our analysis of Milton requires us to separate, identify and quantify whatever instabilities we may find in the lyrical amalgam in order to determine how it emits such enormous aesthetic value. As we do so, we find that lyrical invention often disrupts modal equilibrium and initiates reactions that break through genre boundaries to fuse rhetorical alliances together in new combinations. Milton’s lyrical practice leaves dense clusters of meaning cached with his verse. The semiotic value that accumulates in these reservoirs of poetic expression allow him later to exploit what is already stockpiled in his own verse and so to assemble previously unknown, but astonishingly well-furnished, political and theological associations. This creative disruption and redistribution of balance, which has its origin in the instabilities that characterize lyrical modes of poetry, belongs to the category of transgressive lyric.

Professor Dubrow underscores problems of interpretation and meaning germane to our analysis of Milton’s Italian verse, for the transgressions she identifies inhere to the substance of his lyricism at all stages of its rhetorical
deployment. A short list of the transgressive features that Dubrow discerns in the mode follows.

In many texts from the English Renaissance... lyric is variously and at times simultaneously represented as source and symptom of disease and as medicinal; as masculine, feminine, and cross-dressed; as public, private, and the denizen of territories that cannot readily be classified as either. [...] Especially central, however, are two paradoxes in particular: early modern lyric is represented as the site of both extraordinary power and helpless passivity, and as the source of both glorious achievements, especially in military and spiritual spheres, and of perilously seductive threats.  

Above all, however, English lyric is Ovidian. Ovid thus serves as a kind of lightening rod for the problematic nature of lyric in English Renaissance poetry. Two categories of moral dilemma present themselves immediately. Firstly, as we have seen in Milton’s critique, this Roman elegist, above all others, represents that consummate reprobate whose song nonetheless takes flight in the human heart. Ovid’s love lyric draws us ineluctably into moral wreckage upon Scylla and so embodies in every respect Plato’s reasons for excluding poets from the Republic. Secondly, the Ovidian versions of myth appear so frequently and so prominently in the allusions of English Renaissance poets as to suggest a wholly pathological obsession with transgressions and their resultant transformations, typically punitive, but sometimes inexplicably rewarding.
Deborah Clark, Milton’s youngest daughter, gives us direct testimony to her father’s lifelong attachment to Ovid. Though she herself had no understanding of the Latin language, she could nonetheless recite the opening verses of the *Metamorphoses* from memory, so often had her father called upon her to read aloud from the Roman poet whose character he deplored. Grasping this debt that Milton owes to Ovid certainly makes more visible whatever darkness one encounters in Book I of *Paradise Lost*. But only a facile reading of the *Animadversions* would have Milton smelt Ovidian style simply to extract its metrical gold, leaving aside all the ethical dross. Milton is altogether more ambitious. He strives to rehabilitate Ovid’s mythographic jouissance so that it may spark transformations in the conduct of states and of men. Even if we come to understand Milton’s experiments in Italian love poetry as studied and intentional reactions to Ovid, in imitation of Dante and Petrarch’s imaginative refinement of the genre’s potential for moral worthiness, we cannot ignore the explicitly Ovidian stimulus for his essay into *petrarchismo* through its native tongue.

By means of what tropological mechanism does transgressive lyric transgress? Whence all this Ovidian juice and all this joy? In the *Institutio oratoria* (VIII:6), Quintilian includes metalepsis — along with its better known and more widely respected siblings, metaphor and metonymy — among the tropes which modify meaning. Metalepsis he describes as an intermediate step leading the way to a more complete figurative statement of some kind. It refers
to the dependence of one trope upon some constituent element of another trope and creates a kind of provisional linking together of otherwise independent figures of speech. In contemporary critical theory, Gérard Genette famously commandeers metalepsis to describe transgressions in narrative levels that produce a paradoxical contamination between the world of the telling and the world of the told. Sometimes this transgression creates humorous effects, sometimes it evokes the fantastical and so on. Lyric, constructed so as to embody the dense and multivalent self-fashioning of a poet as profoundly self-conscious as Milton, releases the floodgates of metaleptic activity and offers the rhetor myriad opportunities to reassert the fundamental consonance of his poetry and his political commitments despite the constant instability triggered by his own ongoing ideological realignments and the ever-mutating political topography that surrounds him. Lyrical metalepsis at once builds bridges from one kairos to another, but it also, in a certain sense, contaminates the rhetorical terrain with unpredictable shifts between the seemingly closed world of the poem and the radically open world of the poet.

**Influences and Sources**

Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) *Rime* and *Prose della volgar lingua*

The Venetian nobleman and ecclesiastic, Pietro Bembo is to the development of modern Italian what a figure like Dr Johnson is to the standardization of English or Eliezer ben Yehuda to the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language. Bembo’s *Gli asolani* (1497-1504) and *Prose della volgar lingua*
(1525) were instrumental in establishing Petrarchan verse, its vocabulary and inflections, as the standard for Italian poetry, and the narrative style and lexicon of Boccaccio as the standard for Italian prose. Bembo impacts developments in England indirectly, but significantly. He exercised direct influence upon one of Spenser’s primary models, Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533), who consulted him and rewrote stanzas of the *Orlando furioso* in response to Bembo’s critique. Also, he embodied a kind of literary standard for subsequent poets who would work in the heroic genre, most notably Torquato Tasso, whom Spenser appears to have admired and whom we know Milton imitates.

A century after Petrarch moved from the Venetian Palazzo Molina to his final residence at Arquà in the nearby Province of Padua, Pietro Bembo (1470-1547) was born in Venice. His father, Bernardo (1433-1519), whom the Venetian Senate had twice appointed as their ambassador to the court of Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449-1492), served the Republic in a number of important offices. Devoted to the literary tradition of the Tuscan *volgare*, the elder Bembo advocated to the doge and Venetian *signoria* the repatriation of Dante’s mortal remains. It never happened, of course, and Bernardo seems to have reconsidered his position entirely when in 1482 he became the *podestà* in Ravenna. Instead of attempting the disinterment and translation of the Alighieri ossuary to Florence, an action the citizenry of Ravenna would have resisted violently, he decided instead to commission the Swiss sculptor and architect Pietro Lombardo (1435-1515) to build a new mausoleum for the great poet there at the Franciscan church
in which the Florentine exile had originally been buried. Thirteen year-old Pietro may well have accompanied his father to the solemn rededication of Dante’s tomb, an ornate Renaissance vault attached to the medieval Basilica of Saint Francis. The free-standing structure, Lombardo’s most famous work, features an effigy in relief of the poet and an inscription that includes the phrase: *Bembus musis incensus hetruscis* [Bembo, by Tuscan muses inflamed]. The younger Bembo evidently shared with his father a lifelong predilection for the Tuscan vernacular, a preference not at all intuitive, given that the natural dialect of the Veneto is quite distinct indeed. Like his father, Bembo came to believe that the *volgare* spoken in Florence was ideally suited to become the literary standard for vernacular Italian throughout the peninsula and there are three entirely fitting reasons for the durability of their conviction: Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio.

Bembo’s advocacy of Petrarch needs some explanation. At the time that Dante wrote the *De vulgari eloquentia* (c. 1305), a Latin defense of the common speech as a medium for epic poetry, there was no single Italian vernacular. Indeed, apart from the Tuscan of Dante, there were many: the Umbrian in which Saint Francis of Assisi composed his *laude*, the Piedmontese of the *Sermones subalpini*, the Neapolitan literary production of Villani, the Venetian of the *Ritmo bellunese*, the dialects spoken at the various courts of Milan, Modena, Venice, Ferrara, Pavia, Naples, Palermo, and the dialects of merchant dynasties, like the Ligurian *zineise*. Especially noteworthy is the *Orlando innamorato* of Matteo Maria Boiardo (1441-1494), whose *emiliàn-rumagnòl* vernacular, however,
has been badly mangled over the centuries by post-Bembonian attempts to correct the language of his epic romance. Even so, none of these corpora of vernacular Italian literature, nor all of them taken together, matched in Bembo’s mind the literary production and importance of the Tuscan troika.

The success of Bembo’s intervention in the developing theory of vernacular literature lies principally in his ability to demonstrate — both in the Prose and in his own rime from the Asolani, one the one hand, and in his influence upon Ariosto, Trissino, Castiglione and the Venetian madrigalists, on the other hand — the endless potential of Petrarchan concepts to expand the range of vernacular genres and to develop new and captivating lyrical expressions. Bembo’s lengthy literary career, and his indefatigable support of petrarchismo won the day. In short, it was largely Bembo’s efforts that reimagined Petrarch, the original and consummate humanist, in a new guise as the exemplar of poetic excellence in the Italian vernacular.

Milton knew Bembo’s criticism and his poetry well. Firstly, Bembo’s own verse embodied a kind of literary standard for subsequent poets throughout Europe who would work in the heroic genre. But perhaps more importantly, his Prose della volgar lingua (1525) marks a key moment in the questione della lingua, that is, the ongoing disputations in intellectual circles throughout the peninsula about which dialect of Italian ought to take precedence in the practices of vernacular literary production. When, for example, in his letter to Buonmattei,
Milton takes a stance on the Italian *questione della lingua*, his posture is decidedly Bembist.

The *Prose* are as much literary criticism as philology *per se*, and in them, Bembo develops metatheories of poetic mimesis, which Milton has clearly absorbed. Moreover, Bembo shows keen interest in the poetic challenges of representing illustrious, edifying and mighty deeds and narrative and stylistic marvels. The works of all the Italian poets whom Milton knew and admired were themselves indebted to Bembo, and specifically his contributions to the development of a Sixteenth Century theory of vernacular literature. The impact of Bembo upon Milton has been carefully scrutinized with regard to the latter’s mature poetry, but is particularly germane to the Italian *juvenilia* as well.

Giovanni Della Casa (1503-1556) *Rime* and *Carminum liber*

During the Sixteenth Century, French, German and Spanish armies devastated the Italian peninsula, sacking her resplendent cities and plundering their wealth. The social and political detritus of the Italian wars (1495-1559) dominated the entire life of Giovanni Della Casa and shaped his career as a humanist, an ecclesiastic, a papal diplomat and an administrator in the Roman curia. Talented, dissolute, ambitious and perennially disappointed in his aspirations for the cardinal’s hat, history remembers Della Casa primarily for his *Galateo* (1558). Translated into several languages, this treatise on the rules for polite behavior in aristocratic circles spread quickly throughout the continent. A closer probe, however, finds that it was Della Casa’s verse that more definitively
augmented the prestige of Italian courtly culture elsewhere and, as we shall see, influenced the humanists throughout Europe who came to admire and replicate her vernacular letters. At a time when, “lyrically speaking, there was no god but Petrarch and Bembo was his prophet,”[40] Benedetto Varchi repeatedly extolled the poetic offering of Della Casa in both volgare and Latin. Nor is Varchi’s praise at all unusual, for Della Casa’s opera prompted both high commendation as well as the compliment of close critical attention and imitation from such Cinquecento humanist luminaries as Alessandro Piccolomini (1508-1579) and Torquato Tasso.

In December 1629, John Milton bought a copy of Della Casa’s Rime for tenpence.[41] The volume, with annotations in Milton’s hand,[42] is now in New York.[43] Forensic evidence aside, Professor Smart believes that, insofar as his sonnets are concerned, “the poet who most directly influenced Milton was Giovanni della Casa.”[44] Thinking specifically of “Miltonic movement and pause,” Smart notes that

In the composition of the sonnet Della Casa deliberately broke with the Petrarchan tradition of regularity and smoothness, which had been carried to excess by minor sonneteers. [...] His aim is to produce new effects by some sudden and striking departure from the familiar flow of language and verse. His sentences ignore the bounds of metre, passing imperceptibly from line to line, and ending abruptly where an ear attuned to Petrarch’s modulation might least have expected; the close, which may occur at any point, being weighty and emphatic.[45]
While we may notice the calculated operation of startling *enjambements* and elision more clearly in Milton’s English sonnets, they do appear in his Italian as well. Indeed, the effect is sometimes unpleasant to the ear of Milton’s modern Italian critics. Federico Olivero (1913), for example, objects to the synalœpha between *suoi* and *avventa* that occurs in the penultimate line of *Diodati, e te’l dirò con maraviglia*, but these irregular modulations are neither haphazard nor negligent. Rather, they are deliberately imitative, and Giovanni Della Casa has appeared to critics to have been the primary Cinquecento source from whom Milton derives such intrepid prosody.

Of the many Italian practitioners of *petrarchismo* between Ariosto and Tasso, Della Casa receives special consideration because of his alleged direct impact upon later poets, Tasso and Milton included. Professor Bullock (1923), however, asserts quite emphatically that Della Casa isn’t at all the prosodic innovator that Smart, D’Ancona, Bacci, Flamini and Mazzoni claim he is. The kinds of deviation from supposedly Petrarchan norms that the critics have wanted to associate with Della Casa turn out to be just as prevalent in Petrarch and Bembo. How then can we assert Della Casa’s influence upon Milton in strictly textual terms? Mightn’t he have just as well have gotten his ideas from an independent and careful study of Petrarch and Bembo? Perhaps future stylistic investigation will equip scholarship with the tools necessary to map the direction and flow of Petrarchan influence to Milton so as to render a definitive judgment in such questions on a purely linguistic basis. In that case, the reason for
undertaking a complete stylistic analysis of the Miltonic Italian corpus lies in the degree to which the discipline brings specific textual elements into sharper focus, according to our best judgment of what demands the closest inspection.

Despite a close working relationship with Pope Paul IV and numerous papal commissions of extraordinary diplomatic and administrative importance, Della Casa was never made a cardinal. Among the various autobiographical features of his verse, the Archbishop of Benevento’s rime lay bear his bitter disappointment that he would never become a prince of the Church. Moreover, Della Casa treats the matter of his frustrated ambition in an explicitly Petrarchan manner. For Petrarch, as the constant wordplay of the canzoniere implies, laurels and Laura are not two distinct passions at all, but a single, unified and overarching obsession with the problem of renown and of how to achieve it in an enduring fashion without thereby forfeiting the immortal soul. So too Della Casa, though what consumes him is not even the noble topos of enduring poetic glory, but rather the fleeting cachet of crimson.

In the matter of his interior struggle to make sense of his own passions and desires, a strife we are privileged to view intimately in his unpublished Secretum, we can see that Petrarch has pondered deeply the prominence of poets among the eternally damned in the Inferno. His intimate familiarity with both sources leads us to believe that Della Casa could not have failed to descry the presence of zealous ecclesiastics, every bit as cultured and able as he, in the same Dantesque Hell. Indeed, the problem of lyrical autobiography recurs so
conspicuously in his *rime* as to suggest that Della Casa, like Petrarch before him, had had to consider deeply the problems of self-fashioning and its relationship to the spiritual agon of the poet. Milton’s sonnets in English show us that he, too, belongs in this category of excoriating poetic self-awareness.

Finally, Della Casa’s contributions to neo-Latin verse bear closer scrutiny as well, since they represent the kind of ebb and flow between classical *carmina* and vernacular *rime* that characterizes the poetic output of the great humanists in both the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. Indeed, though we do not know exactly which poem he declaimed, Milton first distinguished himself among the accomplished members of the Accademia degli Svogliati precisely through the medium of his own early Latin hexameter, judged “*molto erudita*,” by Jacobo Gaddi, the founder and patron, who kept the minutes in which mention of the recitation appears.

Benedetto Varchi (1503-1565) *Sonetti* and *L’Ercolano*

Though Florentine by birth, Benedetto Varchi received his university training *in utroque iure*, that is, in both canon and civil laws, at Pisa. Though he worked for a period as an official notary, he quickly abandoned the legal profession in favor of humanistic studies and poetry. With the definitive return of the Medici in 1532, however, his strong republican sentiments propelled him into exile, which he spent primarily in the Veneto. At Padua, he learned Greek and became involved in the authoritative Accademia degli Infiammati, a principal institution engaged in the contest over the *questione della lingua*. 
Greek and Latin letters were commonplace among the Infiammati until the end of Varchi’s tenure with them, but by then, the emergent practice of the academy required use of either the Tuscan or the Venetian vernacular for all engagement in philosophical and literary debate or publication.

Having apparently resigned himself to the immutability of Medici sovereignty, Varchi accepted a commission from Cosimo I de’ Medici (1519-1574) to return home in order to write the *Storia fiorentina*, a project he began 1543. Ultimately, Varchi produced sixteen volumes covering the eleven-year period from 1527 to 1538, but the plain-spoken truthfulness of his work impeded its formal publication until 1721. The Grand Duke seems not to have minded, for — though an authoritarian ruler capable of extreme ruthlessness with his enemies — he nonetheless assiduously cultivated both Florentine letters and the city’s intellectual and artistic prestige. Apart from Varchi, Cosimo I de’ Medici extended patronage to the polymath art historian Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574); to the sculptor Benvenuto Cellini (1500-1571); to the portraitist Jacopo Carucci (1494-1557), known as il Pontormo; to the mannerist painter Agnolo di Cosimo (1503-1572), known as Bronzino; to the architect Baldassare Lanci (1510-1571); and to Varchi’s rival historian, the younger Scipione Ammirato (1531-1601), whose task, apparently, was to write a *publishable* history of Florence.

In spite of the often subversive impulses of their respective memberships, the Florentine academies that drew Milton to Italy not only thrived under Cosimo I, but proliferated. In 1540, shortly before Varchi returned to Florence,
Giovanni Mazzuoli (1480-1549), called lo Stradino, together with poet-playwright Anton Francesco Grazzini (1505-1584), known as il Lasca, founded the Accademia degli Umidi. Their name, the Damp, positions them quite intentionally as rivals of Accademia degli Infiammati, the Ardent. Ostensibly a reproof of the high-minded approach that characterized the vernacular literature of Varchi’s Paduan connections, the Umidi were champions of a more everyday usage of the Tuscan dialect even for the highest of literary purposes. No small part of the *questione della lingua* centered on the matter of the proper register of the *volgare*. The Paduan Fiammati advocated an Italian, whether Tuscan or Veneto, that conformed to the classical paradigms laid out in the historical grammars of Latin and Greek. The Umidi, on the other hand, felt strongly that the Tuscan language, as it was spoken in their epoch, had an integrity entirely its own and should be used in an unevolved and unpretentious form, according to the kinds of standards that develop naturally among native speakers.

The Umidi attracted ducal attention and patronage and, in short order, became the prestigious Accademia Fiorentina, to which Varchi began to associate himself. Indeed, the emphasis that the original Umidi placed on natural language usage found its way into Varchi’s 1570 dialogue *L’Ercolano*, in which the author casts himself as a literary Socrates engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of the merits of the Tuscan language with a Platonic interlocutor, Count Ercolano. While Varchi repeats the Bembist stance on the paradigmatic qualities of the diction in Petrarch and Boccaccio, positions he would have known in detail from
his time in Padua, he nonetheless opposes the inflexibility of Infiammati tenets and proposes the notion that, aside from classical disquisitions in rhetoric and philosophy, an elevated vernacular ought also to make room for popular genres in common use among Florentines.

Of particular interest to ongoing research into the significance of Italian literary theory on Milton’s development as an English poet, we should note that the two interlocutors of the Ercolano dialogue treat in detail the question of whether Greek is not, in fact, superior to the Tuscan volgare for the purposes of philosophical and poetic discourse. Varchi takes the opportunity to list hundreds of Florentine expressions, which greatly enrich the eloquence of the volgare, and which have no ostensible equivalents in Greek. Indeed, Varchi’s conviction about the vulgari eloquentia is precisely the point to be made here in postulating his effect upon Milton. Lewalski suggests quite emphatically that Milton’s Italian sojourn endowed him with a clear resolve “not to join the fraternity of worthy neo-Latin poets, but to become instead an epic poet in English.”

To evaluate Lewalski’s claim, we must take two factors into account. Firstly, Milton had already cultivated an intimate familiarity with Varchi’s poetry. Though perhaps better known today for his exceptionally candid history of Florence, Varchi’s voluminous poetic output also includes more than 600 sonnets and Milton would have known many of them from the same single tome that also bound together the rime of Della Casa and selections of Le dolci rime d’amor from Dante’s Convivio. As with the verse of Della Casa, so too the poetry
of Varchi bears annotations in what appears to be Milton’s own hand. We cannot say, of course, whether Milton had also acquainted himself with the arguments advanced in Varchi’s *Ercolano*, but we do know that the Italian academic environment, especially at Florence, was saturated with Varchi’s advocacy of the Tuscan dialect for high discourse, whether philosophical or poetic, and that he valued his native tongue’s flexibility and collectivity. If Lewalski is correct, it will be important to establish with greater precision the nodes of literary and cultural theory to which Milton was exposed within the Italian academic nexus.

Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) *Discorsi sul poema eroico, Rime, Gerusalemme liberata* and *Sette giornate del mondo creato*

By the time the Duke of Parma and the Spanish Armada threatened its shores, Tasso’s *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581) was already well-known and highly regarded in England. In his study of Torquato Tasso’s impact on English literature, C. P. Brand makes this observation:

The *Gerusalemme liberata* quickly established Tasso’s reputation not only in Italy but throughout Europe. Tasso’s name was well known to English writers well before the end of the sixteenth century, and he was accepted in England as one of the great poets of all time. Queen Elizabeth is reported to have learned passages from the poem by heart, and to have thought Alfonso [d’Este] highly honoured to have his praises sung by such a poet.53
Milton himself expresses his respect for Tasso in the 1644 treatise *Of Education*. He writes of “that sublime Art which in *Aristotles Poetics*, in *Horace*, and the *Italian Commentaries* of *Castelvetro*, *Tasso*, *Mazzoni*, and others, teaches what the laws are of a true *Epic Poem*, what of a *Dramatic*, what of a *Lyric*, what *Decorum* is, which is the grand master-piece to observe.” Clearly Milton has read and considered deeply both the critical and poetic works of Torquato Tasso.

Milton appears also to have profitted crucially from his reading of Tasso, albeit in subtle ways. As F. T. Prince puts it, “the striking dissimilarity between the *Gerusalemme Liberata* and *Paradise Lost* may well have diverted attention from the deeper relationship between the two poets.” In what does that relationship consist? Prince locates it in “the immense debt” that Milton owes “to Tasso’s instructions and experiments in epic diction.”54 To account for the nature of Milton’s obligation to the poet of the *Gerusalemme* we must turn first to the *Discorsi sul poema eroico* (1561-1562) and then to Tasso’s own bold cosmology in Italian blank verse, the *Sette giornate del mondo creato* (1592-1594).

With the *Discorsi*, Tasso intervenes energetically into the surprisingly passionate debates of late Sixteenth-Century Italian academies over the proper character and substance of the heroic poem. The battle lines in this contest set proponents of the literary innovations of Ludovico Ariosto (1474-1533), the most widely read epic poet of the Italian Renaissance, against the Aristotelian revivalists that emerged in some of the academies in response to an influential reappearance of the *Poetics*, newly translated from the Greek and published in
Venice in 1498. The arena of warfare in this century-long campaign was precisely the Italian academy, that magnificent garden of intellectual and aesthetic delights that Milton so greatly admired. Tasso promotes a complex détente between the two hostile camps by proffering a comprehensive Aristotelian alternative to the narrow reading of Aristotle’s *Poetics* that dominated intellectual polemics. The sagacity of his approach lies in its making room for Ariostan innovations, but doing so in explicitly Aristotelian terms. Tasso’s rapprochement thus overcomes the impasse begotten by a narrow, academic reading of the *Poetics* as essentially a manual of procedures and proscriptions.

For Tasso, the nature of the modern epic poem should be understood in light of three overriding concerns which he slyly expresses in the language of Aristotelian metaphysics, namely, the doctrines of hylomorphism and causality. These he applies to the practice of the epic poetry that emanates from the great Italian courts. Firstly, the matter of the modern epic ought to synthesize the authority of history and the truth of religion in order to fuse verisimilitude with wonder. Secondly, poetic form ought to achieve thematic unity and prosodic consistency even while pursuing the kind of complex narrative diversity that characterizes Ariosto. Thirdly, if poetry does this, then the moralist need not fear the seemingly hedonistic representation of lurid scenes or improper acts, the perennial delight of Ariosto’s readers, since the substance of epic narrative tends toward the final subjugation of intemperance and extravagance to justice and reconciliation.
While the *Discorsi* have obvious bearing on *Paradise Lost*, *Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Regain’d*, we cannot underscore too emphatically the impact of Tasso’s voluminous production of Petrarchan verse — more than 1700 *rime* — on the composition of Milton’s own Italian sonnets. As a young man, Tasso playfully re-wrote poems of Petrarch. Where the eminent master longs with unfulfilled desire, the impudent youth imagines erotic fulfilment. The exemplar’s long and tragic exhalations become the short, passionate breaths of the innovator. Again and again, the lyrical melancholy so frequent and so prominent in the *Rime sparse* undergoes an exhilarating and rhapsodic metamorphosis in the *Rime d’amore*. As we know, both from biographical sources and *Paradise Lost* itself, Milton greatly admired such Ovidian mirth, but he may also have perceived in Tasso’s daring trials an incipient strategy for transforming the verse of venerable archetypes into something authetically his own. Moreover, it is unlikely that Milton will have been alone among the members of the Florentine, Roman and Neapolitan academies he is known to have frequented in showing awareness of and interest in the audacity of Tasso’s Petrarchan manoeuvres.

Finally, while he stayed in Naples, Milton made the close acquaintance of Tasso’s patron, the nobleman Giovan Battista Manso (1560-1645), who evidently took the trouble to show Milton around the city and may even have presented him at the Spanish Viceregal Court. Manso had founded the Accademia degli Oziosi, one of the Neapolitan cultural institutions that Milton is known to have
frequented. We cannot underestimate the importance to Milton of the attentions Manso lavished upon him. The Marquis of Villa had been generous and kind to Tasso at the otherwise miserable end of poet’s life. Manso was also a friend and supporter of the wildly popular, though utterly dissolute, baroque poet Giambattista Marino (1569-1625), whose works Milton knew and admired. Milton’s Latin poem *Mansus* praises the Neapolitan aristocrat “for his patronage of Tasso and Marini, through whose immortality Manso’s name too will be remembered.” To be sure, “*Mansus* celebrates Manso as a befriender of poets, and Milton clearly thought that a noble role.” Indeed, Manso will write one of the encomia with which Milton prefaces the 1645 *Poems*. The rhetorical deployment of that particular tribute from the patron of Tasso, more than any of the others, suggests a deliberate attempt on Milton’s part publicly to link himself to the tradition of Italian epic poetry and to one of the more favored Italian theorists and poets in the eyes of England’s humanist élite. In asserting this connection, the display of Italian verse makes the relationship with Tasso all the more concrete and vastly augments the humanist poet’s authority as a Commonwealth polemicist.

Benedetto Buonmattei (1581-1648) *Grammatica della lingua toscana*

In 1638, Milton made the acquaintance of Father Benedetto Buonmattei (1581-1648), a prominent figure in Florentine letters whose renown as a master of the Tuscan vernacular conferred special prominence upon him in many of his city’s more distinguished academies. Indeed, the most respected intellectual
circles seem to have competed energetically for the prestige of Buonmattei’s participation. Though convened by Agostino Coltellini (1613-1693), the Accademia degli Apatisti always regarded Buonmattei as a founding father, which makes it quite probable that the erudite priest had a hand in the decision to admit Milton to its ranks.\(^{57}\) By the time of Milton’s sojourn in Florence, two editions of the first volume of Buonmattei’s highly influential *Grammatica della lingua toscana* had already been printed in Venice, and he appears to have been working on the second volume when the two were introduced to each other. In a letter to Buonmattei,\(^ {58}\) Milton expresses a pointed interest the clergyman’s judgment regarding writers whose use of the *volgare* may be taken as irreproachable. Moreover, as he asks Buonmattei for specific illustrations of comedic, tragic, dialectic and epistolary genres, and historical writing,\(^ {59}\) we may guess that Milton deliberately patterns his own writing on exemplary authors whom he has come to hold in high esteem. One senses that, for Milton, the proper artistic use of a language, whether Latin or Italian, must embody its recorded tradition, a feature of the Republican texts of Rome that Livy refers to as *monumentum*.\(^ {60}\) As in Latin, then, Milton’s personal criteria for the selection of models in Italian rhetoric and poetics reflect a strong preference for traditional values, a kind of literary application of the ancient Roman principle of *mos maiorum*.

In the same letter to Buonmattei, Milton goes so far as to suggest that the eminent academician include a chapter on proper Tuscan pronunciation in the
volume then under preparation. This somewhat cheeky recommendation seems nonetheless to spring forth quite congenially from the bonds of intellectual fellowship which Milton himself experienced in Florence and which he praises in the *Reason of Church Government* (1642). The candor with which the young and still unknown Englishman addresses the elder and widely celebrated Italian speaks to the steadfast affection with which Milton recalls his time in Italy. But the temerity of the junior scholar before an academic paterfamilias also betrays Milton’s keen anxiety about Italian orthoepy. A fuller exploration of the significance of such concerns as Milton expresses in his letter to Buonmattei really begs for an explicitly linguistic analysis to lay the foundation of the discussion. In the published version, there’s no clear evidence that Buonmattei acted on any of Milton’s suggestions. Though the second volume of his *Grammatica* does pay somewhat greater attention to issues of orthoepy than the first, there’s no chapter-length discussion of correct pronunciation with which to trace Milton’s impact on Buonmattei. Even so, the *Grammatica* is worth taking into consideration because the epistolary comment upon the project that Milton himself offers directly to its author indicates a cluster of his particular concerns about foreign-language acquisition, especially with regard to Italian, and reveals core Miltonic convictions about style.

John Milton (1608-1674) *Poems of Mr John Milton, Both English and Latin, Compos’d at Several Times* (1645) and the Encomia
Even in the afterglow of Milton’s warm reception in the Italian academies and the myriad ways in which his apparent virtue, social grace, scholarship, erudition, multilingualism and poetic artistry had been endorsed among that extraordinary class of humanists that the peninsula had to offer, the fact remains that his talents were altogether undisclosed before his insular countrymen. Giovanni Milton, inglese, may have left a mark in Italy, but his obscurity in England can hardly have been more acute. He entered into the public forum only with the May 1641 release of the pamphlet, Of Reformation of Church-Discipline in England: and the Causes that hitherto have hindered it, the first of five anti-prelatical tracts he would publish in the course of the next eleven months. The appearance of this first tract coincides exactly with the Long Parliament’s (1640-1660) attainder of Thomas Wentworth (1593-1641), the Earl of Strafford, and his subsequent execution. By the time Strafford was beheaded, Archbishop Laud (1573-1645) had also been arrested by Parliamentary order and confined to the Tower. By December of the same year, Commons had imprisoned twelve bishops and presented the king with the Grand Remonstrance (1641). Consequently, the position of the episcopacy in England was precarious indeed, and Milton may have felt that, close upon his return from the continent, the moment for his earliest interventions into the great questions of his age had clearly come.

Remarkably, the future of prelacy in England turns out to have been a polemical matter of considerably less rhetorical consequence to Milton than his
marriage with Mary Powell in the summer of 1642. Her abrupt departure from their nuptial chamber at the Aldersgate house to her father’s home in Buckinghamshire quite evidently turns the yet unlaureled poet’s mind elsewhere. Instead of epithalamia, he would write five divorce tracts in only three years’ time. Even in the hurly-burly of the English Civil Wars (1642-1651), the public advocacy of divorce was an audacious move and, predictably, Milton attracted bitter reproach from clergymen of every theological ilk, but especially from the newly ascendant Presbyterians whose fundamental ecclesiology he had recently defended in both the *Animadversions* (1641) and *The Reason of Church Government Urg’d against Prelaty* (1642).

Before 1645, those few poems of Milton which had seen the printed light of day were all published anonymously. Even *Lycidas* appeared only with the initials JM, which leads Stephen B. Dobranski to insist that “the 1645 Poems foreground Milton’s authorial presence.” Recent studies treat precisely the rhetorical implications of that foregrounded authorial presence in light of the Commonwealth polemics in which Milton was engaged in the early part of the same decade, but none that I am aware of ask what, if anything, the Italian sonnets may bring to his attempted construction of authority. In any case, the *Poems of Mr John Milton, Both English and Latin, Compos’d at Several Times* (1645) looks like two separate books of poetry bound together, one primarily English and one primarily Latin. In addition to the cycle of ten sonnets in English and Italian, the 120-page English section includes liturgical poetry, psalm
paraphrases, occasional verse, commemorations, *L’Allegro, Il Penseroso, Arcades, Lycidas* and the *Comus*. The Latin section, composed of eighty-seven pages of Latin and Greek verse, is prefaced by the encomia of Milton’s fellow academicians in Latin and Italian. The *Poemata* consist of an *Elegiarum liber*, that is, sixteen poems in couplets alternating between dactyls first in hexameter and then in pentameter; the *Sylvarum liber*, an anthology of Greek and Latin meters, by which Milton means to showcase his facility and ingenuity with classical paradigms; and the *Epitaphium Damonis*, a pastoral elegy on the loss of his friend, Charles Diodati.

Milton’s printer for the 1645 volume was Humphrey Moseley (1603-1661), who started his career in the Stationers’ Company in 1627 working for a bookseller in St Paul’s Churchyard. Having successfully re-issued the poems of the decidedly royalist Edmund Waller (1606-1687), also a poet-politician, Moseley appears to have sought out Milton in an effort to cater to the vastly expanding market for new books of poetry and dramatic verse in the aftermath of the closure of theaters in 1642. The occasion was evidently auspicious for both parties. Together, Milton and Waller, unlikely bedfellows indeed, seem to have launched Moseley on a trajectory of prestige literary publication. Robert Wilcher notes

> Over the next fifteen years the list of poets and dramatists whose works appeared under his imprint included Crashaw, Shirley, Suckling, Beaumont and Fletcher, Cowley, Davenant, Denham, Carew, Cartwright,
Stanley, Vaughan, Brome, Middleton, and Massinger. His astute exploitation of the taste for literature associated with the cultural traditions of the Caroline era helped to confirm ‘the single-author edition of lyric poetry’ as ‘a familiar phenomenon in the world of publication’ and to establish the individual canons of the dramatists featured in his other major pioneering venture, the ‘serial publication of octavo play collections.’

Moseley’s royalist alignment cannot have escaped Milton’s notice, nor Milton’s pamphleteering forays his, but their collaboration indicates the practicality of mutual benefit. Furthermore, it suggests that a conscious deployment of poetry, even verse without obvious political content, can still serve polemical ends in the rhetorical situation of the Civil Wars. Moseley writes his own introduction of Milton’s poetry to the reader, which, while lamenting that “the slightest Pamphlet is nowadayes more vendible then the Works of learnedest men,” cogently notes Milton’s debt to Spenser and — somewhat prophetically, if not also profitably — compares him in favorable terms to the poet of *The Faerie Queene*.

His subsequent success as a printer affirms that Moseley was an astute judge of market value in literature. If, therefore, we consider the 1645 *Poems* in light of Moseley’s profit-motivated intuitions about what sells, we may, I believe, correlate the market value of Milton’s polyglot display to its rhetorical value, at least by way of analogy. To be sure, Moseley’s written praise of his product are
to be expected from a stationer, but the encomia of learned Italians are not. The Latin section of the 1645 volume, the *Poemata*, begins with the poet’s introduction in Latin to the *testimonia* of his erudition, his linguistic ability and his poetic skill provided by Italian academicians. Supplying Latin epigrams are Giovan Battista Manso, of Naples; Giovanni Salzilli, of Rome; and Matteo Selvaggi, possibly the pseudonym of English Benedictine David Codner, whom Milton would have met in Papal Latium at the Roman *palazzo* of Francesco Cardinal Barberini. Antonio Francini, a young Florentine, delivers an extravagant, eighty-four line ode in praise of Milton in the Tuscan *volgare*. Last of all, Carlo Roberto Dati (1619-1676), a Florentine patrician, offers a prose encomium in Latin.

In 1660, Parliament’s decision to restore the Stuart monarch to the throne dramatically restricted Milton’s options for intervention in the affairs of his country. After the 1672 version of *Paradise Lost*, a new volume of *Poems* appeared in 1673 with English additions to the sonnet cycle, though some of Milton’s epideictic sonnets were doubtless withheld from the collection to avoid collision with either Restoration sensibilities or royal censors. The Italian verse, however, remains unaugmented and unchanged, with only minor orthographical variations from the 1645 volume, which will be discussed in greater detail in the Appendix. Whatever purpose the Italian poetry may have served in 1645, Milton deemed it still adequate to the new rhetorical challenges
presented in the vastly different cultural and political climate over which Charles II (1630-1685) reigned.

**Assessing the Critical Reception**

In the last two centuries, the Italian poetry of Milton has produced critical assessments in English and Italian that differ radically in method, interpretation and evaluation. But unlike the legion of cerebral articles spawned by his English writing, Milton’s Italian has engendered relatively few scholarly investigations. Indeed, the initial appeal of this project lay in the plausibility of taking into account virtually all the published studies, at least in English, Italian and French, that refer explicitly to the eighty-five slender lines which our poet fashioned in the exemplary vernacular of Petrarch. Are there any other such clearly defined subsets of the field of Milton studies about which we may make such an optimistic assertion?

Insofar as critics consider the impact of Italy on the thought and poetry of Milton, attention falls primarily on either the influences of Sixteenth Century Italian poets in his English verse or the importance of the intellectual networks he developed during his journey to Florence, Rome and Naples. In the former category, F. T. Prince’s slim, but authoritative work, *The Italian Element in Milton’s Verse* (1954), has not yet been superceded, as evidenced by the frequency with which scholars even today continue citing his work. In the latter category, however, three English-language works deserve particular attention. The first is the large, single-volume anthology edited by Mario di Cesare called
Milton in Italy: Contexts, Images, Contradictions (1991). The second is Estelle Haan’s monograph From Academia to Amicitia: Milton’s Latin Writings and the Italian Academies (1998). The third is the compilation Milton in Context (2010) edited by Stephen Dobranski which features several articles that treat the subject of the Italian academies. Though none of the above treat the Italian verse of Milton with more than a passing glance, they all do offer detailed insights into the nature of Milton’s love for the intellectual life embodied in the Italian academies. As his commentary in both his polemical works and his treatise Of Education (1644) declare, the academies were, for Milton, a lively social and cultural institution of learned peers drawing its nourishment from poetry, especially petrarchismo.

A handful of short, but influential analyses of the Italian verse of Milton appeared during the sixty-year period from 1907 to 1967 in Italy, England, Canada and the United States. Apart from the work of Angiola Maria Volpi and John K. Hale (1994), however, what little has been published since then typically relies on the same set of twelve short commentaries — sometimes they are simply comments — about Milton’s Italian, in order to address more up-to-the-minute interests in psycho-sexual, theoretical, historical or biographical questions. Foremost among such themes we find (i) the identity of the dark lady; (ii) the nature of the relationship between Diodati and Milton; (iii) Dantesque influences; (iv) the Miltonic synthesis of religious and secular modes of thinking; and (v) feminist critical theory.
Whereas the English-language criticism of Milton’s Italian verse not infrequently disparages its poetic value, Italians will, often as not, hold the youthful Petrarchan in somewhat higher regard. English critics complain that Milton’s Italian corpus is derivative, imitative and conventional. Some Italian reviewers, however, may quibble about seemingly anachronistic diction, deliberately unconventional prosody and non-standard orthography, but they will often concede that Milton demonstrates an exceptional grasp of Italian Cinquecento poets, especially Bembo, Della Casa, Varchi and Tasso, and their respective positions in the questione della lingua. Nonetheless, neither English nor Italian criticism insists upon a wholly unified set of views and each language group reveals divergent emphases worth examining in greater detail. This dissertation, therefore, will take into account the whole of the secondary literature in Italian on the subject of Milton’s volgare from 1736 to 2016.75

The nature of my study of Milton’s Italian verse as a whole, of course, requires me not only to sift through the secondary literature, but to reject some positions, to adopt others, and, in multiple instances, to offer alternatives. Most of all I intend to comment, particularly on the Italian commentary upon Milton, for it is often quite compelling and takes place against an historical backdrop with extraordinary parallels to the political turbulence of Milton’s own age. In doing so, I hope to contextualize both the negative and positive Italian appraisals upon which so much of the later English criticism depends. This includes the most common questions that emerge from the historical treatment of Milton’s
fleeting sonnet cycle in the *volgare*: (i) the date of their composition; (ii) the place of their composition; and (iii) the audience Milton had in mind when composing them; (iv) the problem of interlanguage ideolect; (v) the problem of an anachronistic lexicon; and (vi) how in each case to evaluate the ballyhoo and the broadside they have attracted.

Although the first substantial Italian-language criticism of the style of Milton’s *sonetti* emerges in the late Nineteenth Century, English criticism has hitherto paid little attention to the intellectual context of the Risorgimento (1815-1871). Doubtless this is because, as Denis Mack Smith, an English revisionist historian of the Italian reunification period, puts it quite bluntly, “literary criticism travels less well than literature and is almost inevitably less durable.” At least with regard to the earliest Italian commentaries on Milton’s use of the *volgare*, therefore, it will be useful in each instance briefly to sketch an historical critique of the literary criticism, especially regarding discernible attitudes in Risorgimento intellectual circles toward Renaissance *petrarchismo* and the tangle of Romanticism’s complicated relationship with rhetorical praxis. Indeed, the Nineteenth Century reunification of Italy conditions the Italian reception not only of Milton’s *volgare*, but of the whole rhetorical arc implicit in his poetic œuvre, particularly his epic verse, which has enormous repercussions for any modern project of European nation-building.
The Italian Sonnet Cycle

The Italian verse of Milton consists of but six poems: five sonnets and the single stanza of a *canzone* with a *commiato* or *congedo*, that is, a farewell. In both the 1645 and 1673 collections, they appear in the following order: Sonnet II *Donna leggiadra*; Sonnet III *Qual in colle aspro*; Canzone *Ridonsi donne*; Sonnet IV *Diodati, e te’l dirò*; Sonnet V *Per certo i bei vostr’occhi*; and Sonnet VI *Giovane piano*. In both instances, they are preceded by Sonnet I *O Nightingale*; and followed by Sonnet VII *How soon hath time*, which Milton himself refers to as a “Petrarchian stanza.” The English and Italian cycle contains ten sonnets and the *canzone* in 1645. In the 1673 edition, however, the cycle expands to include nine more English sonnets, leaving out four other sonnets also in English and the *sonetto caudato*, *On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament*. In both editions, the sonnets and the *canzone* follow immediately upon *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* and precede *Arcades, Lycidas* and the *Comus*. In order, Sonnets I-VII present the Italian verse framed by two English lyrics concerned with the passage of time, longing for love and inward ripeness even as youth fades.

Three of the Italian poems, Sonnets II, IV and V, bear many of the anticipated traits of conventional *petrarchismo*: the poet’s unrequited attraction to the charm and beauty of a faultless lady, the ensuing struggle against carnal desire, the lover’s anguish at the beloved’s indifference to his plight, and the recognition or deferral of spiritual betterment derived from the contemplation of her virtues. Sonnet III and the *canzone*, inasmuch as they foreground lyrical experimentation in the lady’s vernacular, innovate
within the genre and assert the unexpected integrity of the entire sonnet cycle. Sonnet VI unexpectedly places the moral and affective qualities of the poet himself on display.

Though later in life the poet will celebrate conjugal love in Book IV of *Paradise Lost* and in Sonnet XXIII *Methought I saw my late espousèd saint*, in 1645 Milton proffers his lyric of erotic desire in the Italian language alone. His choice is both unusual and entirely fitting. How did Milton, born in Cheapside, acquire Italian at such an elevated level of proficiency? When did he write these poems and where? Is the woman about whom he speaks an historical person or is she merely the poetic trope demanded by the genre? This chapter presents the original Italian poetry with a side-by-side translation and briefly responds to these three most commonly asked questions in order immediately to advance our understanding about what Milton has done in this short sonnet cycle and so proceed to discuss its style and historical reception in the chapters that follow.

Each of the poems and my translations follow below. Although the Appendix treats the text and its commentary in depth, my aim here is simply to familiarize the reader of this dissertation with Milton’s Italian verse as quickly as possible. Translation, however, is always both an exercise in criticism and an application of theory. The choices I have made here, then, are informed in part by my understanding of Walter Benjamin’s thesis in *The Task of the Translator*. The problems or incongruencies revealed by my translation should, ideally, point to the most fundamental issues of representation and meaning in Milton’s Italian. Translation strives to extend some fundamental feature of the original into another socio-linguistic context; criticism
facilitates the maturation of the work, which, in turn, makes it possible to uncover what lies hidden in a text. In that sense, translation figures as the counterpart of the criticism that I have accessed in this dissertation, and my own convictions about the significance and meaning of the poems.

For Benjamin, translation need not seek seemlessly to eviscerate all traces of the original language, that is, to create the illusion of being an original work written in its own language. Instead, he says, a translation should “lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel.” The fragmentary effect of literal translations foregrounds linguistic intentionality. The translator, then, should embrace, rather than eschew, the necessary awkwardness that results from a literal rendering of the syntax of the original.

Consequently, my method in translating has not been to produce quatrains, tercets or lines that stand on their own as English verse, but simply to parallel Milton’s words so that the eye can move easily back and forth from Italian to English in order to make as many grammatical, syntactical and lexical connections as possible. This procedure generates insuperably clumsy effects in English, of course. For that reason, I have tried to render something more intelligible in a prose translation following the parallel. The critical text I use is from Sergio Baldi.
Sonnet II

Donna leggiadra il cui bel nome honora  
Gracious lady, whose beautiful name honors

L’herbosa val di Rheno, e il nobil varco,  
the grassy valley of the Reno, and its noble ford,

Ben è colui d’ogni valore scarco   
Truly is he of all worth discharged

Qual tuo spirto gentil non innamora,  
whom your gentle spirit does not enamor,

Che dolcemente mostra si di fuora   
That sweetly shows itself from afar

De suoi atti soavi giamai parco,  
of its courteous acts never miserly,

E i don’, che son d’amor saette ed arco,  
and the gifts, that are of love arrows and bow,

La onde l’alta tua virtù s’infiora.  
there whence your high virtue may flourish.

Quando tu vaga parli, o lieta canti  
When you, graceful one, speak, or joyous sing

Che mover possa duro alpestre legno,  
so that the hard, alpine wood may move,

Guardi ciascun a gli occhi ed a gli orecchi  
let each man guard to the eyes and to the ears

L’entrata, chi di te si truova indegno;  
the entrance, whoever of you be found unworthy;

Gratia sola di su gli vaglia, inanti  
grace alone from above avail him, before

Che’l disio amoroso al cuor s’invecchi.  
that amorous desire in his heart grow old.

Gracious lady, whose beautiful name honors the grassy valley of the Reno, and its noble ford, truly is he empty of all worth who is not enamored by your gentle spirit, which sweetly shows itself on the outside and is never miserly of courteous acts, and by the gifts, which are the bow and arrows of love, there whence your high virtue flourishes. When you speak, O graceful one, or sing, O joyous one, such that the hard, alpine wood may be moved, let each man guard the entrance to his eyes and ears, lest he be found unworthy of you. Grace alone from above avail him, before amorous desire in his heart should grow old.
Sonnet III

Qual in colle aspro, al imbrunir di sera    As on the austere hillside, at the browning of evening
L’avezza giovinetta pastorella     the skillful young shepherdess
Va bagnando l’herbeta strana e bella    goes soaking a plant foreign and beautiful
Che mal si spande a disusata spera    that weakly propagates itself in unfamiliar clime

Fuor di sua natia alma primavera,    far from the soul of its native spring,
Così Amor meco insù la lingua snella    so Love upon my agile tongue
Desta il fior novo de strania favella,    awakens a new flower of foreign speech
Mentre io di te, vezzosamente altera,    while I of you, O delicately high one,

Canto, dal mio buon popol non inteso    sing, by my good people not understood
E’l bel Tamigi cangio col bel Arno.    and the fair Thames I exchange for the fair Arno.
Amor lo volse, ed io a l’altrui peso    Love desired it, and I at the expense of others
Seppi ch’Amor cosa mai volse indarno.    knew that Love never desired in vain.
Deh! foss’il mio cor lento e l’ duro seno    Ah! if only my slow heart and hard breast were
A chi pianta dal ciel si buon terreno.    to the one who plants from heaven such good soil.

As on the austere hillside, at the browning of evening the skillful young shepherdess moistens a foreign and beautiful plant that weakly propagates itself in an unfamiliar clime far from the soul of its native spring, so while I sing of you, O delicately high one, Love awakens upon my agile tongue a new flower of foreign speech not understood by my good people, and I exchange the fair Thames for the fair Arno. Love desired it, and I at the expense of others knew that Love never desired in vain. Ah! if only my slow heart and hard breast were such good soil for the One who plants from heaven.
Canzone

Ridonsi donne e giovani amorosi  
They laugh, the maidens and amorous youths

M’accostandosi attorno, e perche scrivi,  
pressing in around me, and why do you write,

Perche tu scrivi in lingua ignota e strana  
why do you write in a tongue unknown and foreign

Verseggianto d’amor, e come t’osi?  
versifying of love, and how do you dare?

Dinne, se la tua speme si mai vana,  
Speak of it, so your hope be not vain,

E de pensieri lo miglior t’arrivi;  
and of thoughts the best come to you;

Cosi mi van burlando, altri rivi  
Thus they mock me: other shores

Altri lidi t’aspettan, & altre onde  
other strands await you, and other waves

Nelle cui verdi sponde  
on whose green banks

Spuntati ad hor, ad hora la tua chioma  
will appear even now upon your locks

L’immortal guiderdon d’eterne frondi.  
the immortal reward of everlasting laurels.

Perche alle spalle tue soverchia soma?  
Why [bear] upon your shoulders greater load?

Canzon dirotti, e tu per me rispondi  
O Song, change course, and respond for me,

Dice mia Donna, e’il suo dir, è il mio cuore,  
“My lady says,” and her speech is my heart,

Questa è lingua di cui si vanta Amore.  
“This is the tongue of which Love boasts.”

Pressing in about me, maidens and amorous youths laugh. “Why do you write? Why do you write in an unknown, foreign language versifying of love? How do you dare? Speak of it, so that your hope be not vain and best wishes come to you.” Thus, they mock me. “Other shores and other strands await you, and other waves on whose green banks and your locks sprouted even now the immortal reward of everlasting laurels. Why let this load weigh upon your shoulders?” O Song, change course, and respond for me, “My lady says,” and her speech is my heart, “This is the tongue of which Love boasts.”
Sonnet IV

Diodati, e te'l dirò con maraviglia, Diodati, and I tell you this with wonder,
Quel ritroso io ch'amor spreggiar soléa that my reluctant self, who used to despise love
E de suoi lacci spesso mi redéa and at his snares often have laughed,
Gia caddi, ov'huom dabben talhor s’impiglia. have now fallen where good men do at times get caught.

Ne treccie d’oro, ne guancia vermiglia Neither braids of gold, nor cheeks vermillion
M’abbaglian sì, ma sotto novia idea dazzle me so, but under new form
Pellegrina bellezza che'l cuor bea, pilgrim beauty that makes the heart glad,
Portamenti alti honesti, e nelle ciglia deportment high and honest, and in the brows
Quel sereno fulgor d’amabil nero, that serene effulgence of amiable black,
Parole adorne di lingua piu d’una, speech adorned with more than one tongue,
E’l cantar che di mezzo l’hemisfero and singing that from the middle of the hemisphere
Traviar ben può la faticosa Luna, might well lead astray the troubled moon.
E degli occhi suoi avventa si gran fuoco And from her eyes shoots forth such great fire
Che l’incerar gli orecchi mi fia poco. that putting wax in the ears for me does little.

Diodati, and I tell you this with wonder, that my reluctant self, who used to despise love and at his snares often have laughed, have now fallen where good men do sometimes become entangled. Neither braids of gold, nor vermillion cheeks dazzle me so, but rather a new form, a rare foreign beauty that makes the heart glad, deportment high and honest, and in her brows there is a serene effulgence of amiable black, her speech adorned with more than one tongue, and singing that from the middle of the hemisphere might well lead astray the troubled moon. And from her eyes shoots forth such great fire that putting wax in my ears does little for me.
Sonnet V

*Per certo i bei vostr’occhi Donna mia*  
Certainly your beautiful eyes my Lady,

*Esser non puo che non sian lo mio sole*  
cannot but be my sun.

*Si mi percuoton forte, come ei suole*  
Yes, they strike me hard, as one accustomed

*Per l’arene di Libia chi s’invia,*  
by the sands of Libya who is sent,

*Mentre un caldo vapor (ne senti pria)*  
while a hot vapor (not sensed previously)

*Da quel lato si spinge ove mi duole,*  
from that side pushes out right where it pains me,

*Che forse amanti nelle lor parole*  
which perhaps lovers in their speech

*Chiaman sospir; io non so che si sia:*  
call a sigh; I do not know what it may be,

*Parte rinchiusa, e turbida si cela*  
partly recused and troubled, it hides itself

*Scosso mi il petto, e poi n’uscendo poco*  
having shaken my breast, and then leaving a little

*Quivi d’attorno o s’agghiaccia, o s’ingiela;*  
here about either it ices up, or it freezes;

*Ma quanto a gli occhi giunge a trovar loco*  
but that much in my eyes arrives to find a place

*Tutte le notti a me suol far piovose*  
all my nights usually to make rainy

*Finche mia Alba rivien colma di rose.*  
until my Dawn comes again full of roses.

Certainly your beautiful eyes my Lady, cannot but be my sun. Yes, they strike me hard, as one accustomed by the sands of Libya who is sent, while a hot vapor (not sensed previously) from that side pushes out right where it pains me, which perhaps lovers in their speech call a sigh; I do not know what it may be, partly recused and troubled, it hides itself having shaken my breast, and then leaving a little here about either it ices up, or it freezes; But that much of it that gets into my eyes always finds a way to dampen my nights until Dawn comes again full of roses.
Sonnet VI

Giovane piano, e semplicito amante A gentle youth, and simple lover am I,

Poi che fuggir me stesso in dubbio sono, Whether to flee from myself I am in doubt,

Madonna a voi del mio cuor l’humil dono My lady to you from my heart a humble gift

Farò divoto; io certo a prove tante I will devote, certainly through many trials

L’ebbi fedele, intrepido, costante, have I been faithful, intrepid, constant,

De pensieri leggiadro, accorto, e buono; in my thoughts graceful, alert, and good.

Quando rugge il gran mondo, e scocca il tuono, When the great world roars, and thunder crashes,

S’arma di se, e d’intero diamante, my heart arms itself, and entirely adamant,

Tanto del forse, e d’invidia sicuro, As from doubt, and from envy secure,

Di timori, e speranze al popol use From fears, and hopes as common folk have,

Quanto d’ingegno, e d’alto valor vago, so with ingenuity, and high value desirous,

E di cetra sonora, e delle muse: and with sonorous lyre, and with the Muses.

Sol troverete in tal parte men duro Only in one place will you find it less impenetrable

Ove amor mise l’insanabil ago. there where love has stuck its incurable dart.

A gentle youth, and simple lover am I, whether to flee from myself I am in doubt, my lady to you from my heart a humble gift I will devote, certainly through many trials have I been faithful, intrepid, constant, in my thoughts graceful, alert, and good. When the great world roars, and thunder crashes, my heart arms itself, and entirely adamant, As from doubt, and from envy secure, From fears, and hopes as common folk have, so with ingenuity, and high value desirous, and with sonorous lyre, and with the Muses. Only in one place will you find it less impenetrable there where love has stuck its incurable dart.
Milton’s Fluency in Italian

How well did Milton know Italian? Though it’s impossible to say for certain, there is still a good deal to be inferred from the historical context, from textual sources and from the poems themselves. Chapters 2 and 3 deal with different aspects of the negative assessments that Milton’s Italian poetry has generated from Italian readers and critics. Chapter 3 further treats Italian critical responses to negative Italian evaluations in light of Milton’s known classical, Trecento, Quattrocento and Cinquecento influences.

Today, knowing a language means being able to do something in that language. Someone with language proficiency would know when to speak using the language, why the utterance should be made and how properly to make it. Speaking, however, is but one component of linguistic competency. Other essentials include understanding what is being said when spoken to, reading with comprehension, and writing correctly. Reading, writing, speaking and listening, then, are our categories for evaluating Milton’s knowledge of Italian. Nor would it be anachronistic to analyze Milton’s alleged mastery of Italian in light of these four basic skills, for as we shall see, both textual and historical evidence contribute to a strong portrait of the poet’s high quality of multilingualism in each category.

That Milton could read, write and speak Italian and understand the spoken form of the language by the time of his sojourn in Italy is incontestable. The Latin encomia praise the polyglot scholar and Salzilli specifies Italian among Milton’s languages. The encomium from Giovanni Antonio Francini (1624-1699), however, is especially compelling, firstly because of what it says about the quality of Milton’s Italian, and
secondly because, unlike the others, he has written it for Milton in Italian, which suggests that the tribute means to compliment his knowledge of *volgare*.

*Quanti naquero in Flora*  
How many born in Florence

*O in lei del parlar Tosco appreser l’arte,*  
or in her learned the art of speaking Tuscan,

*La cui memoria onora*  
whose memory honors

*Il mondo fatta eterna in dotte carte,*  
the world, made eternal in learned pages,

*Volesti ricercar per tuo tesoro*  
you wanted to seek out as your treasure

*E parlasti con lor nell’opre loro.*\(^{83}\)  
and you spoke with them in their own works.

It’s worth puzzling out the phrase, *E parlasti con lor nell’opre loro.* Francini seems to be saying that “Because they are made eternal in learned pages, the world honors the memory of the many born in Florence (Dante, Cavalcanti, Frescobaldi) or purposefully came to Florence in order to learn the art of speaking Tuscan (Bembo, Alberti, Trissino) and you, John Milton, have apostrophized them through the medium of the selfsame vernacular eloquence that they themselves created, that is, their works.” This clearly communicates Florentine admiration for the significant learning in the matter of their literary tradition evident in the Englishman.

Reading, speaking and writing a Romance language, however, requires a lesser degree of linguistic competence than versifying according to the exacting demands of Italian prosody. For this reason, numerous critics have entertained the notion that Milton must necessarily have had help from a native speaker, either in London or in Italy. Campbell and Corns, then, review a report from Thomas Warton the younger (1728-1790), which follows here:
In 1762, the late Mr. Thomas Hollis examined the Laurentian library at Florence, for six Italian Sonnets of Milton, addressed to his friend Chimentelli; and for other Italian and Latin compositions and various original letters, said to be remaining in manuscript at Florence. He searched also for an original bust in marble of Milton, supposed to be somewhere in that city. But he was unsuccessful in his curious inquiries.84

While some of Milton’s later correspondence with Carlo Roberto Dati (1619-1676), his academic fellow from the Svogliati, does survive, along with the letter to Benedetto Buonmattei (1581-1648) discussed at length in the next chapter, there’s no mention of similar correspondence with Valerio Chimentelli (1620-1668), though Milton remembers him fondly him in the Defensio secunda (1654). The Warton report nonetheless offers Campbell and Corns an opportunity to speculate.

The fact that Hollis was searching for six sonnets raises the possibility that underlying this unverifiable story there is a kernel of truth that might help to explain the extraordinary fluency of Milton’s sonnets; perhaps Chimentelli was the friend who helped to bring the Italian of Milton’s sonnets to native-speaker proficiency.85

The Francini encomium, however, specifies that Milton spoke to the great poets of the Tuscan vernacular in their own works. No matter what other meanings may cluster around Francini’s verse, one can only really speak to dead poets poetically and, in this case, that requires superior linguistic skill in volgare.

Needless to say, if there had been manuscripts with Milton’s poems in Latin and Italian, or any other mention of our poet, to be found in Florentine, Roman or
Neapolitan archives, their interest to scholarship could hardly be exaggerated. Nor is Warton the only one to mention rumors of this nature. In the mid-Nineteenth Century, Alphonse de Lamartine (1790-1869) makes this extraordinary claim:

Il est curieux aujourd’hui, quand on visite les archives et les bibliothèques des souverains d’Italie, de retrouver fréquemment, dans les correspondances des poètes et des savants de ce siècle, la mention du nom de ce jeune Anglais ami des muses, qui parle et qui écrit même en vers la langue de Torquato, et qui promet à l’Angleterre un grand orateur, un grand politique, un grand poète. Les étrangers, plus impartiaux, pressentent un homme avant ses compatriotes.

[It is curious today, when one visits the archives and libraries of the sovereigns of Italy, frequently to find, in the correspondence of the poets and scholars of that age, mention of the name of the young Englishman, friend of the muses, who speaks and even writes in the language of Torquato, and who promises to England a great orator, a great politician, a great poet. Foreigners, more impartial, have a feel for the man even before his compatriots].

To me, this account sounds fanciful. The historical portraits (Cicero, Gutenberg, Nelson, William Tell!) that Lamartine produced for his three-volume series, Le Civilisateur (1852-1854), in which the essay on Milton appears, tend to focus on the big picture in highly encomiastic terms, often at the expense of verifiable particulars. Still, though perhaps he has simply garbled the 1769 report of Warton, Lamartine does distinctly assert the existence of correspondence, not between Milton and his erudite friends, but among the Italian academicians regarding Milton. Lamentably, he does not mention in which archives of which Italian nobility one frequently finds mention of Milton in the
letters of the poets and scholars of the period. Nonetheless, in 1998, Estelle Haan did discover explicit mention of Giovanni Milton Inglese, in the recently transcribed Manoscritto Marucelliano, an Eighteenth Century chronological survey by Anton Francesco Gori (1691-1752) of the activities of the Accademia degli Apatisti, which Milton’s friend Agostino Coltellini (1613-1693) had founded in 1631.\footnote{87} Since the document was previously unknown to Milton scholars, it does make one wonder what more the ongoing research into the history and literary activities of the peninsular academies yet may yield for the benefit of Milton studies.

Indeed, the Seicento academies remain a promising area for the full range of interests in Milton precisely because, in the context of Commonwealth polemics, he took pains to identify himself with Italian academicians, their literary and scientific interests, their apprehension of classical literature and philosophy, and their exacting philological studies. John Steadman makes the point that “to a considerable extent [Milton] tended to see the classics themselves through Italian eyes.”\footnote{88} In the Renaissance, a boy’s first introduction to Latin came at an early age and in order for Milton to have acquired Italian pronunciation of the language of Vergil, and to have felt right about it, suggests that he came into contact with both languages in close proximity to one another. The pedagogy of ancient and medieval languages is quite different today, and does not necessarily require speaking. In the Renaissance, however, learning non-vernacular tongues would typically have required a significant component of speech. The emendation of texts through the oral presentation of their content constitutes one reason to speak a non-vernacular language out loud, memorization and
declamation others.\textsuperscript{89} All the biographical data suggests that Milton got his Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac by following the normal patterns of language acquisition, modeled on Latin grammar, that were common to his age.\textsuperscript{90} It’s not entirely clear that vernacular languages would always have been taught in the same ways, \textsuperscript{91} but the general picture one has of learned persons learning spoken tongues strongly suggests analogous processes, especially after John Florio’s \textit{A Worlde of Wordes} (1611). It’s my guess that Milton acquired Italian in much the same way that he did Latin, and quite possibly at the same time.

Both Greek and Hebrew held special prominence as languages of Holy Writ, but Latin nonetheless reigned supreme. Moreover, in Milton’s time, the practice at both St Paul’s and Cambridge certainly did require the development of oral and auditory capacities, as the \textit{Sitz-im-Leben} of university Latin exercises in at least some of the genres suggests. Latin was the language of diplomacy, of international commerce, and of scholarship. Hale, however, notes that

\begin{quote}
Latin was the \textit{sine qua non} of an educated person. It was a triple gateway: to preferment, to the intellectual life of antiquity, and to active membership of the European intelligentsia. Nonetheless the grandeur of Rome’s long history made it’s language potentially overwhelming. The dilemma of the Renaissance humanist was, how to absorb and exploit antiquity through its languages without being dwarfed by these languages axiomatic, definitive greatness.\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quote}

Petrarch himself felt this dilemma keenly with regard to his Latin epic, \textit{Africa}, for he became convinced that he would never achieve in the language of Vergil, what Dante had done in the vernacular tongue. The Renaissance humanist finds the absorption and
exploitation of the languages of antiquity all the more challenging because they are never spoken as native tongues. The Erasmian reconstruction of classical Greek, for example, alienated the scholarship of the Attic dialect in Northern Europe from the resources for aural language learning that might otherwise have been derived from direct contact with Byzantine Greeks, whose expertise was so commonly accessed by Italian scholars. Moreover, Erasmus’ lectures in Greek grammar at Cambridge, beginning in 1511, endowed Milton’s university with a special degree of prominence in the field insofar as England was concerned. This, in turn, favored the appointment at Cambridge of the first Regius Professors of Greek, John Cheke (1514-1557) and Thomas Smith (1513-1577), who built upon the foundation that Selling, Linacre and Erasmus laid, and advocated similar reconstructions which further extended the scope of the alienation.

If Jespersen’s theory of the great vowel shift in England is basically sound, it will have impacted learned languages like Latin and Greek as well, which accounts for the significant variation in pronunciation between native speakers of English and the speakers of other languages when ancient forms of Latin or Greek are spoken aloud. Milton is profoundly aware of orthoepaic criteria and controversy and, not surprisingly, has formulated his own utterly unique position. In the treatise, Of Education (1644), he argues that English children

should begin with the chief and necessary rules of some good Grammar, either that now us’d, or any better: and while this is doing, their speech is to be fashion’d to a distinct and clear pronunciation, as near as may be to the Italian, especially in the Vowels. For we Englishmen being far Northerly, do not open
our mouths in the cold air wide enough to grace a Southern Tongue; but are
observ’d by all other Nations to speak exceeding close and inward: So that to
smatter Latine with an English mouth, is as ill a hearing as Law-French.95

Unlike so many of his compatriots, Milton, then, can hear the diphthongization and
phonetic raising of vowels that so clearly marks the native speaker of English to the
speakers of any of the continental languages. Moreover, he considers it worthwhile to
remediate the Engli
shed Latin of his land precisely by imitating the speech of Italians,
though virtually none of his contemporaries agrees.

Among Italian academicians, the ability to speak Latin fluently would have been
the rule. The 16 September 1638 minutes of the sitting of the Accademia degli Svogliati
in which Giovanni Miltone Inglese is mentioned explicitly, taken together with his own
testimony in The Reason of Church Government (1641) of the trifles he “had in memory”
and had had “to patch up amongst them,” suggest that the “very erudite” Latin
hexameters which “met with acceptance above what was looked for” were received
aurally by his Italian audience. The same is true of Milton’s “noble verses” reported in
the Svogliati minutes of March in the following year. For their part, the Italian
academicians evidently processed the poet’s spoken Latin and comprehended it with
facility. Irrespective of whether the verse presented that evening had been the Naturam
non pati senium, the In quintum novembris or the Ad patrem,96 understanding the
demanding syntax of Milton’s Latin poetry on a first hearing would have required an
outstanding level of philological sophistication coupled with an extraordinarily high
level of linguistic competence in a non-vernacular language in order to make sense of it
all on a purely auditory basis. Moreover, they would have had to have grasped Milton’s
oral delivery, which in turn suggests that our poet had himself already made the effort to cultivate the kind of Italianate pronunciation of Latin that he recommends for English grammar school children in *Of Education*.  

Milton’s preference for Italian pronunciation was an odd thing, quite unlike the more common English view toward the exercise of speaking Latin. Dr Johnson captures the matter splendidly in his *Life of Milton*.

There is little reason for preferring the Italian pronunciation to our own, except that it is more general; and to teach it to an Englishman is only to make him a foreigner at home. He who travels, if he speaks Latin, may so soon learn the sounds which every native gives it, that he need make no provision before his journey; and if strangers visit us, it is their business to practise such conformity to our modes as they expect from us in their own countries.  

For an Englishman, Milton’s attitude toward the pronunciation of Latin must have seemed decidedly idiosyncratic to his contemporaries. Where did it come from? How did he develop it? On the one hand, there’s no way of knowing for sure. On the other hand, his stance on the proper way of pronouncing Latin, and indeed our inferences about his spoken Latin, are perfectly intelligible if he had received early childhood training in the Tuscan *volgare* itself.

In the *Ad patrem* analysis of the Introduction, we have seen that Milton’s father went to pains to provide his son with instruction in Italian at an early age. Clearly, the boy had an aptitude for languages and if neither Latin nor Greek daunted him, Italian must have delighted. Thus, the means. Unusual though the choice of a vernacular language may have been (French certainly recommends itself to a London scrivener
with mercantile connections), perhaps the elder Milton’s openness to Italian comes from his own madrigalist background and the importance of the language of Petrarch in the Elizabethan music scene.\textsuperscript{99} That might provide motive. Campbell and Corns point now to another intriguing possibility.

The Diodatis were members of the small Italian Protestant community whose church (which had closed in 1591) had reopened in 1609 in the Mercers’ Chapel in Cheapside, a short distance east of Bread Street. Milton’s friendship with a young Italian, and the proximity of an Italian expatriate community, may explain the fluency of Milton’s spoken Italian and of the Italian sonnets that he was to write before his visit to Italy.\textsuperscript{100}

The Italian parish, to which the English Diodati family belonged, reconstituted itself the year after Milton’s birth, that is, the year that Charles Diodati was born. No sources known to me document the size of the congregation, but by the time Milton had published the 1645 Poems, Italian ministers in Cheapside had been replaced by Englishmen from elsewhere. This suggests to me that, whatever the census of the Italian-speaking congregation may have been at the time of Milton and Charles Diodati’s birth, it was not large enough to promote the ongoing training of Italian or Anglo-Italian clergy from among its own parishioners. In 1620, however, as the Milton and Diodati boys were beginning their tuition together at St Paul’s, the Italian parish still had the wherewithal to publish rhymed Italian psalters meant to be sung to Anglican psalm tones.\textsuperscript{101} The very notion of an effort to provide for the needs of a vernacular liturgy in Italian seems at once to bring the known musical interests of Milton the elder, who also composed sacred songs, together with a newly reborn,
neighboring speech community of Italian Protestants. Thus, even without dependence upon Milton’s close relationship with Charles Diodati, whose status as a heritage speaker of Italian is by no means completely established, the proximity of the Italian church to his own family’s Bread Street residence in Cheapside, especially when taken in light of his father’s musical and social circle, offers clear opportunity. Means, motive and opportunity: *potuit, decuit, ergo fecit.*

Milton himself has woven Diodati so closely into the fabric of his polyglot verse as to make any discussion of the poet’s knowledge of Italian impossible without reference to their friendship. Milton addresses Diodati directly in the *Elegia prima* and the *Elegia sexta,* makes of him the explicit audience in Sonnet IV, and memorializes him in the *Epitaphium Damonis.* The latter commemoration offers still more criteria with which to evaluate the level of Milton’s Italian proficiency. Against the rhythm of an unabating, pastoral lament, “*Ite domum impasti… agni*” [Go home unfed, my lambs], we hear Milton singing of the exhilaration he experienced in the intellectual and poetic fellowship of Tuscany. He apostrophizes “*Pastores Thusci Musis operata juventus*” [the Tuscan shepherds, youth devoted to the Muse], who in Italy had become new companions at the musical table once shared primarily with Diodati himself in England. They contend with one another in song and Milton audaciously participates, winning their esteem: *Ipse etiam tentare ausus sum, nec puto multum/ Displicui, nam sunt & apud me munera vestra* [even I myself dared to enter the contest, nor do I think I greatly displeased you, for I still have with me your gifts]. These Italian poets, specifically Dati and Francini, both significantly younger than Milton and Diodati, gave
him the gift of the encomia he published in his 1645 collection, yes, but more to the point, they offered him their high commendation of his verse.

The question we must now address is this: with which verse did Milton dare to enter their competition, Latin or Italian? On the one hand, Milton writes here in Latin. Moreover the hexameters mentioned in both the sets of Svogliati minutes, and to which the passage from The Reason of Church Government may also allude, were written in Latin. On the other hand, these lines of the Epitaphium emphasize Tuscan shepherds, Tuscany’s river, and the Tuscan identity of Diodati himself, whose familial origins lie in Lucca. The context thus implies that the figurative competition of such as Dati and Francini, into which Milton himself had had the temerity to enter, took place on the banks of their Arno, not Latin’s Tiber, not the English Thames. Dati, Francini and Milton, therefore, versify in the Tuscan vernacular and do so in playful competition with one another. In the manner of the De vulgari eloquentia, which is never far from the ken of our Italian-speaking Latinist, Milton implies that in Florence he shared his poetic voice in volgare with Tuscans, even as he had shared it previously in London with their distant kin, Diodati, and won renown from them for his poetry in their language. Dati and Francini, both teenagers at the time of Milton’s visit (Musis operata juventus), may well have been the perfect interlocutors for this pursuit. In the event of commemorating his lost friend, these young Tuscan poets summon both Milton and Diodati back to the youthful context in which the Italian verse was very likely first written. E.A.J. Honigmann (1927-2011) points out a striking affinity between the setting of the canzone and the poetic contest imagined on the banks of the Arno in the Epitaphium.
The bystanders in the Canzone ask ‘why dost thou write in a strange and unknown tongue, and how dost thou dare?’ The daring celebrated in the *Epitaphium Damonis* most probably refers to attempts at Italian poetry, in which Milton would be at the greatest disadvantage.106 Honigmann’s observation here will have enormous significance for dating the poems, as presently we shall see, but for the moment our interest lies in Milton’s audacious self-portrait attested in both the Latin and the Italian verse. This poet *dares* and his daring lies precisely in his willingness to essay his poetic skill in Italian.

By the time of his journey to Italy, though Milton would have been entirely fluent in Italian, we must not assume that he was perfectly confident in his mastery of the spoken language. In what manner does his tongue proclaim him an Englishman? In the Tuscan ear, will his Italian produce as ill a hearing as Law French? His September 1638 letter to fellow academician,107 Benedetto Buonmattei, includes a plea for a chapter on the correct pronunciation of the Tuscan language in the newest edition of his *Grammatica della lingua toscana* (1643).

For this reason it behoves you to remember what I have so often urged upon you; namely that you would consent to add to your work, already begun and in part completed, a short chapter on the correct pronunciation of the language, treated as simply as the subject will permit, and so earn the gratitude of us foreigners.108 Although there is no separate chapter on pronunciation in the *Grammatica*, the author does include comments on pronunciation throughout the work. Nonetheless, it’s impossible to tell from its publication history whether or in what measure Buonmattei
may have been responding to Milton’s request. About the work of scholars in Italian philology before Buonmattei, Milton says, “Yet, in my opinion, they would have acted in the better interests both of their own fame and of the reputation of the Italian tongue if they had so set forth their teaching as if men of every race might reasonably be expected to desire a knowledge of that language.” And why not? If the Elizabethan fashion for all things Italian has waned in England at least there is one Englishman left who yet perceives the enduring value of Italian letters, both in its tradition of humanist scholarship and in its vernacular poetics. In his discussion of the singular role that Italian plays in the matrix of Milton’s multilingualism, Hale says, “Besides standing closest to Latin, for instance in pronunciation, Italian most renewed its poetic and expressive resources from Latin.” And, indeed — as the Italian element apparent throughout his works amply displays — Milton will subsequently marshall both Latin and Italian in order to renew the poetic and expressive resources of English, especially in Paradise Lost, Paradise Regain’d and Samson Agonistes.

The Date of the Poems

We must now address the question of dating these poems by summarizing and evaluating the approaches that Milton’s Nineteenth and Twentieth Century biographers have used. The Italian poems are undated and do not appear in the “collection of drafts now known as the Trinity Manuscript” (c. 1632). None of the first lives of Milton assigns a date to the composition of the Italian sonnets: not the terse John Aubrey (1626-1697); nor the anonymous author (John Phillips? Cyriack Skinner?) of the 1686 Life of Milton; nor Edward Phillips (1630-1696), the poet’s nephew, whose 1694 account of his
uncle’s life, scholars agree, is most generally reliable early biography. Dr Johnson says nothing about their dates, nor do any of Milton’s other biographers up to and including William Howitt (1792-1879), who published his sketch of Milton’s life in 1849.

Germene to the matter of dating the sonnet cycle are these related questions. Were the sonnets composed at roughly the same time? In what manner might they depend upon one another? Who are the audiences within the poems? For whom were the poems written? Might our poet have composed the *sonetti* during his visit to Italy? Starting with Irish critic Thomas Keightley (1789-1872), almost every Milton biographer and critic who does mention their composition, whether English, French or Italian, seems to have taken it for granted that they were written together, addressed to a *donna leggiadra* whom he met on the journey or to Diodati before he knew of the latter’s death. Not until Ettore Allodoli (1882-1960) do critics begin to place these assumptions under greater scrutiny.

In *The Reason of Church Government*, Milton speaks of previously composed verse “which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to patch up amongst them.” Biographers take this to refer to the Latin hexameters with which he proved his wit to the Italian academicians among the Svogliati and the Apatisti, but there’s no reason it could not also apply to the Italian verse. Moreover, these “trifles which [he] had in memory, compos’d at under twenty or thereabout” are said to have “met with acceptance above what was looked for” and “were received with written encomiums which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps.” Thus we have three criteria to examine. Firstly, whatever Milton may have patched up while
travelling in Italy, he had composed, or had begun composing, at “under twenty or thereabout.” Secondly, this verse clearly “met with acceptance” from Italian scholars and writers who themselves were known to have produced both neo-Latin and vernacular compositions. Finally, these same Italians emitted “written encomiums” attesting to Milton’s wit and tongues. However common a practice it may have been for one Italian to write in praise of another Italian, Milton asserts that it would have been an unusual thing for an Italian to offer such tribute for a foreigner.

Milton says that the poems he shifted about were written at “under twenty or thereabout.” Though Estelle Haan calls the phrase “sufficiently vague,” it’s not vague at all. The term thereabout “was no more than contemporary legal jargon, a standard disclaimer added to almost all ages given in English court documents: it removed the obligation to add a precise number of months and days.” The expression represents a common formula with which a scrivener’s son would certainly have been familiar. Thus, Milton clearly means that he was not yet twenty when these trifles were composed. That Milton’s Latin hexameters met with success, we know from the minutes of the Accademia degli Svogliati discussed at length in Chapter 2. Nonetheless, it is my view, drawn from reading the Epitaphium Damonis above, that Milton claims to have shared his Italian verse with at least some of the younger Florentine academicians during his Italian sojourn. If this hypothesis stands up to scrutiny, then the trifles patched up may just as well have been Italian as Latin.

The encomia, of which Milton is so justly proud, make much of his erudition and multilingualism. But erudite and multilingual foreigners traveled frequently to Italy
and often stayed for long enough periods of time to establish friendly relationships with Italian poets,\textsuperscript{117} aristocrats and ecclesiastics.\textsuperscript{118} Why wouldn’t they have received written encomia? Surely the transalpine polyglot scholar comes armed with notable Latin and Greek along with whatever vernaculars obtain in his region of Flanders or Austria or Provence. The difference between him and Milton, however, lies precisely in the latter’s command of Italian, a distinguishing feature that evidently delights his peninsular acquaintances. Nor is it merely his speech that captures the imagination of his Italian interlocutors. In order for them to have awarded him written encomia, he would have had to have familiarized them with his writings in Italian.

Lastly, there’s that word Milton uses, \textit{trifles}. Petrarch speaks of the \textit{Rerum vulgari\textit{um fragmenta}} as trifles, doesn’t he? In the letter to Pandolfo Malatesta (1325-1373) accompanying an early manuscript\textsuperscript{119} of lyrical verse, Petrarch refers to his lifelong effort at composing Italian poetry as “vernacular trifles.”\textsuperscript{120} In 1373, he writes, “\textit{Invitus, fateor, hac etate vulgari iuveniles ineptias cerno, quas omnibus—mihi quoque, si liceat—ignotas velim} [Reluctantly, I acknowledge at my present age what I perceive as the vernacular trifles of my youth, for which I would like to be pardoned by all — by me also, if it were possible].”\textsuperscript{121} The trope of modesty regarding youthful vernacular composition is deployed so frequently in the practice of \textit{petrarchismo} as to suggest that Milton may well be referring to his Italian verse, since it’s unlikely he shared Sonnet I \textit{O Nightingale} with Italians. In any case, the language of trifles is \textit{volgare}.

In summary, we may infer from Milton’s testimony in \textit{The Reason of Church Government} that he was a teenager when he began the trifles that subsequently “met
with acceptance above what was looked for” at least in the social setting of the Italian academies, if not in a formal session of an academic convivium. If the trifles themselves were composed in volgare, that would account for why Florentines, Romans and Neapolitans bestowed encomia upon Milton that would not ordinarily have been considered in the case of other erudite, classically trained and multilingual Europeans. Milton composed in Italian, which was something that others, despite their potential mastery of Latin, did not commonly do. Finally the equivalence of the English term *trifles* with the Latin *ineptias* itself bespeaks the imitation of Petrarch and the practice of petrarchismo.

Inference from the polemical prose, then, suggests that Milton would likely have begun composition of the Italian verse eight to ten years before he traveled to Italy in 1638-1639. Nonetheless, in the same *The Reason of Church Government*, he also says that while he was traveling he shifted and patched up the trifles he had composed at twenty that met with the approval of Italians. This leads one to believe that he revised his verse in Italy. If so, Milton’s Latin seems an unlikely candidate. But his poetic skill is not as deft in Italian as in Latin and the influence and advice of Italian poets regarding their own vernacular may have provided just the right impetus for revision.

Advocating composition that began before the Italian journey would put one at odds with the influential Thomas Keightley, with whom we shall become better acquainted in Chapter 3. Between 1855 and 1859, Keightley published three formidable tomes on the poet: a biography with an introduction to *Paradise Lost*, and a two-
volume, densely annotated edition of Milton’s complete poetry. On the composition of the Italian verse, Keightley wrote

During his residence in Florence, [Milton] even ventured to essay his powers in the composition of verses in that language, which were probably received with the indulgence due to the poetic efforts of a man of genius in an idiom not his own, and were honoured with the approbation of his learned Italian friends. When publishing his Poems in 1645, he inserted among them five Sonnets and a short Canzone in the language of Italy.\textsuperscript{122}

Lamartine precedes him,\textsuperscript{123} so he’s not the first to assume that the Italian poetry belongs to the period of the peninsular sojourn, but his otherwise astute and well reasoned biography of Milton is so authoritative as to lend weight even to views formed without strong evidence, whether inferential corroboration from Milton’s own writings or historical attestation from other documentary sources. For Keightley, it is primarily the notion of an Italian setting that justifies the otherwise unwarrented departure of our poet from his native tongue to another vernacular.

The allusion in Sonnet II to the river that divides Emilia from Romagna, \textit{l’herbosa val de Rheno} [the grassy Reno valley] draws David Mather Masson (1822-1907) to assign the date of the Italian verse to the end Milton’s peninsular sojourn.

And yet it seems to be with this transit through Bologna and Ferrara on the way to Venice, rather than with any other portion of his Italian tour, that we are bound to connect what is, in one respect, the most characteristic relic of that tour as a whole — his own attempts in Italian verse.\textsuperscript{124}
Masson considers, but then rejects altogether, the possibility that at least the majority of the Italian poems were written in England before the Italian journey. Masson assumes that Milton cannot, therefore, have known at that time about the August 1638 death of Charles Diodati, since he would agree that the address of Sonnet IV, Diodati, e te’l dirò con maraviglia, would be unseemly if that were the case. To be sure, the matter of when Milton came to know of the death of his friend is not settled, but to assume that he could not have known while in Bologna else he would not have written Sonnet IV as he must have done there is to put the cart before the horse.

Federico Olivero (1875-1955), focusing on the figure of Diodati and the Epitaphium Damonis, entertains the notion that Sonnet IV was written during Milton’s sojourn in Florence on the occasion of his short visit to Lucca, the Diodati ancestral home.

Quando il poeta nel suo viaggio sul continente visitò Lucca, il ricordo dell’amico può aver aumentato l’attrattiva della città ma di più particolare interesse è il fatto che fra le poesie italiane del Milton si trova un sonetto dedicato al Diodati, come alla persona più atta a comprendere ed a gustare le finezze del linguaggio. Forse quando il Milton indirizzava all’amico questo suo lavoro il Diodati era già passato ad altra vita, avendo il suo decesso avuto luogo nell’agosto del 1638 in Londra [When the poet, in the course of his continental journey, visited Lucca, the remembrance of his friend may have augmented the attraction of the city; but of more particular interest is the fact the among the Italian poems of Milton is found a sonnet dedicated to Diodati, as the person most apt to comprehend and to appreciate the finesse of the language. Perhaps by the time Milton addressed this work to his friend, Diodati had already passed
on to another life, his decease having taken place in August of 1638 in London.\textsuperscript{126} 

Surname notwithstanding, Olivero offers little else to raise his Diodati theory above the level of surmise. From Masson, whom he cites in footnotes, Olivero believes that Milton cannot have known of Diodati’s death until the latter part of his Venetian sojourn or in Geneva, where he may possibly have had the news from Giovanni Diodati, Charles’ uncle. By that time, Milton had already been twice in Florence, twice in Rome, in Naples and, according to Masson’s theory, had passed through Emilia-Romagna. For Olivero, Lucca and the Tuscan milieu are as good a guess as Bologna, but it’s clearly just a guess.

An exact contemporary of Olivero, Ettore Allodoli becomes the first critic, English or Italian, to question the assumption that Milton composed his Italian poetry while in Italy. While he dutifully mentions Keightley’s position, which dates the Italian sonnets to the period of Milton’s Italian sojourn, Allodoli contradicts the conventional wisdom and instead assigns greater probability to a date corresponding to the youthful composition of \textit{L’Allegro} and \textit{Il Penseroso}. In this hypothesis, Milton tries his hand at Italian prosody in the context of his early Italianizing experimentations in English. Nor is this reasoning unsound. Nonetheless, though Allodoli clearly knows of Milton’s correspondence with Charles Diodati in Latin verse, he makes no mention of the passage from the \textit{Elegia sexta}, by which Carey will establish the year 1629 as the \textit{terminus ad quem} for the composition of the Italian poems. This is not the young critic’s only instance of coming close to a major breakthrough without quite breaking through.
Allodoli has these reasons to offer in defense of an earlier date. Firstly, he adduces from the text of Sonnet III *Qual in colle aspro*, that the speaker’s point of reference must be London, and cannot be Florence:

*Cosi Amor meco insù la lingua snella*

*Desta il fior novo de strania favella,*

*Mentre io di te, vezzosamente altera,*

*Canto, dal mio buon popol non inteso*

*E'l bel Tamigi cangio col bel Arno.*

[So Love in me upwardly the agile tongue
Arouses to a new flowering of foreign speech,
While I of you, it delicately alters,
sing, by my good people not understood
and the fair Thames I exchange for the fair Arno.]

Though he cites Lamartine’s view to the contrary, in Allodoli’s reading, it is by singing of the lady in Italian, the *strania favella*, that the poetic voice metaphorically transforms the fair Thames into the fair Arno, the literal result of which is that his own countrymen will not understand him. Keightley, however, made a right mess of this. In his 1859 edition of the *Poems of John Milton with Notes*, his annotation reads: “*dal mio*, etc., i.e. in a language not understood by my countrymen in general. We are to recollect that he was writing in Italy.” 127 Why would it matter that the poet’s good people do not understand him if he’s far away from them when he sings of his lady in a *strania favella*? Having committed himself to the romanticized symmetry of an Italian setting for the composition of Italian poetry, Keightley misses the more natural inference that
having learned Italian in England alienates an English poet from most Englishmen who find the language an oddity of little worth.

Developing his argument in favor of earlier composition further, Allodoli cites the sole stanza of the *canzone* as a parallel instance of the same decidedly London topos he has already established as the setting of the preceding sonnet.

*Ridonsi donne e giovani amorosi*

*M’accostandosi attorno, e perche scrivi,*

*Perche tu scrivi in lingua ignota e strana*

*Verseggiando d’amor, e come t’osi?*

[They laugh, maidens and amorous youths, crowding around me, and why write, Why do you write in a tongue unknown and foreign Versifying of love, and how do you dare?]?

Note that, in the *canzone*, the maidens and amorous youths crowd mockingly around the poet. In a Florentine setting, the poet’s use of *volgare* would meet with less resistance. Though it may well constitute an audacious move for an Englishman to write in an unknown and foreign idiom, what — the song itself asserts — could be a more natural language for the genre of love poetry? For Allodoli, the phrase *lingua ignota e strana* must therefore refer primarily to the astonishment of English lads and lasses at the poet’s decision to versify in Italian. In a London setting, the choice is twice odd, being the tongue neither of the poet nor of the people.

Lastly, Allodoli detects in Sonnet IV, *Diodati, e te’l dirò con maraviglia*, the same familiar tone of the Latin elegiac verse which the poet had previously adopted for
correspondence with his friend during the period of their university studies. Also, since there is no other known instance of Milton corresponding with or addressing his friends or family in England from Italy, it strikes Allodoli as strange that he would have done so in Diodati’s case. This is the stronger part of the argument, for though it is certainly true that Milton addresses Diodati in a familiar way both throughout the *Elegiarum liber* and in the fourth sonnet, Allodoli seems not to have considered that the only other poetic address to Diodati comes in the later *Epitaphium Damonis* (1639), the somber genre of which calls for greater formality and decorum.

John S. Smart (1921), while demonstrating no particular awareness of his work, nonetheless builds upon Allodoli’s preference for a date before the Italian sojourn. In his view, and contrary to Masson’s position, Milton would surely have learned about Diodati’s death while he was in Italy.

It is not known when Milton received the news of his friend’s death; but it reached him, as he relates, when abroad; and he can hardly have been without knowledge of it during the period which he spent on Italian soil. Postal communication was then easy and familiar; letters left once a week, and, as we learn from James Howell, a practised traveller, twenty days were the usual time allowed between London and Italy.¹²⁸

That Milton would not address a trifle to a dead friend needs no argument, especially inasmuch as the *Epitaphium Damonis* itself reveals the mournful grandeur Milton can summon for such an occasion. If, on the other hand, it were written in ignorance, Smart thinks the ironic juxtaposition of a sonnet with the circumstance of his friend’s death
would have been too painful a recollection for Milton subsequently to publish the poem. Its inclusion in the 1645 collection means that the sonnet recalls happier times.

Stronger yet for Smart are the inferences from Sonnet III *Qual in colle aspro* and the *canzone* – which Allodoli also noted – that both Milton’s native land and its insular people are represented in the Italian poetry. Like Allodoli, Smart implies that the two poems are meant to be taken together.

Milton compares himself to a youthful shepherdess dwelling on a rugged spot among the mountains, who tends a plant from some garden on the plain below, which cannot flourish in the bleak air, so far from its native clime: so he cultivates the flower of a foreign speech. Italian verse is the plant thus transported to an alien soil; and the rugged hill is England, where the poet writes. In the Canzone also he tells us that he is surrounded by youths and maidens who jest at his labours, and ask why he thus makes verses of love in a strange and unknown tongue – *in lingua ignota e strana*. It is unknown to them, for they are English and in England.129

Smart further regards the image of the shepherdess as “original and Miltonic.” In his view, the poem bespeaks not so much the metaphorical transformation of the Thames into the Arno, as Allodoli would have it, but the passing from the English language to Italian. In classical poetics, it would have been common enough to refer to a language by the river associated with the place it is spoken. In fact, Milton himself does just this in his 1638 letter to Buonmattei: “Not Attic Athens herself, with her clear stream of Ilissus, nor ancient Rome, beside the Tiber, have had the power to make me lose my affection for your Arno and the hills of Fiesole, or cease to visit them with joy.”130 On
three separate occasions (Sonnet II, Sonnet III and the canzone), fluvial metonymy in the Italian verse also links the riparian populace to its own tradition of vernacular poetics.

In a short note published in 1963, John Carey offers an important argument in support of Smart’s position. Firstly, Carey calls our attention to the Elegia sexta which Milton addressed to Charles Diodati at Christmastide of 1629. In lines 89-90, he writes: *Te quoque pressa manent patriis meditata cicutis,/ Tu mihi cui recitem, judicis instar eris* [For you also there await pressa (unpublished poems? compact poems?) in your ancestral pipes/when I recite, you will be like a judge of them to me]. Carey’s note on the word pressa bears repeating in whole:

In the *Ars Poetica* 388, Horace advises that a poem should be kept for nine years (nonumque prematur in annum) before it is published: he allows, however, that it may be shown to one or two intimate friends. When Milton suggests reading his poems to Diodati he probably has Horace’s advice in mind, and so uses the verb *premo* in the same sense. Thus Milton’s *pressa* would mean something like *unpublished or closely kept*. However, with reference to literary matters *pressus* could also mean *compressed or concise*: Quintilian uses it (*Institutio Oratoria* XII.x.18) to distinguish the terse Attic prose writers from the redundant Asiatic. Probably Milton is playing on the word and wishes his *pressa* to carry both meanings. In the second sense it could be more naturally applied to short poems with strict forms, like sonnets or epigrams, rather than to *L’Allegro* or *Il Penseroso*.132
Before Carey, *patriis meditata cicutis* had been taken to mean Milton’s ancestral pipes, which would indicate a poem in English. Nonetheless, Carey rejects the notion that Milton speaks of yet another English poem on the grounds that the Nativity Ode was incomparably his most important English poem to date, and the space he allocated to it in the elegy implies that he realized this; yet he says nothing about the language in which it is written, though oddly enough he takes the trouble to point out that the *pressa*, which also await Diodati’s inspection, were written in English, if that is what the phrase implies. Again, why is Diodati apparently to act as judge or critic of these *pressa*, when they are read to him, rather than of the Nativity Ode?¹³³

His conclusion is that the ancestral pipes are Diodati’s, whose ancestors came from Lucca in Tuscany. Thus *pressa* refers to Italian verse. Diodati appears as the first audience of these *pressa*, which, in this analysis, would refer to closely-guarded sonnets in the *volgare*.

In the 1920s, Ernest Kuhl points out that two Americans had already postulated the earlier period of composition for the Italian sonnets that Smart advances in 1921: “In assigning an early date for these sonnets, however, he was anticipated by two scholars in this country.”¹³⁴ In 1919, the first of these, David Harrison Stevens, posits the view that Milton attached particular importance to the time of his life in which he wrote each of his poems and, *ceteris paribus*, intended their publication to reflect as much. Placing *Nightingale* and the Italian poems before Sonnet VII *How soon hath time*, therefore, suggests a date before the poet’s twenty-third year.¹³⁵ In 1921, before Smart published, the second of these American scholars, James Holly Hanford, pointed out that the first
six sonnets also connect thematically and Milton has elsewhere departed from the chronological order of the Trinity Manuscript for thematic reasons, as in the case of the divorce sonnets published in 1673. If, however, one could adduce from other kinds of evidence a reason for placing the Italian poems before Sonnet VII, then thematic and chronological motives would be seen as reinforcing one another on the question of the date of composition.

Professor Hanford’s argument for the early date of the Italian sonnets, therefore, derives from the trajectory of a recurring motif in the elegies: (i) in *Elegia prima* (1626), our poet declares that Cupid has granted him immunity from love; (ii) in *Elegia septima* (1627), that he has been stricken by the blind boy; (iii) in Sonnet I and *Elegia quinta* (1629), that he serves the Muse and Love; (iv) in Sonnet IV, that he has fallen where others have preceded him; (v) in the commiato of *Elegia septima* (1629), that philosophy has freed him from love’s tyranny; and, at last, (v) in *Elegia sexta* (Christmas 1629), that he is finished with love poetry. Hanford concludes,

In these utterances we seem to have playful but coherent record, expressed in a leash of languages for the edification of his friend, of a well-defined phase of the young poet’s experience. It seems unlikely that the light game would ever have been renewed. With the composition of the *Nativity Ode*, about Christmas, 1629, Milton's poetry, in accordance with the intention implied in Elegy VI, takes on a decidedly higher and more serious tone. The pieces in Latin and English which we know to have been composed in Italy or at Horton are entirely untouched by the Petrarchan mood. That Milton should be found writing to Diodati in 1638-39 in the strain which he had used a whole decade earlier is well-nigh incredible. In
the absence of evidence to the contrary, therefore, I should date Sonnets I-VI between Elegies VII and VI, i.e., in 1628-29, certainly not later than the sonnet *On Arriving at the Age of Twenty Three*.137

As we have seen already, in his 1907 monograph published in Italy, Allodoli likewise infers an earlier date on the basis of this same kind of reasoning from internal evidence in the *sonetti* and the *liber elegiarum*, but I have seen no evidence that scholarship on either side of the anglophone Atlantic knew yet of his work.

Honigmann finds these arguments for earlier dating unconvincing. Firstly because he disagrees with Smart’s translation choices. Secondly, Smart doesn’t respond to Masson’s conclusion that Milton cannot have known about Diodati’s death until after his visit to Naples. In the *Epitaphium*, Milton declares his intention to show the gifts he received from Tasso’s patron, Giovan Battista Manso (1569-1645), to Diodati. Finally, Honigmann replies to Smart’s identification of Milton with the youthful shepherdess:

Milton, surely, never meant to compare *himself* to a youthful shepherdess…

Sonnet III consists of a series of parallel statements about planting and growth: (a) the shepherdess (b) waters a plant (c) on a rugged hill (d) which is an unfamiliar clime for it; (a) Love (b) quickens the new flower (c) on my swift tongue (d) which is foreign to it; (a) the Shepherd [=Him] (b) plants (c) in my slow heart and hard bosom (d) which are not good soil. The logic of the poem identifies Milton with the *rugged hill*, the *swift tongue*, the *hard bosom*, and makes Milton himself, not England, the alien soil.138

The shepherdess, then, would represent the Muse who operates upon the poet despite his linguistic disabilities, even as Divine grace operates upon the soul despite its
unworthiness. As for Carey’s defense of a date before the travel in Italy, Honigmann dismisses him thus: “Even if Milton had written Italian poetry when he composed Elegy VI, which is not certain, this need not have been the Italian sonnets.” Elsewhere in the Italian verse, Milton certainly deploys the trope of modesty implicit in Honigmann’s reading of Sonnet III. Indeed, for the poet to veil his feelings for the donna leggiadra from the sight of his fellow countrymen by writing of her only in Italian implies precisely as much.

Nor does the Allodoli-Smart reading of Ridonsi donne find an especially sympathetic ear in Honigmann. His objection derives from Qual in colle aspro.

Here we may appeal to the preceding poem, sonnet III, where the very word strana of the Canzone (l. 3) was already attached to the poet and not to his countrymen — the plant being strana e bella (III. 3) for him, the poet’s new language strania favella (III. 7). Perusing the Italian poems in their proper order it seems natural to accept the strange and unknown tongue of the Canzone as strange to the poet— for is it not implied that the bystanders know Italian? They recognise the poet’s writings as verses of love, and they pick up his conceits: in sonnet III Milton spoke of changing Thames for the Arno, in the Canzone they reply that other streams, other banks await thee. How, moreover, can the Canzone answer for me (l.13) unless the poet’s friends understand Italian?

Interestingly, Smart and Allodoli, on the one hand, and Honigmann, on the other, each take Sonnet III and the canzone as belonging to the same lyrical setting, one determined principally by a disjunction between land and language. In the first instance, Allodoli and Smart emphasize the linguistic disparity between the English people and the
Italianizing English poet. In the second, Honigmann locates the disjunctive force of the
two poems within the matrix of the poet’s own multilingualism.

When did Milton formulate the desire to visit Italy and test his own learning
against the standard of Italian letters? We cannot know know with any precision. We do
know, however, that by 1629, he was already in possession of a now heavily annotated,
single volume that bound together works from Dante’s Convivio, Della Casa’s Rime,
and Varchi’s Sonetti. He had thus begun his deep and extensive exploration of Italian
vernacular literature, but though his sonnet cycle bears clear traces of the influence of,
for example, Della Casa, he may already have known the Italian poet before he
purchased the volume. The composition of his Italian poetry may well have played a
role in the decision to travel, but it’s also possible that a long-standing resolve to travel
to Italy formed part of the cultural, scholarly, linguistic and poetic matrix out of which
the poems themselves emerged.

Our operational hypothesis, then, will be that Milton had produced the earliest
versions of the sonetti in England between 1629 and 1632, well before his peninsular
sojourn, although he may later have polished those poems in Italy in the context of his
friendship with younger academic fellows from among the Svogliati and the Apatisti,
for example, Dati, Francini and Chimentelli. The canzone, however, inasmuch as it
embodies a setting cognate to the Epitaphium’s poetic competition in Italian, which
explicitly includes Dati and Francini, may well have been written in Italy or thereafter.
Nonetheless, since it stands in thematic apposition to Sonnet III, it makes perfect sense
that Milton would aggregate it to the sonnets, though its lyrical type is the Provençal *canso*, favored by Dante.

The Dark Lady

Who is Milton’s dark lady? We may assert with confidence that she is not meant to simulate the madonna of Avignon whose golden hair loosed upon the breeze wrapped itself into a thousand sweet tangles.\(^{140}\) Surely, then, the young Londoner means to recall the dun, anti-Petrarchan, mistress of the raven black eyes. But three objections to a such a straightforward alternative present themselves immediately. In the first place, beauty’s successive heir hath no name, but Milton’s *donna leggiadra* clearly does, as presently we shall see. Secondly, the poetic voice of the Italian sonnets never calls into question the unproblematic chastity of the *pellegrina bellezza*, in graphic contrast to the fever longing, sickly appetite, desperate desire, frantic-mad thoughts and discourse of the poetic voice in Sonnet 147 who declares his beloved black as hell and dark as night. Lastly, Shakespeare is widely taken to have subverted the Petrarchan legacy of the genre, though the precise contours of that subversion often pass unnoticed.\(^{141}\) Milton, however, in a patently retrograde scheme, seems to want to re-stabilize our expectations about the lady’s unimpeachable honor in order first to assert an explicitly Dantesque ideal about the worthiness of the Italian vernacular to sing the nobility of love and then to show the beloved an authentic and merited respect. As we see in the *Animadversions* (1641), this attitude, which Milton so admired in Dante and Petrarch, constitutes the polar opposite of the relentlessly demeaning treatment of women, an attitude he so reviled in those “smooth elegaic poets,” Catullus and Ovid,
who speak “unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before 
they had extolled.” Thus, Milton’s plurilingual, pilgrim beauty, a native speaker of 
Italian, possesses unique qualifications to adjudicate the veracity of love’s declarations.

Still, it comes as no surprise that Shakespeare looms large in the critical 
discussion of Milton’s dark lady. The interest, of course, is more than strictly 
disciplinary. Indeed, the very notion that she is a dark lady of the Shakespearean kind 
gushes obsessively from the psychosexual fixation of bourgeois criticism seeking to 
penetrate the mysteries of masculine poetic desire. Both dark ladies have to be similar 
manifestations of the suppressed libido that seeks to overcome deferred fulfilment, 
right? But Milton hadn’t read Freud, so he could hardly have counted on the prurience 
of future generations to fuel an ongoing interest in his poems of youthful ardor. On the 
other hand, if we have learned nothing else about him, at least we may be pardoned for 
the conviction that there is hardly a thought to have occurred to any contemporary thinker 
that Milton did not have first. Furthermore, the exalted celebration of conjugal love in the 
pre-lapsarian sexuality of Adam and Eve consciously and resplendently weaves the 
Dantesque thread of respect for the woman into the very fabric of *Paradise Lost*.

Might Milton have consciously scripted the critical response to his dark lady in 
light of the Shakespearean beauty who herself is black? In my view, the supposed 
consanguinity of these two poetic idealizations of femininity can never be firmly 
established. Nor can their purported entanglements with or estrangements from their 
respective poets be fully determined, whether they turn out to have been empirical 
persons or not. Nonetheless, having chosen the genre of the sonnet, while eschewing
the most predictable trope of petrarchismo in favor of the well-known Shakespearean alternative, the young Milton has strategically manoeuvred himself into an explicit and perennial affinity with England’s greatest sonneteer. Nor should we doubt that even the juvenile Milton would consciously and painstakingly vie with the problem of false compare, whether between himself and any of his predecessors or within the mimetic perils of poesy. And, after all, these persistant comparisons with Shakespeare do not, in the end, show our fledgling poet in such an unfavorable light.¹⁴³

The real issue lies in what it means to think of either dark lady (Shakespeare’s or Milton’s) as an empirical person, as a tropological person, or as some amalgam of both. Were literary heuristics even capable of discerning plausible candidates from hitherto unknown artifacts in each historical instance, the phenomenon of poetry still necessarily fictionalizes facts. Not even the poetic voice maps unproblematically onto the empirical poet. With what degree of conviction, then, may we ever dare to assert correspondence between the distillation of experience in verse and the disclosure of experience in actuality? Notwithstanding the significant epistemological questions at stake, the critical reception of Milton’s Italian verse, with a few notable exceptions, returns again and again, with all-consuming passion, to the search for an honest-to-goodness ingénue, for her physical place of residence, for her ethnicity, for the company she kept and the Miltonic circles in which she moved. We cannot resist. The principal attraction of this English poet’s donna leggiadra derives from the later image of “Espousèd Eve” for whom “heavenly choirs the hymenean sung.” She it is whom the critics seek.
No matter what the dark lady may or may not have been, Dr Johnson shows no interest in her whatsoever. Perhaps Giuseppe Baretti, upon whom he relied, had nothing to say about her. In this case, Dr Johnson quite sensibly avoids discussion of matters about which he has no information. Cowper’s biographer, William Hayley (1745-1820), however, thinks that Milton must have had the enthralling Mantuan singer and lutenist, Eleonora Baroni (1611-1670), in mind. Called l’Adrianella, the polyglot musician navigated the aristocratic and intellectual circles of Rome with ease and frequented the selfsame Accademia degli Umoristi which Milton visited in 1638. Indeed, our poet penned three Latin epigrams, *Ad Leonoram Romæ canentem*, in her honor: *Angelus unicuique suus*, *Altera Torquatum cepit* and *Credula quid liquidam*, which he includes quite conspicuously in the *elegiarum* of the 1645 *Poemata*. We must, therefore, consider her carefully.

Milton would have heard Baroni perform at the inauguration of the new theater in the recently completed Palazzo Barberini, an architectural masterpiece begun by Carlo Maderno (1556-1629) in the Rione Trevi. By the time of Milton’s visit to the palace in February 1639, the subsequent collaboration of Francesco Borromini (1599-1667) and Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) had only recently brought the ambitious building project to its stunning conclusion. The Habsburg commander, Raimondo Montecuccoli (1609-1680), then in the service of the Duke of Modena, recalls that Antonio Cardinal Barberini the younger (1607-1671) greeted guests at the entrance of the *salone*, while Francesco Cardinal Barberini (1597-1679), with whom Milton would meet privately the following day, perambulated throughout the *piano nobile*. Jules Cardinal Mazarin
(1602-1661), shortly thereafter to become chief minister to Louis XIV, numbered among the beau monde whom the Barberini had assembled that night. Neither reclusive nor dour, by any means, Milton’s life in London, Cambridge and Horton before his continental tour still hardly suggests that he enthusiastically sought out in England the kind of magnificent social display of wealth, prestige, art and power in the midst of which he found himself on this occasion in Rome. Caroline opulence, in even its most sumptuous surfeit, could not but have appeared mean and shoddy by comparison.

The significance to Milton of having moved, however briefly, in such celebrated Italian circles lies in the cultural profile conferred upon him by even a slight acquaintance with the diva herself, the aristocratic prelates of Rome and France, imperial officers and the rest of the smart set that would flock to a venue like the Palazzo Barberini. Neither noble, nor wealthy, nor famous, Milton found himself in such company solely on the merit of intellectual gifts plainly evident to his first interlocutors among Florentine academicians, and the enthusiastic recommendation of the young Englishman they likely proffered to their Roman colleagues. Such connections, though perhaps provisional, still offer a remarkably different portrait of the audacious young apologist for divorce than the vulgar caricature of him sketched by his Presbyterian adversaries. Moreover, his keen observation of Roman ecclesiastical dignitaries at close hand could only augment his credentials in the anti-prelatical discourse into which he would shortly immerse himself upon his return to London.

Keeping in mind the kind of polemical capital that accrues from such associations, it’s difficult to imagine that Milton would not himself have left a trail of
crumbs leading straight to Baroni, if, in fact, she were the dark lady of his sonnet cycle. Instead, he pens for her Latin epigrams in smooth elegiac verse. Although there is no reason to suspect any degree of insincerity in his praise of Baroni, Latin is not the lingua di cui si vanta amore and his choice of language in her regard does therefore suggest a disposition of purposeful detachment. If indeed we may attribute his excursions into Italian prosody to his clear preference for the ethics of “the two great renouncers of Beatrice and Laura,” the testimony of the Animadversions would tend to mitigate against identifying Eleonora Baroni as the subject of his sonnet cycle.

Hayley’s empirical position with regard to the identity of the lady has the advantage of being grounded in a known encounter with an historical personage for whom Milton produced a verse encomium which later he published. Others, however, persist in the empiricist vein, but without a shred of evidential correlation between Milton and a particular woman in Italy. Of the donna leggiadra, Keightley writes,

It is not known who the lady was to whom this sonnet was addressed. From what follows, it would appear that she was a native of Bologna. Milton probably met her in Florence during the period of his first residence in that city. She seems to be the same whom he describes in Sonnet V., and to whom he addresses Sonnets VI. and VII.—il cui, etc. By this is probably meant that she belonged to one of the principal families of Bologna, as the Pepoli, the Bentivogli, etc. He however may only mean her own Christian name.

The Vita Nuova (c. 1295) looms large here, and well it should. Dante’s prosimetrum account of first sighting Beatrice at the Ponte Santa Trinità would have been well known to Milton and Keightley and everyone. Moreover, the significance of the Beatrice
figure as the culmination of the medieval courtly love tradition, and for launching the all-consuming, pan-European zeal for vernacular eloquence that eventually took hold of the Renaissance, can hardly be overstated. Keightley evidently knows something of the aristocratic society of Seventeenth Century Bologna as well, but his acquaintance with such details still leaves him powerless to resist the gravitational pull of the Dantesque trope. As we shall discover in Chapter 3, Keightley is a hopeless Romantic.

Nobel laureate Giosuè Carducci (1835-1907) likewise believes Milton’s dark lady to have been a Florentine beauty whom he would have encountered during his Italian sojourn. In the essay on Louisa Grace Bartolini, he writes, “Il Milton in grazia d’una bellezza fiorentina fece versi italiani” [Thanks to a Florentine beauty Milton produced Italian verse]. While the hypothesis of a latter day Beatrice for an aspiring poetic votary from England offers an appealing parallelism, it lacks any compelling evidence. Nor could Milton have first seen the donna leggiadra in Florence if, as the analysis above argues, he produced the earliest versions of the Italian poems in England between 1629 and 1632, and later polished them in Italy.

In a slight variation, Masson assumes that the same Emilian reference which determines for him the date of the composition of the poems further suggests that the poet must have met his donna leggiadra in Bologna and not in Florence. How else could Milton have known the geography of the region which features so prominently in Sonnet 1? Smart, however, has demonstrated that all of the topographical details of poem are attested either in Cinquecento poetry, whether neo-Latin or vernacular, or alternatively in books of geography and history readily available Milton’s day.
Masson’s view conspicuously lacks the enthusiasm for assigning the lady a Florentine origin that we see in Keightley and Carducci. Nonetheless, he’s unwilling to jettison the notion of necessary correspondence between the composition of Italian verse and an Italian geo-political setting for reasons we shall see more clearly in Chapter 3.

Regarding the dark lady motif, Allodoli holds that she is either an Italian of Emilian lineage whom Milton would have known in England, or an entirely imaginary figure altogether. He stops short of identifying her name as Emilia, a datum that Smart uncovers. Though he opens the door to a verifiable *donna leggiadra*, he never insists that we march through it in lock-step. In this respect, then, Allodoli seems intuitively to have grasped that the poetic function dominates, and therefore need not obliterate, the referential function of language in Milton’s Italian verse.

On the basis of evidence internal to the poems, Allodoli adduces that Milton’s *pellegrina bellezza*, whether empirical or tropological, is meant to have been encountered in London. Instead of further speculation about a London-based lady with ancestors from Emilia-Romagna, Allodoli prefers to move as quickly as possible to a more provocative, though lamentably underdeveloped, idea. For him, the well-known trope affords Milton an opportunity to engage directly in the English Sixteenth Century vogue of composing in the Italian style through the medium of the Tuscan *volgare* itself. In my reading of his chapter on the sonnets, Allodoli seems to imply that the English penchant for scribbling Italian verse amounts to a rather quaint pastime, but if that is the case, we might ask why Milton would want to undertake such an eccentric activity at all, unless the Seventeenth Century poet perceives some intrinsic value that
accrues to the Englishman who practices petrarchismo in the empirical language of Petrarch, a value that goes unnoticed by the Twentieth Century Italian critic. Yet again, Allodoli has led us to the edge of something important without himself taking us across the threshold.

Reference to L’herbosa val di Rheno, e il nobil varco lead Smart to identify the lady as Emilia,\textsuperscript{148} though Allodoli came close to saying so himself. At first glance, the line suggests not the Emilian Reno, but the German Rhein, though Milton’s preference for Latinisms may account for the variation in spelling. The “nobil varco” would have to be the ford at which Caesar and his legions crossed the Rubicon, also a river in Emilia. The allusion, therefore, may account for the Latinized orthography. The river metonym, common to classical poets and to Dante, appears frequently and prominently in Milton’s verse to identify persons, ethnicities or languages. In Smart’s view, Emilia must be an empirical person, “had it been a poetical designation, a Stella or a Delia, Milton would have written it without reserve.”\textsuperscript{149} From Sonnet IV, we know that Emilia, the donna leggiadra, speaks more than one language.

Just as Smart at last identified the implied name of the dark beauty, so Angiola Maria Volpi\textsuperscript{150} adduces her genealogy. Unfortunately, Volpi’s research, published in French, has not, by and large, come to the attention of contemporary Milton scholarship, English or Italian, in the matter of the Italian sonnets. Nevertheless, the clarity she brings to the matter deserves a hearing. She notes that

\begin{quote}
Il sera désormais impossible de mettre en doute l’influence qu’a dû exercer la solennelle célébration par Marino de la beauté insolite sur le jeune Milton qui, évidemment désireux de frapper par son choix de canons esthétiques nouveaux
\end{quote}
et, en même temps, de se présenter comme l’adepte d’une tradition poétique pour laquelle l’expérience néo-platonicienne avait été marquante, scella ainsi son éloge: sotto nova idea/Pellegrina bellezza (IV.6-7) [It will henceforth be impossible to doubt the influence which Marino’s solemn celebration of unusual beauty exercised upon the young Milton who — evidently eager to strike a new chord with his choice of aesthetic canons and, at the same time, to present himself as the follower of a poetic tradition in which the neo-Platonic experience had been outstanding — thus sealed his praise under a new idea of rare, foreign beauty].  

For her part, Volpi finds the obsessive comparison with Shakespeare to have proven an unproductive track that in fact directs us away from Tasso, Marino and Gabriello Chiabrera (1552-1638), in all of whose lyrical verse dark beauties appear quite conspicuously.  

In the Rime d’amore, Tasso pens his bruna sei tu, ma bella [dark are you, but beautiful] sequence ostensibly to a maidservant of Leonora Sanvitale, the Contessa di Scandiano, a luminary of the d’Este court at Ferrara. Marino’s La bruna pastorella (1620), drawn from the idylls of La Sampogna, celebrates a shepherdess about whom the poet says, nera sì, ma sei bella [black yes, but you are beautiful].  

Turning to the question of influence from Marino’s contemporary, Volpi finds that Milton has also drawn upon specific thematic elements present in the lyric, epideictic and epic poetry of Gabriello Chiabrera. Like Milton, Chiabrera belonged to the circle of the Svogliati, though they would not likely have met as Chiabrera died in Savona, the Ligurian seaside comune, in October of the year that Milton first came to Florence. Because of their historical proximity and stylistic dissimilarity, literary criticism often treats Chiabrera in explicit contrast to Marino. Even so, the canzonette among the Rime
of Chiabrera likewise draw our attention to la beltà, che 'n voi s'imbruna [the beauty that in you darkens];\textsuperscript{156} and i capegli, non biondetti, ma brunetti;\textsuperscript{157} and again, O begli occhi, o pupillette, che brunette.\textsuperscript{158} Indeed, the whole energetic search for an empirical donna leggiadra with dark hair and fiery eyes has, at the very least, obscured the stunning figure’s demonstrable poetic genealogy, for which Volpi more than plausibly accounts. For reasons that completely escape me, however, anglophone criticism on the question of Milton’s dark lady ignores Volpi’s research in this matter altogether.\textsuperscript{159} John Carey’s otherwise splendid 1997 revision of his 1968 commentary on the minor poems, for example, though it explicitly cites Shaw-Giamatti and Baldi against the idea of stylistic influence from the marinisti, takes no account of Volpi’s identification of the dark lady’s pedigree in Tasso, Marino and Chiabrera.

From Roman Jakobson’s (1896-1982) Linguistics and Poetics (1958), we know not to restrict the notion of information to the referential function of language alone. Likewise, any attempt to reduce the sphere of poetic function to poetry alone or to confine poetry only to the poetic function of language, for Jakobson, would be “a delusive oversimplification.”\textsuperscript{160} The most conspicuous theme the English critic treats in the Italian sonnets, for example, centers on the identity of the possibly empirical beauty to whom the dark lady motif refers. Indeed, enough ink has been spilled on this single historical asterisk to darken the damsel several times over. As we have seen, Masson holds that Milton met the lady whom the sonnets address while traveling in Italy in 1638-39. Smart deduces from the political geography associated with the flow of the Reno, to which Sonnet II alludes, that her name is Emilia. Based on further textual
evidence, he quite rightly infers that she must speak both English and Italian. But throughout his discussion he assumes, for extra textual reasons, that this Emilia is an empirical person whom Milton would most likely have known from his father’s circle of English madrigalists. Brennecke suggests that Emilia frequented Milton’s home on Bread Street and implies that she was known to Charles Diodati as well. In Broadbent’s reading of Sonnet VI, Milton actually proposes to the lady, who has replaced his love for his father and Charles Diodati and so on. Precisely because “the supremacy of the poetic function over the referential function does not obliterate the reference but makes it ambiguous,” critics do have the space to convince themselves that correct heuristic procedures will at last reveal her full identity. But Jakobson’s point is that the dominance of the poetic function over the referential function in this kind of language submerges us in the inescapable predicament of ambiguity. The formal attributes of the sonnets simply do not require any other lady than the Petrarchan donna leggiadra who emerges from the intertextual genealogy of the poems themselves.

Poetic function, Jakobson assures us, is never the sole purpose of verbal art but only its dominant, determining activity, whereas in other verbal tasks it acts as a subsidiary, or even accessory constituent. In the conjecture about Milton’s madonna as given above, however, one has the uncomfortable feeling that the critic sometimes misses precisely how the poetic function dominates the referential: namely, by drawing us into that play of ambiguity from which there is ultimately no exit. To ignore this conviction drawn from both the New Criticism and Russian Formalism — and for which Jakobson’s function-based taxonomy of language usage gives an explicit account
— invites a kind of critical speculation that oddly distracts us from the poetry. Are we really meant to think of Milton as a kiss-and-tell sort of sonneteer?

Giacomo Colonna (1300-1341), the close friend for whom Petrarch writes Sonnet 10 *Gloriosa columna* and to whom he responds in Sonnet 322 *Mai non vedranno le mie luci asciutte* and the Canzone 323 *Standomi un giorno solo alla fenestra* that follows, “seems to have doubted that [Laura] was anything but a symbol and a pretext for poetry.”¹⁶³ If the thought entered the mind of Colonna, it will have come to Milton as well, for our poet immersed himself in the prose, verse and lore of Petrarch. Perhaps following Colonna’s lead, John Shawcross asserts that this Emilia must therefore be a “personification representing the inspiration through which man can raise earthly beauty and love to emulate heavenly beauty and love.”¹⁶⁴ Fair enough. Though it must have occurred to someone previously, I have yet found none who dare to say that Emilia likewise bears allegorical weight as a figure of Milton’s love for the long history of Italian vernacular eloquence and plurilingual humanism, and so constitutes a symbol and a pretext for the English poet’s *petrarchismo*. Perhaps that is too obvious for the serious critic ever to have to say.
Imitatio and Milton’s Italian Style

The Italian style of Milton illustrates fundamental attributes of the poet’s approach to composition in both his prose and his verse. This section of the dissertation, therefore, undertakes the following interrelated tasks: (i) to offer a hypothesis about the nature of style apposite to the Italian verse of Milton; (ii) to discuss Dionysian imitatio of the kind advocated by Quintilian as the model for Milton’s praxis in rhetoric and poetics; and (iii) to synthesize Milton’s own stance on the social dimensions of style and the light that his convictions shed upon the nature and purposes of his Italian verse.

Style and Practical Intelligence

It seems necessary to me to offer a few preliminary remarks about the nature and genealogy of style, commonly understood as the third canon of oratory, and the epistemological problems that cling to any discussion of style as a feature of both classical rhetoric and Renaissance poetics. As such, this section serves to trace the theoretical structure of a systematic discussion of the stylistic criticism that emerges from Milton himself and contemporary Italian critics of Milton’s volgare.

Insofar as we consider Milton’s Italian verse, what exactly falls under the rubric of style? Unquestionably the subject includes the poet’s choices in diction, syntax, tropes and schemata in order to establish mood, imagery and meaning in the poetic texts. But the notion of a fundamental cleavage between Renaissance rhetoric and poetics represents a distinction we have seen fit to efface altogether. For that reason, we must strive above all to understand how classical rhetoric nurtured Milton’s poetic development. Doing so, as we shall see, will provide us with the backdrop against
which to evaluate the modern Italians who have critiqued the style of Milton’s *volgare*. Whether or not these critics themselves had any particular commitment to rhetorical analysis in light of the ancients, Milton himself certainly did and his intent, inasmuch as we can capture it, more than anything else determines the inventory of attitudes toward style that receive analytical attention in this chapter.

An insouciant discourse on style beginning in Romanticism invariably conjures up the spectre of superficiality. As we shall see in Chapter 3, this phantom figures prominently in the anti-rhetorical rhetoric of Risorgimento critics and the incessant complaints they direct toward the allegedly feigned sincerity of Renaissance *petrarchismo* of the type that Milton emulated so consciously and deliberately. In the next chapter, we will note the penchant of such figures as Gabriele Rossetti and Giosuè Carducci, staggering under the weight of Romantic literary assumptions, to censure the supposedly artificial style of Milton’s essays into Italian verse. But neither classical philosophy, in its most aggressive anti-rhetorical posture, nor ancient rhetoric much less, ever makes the mistake of conflating style with mere ornamentation in the common sense of decoration or embellishment. Such an attitude would make of the third canon of oratory an entirely expendable and idiosyncratic superfluity, rather than the master spell that really does hold in thrall the crowds that swarm upon popular poets and orators alike. Plato sees this as the material cause of a longstanding quarrel between poetry and rhetoric, on the one had, and philosophy on the other. The philosopher, recognizing its substantive potential to override an authentic epistemology of justified, true belief, wants urgently to account for the phenomenon of style and its
enduring, though ultimately irrational, appeal. Precisely because he takes the persuasive efficacy of style so seriously, Plato excludes mimetic poets\textsuperscript{166} from the ideal Republic.\textsuperscript{167} In the old boy’s defense, one simply cannot guarantee that Cato’s paradigm, \textit{vir bonus, peritus dicendi}, will always represent the actual moral condition of any given orator. Moreover, despite Aristotle’s insistence that rhetoric functions as the counterpart of dialectic, rhetoric also operates readily enough in the countering of dialectic. Ironically, the anti-rhetorical dialogues\textsuperscript{168} may be numbered among the more successful rhetorical interventions of antiquity, not because ideal republics subsequently flourished, nor even because of the astonishing longevity of the theory of forms, but because Plato succeeds in embedding in Western thought durable suspicions about the knack of rhetoric. How does Plato simultaneously deploy and condemn rhetoric and poetics so as to deflect attention from the very rhetorical and poetic procedures in which he himself engages throughout the many dialogues? He does so by paying careful attention to the problem of style, and by developing a particular style capable of drawing his interlocutor into dense philosophical reflection while simultaneously assuaging any epistemological angst that such activity is likely to produce. In the end, we have to say that Plato has produced a rhetorical style with an abiding appeal that has lasted centuries and continues to be emulated in both philosophy and rhetoric even today.
Aristotle himself, the still unknown author of the *Ad Herennium*, the early Cicero, Quintilian (AD 35-100) and Hermogenes (AD 155-225) all understand style as an essential element of setting forth ideas with clarity and vigor, whether artfully or practically, if one discerns any difference between the two purposes. In classical rhetoric, therefore, style treats the matter of how language embodies ideas and applies them to a particular task. Indeed, Aristotle disinterestedly and notoriously omits discussion of memory and delivery altogether, though his Peripatetic successor Theophrastus (c371-c287 BCE) appears to have expanded earlier Aristotelian discourse with a fuller inventory of rhetorical canons as they would eventually become regularized in antiquity. If discovery and arrangement take place in the silent phase of rhetorical intervention — before the orator lifts up his voice in the assembly and speaks aloud — it is style that propels rhetoric into the sphere of public awareness.

Since neither grammar nor logic fully exhausts the potential of language to screw into the inscrutable mind, knowledge of style remains a necessary precondition for the release of what lies concealed within the psyche into the revelatory light of the world without. Understood as speech shaped by careful choice, style moves interior subjectivity into the realm of the experiential datum, even if only through transitory sound, but especially when transformed into textual manifestations. Understanding the structure and meaning of the linguistic phenomena that fall under the category of style then produces certain real psychological effects, which, in turn, make it possible to move from inchoate thought processes to external and ever more concrete expressions. In antiquity, learned persons took for granted that mastering the demands of rhetorical
style bestowed upon citizens the skills they needed to defend their legal rights and privileges, to undertake their ceremonial duties, or to advocate their political commitments precisely in the constantly evolving circumstances that create particular threats or opportunities in their polis.

Style is not simply the adornment of an otherwise whole and complete sequence of thoughts. Rather, it is the mechanism according to which those thoughts come into being and find expression. Whereas in English, to ornament something is to decorate it, the Latin *orno*/*ornare*\(^{174}\) refers to the requisite fitting out of a ship or the furnishing of Roman proconsuls setting out for their provinces with all the attendants, money and arms they will need properly to govern.\(^{175}\) Style provides what is essential for debate by fitting out the speaker, that is, by furnishing the orator with all the linguistic wealth needed properly to intervene in a rhetorical situation.

By the time the progression of rhetorical operations stabilizes in classical oratory, and certainly long before the *De inventione* of Cicero’s juvenilia, the canon of *memoria* follows the canon of *elocutio*. Although the arrangement makes a certain obvious practical sense, closer examination further reveals a kind of neural pathway connecting style to memory, which in the ancient world always operate interdependently. Memory retrieves the content prepared for rhetorical intervention, yes, but style makes that content retrievable by wiring the psycholinguistic circuitry through which thought itself moves and within which the inchoate impulse begins to acquire enough semantic density to recognize it as an idea. Style then is not simply a set of arbitrary procedures designed to decorate the hard core of an idea which already possesses pristine and
fundamental qualities of intelligibility. We can see the contours of the intersection between style and memory in what Walter Ong has called “residual formulary essentials of oral thought processes.” Here it will help to quote him at length.

This characteristic is closely tied to reliance on formulas to implement memory. The elements of orally based thought and expression tend to be not so much simple integers as clusters of integers, such as parallel terms or phrases or clauses, antithetical terms or phrases or clauses, epithets. Oral folk prefer, especially in formal discourse, not the soldier, but the brave soldier; not the princess, but the beautiful princess; not the oak, but the sturdy oak. Oral expression thus carries a load of epithets and other formulary baggage which high literacy rejects as cumbersome and tiresomely redundant because of its aggregative weight. The clichés in political denunciations in many low-technology, developing cultures – enemy of the people, capitalist war-mongers – that strike high literates as mindless are residual formulary essentials of oral thought processes.¹⁷⁶

Among modern thinkers, to whom could we possibly point with a higher degree of literacy than Milton? Yet “formulary baggage” of the kind soon to be reviled by the highly literate, seems to trouble him quite a bit less than those of us who live on the far side of the Romantic divide might have imagined. The rigorously imitative progymnasmata of Renaissance pedagogy in rhetoric and poetics offer an alternative model of high literacy, one that does not buckle under the aggregative weight of thinking patterned on residual oral formularies. If high literacy in the age of informational technology finds it a mindless thing that tropes press ready-made, but
still embryonic, thoughts into language, well, so be it. Milton had enough exposure to the residual orality of an otherwise highly literate classical culture not to be so fussed that stylistic formulæ are the kinds of things that can be learned and deployed, even though the poet may not yet possesses the true επιστήμη that Plato demands for rulers in the Republic, but merely the δόξα that imitates such.

**Style and Dionysian imitatio**

Imitation is the key idea, of course. The whole of Milton’s education in Cheapside, first in the private tuition arranged by his father at home until 1620 and then at St Paul’s (1620-1625), was based on imitating the style of the best writers of antiquity in each discernible category of verse and prose. As Professor J. H. Hanford (1882-1969) has put it,

> The point to observe is that Milton’s poetry... is essentially imitation, the imitation of a peculiarly generous and dynamic kind. The process of literary composition is with him in each case the result of a cultural enthusiasm which enables the poet to identify himself so completely with a literary mode that he can express himself in it freely and spontaneously without having to resort to a particular model.\(^{177}\)

We might say, then, that Milton inhabits the virtue of poetry. In Aristotelian ethics, the acquisition of virtuous character is a function of φρόνησις or practical intelligence, and one becomes virtuous first by cultivating the habits of virtue — prudence, courage, magnanimity, fairness — in childhood under the tutelage of someone virtuous, and then by philosophical reflection upon the product of habituation as an adult.\(^{178}\)
Now, in addition to Aristotle and the classical philosophers, Milton knows all the rhetoricians as well, but seems to have internalized completely the synthesis of ancient rhetoric offered in Quintilian, the Hispano-Roman enthusiast of Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c60-7 BCE). In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the concept of μίμησις signifies the imitation of nature, but for Dionysius and Quintilian, *imitatio* refers to something that more closely resembles the doctrine of habituation in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. We might say that, for Quintilian the pedagogue, early rhetorical education focuses on the development of good stylistic habits. John Hale recognizes in the Dionysian *imitatio* that Quintilian advocates the method out of which Milton’s multilingualism generates its intertextual richness:

*Imitatio*, here, means emulation, not slavish copying. In order to emulate the exemplary poets and thinkers of the multilingual past, the renaissance humanist strove to use their thought as texture without perpetrating pastiche. The resulting intertextuality is the index of the emulation but also its criterion; that is to say, while the ancients are a felt presence, recognized in diction and allusion and much else, the humanist has failed utterly if the reader’s attention is held by nothing but the debts. Through *imitatio* the thought of the ancients becomes the texture of humanist literary production. In fact, Dionysian *imitatio* does bear a striking resemblance to the Kristevan view of intertextuality in which every text may be said to absorb and transform antecedent texts, thus revealing itself as a mosaic of quondam confabulation. According to Kristeva, the notion of intertextuality comes to replace that of intersubjectivity, which, in Husserlian phenomenology, refers to the process of many people coming to
know and assimilate a common phenomenon, each through the matrix of subjective experience. Kristeva sees the voices that participate in textual discourse as hidden in the unconscious, but for Dionysius and Quintilian *imitatio* signifies the deliberate and purposeful integration of literary tropes, schemes and plots over time. Quintilian’s advocacy of Dionysian *imitatio* focuses primarily on rhetoric, to be sure, but nothing prevents us from applying the concept to poetics as well. Really, it’s Quintilian’s fault that intertextual moments in *Paradise Lost* disclose themselves like so much hay in a haystack.

Called *quadripartita ratio* in Books I and VI of the *Institutio oratoria* (AD 95), Quintilian underscores four operations — omission (*detractio*), addition (*adiecotio*), transposition (*transmutatio*) and permutation (*immutatio*) — first under the category of solecism, or speaking incorrectly, but later as potential variations of any norm which an orator may exploit in order to imitate, modify, recast or enhance even the most revered conventions of prior prestige discourse. During the Renaissance, Erasmus appropriates the *quadripartita ratio* and, in the *De copia rerum* (1520), develops them as easily digestible procedures to undertake in purposefully imitating the work of others. We must insist, however, that no such imitation, even the exercises of schoolboys, would be expected to produce a mere facsimile of another’s style, but would rather — in quite discernible ways — omit, add, transpose or change received elements of style according to a considered and original intent of ever greater proportions and consequence according to the maturity and talent of the imitator.
Lycidas (1637), first published in a polyglot anthology from Cambridge and later republished with the Italian verse in the 1645 Poems, offers a case in point. By Milton’s time, no lyrical genre, except perhaps the Petrarchan sonnet itself, comes more laden with expectations regarding style than the pastoral elegy. As J. Martin Evans explains,

It belongs... to a long-established generic tradition characterized by a number of stylistic and structural conventions which enable the reader to recognize it as an heir to such works as Spenser’s Astrophel, Moschus’s Lament for Bion, Virgil’s Eclogue X and Theocritus’s Idyl I. In poems written within this tradition the poet typically represents himself as a shepherd mourning the death of a beloved companion whose departure has afflicted the entire natural world with grief. By choosing threnody, Milton deliberately embraces the conventions that come with it and he unquestionably intends to imitate them. Evans continues, “Of all Milton’s poems, we may begin by noting, Lycidas is the most specifically imitative. It is closely modelled on Virgil’s Tenth Eclogue.” But Erasmus, we recall, does not simply permit omission, addition, transposition or permutation, his analysis of the quadripartita ratio enjoins these operations upon the orator or, in this case, the poet. Can we then expect to find in Lycidas transformations of the expected stylistic and structural conventions of the pastoral elegy? The paths of critical discovery in this early poem are well charted. Despite the sedimentary layers of literary custom pressing down upon the category of verse in which he has decided to work, our poet produces a traditional and unequivocally pastoral lament, which nonetheless departs markedly from the anticipated practices of the type. The list is striking. Arcadian nature absorbs and reflects the grief of the shepherds; Milton appears unmoved. The mourning shepherd
leaves his sheep to a companion in order to dedicate himself to the dirge; Milton’s uncouth swain leaves his sheep unattended. Elegies contemplate the loss of another; Milton anxiously ponders his own death. Shortly after completing *Lycidas*, Milton departs optimistically for Italy even as we imagine Edward King must have departed eagerly for Ireland.

But surely the literary manifestation of style, whether Miltonic or classical, derived from imitative progymnasmata represents a textual phenomenon and not something predicated upon oral formularies? True, but in ancient culture even a text is not primarily a legible thing, but a memorable one. Mary Carruthers analyzes the impact on medieval culture of Cicero’s comments about mnemonic training in the *De oratore* (55 BCE). She sees the socializing effect of a text as primarily the work of memory: “Whether the words come through the sensory gateways of the eyes or the ears, they must be processed and transformed in memory.”¹⁸⁵ A text, then, at least in antiquity and the Middle Ages, would function simply to institutionalize narrative discourse by making it accessible to the common memory of a culture.¹⁸⁶ Note above: “processed” and “transformed.” Style likewise processes and transforms thought. If memory is the place where speech is processed and transformed, style is the place where thought is processed and transformed. Thus memory is to speech what style is to thought.

**Milton Himself on Style**

Milton’s epistolary and polemical works speak quite comprehensively to the question of style and so this next section of the present chapter synthesizes his views in
order to postulate more clearly what he himself might have hoped to achieve by writing in Italian. A brief survey of his discernible attitudes on style, from the earliest letters produced while he was still at St Paul’s, to the later university exercises at Cambridge, through the more developed and mature positions of the seasoned Commonwealth polemicist, will serve to establish the continuity of his thought about the third canon of rhetoric. In effect, this section asks Milton to speak for himself on style.

Already profoundly conscious of the knotty technical requirements of versification, on the one hand, and his growing self-assurance in Latin prose, on the other, the teenage Milton writes the following in a 26 March 1625 letter to his former tutor, the Scottish Presbyterian and Westminster divine, Thomas Young (1587-1655), during the latter’s sojourn as minister to English merchants in Hamburg.

Although my intention was, my dearest Master, to send you a letter carefully composed in metrical form, yet I did not feel satisfied without writing another as well, in prose; for that unparalleled and matchless gratitude, which your goodness toward me needs must arouse in my heart, could not find expression in that style of writing which is fast bound and fettered by definite feet and syllables, but only in a style free from all such restrictions, or rather in an Asiatic flow of words, if that might be.\textsuperscript{187}

Here poetry, fast bound and fettered, yields to the genus orationis asiaticum which Cicero discusses at unflattering length in Brutus, his history of Roman oratory (46 BCE). Not greatly admired in late Republican Rome (147-30 BCE), the literature of which figured so prominently in the curriculum at St Paul’s, Milton’s allusion to the Asiatic style represents modest self-deprecation, indeed. But it seems as well to betray a keen,
juvenile anxiety about whether he possesses sufficient command of poetic and prose styles to respond to the rhetorical demands that this deliberately elevated epistolary manoeuvre lays upon him. In other words, is he ready for university?

The Latin exhibitions of students at Oxford and Cambridge span a surprising range of literary genres in the Caroline period. We encounter, for example, formal disputation, philosophic verses presented at an official academic act, declamations, obituary poems known as voluntaries, polyglot anthologies of the sort in which *Lycidas* first appeared, Gunpowder poems mocking recusancy, and— of particular importance for his later *Defensio pro populo anglicano* (1651) — saltings. Grouped generally under the category of prolusions, typically a prelude to the end of term, student compositions and performances may appear in either prose or verse, according to the nature of the exhibition and the year of the young scholar lifting up his voice amongst tutors and peers. Milton excelled at all of the genres in part because his deft stylistic instincts, stimulated by the Dionysian *imitatio* he would have learned principally in schoolboy assignments drawn from Quintilian, endowed him with tremendous rhetorical versatility. Moreover, as much of the content of the 1645 Poems comes directly from these sources, we should consider their companion pieces, the Italian poems under our scrutiny, in light of whatever stylistic attitudes Milton underscores for us in the university exercises themselves. We will, therefore, pause to examine at length but two passages from the early Prolusions in order to postulate an hypothesis of Milton’s rhetorical praxis in the matter of the third canon during the period in which we believe he wrote the Italian poems.
In the first instance, *Prolusion II* must belong to the period immediately preceding Milton’s rustication for quarrelling with his tutor, William Chappell (1582-1649), perhaps early in 1626.¹⁹⁰ We don’t know exactly what kind of quarrel took place between the two of them, but the general consensus is that — *pace* Aubrey¹⁹¹ — corporal punishment is unlikely to have been the cause. What interests us at this juncture, however, is simply Milton’s notion that style can be either musical or unmusical:

> At this point time cuts me short in mid career, and luckily too, for I am afraid that by my confused and unmelodious style I have been all this while offending against that very harmony of which I speak, and have myself been an obstacle to your hearing it.¹⁹²

While an unmusical style confuses, by antithesis, something harmonious or melodious would represent a more noteworthy achievement in human communication. Here the orator figures as either the musical instrument itself or the obstacle that prevents his audience from hearing the music. In Milton, however, musicality also refers to all of the qualities that proceed from the Muses¹⁹³ and, therefore, by metonymy, references the whole catalogue of literary genres that today we associate with the liberal arts: epic poetry (Calliope), history (Clio),¹⁹⁴ lyric and dithyrambic poetry (Euterpe), comedy and pastoral poetry (Thalia),¹⁹⁵ tragedy (Melpomene), dance (Terpsichore), love poetry (Erato – to whom the Italian poems belong), sacred hymnody (Polyhymnia),¹⁹⁶ and astronomy (Urania).¹⁹⁷ Harmony, then, implies a necessary congruence among the disciplines and genres of the liberal arts. Milton’s anxiety about a “confused and unmelodious style” that “offends against that very harmony” of which he speaks refers
as well to the cognitive discord brought about should any of the arts and sciences lack the style that makes them congruent with one another. Consonance deteriorates into dissonance when style falls out of balance and becomes unmusical.

*Prolusion III*, dating perhaps to 1627, the term of the young scholar’s return to Cambridge, offers an especially revealing Miltonic disquisition on style. His argument against scholastic philosophy re-echoes the standard Renaissance position most completely articulated in its earliest phase by Lorenzo Valla (1407-1457). Valla’s career gives us an important example of how humanism had begun to shake European intellectual life loose from the stranglehold that scholasticism, particularly in its appropriation of Aristotle, had held for centuries. In March of 1457, the Dominican friars invited Valla to present the annual encomium of the Angelic Doctor, that is, of Saint Thomas Aquinas, at their Studium Generale in Rome. Valla used the occasion to attack foundational principles of the Thomistic synthesis and then proposed a *repastinatio*, that is, a re-ploughing and weeding out, of what had become “barren and infertile” in Aristotelian systems of dialectical reasoning. Specifically, Valla targets the Peripetetic appetite for taxonomies, which late scholastic logicians had, in his view, blown up into monstrous proportions. In place of bloated categories for metaphysics, Valla proposes a grammar-based philosophy, a forerunner of the ordinary language philosophy that will later be taken up by Wittgenstein, Austin and Searle, and Ryle. Notice that Valla trades principally in the humanist commodities of grammar and rhetoric in order to reform the marketplace of philosophical transactions. Because the
Reformers themselves would subsequently find Valla’s effort to recast scholastic philosophy quite congenial indeed, Milton’s contempt for the tradition hardly surprises.

Milton’s reproof of scholasticism begins with a diatribe against the formalized and rarefied use of a highly particularized, technical jargon common in the centuries-old, received style of dialectics from roughly Saint Anselm (c1033-1109) to Francisco Suárez (1548-1617) in Catholic circles. But the pinnacle of scholastic philosophical achievement in figures like Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus, though he names them explicitly, can hardly have been the primary targets at which Milton takes aim in this *prolusio*, for the Dominicans and the Franciscans had long since been expelled from England. It seems more likely, then, that he had lingering attachments to scholastic method among Protestants in his sights. In fact, none lesser than Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) himself bears blame in this regard. Despite his early rejection of Aristotelian dialectic in favor of humanism, Melancthon not only returns to Aristotle, but to scholastic methodology itself in the *Loci communes rerum theologicarum* (1521) and thence to the scholastic pedagogy that would influence future generations of Lutheran theologians and philosophers: Martin Chemnitz (1522-1586), Matthias Haffenreffer (1561-1619), Leonhard Hütter (1563-1616) and Johannes Gerhard (1582-1637) right up to Milton’s time. Even putative Calvinists at Cambridge could be vectors of the scholastic pathogen, which suggests that Milton has taken on more than a straw man here to pillory. In any case, by the early Seventeenth Century, the triumph of humanist education over scholastic obscurantism would have been a topos for either Catholic or Protestant intellectuals, on the continent or in England.
In fact, the Cambridge prolusions of Milton’s day themselves form the first line of attack against already crumbling structures of scholastic pedagogy, especially the public *quaestiones disputatae* with their entirely predictable categories and stale technical style. Not yet twenty, Milton’s energetic *ad hominem* surely gets the blood of his audience flowing.

If I can at all judge your feelings by my own, what pleasure can there possibly be in these petty disputations of sour old men, which reek, if not of the cave of Trophonius, at any rate of the monkish cells in which they were written, exude the gloomy severity of their writers, bear the traces of their authors’ wrinkles, and in spite of their condensed style produce by their excessive tediousness only boredom and distaste; and if ever they are read at length, provoke an altogether natural aversion and an utter disgust in their readers. Milton strikes, with a now quite unabashed Asiatic flow of words, against that excessively tedious and “condensed style” that produces only boredom and distaste. The greater one’s exposure to this wretched and forlorn style, the more it provokes “an altogether natural aversion and an utter disgust.” In a rhetorical world saturated with Dionysian *imitatio* and Erasmian *copia*, condensed style clearly cripples language itself, the heuristic medium par excellence for discovering the truth. Such disputations are petty from the start, as they can only scrawl along the circuitous paths to which their reductive style has banished them. Milton carries the metaphor of disordered perambulation even further:

And then this dull and feeble subject-matter, which as it were crawls along the ground, is never raised or elevated by the ornaments of style, but the style itself
is dry and lifeless, so exactly suited to the barrenness of the subject that it might
well have been composed in the reign of the gloomy king Saturn, but that the
innocent simplicity of those days would have known nothing of the delusions
and digressions with which these books abound in every part. Believe me, my
learned friends, when I go through these empty quibbles as I often must, against
my will, it seems to me as if I were forcing my way through rough and rocky
wastes, desolate wildernesses, and precipitous mountain gorges. And so it is not
likely that the dainty and elegant Muses preside over these ragged and tattered
studies, or consent to be the patrons of their maudlin partisans; and I cannot
believe that there was ever a place for them on Parnassus unless it were some
waste corner at the very foot of the mountain, some spot with naught to
commend it, tangled and matted with thorns and brambles, overgrown with
thistles and nettles, remote from the dances and company of the goddesses,
where no laurels grow nor flowers bloom, and to which the sound of Apollo’s
lyre can never penetrate.²⁰³

Notice that the Miltonic topos of musicality reappears in distinct contrast to the hobbled
shifting through the dull and feeble matter that the gloomy dialectician must habitually
endure. Style dry and lifeless points unfailingly to a barren subject bereft of ornament,
but full of digressions and delusions. Scholasticism benefits neither from music nor
from Muse. Even radiant Apollo, the deity of rational thinking and right order, cannot
shed the light of prudence, purity and discernment where the lyre will not be heard.
The phrase, “when I go through these empty quibbles as I often must, against my will,”
says quite plainly that Milton has had enough of what he feels to be the enduring
tyranny of scholastic curriculum at Cambridge and the dreadful style that comes
bundled with the methodology, suggesting something rather more subversive at work than a mere *repastinatio* after the pattern of Valla.

Given the vehemence of the appeal to personal experience in the passage above, one begins to wonder again at the nature of the quarrel with William Chappell that resulted in Milton’s rustication in the previous year and whether his former tutor and like minded scholars of Chappell’s college circle, suckled as it were in a creed outworn, still skulked about the reedy marshes of the Cam. While certainly not a scholastic in the older, more evident sense of the term, Chappell was nonetheless a staunch and subtle defender of the presumably anti-Aristotelian logic of Petrus Ramus (1515-1572), the Huguenot convert killed during the militant Catholic mob violence incited by Valois partisans on St Bartholomew’s Day in 1572. Ramus’ contemporary biographer, Johann Thomas Freigius (1543-1583), claims in the *Petri Rami vita* that he launched his career with a public disputation in which he declared “*quæcumque ab Aristotele dicta essent, commentitia esse*” [whatsoever is said to be from Aristotle, is fabricated]. Thanks to Petrarch’s attack upon the principle of Aristotelian authority, Erasmus’ *Anti-barbari* (1495), Luther’s rejection of scholasticism, and the strongly neo-Platonic bent of the Italian academies, anti-Aristotelianism became a kind of cottage industry in the humanism of both Catholic and Protestant scholarship. On the one hand, Ramus served as a lightening rod for the reform of curriculum in continental universities, over which a sclerotic *corpus Aristotelicum* held dismal sway. On the other hand, Ramus did borrow heavily from Aristotelian logic and defended the position that his own work represented a more authentic interpretation of the original Peripatetic.
Ramist approaches proliferated in the aftermath of his death and his books, frequently reprinted, influenced university curricula all over Europe, Cambridge being but one noteworthy instance. Even so, Walter Ong suggests that Ramism “could in no real sense be considered an advance or even a reform” of either dialectic or rhetoric. Rather, I would venture to describe Ramism as itself a rhetorical intervention, at the level of *dispositio*, into the long-established structure and pedagogy of the Trivium. To be sure, in the late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Ramism captured the moment, but its influence has unquestionably waned, whereas its mortal adversaries — Aristotelian commentary, classical rhetoric and medieval scholasticism — have proven themselves to be more renewable and sustainable intellectual resources than the Cambridge Ramists might have anticipated.

Ramist logic controversially appropriates the first two canons of rhetoric, notably excluding the third canon, style. Herein lies the oppositional significance of Ramism for Miltonic rhetorical praxis in the period leading up to the publication of the Italian poems. Though Milton would later in life publish a quasi-Ramist treatise on logic, his earlier, more classical, education in rhetoric and poetics at St Paul’s would have put him instantly at odds with the Cambridge Ramists upon his arrival. This would have been painfully the case with his tutor, Chappell, who dominated the intellectual scene at the university. Nor can we take the later appropriation of Ramism on Milton’s part as an entirely unproblematic affair. His treatise, the *Artis logicae plenior institutio* (1672) was not published until after the 1667 version of *Paradise Lost*, even as he readied the 1673 *Poems*, in which the *sonetti* reappear. Moreover, the *Artis logicae* may in fact belong
precisely to his Cambridge years. In fact, the bulk of it simply compiles Ramist material produced elsewhere and bespeaks, in no small measure, the kind of florilegium typical of university exercises. The truly original analysis that Milton offers in this work probably belongs to a later period, but in any case, “Milton’s commentary on the text of Ramus is more often in opposition than in support.” Here’s a surprise! To the extent that Milton does at last begin to apply Ramist method for a particular purpose, he can hardly be considered a true believer in the system. Above all, Ramus’ notion that Quintilian betrayed Aristotle in both logic and rhetoric will not have found a sympathetic ear in the younger Milton, for however much of the Ramist approach he might have adopted later in life in order to produce the *De doctrina Christiana* (1825) — if that strange and staggering work is Milton’s at all — the multiple points of Miltonic departure from Ramist orthodoxy in his *Artis logicæ* represent emendations in favor of more conventional Aristotelian positions.

While Ramism is considered, in one sense, an anti-scholastic methodology, we may also say that it “was itself a methodology from the schools.” An intriguing possibility, then, suddenly presents itself. Could the scholasticism of which the third *Prolusio* is the implacable adversary, be itself an allegorical Ramism of the kind implicit in the now supposed conflict between Milton and Chappell? His grievance against that “dull and feeble subject-matter, which as it were crawls along the ground, [and] is never raised or elevated by the ornaments of style” could just as readily speak to Ramism as to scholasticism. Finally, if scholasticism stands in figuratively for Ramism, that sheds
clearer light upon his complaint to Diodati early in the *Elegia prima* (ll. 15-16), *Nec duri libet usque minas perferre magistri/Cæteraque ingenio non subeunda meo* [Nor is it agreeable to bear the ongoing threats of an unbending master and all the other things to which it is not necessary to subject a disposition such as mine]. In my interpretation, then, the “other things” mentioned here find fuller development precisely in the discourse of the third *Prolusio*, which would otherwise seem a hopelessly hackneyed, though artfully ornamented, attack on the philosophical method of the remote Middle Ages, which, as we have seen, had already been under sustained assault for centuries. If I am correct, then we should think of this prolusion not as a skillful, but ultimately negligible, display of undergraduate progress, but rather as an early instance of Milton being the subtle and lethal polemicist we recognize so readily from his Commonwealth interventions into matters of prelacy, divorce and regicide.

In the same metrical correspondence with Diodati (line 90) in which the young, but sure-footed, poet alternates so purposefully between elegaic pentameters and heroic hexameters, he later plies the phrase *rauæ murmur scholæ*. Following Vergilian usage, which often treats the term *murmur* as synonymous with *fragor* [a noisy crash] and *strepitus* [confused noise, clatter], this expression could well refer to the noisy roar of the schools, and has often been taken as such. Nonetheless, I think it unlikely that Milton here grouses to Diodati about too boisterous high jinks amongst crude undergraduates. He’s not Anthony Blanche and, anyway, that particular caricature of college life is somewhat anachronistic. Above all, such a gesture would reduce the elevated tone of the first elegy to a form of bellyaching about bagatelles, which stands in
stark contrast to the pathos of the allusion to Endymion’s bereft goddess, Selene, whose protestations of desire fall only upon comatose ears. For the climactic moment of the first elegy to turn on a triviality would constitute an instance of precisely that offense against the necessary harmony of style and meaning to which he objects in the second *Prolusio* discussed briefly above. But what are our alternatives? Whose lexicon could possibly have higher standing with Milton than Vergil’s? Well, we might consider Exodus 16:1b-2: *quintodecimo die mensis secundi postquam egressi sunt de terra Ægypti et murmuravit omnis congregatio filiorum Israel contra Moysen* [on the fifteenth day of the second month after they went out from the land of Egypt, all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses].215 The motif of stubborn resistance to the prophet and law-giver, signified by *murmur*, appears so frequently and so prominently in the wilderness narratives216 of the Pentateuch as to suggest that the Biblical significance of the term would have been all the more present to the minds of both Milton and his interlocutor, whether Diodati or posterity itself, than even the thesaurus of the Augustan age, while acknowledging that those various shades of meaning from late Republican sources will never be completely absent. Thus, I would propose that “the grumbling of raucous schools,” that is, the stubborn and unsound opposition of discordant academics, to which he must shortly return could just as well be taken to refer both to the scholastic remnant and those whom — by metonymy — he aggregates to them, namely the Ramists to whose “rough and rocky wastes, desolate wildernesses, and precipitous mountain gorges” we have already referred above.
Exploring such latent attributes of Milton’s early discourse upon style and the choices he actually makes in early rhetorical interventions, like the juvenile *Prolusiones* under our scrutiny here, really does shed light on the contemporaneous Italian works, since the role these *sonetti* play in augmenting the poet’s cultural status works likewise by metonymy. If Milton’s ethos as a cultured and erudite humanist is called into question by either his Cambridge cohort or by the homespun critics of his views on divorce, his private composition in the language and style of Petrarch, as well as the subsequent inclusion of that poetry in the 1645 volume, offers very different account of his learning and proficiency than his opponents may have imagined. The choice to aggregate the Italian poems to an otherwise English-language sonnet cycle imports all the literary heft of centuries of Italian *petrarchismo* into a single polyglot display and foregrounds the essential musicality of the Tuscan vernacular whose *eloquentia* Dante so persuasively advocates. If my reading of the third *Prolusio* is correct, then this method of condensation, to adopt the Freudian nomenclature, derives not at all from communion with Ramus, but rather in ferocious opposition to Ramist tendencies. Our poet learned the kind of stylistic deployment of the master tropes that we see at work in the rhetorical deployment of the 1645 *Poemata* from reading Quintilian under the guidance of Alexander Gil (1565-1635), the headmaster during his years at St Paul’s (1620-1625), and by practicing what he learned in the course of his many public Latin exercises in all the various genres required at Cambridge.

**Milton’s Attraction to Italian Vernacular Style**
We cannot be quite sure when Milton starting learning Italian, but it may well have been while still a child, contemporaneously with his tuition at St Paul’s. As the Ad Patrem makes clear, his father went to some effort and cost to endow the lad with access to Italian-language instruction, which would have been an unusual choice for a scrivener’s son, especially in the absence of any known record of commerce with Italy. The elder John Milton (1562–1647), however, was a madrigalist and composer of liturgical music. Moreover, the Cheapside home is known to have been filled with music, which would have exposed the younger Milton to a fair degree of Italian art songs in all genres. Although Nicholas Yonge’s Musica transalpina (1588)\(^\text{217}\) certainly ignited the English madrigal movement (1588-1627), it never extinguished the popularity of the Italian originals or the demand for new Italian music.

On the subject of Milton’s great admiration for Italian speech and letters, and the implications of such fulsome esteem on the problem of style, we must now consider at length the young poet’s correspondence with Benedetto Buonmattei (1581-1648), the Florentine polymath and author of the Grammatica della lingua toscana (1643), a work already discussed in the Introduction. In the well-known letter,\(^\text{218}\) Milton could hardly speak more plainly. Of his own predilection for Italy, he says, “Your country has, I think, no more devoted admirer.” When the eager italophile declares that, “no one with any pretensions to superior intellect or to culture and elegance but counts the Tuscan language among his chief delights,” I think he means it and has in mind at least his own father, his father’s musical circle, the English Diodati family and multiple European intellectuals with whom he had recently become acquainted. He makes a further claim,
however, which casts a yet more revealing light on the overtly anti-scholastic flow, and slyly anti-Ramist ebb, that we have detected in his third *Prolusio*. “The learned man,” Milton asserts, “considers [Italian] an essential part of his serious studies.” With what scorn must he have looked back upon the general ignorance of Italian language and letters that he endured at Cambridge?

By the time he wrote the 10 September 1638 letter, we know that Milton had already been in Florence since at least July and was most likely attending sessions at both the Accademia degli Apatisti, of which Buonmattei had been considered a founding father, and the Accademia degli Svogliati, founded by the neo-Latin poet and historian, Jacopo Gaddi (1600-1608), which Buonmattei frequented as well. The statutes of the Svogliati, launched in 1620, declare Gaddi the *Primo Principe e Promotore* and this was no exaggeration as the Svogliati convened in his home on what today is the Via del Giglio near Santa Maria Novella. Academicians doubtless dined and imbibed at his expense. What kind of Platonic symposium would skimp on the banquet? After all, the Greek *συµπίνειν* does mean to drink together. The *Paradiso dei Gaddi*, or garden of the palazzo in which the academicians would have met on summer evenings, is now lamentably divided between the Astoria Firenze Hotel and the Grand Hotel Baglioni facing the central train station, but otherwise the architectural integrity of the magnificent Seicento structure appears to be mostly undisturbed. Gaddi’s evidently well-known “endearing hospitality” to foreigners, lends credence to the conclusion of Piero Rebora that “*Milton dovette alloggiare, con molto fondata probabilità, nelle case dei Gaddi, in via del Giglio, presso i giardini gaddiani, o paradiso dei Gaddi*” [Milton
would have lodged, with well-founded probability, in the houses of the Gaddi, in the Via del Giglio, in the Gaddi gardens, that is, the Paradise of the Gaddi].

What kind of institution is the Florentine academy? By the Seventeenth Century, these academies were largely *sui generis* and a phenomenon of the social class that includes the signoria and their clerical counterparts. Typically members shared common interests in drama, poetry, rhetoric, history, politics and science and held regular meetings in order to discuss these topics. Academicians often wrote out and published material treated at length in the context of their academy’s sessions. The academies invariably had elaborate rules governing matters of identity, publication and membership. Estelle Haan offers this overview of how the academies functioned generally when Milton arrived on the scene:

Most academies observed a meticulously rigorous procedure for admitting new members. And when original compositions were performed, a piece of prose or verse would be read or recited by its author. Then, in response to comments or questions from fellow-academicians, who participated in a line-by-line critique of the whole, that author would present what amounted to a viva voce defensio.

And, indeed, a few days after Milton wrote his letter to Buonmattei, the Svogliati minutes record the following: *A di 16 di Settembro furono lett’ alcune compositioni e particularmente il Giovanni Miltone Inglese lesse una poesia Latina di versi esametri molto erudita* [On the 16th day of September some compositions were read and particularly Englishman John Milton read a Latin poem of hexameter verse – very erudite.]

Estelle Haan has this to say about Gaddi’s terse comment on the evening that Giovanni Miltone Inglese would have read his verse:
That “particularmente” is important—a youthful Englishman abroad doing much more than simply being “in attendance” at the academy. Rather, in using the universal language of Latin and in reviving that language through his own verse-composition, Milton excels among fellow neo-Latin and vernacular poets. Even the fact that his poems were granted a performance is in itself a tribute to their author’s erudition, for as Cochrane’s analysis has indicated, the methods by which academic officers selected individual contributions for performance were extremely rigorous.  

From the records of the Svogliati, it appears that Milton was present in the Paradiso dei Gaddi on multiple occasions from June to September of that year and from the academy’s statutes we may infer that both such protracted attendance and the *viva voce* declamation of Latin hexameters means he was formally inducted into membership. Milton had apparently earned the esteem of scholarly Florentine polymaths, who appear to have admitted him among their ranks. Certainly this is how Milton himself remembers it. In *The Reason of Church Government* (1641), not long after the Italian sojourn, he reflects on the significance of having been accepted by such cultivated and densely educated worthies.

But much latelier in the privat Academies of Italy, whither I was favoured to resort, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, compos’d at under twenty or thereabout (for the manner is, that everyone must give some proof of his wit and reading there), met with acceptance above what was looked for; and other things which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to patch up amongst them, were received with written encomiums which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps.
In effect, Milton has simply repeated here the very standards that would have been surely applied to him, for the statutes of the Svogliati state quite plainly: “non pero s’accetti in Accademia, fuora, o di qua dall’Alpi suggetto si sangue, o virtù, o scienza chiarissima, non sia notabile” [but no one is accepted into the Academy from the other side, or from this side of the Alps, if blood, or virtue, or lucid scholarship, not be notable]. The episode marked by the 16 September minutes of the Svogliati might well represent precisely the proof of wit and reading of which Milton speaks.

**Vernacular Eloquence and the Florentine Academies**

We cannot underscore how important it was to Milton himself to have come to belong to the higher intellectual culture of the Florentine academies on the basis of his own merit as a poet and scholar. This forms the proper context within which to understand his correspondence with Buonmattei. If our supposition that the recital of his Latin hexameter on 16 September represents Milton’s formal proof of wit, his letter six days earlier is no less accomplished and seems to serve a similar purpose, not in an academic exhibition, but in an important private performance before one of the great scholars of language for whose attention several academies were known to have competed.

In the first place, Milton’s choice of Latin as the language in which to extol the Tuscan vernacular deftly recalls Dante. Secondly, his Latin prose style is sure and his rhetorical control exceptional. Moreover, as we see below, by carefully demonstrating his command of classical languages, he seems to imply that, given the resource of Buonmattei’s amplified *Grammatica*, he would assiduously place the same linguistic gifts at the service of perfecting his grasp of Italian, which in any case provides
discernment and delights from which neither the lyric of Pindar nor the elegies of Catullus can ever distract him.

   For my own part, I have not merely sipped of both these languages, but have drunk as deeply of them as any man of my years; yet I can often partake with eagerness and delight of the feast afforded by the great Dante, by Petrarch, and by many another of your writers. Not Attic Athens herself, with her clear stream of Ilissus, nor ancient Rome, beside the Tiber, have had the power to make me lose my affection for your Arno and the hills of Fiesole, or cease to visit them with joy.226

He entreats his senior colleague, therefore, to undertake a particular task, after the pattern of Cicero’s Brutus and Quintilian’s Institutio, in the next anticipated volume of the Grammatica.

   There will be yet another claim to fame no less your own, if you will go to the trouble of indicating severally who among all the host of authors can justly claim the second place after the acknowledged masters of the Florentine tongue, who excels in tragedy, who writes lively and elegant comedy, who shows acuteness or depth of thought in letters or dialogues, and who has a noble style in historical writing.227

One can begin to perceive an urgency in this request from Milton, who looks to the venerable Buonmattei in order to legitimate his own extraordinarily comprehensive, but largely self-guided, journey through Italian vernacular literature from Dante through the Cinquecento petrarchisti. In a sense, Milton’s Italian sojourn only culminates in Tuscany, but he had truly begun his travels in demotic realms of gold during his
Cambridge years (1625-1632) and while engaged in his own private study (1632-1638), first at Hammersmith, on the banks of the Thames, and later in the country village of Horton in what was then Buckinghamshire. Nor is it difficult to imagine that the question “who among all the host of authors can justly claim the second place” after Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio would have become a leitmotif in Milton’s ongoing colloquia among the cultured litterati of the Italian Seicento academies. And who better to affirm or deny the findings of Milton than his own fellow academicians? Last of all, there arises the question of his own essays into the dolce favella of that marvelous place where the Arno overflows with vernacular eloquence. How well does the Italian verse of Milton demonstrate, not so much his poetic instincts for a “lingua ignota e strana,” but rather his command of the erudition and learning implicit in the intellectual culture of the Tuscan volgare? If Milton were to have shared his poems with any of his new social group in Florence, and we may suppose that indeed he did, the matter of whether his own learning in Italian amounted to anything in the one European city where his kind of humanism really counted must have been much on Milton’s mind.

Though often described as such, the content of Milton’s letter to Buonmattei is not audacious, unless audacity means that a younger scholar ought not to conduct himself as the colleague of an erudite elder. But is this not exactly what it meant for Milton to have become a fellow academician of Benedetto Buonmattei, of Jacopo Gaddi, of Agostino Coltellini (1613-1693)? The evidently gracious interaction of the academic fathers with Carlo Roberto Dati (1619-1676), Valerio Chimentelli (1620-1668) and other prodigies of Milton’s own age group or younger must have shown him just how highly
Tuscan intellectuals valued wit, talent and honor, irrespective of age or social standing. Did Chappell treat Milton thus? How unlike Cambridge the Florentine academy!

Indeed, the fundamental dissimilarity between the convivial meritocracy of the Platonic academies in Florence, on the one hand, and the dour remnants of scholastic pedagogy at the English universities, on the other, must have played a decisive role in Milton’s resolution to travel to Tuscany in the first place. But peninsular universities were presumably more doddering and decrepit than their insular counterparts; their professoriates even more atrophied, given the chokehold of papal, episcopal, imperial, ducal and signorial entanglements in pedagogical and scientific matters. While Italians “suppos’d England” was a place of “Philosophic freedom,” yea, Italy herself walked in the valley of the shadow of the Inquisition. After all, Milton met Galileo! England, at least, had undergone a Reformation of sorts. How then did Circe’s court, Ascham’s blight, acquire such fresh and free, weighty and flexible guilds of learning and high culture?

In 1438, Georgios Gemistos (d. 1452), called Plethon, came to Italy in the retinue of the Byzantine Emperor Ioannis VIII Palaiologos in order to participate in the Ecumenical Council that met first in Ferrara, but later reconvened in Florence. At the invitation of Tuscan intellectuals, Plethon began to teach neo-Platonism in Florence and concentrated his efforts on distinguishing Platonic positions from the Aristotelianism that dominated medieval Scholasticism. Plethon’s lectures on Plato electrified Florentine humanists, among them Cosimo de’ Medici. In 1462, Medici patronage brought the Accademia platonica into being on the grounds of the Villa di Careggi with Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) as the head, and quite possibly the only, scholar in residence. Ficino had learned
Greek philosophy from the émigré Platonists Basílios Cardinal Bessarion (1403-1472), himself a student of Plethón, and Ioánnis Argyropoulos (1415-1487), also a member of the Byzantine delegation to the Council of Florence. Although it’s not entirely clear exactly what kind of institution the Platoníca Académia of Florence was, its earliest configuration turned very much upon Fícino’s erudition and productivity, which, in any case, amply returned the Medici investment in humanist learning. Philosophically speaking, the Florentína académies that Milton admired so greatly and into which he himself was inducted 175 years later were still saturated with, and structured by, the ideals of Sócratic dialogue embodied in Plato’s rhetorical praxis.

**Miltonic Disposítiones Regarding Style**

But Plato is the known enemy of rhetoric, isn’t he? And style is a canon of rhetoric. Surely, then, Plato must be the enemy of style. Moreover, we have already seen Milton openly attack the Scholástica Aristotelíans and, by stealth, neo-Platonic Ramísts. How can Milton have become so enamored with the idea of Platoníca societies in Catholic Italy? This knotty thread deserves to be untangled. In the third *Prolusío*, the young Milton attacks scholasticísm and, as I have postulated, Ramísm. The substance of his argument is that both scholastic and Ramíst approaches to logical reasoning lack style, understood as the third canon of rhetoric. Furthermore, the defect to which he points amounts to much more than a style merely “dry and lifeless.” Nor is Milton wrong to find fault here, for, as we have seen in the first section of this chapter:

1. Style transforms inchoate thoughts into concrete, external expressions.
2. Style transfers interior subjectivity into the realm of experiential data.
3. Style produces real psychological effects.
4. Style embodies ideas and applies them to the dialectical task.

5. Style propels the ideas embodied in language into the sphere of public action.

Aristotle deftly implies that rhetoric both complements and supplements dialectic, and Plato’s own practice, despite his stated misgivings about the inevitability of abuse, nonetheless provides clear evidence of the dialectical advantages that style bestows upon the extramental representation of dense philosophical doctrine. In other words, Plato is as sophisticated a rhetor as any sophist and Aristotle is as rhetorical as Plato.

The Florentine academies, of course, are themselves essentially neo-Platonic institutions and both Milton and Buonmattei know well the benefit of rendering philosophical truth in sophisticated and elevated style. When Milton insists to Buonmattei that he has drunk as deeply of Latin and Greek letters and philosophy as any man of his years, he authorizes himself to assert that Dante and Petrarch belong as much to Parnassus as “Athens herself, with her clear stream of Ilissus, [or] ancient Rome, beside the Tiber.” In other words, the Italian language is to superior intellect what style is to dialectic. While it would not be controversial for an Englishman to hold such a view about Latin or Greek, it was unusual for Milton for assert it about Italian.

Milton sought out the Italian academies because they embodied a commitment to vernacular eloquence on a poetic, political, scientific and cultural scale unmatched elsewhere in Europe, especially England. Despite his incontrovertible mastery of neo-Latin prose and rhyme, the medium of intellectual discourse that distinguished Jacopo Gaddi and brought so many other Tuscan intellectuals fame throughout Europe, he made the choice — evidently crystalized while in Italy – to press on primarily as an English vernacular poet. This decision was doubtless influenced by his experience of the
tireless, astute and dedicated exegesis of Petrarchist verse, by then beginning its fourth century of ongoing evolution, that he witnessed firsthand in Florence. How could he not be inspired by the insatiable appetite of his fellow academicians for poetry in their own tongue? Furthermore, his fateful decision to publish the first version of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* in English prose — one he came bitterly to regret — may well have been grounded in the conviction that emerging revolutionary sentiment in England demanded vernacular eloquence of the kind so prevalent throughout the peninsula. Italy represents much more than the warm affirmation of Milton’s erudition and talent by a group of equally erudite and talented men. The Florentine academy is the crucible wherein the amalgam of Milton’s emerging commitment to Commonwealth polemics has been smelted. For this reason above all, Milton chose to weave Italian verse into the fabric of an English sonnet cycle which, in turn, he would deploy in the rhetorical pursuit of truth in matters of nation-building, of freedom of the press, and of the exercise of conscience regarding the provisions of conjugal unity and the qualified permissibility of its dissolution.

The letter to Buonmattei tells us that Milton understands style — with all its weighty benefits to the future Commonwealth and to freedom hanging in the balance — as precisely the sort of thing one develops by *imitatio* in the Dionysian sense. We must now add one last item to our list of Miltonic dispositions on style from above:


As he has mastered style in Latin and Greek by knowing “who excels in tragedy, who writes lively and elegant comedy, who shows acuteness or depth of thought in letters or
dialogues, and who has a noble style in historical writing” among the classical writers, so now he may hope to acquire the best components of style in Italian with the help of Buonmattei, who would through his Grammatica become Milton’s new Quintilian of vernacular eloquence.

This analysis of the letter to Buonmattei shines light on the style of the Italian poems in the following respects. Firstly, they were always meant to be understood as experiments in Dionysian imitatio and there is every reason to believe that Italian academicians would instantly have recognized that feature if it turns out that any of them had indeed known the poems. Secondly, the lexical anacronisms and well-established tropes of Milton’s Italian verse are deployed deliberately in order to foreground the wide familiarity that the English poet has developed with three centuries of Italian petrarchismo. Lastly, neither of the previous characteristics would mark anything worth noting in the Italian academies if the sonetti were inferior in quality. Though we cannot know for sure which of the poems Miton may have shared, and with whom among his diverse academic colleagues he may have shared them, or even whether he shared them, the encomia clearly award him the laurea hetrusca. As I have argued in the Introduction, traditionally such laurels are awarded on the basis of two elements: a demonstration in writing and an oral defense. While the collegiality and conviviality of Renaissance symposia in Florence offer a markedly different social setting for such activity in comparison to the crabbed disputations of the medieval universities, there’s no indication that “the proof of wit and reading” would have been any less demanding.
Style and Commonwealth Polemics

To conclude this chapter, we must look carefully at Milton’s seminal treatise *Of Education* (1644), which saw the light of day only shortly before the 1645 *Poemata* themselves appeared on the scene. At first glance, it may appear that Milton has, in this treatise, taken a moment’s respite from polemics, but the larger historical picture makes that view untenable. In August of 1642, Charles II (1600-1649) had raised his standard at Nottingham, the episode considered to have inaugurated the English Civil Wars (1642-1651). Without the consent of the monarch, Parliament convened the Westminster Assembly of Divines (1643-1653), which met to reform the Church of England against the wishes of the king and in strident opposition to the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud (1573-1645). A month after its initial gathering, the Assembly accepted the Solemn League and Covenant (1643), an agreement in principle between Scottish Covenanters and English Parliamentarians to preserve and defend the reformed polities of Scotland and to restrict prelacy in England. Despite widespread theological consensus in matters of Calvinist orthodoxy and a clear propensity to limit the role and authority of bishops, if not to eliminate them altogether, the Assembly was deeply divided by competing views of church governance, especially by the accelerating conflict between Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, called Independancy by its adversaries.

By the time Milton’s short tract on the education of young Englishmen was published, the king had already summoned Parliament to Oxford, though two-thirds of Commons stayed behind at Westminster. Consequently, the political machinations of the various ecclesial parties intensified and so did their pamphleteering. Although
Presbyterianism appeared to have triumphed over the Independents as the Commonwealth emerged, the Presbyterian faction never achieved the goals it sought in reorganizing church governance. In any case, when it convened nearly two decades later, the Cavalier Parliament (1661-1679), the longest in the history of the realm, re-established the Church of England exactly as it had been constituted under Laud, restored the episcopacy, required that all ministers be ordained by bishops, imposed the Book of Common Prayer, ejected 2,000 Puritan clergymen and, in single blow known as the Act of Uniformity (1662), managed to dismantle virtually everything the Westminster Assembly of Divines had painstakingly constructed, whether according to Presbyterian or Congregational patterns.

After the Restoration of the Stuart monarchy (1660), his Presbyterian nemesis, Robert Baillie, would class “blind Milton” among the Independents, and certainly our poet’s preference for a system of ecclesial discipline would have leaned toward some form of congregationalism. Milton would likely have found agreeable the fundamental commitment to expansive subsidiarity in church government as represented among the Independents, but too many theological and political assumptions came bundled with the congregationalism that actually existed in England at the time for him to have been entirely at home in such an ecclesial polity. Indeed, as the implicit Christology of Paradise Lost and the explicit theological propositions of the De Doctrina Christiana make abundantly clear, this English poet has no denominational home whatsoever.

Of Education follows the five anti-prelatical tracts (1641-1642) and precedes the Areopagitica (1644). By this time, Milton had already composed all the poems collected
in the 1645 volume. Both in the arc of his Commonwealth polemics and in its immediate historical context, the tract belongs to the ongoing debate over how the Church and the State should be governed. The underlying theme here reveals the same cluster of convictions about the role of education in nation-building, particularly the comprehensive and efficient development of vernacular eloquence, that six years earlier Milton had expressed in his letter to Buonmattei:

> For we ought not to minimise the importance of the purity or corruption of the language, and of the degree of correctness with which it is commonly used. This indeed more than once played a part in the welfare of Athens. It is Plato's opinion that an alteration in the style and fashion of dress portends grave disorders and changes in the State; I would maintain rather that when the language falls into corruption and decay the downfall of the State and a period of degradation and obscurity are at hand. For is not the use of words which are illiterate and mean, incorrect in form, or wrongly pronounced, a very clear indication of a slothful and sluggish disposition among the people, and a proneness to submit to any form of slavery? On the other hand, we have never heard of an empire or a country which did not enjoy at least moderate prosperity as long as its people continued to cultivate and take a proper pride in their language.²³⁶

Now, in Of Education, he has outlined a program integrating grammar, logic, rhetoric, poetics and history for the young of his own country in order that the proper cultivation of their language prepare them for self-governance. They will be endowed with the essential skills they need to resist corruption, decay, the downfall of the state, degradation, obscurity and slavery. In the midst of the Civil War, Milton recognizes that
no matter what the outcome, any political or religious settlement would necessarily be provisional and, therefore, as Plato did, he too seeks long-term stability. This he finds in the principle of education for freedom and prosperity by the cultivation of the English language alongside the classical languages, even as he had seen in Florence the Italian vernacular studied and cultivated by the peninsula’s greatest scholars of Latin and Greek.

Three sections in this pedagogical treatise appear to confirm my findings in the two prolixions and the two letters examined above. Firstly, regarding the culmination of the proper sequence of studies, Milton writes

> When all these employments are well conquer’d, then will the choise Histories, Heroic Poems, and Attic Tragedies of stateliest and most regal argument, with all the famous Political Orations offer themselves; which if they were not only read; but some of them got by memory, and solemnly pronounc’t with right accent, and grace, as might be taught, would endue them even with the spirit and vigor of Demosthenes or Cicero, Euripides, or Sophocles. And now lastly will be the time to read with them those organic arts which inable men to discourse and write perspicuously, elegantly, and according to the fitted stile of lofty, mean, or lowly.\(^{237}\)

On the face of it, the passage simple restates convictions he had previously articulated to Buonmattei. But his position comes into even sharper relief when he declares that studying “choise” exemplars of the best style in the various genres of liberal arts will “endue them even with the spirit and vigor of Demosthenes or Cicero.” That Milton believes the liberal arts liberate comes as no surprise. But the present crisis in American culture that causes us all to wring our hands about the value of the liberal arts in a
pragmatic university curriculum derives from the decidedly non-Miltonic view that the liberation of the well-educated person takes place primarily within the matrix of that person’s inner core and sanctuary, and not in external ways that, among other things, are capable of resisting “a proneness to submit to any form of slavery.”

Inasmuch as we — contemporary American advocates of the humanities — would claim that the humanities humanize us, we have imagined the process and effects of humanization primarily as phenomena of our interiority. In this respect, we treat the humanities as the privileged aggregation of essentially private interpretive dispositions that make it possible for the thinking persons among us to think in helpful ways about the milieu of commodified values into which we find ourselves immersed. But along with that voluntary, psychological move ad intra comes an implied vacating of the public square. If the primary purpose of humanistic education is merely to transform the individual, then the humanities can be said essentially to belong to the interior life and only incidentally to the communal space of external commitments and contests. The passive interiorization of humanistic education reduces the role of the humanities in the public square to spectacles that can be monetized. In consequence, the liberal arts have become progressively irrelevant to the conduct of democratic pluralism and, among other things, incapable of competing for funding in the universities, or even surviving there unless they can demonstrate some utility in the service of commerce or the quantitative sciences, which are also subject to disfigurement by commodification. In the Renaissance, however, humanism never recuses itself from direct, vigorous public engagement. Eloquence disputes, challenges, defends, attacks and does so in the
Forum upon the Rostrum in full and urgent view of the Tarpeian Rock. Even the young Milton feels this in every fibre of his existence. Again and again, he demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the view that

5. Style propels the ideas embodied in language into the sphere of public action.

There is no inchoate disposition of belief, of the sort that can become a conviction expressed in speech, that style will not first have transferred from the interior realm of private subjectivity into the exterior realm of experiential data. From there, belief may return to the inner life of the person, yes, but it returns transformed by its exposure to the world without. And if the experiential data of extramental reality includes “choise Histories, Heroic Poems, and Attic Tragedies of stateliest and most regal argument,” then it endows the inner life of a citizen with the spirit and vigor of the Demosthenes who strove against Philip of Macedon for the freedom of Athens, or the Cicero who took on Mark Antony for the survival of the Republic.

On the one hand, these are common views of the utility and desirability of an explicitly rhetorical education. Since rhetoric requires the capacity to reason, it depends upon an education in logic. Since logic requires understanding of how language functions, it depends upon grammar. Voilà trivium in an entirely trivial enthymeme. Style, however, lies at the center of the canons of oratory not trivially, but essentially, for it is style that transfers the power of grammar and logic into the public ken. The properly educated, then, would command and rule, teach and sanctify, first themselves and then others, for

whether they be to speak in Parliament or Counsel, honour and attention would be waiting on their lips. There would then also appear in Pulpits other Visages,
other gestures, and stuff otherwise wrought then what we now sit under, oft
times to as great a trial of our patience as any other that they preach to us. These
are the Studies wherein our noble and our gentle Youth ought to bestow their
time in a disciplinary way from twelve to one and twenty; unless they rely more
upon their ancestors dead, then upon themselves living. 238

Notice, parliament and pulpit, that is state and church, are public venues in the
marketplace of both ideas and actions. But so too is poetry, and that is how the release
of the 1645 Poems can impact the great political and religious questions of its day.

We must not lost sight of the Italian poems of Milton which, in 1645, still retain
enough rhetorical density to impact Commonwealth polemics. Firstly, the publication
of the sonetti and the encomia that accompany them augments the poet’s ethos by
presenting him to England as an erudite Italian academician. If the English public
doesn’t know exactly what that means, they have only to ponder The Reason of Church
Government. Secondly, what do Buonmattei’s Grammatica, academic discussions of
innovation in Petrarchan tradition and Milton’s Italian verse all have in common? They
demonstrate the exacting standards of Italian vernacular eloquence, which prove every
bit as demanding and worthy as classical poetics in the style of the smooth elegaic
poets, Ovid and Catullus, also displayed in the 1645 Poemata.

Since we have seen fit to efface any distinction between poetics and rhetoric, we
must now imagine the audience of the Italian verse in terms just as expansive as the
categories of parliament and pulpit in order to grasp both their composition and their
eventual publication in 1645. First to the question of composition. John K. Hale
distinguishes four audiences for the Italian sonnets that appear in the 1645 Poems: (i) the
audience within the poems, for example, the *donna leggiadra* and the *giovani amorosi*; (ii) Italian speakers, whether in England or abroad; (iii) English speakers at home; and (iv) Milton himself. Hale is concerned primarily with publication, but it’s worth pausing for a moment to see whether his taxonomy sheds any light on the question of composition as well. The first category seems a fairly straightforward nod to the criteria of both the New Criticism and Russian Formalism, neither of which would be much inclined to ask what motivates composition, since it would have to be a factor outside the literary artifact that takes textuality as its absolute limit. Sonnet IV addresses Charles Diodati both as an audience within and without, so he (that is, the empirical Diodati and his doppegänger in Sonnet IV) quite naturally bridges the first and second categories. We should stress, however, that if Dorian’s portrait of the English Diodatis is correct, it would be unlikely that Diodati was a heritage speaker of the language, however well he might have come to know Italian by diligent study. As for other Italian speakers in Milton’s social milieu, there were not so many Italians in England in either 1629 or 1645, so it’s difficult to imagine a domestic audience, though there were bound to have been some. If Emilia turns out to have been an empirical person after all, then she, like Diodati, would certainly be motive enough to compose in *volgare*. The Italian sojourn (1638-1639) offers the best opportunity for Milton have shared his poems with Italian speakers. But did he? We cannot be certain, but for the reasons I have given in the Introduction, it seems probable to me that at least some of his fellow academicians would have been aware of his essays into their vernacular tradition. Milton writing Italian for an English audience seems entirely counterintuitive, though publishing Italian for an
English audience is a different matter altogether, as presently we shall see. The last audience category, Milton himself, requires no further speculation as to the motivation for writing in Italian. He did so in order to express inchoate Dantesque and Petrarchan ways of thinking about love in the empirical language of Petrarch and Dante.

What can we infer about Milton’s audiences at the time of publication? The audience within the poems remains unchanged. Having spent significant time in Italy, however, Milton now has a potentially larger Italian audience than he did in 1629-1630. As we know, the 1645 Poems have two sections: one English and one Latin. Additionally, Milton has interpolated Italian verse into the English section and Greek verse into the Latin section thus producing a balanced polyglot display. Nonetheless, the Latin and Greek section was published separately as Poemata, probably for the continental market. Since the Italian belongs to the English section, however, that would mean that Milton did not intend that the Italian poems be sent to his fellow academicians. Hale offers the following analysis:

Two facts entail that the speech-community of English mattered more as audience in Poems, 1645 than the Italian one. First, the poems are placed as a minority voice inside a sonnet-series in English: this presupposes that a reader of English was to be surprised, then impressed or delighted or threatened, when the series veered into another vernacular. Secondly, if we assume that Milton sent only the second part of 1645, the Latin and Greek Poemata in their separate volume, to his friends in Italy because they could not have read the English of the other volume, it follows that by placing the Italian poems with the English poems Milton makes it
unlikely that native Italians will have read and judged them. In 1645, his Italian presence and voice are being offered to English readers.241

The publication of a mostly unintelligible continental language for an essentially insular market certainly invites speculation. If Hale is correct and the Italian poems are published for English speakers, why does Milton implore Buonmattei to indicate who “excels in tragedy, who writes lively and elegant comedy” and so forth in Italian? What does it matter if Milton turns in a subpar performance in Italian? Who will ever know? Firstly, it’s hard to imagine that Milton is ever writing for anyone more exacting than himself. Secondly, if he published material that he’d written more than a decade earlier, it’s because he thought highly enough of it to do so, irrespective of their exclusion from the material he might have sent to friends in Italy. Most importantly, however, English, like Italian, is a spoken language with native speakers. By integrating the paradigmatic language of vernacular eloquence, the living speech of Dante and Petrarch, into a collection of his own English-language poetry, Milton makes the point (if only to himself) that command of style in their own language can preserve the English from servitude. Milton places his own vernacular eloquence in English and Italian on display in a manner entirely consonant with his prose interventions into Commonwealth polemics. The “illiterate and mean” diatribes from the pulpit against his interventions on divorce would constitute but one example of “a proneness to submit to any form of slavery.” If, for Milton, style externalizes thought, then it follows that impoverished style reflects poor thinking. Thus, “when the language falls into corruption and decay the downfall of the State and a period of degradation and obscurity are at hand.”
About the last audience, Hale asserts that, “Dante informs Milton’s enterprise and its attitudes to languages... their ultimate audience is Milton’s idea of Dante.” Nowhere, I think, more than Dante do we see the political and social implications of style, and not merely in the De vulgari eloquentia, but foremost in the Commedia itself. The empirical poet is an exile from the city of his birth, his life endangered. On the political level this is a crisis that Dante seeks to overcome through the medium of vernacular eloquence. On an epistemological level, the pilgrim Dante within the sacro poema begins his journey as a consequence of the loss of sense in the dark wood and the hellish crisis of meaning which that loss provokes. Indeed, from the very first lines of the Inferno, Dante as poet signals to his reader an interpretive strategy which gradually reveals the value and integrity of his journey as pilgrim. The pattern of that interpretive strategy appears in the pilgrim’s crisis of discernment and eventual recovery of meaning. But what is interpretation if not the analysis of style itself and all those inner realites revealed at the intersection of language and choice? The poet establishes his authority to guide the reader by paralleling his narrative perspective with the pilgrim’s emergence from Hell and recovery from the crisis of discernment that so afflicts him at the outset of the poem in the dark wood. If the poet can successfully convince the reader of the integrity of the pilgrim’s journey, he can, by paralleling that recovery at the semantic level, lay claim to an authoritative experience according to which he may legitimately offer moral and political guidance to his reader.

Three and a half centuries later, Milton, likewise an exile from the city of his birth on account of his commitment to discredited republican values, his life endangered,
finds himself lost in darkness. How can the blind poet establish his authority to guide the reader except through the medium of vernacular eloquence? The Italian verse of Milton represents the incipient stage of Milton’s lifelong imitatio of Dante.
Recruiting Milton

Although Milton wrote only five sonnets and one stanza of a canzone, the rhetorical impact of his Italian verse reverberates well beyond the Commonwealth polemics in the midst of which the 1645 collection first appeared. By asking who shows any interest whatsoever in the sonnet cycle and why they do so, this chapter traces the earliest Italian national connections to the volgare of Milton simply to see where they will lead.

The Tinsel of Tasso

In 1668, not twenty-five years after Milton’s first public commendation of Italian learning and vernacular eloquence in Of Education (1644), the French poet and critic, Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux (1636-1711), in a quatrain that would subsequently come to express a generalized French derision of the whole of Italian literature, detonated the literary equivalent of a cluster bomb with Satire IX:

Tous les jours, à la cour, un sot de qualité
Peut juger de travers avec impunité,
À Malherbe, à Racan préférer Théophile,
Et le clinquant du Tasse à tout l’or de Virgile.

[Every day at court, a fool of quality
can judge crookedly with impunity,
to prefer Théophile to Malherbe or Racan,
and the tinsel of Tasso to all the gold of Vergil.]243

A partisan in the querelle des Anciens et des Modernes of the more refined and classical poetics then emerging in the work of Jean Racine (1639-1699), Molière (1622-1673) and Jean de la Fontaine (1621-1695), Boileau’s primary targets — poets Jean Chapelain (1595-
Philippe Quinault (1635-1688) and Georges de Scudéry (1601-1667) — have nothing in particular to do with Italian anything. Moreover, Boileau elsewhere praises the *Gerusalemme liberata*, though he certainly does find the *Discorsi del poema eroico* defective. While clearly no friend to the Italian vernacular tradition of eloquence, in fairness, his point here focuses more on the demonstrably inelegant judgment of the *sot de qualité* than on Tasso *per se*, but it didn’t matter. Thereafter, French criticism implacably belittles Italian letters and taste.

From the Sixteenth Century, France itself had had to negotiate the place of its own language and literature in relationship not only to the classics of Greece and Rome, the fundamental task of all Renaissance vernaculars, but also insofar as well-known, widely emulated, and frankly coveted Italian linguistic and literary achievements were concerned. French intellectuals, perhaps, were particularly vulnerable to the green-eyed monster with regard to Italy’s high culture, for the Renaissance in France materializes precisely out of the Italian Wars (1494-1559), stimulated by the selfsame urbane civilization that dynastic *maréchaux* and *chevaliers* savagely and systematically despoiled. Valois ascendancy at last exhausted itself in these endemic peninsular conflicts and withdrew from its Habsburg rivalry ill-prepared for the crisis of the French Wars of Religion (1562-1598) which would quickly overwhelm it. French poetics fared better than the Valois, of course, but afterwards struggled to define itself in the contest, as it were, against such triumphs as the *Canzoniere*, the *Decameron*, the *Orlando*, the *Sofonisba* (1524), the *Gerusalemme*, and all the myriad accomplishments
that Italian civic culture had produced in its lively legal, rhetorical, historical, scientific and grammatical practice.

French Renaissance literature is said to begin with *La Pléiade*, that is, Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585), Joachim du Bellay (1522-1560) and Jean-Antoine de Baïf (1532-1589), who attempted to ennoble their language through the production of Greek and Roman genres in the vernacular. The *pléiadistes* and their ilk, typically French humanists from among the nobility, were convinced that their language had all the literary potential of Tuscan. To fulfill its promise, then, du Bellay outlined an ambitious project for French letters in *La Deffence et Illustration de la langue Francoyse* (1549). Citing the exemplary verse of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, he writes,

> j’alléguerai ... un Pétrarque, duquel j’ose bien dire que, si Homère et Virgile renaissant avaient entrepris de le traduire, ils ne le pourraient rendre avec la même grâce et naïveté qu’il est en son vulgaire toscan. [I will allege ... a Petrarch, of whom I dare say that, if Homer and Virgil reborn had undertaken to translate him, they could not render him with the same grace and freshness that he has in his Tuscan volgare.]

It should not surprise us that *petrarchismo* played such a significant role in the *pléiadistes* program, for du Bellay had already relied heavily upon the *Dialogo delle lingue* (1542) of the Paduan philosopher and logician, Sperone Speroni degli Alvarotti (1500-1588), even repeating passages of his *Dialogo* word for word in the *Deffence*. Speroni belonged to the influential Accademia degli Infiammati, which in his lifetime included such eminent *petrarchisti* as Bembo, Varchi, Pietro Arentino (1492-1556), Alessandro Piccolomini (1508-1578), Galeazzo Gonzaga (1509-1562) and Tasso himself,
with whom Speroni enjoyed a close friendship. The *Deffence* calls explicitly for the imitation in French of classical and Italian genres. Early setbacks in epic poetry, like Ronsard’s incomplete *La Franciade* (1542), did not diminish the enthusiasm with which French poets would embrace *petrarchismo* in their own language. Nonetheless, though he successfully articulates a program for the development of French language and literature, its escape from dependence upon Greek and Latin for progress in philosophy, science and literature borrows heavily from the centuries-long history of the Italian language, as du Bellay’s theoretical work, and the early sonneteering of the *Pléiade* make abundantly clear. Boileau, Racine, Molière and Fontaine, however, represent an eagerness to assert French classicism on its own terms, unmediated by Italian humanism and its much longer tradition of vernacular letters.

Typical of the growing contempt for the Italian vernacular tradition so beloved of Milton was the *Entretiens d’Ariste et d’Eugène* (1671) of Jesuit Dominique Bouhours (1628-1702). The invective against Italian letters that emerges here suggests more than mere chauvinism at work. Reclaiming elegance and taste from the decadence of *marinismo* provided the right opportunity for French literary theory to try to efface the traces of its earlier reliance on the *lingua del sì* in order to develop its own *langue d’oïl*.

French obloquy, then, would have served essentially therapeutic purposes. In any case, Père Bouhours’ later work, *La manière de bien penser sur les ouvrages d’esprit* (1687), subjects the tinsel of Tasso, Ariosto, Boiardo, Pulci, Sannazaro, even Dante, at least by implication, to withering disparagement. Why? Because Italians don’t follow the rules. The French, on the other hand, having considered the matter calmly
and judiciously, ferreted out a compendium of coherent æsthetic codes, derived from Aristotle and filtered through Cartesian rationalism, to apply rigorously to the practice of poetics: in lyrical verse, by such as François de Malherbe (1555-1628) and Honoré de Bueil, Marquis de Racan (1589-1670); in tragedy, by Racine and Pierre Corneille (1606-1684); and in comedy by Molière and the abbé d’Aubignac, François Hédelin (1604-1676).

A perfect foil for the early phase of rationalist æsthetics, the Italian literary imagination attracted mordant scrutiny from French critics. Its well developed theory and inherited practice of maraviglia — represented preeminently in Tasso, whose influence upon Paradise Lost F. T. Prince has adduced so persuasively — now seems almost tailor-made to have invited the caustic response first delivered by Boileau, but subsequently theorized by Bouhours. Apart from Tasso, Père Bouhours deprecates, for example, Giovanni Battista Guarini (1538-1612), whose enormously successful play, Il pastor fido (1590), inspired a century and a half of madrigalists in the Italian, Franco-Flemish, English and German schools from Giaches de Wert (1535-1596) and Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) to Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672); a 1712 lyric opera from Georg Friedrich Händel (1685-1759); an eponymous sonata for flute and harpsichord attributed to Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741), but in fact forged by Nicolas Chédeville (1705-1782); and an English translation from Milton’s exact contemporary, Richard Fanshawe (1608-1666). La manière further disparages such as Guidobaldo Bonarelli (1563-1608), whose Filii di Sciro (1607) initially enjoyed tremendous popular acclaim when it debuted in French translation on the Parisian stage in the Seventeenth Century, but fared less well under critical scrutiny a hundred years later. Too closely associated with Tasso’s
Aminta (1573) and with Guarini, Bonarelli’s pastoral drama provoked the same corrosive inspection from Bouhours. Nor did the immensely popular lyrical poet Fulvio Testi (1593-1646) or even madrigalist Benedetto Pallavicino (1550-1601) receive kinder treatment.

Partly because no one had had the temerity to translate Bouhours’ attacks into the Italian language, it took a long time for peninsular intellectuals to take any notice whatsoever. When at last they did, however, the Franco-Italian controversy began in earnest. Early in the Settecento, the Marchese Giovan Gioseffo Orsi (1652-1733) of Bologna, having previously made off to France in 1686 after arranging for the contract killing of his wife for conjugal betrayal, became aware of Bouhours’ critique and launched the Italian reply in Considerazioni nelle opere degli antichi, sopra un famoso libro francese intitolato: Manière de bien penser sur les ouvrages d’esprit (1703). The lethal tedium of Orsi’s treatise — seven fastidious and interminably protracted dialogues! — suggests something very like the handiwork of a debased uxoricide. In 1923, Professor J. G. Robertson remarked,

Nowadays, when we look back on this once famous quarrel... [w]e are filled with a kind of wonder at the huge compendium of the controversy, with its page upon page of arid, pedantic discussion of the legitimacy of certain lines and phrases in Italian poets – as Voltaire wittily, but not unjustly said, “deux gros volumes pour justifier quelques vers du Tasse” — its childish attempts to set up irrefutable standards of good taste.

The principal benefit of Orsi’s work, however, lay in its having stimulated interest in the substance of Bouhours’ critique among more able, and less morally objectionable,
literary theorists and critics. These are primarily Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), who criticizes the reductionism of French rationalist thought in *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* (1709) and *De antiquissima italorum sapientia* (1710), and Lodovico Antonio Muratori (1672-1750), who responds directly to Bouhours in *Della perfetta poesia italiana* (1706). Historian and prelate, Giusto Fontanini (1666-1736), in *Biblioteca dell’eloquenza italiana* (1726), and poet-librettist Pietro Metastasio, pseudonym of Pietro Antonio Domenico Bonaventura Trapassi (1698-1782), likewise mount thoroughgoing responses to the French challenge.²⁵²

In fact, Père Bouhours is not always wrong, or even all that unfair, in his assessment of the deficiencies in Italian literature. Vico and Muratori clearly know this, and demonstrate their awareness of the exact degree to which the feverish Seicento embrace of *marinisimo* had left Italian national taste vulnerable to French attack. In their first order of business, the polemicists happily sacrifice Marino, already contaminated by his years in the literary circles of France, to the critics. Afterwards, however, each of these remarkable minds undertakes constructive work in critical and rhetorical theory as part of a conscious effort to improve the standing of Italian letters among European intellectuals in the bitter milieu of French vilification. Professor Paola Gambarota offers this analysis.

At first the Italian response, though motivated by wounded national pride, concentrated on æsthetic issues and ideals of eloquence, addressing in particular *La manière de bien penser* and only occasionally the dialogues *La langue française* and *Le bel esprit* of the *Entretiens*. But gradually the French-Italian controversy began to shape new forms of national sentiments, generating the
sense that the creation of national cultural institutions was a vital necessity. In my reading of the Orsi-Bouhours polemic, they figure prominently because I believe that, among the Italian respondents, Muratori and Vico were the ones who most deftly confronted the political implications of Bouhours’ attack. With the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1714) unfolding in the background, the question of what truly constitutes a modern nation becomes all the more urgent everywhere on the continent, not least among the urbane and long-standing, but politically fractured, cities of the Italian peninsula. Against that backdrop, the aesthetic and scientific deployment of the volgare that took place during the Renaissance constitutes the pre-condition for later stages of incipient national identity. The studied and deliberate reaction to French attacks upon its history of literary achievement reveals the Seicento academies commended by Milton transforming themselves into pan-peninsular cultural institutions focused on the literary and scientific dimensions of Italian identity and history, and so solidifying the place of its vernacular in the ongoing development of European thought. In a relatively short period of time, however, those same intellectual networks will become the matrix of the Risorgimento ethos.

As gradually the later generations of peninsular academicians come to discover, their Milton speaks credibly to the amalgam of Italian politics and poetics implicit in the Bouhours polemic. With his bold but reasoned defense of the regicide, especially in The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (1649), Milton reframes the dynastic ambitions that fuel the endemic conflicts of Europe against an assertion of the sovereignty of free citizens, and he does so well in advance of Locke. As we heard in the last chapter, in his 1638 letter to fellow academician, Benedetto Buonmattei, Milton himself says, “we
have never heard of an empire or a country which did not enjoy at least moderate prosperity as long as its people continued to cultivate and take a proper pride in their language.” Though silent in the early progression of the polemic engendered by Boileau and Bouhours, no one fuses politics and poetics more cogently than our poet, as the proximate enlistment of Milton in the cause of Italian letters will demonstrate.

When, in 1742, he places his translation of *Paradise Lost* before the guild, as it were, of Italian intellectuals, Paolo Antonio Rolli (1687-1765) includes a biography of Milton in Italian that makes no effort to conceal our poet’s republican commitments. Moreover, Rolli underscores and commends our poet’s *sonetti*, as if to confer again upon Milton the triple laurels first accorded him by Salzilli. In effect, Rolli recruits Milton in defense of Italian letters. About *Paradise Lost*, Professor Robertson says, That work was the mainstay of those adventurous critics who dared to vindicate in the face of French classicism the rights of the imagination over the reason as the creative and motive force in poetry.256

This intervention demonstrates the essential congruence of classical rhetoric and the Renaissance poetics of the *volgare*. Indeed, Milton himself turns in an exemplary performance of Italian genres, first in the modest *petrarchismo* of his sonnet cycle, to be sure, but later in that great English epic that is itself so indebted to three centuries of Italian vernacular eloquence. The child, of course, is father to the man, and so the discourse on grammar, literature and taste generated by the tinsel of Tasso controversy, childish as it may have seemed in its childhood, nonetheless engenders fully matured cultural institutions of enormous significance to Italian letters and nationhood. One of
these, the Pontificia Academia degli Arcadi, to which Muratori and Vico both belonged, figures prominently in the discussion of Milton’s first Italian translator and biographer.

**Rolli contra Voltaire**

We know Rolli best for his collaborations with Händel. He produced the libretti for *Floridante* (1721), *Scipione* (1726), *Alessandro* (1726), *Riccardo primo re d’Inghilterra* (1727) and *Deidamia* (1741). Born in Rome to Philippe Roleau, an architect from Boulogne, and Marta Arnaldi from Todi in Papal Umbria, Rolli was taught first by the Dominicans at Santa Maria sopra Minerva and then at the Collegio Romano of the Jesuits. From both, he received a thoroughly humanistic education and, indeed, excelled at composition and improvisation in verse, which brought him to the attention of Gian Vincenzo Gravina (1664-1718), one of the early lights of the Pontificia Accademia degli Arcadi, into which Rolli would come to be inducted.

Rolli belonged to the second generation of the Arcadia. According to the custom, he enrolled under an outlandish pseudonym: Eulibio Brentiatico. The Arcadia had been founded in 1690 by Gravina, together with Giambattista Felice Zappi (1667-1719), Vincenzo Leonio (1650-1720), and Giovan Mario Crescimbeni (1663-1728), all closely associated with the literary circle of Queen Christina of Sweden (1626-1689), the infamous daughter of Gustavus Adolphus who took up residence in Rome after her abdication and conversion to Catholicism. Fabio Cardinal Chigi (1599-1667), later Pope Alexander VII, would refer to her as “a queen without a realm, a Christian without faith, and a woman without shame.” Upon her death, Padre Crescimbeni struck upon the idea of founding an academy to continue the literary and intellectual activities of the
coterie that had previously surrounded the queen. In his 1729 life of Crescimbeni, Francesco Maria Mancurti (1689-1754) recounts that

*in tempo d’estate l’anno 1690 si adunarono insieme ora in uno, ora in un’altro
de’ luoghi deliziosi, che Roma concede a’ suoi felici Abitatori; Avenne pertanto un giorno, che sedendo egli su un verde Prato, e recitando i loro Versi, uno di essi più spiritoso degli altri disse per gioco: Ecco per noi risorta Arcadia*

Their first formal session took place in the Franciscan friary of San Pietro in Montorio on the Janiculum overlooking the Vatican. The church and grounds of the friary house Bramante’s *Tempietto* (1502), a number of ceiling frescoes by Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) and, at the time, Raphael’s last painting, *The Transfiguration* (1520), since moved to the Pinacoteca Vaticana. As the setting for their inaugural meeting clearly suggests, in this resurrection of Arcadia, the Italian Renaissance would figure as prominently as the aesthetic achievements of classical Greece and Rome.

The name chosen by the nascent academy deliberately recalls the eponymous prosimetrum pastoral (1504) of Jacopo Sannazaro (1458-1530), whose influence reverberated throughout the Sixteenth Century — one thinks immediately of Sidney and Shakespeare — and continued well into our poet’s time. Since Milton’s own *Arcades* imagines the storied land of pastoral poets transported from a utopian
Peloponnese to Harefield in Middlesex, residence of the septuagenarian Countess Dowager of Derby, a decidedly Roman Arcadia germinating from the artistic retinue surrounding a Scandinavian queen at the Palazzo Farnese seems somewhat less far-fetched. At any rate, the members of the Pontifical Arcadia were designated *pastori*. Padre Crescimbeni himself reports that, by 1711, their membership had swollen to 1,300 shepherds!\(^{260}\) Evidently, the Arcadia had become quite the vogue. Indeed, the academy would quickly develop into a robust literary and artistic movement vigorously advocating good taste in Italian letters, presumably in contradistinction to the poor taste of the Italian Baroque and the *marinisti*. The principal Italian controversialists in the Orsi-Bouhours polemic were all Arcadians, and subsequent initiatives to recover Italian preeminence in the literature of European vernacular languages likewise featured Arcadian shepherds prominently.

While still in his twenties, Rolli distinguished himself in literary and dramatic circles in Rome editing collections of Italian *petrarchisti*, publishing his own *Sacrificio a Venere* (1714), and adapting the works of others for the stage. In the latter capacity, his 1715 reworking of the *Astarto* of Apostolo Zeno (1668-1750) brought Rolli to the attention of Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington and Cork (1672-1750), then on his Grand Tour, who arranged for the young Italian to return with him to London. Lord Burlington, a passionate patron of Italian arts, renewed English interest in Palladian architecture with his 1718 modifications to Burlington House on Picadilly in Mayfair, and the 1729 completion of the new Chiswick House in West London, which he himself designed with the assistance of William Kent (1685-1748), who completed the gardens. In
the course of his continental journey, Rolli and Burlington traveled with William Dalrymple (1678-1744), and stayed in Paris with his brother, John Dalrymple, Earl of Stair (1673-1747), then British ambassador to the Bourbon monarch. Thus, Rolli arrived London in 1716, already very well-connected, and stayed until 1747.

During his three decades in England, Rolli taught Italian in the royal household, translated Italian works into English, produced Italian melodramas for the English stage, edited critical editions of Italian poets for publication in Britain, and became an Italian fellow, by no means unique, of the Royal Society. Dorris notes that “his Rime went through ten editions in England and Italy.” Nor did he abandon contacts in Italy, as we know, for example, from his lively correspondence with the Modenese diplomat, Giuseppe Riva (1685?-1737), who had once been assigned to London by the Rinaldo d’Este (1655-1737) and may first have met Rolli there. Apart from the well-received libretti for Händel, the Italian poet’s industry, composition and learning garnered for him popular accolade, scholarly respect and aristocratic patronage. Alexander Pope (1688-1744) even assigns him a not unflattering couplet in The Dunciad: “Rolli the feather to his ear conveys,/Then his nice taste directs our operas.”

Rolli came of age in the intellectual and literary circles of Rome in the aftermath of the Bouhours polemic, just as the influence of Vico and Muratori had begun to impact Italian rhetoric and poetics. During Rolli’s London years, however, Voltaire opens a new front in the longstanding Franco-Italian quarrel. In his Essay upon the Epick Poetry of the European Nations, from Homer down to Milton (1727), first written and published in English to accompany a subscription publication of his own epic
poem, *La Henriade* (1723), Voltaire offers an equivocal assessment of Tasso, vacillating between praise and censure. He also commends our poet, though not unreservedly. Nonetheless, in the course of preparing a substantially revised version of the same work in French, *Essai sur la poésie épique* (1733), the philosophe evidently changes his mind on the subject of *Paradise Lost* and further denigrates Tasso. David Williams summarizes the differences in the two versions of the work.

What is most immediately evident, however, is the general change of emphasis in the French version of the essay to Milton’s defects. [...] The outline of Milton’s travels in Italy and the reference to the possible influence of Andreini follow that of the English original quite closely... Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, ‘the noblest Work which human Imagination hath ever attempted’ *(Essay 104)* now becomes ‘un ouvrage plus singulier que naturel, plus plein d’imagination que de grâces, et d’hardiesse que de choix, dont le sujet est tout idéal, et qui semble n’être pas fait pour l’homme’ *(Essai 360).*

In any case, the longest commentary of Voltaire’s work in both the English and the French versions focuses upon Milton, and after him, Tasso. Ironically, in the five-year incubation of his critical account of epic poetry, Voltaire has done more to enlist Milton in the service of Italian literature than the whole of the Arcadia during the Bouhours phase of ongoing, multi-generational French opprobrium.

Voltaire’s tactic throughout is to damn with faint praise or expressly to trivialize indispensable elements of the epic poetry of Tasso and Milton. Without any mention of Dante, Milton’s most obvious source, Voltaire impugns the nature of Italian influence upon our poet by identifying his inspiration for *Paradise Lost* as the sensational and
sentimental *L’Adamo* (1613) of Florentine playwright, Giovan Battista Andreini (1576-1654). Voltaire alleges that Milton would have seen it while traveling in Italy. The ever Arcadian Rolli rises to the occasion presented by impenitent French chauvinism. As Rolli “saw in Milton the heir to the glorious epic tradition of Trissino and Tasso,” his strategy in addressing Voltaire has two parts. Firstly he refutes him on the matters of Tasso and Milton in an English essay, *Remarks upon Voltaire’s Essay on the Epick Poetry of the European Nations* (1728). Then, a year later, he publishes an Italian translation of the first six books of *Paradise Lost*.

Robertson reports that it “was, in fact, the Italians rather than the French who were the pioneers of a true critical appreciation of Milton on the continent,” and we have Rolli to thank for that. In 1729, a year after his *Remarks upon Voltaire*, he released an Italian translation of the first six books of *Paradise Lost*. Though philosopher Lorenzo Magalotti (1637-1712), classicist Anton Maria Salvini (1653-1729), and scientist-cleric Antonio Schinella Conti (1677-1749), had all began to translate the epic poem into Italian before him, none completed the task until Rolli. In 1742, Rolli arranged for his translations of both the great epic and Joseph Addison’s critical essay on Milton (1711) from *The Spectator* to be published in Verona. Subsequent editions of the Italian *Paradise Lost* would aggregate a translation of his response to Voltaire as well. Thus, Italians had at their disposal in a single volume *Il paradiso perduto* and Rolli’s *Risposta a Monsieur Voltaire, Poeta Epico e Tragico Francese*.

The 1742 edition also included Rolli’s *Vita di Giovanni Milton*, which has served as his introduction to the 1736 edition printed in London. In the *Vita*, Rolli
discusses the Italian sojourn at length, details the English epicist’s dependence upon Italian sources in matters of style and theme, and specifically addresses the sonetti and the canzone, commending them to Italian readers. Rolli goes so far as to reproduce Sonnet VI Giovane piano, e semplicetto amante in its entirety with this commentary:

E veramente egli molto intendeva la Lingua toscana e i nostri Poeti, sino al comporvi alcuni Sonetti, il più leggiadro dei quali mi sembra questo [And truly he very much understood the Tuscan language and our Poets, to the point of composing some sonnets, the most graceful of which seems to me this one].

Exactly as his earlier Remarks upon Voltaire had reasserted before the Royal Society the debt of European vernacular literatures to Italian eloquence, so in 1742, Rolli’s Vita di Giovanni Milton placed the English italophile poet before the Italian academies, specifically the Accademia degli Intronati of Siena, the Accademia Fiorentina — into which Milton’s Svoagliati and Apatisti had by then been absorbed — and the Arcadia. In effect, Rolli commends our poet to the whole of Italy’s literary and intellectual élite as one of their own. Milton is an English vernacular epicist, yes, but he is also a poet of the volgare, deeply indebted to the long tradition of Italian eloquence and particularly well-schooled in the kind of Cinquecento petrarchismo championed by Arcadians. His sonetti in Italian demonstrate that this is so. As with Tasso and noblest poets of Italy, scurrilous French smart-alecks fling scorn upon the poet of Il paradiso perduto. They would. His greatest English works reflect three centuries of Italian vernacular influence shaping the thought and eloquence of other peoples. Rolli’s publication of Il paradiso perduto offers the Italian academy a way of looking beyond its defensive and reactive gestures at the positive and significant impact that their literary tradition exercises upon European letters.
Defensor anglicanorum

Since subsequent critics in both England and Italy are profoundly aware of his judgments and often argue against his positions, Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) marks our next point of departure. In his commentary on Milton’s *volgare*, Dr Johnson says “Of the Italian, I cannot pretend to speak as a critic; but I have heard them commended by a man well qualified to decide their merit.” Johnson here refers to his friend and correspondent, Giuseppe Marcantonio Baretti (1719-1789), a Piemontese adventurer, literary critic, translator, poet, polemicist, lexicographer, anglophile, secretary of the Royal Academy of Arts and defendant in the salacious 1769 murder trial of Evan Morgan. Boswell discusses the infamous episode at length and supposes that it marked the only occasion on which Johnson had ever been called upon to testify in a capital case. The *Sessional Reports* of the Old Bailey give a verbatim of Dr Johnson’s testimony:

[Baretti] is a man of literature, a very studious man, a man of great diligence. I have no reason to think he was ever disordered with liquor in his life. A man that I never knew otherwise than peaceable, and a man that I take to be rather timorous.

The case was heard by the magistrate, Sir John Fielding (1721-1780), Henry Fielding’s (1707-1754) brother. Baretti, colorful as he was, nonetheless received high praise for his erudition and character from lettered men in England, and not only from Johnson. Among others, Edmund Burke (1729-1797), Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) and David Garrick (1717-1779) all testified at his trial in affirmation of his scholarly temperament and habitually decorous behavior. A foreigner himself, he had the right to ask for a jury composed of at least half foreigners. Even so, Baretti insisted upon an all English jury,
declaring his absolute confidence in the Common Law of England and the commonsense of Englishmen. At the Old Bailey, in Boswell’s account, Dr Johnson “gave his evidence in a slow deliberate and distinct manner, which was uncommonly impressive. It is well known that Mr Baretti was acquitted”\(^{275}\) of both murder and manslaughter on the grounds of legitimate self-defense.

By the time of his arrival in England in 1751, Baretti was already well known in literary circles in Italy. He had begun to distinguish himself by producing introductions to the works of French tragedian Pierre Corneille (1606-1684), Milton’s contemporary and one of Boileau’s favorites. Baretti’s literary prefaces to the Italian translations of French literature of the age evince a distinct antipathy toward Voltaire (1694-1778) and establish his reputation among Italian intellectuals as an international controversialist arguing incessantly in defense of Italian vernacular letters. In the context of these early works, Baretti first develops his credentials as a scholar of Dante, whose works will then figure prominently in his subsequent *A History of the Italian Tongue* (1757), published in English by London stationers.

Formerly a devoted pupil of Girolamo Tagliazucchi (1674-1751), an Eighteenth Century champion of Petrarchan pastiche,\(^{276}\) Baretti founded *La frusta letteraria* [The Literary Whip] in 1763. Through the journal, which initially he published pseudonymously in Venice, Baretti sustained a number of ongoing polemical dialogues with, among others, Giuseppe Bartoli (1717-1788), Tagliazucchi’s successor in the chair of classical languages and eloquence at the University in Turin. In the *frusta letteraria*, Baretti often takes on the æsthetics of the Roman Accademia degli Arcadi, to which
Rolli had belonged. Baretti’s critique of the Roman Arcadia isn’t a reaction to its classicism *per se* — though his opponents are indeed referred to as *classicisti* — nor to their concurrence with the Cinquecento *petrarchisti* whom Milton emulated. By his time, the ideals of the Arcadia — once so prominent in the Franco-Italian controversy against positions articulated by Voltaire — had come more closely to resemble the rationalism of the French *République des Lettres* movement, of which Rousseau, Montesquieu and Voltaire, the very target of Baretti’s long-standing reproof, were the more celebrated figures.

Two features of Baretti’s literary background ought to be taken into account with regard to his commendation of Milton’s Italian verse. Firstly, Baretti considers the French translations of Dante to be grossly inferior in quality owing, he claims, to a poor grasp of the Italian language on the part of French intellectuals. Secondly, Baretti had already made a name for himself in Italy by taking Voltaire and other French critics to task for their generally condescending attitude toward Italian vernacular letters. Thus, Baretti’s spirited defense of Italian letters against the ignorant attacks of the French anticipates the English reaction to Voltaire’s famous vituperation of Shakespeare before the *Académie française* in 1776. By then, however, Baretti had already established himself permanently London and written *A Dissertation upon the Italian poetry in which are interspersed some remarks on Mr Voltaire’s ‘Essay on Epic poets’* (1753). In his argument against Voltaire, Baretti writes

Milton understood the Italian authors so well and was so fond of Dante in particular, that he wrote some Italian verses, yet extant, in the style of that epic poet: a thing not only extremely difficult for a foreigner, but also for an Italian,
since to understand Dante perfectly we are obliged to study him in the schools and Universities with almost as much labour as we do Virgil. If then Milton was so much master of Dante’s style that he could write verses in his manner, and if the thoughts and images of both the poems have a great resemblance to each other, as the reader may see by the quotations I have given; if the very subjects and titles are alike, is it not more reasonable and probable to say that Milton took the first hint of his Paradise Lost from a noble and famous epic poet, than from a mean ridiculous comedian?277

This commendation of Milton’s talent for imitating the style of Dante at once lauds the English poet and anchors him to the foundational achievements of Italian literature. For English and Italian letters, French disdain fuels more than spirited defense. It offers a captivating and friendly platform for critical inquiry into the impact of Italian letters upon English literary production, the polar opposite of Italian literature’s relationship with French theory and taste.

As the outcome of his trial confirmed his opinion that England was the most noble and judicious realm of Europe, Baretti gleefully took on the defense of Shakespeare in his Discours sur Shakespeare et sur Monsieur de Voltaire (1777), a literary work which further endeared him to Johnson and the English public. The irony that Voltaire’s shrill abuse of Shakespeare found anyone at all to listen merely indicates, in Baretti’s view, that the French have no sophisticated appreciation of the English dramatist, but are swayed against him primarily by execrable French translations such as the adaptation of Hamlet produced by Jean-François Ducis (1733-1816) in 1769. On account of their only slight acquaintance with modern languages other than French,
France really knows nothing of the Bard’s consummate verse. Voltaire, however, spent three years in England (1726-1729), whence he produced the immensely flattering *Lettres philosophiques sur les anglais* (1733), and his contemporaries in Great Britain praised his English. Moreover, he had presumably enjoyed English theater and had found Shakespeare captivating. So, Baretti argues, Voltaire ought to have known better, but his dogmatic insistence that all drama observe the Aristotelian unities had blinded him to Shakespeare’s virtues. In this reply to Voltaire, Baretti revisits his earlier contention that the facile rejection of Dante among French *philosophes* exhibits their shoddy philological foundation and leads now to the superficial dismissal of yet another eminently worthy vernacular poet who wrote in a language other than French.

John Milton, on the other hand, unlike the French contemporaries of Johnson and Baretti, was exceptionally good at languages, especially Italian. He was so good, in fact, that he could even compose poetry in the exemplary vernacular of Dante and Petrarch. Thanks as well to the enormous success and wide circulation of the *Defensio pro populo anglico* (1651) and its sequels, Milton was known throughout humanist circles in Europe as an unapologetic italophile who offers an animated recommendation of the intellectual life of Italian academies and the quality of their letters.

Whether Baretti knew it then or not, Milton was a natural ally of his own earlier literary work in *La frusta letteraria* and in his polemics against the French. Rolli’s translation had already seen the light of day and, elsewhere in Italian letters, the academies held Milton in high regard. Certainly the Inquisition was aware of Milton in that same period.278 By the time Baretti had taken up residence in London, among
whose lettered classes he won so much acclaim, multiple lives of Milton and multiple editions of the great poet’s epic and occasional verse, as well as his prose, had been published. Antiquarian and curmudgeon Anthony Wood (1632-1695), for example, had discussed Milton at length in his *Athenæ Oxonienses* (1691-92). Milton’s nephew, Edward Phillips (1630-1696), had released both his edition and translation of *The Letters of State, written by Mr John Milton* and *The life of Mr John Milton* in 1694. The Whig radical and philosophical empiricist, John Toland (1670-1722), had written his *Life of John Milton* (1698) and included in that edition his own essay *Amyntor; or a Defense of Milton’s Life*, that is, a paean to Milton’s radicalism. Though they are known primarily as painters, both Jonathan Richardson’s, the elder (1667-1745) and the younger (1694-1771), collaborated on the volume *Explanatory Notes, &c. on Paradise Lost* (1734). Whig Historian Thomas Birch (1705-1766) edited *Milton’s Prose Works* in 1738. Celebrated Biblicist, Bishop of Bristol and Dean of Saint Paul’s in London, Thomas Newton (1704-1782) produced an edition of *Milton’s Poems* in which he added the famous title, *On His Blindness* to Sonnet XIX and a variorum to *Paradise Lost* (1749-1752). In any case, by the time Johnson will have consulted him on the matter of our poet’s Italian verse,\(^{279}\) Baretti was familiar enough with the Miltonic corpus to have undertaken a systematic rebuttal of Voltaire on the question of Italian dramatic sources for *Paradise Lost*.\(^{280}\) With palpable relish, then, Baretti took upon himself the Miltonic mantle of *defensor Anglicorum* against spurious French detractions.
The Risorgimento 1859–1894

In the Victorian age, Italian nationalism became the cause célèbre of Whiggish intellectuals and literati in Great Britain. The reasons for this phenomenon are complex and the historical material dense, but Harry Rudman’s 1940 account of it still holds:

the contemporaneous struggles of the Italians against their oppressors and the personal magnetism of exiles like Mazzini were sources of superb literary material. It is therefore not astonishing that the Risorgimento, the “resurrection” of Italian nationalism from 1815 to 1870 (when Rome at long last became again the capital of Italy), should be reflected in the work of a great many British writers. Of those who readily occur to one’s mind, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, Thomas Moore, Landor, Hazlitt, Clough, Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, Arnold, Meredith, and Swinburne, are only a few; and pamphlets, novels, poems, plays, travel accounts, etc., are numerous indeed [...] but the important rôles can be played only by the leaders of the Italian national revival, Mazzini, Cavour, and Garibaldi, the currents of whose lives mingled with the mighty torrent of English life and letters. One could even maintain, and with more than a show of reason, that Italian exiles like Foscolo and Mazzini were really English literary figures. In any case, as Bertrand Russell once remarked, to the nineteenth century the patriot of an oppressed country was as attractive as the idealized noble savage had been to the eighteenth.\(^\text{281}\)

Though he hasn’t made the connection himself, I would add that, consistent with Rudman’s analysis, the physical proximity of the ruins of ancient Rome to the struggles of the modern people, perhaps as much as any other factor, condition the favorable reception of Italian nationalism among Victorians who — believing themselves to have
surpassed Roman achievements in culture, commerce and empire — find in the Italian patriot a kind of modern Lucius Junius Brutus primed to overthrow that latter-day Tarquin, the pope, in order to re-establish the Republic. While Rudman concentrates his attention primarily on Victorian poets and novelists, his comments are just as apropos of literary critics and historians, including, as we shall see, Milton’s foremost biographer of the period, David Mather Masson (1822-1907). As the first discernible node of contact between Milton criticism and the Risorgimento appears in a 1836 publication, however, Antonio Panizzi represents the terminus a quo of this section on the critical reception of Milton’s Italian verse.

An Emilian from Brescello, Antonio Genesio Maria Panizzi (1797-1879), later Sir Anthony Panizzi KCB, fled Italy in 1822, ostensibly to evade arrest for revolutionary activities. At the time, the Habsburg Duke of Modena, Francesco IV Giuseppe (1779-1846), ruled Reggio nell’Emilia with an iron fist, brutally suppressing any republican sentiment he could find. Panizzi came to England the following year. Despite difficult circumstances in Liverpool, where he taught Italian, Panizzi cultivated the good will and gratitude of Henry Brougham (1778-1868), the 1st Baron Brougham and Vaux, a Whig abolitionist soon to become Lord Chancellor of Great Britain. In that post, Brougham secured a professorship in Italian for Panizzi at University College London, and later a position in the library of the British Museum, where Panizzi rose to the directorship in 1856. Connected both to Lord Palmerston and to Gladstone, Panizzi proved useful to Cavour, Mazzini and Garibaldi as various phases of their respective revolutionary and nation-building careers intersected with Britain and British interests.
After having been knighted by Queen Victoria, Cavour offered Sir Anthony a position as a Senator in Italy, though he declined to leave England. Ironically, Panizzi may have been much more effective in the Risorgimento cause as librarian in London than ever he would have been among the ranks of the Carbonari in Emilia-Romagna.

From 1830 to 1835, Panizzi, who had received his laurea from the Università di Parma, prepared editions of Boiardo’s Orlando innamorato, Boiardo’s minor poems, and Ariosto’s Orlando furioso for publication in Italian for the British market. By the 1830s, of course, Italy was an obligatory destination for upper-class Englishmen, but within a decade, rail travel would begin to replace the Grand Tour with Cook’s Tours, making the peninsula increasingly accessible to the British middle-class. As our poet anticipated important elements of the Englishman’s finishing in Italy, Milton’s Italian sojourn and his poetry in volgare thus figure even more prominently in the scholarly and popular discussion of his work and legacy. We cannot underscore how profoundly the advent of Nineteenth Century British tourism accelerated Whiggish doubts about the Concert of Europe, cast an irresistibly Romantic light on the figure of the Italian patriot, and brought the Risorgimento to the attention of the British intellectual élite. In 1836, at the invitation of the Reverend John Mitford (1781-1859), editor of a recently issued three-volume edition of the poetry of Milton (1832), Sir Anthony modernized the orthography of Milton’s Italian poems and annotated them for publication in The Gentleman’s Magazine. The editor’s note reads as follows:

We hope to gratify the admirers of Milton, by presenting to them the Italian sonnets, for the first time printed with correctness. The editions of Todd,
Newton, and others, have followed the original without alteration or remark. We are indebted to an eminent Italian scholar for his kind assistance and authority. As we shall see in the updated variorum of the appendix, questions of orthography and correctness are by no means easy to adjudicate. To his credit, Panizzi shows remarkable restraint, though Keightley will subject him to mild chastisement for it.

Panizzi’s collaborator, Mitford, discusses Milton’s Italian sojourn at length in his Life of Milton, written as an introduction to the first installment of the three-volume Aldine edition published by William Pickering. The Italian verse appears in the third volume, with the annotations of the Reverend Henry John Todd (1763-1845), whose own six-volume edition of the complete poetry of Milton from 1801 had gone into its third printing as recently as 1826. Astonishingly, there would be two more printings of the Todd edition before Masson’s magnum opus at last eclipses the clergyman. Less than four years after having published the Italian verse the first time in a three-volume edition, Mitford publishes it again with Panizzi, separately, in The Gentleman’s Magazine, recently acquired by Pickering. Why so much interest in Milton’s Italian? To my knowledge, Mitford’s consultation of Panizzi constitutes the first point of intersection between Milton’s Italian poetry and the nexus of British literary and national interests that intertwine with the Risorgimento. It also marks the first publication of the Italian verse as a self-contained, freestanding sonnet sequence.

Polyglot Thomas Keightley (1789-1872) was born to the Ascendancy in Ireland, He received his university education at Trinity College Dublin, but by 1824 had removed himself to London where he began a successful career of historical scholarship, literary criticism and journalism. An early literary collaboration with
Thomas Crofton Croker (1798-1854) resulted in the publication of *Fairy Legends of South Ireland* (1825). Later work in the genre of folklore would bring him favorably to the attention of Jacob Grimm (1785-1863). Keightley’s 1855 volume on Milton’s life, opinions and writings was highly regarded, and the notes in his subsequent two-volume 1859 edition of Milton’s poems were considered excellent in his day and for generations to come. He treats the Italian poetry in both works.

Keightley knows the Italian language well and offers a perspicacious critique of Milton’s Italian. Moreover, I should say that I certainly commend the transparency of his method. Firstly, he summarizes Dr Johnson and Baretti. Thereafter, however, we find Keightley quite at variance with both of them.

... it always struck us in reading these poems, that they had the fault common and almost inevitable to modern Latin poetry, namely, that of confounding the language and style of different periods; that, in fact, though written in the middle of the seventeenth century, they presented forms peculiar to Dante and the poets of the fourteenth century. We therefore marked the passages in which we thought we had discerned this fault, and then submitted them to the criticism of our friend, the late Gabriele Rossetti, himself a poet of a high order, and inferior to none in the critical knowledge of the poetry of his native language. In every instance our conjectures were right. In our notes on these poems we have given our friend’s observations: his concluding remark is as follows: “... *lo scrivere in lingua straniera è stato per Milton un’audacia di cui il solo successo potrebbe giustificarlo; ma che sventuratamente non è così*” [writing in a foreign tongue was for Milton an audacity that only a favorable outcome could have justified; but which unfortunately is not the case].289
Keightley here raises the spectre of Milton’s conspicuously old-fashioned, artificial, and therefore faulty, use of Cinquecento *pertrarchismo* by comparing it to the “almost inevitable” anachronisms of neo-Latin literature. Almost inevitable? What, we may ask, is the speech of Cicero and Vergil, Horace and Quintilian in the second millennium of the common era if not a consciously and deliberately anachronistic use of a written language that no one speaks as his native tongue? What Keightley calls the “confounding [of] the language and style of different periods” is the whole point of Latin learning in the period in which Milton learned his Latin.

Keightley is no dullard, but his stance on neo-Latin poetics represents the irreversible metastasis of discouragement we see already infecting Petrarch himself, who is said to have abandoned his work on the ambitious epic poem *Africa* precisely because he could no longer imagine achieving in Latin what Dante had accomplished in the *volgare*. In the view of Keightley and his friend, Rossetti, the audacity of composing in any other language than that of native fluency requires absolute success, or else it should not be dared. We have reason, therefore, to be grateful that fear of interlingual contagion never contaminated Maimonides, Erasmus, More, Della Casa, Thomas Mathias, Louisa Grace, Joseph Conrad, Leo Tolstoy, Vladimir Nabokov, Anna Akhmatova, Milan Kundera, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, Sholem Aleichem, Scholem Asch, Jorge Luis Borges, Jack Kerouac, Breandán Ó Beacháin, Flann O’Brien, Samuel Beckett, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, J. M. Coetzee, Buchi Emecheta, nor Kazuo Ishiguro, else they might not have dared. Milton, as we have seen, is a poet who dares.
The gentleman whom Keightley consulted on the matter of Milton’s Italian, and whose opinion coincides precisely with his own, was himself an Abruzzese poet from Vasto on the Adriatic seacoast. Compromised by a failed revolution led by Carbonari (c. 1800-1831), a loose network of *sub rosa* societies agitating for Italian unification, Gabriele Pasquale Giuseppe Rossetti (1783-1854) fled his homeland in 1820 never again to return. Italian historiography describes his unification politics as neo-Ghibelline, that is, anti-papal. In any case, he embraced the Church of England upon his marriage to Frances Polidori (1800-1886), to whose older brother, John William Polidori, we owe *The Vampyre* (1819). Rossetti’s verse and his prose, especially his studies of Dante, show all the intense lyrical subjectivity, the mawkish Medievalism, the melancholy sentiment, the Arcadian naturalism and the strident reaction to neo-Classicism that we have come to expect of Romanticism in the vein of Fichte, Schlegel and Hölderlin. From 1825 until his retirement in 1847, he taught Italian literature at King’s College London. We know him best as the father of English poets Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) and Christina Rossetti (1830-1894), and the literary and art critic, William Michael Rossetti (1829-1919). Christina, whose mother was born in England to an Italian emigré father, also produced notable Italian verse, though it is not clear to me whether we would classify her as a heritage speaker or someone defiantly possessed of the audacity to write in a foreign tongue. The elder Rossetti’s reported commentary on Milton makes an appearance in both of the Keightley critical works and so too does his *Sturm und Drang*.

Keightley and Rossetti, polyglots themselves, are not alone in their skeptical view of multilingual literary production, but it seems to me that the attitude they
exhibit grows out of anxieties incubated in the Romantic paradigm of the homeland. An anecdote of Ivan Turgenev (1818-1883), I think, best captures their predicament.

J. W. Cross, out in the woods [in Cambridgeshire] with Turgenev, enquired if any of his works were first composed in French. ‘You have never written a book or you would not have asked that question,’ answered the other; ‘a man can only write his best in his own language. When I write in Russian I am free, I run without encumbrance; when I write in French, I have restraint, I have boots on and advance more slowly; when I write in English I have tight boots on.’

History remembers John Walter Cross (1840-1924) as the husband of George Eliot (1819-1880), twenty years his senior. Eliot reviewed Keightley’s biography of Milton and engaged deeply with the poet of Paradise Lost in Romola (1863), Middlemarch (1872), Felix Holt, the Radical (1866) and Daniel Deronda (1876). On his honeymoon with Eliot in Venice, Cross jumped from the balcony of their hotel into the Grand Canal. It is still a matter of some speculation as to why. At any rate, either inspired or irritated by the Russian’s comment, Cross would subsequently write two books himself, both in his native English, one on Dante and one on his wife, who died in December of 1880. This reported conversation with the author of Fathers and Sons (1862), then, would have taken place roughly half-way through Cross’ seven months of marital bliss.

Turgenev here speaks not so much to Cross as to his own fellow countrymen, taking pains to underscore his essential and incorruptible Russian identity. At the time, Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy in particular could find nothing but fault with him for having abandoned Russia to live in France. Rossetti, too, dwelt in awkward exile, publishing Italian poetry in London at his own expense in order to distribute it in the land to which
he would never himself return. Keightley, who made his first forays into literary criticism in England by exploiting the Irish folklore he learned as a child, is likewise alienated from the place of his birth and education. Thus, Keightley, Rossetti and Turgenev each finds himself abroad, living as an expatriot while Ireland, Italy and Russia struggle to define themselves as modern nation states. For them, multilingualism of the kind displayed so trivially by Renaissance polymaths like Milton must of necessity yield to the infinitely greater demands of forging a national identity. The poetic urgency of Volksgemeinschaft leaves no place for exasperating trifles like Milton’s essays into Italian love poetry. For above all, a poet must be able to run “without encumbrance,” that is, to write in the language of his people. But despite the discomfort of Turgenev’s tight boots, one can almost discern the Commonwealth polemicist eulogizing that skillful and venerable old cobbler, Master Rhetorick, who at once preserves our surety of step, safeguards our feet from injury and filth, and adorns our stride with every decorous practicality.

Notice that, in order to critique Milton’s Italian poetry, both Dr Johnson and Thomas Keightley have considered it proper to avail themselves of the judgment of native speakers, in this case, Baretti and Rossetti, though the opinions generated from these sources could hardly be less harmonious. Both are born in Italy; both are lettered; both are poets. To what then do we owe the conspicuous disparity of their views on the quality of Milton’s Italian? In the sixty-four years that intervene between their respective births, the æsthetics of Romanticism, the social values of the French Revolution and the politics of the Risorgimento all play a crucial role, yes, but they are
only part of the drama. The two Italian denizens of London also hold fundamentally contrastive views on the disciplinary boundaries of rhetoric. To illustrate, let us return, for a moment, to Dr Johnson whose discussion of Milton’s neo-Latin efforts presents a marked opposition to Keightley. Immediately following the commendation of Milton’s Italian by Baretti, Johnson writes:

[Milton’s] Latin pieces are lusciously elegant, but the delight they afford is rather by the exquisite imitation of the ancient writers, by the purity of the diction, and the harmony of the numbers, than by any power of invention or vigor of sentiment.397

Even as Keightley objects to exactly what Johnson finds delightful in Milton’s Latin, so I believe Rossetti disapproves of what Baretti commends in his Italian, namely the “exquisite imitation” of model poets, in this case Dante, Petrarch, Della Casa, Varchi and Tasso. Nor can we regard this kind of studied emulation as in any way peculiar to Milton. Rhetorical method in Renaissance education begins with progymnasmata, in effect, practice in imitation, and Milton was better at these exercises than most. That his efforts in Italian lack “any power of invention or vigor of sentiment” is simply to their benefit for Neoclassical critics like Johnson and Baretti, and to their detriment for Romantics like Keightley and Rossetti. Nonetheless, Milton’s Italian verse produces a different rhetorical effect in Italy than in London, as the criticism of Eugenio Camerini, a contemporary of Keightley and Rossetti, more clearly reveals.
A Travesty of Italian Art

Salomone Eugenio Camerini (1811-1875), having already pursued the study of law in Naples and Pisa, began his work in literary criticism in Florence with analyses of Petrarch (1837) and the reissue of editions of minor Cinquecento polymaths (1834-1839). The sudden death of two of his brothers interrupted his incipient career in journalism and compelled him to return to his parents’ home in Ancona in order to manage his father’s precarious commercial venture in printing. After the definitive failure of the family business in 1848, Camerini moved back to Florence to rededicate himself to literary criticism and political journalism.298

Among other literary activities, Camerini wrote for the short-lived *Il Nazionale* (1848-1850), a political and literary daily published in Florence under the editorial direction of Celestino Bianchi (1817-1885). These were heady days, full of revolutionary and counter-revolutionary disturbances, the repercussions from which punctuated every eardrum in the Grand Duchy. Bianchi supported the center-left triumvirate of Mazzoni, Montanelli and Guerrazzi to whom Leopoldo II (1797-1870), the Habsburg Grand Duke, had reluctantly handed over the governance of Tuscany in 1848. They, in turn, proclaimed a Tuscan Republic early in 1849, but hotly debated whether to attempt political union with Mazzini’s Roman Republic.299 Ultimately they rejected the idea, fearing it would provoke an armed Austrian incursion, which in any case turned out to have been inevitable once Vienna recovered from its own upheavals. By mid-summer 1849, imperial troops occupied Florence and restored the Grand Duke, who then took the precaution of suppressing *Il Nazionale* in 1850 and removing Bianchi from his
university chair. As Metternich’s protégé and replacement, Prince Felix of Schwarzenberg (1800-1852), continued to garrison Austrian infantry in the Tuscan hills until 1855, Camerini and like-minded colleagues, including Carlo Collodi (1826-1890), thought it advisable to remove themselves to Turin.

Camerini’s literary criticism and his Risorgimento political commitments go hand in hand. Indeed, the masthead of Il Nazionale proclaimed itself *Periodico politico e letterario*, which suggests the exactly kind of alliance between literature and polemics that Milton forged in his time. Until 1859, Camerini published his literary studies, including the essay on Milton, in Piedmont through the medium of a weekly literary column in Il Crepuscolo (1850-1859). Caught up as he was in the revolutionary project of Italian unification, we might have guessed that Camerini’s interest in Milton would focus primarily on *Paradise Lost*, for what other epic poem in a European vernacular has such enormous consequences for the mission of building a modern nation? But first, Camerini has to establish Milton’s Italian credentials and, providentially, his learned italophile subject lends himself quite readily to the task.

Above all, Camerini insists upon Milton’s fundamental debt to the poet of the Commedia and the Englishman’s further dependence upon three centuries of Italian vernacular poetics. His point is well taken, but, as we shall see, Milton himself quickly becomes a mere touchstone for Camerini’s larger and primarily nationalistic concerns. At this juncture, it will be well to quote the essay, *Milton e l’Italia*, at length.

*Il Milton non si nutrì solo di Dante, ma di tutti i poeti italiani, e l’essersi scontrato ad un’età in cui le nostre lettere volgevano al basso e la stella del Marini signoreggiava, non lo fece più tiepido alla ammirazione de’ nostri. Il*
Marini non era che un angelo caduto; traviando l’arte italiana, l’aveva più violentata che corrotta. La crescente perversione della politica e degli studi, più che la imitazione de’ vizi di lui, precipitò la rovina della nostra letteratura; senz’aché a Firenze ed a Roma, città dove il Milton si trattenne più lungamente, fioriva ancora il gusto della schietta eleganza e della sottile erudizione; e la scuola del Galileo dava alle lettere una nuova sostanza, che non poteva supplire veramente alla mancata forza dei principi politici e morali e della vita nazionale, ma bene manteneva l’intelligenza eretta verso il cielo, o confortata della famigliarità coi prodigi della natura. [Milton was nourished not only by Dante, but by all the Italian poets, and though he stumbled upon an age when our letters were spiraling downwards even as the star of Marini reigned above, this did not dampen his enthusiasm for our own. Marini was nothing less than a fallen angel; a travesty of Italian art, which he more defiled than corrupted. The increasing perversion of politics and the intellectual life, even more than the imitation of his vices, precipitated the ruin of our literature, though in Florence and Rome, cities where Milton spent the greater part of his time, there flourished yet a taste for genuine elegance and subtle erudition; and the school of Galileo gave our letters a new substance, which though it could not completely resupply the strength that political and moral principles and the life of the nation lacked, yet could it keep our knowledge oriented toward the heavens, or at least comforted by familiarity with the wonders of nature.]

Milton, nourished by Italian verse, gives us the great epic Paradise Lost, in which we see a star burning so brightly that it consumes everything around it. And in another fallen angel — Giambattista Marino (1569-1625) — we may more clearly perceive the
loss of our own literary *paradiso* through the perversion of Italian politics and culture. Thus have Milton’s *opera* become the springboard from which Camerini launches into a disquisition on the intimate association between Risorgimento politics and poetics. All of a sudden, it becomes clear that, as the title of the essay had boldly proclaimed from the very beginning, Camerini’s real interest lies not so much in Milton’s experiences of Italy, nor even in the legacy of Italian art exemplified in Milton’s epic poetry, but rather in Italy herself, the lost paradise of humanist civilization. And so, as Camerini would have it, the patriot and Italia, with Galileo thir guide: hand in hand with wand’ring steps and slow, through Eden take thir solitarie way.

Honestly, with these infinitely more grand cultural and political points to make, it’s a wonder that Camerini even bothers with the slender *sonetti* and the scant *canzone*. But that he does take time to address Milton’s minor excursions into the *volgare* — more than what he actually says about them — suggests something very important about what it means to this Risorgimento scholar that the England’s greatest epic poet has produced an unambiguously Italian *petrarchismo*. For Camerini, Italian verse invests Milton with the authority to speak, even from the grave, on the urgent moral challenges of building a new peninsular nation out of the birthright of her native vernacular eloquence.

Camerini has familiarized himself with all the commonly known details of Milton’s sojourn in Florence: the length of his stay, his association with the academy of Jacopo Gaddi, his friendship with Carlo Dati and Antonio Francini and, importantly, their encomia. Following the early view that Milton’s Italian poetry belongs to the
period of his sojourn in Italy, Camerini speculates that Milton may have met a particular woman in Florence and that the *canzone* would then refer to his infatuation with her. He calls the poem “non al tutto irreprehensibile” [not at all deplorable]. The main point that Camerini wants to make, however, is simply that Milton writes “nella dolce nostra favella” [in our sweet speech]. Since Camerini must also have been keenly aware of the close relationship between English letters and Mazzini’s ongoing efforts to promote Italian nationalism from his London base, an affirmation of Milton’s essays into the *volgare* underscores precisely the central appeal of Italy’s unification to an English audience. The poetic achievements of Milton, an Englishman, display the great literary endowments which the Italian peninsula has lavished upon world.

Importantly for this study, Camerini also considers carefully the contact Milton had with Manso, the patron of Tasso and Marino, in Naples. He detects, on Milton’s part, a certain defensive anxiety about English poetics in these lines from the *Mansus*:

*Sed neque nos genus incultum, nec inutile Phæbo,* [35]

*Qua plaga septeno mundi sulcata Trione*

*Brumalem patitur longa sub nocte Boöten.*

*Nos etiam colimus Phæbum...*

[But we, neither uncultured nor useless to Phoebus, are a race who through the long night of the Winter solstice suffers beneath Boötes at that place of the world plagued and plowed by the seven Triones. We too cherish Phoebus...]

On the whole, both the historical record, and Milton’s generous response to him, suggest that Manso’s treatment of Milton was born of forthright courtesy and an enthusiastic admiration for his evident poetic gifts. Nor has Camerini missed the
significance of Tasso’s benefactor covering Milton with his mantle, however brief the Neapolitan moment may have been.

Camerini’s commentary on Milton, though originally published in 1856, receives wider dissemination once it is collected with other critical works of his in a single volume released in 1870. In the moment, the complete unification of Italy under the Piemontesi awaited only the final integration of Papal Rome, a feat shortly to be accomplished by the Bersaglieri who breached the Porta Pia in September of the same year. By that time, Giosuè Carducci, also an important Risorgimento critic, but one who operated from a different set of criteria, had already written and published his essay on Louisa Grace Bartolini discussed below.

Starting with *Della poesia cavalleresca o trovadorica* (1856) and continuing throughout his literary career, the work of poet-scholar Giosuè Carducci (1835-1907) reads as a compendium to the many and varied intellectual aspirations of the Risorgimento. In 1906, he became Italy’s first Nobel laureate in literature, “not only in consideration of his deep learning and critical research, but above all as a tribute to the creative energy, freshness of style, and lyrical force which characterize his poetic masterpieces.” As a scholar, Carducci won his spurs in Classical, Renaissance and Modern literary criticism by producing, in rapid succession from 1855 to his death in 1907, a prolific series of more than forty articles and monographs, including studies of Vergil’s *Georgics* along with Horace’s *Epodes* and *Carmen saeculare*; La secchia rapita, which the Emilian poet Alessandro Tassoni (1565-1635) had published in Paris in 1622; the poetry of Lorenzo de’ Medici (1449-1492); the *Stanze, Orfeo* and *Rime* of
Angelo Ambrogini (1454-1494), known as Poliziano; the neo-Latin poetry of Ariosto, and an important critical edition of Petrarch.

In an early critical work, Carducci celebrates the life, culture and literary accomplishments of his close friend and patroness, the Bristol-born Louisa Grace (1818-1865), eventually married to Pistoian architect Francesco Bartolini. The essay occasions his treatment of the Italian verse of two other English poets: Milton and Thomas James Mathias (1753-1835). His valediction commends the late Mrs Bartolini, in whose salon Carducci found frequent welcome, by comparing her mastery of Italian favorably against the precedents of her countrymen, Milton and Mathias. By foregrounding the rhetorical attributes of Carducci’s sortie into Miltonic criticism, I do not mean ipso facto to invalidate his conclusions. But it does help us to know that his primary aim in this essay is to pay tribute to Louisa Grace Bartolini. Consequently, he has not concerned himself with the kind of “open, evidenced and retrievable” procedures that would make his critique of Milton falsifiable in any significant sense. This, of course, is exactly the problem that makes a stylistic evaluation of the Italian verse of Milton so desirable.

And, in fact, Carducci damns the English poet with a faint praise that will re-echo in future evaluations of Milton’s Italian. Regarding only the last verse of the canzone, he writes “potrebbe sonare non indegnamente tra alcuni della Vita Nuova [it would not sound unworthy aside some verses of the Vita Nuova]. Likewise, insofar as the second quatrain of Sonnet IV is concerned, he says “né accanto a certi del Petrarca scomparirebbero questi altri” [nor beside certain verses of Petrarch would these others disappear]. His oft-cited coup de grâce, however, is “Ma i più son duri e stentati e
talora in onta alle leggi più strette della sintassi” [But the rest are harsh and stunted, and at times fly in the face of the more precise rules of syntax]. Nevertheless, he concedes, Milton has an entirely justifiable excuse for having produced such unconvincing poetry in Italian: “mancò l’esercizio e l’uso del conversare italiano; egli non soggiornò in Firenze più di due mesi [he lacked the exercise and habit of conversing in Italian as he did not spend more than two months in Florence].

Continuing for a moment along this trajectory, however, we should note that Carducci has no comment whatsoever to make about the otherwise favorable appraisal of Milton’s conversational ability in Italian rendered by Renaissance Florentines, Romans and Neapolitans themselves. This disappoints, since the same sources that would first have alerted Carducci to the duration of Milton’s sojourn in Florence will also have reported the general acclaim that Milton’s spoken Italian receives among Seicento academicians. Taken at face value, Carducci’s judgment would seem to eviscerate the view that the English poet’s volgare is so good, he must have had help from a native speaker in bringing his work up to such a high level of proficiency.

Unfortunately, we cannot take his comments any further than face value, since Carducci doesn’t provide us with any concrete examples of Milton’s harsh and stunted Italian, nor does he elaborate further on the tremendously provocative notion that breaching the more precise rules of syntax constitutes a poor aesthetic practice for Milton. Indeed, since Miltonic style in both English and Latin also characteristically encroaches upon syntactical boundaries, we may well ask whether Carducci’s principal concern isn’t simply that Milton is being too Miltonic. On the other hand, had he shown
any inclination whatsoever to identify where specifically the English poet’s volgare flies in the face of the more precise rules of Italian syntax, Carducci’s comments about Milton’s awkward sentence structure might have offered substantial critical and historical value to the scholar. Were it the case that characteristics typical of Miltonic style work well in Latin and in English, but not in Italian, then we’d know something definite about the limits of Milton’s multilingualism and, specifically, his use of Italian. Moreover, we’d have a place to start our assessment of the question of interlanguage ideolect, or whether language interference problems originating in either his English or his Latin, begin to surface in his Italian verse. Alas, Carducci shows no interest. His purpose, as we have seen, is altogether epideictic and his rhetorical efforts, therefore, focus squarely on the praise of Mrs Bartolini.

Despite Carducci’s substantial credentials in Fifteenth, Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Italian literature, or perhaps because of them, he takes a decidedly negative view of Renaissance rhetoric and, frankly, of rhetoric in any age. His position requires some explanation. Anti-rhetorical discourse is, of course, a rhetorical position and Carducci certainly knows this. While this dissertation posits a complete effacement of the distinction between Renaissance rhetoric and poetics, in Carducci’s view, the Risorgimento needed there to be a fundamental cleavage between the two. For Italy’s public space, wherein the citizen rhetor might otherwise have intervened to restore the peninsula’s ancient glory, had been locked down by the repressive hegemony of the Church and her militant Sanfedisti (1799), by Metternich and the Congress of Vienna (1815), by the Bourbon Kingdom of the Two Sicilies (1808-1861), and all manner of
retrograde political institutions. In an essay steeped in the aesthetics of Romanticism, Carducci equates the firebrand Italian poet and tragedian, Vittorio Alfieri (1749-1803), first to Agis IV, the reforming king of Sparta who tried to revive the ancient and egalitarian discipline of Lycurgus, and then to Roman citizen-orators like Brutus and Pliny who publicly defy the tyrannies of Cæsar and Trajan respectively. Let Carducci himself explain.

Ma l’orazione del moderno non ebbe spazio dove manifestarsi, né ascoltatori da commovere: la lotta si agitò dentro l’anima del l’oratore poeta, e tutto all’intorno fu muto. Ciò avvenne spesso nell’umile Italia: dove poi novellamente è sorta una scuola che alle manifestazioni solitarie di tali anime che non poterono operare appicca la taccia di esercitazioni retoriche, e mostra di non sapere quanto dolore quanta pietà quanto fremito sta nascosto sotto cotesta che a lei par retorica; [But the speech of modern man had no space in which to manifest itself, nor any audience to persuade. The struggle convulsed within the soul of the poet-orator, while all around him was silent. This happened often in humble Italy, where only a short time ago, there arose a school which, upon the solitary manifestations of those souls who could not act publicly, affixed the label of rhetorical exercises, clearly demonstrating that it did not understand how much pain, how much pity, how much trembling lies hidden beneath this exterior which to the schoolmen seems mere rhetoric.]

Carducci here heaps his scorn upon an attempt to label the work of the poet-orator as mere rhetorical practice. Thus, the humanistic curriculum out of which the whole of Milton’s poetics develops has fallen victim to a larger polemical context, one that would
not necessarily appear before the contemporary critic on a *prima facie* examination of Carducci’s brief comments on the Italian verse of Milton.

In this light, Carducci’s willingness to compare but four Miltonic lines (*Diodati, e te’l dirò* ll. 5-8) to the exemplary style of Petrarch isn’t necessarily a compliment. Firstly, he himself had at an early age disparaged the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* as “*un libretto d’aritmetica*” [a book of arithmetic].\(^{314}\) Though he clearly modifies his view of Petrarch as his scholarship matures, we can still discern throughout his literary criticism a general derision of the kind of Petrarchan pastiche that Baretti’s teacher, Tagliazucchi favored, on account of its close link to rhetorical praxis. Here I’m thinking especially of the kind of imitative progymnasmata that would have characterized Milton’s early humanistic formation and which he puts on display in the 1645 collection. We are not, therefore, surprised to discover that the Risorgimento æsthetic represented in Carducci will sometimes denigrate, if not Petrarch himself, at least a conscious and deliberate imitator of the kind exemplified by Milton.

**Whig Italophile**

Many of England’s more celebrated Whig historiographers are also confirmed Italianists. Charles James Fox (1749-1806) was taking his leisure in Italy in 1788 when the crisis of George III’s most severe bout with mental illness propelled the Prince of Wales into the Regency. His nephew, Henry Vassall-Fox (1773-1840), the 3rd Baron Holland, likewise spent time in Italy, traveling to Florence where he met his future wife in 1793. Henry Hallam (1777-1859) wrote a history of Italy and Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859), who first came to the attention of the British public in 1825 for having
penned an essay on Milton for the *Edinburgh Review*, cherished Rome and wrote extensively on Italy in works discussing Dante, Petrarch and Machiavelli. Though it hardly needs emphasis, of course, Milton himself enjoys special status as a Whig hero, for though he antedated the political movement, they nonetheless share striking similarities of worldview in matters of politics and society.

At the turn of the century, Scottish biographer, David Mather Masson (1822-1907), produced an ambitious, comprehensive, multi-volume *Life* of the poet that continues to reverberate throughout Milton criticism even today. Widely acknowledged as the magnum opus of an already well-established historian and literary critic, Masson’s *Life* attempts to situate Milton in the context of his times by alternating chapters of literary biography with chapters accounting for England and Scotland’s religious and political turmoil in the poet’s lifetime. The author’s keen attraction to Milton discloses all the bright surmise of Whig historiography in its most sanguine frame of mind. And why not? There is hardly a thought that any contemporary thinker thinks that Milton didn’t think first. Could there be a surer sign of the inevitability of progress than the voice of an English prophet crying out in the desert of Civil War and Restoration debauchery? Milton’s lifelong commitments to political liberty and freedom of conscience laid the foundation for the Victorian stability and prosperity which clearly placed British institutions on a higher moral plane than any of her ancient predecessors or modern rivals. In the Whiggish view, Milton’s role as a Commonwealth polemicist places him at the rhetorical epicenter of the historical forces that first subjected Crown and Church to the principled authority of Parliament.
The list of Masson’s close associates reads like the honor role of Victorian intellectual élites in both England and Scotland in the middle the Nineteenth Century: William Makepeace Thackery (1811-1863); William Mayhew (1787-1855) and Henry Mayhew (1812-1887); Charles Dickens (1812-1870); William Hazlitt Jr (1811-1893); poets Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) and Christina Rossetti (1830-1894). Among his more intimate friends were John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881). Indeed, it may well have been Carlyle who first introduced Masson to Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), a republican theorist and one of the key political and intellectual figures of the early militant phases of the Risorgimento.

Mazzini’s penurious London exile had begun in 1837, but his Giovine Italia (1831-1848) and Giovine Europa (1834-1836) networks of revolutionary communication and activism extended throughout the continent and his influence came sharply to bear upon the general uprisings of 1848 that scorched the blueprint of social conservatism which Prince Klemens von Metternich (1773-1859) had orchestrated at the Congress of Vienna (1815). Metternich’s brainchild, the tightly wound system of dispute resolution among the great powers known as the Concert of Europe, lasted in some form from the end of the Napoleonic Wars until the Crimean War (1853-1856), but it always depended upon the skillful and incessant balancing of political and ethnic ambitions in constant flux across the continent. During the period that Metternich held sway, a European nation, divorced from the imperial ambitions of great houses, was a largely imagined community. Nevertheless, under the rhetorical weight of Romantic nationalism, the homeostasis of the inflexible Congress system steadily disintegrated and a vigorous
republicanism that eerily resembles the opposition to monarchical tyranny of Milton’s Commonwealth prose\(^\text{317}\) began repeatedly to challenge dynastic autocracies. In the tumultuous events of 1848, Habsburg authorities did indeed tremble before Slovak revolutionaries; the Poznan uprising attempted simultaneously and audaciously to expel Russians, Prussians and Austro-Hungarians in order to reconstitute the Polish Commonwealth; in France, revolutionaries brought an end to the Orléaniste monarchy and ushered in the Second Republic (1848-1851); the \textit{Märzrevolution} in Germany led to uprisings in Baden, the Palatinate, the Rhineland, Saxony and Bavaria. Finally, mass demonstrations that developed into riots in the streets of Vienna forced Metternich out of office and into temporary exile in Britain, where he’d just missed Mazzini, by then on his way back to Rome to refound the ancient Republic.

From 9 February to 2 July 1849, Mazzini played a crucial role as triumvir in Rome together with Carlo Armellini (1777-1863) and Aurelio Saffi (1819-1890). In many ways, their republic exemplified the Whiggish political decorum that reigned in the aftermath of the Reform Act of 1832: religious toleration, direct and universal suffrage (for men), legislative assemblies, freedom of the press, and secular education. Though the Roman Republic of 1849 lasted only five months, Mazzini and his colleagues succeeded in capturing the imagination of the Britain to which he and Saffi would subsequently retreat in exile after Charles-Louis Napoléon Bonaparte (1808-1873), recently elected President, restored Pius IX. Nor did Whiggery fail to notice that the Roman Pontiff owed his return to the Quirinale entirely to the electoral influence of ultramontane Catholics in France.
Risorgimento culture and politics, then, finds a particularly receptive hearing in Masson’s ear. He followed closely the multiple attempts to establish national republics that swept across the European continent in the 1848 and became a member of the London Society of the Friends of Italy, which Mazzini had founded in the immediate aftermath of the failed Roman Republic. The objects of the Society were:

1. By public meetings, lectures, and the press—and especially by affording opportunities to the most competent authorities for the publication of works on the history of the Italian National Movement—to promote a correct appreciation of the Italian Question in this country.

2. To use every available constitutional means of furthering the cause of Italian National Independence, in Parliament.

3. And generally to aid, in this country, the cause of the Independence, and of the political and religious liberty, of the Italian People.

In 1851, during the period that Masson himself served as the Society’s secretary (1851-52), Mazzini, addressed the Society. The address is extraordinary, not least because Italian patriot speaks as if he were an Englishman, which suggests that Rudman was not exaggerating to call Mazzini an *English literary figure*.

Give his own keen interest in the politics and culture of Italy, we would anticipate Masson to dwell at length on the *sonetti* and he does not disappoint. Like Dr Johnson, Mitford and Keightley before him, Masson finds it necessary to consult a native speaker in order to render a judgment on the merit of Milton’s Italian style. His principal interlocutor on the subject of Milton’s Italian is none other than Aurelio Saffi, one of the triumvirs who, together with Mazzini and Carlo Armellini, ruled the short-
lived Roman Republic in the spring and early summer of 1849 until French troops toppled their nascent government. By the time Masson had sought him out for an opinion on Milton’s poetry, Saffi’s political career as an Italian nationalist had become inextricably entwined with English letters, for England, specifically the Taylorian Institution at Oxford, had become his principal refuge from the arrest warrants issued in various parts of Italy, France and Austria. In Oxfordshire, he married Georgina Janet Craufurd (1827-1911), a suffragist and an ardent supporter of Mazzini. Saffi discusses dialect and register, idiom and grammar, figures and meter as Masson here reports:

On a matter respecting which there has been some difference of opinion, and on which I am not myself competent judge, – the Italian style of these poems, – I have the pleasure of presenting the following opinion, from my friend, Signor Saffi, of the Taylorian Institution, Oxford: “Concerning the few Italian poems written by Milton in his youth, about which you ask my opinion, I think I may venture to offer the following remarks: As regards the form of the language, there are here and there irregularities of idiom and grammar, and metaphors which remind one of the false literary taste prevalent in Italy when Milton visited that country; although such a defect appears, in the English imitator, modified by the freshness of his native genius. The measure of the verse is generally correct; nay, more than this, musical; and one feels, in perusing these poems, that the mind of the young aspiring poet had, from Petrarch to Tasso, listened attentively to the gentlest notes of the Italian Muse, though unable to reproduce them fully in the form of his own.” The false literary taste, and the Marini style of metaphor, of which Signor Saffi speaks, seem to me most flagrant in the fourth of the sonnets; which is, I believe, the worst thing that Milton ever wrote. The fifth
sonnet is in the most serious strain, and is a fine and proud definition by Milton of his own character.\textsuperscript{321}

We know already of the “difference of opinion” between Baretti and Rossetti on the matter of Milton’s Italian and I have posited the tectonic shift from literary Classicism in the Age of Enlightenment to the advent of Romanticism in England as the lens through which to view the fundamental disparity of their thinking. But in this new instance, either Masson isn’t really listening to Saffi, or he understands the Italian’s commentary as sarcasm. Though his colleague seems clearly to affirm with admiration that “the mind of the young aspiring poet had, from Petrarch to Tasso, listened attentively to the gentlest notes of the Italian Muse,” Masson fixes instead upon the slighter notion of “false literary taste” in the style of Marino, which Scottish Whigs evidently loathe. Note the magnitude of Masson’s deprecation of allegedly Marinesque traces in Milton as compared to the mild chastisement implied by Saffi. For Masson, Milton’s participation in this false literary style is “flagrant,” as if our poet knew he shouldn’t do such a thing, but still couldn’t help himself from imitating Marino. Lastly, we must emphasize that Saffi finds Milton’s Italian prosody essentially sound: “The measure of the verse is generally correct; nay, more than this, musical.” Carducci, we will remember, found the same verse harsh and stunted.

In the Nineteenth Century, Milton’s editors commonly printed the Italian poems separately from their English counterparts, so what Masson says above about “the fourth of the sonnets,” refers in fact to Sonnet V \textit{Per certo i bei vostr’occhi}. For him, it is “the worst thing that Milton ever wrote.” Is it the perception of \textit{marinismo} that elicits such strong censure? The impact of the style of Marino and the \textit{marinisti} both on
Milton’s Italian sonnets, and on the whole of his literary production, certainly deserves more attention and, indeed, the next chapter treats the matter at length. For the present, however, we note that later critics, both anglophone and Italian, will credibly refute the idea that Milton borrows heavily, or even at all, from Marino insofar as the style of any of the Italian sonnets is concerned. Masson’s orotund reaction to alleged Miltonic marinismo smacks of aesthetic commitments that do not apply here, especially in light of Saffi’s largely commendatory response.

The plaintive suffering of the poet-lover — the central construct of Sonnet V — is, of course, the most commonplace trope of the whole genre in any language. In Milton’s defense, however, it is so dear to the Cinquecento petrarchisti whom he has consistently emulated in many other ways, that he may have felt obligated to try his hand at the task. In his characteristic treatment of the conventions bundled into a received tradition, however, the question of what Milton chooses not to transform always reveals as much as what he does. Assessing the conventionality of Sonnet V, therefore, depends in large measure on what we make of the caldo vapor trope at the beginning of the second quartina. We might, like Masson and many others besides, find it less striking if it denoted simply the predictable, lovelorn wellspring of the poet’s tears and sighs. Suppose, on the other hand, we were to read Sonnet V as a continuation of the analogy pointed out by Honigmann between the rugged hill, the swift tongue, the hard bosom in Sonnet III. Between the two, Milton has interposed first a canzone, in which Tuscan youths prophesy altri rivi and eterne frondi for the pitiful English poet trying to versify of love in an unknown and foreign tongue. Then comes Sonnet IV,
wherein the poet contemplates a new idea of rare, foreign beauty that gladdens the heart, and not only his heart, but any heart with the wit to perceive it. Thus, each figure of the poet — sands of Libya, the lovers in their speech, and the shaken breast — in Sonnet V correspond to parallel elements in Sonnet III. Would the caldo vapor that Masson has so contempuously dismissed not then signify the herbetta strana e bella of Italian vernacular eloquence, watered by the avezza giovinetta pastorella, that is, the Muse revealed in the figure of the dark lady? That inchoate urge to achieve laurels, recused and troubled, shaking the poet’s breast would refer in the first place to his own Italian verse, painfully, awkwardly pushing out from his side. But in a subsequent and more significant way, the language of lovers would describe the Italian element in the later English poetry that he imagines writing, but has not yet written. When at last he does compose vernacular eloquence of kind found among the Italians, it will be to him like the escape from the lover’s icy and freezing night into the rosy warmth of Dawn.

In that case, Sonnet V wouldn’t seem so conventional. Or it would only seem conventional to a fastidious Scot who had not grasped the maraviglia of an English poet versifying of love in Italian. Perhaps more to the point, as the composite gloss from Baldi, Giamatti and Olivero makes abundantly clear, Milton has accessed the tradition comprehensively and skillfully, which is the hallmark of the imitative procedures he has adopted throughout. Masson seems mostly to miss the mark here and he does so despite the plainest possible indications from his Italian consultant, Aurelio Saffi.
Unified Italy

Though born in Florence one year before the unification of Italy, Diego Angeli (1869-1937) came of age intellectually in Rome under the influence of Carducci and in the shadow of Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863-1938). Journalist and literary critic, Angeli also translated the complete works of Shakespeare (as many as were known then) into Italian and published them in forty volumes between 1911 and 1935.  

Angeli produced the first Twentieth Century monograph on Milton in Italian. He treats the Italian poems only briefly, but with a modest degree of admiration.

*In quanto ai versi italiani, sono veramente pieni di snellezza e di eleganza e tali da scusare l’entusiasmo nelle convenzioni letterarie che egli frequentava* [As for the Italian verse, they are so truly full of finesse and elegance as to excuse the enthusiasm for the literary conventions that he followed].

Moreover, Angeli recognizes the strong affinity of Milton’s Italian poems with the ongoing tradition of Renaissance *petrarchismo* in Italy and the *petrarchisti* whom he emulates, but he has nothing further to say about their style. Following Aurelio Saffi, he simply remarks that the poems are “*non certo diverso dai molti che in quelli anni si scrivevano da poeti italiani*” [certainly not different from the many that in those years were written by Italian poets]. It’s not entirely clear, however, whether Angeli refers here to Cinquecento Italian poets or Seicento Italian poets, as both come bundled with infelicitous, though dissimilar, literary conventions. Insofar as the date of composition is concerned, Angeli simply repeats the Nineteenth Century position that the *sonetti* were written during Milton’s 1638-1639 sojourn in Italy.
Angeli shows much more interest in two features of Milton that we have already seen among the earlier Risorgimento critics, that is, the nation-building poet who produced England’s greatest epic, and the Englishman who understands and values the fresh, invigorating and uniquely Italian spring of vernacular eloquence that nourishes European letters. Positioned between the Risorgimento and the Twentieth Century criticism that forms the backbone of the next chapter, Angeli focuses our attention on the matters that matter most to Milton.

As we have seen, attitudes about the Italian verse of Milton springing from or intersecting with the context of Italian national identity and especially the Risorgimento are never monolithic and do not necessarily fall into neat categories for broad historical analysis. But in each instance in which an Italian critic has engaged in an evaluation of Milton’s Italian verse, closer examination reveals clear evidence of extra-textual interests so finely woven into the expression of their judgments about the calibre of his Italian or the quality of his lyric as to make us wonder how best to disentangle the knot and so to determine which opinion is verifiable independently and which is not.

The gravitational pull by which actors related first to Arcadian harbingers of nationalistic sentiment and then to the Risorgimento itself have also been drawn into Milton’s orbit must derive from the rhetorical density that inheres to his lyrical poetry. Those who have expressed any measure of admiration for the Italian verse — Rolli, Baretti, Camerini, Saffi — invariably treasure Milton’s poetic construction of liberty, his republicanism, his erudition and, above all, his multivalent defense of the superior quality and singular history of Italian vernacular letters and learning. Rossetti, on the
other hand, takes him to task for the audacity of attempting lyrical verse in a language not his own. Carducci tries to have it both ways. While finding fault with some elements of Milton’s prosody, he nonetheless concedes the poet’s linguistic skill and his profound knowledge of the Petrarchan tradition. Starting with Carducci’s ambivalence, the next chapter will address more fully the questions that arise in and from post-Risorgimento criticism about Milton’s linguistic competence in Italian, his untroubled deployment of Petrarchan tropes, and the attribution of marinista influence.
The Reception of Milton’s Italian Verse

A significant subdivision of the Italian criticism of Milton’s volgare falls into the category of commentary on his style. This chapter of the dissertation, therefore, compiles and systematically reviews the findings of all the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Italian critics who have remarked upon the five sonnets and the canzone, or glossed them or annotated them. Few though they may be, virtually all modern discussion of the style of the Italian verse of Milton in any other language, but especially in English, depends in some manner upon their analysis. The conclusions of the Italian critics, however, underscore problems that take us significantly further than the relatively flaccid question of how well Milton may have known either the Tuscan dialect or its literature. Indeed, taken as a whole (though I have as yet found no one who has taken the Italian criticism as a whole), they raise a significant cluster of issues that lead us to the heart of what Milton the poet has attempted in the long course of his literary production in English, that is, what F. T. Prince (1912-2003) has called The Italian Element in Milton’s Verse. Indeed, Prince’s studies, published over a nine-year period and collected in 1954, loom large in this chapter, which undertakes cognate investigations using the style of the Italian poetry as the point of departure. In what measure, for example, does Milton’s practice of petrarchismo extend beyond the Italian sonnets themselves? Are the stylistic faults of his Italian verse — as some critics have perceived them — present as well in his English poetry?

Many of the Italian critics we have examined so far offer either no details regarding their judgment upon Milton’s style or no stylistic commentary whatsoever. In
the last chapter, however, we did hear the verdict from Nobel laureate Giosuè Carducci (1835-1907) that, apart from a few graceful lines, the bulk of Milton’s Italian poetry is harsh and stunted. We should therefore return to consider more carefully the weight of his opinion. While he himself offers no specific instances of Milton’s failings in verification of his negative assessment of the Italian verse, we can nonetheless compile instances of grating sound and labored sense both implicit and explicit in the criticism of others, which appear by and large to verify the Carducci findings, and to that task we presently turn. Before doing so, however, it’s worth underscoring that Milton rightly enjoys high esteem among Italian critics generally, and not for his English and Latin verse alone, but for his Italian poetry as well, though their praise is not unreserved by any means, as we have already seen in Carducci and will continue to note elsewhere. Modern Italian critics share with their early modern counterparts who wrote the encomia — Dati, Francini, Salzilli and Manso — clear admiration for Milton’s deep study of Italian vernacular eloquence and for his impressive command of their language. To acknowledge Milton’s daring and to laud his essays into Italian verse, while simultaneously finding fault with his handling of meter, lexicon and usage do not, therefore, necessarily embody contradictory dispositions. Rather these nuanced inclinations suggest multiple strata of rhetorical density in the poetry of Milton, a feature that ought not to surprise us.

**Harsh and Stunted Verse**

We turn first to Federico Olivero\(^{328}\) (1875-1955) and Ettore Allodoli\(^{329}\) (1882-1960), who represent the first generation of Italian critics of Milton to have been born and
educated in an entirely unified Italy. Though Risorgimento aesthetics did not by any means collapse before the cannonade that breached the wall at the Porta Pia on 20 September 1870, their work in Italian literature nonetheless represents a new direction for positivism and historical methodology of the kind introduced in the scholarly work of Carducci under the influence of Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893) and French naturalism.\textsuperscript{330}

Professor Olivero specialized in English philology and literature, spending most of his academic career in Turin, where he taught from 1932 onwards. The author of numerous critical works — extended research into broad English subject matter\textsuperscript{331} and Italian translations\textsuperscript{332} (among them Beowulf) — Olivero was perhaps the first significant Italian scholar to have brought the rigorous study of Anglo-Saxon philology to bear upon the interpretation of English literature in the Italian academy.\textsuperscript{333} If by including the Italian poems in the 1645 collection Milton has implicitly asked that they be treated as seriously as his English-language work, Olivero has shown himself more than willing to undertake just that task, but his initial findings do not flatter Milton’s efforts.

\textit{Mentre nei sonetti inglesi egli dimostra una rara perizia nel trattare questa forma lirica delicata ed ardua, in questi componimenti non rivela che una grande debolezza d’espressione, un’esitazione nell’uso della lingua, una mancanza di musicalità, che provano come pure un nobile artefice balbetti e si confonda quando viene ad adoperare un idioma novello [While in the English sonnets he demonstrates a rare expertise in handling this delicate and difficult lyrical form, in these compositions he reveals such a weakness of expression, a hesitation in the use of the tongue, a lack of musicality that, though produced by}
a noble craftsman, they feel stammering; he is confused when it comes to using a new language.\textsuperscript{334}

For all his Anglo-Saxon philology, however, there’s still something of the old Turgenev left in this Italian critic. Like Rossetti and Keightley before him, Olivero takes Milton to task first and foremost for the audacity of writing poetry — love poetry at that! — in a language not his own. Milton, however, prevents. In the canzone, the poet’s mocking adversaries themselves raise the very issue that lies at the heart of the Italian criticism under our scope here. \textit{Come t’osi}, they ask, “How do you dare?” His response, at once self-deprecating and reticent, yet defies audacity: \textit{Questa è lingua di cui si vanta Amore} [This is the tongue of which Love boasts]. In the face of all his prosodic deficits, the poet must nonetheless versify of love in Italian, for the plurilingual and proud beauty whom he addresses demands it of him.

In the last chapter, we saw that Camerini had praised Milton for composing verse in “our sweet speech,” and even Carducci, whose negative comments form the nucleus of this chapter’s investigation, conceded that the effort might have produced better results if the Englishman had only been able to sojourn for a longer period in Italy. In other words, Carducci recognizes the tremendous linguistic and artistic gifts with which Milton was endowed and imagines at least his potential for mastery of the technical demands of prosody in the volgare. Despite the anachronism implicit in applying Hegelian standards of \textit{Volksgeist} to a Seventeenth Century poet,\textsuperscript{335} however, early Twentieth Century Italian critics, like Rossetti before them, seem by and large to find it annoying that Milton even attempts something so impudent. This annoyance becomes all the more evident in the measure with which the selfsame critics will praise
Milton’s dexterity and ingenuity in his own language. Olivero, for example, offers this positive assessment of the English sonnets.

_Tuttavia ne’ sonetti inglesi egli riuscì ad esprimere il suo originale pensiero, la sua immagine sapientemente disegnata e colorita, dimostrando così la sua arte nella prosodia e la duttilità del suo nativo linguaggio nell’adattarsi ad uno stampo metrico esotico_ [Nonetheless, in the English sonnets he did succeed in expressing his original thought, his representation purposefully designed and shaded, thus demonstrating his art in prosody and the malleability of his native language in adapting to an exotic metrical framework].

Originality is the primary virtue of the sonnets in English, though reshaping the language of Englishmen to meet the demands of an Italian metrical scheme meets with Olivero’s whole-hearted approval as well.

Insofar as commentary on the style of Milton’s Italian is concerned, Olivero examines specific instances of prosodic anomaly in the poems. He objects, for example, to the synalœpha in Sonnet IV: 13 (*suoi avventa*). Nonetheless, considering how prominently Milton displays synalœpha and apocope in _Paradise Lost_ and the _Samson Agonistes_ (as elsewhere), one wonders if its early presence in the _sonetti_ can really be a fault of style or simply Milton being Milton. Olivero, though attentive to the details of English diachronic linguistics, does not seem to imagine that the demanding and complex ways in which our poet employs his own mother tongue could represent core Miltonic convictions about the parameters of poetic expression in any language. Especially if Milton understands himself as conquering new territory for English vernacular eloquence, it stands to reason that we would find him experimenting with
prosody and pushing the boundaries of intelligibility across the full range of his own plurilingual spectrum, including even Italian.

An exact contemporary of Olivero, Ettore Allodoli held the Italian literature chair in the Scuola di Architettura of the Università degli Studi di Firenze from 1940 until his death in 1960. His studies in Milton represent an early phase of his precocious career.\textsuperscript{340}

In \textit{Giovanni Milton e l’Italia}, the chapter on the sonnets is brief, a prelude to the lengthier discussion of the \textit{elementi italiani} throughout the rest of Milton’s work. Perhaps it is from Allodoli that F. T. Prince takes the “Italian element” phrase that features so prominently in the titles of his Milton essays from 1946 to 1954.

Allodoli’s hypothesis of an early date for the Italian sonnets — already discussed at length in Chapter 1 — rests on two further views that touch significantly on matters of Petrarchan lexis, the rhetorical pedagogy of imitation and Italian prosody. In the first item regarding the question of dating the Italian sonnets, Allodoli points out that three of them end in \textit{rima baciata} (Sonnet III: seno-terreno; Sonnet IV: poco-foco; and Sonnet V: piovose-rose), that is, the rhymed couplet that, in his view, characterizes English prosody more than Italian. Problematically, however, he doesn’t explain why he thinks this feature of the sonnets calls necessarily for an earlier date. Does he mean to imply that Milton — had he had more exposure to Italian prosody of the kind perceptible in his later English work — would not otherwise have chosen \textit{rima baciata}? In any case, there is no discernible date at which the poet is ever more English and less Italian than he always had been. Secondly, Allodoli sees the occurrence of Petrarchan tropes as
evidence of poetic immaturity belonging necessarily to the earliest period of Milton’s literary production. Here it will be helpful to quote him directly:

La scorrettezza di queste poesie, la scarsissima originalità di pensiero fanno attribuire queste poesie proprio al periodo più giovanile del Poeta: vi ricorrono frequentemente le più viete frasi petrarcheggianti: “che l’incerar gli orecchi mi fia poco” (Son. IV), “quando tu vaga parli o lieta canti (Son. II), etc...” [The unseemliness of these poems and their meager originality of thought make one attribute these poems precisely to the most juvenile period of the poet: frequently, there recur the worst sort of Petrarchifying phrases: “that sealing my ears with wax does me little good” (Son. IV), “when you O beauty speak or happily sing (Son. II), etc...”].

Future critics will echo Allodoli’s view that the sonetti evince immaturity and cliché. Even A. Barlett Giamatti refers to the Homeric allusion as “a grotesque conceit.” But the young Milton who wrote these lines was already an accomplished scholar of the classics, and so was the even younger Diodati whom he addresses in the sonnet. In both the lyrical and empirical contexts, therefore, the abrupt deployment of the “incerar gli orecchi” trope seems to imply that, despite his humanistic formation in ancient wisdom and epic poetry, the heart of the young poet possesses no resources with which to resist the fire in the eyes of the pellegrina bellezza. This is the maraviglia of which he speaks.

Both Olivero and Allodoli object above all to Milton’s practice of Sixteenth Century petrarchismo, which they find utterly threadbare. Olivero, for example, says,

Il Milton, come risulta dalle precedenti osservazioni, rimase dunque imbarazzato dalla nuova lingua ch’egli imprendeva a trattare; il suo ingegno,
che già ci aveva dato la mirabile Ode sulla Natività e i freschi ed eleganti idillii hortoniani, in questi sonetti non sa che riandare luoghi comuni, che adattarsi alla grande corrente petrarchista, senza assurgere ad alcuna ragguardevole altezza [Milton, as we have noted in the preceding observations, was therefore constrained by the new language that he attempted to deal with; his wit, which had already given us the admirable Nativity Ode and the fresh and elegant Horton idylls, in these sonnets cannot but revisit commonplaces, accommodating himself to the great Petrarchist current, without rising to any notable height].

The Petrarchist current to which Olivero refers, and which Allodoli joins him in deprecating, belongs precisely to the activity of those Cinquecento poets — Bembo, Della Casa, Tasso and Varchi — whom Milton so purposefully imitated, both in his Italian verse and, as Prince has shown, throughout his English verse as well. Perhaps Olivero and others find the decidedly Bembist moments in Milton’s English less objectionable because they represent the successful penetration of Italian motifs into a new and strange environment of speech. Or perhaps this kind of criticism has less to do with what Milton has done in his modest eighty-five lines than what Tasso and Della Casa and Varchi had done in the scores of thousands of Petrarchist lines they produced.
The Bembist Manner

The work of Mario Praz\(^4\) (1896-1982) represents the next generation of Italian critics to examine Milton’s Italian poems. Roman by birth, Praz published prolifically on literature and design. At the hand of Queen Elizabeth II, he became a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire. Before the Second World War, he had held chairs simultaneously at the University of Manchester in Italian literature and at the Università degli Studi di Roma, La Sapienza in English literature. The generally\(^3\) stellar reputation of scholarship and erudition enjoyed by Praz has endowed him with sufficient authority to proclaim: “I sonetti italiani del Milton... mostrano una profonda conoscenza della maniera bembista e solo qua e là tradiscono la mano straniera” [The Italian sonnets of Milton... show a profound knowledge of the Bembist manner and only here and there betray the foreign hand].\(^3\) Like Carducci before him, Praz doesn’t pause long enough to provide details. In fact, he’s not especially interested in the Italian verse of Milton. Although the 1948 critical effort cited above represents an otherwise substantial revision of his 1937 treatment of Milton, Praz nonetheless repeats himself verbatim in the matter of the Italian sonnets. Unfortunately, Praz points out neither the \textit{qua} nor the \textit{là} in which the foreign hand betrays itself, so we can neither revisit nor verify his findings. The Shaw-Giamatti (1970) commentary nonetheless accepts his ethos as sufficient. For them, Praz is simply “as excellent a judge as could possibly be desired.” After all, he wrote for the \textit{Sunday Times}!

In some ways, the perspicacity that Praz has shown in discerning a Bembist connection opens the door to Sergio Baldi (1909-1984), to whose studies of Milton we
shall turn in greater detail below. Baldi affirms in careful detail what Praz has observed in more general terms, namely, that the young Milton’s dependence on Bembo operates at multiple dimensions of his Italian style, especially lexis. Baldi further notes, for example, that of all the many Petrarchists of the Cinquecento to choose from, much of the vocabulary of Milton’s Italian verse appears to rely upon a single lyric of Pietro Bembo. He offers this sonnet as a potential source for Milton’s profound knowledge of the Bembist manner:

\[
\text{Sì come suol, poi che'l verno aspro e rio} \\
\text{parte e dà loco a le stagion migliori,} \\
\text{giovene cervo uscir col giorno fuori} \\
\text{del solingo suo hosco almo natio,} \\
\text{et or su per un colle, or lungo un rio} \\
\text{gir lontano da case e da pastori,} \\
\text{erbe pascendo rugiadose e fiori,} \\
\text{ovunque più ne porta il suo desio;} \\
\text{né teme di saetta o d’altro inganno,} \\
\text{se non quand’gli è colto in mezzo al fianco} \\
\text{da buon arcier che di nascosto scocchi;} \\
\text{tal’io senza temer vicino affanno} \\
\text{moss’il piede quel di, che i be’ vostr’occhi} \\
\text{me ’ mpiagar, Donna, tutto ’l lato manco.}\]

[For thus it happens, after a harsh and hostile winter departs and gives way to the best of seasons, that a young deer coming out of his solitary, dark and fertile}
native place by day, and now up a hill, or along a stream turns away from houses and shepherds, grazing dewy grasses and flowers, wherever his desire carries him; fearing neither arrow nor other deception, he is suddenly struck in the middle of his flank by a skilled archer who releases his arrow from a place of hiding; so I without fear of impending heartache stepped out on that day when your beautiful eyes overtook me, my lady, maiming the whole of my side.]

Baldi points out the following intersections between this single sonnet of Bembo and the Italian verse of Milton: **Bembo** Si come suol — **Milton** come ei suole Sonnet V.3; **Bembo** verno aspro e rio and or su per un colle — **Milton** colle aspro Sonnet III.1; **Bembo** dà loco — **Milton** a trovar loco Sonnet V.10; **Bembo** fuori del solingo suo hosco almo natio — **Milton** fuor di sua natia alma primavera Sonnet III.5; **Bembo** da pastori, erbe pascendo rugiadose e fiori — **Milton** l’avezza giovinetta pastorella va bagnando l’herbetta strana e bella Sonnet III.3-4; **Bembo** di nascosto scocchi — **Milton** scocca il tuono Sonnet VI.7; **Bembo** i be’ vostr’occhi — **Milton** i bei vostr’occhi Sonnet V.1; and **Bembo** tutto ’l lato manco — **Milton** da quel lato si spinge Sonnet V.6. To Baldi’s list, I would add: **Bembo** saetta o d’altro inganno — **Milton** che son d’amor saette ed arco Sonnet II.7. Nor is this the only poem in the Bembist catalogue to which the Italian verse of Milton corresponds.

Mario Praz was a star among public intellectuals in Italy and England, but he was not alone in turning his attention to the legacy of Italian letters evident in the works of Milton. Professor, critic and translator, Augusto Guidi (1914-1999), a contemporary of Praz and Gabriele Baldini (1919-1969), constituted with them a kind of triumvirate of English literary criticism in the Italian academy. In the parentheses of a longer comment about the *donna leggiadra*, Guidi has this sole cursory remark about the style of the
Italian sonnets: “quei sonetti in italiano, tanto poco italiani che piacciono soltanto ad alcuni critici inglesi” [those sonnets in Italian, so little Italian that they please only certain English critics]. Guidi’s interest in Milton follows the same trajectory of investigation and generally positive appraisal that we have already seen in the Risorgimento critics. Like Allodoli, he focuses on the Italian element in Milton’s English prosody and thematic material and the implicit affirmation of Italian literary achievements in the work of the great epicist. As with Carducci and Praz before him, however, Guidi subjects the Italian sonnets to mild chastisement, but lamentably provides no examples or explanations. As presently we shall see, however, Guidi may well have anticipated something important in suggesting that the Italian poems were written, at least in part, for an English audience.

As stands to reason, scholarship on the Italian verse is virtually unknown except among anglophone and italophone Miltonists. Slavs, Lithuanians, Hungarians, Germans and Arabs study both Milton and Italian, but not the Italian verse of Milton. Cursory though they may be, therefore, the summary verdict of such critics as Carducci, Praz and Guidi rest upon their considerable ethos as Italian scholars of English literature. Had Milton composed verse in Dutch or Spanish, we would likewise expect the anglophone critic to turn to scholars of English literature in Holland or Spain for reliable assessments of the work. Nonetheless, like the anglophone scholars who rely upon their assessments, Italian critics bring complex networks of philosophical, social, political and linguistic commitment to bear upon their evaluation of Milton’s volgare. Consequently, the disapproving attitude of Italian critics toward Sixteenth Century
petrarchismo has served to redirect the attention of anglophone critics away from the rich Cinquecento intertextuality of Milton’s sonetti and towards the more mundane issue of Milton’s linguistic competence.

We are not surprised, therefore, to discover a reconsideration of Milton’s Italian verse in the wake of a more positive appraisal of Cinquecento Petrarchists. John Purves, who prepared the annotation of the Italian sonnets for Darbishire’s 1963 edition of The Poetical Works of John Milton, calls attention to the beginnings of a change in the critical assessment of Milton’s volgare by Italians. About Sonnet VI, Purves says:

This is the most original and personal of the Italian sonnets, and there is good recent Italian opinion that it is also the most successful both for its literary and linguistic qualities. The young scholar Guido di Pino writes “Questo è certo il migliore dei sonetti: quello in cui l’ispirazione riesce a superare il gioco letterario che c’è sempre in queste poesie in lingua straniera. Linguisticamente questo sonetto mi pare il più sicuro e sciolto di tutti. Ci sento un piglio calvacantino” [This is certainly the best of the sonnets: that in which his inspiration manages to overcome the literary play that there always is in poetry in a foreign tongue. Linguistically this sonnet seems to me the most secure and effortless of them all. I sense there a touch of Calvalcanti]. Wordsworth, too, seems to have recognized its individual character when he chose it for translation in his recently recovered version.

The comments of Guido di Pino (1912-2002), who had been a student of Attilio Momigliano (1883-1952) at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa, prefigure a new and more receptive attitude toward Milton’s Italian verse from scholarship in Italy. The
gioco letterario that di Pino sees as something Milton has overcome in Sonnet IV, seems to refer simply to *imitatio* in the Dionysian sense that we have already explored at length in Chapter 2.

**Poetic Language Methodically Acquired**

The two decades from 1966 to 1985 saw the publication of three significant studies of the Italian verse of Milton. More than any of their antecedents in any previous century, each of the new kind of investigation addresses, both substantially and systematically, specific issues of Milton’s Italian style. The first two investigations were undertaken by Italians, Sergio Baldi (1909-1984) and Angiola Maria Volpi (b. 1943), writing in Italian and French respectively. The other work was written in English. Former Major League Baseball Commissioner, A. Bartlett Giamatti (1938-1989), inherited the Columbia University Press Variorum edition of Milton’s Italian poetry when Professor James E. Shaw died in the mid-1960s, and saw the project through to its publication in 1970. Born to an Italian-speaking family in Boston, Giamatti lived in Italy as a child and returned to live there again as an adolescent before finishing prep school at Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts. Based on information gleaned from correspondence with his family, I would consider Professor Giamatti a heritage speaker of the language whose linguistic competency was vastly amplified by in-depth adult scholarship which began during the time of his undergraduate years at Yale.

In his 1966 study, *Poesie italiane di Milton*, Sergio Baldi undertakes a methodical response to all of the negative attitudes toward Milton’s Italian that we have read from Italian critics above. His three principal arguments in defense of Milton’s
Italian may be summarized as follows. Firstly, the grammatical, lexical and syntactical components which modern Italians have found stilted, harsh or idiosyncratic turn out, as often as not, to have clear precedents in Dante, Petrarch, Bembo, Della Casa, Varchi and Tasso, which also sound stilted to the modern Italian ear. Secondly, objections to a worn-out petrarchismo quickly reveal themselves to be objections to petrarchismo pure and simple, which suggests not so much a critique of Milton as of Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Italians composing in the same tradition. Moreover, the generalized censure of petrarchismo would, of course, include the very poetic opera of Milton’s fellow academicians in Florence, Rome and Naples as well. Lastly, the prosodic choices to which Italian critics have objected in Milton’s Italian verse often correspond exactly to directions in which he has taken his English verse. In other words, the Milton composing in Italian is remarkably like the Milton who composes in English.

Trained in philology and text editing, Baldi discusses at length the problems of reconciling the variations between the 1645 and 1673 editions of the Italian verse of Milton. His method is to ask whether the irregularities of usage about which subsequent generations of Italian critics have complained represent genuinely grammatical errors in the text, or contraventions of the standards of Cinquecento usage fixed in large measure by the efforts of Bembo, or neither. To my knowledge, it is the first attempt to reconstruct the text of the poems in volgare by asking what Milton might have intended and not what sounds correct to the ear of an Eighteenth or Nineteenth Century Italian critic. Since he addresses substantive issues, I have summarized the whole of Baldi’s textual criticism in the Appendix.
Published in Italy, Baldi’s study apparently did not come to the attention of American scholarship until the eve of the publication deadline set for Giamatti’s revision of the short inspection that James E. Shaw had begun to prepare for inclusion in Volume I of *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton* (New York: Columbia UP, 1970). Nonetheless, Baldi’s work is a treasure trove of comparative analysis which vastly exceeds the Shaw-Giamatti study, in particular by paying attention to text-critical problems and to the lexical and metrical influences upon Milton’s work in Cinquecento poets of the *volgare*. Baldi also reviews Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Italian critiques of the quality of Milton’s language and accounts for perceived linguistic flaws with specific attestations of the same kinds of usage, especially regarding lexis and prosody, in Petrarch, Bembo, Varchi, Della Casa and Tasso. His gloss forms the basis for the updated variorum which constitutes Chapter 5.

Although he seems somewhat ambivalent, Baldi does nonetheless entertain the notion that Italian serves a particular purpose for Milton in the celebration of amatory impulses, a purpose that he could not yet achieve in English, but one which reaches its culmination decades later in *Paradise Lost*. Indeed, other critics, both English-language writers and Italians, explicitly connect Milton’s commendation in the *Animadversions* of the honor that the love lyrics of Dante and Petrarch show with regard to Beatrice and Laura to both his essays into Italian verse and to the poetics of desire with which the mature Milton will treat the passion of Adam and Eve for one another. Baldi goes so far as to call the Italian language the poet’s *velo pudico*, his veil of modesty, which Milton dons precisely in order to treat this subject of erotic desire.
Milton’s poetry in the volgare doesn’t sound like speech, principally because of its difficulty and unusual syntax. In this respect, his Italian certainly resembles the English he uses in poetry. Moreover, the lexicon Milton adopts is itself already anachronistic in Seicento Italy. To what processes of language acquisition, then, can we ascribe Milton’s Italian? Baldi addresses exactly this question:

*L’italiano di Milton non è né orecchiato in conversazione, né sommariamente appreso dalla rapida lettura di qualche testo: è una lingua poetica metodicamente appresa, proprio per il suo valore di continuatrice diretta, sia in senso linguistico che retorico, della grande tradizione classica* [The Italian of Milton is neither overheard in conversation, nor summarily learned from the rapid reading of a text: it is a poetic language methodically acquired, precisely for the value of its direct continuity, both in linguistic and rhetorical senses, with the great classical tradition].

Baldi has captured here both the method of Milton’s education in the classical tradition of rhetoric and his desire to produce poetry of the kind he most admires, particularly in Italian. Consonant with the accolade represented in the 1645 encomia and discussed in the Introduction, Baldi thus offers a generally positive view in his assessment of Milton’s command over the language and especially its practice of eloquence.

Baldi’s work reappears throughout this dissertation, most prominently in the Appendix. Moreover, I must also acknowledge that his gloss of the poems has provided me with a more comprehensive grasp of Milton’s conscious and skillful appropriation of the Sixteenth Century petrarchisti, especially Bembo, Tasso, Della Casa and Varchi, than any other critical source. Indeed, among all the Italian scholars who have
addressed themselves to the issue from Paolo Rolli to the present day, and taking into account critics writing in any language, it is Sergio Baldi who offers the most comprehensive and penetrating analysis of the Italian verse of Milton.

While Baldi was engaged in his study of the Italian verse of Milton in Italy, James E. Shaw and, later, A. Bartlett Giamatti were likewise at work on their parallel project in North America. They assert that “Milton’s mastery of the language is amazing!” though they go on to specify that “these youthful essays in Italian verse are not great poetry.” The Shaw-Giamatti commentary also figures prominently in the apparatus of the Appendix, but for the present it is their interpretation of the poems that attracts our attention. Firstly, they notice the influence of Sixteenth Century *petrarchismo*, framed, as it were, by poetic anxiety over erotic fulfilment and the march of time.

This string of poems seems to be a compliment to a lady, but it is still more of an essay in Italian verse, an imitation of Italian Petrarchan poets of love, whose artfulness Milton had learned to appreciate. It is introduced by the Nightingale Sonnet in English, a wistful expression of the hope that love will come to him, and will not come too late. [...] The love that he really longed for, for himself, was of a kind that he was well able to imagine, the love of Adam for Eve in *Paradise Lost*, noble, deep and enduring, tender and delicate, and naturally sensuous besides. Shaw-Giamatti, like Sergio Baldi, have seen fit to underscore for us potential nodes of intersection between the Italian verse of Milton and *Paradise Lost*, and they are not wrong to do so. Nonetheless, as far as I am aware, neither anglophone nor italophone critics have fully explored these junctions in light of the Italian element that our poet
incorporates throughout his English verse, especially the major poems. Thus, Milton’s youthful essay into Italian verse may not, in fact, be great poetry in itself, but it certainly seems either to have engendered great poetry, or at least to have encapsulated in Petrarchan form and idiom the selfsame elements out of which his great poetry would subsequently emerge. Herein lies the singular value of studying the Italian poetry in light of the whole of Milton’s literary production. Even more than the elegaic verse he generates in the style of Ovid and Horace, which despite his youth shows the deft hand of a confident neo-Latinist, the Italian poems lay bare the imitative procedures and conscious intertextuality that form the foundation of both the Englishman’s poetics and his rhetoric, as Chapter 2 has discussed in detail.

The Shaw-Giamatti gloss of the Italian poems, the most extensive attempted in English, vastly surpasses the work of Thomas Keightley (1789-1872) and Thomas Warton (1728-1790) before him. Both by the very task of producing a gloss and by recognizing explicitly that Milton imitates “Italian Petrarchan poets of love,” Shaw-Giamatti have foregrounded the question of influence. In this matter, it has always been a striking feature of the Italian poems that they represent more a throwback to the lexis and style of Cinquecento Petrarchists than any obvious reliance upon the emerging Baroque aesthetics of the marinismo current in Italian poetry during Milton’s lifetime. Here, Giamatti flatly contradicts the findings of Masson, discussed in Chapter 3, regarding the influence of Giambattista Marino (1569-1625) on Milton’s Italian style.

That he did not, in the Italian poems, choose to imitate the Marinisti of his own century is not surprising, for these latter poets were reacting against the manner inculcated by been Bembo and Tasso, which he himself admired. They called it
old-fashioned and decrepit, and they particularly disliked the poems of Della Casa, which were like a textbook for Milton. One of them, Pier Francesco Minozzi, called the followers of Della Casa *casisti* and said that they were living in a ruined *casa*. The outstanding quality of the Marinistic love-poetry is an exquisitely soft sensuality which Milton, who called a lyric in Sidney’s *Arcadia* a ‘vain amatorius poem,’ did not esteem.

In this respect, Baldi likewise concurs; he dismisses the notion of stylistic influence from Marino or the *marinisti* in a terse statement: “*non vi è traccia di marinismo*” [there is no trace of *marinismo*]. His verdict, then, affirms that Giamatti stands on solid ground in his judgment. Indeed, whatever else they may think of his *volgare*, Italian critics never speak of Milton’s style as either soft or sensuous and they do not, by and large, perceive much effort to imitate the densely rhetorical deployment of wit and ornamentation that characterizes *marinismo*. Nonetheless, since the *marinisti* dominated the literary scene in Italy and France at the time of Milton’s studious retirement at Hammersmith and Horton, and especially during his subsequent continental sojourn, we ought to wonder if the sweet-speaking Marino who appears in the *Mansus* may yet have had his impact upon the *sonetti* and the *canzone*.

We return now to Angiola Maria Volpi, whose academic career at the Sorbonne has centered primarily upon Seventeenth Century English Literature, especially Dryden. Volpi responds in particular to Giamatti’s findings that, despite Milton’s supposed admiration of their achievements, he nonetheless eschews imitation of the style of Marino and the *marinisti* in general. By dismissing, for perfectly sound stylistic reasons, the notion of any *marinista* influence upon the young Milton, both Baldi and
Giamatti seem nonetheless to have overlooked multiple significant thematic nodes leading from Marino to the Italian verse of Milton, namely, neo-Platonism, the dark lady, an admiration for Ovidian motifs and sensualism, and, above all, a highly cultivated fascination with a poetics of the marvellous. Volpi focuses our attention on *Diodati, e te’l dirò con maraviglia*, which, in a single lyrical moment, condenses the rare, foreign beauty, the Platonic theory of forms and the æsthetic experience of *maraviglia*.

The young Milton’s commitment to neo-Platonism hardly needs affirmation. He certainly composed the *Naturam non pati senium* together with the *De idea Platonica* while at Cambridge, possibly in 1628, though they would not see the light of day until the very 1645 collection that brings forth the Italian verse as well. These Horatian stanzas showcase his humanist commitment to Plato and further serve to anchor Milton solidly in the tradition of anti-Scholastic critique. The full range of proposed dates for the Italian poetry still places its composition well within the decade when Milton chose elsewhere to foreground Platonic concepts in his verse. Both Marino and Milton have the whole of Renaissance humanism to thank for their exposure to neo-Platonism, of course, but Volpi here intends merely to underscore one commonality of the many that conjoin these two poets.

While she affirms this assessment with regard to Milton’s Italian style, we have already seen in Chapter 1 that Volpi nonetheless discerns the impact of Marino in other elements of our poet’s sonnet cycle in *volgare*, first and foremost insofar as the motif of the dark lady is concerned. Given her findings, we ought then to reconsider what it means for Milton to eschew Marino’s soft sensuality, while nonetheless pursuing a
decidedly marinista madonna. What if the harsh and stunted character of the lines to which Carducci objects were a deliberate poetic stratagem meant to inoculate Milton’s sonnets from the stylistic pathogen of marinismo while, at one and the same time, harnessing thematic material that might otherwise call it to mind? Surely this would dissuade any association of our poet’s Italian verse with the mannered artificiality of Marino and his followers, despite the adoption of the dark lady trope drawn so wittingly from that very source. One might almost conclude that Milton had considered the matter cautiously and artfully.

In their thoroughgoing fascination with Ovid, from among all the many classical poets with whom they were intimately familiar, Volpi hits upon yet another significant nexus between Milton and Marino. For indeed,

\[\text{l’admiration que Milton vouait à Ovide est un trait d’union significatif entre le poète anglais et Marino, pour qui l’influence ovidienne a été préponderante.} \]
\[\text{Le fait que dans les poèmes italiens Milton ait abandonné l’inspiration sensuelle de certains passages de ses élégies latines en faveur d’une expression plus élevée du sentiment amoureux, n’exclut nullement la possibilité qu’il ait continué à être tributaire, à d’autres égards, de l’expérience mariniste [the admiration that Milton devoted to Ovid is a significant link between the English poet and Marino, for whom the Ovidian influence was dominant. The fact that in his Italian poems Milton had abandoned the sensual inspiration of certain passages from his Latin elegies in favor of a higher expression of amorous feeling does not in any way exclude the possibility that he had continued to be a tributary, in other respects, of the marinista experience].}\]
She further notes the obsession for Italian epic verse common to Marino and Milton leads inevitably to a consideration of the latter’s acquaintance at Naples with the Marchese of Villalago, patron to both Tasso and Marino, Giovanni Battista Manso (1567-1645), whom the poet addresses in the Latin elegy, *Mansus*. Her point is simply this: though he may have chosen to abjure the mannered style of the *marinisti*, Milton would nonetheless have cultivated a detailed familiarity with the whole tradition of Italian letters, including Marino, from whom in particular our poet appears to have accessed and incorporated important thematic and generic material.

In his day and well beyond, European courts celebrated Giambattista Marino as the poet *par excellence* of the marvelous.\(^{364}\) Widely acknowledged his successor, Marino also stands in close continuity to Tasso, whose theory and praxis of *maraviglia* the Neapolitan poet had thoroughly absorbed. Throughout the Seventeenth Century, the literary and cultural phenomenon of *marinismo* and its cognates penetrated to every corner of the continent. Though it surfaced first in prose, the euphuism of John Lyly (1554-1606) in many ways anticipates elements of *marinismo* and, in any case, shares with it a predilection for antithesis, alliteration, contrived balance, displays of wit and superabundant ornamentation. Sidney and Gabriel Harvey (1552-1631) upbraided the euphuistic style and, in doing so, likewise anticipated critiques that Marino and the *marinisti* would inevitably attract. Called *préciosité* in France, the early stages of the movement there emerged from literary activity associated with the salon of Roman-born Catherine de Vivonne (1588-1665), the Marquise de Rambouillet. The floreant of her famous *chambre bleue*, in which Marino from 1615 to 1623 figured so prominently,\(^{365}\)
coincided exactly with our poet’s sojourn on the continent, though we know of no social connection that might have brought Milton to the glittering Hôtel de Rambouillet in the quartier Porte Saint Antoine. In Spain, culteranismo owed its popularity to the literary production of Marino’s exact contemporary, Luís de Góngora (1561-1627). Opponents of Góngora’s florid style coined the term culteranismo from luteranismo [Lutheranism] and culto [learnèd, cultivated] to imply that an æsthetics built upon exaggerated ornamentation, fulsome displays of wit and deliberate ostentation constituted a grave poetical heresy of the most destructive kind. The German term, Schwulststil means “swollen style;” schwulst also designating the medical conditions of edema and tumor. Luther used it to mean “pompous.”

Despite the prominence and sobriety of its detractors, marinismo appears nonetheless to have been a kind of guilty pleasure among the Italian academicians with whom Milton associates in Florence, Rome and Naples. Francesco Rovai, for example, Milton’s fellow academician among the Svogliati, clearly embodies elements of marinismo in his poetry. Moreover, Dati will later invite Milton to contribute commendatory verse to a projected volume honoring their late colleague upon the publication at Florence of the 1652 posthumous edition of Rovai’s poetry. Still, it’s hardly far-fetched that the poet of the Comus, the Latin elegies and At a Solemn Musick would take pains to dissociate his Italian literary production from the mannered surfeit of marinismo, especially if he has consciously integrated other hallmarks of marinista literary practice into his sonnet cycle in the volgare.
Above all, Milton may have wanted to distance himself from Marino because the latter’s frank eroticism, explicit sexuality and unabashed obscenity stood completely at odds with the view of the beloved that Milton articulates in the *Animadversions* (1641). There our poet forcefully condemns Ovid and Catullus for speaking unworthy things of themselves and unchastely of those whom previously they had extolled. His formula is deprecatory and succinct: “the art I still applauded, but the men I deplor’d.” As Volpi rightly notes, Ovid clearly attracts both Marino and Milton. The verse of the former, however, amplifies the deplorable Ovidian attitude toward women, while the latter chooses to emulate “the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honour of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts, without transgression.” Herein lies the great ethical dissonance that sunders the two poets, despite Milton’s enthusiastic appropriation of the theme of *maraviglia*. Whereas Marino will readily sacrifice decorum to the more immediate satisfaction of sensual pleasures, Milton demurs. The close association between erotic desire and conjugal love that he traces out in *Paradise Lost* suggests a longstanding, deep-seated philosophical commitment on Milton’s part. The Italian verse, then, seems already to express the fundamental cleavage between our poet’s view of sex and that of Marino.

In *Sonnet IV, Diodati, e te’l dirò con maraviglia*, by juxtaposing the *Phædo* theory of forms, with a rare, foreign beauty, Milton reveals a multifaceted wonder. The most essential aspect of this wonder perdures in the lady herself, in whom the poet apprehends an ontological participation in the Platonic form of Beauty Itself. But now the poet, transformed by the wonder of her beauty, becomes himself a new wonder.
Where once he was wont to disparage love, now he must acknowledge that he himself has fallen to love’s wiles. The “serene effulgence of amiable black,” where by custom (and the precedent set in the Elegia prima) we have come to anticipate “braids of gold and cheeks vermillion,” must likewise count as a wonderful surprise. A last unusual turn, which Giamatti modestly labels “unconventional,” recounts the maraviglia of the dark lady’s “speech adorned with more than one tongue.” Volpi claims that she can find no other instance of a poet writing in Italian who deploys the motif of plurilingualism among the catalogue of Petrarchan praises that aggregate to the beloved. If her inventory is complete, then we must recognize in this praise of the linguistic ability of the donna leggiadra a uniquely Miltonic adaptation of the lyrical genre, which comes now to emphasize an explicitly feminine instance of the intellectual qualities that Renaissance humanism prizes most. This has enormous implications for the rational dimensions of the love of Adam for Eve in Paradise Lost.

For Volpi, Milton chooses the language of the great vernacular epics precisely in order to explore the poetic praxis of maraviglia that features so prominently in Italian narrative verse starting with Dante, continuing through Boiardo, Ariosto and Tasso, and arriving at last to Marino. He may have chosen Petrarchan lyric as the medium of his essays into the volgare, but Milton’s ambitions are plainly epic. Volpi continues,

C’est précisément la volonté — parfois tendue jusqu’à l’effort — de créer du nouveau et, par conséquent, d’étonner, qui régit la poésie italienne de Milton, l’expérience d’écrire dans une langue étrangère étant elle-même un puissant instrument de maraviglia et un bel exemple de mimétisme expressif [It is precisely the desire — at times strained by the effort — to create anew and, thus,
to amaze, which governs the Italian poetry of Milton, the fact of writing in a foreign language being itself a powerful instrument of maraviglia and a good example of expressive imitation].

By versifying of love in Italian, Milton has seized upon a splendid opportunity to astonish, and astonish he does. In the canzone, we hear firsthand of the maidens and amorous youths pressing around the poet asking, “Why do you write? Why do you write in an unknown, foreign language versifying of love? How do you dare?” And in the Epitaphium Damonis, the poet claims “even I myself dared to enter the contest, nor do I think I greatly displeased you, for I still have with me your gifts.” How could the Tuscan shepherds, Francini and Dati, have been displeased? They were too astonished by the maraviglia of an English poet’s achievement in their own tongue.

If she is correct in identifying fascination with the concept of maraviglia as a factor that motivates Milton to compose in Italian, Volpi will also have corroborated my rejoinder to Shaw-Giamatti — and, for that matter, to Allodoli, Olivero and Guidi as well — that, though the Englishman’s Italian verse may not itself match the control and elegance of his English or Latin poems, it nonetheless discloses in seminal form essential elements of that great epic upon which his laurels do justly rest. Consequently, the sonetti and the canzone merit study precisely because they represent an early, sophisticated and distinctly Petrarchan treatment of the noble eroticism that comes to vivify Milton’s poetic vision of Adam and Eve. The wonder here lies in the modest figure of the English poet himself, a giovane piano, e semplicetto amante, who nonetheless dares to versify of love in an unknown and foreign tongue. In Paradise Lost, however, the maraviglia of the man’s desire for the woman becomes an
“adventrous Song” soaring “above th’ Aonian Mount” to pursue “Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.”

Regrettably, Volpi shows no awareness of Baldi’s work. Since, however, she has clearly read Shaw-Giamatti, in which the Baldi essay receives both explicit mention and commendation, this constitutes a significant omission on her part, especially as her article signals from the outset a particular interest in “la laborieuse réconstruction des sources de ces poèmes” [the laborious reconstruction of the sources of these poems], which the Florentine philologist’s work has advanced beyond all others.

Poems That Narrate Themselves

Two relatively recent works by Italian critics deserve detailed consideration. Firstly, Mario Melchionda, now an emeritus professor of English Literature of the Università degli studi di Padova, entitles his study of the Italian poetry of Milton Il fior novo di strania favella, a phrase taken from Sonnet III. Melchionda’s work builds solidly upon the philology and source criticism of Baldi and so produces as strong an interpretation of the Italian poems as I have found in any language. In the sixth section of his comprehensive article, Melchionda discusses the implications of Milton having framed the Italian sonnet cycle with thematically related sonnets in English, as they appear both in the 1645 and 1673 editions. Reading the Italian sonnets with or without the accompanying English sonnets yields significantly different results in meaning. He offers what he believes to be three possible alternatives: (i) the Italian poems are a self-contained unit; (ii) the Italian poems are prefaced by Sonnet I O Nightingale, that on yon bloomy Spray, but the sequence ends with Sonnet VI Giovane piano, e semplicetto
amante; or (iii) the Italian poems begin with Sonnet I and conclude with Sonnet VII *How soon hath time the suttle theef of youth.*

In the first instance, the sonnets would have as their thematic starting point the poet’s encounter with Emilia and would culminate in the disclosure to her of his own moral and æsthetic worth. In the next case, the sequence opens with *Nightingale* in order to reveal the poet’s pre-erotic predicament, that of yearning for the Muse and for Love, only to have both longings satisfied by the appearance of the *donna leggiadra*. In the passage from Sonnet I to Sonnet II, that is, from English to Italian, the poet “*narrerebbe elliticamente il suo innamoramento, e l’eloquenza del iato starebbe nel salto di lingua*” [would narrate elliptically his falling in love, and the eloquence of the break (between the two sonnets) would consist in the leap to another language]. Finally, in the last instance, another break appears between Sonnet VI *Giovane piano, e semplicetto amante* and Sonnet VII through which the poet passes from the convivial exuberance of youthful love back to the pre-erotic condition of poetic introspection, back to his confident trust in the “great task Master,” and back to English.

Conceiving of the Italian sonnet sequence as having English-sonnet bookends recasts the whole enterprise as a lyrical meditation on the nature of poetic self-awareness and anchors the Italian verse in the overarching thematic concerns that govern Milton’s lifelong polyglot literary production. Melchionda notes that

*nelle poesie italiane il tema amoroso è intrecciato, anzi soggiogato dalla riflessione sul poetare, e sul poetare in altra lingua, nella lingua eletta della poesia d’amore: l’incontro con la donna italiana figurerebbe l’incontro con la poesia italiana, e le poesie che lo narrano sarebbero dunque le poesie che*
narrano se stesse, il loro farsi [in the Italian poems the love theme is intertwined with, even subjugated to, reflection on making poetry, and on making poetry in another language, in the chosen language of love poetry: the meeting with an Italian woman would represent an encounter with Italian poetry, and the poems that narrate it would therefore be the poems that narrate themselves, their self-making].

Needless to say, Melchionda’s hypothesis that the donna leggiadra in fact allegorizes Milton’s own essays into Italian verse, especially when taken together with Volpi’s poetic genealogy of the dark lady, compells us to re-evaluate the search for an empirical beauty. Notwithstanding Smart’s conviction to the contrary, there’s no reason Milton mightn’t have crafted Emilia whole cloth. On the other hand, if there had been an historical encounter with a pellegrina bellezza, the subsequent inclusion of the Italian-language sonnet cycle inspired by her into a framework of English verse recasts that chance meeting as something significantly poetic. The young lover’s audacious leap into the Petrarchan vernacular, and his subsequent return to his native tongue, artfully parallels the edifying and salutary role that Italian learning plays in the whole intellectual formation of the Cheapside poet and his subsequent poetic output in English.

In his self-guided, but remarkably discerning, study of Italian literature during the Cambridge, Hammersmith and Horton years, Melchionda notes the tremendous energy that Milton expended to develop himself as an Italian sonneteer, an effort that paid as many dividends in his subsequent English verse as in his experiments with the language of Dante and Petrarch. Melchionda finds the short treatise Of Education (1644) an especially revealing indication of the ways that Italian learning will have shaped
Milton’s poetic praxis in the longer English works of the later period. In *Of Education*, it becomes clear that Milton regards Italian as the peer of Greek, Latin and Hebrew. The Tuscan *volgare* is not only the tongue of which Love boasts, but the only European common tongue fit to train “a man to perform justly skillfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war.” Inasmuch as he places Italian humanism on an equal footing with classical learning, Milton underscores the value of acquiring a thoroughly Italianate education. More to the point, his works themselves illustrate what Italian learning looks like in English poetry and rhetoric. The publishing activity of Milton’s last years, particularly the structure and content of the 1673 volume of *Poems*, which also includes *Of Education*, suggests a kind of apologia for all of Milton’s Italian predilections, including his own *sonetti*. Melchionda claims that

*Il volume fissava... l’autoritratto definitivo del poeta-vate; ed era quello – come, a suo mode, avrebbe visto Samuel Johnson – di un pervicace poeta italiano di lingua inglese: per noi, il piu integrale e illustre di quella non affollata specie* [The (1673 *Poems*) fixed... the definitive self-portrait of the poet-bard; and – as, in his own way, Samuel Johnson would have seen – it was that of a resolutely Italian poet of the English tongue: for us, the most complete and illustrious of that uncrowded species].

Both in 1645 and again in 1673, the Italian verse of Milton declares to the English public that this poet, who dares to versify of love in love’s own language, has indeed drunk deeply from Tuscan springs.

Furio Brugnolo, a colleague of Melchionda at the Università degli studi di Padova, teaches Romance philology. His primary areas of research focus on Italian and
Romance lyric from the Medieval troubadours to Petrarch, on literary multilingualism, and on Italian poetry of the Twentieth Century, especially Umberto Saba (1883-1957) and Pier Paolo Pasolini (1922-1975). To his warm commendation of Milton, we now turn. This scholar’s 2009 work, whose title, *La lingua di cui si vanta Amore*, comes from the commiato of Milton’s *canzone*, focuses on the phenomenon of heteroglossia. Brugnolo’s interest in Milton represents an effort to investigate comprehensively the literary use of Italian by non-Italians, a phenomenon heretofore little acknowledged and less studied. Even so, this artistic rarity has a long history, dating, it would seem, to the very beginning of Italian literature. A short list of luminaries in this category would include Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, Louise Labé, Montaigne, Francisco de Quevedo, Voltaire, Mozart, Lord Byron, Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol and James Joyce.

Brugnolo says, “Quello di Milton è in realtà un episodio pressoché unico nella storia della letteratura italiana fuori d’Italia” [That of Milton is in reality a unique episode in the history of Italian literature outside of Italy]. This uniqueness derives, in the first place, from “la qualità dei suoi sei componimenti, che non sfigurerebbero affatto in una antologia della letteratura italiana tout court” [the quality of his six compositions, which would not look at all out of place in an anthology of Italian literature *tout court*]. Secondly, Milton’s sonnets are distinctive because of

*il loro carattere chiuso e insieme relazionale – sono le sue uniche poesie di carattere amoroso, un piccolo canzoniere autonomo strategicamente incastonato in un contesto di sonetti inglesi di carattere non erotico, quasi che la scelta del contenuto dipendesse direttamente dalla scelta della lingua.*
viceversa [their closed and relational character — they are his only love poems, a short, autonomous canzoniere strategically placed in the context of English sonnets of a non-erotic nature, as if the choice of content depended directly on the choice of language, and vice versa].

As we have seen already in Melchionda, Milton’s sonnet cycle is both closed and enclosed. Closed, in that it reveals an integrated discourse on the love that compels the poet to transgress linguistic boundaries in obedience to the Muse and irrespective of his fitness to do so. Enclosed, because it embodies typographically the same linguistic transgression by appearing suddenly and without warning within a framework of English lyric in the 1645 collection.

Brugnolo’s inquiry, both literary and socio-linguistic, strikes upon an essential element of Milton’s lifelong polyglot literary production. Cromwell’s Secretary for Foreign Tongues must of necessity function as poet and polemicist, routinely crossing linguistic frontiers whenever the genre requires it. In this respect, the Italian verse of Milton — in which the poet responds in a strania favella [foreign speech] to the demands of love — is an occurrence in miniature of the work of the Commonwealth rhetor who likewise answers the challenges of European censure by exploiting the plurilingual resources of Renaissance humanism, and by doing so exceptionally.
Italian Critics and Petrarchismo

As a critical trope, Italian literary scholarship itself has brutally overworked the dogma of fatigued *petrarchismo*. The moil begins perhaps with the 1858 Zürich lectures\(^\text{377}\) of Francesco de Sanctis (1817-1883), but swells with Carducci’s forward to his own 1876 edition of the *Rime*\(^\text{378}\). Thereafter, a decidedly anti-Petrarchist orthodoxy, with surprisingly few apostasies, prevails for more than a century. Olivero, Allodoli and Guidi, for example, bring the full force of these sectarian tenets to bear upon the Italian verse of Milton. They can’t help themselves. For this reason, Baldi notes,

> *la critica italiana ha sentito in queste poesie più asprezze di lingua di quante non ce ne siano; e soprattutto le ha condannate come centone di luoghi petrarchisti; spesso non tanto contro il Milton quanto contro il petrarchismo. In questo senso la condanna è per lo meno anacronistica.* [Italian criticism has perceived in these poems more harshness of speech than there really is; above all they have been condemned as a rehash of Petrarchan commonplaces; often not so much against Milton as against Petrarchism. In this sense the condemnation is at the very least anachronistic.\(^\text{379}\)]

Baldi, then, argues that Italian critics before him do not so much object to stale *petrarchismo* in Milton, as to any *petrarchismo* whatsoever. This prejudice, rooted in historically determined æsthetic commitments, in turn leads to errors in judgment and evaluation. Baldi and Smart cite eight examples from Varchi, Tasso, Gandolfo Porrino (c.1490-1552) and Pietro Barrignano (c.1490-c.1545), all Cinquecento *petrarchisti* of the kind Allodoli derides, who allude obliquely to the lady’s name. Had he less of a visceral
aversion to the Sixteenth Century petrarchisti, Allodoli might himself have seen what Smart finally pieced together, namely, that the dark lady’s name was Emilia.

Ironically, the critics who have expressed such sharp disapproval of the petrarchismo they find in Milton’s Italian verse voice no such protestations to the same phenomenon appearing in his English verse. Take, for example, the expression in Sonnet II.8: *La onde l’alta tua virtù s’infiora*, the line leading into Allodoli’s “worst sort of Petrarchifying” phrase. Presumably, the *virtù* that flows so powerfully from the presence of the *donna leggiadra* reminds us of Laura in *Rime CXCVII.14*, “*Ma li occhi hanno vertu di farne un marmo,*” and must, therefore, be stale and juvenile. But in *L’Allegro* 121-123, which antedates the Italian poetry (in either the earlier or the later dating) and which Olivero and Allodoli both warmly commend, we find the very same trope: “With store of Ladies, whose bright eyes/Rain influence.” Then, in *Paradise Lost* IX.309-310, a work for which the whole lot of them consistently offer the highest praise, we meet it yet again: “I from the influence of thy looks receive/Access in every Virtue.”

Italian scholars have a higher tolerance for petrarchismo in Milton’s English poetry of conjugal love than in his Italian poetry of erotic desire, though we have strong reason to believe that Milton himself conceived of both conjugal love and erotic desire as a radical unity. Perhaps, for these critics, it is exactly the Protestant sponsorship of marriage which Milton weaves into his textual portrait of Adam and Eve that breathes new life into an otherwise moribund performance of tired Petrarchan commonplaces.

Petrarch himself inherited, and then transformed, the tropes, the lexicon and the plain, sweet rhyme of the dolce stil novo associated with Guido Guinizelli (1230-1276)
Guido Calvalcanti (1258-1300), Dino Frescobaldi (1271-1316) and Cino da Pistoia (1270-1336). Dante practiced and fine-tuned stilnovismo. Rescuing poetry from the refined, but difficult, obscure and often unintelligible trobar clus of troubadours, the dolce stil novo achieves a musicality that deliberately seeks to generates an authentic satisfaction. Petrarch seizes upon the introspective dimension of the dolce stil novo and amplifies it, without sacrificing the auditory and intellectual pleasures that stilnovismo stimulates. Ongoing engagement with the dolce stil novo elevates and dignifies the Tuscan language and so invests it with the literary and philosophical depth that first attracts Milton. If his sonetti sound harsh and stunted in Carducci’s ear, then they must in some sense be fundamentally disconnected from the centuries-long tradition that anticipates delight from vernacular poetry. But the same Carducci refutes this conclusion, for at least some of Milton’s lines “né accanto a certi del Petrarca scomparirebbero questi altri” [nor beside certain verses of Petrarch would these others disappear].

The sonnet genre, as he understands it, constitutes a compressed lyrical moment meant to please, captivate, even thrill the hearer. Would Milton not have failed as a poet of the volgare if his Italian poetry doesn’t reward the ear as well as the mind? But the Italian criticism of the sonetti, some of which certainly does assert an awkward handling of prosody and structure, also snatches away the opacity imposed by foreign language and places the building blocks of these poems more solidly within our grasp. As we saw in connection with my analysis of Walter Benjamin in Chapter 1, the criticism of the Italian verse is a counterpart to translation. This, in turn, makes it possible for anglophone critics at last to interrogate Milton’s Italian verse by applying
the procedures they would use when examining his poetry in our language. If we were to find in his English the same prosodic difficulties that Italians have deemed awkward in their language, we would then have to ask whether Milton might not have anticipated that the Italian ear would find his verse harsh, stunted, incorrect and flying in the face of the more precise rules of syntax. Surely the poetic mettle that “pursues/Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime” fears neither prosodic solecism nor the facile expectations of an audience? The confident poet who penned the Horton idylls and the Nativity Ode would not balk at harsh and stunted Italian verse if the rhetorical situation demanded precisely that intervention and none other.

If, in fact, he is doing so, what could lead Milton deliberately to write harsh and stunted verse in Italian? To answer, we must turn to Dante. Though he undoubtedly admires the urbane poet of the Rime petrose, there is also reason to believe that Milton might yet have found fault with at least some thematic elements of his stilnovismo. While Guinizelli and the stilnovisti who follow him certainly do sublimate the adulterous paradigm implicit in the fin’amor tradition of Troubadours, they do not entirely reject it. For what is the motif of the lover who suffers from the unremitting cruelty of the lady if not the artful transposition of concupiscent desire into poetics? Following instead the outlawed Dante of the Commedia, our poet seeks rather a poetics of conversion. This demanding anthropology, implicit in the apostrophe to wedded love in Book IV of Paradise Lost, makes its earliest, incipient appearance in the Italian verse.

Our poet, therefore, does not so much imitate the Rime petrose, as attempt to apply a Dantesque way of reasoning to the poetic challenges that confront him. What
feasible and fitting operations can one perform upon the prosodic forms that Dante treats in *De vulgari eloquentia*, encrusted as they are with centuries of conventional practices? The procedures for transformation have to be fitting, because the sonnet has become a *monumentum*, not of antiquity, but of a received vernacular tradition. His letter to Benedetto Buonmattei (1581-1648) shows that he accords the poetics of the Tuscan language as much respect as that of Greece or Rome. As I asserted in the Introduction, our poet gravitates instinctively toward traditional judgments of worth and utility. The ancient Roman principle of *mos maiorum* guides his selection of models in Italian rhetoric and poetics as well. What have the best said? What have they done? How do they think? In Italian prosody, Dante unquestionably comes first, but Italian literary history abounds with luminaries, which makes it peerless among European vernaculars. Of the Italian verse, Warton has said that they are more in the manner of Dante. He doubtless has the *Rime petrose* in mind. Indeed the very term almost suggests that Dante, whom Milton studied closely, had a kind of harsh and stunted *stilnovismo* in mind. If the anthropology of “sublime and pure thoughts, without transgression” is challenging, shouldn’t the verse that narrates it be just as demanding? Thus, the *Rime petrose* — understood not as model of what the sonneteer must do, but of what he can do — seem to guide Milton’s hand in writing his Italian verse.

Milton will likewise have thought deeply about Tasso’s *Discorsi sul poema eroico*, which I discussed at length in the Introduction. Because Tasso wrote the *Discorsi* while he was composing the *Gerusalemme liberata*, they reciprocally illuminate his theory of poetic discourse and his production of verse. As Milton’s
education at St Paul’s and Cambridge will have included a generous helping of epic poetry, we may safely assert that there is never a time when our poet is not thinking about what makes epic poetry, or lyric poetry, great. By analogy, this comprehensive theory of epic can apply as well to lyrical poetry, so we may be pardoned for thinking that Tasso’s intervention will have had an impact on Milton’s production of the sonnets. For example, Tasso asserts that the raw material of heroic poetry must draw upon well-known sources, so that the novelty of the work consists not in the fictionalization of history, but in the tying up and unravelling of allegorical meanings. What if, in like manner, the raw material of love poetry were to draw deliberately upon well-known tropes, so that the novelty of the sonnet consisted not in its departure from conventions, but in the tying up and unravelling of allegorical meanings artfully drawn from literary commonplaces? Furthermore, Tasso, following the Horatian dictum *miscere utile dulci*, believes that heroic poetry must both delight reader and hold him in awe. To verisimilitude, then, the poet must add the marvelous and, in his Italian sonnet cycle, to the conventions of the genre, Milton likewise adds the wonder of an English poet versifying his love for the lady in the lady’s language of love.

Flaws notwithstanding, the Italian verse of Milton turns out to be an adroit expression of *petrarchismo* in the very language that the genre of love poetry demands. As presently we shall see, however, this brief sonnet cycle is also a prelude to epic. For now, the skill and daring of the Englishman make it possible for him meet the exacting linguistic requirements of the rare, foreign beauty, and thus, despite the *disusata spera*, [unfamiliar clime], that is, the foreign tongue in which he composes, the young poet
discharges his lyrical duties in fidelity to that lady’s honor and intellect. Later, the same skill and daring must sing an “adventurous Song.” Because they are prone to see the Italian verse as the superficial, and extraterritorial, vagary of an otherwise serious poet, critics have been less ready to consider the sonetti as a précis of Milton’s more consequential interests. Consequently they ignore the symmetry of the simple lover’s noble attraction to the graceful lady in the Italian lyric and the ennobling desire of prelapsarian Adam for Eve in the English epic.

**Petrarchan Exegesis in the Florentine Academy**

As we have seen, documentary evidence makes it clear that he shared his own erudite Latin hexameter with fellow Svogliati, but there’s no external proof that Milton ever proffered his Italian verse to members of the Florentine academies. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to suppose that he did. Milton must have written the *Epitaphium Damonis*, mourning the loss of Charles Diodati, shortly after his return from Italy in 1639. Presumably, he commissioned a private printing of this Latin elegy in the pastoral style of Vergil in order to share his grief with his own family, the Diodati family and the circle of learned friends with whom he had become acquainted throughout the peninsula. Sonnet IV, which itself addresses Diodati, offers a natural platform for Milton initially to have disclosed to his academic fellows in Italy this crucial friendship with the known addressee of work that would eventually appear in the *Elegiarum liber* in 1645. To posit their awareness of his Italian sonnets makes sense in light of the *Epitaphium Damonis*, for it would represent Milton’s continuity with
textual embodiments of amicitia known elsewhere in the poetic praxis of the Seventeenth Century Italian academies.\textsuperscript{382}

Unlike the dark lady motif in the sonnets, which, as I have argued, requires no empirical basis, the trope of amicitia plays an important role as a mobile actor moving freely and operating variously throughout the complex network assembled from the corporeal academicians themselves, their publications, their intellectual, literary and artistic activities, their periodic convivia, their viva voce lectures, dialogues and disputes,\textsuperscript{383} and their symbolic self-representations in textual and emblematic artifacts. In the Defensio secunda (1654), Milton himself, at the height of his polemical career in service to the Protectorate (1653-1659), recalls the social matrix of these scholar-poets and their activities in the fondest terms.

In that city, which I have always admired above all others because of the elegance, not just of its tongue, but also of its wit, I lingered for about two months. There I at once became the friend of many gentlemen eminent in rank and learning, whose private academies I frequented—a Florentine institution which deserves great praise not only for promoting humane studies but also for encouraging friendly intercourse. Time will never destroy my recollection—ever welcome and delightful—of you, Jacopo Gaddi, Carlo Dati, Frescobaldi, Coltellini, Buonmattei, Chimentelli, Francini, and many others.\textsuperscript{384}

The Italian academicians with whom Milton developed such close personal friendships were all accomplished neo-Latinists, who also composed and often published in the Tuscan vernacular. Indeed, their works demonstrate the easy facility with which tropes like amicitia/inimicitia, especially when attached to the names of empirical friends or
enemies, travel from poetry in the common tongue to neo-Latin verse to prose encomia or invective. That his sonetti themselves represent Milton’s imitation of Italian models favors the view that the nexus of their dissemination, prior to their first publication in 1645, would include the very Italian scholar-poets who have already demonstrated their high regard for Milton by officially inducted him into academic fellowship with them, and not only the Svogliati, but the Apatisti as well. The act declares quite explicitly, and at least twice, that he is their intellectual and artistic peer and in the security of that affirmation, I find it perfectly plausible that even the most reticent Milton imaginable would have been eager to tender some part of his modest sonnet cycle in Italian.

Recognizing the Italian verse of Milton as the studied performance of a specific kind of historical genre invites a re-evaluation of the worth of Petrarchan pastiche in any language. In Milton’s case, his preference for the Tuscan volgare strongly resembles his commitment to the preeminence of late Republican Latin. First, he takes pains to identify the most prominent form of Italian eloquence, following Bembo in the questione della lingua. Then he assiduously sets about the task of composing Petrarchan verse according to the standards he has adopted by emulating the most celebrated Bembists of the Cinquecento: Della Casa, Varchi and Tasso. In rhetorical praxis, both classical and Renaissance, progymnasmata invariably require the younger student to take the first steps in composition by imitating the great poets. Imitation has a pre-Aristotelian pedigree; it represented standard instructional method in European humanism anywhere. The aim of such curricula, as we have seen, was never to produce vulgar mimicry. Rather, determining the range of fitting variations from the paradigm
was always an indispensible component of the pedagogy rooted in imitation. This is why anti-
petrarchismo, among the French pléiadistes, or in later English sonneteering, is still fundamentally
Petrarchan.

In the Seicento Italian academies that Milton frequented, one quickly perceives an insatiable appetite for imitating and then modifying Petrarchan style and trope, in order to determine whether, where and how the decorous, or dauntless, innovation may be made. As we have seen, Tasso produced more than 1,700 lyrical poems, some of which begin by repeating lines from Petrarch verbatim until a decisive turn of phrase vitiates the prototype, and an utterly new lyrical motif swims into our ken. As Della Casa and Tasso have evidently taught Milton, the Petrarchan form can become a vehicle for the kind of fierce epideictic lyric that we will see in the later sonnets, both those published in the 1673 collection and, especially, those withheld from it. Thus, to call Milton’s sonetti and the canzone derivative misses the point, not only of their composition, but of their later placement in the 1645 and 1673 collections. In his Italian verse, Milton emulates Dante and Petrarch to show that he can display for Emilia some measure of the honor and respect that they had shown to Beatrice and Laura. The cycle of Tuscan poems is as much a study in the construction of ethos as it is an experiment in Italian prosody. Its autochthonous rhetorical contours inevitably endow the poetic datum with the kind of density and multivalence that favors the political deployment of its petrarchismo and, thus, its lyrical transgressions. It is precisely this understanding of the Italian verse as a rhetorical exercise that makes it an entirely acceptable kind of
composition to bring to the attention of any of the Florentine scholars who become Milton’s fellow academicians.

Milton’s youthful experiments in Italian love lyric do at last become an explicitly political *petrarchismo* in 1645, when he marshals them to a rhetorical purpose related to and consonant with his initial excursions into Commonwealth polemics. In the 1645 *Poems*, Milton presents himself as a thoroughly Petrarchan poet, whose credentials are ratified by no less an honor than his fellowship in the Italian academies. The evidence he offers for public scrutiny is a polyglot anthology of his own work composed on diverse occasions in the idiom of classical poetics, in his own native tongue and even in the quintessential European language of vernacular eloquence, Italian. With this display, he seeks to establish an ethos of cultural authority from which Milton the radical polemicist may advocate divorce or deprecate prelacy.

In the 1645 *Poems*, while yet immersed in Commonwealth polemics, Milton debuts his Italian verse to the English public. Given urgency of the themes treated in the *Areopagitica*, the massive and timely political implications of anti-prelatical debate in Parliament, the ongoing deliberations of the Westminster Assembly of Divines and the bitter censure of his divorce tracts among the pious, this seems like an odd historical moment for Milton to release poetry that had languished in notebooks for over a decade. Turning again to Campbell and Corns, we find them neatly summarizing the speculation about his motives here:

Three hypotheses, by no means mutually exclusive, suggest themselves. Moseley in his epistle claims that he had actively solicited the poems, which could have stimulated Milton to pull the volume together. In the context of the vicious
campaign against him, Milton could have been minded to challenge the crude stereotyping by Presbyterians and the like of the tub-preaching fanatic with a definitive demonstration of his own, very different, cultural history. Finally, the collection could mark a current inclination, evident elsewhere, of irenic rediscovery of former friendships.\textsuperscript{385}

Without excluding the others, this dissertation roundly endorses the second hypothesis set forth here and explores more fully the implications of Milton’s challenge to “the crude stereotyping of Presbyterians” and the role that the political use of his own Italian-language \textit{petrarchismo} plays in the rhetorical architecture that emerges therefrom. The disciplinary conceit which here we must ignore purports to build a wall between rhetoric and poetics and to make the Milton scholars pay for it.

\textbf{Excursus: Contemporary Anglophone Criticism}

Although the emphasis of this dissertation rests squarely upon the Italian criticism of Milton’s \textit{volgare}, we may not neglect the research of those anglophone scholars who have themselves paid close attention to the evaluations of their counterparts in Italy. Their work often appropriates elements of Italian research, but sometimes without fully recognizing, or at least acknowledging, the complex matrices of historical, philosophical and ideological commitments that come bundled with the interpretation and assessment of Milton’s Italian verse by literary critics in Italy.

Thus far, we have heard from many of those among the Twentieth Century’s anglophone critics who have shown the most interest in Milton’s Italian verse and the Italian scholarship of that poetry. These include John S. Smart, Ernest P. Kuhl and his consultant, Charles W. Lemmi, and John Carey. To their ranks, we must add F. T.
Prince, Helen Darbishire’s consultant, John Purves, E.A.J. Hönigmann, John T. Shawcross, James E. Shaw and A. Bartlett Giamatti, and John K. Hale. Although the focus of this dissertation lies upon the Italian reception of Milton’s Italian verse, it has often been necessary to reference the work of anglophone critics in conjunction with the Italian criticism. As Bart Giamatti was a heritage speaker of Italian who lived in Italy as a child and then again as an adolescent, previous sections of this chapter treat the criticism of Shaw and Giamatti at length, though they write in English. Smart, Prince, Purves, Honigmann, Shawcross, Carey, and Hale, however, merit brief treatment here.

John Semple Smart (1868-1925) spent the whole of his academic career in Scotland. He was graduated from St Andrews as a Master of Arts in philosophy in 1894, and was awarded the LittD in 1912. In 1907, he was appointed to a lectureship in English at Glasgow where he stayed for the rest of his career. Apart from his oft-cited 1921 edition on Milton’s sonnets, he wrote on the Ossian controversy in an unsympathic 1905 study of James Macpherson, a philosophical disquisition on tragedy (1922), and a life of Shakespeare unfinished at the time of his death, but completed and published by W. Macneile Dixon in 1929. All four of his principal literary studies have recently been reprinted. We value his work on the sonnets primarily for the clarity he brings to questions of Milton’s use of Italian sources and for his glosses. His treatment of the Italian poems themselves was the most comprehensive in English at the time of publication and remains standard even today. He seems independently to have drawn many of the same conclusions about the Italian poems that we find in Ettore Allodoli’s
1907 work, but does not appear to have been aware of either Italian or American scholarship on Milton’s volgare.

The scholarship of Frank Templeton Prince (1912–2003) plays a role of singular importance in this dissertation, primarily because I have sought throughout to investigate Milton’s sonetti as he did the foremost English works, that is, through the lens of the Italian vernacular eloquence that our poet admired and absorbed. His work, *The Italian Element in Milton’s Verse* (1954), is still widely consulted and cited. Nonetheless, the South African-born, British poet and scholar was once better known for the poems he wrote during World War II, though they are now little remembered. Prince taught himself Italian at Oxford and wrote *Soldier’s Bathing*, his most anthologized poem, while interviewing Italian POWs for the British Army Intelligence Corps in the latter months of the war. What better pairing than for an italophone English poet-critic to deliberate languidly over an italophone English poet-critic?

Despite the ongoing, seemingly frenetic, search for an empirical dark lady, particularly acute in his day, a glance at Prince’s own verse indicates to us that he always knew better. Prince the poet shows traces of the same kind of dramatic multivalence and rhetorical density that we find in Milton, though perhaps more on the modest scale of the Italian poems themselves than that of our poet’s English verse. Prince’s simple observation in 1954, namely that the “Italian influence on Milton’s verse is deeper than it had been thought to be, especially as it affects the epic verse” remains utterly contemporary, for English-language scholarship still finds itself in the incipient stages of assimilating the already expansive and still rapidly expanding sphere
of Anglo-Italian Renaissance literary transactions. Milton represents an exceptional instance of such transactions, and Prince, more than any before him, grasped the depth of Italian learning in our poet and its impact on his literary production over a lifetime.

Thanks largely to Prince, we know that “Milton’s style stands in particular in a very precise relationship to the verse of two poets, Giovanni Della Casa and Torquato Tasso,” and Prince’s work details this particular relationship very precisely. Behind both Della Casa and Tasso, Prince detects the towering figure of Pietro Bembo. Though his own poetic output suffers in comparison to the superior work of the other two poets, Bembo’s criticism nonetheless established the widely accepted requirements of an elevated, classical use of the Tuscan language. Prince therefore notes,

The distinction between words and the arrangement of words, between vocabulary and idiom, thus stands at the head of Bembo’s critical analysis, and makes possible the chief literary effort of the century, the cultivation of that latinità in volgare to which we find a parallel in Milton. Without the example of Bembo’s followers Milton would never have succeeded as he did in forming his epic diction, in which he uses all the varied texture and substance of English words, but exerts all his strength to work them into an un-English structure.

As the expression latinità in volgare suggests, Bembo’s concern focuses on how to invest common speech with the Latin syntax and diction that will ennoble it. On the one hand, these procedures endow the Tuscan language with magnificent poetic resources and a long classical history. On the other hand, by hitching the fortunes of the volgare to a decidedly Vergilian star, Bembo “did not in fact liberate Italian from the apparently
crushing superiority of the classical languages, but rather attempted to impose on the modern language as many of the procedures of the ancient as it could be made to bear. Thus Prince sees Milton’s exceptionally Latinized English as the legacy of Bembo, Della Casa and Tasso operating throughout the later poems. Nonetheless, it operates in the earlier, shorter poems as well.

Though idiosyncratic, Prince uses the term heroic sonnet to describe the nearly five hundred rime in which Tasso has labored to clothe the Tuscan vernacular in the vesture of Latin style. For Prince, Tasso’s indefatigable applications of the Bembist theory of magnificence on the smaller scale of the heroic sonnet yield at last the elevated lexicon he would subsequently exploit in the Gerusalemme and the Mondo creato (1594/1607). We hear, for example, that

The elaborate Latinate diction which was eventually to emerge in Tasso’s epic poetry therefore made its first appearance in the sonnets of Bembo and Della Casa. The position of the sonnet in relation to the development of epic diction is the same in the history of Italian sixteenth-century poetry as it is in the work of Milton, for in both cases the style which is to achieve such expansion is tested earlier on this small scale.

Milton’s English sonnet production likewise falls into this heroic category. In the Italian poems, however, Milton’s concern focuses on the inherent nobility that the volgare has, through the efforts of Bembo, Della Casa and Tasso, now acquired. If he can — and Mario Praz assures us that in fact he does — master the Bembist manner in Italian, will he not possess all the resources that such mastery confers upon him for the benefit of his later English verse as well? Though Prince does not treat the sonetti and the canzone
specifically, there are nonetheless multiple instances (integrated throughout this dissertation) in which his observations about the impact of Della Casa and Tasso on Milton’s later verse seem to me to apply in the first place to the Italian poems. If it is correct to see in Milton’s profound knowledge of the Bembist manner a storehouse of Latinate style from which his later epic verse so confidently draws, then surely the experiments in Italian prosody offer an early and privileged insight into how Milton handles explicitly Bembist requirements. The Italian poems constitute a ledger, as it were, of stylistic and thematic imports — Prince calls them the Italian element — exchanged so profitably in his epic commerce as to suggest that Milton had spent a lifetime stocking his shelves with these goods.

John Purves (1877-1961), who prepared the notes on the Italian poems for volume II of the Darbishire edition of Milton’s complete poetry (1963), was Lecturer and Reader in Italian at the University of Edinburgh from 1919 until 1947. After two years in Rome and Siena as a Carnegie Scholar at the turn of the century, he began his teaching career at the University of Aberdeen. Thence he taught Italian in Johannesburg before returning definitively to Scotland at the end of the First World War. In 1949, he assisted in refounding the Scottish-Italian Circle, suspending during the Second World War. In the course of his research and writing, he published studies of Camões, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Pringle, Shakespeare, Sixteenth Century Scoto-Italian Cultural Relations, the Dutch poet, Constantijn Huygens; he edited collections of Italian lyric poetry, including Foscolo and Carducci. In 1953, he released a Dictionary of Modern Italian, published by Routledge. Purves himself corresponded with Thomas Hardy, J. M. Barrie, A. C.
Swinburne, A. E. Housman, Rudyard Kipling, William Butler Yeats, Dylan Thomas, Sully Prudhomme, Teófilo Braga, Luigi Pirandello, Salvatore Quasimodo, Giuseppe Ungaretti, Virginia Woolfe and John Heath-Stubbs. This correspondence is now collected in the National Library of Scotland.

Purves’ reviews of the critical work of Sergio Baldi (1909-1984), whose Milton criticism figures so prominently in this dissertation, show that he kept a close watch on contemporary Italian literature and scholarship. Purves commends Baldi’s 1954 study of Wyatt as “one of the fullest and best documented” in any language. Purves pays particular attention to what Baldi says about the structure of Wyatt’s verse, which he sees as “a phase in the long contest between syllabic and accentual metre, seen both in Donne and Milton, and renewed in modern times by Coleridge, Browning, and Hopkins. *Una storia della metrica inglese*, [Baldi] writes, *sarebbe, credo, la storia di questo conflitto fra regole sillabiche e sensibilità accentuale e della loro alterna fortuna.*”392 As we shall see, the relevance of Baldi’s interest in the history of English prosody bears tremendous fruit in his future studies of Milton: the Italian verse and the Italian element in the English verse. To his credit, Purves recognizes the value of such attention being paid to the relationship of prosody to the overarching challenges of transposing classical and Italian paradigms into English verse, a vital feature of Milton’s longer and later poems. His experiments in Italian prosody thus constitute an incipient stage of Milton’s intervention into the history of English prosody. Likewise, Baldi’s early work on the prosody of English and Scottish ballads, *Ballate popolari d’Inghilterra e di Scozia* (1948), receives high praise from Purves.
The next figure to consider in this cluster of anglophone critics is the German-born Englishman, Ernst Anselm Joachim Honigmann (1927-2011), whom we first met in Chapter 1. Eventually elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1989 at the peak of his career, Honigmann had also been an early fellow of the Shakespeare Institute during its first three years of operation at Mason Croft (1951-1954) in Stratford-upon-Avon. In the same year that Baldi published his work on the *sonetti*, E.A.J. Honigmann, like Olivero, Allodoli and Smart before him, treated the Italian verse of Milton in the context of his comprehensive work on all of Milton’s sonnets. The section in Chapter 1 on the date of the Italian verse summarized Honigmann’s position not so much in support of the later dating of Italian poems as against the interpretations upon which much of argument for earlier dating rests. The paucity of annotations on the Italian sonnets, however, suggests that Honigmann cannot have read either Baldi or pre-publication drafts of Shaw-Giamatti. Instead he relies primarily upon Smart, Prince and Purves.

About the tone of the Italian poems, Honigmann notes that Milton’s

tributes to the bewitching Leonora Baroni in three Latin epigrams establish that while in Italy he adopted a more Italian attitude to feminine charms: the Italian sonnets are a trifle of much the same order and, in the circumstances, would have been perfectly excusable as, at least in part, a literary exercise.

Though Honigmann doesn’t say so, Milton’s Greek poetry might also fit into the category of literary exercise, but if this is so, we must note that Milton himself is remarkably unabashed about publishing his Greek and Italian, first in 1645 and again, without any revision whatsoever, in 1673. Lastly, for the reason given above in the section on the date of the poems, the term *trifle* bespeaks Petrarch’s coy modesty
regarding the vernacular production of the *Canzoniere*. To be sure, Honigmann does not seem to mean this, but he has inadvertently implied as much.

A year after Honigmann released his work on all of Milton’s sonnets, John T. Shawcross published a short interpretation of the Italian verse as a complete sonnet cycle. Shawcross understands the neo-Platonic motif to indicate a poetic oscillation between the demands of divine love and human love.

The lady, we are told, in Sonnet 2 is charming with a noble soul that inspires love; her acts are gentle, her virtue high; her speech or song stirs the obdurate alpine wood. She is Aemilia, a name which signifies one who emulates: she represents the earthly beauty and love which emulate divine beauty and love, as in Spenser’s four hymns. Only grace from Heaven would enable one to withstand amorous desire for her. The poet’s strategy is to pose human love against divine love, as if the two were in conflict. One falls victim to the arrows and bow of love, or one withstands it... But Sonnet III makes it explicit that, though love for her moves him to versify in a new flowering of foreign speech, the poet’s heart does not yet respond with such agility to the promptings of divine love. Gradually, however, the apparent opposition of the two loves retreats, for “Although [Italian] works to raise human love to an ideal and ethereal level, it also works to suggest divine meanings.” His conclusion that the dark lady is a personification deals adroitly with the problem of Milton addressing both the *donna leggiadra* and Diodati in the same sonnet sequence and obviates the need for further historical heuristics. As we have seen, Melchionda parallels Shawcross’ insight,
but further develops the implications of narrating both human and divine love in Italian poems that narrate themselves.

The interest Shawcross manifests here spotlights a feature of the critical reception of the Italian poems heretofore unaddressed by this dissertation, namely, the paucity of interpretive efforts that have been brought to bear upon the sonetti and the canzone. By and large, the critics, English or Italian, ask about the structure of the cycle, its heroic diction, prosodic elements, the lady herself, the Petrarchan commonplaces, the date of composition, the linguistic competency of the poet, his influences and so forth, but rarely venture an interpretive word and — apart from Shawcross, Lynn Enterline399 and Mario Melchionda — never ask what they all mean when taken together. Why? I judge that there are three reasons, two that obtain for anglophones and the last for Italians. Firstly, they’re in volgare, before which linguistic anomaly the anglophone scholar, like the amorous youths of the canzone ask, “Why?” Secondly, the view that these poems are minor, juvenile and experimental dissuades the English critic from engaging them. Thirdly, because they seem to belong to the discredited category of Petrarchan pastiche, the contemporary Italian critic had likewise found little reason to treat them seriously.

An education in the literæ humaniores makes for a fit Miltonist indeed, as the examples of John Carey (b. 1934) and John K. Hale clearly show. Both read Greats at Oxford and both bring their own considerable knowledge of Milton’s languages to bear upon their critical investigation of his work. Carey, on whose reading of the Elegia sexta the earlier date of the Italian poems largely rests, held the Merton Professorship of English Literature at Oxford from 1975 to 2002, during which time he edited the
complete shorter poems of Milton, including the Italian verse, twice for Longman. His annotations for the Italian poems are broad and succinct; they draw as much upon contemporary Italian scholarship as English. Their primary value is to make a wide selection of Italian and English commentary immediately accessible to the casual reader of the sonetti, though they are by no means comprehensive. Carey has made excellent use of Sergio Baldi’s work.

No one has done more than John Hale to shed light upon the particulars of Milton’s multilingualism. Hale’s work in this field thus lays the foundation for any investigations of our poet that attempt to keep his polyglot output and resources squarely in view, my own included. Multilingualism endows our poet with a tremendous wealth of choice, not only what language to compose in, but what resources of language to draw from no matter what language he composes in. Hale summarizes the ways in which Milton’s many tongues intersect with the widest possible matrix of Renaissance humanist concerns, which include:

(a) the question of whether (or when) to write in Latin or the mother tongue; (b) languages as access to the springs of religion and thought for the Christian humanist; (c) the practice and norms of humanist education; (d) related broader questions of and intertextuality. A fifth language-issue is more speculative: (e) the question, was the past to which languages gave access more of a burden than an opportunity to the humanist, leading one home or into exile, and as double vision, was it a source of curse or blessing? Finally, (f) was Milton’s attitude to languages typical or exceptional in his age, so that we may perceive the purposes for which you acquired and maintained them?
Poetic laurels notwithstanding, Milton’s multilingualism alone situates him in the pantheon of European humanists. While the Muse may have pledged the renown of later generations, his erudition and languages brought him a preeminent reputation in his own day. After Sergio Baldi, my greatest debt in this dissertation is to John Hale.

In 2012, with Donald Cullington, Hale released a new translation and critical edition\textsuperscript{403} of the Miltonic \textit{De doctrina christiana}, discovered in 1823 and first translated into English by Charles Sumner (1790-1874) two years later.\textsuperscript{404} The Sumner translation is defective, most notably because he insists upon using the King James version throughout for all Scripture citations, whereas Milton himself used either Immanuel Tremellius’ translation (1575-79) from Hebrew into Latin or his own translations from Hebrew and Syriac into Latin,\textsuperscript{405} both of which produce alternative readings to those preferred by the Authorized version translators. To address these deficiencies, John Carey likewise produced a translation in 1973.\textsuperscript{406} Though Milton’s authorship is still contested,\textsuperscript{407} our chief interest in the \textit{De doctrina christiana} lies in its potential to elucidate the theological convictions and hermeneutic methods undergirding \textit{Paradise Lost}, \textit{Samson Agonistes} and \textit{Paradise Regain’d}. The project,\textsuperscript{408} ideally suited to the philological expertise and insight that Hale brings to bear, does for exegetical investigation into our poet’s work what his earlier criticism in multilingualism and polyglot display does for philological inquiry of the kind upon which I have relied for my study of the Italian verse of Milton.
Conclusion: Prefiguring the Poetics of Conjugal Love

In his letter to Benedetto Buonmattei, Milton says, “Consider now, I beg, whether there is not something providential in my having been sent to spend these few days among you, your latest guest from foreign lands — one than whom your country has, I think, no more devoted admirer.” Milton’s admiration for Italian language and letters, however well it may have won over the Italian academicians with whom he became acquainted in Florence, Rome and Naples, nonetheless leaves him, at least potentially, in a compromising position regarding the militantly Protestant intellectual and cultural life of his own native land. This would doubtless have been all the more acutely problematic in the context of the multiple ecclesial controversies that led up to the Civil War. Whether one advocates an earlier or a later date for their composition, Milton would still have written the Italian poems in the decade between 1629 and 1639. During that very period, however, an unremitting and ardently Calvinist censure of the Church of England inveighed against the prelatical opposition to a more thoroughgoing Reformation, especially in the policies of Archbishop Laud. To be sure, Milton had not yet embarked upon his public career in Commonwealth polemics, but English culture generally deprecated any propinquity to Catholic intellectual achievement and, of course, our poet’s attraction to Italy was uncommon, unorthodox and undisguised.

How problematic is his relationship with Italian vernacular poetics in light of his Protestantism? Ought Italian humanism’s propinquity to Catholicism have disturbed Milton and, if it did, do any signs of that disturbance remain in his poetry or in his prose? Milton’s affinity for Catholic Italy, therefore, can be problematized in light of
the critique of Roger Ascham (1515-1568), to which we briefly alluded in the Introduction and which we must now develop in greater depth. Ascham, then, will embody for us the kind of opprobrium called forth by those who might have been inclined to see Italy as contaminating Milton. Nor can our poet have been unaware of his susceptibility to rebuke in the matter of Italy, *petrarchismo* and his academic friendships with Catholics. As we can imagine, he will consequently have taken pains to shield himself from at least his own self-denunciation in this regard and the harsh and stunted verse in the Italian poems may well provide a trace of his efforts.

**The Lascivious Metres of Italian Humanism**

Upon his death in 1600, the friends of Orazio Pallavicino (1540-1600), a Genovese patrician, convert to Protestantism and denizen of Cambridgeshire, published a short volume of poetry to commemorate his life, his fortunes and his unusual career. Entitled *An Italians dead bodie Stucke with English Flowers: on death of Sir Horatio Pallavicino*, the collection includes this memorable ditty:

*An Englishe man Italianate*

*Becomes a devill incarnate*

*But an Italian Angelifide*

*Becomes a Saint Angelifide* (Field 11).

The first couplet of the free-standing quatrain translates a well-known Italian maxim: *un inglese italianato è il diavolo incarnato*. In its original context, the proverb may refer to Sir John Hawkwood (1320-1394) an English *condottiere* who rose to prominence during the endemic Fourteenth Century peninsular wars between city republics,
imperial factions and papal interests in Italy (Caferro 2). Having fought for Edward III at Crécy and Poitiers, Hawkwood later found his way to the Italian peninsula where, for more than thirty years and through constantly shifting alliances, he commanded independent mercenaries in the service of the Pope, of the Visconti, and of the Florentine and Pisan republics. Always working for the highest bidder, he sometimes changed sides multiple times in the midst of a single campaign. In 1377, acting on behalf of Gregory XI, the last of the Avignon popes, Hawkwood destroyed Cesena and slaughtered its citizens, possibly on the instructions of Robert of Geneva, the future antipope Clement VII. Machiavelli refers to him in Book XII of the Prince and claims that Florence was better off for his defection, for had he triumphed on behalf of the Republic, he would have been ideally positioned to coerce either more capital or more power from the Florentines. To Italians, Hawkwood represented the very worst that England had to offer. In its Englished version, however, the proverb takes on an entirely different meaning.

As we have seen, Roger Ascham, a Cambridge scholar who received appointments at the courts of Edward, Mary and Elizabeth, energetically repudiated the idea of An Englishe man Italianate, that is, the intrusion of Italian intellectual influence into the moral and political formation of an English gentleman. Though Protestant by conviction, and openly so, Ascham nonetheless served in the royal household of Mary and Philip. His prose style in Latin was highly regarded by Cardinal Pole and by the Bishop of Winchester, Stephen Gardiner, through whose patronage he secured employment as a Marian bureaucrat. Evidently, he minded his own business at court
and, as Latin secretary during a particularly tumultuous period, must have had plenty of his own business to mind. Formerly tutor to the young princess, Ascham kept his position at court when Elizabeth acceded to the throne. At her instigation, he wrote *The Scholemaster* (1563), a strikingly progressive and humane tract in pedagogy, in which he famously equates Italy with the Homeric enchantress, Circe. Michael Wyatt explains Ascham’s cynical assessment of Italian learning:

> Besides citing his own adverse experience in Venice, Ascham offers further proof of Italy’s negative valence in Plato’s unhappy experience with the Sicilians he had lived among during his service to Dionysius, the tyrannical ruler of Syracuse, as well as the same philosopher’s diagnosis of those who yield to Circe’s blandishments: forgetfulness, the abandonment of learning and honesty, the loss of discernment between good and evil, and an arrogant disdain of the good; all leading to “pride in [oneself], and contempt of others, the very badge of all those who serve in Circe’s court” (159).

Ascham’s own travel in Italy would have taken place during the Edwardian period, when he entered the service of Richard Morrison, the King’s ambassador to Charles V. Dr Johnson reports that he intended to visit Trent during the second period of the Ecumenical Council between May of 1551 and April of 1552, “but the scantiness of his purse defeated his curiosity.” Had he attended, Ascham would have found himself at the epicenter of Tridentine debates over the central doctrinal controversies in Catholic and Protestant sacramental theologies: the Eucharist, Penance and Extreme Unction.
During Elizabeth’s reign, Ascham had come to identify in the English penchant for all things Italian a dangerous potential to compromise an education in genuine virtue grounded in the classics. For Ascham, a devill incarnate epitomizes those dimensions of the Italian Renaissance that would surely corrupt English mores, given any chance to do so.

If Scylla drowne him not, Carybdis may fortune swalow hym. Some Circes shall make him, of a plaine English man, a right Italian. And at length to hell, or to some hellish place, is he likelie to go: from whence is hard returning, although one Vlysses, and that by Pallas ayde, and good counsell of Tiresias once escaped that horrible Den of deadly darkenes. 412

Here Circe is the once noble peninsula now overrun by condottieri, stuck in a quagmire of political maneuverings, submerged by factional loyalties constantly and disastrously in flux. Most of all, Ascham’s Circe is an Italy of papism, that is, a tangled, pan-European web of decayed ecclesial polities unable or unwilling to shepherd a populace overwhelmed by vice. Ascham never attempted, nor to my knowledge did any Elizabethan, a descriptive ecclesiology of the Roman Church, although his curiosity about Trent suggests an interest in the matter. Rather, he would more likely have experienced Catholicism much as his contemporaries did. For the English Protestant, popery designates an aggregate of repressive disciplinary practices, doctrinal accretions, and ritualistic operations that nevertheless come together in a perilously enticing manner, at least for those who lack the sobriety to peer beyond the mask. After all, Circe must first beguile in order to entrap. In contrast to the continental venalities of Rome, the principal advantage of the Church of England is that it is English, and, as
such, maintains a geographical and ethnic detachment from the impractical claims of universality that have wreaked so much havoc upon continental Europe. To place the monarch at the head of the national church simply means that uniquely English ecclesial concerns can consistently be treated in a uniquely English manner.

Ascham gives voice to a recurrent and decidedly negative English assessment of Italy and its close association with the Roman Church, a critique at once chauvinistic and practical. If the episodic conflicts of the Hundred Years War honed England’s sense of its Englishness, they also taught the English that foreign influence upon their political structures rarely benefitted the populace. Though Italians never presented the kind of threat to national security that we see in relations with the Valois or the Habsburgs, Ascham nonetheless applies the lessons of French and Spanish interference to the case of papist Italy. As the Elizabethan skeptic would understand it, Italian learning, like Italy itself, expresses

Lascivious metres, to whose venom sound

The open ear of youth doth always listen;

Report of fashions in proud Italy,

Whose manners still our tardy apish nation

Limps after in base imitation (Richard II, I.ii.19ff).

Regarding the seductive influence that poetry exercises over national imagination, the Duke of York here shares his distrust with Plato. In books X and XXXV of the Republic, Socrates too frets about the non-rational charms of poetic mimesis and, for this reason, proposes the expulsion of poets from the ideal state. Ascham’s Platonist attitude toward Italian vernacular poetics permeates the intellectual milieu to which Puttenham and
Sidney feel constrained to reply in *The Art of English Poesie* (1589) and *The Defence of Poesy* (1595) respectively.

To be clear, Ascham objects not only to the influence of *petrarchismo* on the open ear of youth, but comprehensively to the whole venom sound of a wide-ranging and unrestrained humanism, made all the more compelling by the elegance and attractiveness of Italian vernacular literature. In their prescriptive return to, and re-evaluation of, the sources, Italian humanists had radically destabilized the received wisdom of the ages and thus undercut the moral topoi derived from classical learning that Ascham would have preferred to keep as axiomatic. So even the treasury of Italian humanism through which Milton tended to view the classics themselves would in principle have been subjected to Ascham’s withering glance.

The scholarly academies frequented by Milton during his journey to Italy flourished amidst the historical detritus of merchant republicanism. From the medieval period, endemic internecine strife in the *commune*, once governed by robust assemblies of the propertied classes, propelled Italian city-states into essentially monarchical principalities ruled by the great families: Visconti, Sforza, della Scala, Gonzaga, d’Este, Colucci, Malatesta, Colonna and Medici. Even so, the historical memory of the *serenissima repubblica* permeated academic ideals throughout the peninsula and often found a welcome reception in the intellectual networks generated by participation in the activities of the various academies. Indeed, the very nature of inquiry and debate in the academies, focused as relentlessly as they were on the theoretical dimensions of even the most practical considerations, seems to have allowed the *signoria* to endorse
an entirely Platonic ideal of a republic, so long as it never actually threatened their *de facto* principate. Moreover, aristocratic patronage of intellectual pursuits always kept the princely cheek close by the academic jowl, as the examples of Tasso, Varchi, Ficino, and even Petrarch himself, clearly show.

Even so, let latter-day Aschams repeat the old schoolmaster’s remonstrance of Italy; Milton has already thought the matter through. His first-hand experience of the academies, guided by his Protestant instincts, gives him a privileged position from which to adjudicate the benefits of Italian humanism while avoiding the hazards of treating Italian social, political and ecclesial models uncritically. Nor does the censorial gaze, however severe, intimidate him. We hear, for example, in the *Areopagitica* (1644):

That vertue therefore which is but a younclung in the contemplation of evill, and knows not the utmost that vice promises to her followers, and rejects it, is but a blank vertue, not a pure; her whitenesse is but an excrementall whitenesse; Which was the reason why our sage and serious Poet Spencer, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher then Scotus or Aquinas, describing true temperance under the person of Guyon, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bowr of earthly blisse that he might see and know, and yet abstain. Since therefore the knowledge and survay of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human vertue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more safely, and with lesse danger scout into the regions of sin and falsity then by reading all manner of tractats, and hearing all manner of reason? And this is the benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.
Good is neither the absence of evil nor virtue the absence of vice. Rather, good is distinguished by its contrary and antagonistic relationship to evil and virtue is seen as a preference for that which is truly better. “See and know, and yet abstain” must, then, be Milton’s rejoinder to whomsoever would call into question his close association with Italian humanists in their own quarters. Milton famously rewrites even Spenser in this passage and one cannot help but see something of the Italian academician himself in the guise of this revised Guyon of the *Areopagitica*.

Somewhat counterintuitively, therefore, considering the prominence of Genevan letters in the development of the English Protestant identity, it is instead to the academies in Catholic Italy that Milton turns for models of “cultural support for a reformed community.” In the Second Book of *The Reason of Church Government* (1642), the experience of Geneva still fresh in his mind, he commends rather the Italian paradigm to his countrymen:

[We] may civilize, adorn and make discreet our minds by the learned and affable meeting of frequent Academies, and the procurement of wise and artfull recitations sweeten’d with eloquent and gracefull inticements to the love and practice of justice, temperance and fortitude, instructing and bettering the Nation at all opportunities.

Though perfectly congenial to orthodox Calvinists, Geneva was neither a model of republicanism nor even of pan-Protestant tolerance of the kind for which Milton would become such a distinguished advocate in the *Areopagitica*.

While in Geneva, Milton lodged, if not with Giovanni Diodati, Charles’s uncle, at least in close enough proximity to him in order to speak with the gentleman daily. By
then, of course, Charles Diodati had died in England, but it’s a matter of some speculation whether Milton and the elder Diodati yet knew of the young man’s fate. In any case, on 10 June 1639, we do know that Milton inscribed an *album amicorum* in the Genevan home of the Cerdogni family, prominent Neapolitan Protestants. In it, paraphrasing Horace, Milton writes: *Cælum non animam muto dum trans mare curro* [The sky, not my soul, do I exchange when across the sea I hasten]. He also includes this phrase from the *Comus*: “if vertue feeble were/ Heaven it selfe would stoope to her.”

What does he mean by these inscriptions? Lewalski regards what Milton has written here as “wholly characteristic,” at least in part because of the juxtaposition of his own verse with that of a classical poet. Campbell and Corns suggest they are simply “an affirmation of Milton’s unwavering Protestantism” in the context of theocratic Geneva. Perhaps contemporary scholarship derives the meaning of his epigraphy on this occasion from the 1654 *Defensio Secunda*, in which Milton justifies his integrity in matters doctrinal and moral despite extensive travel in dissolute Catholic realms. Indeed, it almost sounds as if he were responding to the complaints of some latter-day Ascham that “Circes shall make him, of a plaine English man, a right Italian.” In the moment, however, he could just as easily be implying that he’s not so impressed with Geneva as to forswear his frank and unabashed admiration of the Italian academies, their intellectual networks and their potential to “civilize, adorn and make discreet our minds.” In other words, it is just as plausible to read his Genevan state of mind in light of what he has written first in *The Reason of Church Government* on the academies and
his fellowship with Italian intellectuals, and later in his letter to Carlo Dati\textsuperscript{419} on the great sense of loss he felt in leaving them all behind. Especially since this is precisely the confident, world-travelling, Italian academician who will shortly launch upon his career as a polemicist precisely by taking the Protestant establishment of England to task, I see no reason not read his deployment of Horace and his own verse in Geneva as both deliberately ambiguous and potentially subversive.

In the \textit{Defensio secunda pro populo Anglicano} (1654), Milton makes specific mention of Italian humanists Jacopo Gaddi, Carlo Dati, Valerio Chimentelli, Piero Frescobaldi, Agostino Coltellini and Benedetto Buonmattei. Two of this august company, Piero Frescobaldi and Benedetto Buonmattei, were priests, and a third — Valerio Chimentelli (1620-1668), but eighteen years old at the time of Milton’s visit — would later receive holy orders. Given the interesting node of connection noted in Chapter 1 between the \textit{sonetti} and Valerio Chimentelli, we should recall that Campbell and Corns raised the question of whether he mightn’t have been the native speaker of the Tuscan \textit{volgare} thought to have helped Milton polish his Italian verse, if indeed there had been one. What are we to make of the future, anti-prelatical detractor fraternizing with Catholic clergy? And what if his Petrarchan verse proves to have been honed through an intimate alliance with the same? Yet Milton shows no signs of embarrassment or defensiveness with regard to the \textit{sonetti}. Quite the contrary, by featuring them so conspicuously in the 1645 \textit{Poems}, he asks in effect that they be taken as seriously as his English verse, which he makes public precisely in the midst of that brutally Protestant arena of contest: the polemics of a nation careening toward Civil
War. As the controversy over his divorce tracts will have made plain, the poet’s efficacy in the public forum depends entirely upon the strength of his Reformation commitments. Indeed, as an oblique reference in the tract *Of Reformation* (1641) may suggest, Milton does seem to want to recruit Petrarch to the Protestant cause. Thus, we must regard Milton’s confidence in his own unimpeachably Protestant way of absorbing Italian genres and learning, and his cultivation of Italian intellectual society, as neither wishful nor ill-considered. In fact, as presently we shall see, he has consciously and deliberately built his own italophile poetics upon a foundation laid by none lesser than “our sage and serious Poet Spenser.”

**Sublime and Pure Thoughts Without Transgression**

In the much same way that Milton anticipates the learned secularism of our age, so Petrarch prefigures the introspective humanism of the late Renaissance. Thomas Greene summarizes the common view of Petrarch’s essential modernity.

The radical stasis of the medieval personality was first explicitly challenged by Petrarch who, gazing steadily upon himself, found an altogether different state of affairs. The egoism of Petrarch was so monumental and so acute that it was an event in European intellectual history. What troubled Petrarch about himself was precisely the lack of continuity in his tangled passions, the distractions of his cluttered motives, [his] fatal complexity. Because he appears to us from the oriental horizon of our modern sense of self, we cannot help but interpret Petrarch in light of those dispositions of thought most congenial and familiar to us. Among them, differentiation between the psychological and social spheres of human self-imagining best captures what we mean when we think
of ourselves as modern. Thanks, we would say, to the revolutionary paradigm shift implicit in Renaissance rhetoric, music and art, we know that religion should not intrude into politics, nor economics into science, nor law into sexuality, and so on. Yet even if modern culture today implies secularization and the retreat of religious conviction from the sphere of public consciousness, the various elements of the Canzoniere, to say nothing of the Secretum, make it clear that Petrarch himself did not think this way, or at least, could never continue for long on such a train of thought. He had not yet divided his world forever into hermetically-sealed domains that may communicate with, but never bleed into, one another. Modernity, to borrow from Bruno Latour, purifies the discrete content of each separate field of human endeavor so that no vestige of faith may blemish art, no spoor of the market contaminate the laboratory, no trace of law impinge upon affect. For modern thinkers, the lack of clear boundaries to segregate the individual from the collective, or the ethical from the preferential would signify a primitivism both gross and, ironically, unnatural. Such distortion, for indeed it must be viewed as such through the lens of modernity, explains how even an astute contemporary reader can conclude that Petrarch is fundamentally a modern. But I suspect that Milton himself would have seen Petrarch’s strange and potent brew of piety and self-awareness as proceeding from an essentially unreformed mind and therefore standing in need of thorough revision.

However much we may want to see an early and flattering version of our modern selves in Petrarch, a close inspection of the very last poem in the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta reveals that the poet’s anxiety about love, glory and death bears
little resemblance to contemporary mores. Moreover, the clean divisions that we presume characterize our existence don’t really map very well onto the poet’s lived experience, which stubbornly, even obscenely, commingles piety and fear, emotion and science, law and desire so as to create a frightening chimæra of gigantic proportions. That monstrous hybridization of everything that ought to be segregated – faith, love, law, identity, sexuality, purity, family, individuality, society, class and knowledge – provokes the poet, in a gesture replete with medieval piety, to implore the Blessed Virgin for help from heaven. In the canzone CCCLXVI that brings the Rime sparse to its conclusion, Petrarch has transformed the Provençal canso, once the domain of dense, troubled, adulterous and deliberately obscure trobar clus, into an utterly transparent litany of supplication modeled precisely on liturgical prayer.

Man’s fallen state is precarious and — like his namesake from Rimini — Petrarch finds himself swept by the winds from one disordered fantasy to the next. Now revealed as much more than mere trifles, the whole lifelong project of the Rerum vulgarium fragmenta itself risks plunging its maker headlong into the pit of despair. No expenditure of erotic love or erudite wit on his own part succeeds in staving off the inevitable misstep that must carry him at last to an eternal and inescapable agony. Both l’aura and laurels have exerted their power over the poet, and his own concupiscent desires continue to master even his best instincts. His most authentic moment in the whole long manifestation of conscience that builds gradually throughout the second half of the Canzoniere begins with these words:

Vergine, tale è terra, et posto à in doglia

lo mio cor, che vivendo in pianto il tenne
et de mille miei mali un non sapea:
et per saperlo, pur quel che n’avenne

fora avenuto, ch’ogni altra sua voglia
era a me morte, et a lei fama rea.

[Virgin, one is now dust and makes my soul grieve who kept it, while alive, in weeping and of my thousands sufferings did not know one; and though she had known them, what happened would still have happened, for any other desire in her would have been death to me and dishonor to her].

Now more than ever can we feel the weight of Petrarch’s deep Augustinian disquiet. When at last he speaks of Laura, now dust, his soul grieves, but it is a grief more ambiguous even than the almost imperceptible intrusions of grace. In perfect concord with the great Latin Doctor, Petrarch experiences his sexuality precisely as an *habitus ad nihilum*. This, of course, opposes the habitual grace so resplendent in the figure of the Virgin. In the end, there is no overcoming concupiscent desire. Petrarch has experienced intuitively what the Council of Trent would, in coming centuries, at last declare dogmatically: grace can sanctify even without completely removing concupiscent desire, the *fomes peccati* [tinder of sin]. But in his Italian verse, Milton seems to ask, “what if the Petrarchan attitude toward sexuality could finally be rescued from its self-destructive inclinations?”

In the earliest phase of the Reformation, Luther praised marriage and railed against clerical celibacy. Theologically, however, he took the conservative and fundamentally Augustinian position that marriage constituted a natural state meant
primarily for the procreation of children and to avoid the sin into which sexual desire propels all but a few. To a lesser degree, Luther acknowledged the benefit of marriage for the mutual help and companionship of the spouses. Apart from clerical marriage, the Evangelical sphere of Protestantism, then, retained a theology of matrimony almost identical to its Catholic antecedent. The Reformed tradition, on the other hand, would have been substantially different, especially in the comprehensive integration of theological principles into law and social policy. Witte and Kingdon note

Calvin drew the Consistory and Council of Geneva into a creative new alliance to govern domestic and sexual affairs. Together, these authorities outlawed monasticism and mandatory clerical celibacy, and encouraged marriage for all fit adults. They set clear guidelines for courtship and engagement. They mandated parental consent, peer witness, church consecration, and state registration for valid marriage. They radically reconfigured weddings and wedding feasts. They reformed marital property and inheritance, marital consent and impediments. They created new rights and duties for wives within the bedroom and for children within the household. They streamlined the grounds and procedures for annulment. They introduced fault-based divorce for both husbands and wives on grounds of adultery and desertion. They encouraged the remarriage of divorcees and widow(er)s. They punished rape, fornication, prostitution, sodomy, and other sexual felonies with startling new severity. They put firm new restrictions on dancing, sumptuousness, ribaldry, and obscenity. They put new stock in catechesis and education, and created new schools, curricula, and teaching aids. They provided new sanctuary to illegitimate, abandoned, and abused children. They created new protections for abused wives and impoverished widows.425
Reforming the customs of marriage and family became the principle mechanism for extending Reformation values from one generation to the next and for transforming a culture once steeped in concupiscent desire into a society of the elect. If, then, there is such a thing as Protestant poetics, it would consist not so much in pioneering new genres nor developing unique thematic material, but rather in reforming literary tropes by saturating them with Reformed theology’s optimism about marriage and sexuality.

By the end of the Sixteenth Century, Petrarchan passion, fueled by the endless deferral of consummation, may be seen as standing in contrast to an increasingly affirmative theology of marriage emerging in Reformed doctrine and, consequently, in the poetics reflected in Spenser’s treatment of chastity in Book III of *The Faerie Queene*. Reed W. Dasenbrock notes that

> Protestants, in short, had a range of opinions on the sacredness of marriage; whatever the extent to which Spenser was influenced by Protestant teaching on marriage, he was the first writer to put the sense of the sacredness of marriage into love poetry.\(^{426}\)

But he was not the last. When the Reverend Thomas Warton asserts above that Milton’s Italian poetry is “free from the metaphysics of Petrarch,” he means at least in part that it has managed to shed the explicitly Pauline attitude — ubiquitous throughout the Petrarchan corpus — that celibacy represents a spiritual state superior to marriage.

In 1595, *Amoretti*, Spenser’s sonnet sequence, appeared in print at the height of the period that saw multiple Italian influences brought to bear upon Elizabethan literary and musical practices. Though he does not declare it explicitly himself, Spenser’s literary effort is widely taken as the poetic commemoration of his marriage to
Elizabeth Boyle the previous year. The short poems, eighty-nine sonnets and nine so-called *Anacreontics*, were bound in a single octavo together with the poet’s *Epithalamion*. The collection at once unites *petrarchismo* to a classical song of wedded love, which Sappho and Pindar, among the Greeks, then Catullus and Statius among the Romans, immortalized as a genre. Whereas Petrarchan lyrical genres typically circle around the agonized deferment sexual desire, Spenser’s verse rather buoyantly leads to fulfilment and does so in frankly resurrectional terms.

Most glorious Lord of lyfe that on this day

Didst make thy triumph over death and sin:

and having harrowd hell didst bring away

captivity thence captive us to win,

This joyous day, deare Lord, with joy begin,

and grant that we for whom thou diddest dye

being with thy deare blood clene washt from sin,

may live for ever in felicity.

And that thy love we weighing worthily,

may likewise love thee for the same again:

and for thy sake that all lyke deare didst buy,

with love may one another entertaine.

So let us love, dear love, lyke as we ought,

love is the lesson which the Lord us taught.427

For us to entertain love like the Resurrected One, on the day of the Resurrection, in full view, as it were, of the Resurrected Body revises our expectations for the Petrarchan genre, doesn’t it? In light of its Italian precedents, Spenser’s revision cannot but shock.
And in this collection, Spenser purposefully brings his reimagined, that is, reformed, *canzoniere* into immediate correspondence with the bridal chamber. Germaine Warkenton writes, “the pairing of two such works in one book has puzzled critics, who for practical reasons usually treat them separately.”\(^{428}\) Really? Nothing could be plainer. By adopting a rhetorical strategy that harmonizes closely with the critical implications of Calvinist theology, *Amoretti* endeavors to bring Reformation values to bear upon the Petrarchan commonplace, that well-exploited topos which posits a fundamental cleavage between profane love and divine spirituality. Moreover, placing *Amoretti* side by side with *Epithalamion* further declares the simple and unproblematic godliness of sexual fulfilment in marriage.

Here at last we can see the fuller impact of Spenser, both from the *Amoretti* and from *The Faerie Queene* Book III, who rewrites the Petrarchan doctrine of celibate chastity in favor of conjugal love. Thus, the hymn to wedded love in Book IV of *Paradise Lost* makes it abundantly clear that, in our poet, Spenser had found an enthusiastic and able disciple.

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Whatever hypocrites austerely talk 745
Of purity and place and innocence,
Defaming as impure what God declares
Pure, and commands to some, leaves free to all.
Our maker bids increase, who bids abstain
But our destroyer, foe to God and man?
Hail wedded love, mysterious law, true source
Of human offspring, sole propriety,
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In Paradise of all things common else.

By thee adulterous lust was driven from men

Among the bestial herds to range, by thee

Founded in reason, loyal, just, and pure,

Relations dear, and all the charities

Of father, son, and brother first were known.

Far be it, that I should write thee sin or blame,

Or think thee unbefitting holiest place,

Perpetual fountain of domestic sweets,

Whose bed is undefiled and chaste pronounced,

Present, or past, as saints and patriarchs used.

In the *Amoretti*, the nearest English analogue to the Italian verse of Milton, Spenser provided a model for investing Petrarch with explicitly Protestant values. Our poet takes on the project with relish. Though he composes his Petrarchan verse in Italian, he does so under the watchful eye of the sage and serious one and, by embracing that imagined scrutiny, not only meets, but exceeds Reformed expectations for the genre. The Italian verse of Milton, then, together with Spenser’s *Amoretti*, appear before us as incursions into the Italian tradition of vernacular lyric, yes, but they aim at more than merely appropriating the genres and themes of continental *petrarchismo*. They intend to reform them. And thus it is in no small part because of Milton’s thoroughgoing revision of Petrarchan ideals, including the *Canzoniere*’s patently medieval piety, that we can now view Petrarch as a modern.
Giovanni Milton, of course, was inglese. Especially in light of the time he spent in Geneva on his way home from Italy, our poet seems to have considered himself utterly uncontaminated by those Italian manners after which an apish nation limps in base imitation. In other words, Milton has already discern’d the cunning resemblances, culled out and sorted asunder the confused seeds of Italian behavior and thought that might otherwise seem to undermine his authentically republican values, however nascent and theoretical they would have been in the summer of 1639. But how can he have been so sure? The young man’s confidence derives in no small part from the success of his essays into petrarchismo, which demonstrate precisely the capacity of the poet and the polemicist to sift through centuries of Italian vernacular eloquence and in them to discern “the knowledge of good” that is so “involv’d and interwoven with the knowledge of evill.”

If, therefore, our poet can reform Petrarch in the very language of Petrarch, there can be no doubt that he knows better than any Englishman how to apply the model of Italian intellectual achievement and literary art that he himself experienced in the peninsular academies to a new insular commonwealth without risk of Scylla drowning him, or Carybdis swallowing him up. As Milton tells Buonmattei in his assertion of the pan-European value of Italian, “we have never heard of an empire or a country which did not enjoy at least moderate prosperity as long as its people continued to cultivate and take a proper pride in their language.”429 Because style of the kind embodied in the centuries-long tradition of the volgare propels ideas into the sphere of public action, Milton’s unique and unprecedented Englishing of Italian vernacular eloquence becomes the
vehicle *par excellence* for our poet’s well-known commitments to republicanism and the reformation of wedded love.

In the first chapter, I suggested obliquely that the Eve of *Paradise Lost* fuels critical fascination with Milton’s dark lady, the *donna leggiadra* of the Italian sonnets. Now, I’m prepared to extend the analogy and assert that the Italian verse already gives us a glimpse of the systematic reformation of Petrarchist poetics that Milton undertakes in all his later verse in English straight across the board. Perhaps it is because Petrarchan values came to England directly from Italian sources that Milton decides to reform *petrarchismo* first in Italian. Whereas Tasso brazenly rewrites verses in the *Canzoniere* to slake desires that Petrarch had once sublimated, Milton’s Italian verse attempts a moral reformation of the whole genre of love poetry itself.
Appendix: An Updated Variorum

This appendix provides a systematic inventory of the items that have attracted the attention of native speakers in Milton’s use of the Tuscan vernacular as those issues have emerged in the Italian criticism of the previous chapters. My method for treating them comes in two parts. Part I consists in a summary of a 1966 note on textual criticism of the Italian poems from Sergio Baldi (1909-1984). An updated variorum, the first in English since 1970, follows in Part II.

Because he is neither a native-speaker of the language, nor a resident of Tuscany, Milton will most likely have developed his lexicon and grammatical understanding of volgare from written sources and, possibly, from native speakers of Italian in London. While we do not know exactly what published Italian works he had within his reach, we do know that both of Florio’s dictionaries (1598 and 1611) had seen the light of day in England and at least two printings of the first volume of Buonmattei’s Grammatica della lingua toscana had gone forth from Venetian presses by 1623. Though there is no record of the Grammatica having reached the English market before the conjectured range of dates for the original composition of the sonnet cycle in Italian, we do know that Milton had reviewed the work by the time of his letter to Buonmattei on 10 September 1638.

Neither the Trinity Manuscript or any other known sources contain drafts of the Italian verse of Milton. We cannot therefore determine by means of historical-textual evidence whether, when or how many times Milton may have revised his Italian work. Biographers have posited the assistance of native-speakers either in London or during
the Italian sojourn, but no one knows for sure. Even so, the imitation of Italian sources, inasmuch as they can be identified, ought to provide important clues to the prosody and cohesion of the poems.

The appendix also calls our attention to the question of interlanguage ideolect, that is, whether or in what degree Milton’s Italian sonnets, as in the view of Mario Praz (1937), “qua e là tradiscono la mano straniera” [here and there betray the foreign hand].

Secondly, we must think about speech. Regrettably, Milton left us no audio recording of himself conversing in Italian, but we do know from historical sources that throughout the peninsula he spoke with his academic fellows in the Tuscan language and that he received accolade from them for his apparent mastery of their tongue. Lastly, we should reflect upon the issue of translation. Though Milton did not, to our knowledge, translate any Italian works of prose or rhyme, both the curriculum of his humanist education and the Italian element in his English verse imply a significant role for translation in his own literary activity and in the pedagogy of rhetoric and poetics that dominates his 1644 pamphlet, Of Education, published in close proximity to his 1645 polyglot display of verse in which the Italian sonnets first appear.

**Textual Criticism**

Since the orthography and punctuation in the 1645 and 1673 editions vary, the first problem is to establish the best text of the Italian poems. Milton’s printer for the 1645 volume was Humphrey Moseley (1603-1661), who began his work in the Stationers’ Company in 1627. Based on data culled from *Early English Books Online*, Moseley seems not have published any other work with Italian content before Milton’s 1645
Poems went to his presses. Whether deriving from the printer’s inexperience, or from lacunae in Milton’s otherwise considerable linguistic knowledge, there are not inconsiderable errors in the text of the Italian poems. Moreover, no known draft of the Italian poems exists with which to compare the printed text. Nor do we know of any emendations of the Italian in the 1645 edition having originated in the poet himself, though it is not difficult to imagine Milton having made corrections if he were aware of errors. Milton, of course, lost his eyesight between the publication of the two editions of the Italian poems and no one knows who might have revisited the text of the 1645 Italian corpus for him in preparation for its re-publication in 1673.

As there is considerable variation in the practices of accentuation, elision, punctuation and orthography in Cincquecento Italian publications from Italy, the point of textual criticism must be simply to determine what lies closest to Milton’s understanding and use of the language, and not to re-write the poems for him according to perceived Petrarchan, Bembist, or any other standards. Even so, Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century editors, both English and Italian, often took it upon themselves to correct Milton’s volgare in all respects, even going so far as to change entire phrases in order to make his verse more intelligible, more grammatically correct in light of Seicento usage, or more in conformity with the prevailing standards at the time of the editorial intervention.

For this reason, Sergio Baldi’s short, but superb, note on the textual criticism of Milton’s Italian verse deserves summary and commentary. While Baldi considers apostrophaic elision, punctuation, orthography and word separation, he begins with the
most evident problem, accentuation. The first edition indulges, he tells us, in a certain “overabundance” of accents: III.5 natìa; IV.2 soléa; IV.3 ridéa. The second edition, on the other hand, eliminates them in all but one instance, namely the è in II.3 Ben è colui d’ogni valore scarco. Keeping in mind the irregularities of Italian Cinquecento editions, Baldi has decided to keep accentuation as it appeared in the 1645 edition, whether it exhibits a paucity or an overabundance of accents in comparison to modern usage. He maintains this choice even in an instance like IV.12 where the 1645 version reads puo, while the 1673 version gives the more common può, or when the apparent sense seems clearly to merit emendation, as in V.5: Mentre un caldo vapor ne sentì pria, when it ought to read né sentì’ pria. The choice of 1645 is justifiable, as Baldi argues: “è troppo noto che le edizioni antiche potevano non curarsi di queste ambiguità; e questa mi è parsa una caratteristica da mantenere” [it is very well noted that the older editions were capable of ignoring such ambiguities; and this seemed to me a characteristic to preserve].

Likewise, insofar as apostrophaic elision is concerned, Baldi has decided to preserve what he found in the 1645 edition, notwithstanding standards of modern use. Regarding punctuation, however, he has chosen to correct the 1645 text in light of the 1678 version in three instances: the canzone and Sonnets V and VI. In five other instances (four times in the canzone and once in Sonnet V, he has intervened on the grounds that the sense absolutely requires the emendation and Milton himself is otherwise quite accurate in matters of punctuation.
Addressing the matter of spelling touches at once upon questions of grammar and lexicon. Baldi says, “Mi sono regolato a seconda del caso, sempre cercando di mantenere le peculiarità miltoniane e di eliminare gli errori dello stampatore, ma non sempre con la stessa certezza” [I have limited myself to following each case, always trying to preserve Miltonic peculiarities and eliminate printer’s errors, but not always with the same degree of certainty]. Specifically, he has maintained the spelling of III.2 avezza, II.13 gratia, IV.2 spreggiar, and IV.13 degli occhi. The spelling of avezza and gratia, though not standard, nonetheless follows Florio. Whereas spreggiar is not to be found in the writing of Tuscans, it does occur both in the sonnet of the Veneto poet Francesco Flavio, written on the death of Serafinio Aquilano and cited below, and in the Second Fruites of John Florio. Also, de is given for da in Petrarch. Nor does he correct III.10 bel Arno with bell’Arno, on the grounds that this may simply represent something Milton did deliberately. For the same reason, III.1 imbrunir remains untouched. Though uncertain about II.5 mostra si which ought to read mostrasi, and V.10 scosso mi which ought to be scossomi, Baldi has decided to keep them as they are found because their presence in both the 1645 and 1673 editions could represent a Miltonic peculiarity worth preserving, even if (or especially if) it runs contrary to normal expectations for Italian orthography in the period. He did, however, emend IV.13 auventa to avventa, as the former must, in his view, have resulted from a printer’s error.

In the last category, Baldi addresses two special cases. Firstly, in the verse II.6 De suoi atti soavi giammai parco, the 1673 edition replaces the more common suoi with the unusual, but more Dantesque sui, found in Varchi. Although the principle that a
more difficult reading is the stronger reading would normally favor the Dantesque option, Baldi has elected against it on the grounds that Milton’s language does not otherwise depend upon Dante in this manner and the appearance of the term in Varchi is exceptional, required by the rhyme. Secondly, in the line v. 2 Esser non può che non sian lo mio sole, the 1673 edition gives fian for sian. Although fian may sound more erudite, Baldi holds that it is not appropriate in this case. Thus, he has preferred to classify these two lectiones difficilior as instances of typographical error.437

Baldi considers questions of meter as well, but finally decides not to change anything more from the text of the 1645 edition. At the end of his note, Baldi writes

Per conclusione diremo che non e possibile presentare un testo veramente critico delle poesie italiane di Milton, un testo cioè che ricostruisca il manoscritto dell’autore. Si sarebbe potuto invece correggere il testo della prima edizione facendo nostro l’uso delle buone edizioni italiane del tardo cinquecento (si sarebbe avuto così un’edizione intonata alla lingua in cui le poesie sono state scritte); oppure si sarebbero potuti far nostri i criteri del Buonmattei, che il Milton conosceva. Mi ha trattenuto dal farlo il timore di correggere Milton, cioè di presentare un testo superiore alle conoscenze linguistiche del poeta. Praticamente, quindi, tutta la mia filologia non ha servito che ad aggiungere o togliere qualche virgola al testo della prima edizione [In conclusion we would say that it is not possible to present a truly critical text of Milton’s Italian poems, that is, a text that reconstructs the manuscript of the author. Instead, it would have been possible to correct the text of the first edition by making use of the good Italian editions of the late Sixteenth Century (if one had had an edition in tune with the language in which the poems had been written); or if it were
possible to make our own the criteria of Buonmattei, whom Milton knew. What restrained me was the fear of correcting Milton, that is, of presenting a text superior to the linguistic competence of the poet. Practically speaking, then, all my philology has not served but to add or subtract a few commas from the text of the first edition]. And this is exactly as far as the most thoroughgoing Italian philologist to have worked on the textual criticism of Milton’s Italian verse is willing to go.

Variorum

Though the tasks associated with the production of the following material are fairly mechanical, the poems have not been glossed in English since A. Bartlett Giamatti completed Professor James E. Shaw’s edition for the Columbia University Press in 1968. This section, then, should be particularly valuable to the English reader because the two most complete sets of annotations in English — Purves-Darbshire (1952) and Shaw-Giamatti (1970) — are still considerably less detailed than Baldi (1966), who has consulted Rolli (1736) and Baretti (1753), Todd (1826), Olivero (1913) and Smart (1921). Professor Baldi seems not, however, to have consulted Keightley-Rossetti (1859), which incorporates the commentary that Antonio Panizzi (1797-1879) provided in 1836. Nor could Baldi have been aware of Shaw-Giamatti (which incorporates Purves-Darbshire) at all, as the work did not appear in print until 1970. Professor Giamatti apparently had only learned of Baldi’s study at the time of his press deadline, so the Baldi glosses were not incorporated into the Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton series, though Giamatti, in fact, commends the Baldi text to readers. Shaw-Giamatti does, however, offer translations into English of the difficult sections that occur in each poem
and pays special attention to syntactical challenges that Milton’s Italian text is liable to present to the primarily English-speaking reader.

Milton’s six Italian poems, five sonnets and a canzone, follow with my translation of Baldi’s annotations supplemented by Keightley-Rossetti and Shaw-Giamatti. Additionally, I have compiled annotations and commentary from Kuhl-Lemmi (1924), Honigmann (1966), Volpi (1983) and Melchionda (2004). When both Baldi and Shaw-Giamatti cite the same source, I have reproduced only the gloss from Baldi.
Sonnet II

Donna leggiadra il cui bel nome honora  
L’herbosa val di Rheno, e il nobil varco,
Ben è colui d’ogni valore scarco  
Qual tuo spirto gentil non innamora,
Che dolcemente mostra si di fuora  
De suoi atti soavi giamai parco,
E i don’, che son d’amor saette ed arco,
La onde l’alta tua virtù s’infiora.

Quando tu vaga parli, o lieta canti  
Che mover possa duro alpestre legno,
Guardi ciascun a gli occhi ed a gli orecchi  
L’entrata, chi di te si truova indegno;
Gratia sola di su gli vaglia, inanti  
Che’l disio amoroso al cuor s’invecchi.

Gracious lady, whose beautiful name honors the grassy valley of the Reno, and its noble ford, truly is he empty of all worth who is not enamored of your gentle spirit, which sweetly shows itself on the outside and is never miserly of courteous acts, and by your gifts, which are the bow and arrows of love, there whence your high virtue may flourish. When you speak, O graceful one, or joyously sing, such that the hard, alpine wood may be moved, let each man guard the entrance to his eyes and ears, lest he be
found unworthy of you. Grace alone from above avail him, before amorous desire in his heart should grow old.

GIAMATTI – The Lady addressed in this sonnet has all the qualities of the conventionally adored object of the sixteenth-century love lyric. Her noble spirit, shown generously in her gracious ways, enamors all men of worth and so does the beauty of her eyes and voice. In her eyes are the bow and arrows of Cupid, and when she sings hard trees are moved as by the lyre of Orpheus. Men who are unworthy of her are in grave danger, for the passion of their desire maybe come incurable. They had better not look or listen.

BALDI – 3 Ben 1645, Bene 1673. 6 suoi 1645, sui 1673. 7 arco, 1645, arco. 1673. 8 virtii 1645, virtu 1673. 12 sii 1645, su 1673.

1-2 SMART – The lines indicate that the name of the lady was itself identical with that of district in which the Reno is situated, and hence that she was called Emilia.

BALDI – BARIGNANO 6.155.1-2, Donna, c’havete il bel nome di quella,/Che trasse Dante per gli eterni giri (cited in SMART 141); Porrino Rime II.1-4, O d’ogni riverenza e d’onor degna/Alma mia Luce, il cui bel nome honora/L’aria, la terra; e le campagne infiora,/E di salir al ciel la via c’insegna (the name given is Lucia, cited in SMART 143, note the rhyme onora : in fiora of the second verse); VARCHI Sonetti XLII.1-4, Vezzoso fonte, che tra mille honor!/Di rose, e gigli molle argento scendi,/E del ginebro il tuo bel nome
prendi,/Vicino a lei che si chiamo da fiori (a tributary of the Arno); **VARCHI**
Sonetti DVI.1-3, **Donna, che (come chiaro a ciascun mostra/il nome, l’opre piu)**
l’alma del vero/Cibo nodrite (the name given is that of Caterina Cibo); **TASSO**
Rime CCCXCVI.1-2, **Giovinetta gentil, che’l nome prendi/da quelle fiamme che**
egnegli occhi porti (the name given is Flaminia, cited in **SMART** 142); **TASSO** Rime
MCLXXXV.1-2, **Sabina, in cui s’onora il nome prisco,/Chi fu piu degna mai**
d’esser rapita? (the name given is that of Sabina Benlei); **TASSO** Rime MCCXVI,
Dell’onor simulacro e’l nome vostro,/aureo tutto, e a voi ben si conviene (the
name given is that of Onoria de l’Oro). And for a general indication of the
beginning, see **TASSO** Rime CII.1 and 5-7, **Fiume, onde armato il mio buon vicin**
bebbe/.../qual ti fe’ dono e quanto onor t’accrebbe/quel dì, che’l corso tuo
leggiadra e schiva/vincea Madonna.

**Donna leggiadra il cui bel nome honora**

1 **BALDI — Donna leggiadra:** The common form in Petrarch and the petrarchisti
is **leggiadra donna**, nonetheless see **DANTE** Vita Nuova XXIII.17, **Donna pietosa e**
di novella etade; **SERAFINO** Sonetti CXXXIV.1, **Nympha leggiadra a cui il terzo**
cielo; **VARCHI** Sonetti CXC.1 **Donna leggiadra, al cui valor divino; TASSO** Rime
DCCLXXVIII.1, **Donna gentil e ne le verdi sponde.**

**GIAMATTI — Donna leggiadra**—Charming lady: **Leggiadro** is a general
expression including graciousness and beauty, all the attractive qualities
mentioned in the sonnet. **honora.** For other Latin h’s see **L’herbosa** of line 2
and **l’herbetta** of Sonnet 3. 3; and **talhor, honesti, hemispero,** of Sonnet 4 lines
4, 8, 11; *humil* and *hebbi* of Sonnet 6 lines 3 and 5. Other Latin forms are *Gratia* and *inanti* of Sonnet 2 line 13, and *turbida* and *loco* of Sonnet 5, lines 9 and 12.

2-8 **BALDI** — Rhymes for *-arco* are relatively few in Italian, but we note **PETRARCH**

*Rime XXXVI* scarco : incarco : varco; **BEMBO** Rime CXIX incarco : scarco; varco : parco;

**TASSO** Rime MCXXXIV incarco : scarco : varco : parco.

*L’herbosa val di Rheno, e il nobil varco*

2 **BALDI** — **SMART** 142 cites **FRANCHINI** Delitiæ 1.1131, *Tranantur Rubiconis aquæ, fora pervia Livi, Et fora Corneli post cita terga damus:/Ad vada provehimur stagnantis lubrica Rheni, /Cænosum Mutinæ vix superamus iter;* and we recall that the Reno appears frequently in the sonnets of Varchi. For *varco* as *ford*, see also **FLORIO** *New World of Words*, “*Varco, any foard, ferrie, passage, or wading over a river. Also any narrow passage, as a stile over a hedge.*”

**HONIGMANN** — The only authorized texts of the sonnet, in the editions of 1645 and 1673, read not *Reno*, but *Rheno*, suggesting the Rhine rather than the insignificant Reno. **NB**: See **GIAMATTI** above for a discussion of the Latinizing *h* in Milton’s Italian. **NAHOE** — The Bembist manner, which Praz sees at work in Milton’s verse, often consists in farcing the *volgare* with as much Latinate stuffing as the line can stomach. This includes syntax and diction, so why not orthography?

3-8 **GIAMATTI** — He is indeed destitute of all worth who is not enamored by thy noble spirit, which sweetly reveals itself never begrudging it’s gracious ways,
and by the gifts which are the bow and arrows of love there where thy lofty power blooms.

The construction is: *Qual tuo spirto gentil non innamora... e i don, che...* 

*Spirto* is the subject of innamora, and *i don* is an additional subject of the same verb, even though the verb is in the singular.

**Ciro di Pers** *Sonetto, Oblia la fronte* 9-11, *Non può far d’aurei fregi il manto adorno,/non le nevi mentite e gli ostri finti/ricorrer dietro un sol passato giorno* [the gold-embroidered cloak cannot, nor can the painted flush and whitened flesh, cause to return again one single day].

**Bartolomeo Carlo Piccolomini** *Canzone, È dunque vero* 2.1-6, *Com’esser può che’l volto almo e sereno/Che pur dinanzi splendea più ch’altro, e i lumi/Onde si volge e vera gloria il mondo... Hor sia di nebbia indegna e d’horror pieno/Giacendo afflitto?* [How can it be that the calm and kindly face which just a while ago shone more than any other, and the lights which guides the world to true glory... be now filled with unworthy mist and gloom, lying afflicted?].

For other examples see **Gaspara Stampa** *Sonetto, Io assomiglio* 2-3, and **Nicolò Amanio** *Sonetto, Già mi fu un tempo* 1-2. A famous example in Latin is **Horace Carmina** 13.1-5. To make *i don* depend on *parco*, together with *de suoi atti soave*, as most translators have done, is inadmissible. **Olivero** suggests omitting the *E* before *i don*, but that would be too drastic an emendation, changing the meaning of the whole sentence, besides being unnecessary.
GIAMATTI — colui… Qual — He who. For Qual used as a relative pronoun with the article see NICOLÒ AMANIO Sonetto, Quelle pallide, angeliche viole.\textsuperscript{446} Also MOLZA Sonetto, O te, qual Dea dobbiam chiamarti homai.\textsuperscript{447}

Ben è colui d’ogni valore scarco

3 BALDI — Ben e (1673 Bene e): VARCHI Sonetti CCXXX.12, Bene e tre volte sventuroso, e sei. scarco: I have not found scarco in the sense of emptied, but, FLORIO New World of Words gives “Scarico Of discharged, vnlofen, disburthened, quit, free.”

Qual tuo spirto gentil non innamora,

4 BALDI — qual: DANTE Vita Nuova XXII.16-17, Ell’ha nel viso la pietà si scorta,/che qual l’avesse voluta mirare/sarebbe innanzi a lei piangendo morta; PETRARCH Rime CCCL.8, Perdonime qual’è bella, o si tene. spirto gentil: PETRARCH Rime LIII.1, Spirto gentil, che quelle membra reggi; BEMBO Rime LXXXI.7-8, Scorgo i bei lumi ed odo quel gentile/spirto e d’altro giammai non mi cal molto; TASSO Rime II.3-4, Già ricercando di beltà ch’alletta/di piacer in piacer, spirto gentile. innamora: VARCHI Sonetti CCXVII.7-8, Che chiunque beltà uera innamora/L’alma le ’nchina humil sera e mattino.

ROSSETTI — qual: i.e. il quale. Sarebbe meglio dire cui. Cui è accusativo, ma qual richiede l’articolo [It would be better to say cui. Cui is accusative, but qual requires the article]. Cited by KEIGHTLEY 150. NB: Above, BALDI provides examples from DANTE and PETRARCH of the use of qual without the article.

Che dolcemente mostra si di fuora
Baldi — mostra si di fuora: Petrarch Rime CXXV.17-19, Ma non sempre a la scorza/ramo, né in fior né in foglia,/mospa di for sua natural vertude (for virtù see verse 8); Boiardo Amores II.xxx.3, E ciò che fuor mostrar m’ha fatto Amore; Bembo Rime XXV.3-4, Mostrando a me di fore/il ben che dentro agli altri si celava (dentro); Bembo Rime LXXVII.6 and 8, Ma’il gran splendor de la virtute vostra/... /Ovunque’io vado, agli occhi miei si mostra; Porrino Canzone 3-6, Che del frale mortal l’ombra non vale/A celar l’immortale/Vostra bellezza: anzi di fuor si mostra/Come in cristallo chiar rosa vermiglia; Varchi Sonetti DXXIV.1-4, Poscia che lunga e non dubbiosa prova/Quel, ch’io cercava in Donna si gentile,/Mostrato m’ha ch’al bel di fuor simile,/E la beltà che n’voi dentro si trova, NB: in this line E = è and n’ = ’n; Tasso Rime CXCII.5-6, E se potesse a’ bei vostri occhi in parte,/com’egli e dentro dimostrarsi fuori.

Giamatti — mostra si — shows itself. The separation of mostra and si (like scosso mi in Sonnet 5.10) is probably a printer’s error, although the author may be responsible. Such separations are frequent in old editions like that of Giolito, e.g. tesser mi ti. Others are aspettar la, far se, as well as si come, in darno, da i, co i, da gliocchi. They make no difference to the sound or to the meaning.

De suoi atti soavi giamai parco,

Baldi — suoi (1673 suoi): Varchi Sonetti CCXXXI.7-8, Colei che con la falce adunca e sui/Acuti strali in ogni parte aggiunge. atti soavi: Dante Convivio Canzone II.45-46, Li atti soavi ch’ella inostra altrui/Vanno chiamando Amor; Petrarch Triomfi 1.90,
Poi vidi un grande con atti soavi; Tasso Rime CV.9, Bellezza ed arte incolta, atti soavi (see also vi.9). See also Petrarch Rime XXXVII.100, E gli atti suoi soavemente alteri, and see here III.8 as well. SMART 145 notes that atti here signifies looks, but the citations given do not confirm his supposition. parco: Petrarch Rime CCVII.62, Disconvenisi a Signor l’esser si parco (Signor = Amore); Della Casa Rime IV.10-11, Poco da vivere pin credo m’avanzi;/Ne di donarlo a te tutto son parco; Tasso Rime XXI.45, E ne sei così vago e così parco.

Giamatti — atti soave — gracious ways. Atti means ways, including looks and movements. See Della Casa Canzone Amor i piango 3.14 and Della Casa Canzone Come fuggir 4.3. Also Petrarch Sonetto, Padre del ciel 4 and Petrarch Sonetto, Padre del ciel and the comment and references of Chiòrboli.

E i don’, che son d’amor saette ed arco

7 Baldi — saette ed arco: Petrarch Rime LXI.7, E l’arco e le saette ond’i’ fui punto; Tasso Rime XXXI.6, Non hai tu da ferir saette ed arco?; Tasso Rime DCXI.1 and 4-6, La bella pargoletta/ ... /co’ begli occhi saetta e col soave viso;/né s’accorge che l’arme ha nel bel viso; Sidney Astrophel and Stella XVII.9-11, “Till that his grandame Nature pittyng it,/Of Stella’s browes made him two better bowes,/And in her eyes arrowes infinit” (cited in SMART 145).

Giamatti — and the gifts (the beauty and other endowments of the lady: i celeste e rari doni/Ch’a in se madonna, Petrarch Sonetto, Amor io fallo 12-13) which are the bow and arrows of love (i.e. which in enamor men) there where thy lofty virtue blooms (i.e. in her eyes, Tanta negli occhi bei for di
misura/Par che Amore e dolcezza e grazia piova, **Petrarch** Sonetto, Le stelle, il cielo 7-8.)

La onde l’alta tua virtù s’infiora.

8 **BALDI — La onde:** SMART 144 prints it *La, onde* and interprets là (there, i. e, in the lady’s eyes) recalling Petrarch and the *petrarchisti*; **Florio** New World of Words, has “Laonde, whereupon, whereon, also there-whence, and Onde, whence, from whence, whereby;” **Dante** *Purgatorio* 1.30 Là onde il Carro era già sparito, cited and praised by Tasso. 448 **virtù:** SMART 144 remarks that “Petrarch also speaks of virtù — power, excellence or influence — flowing from the presence of Laura, and from her eyes there proceeds virtù which conquers those on whom she looks.” He cites **Petrarch** *Rime* CXCVII.14, Ma li occhi hanno vertu di farne un marmo; and thus **Milton** L’Allegro 121-123, “With store of Ladies, whose bright eyes/Rain influence,” and the words of Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* IX.309-310, “I from the influence of thy looks receive/Access in every Virtue.” Nonetheless, I would not insist upon the astrological implications of these two passages. Rather, I would think of the Platonism of Bembo and the *petrarchisti*, see verse 5 above. **s’infiora:** I would look at the entire verse: *Nel tuo viso, la dove l’alta tua virtu si fa visibile.* **Dante** *Paradiso* XIV.13-14, Diteli se la luce onde s’infiora/vostra sustanza rimarra con voi; **Tasso** *Rime* LXXVI.5, E sulle rose ond’ella il viso infiora; **Tasso** *Rime* CCCXIII.1-4 Bella donna i color! ond’ella vuole/gl’interni affetti dimostrar talora/prende o da verde suol che più s’infiora/di candidi ligustri e di viole.
GIAMATTI — Là onde = Là dove — there where. See PETRARCH Sonetto, Occhi piangete 6 and CLAUDIO TRIVULZIO Sonetto, Dinanzi al novo sol 7.

Quando tu vagà parli, o lieta canti

9 BALDI — HORACE Carmina I.xxii.23-24, Dulce ridentem Lalagen amabo,/dulce loquentem; PETRARCH Rime CLX.14, E come dolce parla e dolce ride (cited in OLIVERO 16-17); PETRARCH Rime CXXXIII.12, E l’angelico canto e le parole; LORENZO il MAGNIFICO Selve II.vi.5, E mentre con Amor or parla or canta; ARIOSTO Orlando Furioso VII.xvi.2, O parli o rida o canti o passo muova; VARCHI Sonetti CCCXCV.1 Si dolce canta e si soave suona; DELLA CASA Rime LVII.14 Colà ve dolce parli, o dolce rida (cited in PRINCE 95); ALBERICO GENTILI (cited in FLORIO New World of Wordes) E sì dolce lo parli & dolce scrivi. vaga: PETRARCH Rime LII.9, Ch’a l’aura il vago e biondo capel chiuda.

Che mover possa duro alpestre legno,

10 BALDI — A clear echo of the myth of Orpheus. The most probable source is OVID Metamorphoses XI.1-60; it also appears in MILTON Lycidas 57-63, and then in MILTON Paradise Lost VII.33-38, in which we note especially verse 35 (cited in SMART 146), “In Rhodope, where Woods and Rocks had Eares.” This is found especially in OVID Metamorphoses XI.45-46, Te rigidi silices, tua carmina sæpe secutæ,/fleverunt silvæ, but one recalls also SENECA Hercules Furens 572-73, Quæ silvæ et aves saxaque traxerat/ars. duro alpestre legno: PETRARCH Rime LIV.55, Sul duro legno e sotto a l’aspre gonne; and PETRARCH Rime LIII.4, Ch’a me la pastorella alpestra e cruda; BOIARDO Amores II.civ.96, Ma Borea, di natura
alpestra e fera; SERAFINO Opera V.24 Ch’io possa questa donna alpestra e dira;

VARCHI Sonetti CCCXX.9-10, Quindi non lunge sopra alpestro, e fero/Sasso fra molli herbette; DELLA CASA Rime XLV.94-96, qual piu adentro punge/Quadrello auenti a questa alpestra fera?; DELLA CASA Rime XLIII.1, Vivo mio scoglio & selce alpestra & dura.

GIAMATTI — See PETRARCH Sonetto, La donna che il mio cor 10; TASSO Canzone, Santa Pietà IV.6; MILTON L’Allegro 145, “That Orpheus’ self may heave his head.”

KEIGHTLEY — Che mover possa: The meaning of this is clear enough, but we doubt if it be a true Italian idiom. We unfortunately neglected to consult Rossetti on it. Mr. Panizzi says that possa is an Anglicism. NB: The BALDI gloss above gives a counterexample from SERAFINO.

Guardi ciascun a gli occhi ed a gli orecchi

11 GIAMATTI — Let each and every one who feels himself unworthy of thee, guard the entrance to his eyes and ears. The construction is: Chi di te si truova indegno, guardi ciascun a gli occhi ed a gli orecchi. Chi is an indefinite pronoun meaning whoever. Although singular, it conveys a plural meaning.

L’entrata, chi di te si truova indegno;

12 BALDI — TODD cites ARISTO Orlando Furioso VII.xiii.5-6, Quindi escon le cortesi parolette,/da render molle ogni cor rozzo e scabro.

GIAMATTI — L’entrata. Placed at the beginning of verse 12, this word completes the sentence begun in verse 11; a device practiced by Della Casa
and recommended by Tasso to produce an unusual rhythm. See PRINCE 27 and 21.

Gratia sola di su gli vaglia, inanti

13 BALDI — PETRARCH Rime CLXVI, Così sventura o ver colpa mi priva/d’ogni buon frutto, se l’eterno Giove/de la sua grazia sopra me non piove; TASSO Gerusalemme Liberata 1.xxvi.3, Vagliami tua virtu, si ch’io ridica.

KEIGHTLEY — Grazia sala di sù, i.e. the grace of Heaven. vaglia. This seems to be i.q. può valere, and we are dubious of its being pure Italian. NB: See example from Tasso above.

Che’ll disio amoroso al cuor s’invecchi.

14 BALDI — PETRARCH Rime XIII.4, Tanto cresce’ll desio che m’innamora; PETRARCH Rime CCLXVI.5.4 Poi quel dolce desio ch’Amor mi spira; PETRARCH Rime LII.8, un amoroso gielo, PETRARCH Rime CCVII.26, ame amorosa; LORENZO IL MAGNIFICO Rime Canzone VIII.19-21, Non ben pensando ancor quant’è gran lalde/svegliere alia radice/quel ch’è difficil poi tagliare appresso; DELLA CASA Rime X.1-2, Caro, se’n terren vostro alligna amore/Serpalo, mentr’ e ancor tenera verga.

GIAMATTI — May Grace from above alone avail him, before the amorous desire becomes inveterate in his heart. Amorous desire, evoked by the lady’s beauty, is at war, throughout the verse of the Petrarchists, with the spiritual love inspired by her good influence. When it becomes inveterate the former is almost unconquerable. See PETRARCH Canzone, l’vo pensando 7.17-18, Un piacer per usanza in me si forte/Ch’a pattegiar n’ardisce con la morte [Desire so strong
in me from habit that it dares to bargain even with death]. See also PETRARCH

Sonnet Due gran nemiche.

Sonnet III

Qual in colle aspro, al imbrunir di sera
L’avezza giovinetta pastorella
Va bagnando l’herbetta strana e bella
Che mal si spande a disusata spera

Fuor di sua natia alma primavera,
Così Amor meco insù la lingua snella
Destà il fior novo de strania favella,
Mentre io di te, vezzosamente altera,

Canto, dal mio buon popol non inteso
E’l bel Tamigi cangio col bel Arno.
Amor lo volse, ed io a l’altrui peso
Seppi ch’Amor cosa mai volse indarno.

Deh! foss’il mio cuor lento e’l duro seno
A chi pianta dal ciel si buon terreno.

As on the austere hillside, at the browning of evening the skillful young shepherdess moistens a foreign and beautiful plant that weakly propagates itself in an unfamiliar clime far from the soul of its native spring, so while I sing of you, O delicately high one, Love awakens upon my agile tongue a new flower of foreign speech not understood by
my good people, and I exchange the fair Thames for the fair Arno. Love desired it, and I at the expense of others knew that Love never desired in vain. Ah! if only my slow heart and hard breast were such good soil for the One who plants from heaven.

GIAMATTI — The poet compares his attempt to sing in Italian verse to that of the shepherdess who is trying to grow a plant imported from a foreign and more fertile soil. Neither of the two experimenters is unskilled: she is an expert gardener (avezza) and his tongue as nimble (lingua snella), but the task is difficult. He would not have attempted it if Love had not insisted, but who has ever been able to resist Love? He only wishes that his heart were as amenable to the commands of Heaven.

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BALDI — 5 natia 1645; natia 1673. 6 Amor 1645, amor 1673; insù 1645, insu 1673 and Fletcher.

Qual in colle aspro, al imbrunir di sera

1 BALDI — colle aspro: PETRARCH Rime CCLXXXVII.2, D’aspri colli mirando il dolce piano; BEMBO Rime III.1, Si come suol, poi che il verno aspro e rio; VARCHI Sonetti CCCXXII.1, Sopra erto poggio, fra monti aspri; DELLA CASA Rime XL.ii, Ne per celarsi in monte aspro et selvaggio; TASSO Rime MCCXLIV 27, Ne gli aspri colli o pur ne’ campi ondosi. imbrunir di sera: TODD cites PETRARCH Rime CXXXVII.22-24. Ratto, come imbrunir veggio la sera,/sospir dal petto, e de li occhi escon onde,/da bagnar l’erbe, e da crollare i boschi (note verse 3 as well). See MILTON Penseroso 134, “shadows brown,” and Paradise Lost IV.246, “Inbround the noontide Bowrs,” and Paradise Lost IX.1088 “brown as Evening;” TASSO Gerusalemme Liberata XIX.iii.4, Quando e il sol ne l’occaso e imbruna l’orto. See
also **Boiardo** Amores II.ciii.9 *E come l’aria intorno a noi se imbruna*; **Sannazaro** Arcadia ii.133, *Ecco la notte e’l del tutto s’imbruna*.

**Giamatti** – see Dante Convivio 3.3.4, a passage marked in Milton’s copy in the New York Public Library, according to Sister Margaret Theresa in Thought 22 (1947) 486. See Kelley 309. See also Francesco Coppetta dei Beccuti, *Porta il buon villanel* in Lirici italiani del cinquecento (Milan: Fimiani, 1934) 57.

**Smart** 147: The picture of the youthful shepherdess is original and Miltonic.

**Kuhl-Lemmi** 49: Hardly original (see Petrarch Rime LI.4-5 cited by Baldi below). Notice that *bagnare* means to wet, and not, as Smart translates, to water. While therefore applicable to the wetting of a veil, it is not to the watering of a plant, and it would not have come into Milton’s mind if he had not been thinking of Petrarch’s lines.

*L’avezza giovinetta pastorella*

**Baldi** – *avezza*: Florio *New World of Wordes*, Avezzato, enured, wont, accustomed; Avezzo accustomed, wont, enured; Bembo Asolani II.xvi.18, Avezza nel desio ch’i serro dentro; also Asolani II.xvi.46, Ch’avezza l’alma a gir là v’io la senta; Ariosto Satire VII.119-120, questa gente inculta/simile al luogo ov’ella e nata e avezza (cited in Smart 147). *pastorella*: Petrarch Rime LI.4-5, Ch’a me la pastorella alpestra e cruda, posta a bagnar un leggiadretto velo.

**Keightley** – *L’avvezza*:450 This word is almost invariably followed by a, di, or in. Rossetti however said, “*Si usa,*” and Panizzi made no remark on it, and
we have met with it apparently thus unattended in the following places:

**Ariosto** *Orlando furioso* XI.13, *Dove avea lasciato il cavallo, avvezza/In cielo e in terra, a rimontar veniva*; **Ariosto** *Orlando furioso* XXII.76, *Ed avean seco quella male avvezza, Che v’ avea posta la costume rea*; **Ariosto** *Orlando furioso* XXIII.96, *Ma, come costumato e ben avvezzo, Non prima il paladin quindi si trasse.*

**Ariosto** *Satire* VII.40, *E questa gente inculta Simile al luogo ov’ ella è nata e avvezza.* **Tasso** *Gerusalemme liberata* VI.37, *Fra i ladroni d’Arabia, o fra simile Barbara turba avvezzo esser tu dei.* These passages, especially the last, may perhaps be regarded as justifying Milton in his employment of *avvezza* thus alone; but still we think that none of his Tuscan friends would have followed his example.

*Va bagnando l’herbetta strana e bella*

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3 **Baldis — Petrarch** *Rime* CCLXXXI.3, *Vo con gli occhi bagnando l’erba e il petto;*

**Boiardo** *Amores* I.xv.40-41, *onde se bagna/la verde erbetta e il colorito fiore;*

**Lorenzo il Magnifico** *Rime*, *Sonnetto*, XLVII.3-4, *e vien sopra il ruscello/che bagna la minuta e verde erbetta;* **Bembo** *Rime* iii.7, *Erbe pascendo rugiadosi e fieri;*

**Varchi** *Sonetti* CCCXXII.9-10, *Quindi non lunge sopra alpestro, e fero/Sasso tra molli herbette, appo un bel fonte;* **Tasso** *Rime* CCCLX.10-11, *e i fior in questi colli/bagnati e molli.* See also **Constable** *Diana* III.i.14-15, “The rayne wherewith she watereth these flowers/Falls from myne eyes which she dissolues in shewers.”
SMART – In the second sonnet Milton compares himself to a youthful shepherdess dwelling on a rocky spot among the mountains, who tends a plant from some garden on the plane below, which cannot flourish in the bleak air, so far from its native clime: so he cultivates the flower of a foreign speech. Italian verse is the planet thus transported to an alien soil; and the rugged Hill is England, where the poet writes.

HONIGMANN – Milton surely never meant to compare himself to a youthful shepherdess... Sonnet III consists of a series of parallel statements about planting and growth: (a) the shepherdess (b) waters a plant (c) on a rugged hill (d) which is an unfamiliar clime for it; (a) Love (b) quickens the new flower (c) on my swift tongue (d) which is foreign to it; (a) the Shepherd [=Him] (b) plants (c) in my slow heart and hard bosom (d) which are not good soil. The logic of the poem identifies Milton with the rugged hill, the swift tongue, the hard bosom, and makes Milton himself, not England, the alien soil.

KEIGHTLEY – Va bagnando, i.e. goes watering. On a similar subject ARIOSTO Satire 1.3 uses the more poetic term rorando. To our query on avvezza, ROSSETTI replied: Trovarci piuttosto a dire su quell’ erbeta strana e bella del 3° verso, dove l’aggettivo strana mi pare strano veramente. Io avrei piuttosto messo amena e bella [I find myself rather inclined to comment upon that strange and beautiful plant, where the adjective strana seems strange to me indeed]. It is remarkable that our friend did not perceive that Milton used strana in the unusual sense of straniera [foreign], as he does strania in v7.
Strano, no doubt, is thus used in the works of the Trecentisti, and even by Bernardo Tasso, who was rather fond of archaisms, in his Amadigi, but we doubt if any other poet of the sixteenth or seventeenth century so used it. ROSSETTI, when we recalled his attention to it said, “Strano per straniero è Italiano” [Strano for foreigner is Italian].

Che mal si spande a disusata spera

BALDI — SMART 147 points to MILTON Paradise Lost XI.273-79, “O flours,/That never will in other Climate grow,/My early visitation, and my last/at even, which I bred up with tender hand/From the first opening bud, and gave ye names,/Who now shall reare ye to the Sun, or ranke/Your Tribes, and water from th’ambrosial Fount.”

VOLPI — spera: Les mots qui indiquent l’acclimitation de la plante – spande, disusata, spera (cette dernière, bien qu’elle soit employée dans l’acception de climat et non de sphère, fait néanmoins image) – suggèrent un mouvement circulaire. Pour ce que est de la rime sera – spera – primavera, nous avons trouvé la même structure dans un poème de Benedetto Varchi [The words that indicate the acclimation of the plant – spande, disusata, spera (the latter, although it is used in the sense of climate, and not of sphere, does nonetheless create the idea) – suggest a circular motion. Insofar as the rhyme sera – spera – primavera is concerned, we have found the same structure (of movement) in a poem of Benedetto Varchi: LXXVII alla Signora Tullia d’Aragona].
Se di così selvaggio e così duro

Legno sì aspro frutto, oimè, v’aggrada,
Chi fia, ch’unqua vi miri, e poscia vada
Di non sempre penar donna sicuro?

Ben ch’io, poi ch’ognor più m’inaspro e ’nduro
in questa orrida, alpestra, erma contrada
Del duol, cui lunge a voi fo larga strada,
E dall’arbor, cui solo in terra curo;

Dovrei trovar pietà, ch’asprezza uguale

Ne più selvaggia, o solitaria vita
Non senti mai, nè visse alcun mortale.

Fera legge d’Amor! sperar aita

Dal dolor, che n’ancide, e del suo male
Pascer l’alma via più, che saggia, ardita.\(^{451}\)

Fuor di sua natia alma primavera

5 **BALDI – BEMBO** Rime III.4, Del solingo suo bosco almo natio; **VARCHI** Sonetti CXXV.3, Nell’aprir di sua dolce primavera; **DELLA CASA** Rime XXXV.3, Che la mia dolce terra, alma, natia.

Così Amor meco insù la lingua snella

6 **BALDI – snella:** **FLORIO** New World of Wordes, “Snello, swift, nimble, fleece, lightfooted.” *Snello* in this sense is found in Dante, in Petrarch, and is
common throughout the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries. I have not found examples of lingua snella.

GIAMATTI – So Love quickens upon my nimble tongue the strange flower of a foreign speech. PETRARCH Trionfo della fama III.20, quant’à eloquenzia e frutti e fiori; GIOVANNI CANALE La tua lingua immortal 9, nell’orar fiorita. ROSSETTI – meco: Meco per a me non si può [You can’t use meco for a me].

MELCHIONDA – lingua snella: possibly a hapax legoumenon in all of Italian literature.

Desta il fior novo de strania favella

7 BALDI – strania: FLORIZ New World of Wordes, “Stranio, as Strano. Strano, strange, vnwonted, new, seldome seene, wonderfull. Also diuers, vnkowne. Also vnconuenient, vmproportioned, without all fashion. Also, peeuish, fretfull, angry, fantastickal, hard to be pleased.”

Mentre io di te, vezzosamente altera

8 BALDI – altera: PETRARCH Rime XXXVII.100, E gli atti suoi soavemente alteri (see II.6); also Rime CCLXVII.2 Oimè il leggiadro portamento altero (see IV.8); VARCHI Sonetti DVI.7, Ed ella in atto humilmente altero.

GIAMATTI – vezzosamente altera—graciously proud: PETRARCH Sonnet, Soleasi nel mio cor 1-2, Soleasi nel mio cor star bella e viva,/Come alta donna in loco umile e basso [Alive and beautiful she used to dwell in my heart, like a noble lady in a low and humble place]; and see PETRARCH Sonnet, Nodi ad arte negletti 3, Altiera fronte umil. 453
Canto, dal mio buon popol non inteso

GIAMATTI – **canto**: the first word of this verse, completing the sentence begun in the previous verse. See also note on *Sonnet II.12* above.

KEIGHTLEY – **dal mio...**, etc., i.e. in a language not understood by my countrymen in general. We are to recollect that he was writing in Italy.

E’l bel Tamigi cangio col bel Arno.

BALDI – *Petrarch* *Rime* CCCVIII.1, *Quella per cui con Sorga ho cangia’t’Arno*; VARCHI *Sonetti* CCCLXII.13-14, *Che cangiar tosto deggio, non pur voglio,/L’Osoli, e l’Arno à l’Anicene, e’l Tebro*; VARCHI *Sonetti* XXXVI.14, *Egloga* III.60 (Egloga II) *bell’Arno*. BARIGNANO c 55.10 *A cangiar l’Aventin co Pirenei*. See MILTON *Epistle* to Benedetto Buonmattei (10 IX 1638), *nec me tarn ipsæ Athenæ atticæ cum illo suo pellucido Ilisso, nec ilia vetus Roma sua Tiberis ripa retinere valuerunt; quin sæpe Arnum vestrum, & Fæsulanos illos colles invisere amem.*

GIAMATTI – *Petrarch* *Sonnet Quella per cui* (see BALDI citation above). [She for whose sake I have exchanged the Arno for the Sorgue]. The Petrarchists often use the names of rivers for cities and countries; Milton uses them here for languages.

PURVES – Here the hendecasyllable, like others in these poems, has an English rather than an Italian cadence.

Amor lo volse, ed io a l’altrui peso

GIAMATTI – **a l’altrui peso**: from the distress of others. Not the same as *alle spese altrui*, at the expense of others. See MILTON *Elegia septima* 27-28, *Et miser
exemplum sapuisses tutius inquit; nunc mea quid possit dextera testis eris. NB:

BALDI (110) finds no problem equating the two phrases, Non vedo poi perché ci si debba maravigliare se un poeta che scrive in italiano cinquecentesco… scrive a l’altrui peso invece che a spese d’altrui [Moreover, I don’t see why one should be surprised if a poet who writes in Sixteenth Century Italian… writes a l’altrui peso instead of a spese d’altrui].

KEIGHTLEY – peso, i.e. spese. This is, we believe, an unusual sense of the word. PANIZZI, “I do not recollect any such Italian phrase: this seems unintelligible, although I may guess the meaning.” Surely the meaning is clear enough.

Seppi ch’Amor cosa mai volse indarno.

12 BALDI – BOIARDO Amores II.xcvii.14, Ché contro Amor non è forza che vaglia.

KEIGHTLEY – mai: According to ROSSETTI, “Mai per non mai ha rari esempi” [There are few examples of mai for non mai]. It may in fact be regarded as peculiar to Dante.

Deh! foss’il mio cuor lento e’l duro seno

13 BALDI – foss’il: TASSO Rime DCCCLXXI.10, Deh, fosse in loro il dolce stile e l’arte (the verb is singular). duro seno: PETRARCA Rime CCXVII.3-4, Ch’un foco di pietà fessi sentire/al duro cor ch’a mezza state gela (fessi = si facesse).

A chi pianta dal ciel si buon terreno.
BALDI — pianta: PETRARCH Rime CXLVII.12-14, Così cresca il bel lauro in fresca riva, e chi'l piantò pensier leggiadri ed alti/ne la dolce ombra al suon de l'acque scriva (see also VI.6).

PURVES — This sonnet, like Sonnets IV and V, ends with a rhyming couplet, rima baciata. That such sonnets, though uncommon in Italy, were not unorthodox, was shown by the late Professor W. Lloyd Bullock, “The First French Sonnets.”

GIAMATTI — (J. E. Shaw) Livingston [sic], preferred to read duro'l seno instead of 'l duro seno and translated: “Oh that my heart were less fertile, my breast more stony, toward one who findeth such fecund soil for the seed she soweth from Heaven.” Understood in this way, the poet wishes his heart were hard and resistant to the influence of the lady; he wishes he could resist the power of love. Livingston may have had in mind the conclusion of the preceding Sonnet 2, which warns against the danger of an inveterate passion, and perhaps even more the conventional repentance of the Petrarchists for a youth wasted in the service of worldly love—the repentance of Petrarch’s introductory sonnet Voi ch’ascoltate. Also the poet has just said, in verses 11 through 12, that he has learned from the sorrows of others that love is irresistible, so the results of love are admittedly sad. There is evidently much to be said for Livingston’s thoughtful interpretation which turns the poet’s own lady into another expert gardener similar to the pastorella of verse 2. on the other hand it is hard to think that the presumed error in the text could
have escaped Milton’s attention; it is easier to believe that *Chi pianta dal ciel* is God; and the conventional recognition of the inferiority of worldly love in the last two lines is as simple as that at the end of Sonnet 2, without any emendation of the text. [The editors are indebted to Professor A. Bartlett Giamatti of Yale for the following remarks on the last lines of the sonnet]: “I think, with Mr. Shaw, that Smart’s straightforward reading is the correct one. However, I noticed here an echo of another who was likened to good earth, in whom greater desires might be planted. For Beatrice says of Dante:

*Ma tanto più maligno e più silvestro*

*Si fa ‘l terren col mal seme e non colto,*

*Quant’elli ha più del buon vigor terrestro.*

Purgatorio XXX.118-20

The more rank and wild a man’s inner self, the better and richer soil he is for that inner cultivation necessary for salvation. This is the point of Dante’s self cultivation in the garden of Eden. However, what is interesting in comparing Dante’s lines with Milton’s—aside from the congruences in imagery and indeed the similarity in language—is that both poets see themselves as arid or ruined earth (souls) which can respond to the efforts and presences of certain ladies (Matelda and Beatrice in Dante; *l’avezza giovinetta pastorella* in Milton, v. 2). Dante knows that by bringing his inner landscape into harmony with Eden, he will achieve Heaven; Milton wishes that, as his Italian flourishes under her inspiration like a small plant in a strange country, and expresses his love—so might he prove, worthless soil that his breast is, an
equally receptive garden for the love of God. Milton’s last two lines are
distinct, and at a higher remove, so to speak, from the first 12; but they
recapitulate the imagery of the beginning of the simile and give the poem a
conventional, yet novel twist. Though the parallel between Milton and Dante
may seem far-fetched, the similarities in diction, imagery, and theme strike me
forcibly and illustrate certain convictions of mine regarding Dante and Milton.”

Canzone

Ridonsi donne e giovani amorosi

M’accostandosi attorno, e perché scrivi,

Perché tu scrivi in lingua ignota e strana

Verseggiano d’amor, e come t’osi?

Dinne, se la tua speme si mai vana,

E de pensieri lo miglior t’arrivi;

Così mi van burlando, altri rivi

Altri lidi t’aspettan, & altre onde

Nelle cui verdi sponde

Spuntati ad hor, ad hora la tua chioma

L’immortal guiderdon d’eterne frondi.

Perché alle spalle tue soverchia soma?

Canzon dirotti, e tu per me rispondi

Dice mia Donna, e’l suo dir, è il mio cuore,

Questa è lingua di cui si vanta Amore.
Pressing in about me, maidens and amorous youths laugh. “Why do you write? Why do you write in an unknown, foreign language versifying of love? How do you dare? Speak of it, so that your hope be not vain and best wishes come to you.” Thus, they mock me. “Other shores and other strands await you, and other waves on whose green banks and your locks sprout even now the immortal reward of everlasting laurels. Why let this load weigh upon your shoulders?” O Song, I will tell you, and you respond for me, “My lady says,” and her speech is my heart, “This is the tongue of which Love boasts.”

GIAMATTI – The subject is like that of Sonnet 3, the difficulty of writing Italian verse, but here it is especially the daring of the attempt. The poet is more than ever aware how daring it is when he undertakes a stanza di canzone, but he takes pride in it. He might have chosen a simple form of stanza, but he prefers one that is complicated. This form is not unlike that of the stanzas of Della Casa’s Canzone, Amor i’ piango, which also have fifteen verses, but Milton’s has an additional rhyme. His young friends gather round him and laugh at him. They remind him that he has already earned the beginnings of fame at home and abroad in English and in Latin, the language familiar to all educated men. Why should he assume a burden too great for his shoulders by writing in a strange unknown tongue (lingua ignota e strana)? The answer is that fame is not his object; his lady has told him that Italian is the language of love.

Ridonsi donne e giovani amorosi

1 BALDI – BOIARDO Amores IlXI.101-2, Fuòr per bon tempo meco in compagnia/giovani lieti e liete damigelle; TASSO Rime DXCI.18-19, Vedi schiere amorose/errare in te di donne e di donzelle.

GIAMATTI – Ridonsi donne—ladies laugh: Intransitive reflexive verbs of the kind which are not real reflexives, since they use the pronoun only to intensify the meaning of the verb, are as common in old Italian verse as they are rare in the modern language: e.g. viversi, morirse, tacersi, cadersi, discendersi, etc. Osarsi in verse 4: Come t’osi? is another.

M’accostandosi attorno, e perche scrivi

2 GIAMATTI – M’accostandosi attorno—Gathering around me: the position of the conjunctive personal pronoun before the present participle is surprising, for, although the Italian poets who were Milton’s models felt free to place conjunctive pronouns and adverbial particles before or after any part of the verb, in practice they placed them after the present participle, except sometimes in negative phrases, such as non mi parendo, or non lo vedendo. Giovanni Florio says: “Note withall that none of these Particles should be used before any Infinitive Mood, Gerund or Participle (an error wherein Englishmen fall very often).” This so-called error occurs in Italian authors as late as the nineteenth-century. See GUERRAZZI Isabella Orsini (Florence, 1910), chapter 3, 56: Si accorgendo, and 76, le stendendo.
ROSETTI — M’accostandosi. Non si può dire, e il secondo verso avrebbe dovuto essere, *Venendo a me intorno perché scrivi*, ecc., o pure, *Dicendo a me d’intorno perché scrivi*, ecc., poichè senza il *Dicendo* mal regge il senso [You can’t say this, and the second verse should have been *Coming around me why do you write*, etc., or, *Saying round about me why do you write*, etc., because without the *Saying* it doesn’t make sense]. NB: See GIAMATTI above for occurrences of this error in Italian authors.

*Perche tu scrivi in lingua ignota e strana*

3 **BALDI** — **DANTE** *Convivio* 1.xi.15 *Et sanza dubbio non è sanza loda d’ingegno a prendere bene la lingua strana* (see also III.7).

*Verseggando d’amor, e come t’osi?*

4 **HONIGMANN** — In the *Epitaphium Damonis* Milton, reminiscing about his recent stay in Florence, mentioned the poetical contests of his Italian friends and added that ‘I myself even dared to compete’ (*Ipse etiam tentare ausus sum*, 1.133). The bystanders in the Canzone ask ‘why dost thou write in a strange and unknown tongue, and how dost thou dare?’ The daring celebrated in the *Epitaphium Damonis* most probably refers to attempts at Italian poetry, in which Milton would be at the greatest disadvantage.

*Dinne, se la tua speme si mai vana,*

5 **BALDI** — **TASSO** *Rime* XXXII.14, *Che non fian sempre vani i miei sospiri?* **TODD** cites **DANTE** *Inferno* XXIX.103, *Se la vostra memoria non s’imboli*, and **PETRARCH** *Trionfo dell’Amore* II.25, *Or dimmi, se colui in pace vi guide; ma per un possibile*
significato augurale di se (which implies mai = nunquam = never). See SANNAZARO Arcadia II.7 Amico, se le benevole ninfe prestino intente orecchie al tuo cantare, fa che io alquanto goda del tuo cantare; SANNAZARO Arcadia VII.30, ma dimmi, se gli Dii ti rechino la desiata donna, quali furon quelle rime; VARCHI Sonetti XXXVII.4-8, Se’l ciel le sponde tue giammai non priui/ Di suoni e canti, e d’amorosi balli/ Questo (ch’altri non ho marmi ò metalli)/ Per le tue scorze, e ne tuoi marmi scrivi; VARCHI Sonetti XC.5-6, 9-10, Deh, se per venti ò pioggie unqua turbate/ Non sian vo str’onde.../ Serbate in questi tronchi, e’n questi sassi/ Le mie giuste preghiere, e’l mio rammarco.

KEIGHTLEY — se. According to ROSSETTI, “Il se col congiuntivo esprime augurio, e non altro. Ma in questo verso la dizione me pare un po’ zoppa, e avrebbe dovuto dirsi: “Di, se la speme tua non sia mai vana” [se followed by the subjunctive expresses wish, and nothing else. But in this verse the diction seems to me a bit hobbled, and it should say: “Speak, if your hope be not vain]. As ROSSETTI seems here not to have perceived the reason of our query respecting se, which was its archaism, we will here give the result of our own researches respecting it. It is then the Latin sic, as in HORACE Carmina 1.3.1, Sic te diva potens cypri/ Sic fratres Helenæ, lucida sideran; VERGIL Bucolics IX.30, Sic tua Cyrncas fugiant examina taxos,/ Sic cytiso pastas distendant ubera vaccæ. It seems to have been almost peculiar to the Tuscans; for though DANTE, BOCCACCIO, and PULCI use it frequently, it occurs but once in PETRARCH Trionfo d’Amore II.9, Or dimmi, se colui in pace ti guide; twice in ARIOSTO
Orlando furioso VI.27, *Se da grandine il cielo sempre ti schivi,* and Orlando furioso XXXIV.9, *E dice all’ ombra: Se Dio tronchi ogni ala/Al fumo si ch’a te non più ascenda;* once in Bernardo Tasso *Amadigi* VI.38, *Se mai sempre vi sian fiorite e liete De’ vostri umidi alberghi ambe le sponde;* and once in Tasso *Gerusalemme liberata* VII.15, *Se non t’invidii il ciel si dolce stato.* It occurs once in the eighteenth century: Maffei *Merope* IV.2, *Se t’ arrida il ciel.* We have not met with it anywhere else except in Sannazaro *Arcadia,* and *never* in lyric poetry.

In Old French *si* was thus employed: Marot *Seigneur, si Dieu vous garde.*

5-6 Giamatti — Tell us so that thy hope be never vain and the best of thy wishes come true. This form of adjuration or appeal, with *se* followed by the subjunctive, is frequent in Italian verse from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century: e.g. Dante *Inferno* X.82-83; Tasso *Sonetto,* *Come ne l’ocean* 12-14; Jacopo Marmitta *Sonetto,* *Se l’onesto desio.*

For bibliography of recent discussion as to the origin of this *se*—whether from Latin *si,* *sic,* or *sit*—see Italica 15 (1938) 152-155; 17 (1940) 16-17.

E de pensieri lo miglior t’arrivi

6 Baldi — Petrarch *Rime* CCLXXXIX.6, *Per lo migliore mio desir cortese;* Barignano *Sonetti* I.78.1-2, *Donna, se Morte con far grave torto/Al caro amante, nel miglior t’offese;* Delia Casa *Abbozzi* VIII.14, *La tua bontade il mio miglior raccolga.*

Giamatti — pensieri—wishes: Pensieri may mean either *cure* or *speranze*—anxieties or hopes, as Leopardi says in his note on Petrarch *Sonnet Quando’io mi*
volgo 2, and see Chiòrboli’s note. Hope has already been expressed by speme in the previous line. Smart’s translation, “wishes” seems best.

Cosi mi van burlando, altri rivi

7 OLIVERO – Venendo ad esaminare la prosodia di questi componimenti, appare errato il verso 7 della Canzone, a meno di ammettere una dialefe tra la 7a e l’8a sillaba; malgrado il distacco delle frasi questa dialefe riesce debolmente preparata dalla parola piana antecedente [As we come to examine the prosody of these elements, verse 7 of the Canzone appears to be an error, unless we introduce a dialœpha between the 7th and the 8th syllables (burlando, altri); despite the detachment of the phrases this dialœpha would be anticipated only weakly by the flat antecedent word].

PURVES – burlando: This seems to refer particularly to the preceding lines; a fuller stop than a comma is therefore called for. The jest is at the poet’s writing in Italian, while his true gifts are for English poetry.

Altri lidi t’aspettan, & altre onde

7-8 BALDI – SANNAZARO Arcadia V.14-15, Altri monti, altri piani, schetti e rivi; ARIOSTO Orlando Furioso XXXIV.lxxii.1-3, Altri fiumi, altri laghi, altre campagne/sono lassu, che non son qui tra noi;/altri piani, altre valli, altre montagne (cited in TODD). See also MILTON Lycidas 174, “Where other groves, and other streams along” (cited in TODD).

Nelle cui verdi sponde
7-9 GIAMATTI — Thus they banter me, other streams other shores await thee, and other waters upon whose green edges. *rivi* means streams or rivers; *lidi* means sea-shores; *onde* and *sponde* may belong to either sea or river. Notice the marked pause in verse 7 between *burlando* and *Altri*, caused by the diaeresis of the syllables *do* and *Al*. This *asprezza* as Tasso called it, was intended to provide distinction from smooth and less significant verse. See PRINCE 27.

*Spuntati ad hor, ad hora la tua chioma*

10 BALDI — *ad hor, ad hor*: FLORIO New World of Wordses, “*Adhora, adhora, euen now, at this houre.***

10-11 GIAMATTI — There sprouts for thee from time to time the immortal guerdon of perennial fronds from thy hair. The *tua* of *la tua chioma* may seem a superfluous repetition of the *ti* of *spuntati*, but the construction is not *spuntati...a la tua chioma* but *spuntati...l’immortal guiderdon d’eterne frondi a la tua chioma*. *ad hor, ad hor* — from time to time: See PETRARCH Sonnet Quando fra l’altre 1 and PETRARCH Sonnet Quando’l voler 3, and the notes of Leopardi. Also PETRARCH Canzone, Ne la stagion 2.11 and PETRARCH Canzone, Perchè la vita è breve 6.1 and the notes of Chiòrboli.

*L’immortal guiderdon d’eterne frondi.*

*Perche alle spalle tue soverchia soma?*

*Canzon dirotti, e tu per me rispondi*

*Dice mia Donna, e’il suo dir, è il mio cuore,*
11-13 BALDI – PETRARCh Rime V.7-8, che farle onore/e d’altri omeri soma che non tuo;

PETRARCh Rime CXXX.4, Riposto il guidardon d’ogni mia fede; SANNAZAR0 Arcidia
II.107-108, Per guiderdon de le gravose some/deh spargi al vento le dorate
chiome; TASSO Rime CMXXXVII.12-13, Ne verdeggia in Parnaso a queste
chiome/sacrato lauro. See also MILTON Lycidas 73, “But the fair Guerdon when
we hope to find.”

ROSSETTI – Perché, etc. Può omettersi il verbo, ma sarebbe meglio se ci fosse
[You may omit the verb, but it would be better if it were there]. See GIAMATTI
at Sonnet V.5, and KUHL-LEMMI at Sonnet V.10 below on Milton’s besetting sin
in Italian.

OLIVERO – L’effetto delle rime dei vv 8-9 e 11-13 è spiacevole, la differenza
di suono fra quelle in ondi e l’altri in onde essendo troppo lieve. La
divisione in fronte e sirima potrebbe presentarsi con questo schema, in cui il
verso collegatore o chiave avrebbe maggior risalto: ABC | ACB || BDdEFE |
FGG. [The effect of the rhyme scheme of vv 8-9 and 11-13 is unpleasant, the
difference in sound between those rhymes in ondi and the others in onde
being too slight. The division between fronte and sirma could be presented
with this scheme, which would place the linking or key verse in greater relief:

ABC | ACB || BDdEFE | FGG].

Questa è lingua di cui si vanta Amore.

15 BALDI – That Italian is the language of love is a saying popularly attributed
to Charles V, but I cannot find satisfactory testimony for it. On the subject, see
E. Buceta, *El juicio de Carlo V acerca el Español*. The oldest version cited there is from *De locutione* di Gerolamo Fabrizi (or Fabrici) d’Acquapendente (1533-1619), but it doesn’t quite fit: *Unde solebat, ut audio, Carolus V Imperator dicere, Germanorum linguam esse militarem, Hispanorum amatoriam, Gallorum nobilem* (14). More to the point would be the saying of Jacques Davy Cardinal du Perron (1556-1618), collected in the *Perroniana* of Aristophe Dupuy, *La langue italienne est fort propre pour les choses d’amour a cause de la quantité de diminutifs qu’elle possede* (Buceta 12), but the *Perroniana* was only printed in 1666 at Aix-en-Provence.

**CARDUCCI** — *L’ultimo verso potrebbe sonare non indegnamente tra alcuni della* Vita Nuova [The last line would resonate not unworthily among those of the *Vita Nuova*].

**Sonnet IV**

*Diodati, e te’l dirò con maraviglia,*

*Quel ritroso io ch’amor spreggiar soléa*

*E de suoi lacci spesso mi redéa*

*Gia caddi, ov’huom dabben talhor s’impiglia.*

*Ne treccie d’oro, ne guancia vermiglia* 5

*M’abbaglian sì, ma sotto novia idea*

*Pellegrina bellezza che’l cuor bea,*

*Portamenti alti honesti, e nelle ciglia*

*Quel sereno fulgor d’amabil nero,*
Parole adorne di lingua piu d’una,
E’l cantar che di mezzo l’hemisfero
Traviar ben può la faticosa Luna,
E degli occhi suoi avventa si gran fuoco
Che l’incerar gli orecchi mi fia poco.

Diodati, and I tell you this with wonder, that my reluctant self, who used to despise love and at his snares often have laughed, have now fallen where good men do sometimes become entangled. Neither braids of gold, nor vermillion cheeks dazzle me so, but rather a new form, a rare foreign beauty that makes the heart glad, deportment high and honest, and in her brows there is a serene effulgence of amiable black, her speech adorned with more than one tongue, and singing that from the middle of the hemisphere might well lead astray the troubled moon. And from her eyes shoots forth such great fire that putting wax in my ears does little for me.

GIAMATTI – A conventional announcement of a surrender to the wiles of Cupid by one who has hitherto been impervious to them. Compare the more elaborate announcement in Elegia septima. Unconventional is the preference for the foreign beauty of the black-eyed lady over the golden-haired, rosy cheeked British type, and the information that the lady speaks more than one language. Then, in the last two lines, come a grotesque conceit.

BALDI – 1 dirò 1645, diro 1673. 2 soléa 1645, solea 1673. 3 ridéa 1645, ridea 1673. 4 s’impiglia. 1673, s’impiglia, 1645. 6 sì 1645, si 1673. 12 può 1645, puo 1673; Luna, ed., Luna, 1645, 1673. 13
Diodati, e te’l dirò con maraviglia,

1 BALDI – Diodati: Prince points to Bembo’s practice of beginning with the name of the person to whom the sonnet is dedicated, but it’s found also in Petrarch (for example, Rime XCVIII). It’s certainly common in Bembo, and even more so in Varchi, and it’s found in Tasso. Milton uses it at different times in the English sonnets. maraviglia: Petrarch Rime LXIX.5, Ma novamente, ond’io mi meraviglio (cited in OLIVERO 17); Petrarch Rime CLX.1, Amore et io si pien di meraviglia.

GIAMATTI – Diodati—and I shall tell it thee with wonder... (SMART). For similar parenthoses see Petrarch Sonnet, Ben sapev’io 5 and Canzone, Ben mi credea 5.9.

Quel ritroso io ch’amor spreggiar soléa

2 BALDI – Vergil Aeneid 1.18 Ille ego, qui quondam gracili modulates avena and, in the tradition of Caro, Quell’io che gia tra selve e tra pastori. – spreggiar: Florio New World of Wordes has only spregiare, but Florio Second Fruites, on the last line of page 96, has Non spreggiar mai nissuno; Francesco Flavio Sonetto II.10 Sciolto, e sicuro hormai spreggia ogni guerra.459

GIAMATTI – spreggiar—to despise: Spreggiare and preggio, worth, unusual forms even in old Italian, og their gg by analogy to the many words which, in Folk Latin, had a simple intervocalic y sound derived from various sources. E.g. peggio, peggio, leggenda, legge, suggello, raggio, poggio.

PURVES – io: Preceded by elision or synalœpha
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E de suoi lacci spesso mi redéa

3 BALDI — PETRARCH Rime VI.3, E de’ lacci d’Amor leggera e scolta; PETRARCH Rime CCLXIII.7, Ne d’Amor visco temi o lacci o reti; DELLA CASA Rime XXVII.4, Oue al laccio cader l’alma non sdegni.

Gia caddi, ov’huom dabben talhor s’impiglia.

4 BALDI — DELLA CASA Rime XXVIII.10, Si leggiadra la rete ond’io son preso.

GIAMATTI — Gia caddi — Have now fallen.

Ne treccie d’oro, ne guancia vermiglia

5 BALDI — TODD cites TASSO Aminta 1445-46, A le guancie di Fillide volando,/a le guancie vermeilie come rosa, and MILTON Death of a Fair Infant 5-6 “that lovely die/That did thy cheek envermeil,” and MILTON Comus 752-53, “What need a vermeil-tincter’d lip for that/Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the Morn?” See also MILTON Elegia prima 59-62, Et decus eximium frontis, tremulosque capillos,/Aurea quæ fallax retia tendit Amor;/Pellacesque genas, ad quas hyacintina sordet/Purpura, & ipse tei floris, Adoni, rubor.

5-6 GIAMATTI — The poet is abandoning the British type of beauty, the supremacy of which he had vaunted in Elegia prima II. 51-72, for a foreign black-eyed type.

M’abbaglian sì, ma sotto novia idea

6 BALDI — TODD 17 and SMART 151 both cite PETRARCH Rime CXLIX.1-4, In qual parte del ciel, in quale idea/era l’esempio, onde Natura tolse/quel bel viso leggiadro, in che ella volse/mostrar qua giu quanto lassu potea?
GIAMATTI — Strange beauty copied from a rare idea. An allusion to Plato’s doctrine of ideas. Smart quotes from Petrarch (see BALDI above). See also Bernardino Tomitano Donna del mondo stanza 3, In quale parte del ciel la cura eterna/Tolse l’idea di voi, l’esempio adorno? [From what part of heaven did the Eternal Providence take the idea of you, the ornate copy?].

Pellegrina bellezza che’l cuor bea,

BALDI — Florio New World of Words, “Pellegrino, a Pilgrime, a palmer, a wandrer, an outlander, Also a fren, an alien, a forrener, a stranger, ... Vsed also for excellent, noble, rare, singular and choise;” Petrarch Rime CCXIII.5-6 and 9, Leggiadria singolare e pellegrina/e’l cantar che nell’anima si sente/.../e quei begli occhi che i cor fanno smalti; Boiardo Amores 1.liv.9-11, Il suave tacer, il star altero/lo accorto ragionar, il dolce sguardo,/il perreggin dansar ligiadro e novo.

VOLPI — L’adjectif pellegrina ou peregrina, la langue n’étant pas encore fixée au XVIIe siècle, ne signifie pas seulement étrangère qui serait simplement en opposition... avec nationale, selon l’interprétation la plus répandue, mais aussi rare, étrange, exceptionelle [The adjective pellegrina ou peregrina, in the 17th Century the language had not yet fixed its meaning, does not only mean foreigner which would be simply the opposite... of national, according to the most widespread interpretation, but also rare, strange, exceptional].

Portamenti alti honesti, e nelle ciglia
8  BALDI — PETRARCH Rime CCLXVII.1-4, Oimè il bel viso, oimè il soave sguardo,/Oimè il parlare ch’ogni aspro ingegno e fero/facevi umile, ed ogni uom vil gagliardo! SERAFINO, Un atto honesto, & un parlare cortese; VARCHI Sonetti CDLII.2, Doppio mi sprona, honesto alto desio; VARCHI Sonetti CCLXXXVI.2-3, Leggiadro, honesto ragionar gentile,/E’l dolce vostro portamento umile;

TASSO Rime C.10, E portamenti onesti; TASSO Rime CMLX.29 D’alti costumi onesti.

GIAMATTI — Portamenti alti honesti — Fine manners and modest. See Sonnet 3.8 vezzosamente altera — graciously proud; PETRARCH Sonnet Qua donna 6,

giunta onestà con leggiadria [modesty and charm combined]; AGNOLÒ FIRENZUOLA Canzone, Amor da cui conosco 3, Dove porge onestà ciò ch’io desio.462

Quel sereno fulgor d’amabil nero,

9  BALDI — OLIVERO 17 cites PETRARCH Rime LXII.50-51, Soavemente tra ‘l bel nero e ‘l bianco/volgete il lume in cui Amor si trastulla. See also SERAFINO Sonetto CXII.12-13, Vedran sotto le negre & sottil ciglia/Splender due chiare stelle dal Ciel tolte; SIDNEY Astrophel and Stella VII.1-2, “When Nature made her chief worke, Stella’s eyes,/In colour blacke, why wrapt she beams so bright?”

Parole adorne di lingua piu d’una,

10  BALDI — Il Candido in FLORIO New World of Wordes III.v.14, “That language thou adornest, that language thee.”
ROSSETTI — Parole, etc. “Il verso è senza dubbio inarmonioso, ma se ne trovano innumerevoli esempi fra i nostri” [The verse is without doubt unharmonious, but of these are found innumerable examples among our own].

E'l cantar che di mezzo l’hemisfero

Traviar ben può la faticosa Luna,

11-12 BALDI — VERGIL Eclogues VIII.69, Carmina vel cælo possunt deducere Lunam;

BEMBO Rime V.9, Cantar che sembra d’armonia divina; VARCHI Sonetti LXXI.13-14, Quetar subito in me lira e il disdegno, C’haurian fatto fermar suo corso al sole. See also MILTON Paradise Lost II.665-66, “while the labouring Moon/Eclipses at thir charms.”

GIAMATTI — And her singing which may will send the toiling moon astray from her past in the midst of the sky. SMART 151 mentions “the labouring moon” of Paradise Lost and quotes VERGIL (as above).

ROSSETTI — faticosa. “Faticosa per attiva o operosa è alquanto strano, ma può stare” [Faticosa for active or operative is quite strange, but it’s possible].

E degli occhi suoi avventa si gran fuoco

13 BALDI — degli occhi: PETRARCH Rime CXXXVII.23, Sospir dal petto e de li occhi escon onde.

OLIVERO — Il penultimo verso del Sonetto pecca per accumulazione di vocali nella sinalefe: suoi avventa [The penultimate verse of the sonnet offends through the accumulation of vowels in the synalœpha: suoi avventa].

Che l’incerar gli orecchi mi fia poco.
13-14 BALDI — See HOMER *Odyssey* XII.47-49. The force of the image recalls PETRARCH

*Rime* CCXIII.9-11, *E que’ belli occhi che i cor fanno smalti, possenti a rischiara
abisso e notti, e torre l’alme ai corpi e darle altrui.* See as well PETRARCH *Rime*
II.11-12.

GIAMATTI — And from her eyes their darts such fierce fire that to stop my ears with wax will avail me little. It’s no use trying to defend his ears against the charm of her singing—like the sailors of Ulysses—because the fire from her eyes would melt the wax. This is a *concetto* of the kind that is frequent in the verses of Serafino Aquilana [*sic*] and Teobaldeo, the use of a metaphor in a material sense. Della Casa, in his sonnet *Vago augellato*, warns his lady’s pet parrot that the fire from the lady’s eyes may burn its feathers, and Serafino, in his *O felice libretto*, wonders why the little book in which his lady is writing does not catch fire. Petrarch’s lines (Canzone, *Ben mi credea* 7.3-5) which may nevertheless have suggested these of Milton’s, are without any such deformity:

… chè dovea torcer li occhi

*Dal troppo lume, e di serene al suono*

*Chiuder li orecchi*

[for I ought to have turned my eyes away from the excessive light, and closed my ears against the siren’s song].
Sonnet V

Per certo i bei vostr’occhi Donna mia
Esser non puo che non sian lo mio sole
Si mi percuoton forte, come ei suole
Per l’arene di Libia chi s’invia,

Mentre un caldo vapor (ne senti pria)
Da quel lato si spinge ove mi duole,
Che forse amanti nelle lor parole
Chiaman sospir; io non so che si sia:

Parte rinchiusa, e turbida si cela
Scosso mi il petto, e poi n’uscendo poco
Quivi d’attorno o s’agghiaccia, o s’ingiela;

Ma quanto a gli occhi giunge a trovar loco
Tutte le notti a me suol far piovose
Finche mia Alba rivien colma di rose.

Certainly your beautiful eyes my Lady, cannot but be my sun. Yes, they strike me hard, as one accustomed by the sands of Libya who is sent, while a hot vapor (not sensed previously) from that side pushes out right where it pains me, which perhaps lovers in their speech call a sigh; I do not know what it may be, partly recused and troubled, it hides itself having shaken my breast, and then leaving a little here about either it ices up, or it freezes; But that much of it that gets into my eyes always finds a way to dampen my nights until Dawn comes again full of roses.
GIAMATTI – This is the only one of the six poems that deals with the suffering of the lover. None of the others would lead one to suspect that he is convulsed with sighs during the day and weeps all night regularly (tutte le notte mie) until dawn. But the pathetic pathological condition of the lover is such a favorite subject with the Italian sonneteers that it could hardly be omitted. The burning light from the lady’s eyes draws from his aching heart a hot and turbulent vapor which fills his breast and shakes it. Some of it escapes in sighs which freeze in the uncompromising cold of the lady’s presence; and some of it finds a way to his eyes, where it condenses into tears at night until the rosy dawn brings a glimmer of hope. See GIROLAMO MUZIO Canzone, Donne gentili,463 Chiaccio di tema, e foco di desiri,/Pioggia di pianto, e vento di sospiri. SMART compares appropriately Petrarchan verses of Ronsard (see BALDI below).

BALDI – 2 sian 1645, fian 1673. 5 sentt 1645, senti 1673. 12 a trovar 1645, 6 trovar 1673.

Per certo i bevi vostr’occhi Donna mia

1 BALDI – PETRARCH Rime III.4, Che i bevi vostr’occhi, donna, mi legaro; BEMBO Rime III.13, Moss’il piede queldi, che i be’ vostr’occhi; TASSO Rime CXCII.5, E se potesse ai bevi vostri occhi in parte.

1-2 BALDI – PETRARCH Rime IX.10-11, Così costei ch’è tra le donne un sole,/in me, movendo de’ begli occhi i rai; DELLA CASA Rime XLII.3 and 5, Tormi de be’ vostri occhi il dolce raggio,/…e sole altro non haggio; DELLA CASA Rime XLIV.7, Celar non po de suoi begli occhi il sole; TASSO Rime LXXV.3, Volger in me de’ suoi begli occhi il sole; TASSO Rime CLI.1-2, Si come torna onde si parte il sole,/Usci
da’ bei vostr’ occhi un raggio altero. SMART 153 cites RONSARD lxvi.14, Des beaux yeux bruns, les soleils de mon cœur.

1-2 GIAMATTI – Assuredly, my lady, your beautiful eyes can be naught else but a Sun to me. The lady’s eyes are the poet’s sun in quantities of Italian poems, e.g. PETRARCH Canzone, Quando il soave 6.2-3; BEMBO Sonnet Se mai ti piacque 14; DELLA CASA Sonnet Già non potrete 6. The inverted order of the sentence in these two verses is characteristic of the manner of Della Casa and Bembo. See PRINCE 22-24. A typical example is in NICCOLO AMANIO Canzone, Dunque sei i miei desiri 20-22: Ch’io non posso di quella/Onde mia morte viene,/Luce fugir’ il foco.464

Esser non puo che non sian lo mio sole

2-3 BALDI – TASSO Rime CCCXIX.5-6, E chi nasconde il sole/perche non splenda fuor com’egli suole?

Si mi percuoton forte, come ei suole

3 BALDI – percuoton: PETRARCH Rime LXXVI.1, I begli occhi ond’i fui percosso in guisa; ALESSANDRO PICCOLOMINI Voi donna insieme ed io, percossi e presi,/Da lo splendor de’ bei vostri occhi alteri.465 BALDI further cites SHAKESPEARE Love’s Labour Lost IV.iii, “As thy eyebeames, when their fresh rayse have smot/The night of dew that on my cheekes downe flows,” and MILTON Paradise Lost IV.244-45, “Both where the morning sun first warmly smote/The open field.”
Per l’arene di Libia chi s’invia,

4 BALDI — arene di Libia: TASSO Rime DXCV.5-6, Udran gli Sciti, udra l’arena aprica/di Libia il tuo bei nome; TASSO Rime DCCXCIX.9-10, E se le arene mai di Libia o i lidi/d’Asia premessi. invia: FLORIO New World of Wordes, “Inviare, to adresse, to sende or set in the right way.” DANTE Purgatorio X.102, Questi ne ’nvieranno a li altri gradi; PETRARCH Rime L.13-14, qualor s’invia/per partirsi da noi l’eterna luce.

Mentre un caldo vapor (ne senti pria)

5 GIAMATTI — un caldo vapor—a hot vapor: See PETRARCH Sonnet Ite caldo sospiri; 5, Valle che; 10, Al cader. nè senti’ pria—nor have I felt (the like) before: Sentences beginning with nor (Latin nec = and...not) without a preceding negative, sometimes parenthetical or elliptical, are frequent in Milton’s verse (see, for example, MILTON Paradise Lost 4.224; 4.1014; 5.548). They are common enough in old Italian verse too, see PETRARCH Sonnet L’ardente modo 3-4 and Canzone, Si è debile il filo 75-76; DELLA CASA Sonnet Danno (nè di tentarlo) 1; LUIGI ALAMANNI Sonnet Mentre io seguo 2; CESARE CAPORALI Sonnet Armata di quel fuoco 9. The absence of an object for the verb is, no doubt, a Latinism.

5-11 BALDI — PETRARCH Rime CXXI.1-4, Io canterei d’amor si novamente/ch’al duro fianco il di mille sospiri/trarrei per forza, e mille altri desiri/raccenderei nella gelata mente; BOIARDO Amores 1.iii.1-4, La smisurata ed incredibil vogli/che dentro fu renchiusa nel mio core,/non potendo capervi, esce de fore,/e mostra altrui cantando la mia zoglia (zoglia = gioia); ARIOSTO Capitoli IV.13-18, Così, quando soverchia e sovrabonda/a quanto cape e puo capir il petto,/convien
che l'allegrezza si diflonda, e faccia rider gli occhi e ne l'aspetto/ir con baldanza e d'ogni nebbia mostri/l'aer del viso disgravato e netto; VARCHI Sonetti LXXV.1-4, Ben mi credea poter gran tempo armato/Di pensier tristi, e freddo ghiaccio il core,/Girmen senza sospetto omai ch'Amore/Fianco scaldasse piu tanto gelato; DELLA CASA Rime VI.5-6, Hor tal è nato giel sovra il mio fianco,/Che men fredda di lui morte sarebbe; TASSO Rime CLX.7-12, Ahi! soavi ben furo e dolci i raggi/ch'acceser gia nell'alma il dolce foco,/struggendo il gelo interno in caldo rivo/e movendo i sospiri a guisa d'aura,/mentre d'ogni pietà la viva fonte/diè qualche refrigero a tanta fiamma. ne senti: (né sentii is understood). PETRARCH Rime CXI.14 Che duol non sento né sentì ma'poi. See also TASSO Rime VI.1.

Da quel lato si spinge ove mi duole,

6 BALDI — lato: BOIARDO Amores I.xlii.10-11, Che come stral di foco il lato manco/sovente incende, e mette fiamme al core (cited by SMART 155); VARCHI Sonetti LXXXI.6 and 10, poi che nel lato destro e manco/.../mi saetta lo stral.

Che forse amanti nelle lor parole

Chiaman sospir; io non so che si sia:

8-10 GIAMATTI — Parte rinchiusa... e poi n'uscendo poco—Part of it compressed...then a little escaping: MICHELANGELO Madrigal Come può esser 9-12, Che cosa è questo, Amore,/Ch'al core entra per gli occhi/Per poco spazio dentro par che cresca?/E s'avvien che trabocchi? [What is this, Love, that
enters the heart through the eyes, and seems to swell the more the less space it finds? And what if it overflows?]

8-14 **BALDI** — **PETRARCH** *Rime* CCXXIII.10-12, *Ma sospiri e lamenti in fin all'alba/e lagrime che l'alma a li occhi invia./Vien poi l'aurora e l'aura fosca inalba.*

**SMART** cites **RONSARD** *Amours* l.xxiv.1-4, *Las! je me plains de mile et mile et mile/Soupirs, qu'en vain des flancs je vais tirant,/Et ma chaleur doucement respirant/Trempée en l'eau qui de mes pleurs distile.*

8-10 **OLIVERO** — *Faticosa e contorta si presenta la sintassi della prima terzina del Sonetto* [The syntax of the first tercet of the sonnet is troubled and contorted].

*Parte rinchiusa, e turbida si cela*

9 **BALDI** — **TASSO** *Rime* MCLVIII.5-7, *Siede nel cor quasi sua reggia e splende/ne gli occhi, e la ci spinge ove ci piega/natura.*

*Sosso mi il petto, e poi n’uscendo poco*

10 **BALDI** — **PETRARCH** *Rime* III.9-11, *Trovonimi Amor del tutto disarmato,/et aperta la via per gli occhi al core/che di lagrime son fatti uscio e varco; BEMBO* *Rime* LIII.1-3, *Questo infiammato e sospiroso core/di duol trabocca, e gli occhi ognior piu desti/sono al pianger; TASSO* *Rime* LXI.14-15, *E’ ‘nfinito il dolor che dentro accolto/si sparge in caldo pianto e si mantene.*

**KEIGHTLEY** — *Sosso mi il petto.* This, we suppose, answers to the Latin ablative absolute; but it is so unusual that we could almost suspect that the poet wrote *Sotto il mio petto. n’uscendo poco.* According to **ROSSETTI**, “Fatto
per ritmo, dovrebbe essere uscendone poco” [Done thus for the rhythm, but it should be uscendone poco].

SMART – Scosso mi il petto is almost certainly a printer’s error. The true reading is probably Sotto il mio petto.

KUHL-LEMMI – SMART believes that Scosso mi il petto is almost certainly a printer’s error. The true reading is probably Sotto il mio petto. I doubt it. It is true that Smart’s Sotto il mio petto has an analogue in Milton’s Elegia prima; but the printer would surely be an ingenious one who should twist Scosso mi il petto into Sotto il mio petto; and also, if analogy with Latin did not induce Milton to intend it, Italian certainly did not, for Sotto il mio petto would have been as unidiomatic in Italian as under my breast would be in English. I suspect that Milton meant to say that the tempest of his passions was pent up in his passion-shaken breast, and that he used the word scosso (shaken) as a locative, possibly misled by analogy with the Latin. In omitting the preposition and article he committed a sin of omission—his besetting sin in Italian. In the same poem he makes another slip of the same kind: ne senti pria should be ne tale senti pria, the such as in Smart’s translation being omitted. NB: For treatment of Milton’s besetting sin (the ellipsis) in Italian see GIAMATTI above v5.

GIAMATTI – Scosso mi il petto—Having shaken my breast: SMART seems to find the phrase obscure and proposes to read Sotto il mio petto instead, but no emendation is necessary.
Quivi d’attorno o s’aggiaccia, o s’ingiela;

11 BALDI – s’ingiela: GIOVANNI DI GHERARDO Sonetto al Sacchetti DXCV.5-6, Rider li colli, poi che ’l verno ingela (I owe this citation to my friend Bruno Miglierini). It seems unlikely that Milton would have known this sonnet which was published (according to Chiari) for the first time by L. Allacci in 1661. I have not found ingelare in Dante or Petrarca, nor in the authors surveyed (a decidedly encapsulated survey); nor is it included in the Florio dictionary, whose New World of Wordes has instead “Aggielare, to freeze, or to grow to frost,” nor in the Dicitonary of the Accademia della Crusca, but it is in that of Tommaseo-Bellini, which gives as an example the verse cited above and refers one to “other lexicographers.” Notwithstanding the above it could possibly be an invention of Milton. In the Discorsi sul poema eroico, Tasso writes: Fatto o finto è quel nome che, non essendo mai stato usato da alcuno, il poeta fa di nuovo: come fece Dante binato, e similmente, intuassi, immii, inciela, impola, imparadisa, inoltra, insempra [Fact or fiction is that word which, not having ever been used by anyone, the poet makes up newly: as did Dante with binato, and similarly, intuassi, immii, inciela, impola, imparadisa, inoltra, insempra]. The Discorsi were well known to Milton and in his Italian sonnets a good seven words are retraceable to this series: innamora (II.4), infiora (II.8), invecchi (II.14), imbrunir (III.1),incerar (IV.14), invia (V.4), ingiela (V.11). For the image see PETRARCH Rime XVII Ma gli spiriti miei
s’agghiaccian poi; **Petrarch** *Rime* XXIII.24, *E d’intorno al mio cor pensier gelati;*

**Boiardo** *Amores* l.ii.10 *Al cor se agira un timoroso gielo.*

**Giamatti** — *O s’inghiaccia, o s’ingiela*—either is chilled or freezes: **Petrarch** *Canzone, Perchè la vita è breve* 3.4-5, *Ma la paura…che ’l sangue vago per le vene agghiaccia* [But fear, which chills the blood flowing through the veins].

**Francesco Coccio** *Sonnet Veloce mio pensier* 8, *gelata paura.*

*Ma quanto a gli occhi giunge a trovar loco*

*Tutte le notti a me suol far piovose*

13 **Baldis** — **Petrarch** *Rime* XLIX.9-10, *Lagrima tristi, e voi tutte le notti/m’accompagnate; Petrarch* *Rime* LXVI.27-30, *Fia di nanzi ai begli occhi quella nebbia/che fa nascer di’ miei continua pioggia,/e nel bel petto l’indurato ghiaccio/che tra’ dal mio sì dolorosi venti* (cited by **Olivero** 17-18); **Petrarch** *Rime* CCCXXXII.44-45, *quel viso lieto/che piacer mi facea i sospiri e’l pianto,/l’aura dolce e la pioggia a le mie notti. See also Shakespeare Sonnets XC.7, Give not a windy night a rainie morrow; Drummond* *Poems* Sonnet III.8, *“There Hope lookes pale, Despaire with rainie Eyes.”*

*Finche mia Alba rivien colma di rose.*

14 **Baldis** — **Petrarch** *Rime* CCXLI.1-2, *Quand’io veggio dal del scender l’Aurora/con la fronte di rose e co’ crin d’oro; Boiardo* *Amores* lxv.46-47, *Chi mai vide al mattin nascer l’aurora/di rose coronata e de jacinto; Varchi* *Egloga* II.12, *O fresca rosa all’apparir dell’Alba; Tasso* *Rime* CXLI.1 and 5-6, *Quando l’alba si leva../e l’aurora mia cerco; e s’ella gira/ver me le luci mi puo far*
contento; Tasso Rime CXXXI.1 La bella aurora mia, ch’in negro manto/inalba le mie tenebre (Laura Peperara).

Sonnet VI

Giovane piano, e semplicetto amante

Poi che fuggir me stesso in dubbio sono,

Madonna a voi del mio cor l’humil dono

Farò divoto; io certo a prove tante

L’ebbi fedele, intrepido, costante,

De pensieri leggiadro, accorto, e buono;

Quando rugge il gran mondo, e scocca il tuono,

S’arma di se, e d’intero diamante,

Tanto del forse, e d’invidia sicuro,

Di timori, e speranze al popol use

Quanto d’ingegno, e d’alto valor vago,

E di cetra sonora, e delle muse:

Sol troverete in tal parte men duro

Ove amor mise l’insanabil ago.

A gentle youth, and simple lover am I, whether to flee from myself I am in doubt, my lady to you from my heart a humble gift I will devote, certainly through many trials have I been faithful, intrepid, constant, in my thoughts graceful, alert, and good. When the great world roars, and thunder crashes, my heart arms itself, and entirely adamant, As from doubt, and from envy secure, From fears, and hopes as common folk have, so
with ingenuity, and high value desirous, and with sonorous lyre, and with the Muses. Only in one place will you find it less impenetrable there where love has stuck its incurable dart.

GIAMATTI — Dante had said that the magnanimous man always exalts himself in his own heart just as the pusillanimous man always considers himself of less worth than he is. Milton was not pusillanimous. He had a high opinion of himself and often praise himself in his defensive writings, never without some good reason, which Dante said was necessary to excuse self praise. In this sonnet at the artistically presumed reason is his need to ingratiate himself with the lady he loves, and the best he can say for himself is required. He is praising his character, not his talent for attainments, and no one can mistake the sincerity of his earnestness or the happiness of its expression, completely free, in the manner of Della Casa, from the separation of quatrains and tercets. The truth of what he is saying was confirmed later when the great world did roar and the storm struck, and by the manner in which he faced rather than endured his blindness. The last two verses returned gracefully to the conventional subject of the poem.

Baldi — 1 amante, ed., amante 1645, 1673. 2 in dubbio 1645, indubbio 1673. 4 Farb 1645, Faro 1673. 8 se, e d’ 1645, se, d’ 1673. 14 Amor 1645, amor 1673.

Giovane piano, e semplicitto amante

1 Baldi — Petrarch Rime CCCLX.125-26, Giovene schivo e vergognoso in atto/et in penser; Serafino Opera, Giouine, simplicitta, innamorata;472 Tasso Rime VII.1-2, Giovene incauto e non avvezzo ancora/rimirando a sentir dolcezza uguale.
See also Tasso Rime V.5. \textbf{piano}: Bembo Rime XIV.9, Più giovera mostrarsi umile e piano; Varchi Sonetti I.8, Degne grazie rendendo humile e piano. \textbf{semplicetto}:

Dante Purgatorio XVI.88, L’anima semplicetta che sa nulla; Petrarch Rime CXLI.2, Semplicetta farfalla al lume avvezzo; Petrarch Trionfi d’Amore V.129, Lento che i semplicetti cori invesca; Bembo Asolani I.xxxiii.40-41, due fere/... semplicette e snelle.

Poi che fuggir me stesso in dubbio sono,

2 \textbf{BALDI – PETRARCH} Rime CXXXIV.9-10, \textit{Ne pur il mio secreto, e'l mio riposo/fuggo, ma più me stesso e il mio pensero} (cited in \textsc{smart} 155); Petrarch Rime CCLXXI.2 Fuggendo altrui, e, s’esser po’, me stesso. \textbf{– in dubbio}: Petrarch Rime CCLII.1

In dubbio di mio stato, or piango or canto; Bembo Asolani II.xxxviii.29-30 \textit{Tal ch’io rimango spesso/com’uomo che vive in dubbio di se stesso}.

Giamatti – Since I am in doubt how to escape from myself: \textit{fuggir me stesso} is taken from Petrarch (see BALDI above). For Petrarch, it meant escape from the storm of fears and hopes, desires and disappointments, caused by his love, to the calming and ennobling influence of the virtuous Laura. See Michelangelo Madrigal \textit{Un uomo in una donna}, \textit{Deh fate che a me stesso più non torni} [pray let me never return to myself]. For Milton it is a merely conventional expression meaning escape from the condition described in the preceding artificial sonnet. For the absence of a word meaning \textit{how}, or a preposition before \textit{fuggir}, see Della Casa Sonnet \textit{Le chiome d’or 4}, \textit{E ben avrai vigor cenere farmi} [And it may well be fierce enough to turn me to ashes].
See also Della Casa Sonnet Già nel mio duol 4 and Della Casa Canzone, Errai gran tempo 5.16.

Madonna a voi del mio cuor l’humil dono

3 BALDI — TASSO Rime MDCLXVII.113-114, Però quasi umil dono/t’offre, canzone, il core, e spera e pave (This is the canzone that influenced the Ode on the Morning of Christ’s Nativity).

GIAMATTI — Lady, I will devoutly make the humble gift of my heart to you: By this formal presentation he ensures the happiness of his heart and relieves himself of all anxiety concerning it.

Farò divoto; io certo a prove tante

4 GIAMATTI — farò divoto completes the sense of the previous verse, the device noted in Sonnet 2.12 and Sonnet 4.4.

L’ebb i fedele, intrepido, costante,

5 BALDI — PICCOLOMINI Sonetti s.II.2, del petto mio saldo e costante; TASSO Rime CXLIX.9-10, Ne trovar lo potrai da Battro a Tyle/più costante ai tuoi colpi o dolci o ’nfesti (lo = il cuore).

De pensieri leggiadro, accorto, e buono;

6 BALDI — leggiadro: TODD notes that Rolli, Baretti and Hayley have all emended leggiadro to leggiadri. This emendation appears to be the one favored by PETRARCH Rime CXLVIII.12-14, Così cresca il bel lauro in fresca riva/e chi ’l pianto pensier leggiadri ed alti/ne la dolce ombra, al suon de l’acque scriva (see III.14). I have not found examples of locutions like leggiadro di
pensieri, but it could be the invention of Milton analogous to leggiadro di forme.

Quando rugge il gran mondo, e scocca il tuono,

7 BALDI — SAINT PAUL Epistle to the Ephesians VI.12, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Authorized Version 1611).

S’arma di se, e d’intero diamante,

8 BALDI — S’arma di se: SAINT PAUL Epistle to the Ephesians VI.11, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Authorized Version 1611); LORENZO IL MAGNIFICO Rime s.XCVI.12-1, Lassa il mio petto e su negli occhi monta/di te armati; TASSO Rime MDCCII.3, Di voglie schife armato e d’atti onesti. d’intero diamante: See above “whole armour of God;”

VARCHI Sonetti CLVIII.2, Di ferro armato, e di diamante il core; VARCHI Egloga II.83, Tutta hai di ferro, e di Diamante il petto; DELLA CASA Rime XV.12-13, Da spada di diamante, unfragil vetro/schermo mi face; TASSO Rime XIII.9 and 11, ma ’l castopetto/.../copre d’un lucidissimo diamante; TASSO Rime CV.1-4 S’arma lo Sdegno, e’n lunga schiera e folta/pensier di gloria e di virtu raccoglie,/mentr’ei per la ragion la spada toglie/ch’e in lucide arme di diamante involta; See MILTON Smectymnuus, “Zeale whose substance is ethereal, arming in compleat diamond ascends his fiery Chariot;”473 MILTON Paradise Lost VI.110, “Came tow’ring, arm’d in Adamant and Gold.”
GIAMATTI — S’arma di sè, e d’intero diamante — It (his heart) arms itself (that is, with self-confidence) and complete diamant. Livingston [sic] prefers to read s’arma di fe, and translates: “it girdeth itself with the impenetrable adamant of self-confidence,” but sè does not need to be altered, and fe might be taken to mean religious faith, which is not meant here. See TASSO Gerusalemme liberata 7.98, Quei di fine arme di se stesso armato. For intero diamante, see MILTON Smectymnuus 3.313-314, “arming in compleat diamond.”

Tanto del forse, e d’invidia sicuro,

Di timori, e speranze al popol use

Quanto d’ingegno, e d’alto valor vago,

11 BALDI — PETRARCh Rime CXLII.14, Onde piu volte, vago de’ bei rami; TASSO Rime XXXI.45 E ne sei cosi vago e cosi parco; TASSO Rime MCCIV.6 Di gentil sangue e vaga.

E di cetra sonora, e delle muse:

12-14 OLIVERO — Meno felice appare il finale del Sonetto, la cui intera costruzione procede a periodi eccessivamente lunghi e mal coordinati all’andamento delle strofe [Less felicitous is the end of the sonnet, whose entire construction moves forward in excessively long pauses, poorly coordinated with the pace of the strophes].
Sol troverete in tal parte men duro

Ove amor mise l’insanabil ago.

13-14 GIAMATTI – Only there will you find it less hard, where love placed his incurable sting (SMART). *men duro* may be the object of *troverete*, so that a literal translation would be: “you will find less hardness,” but the object may be an *it* which has been omitted in the Latin manner, as in Sonnet 5.5 *nè senti’ pria*. The word *sting* as a translation for *ago* used by a number of translators has the advantage of representing both the pain and the instrument of the wound. *Ago* (needle) is often used for the sting of an insect (*see DANTE Purgatorio* 32.133). It is used poetically for Cupid’s dart (*see PETROCCHI Dizionario, strale d’amore*) as in the sonnet of Tasso *Rose, che l’arte* mentioned by Keightley.474 For the adjective (*insanabil*) applied to the instrument instead of the wound, see ALESSANDRO GUARINI *L’artiglio irreparabile del tempo*.475 HANFORD appropriately quotes476 MILTON *Paradise Lost* 8.531-533, “in all enjoyments else/superior and unmoved, here only weak/Against the charm of beauty’s powerful glance.”

14 BALDI – The idea of the incurable dart (*insanabil ago*) may derive from two epigrams of Wyatt (ed. Muir, No. 42 and 54) that Milton might have read in Tottel’s *Miscellany* (ed. Rollins, N. 67 and 68). Rollins (II.181-82) discusses other parallels.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


**Secondary Sources**


For a detailed discussion and the texts of these royal essays into petrarchismo, see Peter C. Herman, *Royal Poetrie: Monarchic Verse and the Political Imaginary of Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 106.

Establishing a precise census of Italians dwelling in 16th and 17th England defies our documentary resources. Even so, an examination of Sir William Cecil’s 1567 *Account of Strangers in the several parts of London*, as it is treated in Kirk (1900-08: xiv), leads Michael Wyatt to conclude that “at no time during the Elizabethan period did the Italian community in London exceed more than several hundred persons, and of them only a very small number were engaged at any given time in professions associated with the promotion of Italian culture.” See Michael Wyatt, *The Italian Encounter with Tudor England: A Cultural Politics of Translation*. (Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 183.


The form is plural gerundive neuter genitive poetic.


Hughes 82-86.


The minutes of this session are in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, MS Magliabechiano, Cl. IX, codex 60, folios 46v, 47 and 48.

Bush (1964), 206.

See for example, the venerable Walter MacKellar, *The Latin Poems of John Milton*, Cornell Studies in English 15 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930); the translation that appears in the Columbia edition (Patterson); and the standard Hughes volume (1957), 82.
The pluralis modestiæ, or nos-ism, of classical rhetoric.


Heather Dubrow credits Susan Stanford Friedman for the use of this term, but it is from Dubrow’s work on the rhetoric of lyric that I have learned how to apply the concept to the Italian verse of Milton. See Heather Dubrow, The Challenges of Orpheus: Lyric Poetry and Early Modern England (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 198.
And not only at the beginning of *Paradise Lost* (lines 6-26), but elsewhere: cf *PL* III: 52-54; *PL* IX: 21-24; and so on.

Campbell and Corns 94.

Dubrow (2008), 17.


My apologies to Gerard Manley Hopkins.

John Selby Watson, ed., *Quintilian’s Institutes of Oratory*, vol. 2 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1891), 124.


Campbell and Corns 44.


New York Public Library Rare Book Room KB 1529.

John Semple Smart, *The Sonnets of Milton* (Glasgow: Maclehose Jackson, 1921), 30.

Smart (1921), 31ff.


Bullock 88ff.

The best guesses are *Ad patrem* or *Naturam non pati senium*. See Campbell and Corns 105.

Campbell and Corns 105.


Campbell and Corns 115.


Campbell and Corns 105. See also A. A. Cinquemanni, *Glad to Go for a Feast: Milton, Buonmattei and the Florentine Accademici* (New York: P. Lang, 1998).


Baldi’s work represents the apogee of philological criticism on the Italian verse of Milton.

By my count, from 1968 to 2016, there are seventeen articles that offer interpretations, evaluations or make other historically informed contributions to the study of the Italian corpus, four unpublished dissertations and no published monographs.


A. Bartlett Giamatti’s revision of J. E. Shaw’s commentary and annotations, prepared for inclusion in the Columbia University Press Variorum series, is not released until 1970. Nonetheless, its last draft would have been completed no later than 1966. By that time, Giamatti was aware Sergio Baldi’s work, but the editorial deadline apparently prevented him from integrating Baldi’s annotations into the text originally prepared by Shaw.


In the *De vulgari eloquentia* (c1305), Dante assigns the *canzone*, that is, the Provençal *canso*, to the highest place among metrical genres.


For Benjamin, translation figures as a kind of corollary to criticism. The problems or incongruencies revealed by translation should, ideally, point to the most fundamental issues in representation and meaning in the original work itself.

80 W. Benjamin 78.
81 Sergio Baldi, “Poesie italiane di Milton,” *Studi Secenteschi*, vol. 7 (1966), 103-130.
82 Diodati, of course, means God-given.
89 Milton himself recommends such methods in the treatise *Of Education* (1644), treated in greater depth in Chapter 2.
91 See Jason Lawrence, “Who the Devil Taught Thee So Much Italian?” *Italian Language Learning and Literary Imitation in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), especially the Introduction which outlines three methods used by Elizabethan aristocracy to acquire Italian: protracted visits to Italy, tuition from native speakers, and exemplary texts with side-by-side translations.
96 For a detailed discussion on the question of which poems Milton might have shared in the Florentine academies as “proof of his wit,” see Haan (1998), 25-28.


Campbell and Corns 16. NB: Villani specifies that the Italian parish had not been dissolved until 1598, when its members were “recommended to join the Flemish or the French Church.” See Stefano Villani, “The Italian Protestant Church of London in the 17th Century,” in Barbara Schall, ed., *Exiles, Emigrés and Intermediaries Anglo-Italian Cultural Transactions*, Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemeinen und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, no. 139 (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2010).

Villani 217-236.


*Epitaphium Damonis* lines 127-128 (Hughes 136).


Campbell and Corns 105.

P. B. Tillyard 18.

Hale (1997), 7.


Campbell and Corns 54-55.

Hughes 667-668.

McCarthy 3.

Jacopo Gaddi (1600-1658) is known regularly to have hosted foreigners at the Palazzo Gaddi in Florence, for which reason it is supposed that Milton stayed there.

In 1569, Cervantes lived at the Roman court of Giulio Cardinal Acquaviva d’Aragona (1546-1574).

This manuscript is named for Pandolfo Malatesta, to whom Petrarch apparently sent an early collection containing but 333 of the 366 poems in the present Canzoniere. The only known version of the Malatesta manuscript is a late fourteenth-century copy (XLI.17) in the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence. See the Oregon Petrarch Open Book: [https://petrarch.uoregon.edu/ rvf/manuscripts/11210]


John S. Smart, Sonnets of John Milton with Introduction and Notes (Glasgow: Maclehose, Jackson and Company, 1921), 134ff.

Smart (1921), 135ff.

P. B. Tillyard 16ff.


Carey 385, footnote 3.

Carey 385.


Yes, the section of *Elegia* VII before the envoy antedates *Elegia* V and *Elegia* VI – an example of the unreliability of paralleling publication order with chronological order of composition for which reason Hanford urges caution.


Honigmann 78.

Honigmann 80.


But not by Heather Dubrow. See her *Genre* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 14-16.


Keightley (1859), 149.


Smart (1921), 137-144.

Smart (1913), 91-97.

Smart (1921), 140.


Volpi 21.

See the updated variorum in the Appendix for more parallel instances.


To be sure, the Volpi article is available only in awkwardly type-set manuscript form, but it is available, even digitally, and is listed in a well-known and comprehensive bibliography of all the literature on the sonnets. See Edward Jones, *Milton’s Sonnets: an Annotated Bibliography, 1900-1992* (Binghamton NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994).


*Republic* 602b.

*Republic* 396e–397d.

Gorgias, Phædrus, Ion, and Republic Books II, III, X.


Regarding the former maritime usage, note, for example, in Cicero’s Pro lege Manilia (66 BC) IV.9 we read: Mithridates autem omne reliquum tempus non ad oblivionem veteris belli, sed ad comparationem novi contulit: qui postea cum maximas ædificasset ornassetque classis exercitusque permagnos quibuscumque ex gentibus potuisset comparasset. [But Mithridates took all the time he had left, not in forgetting the old war, but in preparing for the new one; for afterwards he had built and equipped very large fleets, and had brought together great armies from all the nations he could]. Regarding the latter administrative usage, note Cicero’s De lege agraria (c. 63 BC) II.xiii.32, in which we hear: deinde ornat apparitoribus, scribis, librariis, praecibus, architectis, præterea mulis, tabernaculis, centuris, supellectili; sumptum hauritex ærario, suppeditat a sociis; finit ores ex equestri locodu-centos, vicenos singulorum stipatores corporis constituui, esos ministros et satellites potestates. [Then he provides them with civil servants, secretaries, clerks, and criers, architects; besides that, with mules, tents, troops, and all sorts of furniture; he draws money for their expenses from the treasury; he supplies them with more money from the allies; he appoints them two hundred surveyors from the equestrian body every year as their personal attendants, and also as ministers and satellites of their power].


Evans 42.


In his notes upon the account of Christopher Milton, the poet’s brother, John Aubrey (1626-1697) speculates that Milton having been “whip’t” accounts for the rustication. See *Aubrey’s Brief Lives: Omnibus Edition* (Durham UK: The Langley Press, 2017), 56-62. Campbell and Corns (38-39), however, review the matter in detail and cannot concur. Nor does Rand below.

P. B. Tillyard 67.

Four of whom, Melpomene, Erato, Urania and Clio, are depicted on the engraved frontispiece of 1645 along with the disastrous image of Milton, lampooned by the poet in the Greek verse entitled *In effigiei eius sculptr*


See *Elegia VI*: 48, *Irruet in totos lapsa Thalia sinus* (Hughes 51).


In *PL VII*: 1 “Descend from Heav’n Urania, by that name,” and 31, “Urania, and fit audience find, though few.” Urania, more customarily associated with astronomy, here replaces Calliope as the Muse of epic poetry.

Professor Rand makes the delightful (though now contested) observation that Milton having been sent down, for all it smacks of Ovid’s *crimen et error*, seems likewise to have stimulated a fair amount of Ovidian jollity, judging strictly by the exuberance of the smooth elegaic verse he composed for Charles Diodati in the *elegia prima* and


202 P. B. Tillyard 68.

203 P. B. Tillyard 69.

204 In the first elegy, widely taken to refer to the period of his rustication, but possibly just a normal vacation period, Milton uses the phrase, *juncosas Cami paludes*. See line 89ff (Hughes 10).

205 Walter J. Ong, *Ramus: Method and the Decay of Dialogue* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 45. After a lengthy disquisition on the etymology and semantics of *commentitia*, Ong posits the meaning of the phrase as something more like “All the things that Aristotle has said are inconsisent because they are poorly systematized and can be called to mind only by the use of arbitrary mnemonic devices.” In Ong’s view, whether or not Ramus actual said what is attributed to him, the thesis is “rather more cunningly” constructed than most have imagined (46-47).


207 Ong (1958), 5.


210 Clark 339 and 346.


The variation in Numbers 11 shows the Israelites, murmuring against the Lord and Moses, turning their hearts yet again to the flesh pots and cucumbers of Egypt.


All subsequent quotation from the letter to Buonmattei come from Tillyard 15-17.


Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Mss Magliabecchiana, Mss. Cl. IX, cod., 60, folio 48; the pages of the codex are not numbered.


The Svogliati statutes may be found in the Codex Magliabecchiana VI: 163 in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze. This excerpt from article X is cited in John Arthos, *Milton and the Italian Cities* (London: Bowes & Bowes 1968), 46, footnote 21.

P. B. Tillyard 17.

P. B. Tillyard 18.

From the *Areopagitica*: “I could recount what I have seen and heard in other Countries, where this kind of inquisition tyrannizes; when I have sat among their lerned men, for that honor I had, and bin counted happy to be born in such a place of Philosophic freedom, as they suppos’d England was, while themselvs did nothing but bemoan the servil condition into which lerning amongst them was brought; that this was it which had dampt the glory of Italian wits” (Hughes 737).

Milton continues, “There it was that I found and visited the famous Galileo grown old, a prisner to the Inquisition, for thinking in Astronomy otherwise then the Franciscan and Dominican licencers thought” (Hughes 737ff). For the record, it was Galileo’s conflict with the Jesuits of the Collegium Romanum, not the friars, that resulted in the Inquisition’s fateful 1633 sentence to house arrest, first with his friend Ascanio Piccolomini (1590-1671), then Archbishop of Siena, and finally at his own villa in Arcetri.
At least he says he did in the *Areopagitica* and, as it turns out, he may well have. For an entirely plausible discussion of the matter, see George F. Butler, “Milton’s Meeting with Galileo: A Reconsideration,” *Milton Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2005), 132-139.

See Lewalski 111, cited and discussed in the Introduction.


P. B. Tillyard 16.

Hughes 636.

Hughes 637.


Hale (1994), 83.


Related, though somewhat distantly, to the Genovese branch, and, therefore, to our English Pallavicino family.


For details of the polemic, see Chapter I: “The Franco-Italian Controversy and the Arcadians” in Robertson (1923), 1-23.

Robertson (1923), 14.


Rolli publishes his Italian version of the first six books of *Paradise Lost* in London in 1729, reprinted the following year in Verona. He releases his translation of the whole poem in 1735 in London, 1740 in Paris, and 1742 in Verona. See George E. Dorris, “Paolo Rolli and the First Italian Translation of *Paradise Lost*,“ *Italica*, vol. 42, no. 2 (June 1965), 215.


See Dorris (1967), 127.


Dorris (1967), 125.

Dorris (1967), 126.


It’s very possible that Voltaire didn’t know Dante.


Valentine J. Boss, “Kantemir and Rolli-Milton’s *Il paradiso perduto*,” in *Slavic Review*, vol. 21, no 3 (September 1962), 446.


Valentine J. Boss, “Kantemir and Rolli-Milton’s *Il paradiso perduto*,” in *Slavic Review*, vol. 21, no 3 (September 1962), 446.


See Gabriele Rossetti, *Il veggenti in solitudine* (Florence: Barbèra, 1879). NB: This edition of Rossetti’s poetry is edited with a preface by Giosuè Carducci, another prominent Risorgimento critic of Milton’s Italian verse, whose work figures below.

See, for example, Gabriele Rossetti, *La Beatrice di Dante: Ragionamenti critici di Gabriele Rossetti* (London, [n.d.], 1842) and his pamphlet “L’Eco di Savonarola” (London: Partridge and Oakey, 1850) for a sampling.

Historians of literary criticism will often speak of Turgenev and Dostoyevsky under the rubric of Realism, taken to be something distinct from Romanticism. The enduring success of Romanticism, however, lies in its porous boundaries and its anti-dogmatic creed. So the kind of Realism attributed to Turgenev and the Russians by no means purges them of the attributes of the national Romanticism that interests me here, for such alliances consist precisely in attitudes toward the homeland and the mother tongue of the kind discussed above.


Camerini 265ff.

In print, the poet’s name is given both as Giambattista Marino and Giovan Battista Marini.

Camerini 267.


Giosuè Carducci, *La Secchia rapita e l’Oceano di Alessandro Tassoni* (Florence: Cellini, 1858).


Carducci 458.

These sources would have been either Masson or Keightley. Alternatively, the *Defensio secunda* together with the encomia of the 1645 Poems themselves would have been specific enough.

While Italian literary history will often speak of Carducci’s criticism as representing positivist or naturalist tendencies, that doesn’t preclude him from channelling his inner Goethe when the Spätromantikgeist moves within him, as clearly happens in the essay on Alfieri. In any case, both the positivism and the naturalism attributed to Carducci are equally hostile to the Renaissance rhetoric that Milton learned and practiced in both his polemics and his poetics.


Monthly Record of the Society of the Friends of Italy, September 1851 (London: Offices of the Society, 1851).


See “Chapter 1: Dating the Sonnets” in this dissertation.


Angeli 34.

Angeli 35.

There is one French-language study, which is nonetheless written by an Italian: Angiola Maria Volpi (1983).


Over a thirty-year period, Olivero published Saggi di letteratura inglese, 1913; Studi sul romanticismo inglese, 1914; Sulla lirica di Alfred Tennyson, 1915; Correnti mystiche nella letteratura inglese moderna, 1932; Edgar Allan Poe, 1932; Francis Thompson, 1935; Lirica religiosa inglese, 2nd ed., 3 vols., 1942.


Olivero (1913), 14.

On the other hand, Hegel does raise anachronism to an art form.

Olivero (1913), 14.

See, for example, *Paradise Lost* III: 625 “Of beaming sunnie Raies, a golden tiar.”

Baldi 109: E si potrebbe anche aggiungere che il Milton del Paradiso Perduto e del Sansone Agonista mostra una particolare predilezione per la sinalefe, praticamente sconosciuta alla metrica inglese [And one could also add that the Milton of *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* shows a particular predilection for synallœpha, practically unknown to English meter]. See also F. T. Prince, *The Italian Element in Milton’s Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 133-35.

At the encouragement of his close friend, the writer Giovanni Papini (1881-1956), Allodoli, then only sixteen, edited and published an anthology of Portuguese literature entitled, *Pegueño livro de leitura portogueza* (Milano 1898) and, a short time later, a history of Japanese literature (1905) at the age of only twenty-three. See the Dizionario biografico italiano article: [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ettore-allodoli_(Dizionario-Biografico)/]

Olivero (1913), 15.

See Mario Praz, *Storia della letteratura inglese* (Florence: Sansoni, 1937) and *Rapporti tra la letteratura italiana e la letteratura inglese* (Milan: Marzorati, 1948), 168.

Generally, but not incontestably. Though Edmund Wilson (1895-1972) thought highly of his magnum opus, *La casa della vita* (Milano: Mondadori, 1958), fellow *Sunday Times* literary critic, Cyril Connolly (1903-1974), wrote that it was “exhausting” and “might be retitled *The House of Death-in-Life* — for it is one of the dullest I have ever read; it has a bravura of boredom, an audacity of ennui that makes one hardly believe one’s eyes.” Praz, apparently, took the critique badly. See Jeremy Lewis, *Cyril Connolly: A Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), 537ff.

Praz (1937), 156.


My translation.

See Sergio Baldi, “Poesie italiane di Milton,” *Studi Secenteschi* vol. 7 (1966), 103-130; also G.M. Hopkins (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1941), *Studi sulla poesia popolare d’Inghilterra e di Scozia* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1942); *Ballate popolari d’Inghilterra e di Scozia* (Florence: Sansoni, 1946); *La poesia di Sir Thomas Wyatt, il primo petrarchista inglese* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1953); *Studi Miltoniani* (Florence: Istituto di lingue e letterature germaniche, 1985).

Whereas Keightley believed it his scholarly duty to correct Milton’s errors in orthography and grammar, Mitford invited Panizzi to correct what they believed were errata having their origin in the printer’s lack of familiarity with Italian.

Apart from Baldi there are Volpi, Melchionda and Brugnolo.


Shaw-Giamatti 373.

Shaw-Giamatti 374.

Shaw-Giamatti 366.

See Benedetto Croce, *Saggi sulla letteratura italiana del seicento* (Bari: Laterza, 1911), 381.


Baldi 112.

The phrase, “*dulciloquum Marinum,*” is Milton’s expression, not mine. See *Mansus* line 9, in Hughes 127.


Volpi 18.


NB: In his comprehensive treatment of Marino’s biography, Mirollo calls the alleged association with the Marquise de Rambouillet into question.

Baldi says, “In questa non vi è traccia di marinismo, nemmeno quel poco che si può sentire, ad esempio, nelle poesie di Francesco Rovai, quasi coetaneo del Milton e
da lui conosciuto a Firenze” [In this there is no trace of marinism, not even the little that can be felt, for example, in the poems of Francesco Rovai, almost contemporary with Milton and whom he met in Florence], 112.

Volpi 20.


Melchionda 98.

Melchionda 99.

Melchionda 98-99.

Melchionda 99.

Melchionda (103) cites the Ainsworth 2nd edition reprinted in Hughes (632).

Melchionda 111.


Furio Brugnolo, La lingua di cui si vanta Amore (Rome: Carocci, 2009), 75-80.

Later reworked and published by de Sanctis as Saggio critico sul Petrarca (Napoli: Morano, 1869).


Baldi 114.

Rolli’s translation of the line — Per l’influenza io stesso de’ suoi sguardi, trovo ad ogni virtù facile accesso — certainly has a Petrarchist ring to it.


Manuscripts of the minutes of the Accademia degli Svoagliati during the period of Milton’s sojourn in Florence, for example, frequently allude to conversation and debate on multifarious topics, but they never even approximate verbatim reports on the content.

Wolfe (1953-1982), vol. 4, 615-616.


Honigmann 80.


Shawcross (1967), 30.


Hale (1997), 1-2.


Thus Lewalski 108. Campbell and Corns (123) give their surname as Cardoini. In any case, the guest register itself is in the Houghton Library Collection (XI.3.43) at Harvard.


The letter is dated 21 April 1647. See Patterson (1931-38), volume 12: 44-52.


or son venuto
là dove molto pianto mi percuote.

Io venni in loco d’ogne luce muto,
che mugghia come fa mar per tempesta,
se da contrari venti è combattuto.

La bufera infernal, che mai non resta,
mena li spiriti con la sua rapina;
voltando e percottendo li molesta (Inferno V. 26-33).


Prince (1954).


Händel’s librettist, Paolo Antonio Rolli (1687-1765), couldn’t resist. See his *Vita di Giovanni Milton* (Paris: Tumermani, 1742), 3, in which he edits Sonnet VI and then proclaims it Milton’s most gracious Italian poem.

Baldi (1966), 107.

Baldi (1966), 107.

Baldi (1966), 108.

Baldi (1966), 108.

Baldi (1966), 108.

Baldi (1966), 109.
See Giuseppe Baretti, *An Introduction to the Italian Language* (London: A. Millar, 1755), which includes the author’s translation of Milton’s sonnets.


NB: Baldi and Giamatti both use the Chiòrboli edition: Francesco Petrarca, *Le Rime Sparse e i Trionfi*, Ezio Chiòrboli, ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1930). For citations from Petrarch, Baldi cites the number of the poem given in Chiòrboli as a Roman numeral, then the lines. Giamatti cites the type of lyric (sonnet, canzone, etc...), then the first line of the poem, then the lines.


Gabriel Giolito de Ferrari and Lodovico Doménichis, eds., *Rime diverse di molti eccellentissimi autori*, vol. 1 (Venice: Giolito, 1548), 130.


Frati (1918), 92.


Croce 207.

Note Keightley’s emendation of the spelling.


Croce 474.

Giolito (1549), 131.


John Florio, *Queen Anne’s New World of Wordes* (London: 1611), 630.

Giovanni della Casa, *Opere*, vol. 1 (Venice: Pasinelli, 1752), 120.

Not in the original edition of Della Casa’s *Sonetti* published in Venice in 1563.

In Serafino Aquilano de’ Ciminelli, *Opera dello Elegantissimo Seraphino tutta di nuovo riformata* (Venezia, A. Bindoni, 1550), A3v.

Giolito (1549), 41.

Serafino, 115, Disp. ii, 34

Fimian 49.

Giolito (1548), 302.

Frati 89.
Gismondo Santi, ed., *Sonetti di diversi accademici sanesi* (Siena: Marchetti, 1608), 2, vv. 1-2.

Giolito (1549), 5 iv.

Frati 72.

F. Sacchetti *Rime*, CCXXXVIII a) v. 6


Giolito (1548), 355.

Serafino 66v 9.


Frati 283 and 114.