

*Telos* and Philology in the Early Modern English Epic

by

John Paul Hampstead

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
(English Language and Literature)  
in the University of Michigan  
2017

Doctoral Committee:

Professor Michael C. Schoenfeldt, Chair  
Professor Linda K. Gregerson  
Professor Karla Mallette  
Professor Douglas Trevor

**John Paul Hampstead**

**[jphampst@umich.edu](mailto:jphampst@umich.edu)**

**ORCID iD: 0000-0003-2242-4907**

**© John Paul Hampstead 2017**

for Ryan and Hilary

## Acknowledgements

Many friends and colleagues inspired, shaped, and improved this project. It was conceived in an embryonic form during conversations with Jane Bellamy and Anthony Welch at the University of Tennessee; later discussions at the University of Michigan with my committee members in the Department of English Language and Literature, Michael Schoenfeldt, Linda Gregerson, and Doug Trevor, clarified and focused the now-dissertation's driving questions. Part of the Spenser chapter was presented to a panel of Spenserians at Kalamazoo in 2011; the material on *Africa* was worked up for Karla Mallette's Petrarch course; I first tried out my ideas about Sannazaro at a conference on the Reformation at Victoria College, University of Toronto. Anthony Welch gave generous advice on an early draft of the Cowley chapter; the Early Modern Colloquium provided feedback on a later draft. Logan Scherer read most of the project several times and Adam Sneed seemed always willing to help sharpen my understanding of Kant.

I started writing this dissertation in earnest shortly after marrying Ryan; her love and support are the conditions that made aught else possible. The newest addition to our family, Hilary, made delightful company during the last year of work.

## Contents

Dedication	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Figures	v
Abstract	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1. Under the sign of monotheism?	9
Chapter 2. <i>The Faerie Queene</i> and Tudor historiography	42
Chapter 3. Drayton's borders: songs of the Severn in <i>Poly-Olbion</i>	66
Chapter 4. Hebraists, Royalists, and Cowley's <i>Davideis</i>	93
Chapter 5. Milton, Kant, and the end(s) of man: <i>Paradise Lost</i> as rational history	118
Coda The two fates of Odysseus	149
Works Cited	154

## List of Figures

- |                  |  |           |
|------------------|--|-----------|
| <b>Figure 1.</b> | William Hole's frontispiece for Drayton's <i>Poly-Olbion</i> (1612). | <b>77</b> |
| <b>Figure 2.</b> | Rembrandt's <i>Supper at Emmaus</i> (1648), the Louvre.              | <b>95</b> |

## Abstract

This dissertation identifies an internal contradiction or inherent tension in the Renaissance epic and reads four early modern English epics in light of this generic feature. Vertical pressure from poets' monarchical patrons to craft teleological political narratives legitimating their rule collided with horizontal pressure from the poets' humanist peers who expected their poems to reflect cutting-edge humanist historiography and its new methods of critically evaluating documentary evidence. Crises in English politics—from the Elizabethan succession, to the unification of the Crowns under the Stuarts, to Civil War and Restoration—made unitary myth-making more imperative than ever, but advances in history-writing made this task more difficult. Before my readings of English epic commence, a wide-ranging, comparative prologue chapter considers the potential relationship between monotheism and teleological narrative in order to isolate politics as the determinative factor.

Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1596) engages deeply with the legendary matter of Britain popularized centuries earlier by the medieval chronicler Geoffrey of Monmouth, even as Spenser seems to acknowledge how the legends have been discredited. Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612) works through much of the same material, but largely foregoes any attempt to connect the old fables to current political realities, preferring instead to embed these anecdotes from the ancient British past into systematic descriptions of the landscape. Rather than spinning Trojan-British legends into a justification for British unification, Drayton uses the figure of the Severn to remind his readers of the Welsh rights and particularity that has been erased by English hegemony. Abraham Cowley's  *Davideis* (c. 1640s), while ostensibly about the troubles of King David, also maps onto the exile of the Stuarts during the Interregnum, and rather awkwardly tries to find a Biblical

precedent for the Stuarts' version of absolutist kingship. Finally, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667; 1674), written after the Restoration of Charles II and Milton's utter alienation from power politics, rejects English politics and instead dives deep into human prehistory, to the origins of humankind. I argue that Milton's narrative about the gradual unfolding of human nature and our capabilities resembles the speculative, rational histories couched in the subjunctive written by Hobbes, Vico, Rousseau, and especially Kant. Rather than subjecting these epics to a deconstructive critique that would expose the poets' subconscious anxieties, I argue that Spenser, Drayton, Cowley, and Milton were aware of these contradictions, and had the courage—however fleeting—to face destabilizing, disillusioning facts and include them in their great poems.



## Introduction

In the fourth book of Vergil's *Aeneid*, "heartless Rumor" (*impia Fama*) tells Dido that Aeneas, shamed into action once more by Mercury, has begun preparing his fleet to leave Carthage and sail for Italy. Dido rushes to find Aeneas and, in a rage, confronts him with a torrent of questions: "If you were not in quest of alien lands and homes unknown, were ancient Troy yet standing, would Troy be sought by your ships over stormy seas? Is it from me you are fleeing?"<sup>1</sup> Aeneas' terse response deflects responsibility from his own will to the fate ordained for him by the gods: "It is not by my wish that I make for Italy..."<sup>2</sup> Part of what is at stake in this dramatic exchange is Aeneas' motivation, which might also be called the *directionality* of history: does Aeneas flee from Carthage, or does he sail for Italy? At what point does his band of Trojan survivors stop running from their past and start sailing toward their future?

These were not idle questions for readers and makers of epic poetry in early modern England. Indeed, Henry Howard, the Earl of Surrey—who rendered Dido's question "Shunnest thou me?"—seems to have brooded over the directionality of history and how best to respond to catastrophe and flames while translating Vergil in the 1540s.<sup>3</sup> Surrey's decision to create translations of only the second and fourth books of the *Aeneid* was surely significant: in the second book, a frame tale, Aeneas recounts the fall of Troy, the confused fighting in desecrated temples, and the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid* 4.311-4. ... *si non arva aliena domosque / ignotas peteres, et Troia antiqua maneret, / Troia per undosum peteretur classibus aequor? / mene fugis?* trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> *Aen.* 4.361 *Italiam non sponte sequor*...

<sup>3</sup> I use the unpaginated edition *Certain Bokes of Virgiles Aenaeis turned into English meter*... London: Richard Tottel, 1557.

“wretched multitude” (*miserabile vulgus*) waiting for him outside the shattered walls; in the fourth book, destiny and his duty to his son Ascanius call Aeneas away from Carthage, toward unseen shores. Surrey gives us two versions of the kind of sacrifice demanded by epic *telos*: in the first, an act of wanton destruction and pillage strips Aeneas of his old identity; in the second, after Aeneas has “... in his brest / Represt his care, and strove against his wil” he commits himself in the end, to the end, to Rome.<sup>4</sup> Surrey’s selection of the second and fourth books underscores Dido’s line of questioning; he balances his translation between fleeing *from* and sailing *toward*.

Early twentieth century literary critics did not think much of Surrey’s translation—C. S. Lewis memorably called it “Virgil in corsets”—but after a period of neglect, his blank verse experiment gained admirers, first due to a renewed appreciation of Surrey’s fidelity to Vergil’s Latin, then for his contribution to English poetry.<sup>5</sup> More recent scholars working in a sophisticated paradigm of translation studies have sought to historicize Surrey’s decisions: Edward Wilson-Lee has considered how for a sixteenth century reader of the *Aeneid* “upheaval could be barbaric or regressive, millenarian and progressive, depending on perspective,” especially for a reader like Surrey, for whom Tudor upheaval was personal, as well as political.<sup>6</sup> Wilson-Lee’s important reading of Surrey’s *Aeneid* pays attention to idols and iconoclasm in the context of Surrey’s participation in the 1563 Pilgrimage of Grace, the popular protest against Henry VIII’s break with Rome and dissolution of the monasteries. Certainly the holocaust of Trojan temples and household gods would have resonated with the recusant Howard family; but Surrey, first cousin of both Anne

---

<sup>4</sup> Here Surrey translates *Aen.* 4.332 ... *obnixus curam sub corde premebat* (“with a struggle smothered the pain deep within his breast”).

<sup>5</sup> See David A. Richardson’s “Humanistic Intent in Surrey’s *Aeneid*”, *English Literary Renaissance* 6.2 (Spring 1976), pp. 204-19 ; Alan Hager’s “British Virgil: Four Renaissance Disguises of the Laocoön Passage of Book 2 of the *Aeneid*”, *Studies in English Literature* 22.1 (Winter 1982), pp. 21-38; and O. B. Hardison’s “Tudor Humanism and Surrey’s Translation of the *Aeneid*”, *Studies in Philology* 83.3 (Summer 1986), pp. 237-260.

<sup>6</sup> “‘The Subtle Tree’: Idolatry and Material Memory in Surrey’s *Aeneid*”. *Translation and Literature* 20.2 (Summer 2011), pp. 137-56. p. 138.

Boleyn and Catherine Howard—the two queens beheaded by Henry VIII—must have also identified with Dido, sacrificed on the altar of dynasty and power.

In translating the *Aeneid*—considered the first epic printed in English—Surrey created a new kind of English poetry in blank verse, and at the same time he was working through questions about the shape and direction of history, the *telos* of religious-political struggle, and the capacity of epic to make sense of disorientation, confusion, and reversal. Surrey was executed by an ailing and paranoid King Henry VIII on trumped-up treason charges in January 1547, but the linguistic and cultural resources that he discovered continued to be mined by English humanists. Over the next century of upheaval—from the whited sepulcher of the late Elizabethan court to attempts to unify Britain under the Stuarts, to civil war, and then Restoration—English poets wrote epics that tried to tame an unruly history and narrate a smooth translation of power. At the same time, the historiographical revolution that began in Italian city-states and was exemplified by Bruni's *History of the Florentine People* (1442) and Bembo's *History of Venice* (1551) had reached England, most famously in the person of Polydore Vergil, who applied the acid test of source criticism to the legendary matter of Britain.<sup>7</sup> In early modern English culture these two humanist inheritances—the epic tradition and the new historiography—rubbed against one another in a productive friction. The fracturing and dislocation of early modern English society made unitary myth-making more imperative than ever; but increasingly rigorous standards for history-writing made those narratives more uncertain and complex.

The internal contradiction in early modern English epic between teleology and scholarship forms the subject of the dissertation that follows. Methodologically, I synthesize work on the

---

<sup>7</sup> I draw on the work of F. J. Levy, Paul Grendler, D.R. Woolf, Virginia Stern, and Anthony Grafton to show how humanist historiographers presented their work as radically different from their medieval predecessors in my chapter on Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; in my chapter on Cowley's  *Davideis*, scholarship by G.J. Toomer, Jason Rosenblatt, and Steven Nadler fleshes out a picture of scholarly philo-Semitism. The prologue chapter, which seeks to answer a theoretical question about monotheism, uses the insights of Arnaldo Momigliano to mark what was distinctive about Christian, as opposed to pagan, historiography.

tensions inherent in epic by literary scholars such as Giamatti, Quint, and others with more recent historians' reconstructions of the history of scholarship in the Renaissance. First, a prologue chapter takes up a preliminary theoretical question: what, if anything, does Renaissance epic teleology have to do with monotheism, with Christian anagogy? Ranging across epic poetry from the Indo-European tradition—some polytheistic, like the Sanskrit *Ramayana*, Latin *Aeneid*, and Old Norse *Völuspá*, and some monotheistic, like Petrarch's *Africa* and Sannazaro's *Virgin Birth*—I argue that it is rather the state's sense of itself that demands a teleological narrative connecting the epic past to the present. Answering this question allows me to isolate politics and especially the politics of patronage, rather than theology, as the driving force behind teleological narrative in the poems I study.

After the comparative prologue, I examine how four early modern English epics—Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1596), Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612), Abraham Cowley's  *Davideis* (1656), and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667; 1674)—try out ways of addressing, if not resolving, the tension between political teleology and humanist scholarship. In his playful, densely allusive *Faerie Queene*, Spenser actually stages a scene of princely manuscript reading, where Arthur tries to discover his own lineage in the chronicles at the House of Alma. To his bewilderment, Arthur finds that these old books are worm-eaten, broken, full of lacunae, and the text suddenly cuts off before he locates his name. While in other passages Spenser is clearly disturbed by the divorcing of memory from police, here he only seems to tease us about the reliability of the British myths of which he is so fond. At the end of the *Faerie Queene*, though, Spenser's note turns dark once more, and in the Cantos of Mutabilitie he despairs of ever discovering the true shape of history, including its direction.

In *Poly-Olbion*'s Sabrina, the Trojan-Briton princess whose death transforms her into the regal River Severn, we meet another Dido figure who stands athwart history yelling 'Stop'. County borders and geographical barriers structure Drayton's epic, cutting off the flow of plot and

movement toward *telos* as each song ends and the Muse flits off to a new region to start her chorographical descriptions anew. Sabrina-the-Severn serves as a local iteration of this larger structural principle—while she commands all the tributaries in her watershed with queenly authority, she also embodies a forgotten, trampled-upon English-Welsh border and reminds Drayton’s readers of Welsh territories that have been usurped by the English encroaching from the east. Although Drayton deals in much of the same British mythos as Spenser, and they share a source in Geoffrey of Monmouth, Drayton largely foregoes teleological narrative and instead emphasizes local difference and idiosyncrasy, the *poly-* of the title taking precedence over any sense of British unity. At certain moments, like in his sonnet describing the frontispiece engraved by William Hole, Drayton seems to want to present the succession of peoples—Trojan, Roman, Saxon, Norman, etc—who ruled the British islands as an orderly series, each new group neatly replacing its predecessor. But Sabrina sings about old place names, recovers border histories from obscurity, and insists on an almost revanchist Welsh identity that cuts back against any such progressive narrative.

Abraham Cowley’s  *Davideis*, a four book epic about the troubles of King David published posthumously, takes the scholarly grounding of its plot seriously indeed: the literal truth of the Old Testament narratives were unquestioned, and Cowley added copious annotations to the end of each book, drawing on a wide range of scholarly and literary sources to justify each detail of his Israelite poem. The main interpretative crux of the  *Davideis*’s Hebrew learning concerns 1 Samuel 8, when Israel asks God for a king in response to Samuel’s appointing his sons as judges. God sends a message back to his people, warning them that kings arbitrarily seize the property and daughters of their subjects and send their sons to war. In early modern Europe the interpretation of that passage was highly contested, and hinged on whether one took it to mean that all kingship amounts to tyranny, or that kings have a *tendency* toward abuse of power, or, finally, the position of the ultra-royalist Stuart apologists—that kings have a *right* to do those things. Cowley tries to navigate the Scylla of republicanism and the Charybdis of absolutism by means of a convoluted translation from

Hebrew to Greek to Latin to English. At issue, of course, is the underlying premise of Cowley's epic—that the Stuart exile echoes the tribulations of the anointed King David—and it turns out, awkwardly, that ancient Israel might have less to do with seventeenth century England than the Stuarts were in the habit of claiming.

While Drayton and Cowley take opposing positions on the direction and *telos* of British history—Drayton foregoing any orderly historical plot and any assumed connection between the epic past and the present, Cowley drawing as many parallels as he can between anointed Israelite kingship and the Stuarts—the work of John Selden, jurist and antiquarian, forms a through-line connecting both epics. Selden composed the notes (or “Illustrations”) appended to each of *Poly-Olbion*'s songs, and Cowley's notes to the  *Davideis*  often rely on Selden's scholarship on the history of political institutions, sometimes citing him and sometimes plagiarizing him, as I discovered. Recent historians' excavations of Selden's intellectual career have made these aspects of Drayton and Cowley's poems legible for the first time. The matter of Britain deriving from Geoffrey of Monmouth, in turn, connects Spenser's *Faerie Queene* to Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, and the differences in their treatment of that material—the first fraught with anxiety, the second heedlessly lost in *copia*—demonstrate the near incomprehensibility of the British past as understood by late humanist historiographers. British legend and John Selden's scholarship tightly link the first three English epics I consider, but my reading of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* puts it outside of this main stream.

Milton's decision to set his epic at the beginning of human history, long before the construction of cities like Troy or the discovery of lands like Britain, asks us to loop back to the prologue chapter and its question about monotheism. In the epics of Spenser, Drayton, and Cowley, the shape and direction of history is mostly a political question; but in *Paradise Lost*, the monarch whose ways Milton seeks to justify does not sit atop an earthly throne, but a heavenly one. Still, Milton's protagonists are human, with mortal gifts and flaws, and, in a certain sense, it is the gradual unfolding of human nature that constitutes the teleological narrative in *Paradise Lost*. I read Milton's

epic alongside the rational, speculative histories that became so popular in the Enlightenment—the historical essays of Immanuel Kant in particular are relevant because they too explore, gloss, and fill in the gaps of the Genesis creation story. Writing after the Restoration of Charles II, Milton and his poem are more isolated from English power politics than any of his predecessors: Milton’s version of human prehistory resembles the speculative thought experiments of Hobbes, Rousseau, and Vico more than the dynastic epics of his English predecessors. In Milton’s turn away from English politics toward a universal history predicated on postulates about human nature, I find a fitting end to my project. The composition and publication of epic poetry in English had, by the time of *Paradise Lost*, been severed from power politics and the economy of literary patronage. John Dryden would fund the publication of his *Aeneid* (1697 in *The Works of Virgil*) by subscription, and for 18th c. writers and publishers the marketplace became more important than the imprimatur of a royal patron.<sup>8</sup>

It is not that epic poetry in the classical style ceased to be written: Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), Robert Southey’s *Madoc* (1805), John Keats’ *Endymion* (1818), Lord Byron’s *Don Juan* (1824), and Alfred Lord Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* (1874) all lay claim to one aspect or another of the epic tradition. But only in the Renaissance did the twin pressures of the teleological narratives demanded by royal patrons and the historiographical sophistication of humanist scholarship combine to create a destabilizing yet productive tension in epic poetry. The generic feature I identify and analyze in this dissertation requires the simultaneous presence of a particular political system, monarchy, a particular economy of literary production, that is, patronage, and a particular intellectual culture, that

---

<sup>8</sup> Adrian Johns observed that “Extending such [commercial] strategies beyond individuals and corporate fellowships, another option, of increasing importance after 1660, was to publish by subscription. This was a practice peculiarly suited to the English trade.” *The Nature of the Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. p. 450. And indeed Dryden’s decision to publish by subscription was a commercial one: he had been deprived of his £300 per annum laureate stipend when William and Mary deposed James II in 1688 and wanted some measure of financial security. One could almost say that Jacob Tonson, the printer, specialized in publication by subscription, as he brought out twenty-one works by this method by 1720, including his 1688 edition of *Paradise Lost*.

is, humanism, which was sophisticated yet often practiced by learned amateurs, increasingly specialized while still permitting generalists. In this sense, while I limit my focus to epic poems from early modern England, my argument about the internal contradictions of Renaissance epic will apply to epic poems from other national traditions, so long as they are written by humanist courtiers.



## Chapter 1. Under the sign of monotheism?

In this prologue chapter I answer a question about teleology and monotheism that illuminated the connection between Tobias Gregory's work and my own. In order to understand the significance of monotheism for the teleological narratives of early modern English epic, I cast my net into the ocean of predecessor epics—this chapter is my only truly 'comparative' chapter and sets the stage for my study of early modern English epic. First I use the scholarship of Arnaldo Momigliano to explain what Christian historiography is, and show how it underlies both Tobias Gregory's book on divine action and epic plotting and my own thoughts on teleological narrative in epic poetry. Then I look at two relatively early Renaissance—thus, relatively early Christian—epics by Petrarch and Sannazaro and evaluate their narrative structures and historiographies. Petrarch's *Africa* is much less invested in diachronous, contiguous historical narrative than Sannazaro's *Virgin Birth*, so it appears that monotheism is not the decisive factor for epic teleology. For further, more systematic evidence about the relation between poly/monotheism and teleology in epic, I look outside the classical tradition at two poems, the *Ramayana*, in both Valmiki's Sanskrit and Kamban's Tamil, and the Old Norse *Völuspá*, from the *Poetic Edda*. I conclude that a powerful state's sense of its own past is just as determinative for teleological epic as a monotheistic religious practice, though both factors interact symbiotically, and then remark briefly on the consequences for my study of early modern English epic.

\*

\*

\*

In some respects, the spirit of Arnaldo Momigliano hovers over the waters of contemporary scholarship on epic poetry. Let me explain. This dissertation argues that in the Renaissance, one of

epic's generic features, its teleological narrative, came under pressure from reinvigorated humanist learning: it became harder and harder to tell an accurate, credible story that rendered a given political arrangement (the waning Tudor dynasty; the Stuarts' radical ideas about kingship) natural, inevitable, and significant in the grand scheme of history. The Renaissance epic was to double-business bound. Yet we should not overlook that role that religion, apart from politics, might play in Renaissance epic teleology, because a lingering question remains about the differences between pagan and Christian epic: "does Renaissance epic take on this view of history because it was written, unlike ancient epic, under the sign of monotheism?"<sup>9</sup> In other words, does belief in a singular, all-powerful deity imply a view of history as providentially ordered, meaningful, planned, and comprehensible if not exactly pre-ordained? And what does this mean for the composition of Renaissance epic, a genre bound up with issues of collective memory, fate and destiny, and the relation of the epic past to the prosaic present? The question about monotheism is not a new one, though it was new to me, and it proved to be more complicated than I first realized.<sup>10</sup>

Eighteen years ago Tobias Gregory asked a similar question in his Michigan dissertation.<sup>11</sup> How did Renaissance epic poets adapt the divine machinery from Homer and Vergil to their own Christian worldview? If Renaissance epic heroes are the divinely favored agents of an omnipotent, omniscient, and benevolent deity, why do Renaissance epics have 'plot' (i.e., the hero's struggle) at all? As Gregory recognized, this problem of narrative logic—why God doesn't just hand Jerusalem over to Godfrey in the first canto of Tasso—interlocks with deeper questions of theology, especially

---

<sup>9</sup> Gregerson, Linda. Personal conversation. January 12, 2015, Angell Hall, Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>10</sup> Regina M. Schwartz has explored the connections between monotheism and identity formation in the case of the Hebrew scriptures in her *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). In particular, her final chapter "Inscribing Identity: Memory" emphasizes how Jewish exile was experienced as a crisis demanding "that authority bec[o]me attached to a set of narratives rather than to a geopolitical configuration" (p. 145). Certainly, early modern English epics can be read alongside the series of political crises that erupted across Britain from the Reformation through the Restoration; my dissertation tracks some of these.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory's excellent *From Many Gods to One: Divine Action in Renaissance Epic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) grew out of his 1999 dissertation.

predestination and theodicy. In the transition from ancient, polytheistic epic, with its pantheon of quarreling, spiteful, deal-cutting gods to Renaissance monotheistic epic, with its cosmology united under One True God, epic poets had to find new ways of prolonging the plot through supernatural action, and they introduced devils, fallen angels, demons, and black magic.

My question is a kind of corollary to the one asked by Tobias Gregory. His book, *From Many Gods to One*, examined epic poets' attempts to generate plot within a monotheistic worldview, to have God's mortal favorites struggle despite the Christian commonplace "that human history constituted the unfolding of God's will".<sup>12</sup> In Gregory's work, then, the teleology implicit in Christian epic is an inconvenient problem that has to be 'worked around' by the poet. In my project, the teleology implicit in Christian epic gives a coherent theoretical framework to uppercase History that is at many times hard to reconcile with the garbled data of lowercase history. The unpredictable whims of the Olympian gods were often a more satisfying fit to the seeming chaos of history than the inscrutable will of a benevolent, all-powerful Christian God. Gregory's work and mine share that understanding even as our lenses—or perhaps our depths of field—are slightly different. Where Gregory focuses on the scale of the poem, and how divine action generates plot within the bounds of the poem, I am studying how the epic sees its place in a larger historical framework. To take Cowley's  *Davideis*  as an example: Gregory's specific arguments would apply to the diabolic forces keeping David from assuming the throne; my arguments pertain to Cowley's understanding of the link between the events he depicts in ancient Israel and the situation of the Stuarts in 17<sup>th</sup> century England. But both Gregory's tighter focus and my wider frame are subject to the logic of Christian epic teleology and ultimately of Christianity's providential vision of history.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory is aware of the double scale of providentialist, teleological narrative, both in the epic past and in the poet's present (see his discussion of Ariosto's relationship with the Este on pp. 119-26), but he chooses not to focus on it.

Now we can turn to Momigliano's pioneering work on ancient historiography, where he spelled out in detail how and why the Christians forged their unique sense of history in the fourth century. Let a brief example from Eusebius' writings stand in for the finished product of Christian historiography: in his *Chronicle*, a universal history from the birth of Abraham to 325 C.E., Eusebius took advantage of a new medium, the codex, and totally recast historical chronology. He laid out his pages in tables, with parallel columns corresponding to each kingdom (Roman, Persian, Egyptian, Hebrew, Athenian, etc), nineteen in all, and linked the separate regnal lists with synchronisms—he knew, for instance, that the second Temple in Jerusalem was constructed in the second year of King Darius, linking up the Hebrew and Persian lists. As the reader turns the leaves of the *Chronicle*, she can watch empires rise and fall and indeed, as time marches forward, the kingdoms drop off, one by one, until only two remain, Hebrew and Roman. Then Jerusalem is taken by Vespasian, and the world is united under a common language for the first time since Babel—the perfect moment for the Gospel of Christ to enter the world. Diverse, scattered dynastic lists are made comprehensible by one divine plot, the story of God's plan for humanity. Though Momigliano stresses that “the spade-work in Christian chronology was done long before the fourth century”, he expends more words exploring the implications of this unique way of comprehending the past than in reconstructing the technical details of its development.<sup>14</sup>

Momigliano made a number of observations about ancient Christian historiography that bear directly on the monotheism question, Tobias Gregory's book, and this dissertation: “People

---

<sup>14</sup> “Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D.” rpt. in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1977. p. 110. The essay first appeared in 1963. Momigliano is really only interested in what distinguished the Christian historiographers intellectually, philosophically, and methodologically. For a very fine recent treatment of the bibliographic, institutional, material and even papyrological contexts of Eusebius' *Chronicle* which grounds it in the tabular *mise-en-page* of Origen's *Hexapla*, see Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams' *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006), especially the chapter “Eusebius's *Chronicle*: History Made Visible”, pp. 133-77. For a diverse comparison of ancient historiographical traditions including the Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Persians, see Momigliano's *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1975).

learnt a new history because they acquired a new religion”; “Conversion meant literally the discovery of a new history from Adam and Eve to contemporary events”; “... unlike pagan chronology, Christian chronology was also a philosophy of history”; “Chronology and eschatology were conflated”; “[Christian chronography] showed concern with the pattern of history rather than with the detail”.<sup>15</sup> Momigliano took up the issue of a fourth-century pagan compilation of historical dates that had been rendered Christian by the interpolation of some passages from Orosius and made a comment that could almost refer to the literary history of epic poetry: “consequently, it was very easy to transform a pagan handbook into a Christian one, but almost impossible to make pagan what had been Christian.”<sup>16</sup> So my argument about the difficulties posed to Renaissance epic by the demands of teleology runs parallel to Gregory’s argument about the necessity of adapting divine machinery to the Christian worldview because we both labor in the shadow of Momigliano’s explanation of the fundamental differences between pagan and Christian historiography.

This is not to say that I am replicating Tobias Gregory’s work—the differing scales on which we operate have somewhat divergent effects on our results. Vergil’s *Aeneid* can illustrate these distinctions. On the smaller scale of the epic narrative itself, the *Aeneid* works like a polytheistic epic should, the wrath of Juno making progress difficult for the Trojan exiles while Mercury’s reminders spur Aeneas on toward his *fatum*: the back-and-forth of a divided Olympus. But on the larger scale of the *Aeneid*’s locating the founding of Rome in a longer historical narrative stretching up to Vergil’s own day, the poem assumes a coherent and unified pattern, even a providential vision. When the Trojans, finally in Italy, come upon the rustic king Evander, his people are sacrificing to Hercules on the site of the future Great Altar of Hercules in the Forum Boarium.<sup>17</sup> During the tour Evander gives Aeneas of his forested domain, Vergil layers the Capitoline Hill of first century BCE Rome

---

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, p. 110-12.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p. 113.

<sup>17</sup> Vergil pointedly uses verbs in the future indicative to tell us that the altar “shall always be called [*semper dicetur*] Mightiest by us, and mightiest it shall always be [*erit quae maxima semper*]”, *Aen.* 8.271-2.

over archaic Pallanteum: the Capitol is “golden now [*aurea nunc*], then bristling with woodland thickets.”<sup>18</sup> Even the name that the *Aeneid*'s narrative voice assigns to the hill—the Capitol, *Capitolia*—would have been recognized as anachronistic by a first-century reader, because as Livy relates in 1.55 of his *Ab urbe condita*, the hill was named for the human head (*caput*) discovered by the engineers excavating the tunnel for this same temple to Jupiter. Thus it is possible for a polytheistic epic to feature a politicized teleological narrative (even leaving aside the prophecy of Anchises); the sign of monotheism is not strictly necessary for this generic feature to emerge in epic literary history.

In fact, the first Renaissance epic written under the sign of monotheism that I wish to discuss, Petrarch's *Africa* (c. 1340s), goes to great lengths to avoid anachronism and teleology in its account of the topography of the city of Rome during the time of the second Punic War. Yet Petrarch's sharpened sense of historical rupture was unusual among his contemporaries, if not unique—even subsequent generations of neo-Latin epic poets did not view antiquity as a lost world, cut off by an age of darkness, but as contiguous, and I look to Jacopo Sannazaro's *The Virgin Birth* (1526) for this point. The rest of this chapter will proceed in two parts: first I compare and contrast notions of continuity, destiny, and teleology in Petrarch and Sannazaro in order to tease out a more precise answer to the monotheism question; then I ask if epic poems from outside the classical tradition may be able to help us arrive at a rigorous conclusion about the precise effects of monotheism on the epic.

In his introduction, Gregory grounds his claims about epic narrative problems in the language of logic and reason, showing how generic features in Renaissance epic derived directly from certain theological premises (if your understanding of the nature of God is *n*, then your epic

---

<sup>18</sup> *Aen.* 8.348.

should look like *p*).<sup>19</sup> Gregory’s introduction combines work from religious studies scholars on metaphysics, theodicy, and predestination with the religious history of Europe to arrive at a fresh schema of the possibilities available to Renaissance epic poets. Yet he wrote the subsequent chapters of his study along more traditional lines, from Homer and Vergil through Ariosto, Tasso, and Milton. In those chapters, Gregory invokes the language of inheritance, tradition, and adaptation specific to the main line of European literary history. Another way of putting this is that Gregory does not fully test his theo-logical claims because he limits his evidence to one tradition of epic poetry—because these poems are self-consciously derivative of their predecessors, they do not prove the more systematic claims in Gregory’s introduction. At the end of this chapter, I want to enrich Gregory’s sense of the generic and imaginative possibilities available to epic poets based on their theologies with readings from corpora outside the classical tradition—the Old Norse poems of the Codex Regius and the Indian epic *Ramayana* (working between the fourth century BCE Sanskrit of Valmiki and the 13<sup>th</sup> century CE adaptation into Tamil by Kamban [likely the earliest vernacular *Ramayana*]).<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> The use of the second-person pronoun usually indicates when Gregory slips into his theological-rational mode as opposed to the literary-historical, as on p. 126 when discussing Ariosto’s theodicy: “It is, however, an irrepressible human instinct to try to make sense of the world we live in, and if your religion commits you to the proposition that human history transpires according to the will of an omnipotent supernatural being, ‘per punir forse’ [perhaps to punish {for ‘antique colpe’, faults of old}] will be the best explanation for catastrophe you will have available”, brackets mine.

<sup>20</sup> I am trained to read Old English, which is not exactly Old Norse, and so use the Old Norse texts alongside the English translations of Henry Adams Bellows (*The American-Scandinavian Foundation*, 1923) and Ursula Dronke (Oxford UP, 1969, 1997, 2011) and Zoëga’s *Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic* (1910, rpt. 2004 by Dover). Editions of the *Ramayana* and especially the secondary literature are difficult for non-Indologists to navigate. Only recently, after Gregory’s work was complete, have scholarly editions and translations in English become readily available: I use Ronald P. Goldman’s five volume 2005 edition and facing translation of the Valmiki *Ramayana* for NYU Press’s Clay Sanskrit Library, a series similar in conception and format to Harvard’s Loeb Classical Library, I Tatti Renaissance Library, and Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library. For the medieval Tamil version of the *Ramayana* by Kamban, I check the English translation by Shanti Lal Nagar (2 vols., Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2008) with some discretion.

Having already touched on the prophetic, numinous teleology of Vergil's Pallanteum, the future site of Rome, I wish now to consider carefully Petrarch's drastic revision of this scene in *Africa* book 8, when the Carthaginian diplomatic envoy arrives in third century BCE Rome and is given a tour of its landmarks. In Petrarch's version, scholarship apparently trumps teleology: the poet's concern is to display his antiquarian erudition, to bring a specific stratum of the ancient city back to life—not to show that Scipio's Rome presaged Rome's future, either its classical Augustan glory or its medieval Christian pilgrims. But to understand why Petrarch did not want to render his own present moment as natural, inevitable, and justified, to set into context his refusal to construct a teleological narrative linking Scipio's Rome with all later Romes, we must first give an account of Petrarch's innovative historiography. We will see that Petrarch emphasized rupture over continuity and synchrony over diachrony because he felt that he lived in a fallen, barbarous age—things weren't supposed to turn out this way.

If Vergil's project in *Aeneid* 8 blurred the temporal boundaries between Trojan, Arcadian, and Roman histories, Petrarch, on the other hand, has been lauded by modern scholars for his innovations in historical periodization.<sup>21</sup> One of Petrarch's most famous letters recounts to Giovanni Colonna their perambulation through Rome, noting site after site; after the walk the two friends had a conversation about history. Just as in his catalogue of Rome's *mirabilia* during the walk, Petrarch distinguishes between classical and ecclesiastical history:

---

<sup>21</sup> Philip Jacks, for instance, contrasts Petrarch's historiography with the account presented in Giovanni Cavallini de Cerronibus' *Polistoria de dotibus et virtutibus Romanorum* (1343-52) in his masterful *The Antiquarian and the Myth of Antiquity: The Origins of Rome in Renaissance Thought* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1993): "Whatever Cavallini and Petrarch might have shared in their antiquarian pursuits, they differed profoundly in their underlying purposes. Cavallini envisioned an unbroken continuum from classical civilization to modern Christian society. For Petrarch, by contrast, his own age of darkness, the *aetas nova*, had cut itself off irretrievably from the greatness of ancient days, the *aetas antiqua*" (p. 62).



We talked long of the city's history. We seemed to be divided; you seemed better informed in modern, I in ancient history. (Let us call "ancient" whatever preceded the celebration and veneration of Christ's name in Rome, "modern" everything from then to our own time.)<sup>22</sup>

Though Petrarch identifies in the Christianization of the Empire a cultural and historical rupture, his historical schema is not simply a binary between 'ancient' and 'modern': Petrarch seems to anticipate what would later be called the Renaissance, implying a tripartite division. After lamenting the ignorance of the Roman populace, Petrarch asks Colonna a rhetorical question: "For who can doubt that if Rome should commence to know itself it would rise again?"<sup>23</sup>

Though the passage cited above has been a *locus classicus* for Petrarch's idea of antiquity and mediocrity, Petrarch scattered clues in other writings as well. In a letter to Agapito Colonna, Petrarch uses the word *tenebrae*—'darkness'—to describe post-classical civilization, ironically applying the name of a somber, Holy Week liturgy in which candles are gradually extinguished in a kind of funeral dirge for Christ to the rise of European Christendom itself.<sup>24</sup> Theodor E. Mommsen brilliantly suggested that Petrarch revised his plans for the *De viris illustribus*—he had initially planned to discuss great men of all ages, but then, by the writing of the *Secretum*, decided to narrow the field down to the Roman period 'from King Romulus to Emperor Titus'—because of a new conception of history he had gained following his coronation in Rome.<sup>25</sup> The reference to Rome rising again in *Epist. Fam.* VI.2, along with, in the *Africa*, the abrupt break in the elder Scipio's narrative of the future of Roman history to his son, when he exclaims that "I am reluctant to go further"<sup>26</sup> are for Mommsen evidence that Petrarch thought of the period after antiquity not only as 'modern' but also as 'the Dark Ages.' As Mommsen observes,

---

<sup>22</sup> *Epist. Fam.* VI.2, trans. Morris Bishop in *Letters from Petrarch*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1966. p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> Bishop, p. 65.

<sup>24</sup> *Epist. Fam.* XX.8.

<sup>25</sup> "Petrarch's Conception of 'The Dark Ages.'" *Speculum* 17.2 (April 1942), pp. 226-42.

<sup>26</sup> *ulterius transire piget*. II.274.

By setting up the ‘decline of the Empire’ as a dividing point and by passing over the traditional marks either of the foundation of the Empire or of the birth of Christ, Petrarch introduced a new chronological demarcation in history... Its most manifest expression is found in the title of Flavio Biondo’s work *Decades historiarum ab inclinatione imperii*, a history of the period stretching from 410 to 1440. The origin of this new chronological demarcation, therefore, has usually been dated hitherto from the middle of the fifteenth century. But, since Petrarch consciously confined his historical studies to the period ‘*usque ad declinationem imperii*,’ if we may say so, we are justified in stating that thereby he implicitly anticipated ideas of the fifteenth-century Italian humanists.<sup>27</sup>

While it is true that Petrarch’s new demarcations of history anticipated *quattrocento* humanism, we must read his letter to Giovanni Colonna as taking its place in a long lineage of medieval pedestrian guidebooks to Rome, most notably the twelfth century *Mirabilia urbis Romae*. Judging from the nomenclature for specific Roman sites, the *Mirabilia* were assembled in response to the needs of Christian pilgrims rather than classicist antiquarians: the section on the gates of the city of Rome, for instance, makes clear that the Porta Capena is now called the Gate of St. Paul.<sup>28</sup> The narratives collected in the *Mirabilia* reinforce this impression: the story of ‘the vision of Octavian and the response of the Sibyl’ begins with the Emperor’s embarrassment at the senators’ request to worship him, on account of his great beauty and because he had forced the whole world to pay tribute to him. Octavian goes to the Sibyl and is shown a vision of a virgin (*pulcerrimam virginem*) in heaven holding a child in her arms.<sup>29</sup> This miraculous prefiguration reminds us of the Vergilian account of the Palatine and Capitoline hills in *Aeneid* 8 in which past, present, and future are simultaneously overlaid onto the same physical space, especially because of the *Mirabilia*’s explicit linking together of pagan antiquity and Christianity.

Though the *Mirabilia* sorts its wonders according to architectural categories—gates here, arches there, bridges here, palaces there—no consideration is given to the relative age or position of the features: the *Mirabilia* does not attempt to create a mimetic portrait of Rome at either the

---

<sup>27</sup> Mommsen, p. 239.

<sup>28</sup> *porta Capena que vocatur sancti Pauli. Mirabilia 2. De portis urbis.*

<sup>29</sup> *Mirabilia 11. De inssione Octaviani imperatoris et responsione Sibille.*

present moment or at any specific moment in historical time. In this way, Petrarch's letter to Giovanni Colonna resembles it: despite what Petrarch says, he does not precisely recollect the duo's peregrination through the city. The marvels that Petrarch lists are in a kind of diachronic chronology rather than a synchronic topography: that is, Petrarch arranges the features of Rome roughly according to their age, beginning with Evander, Carmenta, and Cacus, then considering Romulus, Numa, and the Tarquins, before moving on to stories of the Republican heroes and the Emperors.<sup>30</sup> Only after mentioning the Severan dynasty does Petrarch pause to note the sites relevant to ecclesiastical history: "here Peter was crucified, Paul beheaded, Lawrence grilled..."<sup>31</sup>

It should be noted that Petrarch's separate listing of pagan and Christian sites is not entirely consistent with his periodization of the ancient and modern phases of history later in the letter. Remember that Petrarch says that the 'modern' or Christian era begins with the veneration and worship of Christ in the city of Rome, which scholars take to mean 'with the conversion of Constantine.' Why then would he list Peter's crucifixion (c. 64 AD) *after* 'the column of Antoninus,' who reigned from 138 to 161 AD?<sup>32</sup> Not only does Petrarch identify the end of antiquity and the beginning of the middle ages in this letter, but he also seems to think of pagan and Christian history as two different *kinds* of history, which, even though they might overlap (as Peter's martyrdom does with the reign of Nero, for example), are properly thought of as separate and distinct subjects. Not only does Petrarch prefer ancient history to modern, he privileges pagan antiquity over Christian antiquity. To briefly recapitulate: while both the *Mirabilia* and Petrarch's letter to Colonna retain the

---

<sup>30</sup> In keeping with the *Mirabilia's* mode of recounting 'wonders,' Petrarch repeats the tale that "The Sybil showed the infant Christ to the aged Augustus," though he qualifies it "so the story goes."

<sup>31</sup> Bishop, p. 65.

<sup>32</sup> Decades ago, J. M. Huskinson pursued a fascinating investigation of a related issue—the 15<sup>th</sup> century antiquarian debate over the location of St. Peter's crucifixion—by collating Filarete's 1445 door panel depicting the event with the *Mirabilia urbis Romae*, Flavio Biondo's *Roma instaurata*, Alessandro Strozzi's famous archaeological map of Rome, and Maffeo Vegio's *De Rebus antiquis memorabilibus Basilicae Sancti Petri Romae* in his "The Crucifixion of St. Peter: A Fifteenth-Century Topographical Problem" (*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32 [1969], pp. 135-61).

tone of the marvelous and the pilgrimage, the *Mirabilia* rarely situates its wonders in space and never in time, while Petrarch's letter carefully creates a chronology, not continuous, but broken by the arrival of Christianity into a pagan civilization, though his letter does not represent Rome spatially or situate the walk with Colonna with regard to either position or direction.<sup>33</sup> Now we are ready to turn to the entirely different techniques with which Petrarch records Roman topography in his *Africa*.

As Anthony Grafton tells the story, Leon Battista Alberti's method in the *Descriptio urbis Romae* represented the culmination of a series of cartographical efforts and harnessed the quantitative techniques of the most advanced Renaissance disciplines, including maritime navigation and astronomy.<sup>34</sup> In his *Mathematical Games*, Alberti had used a circular instrument whose circumference had been marked off into degrees and minutes, with a string attached to its center, to take down measurements from three separate points in the city. Plotting the intersections of the resulting lines allowed Alberti to reconstruct an accurate, triangulated plan of Rome's most important features, including churches, ruins, and the *anguli* in the walls, the places where straight sections of wall intersected.<sup>35</sup> But Alberti's *Descriptio* was even more ambitious: not only was the circular component of the instrument he used carefully graduated, but the rotating piece in the center was not simply a string, but a ruler, so that relative distances could also be recorded, resulting

---

<sup>33</sup> The final peroration of Petrarch's account of pagan antiquity is a litany of stories attached to the Capitoline Hill, told in no particular order and without any kind of topographical precision. For instance, Petrarch writes "Here is the cliff defended by Manlius, whence he cast himself down" and then, a few anecdotes later, writes "This is the Tarpeian Rock..." without pointing out that these are precisely the same places. This is how we know that Petrarch's letter recounts Roman *history* rather than a *walk* through a particular place: he recites stories about the Tarpeian Rock at different points in his narrative according to *when* they happened, not *where* they happened.

<sup>34</sup> The relevant chapter in Grafton's *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000) is "His lost city: Alberti the antiquary," pp. 225-59.

<sup>35</sup> As Grafton points out, Alberti's method closely resembled sailors' portolan charts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which provided angular directions to destinations rather than locating them in a universal system of coordinates.

in a map where “each point, in other words, received a precise location within a single polar coordinate system.”<sup>36</sup>

The brief text of the *Descriptio* was, therefore, accompanied by a series of numerical tables indicating the coordinates of a variety of topographical features including Antoninus’ Column, Nero’s Golden House, Trajan’s Column, and the Pyramid of Caius Sextius.<sup>37</sup> These charts represented an antiquarian construction of space that superseded the *Mirabilia*’s sorting of features by category, Petrarch’s recitation of Roman history in the letter to Colonna, and even Alberti’s earlier portolan-style measurement of angles, because with the aid of a map built around these new coordinates, the humanist could navigate to any point in the city no matter his location. Grafton spells out the implications of Alberti’s revolutionary method:

In an age when maps inevitably underwent change and distortion every time they were copied, Alberti had found a way to transmit securely, not a particular vision of the ancient city as a whole, but the abstract mathematical data from which a scholar or an illuminator could restore the whole lost world to flickering, schematic life.<sup>38</sup>

While I do not claim that Petrarch’s *Africa* achieves the kind of mathematically precise mapping of the Roman landscape that we find in Alberti’s *Descriptio*, I do agree with Mommsen that in many ways, Petrarch’s sense of *temporal* perspective in *Epist. Fam.* VI.2 anticipated the humanists of the fifteenth century and rejected the medieval chroniclers’ continuous universal histories. Now I will argue that Petrarch’s *spatial* perspective, too, in *Africa* 8, has more in common with Albertian delineation and triangulation than it does with the timeless, spatially jumbled medieval pilgrim’s guide of the *Mirabilia*.

Near the end of Petrarch’s epic *Africa*, after Hasdrubal has traveled to Rome on a diplomatic mission with the other Carthaginian envoys to beg the senate for clemency and aid against Hannibal, the Punic chief indulges his curiosity about the famous city and asks for a tour of its wonders: “In

---

<sup>36</sup> Grafton, p. 243.

<sup>37</sup> *Descriptio Urbis Romae*. eds. Martine Furno and Mario Carpo. Geneva: Droz, 2000. pp. 59-61.

<sup>38</sup> Grafton, p. 243.

truth I'd glad cross the widest sea to gaze on Rome, the whole world's capital."<sup>39</sup> The tour Hasdrubal and the other Carthaginians undertake begins with those sites familiar from Vergil's tale of the tour given to Aeneas by Evander—Pallanteum, the Carmental Gate, and the story of the cave of Cacus<sup>40</sup>—but Petrarch frames his version of the tour quite differently.<sup>41</sup> Hasdrubal says that because of Rome's fame and prominence, he desires to 'gaze upon' (*videre*, 'see,' 'look at') the city, and then, before the tour properly begins, Petrarch dramatizes the Carthaginians' amazement in an epic simile that refers to Ganymede's abduction by Zeus:

...Such amaze  
he knew as did the Trojan youth of old  
(unless the tale be false) when suddenly  
he felt himself borne off from Ida's top  
to walk 'mid straying stars on Heaven's paths  
and from on high look down on Ilion's groves.<sup>42</sup>

Instead of the elaborate narratives of antiquity and futurity with which Vergil unfolds the meaning of what will become the Roman landscape, here Petrarch invokes an almost cartographical vision, a comprehensive survey from an elevated viewing position. The simile specifically refers to the emotional effects the city's spectacle has on Hasdrubal, but Petrarch also chooses this moment of transcendent seeing as a way to prepare us for the precisely spatially located topographical details which follow.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> *Quodque libens longinqua petam super equora, Romam et mundi vidisse caput. Africa* 8.855-6. trans. Thomas G. Bergin and Alice S. Wilson.

<sup>40</sup> *Africa* 8.864-75.

<sup>41</sup> The first thing we might say is that Petrarch concerns himself with "the traces of the early town / still visible to an experienced eye" (*hic elementa notis impressa* [8.866]), acknowledging that ancient topography has become a specialized antiquarian discipline.

<sup>42</sup> *non aliter stupuit, nisi falsa est fabula, celum ingrediens viridi subito translatus ab Ida Laomedonteus puer, ut vaga sidera circum Hesit et Iliacus despexit ab ethere silvas. Africa* 8.858-61. trans. Bergin and Wilson.

<sup>43</sup> It is worth pointing out that Alberti took down the coordinates in his *Descriptio urbis Romae* from an elevated viewing position on the Capitoline Hill.

Petrarch characterizes the Carthaginians' perambulations as a topographical survey from the outset, and goes on to provide details about individual sites redolent of the new antiquarian learning. For instance, Petrarch writes that the ambassadors enter the city's walls through the 'marble' (*marmoreo*) Appian Gate.<sup>44</sup> In Petrarch's own day, the Appian Gate was a brick structure, as it still is, having been rebuilt several times in the fourth and sixth centuries. The crucial architectural detail that Petrarch includes here signals his intent to reconstruct ancient Rome as it was in the late third century BC and to show his readers the Rome that would have been seen by Scipio and Hasdrubal. His nomenclature, too, signifies this antiquarian mode: a medieval pilgrim's guide to Rome would have referred to the Appian Gate as the 'Porta San Sebastiano.' This kind of historical specificity represents a shift away from the diachronic teleology we saw in Petrarch's letter to Giovanni Colonna, where the city's *mirabilia* were narrated in chronological order, rather than organized according to an actual walk through real space. Now, instead, Petrarch presents us with a synchronic vision of Rome: that is, the poet carefully lays out details from the city at a particular moment in time, as if he were excavating a single stratum of Roman history.<sup>45</sup>

Petrarch situates the Carthaginian envoys' tour at a specific moment in time; he also locates them precisely in space. We were told that Hasdrubal and company are moving northward into the city—they crossed through the Servian Wall at the Appian Gate and began approaching the Palatine Hill to hear the now-familiar story of Hercules' slaying of the cave-dwelling Cacus. But the poet includes a striking piece of information absent from both his letter to Giovanni Colonna and the

---

<sup>44</sup> *Africa* 8.862.

<sup>45</sup> There are moments in his account which seem anachronistic, but are actually not: the reference to the low plain of Suburra in old Rome, which Petrarch calls "the home of the Caesarian clan" (8.903-4), could refer to Sextus Julius Caesar, praetor in 208 BC, about seven years before this tour would have taken place. The only other anachronism introduced by Petrarch in this passage is a cryptic reference to the Pantheon built by Marcus Agrippa in the Campus Martius (it was constructed in the first century BC). I cannot explain this mistake by saying that Petrarch was unaware of when the Pantheon was constructed, because the temple is dated by the consular year inscribed across the front of the building. It is possible, I suppose, that Petrarch believed M. Agrippa built his Pantheon on the site of an older temple 'to all the gods.'

picture of pre-Roman topography in the *Aeneid* 8: “Between two hills the visitors now stand; / the Coelian on their right, the Aventine / raising its lofty summit on their left...”<sup>46</sup> Where Vergil would have written something to the effect that “Aeneas gazes upon the hill,” Petrarch defines Hasdrubal’s position by establishing his orientation with respect to two different landmarks (three landmarks, if we include the Palatine). At this moment in the text, Petrarch’s positioning data are not quite as precise as Alberti in the *Descriptio*—Petrarch does not include the relative distances that distinguished Alberti’s late work and made his coordinate system possible—but they do reproduce exactly the technique of the portolan charts and Alberti’s *Mathematical Games*, which worked by taking angles from known points and plotting the intersections of the resulting lines. Since Petrarch tells us that the Coelian is to the right of the envoys (a ninety degree angle) and that the Aventine is to the left of the envoys (a two hundred and seventy degree angle), we can establish the tour group’s position.<sup>47</sup>

In fact, Petrarch has filled his tour of Rome in the *Africa* with directional and positional information of this kind: after summiting the Quirinal, the Carthaginians “turn left” (*hinc leva flexere viam*)<sup>48</sup> to approach the Flaminian Gate; in the Campus Martius they see the Minervan temple and the temple to all the gods “on their left” (*levaque Minerve amplaque cunctorum monstrantur templa deorum*).<sup>49</sup> One of the more complex and precise descriptions of the party’s progress involves the group, on the right bank of the Tiber, that is, outside of the old walls, descending down the Quirinal to the Tiber’s bank at a point that Petrarch specifies is just at the foot of the Janiculum.<sup>50</sup> When Petrarch

---

<sup>46</sup> *Celium ad dextram remanet, fastigia leva Collis Aventini, validasque in rupibus arces suspiciunt antrumque vident. Africa* 8.871-3. trans. Bergin and Wilson.

<sup>47</sup> The precision with which we can define the group’s position is only limited by the general directions rather than exact angles that Petrarch provides and the general points of reference (the two hills) he gives rather than, say ‘the summit’ or a specific building on each hill, but the underlying concept is exactly the same.

<sup>48</sup> *Africa* 8.914.

<sup>49</sup> *Africa* 8.923-4.

<sup>50</sup> *Iam flumina preter descendunt, collemque vident ubi regia Iani prisca fuit. Africa* 8.933-5.



tells us that the envoys are at the bottom of a hill looking up, or at a summit gazing down upon a specific feature—the Tarpeian rocks, for instance—we even get positional information in three dimensions.

But perhaps the most jarring fact about this passage in the *Africa* is that the Carthaginians' tour of Rome is wholly absent from the relevant section of Livy.<sup>51</sup> In Livy's account, the Punic delegation simply pleads for peace and asks to see their hostages in Rome—there is no tour. Petrarch has clearly inserted this perambulation as a literary homage to Vergil's own vision of pre-Roman topography as told to Aeneas by Evander, yet Petrarch removed the overwhelming sense of futurity and inevitability which colored Vergil's Pallanteum and gave that ancient place a contemporary meaning. Petrarch had another goal: to present in verse the emerging antiquarian topography, both spatially and temporally. Crucially, the procedures and values governing this new humanist discipline stripped Petrarch's vision of ancient Rome of any political resonance with the present—instead, we see third century politics: the Carthaginians compare the legend of the human head found on the Capitoline with their own founding myths; they are dismayed to see trophies taken from their own armies and lands in Roman temples. We cannot know what Robert of Naples thought of Petrarch's triangulated topography of ancient Rome—he died before the poem was completed—but the poet himself chose the stricter disciplines of humanist knowledges over Vergil's political appropriation and ideological distortion again and again.

These were unusual, precocious choices not necessarily emulated by the neo-Latin epic poets who came after Petrarch. Petrarch's anti-teleological, synchronic vision of the Roman cityscape was motivated by his love of antiquity, an ardor so fierce that he felt guilty, in a Christian sense, for his affinity for this pagan culture. Petrarch's fidelity to antiquarian detail, his desire to reconstruct the ancient city for its own sake, was also motivated by a self-conscious rejection of his own age, a disavowal that could be problematic if it included Christianity and threw the baby out with the

---

<sup>51</sup> That would be *Ab urbe condita* 30.42.

bathwater, as it were.<sup>52</sup> This was the uncomfortable irony of Petrarch's letter to Colonna, when he used a theologically charged word for darkness—*tenebrae*—to describe post-classical civilization, which happens to coincide with the rise of Christendom. In the *Secretum*, and in his letter recounting the ascent of Mont Ventoux (*Epist. Fam.* 4.1), Petrarch carries on an agonized dialogue with Augustine about his commitment to the Christian religion, but as in the *Canzoniere*, Petrarch's self-presentation is so theatrical and calculated that it is impossible, and not even desirable, to separate sincere angst from literary convention.<sup>53</sup> In the case of Petrarch, we see how nostalgia for a lost golden age carries with it an implicit challenge to the current Christian dominion, a challenge that makes Petrarch anxious to deny its very existence.

Jacopo Sannazaro could not be more different: Sannazaro writes a poetry of studied imitation, intricate metaphor, oblique reference and obscure allusion. He has an almost Baroque imagination that verges on silliness, a mystic sensibility that actually encourages anachronism, typological readings, and parallels. The end of the second book of *The Virgin Birth (De Partu Virginis)*, 1526) has one of the most striking, deliberate, militant Catholic anachronisms that I can imagine. After the baby Jesus has been born, and the astonished farm animals have fallen to supplication on bended knees (they already seem to know the liturgy), Mary floats into the air with her son, radiating light and surrounded by a chorus of angels as Joseph sleeps—Sannazaro compares her to a phoenix rising into the sky to challenge the sun, surrounded by smaller birds.<sup>54</sup>

The sound and fury wakes Joseph, who sees the holy pyrotechnics and promptly faints. When he regains his strength, he sings a beautiful hymn of praise to Christ that ends:

---

<sup>52</sup> This is the kind of historiography we get in Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88), which makes the rise of Christianity one of the primary causes of the empire's decline. By the Enlightenment, most *philosophes* and philosophic historians had stopped trying to reconcile pagan philosophy with Christian theology.

<sup>53</sup> I'm thinking especially of Jerome's letter to Eustochium, where God tells him in a fever-dream "You lie—you are a follower of Cicero and not of Christ" (22.30).

<sup>54</sup> *Virgin Birth* 2.405-20.

...around you I and your mother, around you the rejoicing retinue, join in song as we initiate the proclamation of your glory and extend the celebration of your timeless rituals through ever-enduring ceremony.<sup>55</sup>

Joseph's adoration of Jesus begins an unbroken, and apparently incorruptible tradition of Christian liturgical worship. The last phrase of Sannazaro's Latin is worth unpacking—the adjectives, 'timeless' or *longa* in the sense of 'boundless', and 'ever-enduring' or *perpetuis* are conventional enough, but the nouns that Michael Putnam has translated as 'rituals' (*orgia*) and ceremony (*fasti*) are more interesting. *Orgia*, from *orgium*, in classical Latin referred to 'secret rites [of Bacchus]; mysteries; orgies'; *Fastis*, from *fastum*, means 'calendar, almanac, annals', and has a technical sense of referring to judicial schedules. The ancient Roman *fasti* were official year-by-year records of consuls, festival dates, priestly offices, and religious sacrifices. To my ear, Sannazaro seems to be using the word *fastis* to mean more than just 'ceremony'—he is making the point that Joseph has begun celebrating Christmas, a religious festival with a specific place on the calendar, and he implies that the date has remained the same. 'Rituals' translates *orgia* well—Sannazaro's emphasis here is on the mystery of the Incarnation, but also the mystery of the sacraments generally. It is fascinating to me that Sannazaro describes Christian liturgical worship with these two Roman religious terms, the first denoting a secret cultic practice, the second an officially scheduled holy day: he captures both the inward, ineffable, devotional aspect of early modern Catholicism as well as its public, social, scheduled orderliness and predictability. Sannazaro's learned wordplay asks us to forget the differences between first century Judea and sixteenth century Naples; we nearly do so.

---

<sup>55</sup> ... te te ego, te circum genitrix laetique ministri / concinimus primique tuos celebramus honores / longaque perpetuis indicimus orgia fastis. *Virgin Birth* 2.466-8. trans. Michael C. J. Putnam. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2009.

If Sannazaro's theory of ecclesiastical history is *semper eadem*, 'always the same', then how does he account for the pre-Christian period?<sup>56</sup> How does he explain the rationale and timing for God's Incarnation into the world? We can ask two questions: why the Virgin Birth, and why 'now'? God's speech in book 1 reveals his thoughts, beginning with a rhetorical question: "Will there be any end?"<sup>57</sup> We are reminded of Momigliano's dictum, quoted above, that in Christian historiography "chronology and eschatology were conflated". God is always already thinking of ends—he wants to redeem humankind in order to (re)populate heaven, so that his creatures can admire his handiwork. God goes on to explain why the Messiah should be born of a virgin:

Since the source of such great misfortune, which had brought tears and death to the earth, originated in a single woman, now let a woman herself bring help and place whatever end she may to their troubled affairs.<sup>58</sup>

Gospel accounts of Jesus' ministry oscillate between the surprise and disruption attending his challenges to Judaism and Rome and claims of his fulfilling ancient prophecies, scenes of his debating rabbis on their own terms, and supernatural miracles. In other words, as the Gospel writers show us what was new and shocking about Jesus, they always feel pressured to remind us that we should have seen this coming, that all of this is part of a plan long written down. Sannazaro's mirror-image symmetry of Eve and Mary is part of the effort to articulate what Momigliano called the Christian 'philosophy of history'—that there is a moral and aesthetic harmony to God's plan for humans, that miracles only shock when taken out of context.

But why 'now' (i.e., the first century CE)? Eusebius's ingenious chronological tables were a visual argument that Rome's hegemony created a common language and widespread political stability, the perfect conditions for a new message of universal salvation. Sannazaro makes a similar

---

<sup>56</sup> Sannazaro's Mary is also a weirdly Catholic nun *avant la lettre*—in his poem she is not chaste simply because she is betrothed to Joseph but still unmarried, but because she took an 'unshakeable, unalterable vow... for virginity alone' (*Virgin Birth* 1.160-1), apparently at the moment of her own birth.

<sup>57</sup> *'Ecquis erit finis?' Virgin Birth* 1.41.

<sup>58</sup> *'... cumque caput fuerit tantorumque una malorum / foemina principium lacrimasque et funera terris / intulerit, nunc auxilium ferat ipsa modumque / qua licet afflictis imponat foemina rebus'.* *Virgin Birth*, 1.51-4.

argument whereby an historical process gradually prepares the human race for a new religion.

During the annunciation, Gabriel tells Mary that the end of animal sacrifice is at hand:

So it is that in the minds of the just the most beautiful form of worship will gradually arise. Not monsters but chaste altars in holy shrines will appease divinities, without abominable bloodshed.<sup>59</sup>

Fallen mankind gradually re-ascends toward God, and this progress is both aesthetic and moral. The *telos* is Judgment Day, when, according to God's first speech, the faithful will take up the 'abandoned seats and vacant benches of heaven' left by the rebel angels and history comes to an end.<sup>60</sup>

Sannazaro, then, represents the classic expression of teleological narrative in Renaissance epic poetry: a story about past events which were themselves pre-ordained and which continue to naturally and inevitably play out their consequences in the present. We live in times set to unalterable patterns established deep in the past. These patterns were known only to God at first—Sannazaro's God had "sequestered the notion deep in my thoughts that she should be the virgin who would conceive in her womb the sanctity of God"—and only gradually revealed as God drew humankind ever closer to him.<sup>61</sup> This is what we meant by Renaissance epic written 'under the sign of monotheism', and it also explains the reasons for the 'delayed' Incarnation, the 'plot' of Sannazaro's epic in Tobias Gregory's terms. Questions remain. Why is Sannazaro so strikingly different from Petrarch in his construction of the antique past and his conception of its relation to the present? Sannazaro's epic is learned, in the same way that Hellenistic literature displayed erudition with oblique references and obscure allusions—echoing Vergil, Sannazaro calls Judea 'pine-rich Idume', for instance—but not scholarly in the sense of Petrarch's interest in the topography of ancient

---

<sup>59</sup> ... *quin iustis paulatim animis pulcherrima surget / religio: non monstra, piis sed numina templis / placabunt castae diris sine caedibus arae*. *Virgin Birth* 1.152-4.

<sup>60</sup> '... *desertosque foros vacuque sedilia coeli...*' *Virgin Birth* 1.48.

<sup>61</sup> *Hanc mihi virginibus iam pridem ex omnibus unam / delegi prudensque animo interiore locavi, / ut foret intacta sanctum quae numen in alvo / conciperet ferretque pios sine semine partus*. *Virgin Birth* 1.73-6.

Rome for its own sake.<sup>62</sup> Petrarch has been widely recognized as a precocious humanist (even if he didn't know Greek and his Latin wasn't Ciceronian by later standards), but Sannazaro starts to write *The Virgin Birth* one hundred and fifty years after Petrarch's *Africa*, in the 1490s, and is still nowhere close to Petrarch's historical consciousness.

Two differences between the *Africa* and *The Virgin Birth* are subject matter and audience: the *Africa* was a work of Roman antiquarianism written in manuscript for Robert of Naples but unfinished at his death; *The Virgin Birth* is a dogmatic Catholic work dedicated to Pope Clement VII and submitted to his censorship.<sup>63</sup> The political situation was different, too: when Petrarch wrote the *Africa*, there was no pope in Rome—the papacy was in Avignon for nearly all of Petrarch's life; even the Italians living through the 14<sup>th</sup> century perceived it as a chaotic, unstable period. It was hard to conceive of the 1347 revolt and 'tribunate' of the notary Cola di Rienzo in Rome as the ineluctable *telos* of a preordained historical process, but Petrarch tried in "Spirto gentil che quelle membra reggi", #53 in Robert Durling's edition of the *Canzoniere*.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, Sannazaro wrote for a wealthy and worldly papacy largely controlled in this period by a few noble families, the della Roveres (Sixtus IV, 1471-84; Julius II, 1503-13), the Borgias (Callixtus III, 1455-8; Alexander VI, 1492-1503) and the Medicis (Leo X, 1513-21; Clement VII, 1523-34); *The Virgin Birth* was finished and printed before the Sack of Rome in 1527. The papacy of Sannazaro's period, especially from the perspective of an humanist poet, seemed resurgent and triumphant.

---

<sup>62</sup> The phrase used by Sannazaro is '*palmiferae... Idumes*' (*Virgin Birth* 1.91); the phrase used by Vergil is '*Idumaeus... palmas*' (*Georgics* 3.12).

<sup>63</sup> From Sannazaro's dedicatory poem: "if anything unsound in my little books comes to your attention, let your good judgment's cancellation expunge my mistakes" (*occurrent siqua in nostris male firma libellis, / delet errores aequa litura meos*).

<sup>64</sup> In Durling's English prose translation: "I speak to you because I do not see elsewhere a ray of virtue, which is extinguished in the world, nor do I find anyone who is ashamed of doing ill. What Italy expects or yearns for I do not know, for she does not seem to feel her woes, being old, idle, and slow. Will she sleep forever, and will no one ever awaken her?" *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: the Rime sparse and other lyrics*. ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976. p. 124.

We have seen in the example of Vergil's *Aeneid* a teleological, political narrative frame despite a polytheistic plot; we have seen in Petrarch the antiquarian refusal to construct such a narrative despite Petrarch's writing more or less 'under the sign of monotheism'; we have seen in Sannazaro the paradigm of Christian theological-political teleology, written in apparent innocence of historical change, anachronism, and the past's alterity.<sup>65</sup> At this point I would like to submit a provisional hypothesis: that the teleological narrative of an epic poem depends on the quality of the state that sponsors it and the sophistication of that state's sense of its own past (its historiography). Christianity gave the ancient Mediterranean a philosophy of history, but perhaps monotheism was not the deciding factor. Monotheism and a strong state are distinct factors but are not entirely independent; indeed, in many histories, monotheism looks like a socio-cultural technology wielded by a state looking to extend a monopoly over religious practice and identity.

The advantages of monotheism to the state are two-fold: state-sponsored religious cults worshipping rival gods create a multi-polar, inherently unstable social order, and so promoting one god over all others allows religious practice to unify the society rather than to divide it; a monotheistic religion, especially one embracing the 'Mosaic distinction' stressed by Tobias Gregory, is more easily controlled by a centralized authority, more easily monopolized (one set of scriptures, one set of practices, one theology). Many states have recognized the advantages of monotheism—this recognition explains Arab states' experimental embrace of Judaism in the century before Muhammad and the constant attempts by the Sasanian Zoroastrians to define orthodoxy and promote the cult of Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda) in the sixth century.<sup>66</sup> More pertinent to this chapter's

---

<sup>65</sup> Though this is not to say that Sannazaro's epic has no Momiglianean 'philosophy of history'—Sannazaro does offer theories that explain why, for instance, the Incarnation happened when it did.

<sup>66</sup> The only lucid discussion of Himyar, the bellicose Jewish kingdom of sixth-century Yemen, is still G. W. Bowersock's *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (New York: Oxford UP, 2013). Touraj Daryaee's *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009) is the most thorough academic account of this late antique state; Daryaee handles the complicated religious scene in pp. 69-97.

reading of the *Ramayana* is how the Sanskrit ‘bardic’ epics were rewritten by Brahmans as religious literature; Rama became the incarnation of Vishnu, whose worship was privileged over the cults of the lower castes (‘caste’ or *varna*, a Sanskrit word for ‘outward appearance’ or ‘color’, was being firmly demarcated in this period as well).<sup>67</sup>

*Evidence from outside the classical tradition*

One of the central insights of Tobias Gregory’s *From Many Gods to One* was to treat Renaissance epic as essentially syncretic—an attempted amalgamation of different religions and philosophies similar in spirit to Ficino’s *Platonic Theology*, or before him Aquinas’ *Summa*:

The syncretisms of other persons, times, and places look strained, arbitrary, and bizarre; the syncretisms to which we are accustomed look natural, if we even notice them as syncretisms at all. But once you notice it, syncretism is everywhere.<sup>68</sup>

The unique attributes of the Christian God—omnipotence, omniscience, benevolence—made adapting the plot-generating devices of polytheistic epic problematic, and the various syncretic solutions hit upon by Renaissance poets are intrinsically interesting, from demonic possession to mortal error. Yet because Gregory’s book, as its title indicates, treats a problem of literary-historical adaptation and confines itself to the relatively unified mainstream of the European classical

---

<sup>67</sup> Romila Thapar, one of the most respected historians of ancient India, writes that “The brahmans appropriated the Vedic texts and in their place people accepted the Epics, the *Dharmashastras*, and the *Puranas* as their religious literature. The Epic heroes, Rama, Krishna, etc., became incarnations of the god Vishnu, and the Epics, which had been essentially bardic poetry, were now given the sanctity of divine revelation. The Epics had originally been secular and therefore had now to be revised by the brahmans with a view to using them as religious literature; thus, many interpolations were made...” *A History of India, Volume One* (New York: Penguin, 1966), pp. 133-4. Thapar specifically connects the rewriting of Indian epic to the Gupta administration and its entrenchment of brahman hegemony: “The Gupta period saw the acceptance of the Aryan pattern in northern India, an important aspect of which was that the status of the brahman was firmly established. The fact that a number of texts were re-written with an underlining of the brahman viewpoint indicates that the status was effective and powerful” (p. 166).

<sup>68</sup> Gregory, p. 27.



tradition, *From Many Gods to One* has only a limited application for answering the monotheism question in the form that we have raised it. Put another way, we still need to isolate the question of monotheism from the conception of divine action, *moira*, and *fatum* that Renaissance epic inherited from the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid*. Can polytheistic epics, whether written under the aegis of a ‘strong’ state or not, organize themselves according to a teleological narrative? Will the Mosaic distinction still look as determinative when we shift from a literary-historical to a more broadly comparative mode of analysis? My hope is that by considering evidence from outside the classical tradition (but still within the Indo-European language family), we will arrive at a more precise understanding of the relationship between teleology, monotheism, fatedness, divine action, and the state in epic poetry generally and thus in the early modern English epic specifically.

The first epic from outside the classical tradition I want to take up is the *Ramayana*, the great Indian poem of Rama’s trials and eventual triumph. The earliest texts of the *Ramayana* are in Sanskrit, ascribed to Valmiki, and date to probably the fourth century BCE.<sup>69</sup> The epic tells the story of a powerful, intelligent prince named Rama who strings a gargantuan bow that no one else can even lift, wins a beautiful bride named Sita, and is chosen by his father, the king Dasaratha, for the throne, but is thwarted when one of the king’s other wives, who has her own favorite son, cashes in an old promise and forces the king to banish Rama. Rama goes into a spiritual, ascetic exile, but his bride is abducted and taken to Sri Lanka. With a little help from his friends, including Hanuman, a swift-moving and –thinking monkey warrior, Rama defeats the demon king Ravana, completes his period of exile, and returns to assume his rightful place on the throne of Ayodhya. The *Ramayana* has been adapted into every major Indian language, not to mention Cambodian and Malay and many

---

<sup>69</sup> Pollock, ed. Goldman, pp. 16-21. However, Sheldon Pollock notes that “The Valmiki ‘Ramáyana’ appears to originate in and centrally concerns the royal house of the Kósala-Mágadha region. This is the area in which the Buddha lived in the fifth century BCE, the rise of the imperial Mágadhan power occurred toward the end of the fourth century BCE, and the great Buddhist movement spread in the fourth and third centuries BCE. But the epic appears to know nothing of these important developments” (p. 16).

others; important vernacular versions include the medieval Tamil poem of Kamban, which will also be treated here, the *Ramacharitamanas*, a sixteenth century devotional poem based on Rama's life, the *Ramleela*, a folk pageant-play still performed in small towns from Trinidad to northern India, and the television serial of 1987-8 directed by Ramanand Sagar and starring Arun Govil as Ram and Deepika Chikhalia as Sita.<sup>70</sup>

I want to focus on a specific episode in the *Ramayana*, one that can be said to set the larger plot in motion: the hunchback Manthara, a maidservant to Dasaratha's queen Kaikeyi, succeeds in poisoning her mistress with jealousy so that Kaikeyi demands that Dasaratha banish Rama for fourteen years rather than give him the kingdom.<sup>71</sup> It is during this period of exile, the delaying of Rama's succession, that the battles and intrigues that form most of the *Ramayana's* plot take place. The question is to what extent Manthara's scheme is represented as fated, whether by the various systems of astrology referenced in the *Ramayana* or by the gods, or whether it is contingent, random, unforeseen. To what extent is Rama's betrayal and subsequent misfortune part of a teleological narrative leading toward his enthronement (first in Ayodhya, then in heaven)?

Although the Sanskrit version attributed to Valmiki is preoccupied with fate, *daiva*, 'what comes from the gods' and *kertanta*, 'doom' or 'destiny', these concepts are generally employed by the characters to rationalize what befalls them, not by the narrative voice describing the actual order of things. So Manthara only "happened to ascend to the rooftop terrace that shone like the moon" where she sees the preparations for Rama's coronation and realizes that her mistress' son, prince

---

<sup>70</sup> The Indian novelist Pankaj Mishra offers an accessible overview of these adaptations in his introduction to R. K. Narayan's English prose version of the *Ramayana* (New York: Penguin, 1972; Mishra introduction 2006). Wai Chee Dimock, in a more theoretically sophisticated argument about the globe-trotting genre of epic, discusses an even wider range of *Ramayana* adaptations including women's work songs about Sita in the Awadhi- and Bhojpuri-speaking areas of northern India and effigies of the demon king Ravana in the political protest theater of Thatcherite London in her "Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge", *PMLA* 122.5 (Oct. 2007), pp. 1377-88.

<sup>71</sup> This episode is in the *Ayodhya-kanda* (the *Ramayana* is divided into five *kandas*, or books; the *Ayodhya-kanda* is the second).

Bharata, will be excluded from the succession.<sup>72</sup> When Manthara tries to convince Kaikeyi to intervene with her husband Dasaratha, she resists and is only gradually overcome by Manthara's persistence. In the medieval Tamil version, Manthara's malevolence is explicitly connected to the demon king Ravana, the chief antagonist of the poem: "she appeared like an incarnation of all the evil deeds of cruel Ravana, her mind was immensely cruel".<sup>73</sup> Kamban has woven the incidents more tightly together and loaded the characters with theological weight—in Valmiki's Sanskrit, Rama is a mighty, perfect, righteous man "born in the house of Ikshvatu"<sup>74</sup> but in Kamban's Tamil, Rama is the incarnation of Vishnu by whose lotus-like feet his devotees prostrate themselves.

An even more clear difference in the teleological structure of the *Ramayana's* Sanskrit and Tamil versions can be seen at the end of the *Ayodhya-kanda* where prince Bharata, having been recalled to Ayodhya to assume the throne, refuses it out of respect for Rama and travels to the little village where Rama is practicing yoga in preparation for his forest exile. Bharata attempts to convince Rama to take up his inheritance or at least share power with him; Rama refuses because he wants his father to fulfill his promise to Kaikeyi. They have a long philosophically-inflected debate about the nature of duty and kingship, but Rama is resolute and Bharata returns to Ayodhya with a pair of sandals given to him by Rama. There's a key moment in Kamban's Tamil version where we get something like Homer's Olympic vision:

The gods came to realise all these things. They thought, in case Bharata took Rama with him to Ayodhya, then their task could not be established. They felt concerned. They assembled in the sky and talked among themselves.<sup>75</sup>

The gods make their pronouncement, Rama hears their words directly and repeats them to Bharata, and this is what finally changes his mind. In the earlier version of Valmiki, there is no such divine

---

<sup>72</sup> *Ayodhya-kanda* 7.1 (Valmiki).

<sup>73</sup> *Ayodhya-kanda* 136 (Kamban).

<sup>74</sup> *Bala-kanda* 1.1-10 (Valmiki).

<sup>75</sup> *Ayodhya-kanda* 1199 (Kamban).

assembly, no ‘task’ for Rama-Vishnu (because Rama is not understood as an incarnation of Vishnu), no supernatural concern for Rama’s mission and no relief when Rama succeeds in putting off Bharata.

In these accretions we see the transition from an orally composed bardic ‘romance’ to a literate theologically oriented epic, a shift in emphasis from delineating the duties of those in a newly hierarchical, urban society to religious contemplation and promotion of the cult of Vishnu as opposed to Shiva and the minor deities venerated by the lower castes (in Kamban’s Tamil version, Rama is described as blue, revealing his connection to Vishnu, for the first time). It is in the period of Kamban and his fellow vernacular adapters, that is, the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, that the Ramayana story assumed its centrality to public political discourse; in the words of Sheldon Pollock:

the text offers unique imaginative instruments—in fact, two linked instruments—whereby, on the one hand, a divine political order can be conceptualized, narrated, and historically grounded, and, on the other, a fully demonized Other can be categorized, counterposed, and condemned.<sup>76</sup>

At the same time that Rama was being turned into an incarnation of Vishnu by vernacular poets like Kamban, temples devoted to Rama-Vishnu were being constructed in Ayodhya by the Gahadavala dynasty.<sup>77</sup> Subsequent to these literary and architectural developments, rulers began referring to themselves as the equivalent or incarnation of Rama, linking their temporal kingdoms to the divine realm.<sup>78</sup>

Thus the *Ramayana* only gradually was made to conform to a teleological narrative both within the epic’s plot (structured by divine action in the sense that Tobias Gregory uses the phrase) and also with respect to the relation of the epic past and the politics of the present, the sense that matters most to my project. The councils of the gods and Rama’s (secret) divine nature were not

---

<sup>76</sup> “Ramayana and Political Imagination in India”. *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52.2 (May 1993), pp. 261-97. p. 264.

<sup>77</sup> Pollock, p. 266.

<sup>78</sup> Pollock quotes from an inscription of 1379 CE: “In that same city [Vijayanagar] did [King] Harihara dwell as in former times Rama dwelled in the city of Ayodhya”, p. 268.

intrinsic to the original hero's journey but were added later, at the same time that the theology of the text began to incorporate Vaisnavistic elements in addition to its earlier theme of *dharmā*, 'righteousness'.<sup>79</sup> In the transmission and reception history of the *Ramayana*, then, we can clearly see how the welding together of teleological narrative and traditional legend was a product of the collaboration between an increasingly sophisticated state in terms of kingship and historiography, and monotheism as a sociocultural technology. Rather than a particular conception of a god's attributes—omnipotence, omniscience, benevolence—determining a philosophy of history, as in the Christian historiographic revolution of the fourth century CE described by Momigliano, in the *Ramayana* we see states appropriating and elaborating folk tales to their own ends. The political *Ramayana* was a result of a syncretic, accretive process, more like the allegorizing Homeric scholia of Constantinople than the fully realized Catholic vision of Eusebius and Sannazaro.<sup>80</sup>

I want to look at one more piece of evidence from outside the classical tradition of epic poetry that will help us further understand the complex links between monotheism, polytheism, and teleology: the Old Norse poem *Völuspá* ('Prophecy of the *Völva*' [Seeress]) the first and most well-known poem collected in the Icelandic *Codex Regius* (c. 1270s), a book of forty-five leaves that remains one of our best sources for Old Norse poetry. The speaker of the *Völuspá* is a prophetic or medium who refers to herself both in the first and third persons, and who narrates the creation

---

<sup>79</sup> Vaisnavism is the branch of Hinduism that regards Vishnu as supreme; it tends toward monotheism or perhaps more accurately what Tobias Gregory calls henotheism, "the worship of one god without denying the existence of other gods" (Gregory, p. 5). It's worth noting that in Valmiki's Sanskrit text, when king Dasaratha laments the situation that his queen has put him in, holding him to an old vow, he does not blame fate or an evil god for his predicament but says "I am bound by the bond of righteousness" (*Dharma | bandhena baddho 'smi* [*Ayodhya-kanda* 12.15 {Valmiki}]).

<sup>80</sup> I want to be clear that in treating the Vaisnavistic 'main stream' of *Ramayana* adaptation I am leaving out other 'alternative' versions, like the adaptations in Prakrit produced by the Jains (Vimalsuri's *Paumchariya*, for instance); these versions have differing theological interests and variants as to character and plot. According to Vimalsuri, Rama's brother Lakshmana, rather than Rama himself, kills the demon king Ravana and goes to hell for it, reflecting Jainism's strict ethic of non-violence.

and eventual destruction of the world in response to questions from Oðin, whom she calls *Valföðr*, ‘father of the slain’.<sup>81</sup> This poem serves my argument as an example of yet another possible combination of political, religious, and historiographic features: we have a polytheistic religious tradition with a fairly advanced notion of fate (both individual and universal) but which in the absence of a strong state fails to develop narrative connections to the events of human history.<sup>82</sup> In other words, although the *Völuspá* gives us an integrated account of universal history, from the creation of the world through the Aesir-Vanir war, through the death of Baldr, the groaning of the world-tree Yggdrasill, the destruction of the gods and the world’s eventual rebirth, these events are not connected to particular human people or their communities. There is no attempt to synchronize divine and human history as Eusebius did when he connected the triumph of Rome and Latin to the Incarnation.

The *Völuspá* takes place in the realm of myth without attempting to explain or interpret human history, except to say that the end of the world on a cosmic scale will be foreshadowed by the collapse of civilization. The striking forty-fourth stanza describing this period of anarchy is worth quoting in full:

Brothers will fight  
and kill each other,  
sisters’ children  
will defile kinship.  
It is harsh in the world,  
whoredom rife  
--an axe age, a sword age  
--shields are riven—  
a wind age, a wolf age—  
before the world goes headlong.

---

<sup>81</sup> *Völuspá* 1.5.

<sup>82</sup> See Thomas A. DuBois’ *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) for an overview of the religious diversity in the region for the period 800-1300 CE. DuBois’ study is valuable for treating the relatively overlooked Sámi (Lapps) and Balto-Finnic peoples alongside the Norse; a sharply resolved picture of decentralized, locally oriented religious practices engaging in widespread cultural exchange emerges.

No man will have mercy on another.<sup>83</sup>

That is really all we get about the implications of the supernatural *telos* of Ragnarök for human history. There are, however, hints that the author of the *Völuspá* had a more nuanced appreciation of individual fates. The first humans created, Ash and Embla, are *orlöglausa*, ‘without destiny’.<sup>84</sup> In the twentieth stanza, the speaker mentions three maidens who emerge from the lake under Yggdrasill and are named ‘Had to be’, ‘Coming to be’, and ‘Had to be’. These maidens write the fates of all men on slips of wood, a detail that Ursula Dronke compares to the traditional Germanic practice of using runes carved on pieces of wood to draw lots.<sup>85</sup> These sisters determine the destinies of men, not Oðin, but we do not hear of peoples in the sense of ethnic groups or even clans, much less polities.<sup>86</sup>

There are many other sources for Norse mythology and religion, in verse and prose, and indeed the Norsemen’s social and political organization; I cannot pretend to a comprehensive knowledge of all of these texts. Even the classification and dating of the available materials preliminary to interpreting them is still controversial. I have only tried to gain a glimpse of how a poem addressing the structure of history from the perspective of a polytheistic society lacking a

---

<sup>83</sup> *Bræðr muno beriaz / ok at bönom verða[ǣ], / muno systrungar / sífiom spilla. / Hart er í heimi, / bordomr mikill / --skeggöld, skámöld / --skildir ro klofnir-- / vindöld, vargöld-- / áðr veröld steypiz. / Mun engi maðr / öðrom þyrma.* trans. Ursula Dronke (New York: Oxford UP, 1997), p. 19.

<sup>84</sup> *Völuspá* 17.8.

<sup>85</sup> Dronke, pp. 39-40.

<sup>86</sup> Collective identity in the *Völuspá* has to do with ‘races’—giants, dwarfs, Aesir, Vanir, men—and seems to be based on shared ancestry, so that humankind is referred to as *mügo Heimdal[ǫ]ar*, ‘sons of Heimdallr’, in the first stanza. The catalogue of dwarfs, who are created to mine gold for the Aesir once a conflict with ogres ended their access to free gold, is probably an interpolation but remains famous because Tolkien fashioned the name of Thorin Oakenshield from two of the *Völuspá*’s dwarfs, *Dorrin* (‘Darer’, 12.3) and *Eikinskjaldi* (‘Oakenshield’, 13.8), and Gandalf from *Gandálfr* (‘Sprite Elf’, 12.1).

strong state deals with the fatedness of individuals and groups.<sup>87</sup> A taxonomy of these teleological narratives would place the *Völuspá* closer to the *Iliad* than Kamban's Tamil *Ramayana*, the *Aeneid*, or any Renaissance epic, which is to say that while divine action creates a coherent narrative form inside the poem, the epic past remains disconnected from what I have called the 'prosaic present' of the author. Again, the decisive factor appears to be the presence of a strong state with a sophisticated sense of its own past which in turn uses monotheism as a 'sociocultural technology' to monopolize religious practice and sacralize its own authority. Polytheistic religion is not necessarily an insurmountable barrier to the articulation of a teleological epic narrative; but then again, we have ample evidence that in the hands of a strong state, polytheistic worship often tends toward henotheism or monotheism. Therefore the investigation of teleological narrative in early modern English epic should focus on how the state at a particular moment (the Elizabethan succession; the Stuart Union of the Crowns; the Civil War; exile; Restoration) understands its role in history as God's favored agent. This method should yield more precise results than simply ascribing the robust philosophies of history found in Renaissance epic to monotheism. The rest of this dissertation will proceed along those lines.

In the next chapter I give a reading of Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* closely attuned to the schizophrenic anxieties of the 1590s Elizabethan court, where Elizabeth's virginity was fetishized as the source of an androgynous vigor but also where the intrigues and rumors of marriage swirled. Royal propaganda depicted Elizabeth herself as an ageless icon while her courtiers traded rhymes about the doomed Tudors' sterility. Late Elizabethan England saw frantic myth-making and hushed cynicism, and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* plays with these contradictions, sometimes singing panegyric, at other times engaging in bitter, anti-court vitriol. Spenser takes up these uncertainties around dynastic

---

<sup>87</sup> I say that the pagan Norse lacked strong states in part because the elites maintained their lifestyles and acquired their prestige goods through raiding and forced tribute; not, for example, systematic taxation in exchange for security and other benefits (DuBois, pp. 14, 20, 24-5). Bureaucracy came with Christianity.



continuity, humanist memory's relationship to power politics, and history's ambiguous, encoded lessons. Because Spenser writes his *Faerie Queene* at a time when the prospects for his and his monarch's futures are so unclear, the poem develops a troubled relationship with teleological narrative, struggling to maintain faith in the humanist command of an archive that can no longer point the way forward.

## Chapter 2. *The Faerie Queene* and Tudor historiography

After asserting his stance on the liberty of unlicensed printing and then taking down the Inquisitorial *imprimatur* in a splendid example of early modern English snark at the outset of his pamphlet *Areopagitica* (1644), John Milton paused to consider the consequences of an uncensored and unprecedented print culture. Not only will right reason and true doctrine prevail over lies and heresy in the public sphere, Milton argued, but the soul of the promiscuous reader will emerge stronger from its exposure to bad books. Examples from church history filled out his claim: Paul “thought it no defilement” to quote a Greek playwright in holy scripture; the evangelist Matthew could very well have been discussing reading habits when he recorded Christ’s amendment of Hebrew dietary law to the effect that “those actions which enter into a man, rather than issue out of him... defile not”. Milton even worked in an obscure classics joke: Jerome must have been mistaken in his letter to Eustochium when he wrote that in a dream an *angel* whipped him for being a Ciceronian—only a *devil* could have punished the saint for reading Cicero while passing over his devotion to the ‘scurrill Plautus’!

But to find a model for how a Christian reader might actually overcome tempting falsehoods, Milton looked back at his great predecessor:

Which was the reason why our sage and serious Poet *Spencer*, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than *Scotus* or *Aquinas*, describing true temperance under the person of *Guion*, brings him in with his palmer through the cave of Mammon, and the bow of earthly blisse that he might see and know, and yet abstain.

To ‘see and know, and yet abstain’—we can read in Milton’s description of the pious, self-possessed reader the germ of his doctrine of free will as expressed in *Paradise Lost*: “sufficient to have stood,

though free to fall”.<sup>88</sup> The congruence between Calvin’s individual, even atomized soul culpable for its own sins and the free citizens of a commonwealth reasonably governing themselves makes a certain kind of sense. One imagines a gloomy Genevan praying for discernment while browsing—and casting judgment on—the printer’s latest offerings, doling out grace to the wheat and leaving the chaff to be remaindered.

When read more closely, though, Milton’s neat congruence of Puritan theology and republican politics gives way to friction and anachronism. The link between reading wisely and acting virtuously might be found in free will, the human capacity to exercise reason in deliberate choice, but the matter becomes more complicated when we remind ourselves that Milton wrote ‘free to fall’ about *pre-lapsarian* Adam, before the corruption of mankind. It is less obvious how fallen humans, even those redeemed by Christ, can overcome their predisposition to sin in an unregulated bookseller’s stall. A further question can be termed ‘political’: Spenser’s poem and the knights in it are oriented toward a monarchical center, a queen—every chivalric quest has a sponsor who serves as both impetus and terminus. Guyon does not survey a range of options and freely choose but rather overcomes obstacles in the carrying out of his royally sanctioned mission. The undirected print forum of war-torn 1640s England, clogged by ranters, diggers, and Fifth Monarchists represented a more disorienting and uncertain landscape in which political authority itself was called into question.

Finally we can turn to the text of the *Faerie Queene* proper, especially Book II, wherein Guyon’s adventures in the Cave of Mammon and the Bower of Bliss are found. Milton alludes to

---

<sup>88</sup> *PL* 3.99.

Guyon's journey through the cave<sup>89</sup> but does not elaborate on the details: the knight, after being tempted for forty stanzas and enduring Mammon's tableau of the damned, collapses from exhaustion, his senses 'with deadly fit opprest'—hardly an image of fortifying abstinence. Strikingly, Book II's scenes of reading are even less appropriate as models for temperate Christian readers relying on their own judgment: when Arthur and Guyon sit down with their broken, worm-eaten chronicles in the House of Alma in the tenth canto, they are 'beguyled thus with delight of nouelties', not properly instructed in their origins and responsibilities.

*Contra* Milton, then, I would like in this chapter to call attention to Spenser's portrayal of bad books and the naïve readers who get lost in them. In passages from the Cantos of Mutabilitie and Books II and III we will glimpse a vision of chronicle reading in 1590s England markedly different from Milton's paean to savvy citizen-shoppers: so many readers' experiences in the *Faerie Queene* suffer from problematic information resources and tendentious interpretations; dynastic insolvency, professional insecurity, and political pessimism color these accounts instead of the civic autonomy

---

<sup>89</sup> Ink has been spilled on Milton's 'error' in placing the Palmer with Guyon in the cave: see Harold Bloom's *Map of Misreading* (Oxford UP: 2003 [2<sup>nd</sup> ed]), pp. 127-8, and John Guillory's *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History* (Columbia UP: 1983), p. 135. George F. Butler has published a more recent discussion of the passage in "Milton's 'sage and serious Poet Spenser': Error and Imitation in *The Faerie Queene* and *Areopagitica*", *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 49.2 (Summer 2007), pp. 101-24.

mandated by an emerging commonwealth.<sup>90</sup> Arthur and Britomart gain access to chronicles overstuffed with the rising and falling of monarchs relevant to their own destinies but, for a variety of reasons, fail to make sense of them.

During the last half-century historians of early modern English intellectual life have established a narrative about sixteenth and seventeenth century historiography that helps contextualize Spenser's scenes of failed politic reading: call it 'the death of the chronicle'.<sup>91</sup> Attending to that history of histories will cast Spenser's canny medievalisms into sharper relief—his loving, bibliophilic accounts of crumbling chronicles that absorb readers but don't quite *work* were written just as intellectual and commercial factors converged to render the medieval chronicle obsolete. Gabriel Harvey berated the “many asses who dare to compile histories, chronicles, annals,

---

<sup>90</sup> By treating passages from *The Faerie Queene* out of order and discussing the Cantos of Mutabilitie first, I leave myself open to the charge of anachronism and seem to miss an opportunity for considering how Spenser's thoughts on the intelligibility and utility of the historical record might have developed over the years that he drafted his great poem. However, any purportedly chronological narrative of development would need to be grounded in texts that have been reliably dated, and the circumstances of the composition of the *The Faerie Queene*, especially of the Cantos of Mutabilitie, are notoriously obscure. In *Edmund Spenser: A Life* (Oxford UP: 2012), Andrew Hadfield summarizes what is known about the 'final' Cantos and counsels modesty and restraint in what we may claim about them (pp. 370-9). We know that Spenser's publisher William Ponsonby was in possession of more *FQ* leaves than he had printed at the time of his death in 1604; we know that most of his copyrights were purchased by his wife's half-brother Simon Waterson, who sold them to the upstart printer Matthew Lownes, who published at least some of the *FQ* material five year later, a full decade after Spenser's death. We can also deduce that Lownes misunderstood the organization of the text he was dealing with—Hadfield for instance agrees with Andrew Zurcher (see my footnote 119) that the *Faerie Queene*'s last two quatrains, which Lownes printed as “*The VIII. Canto, unperfite*” surely were intended to conclude Canto VII. Hadfield admits that “Spenser's poem appears to have reached a real conclusion” but then goes on to say that “such a conclusion would appear to be rather too neat and too easily assimilated into his biography” and modestly observes that “It is more likely that a manuscript which proclaimed that these were Spenser's final verses circulated than that he for a poet's final words left behind an authorized fragment that others then recognized as his last thoughts” (p. 371). We certainly don't know, then, that Spenser intended the Mutabilitie verses to represent any kind of culmination, and their Ovidian elements are probably reworked from earlier drafts. In sum, because of our lack of information about the date of composition of the Cantos of Mutabilitie and their intended position in an epic of apparently shrinking dimension, a confident chronological reading that fixed them as Spenser's final destination would be prematurely conclusive and insecurely anchored by textual criticism.

<sup>91</sup> This phrase is the title of the first chapter of D. R. Woolf's *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge UP: 2000).

commentaries” in the margins of his Livy<sup>92</sup>; and later, speaking generally, the historian Philip Hicks has characterized the humanist attitude toward the medieval genre as “a useless jumble of disconnected facts and fictions, written in bad Latin by superstitious monks”.<sup>93</sup>

The scholarly consensus on the fate of the medieval chronicle in England has evolved from a story about intellectual history in which humanist methods supplant monastic traditions to a story about book history in which the chronicle genre, under commercial pressure, breaks up into more specialized forms like commemorative historical verse, non-narrative antiquarian studies, compendia cross-referencing multiple chronicles, and newsbooks. The place to start is F. J. Levy’s oft-cited *Tudor Historical Thought* (Huntington Library Press, 1967), which stresses the impact of the new Renaissance *épistème*: the decisive factors were a startling new sense of historical anachronism prompted by the Reformation, a skeptical attitude toward sources, and a renewed emphasis on eloquence. Levy’s brief definition of the late medieval chronicle in his preface takes the side of the humanists and implies the genre’s insufficiency: “a compilation, loosely organized, whose author had no firm grasp of the essential differences between past and present.”<sup>94</sup> The chronicle “developed by accretion” and “perhaps the most striking fact about any of these chronicles is the amount of random information they contain”.<sup>95</sup> While history writing remains didactic in the Renaissance, the focus on personal morality is replaced by civic patriotism; random facts were removed from narratives and collated into antiquarian tables. Levy’s most penetrating general observation about the shift from medieval to Renaissance history writing might be that historians no longer looked to Providence or Fortune for the causes of events but instead looked to human nature in a mode Levy identifies as Tacitean (or, alternately, Machiavellian).

---

<sup>92</sup> Stern, Virginia F. *Gabriel Harvey: his Life, Marginalia, and Library* (Oxford UP, 1979), p. 152.

<sup>93</sup> *Neoclassical History and English Culture* (Palgrave: 1996), p. 24.

<sup>94</sup> *Tudor Historical Thought*, p. ix.

<sup>95</sup> *ibid*, p. 167-8.

Historiographers of Tudor history-writing have moved on since F.J. Levy; now the field is more attuned to print culture than canons of rhetoric—scholars are now thinking about which early modern writers created new historical genres in response to pressures from the print marketplace instead of, say, which sixteenth-century Florentine imitated Livy the most slavishly. Still, Levy’s thesis about the importance of the Renaissance’s new ways of thinking about sources and difference across historical time deserves our sustained attention. Before we move to the print-functionalism arguments of more recent historiographers, it’s worthwhile to consider some remarks by Polydore Vergil (c. 1470-1555), whom we can consider to be perhaps the earliest exponent of humanist history-writing in England and certainly the first Tudor historiographer. Polydore is doubly relevant to my question—the relation of Tudor historiography to Spenser’s epic—because not only was he one of Levy’s humanist ‘game-changers’, but he also specifically attacked the British mythology with which *The Faerie Queene* spends so much time playing. Therefore both the form of Polydore’s critical humanist history and its content, his skepticism toward Brutus, Arthur, *et al*, are crucial to my argument about the difficulty of Spenser’s task of working up those legends for presentation to Queen Elizabeth.

Polydore was born in Urbino and after studying at the University of Padua, was ordained in 1496 and entered the service of Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, the Duke of Urbino.<sup>96</sup> The first phase of his career as an intellectual was concerned with the characteristic humanist passion for the cultivation of eloquence and elegant variation in prose—he would later bring these aesthetic standards to bear on history-writing. Polydore’s first work, brought out in 1496, was an edition of

---

<sup>96</sup> The University of Padua, founded in 1222, was alongside Bologna one of the wealthiest and most prestigious institutions of higher learning in Renaissance Italy and attracted an extraordinary student body composed of Italians and ‘ultramontane’ foreigners: the historian Francesco Guicciardini, the printer Aldo Manuzio the Younger, the philosopher Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi, the physician-professor-gambler Girolamo Cardano, the astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus, and the poet Torquato Tasso all studied there (this from Paul Grendler’s *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002], p. 37). While Polydore was at Padua, the faculty numbered about 60 and the student body about 1,000.

Niccolo Perotti's *Cornucopiae latinae linguae* (completed in 1478 and dedicated to Federico III da Montefeltro, Guidobaldo's father). Perotti's *Cornucopiae*, ostensibly a commentary on Martial's epigrams, was part dictionary and part encyclopedia, a maddeningly overstuffed compendium of information grammatical and cultural. Polydore's first 'original' book was the *Proverbiorum libellus* (Venice, 1498), the 'little book of proverbs', which contained 306 Latin adages and actually preceded Erasmus' *Adagia* by two years.<sup>97</sup>

In the *De Inventoribus Rerum* (1499), known in English as *On Discovery*, the last work Polydore wrote while still in Italy, the humanist compiler *par excellence* elaborates his first systematic thoughts on the writing of history as part of his account of how this art originated. As the title of his volume indicates, most of Polydore's entry on 'who first wrote history and on its utility' is concerned with making sure that the true inventors of history receive due credit.<sup>98</sup> Throughout *On Discovery* Polydore, perhaps too piously, consistently holds up Hebraic culture rather than Greek as the fount of Western civilization—he sticks to this pattern in his writing on history. First Polydore sets Josephus' *Antiquities* against Pliny's *Natural History* to show that writing in prose definitely predated Cadmus of Miletus, Pliny's candidate for the inventor of prose and history, whom Herodotus called *logopoiói*. Then Polydore turns to Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel*, book 11, for the final say on the origin of history:

Whence Moses, that wisest of men and first of all the ancients to record the lives of the Hebrews, described their political and practical way of life in historical narrative.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> A brief but thoroughly documented biography of Polydore was published by Denys Hay as "The Life of Polydore Vergil of Urbino" in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* v. 12 (1949), pp. 132-51.

<sup>98</sup> *On Discovery* 1.12.

<sup>99</sup> *Unde sapientissimus ille Moses qui primus cuiusque hominis vetustissimi vitas Hebraeorum conscripsit, civilem atque in actione positum vivendi modum narratione historica docuit. ibid*, 1.12.2. trans. Brian P. Copenhaver (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002).



Normative statements about historiography—‘rules for history’—bracket Polydore’s philo-Semitic argument about the invention of the genre, both, strikingly, based on Cicero’s *On the Orator*; it’s as if Polydore is trying to preserve the priority and truth of Biblical revelation-as-history while admitting at the same time that it was in Republican Rome that history was perfected in its style and purpose. The reason why history is important, writes Polydore at the beginning of his entry, is that it allows people to learn from the experience of others: “history surpasses other types of writing by as much as the whole span of time includes more notable events than the life of a man.”<sup>100</sup> History is a witness to truth and memory and with its cornucopia of examples “makes ordinary people fit for command”. Polydore also makes a sophisticated argument for didactic history, history as moral instruction. For Polydore, it isn’t the case that the conduct of noble heroes of the past will necessarily inspire emulation and that villainous behaviour will be rightly shunned: what matters is not so much what those distant personages did, but the very fact that their deeds have been recorded. Readers of history seeking glory will be comforted by the everlasting fame of the virtuous and will be chastened by the notorious infamy of the vicious—ancient history is not so much a pantheon of exempla to be imitated as it is a warning, so to speak, that what the powerful do, for better or worse, will be recorded and judged.

At the end of his chapter on the origin of history, Polydore returns to Cicero’s *On the Orator* and offers a rule (*regula*) for composing history: “one should never dare say anything false... one should always dare tell the truth”, the historian should not play favorites or participate in feuds.<sup>101</sup> The historian works with the raw material of words and events and must include geography, customs, plans, misfortunes, and fates in his account. Finally, Polydore offers a laconic aesthetic standard: “but the right choice of words demands the sort of language that is smooth, fluent and

---

<sup>100</sup> *Historia, quae tanto caeteris scriptis antecellit quanto plura exempla rerum complectitur diuturnitas temporis quam hominis aetas...* *ibid*, 1.12.1.

<sup>101</sup> ... *ne quid falsi dicere audeat, deinde ne quid veri non audeat...* *ibid*, 1.12.5.

marked by a clear and distinct brevity”.<sup>102</sup> So much for the medieval chronicle’s barbarous Latin, numbing annalistic structure, parochial biases, and profusion of undigested detail.

Although Polydore originally came to England as a sort of tax collector for the Holy See, he was soon welcomed at court by Henry VII and set to work on English history, a task to which he was expected to apply cutting-edge methods. He was of course only one of the many scholars who left Italy to do this kind of work for foreign courts. As Arnaldo Momigliano put it in his inimitable style:

Italian humanists made an honest living from hawking national history according to classical models. They sold this new brand of history to the kings of the nations and eventually roused the native historians to competition.<sup>103</sup>

The first fruit of this labor was an edition of Gildas’ *On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain* (c. 540). Polydore abridged Gildas so that certain anti-clerical passages were omitted,<sup>104</sup> but he thought his treatment of the ancient document better than that of the later medieval historian Geoffrey of Monmouth’s, whom he accuses in his preface of “having written a false summary of Gildas the Wise.”<sup>105</sup> This was the first shot fired in what would be called ‘the battle of the books’—the debate over the veracity of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s British material, especially his Arthuriana, though it really got going when Leland published his response to Polydore’s *Anglica Historia*.<sup>106</sup>

Polydore’s general skepticism toward the British legendarium provoked a patriotic reaction against this interloping Italian, and though his books went through many Latin editions and were translated into several modern languages, their re-packaging into English can shed some light on the

---

<sup>102</sup> *Verborum vero ratio orationis genus desiderat lene, fusum ac pura illustriq[ue] brevitate ornatum. ibid*, 1.12.5.

<sup>103</sup> *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 81.

<sup>104</sup> These passages were restored in John Joscelyn’s edition of 1568.

<sup>105</sup> *Gaufredi scriptis breviarium composuerat...Gildae Sapientis falso compendium inscripserat* (Antwerp, 1525).

<sup>106</sup> A reliable account of the first skirmishes in this war of words can be found in James P. Carley’s “Polydore Vergil and John Leland on King Arthur: The Battle of the Books”, *Interpretations* 15.2 (Spring 1984), pp. 86-100.

differences between Polydore's conception of history and that of his English colleagues. For instance, Polydore's *On Discovery* was first translated into English by Thomas Langley in 1546; he also abridged the text in significant ways. In Langley's version of Polydore's entry on the origin of history, he leaves out the initial citation to Cicero and substitutes Polydore's argument for history's utility with his own. Whereas Polydore held up the reading of history as an efficient way to gain experience, or at least profit from others' experiences, Langley begins with a standard justification based on moral *exempla*:

Hystories of all other writynges be mooste commendable, because it infourmeth all sortes of people with notable examples of livyng, and doth excite noble men to ensue suche activitie in enterprises as they reade to have bene doone by their auncestours, and also discourageth & dehorteth wicked persons from attemptyng of any haynouse deede or cryme...<sup>107</sup>

While Langley deletes Polydore's first reference to Cicero, he greatly dilates the closing reference to *On the Orator* and in doing so obscures Polydore's injunction that historians write clean, accurate, clear, concise prose. Langley takes the reference to oratory and rhetoric and runs with it, closing out the entry on history with a strange digression on the need for rhetoricians to craft speeches that can be memorized, and the importance of pairing comely gestures with apt phrases. Langley transformed what had been a lapidary statement of Ciceronian prose stylistics into an out-of-place expostulation on public speaking. It's impossible to say whether Langley was intentionally or unwittingly distorting Polydore's claim, but the ultimate effect was to turn an epigram about history-writing into a paragraph about speech-making.

The *Anglica Historia* includes a fuller condemnation of Geoffrey of Monmouth's vain inventions in its first book, which covers the history of the British Isles up to the invasion of Julius

---

<sup>107</sup> *An abridgement of the notable woorke of Polidore Vergile...* (London, 1546), p. 19.

Caesar.<sup>108</sup> Indeed Polydore's *incipit* is meant to remind us of Caesar's *Gallic War*—England is divided into four parts, inhabited by the English, Welsh, Scots, and Cornish. We could read this as a rejection of the medieval chronicle tradition in favor of a classical model of brisk historical writing: Polydore in the proem to *Anglica Historia* explicitly condemns the medieval chronicle on stylistic grounds:

And latterly some men undertook to write almost day-by-day accounts. But they compiled annals in which both the arrangement and the style were so threadbare that they justly strike us, as they say, as food without seasoning.<sup>109</sup>

Polydore proceeds with a topographical description full of amusing details: paragraph sixteen opens with the straight-faced assertion “the chickens of Kent are the largest.”<sup>110</sup> A few paragraphs later, things get more serious when Polydore turns to British origins: “some other authors, who have a popular esteem which their care or accuracy in writing do not deserve, have for another origin for the nation.”<sup>111</sup>

Polydore singles out Geoffrey of Monmouth for the sin of writing a partisan history of England that seeks only to glorify the nation—Gildas and Sallust did much better when they upbraided their countrymen for their failings in religious observance and the conduct of war. Polydore in particular objects to the inclusion of legends with no real documentary basis:

But on the other hand, in our times a writer has come forth to excuse these faults in the Britons, manufacturing many silly fictions about them, and with his impudent vanity extolling them for their virtue far above the Macedonians and the Romans. This man is named Geoffrey, having the surname of Arthur because he writes much about Arthur taken from the fables of the ancient Britons and embroidered by himself, and passing it off as honest history by giving it the coloration of the Latin

---

<sup>108</sup> The textual history of Polydore's *Anglica Historia* is not simple. The earliest known version is a manuscript dating from 1512-3 which covers events up to that year; the first printed edition was published in Basle in 1534 and ended in the year 1509; a second edition from Basle spanning the same duration was printed in 1546; the final edition, published in Basle in 1555, the year of Polydore's death, brings the history up to the events of 1537. I use the bilingual hypertext version of the 1555 edition prepared by Dana F. Sutton of UC-Irvine (<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/polverg/>).

<sup>109</sup> *Anglica Historia*, 1.proem.

<sup>110</sup> *Maximae sunt gallinae Cantianae*. 1.16.

<sup>111</sup> *ibid*, 1.19.

language. Indeed with a greater boldness he has published very spurious prophecies of Merlin, supplying additions of his own invention when translating them into Latin, and passing them off as genuine and guaranteed by unshakable truth.<sup>112</sup>

Not so Polydore, “who writes what is written”. The weak historian, according to Polydore, succumbs to the temptation to excuse his country’s faults, amplify its virtues, and invent preposterous genealogies even going back to the gods. As we will see, Spenser’s chronicle scenes dwell on these historiographical dilemmas with a melancholy irony: poor would-be-king Arthur, a ghostly presence in traditional British history whose role no one can quite agree on, reads a worm-eaten chronicle in the House of Alma but cannot manage to locate himself in its broken pages. Britomart loses herself in Merlin’s prophecies but falls into a ‘fitte’ before they reveal her own destiny.

The intellectual-historical account of the emerging Renaissance that treats it primarily as a war of recognizably modern ideas against ignorant superstitions has a long pedigree and remains very much with us: Stephen Greenblatt’s *The Swerve* (New York: Norton, 2012), full of heroic Renaissance humanists outsmarting medieval religious is an especially reductive recent iteration of this tradition. A competing account, one that emphasizes how movable type changed the material conditions of cultural life, is of more recent vintage but has an explanatory power of its own. When Elizabeth Eisenstein look at early modern astronomy through this lens, for instance, she found that the spread of heliocentric theory depended as much on the ability to accurately reproduce large data sets as it did on philosophical argumentation. D. R. Woolf has made a similar move in his investigations of the declining medieval chronicle: what happens if we look at the chronicle not primarily as a way of thinking, but as a product that had a certain function in a literary marketplace?

---

<sup>112</sup> *At contra quidam nostris temporibus pro expiandis istis Britonum maculis scriptor emersit, ridicula de eisdem figmenta contexens, eosque longe supra virtutem Macedonum et Romanorum impudenti vanitate attollens. Gaufridus hic est dictus, cognomine Arthurus, pro eo quod multa de Artuuro ex priscis Britonum pigmentis sumpta, et ab se aucta, per superductum Latini sermonis colorem honesto historiae nomine obtexit. Quinetiam maiore ausu cuiusdam Merlini divinationes falsissimas, quibus utique de suo plurimum addidit dum eas in Latinum transferret, tanquam approbatas et immobili veritate subnixas prophetias vulgavit. ibid, 1.19.*

As Woolf puts it, “the chronicle [was] not simply a literary and methodological but also a commercial dinosaur,”<sup>113</sup> an all-purpose historical genre that did none of its jobs very well and was quickly replaced with more specialized forms.

Woolf’s print-market-functionalism thesis forces us to ask what Tudor histories were *for*, and he traces how the loose, baggy monster of the chronicle fragmented into other genres along the fault lines of use. The ‘day-to-day’ of the medieval chronicle found a new home in newsbooks; sacred chronology and non-narrative antiquarian description split apart; biographical passages secular and hagiographic were expanded and published in their own right.<sup>114</sup> But we don’t have to treat the two theories of the death of the chronicle—‘humanism’ and print—as mutually exclusive. A more specific array of genres available to the humanist historiographer prompted more precise theorizing on history’s several purposes.

Thomas Blundeville’s *The true order and methode of wryting and reading Hystories* (London, 1574), dedicated to the Earl of Leicester, is an excellent example of a manifesto for the purposeful, ‘politick history’ that statesmen turned to for counsel in the latter half of the sixteenth century—it was also another import from Italy, most of Blundeville’s arguments being distilled from the Venetian Platonist Franciscus Patricius’ *Della historia dieci dialogi* (Venice, 1560). Blundeville makes a few half-hearted gestures toward the morally edifying properties of historical narrative, but most of his short book is spent on practical problems of statecraft. Blundeville systematically divides the content of historical narratives into categories or factors that weigh on a general or prince facing what the second President Bush would call ‘decision points’: “Foure things would be disparsed through the history, that is to saye, the trade of lyfe, the publique renewses, the force, & the manner of gouvernement.” Blundeville goes on to lay out how knowledge of these four things is necessary for the reader to put himself in the place of the historical personage and imagine himself

---

<sup>113</sup> *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge UP, 2000), p. 8.

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*, p. 27.

making similar choices in different circumstances or different choices in similar circumstances. In the section “of the duty and office of hystoriographers” Blundeville instructs the writer of history to outline carefully the causes of events and take great pains to portray temporality accurately so that politick readers can create the most realistic simulations possible. Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton have reconstructed one of these scenes of politick reading on the basis of Gabriel Harvey’s annotations of Livy—he took Sir Philip Sidney through the text and debated specific scenarios as a way of preparing Sidney for a diplomatic mission to the Low Countries.<sup>115</sup>

Yet, at the end of the sixteenth century, the idea that classical learning could be of practical use to politicians and monarchs was being treated with skepticism by some learned Englishmen. Robert Devereux, the second Earl of Essex, blamed his Latin teacher for his traitorous rebellion. After he had been found guilty at trial in February, 1601, he turned on his ‘discourser’, Henry Cuffe, whose reading of Lucan had apparently prompted Essex to revolt against his Queen, exclaiming: “you were the principall man that moved me to this perfidiousnesse.”<sup>116</sup> Remarking on this incident years later, Isaac Casaubon reminded himself of the folly of the “book-trained politician (the *politicus e libro*).”<sup>117</sup> Perhaps Casaubon took his cue from Leon Battista Alberti, who, over a century earlier, had warned of the classics’ inapplicability to statecraft in his *The Advantages and Disadvantages of Letters*.<sup>118</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> “‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy.” *Past and Present* 0.129 (Nov. 1990), pp. 30-78.

<sup>116</sup> Camden, William. *The historie of the life and reigne of the most renowned and victorious Princesse Elizabeth, late Queene of England*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Benjamin Fisher, 1630. p. 187.

<sup>117</sup> This according to the Casaubon miscellany quoted in Jardine & Grafton, p. 75.

<sup>118</sup> “I cannot persuade myself that the republic needs book learning in its magistrates more than the practical knowledge gained by long experience and practice. I think I should clarify this point briefly here. I have noticed that, in fact, the government rarely holds meetings to discuss the heavens and planets, and never to discuss the nature of the gods, procreation, and the soul.” *The Use and Abuse of Books*. trans. Renee Neu Watkins. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1999. p. 48.

This, then, is the context surrounding Spenser's chronicle scenes in Books II and III of the *Faerie Queene*: a humanist-led turn away from fabulous legends and toward documentary evidence and a renewed emphasis on rhetorical structure and literary eloquence, both taking place amid a diversifying print market of specialized genres and a general debate about the utility of history-reading for political leaders. Finding the right books—and reading them for the right reasons—was never as simple for Spenser and his contemporaries as John Milton would have liked. In what follows I will look first at Spenser's most programmatic theory of the interpretation of the passage of time in his Cantos of Mutabilitie; then we will see how well Spenser's history readers, Arthur and Guyon in Book II, and Britomart in Book III, make sense of their chronicles.

The Cantos of Mutabilitie have a somewhat obscure relation to the rest of the *Faerie Queene*: they were discovered late and not published until 1609, a decade after Spenser's death; their header, possibly written by Gabriel Harvey, frames them as the only surviving fragment—cantos six and seven—of a seventh book about the virtue of constancy; two final stanzas are assigned to a last unfinished canto, but could just as easily conclude VII.vii.<sup>119</sup> Thematically, too, Spenser's meditations on mutabilitie are a departure from the *Faerie Queene* proper, especially the epic poem's obsessive historical consciousness. Jane Grogan notes that the “Mutabilitie Cantos are just the most persistent and thoughtful of Spenser's works in their pursuit of historical futures—and even, perhaps, futures beyond history.”<sup>120</sup> Spenser's longed-for perspective on history from an apocalyptic future is what interests me in these cantos—the notion that, as fallen readers trapped in the mutable, sublunary sphere, we cannot truly perceive the order underlying history's ceaseless change, which will only be revealed at the last trumpet.

---

<sup>119</sup> Andrew Zurcher, confirming J.C. Smith's 1909 hunch, presents persuasive textual evidence that the cantos of mutabilitie were ‘parcell-poetry’ circulating independently of *FQ* in the years before and after Spenser's death, and were included in the 1609 folio by a confused and cautious Matthew Lownes in “The Printing of the *Cantos of Mutabilitie* in 1609” in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser's Mutabilitie Cantos*, ed. Jane Grogan. New York: Manchester UP, 2010. pp. 40-60.

<sup>120</sup> “Introduction.” *ibid*, p. 3.



In the first stanza Spenser appeals to the obvious—the ubiquity of change—while also associating mutability with destruction and decay (rather than birth and growth):

What man that sees the ever-whirling wheele  
Of *Change*, the which all mortall things doth sway,  
But that therby doth find, and plainly feele,  
How *MUTABILITY* in them doth play  
Her cruell sports, to many mens decay?  
Which that to all may better yet appeare,  
I will rehearse that whylome I heard say,  
How she at first her selfe began to reare,  
Gainst all the Gods, and th'empire sought from them to beare.<sup>121</sup>

Although all men see, find, and plainly feel Mutabilitie's cruel sports, Spenser sets out to demonstrate, we should remember, overwhelming evidence of her sway over all mortal things. Though we encounter Jove's arguments of identity, ideal form, and substance that counter Mutabilitie's claims of Heraclitean flux, and Nature, as judge, offers her opinion from the bench that even relentless change is bound by order, that objects keep their states as they change and perfect themselves, we should not forget that Spenser has told us that he writes these cantos to make it appear better to all that Mutabilitie has absolute sovereignty over earthly existence. Mutabilitie calls the pageant of witnesses and puts on the most compelling proof; it seems that Jove wins on a technicality, a decision that even Spenser himself seems to find unconvincing.

Mutabilitie is cruel and makes a sport of men's decay. Odd, then, that most of the testimony put forth on Mutabilitie's behalf in her suit over the title to heaven's imperial throne—held by Jove, who usurped it from the Titans—does not have anything to do with the ruin and human suffering that time makes, but instead is couched in the familiar, even reassuring terms of nature's cyclical time: seasons, months, hours, planetary orbits. In the fifth stanza we hear of the prehistory of Mutabilitie's attempt to enlarge her dominion, when she “did pervert” “all which Nature had establisht first” and her “statutes burst”.<sup>122</sup> That is one way to link the rhythm of seasonal change to

---

<sup>121</sup> *FQ*, VII.6.1.

<sup>122</sup> VII.6.5.

man's decay: the seasons must have been part of the curse on mankind that followed them from the Garden of Eden, when God decreed that the ground would be cursed, that only toil would produce food, and when he fashioned Adam and Eve garments, not only because their sinfulness called for modesty, but because they now had need of shelter from harsher elements.<sup>123</sup> The seasons and constellations by which people mark time itself are features of our fall that keep us blind to what is eternal and unchanging.

Despite Mutabilitie's ingenious arguments that even the heavens themselves are subject to change—she points out troubling solar eclipses and Mercury's well-known eccentricity—Nature finds in Jove's favor:

They are not changed from their first estate;  
But by their change their being doe dilate:  
And turning to themselves at length againe,  
Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate.<sup>124</sup>

Things do not change, but their change dilates their being, “whatever *dilate* means, and whatever *being* means,” asks Gordon Teskey.<sup>125</sup> These are mysterious pronouncements that seem rooted in a metaphysics or theology that Nature leaves unspoken for the most part, though many critics have detected the tropes of the fifteenth chapter of S. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, in which he explains bodily death and spiritual resurrection. “We will all be changed,” Paul writes, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet... for this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”<sup>126</sup> Nature seems to point us to the way that what is changeable and mutable on earth will be raised to be what is divinely permanent at the last

---

<sup>123</sup> Genesis 3:17-21. This was also Milton's account of the origin of seasons: “... Such was their song, / While the Creator calling forth by name / His mighty angels gave them several charge, / As sorted best with present things. The sun / Had first his precept so to move, so shine, / As might affect the earth with cold and heat / Scarce tolerable, and from the north to call / Decrepit winter, from the south to bring / Solstitial summer's heat...” (*Paradise Lost* 10.648-56).

<sup>124</sup> *FQ* VII.vii.58.

<sup>125</sup> “Night thoughts on Mutability” in Grogan, p. 30.

<sup>126</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51-3.

judgment: she does not specify how earthly change, the legacy of the fall, is ordered during our mortal lives.

In the final part of her verdict, Nature makes an even more explicit reference to the end times: “But time shall come that all shall changed bee, / And from thenceforth, none no more change shall see.”<sup>127</sup> Presumably this is supposed to console the men who suffer Mutabilitie’s cruel sports—there will come a time when all movement ceases, when everything and everyone finds rest. From this fixed point the divine presence can survey the universe and see all bodies in their rightful positions: only from the anagogic point of view does anything really make any sense at all. Spenser’s concern with making sure that men see Mutabilitie’s dominion over the earth, his interest in looking at time’s passage on different scales, and his struggle to read the meanings of decay and destruction all point to an ambiguity in his epic’s very last line. Befitting his end, Spenser turns his thoughts to God and “all things firmly stayd”, to the “pillours of Eternity” and the heavenly Jerusalem at the end of time. He prays “O that great Sabbaoth God, graunt me that Sabaoths sight.”<sup>128</sup> A. C. Hamilton glosses the line thusly: “S. prays for the sight of the Lord on the last day: both for the sight of the host, the body of the redeemed, and for his place of rest after the six ays of creating the six book of the *FQ*.” I think that while Spenser is certainly praying for his own salvation, he is asking for “Sabaoths sight” not only in the sense of seeing this glorious miracle, but also in the sense of “the vision/perspective/sight belonging to the Sabaoth/end times”, that is, Spenser yearns to see history from outside its confusing, blinding flux.

My reading of the *Faerie Queene*’s last line highlights the incompleteness, even the fated incompleteness of Spenser’s great work—at the end, his survey of Britain’s past, present, and future remains unresolved, imperfect. He can only beg God for understanding, and wait for the fullness of time to make all things visible. The reader of history—the epic poet, too—labors under the curse of

---

<sup>127</sup> *FQ* VII.vii.59.

<sup>128</sup> VII.viii.2.

Adam, toiling painfully among corrupted materials for his food, always suffering the reversals wrought by Mutabilitie, never holding on to what he has grasped from season to season. Despite Nature's decision that Olympian laws govern the motion of the heavens and in some unknowable way the birth and death of mortal things under the moon, human nature itself hides this order from us. Ultimately, there can be no true histories written or rightly read; the most we can hope for is an elusive glimpse of God's purpose in the random sufferings of mankind. With Spenser's theology of the unknowable order of history firmly in hand, we can now visit the more material and political realm of readers and books, kings and queens in their stacks grappling with the ruins of Time; Guyon, Arthur, and Britomart.

Rather than a philosophical-legal debate between sovereigns over the contest between identity and flux, we will examine a more humble, and anxious account of the chronicle that emphasizes its inapplicability, incompleteness, questionable political utility, and, above all, its unmanageability: the house of Alma's inner recesses, representing the intellect's foresight, judgment, and memory in Book II.ix-x.<sup>129</sup> The first chamber contains the melancholic Saturnalian prophet Phantastes, whose empty devices and idle fantasies are useless to Arthur and Guyon. The second room houses many paintings of magistrates, courts, tribunals, policies, and laws: an unnamed political counselor who has grown wise "through continuall practise and usage" occupies this room. Although the first chamber, which seemed frivolous and less pertinent to true wisdom, was described over four stanzas (49-52), Spenser tellingly only devotes two stanzas to policy before delving deeply into memory's archives.

Not only has Spenser divorced policy from memory, in some sense anticipating Casaubon's rejection of the *politicus e libro*, he also makes policy solely dependent on practice and usage, rather than any kind of book learning. Normally the policy counselor's responsibility for judgment of

---

<sup>129</sup> Davis, Walter R. "Alma, castle of." *The Spenser Encyclopedia*. Buffalo, NY: The University of Toronto Press, 1990.

present events, as opposed to the past, would explain his lack of Memory's books. However, we note that with the word "practice," which denotes the importance of prior experience, Spenser tells us that practical wisdom for the present inevitably relies upon the past. Spenser reveals the separation of policy and memory to be an arbitrary categorization that both impoverishes counsel and neglects history, leaving statesmen uninformed, unnamed, and inactive, and relegating historiographers to squalid, deteriorating libraries.

Spenser situates Eumnestes' chamber of memory, "th'hindmost rowme of three" (54.9), in the least accessible and least visited part of Alma's castle. Instead of a precisely furnished memory palace polished by frequent recollection, Arthur and Guyon find themselves in a study "ruinous and old" (55.1) with sagging walls, staffed by a decrepit, half-blind librarian who is also the oldest living human, Eumnestes, and his assistant, the little boy Anamnestes.<sup>130</sup> We quickly perceive a Platonic dualism structuring Spenser's scene of "infinite remembraunce": Eumnestes' active mind is concealed by his "feeble corse" (55.6); a youthful, perhaps illiterate boy who does not remember but only obeys enables the ancient historian's labor; most importantly, the ideal "immortal scrine" of Eumnestes' "incorrupted" memory (56.6-7) transcends the fallible, decaying, material books and scrolls "that were all worm-eaten, and full of canker holes" (57.9).

These opposing terms are difficult to disentangle, but persisting along this tack will alert us to the philosophical and material issues that constrained historiography in late sixteenth century England. Eumnestes has outlived Assaracus, Nestor and Methusalem: his memory and authority stretch backward to include the ancestors of the Trojans, the eldest Greek warrior in the *Iliad*, and the longest-lived patriarch from Genesis, encompassing the Roman, Greek, and Hebrew traditions. There is reason to doubt Eumnestes' mental fitness, however. Spenser claims that humanist study's

---

<sup>130</sup> In Greek, Eumnestes is "well-remembering" and Anamnestes means the "re-minder," corresponding to Aristotle's distinction between memory and recollection. The contents of Eumnestes' library, history (*Briton monuments*) and mythic epic (*Antiquitee of Faerie lond*), correspond to the muses Clio and Calliope, respectively (Barker, William W. "Memory." *The Spenser Encyclopedia*).

enervation of the body is counterbalanced by its animation of the mind: “Weake body well is chang’d for minds redoubled forse” (55.9), but we should question this mind/body distinction. To do this, we can recall one of Alberti’s vivid images of the over-worked young scholar:

Poor creatures, how exhausted, how listless they are, thanks to long hours of wearisome reading, lack of sleep, too much mental effort, too many deep concerns.<sup>131</sup>

Humanist scholarship exhausts the mind as well as the body, and indeed, Eumnestes shows the symptoms of mental fatigue. Seemingly paralytic, Eumnestes “in a chaire was sett,” whereupon he begins “tossing and turning [books] withouten end” (58.1-2), a man whose absent-minded “endlesse exercise” (59.2) causes him to constantly lose and misplace the books eventually retrieved by Anamnestes.

Eumnestes also seems to integrate the three methods of information storage familiar to Renaissance humanists: memory and oral recitation and manuscript scrolls and codices. Of these media, only Eumnestes’ memory is infallible, but it is silent, and inaccessible by Arthur and Guyon. The knights must approach history not through the mentally ordered comprehensive wisdom of Eumnestes, the ultimate historian, but in his worm-chewed, lacunae-riddled chronicles: the historiographer is only as useful as his material archive; early modern regimes cannot rely solely upon their counselors’ genius but must properly equip them. We cannot help but notice that Eumnestes’ pathetic reliance on his boy Anamnestes to fetch volumes would have been eased if his study had a bookwheel, invented by Agostino Ramelli in 1588, and that his endless tossing and turning of pages might have been expedited by the compilation of a topically indexed commonplace book. Not only does Eumnestes drown in an unmanageable sea of books, the sea is conspicuously medieval, anachronistic, and obsolete.

As noted before, the chronicles the knights consult—Arthur takes up *Briton monuments* and Guyon *The Antiquitee of faery lond*—prove inscrutable, incomplete, and perhaps even fictitious. Jerry

---

<sup>131</sup> *The Use and Abuse of Books*. p. 18.

Leath Mills has argued that Arthur's reading of *Briton monuments* should be understood as an example of the 'conventional' historical reading that encouraged prudence in princes, though he puts aside the deep mistrust early modern humanists felt toward the *politicus e libro*.<sup>132</sup> Mills works to prove that the four interregna that break dynastic succession in *Briton monuments* result directly and indirectly from God's punishment of sin with sterility and debilitation, not natural causes. Arthur is supposed to recognize this pattern and prudently avoid sin in his own reign. "In the chronicle, then," writes Mills, "there is an artfully achieved yet thoroughly conventional pattern of deferred retribution for sin."<sup>133</sup> But Mills omits a discussion of the most important political context of the poem's composition, the praise of Elizabeth by means of her Welsh, Tudor lineage: is Arthur supposed to learn from the chronicle, or is Elizabeth? In my reading, *Briton monuments*' destabilizing interregna and withering dynasties render the poem completely unsuitable for the praise of Elizabeth; only the abundant, fanciful and fertile golden age narrative of *The Antiquitee of Faery lond* can present a seamless, untroubled lineage and future of the Tudor dynasty.<sup>134</sup>

Just before Arthur reaches the point in *Briton monuments* that would tell of his own reign, the narrative abruptly breaks off in mid-sentence, without narrative closure or appropriate punctuation:

After him Uther, which *Pendragon* hight,  
 Succeeding There abruptly it did end,  
 Without full point, or other Censure right,  
 As if the rest some wicked hand did rend,  
 Or th'Author selfe could not as least attend  
 To finish it: that so untimely breach  
 The Prince him selfe halfe seemed to offend,  
 Yet secret pleasure did offence empeach,

---

<sup>132</sup> "Prudence, History, and the Prince in *The Faerie Queene*, Book II." *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 41.2 (Feb. 1978), pp. 83-101.

<sup>133</sup> Mills, 98.

<sup>134</sup> As Harry Berger writes, "Spenser places traditional material in historical perspective by quotation and revision: he depicts it as something old, separates those elements which are still valid from those which are inadequate or outmoded, and transforms it into something new." *Revisionary Play*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988. p. 38.

And wonder of antiquity long stopt his speach.<sup>135</sup>

Not only does *Briton monuments* lack the key piece of information that makes it relevant to its reader, but the cyclical process of dynastic dissipation and regeneration have transfixed Arthur. The book itself is supposed to contextualize Author's life but is defective, and if Arthur is supposed to interpret the events of the narrative, particularizing its archetypes to make them relevant to his life and suggest courses of action, he is instead silent, wondering, "ravisht with delight" (69.1). Likewise when Guyon finishes *The Antiquitee of Faery lond*, both knights are "beguyled" and forgetful of time (77.1, 4). The knights have not discerned the patterns of time, but are forgetful of it: they have been enthralled by another Spenserian fiction, a show that seems substantial and dynamic but only numbs and paralyzes.

"How brutish is it not to understand" (69.7) what one has inherited from and owes to the motherland, exclaims Arthur at the end of *Briton monuments*, though he himself does not understand. The word 'brutish' here has multiple valences: the literal meaning suggests that an ignorance of history signifies uncultured barbarity, but 'brutish' plays on Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas who murdered his parents<sup>136</sup> and founded Britain, implying that Arthur's current inability to recognize his own ancestors falls into a genealogical and national pattern established by Brutus. Finally, because of the Brutus pun, 'brutish' also connotes 'British,' that vague, muddy concept that became at once politically charged and discredited by scholars like Polydore Vergil and John Leland during the Tudor dynasty: to what extent has Spenser's nascent *ars historica* dismantled Britain's own political mythology?

How should the historiographer striving for position at court order his archive, if all of his books are fiction? Arthur and Guyon escape Eumnestes' overflowing archive to read intensively,

---

<sup>135</sup> *FQ* II.x.68.

<sup>136</sup> According to Geoffrey of Monmouth's version, Spenser's primary source for *Briton monuments*.



linearly, deeply in single books, according to Seneca's dictum in the second moral letter,<sup>137</sup> but their minds are still hypnotized, "beguiled," seduced, not enlightened. Spenser finds himself condemning Roman history to the dungeon and letting Eumnestes' misunderstood archive fall into ruin. At an historical moment when memory has been amputated from policy, the Tudors are sterile, and monarchs are distracted rather than instructed by the archive, is to be British not to understand?

Eighty years later, long after the political optimism that had occasioned *Areopagitica* had waned, John Milton, like Spenser, tried to find King Arthur in the ancient British archive. Milton begins Book III of his *History of Britain* by comparing the troubled politics of Civil War era England to the tribal conflicts of the post-Roman British, justifying the serious, sober attention he's about to give to a contested, problematic legendarium.<sup>138</sup> The main difficulty, Milton makes clear, is that Gildas, the only real source for this period, never mentions anyone named Arthur. The inventions by Geoffrey of Monmouth—that Ambrose was merely Arthur's general—and the interpolations in the laws of Edward the Confessor claiming that Arthur expelled the Saracens (who didn't exist yet) from Britain exceed the bounds of credulity and chronology. As Nicholas von Maltzahn demonstrates in his full-length treatment of the *History of Britain*, "Milton's *History* forbids any heroic interpretation of the Arthurian age".<sup>139</sup> As we will see in this dissertation's final chapter, Milton at this point in his career is trying to discover the laws that govern fallen human nature—in his *History* specifically this is the national character of the British people—and thus create the turbulence and chaos of political history, instead of preserving patriotic legends and national self-delusion.

---

<sup>137</sup> "You must linger among a limited number of master-thinkers, and digest their works, if you would derive ideas which shall win firm hold in your mind. Everywhere is nowhere." *Moral Epistles* 1.2.

<sup>138</sup> "... considering especially that the late Civil Broils had cast us into a condition not much unlike to what the *Britans* then were in, when the Imperial Jurisdiction departing hence left them to the sway of thir own Councils..." (p. 117).

<sup>139</sup> *Milton's History of Britain: Republican Historiography in the English Revolution*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991. p. 117.

### Chapter 3. Drayton's borders: songs of the Severn in *Poly-Olbion*

In his Cantos of Mutabilitie at the end of the *Faerie Queene*, Edmund Spenser despairs of the possibility of understanding the shape of history until he can view it from the divine perspective, from the point of view of eternity. This pessimism at the epic's end encompasses alienation from the favor of Queen Elizabeth and her court, the intractable failures of the Irish colonial project, and the troubling dynastic sterility that always underlaid the encomia of Elizabeth's virginity. When taken together, these pessimisms were an irresolvable obstacle for the completion of Spenser's great poem and his imagining of the translation of power—he could see no way out, and finally had to console himself with the otherworldly vision from the afterlife. Michael Drayton, on the other hand, pursued a less severely imperial path: *Poly-Olbion* does not revolve around a singular monarch and her past and future, but bestows dozens of thrones to physical features in the land itself, truly embracing the *poly\** of the title. Although *Poly-Olbion* finds occasion for the same prophecies and legends and treads over some of the same historical ground as the *Faerie Queene*, Drayton foregoes a single linear, teleological plot and scatters his chronicle across the land, subordinating history to topography. One of the most striking differences between the *Faerie Queene* and *Poly-Olbion* is that while Spenser mobilizes the matter of Britain for teleological purposes, to suggest the deep continuity of echoes and rhymes through history, in Drayton's poem the stubbornly persisting personalities of Britain's ancient past continue to voice their claims, blocking any sense of progress, historical movement toward an end, or continuity: *Poly-Olbion* is full of ruptures that never heal.

In *Poly-Olbion* geographical borders block and turn back against the flow of epic plot and British history. At its most basic structural level, Drayton's poem unfolds spatially rather than

temporally: each of the epic's Songs, equivalent to a Spenserian Canto or Miltonian Book, focuses on the description of a region, generally moving from one county to another. So the first Song describes Cornwall and then Devonshire in the southwest extremity of England, and the second Song moves eastward along the southern coast from Dorset to Hampshire. Instead of, for example, presenting a linear history of the Norman Conquest, Drayton calls up individual anecdotes from that war as they relate to the geography under his purview in any given Song, ignoring chronology. Slicing up the Norman Conquest and rearranging its episodes topographically would make a demanding and confusing epic alone, but Drayton also intersperses incidents from Anglo-Saxon chronicles and even more dim legends from the Trojan-British mythos. The result is nearly unreadable and almost unpublishable.<sup>140</sup> Formally, then, the borders of each Song in *Poly-Olbion* proscribe any narrative momentum or easily grasped endpoint (goal, *telos*, τέλος) in history, especially when that endpoint is the political and cultural unity of the British isles.

The hybrid topographical-historical form of his epic allows Drayton the chance to give voice to dissidents, the conquered, marginalized people, and the losers of history—many of whose stories survive only in the physical landscape of Britain—in a way that enriches his island poem rather than

---

<sup>140</sup> Judging from the paratexts in the 1613 printing of the first part of the epic, *Poly-Olbion* had a rocky reception. In the dedicatory letter to Henry, Prince of Wales, Drayton mentions the “envie” the poem has already found in its birth. In his defensive preface “To the Generall Reader”, Drayton is only willing to admit that his “unusuall tract may perhaps seeme difficult, to the female Sex”, but insists that in the case of a reader’s confusion or exasperation “the fault proceeds from thy idlennesse, not from any wante in my industrie.” Still, Drayton seems to realize that *Poly-Olbion* is a tough read, a slog through a pathless wilderness, and he begrudgingly points the reader to “three especiall helps” for navigating it: the Arguments at the beginning of each Song which offer an abstract of what follows, the Maps illustrating each river, mountain, and other site mentioned in the Song, and Selden’s notes following each Song, which “explaine every hard matter of history”. Apart from the inherent strangeness of *Poly-Olbion*’s experimental form and the obscurity of its matter, Drayton also identifies another reason why readers greeted his epic with less than enthusiasm: changing literary fashions at court where witty private verses on current events circulated in manuscript were all the rage. Drayton writes: “In publishing this Essay of my Poeme, there is this great disadvantage against me; that it commeth out at this time, when Verses are wholly deduc’t to Chambers, and nothing esteem’d in this lunatique Age, but what is kept in Cabinets, and must only pass by Transcription; In such a season, when the Idle Humerous world must heare of nothing, that either savors of Antiquity, or may awake it to seeke after more, then dull and slothfull ignorance may easily reach unto...”

derails it. At a closer level of analysis, we can still see borders functioning to halt, disturb, and block epic teleological progress: the character of the river-queen Severn/Sabrina lodges her complaints against the English encroaching into Welsh-British lands. The slow unification of the British islands under the Tudors and then Stuarts is one of *Poly-Olbion*'s most important subtexts, but Drayton gives a compelling voice to the Severn, who never forgets the old borders separating the Britons and English. Any imperial expansionist project latent in *Poly-Olbion* doubles back on itself, questioning the legitimacy of victors, recalling abolished rights and obsolete names. For each Aeneas Drayton lauds, we hear Dido's anguished counterpoint.

Richard Helgerson's final book, *A Sonnet from Carthage*, explores the double vision of conqueror and conquered in the imperialist vernacular poetry of the Renaissance in a different context, but his model inspires me here.<sup>141</sup> Garcilaso's sonnet to his friend Boscán on the recapture of Tunis by Charles V begins with a modified Vergilian allusion to "the arms and fury of Mars" (*las armas y el furor de Marte*) and sees in Charles' victory a revival of Roman imperial glory, particularly the Third Punic War, which ended with Carthage's notorious obliteration in fire and salt. Yet by the end of the sonnet, Garcilaso has in mind a different Rome-Carthage connection, an earlier one, and he inhabits Dido's persona—the poem finishes not in a ceremonial triumph but in heartsickness, regret, and longing: "and in tears and ashes I am undone" (*y en llanto y en ceniza me desbago*).

Helgerson wrote a series of short chapters exploring different facets of Garcilaso's sonnet, a tiny, jewel-like emblem for the whole movement of 'new poetry'—classicizing vernacular poetry that would give the languages of early modern Europe the same elegance and dignity of Latin, thereby justifying the regimes' claim to empire—including place, homosocial collaboration, erotic 'undoing', the 'Italian art' (whether of arms or verse), and martial fury. And many of Helgerson's findings pertain to my reading of the Severn in Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, an elegiac, Dido-like figure who laments

---

<sup>141</sup> Helgerson's full title is *A Sonnet From Carthage: Garcilaso de la Vega and the New Poetry of Sixteenth-Century Europe*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.

her lost status as the border between England and Wales and curses the humiliating Saxon encroachment on her lands. Here is Helgerson on place: “Thus for Garcilaso to insist on being in Carthage, to insist that Carthage is his *aquí* [‘here’], is to identify not with empire but rather with places of which empire leaves only the name.”<sup>142</sup> Drayton, the great lover of toponyms, not only lists the names of rivers and hills and dales but tries to recover their older, original British names, and tells the stories of how they got their names—the origin of the Severn in ‘Sabrina’ forms a crux for my interpretation of the Severn as a character in this chapter.

*A Sonnet from Carthage* overflows with wise observations and deep insights about the entangled drives that animate the poetry of the European Renaissance; I can only consider one more here, in Helgerson’s chapter on *me desbago* (“I am undone”), where he writes about “the revelation of empire’s emptiness, poetry’s longing to express darker passions, the need for an abandoned woman to inhabit, epic’s quest for its abandoned other, the necessary authentication of heroic grief...”<sup>143</sup> This passage, for me, sketches the role that the Severn plays in *Poly-Olbion*: a virgin girl born from an illegitimate, forbidden passion, who was murdered in a familial-dynastic feud and transformed into a river, queenly but dispossessed, singing her grief and calling her tributaries and hills in the Welsh borderlands to account for having lost her lands. The Severn tells a story where the English-Welsh border is not natural, eternal, and handed down from time immemorial but where it is fought over again and again, bloodily contested and violently enforced by a series of invaders, constantly redrawn toward the west. The Severn’s songs in *Poly-Olbion* are not the first place where Drayton writes about the relationship between peoples, language, empire, borders, and poetry’s (in)ability to transcend them—these problematics are almost unavoidable for his thinking about British diversity and potential unity.

---

<sup>142</sup> p. 40. The lines Helgerson glosses are the first half of the sextet: “Here, where the Roman conflagration, where fire and licentious flame left only the name of Carthage...” (*Aquí donde el romano encendimiento, / dond’ el fuego y la llama licenciosa / solo el nombre dexaron a Cartago...*).

<sup>143</sup> *ibid.* p. 54.

Before wading into the figure of the Severn, we should look at one of Drayton's sonnets, that, like that of Garcilaso, begins with imperial ambition but ends in isolated erotic grief. In this sonnet Drayton gives us the first of several historical models narrating linguistic and political change that I will discuss in this chapter. In *Idea* 25 the speaker's overweening poetic ambition redounds back toward Britain when his English verse fails to penetrate foreign lands, and instead exercises its imperial powers on the home islands, assimilating Scots and Gaelic others and pacifying political rebels. The frontispiece to *Poly-Olbion* presents a much less frustrated and contingent model for British unity: the island is figured as a woman, Britannia, who entertains suitor-conquerors (Trojan-British, Anglo-Saxon, Dane, Norman) in succession and substitutes her old lovers with new ones. But in Book 5, during one of *Poly-Olbion's* stately set-pieces, the river Severn constructs an elaborate horticultural metaphor whereby invading peoples do not simply replace their predecessors but are grafted onto them, and the later Tudor and Stuart monarchs become something like exotic, artificially-pollinated hybrid strains. These images and metaphors all have in common the project underlying Drayton's epic, the attempt to excavate and discover a natural, inevitable progression toward the *telos* of British history—political and cultural unity. True to its name, *Poly-Olbion* delineates this history in multiple shapes, turning back and contradicting itself, always maintaining an ironic distance from any singular historiography.

In *Idea*, Drayton's collection of sonnets that he revised for inclusion in his *Poems* of 1619, we read of remedies for lovesickness, complaints addressed To Despaire, and mistresses who fail to appreciate being immortalized in fourteeners. But then the question of Britain erupts seemingly from nowhere. On its face, sonnet 25 employs a familiar motif of the potency of love lyric, which alone can preserve what otherwise would decay, change hearts, and bring fame:

O, why should Nature niggardly restraine!  
 That Foraine Nations rellish not our Tongue,  
 Else should my Lines glide on the Waves of *Rhene*,  
 And crowne the *Piren's* with my living Song:  
 But bounded thus, to *Scotland* get you forth,

Thence take you Wing unto the *Orcaes*,  
 There let my Verse get glory in the North,  
 Making my Sighes to thaw the Frozen Seas;  
 And let the *Bards* within that *Irish* Ile,  
 To whom my Muse with fierie Wings shall passe,  
 Call backe the stiffe-neck'd Rebels from Exile,  
 And mollifie the slaught'ring *Galliglasse*,  
     And when my flowing Numbers they rehearse,  
     Let Wolves and Beares be charmed with my Verse.<sup>144</sup>

The language of *Poly-Olbion*—the mobile Muse who flies from county to county coaxing bodies of water into lyric contests, the curious preoccupation with naming rivers and mountains, and the Druidic bard<sup>145</sup>—interrupts Drayton's complaints about his poetry's unpopularity. Drayton turns from imagining fame on the European continent to consoling himself with British geography, trading the Rhine and the Pyrenees for Scotland, the Orkneys, and Ireland. Strikingly, there is no mention of England, or London, where Drayton published his poems—and, we should note, this sonnet emphasizes the 'Tongue', 'living Song', and 'Sighes' of orally recited verse rather than the permanence of the printed page. Drayton thematizes Britain, and the 'foraine nations' within the archipelago: this sonnet becomes a poem about borders political and linguistic, how they are established and dissolved.

In the first line, Drayton suggests that 'Nature' has been stingy with the population and distribution of native English speakers and thus the audience for Drayton's poems: perhaps because of England's peripheral location, or the backwardness of its culture, or its relatively undeveloped economy, other European nations do not relish the English language. Just as 'Nature' has

---

<sup>144</sup>*Poems*. London: William Stansby, 1619. p. 261.

<sup>145</sup> Geoffrey Hiller has explained how Drayton constructed a composite poet-archetype from the Druid and bard, and their relation to one another (Druids were the ancient British lawgivers and priests; the bards versified and performed their wisdom and 'mysteries') in his "'Sacred Bards' and 'Wise Druides': Drayton and His Archetype of the Poet" (*ELH* 51.1 [Spring 1984], pp. 1-15). Meanwhile John E. Curran, Jr., has complicated this viewpoint by exploring Drayton's ambivalent attitude toward the Druids and bards, who stand as emblems of ancient British history and culture but whose oral verse and lack of texts is largely responsible for the loss of that history and culture, in his "The History Never Written: Bards, Druids, and the Problem of Antiquarianism in *Poly-Olbion*" (*Renaissance Quarterly* 51.2 [Summer 1998], pp. 498-525).

presumably established geographic boundaries like the Rhine river, the frontier of the Roman Empire, and the Pyrenees between France and Spain, so she has also marked differences between peoples with language. The reader of sonnet 25 might wonder whether Scotland and Ireland truly form an audience as ‘natural’ as Drayton implies; after all, like Caesar, his Verse drives into the northern reaches of Britain to ‘get glory’, which sounds innocent enough until one reaches the Irish rebels in the third quatrain, whereupon the phrase takes a martial hue. It is unclear whether the Irish bards Drayton enlists to rehearse his numbers translate them into Gaelic—on the one hand, Drayton seems to include Ireland in the bounded set of places that relish his Tongue, but on the other hand, his use of the loanword *Galliglasse*, from Gaelic *gall-óglách* (‘foreign fighter’), to designate the rebels seems to mark them as linguistically Other—but Drayton certainly gives them the responsibility to quash revolt.<sup>146</sup>

The initial quatrain laments the Nature-ordained provincialism of English verse; the second quatrain looks to Scotland for a nearby, yet foreign audience; and the third quatrain puts Drayton’s sonnets to work suppressing the Irish rebellion. Drayton has moved from a paradigm of foreignness and linguistic difference that is natural and immutable—nothing to be done about it—to a second model in which poetry ends armed conflict by winning the hearts of political actors, somehow suppressing national difference so that the polity of Britain becomes congruent with the geography of the British islands. Are foreigners immune to the charms of English poetry or can it be used to bring them under English domination? It depends on where they happen to live. By the final couplet, all linguistic differences—including the faculty of language itself—have been forgotten: like Orpheus, the Irish bards subdue fierce animals with their voices. What are we to make of this poem’s progress, where at the beginning of the sonnet, Europeans could not understand English verse, but by the end of the poem, even bears and wolves do? Do we read the final couplet as a kind of magical *deus ex machina*—never mind what the Maenads eventually do to Orpheus—or as a

---

<sup>146</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd ed.



considered answer to the question Drayton has posed about the translatability of poetic forms? If the latter, then do we read the charming of bears and wolves as the supernatural-international triumph of Drayton's verse or as the reaffirmation of the connection between a particular kind of poetry—bardic song—and a particular place—an Irish wilderness?<sup>147</sup>

As we will see, the songs of *Poly-Olbion* often turn on these same questions and contradictions: sometimes political institutions and order are seen to be embedded in the very landscape, streams paying tribute to rivers and hills to mountains, while at other times what counts is the movement of peoples, chieftains seizing territory and nations forged by the will to power.<sup>148</sup> The first topographical mode represents dynastic monarchy as natural and eternal, laying out relations of vassalage and patronage as systematically as John Speed's atlas *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine*; the second historiographical mode can barely keep up with the flux of warring tribes and their

---

<sup>147</sup> In the retelling of Orpheus' story at the end of Vergil's *Georgics* 4, we see Orpheus "charming tigers and drawing oaks with his song" (*mulcentem tigris et agentem carmine quercus* [4.510]) only after Orpheus, through his own impatience, has lost Eurydice to the underworld forever and isolated himself, forswearing love and marriage. Likewise in Ovid's version, we find Orpheus "... sitting amidst a crowded assembly of birds and of beasts" (*Tale nemus vates attraxerat inque ferarum / concilio medius turba volucrumque sedebat* [10.143-4]) in his depression, loneliness, and exile in the snow-covered mountains. The point is that if this couplet contains an Orphean allusion—and I suspect it does, because nothing in Caesar or Tacitus on Germanic/British religion refers to the Druids' power over animals—the positive aspects of the reference to the supernatural powers of song are tempered by the negative context of despair, sullen rejection of society, and retreat into a peripheral, northern waste.

<sup>148</sup> Andrew Hadfield has persuasively argued that while Edmund Spenser believed a drastic colonial policy could resolve Britain's internal contradictions, Michael Drayton was resigned to the chaos and "dangers, manifest and hidden in the landscape of the British isles, and the problems of a series of competing identities and races laying claim to the same territory". "Spenser, Drayton, and the Question of Britain". *The Review of English Studies* 51.204 (Nov., 2000), pp. 582-99.

customs—it often falls to John Selden’s annotations to sift ‘fact’ from ‘fiction’ and sketch the boundaries of what can be known from documentary sources.<sup>149</sup>

If Ireland’s rebels and bards actively resist the English, the Welsh Britons, long since overcome, still register their otherness in their language, particularly in their toponyms.<sup>150</sup> The river Severn trills a long narrative of British resistance to foreign invasion and occupation in *Poly-Olbion*’s eighth song: the Welsh marches—the areas of Shropshire on the west side of the Severn—are the context here. The proud Severn counts it a disgrace that the Britons have allowed the English to surpass their natural border and usurp, and rename, Cambrian tributaries and hills. She remembers the ancient borders “when my Selfe, and my deere brother *Dee*, / By nature were the bounds first limited to thee.”<sup>151</sup> The history of the border, though, proves to be rather more complicated. There is also the matter of Offa’s Dyke (“... that Mound which *Mercian Offa* cast / To runne from North to South, athwart the *Cambrian* wast”),<sup>152</sup> the large earthwork presumably constructed by Offa, Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia (757-796 C.E.). The Severn remembers that after they crossed her banks, the Anglo-Saxons were for a time content to accept this barrier, Offa’s wall, as their border, but then the dyke

Could *England* not suffice, but that the stragling *Wye*,  
Which in the hart of *Wales* was some-time said to lye,

---

<sup>149</sup> Anne Lake Prescott’s trailblazing reading of Selden’s rhetorical and historiographical agenda, or lack thereof, in her “Marginal Discourse: Drayton’s Muse and Selden’s ‘Story’” (*Studies in Philology* 88.3 [Summer, 1991], pp. 307-28) seems to begin with an intention to show how Selden’s erudition was meant to reveal whatever truth might lie under Drayton’s myths, but she eventually admits that there are no clear distinctions: “Selden’s illustrations, then, are ambiguously related to the growing separation of story and history, of narrative fiction and narrative tell-troth. Bent on distinguishing fact from legend, he nevertheless willingly entangles us in anecdote, poetry, fable, and myth” (p. 325).

<sup>150</sup> Robert Ralston Crawley deftly summarizes Drayton’s reliance on Caradoc of Llancarvan’s *A Historie of Cambria* (c. 1156), englished by another Welshman, David Powel, in an edition of 1584, in his “Drayton’s Use of Welsh History” (*Studies in Philology* 22.2 [April 1925], pp. 234-55).

<sup>151</sup> *Poly-Olbion* 8.383-4. Blaeu’s 1645 map of the ancient Anglo-Saxon heptarchy shows the Welsh-English border along the river Severn.

<sup>152</sup> *Poly-Olbion* 8.11-2.

Now onely for her bound proud *England* did prefer.<sup>153</sup>

The Severn, a queen dispossessed, calls out the history of the encroaching English border, first over her western bank, then to the Anglo-Saxon fortifications, then to the river Wye. Stipperston hill points out, at the end of the song, that along with Welsh territory, customary place names were lost to the English language:

For though that envious Time injuriously have wroong  
From us those proper names did first to us belong,  
Yet for our Country still, stout Mountaines let us stand.<sup>154</sup>

When the Severn hails her tributaries by name, they respond and come to her; the mountains have lost their old names, but remember their allegiance and answer. The final couplet of *Idea 25* had Irish bards enchanting wild animals with Drayton's transported and translated Numbers, as if to suggest that despite the dream of a English-speaking archipelago dominated by London printers, local oral verse forms still resonated in out-of-the-way areas. In his short speech, Stipperston hill reaffirms this granular particularism, insisting on a British geographic logic that endures through and under eighth century walls and sixteenth century county lines.

The note that John Selden attaches to Drayton's line about Mercian Offa's Mound recapitulates, in somewhat greater detail, the history of the Welsh-English border and the textual reliability of the medieval chronicles from which this history was reconstructed.<sup>155</sup> Selden stresses the violent contest over the river Dee especially, repeating what he calls a 'superstitious judgement' that when the Dee shifted in its channel toward England or Wales, it meant success in the following year's battles for that side. Then Selden addresses Anglo-Saxon encroachment on the Britons from an angle different than the one that the river Severn herself took—he cites Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon* (a Latin chronicle from the 14th century, printed by Caxton in 1480) on King Harold's

---

<sup>153</sup> *Poly-Olbion* 8.13-5.

<sup>154</sup> *Poly-Olbion* 8.429-31.

<sup>155</sup> pp. 151-2 in *Works*, vol. 4 *Poly-Olbion*. ed. J. William Hebel. Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1933.

(d. 1066 at Hastings) law that any Welshman who crossed Offa's Dike with any kind of weapon should have his right hand cut off. Selden shows us the other side of the territorial violence that makes borders—where the Severn spoke of the loss of Welsh lands, and Stipperston of the loss of Welsh names, Selden points out the accompanying loss of Welsh freedom of movement. Not only have the English moved westward, erecting physical barriers and changing toponyms, but they have penned in the Britons, barring them from freely accessing eastern lands that were culturally and linguistically still British.

Drayton's epic is often at cross-purposes with itself; the frontispiece to *Poly-Olbion* by William Hole (fig. 1), for instance, represents a much more orderly and ultimately triumphant transition of power in the islands than does either Drayton's sonnet 25, *Poly-Olbion's* eighth song, or Selden's notes to it. Great Britaine personified sits in the center of the image under a triumphal arch, wearing a chorographical robe bedecked with trees, hills, cathedrals, and towns that leaves her left breast uncovered, and holding a cornucopia and a scepter fashioned with the familiar cornstalk motif.<sup>156</sup> Arranged around her on the arch itself are four figures representing the peoples who have conquered Britannia—the accompanying eighteen line poem “Upon the *Frontispice*” figures them as a succession of suitors—on the upper left, Aeneas' descendent Brute in a simple apron, followed by, on the upper right, Julius Caesar in Roman military dress and laurels, then, on the lower left, a Saxon

---

<sup>156</sup> For another appearance of the cornstalk in this context, see the frontispiece to John Dee's *Perfect Arte of Navigation* (London: John Daye, 1577), which shows a kneeling Britannia on the beach welcoming Queen Elizabeth I, arriving by ship, the cornstalk falling from Britannia's left hand; and also the frontispiece to William Camden's *Britannia* (trans. Philemon Holland. London: Bishop and Norton, 1610), where on the right side of the map of the islands Britannia can be seen standing, across from Neptune, holding the downward-facing stalks in her left hand.



Fig. 1. William Hole's frontispiece for Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612).

in a mail shirt with a pike, and then on the lower right, a Norman wearing plate armor and a crown topped by the Christian cross.<sup>157</sup>

Hole's frontispiece for *Poly-Olbion* includes significant differences from its proximate cartographical contemporary, namely the frontispiece to John Speed's *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine*, which most obviously lacks the central figure of the female Britannia herself, but instead includes a Dane, and whose Roman figure has the standard eagle on his shield rather than an image of Venus, as Drayton's engraver has it.<sup>158</sup> The largest figure in Speed's frontispiece, located at the top center, depicts "A Britaine", and attempts an antiquarian's accuracy: unkempt hair crowns the Briton's head, matching his long, drooping mustache; pointillist tattoos rather than clothes cover his body; his shield, meant to fit over his arm, is of primitive design.<sup>159</sup> Both frontispieces, then, promise to tell the fates of peoples warring over a specific territory, but it is the *Poly-Olbion* image that directs our attention to the landscape itself, the agency of its geographical features, and to a series of *relationships* between the *topos* and *demos*.

Drayton's poem on Hole's frontispiece, in its figuring of war as love—where in *Idea*, love often feels like war—narrates a linear series of suitors, each defeated by the next. But in the image

---

<sup>157</sup> Hole's engraving seems to set the Saxon and Norman in opposition to each other, but the English rivers in Song 4 who sing an encomium to Germanic triumphalism conflate these two peoples, explaining that Norman is derived from 'Northman': "... then which Fate never wrought / A fitter meane (say they) great *Germany* to grace; / To graft againe in one, two Remnants of her race" (4.396-8).

<sup>158</sup> London: William Hall, 1612. John Selden also annotated Drayton's poem explaining the frontispiece and helpfully recounts Julius Caesar's ancestry (the Julio-Claudians were thought to be descendants of Aeneas, himself the son of Venus). What remains unclear is why Julius Caesar would conquer the Britons, descended from Brute (at whom he stares across the page), great-grandson of Aeneas and therefore also the progeny of the love goddess, under the sign of their mutual ancestor, Venus.

<sup>159</sup> These details stem ultimately from Caesar's *Commentaries on the Gallic Wars* V.14: "All the Britons, indeed, dye themselves with woad, which produces a blue colour, and makes their appearance in battle more terrible. They wear long hair, and shave every part of the body save the head and the upper lip" (*Omnes vero se Britanni vitro inficiunt, quod caeruleum efficit colorem, atque hoc horridiores sunt in pugna aspectu; capilloque sunt promisso atque omni parte corporis rasa praeter caput et labrum superius*). trans. H. J. Edwards. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1917.

itself Britannia stares at the reader with a beguiling Mona Lisa smile, not favoring any one of the men surrounding her, and in the poem *Poly-Olbion*, it is the *poly*\* that we see over and over again, the multiple names, peoples, and narratives claiming each place simultaneously. It is not the case that the Romans replace the Britons, the Normans the Saxons, et cetera—Drayton’s Muses choir a more accretive process that never truly leaves the past behind. After all, in the eighth song, the Severn sings about the Anglo-Saxon oppression of the Britons, who, according to the frontispiece ekphrasis, should have already been defeated by the Romans and forgotten by Britannia herself. The obsessive lovers and complicated temporal narratives in Petrarch, Sidney, and Drayton’s sonnets tell us that such a romantic pentagon as formed by Britannia, Brute, Caesar, the Saxons, and the Normans could never be as easily resolved as it is in the frontispiece poem. But Britannia does not really work even as a remote, cruel Petrarchan beloved: she speaks from a *polymorphic* subject position, popping up unexpectedly in new forms with new stories. The iconography of abundance from land and sea—her cornucopia and the three large strings of pearls around her neck—and her semi-nudity ally Britannia instead with the nymph characters in Ovid, always being chased by lecherous gods and heroes but transforming into the landscape at just the right moment, and hanging around to voice counterfactual desires, repressed memories, and quiet protests. *Polytropos* Britannia.

The Severn herself has something of the Ovidian nymph about her, too, not least in the story of her name and origin. We are first introduced to her, of course, in the one of the most well-known episodes of the poem—the English-Welsh dispute over the Isle of Lundy in Song 4, and then we hear from her further when she pronounces her judgment, calls upon Neptune, and prophesies the coming of the ‘Stewards’ in Song 5.<sup>160</sup> It is in these songs that Drayton thematizes

---

<sup>160</sup> The isle of Lundy is not exactly within the Welsh borderlands and only Drayton’s poetic imagination places it within the orbit of the river Severn, who presides over the hearing. Lundy is really quite far out into the Bristol Channel and much closer to the Devon shore—twelve miles or so—than it is to Welsh Pembrokeshire, which is about twice the distance away to the north.

the ambiguous Welsh borderlands and the impossibility of demarcating a clear boundary most abundantly, with his characteristic *copia*; a polyphonic motet of voices with entwined melodic lines and balanced subtleties worthy of William Byrd. Listening closely to these songs should give us a richer appreciation of the way Drayton constructs the history of the English-Welsh border and the issues at stake. It is in Song 4 that we first hear the Severn's original name, Sabrina, after the legendary virgin who was drowned there and who now embodies the river and helps protect maidens' chastity,<sup>161</sup> but her stories are scattered throughout *Poly-Olbion* and it is to Song 6 that we must turn for the tale of Sabrina's metamorphosis into the Severn.

Drayton compresses the complicated Trojan-British internecine conflict that forms the background to the Severn's originary story into 48 lines or so. It begins with two Trojan companions in exile, Brute and Corineus. Brute was the first king of Britain; Corineus was the king of Cornwall (the overlapping jurisdictions and the question of borders are not directly addressed by Drayton here). After Brute's death, his kingdom is divided into three, with his firstborn son Lochrine assuming the throne of England. Lochrine marries Gwendolin, the daughter of Corineus, out of obligation and has a son Madan with her, but is actually in love with his mistress Elstred, who bears him a daughter, Sabrina. Madan is sent to Cornwall to live with his grandfather Corineus, but after Corineus dies, Lochrine casts out Gwendolin and marries Elstred. Gwendolin goes to Cornwall, raises an army with Madan, kills her former husband Lochrine, then confronts the helpless deposed queen Elstred and her daughter Sabrina:

Not so with blood suffic'd, immediately she sought  
The mother and the child: whose beautie when shee saw,

---

<sup>161</sup> The Sabrina tradition ultimately stems from Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*; William Camden cites Geoffrey, but recasts the story as a literary tradition—poetry—rather than an historical event. As late as Milton's *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle*, Sabrina says that "'tis my office best / to help insnared chastity" (*A Maske*, 908-9). Erin Murphy has given a fuller account of how Milton adapts the Sabrina figure from Geoffrey, Spenser, Camden, and Drayton toward a new anti-monarchical national politics in her "Sabrina and the Making of English History in *Poly-Olbion* and *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle*" (*Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 51.1 [Winter 2011], pp. 87-110).



Had not her hart been flint, had had the power to draw  
 A spring of pittying teares; when dropping liquid pearle,  
 Before the cruell Queene, the Ladie and the Girle  
 Upon their tender knees begg'd mercie. Woe for thee  
 Faire *Elstred*, that thou should'st thy fairer *Sabrina* see,  
 As shee should thee behold the prey to her sterne rage  
 Whom kingly *Lochrins* death suffic'd not to asswage:  
 Who from the bordring Cleeves thee with thy Mother cast  
 Into thy christned Flood, the whilst the Rocks aghast  
 Resounded with your shriekes; till in a deadlie dreame  
 Your corses were dissolv'd into that crystall streame,  
 Your curles to curled waves, which plainlie still appeare  
 The same in water now, that once in locks they were:  
 And, as you wont to clip each others neck before,  
 Yee now with liquid armes embrace the wandring shore.<sup>162</sup>

First we should observe that where William Hole's frontispiece and Drayton's poem for it presented the war over Britannia's territory/body—and we might add a third term, *chastity*—as a struggle between a sequence of external suitors and separate peoples (Trojan/British, Roman, Saxon, and Norman), Sabrina's story pushes the regional conflicts over southwest England and Wales much further back in time. Instead of eighth century Anglo-Saxon encroachment onto the Britons' land by way of Offa's Dike, Drayton now locates the beginning of violent contest over the Severn river in a civil war between second-generation Trojan-Britons. Yet in some ways the frontispiece's paradigm of war-as-romance-as-war still holds. King Lochrine, whose name Drayton uses in other places as a synonym for England,<sup>163</sup> waffles between his Cornish queen and his Germanic refugee princess Elstred, his sexual indecision eventually leading to civil strife and his death.

Drayton sees something gratuitous in Gwendolin's sterne rage against Elstred and her daughter Sabrina, because Lochrine is already dead and Gwendolin's son Madan sits on the throne unchallenged. Was it Elstred and Sabrina's fairness that provoked Gwendolin? Some of Drayton's watery words hint that Sabrina has already begun her metamorphosis into a river—the poet has added crucial details about Sabrina's power to draw springs and the “liquid pearle” dropped by

---

<sup>162</sup> *Poly-Olbion* 6.162-78.

<sup>163</sup> At 8.33 Drayton calls England “*Loëgria*” after Lochrine, for example.

Sabrina and her mother to Geoffrey of Monmouth's version of the story.<sup>164</sup> Sabrina can draw springs—like the river Severn hailing her tributaries—and drop pearls, which reminds us again of Britannia's pearly freshwater abundance motif in Hole's frontispiece. Perhaps Sabrina's precocious, uncanny command of waters and their sources can be read as a detail that frames her drowning as an Ovidian transformation, an act of mercy 'just in time', as the dissolving of her curls into curled waves suggests.<sup>165</sup> The other relevant interpretative frame here is the holy wells of Britain, often associated with virgin martyrdoms, especially the "Cambrian Spring" St. Winifred's Well, near the estuary of the 'Holy Dee', mentioned by Drayton in Song 10.<sup>166</sup> The river Severn that spoke as an embarrassed and embattled border between the Britons and the English in Song 8 reveals her origin as a casualty of intra-British dynastic struggle, and ultimately in the weird, watery powers of a virgin girl, a girl who has grown immeasurably in strength since her death.

The same Sabrina whom Drayton calls "miraculouslie faire, / ... absolutelie plac't in her Emperiall Chaire" at the beginning of Song 5, when she holds court over the Isle of Lundy's territorial dispute, was once a crying, illegitimate girl wantonly thrown from a cliff into a river.<sup>167</sup> In Sabrina's metamorphosis into the Severn, Drayton shows us how borders are reified, how imaginary lines become real: the chaos and gratuitous, arbitrary violence of intra-familial feuding and civil war at the heart of the English-Welsh border has been transmuted, miraculously, into an absolute and

---

<sup>164</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth simply reads "She ordered Elstridis and her daughter Habren to be thrown into the river which is now called the Severn" (*Jubet enim Estrildem et filiam ejus Sabren praecipitari in fluvium, qui nunc Sabrina dicitur.* [*Historia Regum Britanniae* 2.5]).

<sup>165</sup> Indeed, the Argument of 'The sixth Song' calls the transformation of Sabrina into the river Severn "Her Metamorphosis".

<sup>166</sup> "Yet to the sacred fount of *Winifred* gives place; / Of all the *Cambrian* Springs of such especial grace..." (*Poly-Olbion* 10. 139-40). But in his illustration to this line John Selden debunks the connection between Winifred's martyrdom and the spring by alleging that the connection was fabricated by superstitious and greedy monks who wanted a pilgrimage site to increase their revenues.

<sup>167</sup> *Poly-Olbion* 5.1-2.

imperial, even “God-like” reality.<sup>168</sup> Miraculous, absolute, imperial, God-like: these are the attributes of Sabrina enthroned as the Severn, and with Drayton we leave behind the tawdry, vicious backstory of Sabrina for the transcendent seat of authority of the Severn, sealed by a miracle that guarantees an absolute legitimacy to her rule, where she had been both illegitimate and usurped in her previous life.

I am reminded of Milton’s description of prelapsarian Adam as ‘godlike erect’ in Drayton’s phrase about the Severn’s “God-like self”: what seems to be meant by this descriptor is that Sabrina’s nature, by some transubstantiation, has been elevated to greater understanding, power, and dignity, that her mind apprehends the divine design and her will is congruent with it. Sabrina’s elevation warrants her absolutist queenship and her “Emperial” rule—which I take as referring to her command over other monarchs and realms—in a formula that would seem anachronistic if applied retroactively to the reign of Elizabeth I, but anticipates some of the claims made by the Stuarts and their apologists Robert Filmer and Méric Casaubon.<sup>169</sup> But we should be cautious in using Drayton’s apparently royalist rhetoric about Sabrina the Severn to make inferences about Drayton’s and *Poly-Olbion’s* political commitments—Richard Helgerson argued in a seminal essay that “good evidence suggests that among those most involved in the production and reception of these maps and chorographic descriptions a reading that gave value to the land at the expense of the

---

<sup>168</sup> Here I use the terms ‘real’ and ‘reality’ in the sense of ‘the fundamental metaphysical structures/forms/Ideas underlying the accidents that appear to our senses’—Raymond Williams gave us an influential capsule history of this concept in his entry for the word *realism* in *Keywords* pp. 257-62 (rev. ed. Oxford UP, 1983). I argue that Sabrina’s miraculous metamorphosis into the Severn is what makes the English-Welsh border ‘real’, rather than merely a temporary, ‘accidental’ boundary. The fundamental, underlying *reality* of the Severn-as-border explains why we keep hearing her songs of protest as the boundary *de jure* drifts westward over the centuries.

<sup>169</sup> I discuss Méric Casaubon’s ultra-royalist position on the prerogatives of kingship in chapter 4 of this dissertation, on Abraham Cowley’s epic  *Davideis*.

monarch came to dominate”.<sup>170</sup> For Drayton, then, geographical features have a reality and a sovereignty that human regimes can only imitate; indeed, the mountains and rivers of *Poly-Olbion* persist in their own demesnes with an *indifference*—in this name-filled nationalistic epic that never gets around to naming the current monarch—and resistance to the claims of Whitehall, ephemeral by comparison.

A further word should be said about Sabrina in Milton’s *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634, rev. 1637), commonly called *Comus*: she is the water nymph, summoned at the end of the play by the Attendant Spirit’s song, who alone is able to free the Lady from her stony fetters once Comus has been driven out. First, I observe in Sabrina’s backstory that Milton has amplified the Ovidian register of her transformation; whereas in Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia* and Drayton’s *Poly-Olbion*, Sabrina is killed by being thrown into the Severn, in Milton’s *Comus* Sabrina, “flying the mad pursuit” of her step-mother Guendolen (Gwendolin), “commended her fair innocence to the flood”.<sup>171</sup> Milton’s Sabrina commits suicide in a volitional act, and nymphs at the bottom of the Severn take her to their god Nereus who anoints Sabrina with Asphodil, changing her into an immortal being. Milton subtly rewrites the legend to place new emphasis on Sabrina’s virginity-preserving virtue, in keeping with her role in *Comus* “to help insnared chastity.”<sup>172</sup> The effect of Milton’s choice to transform Sabrina’s death from a murder into a willful escape ironically reverses Comus’s earlier Ovidian allusion, when he threatens with a wave of his wand to turn the Lady into a

---

<sup>170</sup> “The Land Speaks: Cartography, Chorography, and Subversion in Renaissance England”. *Representations* 16 (Autumn 1986), pp. 50-85. This quotation is from p. 65; Helgerson goes on to argue specifically that the way that Drayton breaks up and distributes his dynastic history across county descriptions—the peculiar *form* of *Poly-Olbion*—makes political power de-centered, regional, and parliament-leaning rather than London-based, monarchical, and absolutist. Toward the end of his article, Helgerson even finds in *Poly-Olbion* the first tentative expressions of a blood and soil sort of nationalism based on a particular people’s rootedness in the land, as opposed to a patriotism based on identifying a country with its monarch.

<sup>171</sup> *Comus* 829-31.

<sup>172</sup> *Comus* 909.

stone statue “or as *Daphne* was / Root-bound, that fled *Apollo*.”<sup>173</sup> Comus invoked Ovidian transformation as a description of how he would imprison the Lady, but instead Sabrina, who escaped through a transformation, will free the Lady.

Drayton’s Sabrina is a murdered illegitimate princess who later represents a violated border between England and Wales; Milton’s Sabrina is a virgin suicide who seems to evoke a different kind of patriotic feeling. Given that Milton’s masque was composed and performed for the Earl of Bridgewater, who had moved from London to the Shropshire borderlands to administer Wales for King Charles I, scholars have tried to identify Comus, the Lady and her brothers, and Sabrina with various political or national factions. In the early 20th century Clara Stevens matched Comus with vice at court, and Sabrina with the resurrected spirit of the English people necessary to free a disempowered virtue.<sup>174</sup> Stephen Orgel rightly placed the masque back into its domestic, familial context at Ludlow Castle, and noted that the dark, confusing woods and Comus’ fake pastoral hospitality chimed with Wales’ reputation as a backwater wilderness.<sup>175</sup> Orgel does not mention Sabrina, but asks readers to focus on what he calls the ‘peculiarly Miltonic element’ of the lost children trying to find their way home. Even if a reader strains to read Comus as some kind of Welsh danger and Sabrina as an English or authentically ‘British’ savior, what matters to me more than a forced political allegory is that there is no mention of Sabrina or the Severn as *border* in *Comus*—she might be English, or British, but there’s no sense of her as defeated Welsh or even as a boundary marking the border between England and Wales. In fact in the 17th century the border was no longer at the Severn due to the westward encroachment of the English, so Milton’s allusion to Sabrina’s former status would have been awkward and inappropriate given the masque’s venue. For our purposes, Milton has drained the difficult and intransigent protest politics from Drayton’s

---

<sup>173</sup> *Comus* 661-2.

<sup>174</sup> “Milton’s Nymph: Sabrina”. *The English Journal* 17.7 (Sep., 1928), pp. 571-5.

<sup>175</sup> “The Case for Comus.” *Representations* 81.1 (Winter 2003), pp. 31-45.

Sabrina and channeled her into a nonthreatening local curiosity divorced from the fraught borderlands history. In *Comus*, Sabrina is a magical virgin nymph, a kind of patron saint, not a queenly figure with jurisdictional claims over real British geography.

But in *Poly-Olbion*, the indelible existence of the Severn and Sabrina's hard-won throne allow her to voice a counterpoint of justice and right against the work of Time, and the notes of her song linger long after other kings' attempts to redraw the border have failed and been forgotten. Perhaps there was some irony in Selden's citation of Harold's law enforcing the English-Welsh border at Offa's Dike—Harold was soon dispatched by an arrow to the eye at Hastings, and so the Saxons were replaced by the Normans, the last figure in Hole's frontispiece for *Poly-Olbion*. Borders established by human labor and dictate come and go, while rivers outlast them all, though like the holy Dee they may shift in their courses. It should not necessarily surprise us that rivers have a longer life span allotted to them than the institutions of mankind, but what we should remark is that though the frontispiece depicts a *whole*, the personified Britannia, as the stable center round which churn the invasions and conquests of Britons, Romans, Saxons, and Normans, Drayton also makes the *part*, the river Severn, a symbol of partition, of border, and of unrealized indigenous claims just as permanent, wise, and long-lived.<sup>176</sup> Sabrina's story answers Drayton's charge of "Nature's niggardly restrain[t]" in *Idea* 25—far from being a passive territory (or female body) to be dominated by a violence-monopolizing state, Sabrina and therefore Britannia has a physical form that channels

---

<sup>176</sup> In other words, though in Hole's *Poly-Olbion* frontispiece the figure of Britannia symbolizes the aspirational political and unity of the archipelago, because, after all, she is one figure and not *poly*, the poem itself gives the same kind of rooted, all-seeing, beloved-to-many-suitors role to Sabrina/Severn, who symbolizes a legible and ineradicable border and marker of difference within Britannia her/herself. Not only is Britannia not a unified, present, coherent agent, but her most conspicuous components, her best features, so to speak, embody contradiction, anachronism (in the sense of singing lost histories and reviving obsolete claims), and intransigence, rather than the conformity, assimilation, and obedience a reader might expect from an epic proposing a Britain on behalf of monarchy. The title *Poly-Olbion* names a paradox—something like the reverse of the Latin motto on American currency: instead of *e pluribus unum* we have *ex uno plures*, 'out of one, many'—that is perhaps unrepresentable by the forms and conventions of the typical late Renaissance frontispiece, which in its architectural and perspectival *mise en page* reminds us of the monarch-centered masque, almost inevitably framing a central regal figure to which attention, if not tribute, must be paid.

and contains otherwise boundless imperial longing. And yet if Drayton called the forming and shaping work of natural boundaries ‘niggardly’ in *Idea* 25, at the beginning of *Poly-Olbion* 5 they are anointed, queenly, imperious and ‘emperiall’, unstoppably fecund and dripping with pearls.

The judgement on the issue of Lundy that Sabrina the Severn delivers to her gathered “neere and loved Nymphs” in Song 5 essays a different approach from the subdued murmuring of plaint and protest we heard in Song 8. Here, the Severn holds court and authority, and she arrives at her “doome” in a crowded throne room full of attendant streams and rivers eager to hear the matter resolved. It could be that the Severn’s addressing her fellow water nymphs, to her own, lends her oration a confidence and gravity that her lament for the depredations of the English lack. The Severn here also has taken on a different role than her Song 8 and 10 pose as a sadly neglected and ignored physical border, violated and abused by Trojan-Briton spite and English greed; in Song 5 the Severn attempts to resolve a border dispute, to in some sense erase a border, to smooth it over. In her Song 5 speech to the water nymphs about the jurisdiction of the isle of Lundy, Sabrina adopts the incorporating, assimilating, harmonizing mode of the *Poly-Olbion* frontispiece’s Britannia, and evokes the discourses of genealogy, history, and fate in an entirely different way than her other speeches. Let us listen:

... for thus the Powers reveale,  
That when the *Norman* Line in strength shall lastlie fail  
(Fate limiting the time) th’ancient *Britan* race  
Shall come againe to sit upon the soveraigne place.  
A branch sprung out of *Brute*, th’imperiall top shall get,  
Which grafted in the stock of great *Plantaginet*,  
The Stem shall strongly wax, as still the Trunk doth wither:  
That power which bare it thence, againe shall bring it thither  
By *Tudor*, with faire winds from little *Britaine* driven,  
To whom the goodlie Bay of *Milford* shall be given;  
As thy wise Prophets, *Wales*, fore-told his wisht arrive,  
And how *Lewellins* Line in him should doubly thrive.<sup>177</sup>

---

<sup>177</sup> *Poly-Olbion* 5.45-56.

The Severn, after praising the patriotism and eloquence of the arguments made by the Britons and English, begins her speech proper by setting up an extended metaphor, an analogy between the slow, centuries-long fusion of warring British houses and the merging of the rival claims to Lundy (and the metaphor within the metaphor compares this genealogical entanglement with horticultural grafting, a figure of speech to which we shall return). The phrasing with which the Severn ends her speech—“That *Lundy* like ally’d to *Wales* and *England* is”—remains intriguingly ambivalent. The Severn does not posit a Britain to reach a new synthesis, but works within the terms of the dispute and recognizes the discrete identities of the parties to the conflict, England and Wales. Wales and England retain their distinctiveness, and so does Lundy, who forms identical alliances with both countries—and if this feels like something of a rhetorical sleight of hand, it is for good reasons. The Severn never spells out how Lundy can ally itself with two countries in conflict with each other, and one wonders what the dispute was about at all if both parties to it could both be given exactly what they wanted.

The Severn’s cryptic, somewhat unsatisfying answer to the Lundy border dispute aside, it is still worth looking at how she arrives at it. The Severn offers a vision of dynastic genealogy that is botanical and horticultural rather than romantic, as in Drayton’s poem for the frontispiece, or martial, as in Songs 8 and 10. The peoples and houses contending for the territory of Britannia are not suitors who, having wooed the land, are replaced sequentially; nor are they figured as conquerors who defeat and dominate their predecessors almost to the point of eradication. Instead, the Severn uses horticulture to illustrate the artificial selection and hybridization from grafting the scion of one cultivar onto the rootstock of another plant. Sabrina sketches out a convoluted, somewhat recursive history, retracing the genealogy of King James in ethnic rather than personal terms—Plantagenets (Normans) are grafted onto a British stock, then crossbred with Tudors (also Welsh/British), and the resulting plant was eventually mixed with the Stuarts, who also had Welsh blood.<sup>178</sup> Whether the

---

<sup>178</sup> Selden lays out the genealogy in a series of notes to this song and Song 2.



final product of this semi-conscious genetic experiment shows hybrid vigor or takes on a more monstrous cast is left up to the reader, but Drayton has left us with yet another metaphor for the succession of dynasties and monarchies in Britain. Sabrina the water nymph's vision of the unfolding British monarchy sounds suitably organic, and the wars that punctuate British history feel more like low-intensity, endemic feuding than abrupt, decisive regime changes. The peoples contending for Britannia do not replace one another but intermingle and, to some extent, become one—and the force that seems responsible for this process is *fate*.

Does Sabrina's horticultural metaphor for British dynastic succession echo what William Hole's frontispiece for *Poly-Olbion* was doing—does Sabrina allow for a kind of ethnic unity for Britain, even if it is only achieved finally, at great cost, by the aristocrats who calculate their cross-marriages like Mendel in his garden? Does James I, a thoroughly mongrelized monarch, represent a commingled British future, where if we squint hard enough, the invaders surrounding Britannia's body overlap and merge onto her? Or is Drayton merely suggesting that James' ancestry gives him credible title to rule the various peoples of the isles? Regardless, the Severn describes James's breeding as a kind of exotic, artificial process that produced a specimen perhaps not monstrous but definitely unusual, a rarity, an exemplary hybrid. The Severn mixes the political lines of borders and the ethnic lines of in-groups at the end of her speech in such a way that it is difficult to tell when we are talking territory and when we are talking tribe:

Why strive yee then for that, in little time that shall  
(As you are all made one) be one unto you all;  
Then take my finall doome pronounced lastlie, this;  
That *Lundy* like ally'd to *Wales* and *England* is.<sup>179</sup>

After narrating the vain wars of conquest that resulted in intermarriage and hybridization anyway, the Severn points out the fruitlessness of the suit over Lundy to the contending parties, England and Wales—"in little time" they shall be one, so granting jurisdiction to one country or the other is

---

<sup>179</sup> *Poly-Olbion* 5.76-80.

pointless and premature. Drayton assures us that the congress breaks up with “Each part most highlie pleas’d” and conducts his muses to Carmarden and Pembroke-shire before the streams have second thoughts.<sup>180</sup>

Thus concludes the first major episode in *Poly-Olbion* involving the Severn (the border passages about Offa’s Dyke and the rest are in Song 6, and the origin story is in Song 8), one that, if we tried to arrange all of her appearances chronologically, would probably be last, since we see the Severn presiding over a jurisdictional issue contemporary to Drayton himself. Because in this chapter I treat the Severn/Sabrina as a *character*, I present these episodes out of order, but it might be worth considering for a moment why Drayton first gives us the Severn as a reigning ‘Emperiall’ queen adjudicating between two rival nations, then shows us her as a despoiled victim of English avarice, and then finally reveals her genesis deep in the murky Trojan-Briton past. Certainly the topographical organization of his poem had something to do with it—it only makes sense to take up the matter of Lundy in a song about the Welsh coast, and any mention of Offa’s Dyke surely belongs to the Welsh borderlands.

Perhaps Drayton is telling us that sovereign authorities—those that define their own borders and lord over territory—even when they appear absolute and miraculous, tinged with the divine, are merely the end-results of long contingent historical processes that involve a certain amount of random chance. That would certainly be an easy answer, one appealing to literary critics who view the transcendent claims of nation-states with the skepticism they deserve, but I am not so sure it is how Drayton would characterize the centuries-long, majestic elevation of the illegitimate princess Sabrina into a mighty, magical river that commands a vast watershed and marks an ancient division of peoples.

As I suggested earlier in this chapter, there is something very *real* about Drayton’s Severn border; she has a numinous, immanent quality all her own that has very little to do with the early

---

<sup>180</sup> *Poly-Olbion* 5.81.

modern British state, whether Tudor or Stuart. Despite the young John Selden's instinct to debunk medieval legend in the *Poly-Olbion* illustrations—and scholars have sometimes mislabeled his tendency toward *copia* as historical-critical rigor—we have seen that Drayton believes in the explanatory power of story and myth to give context to the British landscape around him. Drayton is less concerned with justifying the consolidation of the British peoples with a prophetic *telos* than he is to make sense of demonyms, toponyms, and weird stories attaching themselves to trees, stones, and springs, the folk histories and folk politics that precede and outlast the pretensions of royal houses. That is why Sabrina, the Severn, keeps singing about her lost borderlands, old crimes that some would rather pardon, and her mysterious, miraculous name that defies the geometry of surveyors and the erudition of etymologists. In this way Michael Drayton escapes the teleological trap set for him by Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. Drayton does not even try to write a flattering pre-history of the Stuart accession, or even really to integrate the scattered tales of Britain into a single body, despite the frontispiece to his overflowing book. Yet Drayton's decision condemned *Poly-Olbion* to irrelevance and obscurity and much delayed the publication of the second half of the book—and the Scottish portion was never finished or printed—resulting in the bitterness of the latter half of his career, a bitterness vented in his preface.

In one sense Edmund Spenser lacked an appropriate *telos* for the *Faerie Queene* because he wrote at the end of a dynasty at a time of political uncertainty. There was no suitable moment of nation-founding or unification for history to point toward and, in any case, the documentary and legendary materials available to the epic poet were inadequate for finding a way out of late Tudor dynastic anxieties. The situation of Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* was different: the Stuarts had replaced the Tudors and seemed to have no problem furthering their line. Because the Welsh and English were united in the Tudors and the English and Scots by the new Stuart royal house, Drayton had an obvious *telos* for his epic: the political and cultural unification of Britain. Yet Drayton's sympathies lay with localism, ethnic patriotism, and antiquarian detail, and he seemed uninterested in

grand narratives of state formation or prophecies of consolidation, preferring instead to play with whimsical little models of nationhood that can be proposed and then discarded. Drayton's indulgence in *copia* and his decision to prioritize organizing these anecdotes by place rather than time make it impossible for him to really imagine what British unification would look like... what get emphasized are borders, idiosyncrasies, eccentricities, and irreducibly particular identities. Drayton's polymorphic Britain mimics the productive fertility of nature, spawning endless new and different forms.

In the following chapter, the question that confronts Abraham Cowley is a different one: how can we save the notion of an orderly progressing teleological history of Great Britain when the rightful king is in exile? In what way could this possibly be supposed to happen? And how could God let this happen? Cowley turns to the trope of King David and his troubles, a figure often cited by Stuart monarchs, for an example of a divinely anointed king who nonetheless is usurped, but eventually returns to his throne to unite his kingdoms again. Unlike Spenser and Elizabeth's Arthurian mythos, Cowley was lucky that the Stuarts' favorite political myths could be readily applied to their varied fortunes. And ancient Israel had become a hot topic for well respected humanists because of doctrinal disputes between Catholics and Protestants—not even Polydore Vergil would dare attempt a skeptical deconstruction of Holy Scripture. Armed with a prestigious archive of primary and secondary sources and faced with the political problem of Stuart exile, Cowley set to work on his  *Davideis*, his main challenge the rhetorical complexity of articulating a theory of absolutist kingship that was both Biblically grounded and appropriate to 17th c. England.

#### Chapter 4. Hebraists, Royalists, and Cowley's *Davideis*

In this chapter I offer a reading of Abraham Cowley's  *Davideis*  (1656) that highlights its connections to diverse strands of theological, political, and philological controversy in mid-seventeenth century England. I begin with a reading of a Rembrandt painting that illustrates—literally—the kind of scholarly philosemitism that I see at work in Cowley's poem, and then move on to my analysis of select passages from the  *Davideis* . First, I make a case for situating Cowley at the intersection of Hebraism and royalism by reading a brief series of three passages: the first can be understood almost solely in terms of epic literary history as an extended allusion to Vergil's  *Aeneid* ; the second, containing Cowley's jarring use of the noun 'Commonwealth', must be a direct topical reference; the third, Cowley's explanation of his unfinished epic's design, is more ambiguous and can be explicated with reference to either epic literary history or to more pressing current affairs. I weigh Achsah Guibbory's interpretation of the relationship between the text of the  *Davideis*  and the notes to the poem supplied by Cowley and, after showing how one of the notes conceals Cowley's reliance on the work of John Selden, build on Guibbory's model to draw the poem's topicality and historicizing closer together. Then I move to a longer passage in  *Davideis*  book 1 that appears to represent Charles I's court at Oxford during the Civil War and think about how the Stuarts appropriated Oxfordian scholarship for their own purposes. My chapter closes by examining how Cowley rewrote 1 Samuel 8, when the prophet warns the Israelites of the dangers of kingship, in book 4 of his  *Davideis* , placing it in the context of James VI's explication of the same passage and Meric Casaubon's translation of the relevant Hebrew vocabulary. I conclude that Cowley's use of Hebrew learning and royalist polemic is neither derivative nor predictable, but confident and

sophisticated, and that he feels authorized to chart his own course between the poles of parliament's advocates and apologists for absolutism.

\*

\*

\*

At first glance, Rembrandt's painting *The Supper at Emmaus* (1648 [Fig 2]), now in the Louvre, is an unostentatious, even humble representation of the resurrected Christ's appearance to two disciples and their startling recognition of him at the meal they shared at the end of the Gospel of St. Luke.<sup>181</sup> Jesus and his two followers are waited upon by a servant in front of an arched alcove; the architecture is monumental but shabby—the stucco is falling from the brick, the walls are unadorned. The serving boy, about to put a platter on the table, seems oblivious to the revelation of Jesus' identity, a typical detail in the iconography of Emmaus.<sup>182</sup> Radiant light streams from Christ's face in a combination of linear beams and halo, marking the scene as one of the “self-unveiling, self-revealing” theophanic irruptions in which God makes Himself known to his confused, frightened creatures.<sup>183</sup> The moment in the Biblical narrative chosen by Rembrandt, the breaking of the bread when the disciples recognize their rabbi just before he disappears, is also conventional and heavily involved in the theology of the Eucharist.

Much in Rembrandt's composition, then, draws on long traditions of Biblical illustration as well as the virtuosic staging of obscure Bible scenes pioneered by his teacher Pieter Lastman (1583-1633), but art historians have found novelty here, too. In Caravaggio's version of the scene from 1601, Jesus is clean-shaven, with a fleshy, Italianate physiognomy; Rembrandt, probably

---

<sup>181</sup> Luke 24:13-35. The cryptic reference to the incident at Emmaus in Mark 16:12, “After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country,” represents one of two endings to Mark's narrative and has been judged by textual critics to be a late second-century interpolation.

<sup>182</sup> c.p. Caravaggio's flamboyant *Supper at Emmaus* (1601) in the National Gallery, London, where the servant merely stares while the disciples gesture in astonishment.

<sup>183</sup> See H.-M Rotermund's “The Motif of Radiance in Rembrandt's Biblical Drawings” (*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 15.3 [1952], pp. 101-21) for an especially learned analysis of when and why Rembrandt chose to surround Christ with radiance or, alternatively, to present him as ‘only’ human.



Fig. 2. Rembrandt's *Supper at Emmaus* (1648), the Louvre.

working from a local Jewish model, depicts Jesus with a thin beard that leaves his cheeks mostly bare and long, curling locks falling past his shoulders.<sup>184</sup> Where Caravaggio has painted a sumptuous banquet of roasted chicken and fruit nearly overflowing the table, Rembrandt gives us a modestly appointed table befitting the impoverished disciples reeling in the wake of Christ's execution. Most strikingly, the bread that Jesus breaks is clearly *challah*, the braided egg-based Jewish bread eaten on Sabbaths and holidays.<sup>185</sup> Instead of a heavily symbolic scene of bread-breaking which would echo the Crucifixion and anticipate the Eucharistic liturgy, Rembrandt emphasizes the *Jewishness* of Jesus and indeed of early Christianity.<sup>186</sup> Lloyd DeWitt, curator of European art at the Art Gallery of Ontario, has written that Rembrandt's New Testament scenes in the late 1640s represent a "decisive break in the iconography of Christ, which becomes especially clear when we compared them to the work of Rembrandt's predecessors."<sup>187</sup> How did Rembrandt arrive at this new mode of representation, and why?

The proximate cause lies in the facts of Rembrandt's biography. The (temporarily) upwardly mobile painter bought a large house on the Breestraat in Vlooienburg, the heart of Amsterdam's

---

<sup>184</sup> The art-historical literature on Rembrandt's use of Jewish models and more broadly his engagement with Judaism is vast and runs the gamut from Franz Landsberger's *Rembrandt, the Jews, and the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1945) written by an exiled German Jew partially as a consolation after the Holocaust (the Foreword begins "It has often proved a comfort to me, in this era of European Jewish tragedy, to dwell upon the life and work of Rembrandt") to Steven Nadler's richly evocative *Rembrandt's Jews* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2003), with its immersion in the world of the Vlooienburg district, the center of seventeenth-century Amsterdam's Jewish community.

<sup>185</sup> Larry Silver and Shelley Perlove point out that in the *Statenbijbel*, the state-sanctioned Dutch translation of the Bible printed in 1637, the gloss on Luke 24:30 helpfully explains that Jesus broke the bread "after the manner of the Jews in the beginning of their meals whose loaves were so baked, that they could be conveniently broken". "Rembrandt's Jesus" in *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus*, ed. Lloyd DeWitt. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2011, p. 77.

<sup>186</sup> During the *fractio panis*, or breaking of the bread, in both the Catholic and Anglican Eucharistic liturgies, the host is elevated for the congregation to see and recognize as the body of Christ, yet in Rembrandt's painting, Jesus breaks the *challah* much lower, at the level of the table. The painting seems intentionally anti-typological, anti-symbolic.

<sup>187</sup> *ibid*, p. 111.



Jewish community, in 1639, and lived there until his bankruptcy forced him to leave in 1658. Two kinds of Jews lived in Rembrandt's Amsterdam. First there were the Sephardic elites, who had arrived from the Iberian peninsula beginning in the early sixteenth century, after the 1492 Alhambra decree expelled all Jews from Castile and Aragon. Little Baruch Spinoza, for instance, who would have been seven years old when Rembrandt moved to Vlooienburg, lived a block away from the painter's new house. The prosperous Sephardic community of bankers, merchants, and scholars built synagogues depicted in paintings by Emanuel de Witte and Gerrit Berckheyde and commissioned group portraits such as Romeyn de Hooghe's *Circumcision Ceremony in an Amsterdam Sephardic Family*, now in Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum.<sup>188</sup>

But beginning in the 1620s and 30s, Ashkenazi refugees from the Thirty Years' War in central Europe began flooding the cities of northern Europe, especially Amsterdam, and in fact the very year of Rembrandt's *The Supper at Emmaus*, 1648, saw a Cossack-led massacre of Jews in Poland that pushed a new wave of Ashkenazim into Amsterdam. These people were different: the new arrivals were, in Steven Nadler's words, "poor, dirty, disheveled, uncultured, begging in the streets—in sum, an embarrassment [to their Sephardic betters]."<sup>189</sup> In Vlooienburg, then, Rembrandt was surrounded by a dynamic, complex society of early modern European Jewry, both those well assimilated to bourgeois Dutch culture and those fresh from the Yiddish homeland. Not only was Rembrandt able to observe the material trappings of Jewish life—the *challah* in his *The Supper at Emmaus*, the *kippah* in his *Portrait of a Young Jew* (1663), the *shtetl*-like clothing, long coats fastened at the waist, on the old, presumably Ashkenazi men in his 1648 etching *Jews in the Synagogue*—all around

---

<sup>188</sup> I draw on Steven Nadler's account of this community in "On the Breestraat", the first chapter of his *Rembrandt's Jews* (pp. 1-41, cited above).

<sup>189</sup> *ibid.*, p. 28.

him but there also exists compelling evidence that Rembrandt consulted Jewish scholars about the details of rabbinical exegesis.<sup>190</sup>

While Rembrandt's personal circumstances gave him direct access to Jewish models and learned informants on Hebrew scriptures, his philosemitic, historically nuanced paintings were also part of a larger artistic, theological, and scholarly movement in early-to-mid seventeenth-century Europe that looked to Judaism for answers to questions about early Christianity.<sup>191</sup> The scholarly Hebraism of the seventeenth century that I want to excavate should first be distinguished from the older, more mystical, hermetic, and syncretic tradition of *ex oriente lux*, 'light from the east' that had dominated ancient near eastern studies in the Renaissance. Early Italian pioneers like Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola studied Hebrew and Egyptian hieroglyphs in an attempt to uncover the divinely inspired esoteric wisdom that was supposed to have had preceded Plato and the

---

<sup>190</sup> Rembrandt's huge, life-sized painting *Belshazzar's Feast* depicts a scene from the Book of Daniel in which Belshazzar, the last Babylonian king, witnesses a frightening apparition of a hand writing the Aramaic inscription "Mene Mene Tekel Ufarsin" in Hebrew letters. In the Biblical story, only Daniel can interpret the message, which led rabbinical commentators to formulate theories as to why the Babylonians were bewildered. Menasseh ben Israel, a rabbi living in Rembrandt's neighborhood and one for whom Rembrandt worked in other contexts, published the theory that the characters must have been written vertically rather than horizontally in his *De Termino Vitae* (1639). The Hebrew characters in Rembrandt's painting take exactly the form Menasseh illustrated in his book. For a fuller reappraisal of what we know about Rembrandt's contact with Menasseh, see Michael Zell's chapter "Rembrandt's Encounter with Menasseh ben Israel: Defining the Rabbi's Status in the Christian World" in his *Reframing Rembrandt: Jews and the Christian Image in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 58-98. N.B. that Menasseh later went to England to petition Cromwell's government for the readmission of Jews and published his *Vindiciae Judaeorum*, a rebuttal of the traditional anti-Semitic libels, in London in the same year that Cowley brought out his  *Davideis* there, 1656.

<sup>191</sup> For an invaluable and characteristically lively survey of these artworks, see Anthony Grafton's series of six A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, titled "Past Belief: Visions of Early Christianity in Renaissance and Reformation Europe", given at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. in the spring of 2014, especially the first lecture, "How Jesus Celebrated Passover: The Jewish Origins of Christianity", though Rembrandt is not discussed. Video of each lecture is available online at <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/audio-video/mellon.html>.

Hebrew prophets.<sup>192</sup> Subsequent generations of these thinkers included figures as diverse as Johann Reuchlin (1455-1522) and the obelisk-obsessed Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), but what their work had in common was the fundamentally ahistorical conviction that Greek philosophy, Christianity, and Hebrew mysticism were reconcilable, derivative of the same source, and that the purest, most complete, and most powerful form of this knowledge would be found in the writings of an eastern language from remotest antiquity. The Hebraists whose works inform this chapter share little with those devotees of the *prisca theologia* in terms of their methods or ends; in fact, more often than not, they attacked the magis' abstruse symbolizing and reliance on texts of dubious provenance.<sup>193</sup>

Since the reign of Henry VIII, Hebraists in England had been employed to accurately interpret the Old Testament and to refute the arguments of Jews, but in the seventeenth century, rather than being the objects of derision, ancient and medieval Jewish commentaries on the Torah and Talmud began to be valued as important sources on the primitive Church, especially in the context of Protestant-Catholic polemic. Like Rembrandt, Isaac Casaubon sought out a Jewish informant in Jacob Barnet when he embarked on his serious study of Hebrew after coming to Oxford from Paris.<sup>194</sup> And when John Selden, legal historian, renowned Hebraist, and moderate MP, wanted to intervene in the English debate of the 1640s over the 'divine right' of clergy—Presbyterian, Anglican, Catholic—to excommunication, he published his massive *On the Assemblies*

---

<sup>192</sup> Ficino's work on the Hermetic corpus presupposed the Egyptian origins of Platonic philosophy, which Ficino argued should in turn be understood as the proper metaphysical ground of Christian theology. Mirandola was especially fascinated by Kabbalistic lore and the magical properties of Hebrew, the language with which God created the universe.

<sup>193</sup> As in Isaac Casaubon's re-dating of the Hermetic texts to the third or fourth century A.D. in his *Exercitationes* (1614); Richard Bentley's *Dissertation* on the letters attributed to Phalaris (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1699) is a spectacular late entry in the catalogue of the humanists' forgery demolition-jobs, unusual for the genre for being originally written in the vernacular.

<sup>194</sup> See for instance Anthony Grafton and Johanna Weinberg's *"I have always loved the holy tongue": Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a forgotten chapter in Renaissance scholarship* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011), which details the Huguenot Casaubon's use of Hebrew sources to refute Cardinal Baronio's history of the Catholic Church on pp. 164-230. Casaubon's studies with Barnet are chronicled on pp. 253-90.

*and Offices of the Ancient Jews which dispensed Justice*.<sup>195</sup> Indeed, the culture of seventeenth century England—both popular and elite—was saturated by a discourse in which ancient Israel was somehow the key to both the early centuries of Christianity *and* to present-day England.<sup>196</sup>

Rembrandt's *The Supper at Emmaus* serves as a kind of emblem of the way that deeply learned humanist art could interrogate and complicate the narratives told by churchmen and politicians in the seventeenth century. In this chapter, I will examine another of these masterpieces, though less well known—Abraham Cowley's epic *Davideis*, published after his return to England in 1656.<sup>197</sup> London, of course, lacked Amsterdam's vibrant Jewish community—Cromwell was apparently unwilling to officially license their readmission, and Jews suffered the disadvantages of 'alien' status through the end of the seventeenth century—but Cowley didn't write his epic in London. Cowley wrote the *Davideis* in Paris and the Low Countries while serving the exiled Stuarts; he ran missions to Amsterdam for Henrietta Maria at the same time that Rembrandt was revolutionizing the iconography of Christ. Furthermore, the Stuarts and their royalist supporters

---

<sup>195</sup> i.e., his *De Synedriis* (Sanhedrin) of 1650. G.J. Toomer's erudite *John Selden: A Life in Scholarship* (New York City: Oxford UP, 2007, 2 vols.) is far and away the best guide to the technical aspects of Selden's philology, but see also Jason P. Rosenblatt's *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi: John Selden* (New York City: Oxford UP, 2008) for illuminating discussions of Selden's reception among literary figures like Shakespeare, Jonson, Milton, et al.

<sup>196</sup> Achsah Guibbory's *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York City: Oxford UP, 2010) gathers together the diverse sources that document how the English saw themselves as/through the Israelites; Guibbory offers an important reading of Cowley's *Davideis* on pp. 132-3.

<sup>197</sup> Jean Loiseau admitted that "Une certaine obscurité enveloppe tant la date exacte de son retour en Angleterre..." (*Abraham Cowley, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre* [Paris: Henri Didier, 1931, p. 112]) but later Frank Kermode, refuting Thomas Sprat, showed how Cowley's Platonic references derived from a 1650 book of Athanasius Kircher's, establishing 1650-4 as the date of composition ("The Date of Cowley's *Davideis*". *The Review of English Studies* 25.98 [April 1949], pp. 154-8).

were heavily invested in the figure of King David as a monarch anointed by ‘divine right’,<sup>198</sup> and explicitly identified with his persecution by the tyrant Saul when their own hegemony was shattered by Parliament and Cromwell. I will situate the  *Davideis*  at the nexus of early modern Hebraists and Stuart royalists to understand how what scholars were uncovering about ancient Israel confirmed, challenged, and complicated the claims made by apologists for absolute monarchy. Cowley’s  *Davideis*  is, as we shall see, an especially rich source for investigating the crosscutting pressures of humanist scholarship and political teleology in the seventeenth-century English epic.

To be sure, many passages in the  *Davideis*  need no recourse to the recondite cloister of seventeenth century Hebraists or even the more visible arena of Stuart royalists for their explication, although the plot is set in ancient Israel and each book of the text itself is accompanied by a monstrous assemblage of Cowley’s own annotations, meant to serve as testimonies to the author’s learning and his poem’s solid foundation in scholarship. Anyone familiar with the prophetic vision of the Roman future that Anchises grants to Aeneas in book 6 of the  *Aeneid* —as all of Cowley’s readers surely were—would recognize the homage paid by Cowley in  *Davideis*  book 2 when a fugitive David is given courage by a prophetic dream in which an angel shows David his descendents down to Christ. Several incidents represent similar variations on themes known well to students of epic literary history, but much of the  *Davideis*  profits from an awareness of its embeddedness in the interlocking Hebraist and royalist discourses of mid-seventeenth century England. How else to make sense of the prose argument—under Cowley’s heading “ *The Contents* ”—before Book 4, where

---

<sup>198</sup> Beginning, say, with James VI of Scotland’s comparison of Elizabeth’s defeat of the Spanish Armada to David’s defeat of the Philistines shortly before he ascended to the throne of England (Guibbory, p. 31) and extending through Charles I’s  *Eikon Basilike*  of 1649, where among other references the imprisoned King prays “Teach me David’s patience” at the end of the fifteenth chapter, all the way to John Dryden’s witty defense of Charles II’s promiscuity in the opening lines of his  *Absalom and Achitophel*  in 1681. Another key Davidic text by a well-known royalist is Lord Clarendon’s  *Contemplations and Reflections on the Psalms of David* , the first half of which was written during his initial exile in Jersey and Madrid (1650-1); Philip Major dwells on a case study of this otherwise neglected work in his  *Writings of Exile in the English Revolution and Restoration*  (London: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 33-65.

Cowley outlines a speech of the exiled David's "containing, The state of the *Commonwealth* [emphasis Cowley's] under the Judges, the Motives for which the people desired a King"? Why would Cowley so pointedly use the term 'commonwealth', a word that already referred to popular rule in the seventeenth century,<sup>199</sup> to describe a loose confederation of divinely appointed tribal chieftains who performed mainly military duties, if not to insist that his epic be read in the context of Cromwell's regime and the Stuart exile?

Other choices that Cowley makes in his *Davideis* and its paratexts are more ambiguous—they seem to embrace both the long lineages of epic literary history with its ceaseless echoes *and* the more immediate political realities of mid-seventeenth century England. Consider Cowley's description of his epic's unrealized twelve-book structure in the preface to the 1656 edition of his *Works*:

I come now to the last Part, which is *Davideis*, or an *Heroical Poem* of the *Troubles of David*; which I designed into *Twelve Books*; not for the *Tribes* sake, but after the *Pattern* of our Master *Virgil*; and intended to close all with that most Poetical and excellent *Elegie* of *Davids* on the death of *Saul* and *Jonathan*: For I had no mind to carry him quite on to his *Anointing* at *Hebron*, because it is the custom of *Heroick Poets* (as we see by the examples of *Homer* and *Virgil*, whom we should do ill to forsake to imitate others) never to come to the full end of their *Story*; but onely so near, that every one may see it; as men commonly play not out the game, when it is evident that they can win it, but lay down their *Cards*, and take up what they have won.<sup>200</sup>

Cowley's focus on David's "Troubles" and his reluctance to represent the Israelite's reign were supposed to be justified by his classical epic predecessors (the narrative of the *Iliad* does not actually reach the sack of Troy; the *Aeneid* breaks off just after the death of Turnus), but there may be more

---

<sup>199</sup> For *commonwealth's* sense of "a state in which the supreme power is vested in the people; a republic or democratic state", the O.E.D. (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, online) cites Walter Raleigh's derogatory definition from his *Maxims of State* (1618): "A Common-wealth is the swerving or deprivation of a Free, or popular State, or the Government of the whole Multitude of the base and poorer Sort, without respect of the other Orders", but c.f. the Act of Parliament 19 May 1649, which creates the new Commonwealth in a document that equates "the Supreme Authority of this Nation" with "the Representatives of the People in Parliament".

<sup>200</sup> *The English Writings of Abraham Cowley*, vol. 1 *Poems*, ed. A. R. Waller. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1905. p. 11. Waller edits the text of the 1668 *Works* folio which itself reproduced the Preface from the earlier 1656 folio.

to it. It is equally conceivable that Cowley learned the folly of narrating current events as if they had a foregone conclusion from his earlier epic *The Civil War*, which he had to abandon in the fourth book when his poem's hero, the Viscount of Falkland, was shot to death at the First Battle of Newbury on 20 September 1643. If Cowley's King David was meant to echo the travails of Charles II, it wouldn't be prudent to have David anointed at Hebron while the Stuart king languished in exile, before it was clear that he would be restored to his throne.<sup>201</sup>

So while Cowley, like other early modern epic poets, always takes care to connect his poem to its ancient epic forerunners, a great deal of  *Davideis*  can be clarified by re-engaging with Hebraist and royalist discourses of the mid-seventeenth century. I want to be clear that by reading Cowley's  *Davideis*  at the intersection of Hebraism and royalism, I do not intend to slough off the historical content of his epic in favor of a topical reading that only seeks to identify personages and events concealed by a 'darke conceit': this is a false choice. Achsah Guibbory's reading of the  *Davideis*  proceeds along these lines:

Like Ben Jonson annotating his Roman plays, Cowley's historical notes deny a contemporary meaning that the text suggests in describing the corrupt, oppressive judges of the 'Commonwealth' government and the Israelites' 'mut'inous Itch of Change'.<sup>202</sup>

We don't have to choose between taking the scholarly grounding of Cowley's epic seriously and reading the poem in its immediate context, because the argument that I make in this chapter is that the contemporary, mid-seventeenth century discourses most relevant to Cowley's epic are themselves deeply historically minded and committed to issues of interpretation and adaptation.

David Trotter had already demonstrated this in his 1979 study of Cowley when he connected  *Davideis*  4's endnotes explicating 1 Samuel 8 to Hobbes'  *Leviathan* , Filmer's  *Patriarcha* , and

---

<sup>201</sup> And even Cowley's choice of David as an archetype of a divinely anointed king may have been informed by the unfortunate intrusion of history that halted his  *The Civil War* —because of David's complicated life story, Charles II can be compared to him whether he's 'winning' or 'losing'.

<sup>202</sup> Guibbory, p. 132.

even the legal arguments of John Cook, the Puritan lawyer who prosecuted Charles I.<sup>203</sup> What Guibbory adds to Trotter's reading is her attention to the ways that Christian identity in seventeenth century England was mediated through a constellation of imaginative (sometimes only imaginary) Judaisms: elusive, potential, enthusiastic, or merely curious early modern philo-Semitism were not on the radar of previous generations of American literary scholars. Guibbory's introduction shows how far we have come since James Shapiro's *Shakespeare and the Jews* (1996), which was still able to argue that the Jew was the 'Other' against which Christians fashioned their shaky collective identity.<sup>204</sup> What remains to be done is what I propose to do here: to show how mid-seventeenth century political arguments could be grounded in rigorous Hebraic scholarship, using Cowley's  *Davideis* as a case study.

Indeed, by reconstructing Cowley's work we can see how some of his discussions of Biblical and other ancient texts are lifted from more current, seventeenth century sources. Cowley takes apparently obscure citations of rabbinical sources from early modern Hebraists' interventions in seventeenth century theological and political debates, and then fails to cite the Hebraist, as if Cowley was suggesting that he had firsthand knowledge of the Hebrew sources. A brief example from  *Davideis* book 1 will suffice as an illustration. Early in the poem Cowley gives us an extended sequence in Hell wherein Satan and his devils decide to drive Saul insane with jealousy—Cowley describes how Satan has watched recent political developments in the kingdom of Israel with interest:

He saw (t'shame the strength of *Man* and *Hell*)  
How by's young hands their *Gathite Champion* fell.  
He saw the reverend *Prophet* boldly shed  
The *Royal Drops* round his *Enlarged Head*.<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>203</sup> *The Poetry of Abraham Cowley*. London: Macmillan, 1979. pp. 83-108.

<sup>204</sup> Guibbory, pp. 1-4. She cites the work of David Katz, Jason Rosenblatt, and Jeffrey Shoulson as pointing to "a rich cultural exchange during this period [that] complicated the antipathy that existed toward Jews".

<sup>205</sup> *Davideis*, 1 (no lineation).



Cowley attaches to his description of Samuel anointing David with royal drops of oil an important endnote in which he explains why the chrism was applied in a circular fashion:

... But there is a Tradition out of the *Rabbins*, that the manner of anointing *Priests* and *Kings* was different; as that the *Oyl* was poured in a *Cross* (*decussatim*, like the figure Ten X) upon the *Priests* heads, and Round in fashion of a *Crown* upon their *Kings*; which I follow here, because it sounds more poetically (*The royal drops round his enlarged head*) not that I have any faith in the authority of those *Authors*.<sup>206</sup>

Cowley wants his reader to think that he has the Hebrew fluency (and the manuscripts) to read rabbinical commentaries on the Babylonian Talmud—he usually calls it ‘*The Chaldee*’—and judge for himself whether they are reliable or not. But Cowley has lifted his discussion of Hebrew anointment wholesale from John Selden’s *Titles of Honor* (London: William Stansby, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1631), his massive investigation into the sources of royal and noble titles, without, of course, actually citing Selden (though Cowley does refer to him on other, more minor issues).<sup>207</sup> Selden for his part cites the Babylonian Talmud, Maimonides, Simeon Keiara, and Obadiah Mebartenora on this point.

Cowley’s minor act of scholarly vanity in book 1 note 12 confirms Jason Rosenblatt’s general theory that

A scholar such as Nathanael Culverwel, like many others in mid-seventeenth-century England, seems to regard Selden’s scholarship as a national and natural resource, whose endless bounty can be plundered with impunity. It is as if Selden were a primary rather than secondary source of rabbinic scholarship. Reading *De Jure* on Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Kimhi, or Maimonides becomes the equivalent of reading the *Biblia Rabbinica* or the *Guide of the Perplexed*.<sup>208</sup>

---

<sup>206</sup> Waller, p. 269.

<sup>207</sup> “And the *Rabbins* deliver as much for a constant Cabbal among them, grounding it especially upon that of *Zadok the Priest his taking a borne of Oile out of the Tabernacle and anointing Saloman*. They say also, as (*Genebrard* relates out of them) *unctionem factam forma x Graecorum, sine crucis Burgundia & decussatim. Solus R. Sclomo* (saith he) *excipit Reges. Nam cos tradit inauguratos non... sed in modum Coronae*.” Selden, p. 144. G. J. Toomer explains in his critical biography of Selden that *Titles of Honor* “was the most popular of [Selden’s] books, and indeed the only one that most readers ever consulted” (*Selden*, p. 126 [cited above]).

<sup>208</sup> *Renaissance England’s Chief Rabbi: John Selden*, p. 5. Rosenblatt’s study does not mention either Abraham Cowley or his *Davideis*; I discovered Cowley’s ‘plundering’ of Selden using electronic text searches.

What especially interests me here is that royalists and republicans alike could appropriate Selden's work for their own ends. The second edition of *Titles of Honor* used by Cowley had had been expanded by Selden while he was imprisoned with other MPs to include sections on English legal history to the effect that monarchs had always been advised by assemblies. The thrust of Selden's argument about the history of the monarch's rights and the constraints on those rights was less important for Cowley's purposes, however, than his facility with Hebrew sources and his extensive quotations of them—and Cowley was unlikely anyway to have much sympathy for Selden's parliamentary principles. So while I take Guibbory's point that Cowley's historical notes function as a kind of scholarly screen, an apparatus that at least momentarily redirects the reader away from contemporary politics, I argue that close inspection of the notes brings out the scholarship's connections to the world of high politics. In fact, Cowley's notes contain valuable information about how a royalist like him adapted the work of contemporary Hebraists to his own purposes, and critics ignore these notes at the peril of flattening out the complicated intellectual landscape of seventeenth century England, where ancient learning and topical controversy were not by any means mutually exclusive. Like Rembrandt's exchange with R. Menasseh ben Israel, this glimpse into Cowley's appropriation of Selden's Hebrew reveals the early modern artist—poet, in this case—to be savvier and more unpredictable than his latter-day critics knew.

Somewhat later in  *Davideis*  book 1 an unaccountably strange scene brings all of these issues—the nature of ancient Hebrew intellectual activity, relations between scholars and royalists, the proper application of learning, and the transmission of knowledge—together in a remarkably rich way. 1 Samuel 19 tells the story of how Saul, javelin in hand, listened as David played his harp, and then threw it at him, as if to pin him against the wall; David escapes, eventually fleeing to “Naioth in Ramah” (1 Samuel 19:19) with the prophet Samuel. King James' Bible tells us that

And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.<sup>209</sup>

On the quite slim basis of the phrases ‘the company of the prophets’, ‘Samuel... appointed over them’, and the (spurious) etymology of ‘Naioth’ as ‘habitations’, Cowley spins out a fantastic description of what amounts to an ancient Israelite Oxford University.<sup>210</sup> The college is a quadrilateral building, with lodging for scholars, lecture hall, library, and synagogue surrounding a courtyard; there are endowed professorships of astronomy and geometry; a few poets hang round the place, too. Cowley’s prophets’ college is in some ways even better than Oxford: the fellows attend “*Divine Service*” three times daily, are content with barely any furniture in their rooms, and never have port hangovers (“... nor could their bodies say / We owe this *Crudeness* t’Excess yesterday”)!<sup>211</sup>

The fact that Charles I set up his court at Oxford—London was under the grip of the Parliamentary forces—following the onset of the English Civil War goes unmentioned, is perhaps unmentionable, by Cowley. In part this is due to the evasion of topicality that Guibbory emphasizes; it must also be related to the flexibility of David as a royalist icon—he’s more useful when he can stand for both Charles I and Charles II (and see my note 18 above for examples of the Stuarts’ dynasty-long self-figuring as David, both in and out of favor). The fact of the Stuart court at Oxford connects Cowley’s otherwise eccentric digression to contemporary English politics, but, as I suggested above, the prophets’ college scene engages on multiple levels with Hebraist-royalist scholarly discourse. Cowley takes the time, before offering an epic catalogue of ancient methods of

---

<sup>209</sup> 1 Samuel 19:20.

<sup>210</sup> Cowley’s note 47 to book 1 admits that “The Description of the *Prophets Colledge at Naioth*, looks at first sight, as if I had taken the pattern of it from ours at the *Universities*; but the truth is, ours (as many other *Christian* customs) were formed after the example of the *Jems*.” It does indeed look like that at first sight, and on a more thorough examination as well.

<sup>211</sup> Waller, p. 264.

writing, to deplore the democratic, volatile, unregulated intellectual marketplace engendered by print technology in a metaphor that gives new meaning to the term ‘open-access’:

Pth' *Library* a few choice *Authors* stood;  
Yet 'twas well stor'ed, for that small store was *good*;  
*Writing*, Mans *Spir'tual Physick* was not then  
*It self*, as now, grown a *Disease* of Men.  
*Learning* (*young Virgin*) but few *Suitors* knew;  
The common *Prostitute* she lately grew,  
And with her *spurious brood* loads now the Press;  
*Laborious effects of Idleness!*<sup>212</sup>

Cowley's description of the library at the prophets' college might seem like a conventional expression of the epic poet's snobbery and exclusivity, related to the idea that the learned epic's prestige among the hierarchy of genres limited its audience only to the specially qualified. Milton, after all, had hoped that *Paradise Lost* would "fit audience find, though few."<sup>213</sup> But how different Cowley's anxieties about the dissemination of learning are from Milton's faith in a free press (excepting Catholics) as expressed in *Areopagitica*, where the exposure to bad books was supposed to strengthen the reader's soul.<sup>214</sup> Cowley's insistence that obscure, spiritually edifying learning is best stewarded by a tiny, cloistered elite for the good of all manages to capture the appeal of academic Hebraic studies, royalist opinion on monarchical prerogatives, and a kind of Laudian liturgical conservatism in an image of surprising metaphorical density.

---

<sup>212</sup> Waller, p. 260.

<sup>213</sup> *Paradise Lost* 7.31.

<sup>214</sup> See my discussion of *Areopagitica* at the beginning of the chapter on Spenser; strikingly, both Cowley and Milton frame their concerns about intellectual integrity in the print marketplace in the language of sexual morality, yet their concern for purity is directed at two different objects. Milton mostly worries about the soul of the individual reader, but in this passage from the  *Davideis*, Cowley feels that learning itself has been abused and cheapened (like political authority that has fallen into the wrong hands, say).

Cowley's prophets' college at Naioth, where the fugitive David takes shelter, is marked by order and cleanliness, spiritual discipline, temperance, and learning applied to the praise of God.<sup>215</sup> This idealized space of learning could be part of a reaction against images of the Stuart court at Oxford popularized by the London press in the 1640s. Jerome de Groot has written that the Cavalier cause was constructed

as a foppish, unauthentic masquerade whose main proponents were licentious and hedonistic foreigners imposing their alien identities onto England's traditional hierarchies and institutions.<sup>216</sup>

Even Cowley's identification of the prophet Nathan as Naioth's resident astronomer and Gad as the geometer can be connected to the politicization of these disciplines at Oxford in the 1640s. Cowley admits in book 1 note 58 that his assignation of these particular academic fields to Nathan and Gad are without Biblical justification—"for their particular *Professorships*, the one of *Astronomy*, the other of *Mathematicks*, that is a voluntary gift of mine to them..."<sup>217</sup>—but de Groot has shown how both Copernican, heliocentric astronomy with its natural 'hierarchy' and Euclidean geometry's foundation in strict definition and measurement were both repurposed by Royalists during their Oxford sojourn.<sup>218</sup>

Some literary scholars have found in Cowley's prophets' college not so much a vision of Oxford as echoes of other literary representations of idealized spaces of learning far removed from the chaos of politics: the country house of the philosopher Astragon in Davenant's *Gondibert* II.5

---

<sup>215</sup> Cowley describes the hymnody of the college's divine services—the fellows sing what amounts to a detailed exegesis of the Pentateuch, including creation, the Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Exodus.

<sup>216</sup> *Royalist Identities* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), p. 6. The Roundhead press was particularly outraged by the near-continuous banqueting and masquing enjoyed by their opponents in Oxford during a time of supposedly traumatic dislocation and warfare. de Groot sketches what we know about the official activities of the Oxford Court on pp. 33-44.

<sup>217</sup> Waller, p. 281-2.

<sup>218</sup> i.e., the republication of Fournier's *Elementa Euclidis* in Oxford in 1644 (p. 23) and the prominent royalism of John Greaves, the Savilian Professor of Astronomy throughout the war (p. 38-9).

(1651), with its precocious early-medieval telescopes and magnetic experiments; Saloman's House in Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), with its specialized benefactors, compilers, inoculators, and interpreters processing data gathered from around the world. Anthony Welch has written with characteristic penetration of the Royalist poets' retreat from public life that mark these passages in Cowley and Davenant's epics:

Cowley's later works held out a dream of studious retirement... Mid-century royalist fictions were extraordinarily self-conscious in their concern for the status of the artist, the relationship between high culture and civil authority, and the psychology of political defeat. It is fitting that the last half of Cowley's poem should take place in a series of exile communities.<sup>219</sup>

But reading the prophets' college through Davenant and Bacon, even through Cowley's own proto-scientific writings like *The Advancement of Experimental Philosophy* (1661), encourages us to hear empiricism and experiment in a passage where the dominant tone is order and conformity.<sup>220</sup> Instead of looking forward to the new science of the Royal Society, then, I argue that the prophets' college is redolent of Oxford in the 1630s and 40s, when it was transformed by a powerful bureaucrat with sociopolitical ideals of his own: Archbishop Laud.

John Evelyn noted in his diary on May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1637, "Then was the University exceedingly regular, under the exact discipline of William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, then Chancellor." Hugh Trevor-Roper's brilliant first book narrates how Laud, building off his original power-base in St. John's College, systematically crushed dissent, promoted his favorites, regularized divine services, enriched libraries, organized statutes, and constructed a new quadrangle at Oxford over a long

---

<sup>219</sup> *The Renaissance Epic and the Oral Past*. Yale UP: New Haven, 2012. p. 122.

<sup>220</sup> I take Welch's point, made in an email dated 30 October 2014, that "it's an open question whether Melchor's song of creation sounds more like Du Bartas or Lucretius": the prophets' 'Genesis' narrative, after all, begins "Yet buried in this *Matters* darksome womb, / Lay the rich *Seeds* of ev'ery thing to com" (Waller, p. 262).

career: Trevor-Roper locates the high-water mark of Laud's triumph in the summer of 1636.<sup>221</sup> Trevor-Roper's account balances the discipline Laud imposed, what we might think of as his negative programme, with a positive programme of endowment, gift-giving, and construction in much the same way that Cowley wants his prophets to be chaste, sober, and punctual as well as properly equipped with books and buildings. What did Laud's reforms look like? Theological censorship, yes, but the Chancellor also forbade the wearing of boots and spurs under academic dress by both students and fellows, banned long hair, reduced the number of licensed alehouses from three hundred to one hundred, prohibited undergraduates from poaching game in nearby royal preserves, and, most substantively, finally replaced the colleges' heterogeneous methods of examination with a system of degrees.<sup>222</sup>

And Laud's strictness was sweetened with the honey of his beneficence: a gift of ninety-two manuscripts in Hebrew, Persian, Arabic, Armenian, Ethiopic, Chinese, French, and Irish; an Arab astrolabe, via John Selden, "whose zeal for learning made him a friend of the Archbishop in spite of their wide disagreement on the subjects of religion and the constitution";<sup>223</sup> a statue of Charles I executed by Hubert le Sueur; five cabinets of coins, adorned by idols from Egypt and the West Indies. Laud endowed a chair of Arabic at £40 per annum for Edward Pococke, recently returned from Aleppo and construction was finally completed of Canterbury Quadrangle at St. John's College, which had been undertaken entirely at Laud's expense of £5,087. All this in the summer of 1636, to honor Charles I's royal visit, itself meant to acknowledge Laud's achievement.

To be sure, many Stuart loyalists had strong designs for the re-ordering of England's institutions, from the episcopacy to her universities; some of these were more avant-garde than

---

<sup>221</sup> *Archbishop Laud, 1573-1645*. London: Macmillan, 1940 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1962), pp. 271-94. Afterward, the crisis of the ship-money and the Crown's botched legal response to it emboldened passive resisters and the libelous in England and the Netherlands; Laudian uniformity was then to be defended rather than extended.

<sup>222</sup> Trevor-Roper, pp. 277-81.

<sup>223</sup> Trevor-Roper, p. 276.

others. Whether one finds their visions of scholarly community to be more Laudian or Baconian, it is true that during the Civil War and Interregnum these ideal academies took on the character of sanctuaries, refuges from epic history, secluded, genteel, and contemplative. But to insist that Cowley's idealized prophets' college can only be an echo of other writers' abstract plans is to underestimate the extent to which a real place, Oxford University, was subjected to and transformed by the abstract social ideals of Archbishop Laud, who had the power to make his vision manifest. In Cowley's emphasis on cleanliness and decorum, in his cataloguing of the prophets' college's manuscript collection ("Some painfully engrav'd in thin wrought *plates*, / Some cut in *wood*, some lightlier trac'd on *slates*", etc.), in the college's prudently limited library (Laud never hesitated to burn a book he didn't like), in its murals ("*Stars, Maps, and Stories* the learn'd wall did fill") and well-appointed synagogue ("drest with care and cost"), I hear Laudian Oxford rather than the Royal Society.

Paradoxically, then, even as Cowley represents his Oxford-as-Naioth as a *locus amoenus* where scholarship naturally serves the ends of hierarchical order, he makes special efforts to conceal the non-royalist Oxfordian sources of his own Hebrew citations (i.e., Selden). It's as if Cowley's trying to enforce, retrospectively, decades later, the orthodoxy that Laud held together for only a few years. Academics' lives in the university and their works were apparently never wholly assimilable to either the sybaritic caricatures of the Roundheads or the studious piety of the royalist self-image. Yet despite Cowley's prophets' college, where scholarship unerringly points toward the truth—whether one reads the passage as a hopeful fantasy of a future laboratory or as a nostalgic recollection of Caroline Oxford—in the final book of his epic fissures open up between kingly prerogative and academic knowledge. The translation of a single Hebrew word incites controversy, and the debate, ostensibly about Semitic philology, is energized by its implications for the Stuarts' absolutist political theories.



The climactic collision of Hebraism and royalism in Cowley's  *Davideis*  must be David's speech in book 4 about "the reasons of the *Change of Government in Israel*".<sup>224</sup> The Biblical account of the transition from the system of judges to anointed kingship found in 1 Samuel 8-9 proved to be problematic, to say the least, for Stuart apologists who needed an inevitable, natural, and divinely sanctioned institution of kingship for their own polemics. The upright judge Samuel grows old and appoints his sons to preside over Israel, but they "walked not in his ways."<sup>225</sup> The people cry out for a king, but God tells Samuel to warn them of how kings will govern: kings will make your sons his instruments of war, your daughters his domestic servants; a king will confiscate your vineyards and oliveyards. Despite God's sketch of tyranny, the Israelites repeat their demand for a king and eventually choose Saul. That the bookish James Stuart (then James VI of Scotland) chose to explicate the text of 1 Samuel 8 verse by verse in his first extended meditation on kingship—*The True Lawe of Free Monarchies* (Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1598)—should strike us then as audacious and yet somehow necessary. The Scottish king recognized the passage as one of the foundational myths of divine kingship, yet also realized that the ambiguous story was in need of a careful explanation.<sup>226</sup>

According to James VI, Samuel's warning to the Hebrews is less an anatomy of the corruptions to which any king will naturally tend as it is a kind of 'user agreement', an outlining of what some (bad) kings will do that still would not justify rebellion against them. James says that Samuel lists potential monarchical abuses

to forewarne them, what some Kings will doe unto them, that they may not thereafter in their grudging & murmuring say, when they shall feel the smartes hereforespoken:

---

<sup>224</sup> From "The Contents" preceding book 4 (Waller, p. 364).

<sup>225</sup> 1 Samuel 8:3.

<sup>226</sup> Kevin Sharpe puts James VI's pamphlets in the context of the increasing sacralization of the English monarch at the turn of the seventeenth century in the first chapter of his *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603-1660* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010), especially pp. 20-3.

We would never have had a king of God, in case, when we craved him, he had let us know how we would have bin used by him, as now we find but over late.<sup>227</sup>

Somehow Samuel's righteous condemnation of the abuses of one-man rule has been transformed into an absolute prohibition on rebellion, tyranny or no, with special attention to verse 18: "... and the Lord wil not heare you at that day [when you cry out under the king's yoke]". Cowley's take on Samuel's warning is less tendentious, and he is careful to bracket off the abuses listed by Samuel as applying only to tyrants. Cowley's innovation is to add this line to the beginning of Samuel's speech:

Cheat not your selves with *words*: for though a *King*  
Be the mild Name, a *Tyrant* is the *Thing*.  
Let his power loose, and you shall quickly see  
How mild a thing *unbounded Man* will be.<sup>228</sup>

The verse itself seems to suggest that 'king' is just a word for 'tyrant', that all kings are tyrants.

Cowley's annotation to the first of these lines, book 4 note 16, clears things up:

It is a vile opinion of those men, and might be punished without *Tyranny*, if they teach it, who hold, that the *right of Kings* is set down by *Samuel* in this place.<sup>229</sup>

In this note Cowley wants to preserve a limited kingship restrained by law—though his use of the word '*Tyranny*' here is unfortunate. Oddly, Cowley gives the king the power to police discussions of monarchical rights, especially, it seems, people who would go too far and allocate to the king absolute powers. Is Cowley taking a moderate position on kingly authority, or does he just want to sidestep an inconvenient, troubling definition of kingship in 1 Samuel 8, one of the most important narratives for establishing kingship by divine right?

Cowley has identified the crux of this issue: whether Samuel has intended to set down the 'right' of kings in the passage. In King James' Bible, Samuel says, "This will be the *manner* of the

---

<sup>227</sup> *True Lave*, (no pagination in the first edition).

<sup>228</sup> Waller, p. 371.

<sup>229</sup> Waller, p. 396.

king that shall reign over you [emphasis mine].”<sup>230</sup> What do seventeenth century Hebraists think? Meric Casaubon, son of the legendary Hellenist Isaac, weighed in on the proper translation of exactly this passage in 1 Samuel 8 in his *Treatise of Use and Custome* (London: John Legat, 1638), using a paraphrase of the Babylon Talmud to supply the Greek equivalent *nomos* (‘law,’ root of the suffix -*onomy*)<sup>231</sup> to the original Hebrew *mishpat*, which he further glosses with the Latin *jus* and *consuetudo* to arrive at the following: “Now as in these words, both *Hebrew* and *Greek*, *right* is taken for *custome*; so in the *Latin*, is *custome* taken for *right*, or *Law*.”<sup>232</sup> Meric Casaubon, who was appointed to a prebendal stall in Canterbury Cathedral by James I and spent the Civil War and Interregnum in Oxford, refusing to ever recognize Cromwell’s authority, seems to have been one of those ultra-Royalists condemned by Cowley’s note.<sup>233</sup> It is worth mentioning now that twenty-first century academic Biblical commentators agree with Casaubon that 1 Samuel 8:11-7 “may preserve an older treaty document that described the rights and privileges of the king”—regardless of *mishpat*’s applicability to English politics, Casaubon seems to have translated the word carefully and correctly.<sup>234</sup>

To review, then: a dexterous opportunist, Cowley gathers his Hebrew learning from parliamentary moderates like John Selden and royalist absolutists like Meric Casaubon (and this is not to mention his copious citations to foreigners like Hugo Grotius, Joseph Scaliger, Petavius, and Gerardus Vossius), walking a rhetorical and scholarly tight-rope between an untenable defense of absolutist ‘tyranny’ and an unspeakable acknowledgement that assemblies might hold jurisdiction

---

<sup>230</sup> 1 Samuel 8:11. The New Oxford Annotated Bible (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2007) has “These will be the *ways* [emphasis mine] of the king who will reign over you” and glosses ‘ways’: “*Ways* [i.e., *mishpat*], the Hebrew word means ‘custom’ or ‘judgment.’”

<sup>231</sup> My thanks to Prof. David Smith of San Francisco State University for his help in transliterating Casaubon’s Greek.

<sup>232</sup> p. 18, but see pp. 16-20 for M. Casaubon’s full discussion.

<sup>233</sup> Meric Casaubon was re-appointed to his position at Canterbury during the Restoration and served there until his death in July 1671. He is buried in the cathedral.

<sup>234</sup> New Oxford Annotated Bible (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.), p. 410.

over kings. In other notes, though, Cowley registers a more forceful defense of the Stuarts' prerogatives, as in book 4 note 40 where he slips in a reinterpretation of 1 Samuel 13, in which Saul sinfully offers a sacrifice in Samuel's place, which eventually results in his removal by God from his throne. Cowley writes:

I confess I incline to believe, that it was not so much *Sauls* invasion of the *Priestly* office, by offering up the Sacrifice himself (for in some cases (and the case here was very extraordinary) it is probable he might have done that) as his disobedience to Gods command by *Samuel*, that he should stay *seven days*...<sup>235</sup>

Here Cowley has no scriptural authority on which to rest and instead seems motivated by his desire to salvage a core tenet of Stuart absolutism, the identity of the monarch with the head of the English church.<sup>236</sup> So although Cowley preserves for the king a certain amount of liturgical authority, he denies him the ability to tithe and conscript on the scale of ancient near eastern kings. The larger point is that the relations between Cowley's  *Davideis*, Stuart absolutist dogmas, and seventeenth century Hebraic studies are not easily mappable according to a categorical schema and are in fact sometimes unpredictable.

Cowley apparently saw his poem as something of a work of scholarship in itself, an academic investigation-cum-epic presentation that could wind its own way through the dense thickets of learned theological-political polemic. Guibbory's reading of Cowley's notes as an historicizing 'cover' for the poem's topical content should be supplemented by an awareness that the historical matter cited by Cowley was also mined by topical controversialists. Not only do Cowley's notes allow us to reconstruct his methods and decisions in the composition of his poem, but their sheer copiousness, the way that they preserve the hints and traces of authors not fully cited and references to controversies not completely laid out, demonstrates the essential *resilience* of the

---

<sup>235</sup> Waller, p. 400.

<sup>236</sup> Yet Selden: "There's a great deal of difference between Head of the Church and Supreme Governor, as our canons call the King. Conceive it thus: there is in the kingdom of England a College of Physicians. The King is supreme governor of those but not the head of them, nor President of the College, nor the best physician" (*Table Talk*, "King of England").

historical-linguistic fact to the layers of allegory and metaphor added by the early moderns. Cowley's laconic reference to those who called *mishpat* 'right' is just the sort of grit that jams the gears of his teleological narrative, the etymology that takes down an entire political theory and opens up an unbridgeable gap between ancient Israel and early modern England. Cowley's spectacular display of learning, perhaps meant in his own time to shore up his poetic decisions with an intimidating wall of multilingual citations, in the end allows us to reverse-engineer his epic, to see how from each line of poetry strands of words reach out to heterogeneous networks of learning across Europe.

## Chapter 5. Milton, Kant, and the end(s) of mankind: *Paradise Lost* as rational history

Until this chapter, we have looked at teleological narratives in epic poetry that concern specific states and peoples: the waning of the Tudors, the prophesied return of the Stuarts, the inevitability of Tridentine Catholicism or English hegemony over the British islands. We have seen how two distinctive characteristics of Renaissance epic, its proximity to power politics through the patronage system and its ambition to assimilate humanist scholarship, created a fundamental tension between political myth and historical detail that introduced endless complications. These complications, these *negotiations* made the poets' work more difficult, to be sure—and the long gallery of failed and unfinished epics attests to those irresolvable problems—but they also greatly enlivened the intellectual content of the poems by forcing the poets to critically examine convenient narratives and exercise their ingenuity in devising work-arounds to the more intractable issues they faced.

In the seventeenth century, new historical modes emerged that would become paradigmatic of what is called the Enlightenment: specifically, a kind of philosophical or rational history that used deduction from given postulates about human nature to logically reconstruct pre-history, instead of weaving together facts and data from ancient documents. In this chapter I propose to treat John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667; 1674) as a forerunner of this rational history, to draw it away from the dynastic politics of Renaissance princes and closer to the Enlightenment *philosophe's* universalizing speculations. I want to be clear that I do not presume to deny that *Paradise Lost* is in fact a Renaissance epic or make an argument for re-evaluating its genre—by combining the cosmological scale of Lucretius, the civil war of Lucan, the prophecy of Vergil, and by rejecting rhyme, Milton brought the English epic closer to classical ideals of form, decorum, and style than any of his predecessors. Therefore *Paradise Lost* represents something of a hybrid specimen, a majestically

paced epic trying to delineate the capacities and limits of human freedom, a treatise on man's prehistory that is nonetheless studded with artful allusions to vast swaths of European literature.

By largely forswearing English politics, Milton departed from his countrymen in a dramatic way: in attempting to justify the ways of God to man, *Paradise Lost* is concerned with legitimating the rule of a divine monarch, not an earthly one. The scope of *Paradise Lost*, too, widens beyond anything envisioned by Spenser, Drayton, or Cowley—Milton takes up the origin, condition, and ultimate fate of the entire human species, not merely one particular band of Trojan refugees or a certain royal family. Finally, in his imaginative embroidery of the rather bare Genesis creation account, Milton's philosophical and theological convictions allow him to flesh out his narrative in a kind of subjunctive mood: the Garden of Eden *would have been* like this; Adam *must have been* like that. It is in these features of *Paradise Lost*—its distance from contemporary English politics, its embrace of universality, and its speculative reasoning based on axioms of human nature—that I find Milton's affinities with the Enlightenment mode of rational history that would gradually displace the type of humanist historiography practiced by Polydore Vergil, Isaac Casaubon, William Camden, and John Selden (to limit the list to England).

The practitioners of the Enlightenment-style rational history I have in mind include Thomas Hobbes, Giambattista Vico, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and finally Immanuel Kant, whom this chapter treats at length. It is appropriate here to glance at some illustrations from the first three of these philosophers in order to better grasp what they have in common with Milton's project in *Paradise Lost*. Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (English 1651, rev. Latin edition 1668) is noteworthy in the history of political philosophy for offering a theory of legitimate sovereignty by way of the social contract, but what interests me about *Leviathan* is Hobbes' method. Although Hobbes eventually gets around to pressing issues like the proper relation between civil and ecclesiastical authorities, all of *Leviathan* Part I is devoted to human nature, with topics like 'Of sense', 'Of imagination', 'Of speech'. In other words, Hobbes builds his political theory from a set of rationally argued propositions and

arguments about human nature,<sup>237</sup> and famously, in I.13, speculates about the “naturall condition of Mankind” (Hobbes does not use the well-known phrase ‘state of nature’): “they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre, as is of every man, against every man.”<sup>238</sup> Apart from a brief reference to ‘America’, Hobbes does not try to point to a time or place where this war of all against all actually existed, and writes in the subjunctive: “it may be perceived what manner of life there *would be* [my emphasis], where there were no common Power to feare.”<sup>239</sup> The natural condition of mankind remains a theoretical construct, the result of a thought experiment governed by what Hobbes has previously established about human appetites, passions, and ideas.

Giambattista Vico’s *New Science* (1725) applies the method of deduction from axioms to a different task—making sense of classical antiquity and systematizing our knowledge of it so that it can be generalized into a universal model of sociocultural development. Vico works on the same sorts of texts as Lorenzo Valla and Joseph Scaliger but differs from the earlier humanists in a crucial way. Vico enumerates rules and principles for considering evidence, creating canons of texts, and isolating historical accidents to reveal the substance of eternal truths. In this way, Vico attempts to rationalize classical studies, even adopting the Euclidean language of ‘axioms’ and ‘elements’:

Our Science therefore comes to describe at the same time an ideal eternal history traversed in time by the history of every nation in its rise, progress, maturity, decline, and fall. *Thus our Science proceeds exactly as geometry* [emphasis mine], which, while it constructs out of its elements or contemplates the world of quantity, itself creates it; but with a reality greater in proportion to that of the orders having

---

<sup>237</sup> Quentin Skinner writes that “While Hobbes was initially formed by the rhetorical culture of Renaissance humanism, there is no doubt that in the 1630s he began to desert the *studia humanitas* in favour of a different kind of *scientia*...” The conversion scene recounted by John Aubrey’s biography and confirmed by Hobbes involved Hobbes’ reading of Euclid’s *Elements* and overcoming his skepticism about a particular proposition that he thought was impossible, by checking all of the preceding propositions and postulates it relied upon until he was finally convinced. *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. pp. 250-7.

<sup>238</sup> Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1950. p. 103.

<sup>239</sup> *ibid*, p. 105.



to do with human affairs, in which there are neither points, lines, surfaces, nor figures.<sup>240</sup>

The true subject of Vico's *New Science* is not Homeric Greece but this 'ideal eternal history' which Homer and other poets allow us to discover through the application of reason (the rules and principles of this reason, which Vico misleadingly refers to in several places as 'common sense', are too complicated to discuss here).

Finally, I want to draw our attention to a telling phrase from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality* (1755), a brief treatise written for a contest the Academy of Dijon held to answer the question "What is the origin of inequality among people, and is it authorized by natural law?" Rousseau takes the opportunity to make several theoretical digressions into the origin of language and the drives of self-preservation and repugnance at pain and death he thought were constitutive of 'natural man'. But Rousseau's justification for a *rational* account of the history of inequality, rather than an *historical*, document-based investigation, is well worth quoting here because of how clearly he describes philosophical history in the Enlightenment style:

Let us begin then by laying facts aside, as they do not affect the question. The investigations we may enter into, in treating this subject, must not be considered as historical truths, but only as mere conditional and hypothetical reasonings, rather calculated to explain the nature of things, than to ascertain their actual origin; just like the hypotheses which our physicists daily form respecting the formation of the world.<sup>241</sup>

Rousseau holds the exercise of reason upon given postulates to be a more sure method for arriving at the truth in the case than the examination of ancient documents, historical or philosophical. By briefly glancing Hobbes, Vico, and Rousseau, I hope that I have shown a common orientation, despite the thinkers' different projects, toward subjunctive thought experiment and axiomatic reasoning, and away from the philological parsing of ancient minutiae. These illustrations can serve

---

<sup>240</sup> Vico, Giambattista. *New Science*. trans. from the 3rd edition (1744) Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1948. p. 93.

<sup>241</sup> Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract and Discourses*. trans. G. D. H. Cole. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1950. p. 198.

as a sketch of what I mean by Enlightenment-style rational history, a kind of history that might gloss an ancient source like the Bible (as Kant does), but with pre-established principles firmly in mind, and only in order to reveal a systematic, universal truth that can seem quite different from the context in which the document was originally produced. Teleological narrative in *Paradise Lost*, such as it is, resembles Enlightenment rational history in its careful deductions from postulates about human nature more than the teleologies proffered by Milton's predecessors, which seek to portray the rule of the poet's patron as natural and inevitable.

In this chapter I wish to take up the work of two profound thinkers about human nature, history and fate, John Milton and Immanuel Kant—I pair them both together because of the universalizing aspects of their projects: they write about the beginnings and ends of all humanity, reasoning outward from what they understand to be human nature. In particular, I will use Milton's *Paradise Lost* (second ed. 1674) and Kant's essays "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent" (1784), "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" (1784), "Speculative Beginning of Human History" (1786), and "The End of All Things" (1794).<sup>242</sup> By reading *Paradise Lost* alongside Kant's abstract rationalist history essays, we can better see the comprehensive scope and philosophical import of Milton's project that distinguishes it from prior Renaissance epics. If heretofore teleology and scholarship have coexisted in a kind of tension, the former providing structure and explanatory, assimilatory power while the data and details of the latter disrupt and complicate, now teleology begins to win out. Partly this is due to Milton and Kant working on

---

<sup>242</sup> English quotations from Immanuel Kant's essays are Ted Humphrey's translations in Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983).

periods—the distant past and the future—for which there are no historical data, but I also think it best to situate Milton’s epic at a greater distance from his Renaissance predecessors.<sup>243</sup>

To draw Milton closer to the Enlightenment is not necessarily to draw him closer to our own historical moment; already, in Kant’s waning years, the writers of that nebulous movement called by Isaiah Berlin the ‘Counter-Enlightenment’ rejected any attempt to reason about Man in general based on supposed universal characteristics. The ferocious clericalist Joseph de Maistre, in his *Considerations on France* (1797), quipped

In my lifetime I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc.; thanks to Montesquieu, I even know that *one can be Persian*. But as for *man*, I declare that I have never in my life met him; if he exists, he is unknown to me.<sup>244</sup>

So this moment of universalizing history grounded in rational reflection on human nature has a beginning and an end. It is not my task here to define the temporal limits of this speculative enterprise but to hold Milton and Kant near one another, especially in their writings on the creation account in Genesis, to find unexpected parallels in Christian anagogy and rational history, and to give this emerging form of universal teleology, based on philosophical conceptions of human nature rather than political expediency and patronage, its just due. First I will describe the cruces in *Paradise Lost* that matter most for my investigation, then I will give background on the role of teleological reasoning in Kant and his project in these under-read essays, and finally I will give a reading of Milton’s human nature, and the fate required by that nature, keeping one eye on Kant’s interpretations of Genesis and history. The title of this chapter, therefore, turns on a pun: we will be concerned with both the end (*telos*) of humankind as Milton and Kant have found it our natures, and

---

<sup>243</sup> There are two primary reasons and one secondary reason for considering *Paradise Lost* to be distinct from its Renaissance predecessors *with regard to the tension between teleology and scholarship*: 1. Milton sets his poem in what can only be a speculative, subjunctive universal prehistory, as opposed to a documented dynastic history; 2. Milton composes his epic in utter alienation from power politics and thus 2b. *Paradise Lost* is published outside the economy of literary patronage within which Spenser, Drayton, and Cowley worked.

<sup>244</sup> *Considerations on France*. trans. Richard A. Lebrun. New York: Cambridge UP, 1994. p. 53.

with the end of humankind, extinction, the apocalypse, the end of history, which Milton and Kant also extrapolate from our natures.

In this chapter I am interested in what Milton has to say about the nature of human beings and what that means about their fates—how the ends for which human beings were created govern their futures. Therefore I begin at the third book when Milton depicts God explaining to his heavenly audience the capacities with which he has endowed humankind; at the beginning of this book of light and vision, Milton offers his most elaborate invocation, to the Holy Spirit, so that he can apprehend “things invisible to mortal sight”. David Quint, citing the letter to the Hebrews, reads this bold gesture as an expression of Christian faith, but my reading emphasizes its reliance on reasoning from axiomatic principles, not all that different from Kant’s project in the essays.<sup>245</sup> From there I move to Adam’s conversations with the archangel Raphael and consider Adam’s dignity, knowledge, and rationality, as well as its limits—here I work in the main line established by C. S. Lewis that appreciates Adam and Eve’s majestic, ceremonial comportment, their perfection, wholeness, and justified lordship—contrasting it with Kant’s account of early human restlessness, dissatisfaction, and development.<sup>246</sup> Lastly, we come to books 11 and 12, where the sinful pair are forgiven, consoled, and learn their destinies.

These crucial passages in *Paradise Lost*—God revealing his plans for human nature, Adam using his reason and learning its limits, and the alienation of Adam and Eve from Eden—gird a

---

<sup>245</sup> Specifically, Quint cites Hebrews 11:1—“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”—and the fourth and fifth chapters of Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians (*Inside Paradise Lost: Reading the Designs of Milton’s Epic*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2014. p. 102).

<sup>246</sup> “Adam and Eve.” *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. New York: Oxford UP, 1942 (rpt. 1969). pp. 116-21. Richard Strier, on the other hand, has taken up an opposing line of argument that minimizes the humiliation of the Fall, extols Adam’s “exercise of intellectual clarity and leadership” in book 9 (after the Fall), and cheerfully recasts the curse of labor, cold, and hunger as an opportunity to “invent practical means of survival and improvement” (*The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011. pp. 266-70). Strier’s voice here is a discordant one, but important to hear because of the way the classical virtues he trumpets are tamed and echoed in the Kantian version of the Genesis narrative.

cosmic teleological narrative applying to all of humanity (and much besides, including angels and demons). Milton leaves behind the genealogical flattery and political spin of typical Renaissance epic to stretch for something more abstract, even ontological. For that reason I propose to read *Paradise Lost* as a bridge between the humanist, court-centered Renaissance epics of centuries prior—and of course, in its twelve book form, mythic structure, and language of allusion, *Paradise Lost* definitely belongs to that tradition—and the new rational history of the eighteenth century. *Paradise Lost* works well as the final poem treated in a project on early modern English epic and it might also do as the prologue of a dissertation on Enlightenment universal history; in both cases, Milton's epic would be something of an outlier, a hybrid work that looks backwards and forwards.

Having pointed to the parts of *Paradise Lost* most relevant to Milton's teleological narrative of humankind, now I will introduce the Kantian texts that will be examined alongside *Paradise Lost*, those texts that treat of humanity's earliest beginnings, the progress of its reason, but also some ethical texts that discuss the purpose (*Zweck*) behind mankind having reason at all. The most important such text is Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), published between his first and second *Critiques*. In this classic, which eventually arrives at the 'supreme principle of morality', or what's commonly referred to as the categorical imperative, Kant thinks through ethics in much the same way as he had reason generally in *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). That is to say, if in *CPR* Kant asked how it is that human beings, through their subjective experience of the world as it is for them, can through reason apprehend a lawful, ordered, objective nature, in the *Groundwork* Kant asks how it is that morality exists, how it is that through our reason we have access to universally applicable laws of conduct. It is important to realize that for Kant, a scientific law like Kepler's first law of planetary motion, the fact that the orbit of a planet describes an ellipse with the sun at one of two foci, and an ethical law like 'falsely promising to repay a loan is immoral' exist in the same real, metaphysical way. Kant famously writes:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and reverence, the more often and more steadily one reflects on them: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.*<sup>247</sup>

In the *Groundwork* Kant goes on to craft a teleological argument for the possibility of morality: he works backwards from what he presumes to be the ‘aim’ (*Zweck*) of humans having reason.

It cannot be that nature has endowed us with reason in order to ensure our happiness, because surely those sorts of needs could have been met by instinct alone, as in other organisms, and besides, the more strenuously a person uses practical reason to satisfy their desires, the less happy they end up.<sup>248</sup> No, nature must have given us reason in order that we fashion a good will—we have reason because only by acting on rationally derived ethical principles do our actions have any moral value at all.<sup>249</sup> Nature’s aim for us is that we create good by doing good, that we will a moral order into being through actions guided by our reason. The *Groundwork* represents one subtle example of how Kant uses teleological reasoning to construct arguments about human nature, progress, and our future, but he also wrote essays in a more explicitly historical register.

Although Kant has written these essays for various reasons and they are of differing scope, they nonetheless form a coherent system, or at least vision, of human history: “Speculative Beginning of Human History” (1786) glosses the Genesis creation myth and brings it in line with Kant’s idea of a progressively rational, self-improving human species; “Idea for a Cosmopolitan History with Universal Intent” (1784) lays out, in nine theses, how a rational history of humankind focusing on moral and political progress could be constructed; “What is Enlightenment?” (1784) concerns Kant’s own historical moment within that larger framework of progress, an opening up to the willingness to use reason to examine all assumptions mixed with praise for the open-minded Prussian king Frederick the Great; and finally “The End of All Things” (1794) is a series of sketches

---

<sup>247</sup> *The Critique of Practical Judgment*. trans. Mary Gregor. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997. p. 133.

<sup>248</sup> *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. trans. Mary Gregor. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997. pp. 8-10.

<sup>249</sup> *Groundwork*. *ibid.* pp. 12.

about the limits of reasoning about eternity, the apocalypse, the end of the world—on the one hand, the notion of moral progress implies a goal, a final state, and eternal rest, but on the other hand, it's very difficult to imagine a paradise or hell where nothing changes and even thinking (reflection in time) is impossible. Simply put, "Idea" is the skeletal version of a complete human history; "Speculative Beginning" would be its first chapter; "What is Enlightenment?" addresses the state of moral and political progress in Kant's own day; and "End of All Things" would be the last chapter of this rational, teleological history.

Before we come to the creation of humankind, our nature, and what that means for our future, we should consider two related prefatory remarks, by both Milton and Kant, that can function almost as statements of 'historical method' for what turn out to be resolutely ahistorical investigations. In Book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, God and his angels become aware of Satan's flight upward to Earth and its paradise, and this challenge to his creation prompts a self-justifying speech on the part of God to his Son as to why Adam and Eve will be allowed to fall. William Empson, Robert Fallon, and Dennis Danielson have parsed the theological complexity of these passages even as most literary critics remain underwhelmed by God's imperious tone and cagey rhetoric.<sup>250</sup> Milton himself felt some anxiety as he prepared to articulate his theodicy—he opens book 3 with his invocation to light, one of his most elaborate and self-abasing invocations of a 'muse' (the Holy Spirit). Milton knows that he is treading on holy ground; he will attempt to write convincingly of matters that he admits are unknowable by humans. But how?

So much the rather thou celestial Light  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.<sup>251</sup>

---

<sup>250</sup> Does God's foreknowledge of the fall mean it was preordained? If God knew about the fall in advance, why did he acquiesce to Satan's plan for humanity (or did he)? If God preordained the fall, does that make him a wicked God?

<sup>251</sup> *PL* 3.51-5.

Physical blindness denies Milton one of our most vivid senses and so is a disadvantage to him as a poet, though he reminds himself of other blind seers; it also depresses him, cutting him off from “the cheerful ways of men”, relegating his song to the poignant cry of a nocturnal bird “in shadiest covert hid”. Indeed, although Milton asks for a special spiritual insight in this invocation—and we will come to that shortly—the dominant trope is of aural song rather than vision. The “nocturnal note” of Milton-as-bird supersedes the rejected paganism of the “Orphean lyre”; Milton feels rather than sees God’s “vital lamp”, and listens to the “warbling flow” of the brooks on Sion. Anthony Welch writes that

The shared choric song of the angels and of the created universe, linked in the poem with the Pythagorean music of the spheres, strains against a recurring motif of the single human voice singing alone...<sup>252</sup>

Milton’s blindness is not the only barrier that separates him from other men; in the invocation to light he specifically asks for a kind of seeing that will render visible what is wholly inaccessible to other mortals, and this pivot elevates his abject tone to something more exalted. Louis Martz has written that in this passage “the poem makes in effect a new start”, and compares book 3 to the “heavenly conferences” that open the *Odyssey* (between Zeus and Athena), the *Aeneid* (between Jupiter and Venus), and the beginning of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, “as angry Zeus consults with all the gods about the destruction of the human race and its regeneration.”<sup>253</sup>

In my reading, the in-sight that Milton asks for seems to be a blend between divine revelation and the creative working of his own reason. Firstly, the scenes that Milton chooses to depict are extra-Biblical—the chief source of Christian revelation, the Bible, can be of no help, and Milton instead wades into a tradition of theological commentary grappling with the problem of evil. The poet also abandons the motif of singing and hearing from earlier in the invocation where we

---

<sup>252</sup> *The Renaissance Epic and the Oral Past*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2012. p. 142.

<sup>253</sup> *Milton: Poet of Exile*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980. p. 97.



might expect allusions to the voice of God, as when he calls “Moses! Moses!” from the burning bush.<sup>254</sup> Instead, Milton asks for a feminine Light to “irradiate” his mind, and “there plant eyes”. While sudden visions can be just as important to divine revelation as disembodied voices, it is Milton’s mind that *constructs* his art rather than receives it; earlier in the invocation Milton emphasizes his “thoughts, that voluntary move / Harmonious numbers...”<sup>255</sup> My point is that in the invocation to light Milton asks God to empower his mind as much as he asks for a supernatural vision; the theodicy that follows is built on logical argumentation as much as divine authority.

Once we accept that Milton reproduces these unseen, unrecorded scenes in heaven by reasoning from axiomatic principles—for example the goodness, omnipotence, and omniscience of God, and human free will—rather than by, say, a mystical rapture, we can pick up on the uncanny parallels with Kant’s project in “Speculative Beginning of Human History”. Kant’s stated aim is to speculate on the beginnings of humanity, that early period without documentation, and to root his speculations in what both reason and experience tell him about human nature; he does this through a rather tendentious commentary on Genesis that conflates the fall of man with, essentially, his own notion of enlightenment, that is, “man’s emergence from his self-imposed immaturity.”<sup>256</sup> But before we prejudge Kant’s reading of the Hebrew scriptures, let us see how he justifies his method:

Because of that [lack of verification], and because here I undertake a mere flight of fancy [*Luftreise*], I may hope to be granted permission to use a holy document as a map and, at the same time, to imagine that my flight—taken on the wings of imagination, though not without a guiding thread by which, through reason, it is tied to experience—follows precisely the same line as is sketched out in that historical document.<sup>257</sup>

---

<sup>254</sup> Exodus 3:4. One of the constant refrains in the Quran when Allah dictates to Muhammed is the imperative verb *qul*, ‘say’, as in the opening of Surah 113, “Daybreak” (*Al-Falaq*).

<sup>255</sup> *PL* 3.37-8.

<sup>256</sup> “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”. trans. Humphrey. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. p. 41.

<sup>257</sup> “Speculative Beginning of Human History”. *ibid.* p. 49.

One could almost imagine this passage as part of the prose Argument in front of *Paradise Lost*. Kant argues that by combining imagination and experience through reason he will arrive at the same developmental narrative as the Genesis account.

At the outset of “Speculative Beginning” Kant coyly pretends that only his imagination, reason, and experience guide his reading of Genesis, but if we permit ourselves a quick glance to his conclusions, we find that he is engaged in a theodicean project similar to Milton’s, justifying the ways of God to men (though his optimism and progressive vision of history far exceeds Milton). The first sentence of the last paragraph of Kant’s essay begins, “So this is the outcome of a philosophical attempt at setting out man’s primordial history: Contentment with providence and with the course of human things as a whole...”<sup>258</sup> “It is of the utmost importance”, writes Kant, that humans achieve some kind of psychological and moral reconciliation with their situation on earth. So now, as we move to a deeper discussion of passages in *Paradise Lost* and associated ideas in Kant’s essays, we can say that both Milton and Kant take up the Genesis narrative in similar spirits, cautiously extrapolating what must have been by the operation of reason and imagination, both seeking to recover a good God for our benefit.<sup>259</sup>

Yet God’s benevolence feels muted, or at least secondary, in his self-justifying speech following Milton’s invocation to light in book 3. The dominant tone is divine wrath:

... whose fault?  
Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me

---

<sup>258</sup> “Speculative Beginning of Human History.” *ibid*, p. 59.

<sup>259</sup> In the mid 20th c. William Empson took his stand on God and Milton’s God against conservative literary critics like F. R. Leavis who thought that *Paradise Lost* was a bad poem because it incompetently made God bad or who, like C. S. Lewis and T. S. Eliot, defended the poem *despite* an ‘embarrassing’ God. In Empson’s view, the poem was good because it truthfully represented (he thought) a bad God (*Milton’s God*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1961. pp. 9-35). I have long accepted the synthesis of the opposing camps proposed by Stanley Fish in *Surprised by Sin* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1967) which argues that, to the extent that in *Paradise Lost* Satan is sympathetic and God is ‘wicked’ (to use Empson’s epithet), “Milton’s method is to re-create in the mind of the reader (which is, finally, the poem’s scene) the drama of the Fall, to make him fall again exactly as Adam did and with Adam’s troubled clarity, that is to say, ‘not deceived’” (p. 1).

All he could have; I made him just and right,  
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.<sup>260</sup>

We might be tempted to accuse God of begging the question here—if it's true that he gave Adam and Eve the same powers of reason and free will as “th'ethereal Powers / And Spirits”, why is it certain that Satan will succeed in corrupting them?<sup>261</sup> But I think the most important rhetorical move God makes is to place humans at center stage: “they themselves decreed their own revolt”, “authors to themselves in all”.<sup>262</sup> I wonder what God means when he claims to have given Adam “all he could have”. Rather than implying some limit of God's powers of creation, I think we're meant to understand that God made Adam as reasonable, dignified, and free as possible while still fulfilling God's purpose for him: to be capable of “true allegiance” and real “love”.<sup>263</sup> To be incapable of sin means also to be incapable of honoring God by *choosing* him.

There is one more capability with which God endows human nature that we should attend to before looking at Kant's version: after the Son prods God into revealing his plan for the redemption of mankind, God says

And I will place within them as a guide  
My umpire conscience, whom if they will hear,  
Light after light well-used they shall attain,  
And to the end persisting, safe arrive.<sup>264</sup>

---

<sup>260</sup> PL 3.96-9. God splits hairs to insist upon a distinction between foreknowledge and predestination, but the grammar of his formula “made him... sufficient to have stood”, with its perfect infinitive tense, makes Adam's ‘standing’ sound counterfactual—as if it's already the case that he has fallen.

<sup>261</sup> Reading Eve's exchanges with Satan does not do anything to convince us that the two are arguing on level ground—but this idea, that God created mankind flawed, is Gnostic heresy.

<sup>262</sup> PL 3.116-7, 122.

<sup>263</sup> Stanley Fish has repeatedly, in *Surprised by Sin* (1967) and *How Milton Works* (2001), emphasized the irrationality and dependence on faith that fidelity to God's commandment entailed. For Fish, although mankind is indeed endowed with reason, that faculty does not bear upon man's relation with God. For a convincing rebuttal of this argument, see William Walker's “On Reason, Faith, and Freedom in *Paradise Lost*,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 47.1 (Winter, 2007), pp. 143-59.

<sup>264</sup> PL 3.194-7.

This sentence comes after God tells of his grace, and of how he will soften stony hearts: the conjunction at the outset of the sentence tells us that this umpire conscience is not synonymous with God's salvific grace—it's not something external to humans that they receive, but an internal capacity that must be developed. Oddly, the bestowal of conscience will occur after the Fall, as a kind of consolation, an aid for the state of fallenness, though we can't help but imagine what use of it Eve might have made in her conversations with the serpent. Although Milton's vision of human nature at the beginning of history has important differences with Kant's—and I'll get to them in a moment—they both share the notion that the fall resulted in new powers for humans, faculties that will ultimately lead them toward an end, a destination, a *telos*.

Kant, in "Speculative Beginning of Human History", aims to provide "a history of freedom's first development, from its original capacities in the nature of man", and reasons that the first human must have been an adult, without need of maternal care, mated in a pair, so as to have the ability to reproduce, capable of walking, talking, and thinking, and placed in a location free from predation—a garden.<sup>265</sup> From there, though, Kant diverges from Christian orthodoxy: the eating of the forbidden fruit merely represents man's use of his reason to overcome his instinctive, olfactory cravings for certain kinds of food, "discover[ing] in himself an ability to choose his own way of life."<sup>266</sup> Moreover, man's reason is not something given to him, but a capacity developed on his own (Kant argues that if man's reason was innate, it must have been inherited, but from whom?). In general, Kant characterizes the expulsion from the garden (an "exit") as an elevation, not a fall, from animality to humanity.

To put it more precisely: "the history of nature, therefore, begins with good, for it is God's work; the history of *freedom* begins with badness, for it is *man's* work."<sup>267</sup> Man's liberation from his

---

<sup>265</sup> "Speculative Beginning", trans. Humphrey. p. 49.

<sup>266</sup> *ibid*, p. 51.

<sup>267</sup> *ibid*, p. 54. Italics are Kant's.

animal state is finally signified by Adam's acceptance of his dominion over the rest of creation. Kant writes that when a human being first took the pelt of a sheep as his own, "he no longer regarded [animals] as his fellows in creation, but as subject to his will as means and tools for achieving his own chosen objectives."<sup>268</sup> This sounds like Heidegger's 'enframing': all creation is standing by for a further ordering, but for Kant this promise of mastery is what allows mankind to will a moral order into existence rather than a destructive, delusory alienation from Being. When we couple this with God's promise to 'uphold' humankind, to "once more... renew / His lapsed powers", which will put man "on even ground against his mortal foe", we begin to see the strange rhymes between Milton and Kant's account of human nature and the moral progress that follows from it. Everywhere Milton, or is it God, contradicts himself: man is depraved, condemned, or renewed, on even ground, gifted with conscience, but we are still able to identify a line of thinking about God's accommodations to man, the compensations he has given to humans so that salvation, the *telos* of moral and spiritual progress, might still be possible.

What of humanity before the fall? How is it that God 'renews' mankind's powers—what did they look like before humanity was corrupted by sin? It is while the first parents are still in Eden, of course, that Milton's teaching on human nature most drastically clashes with Kant's portrait of an animal gradually throwing off the yoke of instinct. It is perhaps fitting that we first glimpse Adam and Eve through Satan's fallen vision, a cloudy, broken perception akin to our own. Satan sees among God's creatures

Two of far nobler shape erect and tall  
Godlike erect, with native honour clad  
In naked majesty seemed lords of all,  
And worthy seemed, for in their looks divine  
The image of their glorious Maker shone,  
Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure...<sup>269</sup>

---

<sup>268</sup> *ibid*, p. 52-3.

<sup>269</sup> *PL* 4.288-93.

The fallen angel is astonished by the first humans, not because of their childlike innocence or naïveté; their *authority* impresses him most.<sup>270</sup> Already separated from other animals by their bipedalism—where Lear noticed man’s being “forked”, Milton’s Satan calls them “erect”; Lear’s “poor, bare” is transmuted to “naked majesty”—the pair are more divine than animal, the equals of angels. In one of the final chapters of his *Preface to Paradise Lost*, C. S. Lewis, discussing prelapsarian Adam and Eve, cites Athanasius, Ambrose, and Augustine in order to recover their dignity for a twentieth-century audience that thought of them as simpletons tricked by a talking snake: these were people who were accustomed to speaking to God ‘face to face’, who did not have to meditate and deduce divine truth but saw it first hand.<sup>271</sup>

Milton measures the distance between our perfect forebears and our own fallenness by juxtaposing humble-sounding adjectives with assertive, even regal nouns: “native honour” and “naked majesty”. All too soon, Adam and Eve’s bodies will be a source of shame, a shame not inborn (“native”), but chosen, put-on, alien to them, and they will be clothed, but in thrall to sin, as Milton and his readers are.<sup>272</sup> How should we read the two instances of “seemed” in this passage? Do they simply remind us that this is how Adam and Eve were for Satan, or is there something darker here, a Spenserian “seemed”, as when Guyon meets Archimago and “Sober he seemde”?<sup>273</sup> Like God, the reader knows that Adam and Eve will fall, and Satan, too, appears to know that his

---

<sup>270</sup> William Poole offers an enlightening discussion of the Greek Patristic—in addition to the Ovidian—sources of Eve’s Narcissus scene (*PL* 4.440-91), placing it in the context of feminine pubescent maturation, in *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005, pp. 168-71), though he admits that “the creation of Adam is a markedly better job than that of Eve.”

<sup>271</sup> Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. London: Oxford UP, 1942 (rpt. 1969). p. 117.

<sup>272</sup> The phrase “naked majesty” gains even more potency when we consider how medieval and early modern states attempted to regulate consumption and dress with sumptuary laws. Not only do Adam and Eve not waste money on vain garments, but their noble character is so plain that it is unnecessary to mark it with expensive fabrics. And from a Puritan perspective, prelapsarian nudity, “native honour”, could be the most modest clothing of all (at least the dissenting Adamites of the 1640s thought so).

<sup>273</sup> *Faerie Queene* I.i.29.5.

schemes will come to fruition. Satan admits that he experiences “wonder” and “love” at their sight, and feels guilty when he ponders how “ye little think how nigh / your change approaches.”<sup>274</sup> Yet we can still preserve an innocent sense of ‘seemed’ if we remind ourselves that Satan is seeing Adam and Eve for the first time, and this is a passage in which their nobility is the primary note: by using “seemed”, Milton tells us that Adam and Eve’s status was obvious, *prima facie*, to a first-time observer like Satan. Not only were they in fact lords of all, but they looked the part, too.

Immanuel Kant, as it might be expected, held more conventional beliefs about clothing. In “Speculative Beginning”, the adoption of clothing is a sign of civilization, a way of disguising genitalia, delaying the satisfaction of lust, and creating the possibility of eroticism, even of love, a higher pleasure than instinctive copulation. Of the fig leaf in Genesis 3:7, Kant writes that

*Refusal* was the feat whereby man passed over from mere sensual to idealistic attractions, from mere animal desires eventually to love and, with the latter, from the feeling for the merely pleasant to the taste for beauty, at first only human beauty, but then also the beauty found in nature.<sup>275</sup>

Indeed, one really doesn’t get a sense at all of original sin in Kant’s writing about Genesis and he tends to reduce the value of Christianity to its ability to inspire a love of performing one’s duty. Consequently, the Crucifixion is nowhere to be found. What matters to Kant is humanity discovering the powers of its reason to create freedom. There are numerous passages in this essay that I will leave unquoted here—the point is that for Kant, Edenic Man is no different from an animal, and is only able to use reason to create material culture (or culture at all) after disobeying God (or what Kant calls ‘the voice of instinct’). Even if Kant sees no exercise of rationality in the garden, if it’s completely unneeded in a paradise, Milton gives us a reasoning Adam curious about the world he finds himself in, and it is in his conversations with the angel Raphael that we find the hints of an awakening consciousness resembling Kant’s “Enlightenment”.

---

<sup>274</sup> *PL* 4.366-7.

<sup>275</sup> “Speculative Beginning,” trans. Humphrey. p. 52. What Kant means by ‘idealistic’ is that once a person’s beauty is concealed, it must be imagined, and then it can be abstracted.

In the prose Argument to his fifth book, Milton tells us that God sends Raphael down to our planet “to render man inexcusable”, to remind Adam of his obligation to obedience, his free will, and the nearness of the enemy. Yet Adam seems to need no reminding: he wakes up Eve for church, as it were (“we lose the prime”),<sup>276</sup> hears about her dream of temptation, and comforts her with his theory of mind. According to Adam, several faculties in the mind serve Reason, among them Fancy, or imagination, which generates conceptions and images that are then framed and put into relation by Reason so as to construct knowledge. When we sleep, a more whimsical, younger sister arises—“mimic Fancy”—to imitate Fancy, but creates disordered “wild work”. Adam counsels that

Evil into the mind of god or man  
May come and go, so unapproved, and leave  
No spot or blame behind: which gives me hope  
That what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream,  
Waking thou never wilt consent to do.<sup>277</sup>

Adam’s hope is in vain, but what I’m interested in here is that not only does reason exist in and is used by Edenic humans, but that they themselves can articulate how their own minds work, where their ideas come from, and how they are to be judged. Adam, if not Eve, is aware of their own powers and limitations. One might object that Adam falls far short of Kant’s injunction to *sapere aude* (“dare to know”), as he accepts without question God’s commandment not to eat from the tree. Then again, Adam’s use of reason is not limited by fallen human consciousness—he does not have to deduce the nature of reality or God’s intentions because God speaks to him directly. But it is evident

---

<sup>276</sup> PL 5.21. In the Rule of St. Benedict, for example in the seventeenth chapter “How Many Psalms Should Be Said During Those Hours” (*Quot Psalmi Per Easdem Horas Dicendi Sunt*), the canonical hour between Matins and Terce is called Prime, ‘*prima hora*’; after Eve is comforted, the pair sing praises to God, though Milton maintains this prelapsarian worship is not formulaic but spontaneous. This liturgy *avant la lettre*, of course, chimes with C. S. Lewis’ account of the dignified, ceremonial comportment of Adam and Eve, lords of all.

<sup>277</sup> PL 5.117-21.



that Milton's prelapsarian humans already use their Reason to distinguish between good and bad ideas and to discern the nature of their duties.

In the introduction to *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant rejected the dogmatic assumption that logical reasoning can produce knowledge about things that lie outside of experience (God, free will, and the afterlife are Kant's examples) and called for a meta-analysis or 'critique':

Now the safe ground of experience being thus abandoned, it seems nevertheless natural that we should hesitate to erect a building with the cognitions we possess, without knowing whence they come, and on the strength of principles, the origin of which is undiscovered. Instead of thus trying to build without a foundation, it is rather to be expected that we should long ago have put the question, how the understanding can arrive at these *a priori* cognitions, and what is the extent, validity, and worth which they possess?<sup>278</sup>

Kant's questions are akin to the questions that Adam answers when he assuages Eve's fears about her dream: he explains where knowledge comes from, distinguishes intentions from fleeting thoughts, and shows the role of Fancy in providing the material for Reason to work on. In this early morning conversation with Eve, Adam does not specifically address *a priori* cognition, or the kinds of reasoning that humans perform prior to experience, but in his later conversations with Raphael, we hear of the mathematical and astronomical knowledges that Kant took to be the quintessential forms of valid *a priori* cognition.

Raphael locates humanity's link in the chain of being according to Milton's monistic philosophy; humans and angels are "differing but in degree, of kind the same."<sup>279</sup> The analogy is that of a plant—as one moves from root to stem and leaf to flower, finally to the pheromones released by the blossom, the plant grows progressively more airy, spiritous, and less solid. Such is the relationship between animals, humans, angels, and God. Then Raphael explains free will to Adam ("our voluntary service he requires")<sup>280</sup> before moving on to an extended narrative about the

---

<sup>278</sup> *Critique of Pure Reason*. trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1990. p. 4.

<sup>279</sup> *PL* 5.490.

<sup>280</sup> *PL* 5.529.

consequences of free will abused, namely, the war in heaven; the implication is that angels and humans have the same sort of reason and will. The war in heaven does not impinge directly on Milton's conception of human nature and how our nature determines our destinies, so we move to the seventh book, at the beginning of which Milton invokes Urania, the muse of astronomy, to help him recount the creation of the world and humankind.

Adam asks Raphael to let his narrative descend from the high empyrean which always remains unseen by man to "this heav'n which we behold", to explain the establishing of the stars' paths, not so that Adam can learn God's secrets but so that his knowledge can magnify his praise.<sup>281</sup> In an important speech for our purposes, Raphael warns Adam of the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, because it so easily leads to folly:

Yet what thou canst attain, which best may serve  
To glorify our Maker, and infer  
Thee also happier, shall not be withheld  
Thy hearing, such commission from above  
I have received, to answer thy desire  
Of knowledge within bounds; beyond abstain  
To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope  
Things not revealed, which th'invisible King,  
Only omniscient, hath suppressed in night,  
To none communicable in earth or Heaven:  
Enough is left besides to search and know.  
But knowledge is as food, and needs no less  
Her temperance over appetite, to know  
In measure what the mind may well contain,  
Oppresses else with surfeit, and soon turns  
Wisdom to folly, as nourishment to wind.<sup>282</sup>

There are two sentences here: in the first Raphael agrees to fulfill Adam's requests to the extent that the knowledge imparted will help him praise God and make Adam happier; in the second, Raphael classifies the desire for knowledge as an appetite constitutive of human nature, like the hunger for food—it must be regulated in moderation. As Juan Christian Pellicer put it,

---

<sup>281</sup> *PL* 7.86.

<sup>282</sup> *PL* 7.115-30.

Prelapsarian happiness, then, depends on modestly recognizing the limits to which that happiness may be fully comprehended at any given time, even while those cognitive limits are always being pushed back by increasing knowledge.<sup>283</sup>

What about the last line of the first sentence, after Milton's colon: "Enough is left besides to search and know"? The line is followed by the qualifying conjunction 'but', as if the appetite metaphor is a kind of antistrophe, a movement back. Although Raphael speaks in two sentences, there are really three terms to his speech about knowledge: firstly, the domain that he will provide to Adam, which will most help him to praise God and increase his happiness, in contrast to the domain which remains hidden by night; lastly, the warning to not over-indulge in the pursuit of knowledge; and in the middle, most significantly for all subsequent human endeavor, the 'enough' that is left over, that which is both meet and right for Adam to learn on his own but is also what Raphael withholds from his speech.

Curiously, Milton sandwiches the line that represents legitimately constructed human knowledge—historical, linguistic, scientific, everything not revealed—in between what Raphael is willing to tell Adam and a simile about gluttony. At the level of the syntactical argument and the form of the verse itself, this is literally "knowledge within bounds." Only God possesses omniscience, Raphael tells Adam, and much knowledge lies suppressed in night, unknowable to humans. This rather obscurantist justification for keeping knowledge—and Adam—in the dark reads somewhat differently if we consider the food simile in a different light. The obvious way to read the passage is with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in mind, where virtues are honed by moderation and vices are found at either extreme (e.g., cowardice and recklessness are the vicious extremities of courage properly exercised, its deficiency and its excess). Thus the excessive lust for knowledge corrupts our understanding; mistaking means for ends, we produce empty, foul-smelling air, not a well-nourished body.

---

<sup>283</sup> "Virgil's *Georgics* II in *Paradise Lost*." *Translation and Literature* 14.2 (Autumn, 2005), p. 134. Pellicer's discussion of Edenic happiness revolves around allusions to the happy farmers of Vergil's *Georgics*, who would be *too* fortunate (*fortunatos nimium*) if they knew how lucky they truly were.

But what if we read the food simile in an organic, biologic sense, relating our brains to our stomachs? Then the simile has to do with the human mind's natural capacities for digesting information, generating understanding, and producing knowledge; the passage is less an ethical admonition than an acknowledgement of the limits of human perception and comprehension, an admission that the kinds of things we can know are determined by the innate structures of our minds. With this understanding of the knowledge-as-food simile, the mysteries that God keeps suppressed by night do not represent the arbitrary whim of a secretive tyrant, but are simply a consequence of the way that he made humans: we do not know these things not because they are merely forbidden but because we cannot, we are incapable of knowing them. Our minds are not equipped for "joining or disjoining... fram[ing]... and call[ing]" these hidden facts.<sup>284</sup> To use a Kantian phrase, they are simply not part of the world *as it is for us*.

At this point we can pause to summarize some of the things we have learned about Milton's human nature and its similarities and differences from Kant's ideas, especially with regard to that great divide in Adam and Eve's story represented by "the brandished sword of God... fierce as a comet".<sup>285</sup> Milton's humans, even before the Fall, use reason and judgment to discern good ideas from bad, and more importantly, can explain how that process works to themselves; they perceive divine truth directly, speak to God, intuitively know the names for things, and possess the same freedom of will as angels. Kant's prelapsarian people can walk, talk, and think, but they are slaves to instinct; only after the fall do they use their reason to plan for the future, fear death, or idealize beauty. In truth, Kant sees great gains for human freedom beginning in Genesis 3:7 with the donning of the fig leaf.

In an important sense, Milton's Adam and Eve already possess, in Eden, the powers that Kant grants to humans after the Fall, but Milton's prelapsarian human nature and Kant's

---

<sup>284</sup> *PL* 5.106-7.

<sup>285</sup> *PL* 12.633-4.

postlapsarian human nature do not map onto each other exactly. For one, that domain of knowledge within bounds demarcated by Raphael will only be explored by Adam and Eve after they leave the garden; while our parents are still in Eden, rational inquiry and the pursuit of knowledge pale in comparison to their proximity to unmediated divine revelation. They are not quite, before the Fall, the inventors that they would be forced to become; they are not yet driven toward the kind of progress, or goal, that Kant esteems so highly. More significantly, the deep wound Adam and Eve receive on their exile from Eden is more limiting than in Kant's version. In "Idea for a Universal History with Cosmopolitan Intent", Kant's fourth thesis involves the antagonism that exists between individuals and how that dynamic spurs the development of rule of law and organized societies.<sup>286</sup> In other words, there's an acknowledgement that human flaws on the individual level spur progress on the level of the species (and Kant uses the term species). This notion of progress in freedom and government is much less clear in Milton—after the Restoration, Milton's political outlook is gloomier, and more pessimistic—but Christian anagogy, the shape of history leading up to the Second Coming and Final Judgment, might bear some comparison with Kant's notion of a gradual, species-wide Enlightenment. Let us now turn to the Fall and its aftermath to see what God has in store for his creatures.

When Eve took the fruit and ate, Milton tells us, the whole world shook to announce that "all was lost."<sup>287</sup> By the end of the poem, some fragments have been restored: vaguely defined powers will have been renewed, the umpire conscience granted to our parents, some measure of hope allowed them, and a sketch of the rest of human history offered them. But in his now shameful nudity, Adam can only imagine himself living out a life, not as lord of all, but at the

---

<sup>286</sup> "Universal History", trans. Humphrey, pp. 31-2.

<sup>287</sup> *PL* 9.784. For a learned discussion of Milton's personification of the earth (which receives a wound at the moment of the Fall) in the context of Lucretius' insensate earth and the Gospel of Matthew's sentient earth that quaked at Jesus' death, see Richard J. DuRocher's "The Wounded Earth in *Paradise Lost*", *Studies in Philology* 93.1 (Winter, 1996), pp. 93-115.

beginning of human history: “O might I here / in solitude live savage, in some glade / Obscured...”<sup>288</sup> Bereft of the spontaneous civility, ritual dignity, divine knowledge, and natural harmony that he had known, in the Fall Adam degenerates from Rousseau’s noble savage into someone piteously suffering through the Hobbesian state of nature. The first humans descend into barbarism inside and out: Milton compares Adam and Eve to the indigenous peoples Columbus found “girt / With feathered tincture, naked else and wild”; so too their “inward state of mind”, where appetite has overthrown reason, and turbulence peace.<sup>289</sup>

Back in heaven, among God’s first words to the assembled angels are “be not dismayed.” And after dispensing curses to the serpent, then to Eve and Adam, Jesus covers their bodies with animal skins and their spirits with “his robe of righteousness”, adopting the posture of the servant in a scene of Milton’s invention meant to resonate with the ablutions of Maundy Thursday.<sup>290</sup> When the Son leaves the pair, they fall into despair, Adam longing to return to dust, Eve threatening suicide. Eve’s sorrow moves Adam’s heart, and he brings her back from the brink by reminding her of the serpent’s curse: they cannot succumb to violence and “wilful barrenness” if they want their seed to crush the snake’s head.<sup>291</sup> Moreover, Adam says, if they pray to God, his ears will ope, “his heart to pity incline / and teach us” how to build shelter, make fire, etc. By the end of the speech Adam looks forward “to pass[ing] commodiously this life”.<sup>292</sup> Not only, apparently, will God renew their powers but he will teach them further mastery over the natural world—mastery, it should be said, that was unneeded in the garden, but still, mastery that makes man’s dominion over creation concrete. Far from being *unaccommodated*, God will give Adam and Eve everything they need to help

---

<sup>288</sup> *PL* 9.1084-6.

<sup>289</sup> *PL* 9.1116-7, 1125-30.

<sup>290</sup> *PL* 10.35, 210-23.

<sup>291</sup> *PL* 10.1042.

<sup>292</sup> *PL* 10.1060-3, 1083.

themselves, to make the earth hospitable to them; if their separation from God cuts them off from his face, then regular prayer, and inward discernment will discipline their souls, its own positive good. In short, Adam's hopeful speech at the end of book 10 anticipates much of what, in "Universal History", Kant sees as the alienation and tension that have worked so productively for human civilization. Finally, it seems, outside of the garden, humans will have "to search and know"—the ends for which they were made might be realized.<sup>293</sup>

In the last two books of Milton's poem, Adam is shown a vision of the future, a comforting prophecy of the coming glory of his race, much like the vision shown to Aeneas in Hades by his father Anchises. Both future-histories are in the form of processional tableaux viewed from high places—Vergil's *tumulum*, 'mound', and Milton's "hill"—and they are full of all the grandeur of epic myth.<sup>294</sup> The elevated prospect allows for a certain panoramic scale, but Michael also changes Adam inwardly, to grant him a special moral sight. Like Athena in the *Odyssey* and Venus in the *Aeneid*, "Michael from Adam's eyes the film removed" (the obstruction brought on by original sin), and with herbs and drops from the Water of Life enables a deep, magical insight into the future of his progeny.<sup>295</sup>

To this new sight Michael reveals crucial incidents in the relationship of man and God, especially those having to do with man's repeated failures to reform himself or be reformed by God's messengers, and yet, despite Adam's supernatural aid, he is always taken by surprise. Each of the scenes shown him has a turn, and until the salvation of Noah at the end of the book, some five hundred lines later, the turns are for the worse: Adam delights in the sacrifice of Abel and is given a chance to speak, before Cain stones him to death; next, after a Boschian theater of illness and maladies, Adam is given a glimpse of richly decorated tents and beautiful dancing women, a

---

<sup>293</sup> The first thesis of Kant's "Universal History" reads "*All of a creature's natural capacities are destined to develop completely and in conformity with their end*" (trans. Humphrey, p. 30).

<sup>294</sup> *Aeneid* 6.754; *Paradise Lost* 11.367.

<sup>295</sup> *PL* 11.412.

seemingly pleasant vision, but these are the lustful, greedy, superficial descendants of Cain. Finally, after being shown the calamity of the flood, Michael lets Adam rightfully rejoice in the preservation of Noah. Much more so than the prophecy given to Aeneas, these tableaux are scenes of moral instruction, where lessons are taught and misguided attachments exposed. Michael even gives Adam advice for achieving a long, disease-free life and a relatively painless death: “the rule of *Not too much*” (Milton’s italics)—temperance, moderation.<sup>296</sup> One might wonder why Michael bothers to instruct Adam in these matters if his descendants are doomed to forget the lessons; unlike the Roman history outlined by Anchises in the underworld, Adam is not given a predominately glorious, encouraging narrative—humankind always seems to take two steps forward, one step back.

Adam’s special sight begins to fail him, and Michael narrates the rest of the prophecy for Adam’s hearing. The relatively decentralized, egalitarian, paternalistic tribes that have repopulated the earth after the Flood are overthrown by Nimrod, and his crew lords over man and even builds a tower toward heaven. Milton registers Adam’s disgust at this abrogation of divine law:

O execrable son so to aspire  
Above his brethren, to himself assuming  
Authority usurped, from God not giv’n:  
He gave us only over beast, fish, fowl  
Dominion absolute; that right we hold  
By his donation; but man over men  
He made not lord; such title to himself  
Reserving, human left from human free.  
But this usurper his encroachment proud  
Stays not on man; to God his tower intends  
Siege and defiance: wretched man! what food  
Will he convey up thither to sustain  
Himself and his rash army, where thin air  
Above the clouds will pine his entrails gross,  
And famish him of breath, if not of bread?<sup>297</sup>

Here Adam applies two prelapsarian teachings he received from Raphael in the garden to Nimrod and the Tower of Babel: that of man’s free will and of his proper place in the order of things. Just

---

<sup>296</sup> *PL* 11.531.

<sup>297</sup> *PL* 12.64-78.



as humankind coerced into obedience to God would be incapable of “true allegiance” or of voluntary praise, and would therefore be a moral nullity, so too individual acts and societies of moral goodness are only possible when humans live free of domination and tyranny. This is a teleological argument in the form of the first thesis of Kant’s “Universal History”: “*All of a creature’s natural capacities are destined to develop completely and in conformity with their end*” (cited above).<sup>298</sup> In other words, we have been given free will in order that we exercise it: the very existence of this faculty justifies its use and our freedom. The human nature provided us implies a certain kind of politics, according to both Milton and Kant. Since Adam was paying attention during Raphael’s lessons, he also remembers the plant metaphor for the chain of being—as one moves from animals to man to angels and God, one notices a decrease in matter and a corresponding increase in spirit, or air. Angels do not require physical food, and humans cannot sustain themselves on the thin air of the empyrean.<sup>299</sup>

Michael dilates on the intimate connection between rational wills and political liberty:

... Justly thou abhorr’st  
 That son, who on the quiet state of men  
 Such trouble brought, affecting to subdue  
 Rational liberty; yet know withal,  
 Since thy original lapse, true liberty  
 Is lost, which always with right reason dwells  
 Twinned, and from her hath no dividual being:  
 Reason in man obscured, or not obeyed,  
 Immediately inordinate desires  
 And upstart passions catch the government  
 From reason, and to servitude reduce

---

<sup>298</sup> I call this argument ‘teleological’ because it is ‘from ends’—Adam knows that he has a free will and supposes that it must be for some reason, or end, and then makes an argument about political organization based on that end. Kant glosses this thesis: “In the teleological theory of nature, an organ that is not intended to be used, an organization that does not achieve its end, is a contradiction. If we stray from that fundamental principle, we no longer have a lawful but an aimlessly playing nature and hopeless chance takes the place of reason’s guiding thread” (“Universal History”, trans. Humphrey, p. 30). The natural selection of Wallace, Darwin, and Bates, of course, made this sort of reasoning obsolete forever from the late 1850s.

<sup>299</sup> We might add a third teaching by Raphael to the list: Adam must have the war in heaven in mind, too, when he bemoans “siege and defiance”.

Man till then free.<sup>300</sup>

Michael redirects Adam's disapproval from the person of Nimrod, an individual despot, to the deep moral and cognitive failings in fallen human nature. A double rhythm plays through the history after Babel, as Michael tells it: virtue and thus freedom "tend from bad to worse", even as some societies are apparently able to achieve more than their neighbors (Michael also uses the strange qualifier "*sometimes* nations will decline so low", [my italics]).<sup>301</sup> Michael sketches out an uneven decline: God singles out Israel as a favored nation, but she undergoes her own back-and-forth with sin and redemption. As Balachandra Rajan wrote about the last two books of *Paradise Lost*, "The arena of combat is now the mind, and history becomes the collective result of the individual struggle for moral transformation."<sup>302</sup>

This gloomy historiography—whose mood can still be punctured by moments of "joy and wonder"—stands in stark contrast to Kant's narrative of gradual rational progress. Kant's fifth thesis in "Universal History", though, admits the difficulty of constructing and maintaining a free society that enables its citizens to develop all of the capabilities endowed them by nature: "*The greatest problem for the human species, whose solution nature compels it to seek, is to achieve a universal civil society administered in accord with the right.*"<sup>303</sup> Kant sees foreign relations as one of the most intractable problems humanity faces—even if a people are able to secure their own rights and liberties and govern themselves rationally, they tend to run roughshod over the rights of the citizens of foreign

---

<sup>300</sup> PL 12.79-90.

<sup>301</sup> A double rhythm that perhaps even Milton himself cannot resolve: it is an open question as to whether the misery of human political history or the hope and promise of the anagogic narrative becomes the dominant note of the last two books. For a forceful defense of Milton's "unresolved choices", see Peter C. Herman's "*Paradise Lost*, the Miltonic 'Or', and the Poetics of Incertitude," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 43.1 (Winter, 2003). pp. 181-211.

<sup>302</sup> "*Paradise Lost: The Hill of History*". *Huntington Library Quarterly* 31.1 (Nov. 1967), pp. 44-5. c.f. Kant's second thesis in the "Universal History": "*In man (as the sole rational creature on earth) those natural capacities directed toward the use of his reason are to be completely developed only in the species, not in the individual*" (cited above, p. 30).

<sup>303</sup> "Universal History", trans. Humphrey, p. 33.

countries, oppressing them in the same way that more powerful individuals oppressed their weaker neighbors before the development of civil society. Eventually, as citizens of free nations learn to subject even the foreign relations of their own government to reason's scrutiny, conflicts between nations will be handled according to the rule of law, and, more importantly, according to 'the right'. The endpoint of this teleological narrative, laid out in Kant's essay "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" (1795), looks like a more enlightened, utopian United Nations, a liberal democracy whose citizens are themselves liberal democracies, countries who have voluntarily abolished standing armies and who contract no international debts.

The dream of perpetual peace runs through the final book of *Paradise Lost*, too, but can only become a reality at the end of time, with the Second Coming. For Milton, man's innate weakness—characterized by Michael as both a stain from sin, an impurity, and a Reason overpowered by other drives—makes permanent, real progress impossible to sustain. But at the same time, God seems to be pulling humankind closer: purifying the human race by purging it in a Flood, favoring Israel, giving laws to the nation, and then creating a new covenant in Christ. Humans cannot help themselves, but God slowly prepares them to re-enter paradise—heaven—to spend eternity. Still, Milton makes distinctions among rulers, calling some tyrants and "violent lords", and explicitly linking immoral leaders to immoral peoples. Left unsaid is the implication that there are virtuous peoples with virtuous rulers, at least in some places, some of the time. In "What is Enlightenment?", Kant makes the case for Prussian king Frederick II ("The Great"), who takes as his mantra "Argue as much as you want and about what you want, but obey!"<sup>304</sup> The enlightened, liberal (and very French) cultural-political moment Kant lived through was more fragile than he could have known; the subsequent history of the *Großdeutschland* argues more strongly for Milton's verdict on humanity than Kant's.

---

<sup>304</sup> "What is Enlightenment?" trans. Humphrey, p. 42.

Both Milton and Kant see a gradually reforming, upwardly climbing humanity beset by permanent limitations—original sin, in *Paradise Lost*; antisocial antagonisms in Kant’s historico-political essays—and write histories in the absence of data, trusting their judgment of humankind. Both, in some sense, see the Genesis account as a myth that can be embroidered, whose details can be magnified to gain significance perhaps not intended by Hebrew scribes. Neither Milton or Kant write in support of a particular dynasty or court—although Kant’s teleology validates Frederick II’s liberal experiments, he takes as his subject not Germans but mankind—but both their histories are governed by distinct notions of what we were created for, the ends of mankind.

### Coda: The two fates of Odysseus

The morning sun breaks over Ithaca: Athena, always watching her favorite, has summoned “golden-throned Dawn to bring light to men.”<sup>305</sup> It is the day after Odysseus’ fateful confrontation with Penelope’s suitors; their bodies, holed by arrows and caked in black blood, still lie strewn through his hall as the wily one awakens, having “had full joy of lying with his wife.” Odysseus leaves his palace to find his father, Laertes, who does not know yet that his noble son lives. Aware that he and his son Telemachus put themselves in danger by taking to the road, Odysseus straps on his beautiful armor before departing. Odysseus finds Laertes, a broken old man in a filthy tunic full of patches, digging beside a vine, and after another one of Odysseus’ false stories, Laertes recognizes his son and they are reconciled. But all is not well, and the violence that Odysseus unleashed upon his countrymen returns to him—an angry mob led by some of the fathers of the princes slain by Odysseus surrounds his palace, seeking vengeance. Odysseus throws a spear through the cheek of Eupheithes, father of Antinous, and for a moment it seems that the primitive, bloodthirsty vendettas over bride theft that set the plot of the *Iliad* in motion are about to erupt anew. But Zeus has other plans: accompanied by his thunderbolt and under his instruction, Athena tells Odysseus to stay his hand, to cease the strife of war and make a truce. Homer tells us “so spoke Athene, and he obeyed, and was glad at heart”; his great saga ends a few lines later.<sup>306</sup>

I want to point out a few aspects of this Homeric ending, which, abrupt though it is, still feels *earned* in some way; no reader of Book 24 wants Odysseus to be torn from his home and set wandering again. Firstly, Zeus and Athena are in agreement about the truce that will secure peace for

---

<sup>305</sup> *Odyssey* 23.347-8. trans. A. T. Murray, rev. George E. Dimock. New York: Harvard UP, 1995.

<sup>306</sup> *Odyssey* 24.545.

Odysseus' remaining years—this is a political accommodation that has divine sanction and even divine inspiration. Secondly, by meeting, feeding, clothing, and fighting alongside his father and son once more, Odysseus has achieved an intergenerational reconciliation with Laertes and Telemachus; the bonds of patrimony have been restored and reaffirmed; past and future have been put back into joint. And, finally, Tiresias' cryptic prophecy in Book 11 notwithstanding, Odysseus has finally come home—he has reached the *telos* (aim; end; goal) of his *nostos* (homecoming). The *Odyssey* ends with Odysseus completing his quest and finding its endpoint where he began decades before. To recapitulate these points briefly, we can say that the Homeric epics conclude with a divinely ordered peace, at home, which reunites a multi-generational family of aristocratic warriors who had been separated from each other.

Dante Alighieri had another idea about how the sacker of cities would end up. Dante and Vergil find Odysseus—*Ulisse*—trapped in a flame with his co-conspirator Diomedes in the eighth pouch of the eighth inferno, populated by fraudulent counselors. Ulisse tells Vergil that he never returned to Ithaca, but instead set out for the open sea, because

neither my fondness for my son nor pity  
for my old father nor the love I owed  
Penelope, which would have gladdened her,  
was able to defeat in me the longing  
I had to gain experience of the world  
and of the vices and the worth of men.<sup>307</sup>

Ulisse sails with his few remaining retainers through the 'Pillars of Hercules', i.e., the Strait of Gibraltar, into the Atlantic Ocean. He girds his men with his characteristically persuasive yet dangerous eloquence: "you were not made to live your lives as brutes, / but to be followers of worth [*virtute*] and knowledge [*canoscenza*]." Instead of virtue and understanding, the Greeks meet death—they come upon a vast mountain, probably Mt. Purgatory, and from it issues a violent whirlwind that spins the ship, points its prow into the depths, and closes the sea over them all. Dante figures Ulisse

---

<sup>307</sup> *Inferno* 26.94-9. trans. Allen Mandelbaum. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.

as hubristic explorer, not content with home and hearth, whose immoderate appetite for “experience of the world” (*divenir del mondo esperto*, literally ‘to become an expert of the world’) signals the same disordered relationship with truth that makes him such a canny liar. In Dante’s telling, an anxious restlessness within the aged Ulisse denies him inner peace, causes him to reject all familial attachments—to his past (Laertes), his present (Penelope), and his future (Telemachus)—and, thus unmoored, to plunge headlong into the unknown, an impulse that can lead nowhere in Dante’s world, only into an absolutely empty, absolutely turbulent ocean.

The two fates of Odysseus and Ulisse could not be more different: divinely imposed peace and intergenerational reunion at home on the one hand, and a psychologized wanderlust entailing an abandonment of familial obligation and death on the high seas on the other. I hold these two stories up together, like the facing panels of a diptych, because to me they seem to illustrate something about the predicament in which Renaissance epic poets found themselves, in England and all over Europe. The dream of a teleological narrative for poets like Spenser, Drayton, Cowley, and Milton was to reconcile the generations through a story set in the epic past but which inflected the prosaic present, a story that would naturalize the way things are now by recourse to a divine plan or an inevitable evolution. Renaissance humanists wanted to recover ancient ethics, rhetoric, and knowledge so that they could, in some mysterious way, restore the true ground of their own societies. Bart Giamatti put it this way:

Spenser knows what his culture knows: that without exploring origins, we have no originals from which to fashion ourselves the new and true copies; that, for individuals as for institutions, unless one first returns to one’s sources, *ad fontes*, there is no genuine rebirth.<sup>308</sup>

And yet what this dissertation has shown is that the further these humanist-poets pursued their appetite for truth, for historical fact, for knowledge of the world, the more *alien* the past became. Instead of philosopher-kings composing propositions about Being in serenity, they found half-

---

<sup>308</sup> *Exile and Change in Renaissance Literature*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984. p. 93.

naked, brutish primitives, their hands soaked in sacrificial blood. The narrative momentum of Renaissance epic strives for the fitting end of Odysseus' Ithacan banquet scene; we get the unanchored, lost ship piloted by the tormented Ulisse only in flashes, only in half-glimpsed anxieties that occasionally break through to the surface.

To write about the scenes on this diptych as I have, in terms of epic's internal contradiction or generic tension between, say, teleology and scholarship or narrative and philology, is to risk lapsing into what Paul Ricoeur called 'the hermeneutics of suspicion' and in turn being bound by what Rita Felski has identified as 'the limits of critique'. Literary scholars and other species of present-day humanists are prone to engaging in a kind of analysis that is habitually *negative* in its exposure and demystification, *intellectual* in its cool irony and rejection of common sense, and that *comes from below* in its instinctive anti-authoritarianism.<sup>309</sup> A dissertation project that traces the unavoidable fissures and unresolved impasses in epic poems written by elite white men to celebrate monarchy might feel like that kind of deconstructive, suspicious critique, but that has not been my intention or approach here. I have not performed a 'symptomatic' reading of the hidden depths of these poems, peeling back the layers of authorial psyches or reconstructing the material conditions of production that un- or subconsciously manifest themselves in literary texts. Instead, I hope to have shown that these poets were well aware of the difficulties their epic labors presented: Spenser sets a description of manuscript reading in an unreliable and inapplicable archive quite deliberately; Drayton turns a forgotten border into a major, eloquent character; Cowley publishes his tortured analysis of Hebrew *mishpat* right alongside his poem; Milton's epic ends with two solitary human beings, alone but for their own powers, facing the chaos of human history.

Rather than deconstructing early modern English epic in order to disentangle these poets' confusion from a position of postmodern knowingness, I have tried to honor those moments of

---

<sup>309</sup> I refer to Felski's "Critique and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion", *M/C Journal* 15.1 (2012), but c.f. her expanded treatment of this theme, *The Limits of Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).



instability that threatened to disrupt and unmake the fragile mythos underlying English society. When the poets I study discover that alienating fact that must be confronted, they render their own home strange once more and make their world contingent instead of teleological, arbitrary instead of natural. To use a resonant Heideggerian term, the poets in this dissertation suddenly remember their ‘thrownness’ (*Geworfenheit*), the quality that refers to human beings as they are thrown into a world not of their own making or desire, with a past that must be interpreted but is not binding or deterministic.<sup>310</sup> These poets, happy to be drinking wine in Ithaca, were occasionally struck by visions of a rudderless ship contending with indifferent, pathless waves and they did not shrink from that disturbing prospect but kept their eyes open. For me, those moments in epic poetry are the most authentic and truly heroic.

---

<sup>310</sup> Section 38 of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper, 1962. pp. 219-24) discusses this concept in detail; c.f. “Thrownness” in Daniel Dahlstrom’s *The Heidegger Dictionary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

## Works Cited

### *Primary sources*

- Alberti, Leon Battista. *The Use and Abuse of Books*. trans. Renee Neu Watkins. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1999.
- Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*. trans. Allen Mandelbaum. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980.
- Bellows, Henry Adams (trans). *The Poetic Edda*. The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1923; rpt. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004.
- Benedict. *Rule of St. Benedict*. ed. and trans. Bruce L. Venarde. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011.
- New Oxford Annotated Bible*. ed. Michael D. Coogan. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007 (3rd ed).
- Blundeville, Thomas. *The true order and methode of wryting and reading Hystories*. London, 1574.
- Caesar, Julius. *Commentaries on the Gallic Wars*. trans. H. J. Edwards. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1917.
- Camden, William. *Britannia*. trans. Philemon Holland. London: Bishop and Norton, 1610.
- . *The historie of the life and reigne of the most renowned and victorious Princesse Elizabeth, late Queene of England*. 2nd ed. London: Benjamin Fisher, 1630.
- Caravaggio. *Supper at Emmaus* [painting]. 1601. National Gallery, London.
- Casaubon, Meric. *Treatise of Use and Custome*. London: John Legat, 1638.
- Charles I. *Eikon Basilike*. London, 1649.
- Cowley, Abraham. *The English Writings of Abraham Cowley, vol. 1 Poems*. ed. A. R. Waller. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1905.
- Dee, John. *Perfect Arte of Navigation*. London: John Daye, 1577.
- Descriptio Urbis Romae*. eds. Martine Furno and Mario Carpo. Geneva: Droz, 2000.
- Drayton, Michael. *Poly-Olbion*. London: M. Lownes, 1613.
- . *Poems*. London: William Stansby, 1619.
- Dronke, Ursula (trans). *The Poetic Edda*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2011 (3rd ed).

- Geoffrey of Monmouth. *History of the Kings of Britain*. trans. Lewis Thorpe. London: Penguin, 1966.
- Gildas. *De calamitate, excidio et conquestu Britanniae*. ed. Polydore Vergil. Antwerp, 1525.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper, 1962.
- Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1950.
- Homer. *The Odyssey*. trans. A. T. Murray, rev. George E. Dimock. New York: Harvard UP, 1995.
- de Hooghe, Romeyn. *Circumcision Ceremony in an Amsterdam Sephardic Family* [drawing]. 1668. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.
- Howard, Henry, Earl of Surrey. *Certain Bokes of Virgiles Aeneas turned into English meter...* London: Richard Tottel, 1557.
- James VI/I. *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*. Edinburgh: Robert Waldegrave, 1598.
- Jerome. *Select letters of St. Jerome*. trans. F. A. Wright. Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1954.
- Kant, Immanuel. *The Critique of Practical Judgment*. trans. Mary Gregor. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- . *Critique of Pure Reason*. trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1990.
- . *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. trans. Mary Gregor. New York: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- . *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. trans. Ted Humphrey. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983.
- Kamban. *Ramayana*. trans. Shanti Lal Nagar. Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2008.
- Livy. *Ab urbe condita*. trans. B. O. Foster. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1924.
- de Maistre, Joseph. *Considerations on France*. trans. Richard A. Lebrun. New York: Cambridge UP, 1994.
- Milton, John. *Areopagitica*. London: 1644.
- . *History of Britain*. London: John Martyn, 1677 (2nd ed).
- . *Paradise Lost*. ed. John Leonard. New York: Penguin, 2000.
- . *Complete Poetry*. ed. John T. Shawcross. New York: Doubleday, 1963.
- Mirabilia urbis Romae*. trans. Francis Morgan Nichols. New York: Italica Press, 1986, 2nd ed.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. trans. David Raeburn. London: Penguin, 2004.

- Petrarch, Francesco. *Letters from Petrarch*. trans. Morris Bishop. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1966.
- . *Africa*. trans. Thomas G. Bergin and Alice S. Wilson. New Haven: Yale UP, 1978.
- . *Petrarch's Lyric Poems: the Rime sparse and other lyrics*. ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1976.
- Rembrandt van Rijn. *The Supper at Emmaus* [painting]. 1648. Louvre, Paris.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract and Discourses*. trans. G. D. H. Cole. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1950.
- Sannazaro, Jacopo. *Latin Poetry*. trans. Michael C. J. Putnam. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2009.
- Seneca. *Epistles*. trans. Richard M. Gummere. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1917.
- Selden, John. *Table Talk*. London: E. Smith, 1689.
- . *Titles of Honor*. London: William Stansby, 1631. 2nd ed.
- Speed, John. *Theatre of the Empire of Great Britaine*. London: William Hall, 1612.
- Spenser, Edmund. *The Faerie Queene*. ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita, and Toshiyuki Suzuki. London: Longman, 2006 (2nd ed).
- Narayan, R. K. (trans). *Ramayana*. New York: Penguin, 1972.
- Valmiki. *Ramayana*. trans. Ronald P. Goldman. New York: NYU Press, 2005.
- Vergil. *Aeneid*. trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999.
- . *Georgics*. trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, rev. G. P. Goold. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999.
- Vergil, Polydore. *On Discovery*. trans. Brian P. Copenhaver. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2002.
- . *An abridgement of the notable woorke of Polidore Vergile...* trans. Thomas Langley. London, 1546.
- . *Anglica Historia*. ed., trans. Dana F. Sutton (bilingual hypertext edition based on the 1555 Basle edition). <http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/polvergl/>.
- Vico, Giambattista. *New Science*. trans. from the 3rd edition (1744), Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1948.

### ***Secondary sources***

- Berger, Harry. *Revisionary Play*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

- Bloom, Harold. *Map of Misreading*. New York: Oxford UP, 2003 (2nd ed).
- Bowersock, G. W. *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam*. New York: Oxford UP, 2013.
- Butler, George F. "Milton's 'sage and serious Poet Spencer': Error and Imitation in *The Faerie Queene* and *Areopagitica*", *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 49.2 (Summer 2007), pp. 101-24.
- Carley, James P. "Polydore Vergil and John Leland on King Arthur: The Battle of the Books", *Interpretations* 15.2 (Spring 1984), pp. 86-100.
- Crawley, Robert Ralston. "Drayton's Use of Welsh History", *Studies in Philology* 22.2 (April 1925), pp. 234-55.
- Curran, John E., Jr. "The History Never Written: Bards, Druids, and the Problem of Antiquarianism in Poly-Olbion", *Renaissance Quarterly* 51.2 (Summer 1998), pp. 498-525.
- Dahlstrom, Daniel. *The Heidegger Dictionary*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Daryaee, Touraj. *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire*. New York: I. B. Tauris, 2009.
- Dimock, Wai Chee. "Introduction: Genres as Fields of Knowledge", *PMLA* 122.5 (Oct. 2007), pp. 1377-88.
- Dubois, Thomas A. *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.
- DuRocher, Richard J. "The Wounded Earth in *Paradise Lost*", *Studies in Philology* 93.1 (Winter, 1996), pp. 93-115.
- Empson, William. *Milton's God*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1961.
- Felski, Rita. "Critique and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion." *M/C Journal* 15.1 (2012). online.
- Fish, Stanley. *Surprised by Sin: the Reader in Paradise Lost*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967.
- Giamatti, A. Bartlett. *Exile and Change in Renaissance Literature*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1984.
- Guillory, John. *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History*. New York: Columbia UP, 1983.
- Grafton, Anthony. *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000.
- . "Past Belief: Visions of Early Christianity in Renaissance and Reformation Europe", A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts. Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2014.
- Grafton, Anthony and Johanna Weinberg. *"I have always loved the holy tongue": Isaac Casaubon, the Jews, and a forgotten chapter in Renaissance scholarship*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2011.

- Grafton, Anthony and Megan Williams. *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2006.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *The Swerve*. New York: Norton, 2012.
- Gregory, Tobias. *From Many Gods to One: Divine Action in Renaissance Epic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006.
- Grendler, Paul. *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2002.
- de Groot, Jerome. *Royalist Identities*. New York: Palgrave, 2004.
- Guibory, Achsah. *Christian Identity, Jews, and Israel in Seventeenth-Century England*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010.
- Hadfield, Andrew. *Edmund Spenser: A Life*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.
- . “Spenser, Drayton, and the Question of Britain”, *The Review of English Studies* 51.204 (Nov., 2000), pp. 582-99.
- Hager, Alan. “British Virgil: Four Renaissance Disguises of the Laocoön Passage of Book 2 of the *Aeneid*”, *Studies in English Literature* 22.1 (Winter 1982), pp. 21-38.
- Hamilton, A. C. *The Spenser Encyclopedia*. Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 1990.
- Hardison, O. B. “Tudor Humanism and Surrey’s Translation of the *Aeneid*”, *Studies in Philology* 83.3 (Summer 1986), pp. 237-260.
- Hay, Denys. “The Life of Polydore Vergil of Urbino”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* v. 12 (1949), pp. 132-51.
- Helgerson, Richard. *A Sonnet From Carthage: Garcilaso de la Vega and the New Poetry of Sixteenth-Century Europe*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007.
- . “The Land Speaks: Cartography, Chorography, and Subversion in Renaissance England”. *Representations* 16 (Autumn 1986), pp. 50-85.
- Herman, Peter C. “*Paradise Lost*, the Miltonic ‘Or’, and the Poetics of Incertitude”, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 43.1 (Winter, 2003). pp. 181-211.
- Hicks, Philip. *Neoclassical History and English Culture*. London: Palgrave, 1996.
- Hiller, Geoffrey. “‘Sacred Bards’ and ‘Wise Druides’: Drayton and His Archetype of the Poet”, *ELH* 51.1 (Spring 1984), pp. 1-15.
- Huskinson, J. M. “The Crucifixion of St. Peter: A Fifteenth-Century Topographical Problem”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32 (1969), pp. 135-61.

- Jacks, Philip. *The Antiquarian and the Myth of Antiquity: The Origins of Rome in Renaissance Thought*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1993.
- Jardine, Lisa and Anthony Grafton. "‘Studied for Action’: How Gabriel Harvey Read His Livy." *Past and Present* 0.129 (Nov. 1990), pp. 30-78.
- Johns, Adrian. *The Nature of the Book*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Kermode, Frank. "The Date of Cowley’s *Dauides*". *The Review of English Studies* 25.98 (April 1949), pp. 154-8.
- Landsberger, Franz. *Rembrandt, the Jews, and the Bible*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1945.
- Levy, F. J. *Tudor Historical Thought*. Pasadena, CA: Huntington Library Press, 1967.
- Lewis, C. S. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. New York: Oxford UP, 1942 (rpt. 1969).
- Loiseau, Jean. *Abraham Cowley, Sa Vie, Son Oeuvre*. Paris: Henri Didier, 1931.
- Major, Philip. *Writings of Exile in the English Revolution and Restoration*. London: Ashgate, 2013.
- von Maltzahn, Nicholas. *Milton’s History of Britain: Republican Historiography in the English Revolution*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.
- Martz, Louis. *Milton: Poet of Exile*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1980.
- Mills, Jerry Leath. "Prudence, History, and the Prince in The Faerie Queene, Book II", *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 41.2 (Feb. 1978), pp. 83-101.
- Momigliano, Arnaldo. *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1975.
- . *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- . "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D." rpt. in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1977.
- Mommsen, Theodor E. "Petrarch’s Conception of ‘The Dark Ages.’" *Speculum* 17.2 (April 1942), pp. 226-42.
- Murphy, Erin. "Sabrina and the Making of English History in *Poly-Olbion* and *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle*", *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 51.1 (Winter 2011), pp. 87-110.
- Nadler, Steven. *Rembrandt’s Jews*. Chicago: University of Chicago UP, 2003.
- Orgel, Stephen. "The Case for Comus", *Representations* 81.1 (Winter 2003), pp. 31-45.
- Oxford English Dictionary. 3rd ed. online.

- Pellicer, Juan Christian. "Virgil's *Georgics* II in *Paradise Lost*", *Translation and Literature* 14.2 (Autumn, 2005), pp. 129-47.
- Pollock, Sheldon. "Ramayana and Political Imagination in India", *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52.2 (May 1993), pp. 261-97.
- Poole, William. *Milton and the Idea of the Fall*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.
- Prescott, Anne Lake. "Marginal Discourse: Drayton's Muse and Selden's 'Story'", *Studies in Philology* 88.3 (Summer, 1991), pp. 307-28.
- Quint, David. *Inside Paradise Lost: Reading the Designs of Milton's Epic*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2014.
- Rajan, Balachandra. "Paradise Lost: The Hill of History". *Huntington Library Quarterly* 31.1 (Nov. 1967), pp. 43-63.
- Richardson, David. "Humanistic Intent in Surrey's *Aeneid*", *English Literary Renaissance* 6.2 (Spring 1976), pp. 204-19.
- Rosenblatt, Jason. *Renaissance England's Chief Rabbi: John Selden*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.
- Rotermund, H.-M. "The Motif of Radiance in Rembrandt's Biblical Drawings", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 15.3 (1952), pp. 101-21.
- Schwartz, Regina M. *The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Sharpe, Kevin. *Image Wars: Promoting Kings and Commonwealths in England, 1603-1660*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2010.
- Silver, Larry and Shelley Perlove. "Rembrandt's Jesus" in *Rembrandt and the Face of Jesus*, ed. Lloyd DeWitt. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2011.
- Skinner, Quentin. *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.
- Stern, Virginia F. *Gabriel Harvey: his Life, Marginalia, and Library*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1979.
- Stevens, Clara. "Milton's Nymph: Sabrina". *The English Journal* 17.7 (Sep., 1928), pp. 571-5.
- Strier, Richard. *The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.
- Teskey, Gordon. "Night thoughts on Mutability" in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser's Mutabilitie Cantos*, ed. Jane Grogan. New York: Manchester UP, 2010.
- Thapar, Romila. *A History of India, Volume One*. New York: Penguin, 1966.
- Toomer, G. J. *John Selden: A Life in Scholarship*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007.



- Trevor-Roper, Hugh. *Archbishop Laud, 1573-1645*. London: Macmillan, 1940 (2nd ed. 1962).
- Trotter, David. *The Poetry of Abraham Cowley*. London: Macmillan, 1979.
- Walker, William. "On Reason, Faith, and Freedom in *Paradise Lost*", *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 47.1 (Winter, 2007), pp. 143-59.
- Welch, Anthony. *The Renaissance Epic and the Oral Past*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2012.
- Williams, Raymond. *Keywords*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983 (rev. ed.).
- Wilson-Lee, Edward. "'The Subtle Tree': Idolatry and Material Memory in Surrey's *Aeneid*". *Translation and Literature* 20.2 (Summer 2011), pp. 137-56.
- Woolf, D. R. *Reading History in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Zell, Michael. *Reframing Rembrandt: Jews and the Christian Image in Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Zoëga, Geir T. *Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004 (rpt).
- Zurcher, Andrew. "The Printing of the Cantos of Mutabilitie in 1609", in *Celebrating Mutabilitie: Essays on Edmund Spenser's Mutabilitie Cantos*, ed. Jane Grogan. New York: Manchester UP, 2010. pp. 40-60.