

“Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation”

Milton, Print, and Nationhood

by

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Abstract

This study begins by examining the interconnections between print and nationalism in John Milton's prose works in order to demonstrate that Milton's interest in print—including print-related activities like reading, writing, and publishing—is not simply a byproduct of his vocation. Instead, I argue that Milton consciously registered his reliance on and use of print in writing the nation. Further, I argue that Milton's writing of the nation is in keeping with a modern definition of nationalism as a unifying cultural construct that wields considerable emotional poignancy despite its lack of ideological specificity. In making this argument, I am adapting a modern definition of nationalism and arguing against scholars who see nationalism as a product of modernity.

I organize my dissertation into two sections: the first section, chapters 2 and 3, discusses the confluence of print and nationalism while the second section, chapters 4 and 5, examines Milton's poems, *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*, as nation-building texts. As chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate, Milton had an acute awareness of the role of print in the public life of the nation, and he shaped his own identity as an author based on his contribution to England's print culture. In chapters 4 and 5, I look at the ways Milton's poems suggest a continuation of his commitment to nation-building although the poems were written during the Restoration: a period of time when Milton would have doubted the critical capabilities of his fellow countrymen. *Paradise Lost* continues the recuperative work undertaken in prose pieces like *Eikonoklastes* by helping to educate the

reader in political reading. In *Samson Agonistes*, Milton explores the way that the individual and nation are vulnerable to the same sort of corruption which emphasizes the degree to which inward and outward servitude is linked. Yet, neither poem gives up on “nationalism” as a source of individual liberty and positive form of community. Instead, both poems offer an examination of nationalism that balances the nation’s potential with a consideration of the limits and possible abuses of this potential.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Milton's Vocation and the Nation

In a hushed yet hopeful manner, a young Milton wrote of his poetic and public aspirations to his close childhood friend, Charles Diodati. “Listen, Diodati, but in secret, lest I blush; and let me talk to you grandiloquently for a while. You ask what I am thinking of? So help me God, an immortality of fame. What am I doing? Growing my wings and practicing flight. But my Pegasus still raises himself on very tender wings” (CPW 1:327). Letters to friends and mentors extant from the late 1630s, a time when Milton had already devoted five years to private study in preparation for a literary career, reveal Milton's concern with fulfilling his vocation. The anxiety over his literary maturity expressed here in the letter to Diodati as well as in early poems such as *Lycidas* (1-7) demonstrates the central space writing held for Milton.¹ Yet, even from Milton's earliest comments on his chosen vocation, we can see that writing was not simply about achieving personal fame. Instead, Milton's understanding of a literary vocation included a national dimension. Indeed, from his early career, Milton was invested in the broader issues associated with print culture such as reading, writing, and publishing.² Besides mentioning his association with booksellers in several letters (CPW 1:

¹ All citations to Milton's poetry are taken from Complete Poems and Major Prose. Ed. Merritt Y. Hughes New York: Odyssey, 1957.

322, 324) and recording his desire for fame through the immortality of print, these letters suggest that Milton believed that these activities were essential to nation-building. For example, his letter to Benedetto Buonmattei, an authority on the Tuscan language whom he met while in Italy, directly speaks to the connection between print and the nation:

Since you are preparing new Institutes of your native tongue, Benedetto Buonmattei, ... you are both beginning a journey to fame shared by some of the highest intellects, and you have aroused, I see, a hope and an opinion among your fellow Citizens that by your own effort you will easily bring either light, or richness, or at least polish and order to pervious works. By what an extraordinary debt you will have bound your countrymen they will indeed be ungrateful if they themselves do not perceive. Whoever in a state knows how to form the manners of men wisely, to rule them at home and at war with excellent precepts, him before others do I think especially worthy of all honor. Next to him, however, is the one who tries to fix by precepts and rules the order and pattern of writing and speaking received from a good age of the nation ... For if we wish to compare the usefulness of the two men, the one alone is able to effect an upright and holy society of Citizens; the other alone can make it truly noble, and splendid, and brilliant... The one provides, I believe, a noble ferocity and intrepid strategy against an enemy invading the boundaries; the other, with a learned censorship of ears and a light-armed guard of good Authors, undertakes to overcome and drive out Barbarism, that filthy civil enemy of character which attacks the spirits of men (CPW 1: 328-329).³

In this letter, the guard of “good Authors” is as valuable (if not more so) as a good army. Language is directly connected to civility and community development and thus print has a significant public role. The idea that the individual writer has an important contribution to his country is repeated in Milton’s later formulations of his vocation and is an important impetus to the poems of his final years.

² While reading and writing are not activities solely associated with print culture, the increase in book production gave these activities a greater reach and significance.

³ I have used *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton* for prose citations.

While Milton's life-long interest and commitment to the printed word involved an elaborate and complex discourse of selfhood, his texts were equally engaged with a discourse of nationhood no less complex or elaborate. By 1642, Milton boldly outlined his intention to create literature that would "imbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of vertu, and publick civility" (CPW 1: 816). In fact, for men like Milton, who were writing after the Reformation had endowed the individual with an unprecedented liberty to read and interpret scripture for himself, the printed word gained extraordinary influence and seemed alive with possibility for both personal growth and public life. Indeed, this sense of possibility is captured in Milton's early prose works. Entering into the pamphlet wars in the early 1640s, Milton asserts that reading and writing could constitute political engagement and action. Milton's early political writings delineate various types of liberties, including the liberty to read, write, interpret, and produce texts. Further, these types of liberties are a key component to Milton's conception of the nation since at its best, the nation guarantees the individual increased liberty, whether personal or political.

There is no easy separation between a discourse of selfhood and nationhood. Although Milton entered the pamphlet wars anonymously in 1641 with his contribution to the *Smectymnuuns*, and then an extended polemic titled *Of Reformation*, by 1642 his name appears on the title page of his *Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty* and he sees fit to step back from his main arguments and provide a detailed autobiographical section. This pamphlet

demonstrates the degree to which Milton's self and national interests were interconnected. Here, he presents himself as a learned poet who will "be an interpreter & relater of the best and sagest things among [his] own Citizens . . . in the mother dialect" (CPW 1: 811-812). Not only will he become the conduit through which the nation's exploits are preserved in print, but he will preserve them in the nation's language, the mother dialect. Although this reference to one's native language is clichéd,⁴ the familial allusion reinforces the author's connection to his would-be readers. Interestingly, the pamphlet seems equally invested in the discursive production of the self and the nation as Milton not only carefully imagines the type of writer that addresses and speaks on behalf of the nation, but he also imagines the kind of nation he is writing to, for, and about. By invoking England as a type of Israel, an elect nation, and citing scriptural authority, Milton imagines an England that by virtue of its privileged position is capable of rejecting prelacy in favour of a church comprised of thinking, reading, and self-regulated individuals. The sense of national destiny and history outlined in the Hebrew Scriptures provided a significant narrative structure for many English writers. As Elizabeth Sauer explains, "In the early modern period, England subsumed the history of ancient Israel into its national providential narrative, which for dissenters and millenarians was to culminate in a temporal *regnum Christi*" (*Milton and Gender* 133).

⁴ The OED's earliest reference to "mother tongue" is dated 1425.

Narratives, such as the England as Israel topos, were indeed an important component of the discursive production of the nation. Reflecting on Milton's body of texts, Andrew Hadfield remarks:

The story of the nation's identity has to be told again and again to affirm its truth, and in these retellings that identity simply cannot remain the same. Milton is remarkably consistent in his representations of the national form and identity throughout his writings, a testimony to the careful thought that he gave this crucial question, as well as to the central place that it had in the lives of seventeenth-century English men and women (1).

While I agree with Hadfield's suggestion that national narratives need to be repeated and that the question of national identity was a significant one in seventeenth-century England, his assertion that Milton is consistent in his representation of national identity needs to be carefully qualified. Milton's poetry and prose exhibits doubts, anxieties, and insecurities about England's national status and thus his commitment to any single national narrative is rarely unqualified. Although Hadfield credits Milton with a "straightforward perception of what [the nation] was and who could speak for it: the people as represented in parliament," and points to the Roman republic as Milton's main national model, I would argue that Milton was interested in the values associated with republicanism—particularly the agency and dignity extended to the individual citizen—well before he was able to articulate a theory of a concrete political organization. Although the Roman republic does figure significantly in texts such as *Areopagitica* and *Eikonoklastes*, this national model is balanced with invocations of other national narratives such as the England as Israel narrative

mentioned above. England is not simply a new Rome or Israel, but exceeds both of these national models. While Milton's growing opposition to monarchy can be mapped out in his prose writing throughout the 1640s and 50s, and while this critique of monarchy is central to the development of Milton's republicanism, it is not until much later in his career that he begins to articulate a republican political theory. In the 1660 *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a free Commonwealth*, Milton argues that the "happiness of a nation must needs be firmest and certainest in a full and free Councel of thir own electing, where no single person, but reason only swaies" (CPW 7: 427). As several critics have noted, even in this pamphlet Milton's theoretical approach to republican theory remains vague; however, the passage insists that personal and political liberty are connected: "The whole freedom of man consists either in spiritual or civil liberty"⁵ (CPW 7: 437).⁵ It is this connection between the personal and the political that remains a constant thread throughout Milton's career.

Milton's attitude to kingship was not unusual, but rather it was symptomatic of a growing public rethinking of monarchy. Although there seems to be a logical progression between the rejection of monarchy to the embracing of republicanism, this political movement was not envisioned or understood in the same way by all seventeenth-century writers. Indeed, Milton's sense of republicanism takes shape over time and first emerges as a set of values and ideals

⁵ See Thomas N. Corns "Milton and the Characteristics of a Free Commonwealth." Milton and Republicanism (43).

rather than a desire for a particular political configuration. As Thomas Corns points out, Milton “appears first as a regicide rather than as a republican,” which is to say that Milton’s republicanism developed over time and, in part, as a consequence of his disappointment and disapproval for the abuses he associated with kingship (*Milton and Republicanism* 26). As will be discussed in chapter 3, monarchy did have a strong cultural acceptance throughout the seventeenth century, and thus it is not surprising that early republican thinking envisioned a limited monarchy where authority, although wielded by the monarch, originates in the people. As Johann Sommerville notes, “the regimes of James I and his son attracted criticism not because they were monarchies but because they pursued unpopular policies” (474). Charles’ refusal to call a Parliament between 1629 and 1640 in tandem with increasing suspicions of his Catholic sympathies led subjects to doubt the king’s ability to facilitate and engender the type of English nation that Milton describes in *Areopagitica*. In other words, these political missteps allowed writers and politicians to question whether traditional monarchy was an appropriate institution for the English people. Despite attempts at censorship, print provided a powerful medium for expressing these ideas. The House of Commons, at least theoretically, enjoyed free speech, and parliamentary speeches were eagerly circulated in print.⁶ Many of these speeches, such as James Whitelocke’s *A learned and Necessary Argument to Prove that Each Subject Hath a Propriety in*

⁶ Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, press censorship remains uneven and notoriously difficult to enforce. Although publishing critiques of the king remained risky under both James I and Charles I, after the long parliament met in 1641 royal censorship collapsed (see Sommerville 474-76).

His Goods and William Hakewill's *The Liberty of the Subject Against the Pretended power of Impositions*, insisted that ancient English law superseded the king and thus only parliament was authorized to legislate and tax. Further, writers such as Thomas Scott resisted the notion of absolute monarchical rule on religious grounds. Arbitrary government was often aligned with popery while Protestantism was aligned with English liberties. This connection between Protestantism and liberty became a dominant focus for influential and controversial writers such as John Lilburne and outspoken Puritans such as John Bastwick, Henry Burton, and William Prynne.⁷

Building upon republican theories of the sixteenth century, anti-royalists continued to insist and argue that English kings were bound by law. For this reason, a subject's duty of allegiance was primarily to the nation and its laws and customs rather than the king's absolute will.⁸ Moreover, these challenges implied a distinction between the nation and the king. While sixteenth-century English nationalism generally relied on a harmonious confluence between the body of the ruler and the body politic, seventeenth-century England allowed for a much more abstract conceptualization of the nation independent of the monarchy. In this sense, seventeenth-century nationalism does comply with a modern understanding of nationalism as the nation remains abstract and independent of any particular form of government. For Milton, republican ideals and language could be

⁷ Interestingly, all of these men faced prosecution for publishing or writing seditious pamphlets in the 1630s.

⁸ See Sommerville 477

incorporated into his vision of the English people and nation, but nationalism and republicanism are not simply conflated. As Derek Hirst has observed, the upheavals that began in 1640 occasioned a great deal of debate about the direction of the nation and the meaning of its experience (634). Indeed, “questions about the meaning of community were inevitable when Englishmen were killing one another, dismantling the monarchy that had figured centrally in almost a millennium of England’s history, and fragmenting the national church” (Hirst 634). Milton’s major poems produced, at least in part, during the post-Restoration period reflect the changes that occurred in the experience of the nation, especially as the English nation lost its close identification with the monarchy and turned to a stronger notion of the community as an independent and significant body with political as well as personal interests.⁹ Indeed, Milton’s poems can be seen as good examples of nation-building texts as they attempt to give shape to England’s history and emerging collective identity.

For Milton, the nation retains a transitory quality: it is almost always in a process of becoming or just passing. Thus, much national discourse involves the language of becoming and imagining. More importantly, as this study attempts to demonstrate, Milton’s interest in nationhood often relies on a discourse of selfhood. Both the identity of the author and the nation that he represents are articulated through textual engagement. Writing, reading, and publishing allow the

⁹ I agree with Derek Hirst’s assertion that Milton’s writings demonstrate some of the key ways that the nation was written during the revolutionary period (634).

individual to take part in larger communal conversation and his ability to engage in this way helps to shape a sense of identity. In much of Milton's writing, we see a connection between these skills and the conception of the good national citizen.

In his anonymous 1641 defense of the cause of reformation in England, Milton praises political thinkers "who by writing layd the solid, and true foundations" of governing a nation, yet laments that in his contemporary England "there is no art that hath bin more canker'd in her principles, more soyl'd, and slubber'd with aphorisming pedantry then the art of policie" (CPW 1: 571).¹⁰ Here, as in his later political tracts, Milton invites his readers to share or imagine an authentic Protestant English nation, which he would continue to (re)define over his lifetime. In *Of Reformation* "to govern well is to train up a Nation in true wisdom and vertue," but these qualities cannot be enforced upon a people and instead must be sought out by each individual and encouraged by political figures (CPW 1: 571).

In response to supporters of episcopacy, Milton questions: "How then this third, and last sort [i.e. the politicians] that hinder reformation, will justify that it stands not with reason of state, I much muse? For certain I am the *Bible* is shut against them, as certaine that neither Plato, nor Aristotle is for their turnes" (CPW 1: 573). Milton's point is that neither the Bible nor the classical texts that inspired republicanism support the assumptions upon which Episcopal arguments

¹⁰ Milton explains that "*Monarchy* is made up of two parts, the Liberty of the subject, and the supremacie of the King" (CPW 1: 592).

depended: that rule by Bishops is prescribed in the scriptures and Aristotle and Plato prized civil obedience and unity over the welfare of citizens.¹¹ Thus, Milton harmonizes classical political theory and the Reformation's fundamental principle; indeed, this sense of harmony is a key component to the type of nation that Milton imagines. He sees the act of self-directed engagement with scripture, the fundamental principle of the Reformation, as necessary to England's identity as a nation.

The type of state government that supported episcopacy¹² threatened "to break a nationall spirit, and courage by count'nacing open riot, luxury, and ignorance, till having thus disfigur'd and made men beneath men, as *Juno* in the Fable of *Iö*, they deliver up the poor transformed heifer of the Commonwealth to be stung and vext with the beese, and goad of oppression under the custody of some *Argus* with a hundred eyes of jealousy" (CPW 1: 572). In his comparison of the commonwealth to the transformed and persecuted cow, Milton emphasizes the dehumanizing and thus servile position citizens will face if a reformation of the church is thwarted. The struggle for liberty of conscience is both religious and political since individuals cannot experience authentic liberty as part of a servile nation; Milton repeats his warnings against the dehumanizing effects of enforced unity throughout his prose in the 1640s. In *Reason*, he defends his "honest liberty of free speech" in speaking out against the Prelates by explaining that not to do so

¹¹ See editor's note in CPW 1: 571.

would constitute a "brutish silence" (CPW 1: 804-805), and in *Areopagitica* this dehumanization is summed up in Milton's caveat: "when God gave [Adam] reason, he gave him freedom to choose, for reason is but choosing; he had bin else a meer artificiall *Adam*, such an *Adam* as he is in the motions" (CPW 2: 527). To be sure, the purpose of writing, either in verse or "the cool element of prose,"¹³ is not studious retirement or a type of retreat from the real world. Instead, for Milton, writing, reading, and publishing are activities that enable the individual to take on a public role by interacting with the national body. Milton is in line with the traditional humanist view that understood education as the foundation for public life; however, Milton is notable in that not only does he ascribe to this philosophy but he also attempts to provide the educational experience for his readers.

The trajectory of Milton's political thought is significant to this study as Milton's conception of the English nation was shaped by his understanding of the public sphere. For Milton, the ideal English nation was created by a public body of individuals who had the freedom to engage in political life primarily through language and print. More importantly, Milton argues that England's institutions, such as the church or government, must be congruent with the character of the people; however, the historical events of the seventeenth century often meant

¹² In *Of Reformation*, Milton rejects the following arguments: "That the Church government must be conformable to the civill politie" and "that no forme of church government is agreeable to monarchy, but that of Bishops" (CPW 1: 573).

¹³ See *Reason of Church Government* CPW 1: 808 where Milton describes *Of Reformation* as the work of his left hand.

strained affinities between the people who made up the nation and those who controlled it. For example, for a poet and politician who regarded reading and writing as political acts necessary to authentic citizenship, the iconic success and popularity of the King's Book, its impact on readers, and the wide-spread desire for a return to monarchy would seem to call into question the public's ability to be critically engaged in political life. By exploring both the possibilities and limitations of the nation, Milton's epic poems suggest a more complicated treatment of English nationalism as they are influenced and produced during a period of time when Milton had good reason to reconsider his understanding of English nationalism as expressed in his earlier prose works.

Critics traditionally argued that both *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* signal a retreat away from politics and a retreat into the self or the paradise within. However, both poems have significant political implications and effectively continue the political education of their readers by encouraging the type of active critical engagement that Milton championed in *Areopagitica*. To be sure, Milton's idealism over the nation is curtailed and becomes much more cautious, yet the nation remains an important symbol of country and people as *Paradise Lost* is also invested in articulating a positive vision English nationhood. Moreover, there is continuity as Milton, perhaps more so than in his prose works, argues for the interrelationship between individual and national freedom and thus blurs any simple separation between the public and private. In this sense, there is no sharp ideological divide between Milton's prose and poetry, but instead the

poetry projects a richer, more complex version of some of the early notions about the English nation.

“Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks.”

– *Areopagitica*

Defining the Nation

The unparalleled developments and influence of print culture in mid-seventeenth century England provide literary scholars and historians with a rich terrain for research on the discursive forms of nationhood. The increased availability and presence of print in public life helped to shape and promote seventeenth-century political culture. In fact, at this time, writing, reading, and the transmission of texts became viable practices of political engagement and nation-building. While the role of print culture in the formation of the early modern public sphere has been addressed by scholars in the areas of political history, book production, and literary theory, less attention has been paid to the importance of writing and print in the development of nationhood. Studies by Richard Helgerson, Claire McEachern, Paul Stevens, and David Norbrook are important exceptions. Building on the influential concept of the imagined community, these critics have mapped out the forms of nationhood as they were discursively produced, and demonstrated how England achieved its literary embodiment in the imaginatively constructed nations of various writers.

Challenging the idea that nationalism is a product of modernity, Richard Helgerson looks to the sixteenth century and argues that poets of Spenser's generation and ambition were anxious to make verse "itself serve, if not the state, then the nation," a concept defined in terms of generic models and discursive practices.¹⁴ Helgerson maps out a relationship between the kingdom/nation and text/form where the kingdom/nation "authorizes—indeed authors—the text/form" and vice versa (*Forms of Nationhood* 12).¹⁵ Regardless of the genre used, "these poets sought to articulate a national community whose existence and eminence would then justify their desire to become its literary spokesmen" (2). John Milton quite consciously shares in this desire to become the nation's spokesman; however, writing at a time when printed texts were more readily available and literacy was on the rise, Milton's awareness of the cultural importance of print is more acute. Further, Milton's works suggest a much more entangled relationship between the individual and nation. For instance, in several of his political tracts Milton takes the time to give an account of himself and his vocation. Throughout Milton's career he argues that personal liberty is dependent upon national liberty and vice versa. Finally, his considerable body of work, which includes political treatises, history, war/state propaganda, and poetry, not only spans the most turbulent years of the seventeenth century, but also participates in England's

¹⁴ In *Forms of Nationhood*, Helgerson also argues that the material production of maps etc discursively produced the nation.

¹⁵ Helgerson also adds that this relationship is shaped by the individual writer and his/ her discursive community (*Forms of Nationhood* 12-13).

development as a nation. Throughout Milton's works, the nation remains an important concept, whether he is writing to the nation, for the nation, against the nation, or simply writing the nation. Indeed, many of Milton's prose and poetic pieces offer a nexus where literary expression and interpretation intersect with the concept of nation-formation; however, it is print culture, Milton argues, that enables the formation of nationhood through the development of a literate, politically engaged public and it is in print and through print that Milton highlights the connection between the individual and his (or possibly her) nation.

Several critics have highlighted Milton's relationship with and concern for the nation by examining his texts in conjunction with political and cultural history. In our contemporary culture it is quite tempting to assume a coherent understanding of what a nation entails since the term has been adopted into the everyday rhetoric of politics and global culture. Seventeenth-century England, however, with its many religious and political upheavals, offers a much more tentative conception of the nation and nationalism. One of the major questions that ignited political unrest during seventeenth-century England was the debate on who would be included in the English nation. As Nigel Smith has demonstrated, literature was often found at the centre of the political controversies in seventeenth-century England. Thus, for Smith, Milton's seeming drastic vacillation between optimism and despair on the subject of the nation and its members is in keeping with the political drama that was unfolding throughout his life. David Norbrook's *Writing the English Republic* builds on Smith's assertion

that the English Civil war was a “war of words” and that never before had literature played such a predominant role in the public sphere. A large part of Norbrook’s project involves rescuing a forgotten “republican art” in order to offer a more balanced view of seventeenth-century England’s political and cultural history, while reconsidering Milton’s most radical leanings. Ultimately, Norbrook’s study situates Milton within the context of a larger republican culture. More importantly, Norbrook credits literary language, especially the use of the “republican sublime,” as the primary tool used to animate an English republican nation.

Like Norbrook, Paul Stevens argues that Milton’s interest in the nation stemmed from a desire for greater personal liberty. According to Stevens, the peculiar virtue of the nation state for Milton is its ability to enable and guarantee the relative liberation of personal or individual aspirations. For Milton, the nation state provides the individual citizen a degree of private freedom unimaginable in customary feudal or patrimonial states. The irony is, however, that this newly found privacy turns out to be intensely political and so public. More importantly, this public is galvanized through the processes of reading and writing. As critics such as Sharon Achinstein have suggested, Milton envisioned and directed his work towards a nation of readers.

While Achinstein, Norbrook, Stevens, and Smith each highlight a national dimension to Milton’s work, my study focuses on the confluence of print and nationalism in order to argue that Milton’s interest in print is not merely a

consequence of his self-proclaimed vocation, but rather that print, especially for Milton, became an outlet for both personal and national articulation. I examine the ways that Milton combines and blurs the distinctions between various genres, such as history/biography, in order to articulate a national-self as well as the nation in general. Milton was profoundly affected by the religious and political events during his life time and these experiences contributed to Milton's defence of reading and textual engagement, for he believed that censorship of books, especially "bad" ones, could only result in a "cloister'd" virtue (CPW 2: 515). Right reading and authentic virtue would naturally seem mutually dependent to Milton since he believed that access to books and right reading were the hallmarks of and prerequisites for authentic religious experience as well as the development of true nationhood.

The concept of the nation and its concomitant ism have proved notoriously elusive terms to explain in any comprehensive or satisfactory way. While in agreement that the concept of the nation is historically variable, critics have struggled with the ideological emptiness of the term in contrast to its "profound emotional legitimacy" (Anderson 4). Some of this ambiguity can be attributed to the nation's ability to yoke together disparate and contradictory claims, as Benedict Anderson has shown. Although considered a cultural product of modernity, the nation is dependent upon claims of antiquity (a nation, after all, is not a nation without tradition and a long history, preferably a noble one). While nationalism is prevalent and has been universally accepted as a component of

identity, each nation regards itself as original. Finally, as mentioned above, despite nationalism's political and cultural legitimacy, nationalism is marked by a philosophical poverty (Anderson 4-5).

Critics and theorists interested in understanding the nation, nation-ness, and nationalism have attempted to identify where and when the term nation metamorphosed to include political groupings rather than simply denoting race or breed. Raymond Williams claims that while the term nation was part of the English vocabulary since the thirteenth century, it was not until the sixteenth century that "nation" acquired a political sense. A century later, clear political meanings of the term "nation" were regularly used, though "*realm, kingdom* and *country* remained more common until [the late eighteenth century]," according to Williams (213).

In addition to debates over when and where the emergence of the nation, or the nation-state for that matter, according to our modern understanding, occurred, the presumption that nationalism is a type of ideology has caused a great deal of confusion. As Anderson rightly points out, "unlike most other isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers: no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes, or Webers" (5). Anderson's point is that nationalism should not be regarded as a type of ideology; in fact, for Anderson, nationalism has much more in common with categories such as religiosity and gender identity than it does with liberalism or Marxism. While responding to such critics as Tom Nairn and Ernest Gellner, Anderson ultimately concludes that the nation is "an imagined political

community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). For Anderson, the nation is imagined in the sense that its members are connected through the process of imagination. The members of the community will not and/or cannot ever know all the other members, yet in the minds of each “lives the image of their communion” (6).¹⁶ This imagined connection is naturalized and integrated into the community’s sense of self; however, Anderson carefully points out that while the imagined community needs to be invented and articulated it is not in any sense a fabrication or deception.¹⁷ While Gellner claims that “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist” (169), Anderson argues that the nation, in part, arose as a response to questions of communal identity. Essentially, for Anderson the nation is an imagined community that is real in the only sense that matters: the way it is perceived, understood, and believed by those who fall under its domain

What intrigues Anderson most about nation formation are the ways that the nation is imagined and the historical shifts that produced this process. For these reasons, Anderson’s concept of imagined community has gained great currency among critics interested in nation formation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While critics such as Claire McEachern, Linda Gregerson, and Richard Helgerson reject Anderson’s assertion that the concept of the nation, as a political community, emerged in the late eighteenth century, they are indebted to the

¹⁶ Seton-Watson, in *Nations and States*, also argues “all that I can find to say is that a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to be for a nation, or behave as if they formed one” (5).

concept of imagined communities. Anderson delineates various types of nationalism; for example, he argues that before the eighteenth century only a type of proto-nationalism primarily focused on a common language was possible. This type of nationalism or imagined community was made possible through print-capitalism. Anderson credits book publishing, one of the earliest forms of capitalist enterprise, with the development of unified print languages; further, Anderson argues that the dissemination and promotion of a unified language through inexpensive texts provided the necessary experience of spontaneous, horizontal connection between members of this emerging imagined community. However, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century nationalism, according to Anderson, remained divided because of the contradictory interests of a monarch-centered English polity. Further, as Gregerson has pointed out, Anderson argues that a “fundamental conceptual contradiction” exists between nation and empire (228). While the empire seeks to expand its boundaries *ad infinitum*, the nation, by definition, requires limitations: “The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet” (Anderson 7). Ultimately, Anderson concludes that the economic and political structures of the early modern world were not conducive to nationalism.

¹⁷ See Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities (6).

Various historical, cultural, and literary critics interested in sixteenth and seventeenth century England have challenged Anderson's interpretation of nationalist history by examining diverse modes of imagining the nation whether in poetry, sermons, political treatises, or maps. These discursive practices have been credited as evidence of a national self-consciousness that exceeds the divisions imposed by monarchic rule, feudal society, and the conventions of patronage or class (Gregerson 229). For instance, McEachern confidently points to the 1533 *Act of Appeals* as the birth of English nationalism. *The Act of Appeals* together with the *Act of Supremacy* (1534) initiate England's movement towards sovereignty over the "indigenous affairs of the church" as well as the state (*The Poetics* 1). McEachern argues that to deny a Tudor-Stuart English nation is to obscure the very moment of its invention. Further, for McEachern, the political form that a government assumes is of no consequence in terms of nation formation as long as the form, whether monarchy, oligarchy, or democracy, is perceived as the most apt form of government for a particular people (*The Poetics* 11). The study of nationalism initiated by Anderson and then adapted by literary and cultural critics of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England suggests that nation-building was largely a discursive enterprise since print culture became intimately enmeshed with religion and politics.

This study likewise argues that nationalism was not a product of modernity and did indeed flourish in the early modern world. Milton's works articulate a complex and carefully nuanced consideration of English nationalism and

demonstrate the ways that religious identity, despite its investment in an international community of believers, did paradoxically contribute to England's understanding of itself as a distinctive Protestant nation. Further, Milton's works reveal the degree to which nationalism incorporated a range of various discourses—religious, political, and personal. Indeed, if we take Milton as a case study, we see that his individual identity is very much invested in a sense of nationalism. In terms of the relationship between politics and nationalism, in seventeenth-century England the concept of the nation has an accommodating quality and remains independent from specific state institutions. This aspect of nationalism is significant in light of Milton's arguments against Charles I and his supporters as he rejects monarchy on the basis that it is a form of government which is antithetical to the nature of the English people. Increasingly, especially in the poems produced in his later life, Milton's concept of the nation embraces republican values and envisions an English political body independent of the monarch. Ultimately, Milton values reading and writing because these activities provide a mechanism for experiencing communal life—reading in particular encourages individuals to imagine connections between themselves and the polity and thereby lessening local affiliations. This idea is in-line with Anderson's conception of imagined communities; however, while Anderson maintains that print negotiates and manages these connections, Milton believes that reading and other print exchanges create these connections.

The first half of this study, which focuses on the earlier portion of Milton's career and his prose works, explores the confluence of print and nationalism. The nation, at least in early modern England, was made tangible thanks to an increased public consciousness negotiated through print culture.¹⁸ Milton not only identified this link and argued for its importance, but he also saw the link between print and nation-building as an essential element of his own identity as an author. Further, Milton demonstrates that the production and circulation of print is part of a larger social network that is vital to an enabling type of nationalism that promotes increased liberty in both the public and private life since it fosters the type of skills that each citizen requires—skills such as critical reading and active learning. The second half of this study does not address the connection between print and nationalism explicitly, but rather examines two of Milton's most important poems as nation-building texts. Both *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* were produced at a time when the fate of the nation, for Milton and others who rejected monarchy, seemed grim. As several historians have demonstrated, the execution of Charles I did not instantaneously result in a republic, and part of the challenge that the new government faced was finding a mode of representation that would resonate with a popular audience in the same way that the traditional royalist discourse had. This study reveals how Milton's poems approach the question of nationalism at a time when Milton's politics and social view were not acceptable

¹⁸ I am heavily indebted to writers like Anderson, MaEachern, Gellner, and other theorists of the nation.

to the majority of his readers. The poems attempt to recuperate the type of nationalism that Milton had championed in his early career by rehabilitating readers and by telling the nation's story in such a way that it accommodates failures. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that the discursively produced notion of the early modern English nation should not be regarded as evidence of a proto or nascent nationalism as it exceeds the expression of patriotism. Milton's nationalism incorporates a number of culturally significant discourses and requires a dynamic connection between individual citizen and national body. While the prose works articulate the interconnections between heuristic skills, the production of texts, and nationalism, the later works attempt to provide the type of education that readers will need in order to become ideal citizens and to solidify the nation's identity through the telling of its story.

Chapter 2 examines Milton's early prose tracts, particularly *Areopagitica*, in order to explore the ways that Milton's understanding of nation-building coincides with Anderson's argument that the nation is an imagined community established through print. My approach to Milton's early prose tracts is in keeping with other critics of early modern literature who argue that the advent of nationalism occurs prior to the eighteenth century. However, unlike Anderson who argues that nationalism arose with the decline of religion, I maintain that the rise of nationalism was aided by a strong religious identity, yet religious discourse is only one of many discourses that gives the nation its character. In this chapter I begin by examining the ways that Milton invokes the nation as a community of readers.

Further, I argue that Milton's defense of reading is in keeping with his defense of personal liberty in other early writings such as the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* which is significant because the notion of expanded liberty continues to be a dominant theme in Milton's later writing on the nation. In addition to the discourse of religions, this chapter explores the relationship between the nation and the national subject that is at the centre of many of Milton's early works.

Chapter 3 examines the tumultuous events of the regicide and its aftermath. In this section, I trace Milton's treatment and understanding of his readers when faced with what seems certain proof of their inability to critically engage with political texts. As chapter 2 demonstrates, Milton's prose of the early 1640s constitutes a provocative view of print culture and its national possibilities. In his *Areopagitica*, Milton optimistically views print as a vehicle through which to educate and produce a nation of agile-minded readers; further, he imagines England as a nation founded on and defined by the dynamic exchange of print-based ideas. Yet, to Milton's mind, the overwhelming success of *Eikon Basilike*, the ostensible first-hand account of the sufferings of Charles I, raised a number of troubling concerns about reading as a form of political engagement and English national identity since the book's popularity signified a body of "silly gazers" and idolaters, rather than critical readers. It is worth noting that the execution of Charles I and the establishment of England's first republic relied heavily on pamphlets and books from both sides of the conflict. For example, the King's Book encouraged subjects to reconsider monarchy in highly emotive terms by

representing Charles I as a martyr-saint. In a sense, the success of *Eikon Basilike* challenged all of *Areopagitica's* optimism for a print-based, English nationalism comprised of critical readers.

For Milton, the permeable divisions between Royalists and Parliamentarians signified a national identity crisis. In *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* he virulently chastises Parliamentarians who lost their political nerve as "*Apostate Scarcrowes*" (CPW 3: 194) who had formerly "devested [the king], disannointed him, nay curs'd him all over in thir Pulpits and thir Pamphlets" (CPW 3: 191) only to capitulate at the sight of his book. This seeming political fickleness denotes the protean nature of English nationalism during the civil war period.

Chapter 4 focuses on Milton's epic *Paradise Lost* which is a pivotal transition for this thesis since we move from prose to poetry and from Milton's early to late career. More importantly, chapter 4 turns from the relationship between print and nationalism to look at *Paradise Lost* as an example of a nation-building text. This chapter explores the hostile circumstances in which Milton wrote his most influential work in order to examine the ways that the poem engages with political debate despite the increased censorship and strong distaste for all things and people associated with the regicide. In order to examine how *Paradise Lost* continues Milton's commitment to national-myth making and political thinking, the chapter considers the critical tradition that reads the epic as an educational model for its readers and the ways that the epic comments on the political makeup of England. Ultimately, this chapter argues that *Paradise Lost* is

an epic that creates a national myth that encourages civil virtues by insisting on the interdependence of personal and national liberty.¹⁹

Chapter 5 explores Milton's closet drama, *Samson Agonistes* as a nation-building text that deals with the experience of defeat post-Restoration. The tendency in early Milton scholarship to interpret the post-Restoration Milton as politically quiet and withdrawn has diminished as critics have devoted increasing attention to the political significance of violence in Milton's later poems. Indeed, in *Samson Agonistes* the role of political violence is brought into sharp focus as Samson, presumably acting in accordance with God's will, takes vengeance on his nation's enemies by literally pulling down the theater and thereby destroying both the Philistines and himself. Not surprisingly, critics have debated whether Milton's *Samson Agonistes* condemns royalist and republican forms of violence, or whether the closet drama endorses certain types of political violence. Indeed, discussions of Samson's final ambiguous act struggle to reconcile Milton's Christian and humanist position with the argument that this mass destruction was God-willed. While engaging with *Samson Agonistes'* critical reception, this chapter interrogates the implications of this contradiction in relationship to Milton's interest in English nationalism.

Further, this chapter also discusses how Milton incorporates the traditional discourse of the body politic to discuss the intimate connection between individual

¹⁹ I am using the word "myth" in Roland Barthes sense.

and nation. Unlike typical monarchical figurations of the body politic that relied on hierarchy with the king as head, Milton imagines the nation as a unified and less hierarchical body. Milton's figuration of the nation as one body, without a clear hierarchical ordering, is in keeping with his republican position. The concept of the state as an organic body is certainly integral to constructions of the individual, since the construction of the body politic and the regulation of its members determines who can act when and what acts can be performed by whom. This chapter traces the trajectory of Milton's conception of the English nation from his early prose to his provocative late poems through the figure of Samson. Indeed, while Milton had quite consciously desired to be his nation's spokesperson early in his career, the political turmoil throughout the seventeenth century necessitated a reevaluation of English nationalism. Finally, this chapter examines how Milton's *Samson Agonistes* raises questions about the motivation of the individual who takes political action on behalf of the nation by dramatizing the conflation of Samson's individual body with the figurative national body.

Chapter 2

“For books are not absolutely dead things:” Galvanizing the Nation in Print.

"It pleased God to open to man the art of printing, the time whereof was shortly after the burning of Hus and Jerome. Printing, being opened, incontinent ministered to the church, the instruments and tools of learning and knowledge."

-- *John Foxe*

Print and Nationalism

Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, print increasingly played a role in producing a tangible and lively political culture by creating a venue where political debate could be widely expressed. More importantly, the increased production of printed materials as well as a rise in literacy afforded not only a sense of political community, but also a political community outside the purview of the monarch. Between 1586 and 1662, England's court and Parliament passed six main measures in an attempt to regulate the press. Punishment for violating these measures ranged from whipping to the destruction of presses and materials.²⁰ Although licensing was introduced quite early in the sixteenth century, this practice received continued support from both king and Parliament throughout the seventeenth century. For example, the renewed efforts to control the press in 1637 were "inspired by the Caroline policy of rigorous governance known as 'Thorough'" (Johns 231). Although press control was considered desirable and

²⁰ Adrian Johns lists the various attempts to regulate the press: 1586 Star Chamber Decree, 1637 second Star Chamber decree passed but lapses in 1641, 1643 Parliamentary Ordinance passed, 1647 second

necessary, the difficulty in maintaining this control is evident in the numerous failed attempts to oversee the book trade. Ironically, it was during moments of increased press vigilance that the number of printed pamphlets tended to increase (Johns 231).

Unlike the sixteenth-century Elizabeth I, who relied on public speeches and processions to represent her royal power, both Stuart monarchs became active participants in the emerging print-based political community. Yet, although print enabled the Stuarts to reach a larger number of their subjects, the very act of writing seemed to emphasize the author's subjectivity, and thus, for a king and author, entering into print meant that his ability to represent the nation was compromised by his position as one voice among a community of voices. The exchange of ideas and on-going debates that took place throughout the seventeenth century created a new sense of political community where the king as author could be answered by his subjects.

This is not to suggest that a strong sense of national community did not exist in the sixteenth century, but only that the nature and texture of that national community, particularly the monarch's role therein, was altered. As Claire McEachern has argued, "the language of English community under Elizabeth I was marked by an idealized affiliation between monarch and people, institutionalised—insofar as possible—by the protocols of an official church"

parliamentary ordinance passed, 1649 Act of parliament passed (lapsed in 1651, revived in 1653, and lapsed in 1659), 1662 Press Act passed (252).

("Literature and National Identity" 327). However, by the seventeenth century, the idealized affiliation between monarch and people gave way as those with opposing political and religious views voiced their discontent. Increasingly, print became the dominant form for this type of critique. Perhaps more surprising than the citizen's willingness to question the nation's monarch is the monarch's willingness to respond in the same media. For example, in 1622 James writes to the public to account for dissolving the recent Parliament. Indeed, "no previous ruler had given such a public account of the Crown's disputes with the House of Commons and of the reasons for ending a Parliament" (Sommerville 473). Charles, like his predecessor, also published explanations for his dissolution of parliament. Implicitly, both Stuart kings recognized a literate and politically aware public beyond the court and Parliament.

Any project that seeks to understand the relationship between print and nationalism in seventeenth-century England would be wise to turn to Milton's *Areopagitica*. In this text the relationship between print and nation-building informs Milton's arguments against pre-publication press-censorship; further, this text has generally been acknowledged as the most important discussion of censorship and the freedom of the press in the seventeenth century. This text has much insight to offer on Milton's conception of the English nation and on the relationship between print and nationalism, and it is this connection that has received scant critical attention. Although relatively ignored until the next

century, *Areopagitica* has since elicited a host of varied contemporary responses.²¹ This is perhaps not surprising since the text itself often seems to negate its claims or at least to qualify its most radical arguments. Consequently, critics have vehemently debated the tract's purpose, content, and intended audience. For instance, Ernest Sirluck believes that Milton wanted to appeal to the Erastians, those who agreed that the state should control the church, in order to defeat the Presbyterians in the House of Commons who supported censorship (CPW 2: 170). On the other hand, Stephen Dobranski argues that Milton, at least in the early 1640s, may not have felt that the church and state needed to be separated (*Milton, Authorship* 104). Rather than appealing to the Erastians, Dobranski suggests that Milton was personally motivated to write *Areopagitica* on behalf of his friends and colleagues in the printing trade as well as in response to the harsh criticism he received over his divorce tracts (*Milton, Authorship* 106). Dobranski's arguments rest on an understanding of Early Modern print culture as a dynamic process of exchange and cooperation between writers, publishers, booksellers, and readers. He effectively demonstrates that Milton had a first-hand acquaintance with and appreciation for this process; however, while Milton was knowledgeable about print culture, his treatment of print extends beyond the production of texts and it is this aspect of the world of print—which includes reading, writing, and publishing—that most concerns *Areopagitica*. Finally, we might also add that part

²¹ See Sirluck's discussion on the reprints of *Areopagitica* in CPW 2.

of Milton's support for these processes is motivated by his investment in nation-building. Part of the difficulty in accessing Milton's motivations and intentions is explained by Paul Stevens when he comments that: "Even in [Milton's] prose, when he most seems to be speaking in his own voice, and when he is most insistent on his identity and integrity, he says different things in different styles at different times to different audiences" ("Janus-faced Nationalism"249). Although many critics have debated the degree to which Milton can fairly be considered "liberal" in his views on censorship and have struggled to balance Milton's eloquent and moving plea for liberty with his numerous conservative qualifications, it seems clear that Milton was indeed interested and concerned about the production of English texts. Yet, more important to this present study is the relationship between the publication of texts and nationalism at the heart of Milton's *Areopagitica*. Milton's early prose, especially *Areopagitica*, offers an opportunity to explore the confluence of print and nationalism which I believe was of considerable importance to Milton.

As several critics have effectively illustrated, by 1644 Milton was well acquainted with the world of printing (Dobranski *Milton, Authorship* 106-107). Besides seeing several of his own early works through the publication process, during the early 1640s "Milton found time to make a good many new friends [and] acquaintances," especially among "printers and booksellers" (Parker 250). Dobranski's study effectively highlights the degree to which Milton was engaged in text production and offers much insight into the nature of authorship in

seventeenth-century England. He argues that Milton's main concern in *Areopagitica* is to demonstrate how Parliament's order has the potential to interfere with and impede the collaborative process of authorship and book production. By examining the confluence between print and nationalism, I believe that this present study will add a new dimension to the print networks within which Dobranski locates Milton. If, as Dobranski argues, Milton regarded authorship as a social practice, the same can be said about Milton's view of reading and the production of knowledge. More importantly, Milton sees the production of texts as a national project and thus it seems pertinent to examine the relationship between print and nation-building. Milton certainly expresses his resentment towards licensing and its "dubious" history: "To fill up the measure of encroachment, [the Council of Trent and the Spanish Inquisition's] last invention was to ordain that no Book, pamphlet, or paper should be Printed (as if S. Peter had bequeath'd them the keys of the Presse also out of Paradise) unless it were approv'd and licenc't under the hands of 2 or 3 glutton Friers" (CPW 2: 503). Yet, throughout *Areopagitica* Milton suggests that interference in the production of English texts jeopardizes England's claim to nationhood. Just as Milton had lamented earlier—"England hath had her noble achievements made small by the unskillful handling of monks and mechanicks" (CPW 1: 812)—so too in *Areopagitica* Milton argues that prepublication licensing

...is a particular disesteem of every knowing person alive, and most injurious to the writt'n labours and monuments of the dead, so to me it seems an undervaluing and vilifying of the whole Nation. I cannot set so light by all the

invention, the art, the wit, the grave and solid judgement which is in England, as that it can be comprehended in any twenty capacities how good soever, much lesse that it should not passe except their superintendence be over it, except it be sifted and strain'd with their strainers, that it should be uncurrant without their manuall stamp. (CPW 2: 535)

Milton begins by describing prepublication censorship as a “vilifying” of the whole Nation—suggesting that text production is of national importance. Unlike the dynamic process of exchange potentially galvanized by writing and reading, pre-publication censorship, a mechanical and artificial approach to insuring acceptability, circumvents this process by placing authority in the hands of a limited number of readers. The image of all texts being “sifted and strain’d” suggests that Milton fears that pre-publication censorship will reduce national-thinking to the lowest common denominator and thereby limit the potential for growth. The national concerns of this text are highlighted again when he comments that it is the invention, art, wit, and solid judgment of England that are in jeopardy. Ten years later, in the *Second Defense of the English People*, Milton would repeat this caveat about leaving the decision on what ought to be published and what to be suppressed in the hands of a few men might mean for England as a whole (CPW 4, 1: 626). Milton suggests that text production is a national endeavor and therefore cannot be regulated by a small group of “strainers.”

By examining *Areopagitica* and some of Milton's other early prose tracts, such as *The Doctrine and Discipline of Punishment*, and the *Reason of Church Government*, this chapter delineates four of the major intersections between print and nationalism that will be touched upon in greater detail in the subsequent

chapters. First, building upon Anderson's influential conception of the "imagined community" this chapter examines how Milton connects nation-building to textual production. I argue that Milton posits an English nation that balances both authentic religious experience and the conception of a shared public space created through print. Next, this chapter examines the role of the reader and the act of reading in order to demonstrate how reading, especially for Milton, was regarded as a form of political engagement. It is often difficult to recover the response of actual readers, yet this study devotes considerable space to implied readers as Milton's presentation of this relationship—between author and audience—helps to decode Milton's conception of the English nation as well as his role as a citizen. As outlined in the introduction, Anderson's concept of imagined community is important to understanding much of Milton's early prose since he models a mode of textual engagement as a way of participating in one's nation. In *Areopagitica* Milton argues that print production is necessary to English nationalism since the regulation of print will determine the nation that England becomes. The third connection essential to an examination of print and nationalism is the relationship between the individual and the nation. Throughout the early prose we see Milton constructing the self as a national subject by blurring the distinctions between the public and private. This is perhaps most evident in Milton's meshing of genres such as national history and biography. Milton's knowledge about print and interest in print is not a consequence of his poetic ambition, but rather an integral component of his poetic ambition, since he realizes that the nation, like the self,

needs to be written. Further, much of Milton's writing, whether prose or verse, provides remarkable and striking details about how the author imagines his audience/readers. In *Areopagitica*, for instance, we see the author addressing a highly idealized body of readers and this idealization enables Milton to model the ideal English citizen (not surprisingly, Milton himself becomes the prototype). The same might be said for Milton's famous lamentation about the "fit though few" readers in *Paradise Lost* (PL VII: 31). In both instances, Milton's reflections and speculations about the reception of a particular text tells us more about the author's identity and his desired readers than it tells us about actual readers. Indeed, the gulf between implied and actual readers is often difficult to navigate as accurate information about a text's reception may be scant or misleading.²² Nonetheless, no matter how disconnected these two bodies of readers may be, an understanding of how and why Milton addresses his readers provides insight to Milton's conception of self and nation. Finally, this chapter examines one of the ways that texts were seen as representing the author's nation. This final section examines how Milton constructs texts as national monuments by probing the relationships between war and writing.

"In contrast to older generic or racial paradigms that tried to prove the natural foundation of the nation, there is now a broad consensus that national identity is an

²² We do have some sources of information such as number of print runs and editions and the occasional commentary of contemporary readers (in journals or letters) that give us some clues about the reception of a particular text. This project does address "actual" readers where possible and relevant, but the main focus is on implied readers.

invention in terms of a collective creation determined by a multitude of historical factors.”

-- *Herbert Grabes*

A Nation of Prophets, Sages, and Worthies

Anderson's conception of imagined community is instructive when examining Milton's *Areopagitica*. Intrigued by the ironic blend of emotional legitimacy and ideological poverty in conceptions of nationalism, Anderson introduces the concept of "imagined community" in order to articulate what he defines as nationalism's essence. According to Anderson, a nation is comprised of individuals who share a naturalized sense of connection with other individuals who would otherwise remain mere strangers. This group of individuals becomes a cohesive whole through a mutual and powerful sense of communal identity. Further, Anderson argues that print culture, in conjunction with other related historical shifts such as capitalism, galvanizes this sense of community by enabling individual members to see or imagine profound connections between themselves and the other members of the group. While Anderson argues that nationalism is similar to religion in that both share the ability to transform fatality into continuity, he maintains that the rise of nationalism coincides with the decline of religion in the eighteenth century. While eighteenth-century Western Europe embraced the ideological freedom proffered by enlightenment and secularism, conceptions such as salvation, paradise, and redemption lost their legitimacy, thus requiring a "secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning" (Anderson 19). Anderson suggests that "few things were (are) better

suiting to this end than an idea of nationalism" (19).²³ Early Modern critics have successfully translated Anderson's findings in order to argue for the emergence of the nation in the Early Modern period. My approach to Milton works as a case study to the findings of critics who advocate an early modern nation. By focusing on the confluence of print and nationalism, I am able to examine the illocutionary work that Milton's texts perform. Further, I argue that seventeenth-century England provides an example of nationalisms that were heavily dependent upon and worked in conjunction with religious experience and this fact suggests a rethinking of Anderson's claim that nationalism arose with the decline of religion.²⁴

We only need to look as far as *Areopagitica*'s title page to see evidence of Anderson's imagined community. More interestingly, this title page effectively demonstrates one of the ways that the nation is discursively produced. Although the direct influence that Milton had on the layout of his title page has been debated, with some critics such as Abbe Blum crediting Milton with complete control (74-96), while others such as Stephen Dobranski arguing that Milton would have had partial control in collaboration with the publisher and printer

²³ Anderson explains that erosion of religion did not "produce" nationalism, and that religious erosion requires its own study; however, Anderson suggests that religious identity promotes a sense of community that exceeds the limits of any one nation.

²⁴ Anderson argues that the nation must be "limited" and thus religion is not conducive to nationalism because it encourages the desire for a transnational community: "The most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for, say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet" (16). One of the paradoxes of the early modern English nationalism is that it maintained limits by incorporating both religious and national discourse. Milton repeatedly makes reference to England as an elect or peculiar

(*Milton, Authorship* 108-9), the title page nonetheless reproduces the rhetorical work of the tract itself. For instance, both the tract and the title page intentionally juxtapose an explicit and implicit audience. The title on the frontispiece of Milton's *Areopagitica*, "A Speech of Mr. John Milton For the Liberty of Unlicenc'd Printing, To the Parliament of England," suggests that the intended audience is the parliament of England. However, this is misleading since *Areopagitica* was sold alongside other printed wares intended for public consumption; ergo we can conclude that the text was written with a wider reading public in mind. Although the Parliament of England theoretically represents the people, *Areopagitica* models a much more direct relationship between the citizen and national body. In this text, reading, interpreting, and responding give individuals access to the political community. Similarly, within the opening passage of the tract Milton addresses his explicit audience by name, "If I should thus farre presume upon the meek demeanor of your civill and gentle greatnesse, Lords and Commons, as what your publisht Order hath directly said, that to gainsay, I might defend my selfe with ease, if any should accuse me of being new or insolent..." (CPW 2: 489). Both the genre, i.e. printed speech, and the material production of the text suggest the reproduction of a conversation between the private citizen and the powers that be: the parliament of England. However, the very act of reproducing the "speech" in print opens the possibility of a larger

nation. So much so that he appropriates biblical patterns and stories to give voice to the English nation in his late poems.

national audience. The text is consciously designed to give the reader the experience of participating in a larger, national conversation by making public discourse evident. *Areopagitica* was not intended to be a speech nor was it directed to “the Parliament of England,” but rather, as other critics have noted, it was intended for a body of readers.²⁵ More importantly, *Areopagitica* asks its audience to imagine the nation as a body of readers by paralleling the implicit and explicit audience in both its material design and content. In *Areopagitica* what begins as an individual utterance intended for a specific audience becomes accessible to a larger body of readers.²⁶ *Areopagitica* is an audience-conscious text because Milton adopts the pose of the orator who is not simply speaking to Parliament, but who is actively debating with Parliament. The dialogic nature of this text can be seen in the articulation of Milton’s arguments when he prefaces responses with phrases such as “I deny not,” “But some will say” and “But if it be agreed” (CPW 2: 492, 507, 511). These phrases signal that the author/speaker is responding to what has been said before and gives readers a sense of both sides of the debate. We see further evidence of this strategy when Milton supports his argument against pre-publication censorship by referencing a book written by one of his opponents, John Selden: “Wherof what better witnes can ye expect I should produce, then one of your own now sitting in Parliament, the chief of learned men

²⁵ See Achinstein *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* 57-68.

²⁶ Since Milton takes on the role of the citizen addressing Parliament he seems to be highlighting his stance as an individual speaker. While a speech is traditionally a monological utterance, in this instance Milton uses form to transform his speech into a dialogic exchange with his intended audience.

reputed in this Land, Mr. *Selden*, whose volume of naturall & national laws proves...that all opinions, yea errors, known, read, and collated, are of main service & assistance toward the speedy attainment of what is truest” (CPW 2: 513). Not only is *Areopagitica* a dialogical text in the sense that it “permits the polyphonic interplay of many different voices,” but it is also a text that strives to demonstrate that books are a key component of dialogic exchange necessary to individual and national liberty and truth (Bakhtin 267). Ultimately, access to print helps to create the sense of community associated with nationalism by allowing the members of the community to exchange ideas with others, thereby sharing a sense of commonality, and by making this process tangible. Yet, it is important to note that this concept of community must always be qualified. For instance, Milton’s concept of community in *Areopagitica* would not likely extend to uneducated or illiterate individuals. Further, Milton does not seem to account for or address the geographical limitations of the print trade. Nonetheless, by positing reading and writing as political activities Milton articulates a type of English nation that could be fairly inclusive and that echoes the core values associated with Protestantism.

As mentioned above, by the time Milton wrote *Areopagitica* he was already acquainted with the complex network of people and technology needed to produce a physical book and this knowledge informs a great deal of his response to pre-publication censorship and Parliament’s attempt to “*regulate Printing*” (CPW 2: 491). However, *Areopagitica* is invested in both the material aspects of books and

print culture as well as what we might call a book's afterlife. *Areopagitica* demonstrates that books are more than material objects by exploring the two overlapping networks that books participate in. In his comprehensive study of Early Modern print culture, Adrian Johns succinctly defines these two networks: "Any printed book is...both the product of one complex set of social and technological processes and also the starting point for another" (3). The first network involves "a large number of people, machines, and materials" that must "converge and act together for [a book] to come into existence" (3). However, as Johns correctly points out, the material production of a book, while significant, is only part of the story since books also initiate and take part in other complex social networks. "How [a book] is then put to use, by whom, in what circumstances, and to what effect are all equally complex issues" (Johns 3). *Areopagitica* is significant because it considers both aspects of books: the material and the immaterial, the tangible and the intangible. Part of Milton's agenda seems to be aimed at demonstrating that books are more than material objects and this is why he devotes a considerable portion of his tract to exploring how print shapes individuals and the nation.

The name *Areopagitica* invokes the ancient court of Athens, the Areopagus, where the country's elected leaders would meet. In the *Panathenaic Oration* Isocrates champions the Areopagus and the democratic constitution that it represents in contrast to Sparta's oligarchic constitution. Merritt Hughes suggests that "Milton implies that Parliament should be like the Areopagus, which Robert

Burton described in the *Anatomy* as consisting only of such men “as are learned, wise, discreet, and well brought up” (Hughes 716). Indeed, as Hughes suggests, Milton highly values good education and judgment. Milton invokes this ancient court as an example to the wider public that the tract is in fact written for. In other words, Milton holds up the Areopagus as an example for his readers.

Reading Milton in the context of contemporary revolutionary writers, Sharon Achinstein persuasively argues that *Areopagitica* “marks a significant moment in the conceptualization of the public sphere” by positing “a capable public” of readers (*Revolutionary Reader* 58-60). Achinstein suggests that Milton rejects Parliament’s 1643 licensing order on the basis that pre-publishing censorship presupposes an audience that lacks the necessary conscience to adequately reason and judge for themselves (*Revolutionary Reader* 61). Although Achinstein makes a significant point about Milton’s insistence on a capable public, she does not address the national quality of this text which is significant to understanding Milton’s self-presentation as well as his relationship with his readers. Indeed, throughout Milton’s impressive career, his identity as an author and nationalist is shaped through his writing particularly in the descriptions of his implied readers. Milton’s capable public is specifically an English public or an English body of readers. Throughout this text Milton associates the ability to read and judge with “Englishness.” He begins by asking: “What could a man require more from a Nation so pliant and so prone to seek after knowledge? What wants there to such a towardly and pregnant soile, but wise and faithfull laborers, to

make a knowing people, a Nation of Prophets, Sages, and of Worthies” (CPW 2: 554). Milton’s nation of “Prophets, Sages, and of Worthies” is an English nation; his point is that press censorship interferes with the exchange of ideas and the making of knowledge. It becomes clear that Milton aligns reading and writing with the development of a nation of prophets as he goes on to argue: “Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making. Under these fantastic terrors of sect and schism, we wrong the earnest and zealous thirst after knowledge and understanding which God hath stirr’d up in this City (CPW 2: 554). Milton’s connection between the “earnest and zealous” desire for knowledge and God demonstrates one of the ways that religion and print culture could work together to define the English nation. This connection is not surprising when one considers the interconnections in the history of the Reformation and the development and spread of print. Indeed, as Achinstein suggests, Milton bases his notion of liberty regarding reading and writing on the Reformation’s main conviction that the Bible be accessible to all (*Revolutionary Reader* 37-42).

Milton argues that press censorship leads to stagnation of both the individual and the nation. He argues that the making of knowledge is a dynamic process dependent on opposition: “Truth is compar’d in Scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in a perpetuall progression, they sick’n into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition” (CPW 2: 543). Besides criticizing censorship by arguing that its invention stems from Catholicism, Milton advocates

a mode of reading based on the Protestant conception of individuality and the individual's fitness to read and reason for himself: "...our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise, as well as our limbs and complexion...A man may be a heretick in the truth; and if he beleeveth things only because his Pastor sayes so, or the Assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds, becomes his heresie" (CPW 2: 543). Milton suggests that an active way of knowing is greatly impeded by press censorship. According to Milton, heresy arises when one takes an inactive role in the search for truth, or in other words, when one is merely an "artificial Adam" going through the motions of belief (CPW 2: 527).

For Milton, Protestant thinking fuels national feeling by promoting the idea that the individual is capable of reading and interpreting scripture for himself and then extending this notion to include all kinds of texts.²⁷ Milton envisions an English nation that not only welcomes opposition and trial but also depends on them: "Lords and Commons of England, consider what Nation it is whereof ye are, and whereof ye are the governours: a Nation not slow and dull, but of a quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discours, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to" (CPW 2: 551). Thus in *Areopagitica* Milton argues that reading and the exchange of

²⁷ Whether or not Milton included women as part of his capable public is doubtful. Although there is nothing to suggest explicitly that women are excluded from such a public, there is also little evidence suggesting that Milton foresaw women taking on this enlarged public role. Perhaps the most convincing suggestion of a more inclusive attitude to women occurs in *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes* as the female characters Eve and Dalila each prove to be capable speakers.

ideas through print provide England with a distinctive national identity that improves upon the country's classical predecessors by adopting a philosophy of reading that is in line with Protestant thinking. The circulation of texts in print becomes an essential component of public life because interfering with this process ultimately results in "the discouragement of all learning, and the stop of Truth" by "disexercising and blunting [England's] abilities in" knowledge and "by hindring and cropping the discovery that might bee yet further made both in religious and civill Wisdome" (CPW 2: 492). Indeed, Milton declares that he intends to argue "that it would fare better with truth, with learning, and the Commonwealth, if one of [Parliament's] publisht Orders... were call'd in" (CPW 2: 488). Part of what makes *Areopagitica* an important discussion of print culture is its insistence that the treatment of print, especially books, writing, reading, and publication are interconnected and have a direct influence on England's national development.

As noted above, *Areopagitica* constructs an image of the English nation as a body of readers by allowing a reading public access to intellectual debate through print. One of the central concerns that *Areopagitica* raises about pre-publication censorship is the intellectual stagnation that this type of suppression will yield in England. Milton argues that while this type of print censorship has been introduced by Parliament in the vain hope of "the suppressing of scandalous, seditious, and libelous Books," the order ultimately does so by attempting to circumvent a necessary process of trial and error integral to the production of print

and, by extension, the production of Truth that guarantees the type of liberty that defines England as a unique nation (CPW 2: 491). Milton's approach in *Areopagitica* moves from a discussion of books as material objects to the complex afterlife that the book engages with. Following a provocative description of the treatment of books, Milton turns his attention to the consequences that England will face if its leaders insist on enforcing unity by removing all forms of schism or dissent: "Why else was this Nation chos'n before any other, that out of her as out of *Sion* should be proclam'd and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all *Europ*. And had it not bin the obstinant perversnes of our Prelats against the divine and admirable spirit of *Wicklef*, to suppress him as a schismatic and *innovator*, perhaps neither the *Bohemian Husse* and *Jerome*, no nor the name of *Luther*, or of *Calvin* had bin ever known" (CPW 2: 553). By reflecting on the history of England's Reformation—which arose thanks to dissenting voices—*Areopagitica* suggests that the nation is a dynamic, unified body not despite the internal divisions but because of them. The Reformation becomes the ultimate example of how dissent plays an active role in the arduous search for truth and increased liberty, especially for the English nation since it is this religious identity that provides England with its most distinctive characteristics. In terms of print, Milton sees books as the vehicles for dissenting voices in his time and suggests that the debate and knowledge that can be obtained through print will insure England's access to liberty and truth.

When Milton address the history of the Reformation in England, he makes a point of demonstrating that dissent and disagreement are a part of the process of Reformation and should not be feared as contradictory to either national unity or liberty. More importantly, Milton argues that there is much more to be done in terms of Reformation before England achieves its full potential: “But now, as our obdurat Clergy have with violence demean’d the matter, we are become hitherto the latest and the backwardest Schollers, of whom God offer’d to have made us the teachers” (CPW 2: 553). Milton argues that England risks failing its national destiny by showing the connections between the regulation of books and the fulfillment of God’s plan and encouraging his readers to view their nation on the precarious brink of achieving its true identity. There is a delicate balance between the expression of optimism for England’s national potential and the expression of anxiety for its possible failure: “Now once again by all concurrence of signs, and by the generall instinct of holy and devout men, as they daily and solemnly expresse their thoughts, God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church, ev’n to the reforming of Reformation it self: what does he then but reveal Himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his English-men; I say as his manner is, first to us, though we mark not the method of his counsels, and are unworthy” (CPW 2: 553). Interestingly, England is chosen and elect yet this status is not guaranteed: action must be taken lest the nation proves itself unworthy. Playing on the notion of England as the new Israel, Milton argues that the work of the nation requires constant effort and movement; furthermore, and

more to the point, he links this work with the business of reading, writing, and textual production. The extent to which this national destiny depends on freedom to write and circulate text becomes evident as he describes England as the

mansion house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with [God's] protection; the shop of war hath not there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed Justice in defence of beleagured Truth, then there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present, as with their homage and their fealty the approaching Reformation: others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reasons and convincement. (CPW 2: 554).

Here Milton links acts associated with textual production to warfare—indeed, this type of activity accounts for the work of the idealized “warfaring Christian” (CPW 2: 515). In this passage “pens” are endowed with a human-like quality—pens and heads muse, search, and revolve new ideas—that reinforces the link between the material aspects of print culture and their broader social significance. Reading writing, publishing are activities that enable both the nation as well as individuals.

Milton uses several revealing metaphors to reinforce this notion of unity, of a dynamic nation comprised of many parts working together yet reliant on difference, each of which articulates the type of “simultaneity” that Anderson credits to nationalism. First Milton compares the nation to the building of Solomon's temple: “Yet these are the men cry'd out against for schismatics and sectaries; as if, while the Temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedars, there should be a sort of irrational men who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections

made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built” (CPW 2: 555). Here Milton compares public debate enabled by exchanges in print to the building of a temple in order to suggest that without “schismatics” or difference no authentic unity can be achieved. Just as Milton defines authentic virtue as one that has been tried by facing opposition, so unity cannot be imposed through the removal of divisions but rather through encompassing them. This point is reinforced when Milton plays with the notion of the body politic and suggests that English people should be like a living body:

For as in a body, when the blood is fresh, the spirits pure and vigorous, not only to vital, but to rational faculties, and those in the acutest and the pertest operations of wit and subtlety, it argues in what good plight and constitution the body is; so when the cheerfulness of the people is so sprightly up, as that it has, not only wherewith to guard well its own freedom and safety, but to spare, and to bestow upon the solidest and sublimest points of controversie, and new invention, it betok’ns not degenerated, nor drooping to a fatal decay, but casting off the old and wrinkl’d skin of corruption to outlive these pangs and wax young again, entering the glorious waies of truth and prosperous virtue, destin’d to become great and honorable in these latter ages. (CPW 2: 557)

Milton’s emphasis on the need for the “rational faculties” to remain “vigorous” recalls his argument for the good that can be obtained by reading bad books. For Milton, the body and the nation can only be healthy when they continue to be active and face opposition. This argument for an active and questioning intellect recalls Milton’s tirade against custom at the start of *The Doctrine of Discipline and Divorce* where he argues that custom being “glib and easie” is too easily mistaken by “credulous men, for the wholesome habit of soundnesse and good constitution” (CPW 2: 222-223). Likewise, the enforced removal of schism cried

out for by irrational men will only produce a nation destined for decay. The emphasis on renewal and continued growth is once again invoked in one of Milton's most powerful metaphors: the comparison of the nation to the Hebrew, strong-man Samson. "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant Nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks" (CPW 2: 557-558). The Samson reference is the embodiment of Milton's ideal English nation; indeed, in this passage the whole nation becomes part of the stately head. This is not what England is but what England can become, Milton argues, if she chooses an active intellect and seeks authentic virtue. This is not an England made of artificial Adams, but rather a nation of prophets. As Claire McEachern has pointed out, the force of the early modern nation lies in its "keen awareness of its historical specificity" (*The Poetics* 33).²⁸ McEachern argues that writers such as Spenser, Shakespeare, and Drayton exhibit a "fascination with the historical location of England" and that each author imagines an "England *in motion*, either yet to be or just past, with anticipation or nostalgia, her forms either comedy or elegy" (*The Poetics* 33). While Milton's writing shares in the same nationalist anticipation and nostalgia as his Tudor-Stuart predecessors, meaning that Milton too is writing about an England that is awaiting full realization or on the verge of coming undone, what is unique about Milton's writings is his connection between language—and by extension print, reading, and writing—and nationalism. When

²⁸ While McEachern is commenting on the Tudor-Stuart nation specifically, I would suggest that her observations can effectively be extended to include the seventeenth century.

contemplating the Latin word *Imprimatur*, Milton hopes that “our English, the language of men ever famous, and foremost in the achievements of liberty, will not easily finde servile letters anow [enough] to spell such a dictatorie presumption English” (CPW 2: 505), thus intimating that the liberty that the English nation represents is encoded in the very language. Pre-publication censorship prevents authors from using language to its fullest potential. *Areopagitica* argues against prepublication censorship because it damages both the individual and the nation. In both the *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* and the *Areopagitica* Milton argues for the necessity of an active intellect. While he argues for divorce on the basis of intellectual incompatibility, and thus turns his attention to domestic liberty, in *Areopagitica* Milton applies the same principles of liberty to the nation as a whole.

“Never before in English history had written and printed literature played such a predominant role in public affairs, and never before had it been felt by contemporaries to be of such importance: ‘There had never been anything before to compare with this war of words. It was an information revolution’”

-- *Nigel Smith*

Promiscuous Readers

The licensing order of 1643 provided Milton with an opportunity to articulate an English nationalism founded upon access to print. Milton’s depiction of the 1643 licensing order as a threat to civil liberty, and by extension religious liberty, allows him to pursue what he sees as the possibilities for English nationalism by comparing the importance of right reading to right virtue, thus

modeling a type of nationalism that is simultaneously public and private.

Parliament's licensing order of 1643 was intended for "suppressing the great late abuses and frequent disorders in Printing many false forged, scandalous, seditious, libellous, and unlicensed Papers, Pamphlets, and Books to the great defamation of Religion and government" (CPW 2: 797). Indeed, the difficulty of regulating or controlling the press went hand-in-hand with the invention of the press itself. In the long, dramatic history of press censorship, the only constant factor is the difficulty of preventing the dissemination of banned texts. The translation and dissemination of the English bible is an excellent example of this difficulty.

Despite the severity of the proffered punishments, including death, unlicensed and unlawful editions of the English bible made their way into the market time and time again. Considering England's tumultuous censorship history, it is not surprising that while, on the one hand, the 1643 order suggests that there is a dire need for press control, on the other hand, the order laments the impossibility of its task:

Which orders [orders restricting the production of texts] (notwithstanding the diligence of the Company of *Stationers*, to put them in full execution (have taken little or no effect: By reason the bill in preparation, for redresse of the said disorders, hath hitherto bin retarded through the present distractions, and very many, as well *Stationers* and *Printers*, as others of sundry other professions not free of the *Stationers* Company, have taken upon them to set up sundry private Printing Presses in corners and to print, vend, publish and disperse Books, pamphlets and papers in such multitudes, that no industry could be sufficient to discover or bring to punishment, all the several abounding delinquents. (CPW 2: 797)

That Milton sent forth his *Areopagitica* into the world with neither license nor the names of the printer and publisher reenacts the very problem that, ironically enough, the order itself raises: the impotence of any governing body to regulate and control print. Although it later gained influence in the early eighteenth century, *Areopagitica* had no impact on the Long Parliament's policy; in fact, as Ernest Sirluck notes, the licensing policy of 1643 "was reasserted in Orders of September 30, 1647, and March 13, 1648. The Commonwealth Parliament followed suit with the Order of September 20, 1649" (CPW 2: 163). However, Milton's primary concern was not the overturning of Parliament's desperate attempt to control press. As several critics have noted, Parliament's Order was at least partly a response to Milton's *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (The Life Lewalski 180). It seems likely that Milton saw the 1643 Order as a reinforcement of "custom," which he often cites as the primary obstacle to personal and civic liberty:

If it were seriously askt...who of all Teachers and Maisters that have ever taught, hath drawn the most Disciples after him, both in Religion, and in manners, it might bee not untruly answer'd, Custome...whether it be the secret of divine will, or the originall blindnesse we are born in, so it happ'ns for the most part, that Custome still is silently receiv'd for the best instructor.
(CPW 2: 222).²⁹

Areopagitica begins with a plea for "the liberty of unlicensc'd printing;" however, the stakes are immediately raised as Milton considers the implications of licensing

²⁹Milton routinely aligns custom with monarchy.

in the larger context of civil liberty. Further, Milton carefully qualifies his conception of civil liberty by arguing for the necessity of difference and debate: “For this is not the liberty that wee can hope, that no grievance ever should arise in the Commonwealth, that let no man in this World expect; but when complaints are freely heard, deeply consider’d, and speedily reform’d, then is the utmost bound of civill liberty attain’d that wise men look for” (CPW 2: 487). It seems likely that Milton viewed the 1643 Order as an opportunity to articulate an English nationalism that was in line with his religious and intellectual ideals.

In *Areopagitica* access to print and right reading become the hallmarks of and prerequisites for authentic religious experience as well as the development of true nationhood. Thus *Areopagitica* can be read as a conscious attempt at nation-building. Milton’s objective in *Areopagitica* is to demonstrate the necessity of a dialogic, public space, a space in which the community of readers can engage with one another through print since it is through this dialogical process that a sense of community is made possible and sustained. Simultaneously, however, this dialogical process is mirrored in Milton's discussion of virtue since he argues that virtue, like right reading, is only acquired through trial and confrontation with what is contrary. Milton argues that the suppression of print will impede English nationalism by circumscribing civil liberty. Ultimately, Milton's parallel arguments about reading and virtue reinforce one another and depict an English nationalism mitigated by an expanded sense of freedom, including the freedom to read and write. In this context, Milton argues for the necessity of reading

promiscuously; this concept, not unlike Milton's claim that it is preferable to be a heretic in the truth rather than to mindlessly accept orthodox teachings, challenges conventional morality by imbuing words that usually denote a breaking of the moral code with a positive sense.³⁰ Just as Milton's true Christian must be exposed to the possibility of heresy, the good reader is one who reads promiscuously in order to benefit from all books: both good and bad. Indeed, as both *Areopagitica* and *Paradise Lost* make clear, human beings occupy the precarious space between good and evil, God and Satan, and wisdom and error. However, the delicate balance cannot be maintained by simply ignoring one side of the equation, but rather each individual must confront and acknowledge both.

For Milton, reading, writing, and print seem integral components in securing England's self-realization.³¹ In *Areopagitica* Milton argues that print culture will provide a sense of community, a public space which, at least ideally, all private citizens can enter, and this is the reason why he believes that England will prevail where other communities have faltered. Indeed, throughout *Areopagitica* Milton maintains a hopeful and optimistic view of England as a community of readers, a community founded on print, while simultaneously expressing concern for the future of the fledgling community then under the shadow of the 1643 licensing order. However, Milton's concern is a large part of his rhetorical stance; for Milton, contrary forces, whether legitimate or

³⁰ For Milton's argument against accepting orthodox teachings see CPW 2: 543

³¹ In *The Poetics of Nationhood*, Claire McEachern argues that the early modern nation is accompanied by a self-consciousness on the part of writers.

exaggerated, allow for the sense of urgency with which he writes: "but the very attempt of this addresse thus made, and the thought of whom it hath recourse to, hath got the power within me to a passion, farre more welcome then incidentall to a Preface" (CPW 2: 487). Much of *Areopagitica*'s rhetorical force arises from Milton's focus on the importance of trial and opposition. Books and men both require trial and, according to the argument that Milton puts forth, pre-publishing censorship threatens to eliminate the opportunity to face trial by "killing" books before they can be widely read, understood, disputed, or accepted. While, on the one hand, Milton endows books with life of their own—"Books are not absolutely dead things" (CPW 2: 492)—on the other hand, he argues that readers are capable of making use of both good and bad books: "Bad meats will scarce breed good nourishment in the healthiest concoction; but herein the difference is of bad books, that they to a discreet and judicious Reader serve in many respects to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate" (CPW 2: 512-513). By arguing that readers are sufficient to judge and reason, Milton eliminates the threat of "bad books". Further, according to Milton's argument, even "bad books" serve a purpose when they are read well. As Achinstein argues, Milton views pre-publishing censorship as a threat to eliminate the opportunity for men to be tried by eliminating their ability to choose which books they read, how they read them, and what use they derive from them (*Revolutionary Reader* 65).

Besides rejecting censorship by arguing that its invention stems from Catholicism, Milton advocates a mode of active reading by explicitly linking this

type of practice to both Protestantism and Englishness. When commenting on the “favour and love of heaven,” Milton argues that the English have “great argument to think in a peculiar manner propitious towards us. Why else was this Nation chos’n before any other, that out of her, as out of *Sion* should be proclaim’d and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all *Europ*” (CPW 2: 552). Although Protestantism was not original to England alone, by claiming that England serves as a pattern of Protestant reform, Milton fuses religious and national discourse.

Moreover, Milton's argument about right reading, which occupies the first half of *Areopagitica*, is paralleled in his discussion of true or legitimate virtue. Throughout this early tract, Milton suggests that both religious and private experience as well as national and public experience is aided by access to print.³² *Areopagitica* not only suggests that nationalism was alive and well prior to the decline of religious modes of thought in the eighteenth century, but that nationalism could and did work in conjunction with religion in order to enable individuals to see themselves as part of a larger collective that was simultaneously and paradoxically unique and limited.³³

Throughout Milton's early prose, the reader holds a privileged position. As Nicholas von Maltzahn has commented, “Milton idealizes the reader, and to this

³² Many other critics of nationalism have argued for the presence of a pre-eighteenth century nationalism (see Hastings, McEachern, and Greenfeld).

Many other critics of nationalism have argued for the presence of a pre-eighteenth century nationalism (see Hastings, McEachern, and Greenfeld).

idealization his many readers have often consented" ("Milton's Readers" 236). However, in *Areopagitica* Milton is not just idealizing the reader, but rather he idealizes print culture: reading, writing, and publishing. Promiscuous reading, that is reading widely but wisely, becomes a model for a way of being in the world as well as a defining feature of the English nation. In Milton's 1642 *An Apology for Smectymnuus*, which was written as a reply to *A Modest Confutation of a Slanderous and Scurrilous Libell* where the anonymous author threatens to expose Milton's true character, Milton presents a thorough account of his reading practices in order to defend his moral character. In this sense, Milton presents himself as a promiscuous reader and, consequently, a moral agent. When defending himself against the charge of being "not honest but licentious" (CPW 1: 891), Milton provides an impressive account of his reading experiences (CPW 1: 890-893). On the subject of his reading material he argues that "even those books which to many others have bin the fuell of wantonnesse and loose living, I cannot thinke how unlesse by divine indulgence prov'd to me so many incitements as you have heard, to the love and steadfast observation of that vertue which abhorres the society of bordello's" (CPW 1: 891). Milton fully acknowledges that the reader is prone to error, but he maintains that these errors are necessary since it is only through error that true virtue, wisdom, or truth is realized. "If every action which is good, or evill in man at ripe years, were to be under pittance, and prescription

³³ Although Anderson does not argue that the decline of religion led to the rise of nationalism, he does suggest that nationalism, in a sense, picks up where religion leaves off.

and compulsion, what were vertue but a name, what praise could be then due to well-doing, what grammercy to be sober, just or continent?" asks Milton (CPW 2: 527). Reading is an internal, intellectual process that precedes action, and in this respect it enables the good reader—that is the reader who has the wisdom to learn from good or bad books—to exercise the moral faculties and act in accordance with them.

Milton does not only draw upon his own experiences to defend promiscuous reading, but also invokes the holy scriptures: "*Salomon* informs us that much reading is a wearines to the flesh; but neither he, nor other inspir'd author tells us that such, or such reading is unlawfull: yet certainly had God thought good to limit us herein, it had bin much more expedient to have told us what was unlawfull, then what was wearisome" (CPW 2: 514). Further, in reference to the "burning of those Ephesian books by St. *Pauls* converts," Milton maintains that it was a private and voluntary act and laments that "another might perhaps have read [the banned books] in some sort usefully" (CPW 2: 514). Like much of Milton's poetry and prose, *Areopagitica* is a testament to his own promiscuous reading. Intertextual references permeate throughout Milton's considerable body of writing and these self-reflexive elements consistently remind Milton's reader that the author is well-read. By invoking the scriptures as a holy precedent for his mode of reading, Milton redefines the "true warfaring Christian" as a promiscuous reader: "what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence

to forbear without the knowledge of evil? He that can comprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true warfaring Christian” (CPW 2: 514-515). The “true warfaring Christian” is placed in the predicament that Adam and Eve find themselves in after the fall: “knowing good by evil” (CPW 2: 514). Milton’s arguments for the necessity for promiscuous reading echo the argument he had earlier made for divorce on the grounds of intellectual incompatibility when he lamented the precarious situation of the “discreet man” who must choose a life partner without the aid of experience (CPW 2: 249-250). When it comes to love and marriage, promiscuity proves to be an unfair advantage to “they who have liv’d most loosely” since “by reason of their bold accustoming, prove most successfull in their matches, because their wild affections. . . have been as so many divorces to teach them experience” (CPW 2: 249-250). Promiscuous reading, unlike promiscuous courting, however, precedes action and is therefore invaluable to the warfaring Christian. Ultimately, Milton argues that promiscuous reading is what defines the true citizen. By modeling the English nation as a nation of warfaring Christians, Milton not only argues that access to print is a national prerogative, but he also demonstrates that the Commonwealth recognizes its members by extending them the freedom to read: “He who is not trusted with his own actions, his drift not being known to be evil, and standing to the hazard of law and penalty, has no great argument to think himself reputed in the Commonwealth wherein he was born, for other then a fool or a foreiner”

(CPW 2: 531-532). *Areopagitica* is as much about reading practices as it is about press censorship since the type of reader that Milton presents himself to be engages in the type of exchange that he advocates for England as a whole.

"Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties."

-- *Areopagitica*

From his Private House

The relationship between the individual and the nation was key for Milton. Many of his political pamphlets model an exchange between the private person and his nation. *Areopagitica's* epigraph, taken from Euripides' *The Suppliants*, highlights the significance of this relationship: "This is true Liberty when free born men / Having to advise the public may speak free, / Which he who can, and will, deserv's high praise, / Who neither can nor will, may hold his peace; / What can be juster in a State than this?" (CPW 2: 485). Milton equates liberty and justness with the ability to address the nation and thus licensing becomes a threat to both the private citizen and the nation as a whole. Isocrates, "who from his private house wrote that discourse to the Parliament of *Athens*, that perswades them to change the forme of *Democracy* which was then establisht," provides a classical point of reference for Milton's written speech to the Parliament of England, but it is the relationship, marked by duty, between the individual and the state that is of most importance (CPW 2: 489). Milton often employs this model in his prose

tracts; for instance, in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, Milton assures the reader that he is not attempting to “seduce the simple and illiterat” but rather he is addressing his “lines chiefly to the Parliament of *England*” (CPW 2: 233).

Stevens persuasively argues that Milton uses the soliloquy—the private, inner voice made public—to simultaneously articulate an autonomous subject and the subject’s nation (“Milton’s Janus-Faced Nationalism” 253-254). While Stevens is correct to argue that the relationship between the nation and the individual, for Milton, is an enabling one, I would suggest that what is most remarkable about this relationship is the extent to which it is dependent upon writing which, in turn, relies on an unfettered print culture for its personal and political effectiveness. For Milton, both the self and the nation needs to be written and this is why so much of Milton’s personal history included in his political tracts is a history of his engagement with texts and/or a history of his evolution as a writer.

Milton's dedication to writing in the vernacular was a crucial component of his nation-building aspirations; he not only uses an eloquent language, but also attempts to raise the cultural capital of his native tongue through the production of English texts. For instance, in *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, he explains:

my errand is to find out the choicest and the learnedest who have this high gift of wisdom to answer solidly, or to be convinc't. I crave it from the piety, the learning and the prudence which is hous'd in this place. It might perhaps more fitly have bin writt'n in another tongue; and I had don so, but that the esteem I have of my Countries judgement, and the love I beare to my native language to serv it first with what I endeavour, made me speak it thus, ere I assay the verdict of outlandish readers. (CPW 2: 233)

Here Milton suggests that writing in the vernacular is not simply an attempt to reach a wide English speaking/reading audience; he makes it clear that it is not the “simple and illiterate” that he is writing to, but rather it is the “choicest and the learnedest.” By arguing that he is writing to a learned audience, Milton elevates the status of his native tongue by suggesting that English is a language that can serve for intellectual debate, thus challenging the primacy of Latin. Moreover, Milton uses the idea of a shared language to define his notion of an English nation. His motive for writing in English is not to “seduce” the illiterate, but rather to speak to members of the same language group. Although the concept of a shared vernacular language suggests an egalitarian view, Milton’s qualifications mark the internal limitations that he imagines. By elevating the status of English as a language, Milton simultaneously elevates the status of the English people by suggesting that his readership is made up of those who are fit to “answer solidly,” to debate and refute as intellectual equals, or otherwise, “to be convinced” by his “reasonable” argument. Finally, in this passage Milton defines the English nation by drawing a distinction between two sets of readers: his native readers and the “outlandish” or foreign readers. This distinction allows Milton to envision England as a community of learned readers and it is this conception of the nation that Milton develops throughout *Areopagitica*. However, the idealistic view of English readers that Milton presents in *Areopagitica* is short-lived, and as Milton continues to write the nation and to write to the nation during the political

upheavals of the 1640s and 50s, his optimism and idealism are drastically altered. In a sense, Milton's changing view of his readers illuminates Milton's conception of and relationship to the nation.

Areopagitica is not the first instance of Milton's connection between print and nationalism; indeed, two years before the unauthorized publication of *Areopagitica* Milton establishes an important connection between print and nationalism in his autobiographical interlude in *Reason of Church Government*. Here he offers a self-reflexive moment which reveals not only his self conception but also his perception of his chosen vocation:

I apply'd my selfe to that resolution which *Ariosto* follow'd against the perswasions of *Bembo*, to fix all the industry and art I could unite to the adorning of my native tongue; not to make verbal curiosities the end, that were a toylsom vanity, but to be an interpreter & relater of the best and sagest things among mine own Citizens throughout this Iland in the mother dialect. That what the greatest and choycest wits of *Athens*, *Rome*, or modern *Italy*, and those Hebrews of old did for their country, I in my proportion with this over and above of being a Christian, might doe for mine: not caring to be once nam'd abroad, though perhaps I could attaine to that, but content with these British Ilands as my world; whose fortune hath hitherto bin that if the Athenians, as some say, made their small deeds great and renowned by their eloquent writers, *England* hath had her noble achievements made small by the unskillfull handling of monks and mechanicks. (CPW 1: 811-12)

In this passage, Milton moves from his own private, poetic aspirations to a much larger and public desire: the articulation of English linguistic nationalism. Yet, Milton's public and private interests are not easily separated and this passage effectively illustrates the degree to which Milton's self-conception was connected to nationalist discourse. As Paul Steven notes, "Milton was a patriot, an English

nationalist, and the identity of the author, especially in his early prose, is inextricably entangled with that of his nation” (254). Nationalism was an important facet of Milton’s identity; in his *Second Defense of the English People* he rhetorically asks: “For who does not consider the glorious achievements of his country as his own?” (CPW 4, 1: 550). Milton fashions himself as a representative of the public he addresses, and in *Areopagitica* this public is fittingly imagined as a community of readers. The comparison that Milton makes in his preface to Book II of *Reason of Church Government* between ancient Athens and his present-day England speaks to the importance he attributes to writing and the production of texts. What distinguishes Athens from England is not the quantity or quality of their respective "noble achievements," but rather, the extent and manner to which these achievements have been articulated in and by writing. In a sense, the difference between Athens and England is in the quantity and quality of their texts rather than their respective exploits. For Milton, the production of texts, whether historical, poetical or political, galvanized individuals along national lines.

At the same time, however, Milton uses print in order to define his own identity. There are numerous instances throughout his early works where Milton takes the time to give a personal account of his development as a writer. For instance, in the *Reason of Church Government* Milton explains that “to venture and divulge unusual things of my selfe, I shall petition to the gentler sort” (CPW 1: 808). After giving a description of his early education, including his private

studies made possible by his father, his trip to Italy, and his eventual realization of his vocation, Milton explains:

I began thus farre to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home [i.e those who were encouraging Milton to pursue writing], and not lesse to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intent study (which I take to be my portion in this life) joyn'd with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die. (CPW 1: 810)

Despite having been “church-outed by the prelates” Milton finds a suitable outlet for his natural talents in writing; however, writing not only serves his own personal desires, but also that of his nation: “...if I were certain to write as men buy Leases, for three lives and downward, there ought no regard be sooner had then to Gods glory, by the honour and instruction of my country” (CPW 1: 810). Here, as in the *Areopagitica*, Milton endows writing, and by extension books, with “a life beyond life,” one that continues to serve a useful purpose even after the author/creator is gone. As Richard Helgerson notes, regardless of genre, poets like Milton, “sought to articulate a national community whose existence and eminence would then justify their desire to become its literary spokesmen” (*Forms of Nationhood* 2). While Helgerson is correct that writers such as Milton regarded themselves as national spokespersons, it is worth stressing the importance of texts for both the production of the nation and the self: both need to be written. Although many of his early prose tracts address a number of issues, including church government, divorce, and free speech, Milton spends considerable time including details about himself and, more precisely, details about himself as a

writer. These personal digressions seem more fitting when we consider the degree to which Milton views his self-development as a component of the nation he is writing to, for, and against. The writing of self and nation is an ongoing project—each text challenges and builds upon what came before. For instance, while Milton examines his reasons for becoming a writer in *The Reason of Church Government*, twelve years later in his *Second Defense of the English People* he presents a history of his engagement with texts. This personal history cannot be separated from Milton's writing of the nation since he views his self-representation as a component of the nation he is writing (and writing against):

And yet, to no one, even the humblest, do I willingly compare myself, nor do I say one word about myself in arrogance, but whenever I allow my mind to dwell upon this cause, the noblest and most renowned of all, and upon the glorious task of defending the very defenders, a task assigned me by their own vote and decision, I confess that I can scarcely restrain myself from loftier and bolder flights than are permissible in this exordium....
(CPW 4: 553-554)

As Stevens has noted, the relationship between Milton's private and public desires is quite complicated and intertwined, thus it is not surprising that Milton would view the licensing order of 1643 as a threat not just to his own liberty, but also to the liberty of his nation. For Milton, pre-publishing censorship will reduce England's writers to mere schoolboys: "What advantage is it to be a man over it is to be a boy at school, if we have only scapt the ferular, to come under the fescu of an *Imprimatur*?" (CPW 2: 531). This imposed infantile state, Milton argues, while insulting to the individual author, is also a detriment to the nation since it is these "written labours" that define the nation.

“And as it is a particular disesteem of every knowing person alive, and most injurious to the written labours and monuments of the dead, so to me it seems an undervaluing and vilifying of the whole nation.”

-- *Areopagitica*

Writt'n Labours as Monuments of the Dead

In his influential *Imagined Communities*, Anderson discusses the importance of national symbols in terms of their ability to physically represent and invoke the sense of community on which nationalism depends. For Anderson, “no more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. The public ceremonial reverence accorded these monuments precisely because they are either deliberately empty or no one knows who lies inside them, has no true precedents in earlier times” (17). Anderson uses the example of the empty tomb of the Unknown Soldier in order to highlight the potency of nationalism. The emptiness of the tomb can only be given significance through the imaginative process under which the concept of the nation is imbued with meaning. While Anderson is thinking in terms of a modern context, this same dynamic plays a significant role in Milton's writings. In *Areopagitica* books function like the empty tombs of unknown soldiers since they become national symbols or monuments. In other words, Milton gives books the same status Anderson attributes to the anonymous tombs when he describes them as the "writt'n labours" of men. Like the tombs of the unknown soldiers, books too serve as national symbols and denote both a national as well as a personal significance.

Yet Milton complicates the relationship between books and the nation by oscillating between the private and public spheres that books represent. One of the most arresting features of Milton's discussion of books is the power he attributes to them; Milton declares that "Bookes demeane themselves, as well as men" and that they are "not absolutely dead things, but doe contain a potencie of life in them to be as active as that soule whose progeny they are; nay they do preserve as in a violl the purest efficacie and extraction of that living intellect that bred them" (CPW 2: 492). At first glance, Milton's description suggests an extremely personal connection between author and book: books are extensions of their authors since they extend the author's very life. However, the connection between author and text moves to the background as Milton considers the more public features of print. In this transition, the discussion shifts from the production of a book as a material object to the life of the book after its creation. This shift begins with Milton's reconsideration of the relationship between text and author: "And yet on the other hand unlesse warinesse be us'd, as good almost kill a Man as kill a good Book; who kills a Man kills a reasonable creature, Gods Image; but hee who destroyes a good Booke kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye" (CPW 2: 492). In this passage, Milton seems to elevate the status of books by aligning them more closely with reason. Thus books are not simply representations or extensions of a given author, but rather they represent or contain reason and are therefore semi-divine. Indeed, that books are described as the "image of God" invokes a direct comparison to Adam's creation in Genesis as

well as Milton's rendition of the creation story in *Paradise Lost* as God says to the Son "Let us make now man in our image, man/In our similitude" (VII: 519-520). In other words, this phrase insists that books are not simply like men but also have a vital quality. Finally, the cryptic comment that killing a good book equals killing the image of God "in the eye" suggests that prepublication censorship is a boldfaced affront to the divine since human beings are not allowed to see God face-to-face. In a sense, Milton divides the book/author relationship by insisting that books are important in their ability to express abstract reason rather than simply serve as an extension of the author: books are part of a particular author, yet they have the potential to be much more. Milton believed that print provided a medium through which reason and truth could be understood, and for him, this process is vital to the nation:

Tis true, no age can restore a life, whereof perhaps there is no great losse; and revolutions of ages doe not oft recover the losse of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole Nations fare the worse. We should be wary therefore what persecution we raise against the living labours of publick men, how we spill that season'd life of man preserv'd and stor'd up in Books; since we see a kinde of homicide may be thus committed, sometimes a martyrdom; and if it extended to the whole impression, a kinde of massacre, whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemental life, but strikes at that ethereall and fift essence, the breath of reason it selfe, slaies an immortality rather than a life. (CPW 2: 493)

In this passage, Milton begins by stating the obvious: no age can restore a life; however, by connecting books to the essence of life—reason—Milton suggests that while a single life may be finite, books are aligned with the infinite. Applying words such as *homicide*, *martyrdom*, and *massacre* not only insist on the human

quality of texts, but also insists that censorship's impact exceeds the individual and has much larger consequences. In this passage we see the overlapping of the two equally significant networks that print culture participates in: the creation of the book or the material object and the "life" inspired by the object. It is the recognition that these two networks are dependent that fuels much of Milton's arguments about the consequences of censorship. By interfering with or preventing textual production, individuals and the nation lose the potential benefits that might be initiated or inspired by a single book. Indeed, if the destruction of one book is tantamount to murder, then, as Milton points out, the destruction of a "whole impression" may become a massacre.

Throughout *Areopagitica* the "writt'n labours" of men gain significance as Milton aligns books and pamphlets with feats of war in the sense that both serve as national monuments. For instance, at the start of *Areopagitica* Milton declares: "I shall be blamelesse, if it be no other, then the joy and gratulation which it [the very attempt of this addresse thus made] brings to all who wish and promote their Countries liberty; whereof this whole Discourse propos'd will be a certaine testimony, if not a Trophey" (CPW 2: 487). By identifying his speech/text as a "trophy," Milton suggests that writing, including political pamphlets such as *Areopagitica*, can serve "as a token or evidence of victory, valour, power [or] skill" (OED). Indeed, Milton makes this argument once again in his 1654 *The Second Defense of the English People* when he concludes: "I have delivered my testimony, I would almost say, have erected a monument that will not readily be

destroyed to the reality of those singular and mighty achievements which were above all praise” (CPW: 4, 1: 685). In both prose works, the physical text becomes a national monument allowing Milton to provide the kind of national writing that he argues England is lacking in his *Reason of Church Government*.

Moreover, Milton’s identification of his speech/text as a “trophy” paves the way for his later comparisons of England with its classical predecessors: Greece and Rome. Milton complains that the Greeks were “unbookish” and minded “nought but the feats of Warre” (CPW 2: 496). While the Romans “for many ages train’d up only to a military roughnes, resembling most the *Lacedaemonian* guise, knew of learning little but what their twelve Tables, and the *Pontifick* College with their *Augurs* and *Flamins* taught them in Religion and Law” (CPW 2: 497). *Areopagitica* rejects prepublication censorship by making the link between the production of English texts and the production of the English nationalism tangible.

In many of the prose works, Milton argues that writing is as valuable, if not more so, than feats of war in terms of their respective national contribution and thus writing and reading are represented as forms of political engagement. For instance, in *The Second Defense* Milton provides a lengthy self-defense that highlights the importance of recording his life in writing:

Although I claim for myself no share in this [military] glory, yet it is easy to defend myself from the charge of timidity or cowardice, should such a charge be leveled. For I did not avoid the toils and dangers of military service without rendering to my fellow citizens another kind of service that was much more useful and no less perilous...Having from early youth been

especially devoted to the liberal arts, with greater strength of mind than of body, I exchanged the toils of war, in which any stout trooper might outdo me, for those labours which I better understood, that with such wisdom as I owned I might add as much weight as possible to the counsels of my country and to this excellent cause, using not my lower but my higher and stronger powers. And so I concluded that if God wished those men to achieve such noble deeds, He also wished that there be other men by whom these deeds, once done, might be worthily praised and extolled, and that truth defended by arms be also defended by reason—the only defence truly appropriate to man. (CPW 4.1: 552-553)

Milton imbues his own personal history with a sense of national destiny. By incorporating a history of his textual engagement on behalf of his “country,” he blurs the distinction between autobiography and national history. Further, the passage not only compares writing to physical combat, but it insists that writing is more important. Unlike soldiers who wield “arms,” writers rely on reason which Milton sees as the “only” legitimate means of defending “truth.” Likewise, in *Areopagitica* writing and warfare are compared:

Behold now this vast City; a City of refuge, the mansion house of liberty encompassed and surrounded with [God’s] protection; the shop of warre hath not there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed Justice in defense of beleaguer’d Truth, then there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present, as with their fealty, the approaching Reformation: others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement. (CPW 2: 553-554)

Just as when Milton compares books to “those fabulous Dragon’s teeth” that “spring up armed men,” this passage argues that writing and reading are as active, perhaps more so, than any feat of war. The single sentence which describes the act of reading and writing contains seven present participles—*musing*, *searching*,

revolving, approaching, reading, trying, assenting—which gives the sentence a powerful and active quality that is comparable to physical combat and yet more arduous. Further, this activity depends on a community of people rather than a single individual.

Areopagitica details Milton's conception of the English nation and connects print and nationalism as printing, publishing, and writing are presented as acts of nation-building. Throughout this tract, Milton expresses concern about the production of English texts and their importance in securing a form of English nationalism that encourages individual liberty. This chapter detailed four ways that Milton connected print and nationalism. First, the chapter focused on how print makes a public sphere identifiable and how Milton's articulation of an English public engaged with religious discourse, but still maintained the features which Anderson argues are necessary for nationalism, particularly a clear sense of limits and an emotional potency. Second, the chapter examined how reading and writing allowed individuals to engage with the national body. The chapter then explored some of the interconnections between the individual and the nation in order to examine how textual practices are involved in articulating both types of identity. Finally, the chapter extended Anderson's comments on national symbols in an examination of Milton's discussion of books. By examining these various relationships between print and nationalism, this chapter highlighted a facet of the text that has received scant attention. Although critics such as Stephen Dobranski have demonstrated that Milton was personally motivated by his first-hand

experiences with the book-trade, this chapter considers another motivating factor—nationalism—that shaped Milton’s response to the 1643 licensing order.

Chapter 3

"An irksome labour:" Redefining a Politics of Reading in Milton's

Eikonoklastes

“Speaking freely is a precondition of *Areopagitica*, but Milton’s tract is not merely a free speech; it is also a question directed at parliamentary readers to make a decision about the kind of citizens they imagine the English to be.”

-- Sharon Achinstein

“Dragon’s teeth:” The Echo of *Areopagitica* in Milton’s *Eikonoklastes*.

As outlined in chapter 1, Milton's early prose, particularly *Areopagitica*, constitutes a provocative and optimistic view of print and its national possibilities. Much of the early prose suggests that Milton was acutely aware of the connection between print and nationalism and that he believed the dynamic exchange of print could foster an ideal type of Englishness. While Milton's valuation of English nationalism is certainly not hegemonic, the early prose articulates a direct and enabling connection between politics and textual engagement. For Milton "Books are not absolutely dead things, but doe contain a potencie of life in them to be as active as that soule was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a violl the purest efficacie and extraction of that living intellect that bred them" (CPW 2:

492). Milton goes on to assure his readers that he knows that books "are as lively, and as vigorously productive, as those fabulous Dragons teeth; and being sown up and down, may chance to spring up armed men" (CPW 2: 492). While, on the one hand, Milton seems to attribute an incredible power to books by claiming that they are not "absolutely dead things" and imbuing them with a "vigorously productive" power, on the other hand, if we consider his comment in light of the historical importance of print and its role in reviving monarchy, Milton's assertion seems almost prophetic. Milton would not have been surprised to learn that the most significant political events of the seventeenth century were to be dramatically played out through the medium of print. One book in particular, *Eikon Basilike*, the ostensive first-hand account of the sufferings and meditations of Charles I, confirmed all of *Areopagitica's* optimism regarding books and visual culture. The printing press did prove to be a powerful tool in creating a sense of community and promoting political ideals; however, much to Milton's horror, *Eikon Basilike* demonstrated the abuse of this type of power. The publication of the King's Book allowed royalists to co-opt the power of the press and provided the dead king the victory that was denied him during his arduous battles with Parliamentarians and their supporting armed forces.

Much like the fabled "dragon's teeth," *Eikon Basilike* altered the anti-royalist tide that had allowed Parliament to try the king for treason. Put another way, although the King's Book did not literally "spring up armed men," it did accomplish what the king's army could not: rehabilitating the perception of

English monarchy. Charles' posthumous metamorphosis into a martyr-king and icon, disseminated in the various manifestations of *Eikon Basilike*, supplied a powerful symbol through which to reunite many political dissenters and malcontents. More significantly, by fusing monarchy with the powerful rhetoric of Christian-martyrdom, royalist supporters were able to mitigate the threat of monarchic power that had served to unite the revolutionaries.³⁴ By applying Anderson's conception of the nation to early modern England, McEachern demonstrates the political flexibility of nationalism: nations are not contingent upon any specific form of political rule, but rather, nationalism relies on a conviction that the institutional forms are congruent with and expressive of the "the character of its people" (McEachern *The Poetics* 11).³⁵ *Eikon Basilike* made a persuasive argument that monarchy was in fact a fitting form of government for the English and initiated a massive wave of regret that was made all the more poignant by the Christ-like depiction of the king. The book was a printing phenomenon that confirmed the very potential Milton had assigned to print in the early 1640s. While *Areopagitica* is quite explicitly a text concerned with the implications of print culture and the political dimensions of reading and writing, *Eikonoklastes*, Milton's formal response to *Eikon Basilike*, is also a text that

Although Anderson does not argue that the decline of religion led to the rise of nationalism, he does suggest that nationalism, in a sense, picks up where religion leaves off.

³⁴ McEachern argues that the Tudor-Stuart nation depended on the institution of monarchy. Interestingly, she notes that the "chief demon of Tudor political theory, far more than fear of popular rebellion, was the threat of monarchic power" (*The Poetics* 8).

grapples with these same issues and seeks to reassure its audience that monarchy was an unsuitable form of government since it encouraged a passive and non-critical type of political engagement. Milton's appointment by Council of State as Secretary of Foreign Tongues on March 3, 1649, put him in the unenviable position of defending the regicides in print. Although only five years separate these two political treatises, the challenge of responding to the popularity of the King's Book necessitated a full-scale reevaluation of the possibilities of reading, writing, and printing as political actions.

In *Areopagitica*, Milton optimistically views print as a medium for educating and producing a nation of agile-minded readers; furthermore, Milton imagines England as a nation founded on the dynamic exchange of print-based ideas, no matter how conflicting. This vision of English nationalism, namely England as a nation of prophets, is one that Milton encourages his readers to share. Yet, the overwhelming success of the *Eikon Basilike* raised a number of troubling concerns about reading as a form of political engagement since, for Milton, the masses' response to the King's Book signified a body of "silly gazers" and idolaters, rather than the critical readers he had hoped to find. Further, and perhaps more troubling, the success of the King's Book destabilized Milton's reliance on "the people" as a source of authority. The concept of a fit and capable public which Milton so eloquently championed in his prose writing only five years

³⁵ In contrast to Anderson, McEachern argues that the nation is not independent of political form. Most importantly, the institutional form of this polity is expressive of the indigenous character of a population (*The Poetics* 11).

before gives way to insecurity and doubt as Milton begins to move to a more conservative view of his readers, to the famous “fit though few.” In *Eikonoklastes* Milton must come to terms with a people who chose self-enslavement by desiring the return of a tyrannical form of government. In many ways, Milton's political evolution takes several drastic turns during the 1640s. His position on the legitimacy of kingship and his understanding of England as a nation are called into question by the political events leading to the second civil war and eventual execution of the king. More specifically, Milton's appreciation of nationalism as an enabling force for the individual is compromised. While Milton would continue to defend the regicide by arguing that the English people had natural rights that preceded all forms of government, he was simultaneously forced to balance this claim with the fact that “the people,” as evidenced by the popularity and overwhelming success of *Eikon Basilike*, refused to live up to their potential. It is within this context that *Eikonoklastes* can be seen as not only a point-by-point refutation of the King's Book, but also as a reconsideration of the politics of reading. These details help explain why Milton structured his response in such a determined and hostile fashion.

Further, the political crisis and its manifestations in print force Milton to reconsider the meaning of political action. The regicides depended on defining Charles as a tyrant in order to substantiate their actions; however, *Eikon Basilike* altered the perception of Charles by transforming him into a martyr-king and casting the regicides in the uncomfortable role of “persecutors.” As Elizabeth

Wheeler notes, "*Eikon Basilike* was a cultural event that signaled a rupture with past discourses of kingship: it enabled its readers to become participants in a political culture that it helped redefine" (123). Milton certainly foresaw the potential of print in producing and sustaining a political culture; however, *Eikon Basilike* seemed to encourage a passive and uncritical, indeed servile, political culture. While political action did not necessarily mean a critical reading of royalism *per se*, it did mean to read critically. Milton's epigraph to *Areopagitica*, taken from Euripides' *The Suppliants*, had defined "true liberty" as "when free-born men, / Having to advise the public, may speak free;" however, the response to *Eikon Basilike* suggested that the majority of Milton's countrymen lacked the necessary critical capabilities for responding to the national crisis that threatened the notion of "true liberty" Milton so prized. The battle to control the image of the king highlights the ambiguity in determining who can act and interpret political action. Interestingly, these ambiguities are taken up again in *Samson Agonistes*, where the question of what constitutes political action and the question of interpreting those actions provides the text with much of its dramatic force.

Many critics have questioned the effectiveness of Milton's approach in responding to *Eikon Basilike*. When examined retrospectively, clearly Milton's tactics did not have the persuasive power or political influence that the regicides needed. Yet Milton's response is admirable for its ability to yoke political and religious history in its thorough reply to Charles I. Critical discussions about Milton's formal response have been quite varied. Not surprisingly, many critics,

most notably David Norbrook, have examined this prose tract as an expression of republican rhetoric; in fact, Norbrook credits Milton with becoming “the republic’s most celebrated champion in the public sphere” (*Writing the English Republic* 203). However, many other contemporary studies on *Eikonoklastes* have examined the text as an act and extension of iconoclasm, a literal dismantling of the king’s image and book, or, alternatively, critics have considered this tract within the context of seventeenth-century changes to the notions of originality and plagiarism.³⁶ Such approaches emphasize the text’s underlying interest in textual practices, such as reading and publishing, and their impact on interpretation. For instance, David Loewenstein argues that “Iconoclasm for Milton consequently emerges as a profoundly radical and creative response that cannot be divorced from his dramatic sense of social transformation: it represents his attempt to undermine an entrenched ideological and historical perspective, so as to bring about a new mode of social vision” (*Casting Down Imaginations* 253). Yet, this new mode of social vision had been introduced five years earlier when Milton rejected prepublication licensing in *Areopagitica*. By presenting reading and writing as political acts and trying to define an idealized political culture mediated through print, Milton articulated an enabling form of English nationalism that synthesized Protestant values. The dynamic exchange of print-based ideas formed the touchstone of Milton’s conception of the public sphere and was the foundation of his idealized Protestant, English nation. Yet in *Eikonoklastes*, Milton must

³⁶See Elizabeth Magnus.

simultaneously re-think and defend the political potential of print culture since *Eikon Basilike* clearly usurped print in order to transform a community of would-be critical readers into a “rabble” of passive spectators.

Elizabeth Magnus’ treatment of *Eikonoklastes* highlights the text’s position as a development in the seventeenth-century notions of originality and imitation. For Magnus, “Milton is the great spokesman for a radical Protestant concept of originality” who “attacks Charles I’s authority through his authorial practice in *Eikon Basilike*, singling out the king’s instances of ‘plagiarism’ to characterize the theft, ill stewardship, and bankruptcy of his rule” (88-89). Elizabeth Wheeler takes an alternative position on the question of “plagiarism” by aligning the king’s textual practices with the growing popularity of seventeenth-century “how-to-books” that provided models for prayer that were adopted by Protestants and Puritans alike. In Wheeler’s estimation “even the appearance of the ‘Pamela Prayer’ from Sir Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* – Milton’s trump card – in various editions of *Eikon Basilike* cannot properly be constructed as plagiarism or cynical misuses by someone unfamiliar with the distinctions between reality and fiction” (130). However, what seems to be of most concern to Milton regarding the king’s use of the Pamela prayer is the servile textual practices that the king implicitly endorses and courts. Milton regards the king’s prayer as “model’d into the form of a privat Psalter” which his readers “so much admire, either for the matter or the manner” (CPW 3: 360). However, to admire the king’s borrowed piety is tantamount to participating in the “lip-work of every Prelatical Liturgist, clapt

together, and quilted out of Scripture phrase, with as much ease, and as little need of Christian diligence or judgement, as belongs to the compiling of any ord'nary and salable peece of English Dvinity, that the Shops value" (CPW 3: 360). Not surprisingly, the reference to "Christian diligence" and "judgement" recalls Milton's criteria for a capable and fit English nation: the ability to read, interpret, and judge for oneself. Milton's point is that the king is guilty of passive reading and writing, so much so that his prayer amounts to little more than lip service. Further, the king's passive textual practice provides his readers with a pattern of piety too closely aligned with Catholic worship. The King's Book is not dissimilar to "the Arch-Bishops late Breviary [namely Laud's controversial prayer book], and many other good *Manuals*, and *Handmaids of Devotion*" (CPW 3: 360). These books fail to uphold the Protestant values that Milton associates with reading in *Areopagitica*; in fact, one of the only seemingly positive qualities that Milton grudgingly acknowledges is that these books are "salable." This emphasis on the value of books as commodities implicitly recalls other Catholic practices that Milton often derides such as the sale of indulgences and relics. A little later on in the same chapter, Milton describes the king at "that sad howr which was upon him" turning to that "grave Bishop" not for true moral guidance, but for a "special Relique of his saintly exercises" (CPW 3: 360). Further, Milton reinforces the allusion to the king's sympathies for Catholicism when he muses upon the sources of Charles' divine inspiration: "for [the king] might certainly...seek a Christian prayer out of a Pagan Legend...one perhaps out of the

French *Astraea*, another out of the Spanish *Diana*; *Amadis* and *Palmerin* could hardly scape him” (CPW 3: 367). While each of these texts is cited primarily as an example of Romance, it is noteworthy that Milton hereby also points to two Catholic countries as the source of the king’s textual models. These allusions to Catholicism are in keeping with Milton’s rhetorical position as iconoclast; indeed, the king is a “buzzard idol” who by “these goodly reliques,” namely his stolen and empty prayers, is “held a Saint and Martyr in opinion with the cheated People” (CPW 3: 364; 367). Milton exposes the king as an unfit ruler by exposing his poor choice of reading material, his inability to read well, and his latent Catholicism.

Ultimately, Milton's concerns with the king’s textual practices are also about competing versions/imaginings of English nationalism. When *Eikon Basilike*'s genre and presentation are compared to Milton's text – the point-by-point refutation of the King's Book – it seems plausible that a large part of Milton’s intent was to rehabilitate a critical reading of the king and his political position. In some senses this effort might be seen as slightly optimistic or even misguided, yet seeing this text in this light requires the advantages afforded by hindsight. It remains unclear whether or not a more effective response to *Eikon Basilike* could have been produced. What is clear is that Milton applied the same standards of critical reading that he defended as distinctively English in *Areopagitica* to the king and his book. Throughout this text, the ideas and estimation central to Milton’s arguments about the value of critical reading and its

ability to produce a nation of prophets guides his response to the king as he urges subjects to become careful readers of themselves and their nation.

*Couldst thou before thy death have giv'n, what wee
Might ask, thy Book had been the legacie,
Thy Will can make but Heirs of Monarchie;
But this doth make each man an Heir of thee.*

Upon Eikon Basilike

“A King is said to be the Author:” Reading the King’s Book.

One of the defining moments of the second Civil War and of seventeenth-century English political life culminated in the dramatic trial and execution of Charles I. While it is true that the sensational trial and execution of the king gave birth to England's first republic, it is equally true that the republic's inception paradoxically initiated its demise. In order to understand just how one historical event could yield two such contradictory outcomes it is helpful to consider the interconnections between politics and print culture. As previously mentioned, throughout the seventeenth century, an emergent public sphere made possible through print had an unprecedented influence on political life. Print not only enabled the transmission of political ideas, but it also provided a forum in which politics could be debated and discussed; further, print culture also offered an arena in which political events were interpreted, challenged, and re-cast.

The trial and execution of the king is an excellent example of an historical event whose meaning was shaped, challenged, and ultimately controlled through print. As Sharon Achinstein has pointed out, “it is significant that the regicides felt compelled first to try the king in court, and second, to publish the proceedings of his trial in pamphlet form in order to justify their action of killing him” (*Revolutionary Reader* 29). In other words, in order to establish themselves as a legitimate authority, the revolutionaries sought recognition from a print-based public. However, this is not to suggest that print was a medium for political radicals alone; the king himself who was at least the ostensible author of the most influential book in the seventeenth century used print to achieve what he could not achieve through military might: the restoration of the monarchy.

Charles was not the first king to capitalize on the linguistic connection between "author" and "authority" by employing the press to reach his subjects. As Richard Helgerson notes, James I, the first Stuart king and father to Charles, broke with the dominant Elizabethan modes of self-representation, namely public processions and symbolic portraiture, by publishing his own texts, encouraging the publication of a folio edition of his writings, and by attaching his name to what would become one of the most influential English translations of the bible (“Milton Reads” 3-6). This change in monarchical self-representation, not surprisingly, mirrors the sixteenth-century shift from an image-centred to word-centred semiotics particularly palpable in religious and political culture (“Milton Reads” 3-6). Just as the Protestant Reformation rested on the imperative that the

individuals who made up the community of believers ought to read the scriptures themselves, political coherence became increasingly dependent on print as a medium of transmission and expression. It is noteworthy that shortly after ascending the throne in 1603, James I republished his *Basilikon Doron. Or His Maiesties instructions to his dearest sonne, Henrie the prince*. Although rhetorically styled as advice literature, this text quite bluntly insists on a monarch's divine authority. The opening sonnet unabashedly declares: "God gives not Kings the stile of Gods in vaine, / For on his throne his Scepter do they swey" (3). However, while attempting to insist on an absolute royal authority by communicating it in print, James' text also allows for the possibility of alternative readings or outright rejection. Helgerson insightfully comments on the precarious nature of print as a medium for representing kingship: "as the author of a book, the king becomes a subject, and his subjects become his judges. Intended to represent the power of the authorial self, print ends by empowering the consumers of that representation. Print makes readers kings" ("Milton Reads" 6). Milton's early prose tract, *Areopagitica*, assigned a similar type of empowerment to print by arguing that reading and writing were forms of political engagement and by imagining England as a text-based community. An idealized vision of English nationalism informs Milton's arguments against censorship; however, the effectiveness of *Eikon Basilike* as a persuasive pro-royalist text undermined many of the critical textual abilities Milton had assigned to the English public in *Areopagitica*.

The publication of the *Eikon Basilike* seemingly opened the constitutional issues of monarchy and government to a reading public; in fact, much of the text of the King's Book involves the king explaining his political actions and choices, even though the addressee(s) of the king's text remain ambiguous throughout most of *Eikon Basilike*. For example, the first chapter, "Upon his Majesties calling this Last Parliament," begins with the king explaining: "This last Parliament I called not more by others advise, and necessity of My affaires, than by My owne choice and inclination; who have alwaies thought the right way of Parliaments most safe for My Crown, as best pleasing to my People" (1). Theoretically, by publishing a personal account of his choices, the king not only becomes accessible to his subjects but also accountable to them. The very existence of a book written by the king that takes such great pains to explain the ruler's decision making process suggests a certain amount of accountability to subjects and/or readers; therefore, the connection between readers and subjects is enforced.

However, what is so striking about the King's Book is the degree to which it is centred on the king as a private person, an individual with whom his subjects can identify. The experience of "privateness" is rhetorically constructed; for example, when Charles explains his position on the controversial issue of Church government: "This I write rather like a Divine, than a Prince, that Posterity may see (if ever these Papers be publique) that I had faire grounds both from Scripture-Canons, and Ecclesiasticall examples, whereon My judgement was stated for Episcopall Government" (162). The aside "if ever these Papers be publique"

suggests that what the reader is experiencing is an unfiltered view of the king's authentic private self since the text is written as if it is the author's private confession. Further, *Eikon Basilike*'s rhetorical style depends on a distinction between actual and implied readers. A series of private meditations comprise the text and read as if they are the musing of a single author; however, the publication of the book and its wide dissemination implied another body of readers: reader/subjects. Many of the king's musings form soliloquies: a dramatizing of the private voice. Simultaneously, however, by alluding to possible future readers, denoted by the reference to "Posterity," the text allows for the possibility of a wider audience. Besides the intimate appeal of confession, the king also employs tropes that suggest familiarity. The king assures his readers that "All Jealousies being laid aside, My owne and My Childrens Interests gave Me many obligations to seek and preserve the Love and welfare of My Subjects" (2). The king fashions himself as a father-figure suggesting a familial relationship between king and subjects punctuated by intimacy. By incorporating familial structures and narratives, *Eikon Basilike* relies on a narrative truth that had a well established value. The king's political accountability—his ability to provide legitimate reasons for his political actions—falls to the wayside as readers engage with the king's private self; in fact, the genuine expression of a private self or the author becomes the main focus of the king's text.

Eikon Basilike shifts the focus from political outcomes that have national consequences to the personal motivations of the king, and it is precisely this shift

that Milton attempts to highlight in his formal response. For example, in *Eikon Basilike* the king addresses one of his most controversial political blunders: the march on the House of Commons and the attempted arrest of five members of Parliament. Charles begins by explaining that his friends and critics “knew not the just motives and pregnant grounds with which [he] thought [him] self furnish’d” (13), thus justifying his actions by assuring his readers that his intentions were honorable. Milton's response is quite interesting here in that he turns to an earlier pamphlet where the king gave a very different explanation of his actions. Milton points out that in a 1642 pamphlet, *An Answer to Both Houses of Parliament*, the king “made profession to be convinc’d that it was a plaine breach of thir Privilege” and yet “heer [in *Eikon Basilike*] like a rott’n building newly trimm’d over he represents it speciously and fraudulently to impose upon the simple Reader; and seeks by smooth and supple words not heer only, but through his whole Book, to make som beneficial use of other ev’n of his worst miscariages” (CPW 3: 376-377). Milton exposes the king's duplicitous textual actions by highlighting the inconsistencies in the king's printed explanations. Further, he consistently models a critical mode of reading and contrasts the critical reading that he advocates with what he sees as passive reading, something akin to the passive reverence of idols. His point is that the king imposes upon his reader/subjects by writing a book that serves his own ends, a book that feels “smooth and supple” but having little genuine substance.

Milton then goes on to dismantle the king's explanation by first pointing out the difficulty in knowing any one's personal motivations, and second by raising the question as to why the king had never stated his "just" reasons: "His best Friends indeed knew not, nor could ever know his motives to such a riotous act: and had he himself known any just grounds, he was not ignorant how much it might have tended to his justifying, had he nam'd them in this place, and not conceal'd them" (CPW 3: 377). After casting doubt as to the authenticity of the king's explanation, Milton takes a different tactic by juxtaposing motivations and results: "But suppose them [the king's motivations] real, suppose them known, what was this to that violation and dishonor put upon the whole House, whose very dore forcibly kept op'n, and all the passages neer it he besett with Swords and Pistols cockt and menac'd in the hands of about three hundred Swaggerers and Ruffians, who but expected, nay audibly call'd for the word of onset to beginn a slaughter" (CPW 3: 377). By drawing attention to the king's actions, Milton insists on a view of history that accounts for political actions and their consequences. By arguing that "the inclination of a Prince is best known...by the current of his own actions," Milton attempts to expose the author of *Eikon Basilike* for what he truly is—a politic contriver—and thereby disenchant readers who would otherwise remain under the spell of king's "conceited portraiture" (CPW 3: 350; 343; 342).

In several key ways, *Eikon Basilike*, unlike the books published by James, rehabilitated the concept of monarchic power, or, in Helgerson's words, the book made "readers want to be subjects" ("Milton Reads" 7). Milton would probably

agree with the well-worn caveat "Don't judge a book by its cover," but would have added that the quality of a book's readers and the type of critical engagement it encouraged could more fittingly be used in judging a book. The King's Book used print to encourage a much more facile type of reading; for example, the dominant genres of *Eikon Basilike*—spiritual history and spiritual autobiography—rely on biblical patterns and formulaic responses.³⁷ Further, spiritual autobiography capitalizes on a reader's familiarity with biblical narratives by paralleling the author's personal narrative to a well-known pattern. For instance, the words of king David in Psalm 51:4, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight," are echoed by Charles when he laments the sentencing of the Earl of Strafford: "Against thee [God] have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, for thou sawest the contradiction between my heart and my hand" (*Eikon Basilike* 11). This biblical echo suggests a similarity between the story of David's murder of Uriah (II Samuel 11) and the king's actions against the Earl of Strafford. In his response to this passage, Milton is dismayed by the king's invocation of the biblical David and the paralleling of the two narratives: "this is a marvel, & may be the astonishment of all that have a conscience, how he durst in the sight of God (and with the same words of contrition wherewith *David* repents the murdering of *Uriah*) repent his lawfull compliance to that just act of not saving him, whom he ought to have deliver'd up to speedy punishment" (CPW 3: 373).

³⁷ See Elizabeth Wheeler on the genres of *Eikon Basilike*

Milton's critique of the King's Book exposes the rhetorical structures upon which *Eikon Basilike* relies for its emotive force.

As several historians have noted, "however inflexible Charles may have been personally, his image as monarch—tyrant defender of the ancient constitution, 'man of blood'—proved remarkably malleable in the hands of his supporters no less than those of his opponents" (Dzelzainis 77). The importance of the King's Book is highlighted by one of the commemorative poems added to the text. In this poem the speaker praises the King's Book for literally transforming people into subjects, making them "heirs of monarchie" and by extension heirs of Charles. More interestingly, the poem's belief in the persuasive power of the king's text is so great that the speaker muses "Couldst thou [king Charles] before thy death have giv'n what wee [presumably the English people] /Might ask, thy *Book* had been the legacie" (1). Not only was the book popular, but, as this commemorative poem suggests, there was also a great deal of attention placed on the book as a material object. Wheeler also notes that a large part *Eikon Basilike's* appeal was that readers were encouraged to identify with the king by contributing to the book, thus making it their own and sharing in an idealized version of monarchy (ironically made much more tangible without the obtrusive presence of a real live king). Wheeler puts it this way: "[the prayers in *Eikon Basilike*] provide a model for devotion that readers may follow themselves; if the readers use the prayers their king used, they in effect join him in a community of believers, entering imaginatively into his last days as they face the confusing times ahead"

(125). Wheeler's analysis helps to elucidate *Eikon Basilike*'s ability to produce the sense of community necessary to nationalism. By galvanizing readers/subjects via a deified conception of monarchy, the producers of the King's Book were able to offer their own view of the English nation.

This was that memorable hour
Which first assured the forcéd power.
So when they did design
The Capitol's first line,
A bleeding head where they begun,
Did fright the architects to run;
And yet in that the state
Foresaw its happy fate.

– Andrew Marvell

"Upon that memorable scene": Performance and Print.

On January 30, 1649 Charles, "the Royal Actor," ascended the scaffold in front of a large crowd and by all accounts gave the performance of a lifetime. The Parliamentary government unwittingly enhanced the king's performance by holding the execution at Whitehall, which traditionally was the setting of sumptuous court masks and entertainments. The stage was set in full public view and furnished with executioners literally dressed to kill in dramatic black masks. Although the audience was kept far enough from the king as to be unable to hear his final words, records of the trial and execution, both sanctioned and illicit, made their way into the public domain in various printed forms. Not surprisingly, then, the most popular book of the seventeenth century was the offspring of these

unprecedented events. Published the day of the execution, possibly within hours, *Eikon Basilike* or the King's Book, as it became popularly known, not only completed the king's performance upon the scaffold but also ignited an outpouring of grief and sympathy for the dead king that ultimately marked the beginning of the end for the fledgling republican government.

Although Charles II did not ascend the English throne until 1660 (11 years after his father's execution) the King's Book enabled a large majority of the English public to imagine and desire a return to monarchy almost immediately after its overthrow. This drastic change in the public's perception of monarchy raised a number of troubling concerns for Milton about the public's ability to read political events and texts effectively. Even more alarming was the fact that many men who had formerly opposed the king on political grounds began to capitulate after the execution and the circulation of the King's Book. By the end of 1649 alone, the King's Book was reprinted an impressive 40 times in English, and this number climbs to an astonishing 69 editions when one includes the numerous translations, abridgments, selections, versifications, and musical settings that augmented the original text.³⁸ As Helgerson notes, "never before had the words of an English monarch reached so many people" ("Milton Reads" 8). While the popularity of this text was made possible through print, the book was not limited to a literate audience alone. The frontispiece to the text—which depicts Charles as a Christ-like martyr, with earthly crown set aside, as he gazes at the kingdom of

God—was certainly a shrewd piece of political propaganda. This sanctified image of the king, like the actual book itself, helped transform Charles the “man of blood” and “public enemy” into a royal martyr.

Shortly after the restoration, when looking back on the publication and reception of *Eikon Basilike*, John Gauden, who was at least the book's secret co-author, commented:

God preserved and prospered [*Eikon Basilike*] to revive [the king's] honor, and redeeme hys Majesty's name from that grave contempt and abhorrence, or infamy, in which they [meaning the regicides] aymed to bury hym. When it came out, just upon the King's death; Good God! What shame, rage and despite filled hys Murthers! What comfort hys friends! How many enemyes did it convert! How many hearts did it mollify, and melt!... What preparations it made in all men's minds for this happy restauration... In a word, it was an army, and did vanquish more than any sword could.³⁹

Interestingly, although coming from an anti-royalist position, John Milton's *Eikonoklastes* echoes Gauden by making a similar point about the potency of the king's polemic: "And how much their intent, who publish'd these overlate Apologies and Meditations of the dead King, drives the same end of stirring up the people to bring him that honour, that affection, and by consequence, that revenge to his dead Corps, which he himself living could never gain to his Person" (CPW 3: 342). While *Eikon Basilike's* success marked the inherent truth of the text and the king's nobility for Gauden, Milton attributes the book's appeal to its ability to make idolaters out of its audience. Thus he goes on to lament that: "[the book's success] appears ... by [the] conceited portraiture ... drawn out to the full measure

³⁸ See Helgerson's "Milton Reads the King's Book" (8).

of a Masking Scene, and sett there to catch fools and silly gazers"(CPW 3: 342). For Milton, *Eikon Basilike* abuses print through its reliance on theatricality. In fact, this emphasis on theatricality has led Helgerson to describe the King's Book as an anti-book or a book that attempts to conceal its own 'bookishness' ("Milton Reads" 9). Elizabeth Sauer also explores the anti-bookishness of the king's text by examining how theatrical qualities were incorporated into a print medium: "When performance was earlier driven from the church by the reformers, it found refuge in the theater. Then, with the closing of the theaters, the 'performance' aspects of literature and political behavior migrated into the realm of print" ("Milton and the 'Stage-work'" 122). Sauer demonstrates that print culture did not displace theater culture, but rather print appropriated and explicitly politicized theater ("Milton and the 'Stage-work'" 122).

The King's Book or anti-book dramatizes the private inner workings of the king through the discourses of meditation, prayer, and private familial addresses. These types of discourses are theatrical in the sense that each one allows the reader to become a type of voyeur; the reader is allowed a glimpse into the inner workings or private thoughts of the king.⁴⁰ Through this process, the king is portrayed as both human and divine. His similarities to Christ become proof positive of his virtue, and the king's inner voice made public resonates with a truth that is rendered all the more convincing by the fact that it is indirect and seemingly

³⁹ qtd. in Elizabeth Sauer's "Milton and the 'Stage Work' of Charles I."

⁴⁰ See Sauer's "Milton and the 'Stage-work' of Charles I."

not intended for public consumption. Ironically, the king's greatest performance is in seeming not to be performing at all, to be beyond the realm of theater and performance. Thus, Charles I becomes the final interpreter of his actions by allowing the reader to discover, as if by accident, his private motivations revealed through exchanges with himself, God, and his children.⁴¹ Just like the frontispiece, the text ultimately places the reader in the position of voyeur rather than active or responsive reader. To Milton's mind, the King's Book circumvented the dynamic exchange of ideas that the *Areopagitica* champions as a distinctive feature of liberty and English nationalism, and, in so doing, subjugates its readers by encouraging their desire to be subjects. In *Eikonoklastes* idolatry is the ultimate form of enslavement since it reinforces a passive and servile attitude. Milton laments that "the People, exorbitant and excessive in all thir motions, are prone oftentimes not to a religious onely, but to a civil kinde of Idolatry in idolizing thir Kings; though never more mistaken in the object of thir worship" (CPW 3: 343). *Eikon Basilike*'s status as icon reinforces the type of "easy and glib" custom that Milton explicitly identifies as the key obstacle to authentic virtue and liberty in his early 1640s prose texts.

By examining *Eikon Basilike* as a completion of the drama of justice that was staged at Westminster Hall by the regicides, I believe that the relationship between drama and print becomes more tangible. *Eikon Basilike*'s reliance on theatrics exposes its shortcomings as a book because it does not allow for the initiation of

⁴¹ See Sauer ("Milton and the 'Stage-work'" 130) and Helgerson ("Milton Reads" 9).

discourse but encourages the audience to assume a passive role. This interconnection between print and performance is perhaps most evident in the subsequent editions of *Eikon Basilike* that included the appendix titled: *A Perfect Copie of Prayers used by His Majesty in the time of His Sufferings: Delivered to Doctor Juxon, Bishop of London, immediately before his Death*. As the title suggests, the material appended to the King's Book was believed to be handed to Dr. Juxon by the king himself at the hour of his death. One of the sections in particular, *His Majesties Reasons against the pretended Jurisdiction of the high Court of Justice, which he intended to deliver in Writing on Munday, January 22, 1648*, literally takes its readers back to the scene of the trial and allows the king to replay and supplement his role. In this section, the king explains: "I will shew you the Reason why I am confident you [the court appointed for his trial] cannot judge Me, nor indeed the meanest man in *England*; for, I will not (like you) without shewing a reason, seek to impose a belief upon My Subjects" (9). Here, the king aligns himself with his subjects; in fact, his comment, "you cannot judge Me, nor indeed the meanest man in *England*" suggests a certain equality among all English citizens under the law. Ironically, the king claims that he will not impose a belief upon his subjects, yet this is precisely what his account is intended to do: to reinforce a pro-royalist interpretation of the trial.⁴²

⁴² This familiarity and equality is underscored by the various exchanges between Charles and his children included in the appendix.

More significantly, in his self-defense, the king points out to his readers that: “Hereabout I was stopt, and not suffered to speak any more concerning Reasons” (9). This passage recalls the “memorable scene” of the king’s trial and then proceeds to provide readers with an image of Charles eloquently defending his authority that was not available to actual spectators. One of the obstacles in the king’s public trial was that it was difficult for the majority of spectators to hear him speak. Reports of the trial recorded the overwhelming noise of the crowd and the distance between the king and spectators.⁴³ Although Charles’ seemingly stoic and reticent appearance seemed to have a profound effect on the public perception of his authority, printed accounts of the trial and reproductions of the famous William Marshall engraving helped to secure the dissemination and interpretation of the king’s performance as well as aiding in the rehabilitation of monarchy. In other words, while the trial and execution had an immense emotional impact upon audiences, this impact was heightened and sustained by the overflowing printed editions and depictions of the trial. In *A Perfect Narrative of the whole Proceedings*, for instance, the address to the reader explains: “There being some impertinent and imperfect narratives of these ...days Proceedings of the High Court of Justice, concerning the King, spread abroad, I have for the greater satisfaction of the Nation in their Proceedings, thought fit (by leave of Authority) to publish this subsequent Relation and Account.” This text, like many other

⁴³ See *A Perfect Narrative of the Whole Proceedings* (London, 1648)

reports of the trial and Charles' own account, helps to secure a pro-royalist interpretation of events and signals the degree to which political positions were controlled through printed narrative structures. Charles' defense, a carefully structured Christian tragicomedy, offers an alternative vision of English nationalism by competing with the republican view of England espoused by men like Milton. Charles insists that "the King can do no wrong" since his power is absolute (10). Then, Charles begins to dismantle the notion that the regicides were acting on behalf of the English people. Addressing the court that tried him, he states: "And admitting, but not granting, that the People of *Englands* Commission could grant your pretended power, I see nothing you can shew for that; for certainly you [the Court] never asked the question of the tenth man of the Kingdome, and in this way you manifestly wrong even the poorest Plough-man, if you can pretend any colour for this your pretended Commission without the consent at least of the major part of every man in England..." (10). With this declaration, Charles calls into question the authority that the regicides depended upon. As Sauer has noted, "the court sought to persuade the people that the proceedings were being conducted on behalf of the public" through their public and dramatic trial of the king (*Paper-contestations* ' 59). However, the king's performance in conjunction with his printed account jeopardized a republican interpretation of the nation and its politics.

"God save the people from such Intercessors."

“A more diligent reader of Poets, then Politicians:” Political Reading and the Nation.

Just as in the *Areopagitica*, *Eikonoklastes* attempts to define a national character based on reading as a form of political engagement. In both texts, Milton links engagement with print to his concept of Englishness, and, for this reason, the inability to read the King's Book critically raises questions about the nation's capacity to judge for itself. In *Writing the English Republic*, David Norbrook connects *Eikonoklastes* with the restoration of republican values and beliefs; he argues that Milton's text is not as disdainful of its readers as critical accounts have led us to believe. For Norbrook, “Milton's belief in the people's readiness for republican civility was always precarious. And yet the very act of writing these treatises indicated the belief that further restoration was possible” (*Writing the English Republic* 205). The republican model of government was a central aspect of Milton's vision of English nationalism at this point in time. This form of government, embodied and idealized in the epigraph from Euripides' *Suppliants* that frames *Areopagitica*, allowed for the type of critical engagement and dynamic exchange that Milton attributed to the “English character.”

Although Milton had not explicitly opposed monarchy as a form of government in the early 1640s, he was wary of its abuses as he became increasingly committed to republicanism. Interestingly, seventeenth-century England demonstrates that nationalism can flourish as a motivating and

galvanizing cultural construct regardless of the form of government that is in place. While institutional monarchy has been credited with enabling early modern English nationalism, particularly during the sixteenth century, the dismantling of that institution did not lead to an abandonment of nationalist discourse, especially for a writer like Milton.⁴⁴ What seems to be more significant is that the government, regardless of its constitution, is imagined or understood to be an extension of the public body and that it is believed to be expressive of its character. The trial and execution of the king meant a rethinking of the relationship between government and people, which in turn had consequences for the writing *to* and *of* the nation. Yet, since the nation is usually imagined as something which is either passing or awakening, the concept retains a versatile quality and effectively adapts to various generic forms such as tragedy and comedy.

For Milton, *Eikonoklastes* was an opportunity to demonstrate the unfitness of monarchy by exposing the king as a seducer and corrupter of the people; therefore, it is not surprising that the optimistic tone of *Areopagitica* gives way to doubt and anxiety as Milton simultaneously warns and admonishes his readers. For example, Milton laments:

How dishonourable then, and how unworthy of a Christian King were these ignoble shifts to seem holy and to get a Sainthood among the ignorant and wretched people; to draw them by this deception, worse then all his former injuries, to go whooring after him. And how unhappy, how forsook of grace, and unbeloved of God that people who resolve to know

⁴⁴ See McEachern *Literature and National Identity* (325-327).

no more of piety or of goodness, then to account him thir chief Saint and Martyr, whose bankrupt devotion came not honestly by his very prayers; but having sharked them from the mouth of a Heathen worshipper, detestable to teach him prayers; sould them to those that stood and honourd him next to the Messiah, as his own heav'nly compositions in adversity, for hopes no less vain and presumptuous (and death at that time so imminent upon him) then by these goodly reliques to be held a Saint and Martyr in opinion with the cheated People. (CPW 3: 367).

In this passage, the king's deception has a disease-like quality that has real consequences for the "cheated People." Moreover, the emphasis on the king's deception mitigates the harshness of Milton's admonishment as he implicitly suggests that the people deserve better. As Norbrook suggests, Milton's "attacks on the people should not be taken entirely at face value: they have a rhetorical purpose in trying to shock readers out of identification with a royalist cause that has emerged as degenerate rather than refined" (*Writing the English Republic* 205). Ultimately, Milton's attacks on the reader were calculated to challenge his audience to reconsider their king's self presentation and the value of his book. Moreover, the king's bad textual practices are often depicted as representative of his bad faith to the people in general.

In *Eikonoklastes*, Milton attacks monarchy by exposing the king's textual misrepresentations: Charles was to be "a warning to all Kings hereafter how they use presumptuously the words and protestations of *David*, without the spirit and conscience of *David*. And the kings admirers may heer see thir madness to mistake this Book for a monument of his worth and wisdom, when as indeed it is his *Doomsday Booke*" (CPW 3: 381-382). Milton attempts to expose Charles'

actions for what they truly were: political maneuvers based on self-interest and a lust for power. By styling *Eikon Basilike* a “doomsday booke,” Milton highlights the mercenary nature of Charles’ motivations in writing. Begun in 1086, the doomsday book was an exhaustive account of land and goods held by various household heads throughout England and was primarily used by William I to determine the amount of tax that could be collected from the people in order to ward off foreign invaders. By the twelfth century, the Doomsday book’s comprehensive accounting led to comparisons of the book to the book of Life in Revelations where the deeds of all Christians are recorded and placed before God during the Last Judgment or “Doomsday.”⁴⁵ The implication seems to be that Charles’ text, like the Doomsday book, aims to exact all it can from its readers by manipulating them via religious discourse. Milton’s point is that the king unfairly appropriates the books he reads, most significantly the Bible, by imitating the language without the necessary spirit.

The distinction between “language” and “spirit” highlights one of the key features and appeals of *Eikon Basilike*’s narrative: conscience. The role of conscience is significant for both the royalists and regicides since acting according to one’s conscience was used as a justification by both sides of the political divide. “Milton had particular reason for being anxious about the claim of conscience: he and fellow radicals themselves employed just this appeal in their own justification of resistance to monarchy and an established church” (Wheeler 124). For Milton,

⁴⁵ <http://www.domesdaybook.co.uk/faqs.html#2> November 20, 2007

Eikon Basilike encouraged readers to disengage from critical reading by relying on a passive engagement; this passivity would prove to be an obstacle for any reader who wished to exercise his or her conscience as doing so requires critical reading and interpretive skills. Finally, Milton's attack on the king's inability to act according to a genuine sense of conscience and his decision to intentionally mislead his subjects by a self-justification that appealed to conscience also demonstrates the incompatibility of the kingship for English citizens.

Milton tries to dismantle and expose Charles' rhetorical construction because by highlighting the artificiality of his text he is able to expose the king's insincere character. *Eikonoklastes* insists on a critical reading of the king and monarchy as a form of government in order to re-establish a public dialogue about the type of government that would adequately reflect the English nation and by rehabilitating readers' critical skills. Although Milton is often harsh in his descriptions of readers, he affords "the people" an extraordinary amount of power. Yet, these claims are tempered by *Eikonoklastes*' heavy-handed admonishment of its readers and reminders that the people must employ critical reading. Ultimately, the omnipresence of the King's Book and its infamous frontispiece demonstrates the worse kind of print abuse: stagnant reproduction of the same idea. Milton complains, "he [Charles] insists upon the old Plea of *his Conscience, honour, and reason*; using the plausibility of large and indefinite words, to defend himself at such a distance as may hinder the eye of common judgment from all distinct view & examination of his reasoning" (CPW 3: 457). Here too, the reference to "large

and indefinite words” is intended to provoke his audience into reading *Eikon Basilike* more critically. Yet, although Milton disapproves of the king’s readers’ servile approach to *Eikon Basilike*, he nonetheless implies that readers have a right to examine and challenge the king when he complains that the king’s textual strategies “hinder the eye of common judgment from all distinct view & examination of his reasoning.” Wheeler makes an interesting point in claiming that “when Milton insists that the king be judged by his actions alone, without consideration of his intent, he makes the serious error of failing to consider the rhetorical context of *Eikon Basilike*” (128). However, I would suggest that Milton’s point is not simply that the king should be judged by his actions rather than his intent, but that the king’s claims about his motivations are themselves false and need to be considered more carefully. For example, in the third chapter which discusses the king’s attempted arrest of five members of parliament, Milton points out that “heer [in Charles’ account of this tactical error] like a rott’n building newly trimm’d over he represents it speciously and fraudulently to impose upon the simple Reader; and seeks by smooth and supple words not heer only, but through his whole Book, to make some beneficial use of other ev’n of his worst miscarriages” (CPW 3: 377). Ultimately, *Eikonoklastes* is as concerned, if not more so, with the king’s misrepresentation and willful manipulation of his image as it is with the king’s actual wrong actions.

In *Eikonoklastes* the sharp critique of readers is periodically mitigated by Milton’s apologetic tone; when confronting the popularity of the king’s text, he

begins by conjecturing that: "[the] low dejection and debasement of mind in the people, I must confess I cannot willingly ascribe to the natural disposition of an Englishman" (CPW 3: 344). As mentioned previously, this servile mental state or debasement of mind is the antithesis to the type of active intellect that Milton had connected with reading in the *Areopagitica*. Milton attempts to explain his readers' "debasement of mind" as something unnatural in the English character. He goes on to argue that this inferior mental state results from "two other causes." Here, Milton cites the "Prelates and thir fellow-teachers...whose Pulpit stuff, both first and last, had bin the Doctrin and perpetual infusion of servility" (CPW 3: 344). This connection between a facile clergy and mental servility blurs the distinction between religious and civil idolatry, and, in fact, for Milton, both types of idolatry are equally repulsive for precisely the same reasons. After accusing the clergy, Milton turns to "the factious inclination of most men divided from the public by...humors of thir own" to suggest that self-interest is the second motivating force that leads to the inability to see the King's Book for what it truly is: a carefully constructed political polemic. This second comment is squarely directed against Parliamentarians who lost their political nerve when the king lost his head. Interpreting the King's Book becomes a highly charged political act. Ultimately, Milton aligns a rejection of monarchy with a critical reading of *Eikon Basilike* and this becomes the true mark of genuine Englishness:

But now, with a besotted and degenerate baseness of spirit, except some few, who yet retain in them the old English fortitude and love of Freedom, and have testifi'd it by thir matchless deeds, the rest, imbastardiz'd from the

ancient nobleness of their Ancestors, are ready to fall flatt and give adoration to the Image and Memory of this Man, who hath offe'd at more cunning fetches to undermine our Liberties, and putt Tyranny into an Art. (CPW 3: 344)

Milton contrasts the "matchless deeds" of those who "retain in them the English fortitude and love of freedom" with those who "fall flatt" and are disconnected from the "ancient nobleness of their Ancestors." Milton defends the republican government by arguing that republicanism is more fitting since it reflects the "true" nature of the English people prior to being corrupted by religious and civil idolatry. More importantly, Milton's own careful reading of the King's Book aligns him with the political radicals whom he praises as exhibiting "English fortitude." Thus, political idolatry, much like religious idolatry, is defined as an inability to act politically, and, by extension, critical reading becomes a radical political action. Alternatively, the passive engagement with the *Eikon Basilike* or with texts in general has very real political consequences, and thus Milton seems anxious to separate this type of passivity from his conception of "Englishness."

Yet, Milton is far less assured than he was during the early 1640s that he is writing to a community of readers with the necessary critical abilities:

[since] it might have seem'd in vaine to write at all; considering the envy and almost infinite prejudice likely to be stirr'd up among the Common sort, against what ever can be writt'n or gainsaid to the Kings book...and though it be an irksome labour to write with industrie and judicious paines that which neither waigh'd, nor well read, shall be judg'd without industry or the paines of well judging, by faction and the easy literature of custom and opinion, it shall be ventur'd yet, and the truth not smother'd, but sent abroad ... [to] finde out her own readers; few perhaps, but those few, such of

value and substantial worth, as truth and wisdom, not respecting numbers and big names, have bin ever wont in all ages to be contented with. (CPW 3: 339-40)

Here, we see Milton moving towards the famous fit-though-few body of readers. This change in the conception of his readers suggests a more complicated view of English nationalism and its relationship to textual engagement than the one first articulated in the early 1640s. Milton is placed in the ironic position of literally writing against the overwhelming majority of his countrymen, while simultaneously, attempting to re-define what it means to be "English."

While *Eikonoklastes* complicates many of the ideas about reading politically expressed in *Areopagitica*, at the same time, the response itself serves as a model for effective political reading. For instance, while Royalist supporters, such as Gauden, saw the popularity of the King's Book and its effectiveness as a sign of the king's martyrdom, Milton offers quite a different reading by pointing to *Eikon Basilike's* famous motto: *Vota dabunt quae Bella negarunt* -- meaning: "That what hee could not compass by Warr, he should atchieve by his Meditations" (CPW 3:342). Milton reads this motto critically by exposing the possibility of alternative meanings. Moreover, by exposing and insisting on the multiplicity of meaning, Milton challenges the emotive quality of the king's "idolized book" and calls into question the veneration of icons in general. While royalists would see proof of a noble king in the success of the book, Milton, when referring to the motto, argues:

For in words which admitt of various sense, the libertie is ours to choose that interpretation which may best minde us of what our restless enemies endeavor, and what wee are timely to prevent. And heer may be well obser'd the loose and negligent curiosity of those who took upon them to adorn the setting out of his Book: for though the Picture sett in Front would Martyr him and Saint him to befool the people, yet the Latin Motto in the end, which they understand not, leaves him, as it were a politic contriver to bring about that interest by faire and plausible words, which the force of Armes deny'd him. (CPW 3: 342-34).

The juxtaposition of image and text, in addition to Milton's urgent caveat that words need interpretation, attempts to refashion the king's image by exposing him as a "politic contriver." Milton reminds his readers that words need to be read carefully since they can "admitt of various sense" and, as in the *Areopagitica*, he aligns reading with liberty. To read is to exercise the liberty of choice; ultimately, Milton insists on a political reading of the King's Book.

Milton's pro-regicide treatise boldly attempts to re-establish a dialogic exchange by responding chapter by chapter and, often, sentence by sentence to the King's Book. While *Eikon Basilike* was easily adaptable to other mediums, such as song, *Eikonoklastes* remains heavily dependent on the medium of print. Since *Eikonoklastes* utilizes italic and roman fonts to distinguish between the king's sentences and Milton's commentaries, the text cannot be read aloud easily, but rather it insists upon a careful reading by forcing the reader to engage with the king's text word by word. Although the alternating fonts which mirrors the dialogue found in a drama could be seen as complicit in the textual strategies employed by Charles, Milton's text makes no attempt to hide or obscure its own theatricality. Indeed, the fonts used in this pamphlet are significant and revealing.

While the use of roman font for Milton's response is entirely in keeping with the dominant conventions of print in seventeenth-century England, the use of italics deserves further commentary. In the early modern period, italic font, which was most often used to represent a different voice in the text, helped to convey the orality of speech and was linked with humanist concerns (Bland 97-98). In *Eikonoklastes*, emphasizing the orality of the king's speech seems intended to give the reader the experience of witnessing an actual debate.

Milton quite openly acknowledges *Eikon Basilike*'s evocative qualities: the book is "handsomly compos'd, and withall so feelingly" (CPW 3: 382); further, Milton muses that the "book might perhaps be intended a peece of Poetrie. The words are good, the fiction smooth and cleanly; there wanted onely Rime, and that, they say, is bestow'd upon it lately" (CPW 3: 406). Not surprisingly, these comments again insist on the disingenuous nature of the king's textual practice by highlighting the text's artistry. Beginning with the very title of his work, Milton consistently responds to *Eikon Basilike* with a fierce enthusiasm. When reflecting on the titles of the respective works, he notes:

In one thing I must commend his op'nness who gave the title to this Book, [Eikon Basilke], that is to say, The Kings Image; and by the Shrine he dresses out for him, certainly would have the people come and worship him. For which reason this answer also is intitl'd *Iconoclastes*, the famous Surname of many Greek Emperors, who in their zeal to the command of God, after long tradition of Idoaltry in the Church, took courage and broke all [superstitious] Images to peeces. (CPW 3: 343)

Milton's act of iconoclasm literally dismantles the King's Book and attempts to

recuperate some of the dynamic engagement described in *Areopagitica*.

Ultimately, Milton offers an iconoclastic reading of both the king's image and his text as a model of critical engagement for his readers. Ironically, the printing history of *Eikon Basilike* and the popularity of its reception demonstrate just how powerful a role print could play in the political realm. While Milton would approve of a print-based public in theory, the King's Book manipulated the aims of this type of public by encouraging a hegemonic response to monarchy. For Milton, responding to the king's text was an "irksome labour;" yet, he attempted to challenge the passive response to the king by modeling a more authentic and critical, politically-charged reading of his book.

Milton's response was far less persuasive than the regicides had hoped; *Eikonoklastes* was reprinted a mere three times and each printing was subsidized by the government. In fact, this number is more meager when compared to sixty-nine various manifestations of *Eikon Basilike*. However, as Norbrook cautions, "*Eikonoklastes* had more success than it is conventionally allowed" (*Writing the English Republic* 205). Norbrook's claim is based on the considerable number of texts produced in the two English edition printings of Milton's text, a French edition circulated on the Continent, and on evidence that suggests the existence of a Latin version that does not survive to the present day (*Writing the English Republic* 205). Yet, even by the most generous accounting, *Eikonoklastes*' success pales in comparison to the King's Book.

However, Milton's text remains an important testament to his continued investment in English nationalism. The response to the King's Book demonstrates that Milton continued to regard reading and writing as significant political acts that had national importance. Although much of the enthusiasm expressed in *Areopagitica* is absent in *Eikonoklastes*, a sense of hope can be found in that Milton continues to attempt to rehabilitate his readers by modeling the type of critical practice he defined in the early 1640s. The publication of the King's Book, along with Milton's response, marks a significant point in the Early modern period where we effectively witness the interconnections of print culture and nationalism. *Eikonoklastes* attempts a bold argument by claiming that not only was Charles' a deceptive and manipulative ruler, but that the institution of monarchy itself was not suitable to the nature of the English people.

Chapter 4

“I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die.” Writing Epic in Restoration England.

The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wand’ring steps and slow,
Through Eden took thir solitary way.
(*Paradise Lost* XII: 646-649)

England’s National Epic

Like all good endings, the final lines of Milton’s epic bring the main characters as well as the poem’s readers to the threshold of a new journey. Adam and Eve are poised to brave the new world and start the long process of postlapsarian history. In the broadest terms, *Paradise Lost* explores the complex drama of human life in all of its varied forms: social, political, and domestic. In this thesis, *Paradise Lost* is located at a significant crossroads as the discussion shifts from prose to verse and from Milton’s early career to his later life. While the first two chapters explore the confluence of print and nationalism, the final two chapters of this project examine Milton’s works as texts dedicated to nation-building. This is not to suggest that Milton’s verse should be read as merely patriotic; indeed, Milton’s commitment to nation-building involves a more complex project that included the education of the reader and a careful consideration of how the nation shapes its citizens as well as how citizens shape the nation. Although Milton had expressed a desire to use writing as a mode of self and national expression early in his career, when writing *Paradise Lost*, he

had to address a popular audience who would not have been receptive to his vision of the English nation. Nonetheless, the author uses epic to explore the relationship between individuals, political systems, and the nation and to recuperate and promote the values he had identified as necessary to a positive type of English nationalism. As we have seen, Milton was ever mindful of his development as a writer and consistently highlighted his contribution to the larger national body. Milton found space to comment on his vocation not only in his personal letters, but also, perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, in the prose writings which addressed various aspects of public life: censorship, marriage, church government, and the state. Yet, writing is not simply a private act; throughout the seventeenth century there was a growing awareness of the public and national dimensions of writing and Milton stands out as a critical commentator on this cultural development.⁴⁶

While addressing the intersection of history and politics, this chapter investigates the relationship between nationalism and the epic genre by asking in what sense *Paradise Lost* can be understood as a nationalist text. Further, this chapter then explores how Milton defines a nation based on republican values and ideals that would have met with skepticism from a popular Restoration audience predisposed to find the author suspect. Yet, what is interesting about Milton's conception of nationalism and what gives his conception its most modern feature is that it remains independent of any specific political or religious system.

⁴⁶ See Helgerson (*Forms of Nationhood* 1-18).

Although republican and Protestant language is often employed to describe England, the nation has an intangible quality that is more closely connected to the identity of the community rather than to any specific system of belief. In other words, while an ideal England may be both Protestant and republican, Protestantism and republicanism alone do not constitute Englishness. Nationalism requires a sense of communal identity and, in turn, one's nation helps to define the individual identity by becoming symbolic of a set of characteristics, ideas, and values. I have suggested that print culture played a crucial role in nation-formation since it enabled the type of communal imagination that Anderson identifies as necessary to nationalism. Critics who focus on the experience of the reader all, to one degree or another, illuminate the dialogic quality of epic verse by demonstrating how *Paradise Lost* promotes an active and critical response from its readers. Milton's *Paradise Lost* remains carefully attuned to its medium and dialogic qualities by dramatizing the process of active engagement, which relies on critical heuristic skills, central to Milton's conception of the ideal citizen. As can be seen in the early prose works and personal letters, Milton considered his vocation to have a national dimension: he not only maintained that writing was important to the nation but that writing and the circulation of texts help to define the nation. What is interesting about *Paradise Lost* is that it was written during a time when Milton would have good reason to doubt the critical abilities—the capability and potential he identified in *Areopagitica*—of his audience. We might expect that Milton would have abandoned his hopes for English nationalism, yet

this does not seem to be the case. Instead, *Paradise Lost* adopts a much more critical approach to nationalism. The epic articulates the need for a form of government that is congruent with the nature of the people by exploring the devastating effects that result from failing to meet this type of congruence. Hell's de facto kingship not only debases the community at large, but it also debases each individual. Although Heaven is also presented as a type of ideal monarchy, it is clear that postlapsarian humans are incapable of adopting kingship as they lack the divine qualities of God, the Son, and heavenly host. *Paradise Lost* is a national myth that dramatizes the interconnections between individual qualities and the larger political community; the poem encourages its actual readers to reconsider political images and constitutions by demonstrating how these systems encourage particular values and, ultimately, shape the human community.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the publication and circulation of *Paradise Lost* in post-Restoration England. The historical and cultural context of the epic poem certainly constrains Milton's creative freedom as he had to contend with sharp state censorship and his own damaging reputation as a regicide and revolutionary. This chapter examines the relationship between epic and nationalism in order to argue that *Paradise Lost* engages in the work of nation-building by asking readers to explore the interconnections between the personal, political, and national. The chapter then considers the ways in which Milton's epic negotiates political arguments and opposes a monarchy-centred vision of the English nation with a republican model. I argue that *Paradise Lost* helps educate

the reader in the art of critical, active engagement by providing both inauthentic and authentic models of such engagement. While Satan and his crew pervert the virtues and spirit championed in *Areopagitica*, Adam and Eve are tested and challenged and eventually become models of the authentic national citizen. Finally, the chapter ends by examining the imagined human community, a community where the individual and political virtues are finally aligned.

“...about Milton there was always a whiff of sulphur”
-- von Maltzahn

Publishing Post Paradise

Merritt Hughes reminds us that the seeds of *Paradise Lost* were first planted in four early sketches in the Trinity manuscript sometime between 1640 and 1642 (175); however, it would take approximately twenty-five years to bring the epic poem into fruition. Speaking of the “Celestial Patroness” who inspires his verse, the author explicitly draws attention to this long process in the poem’s final invocation: “Since first this Subject for Heroic Song / Ples’d me long choosing, and beginning late” (IX: 25-26). Although this long delay proved invaluable to the creative process, the circumstances attending the poem’s inception were less than ideal. In fact, in the late 1640s and early 1650s, Milton could have hardly anticipated that he would be sending forth his long awaited poem into such a hostile world. Ironically, in the 1644 *Areopagitica* Milton used the metaphor of hell and the damned soul to describe the effects of pre-publishing censorship:

But that a Book, in wors condition then a peccant soul, should be to stand before a Jury ere it be borne to the World, and undergo yet in darkness the judgment of *Rhadamanth* and his Colleagues, ere it can passe the ferry backward into light, was never heard before, till that mysterious iniquity provokt and troubl'd at the first entrance of Reformation, sought out new limbo's and new hells wherein they might include our Books also within the number of their damned. (CPW 2: 505-506)

Although Milton fared better than many other men involved in the regicide, he was imprisoned for a short time after the Restoration. Worse yet, a proclamation was issued for the banning and destruction of two of his books: *Defence of the English People* and *Eikonoklastes*. As Milton prepared to release his *Paradise Lost* to a Restoration public that included a renewed vigilance against anti-royalist texts and a great deal of suspicion about the author's politics, he may well have felt that his poem would have to brave unimagined hells to seek out its readers. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that *Paradise Lost* was denied a license when first submitted to the censors due to suspicions of subversion.

Paradise Lost contains a number of moments when the poet expresses doubt and anxiety about his artistic project and its reception. While the qualifying, perhaps despairing, reference to the "fit though few" description of *Paradise Lost*'s audience has been often cited in discussions of the epic and its readers, it is worth recalling that this reference occurs as the poetic speaker considers the conditions in which his poetic enterprise takes shape:

More safe I Sing with mortal voice, unchang'd
To hoarse or mute, though fall'n on evil days,
On evil days though fall'n, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compast round,
And solitude; . . .

(PL VII: 24-28)

The chiasmic intensity in “though fall’n on evil days, / on evil days though fall’n” hardly seems exaggerated when one recalls the stark reality of Milton’s circumstances as he began to fulfill his vocation in the aftermath of the Restoration. Commenting on the publication of *Paradise Lost* in his *The Life of John Milton*, David Masson draws attention to the grim circumstances of Milton’s life at that time:

[Milton] had stepped out—who could have expected it?—in the person of a blind man domiciled in an obscure suburb of London, who, though there was a dim remembrance that he had professed poetry in his youth, had been known through his middle life as a Puritan pamphleteer, a divorcist, an iconoclast in Church and State, and who seven years ago, when Charles [II] came to the throne, had been so specially infamous for his connexion with the Republic and the Regicide that he had barely escaped the gallows (558).

Likewise, Nicholas von Maltzahn puts the matter succinctly when he comments that Milton’s post-Restoration audience was comprised of “a more hostile royalist readership bent on revenge” and that “about Milton there was always a whiff of sulphur” (“Milton’s Readers” 241). Yet, the invocations also reveal the poet’s continued commitment to “the honour and instruction of [his] country” (CPW 1: 810). For example, when distinguishing between what had typically been considered heroic—namely battles and empire—and his own conception of “that which justly gives Heroic name / To Person or Poem”—namely patience and martyrdom—the poet muses: “higher Argument / Remains, sufficient of itself to raise / That name, unless an age too late, or cold / Climate, or Years damp my

intended wing / Deprest; and much they may, if all be mine, / Not Hers who brings it nightly to my Ear” (PL IX: 40-41; 42-48). In this quotation, the poet acknowledges some of the difficulties he faces such as the effects of a cold climate on creativity and his own advanced age. More importantly, the poet’s reference to an “age too late” speaks to his concerns about his audience. Nonetheless, these doubts are ameliorated by the poet’s assurances of his divine inspiration and suggest that Milton had not simply abandoned the public commitment expressed in his earlier prose works. Rather than gloss over the difficulties in producing his poem, Milton incorporates these concerns into *Paradise Lost* and thereby presents himself as a poet facing overwhelming obstacles. It is easy to see elements of the poet’s defiant nature in Satan’s bold words and Eve’s rash deed. These interconnections speak to the precariousness of human existence. Ultimately, Milton’s poetic project is a significant component of the author’s personal and spiritual aspirations; however, does the fulfillment of a life-long ambition mean that the author abandoned the political commitments that occupied the majority of his prose writing?

The difficult circumstances Milton faced after the Restoration have often been considered as scholars wrestle with Milton’s political positioning in his later years. In fact, a pervading concern in Milton scholarship has been the poet’s seeming shift in political stance and the apparent discrepancies between the prose works of the 1640s and 50s and the poetry of his final years. While Milton the pamphleteer seems consistently dedicated to the “good old cause,” critics and

historians have often wondered if the same might be said for Milton the poet. This issue is further complicated by the stark difference in tone and temperament between the two epics, *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, and the closet drama, *Samson Agonistes*. In regards to *Paradise Lost* specifically, the political idealism of the 1640s is especially difficult to read with certainty. Robert Thomas Fallon succinctly summarizes the ambiguity that attends a political reading of Milton's epic poem: "when Satan sounds like Oliver Cromwell, the champion of the English Revolution, and God Almighty for all the world like the King of England, one is hard-pressed to know where to place the poet within the spectrum of allegiances of his day" (*The Politics of Love* 120).

To be sure, any reader acquainted with Milton's political reputation as a staunch supporter of the "good old cause" and the outspoken way in which he admonished those who cursed the king "all over in their pulpits and their pamphlets" and then "turn[ed] revoltors from those principles which only could at first move them" (CPW 3: 219) might experience surprise as the opening books of the epic depict a political drama that echoes Royalist language and images in a seemingly pro-Royalist fashion. Sharon Achinstein addresses Fallon's observations by reading books 1 and 2 as Milton's adaptation of the Parliament of Hell genre, a mode of allegory that applied human politics to cosmic history and made popular throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century. Achinstein argues that Milton adopted this genre for his own purposes—namely to challenge his readers by demanding a much more vigorous textual engagement with

conventional political allegory (*Revolutionary Reader* 224). I would also suggest that books 1 and 2, as will be discussed below, effectively demonstrate the perversion of the qualities that were championed in *Areopagitica* as vital to an enabling form of English nationalism. Moreover, if the political landscape of the poem is ambiguous, volatile, and contradictory, I believe that these qualities likely provide an accurate account of Milton's own experiences over the previous few decades before the poem's composition.

At the other end of the critical divide, Derek Wood reads the later poems as Milton's retreat from his former political beliefs and a turning toward a more abstract spiritual mode of being or a desire to serve God through steadfast belief and patience. In fact, Milton eloquently concludes his 1652 sonnet with just such a sentiment as his inner voice silences the bitter questions and doubts about fulfilling his vocation despite his blindness: "They also serve who only stand and wait" (sonnet ix 14). Wood suggests that the personal fear and horror that Milton experienced in the time following the Restoration was the catalyst for this rethinking of politics and the meaning of God's favour (*Exiled from Light* 166-170). Although I have presented these two positions as either/or alternatives, I believe that they are better understood as two aspects of Milton's commitment to nation building. Discovery or perhaps recovery of the "paradise within" involves the internalization of key values that are prerequisites for any sort of public action or interaction. For Milton, writing can be understood as an active form of resistance; Milton continued to insist on the values he identified as necessary to

nation-building by writing an epic poem which simultaneously acknowledges traditional Royalist aesthetics while subverting them by exposing their dangers.

The struggle to negotiate a Restoration audience's taste and mistrust can be seen in the material production of Milton's epic. Despite Milton's early success as a poet and the ornate style of his 1645 collection of poems, *Paradise Lost* made its first appearance in St Paul's Churchyard with a rather chaste title page and unceremonious style. For instance, one of the early title pages of 1668 that accompanies the ten-book edition discreetly announces the author with only the initials "J.M." Although discreet, it seems unlikely that Simmons, Milton's publisher, intended to hide the author's identity for fear that his reputation as a regicide would hinder book sales. After all, the very first title page of 1667 did in fact have the author's name in full. As Hugh Amory convincingly argues, rather than attempt to disguise the author's identity it is more likely that Simmons would have wanted to draw attention to Milton's identity since "a criminal reputation may even boost sales...if Simmons really wished to conceal his author, there were better disguises than 'J.M.'" (50). Simmons seems to have been a savvy, if cautious, printer and promoter of *Paradise Lost* and thus chose to neither explicitly obscure nor deny the identity of the author. Ultimately, many of the decisions about the presentation, some might say performance, of Milton's text are likely influenced by a desire to make the book a market success and tempered by fear of stringent obstacles ushered in by Restoration vigilance.

Despite being printed in an attractive quarto on good paper, most early editions of Milton's epic were not accompanied by the type of prefatory material—engravings, dedicatory verses, authorial notes, or publisher's epistle—that readers may have reasonably expected. Since the 1662 Licensing Act mandated that “all and every the Titles, Epistles, Prefaces, Preambles, Introductions, Tables, Dedications and other matters and things thereunto annexed” had to be approved by the licenser, it seems likely that Milton and his publisher chose to send *Paradise Lost* into the world with very few accompaniments. Interestingly, if we look at the material production of Milton's poem, we see that a number of distancing strategies are employed to make the author and text more acceptable, or at least less distasteful, to a hostile audience. For example, three of the four early editions of the title page read “Licensed and Entered according to Order” in prominent, large type. Interestingly, the first edition of *Paradise Lost* was issued with a number of different title pages and distributed to as many as six booksellers. The first four title pages of *Paradise Lost* differ in the size of the author's name, the full use of the author's name, the identification of the publisher, the inclusion of the phrase “Licensed and Entred according to Order,” and the inclusion of any prefatory material. Only one of the first four title pages includes a short note from Simmons to the reader, the argument to each book, a note on the verse, and an errata page. Barbara Lewalski maintains that early editions of Milton's epic aimed at increasing the book's sales by making it more widely available and by downplaying the negative associations

that the author's name would necessarily invoke (*The Life* 456). I believe that Lewalski is correct in suggesting a sense of caution on the part of the publisher, yet the early title pages do not seem to make any serious attempt to obscure the author's identity. Instead, the plain style of the title page and lack of prefatory material seem to attempt to distance Milton from his negative reputation among a Restoration audience.

Yet, if Milton and Simmons were concerned about the fate of *Paradise Lost*, these fears were most likely alleviated by the epic's early success: by 1669, 1300 copies of the first edition had been sold and by 1678 the total, including both first and second editions, reached 4000. Dryden's *The State of Innocence*, a text that was clearly influenced by and engaged with Milton's epic, appeared in 1677 and suggests the popularity of Milton's work even across political divides. The subtle changes to the presentation of *Paradise Lost* in subsequent editions of the ten-book incarnation suggest an increased confidence on the part of the publisher. For instance, the fourth version of the title page (1668) not only displays Milton's name in full, but also includes the publisher's name, and removes the "Licenced and Entered" assurance. Moreover, Simmons includes a brief note to the "Courteous Reader" that introduces Milton's defense of blank verse; he also includes a preface that contains Milton's prose arguments to each book and an errata sheet. The 1674 twelve-book edition of *Paradise Lost* is further ornamented with two dedicatory poems that detail reading experience and praise the author's skillful accomplishment.

These changes to the material presentation of the epic poem may suggest an increase in confidence about the poem's reception on the part of the publisher and possibly the author too. Yet, the two dedicatory poems that accompany the 1674 edition must qualify any such speculation as they seemed designed to persuade or assure readers of the poem's value. While sharing a similar objective, the poems use markedly different approaches. The poem, *In Paradisum Amissam Summi Poetae Johannis Miltoni/ On the Paradise Lost of John Milton, Most Excellent Poet*, Samuel Barrow, simply identified by his initials, praises author and poem: "Make way you writers of Rome, make way you writers of Greece, and everyone else, whether modern or ancient, whom fame has celebrated. Anyone who will read this poem will think that Homer only sang of frogs, Virgil only of gnats." Marvell's poem, however, foregrounds a reading experience that includes misgivings, surprise, and, finally, appreciation: "the argument / Held me a while misdoubting his intent, That he would ruin.../The sacred truths to fable and old song" (5-8). Even when Marvell admits that he "liked his project" he immediately qualifies his statement by adding that he "the success did fear" (12). Further, Marvell not only questions Milton's artistic plan, but speculates on the author's motivations in a prophetic allusion to "Sampson" who "groap'd the Temples Posts in spight) / The World o'rewelming to revenge his Sight" (9-10). By taking up the guise of a suspicious reader, Marvell seems to be responding to Milton's own expression and anxiety about negotiating a hostile audience.

While Marvell's comments can be understood as a rhetorical gesture, they nonetheless directly respond to contemporary readers' fears that Milton cannot be trusted: "Since we have lost Cowley; I wish we had a way to engage Milton upon some honest argument. For though he be old & blind, he wil be doing mischief if he be not engaged better, & he was long agoe an excellent Pindariste: Good at all, But best at that straine, & too full of ye Devill" (Add. Ms 78312, letter 63, 31 Aug 1667). Similarly, John Beale, a royalist albeit not a straightforward one, periodically reflected on Milton's penchant for mischief in his correspondence with John Evelyn. Yet, like other readers who disliked Milton's politics, Beale saw fit to grant Milton reluctant praise for the "flowing grace" he saw in *Paradise Lost* despite the absence of rhyme (Letter 68, 18 Nov. 1667). Regardless of their divided sympathies, both Beale and Marvell offer compelling arguments for Milton's unconventional use of blank verse. Beale reasons that "wee should take notice, yt ye best Dramatick writers have ever from Johnsons dayes, & from his paterne, done as well as they could, without ye check of Rhime; & yet have wanted much of ye measure of [Milton's verse]" (Letter 68, 18 Nov 1667). To be sure, Beale's appreciation for Milton's art is a guilty pleasure, an act of reading that he "whispered in a smile" in a private correspondence (Letter 68, 18 Nov. 1667).

"Growing less severe," Marvell paradoxically employs heroic couplets in his defense of Milton's blank verse:

Well might thou scorn thy Readers to allure

With tinkling Rhime, of thy own Sense secure;
 While the Town-Bays writes all the while and spells,
 And like a Pack-Horse tires without his Bells.
 Their Fancies like our bushy Points appear,
 The Poets tag them; we for fashion wear.
 I too transported by the Mode offend,
 And while I meant to Praise thee, must Commend.
 Thy verse created like thy Theme sublime,
 In Number, Weight, and Measure, needs not Rhime.

(45-54)

The final stanza states that Milton eschews readers' expectations when he refuses to ornament his poetry with "tinkling Rhime." The poet remains of his "own Sense secure" rather than following the example of lesser poets who, like slavish pack-horses, literally "tag" or tack their verses with a sweet but empty musicality. Milton's verse, like his theme, emerges as "sublime." Marvell's use of blank verse may at first glimpse seem contradictory; however, this gesture is perhaps his greatest compliment. Marvell is "convinc'd" that Milton's poetic achievement has "not miss'd one thought that could be fit, / And all that was improper dost omit: / So that no room is here for Writers left, / But to detect their Ignorance of Theft" (27-30). Marvell suggests that Milton's genius cannot be matched and thus he refuses to commit a "theft" by imitating Milton's song. The suspicion that the poet seeks revenge for his "loss of Sight" is replaced by the assurance that "Just Heav'n" has rewarded Milton, "like Tiresias," with insight or the gift of "Prophesie" (43-44). Much like the authorial voice that seems to be speaking directly to readers in the invocations, Marvell transforms the poet's deficiencies—blindness, poverty, old age, and political obscurity—by insisting on this idea of recompense. Moreover, by using heroic couplets, which were the mainstay of

Royalist poetry, Marvell maintains some political distance from Milton. In conclusion, what is most interesting about Marvell's laudatory poem is that he writes from the perspective of an unsympathetic reader: a reader who remains suspicious of the author's motives and needs to be persuaded. Yet I suspect that Milton would certainly approve of Marvell's refusal to be "allure[d] / With tinkling Rime" and forgive the author's "causeless, yet not impious, surmise" (45-46; 24).

The publication history of *Paradise Lost* tells us much about the difficulty Milton faced in producing texts in Restoration England. But rather than hide these difficulties, Milton, incorporates them into the structure of the poem and into the persona of the poet speaker. The four invocations insist that the poem is divinely inspired and thus the poet himself becomes a conduit for the verse rather than its source. In book 1, the poet asks the "Spirit" to "raise and support" him so that he may "assert eternal providence, And justify the ways of God to men" (PL I: 17-26). In book 3, the poet reminds his reader that he has been "taught by the heavenly muse" (PL III: 19), and both books 7 and 9 claim that the muse "visit'st [his] slumbers nightly" (PL VII: 29; PL IX: 46-47). Although addresses to the muse are a formal aspect of epic poetry, in *Paradise Lost* these addresses offer another mitigating strategy to make the author more acceptable to the reader. Like all good writers, Milton was cognizant of the relationship between literary form and ideas, and thus he carefully manipulated form so that it was consistent with his meaning. There is an interesting similitude between Milton and Marvell's playful

and thoughtful negotiation of form and meaning since both poets chose to make readerly doubt and anxiety a formal feature of their verse.

Epic Genre and Nationalism

In order to appreciate Milton's attempt to reach his readers, I want to look back on Milton's stylistic approach in his response to the King's Book. As discussed in chapter 2, when given the task of responding to the King's Book, Milton did not simply argue for a more critical and active engagement and consideration of *Eikon Basilike*. Instead, he insisted on this practice by incorporating it into the material presentation and formal features of his response. By creating a point-by-point refutation and dismantling of *Eikon Basilike*, which can be seen in the quotation-response structure highlighted by two distinct fonts, Milton encourages readers to undergo a more critical examination of the King's Book. As the title *Eikonoklastes* intimates, his book is an act of iconoclasm—both literally and metaphorically. When writing *Paradise Lost*, Milton's approach is quite similar; the epic advocates a set of critical skills that enable the reader to take on an active role. *Paradise Lost* has a self-reflexive quality that constantly draws attention to ambiguities and disjunctions. Rather than simply reject or dismiss the Restoration nation, the poem insists that the reader consider and confront the values and assumptions that underpin Restoration imagery and rhetoric.

As Lewalski has observed, “the poem's form makes its first overt political statement” (*Paradise Lost and Milton's Politics* 144). For example, while the

literary construction of the Restoration nation as a coherent, stable entity was achieved in part through the use of heroic couplets, Milton eschews this feature by using blank verse. Although not included in the first edition of *Paradise Lost*, Milton's formal statement defending blank verse concludes with: "This neglect then of rhyme so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming" (PL The Verse). The rejection of rhyming is a part of Milton's distaste for the Royalist aesthetic. Milton emphasises the ways his poem breaks with Royalist conventions in order to create a style that is connected to a form of "ancient liberty." Moreover, as his claim to pursue "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" signals, this choice distinguishes his poem as original and daring even if it means that "vulgar readers" may fail to recognize the poem's worth.

Milton rejects "rhyme" as a fashion based on "custom" which originated from a "barbarous age" and points out that the "jingling sound of like endings" merely limits creativity: "some famous modern poets, carried away by custom, but much to their own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse than else they would have expressed them" (PL The Verse). The break with popular formal conventions invites readers to consider and question the broader implications of form. I believe that Milton would have seen this type of questioning as essential since the formal features and

images of kingship retained their cultural popularity even during the republic. In fact, Kevin Sharpe has speculated that part of the republic's failure can be attributed to its inability to find a mode of representation that could vie with traditional Royalist ones: "the failure of republican politics was a failure to forge a republican culture that erased or suppressed the images of kingship, images that sustained a monarchical polity, even in the absence of the king" (*Remapping* 224). Although contemporary critics may have to struggle to overcome a myopic view of the past, the relationship between political sustainability and representation does not appear to have been unnoticed in the early modern period. Milton's position as Secretary of Foreign Tongues, which required him to respond to the poignant representation of kingship in *Eikon Basilike* as well as defend the republican government at home and abroad, placed him in a position where he was well aware of the influence royalist imagery had in the popular imagination, and thus it is fitting that Milton would begin to challenge his Restoration audience by provoking them to think about the implications of form.

In *Paradise Lost*, this description of rhyme and its vacuous musicality is invoked in the descriptions of Hell. Satan and the reprobate Angels who make up his "infernal court" are described in aesthetic terms befitting the newly restored Stuart court (PL I: 792). Satan sits "high on a throne of royal state, which far / Outshone the wealth of Ormuz and of Ind" (PL II: 1-2), and Pandemonium is "built like a temple, where *Pilasters* round / Were set, and Doric pillars overlaid / With golden architrave; nor did there want / Cornice or frieze, with bossy

sculptures graven, / The roof was freed gold” (PL I: 713-717). As Blair Hoxby has demonstrated, the financial crisis of 1659 helped Royalists argue that “a restored king would take a personal interest in trade” and recapture the nation’s prosperity (593). Indeed, Milton endows Hell with surpassing riches and artistic beauty. Yet, despite the “dulcet symphonies and voices sweet” (PL I: 712), there seems to be little substance as the narrator warns: “Let none admire / That riches grow in Hell; that soil may best / Deserve the precious bane” (PL I: 691-693). As the great council comes to an end, the Satanic crew engage in a wide range of leisurely pursuits; some

...sing
With notes Angelic to many Harp
Their own Heroic deeds and hapless fall
By doom of Battle; and complain that Fate
Free Virtue should enthral to Force or Chance.
Their Song was partial, but the harmony
(What could it less when Spirits immortal sing?)
Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment
The thronging audience.
(PL II: 547-555)

In this passage, Milton hints at a similarity between Restoration and demonic aesthetic values. The poetry of the fallen angels is “partial” suggesting both “in parts” or harmonious and “partial” or biased. While artistically pleasing, these diversions, like the heroic couplet, are limiting; the fallen angels ultimately find “no end” and remain “in wandering mazes lost” (PL II: 561).

From the beginning of *Paradise Lost*, Milton intends to create an epic that simultaneously acknowledges epic features and form, but does not blindly follow

them. Moreover, Milton's epic style effectively layers and integrates political, religious, and cultural allusions in order to forge a distinctive English identity that exceeds the sum of its parts. In the first edition (1667) Milton chose to break with the Virgilian twelve-book epic form and chose "the ten-book model of the Roman republican poet Lucan" (*Paradise Lost* and Milton's Politics Lewalski 144). This choice of form is appropriate as it allows Milton to distinguish his theme from the traditional subject of empire and conquest which are modes reserved for Satan's narrative. Simultaneously, the ten-book format may also indicate a nod to the tragic mode (i.e. 2 x 5 acts) which is appropriate given the emphasis on the fall and the pathos generated through Adam and Eve's suffering. The narrator likewise signals generic shifts throughout the poem. For instance, at the start of book 9 the narrator laments, "I now must change / Those Notes to Tragic" (PL IX: 5-6). For Milton, nationalism meant more than expressing patriotism. While he was invested in extolling the virtues and possibilities of English nationalism, especially in his celebration of the citizen as a central political participant, he remains interested in the interactions between individuals and the nation and mindful of the possible abuse of this relationship. In *Paradise Lost* Milton continues to critique monarchy and its abuses by demonstrating that this form of government debases the individual as well as the values of an ideal nation and that it is ultimately unsuited to the true nature of the English people since it does not promote liberty.

While *Paradise Lost* resists features of the Restoration nation, particularly its enforced unity through the monarchy, and continues to comment on politics and the formation of the public sphere, we need to consider the relationship between epic and nationalism. Interestingly, John Lucas' exploration of English national identity forcefully denies the existence of a modern nation-state before the eighteenth century and raises a number of objections to the epic as an appropriate national genre. For Lucas, "very simply, 1688 marks the beginning of England as a distinctively modern nation" because it is only after that time that a homogenizing culture that endorses a concept of the nation with clearly defined borders and a consolidated source of authority emerges regardless if it is merely perceived rather than actual (1-2). In terms of the epic genre specifically, Lucas argues that epic is not conducive to the spirit of nationalism since it promotes virtues, such as bravery, that are not civic virtues. The epic is a poem of and for the people; it is about the struggles to found a nation or the struggles that come at a nation's inception (16). Further, Lucas maintains that the writing of a modern English epic would necessarily invoke the divisive struggle for English identity associated with the revolution and the political turmoil of the seventeenth century. Looking at the reception of seventeenth-century writers like Milton and Bunyan, Lucas argues that eighteenth-century writers mingled admiration with anxiety over these writers' tendency to project a national image that was bound to fall apart in light of the privileging of "the private conscience" and their support of "the spirit of the Commonwealth which threatened the dream of a united nation" (12).

While Lucas' questioning of the co-existence of an epic voice that champions the private consciousness with the articulation of a coherent and unified nation is reasonable, I would like to raise a number of objections to Lucas' account of the rise of the English nation as well as his formulation of the relationship between epic verse and nationalism. In terms of pre-nineteenth-century epic verse and its relationship to nationalism, the European epic has conventionally been identified as a monologic and authoritative form that generates subsequent "culture, particularly as the literary embodiment of a nation's character;" however, in opposition to this view, a counter history maintains that epic is "more open to pluralities of interpretation" than traditionally acknowledged (Farell 279-283). This counter view emphasizes epic's self-reflexive tendency and its ability "to reinvent itself through inversion [and] opposition to its predecessors" (283). Lucas' view of epic adheres to a conventional understanding of the genre by maintaining that *Paradise Lost* is incapable of promoting a sense of national unity since it is invested in promoting the individual and the divisive spirit of the commonwealth. In this claim, Lucas does not consider how these individual qualities need not be strictly detrimental to nationalism. The historical and cultural moment in which Milton was writing and publishing *Paradise Lost* put him in the unusual position of invoking a type of nationalism that would not have received wide support. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century, we see that England was "imagined" in different ways depending on the writer and his or her discursive community. Yet, for Milton, the

nation remains an important cultural concept regardless of its manifestations because it provided a way of imagining the body politic that did not rely on Royalist language or images and simultaneously placed a greater sense of liberty and accountability on the shoulders of the individual citizen. *Paradise Lost* exceeds patriotism by asking readers to think about the consequences of the nation's political and ideological make-up. The epic successfully rejects forms of nationalism that rely on the royalist tradition by telling the nation's story as a cyclical pattern of fall and redemption that parallels biblical history and thereby insisting on a national identity that can accommodate the experience of defeat. Milton's version of the nation, although fallible, is also resilient. Yet, this is not to suggest that Milton is any less invested in defining the nation's character by telling the nation's story. Milton's epic can be seen as a response to the Restoration's value system. Similar to his approach in *Eikonoklastes*, Milton encourages his readers to consider the implications of royalist politics by encouraging active engagement and critique of popular royalist images.

By envisioning England as a type of Israel—a chosen nation that endures cycles of fall and redemption—and by highlighting the interconnections between particular personal and political values and placing much greater emphasis on community, Milton is able to project a counter-national narrative that argues against Neoclassical nationalism. *Paradise Lost* embraces this sense of paradox and contradiction; the poem is simultaneously about the beginning of human time and yet it extends to the end of time. The focus on the first human pair illuminates

the complexities of the human condition and, therefore, the poem is equally invested in both individual and communal development and interaction. Ultimately, Milton's epic provides the reader with an education in the art of political reading and demonstrates the dangers of forcing unity through artificial means. Lucas' treatment of Milton's epic ignores the many ways in which Milton himself did not produce a typical epic. This is not to suggest that Milton was not writing a poem "of and for the people" since indeed he was, but rather to suggest that the genre of *Paradise Lost* fully acknowledges the virtues associated with classical epics such as the *Aeneid* in order to reject them in favour of the individual values that each English citizen should be armed with in order to participate in the larger community. In other words, *Paradise Lost* invokes but ultimately rejects traditional epic virtues in order to replace them with the type of Christian virtues deemed necessary for a Protestant English nation and the poem brings together a range of important cultural discourses. Indeed, as the poet/speaker addresses the muse in the first invocation, he calls attention to his poem's indebtedness to the classical epics while maintaining a significant departure:

...I thence
Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme.
(I: 12-16)

While the “Aonian Mount” recalls Ariosto’s boast in the opening lines of *Orlando Furioso*, it also calls attention to the break with traditional epic qualities. The poet intends to exceed his predecessors. Indeed, *Paradise Lost* insists on a multiplicity of perspectives and shifts attention to the virtues that prepare one for public action. This idea is confirmed in a later invocation, when the poetic voice explains that his story is intended to be an

...argument
Not less but more Heroic than the wrath
Of stern Achilles on his Foe pursu’d
Thrice Fugitive about Troy Wall; or rage
Of Neptune’s ire or Juno’s, that so long
Perplex’d the Greek and Cytherea’s Son;
(IX: 13-18)

Milton’s epic was intended to not only break with traditional epic arguments but also to provide the reader with an educational reading experience. While there is a great emphasis placed on the individual, the epic seeks to prepare individuals for public action.

Adam and Eve must overcome a literal understanding of their position in order to initiate the beginnings of human society. The human pair fall when they succumb to a Satanic mode of interpretation, a mode of understanding that fails to distinguish between literal and figurative meanings. For example, the serpent tempts Eve by conflating literal and metaphorical nourishment when he cites the forbidden fruit as the source of his increased power and metamorphosis. At the climax of the temptation scene, Satan reasons: “God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just; / Not just, not God; not fear’d then, nor obey’d” (IX: 700-01). Satan

tempts Eve by making “intricate seem straight” (IX: 632). Here the rapid succession of short phrases—not just, not God; not fear’d then, nor obey’d— and alliteration create a quick-paced verse that resists questioning. Throughout the temptation scenes in book 9, Adam and Eve are repeatedly described as “amazed” which suggests passive engagement. The challenge is to move beyond this mode of interpretation to a more critical and engaged position. Yet, it is only when faced with the consequences of their respective falls that Adam and Eve begin to make this transition. Once fallen, Adam and Eve engage in a bitter argument where both accuse the other for their plight without examining their own culpability. It is only when Eve reinitiates conversation with Adam that the two begin to move beyond their states of amazement and despair (X: 914-936).

“We now debate; who can advise may speak”
-- *Paradise Lost*

“This is true liberty, when free-born men, / Having to advise the public, may speak
free”
-- *Areopagitica*

Paradise, Perversion, and the Public

Paradise Lost is about educating the reader in the art of political reading. In this text, being able to read politically means being able to understand the connections between particular political images or configurations and the system of values they promote. Albeit from a Satanic view-point, the first two books depict heaven and hell as competing political systems with their own benefits and

defects. After the initial invocation, the reader quickly discovers the disastrous consequences of Satan's attempted coup: "A dungeon horrible, on all sides round / As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames / No light, but rather darkness visible / Serv'd only to discover sights of woe..." (PL I: 61-64). Not surprisingly, it is Satan who breaks the "horrid silence" with his "bold words" in order to rouse his fallen companion, Beëlzebub (PL I: 84, 83). At this point, Satan challenges God's supremacy by depicting himself as politically oppressed:

To bow and sue for grace
With suppliant knee, and deify his power
who from the terror of this Arm so late
Doubted his empire, that were low indeed,
that were an ignominy and shame beneath
This downfall

(PL I: 111-116)

While Milton's decision to depict God as king is in line with popular Royalist texts that maintained that the king was God's anointed agent on earth, to read the opening books as a pro-Royalist political allegory and thereby suggest that Milton capitulated his former stance on monarchy is misleading. This is not to suggest that the opening books should be read a-politically: Milton fully exploits the dramatic power of politics in order to challenge his readers to engage with political formations critically and thus *Paradise Lost* encourages readers to investigate the values associated with various forms of government, whether that form be monarchy or republican. Moreover, Milton's commitment to this educational process seems to be motivated by his interest in nation-building.

Throughout the poem we see various individuals seeking to take on a public role; however, the poem is mindful of each individual's motivations and values. In the early part of the poem, after rejecting God and the politics of heaven, Satan and his crew find themselves in an unusual position: they are free to set up their own political structure. Satan seizes the opportunity to promote his own interests by appearing to act on behalf of the newly emerging public. He uses the rhetoric of revolution and appeals to a notion of liberty in order to persuade his fallen companions to promote him. Ironically, despite all of his appeals to increased liberty, hell merely offers a perverted form of freedom. In these ways, the Satanic books perversely reflect many of the liberties championed as a necessary component to English nationalism in *Areopagitica*.

Areopagitica argued for the necessity of an unfettered press and connected individual and national liberty by envisioning a nation where “free born men / Having to advise the public may speak free” (CPW 2: 485). In fact, the opening epigraph highlights two of the texts' main preoccupations: authentic liberty and the public sphere. Moreover, by arguing that pre-publication censorship infringes upon the individual author's liberty by circumventing his ability to engage the public, Milton connects reading and writing to public action. As discussed in chapter 2, *Areopagitica* predicates individual as well as national liberty on public debate and discourse. Surprisingly, in *Paradise Lost* it is Satan who echoes *Areopagitica*'s most cherished notions. As the demonic consult begins, Satan declares “by what best way, / Whether of open War or covert guile, / We now

debate; who can advise, may speak” (II: 40-42). This invitation to debate and the notion that the individual who is capable should speak recalls Milton’s arguments against pre-publication censorship. Yet, in *Paradise Lost* Milton is careful to delineate the dangers of taking these liberties for granted. This is not to suggest that Milton rejects his former arguments about the importance of reading and its connection to both individual and national liberty. Instead, *Paradise Lost* refines the arguments made in *Areopagitica* by showing the complexity of this relationship and dangers of its abuse. In other words, Milton insists that his readers learn to distinguish authentic liberty from seeming liberty.

By the time the great Consultation decides to subvert the newly created human pair, the debate is exposed as an elaborate deception where Satan pulls all the strings: “Thus Beelzebub / Pleaded his devilish counsel, first devised / By Satan, and in part proposed” (PL II: 378-380). Even at this early point in the narrative, Satan has demonstrated remarkable rhetorical skill. Yet, the potency of his rhetoric is almost besides the point: “They heard, and were abashed, and up they sprung / Upon the wing, as when men wont to watch / On duty, sleeping found by whom they dread, / Rouse and bestir themselves ere well awake” (PL II:331-335). The analogy between the fallen crew and lack-luster watchmen tells us that Satan’s influence has more to do with his ability to intimidate others—the sense of dread that he inspires—than his ability to use reason. My point is that holding a public debate hardly seems necessary as Satan could simply impose his will—the fallen crew do not need to be convinced since their dread of Satan

demands their compliance. Satan's king-like status and demeanor undermine the possibility of authentic debate. After volunteering to take on the reconnaissance mission, we are told that none of the fallen crew voiced objections because they "dreaded not more the adventure than [Satan's] voice / Forbidding" (PL II: 474-475). Again, these details raise questions about the necessity of the great consult. Further, they highlight the manipulation and deceit that informs Hell's public sphere.

Once Satan and his crew revolt against God's rule and create a new political system in Hell, there is a moment of potential. The building of Pandemonium, which quite literally signals a new world order, initially offers unprecedented freedom. Satan spies a "dreary Plain, forlorn and wild" and suggests that his crew use that spot as a meeting place where they can "consult how [they] may henceforth most offend / [their] enemy" and recuperate their losses (I: 181; 187-88). Although the plain is described as forlorn and wild, it nonetheless suggests a sense of potential: the plain's wilderness is a blank space upon which Hell's capital can be constructed in opposition to Heaven's tyranny. Speaking of this new capital in comparison to Heaven's oppressive regime, Satan boasts that Pandemonium is "established in a safe unenvied Throne / yielded with full consent" (II: 23-24). He describes this new political system in seemingly utopian terms: it is a place of "union, and firm Faith, and firm accord, / More than can be in Heav'n" (36-37). Hell is a place free from "strife" and "faction" (31-32). However, this unity and equality comes at a great price since it is achieved by

eliminating envy. While the elimination of envy may seem liberating, in his exuberance for this new found freedom, Satan glosses over the fact that Hell is free from envy simply because “none sure will claim in Hell / Precedence, none, whose portion is so small / Of present pain that with ambitious mind / Will covet more” (PL II: 32-35). In this sense, unity is achieved since no desire for political change is encouraged in hell and thus Pandemonium breeds a kind of political stasis. Satan himself comes to embody the debilitating effects of stasis. While Satan’s initial claim that he brings a “mind not to be chang’d by Place or Time” seems bold and daring, it is this fixity of mind that ultimately proves his undoing: “Which way I fly Hell; myself am Hell” (I: 253; IV: 75).

Ultimately, Pandemonium represents the kind of stagnant union Milton explicitly objected to in *Areopagitica* when he compared the English nation to the building of Solomon’s temple: “Yet these are the men cry’d out against for schismatics and sectaries; as if, while the Temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedars, there should be a sort of irrationall men who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built” (CPW 2: 555). Milton’s point was that division is an essential aspect of liberty and that authentic unity can only be achieved when the whole is large enough to encompass division. Moreover, Milton is explicit about the necessity of active engagement particularly in times of upheaval: “when a city shall be as it were besieged and blocked about...the people, or the greater part, more than at

other times, [should be] wholly taken up with the study of highest and most important matters to be reformed, should be disputing, reasoning, reading, inventing, [and] discoursing” (CPW 2: 555). Ultimately, as books 1 and 2 unfold we see that there is a contradiction between Satan’s objections to Heaven and the new political order that he initiates.

The debate held by Satan’s crew is reminiscent of the debate in book 10 between Adam and Eve since in both instances characters are faced with the daunting question of how to move forward after a devastating loss. Moreover, both situations require a rethinking of the political and social structures that will organize a new society. However, unlike the Satanic version, Adam and Eve succeed in finding resolution partly because they are able to use their interpretive skills. When Eve suggests suicide as a means of ending their despair, Adam replies:

...Remember with what mild
And gracious temper he [Son of God] both heard and judg’d
Without wrath or reviling; we expected
Immediate dissolution, which we thought
Was meant by Death that day, when lo, to thee
Pains only in Child-bearing were foretold,
And bringing forth, soon recompens’t with joy,
Fruit of thy Womb: On mee the Curse aslope
Glanc’d on the ground, with labour I must earn
My bread; what harm? Idleness had been worse;
(X: 1046-1055)

In this passage, Adam begins to regain his ability to reason which was temporarily distorted when he quit obedience to God for his love of Eve. Adam and Eve’s

interpretive skills, although not perfect, help them come to terms with their loss and allow them to begin to repair their relationship with both God and each other. The final scenes of the epic show Adam's formal education as Michael reveals the future of humanity in a dream-like vision. Unlike Satan's amazing oratory, Michael's teachings are difficult for Adam to understand and penetrate. As Adam witnesses biblical history unfolding—starting with the slaying of Abel—he is horrified and unsure of what he sees: “But have I now seen Death? Is this the way / I must return to native dust? / O sight of terror, foul and ugly to behold / Horrid to think, how horrible to feel” (X: 462-465). Michael educates Adam not just about the nature of human death and life, but also about human society. Indeed, the final two books of *Paradise Lost* begin with the betrayal of one brother by another and work outward through time reaching a first climax with the story of the flood (PL XI: 725-762). Adam wonders if the flood signifies the end of human life: “those few escap't / Famine and anguish will at last consume / Wand'ring that wat'ry Desert” (PL XI:777-779). However, Michael soon reveals that this is not the end of man: “Thus thou hast seen one World begin and end; / And Man as from a second stock proceed” (PL XII: 6-7). Adam is forced to confront societal ills such as war, empire, exploitation, and prostitution. Although difficult, this view of the future forces Adam to acknowledge both human society's potential and weakness. To be sure, the “second source of Men, while yet but few, / And while the dread of judgment past remains / Fresh in thir minds, fearing the Deity, /

With some regard to what is just and right” make a promising start after the flood (PL: XII: 13-16). Unfortunately, the peace and prosperity are short lived:

...till one shall rise
Of proud ambitious heart, who not content
With fair equality, fraternal state,
Will arrogate dominion undeserved
Over his brethren, and quite dispossess
Concord and law of nature from the earth,
Hunting (and men not beasts shall be his game)
With war and hostile snare such as refuse
Subjection to his empire tyrannous
(PL XII: 24-33)

The story of Nimrod’s subjugation of his brothers introduces Adam to the abuse of political power. Under Michael’s tutelage, Adam begins to imagine what sort of societal organization would be in keeping with man’s dignity. Indeed, Adam’s emphatic comments on Nimrod’s subjection constitute an anti-monarchical argument grounded in scripture:

O execrable Son so to aspire
Above his Brethren, to himself assuming
Authority usurpt, 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.
(PL XII: 64-71)

These passages, just like the ones in book 1 and 2, invite the reader to consider the values and ideals that underpin political systems. January 30, 1649, the date of the king’s execution, did not automatically mean the abolition of monarchy and the formulation of a republic. The act officially abolishing the office of the king was

not passed until March 17 and it was not until May 19 that England was officially declared a “commonwealth and free state.” Likewise, Milton’s own republican thinking was fueled by his growing concerns and dissatisfaction with monarchy. In *Paradise Lost*, Milton seems more interested in encouraging his readers to interrogate the implications of politics on their personal lives as well as the national community. Fittingly, Michael makes the connection between the private and public body explicit when he links self-inflicted subjugation to political subjugation:

Therefore since [Man] permits
Within himself unworthy Powers to reign
Over free Reason, God in Judgment just
Subjects him from without to violent Lords;
Who oft as undeservedly enthrall
His outward freedom: Tyranny must be,
Though to the Tyrant thereby no excuse.
Yet sometimes Nations will decline so low
From virtue, which is reason, that no wrong,
But Justice, and some fatal curse annex
Deprives them of thir outward liberty,
Thir inward lost:

(PL XII: 90-101)

Michael’s point is that societal and political abuses are the natural consequence of man’s fallen nature. Under these conditions, it is necessary to maintain an active and critical engagement with the world. Michael’s warning about false religious teachers or the “grievous Wolves” who “all the sacred mysteries of Heav’n / To thir own vile advantages turn” and taint truth with superstition again reiterates the necessity of right reading since true religion is “Left only in those written Records pure, / Though not but by the Spirit understood” (PL XII: 508-514).

Despite having endured tremendous suffering and loss, Adam is consoled by Michael's words. Although Eve is not privy to Adam and Michael's conversation, Eve assures Adam that "Whence thou return'st, and whither went'st, I know; / for God is also in sleep, and Dreams advise, / Which he hath sent propitious, some great good Presaging, since with sorrow and heart's distress / Wearied I fell asleep: but now lead on" (PL XII: 610-614). Although Eve has a subordinate position to Adam, she has an equally important role to play in human history. Their banishment from Eden causes them to drop some "natural tears" yet the tone of the ending is far from bleak (PL XII: 645). The epic ends with the human pair ready to begin human history with a sound understanding of the connections between their individual values and the community.

In writing *Paradise Lost* Milton continues his commitment to nation-building by encouraging readers to adopt the qualities and values he identified in as a part of England's character. Further, despite the collapse of the republican government and the reinstatement of monarchy, the poem explores the consequences and implications of politics on the larger national community. Milton's allusions to politics are an essential component of his epic writing. Indeed, his epic brings together a retelling of biblical history with many other important cultural discourses that invoke the most important religious and political questions of his time. Yet, although these issues were divisive, they could not be ignored. By turning to the epic genre, Milton found a vehicle for telling England's story while acknowledging both the country's struggle and potential.

Chapter 5

"O mirror of our fickle state:" *Samson Agonistes* and the Politics of the National Body.

Milton's Nationalism in Post-Restoration England

This final chapter turns to one of Milton's most complex and perplexing poems. In terms of understanding seventeenth-century English nationalism and Milton's interest in the discursive practices of nation-building, *Samson Agonistes* has much to offer. My study of this post-Restoration poem will focus on several interrelated ways in which the text comments on, responds to, or complicates an understanding of seventeenth-century nationalism and nation-building. First, *Samson Agonistes* is interestingly situated historically in regards to the early modern political climate. Written after the Restoration, at a time when supporters of the regicide had good reason to doubt that their nation was one of "Prophets, Sages, and Worthies," this poem effectively responds to the modernity argument that patriotism, a simple feeling of love or preference for one's country, rather than nationalism, a more complex affiliation and source of identity, was pervasive prior to the eighteenth century since it demonstrates the complexity of nationalism at this time (CPW 2: 554). While many critics have been fascinated by "the experience of defeat" for Milton and his like-minded contemporaries, I am interested in the ways that the Restoration and fall of the republic had important implications for the concept of the nation since the experience of defeat

necessitated for Milton a rethinking of England's collective identity.

Consequently, I suggest that this text combines national myth with the well-known political discourse of the body politic in order to re-write a post-Restoration English nation that maintains the values that Milton felt were part of England's character.

Samson Agonistes rewrites the founding myth of England's national identity—England as the new Israel or Elect nation—in order to present a complex and thoughtful reconsideration of the relationship between the individual and the nation. Indeed, although England was not the only country to adopt the rhetoric of election, this myth provided seventeenth-century English writers with a way of aligning religious identity with national boundaries. In *Samson Agonistes* the question of election becomes equally significant to both the individual and the nation; further, election has serious political consequences for both bodies. For Milton, writing the nation meant more than writing about what England was or could become; in *Samson Agonistes* Milton's goal is to understand the nation's failures and their implications for the individual.

The tendency in early Milton scholarship to interpret the post-Restoration Milton as politically quietist and withdrawn has diminished as critics have devoted increasing attention to the political texture of Milton's later poems. In particular, *Samson Agonistes* has become a dominant subject in discussions about seventeenth-century political culture and theory. Consequently, scholars have criticized and reconsidered typological readings of the poem that insist on a

Christian movement from fall to regeneration, thereby sublimating Samson's final destructive act in a metaphor of spiritual renewal. John Carey's 2002 essay, "A Work in Praise of Terrorism?", articulates the poem's contemporary relevance as he considers how interpretations of Milton's text may implicitly and/or explicitly be used to sanction terrorism.⁴⁷ Carey's provocative comparison of Samson to a "suicide bomber" and his strenuous objection to Stanley Fish's claim that Samson's actions can only be interpreted in the context of Samson's own understanding of his situation and motivations—namely Samson's insistence that he is acting in accordance with God's will—resonates with today's political culture. Carey concludes that "September 11 has changed *Samson Agonistes*, because it has changed the readings we can derive from it while still celebrating it as an achievement of the human imagination. In particular, Stanley Fish's verdict . . . now belongs to a world we have outgrown" (5).

While Carey is quite correct in questioning Fish's a-historical approach to the political significance of Samson's actions, his assertion that September 11 has "changed" *Samson Agonistes* needs to be qualified. Although modern critics of Milton's work may have neglected the text's political reverberations for a period of time, it is worth remembering that this oversight does not change the fact that Milton's *Samson Agonistes* engages with a political, national discourse that is as relevant now as it was when first published in 1671. It may be more accurate to

⁴⁷ Carey's essay is an excellent reminder that the study of literature should not be isolated from "real" world events.

say that September 11 was the impetus for reconsidering or remembering that *Samson Agonistes*, whether aided or hampered by its artistic accomplishments, is in fact a text that wrestles with difficult political questions. Indeed, if the text raises important questions about the use of violence and religious discourse in today's political culture, it is a testament to the enduring nature of these issues. While critics have debated whether Milton wrote his dramatic poem in the 1640s, 50s, or 60s, its late publication along with our awareness of Milton's tendency to allow his ideas considerable time to ferment suggest that *Samson Agonistes* is most likely influenced by political currents from all three decades. This fact coupled with the dual publication of *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* in a single post-Restoration volume is certainly politically relevant and suggests that Milton continues to interrogate the politics of his time.⁴⁸

The ambivalence and indeterminacy which characterizes this dramatic poem can be paralleled with the tumultuous nature of the latter half of seventeenth-century political life, a period of time when the optimistic hopes of English revolutionaries are only equaled by their subsequent disappointment. As Christopher Hill succinctly reminds us, among revolutionaries still reeling from the experience of defeat the foremost question was "How could the God who willed 1649 also will 1660? And how could he sacrifice his servants then even if others had let down his Cause?" (*Experience of Defeat* 307).

⁴⁸ I believe that Milton's choice to invert the expected order of "type" and "truth" further complicates any assertion of a positive reading of Samson.

Although *Samson Agonistes* does not offer any easy resolution to Hill's perplexing question, the text does unflinchingly grapple with the uneasy implications that such a question raises for the elect individual and nation and demonstrates that nationalism, especially for Milton, was conceived independently from particular political configurations. In Milton's *Samson*, we see the extent to which the individual and national bodies are intricately bound, and thus *Samson Agonistes* can and should be read as both a political and personal tragedy. As a representative of Israel, Samson embodies an individual struggle as well as the struggle of a whole people. Further, Samson's experience of alienation and his sense that he was betrayed by his own nation would certainly find sympathy among supporters of the short-lived and vanquished republic. This chapter examines the ways that the early modern nation is a discursive construction that combines the language of the body politic with the language of disease. Milton's conception of the nation collapses individual and collective identities or bodies—both figuratively and literally. I argue that Milton employs this parallel to explore the consequences of a myopic understanding of nationhood and that, ultimately, *Samson Agonistes* represents a departure from Milton's earlier optimism for English nationalism.

“As in so much else, Milton's writings signaled major innovations in the way the nation's identity was imagined and written out across a revolution”

-- Derek Hirst

National Myth Re-written

Although the tension between the individual and the nation generates much of the play's dramatic force as the protagonist's understanding of his nation's elect status is questioned through the experience of personal failure and defeat, Milton's source materials are also significant. Much has been made of Milton's adaptation, appropriation, and alteration of his source material: the Old Testament account of Samson found in the book of Judges. While some critics regard Milton's treatment of this narrative as a severe departure from its scriptural roots, the treatment of the last of the Hebrew judges is in keeping with contemporary conceptions of Samson. More to the point, as Joseph Wittreich has convincingly argued, the figure of Samson as well as the book of Judges became increasingly relevant and topical in seventeenth-century political discourse in England and acquired a specific political function. While the sixteenth and early seventeenth century read Samson in numerous ways, including as a tragic lover, a liberator of Israel, a sinner restored to grace, as an agent of God, a man of prodigious strength, a man enslaved to the passions, and as a type of Christ (Krouse 63-81), by the latter half of the seventeenth century, Samson was imbued with a more precise political meaning. Further, although allusions to Samson were prevalent among Royalists as well as Revolutionaries, the story of Samson was particularly critical for Revolutionaries who adopted Samson's history as a means of understanding and scrutinizing the failure of the "good old cause." As one biblical commentator

observed in 1649, the book of Judges was a " Glasse [for] discovering Israel's calamity" (*Clavis Bibliorum: The Key of the Bible* 1649). What is significant about Milton's anatomization of this failure is that he sees the failure of the Revolution as a national one, rather than a failure of republicanism. This point is significant because it demonstrates that nationalism was not simply conflated with a particular political theory or constitution. Nationalism proves to be accommodating to a number of discourses throughout the early modern period; however, the significant feature that distinguishes nationalism is that it allows for the representation of a collective identity by incorporating various discourses. While republicanism can entail both an ideology and belief in a particular form of government, nationalism does not rely on any such systematic thought. Although the connection between Samson and Israel was well established by Milton's time, Milton develops this connection as a means of explaining why England had failed to meet its potential, a potential that Milton had eagerly supported and encouraged in the 1640s.

Modeled on the classical Greek tragedies of Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus, *Samson Agonistes* remains a closet drama—a play intended to be read rather than performed. This genre is significant since, as Elizabeth Sauer has demonstrated, closet drama was used as a form of political criticism during the late Renaissance and Civil War years in England. Further, Milton's choice of genre is in keeping with his growing distaste and mistrust of popular audiences, such as those who were too easily duped by the immensely popular *Eikon Basilike*.

Charles I's actual performance on the scaffold/stage coupled with the publication of *Eikon Basilike* or "The King's Image" marked the beginning of the end for the revolutionary cause by transforming Charles into a martyr-saint and casting doubt on Milton's and other Parliamentarians' portrayal of Charles as a tyrant-king. *Samson Agonistes* seems intended to continue the type of educational process that Milton encouraged in *Eikonoklastes*. The text is intended for an elite readership, and a continuation of Milton's epic search for the "fit though few."

"England is an empire... governed by one Supreme Head and King... unto whom a body politic, compact of all sorts and degrees of people... be bounden and owe to bear next to God a natural and humble obedience."

-- Henry VIII

The Body Politic

The texture of Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, much like the protagonist, remains remarkably muscular and corporeal. Unlike the internal drama figured in *Paradise Lost* as Adam and Eve discover the paradise within or in *Paradise Regained* as Jesus withstands Satan's brazen temptations with quiet defiance, in *Samson Agonistes* Samson's physicality and desire for action takes center stage. However, Samson's body has more than a personal significance as his outward struggles and afflictions mirror his internal agonies, and, more importantly, his individual body represents or reflects the larger distress experienced in the body politic of the nation.

The specter of the Hebraic strongman loomed large in Milton's imagination. In his early prose tract, *Areopagitica*, Milton invokes Samson as a powerful and positive symbol for the English nation: "Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant Nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks" (CPW 2: 557-558). This passage establishes an important link between the individual and the nation that Milton pursues throughout his career and which reaches a dramatic culmination in his post-Restoration *Samson Agonistes*. Moreover, while the early allusion to Samson is filled with promise, Milton's last poem invokes the same figure only to reject his former position on the nation and its possibilities for the individual's increased liberty. This allusion also recalls the idea of the body politic which was an important mode of discussing and understanding the distribution of political power throughout the early modern period. As this chapter will discuss, the emphasis on the human body politic in this text becomes an effective way to illustrate the degree to which political systems influence and affect individuals as well as the collective body, especially when one considers the degree to which sixteenth and seventeenth-century writers invoked the correspondences between the bodies natural and politic.⁴⁹

The metaphor of the human body as a mode of discussing politics and defining human society has an interesting and varied history throughout the

48 Jonathan Gil Harris effectively demonstrates that for early modern English writers, "the body politic was not simply a heuristic device; it was imbued with a cosmic significance, participating within a system

sixteenth and seventeenth century. Rooted in the classical texts of the ancient Greco-Roman world and a common trope in medieval writing, this analogy was employed by writers of prose and verse throughout the early modern period. During the Reformation, the notion of the body politic underwent considerable change when Henry VIII declared that “this realm of England is an empire...governed by one Supreme Head and King...unto whom a body politic, compact of all sorts and degrees of people...be bounden and owe to bear next to God a natural and humble obedience.”⁵⁰ Henry’s statement insists upon a “natural” sense of unity or a sense of community by virtue of a shared kingdom and by connecting allegiance to the church with allegiance to the king. As David Hale suggests, “Henry and his supporters had on the one hand to deny the claims of the Pope and on the other to maintain the royal headship and the organic unity of the Church *of* England as contrasted to the Church *in* England” (48). Therefore, this move required the king to articulate a limited English body politic based on a shared geography and language. This sense of unity demonstrates one significant way that religious identity could work in conjunction with national identity. For sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, religious identity was very much rooted in the English language and nation. The importance of the English language bible and the break with Rome helped to shape English national identity by providing a type of other.

of correspondences between the body of man, or microcosm, and the larger body of the universe, or macrocosm” (2).

⁵⁰ *Tudor Constitutional Documents: A.D. 1485-1603*, ed. J.R. Tanner Cambridge, 1922 (41).

While Benedict Anderson, who argues that only a type of proto-nationalism existed in England prior to the eighteenth century, maintains that Christianity encouraged an international or a cross-national type of identity which could not exist along side national identifications (7), Henry's vision of England demonstrates the degree to which a national identity could subsume religious identity in a controlled and limited fashion. Henry's break with Rome ushered in a specifically English body politic by applying the analogy of the human body to the subjects of a single realm as a means of imbuing the English kingdom with a secular as well as sacred power. Moreover, the connection between the king and the head of the body politic was an effective metaphor for representing an idealized notion of monarchical authority. Indeed, these details support Claire McEachern's view that English nationalism was first articulated in *The Act of Appeals* (1533) together with the *Act of Supremacy* (1534). By insisting upon England's sovereignty over both the affairs of the church and state, Henry increased the cultural value of the concept of the nation as a source of communal identity. While the viability of this identity was not instantaneous, the fusion of religious and political motives set the stage for the English Protestant identity that Milton would eventually articulate in his verse and prose.

Those who opposed Henry's separation from Rome did so by arguing that "the whole congregation of Christian people professing his name and his faith, and abiding in the body of the same" owe their greatest allegiance to Peter and his

successors as the head of the Church.⁵¹ Henry's vision of the English polity conflicted with the dominant Christian notion of the Church as a single, limitless body encompassing all Christians regardless of nationality. For example, in opposition to the king's decision to become head of the Church of England, Thomas More exclaimed, "sith all christendom is one corps, I can not perceive how any member therof may withowt the comen assent of the body departe from the comen hede."⁵² More's response effectively demonstrates how the king's plans could be understood as a type of violation to the body of the church, a mutilation of the mystical corpus. Yet despite More's objection, Henry's conception of the body politic became increasingly commonplace throughout the Tudor period.

Versions of the body politic ranged from the idealistic to the conflicted.⁵³ One example of this idealized version of the body politic can be found in James Chillester's translation of *Chelidonius Tigurinus, Of the institution and first beginning of Christian Princes, and the Originall of Kingdomes (1571)*:

. . .the natural bodie of Man with the offices and duties of the parts thereof joyned and united togythers to a common function, do represent the lyvely image and very figure of a good and perfect common wealth . . . there be divers partes of divers and sundry actions and motions, differing muche in forme and number, which being knit together, and consenting in one uniformity to the common benefit of the whole, do hew in one marvelous forme of a common

⁵¹ Thomas More *Dialogue Concerning Tyndale*, ed. W.E. Campbell London, 1927 (68).

⁵² More, *Correspondence*, (498).

⁵³ In David Hale's *The Body Politic* and Leonard Barkan's *Nature's Work of Art* a detailed history of the various organic models of the body politic is given beginning in antiquity and through to the Renaissance period. Both authors explain that there is not straightforward history of the body politic – the organic conception of the state has had various manifestations since its conception.

wealth, and there can not be imagined a greater concord than is proportioned by the friendly unite of these divers and contrary members (qtd. in Hale 72).

In this passage, the diverse parts (limbs/members) are harmoniously unified in the conception of the state. In Chillester's account, the monarch is aligned with the "intellective soul" that controls the living body or the "eye" that directs the body's movement.⁵⁴ Yet the comparison of the state to the human body was also often conflicted. In Shakespeare's 1608 Roman tragedy, *Coriolanus*, the allusions to the body politic dominate the play and provide a forum for examining the conflict between individual identity and public action. An early commentator on the play notes the way that Shakespeare articulates the rival claims of aristocracy and democracy through allusions to the body politic and suggests that "anyone who studies [Coriolanus] may save himself the trouble of reading Burke's *Reflections*, or Paine's *Rights of Man*."⁵⁵ Throughout the play we are presented with various interpretations of the body politic—from Menenius' fable of the belly and its riotous limbs to Volumnia's feminized, womb-centred Rome. Tensions arise, however, as the metaphorical language of the body politic cannot contain the literal corporeal needs of the citizens and thus the play highlights the limits of the body politic analogy.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ See Hale (72).

⁵⁵ See Hazlitt's essay in *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* 1817. qtd in the Oxford Companion to Shakespeare ed. Michael Dobson. Oxford UP 2001 (92)

⁵⁶The opening act of the play establishes the difficulty of interpreting bodies through language; it begins with a mob scene where Menenius, a Roman patrician, attempts to quiet the mob of starving plebes with his fable of the belly. Menenius' account is both limited and limiting; he tells the hungry mob of citizens that:

The senators of Rome are this good belly,
And you the mutinous members: for examine
Their counsels and their cares; digest things rightly
Touching the weal a' th' common, you shall find

Not unlike Milton's Samson, Shakespeare's Coriolanus is both a reflection and extension of his community while simultaneously remaining alienated from that community. Over the course of the play, Coriolanus becomes a mutated and displaced limb. Originally seen as the "strong arm" of Rome (I.iv.76), Coriolanus' relationship to the body politic becomes problematic when the threat of war no longer exists. When Coriolanus is expected to publicly display his physical wounds in order to prove his loyalty and contribution to Rome, he simply refuses. One of the citizens, quite correctly, remarks, "if he show/ us his wounds and tell us his deeds, we are to put our/ tongues into those wounds and speak for them" (II: 3: 5-7). This image of the tongue in the wound graphically represents the act of interpreting the body and becomes the central image in the play. The citizen realizes the need to have the body signify, unlike Coriolanus who tragically fails to recognize this need and its consequences.

The interpretation of Coriolanus' body constitutes the moment of crisis in the play. While the citizens of Rome recognize Coriolanus' contribution to the state, they are unable to include him in their conception of Rome because of his

No public benefit which your receive
 But it proceeds or comes from them to you
 And no way from yourselves.

(I.i.148-54)

Menenius attempts to avert the citizen's anger by subverting the citizens' lack of food with metaphoric language; he attempts to convince the citizens that they do "receive the flour of all, / and leave [the belly/senators] but the bran" (I.i.145-6). He adds insult to injury when he claims that the plebes are simply unaware of the "public benefit" that is given to them by the belly/senators. However, the reader and the starving plebes are all too aware that this is not so. By focusing his attention on the belly Menenius, as Arthur Riss points out, foolishly "asks rebels, who are literally starving, to subsume their material hunger for the sake of the state's transcendent nourishment" (60). This is emphasized by Menenius' suggestion that the citizens "digest things rightly / Touching the weal a' the' common." Put another way, Menenius'

refusal to be interpreted by them. Hence, the meaning of Coriolanus' body becomes unstable and his cultural capital fatally decreases; ultimately, he is misread and, consequently, dismembered.⁵⁷ Sicinus insists that "[Coriolanus is] "a disease that must be cut away," but Menenius, in a desperate attempt to reintegrate the war hero back into the body politic, replies: "O, he's a limb that has but a disease;/ Mortal, to cut it off; to cure it, easy" (III: 1: 293-4). All the characters use the discourse of the body in order to define, defend, or demand their right to carry out certain acts or take on specific roles. In fact, the debate over Coriolanus' relationship to Rome and his place in Rome is filtered through the discourse of the body. Like Samson, Coriolanus' strength becomes his bane as his martial prowess transforms him into a diseased limb in a peaceful Roman body. Samson too experiences alienation on account of his problematic relationship to the larger political body. And, as in Shakespeare's play, the language of disease is thus employed to express the lack of equilibrium between the individual and community.

The political turmoil of the seventeenth century raised questions about the aptness of the body politic understanding of the nation. Addressing this concept, critics such as Hale have suggested that "by the time of the Civil War the new science and a new analogy, that of the social contract, provided men with a quite

metaphor is too closely linked to the literal cause of the rebellion; in effect, his tale is a willful misreading of the body politic.

⁵⁷ Here I am using Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital which refers to the power of a given utterance; symbolic capital encompasses but is not limited to a consideration of one's linguistic abilities (i.e. mastery

different pattern of thinking and of communicating their [political] ideas” (17).⁵⁸

To be sure, the beheading of Charles I, a literal dismemberment of the body politic, had a drastic impact on figurations of the commonwealth. Yet, while the analogy of the social contract was often used to challenge royalist discourse, the body politic was not simply set aside. Indeed, royalists continued to invoke the notion of the traditional body politic; for example, Sir John Birkenhead describes the execution as “a day in which the sacred Head offends/ Bycause he stoops not to the kicking feet” (*Loyalties Tears*).⁵⁹ Further, the violence that transpired in the public sphere was often expressed through a discourse of the mutilated or diseased body: “England, that most dismally, hath committed felony upon her self, and with her own bloody hands, cut off her own Royall head” (*A Meditation* 1).⁶⁰ While the regicide and revolution changed the ways various people thought about the make-up of the nation, the discourse of the body politic continues to be invoked throughout the seventeenth century, yet after the regicide, descriptions of the body politic often reflect anxieties about the health and fate of the nation by depicting a body in trauma. The notion of self-mutilation or disease is often metaphorically invoked in order to represent and critique the negative consequences of political actions in the body of the nation.

of the language), one’s particular linguistic history as well as the particular social circumstances of utterance.

⁵⁸ Hale extends Douglas Bush’s analysis of the shift from the conception of society as a living organism to the conception of society as a social contract. For Bush, “The old analogy for the body politic had been the human body, a living organism. The new analogy, insisted upon by Locke, was a business contract... Society, in fact, was no longer conceived as an organism, but as a joint stock company” (*English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century: 1600-1660*, 2nd ed. Oxford, 1962, 2).

⁵⁹ *Loyalties tears flowing after the blood of the royal sufferer, Charles the I. &c.* London, 1649.

Milton was well acquainted with the discourse of the body politic. In his 1642 *The Reason of Church Government*, Milton filters his account of an effective monarchy through this analogy:

I cannot better liken the state and person of a King then to that mighty Nazarite⁶¹ *Samson*; who being disciplin'd from his birth in the precepts and the practice of Temperance and Sobriety, without the strong drink of injurious and excessive desires, grows up to a noble strength and perfection with those his illustrious and sunny locks the laws waving and curling about his god like shoulders. (CPW 1: 858-859).

However, this allegorical reading of Samson as a king-figure serves as a warning against abuses of power by king and prelates alike:

And while he [the king] keeps [his locks/the law] about him undiminisht and unshorn, he may with the jaw-bone of an Asse, that is, with the word of his meanest officer, suppress and put to confusion thousands of those that rise against his just power. But laying down his head among the strumpet flatteries of Prelats...they wickedly shaving off all those bright and waightly tresses of his laws, and just prerogatives...deliver him over to indirect and violent counsels . . . as those Philistims, [who] put out the fair and farre-sighted eyes of his natural discerning, and make him grinde in the prison house of their sinister ends and practices... (CPW 1: 859)

According to Milton's reading, the king's strength is a product of his careful observance of the law. The idea that the king is subject to law was a central tenet for dissenting groups that challenged absolute monarchy. Milton compares the king's condescension to the whims of the prelates to Samson's betrayal of his secret to Dalila; he thus argues that without strict observance of the laws, the king's power can be usurped. Worse yet, the king, like Samson, becomes enslaved to the prelates, represented as the Philistines, and ultimately becomes a tool to

⁶⁰ *A meditation for the 30th of January*. London, 1660.

further Philistine ends, whether idolatry or tyranny, or—as in the case of Charles I—both.

Later, in his 1644 *Areopagitica*, Milton once again turns to the discourse of the body politic and the figure of Samson as a symbol for the English nation. Interestingly, this image establishes an important link between the individual and the nation that Milton pursues throughout *Samson Agonistes*. Further, this reference to the body politic is unlike typical monarchial figurations such as the one cited in *The Reason of Church Government*. Traditionally, the king was seen as the head and the limbs were regarded as members of parliament. Moreover, the masses were typically compared with less flattering body parts such as toes or unruly limbs. For example, in *Coriolanus*, Menenius adds injury to insult by comparing the mutinous citizens to the toe of the body politic: “What do you think, / You, the great toe of this assembly?” (I. i. 154-155). However, Milton's figuration of the nation as one body, without a clear hierarchical ordering, is in keeping with his republican position. While the Milton of the early 1640s was certainly not hostile to monarchy as a form of rule *per se*, throughout his involvement in the antiprelatical polemics, his concern about the abuses of kingship and the dangers of tyranny became more pronounced. In fact, by the late

⁶¹ From the Hebrew word *nazir* (consecrated, separated), the term “Nazarite” denotes Samson’s unique status and his relationship to God.

1640s Milton boldly maintained that kings who become tyrannical⁶² may be “as lawfully deposed and punished as they were at first elected” (Hughes 754).

“Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.”
-- *Luke 12:48*

The Diseased Body

Throughout Samson’s encounters with various interlocutors, the reader’s imagination is repeatedly drawn to Samson’s body which becomes the site and symbol of the larger national drama discussed in the poem. For example, the Chorus, who represent Israel’s public, expresses disbelief when they first encounter the famed strongman:

This, this is he; softly a while,
Let us not break in upon him;
O change beyond report, thought, or belief!
See how he lies at random, carelessly diffus’d,
With languish’t head unpropt,
As one past hope, abandon’d,
And by himself given over;
In slavish habit, ill fitted weeds
O’erworn and soil’d;” (115-23)

The Chorus’ reading of Samson’s defeated posture and desperate appearance can be extended to the whole of Israel. This connection is underscored as the Chorus contemplates Samson’s blindness and names him the “mirror of [their] fickle state” (164). Although the Chorus sees Samson as a reflection of the fickle state

⁶² Milton defined tyrannical behaviour as “if such a one there be, by whose Commission whole massachres have been committed on his faithful Subjects, his Provinces offered to pawn or alienation, as the hire of those whom he had solicited to some in and destroy whole Citties and Countries; be he King, or Tyrant, or Emperor, the Sword of Justice is above him...” (CPW 3: 197).

of man enslaved to the whims of fortune in a general sense, Samson more specifically reflects the fallen nation of Israel. The figuration of Samson's body as diseased is in part connected to his status as a Nazarite. As delineated in the book of Numbers (Num. 6. 1-7), Samson's Nazarite status requires a set of prescriptions aimed at maintaining the body's purity.⁶³ In Milton's text, however, we only encounter Samson once his Nazarite vow has been violated. The emphasis on the physical body also seems motivated by a concern with ethnic purity. This type of purity provides the limits that nationalism relies on. While Anderson suspected that Christian religious discourse would not be compatible with nationalism because the Christian community is ideally limitless, in the early modern period the limits of the nation were defined by other discourses such as ethnic purity. The violation of Samson's Nazarite vow is expressed in his bodily afflictions including his shorn locks and loss of sight. Considering the tendency to understand or imagine England as a type of Israel or elect nation and the Chorus' recognition of Samson as a "mirror," it seems likely that Milton's disgraced hero represents both the fallen individual and nation. Indeed, the state of fallenness is expressed in physical terms. Ironically, though, the Chorus seems unaware of the similitude between the nation's champion and people and thus their inability to recognize

⁶³ Samson must abstain from wine and other intoxicants, avoid defilement by contact with a corpse, and not cut his hair.

Samson when they first see him is fitting. Throughout the poem, parallels between Samson and the Chorus are suggested although both parties often fail to recognize them.

Samson's physical body becomes a dominant focus in the encounter with Dalila and Harapha. While Dalila declares her desire "to behold / Once more [Samson's] face, and know of [his] estate" (742-43), Harapha boldly admits that he wishes "to see of whom such noise / Hath walk'd about, and each limb to survey, / If thy appearance answer loud report" (1088-90). Both Dalila and Harapha suggest a connection between Samson's physical body and his mental state, but there is a bitter irony in the characters' desire to see Samson's body as the eyeless protagonist repeatedly laments that he has become "the scorn and gaze" of his enemies (34). Further, this desire to "see" the body suggests the extent to which bodies speak and need to be interpreted. (In)sight plays a central role in this text as both Samson and the larger community struggle to see things clearly, yet what they most desire to understand is the seemingly inexplicable failure of the elect.

Throughout the poem, Samson's body is figured as diseased and mutilated: he is "eyeless" and his blindness is "worse than chains, / Dungeon, or beggary, or decrepit age" (41; 67-68). When Manoa encourages his son to take comfort in his friends' healing words, Samson replies:

O that torment should not be confin'd
To the body's wounds and sores
With maladies innumerable

In heart, head, breast, and reins;
But must secret passage find
To th' inmost mind,
There exercise all his fierce accidents,
As on entrails, joints, and limbs,
With answerable pains, but more intense,
Though void of corporal sense.

My griefs not only pain me
As a ling'ring disease,
But finding no redress, ferment and rage,
Nor less than wounds immedicable
Rankle, and fester, and gangrene,
To black mortification.
Thoughts my Tormentors arm'd with deadly stings
Mangle my apprehensive tenderest parts,
Exasperate, exulcerate, and raise
Dire inflammation which no cooling herb
Or med'cinal liquor can assuage,
Nor breath of Vernal Air from snow *Alp*.
Sleep hath forsook and giv'n me o'er
To death's benumbing Opium as my only cure.
Thence faintings, swoonings of despair,
And sense of Heav'n's desertion.

(606-632)

In this passage, Samson grapples with feelings of grief, despair, and torment; he wonders why mental anguish appears to exceed the boundaries of physical pain: “O that torment should not be confined / To the body's wounds and sores” (606-07). Although expressed in bodily terms, this speech is Samson's attempt to articulate his “maladies innumerable” as physical symptoms. Yet, the reference to *heart, head, breast, and reins* suggests emotional and mental trauma as Samson's maladies find “secret passage” to his “inmost mind” (610-611). The *reins* or kidneys symbolize “the seat of feelings or affections” (OED), the *heart* and *breast*

represent one's soul or inner most self, and the *head* alludes to one's mental state and reason.

As Samson anatomizes himself, he seems incapable of expressing or understanding his psychological pain and frustration without resorting to terminology connected with the physical body; therefore, he may very well conflate intangible experiences with physical ones. He complains that his "griefs not only pain [him] / as a lingering disease" but that he finds "no redress" from his sufferings (617-620). Since he expresses his psychological distress as a type of physical sickness, he is susceptible to seeking some sort of physical cure. This physical understanding of his experience reveals Samson's tendency to understand metaphorical situations literally, and, worse yet, this disposition suggests that Samson may be misled by outward shows or shadows.

This type of understanding, the tendency to literalize abstract qualities, often proves devastating. For example, in *Paradise Lost*, Satan's temptation of Eve succeeds because he is able to persuade her to treat the comparison of food and knowledge literally. In the fatal climax of the epic, Satan asks Eve: "And what are gods that man may not become / As they, participating godlike food?" (PL IX: 717-719). Satan's phrase "godlike food" insists that divinity springs from physical food and that human consumption of the fruit will therefore lead to godhead. Likewise, Adam mistakes Eve's physical beauty for inward virtue. When he attempts to give an account of his trespass to the Son, he whines:

This woman whom thou mad'st to be my help,

And gav'st me as thy perfect gift, so good,
So fit, so acceptable, so divine,
That from her hand I could suspect no ill,
And what she did, whatever in itself,
Her doing seemed to justify the deed;
(PL X: 138-42)

Indeed, Adam's inclusion of "divine" in his bitter blazon of Eve's charms demonstrates the degree to which he has confused outward and inward beauty. Adam's infatuations with Eve's physical beauty are also suggested earlier in the poem during his discussion with Raphael (PL VIII: 546-553). In response to Adam's uxorious leanings, the "sociable spirit" with a "contracted brow" reprimands the first of men and asks: "For what admir'st thou, what transports thee so, / An outside? Fair no doubt, and worthy well / Thy cherishing, thy honouring, and thy love, / Not thy subjection" (PL V: 222; 8: 560; PL VIII: 567-70). Raphael realizes the dangerous territory that Adam enters when he equates Eve's physical charms with an inward virtue and must remind him not to lose sight of Eve's "attractive, human, rational" qualities which are more worthy of his love (PL VIII: 581-594). Indeed, as seen throughout *Paradise Lost*, a literalizing of the divine often leads to mental enslavement as Satan eloquently, yet unintentionally, reveals in his famous boast: "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven" (PL I: 254-55). Satan intends to assert his will by insisting on the power of the mind. While the imagination is afforded a great deal of power, the chiasmus "a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven" where heaven and hell

are presented as mental states that balance on the individual's perception reminds us that mind can be both a source of liberation or servitude.

Like Adam and Eve, Samson repeatedly opts for a literal understanding of spiritual crises. When faced with blindness, he assumes that he has lost his place in history and can no longer fulfill God's divine plan:

I was his nursling once and choice delight,
His destined from the womb,
Promised by heavenly message twice descending.
Under his special eye
Abstemious I grew up and thrived amain;
He led me on to mightiest deeds
Above the nerve of mortal arm
Against the uncircumcised, our enemies.
But now hath cast me off as never known,
And to those cruel enemies,
Whom I by his appointment had provoked,
Left me all helpless with the irreparable loss
Of sight, reserved alive to be repeated
The subject of their cruelty, or scorn.
(633-646)

Samson measures God's favour according to his own ability to exact physical violence against his nation's foes. For example, when describing his former happy days, Samson claims that "like a petty god / [he] walked about admired of all and dreaded / on hostile ground, none daring his affront" (529-531). Here, as in much of the dramatic poem, Samson equates God's favour with his physical strength. Therefore, when his blindness prevents him from entering mortal combat and he finds himself a Philistine captive, he assumes that God has cast him off. Indeed, Samson's opening lament underscores this idea as he complains that when God gave him strength "to show withal / How slight the gift was, [He] hung it in [his]

hair” (58-59). Although, at times, Samson seems to acknowledge his own culpability in his downfall (60-62; 373-380; 1168-1172), his literal thinking remains habitual. Therefore, if Samson’s story is to be understood in terms of fall and regeneration, it should not be regarded as a linear progression, but rather as a cycle that mirrors the pattern of fall and regeneration experienced by the nation of Israel in the Hebrew scriptures.

Since Samson fixates on physical action, it is not surprising that he seems to be most confident of God’s favour when the possibility of combat presents itself. When Harapha, the “tongue-doughty” Philistine giant whom Milton invents, appears and physically threatens the disgraced Hebrew, Samson responds with a seemingly heightened spiritual vigor and confidence in God: “In confidence whereof I once again / Defy thee to the trial of mortal fight / By combat to decide whose god is God / Thine or whom I with Israel’s sons adore” (1181; 1174-1177). Harapha’s appearance allows Samson to play the part of the nation’s avenger, a role he had formerly assumed had been lost. He threatens Harapha to combat three times and it is only when battle seems possible that he begins to feel or believe that God is with him again.

Throughout the poem, Samson struggles with the disjunction between mind and body. The feast of Dagon offers him “ease to the body some, none to the mind” since he is plagued by “restless thoughts” (18-19). While contemplating his reputation, Samson wonders why his “immeasurable strength” was not equally paired with “wisdom” and asserts that the “two proportioned ill drove [him] to

transverse” (206-209). As the dramatic poem reaches its climax, however, the Philistine officer orders Samson to perform feats of strength in honour of Dagon, but he retorts: “Can they think me so broken, so debased / With corporal servitude that my mind ever / Will condescend to such absurd commands?” (1335-1337). The first two quotations cited in this paragraph not only intimate an incongruence between Samson’s physical and mental strength, but they also reveal that Samson expects to maintain this type of congruence. This expectation seems to stem from Samson’s literal understanding of his election and relationship with God: he believes his physical strength and will are divine. Yet, the reply to the Philistine officer suggests that the strongman has finally come to appreciate a distinction between the mental and physical bondage as he refuses to engage in idolatry as a mental resistance to the Philistines despite his physical enslavement. Indeed, it may be tempting to assume that Samson has learned from his former mistakes. When the Chorus expresses concern over how the refusal to perform will be met, Samson replies:

Shall I abuse this consecrated gift
Of strength, again returning with my hair
After my great transgression, so requite
Favour renewed, and add a greater sin
By prostituting holy things to idols;
A Nazarite in place abominable
Vaunting my strength in honour to their Dagon?
(1354-1360)

In this passage, Samson argues that the return of his physical strength, which is connected with the literal renewed growth of his hair, signifies the return of God’s

favour. He does not wish to use his God-given strength in honour of his enemies' god; however, one cannot help but question whether this is proof of Samson's inward growth or whether he simply misinterprets his renewed physical strength since he expects his mind and body to be congruent. After all, the return of his physical strength, like his "intimate impulse" and "rousing motions," is a sign that needs interpretation (233; 1382).

Manoa likewise desires a congruence between body and mind and often treats God's election in literal terms:

And I persuade me God had not permitted
His strength again to grown up with his hair
Garrisoned round about him like a camp
Of faithful soldiery, were not his purpose
To use him further yet in some great service,
Not to sit idle with so great a gift
Useless, and thence ridiculous about him.
And since his strength with eyesight was not lost,
God will restore him eyesight to his strength.
(1495-1503)

In this passage, Manoa infers God's intentions based on Samson's physical body and thus his son's rehabilitated strength opens up the possibility of the return of eyesight. Like Samson, Manoa understands the growth of literal hair as a sign of renewed strength. While Milton took substantial liberties with his source material, he does maintain Samson's blindness. Moreover, Samson's blindness is presented in both physical and spiritual terms throughout the poem; however, Manoa's understanding of his son's situation is conceived in strict corporal terms. He imagines his son's gift of strength to be "garrisoned round about [his head] like a

camp / Of faithful soldiery” (1497-1498). The use of military words such as *soldiery*, *camp*, and *garrisoned* suggests that Manoa too believes that God intends Samson’s strength for martial combat. Ultimately, this expectation will provide the context for Manoa’s understanding of his son’s final act.

“Even the body within which individuals treat each other as equals...has to do to other bodies what the individuals within it refrain from doing to each other: it will have to be an incarnate will to power, it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant—not from any morality or immorality but because it is *living* and because life simply *is* will to power.”

--*Nietzsche*

The Individual and the Nation

While torn between his present and past, Samson questions the meaning of his elect status,

O wherefore was my birth from Heaven foretold

...

Why was my breeding order'd and prescri'd

As a person separate to God,

Design'd for great exploits; if I must die

Betrayed, captived, and both my eyes put out,

Made of my enemies the scorn and gaze,

To grind in brazen fetters under task

With this heaven-gifted strength?

...Promise was that I

should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver;

Ask for this great Deliverer now, and find him

Eyeless in Gaza at the Mill with slaves,

Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke.

(23-42)

On the one hand, Samson's separate status, much like his "Heav'n-gifted strength," suggests a privileged position, yet this status is called into doubt by the seeming

meaninglessness of the hero's capture and impotence. Still haunted by his diminished status and the thought that he may no longer be "Israel's deliverer," the strongman laments that he has become his "own sepulcher, a moving Grave" (102). This idea is repeated numerous times: Samson is described as the "dungeon of [him]self," his soul is "imprisoned" in "real darkness of the body," and, to borrow Manoa's phrase, Samson is simply "ensnared" (156; 158-59; 365). Indeed, the bitter irony that the person expected to free his nation has instead become symbolic of his nation's enslavement is only one of the ways that the relationship between individual and nation is emphasised in this text.

In the figure of Samson we see the extent to which the individual and national bodies are intricately bound and thus Samson can and should be read in both a political and personal context. Samson, as a representative of Israel, embodies an individual struggle as well as the struggle of a whole people through the conflation of England and Israel. The concept of the nation collapses individual and collective identities or bodies—both figuratively and literally—which is fitting since *Samson Agonistes* often juxtaposes the physical and the spiritual as well as the literal and figurative. Although it is not surprising that we catch many glimpses of the author in his complex protagonist, in the words of Barbara Lewalski, "Samson is not Milton Agonistes, but Milton put much of himself into Samson's lamentation about blindness and captivity among enemies" (*The Life* 523). Speculations about the parallels between author and protagonist are not entirely misplaced since there does seem to be an element of self-parody in

Milton's Samson. Moreover, the conflation between Samson's physical body and the Nation seems consistent with Milton's tendency to blur the distinction between self and nation as he does in his *Second Defense of the English People* which is both a self and national defense.

While Samson identifies with the nation, he is alienated. Samson's "separate" status distinguishes him but simultaneously alienates him from the other members of his nation. Interestingly, the nation is also struggling with the implications of its elect status. While at the start of the drama, Samson complains that he has become a spectacle: "Made of my Enemies the scorn and gaze" (34), in actual fact, his super-human strength had transformed him into a spectacle well before his imprisonment. Indeed, Samson's "heroic" exploits are retold numerous times throughout the text. Samson, the Chorus, Manoa, and Harapha each revisit history; in fact, each one retells how Samson accosted the Philistines and how he "unarm'd and with a trivial weapon fell'd" the Philistines' "choicest youth" (263-64). The repetition of Samson's trademark acts destabilizes any one interpretation of its meaning. For instance, Harapha, in reference to Samson's slaughter of the thirty Philistines who solved his riddle, calls Samson a "notorious murderer" who then "like a Robber stripp'dst them [the Philistines] of thir robes" (1188). Samson's election and national destiny prove elusive for all the characters in this text; each person, including the protagonist himself, struggles to reconcile Samson's personal destiny and status with that of the nation. In a sense, election becomes a complicated business since it relies on human agents.

Samson's physical and spiritual blindness mirrors that of Israel's leaders.

When the Chorus assures Samson that: "In seeking just occasion to provoke /The Philistine, thy Country's Enemy, /Thou never wast remiss, I bear thee witness"

(237-40). Samson replies:

The fault I take not on me, but transfer
On Israel 's Governors, and Heads of Tribes,
Who seeing those great acts which God had done
Singly by me against their Conquerors
Acknowledg'd not, or not at all consider'd
Deliverance offer'd: I on th' other side
Us'd no ambition to commend my deeds,
The deeds themselves, though mute, spoke loud the doer;
But they persisted deaf

(241-9)

While Samson identifies the cause of Israel's enslavement, he remains blind to his own complicity in his subjugation. The juxtaposition of Samson's blindness with Israel's deafness contributes to nation-as-body image and suggests that the individual and national bodies are linked and mutually culpable for their respective states of servitude. Further, considered in metaphorical terms, this dual enslavement (i.e. the enslavement of the individual and the nation) reinforces "the Miltonic principle that inner servitude leads to political bondage" (*The Life* Lewalski 527). Samson voices this connection between inner and political bondage as he continues to muse on the cause of Israel's fallen condition: "But what more oft in Nations grown corrupt, /And by thir vices brought to servitude, /Than to love bondage more than Liberty" (268-70).

As Paul Stevens has suggested, the peculiar virtue of the nation state for Milton is its ability to enable and guarantee the relative liberation of personal or individual aspirations. For Milton, the nation state provides the individual citizen a degree of private freedom unimaginable in customary feudal or patrimonial states. The irony is, however, that this newly found privacy turns out to be intensely political and so public. Throughout *Samson Agonistes* Milton collapses and complicates private and public roles. This collapse is perhaps most evident in Samson's marriage choices. The Chorus is the first to question Samson's private and public interests, in response to Samson's complaint that God unevenly matched his share of strength and wisdom, the Chorus replies:

Tax not divine disposal, wisest Men
Have err'd, and by bad Women been deceiv'd;
And shall again pretend they ne'er so wise.
Deject not then so overmuch thyself,
Who hast of sorrow thy full load besides;
Yet truth to say, I oft have heard men wonder
Why thou shouldst wed Philistian women rather
than of thine own Tribe fairer, or as fair.
At least of thy own Nation, and as noble
(210-18)

When explaining his decision to marry outside his tribe, a seeming conflict of private and public interests, Samson states:

The first I saw at Timna, and she pleas'd
Mee, not my Parents, that I sought to wed,
The daughter of an Infendel: they knew not
That what I motion'd was of God; I knew
From intimate impulse, and therefore urg'd
The Marriage on; that by occasion hence
I might begin Israel's Deliverance,
The work to which I was divinely call'd.

(219-226)

Here, Samson argues that his private and public desires were aligned and divinely sanctioned. However, he also cites the conflation of his private and public roles as the beginning of his divinely motioned national calling, but his claim depends on his ability to interpret God's silent signs—the *intimate impulse*. If Samson's first marriage choice seems dubious, his second choice is even more so, since he argues that he considered his second marriage to be lawful based on the ambiguous "intimate impulse" that prompted his first: "I thought it [the second marriage] lawful from my former act, And the same end; still watching to oppress Israel's oppressors" (231-33). Although Samson's desire for freedom is admirable, his actions become increasingly suspect as the reader witnesses his struggle to interpret and act in accordance with God's plan. However, Samson's struggle is not simply personal: it is indicative of the interpretive problems that the elect nation must confront. If Stevens' supposition that the virtue of the nation is the freedom it can provide the individual is correct, then *Samson Agonistes* presents a nation that is failing. Israel's, and by extension England's, preference for bondage with ease over strenuous liberty places Samson in a precarious position.

Samson takes great liberties when interpreting God's will. Indeed, even Samson's father Manoa questions his ability to recognize God's signs: "I cannot praise thy marriage choices, Son, / Rather approv'd them not; but thou didst plead / Divine impulsion prompting how thou might'st / Find some occasion to infest our Foes" (420-24). Further, Samson's conflation of private and public desire is also

challenged by Dalila's argument that she was conflicted by private and public duties when she decided to reveal his secret to her countrymen. Unlike Samson, however, Dalila admits that her public and private duties are contradictory: "...at length that grounded maxim / So rife and celebrated in the mouths of wisest men, that to the public good / Private respects must yield, with grave authority / Took full possession of me and prevail'd" (866-69). Samson refuses to acknowledge any disjunction between his private and public acts, and he refuses to separate his destiny from his nation's: "I was no private but a person rais'd / With strength sufficient and command from Heav'n / To free my Country" (1211-13).

Taken at face value, this assertion would seem to explain Samson's motive in his final destructive act. However, the repetition of historical events from Samson's past from various view points—particularly the re-telling of Samson's slaughter of the Philistines and the questioning of his ability to understand God's prompts in his marriage choices—undermine the reader's confidence in Samson's interpretive skills and decision making abilities. When the messenger narrates Samson's last moments, he states:

With both his arms on those two massy Pillars
That to the arched roof gave main support.
He [the guide] unsuspecting led him; which when Samson
Felt in his arms, with head a while inclin'd
And eyes fast fixt he stood, as one who pray'd,
Or some great matter in his mind revol'd.
(1633-38)

The reader, as well as the characters, are left to determine whether Samson's final act was prompted by God, or whether Samson mistakenly believed that it was, or

whether Samson was simply strong-arming destiny. The danger or temptation in this passage is to gloss over the simile “he stood, *as* one who pray’d” and assume that Samson *is* praying. He certainly takes up the posture of someone who prays, yet, as the ensuing words make clear, he may alternatively be revolving some great matter. Manoa's claim that "Samson hath quit himself like Samson" (1709) takes on an ominous tone when one considers the ambiguous nature of his son's final act. It is plausible that Samson has simply once again fallen prey to a misguided understanding of his divine calling, and thus has quit himself like himself by repeating past errors. Manoa's claim that Samson "To Israel Honor hath left, and freedom, let but them / Find courage to lay hold on this occasion" (1714-15) also undermines a regenerative reading of the ending by highlighting a considerable stipulation. The nation's liberty is anything but certain; Manoa's point that the nation needs to find courage in Samson's final act is no small obstacle, especially if history repeats itself.

Manoa and the Chorus face the difficult challenge of assigning meaning to Samson's final act. Like the reader of the text, Manoa and the Chorus do not witness Samson's destruction firsthand and must rely on the Messenger's account. Similarly, the text's readers must also confront a type of blindness as they struggle to understand the end of the poem. When the Chorus and Manoa's conversation about Samson's ransom is interrupted by a “hideous noise...horribly loud” (1509-1510), neither party has a context for evaluating what has happened. The Chorus says: “Noise call you it or universal groan / As if the whole inhabitation perished, /

Blood, death, and dreadful deeds are in that noise, / Ruin, destruction at the utmost point” (1511-1514). Having been surprised by this universal groan, the Chorus responds to the din. Their description—emphasized by the alliteration of *death*, *dreadful deeds*, *destruction*—objectively speaks to the terror and violence of the moment and provides a counter point of view to the positive understanding they will eventually arrive at.

After hearing a shocking universal groan, Manoa and the Chorus struggle to assign meaning: has Samson been killed by his enemies or is Samson killing his enemies? Like Manoa, the Chorus wonders if Samson’s sight has returned: “What if his eyesight (for to Israel’s God / Nothing is hard) by miracle restored, / He now dealing dole among his foes, / And over heaps of slaughtered walk his way?” (1527-1530). They too expect a congruence between Samson’s physical body and his connection to God. Further, like Samson, they expect that the return of God’s favour will amount to a renewal of Samson’s former violence against the Philistines. What is significant about their confusion is that their expectations of Samson’s redemption and triumph are shared by some critics to this day. The tendency to read this story as a model of fall and redemption remains desirable, but the implications of such readings need to be further scrutinized. Rather than suggest that Milton writes a revenge fantasy or intends to depict Samson as “heroic,” I would argue that Milton quite intentionally builds this expectation into his narrative as a means of demonstrating the dangers of misinterpretation, especially as it relates to understanding and implementing God’s will on earth.

Although early in the poem Samson complains that his “riddling days are past” (1064), his final words may very well suggest that these days have returned: “Now of my own accord such other trial / I mean to show you of my strength, yet greater; / As with amaze shall strike all who behold” (1643-1645). As Carey points out, these lines should not be seen “as proof that Samson does not believe he is conforming to God's plan when he destroys the theatre” (*A Work in Praise*). Samson may very well believe that he is acting according to God’s plan; in fact, all of Samson’s previous assumptions suggest that this is precisely what he believes as he often conflates his own will and desire with God’s by equating his physical prowess with divine approval, yet this is precisely the problem. Nietzsche’s concept of the *will to power* which argues that individuals are primarily motivated by the desire to assert their will upon the world may prove a better explanation for Samson’s final act than a reading that suggests that God has willed the destruction. Thus, attributing Samson’s will to God, whether this connection is made by the various characters, the reader, or Samson himself, seems to be the real tragedy in the play. Ultimately, the expectation that Samson has been restored to God’s favour—expressed by Manoa who says “all this / With God not parted from him, as was feared, / But favouring and assisting to the end”—and taken up his former role needs to be considered in light of alternative meanings that are equally invoked by the poem (1719-1721). *Samson Agonistes* effectively demonstrates the consequences of misinterpretation on both the individual and national body. In the end, Manoa wants to retrieve his son’s “body

where it lies / Soaked in his enemies' blood, and from the stream / With laves
pure...wash off / The clotted gore" (1725-1728). He wishes to "build [Samson] /
A monument" as a token of remembrance, but this is precisely the end that
Samson had formerly rejected: Samson had refused to be ransomed because he did
not wish to be *idle*. Yet, by the end, Samson becomes a type of *idol*. The idle/idol
pun suggests a parallel between being useless and the dangers of passive
engagement associated with idolatry

Throughout *Samson Agonistes*, Milton invokes the language of the body
politic, but he combines this discourse with that of disease and self mutilation in
order to address the interconnections between the private and public bodies and
the dangers of mistaking one's will for God's. The nation's habitual relapses into
fall are dramatically mirrored by the protagonist who, like the nation, fails to
adequately separate mental and physical bondage. *Samson Agonistes* is not an
anti-nationalist text, but it insists on the necessary conditions for an enabling form
of nationhood by demonstrating the need for addressing both types of servitude.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This project began by examining how Milton's works were invested in print culture and how this investment connected to nation-building in general and Milton's conception of the English nation in particular. As we saw in our discussion of *Areopagitica* and *Eikonoklastes*, writing, reading, and publishing have an important role in the life of the nation. For Milton, these activities created the connections between individuals necessary to the nation by allowing identification with the public body and by encouraging participation in political life. Although there are a number of limits to this type of participation—geographical, financial, and educational, Milton's understanding of his literary career models an ideal relationship between individual citizen and nation. Milton was keenly aware of the powerful and enabling relationship between the nation and individual liberty and understood that this relationship was often mediated by and through exchanges in print. In the first two chapters, print is a means of creating the type of imagined community that Anderson defines as a key component of nationalism. While Anderson does not explicitly credit print with producing the imagined community, he does maintain that print manages the community's sense of connection. Milton, however, credits print with the creation of the imagined community and thus reading and writing are at the centre of his conception of the English nation. Besides arguing for the ability of English people to be judicious

readers, Milton strives to prepare the individual to take on this public role by educating his reader in the art of political reading.

This study investigated Milton's treatment of nationalism in two key ways: first, this study looked at the confluence of print and nationalism particularly in Milton's prose works and second, this study considered two of Milton's key poems as texts explicitly concerned with the relationship between the nation and its members. Both poems read the nation through biblical narratives, but while *Paradise Lost* is focused on the formation of the national community, *Samson Agonistes* investigates the consequences that arise when the nation does not invest in liberty. The poems offer an interesting comparison since the first looks at how the individual can shape the nation and the second looks at how the nation shapes the individual. Scholarly investigations of nationalism remain divided about when the first nation(s) take shape in history. A number of early modern scholars have challenged the view that nationalism arose as a product of modern culture since that culture had the necessary technologies and political conditions to produce, mediate, and impose cultural homogeneity. This study developed the work done by early modern scholars who argued that England did achieve national consciousness in the early modern period by looking at Milton's treatment of nationhood as a case study.

This study demonstrated that Milton himself acknowledged and commented on the many features of nationalism that traditional scholars have identified as uniquely modern. Indeed, Milton's awareness of the role of print and publishing

in producing a particular type of nation informs much of his career as a writer and poet. By the time Milton produced *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*, the civil wars and attending political turmoil had raised the question of national identity in such a way that it could not be ignored. I believe that although monarchy proved to be much more resilient than republican supporters expected, the break with and questioning of kingship was significant in allowing for a representation of the people that was independent of the king. Throughout the sixteenth-century, the monarch was an important symbol of the nation and thus challenging monarchy meant a rethinking of national identity. Milton's poems respond to the question of national identity in several key ways. First, *Paradise Lost* effectively incorporates biblical history with relevant political and religious values that Milton believed were necessary to securing a nationhood that would secure and encourage the liberty of the individual. Likewise, *Samson Agonistes* demonstrates the degree to which the nation is comprised of a number of discourses that grapple with the notion of individual liberty and its relationship to the body politic. Both poems explore the potential and shortcomings of nationhood and encourage readers to see themselves as participating in and shaped by the nation.

In my examination of Milton's *Areopagitica* at the outset of this project, I suggested that this early prose tract, an important seventeenth-century commentary on the production of print, emphasized the connection between print and nationalism by arguing that the production of text is necessary to producing a national community of readers. My argument is in part a response to writers such

as Benedict Anderson, who maintain that nationalism gained increasing influence as religion's ability to transform individuals into an imagined community declined. Anderson's well-known definition of a nation as "an imagined political community" suggests that nationalism is a secularized phenomenon that depends on boundaries and limitations in order to create a sense of communal belonging among individuals who do not and cannot possibly ever know each other. In this view, one of the defining features of religion, particularly Christianity, is its reliance on a community of believers who are not limited by what we would consider modern national divisions. After all, "the most messianic nationalists do not dream of a day when all the members of the human race will join their nation in the way that it was possible, in certain epochs, for say, Christians to dream of a wholly Christian planet" (Anderson 7). Given Anderson's conception of Christianity, it is not surprising that he argues that nationalism emerges with the decline of religion; however, an examination of the cultural climate in seventeenth-century England demonstrates how the sense of religious community does not necessarily preclude a sense of political community defined along national lines. In fact, at times, religious identity harmoniously coincided with and aided national identity. For England, the Reformation meant a break with the idea of a universal Christian community and thus England's geographical boundaries took on a new meaning in terms of defining religious identity. Ultimately, I believe that there is little distinction between pre- and post-

eighteenth century nationalism in terms of its cultural significance and articulation as an “imagined, political community.”

In much of Milton’s writing we see the ways that religious identity was subsumed into an understanding of Englishness. For example, in *Areopagitica*, Milton’s understanding of the nation is made possible by the privileged position afforded to the Protestant individual: extending the logic of the Protestant call for the individual to read and interpret scripture for himself, Milton argues that certain forms of censorship are redundant and damaging to both the individual and the nation since pre-licensing censorship is only necessary when the polity lacks the inner qualities of good judgment and reason. These individual, private qualities must be reflected in the nation’s attitude and position on print as England is a community of active, self-regulating individuals who rely on exchanges in print as a means of communication and identification. Although reading and writing were important activities prior to the emergence of early modern print culture, I believe that the increase in literacy and the increased book dissemination that were initiated with the shift to a print culture meant a greater awareness of the public and political aspects of reading and writing. Milton in particular comments on this aspect of reading and writing as part of his discussion of print in *Areopagitica* and *Eikonoklastes*. Milton maintains that only by encountering difference through authentic debate can one expect to grow and develop. Here, Milton’s conception of the English nation reaches its most optimistic tone (even if this tone is highly rhetorical). This argument, however, is often qualified as Milton seems, at times,

to afford this level of privilege to a limited number of citizens. Nicholas von Maltzahn is quite correct in suggesting that "[Milton's] idealization of himself and his readers succeeded less with his contemporaries than with later generations" ("Milton's Readers" 238).

Nonetheless, whether or not Milton's idealization of his readers and nation is intentionally hyperbolic or naïve, the idea of the nation remains an important feature throughout his career as well as a significant cultural concept for the seventeenth century. The political events of seventeenth-century England demonstrate the malleability of nationalism and add to Anderson's list of paradoxical features that attend any nation. Throughout the seventeenth century, whether the government was a monarchy or a republic, it was imperative that the institution in question was imagined as representative of the people.

Chapter 3 examined the ways that the execution of Charles I and Milton's official role as defender of the new government forced him to reconsider the critical abilities of his countrymen. Despite his disappointment over the support and enthusiasm for Charles I and the institution of kingship that was ignited by *Eikon Basilike*, I believe that Milton's *Eikonoklastes* remains hopeful that readers can be rehabilitated. *Eikonoklastes*, similar to *Areopagitica*, demonstrates an awareness and concern for how print is used and how print shapes the national consciousness. Milton judges the King's Book based on its effect on its readers, which he argues is damaging as the book encourages only a passive response that blinds readers to the historical and cultural implications of the king's actions.

Chapters 4 and 5 looked at Milton's post-Restoration poems, *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*. These poems not only continue to engage with questions about national origins, destiny, and identity, but they also continue some of the recuperative work Milton undertakes in *Eikonoklastes* by eschewing spectacle and other forms of royalist culture and insisting on a readerly, critical engagement. Chapter 4 explores the ways that Milton's epic undertakes the (re)telling of the nation's story by incorporating a number of important cultural discourses. Although written at a time when Milton's politics would have not been received favorably, *Paradise Lost* continues to encourage actual readers to consider the connections between themselves, political structures, and the larger national community by confronting the reader with challenging political dramas.

Chapter 5 examined the discursive production of nationhood in *Samson Agonistes*. In this poem, Milton turns to the language of the body politic to address the relationship between the individual and nation. Samson's suffering is often figured as physical corruption and mutilation. This text seems to display a great deal of anxiety about the welfare and purity of the nation through the discourses of health and disease. Indeed, the nation's flaws are dramatically mirrored by the protagonist who, like the nation, fails to adequately separate mental and physical bondage. Both these chapters responded to the question of Milton's political position in his later life by looking at his continuing commitment to political values that affect both the individual and nation.

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