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Catherine Gimelli Martin. Milton's Italy: Anglo-Italian Literature, Travel, and Religion in Seventeenth-Century England.

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The influence of Italian culture on Milton's works has been highlighted by a venerable tradition of scholarship, from F. T. Prince's *The Italian Element in Milton's Verse* (1954) to J. M. Steadman's *Epic and Tragic Structure in* Paradise Lost (1976) and Mario A. DiCesare's *Milton in Italy* (1991). Catherine Gimelli Martin's Milton's Italy obviously fits in this critical tradition, but it also aims at offering a new perspective on Milton's Italian tour, reassessing (and often chastising) common critical assumptions sedimented with misperceptions or generalizations. Martin stresses that the Italian trip was a "crucial part of his intellectual formation" (74), but also that the "Italian influence" was not limited to the time of his tour: Milton's "complex relationship to his adopted homeland" (5) had begun at least a decade before his trip, and he kept studying Ariosto in the 1640s and Machiavelli even after his blindness in the 1650s.

Each chapter reconsiders, or sheds new light on, the Italian contexts Milton got in touch with during his travel and that influenced his ideas and convictions, from religion (Chapters 3 and 4) to philosophy (Chapter 5), from feminine and androgynous perfection (Chapter 6) to politics (Chapter 7), from epic theories and conventions (Chapter 8) to opera (Chapter 9). Martin's main claim is that Milton was in permanent dialogue with Italian intellectuals: his first and foremost cultural models were the great Italian writers he revered (Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, and Tasso), who had not only made Italy the cradle of the Renaissance, but "planted the seeds of the Reformation" (8). Martin, however, also underscores the relevance of many other, lesser known Italian thinkers who molded Milton's religious and political ideals. This is particularly evident in the first two chapters, where she duly stresses that Italy in the 1630s was not necessarily a country in steep and irreversible decline. True, the increasing ideological pressure of the Counter-Reformation was stifling Italian society more and more, and the trial of Galileo had struck a deadly blow to Italy's cultural prestige; yet, if freedom of expression had been drastically reduced and most writers had chosen the safe way of self-imposed censorship, centuries of secular learning and achievements could not be eliminated. The continuing vitality of the Italian cultural scene is demonstrated by the Italian scholars and scientists who, especially in Padua and Venice, kept attracting the attention of many open-minded English reformers, such as Andrew Marvell, James Harrington, and John Evelyn. Similarly, the most advanced positions of Florentine humanism had been dampened, but not silenced, and in 1657 Galileo's Florentine disciples established the *Accademia del Cimento*, one of the first scientific academies in Europe. As to music, it flourished in Venice and Milton could collect a large number of works of the major baroque composers.

Milton may well have exaggerated the positive aspects of his Italian period, but he was certainly not unaware of the worst manifestations of popery, and even the physical dangers inherent in traveling abroad. However, his main aim was not to see personally and denounce Italy's religious or moral corruption, but to visit what he considered the home itself of arts and civilization, in the hope of exporting that model into England and make his nation the true heir of Italy's cultural and republican legacy. Martin suggests that Milton's openness toward the Italians and his relatively mild criticism against Roman religion are the proof that he had mainly "republican aims for his tour" (35). Moreover, during his trip Milton found confirmation of how intensely Italian intellectuals were still opposing the distortions of the church of Rome and advancing the cause for the arts: Milton especially admired the *spirituali* and "similar 'proto-Protestant' reformers abroad" (80) who had sensibly discussed such decisive problems as the difference between saving grace and implicit faith, or the association of the pope with Antichrist. This certainly encouraged Milton to seek and treasure his friendship with such great scholars as Carlo Dati, Benedetto Buonmattei, Antonio Francini, and Cardinal Francesco Barberini, and easily explains why he chose to celebrate Galileo as a martyr for the cause of truth and science instead of glorifying English Puritan heroes at home. The Milton that emerges from the first chapters is, thus, not the staunch, inflexible censurer of Rome as the embodiment of Antichrist, but a much more complex and refined intellectual whose latitude of thought and belief inevitably made his anti-popery "too international to be properly termed anti-Catholic" (101). He combated any dogmatic approach to religion (be it Catholic or Protestant) in the wake of Sarpi's thought, revived Dante's cry against the clerics who regularly usurped free conscience and opinion, and tried to elaborate a

theological compromise to reconcile different theories of grace that were redolent of the Italian spirituali's speculations.

The convincing and well-documented Chapters 3 and 4 reassess Milton's complex relationship to Catholicism within the wider picture of his hate of any religious authority enforcing indisputable beliefs. Anti-Catholicism was not identical with anti-popery, which is why Milton admired such Catholic anti-papists as Dante, Petrarch, and Sarpi, the author of the *History of the Council of Trent*. Martin provides several examples of Milton's attitude in his prose and poetic writings, showing his impatience with rigid confessional categories, such as "strict Protestant *solafideism*" (116), which he integrated with the humanist value of "self-esteem" and the belief in God's acceptance of human cooperation in the process of salvation (125). After all, Milton traveled in a country that was striving to regain a more authentic religion and in which, paradoxically, most parishes were autonomous, new seminars were independent of the universities, and bishops had little control over the priests recruited from their native communities. Moreover, it was home to several sectarians and "heretics," including Socinians and Waldensians, as well as individual figures such as Bernardino Ochino, Pietro Vermigli (Peter Martyr), and Paolo Sarpi. The central chapters also provide a detailed account of what could appear just theological "technicalities" (including such doctrines as free will and free grace, the "double justice" theory of justification, or the Catholic concept of "engrafted grace" as opposed to the Protestant idea of "imputed grace") but that in fact produced dramatic "differences in outlook" (121) with equally dramatic ideological and political consequences. For example, contrary to Protestant tenets, Milton made free choice a truly universal principle, and, in the wake of Pico della Mirandola's *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, conceived immortality as an open arena in which human as well as heavenly creatures constantly make life-altering decisions.

Chapter 7 discusses the Italian roots of Milton's republican thought, showing that his concept of "negative liberty" was, again, a direct borrowing from Italian thinkers. In Dante, Guicciardini, Machiavelli, Boccalini, Botero, and above all Sarpi, Milton could find a variety of arguments and examples confirming that "the gradual expansion of ecclesiastical power proved disastrous for the health of both church and state" (201), a menace that was looming into view in Laudian England. Martin also sides with Diana Benet and Edward Chaney in exposing the biases and the exaggeration of English historiography in making Milton the perfect champion of the Protestant cause. Rather, he was deeply annoyed by the latent hypocrisy and the unthinking conformity of Protestant authorities, which led him not only to attack English bishops, but ultimately to extol the invisible church as the only true ecclesia, perfectly in tune with Sarpi's idea. After all, popery was not just in Rome, but wherever true religion was perverted, anti-Christian policies were enforced, and clerical misappropriation of authority or power was committed, which was exactly what Milton would denounce in *Of Reformation*.

Less convincing is Chapter 8's analysis of Milton's fusion of the two Italian genres of epic and tragedy. The key factor in this appropriation was Milton's genius, which allowed him to turn into gold the various cues and stimuli he received even from minor intellectuals. The debates on the epic form or the Italian language (the so called "*questione della lingua*"), for example, are usually relegated to an antiquarian, specialist debate by present-day Italian scholars and they are often overlooked as tantamount to boring, useless theoretical subtleties; however, they were fundamental for Milton, whose "grand synthesis" (235) reworked them to serve as the backbone for his revolutionary approach to epic and its language. Martin rightly underscores Milton's typical tendency to blend and reinterpret his many sources "in his own idiosyncratic fashion" (236) because Milton adapted "the entire range of Italian epic and romance tradition" (260). Yet, since this mixed influence on his writing "should be assumed throughout" (13) the book, it is surprising to find many pages reasserting the Italian lineage of his grand style or highlighting some superficial, overarching similarities and differences between Dante and Milton (249), such as the structure and tone of their presentation of demons (250), their cosmological and architectonic imagination (251), or their adoption of triadic structures (253). It would have been more interesting to have poignant textual examples of Milton's less predictable and original use of Italian sources, despite Martin's protestation that Milton's debts to Dante and his successors can be detailed only in focused studies (249).

Chapter 9 reassesses the well-known critical tradition concerning the influence of Italian operas on "the theme, style, and portrayal of Milton's Samson" (265). Martin argues that Milton's chief sources were Italian operas and oratorios rather than Greek tragedies, but, although she certainly offers good opportunity for going over some classic studies on Milton and music, she basically discusses materials within critical paradigms and methods that were already suggested by Prince (1954), Arthos (1968), or Pirrotta (1982).

Therefore, she offers original contributions only sporadically, as in her analysis of Milton's dramatic use of rhymes and regular verse form against the more irregular, "discordant, or 'staccato' Italianate sonnet" (277), or in her scrutiny of the conclusion of *Samson Agonistes*, which she considers "Milton's final tribute to Italian tragic theory" (288).

On the whole, Martin convincingly emphasizes the importance of a broad comparative approach to appreciate fully Milton's poetic, political, and religious development in the light of his Italian experience. She attenuates what DiCesare's subtitle emphasized, that is the contradictions in Milton's relationships to Italy, but her learned forays into so many complex topics demonstrate that what seems contradictory (for example, the fact that Milton was more Catholic than it is usually deemed) is not necessarily so, or is simply the consequence of some critics' undue tendency to adopt rigid and ideologically biased categories.

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