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Selfhood as Otherness: Constructing English Identity in the Elisabethan Age

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Selfhood as Otherness: Constructing English Identity in the Elizabethan Age

Carlo Ginzburg

1. "What the character of poetry is," the young Gerard Manley Hopkins once wrote, "will be found best by looking at the structure of verse. The artificial part of poetry, perhaps we shall be right to say all artifice, reduces itself to the principle of parallelism. The structure of poetry is that of continuous parallelism, ranging from the technical so-called Parallelisms of Hebrew poetry and the antiphons of Church music up to the intricacy of Greek or Italian or English verse."¹

In quoting these words at the very beginning of a highly technical essay on "Grammatical parallelism and its Russian facet," Roman Jakobson emphasized the challenging comprehensiveness of Hopkins's approach.² I have chosen to start with the same passage in order to stress what my talk will *not* be about. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the relative "intricacy of Greek or Italian or English verse" became in many European countries, and especially in England, a debated issue. This story has been told before, but its implications deserve a further look.³

2. Let us consider a well known example of a minor literary genre—Latin without tears. This is what Roger Ascham, tutor to Queen Elizabeth and Latin Secretary to Queen Mary, promised in the lengthy title of a book which was published in 1570, two years after his death, *The scholemaster: or plaine and perfite way of teachyng children to understand, write and speake the latin tong, but specially purposed for the private brynging up of youth in ientlemen and noble mens houses and commodious also for all such, as have forgot the Latin tonge, and would, by them selves, without a scholemaster, in short tyme, and with small paines, recover a sufficient habilitie, to*

*understand, write, and speake Latin.*⁴

I do not know whether any youth ever succeeded either in learning or in recovering some Latin from Ascham's *Scholemaster*. But such a practical purpose was framed by a larger issue, which was not mentioned in the book's title. Sir Richard Sackville had asked Ascham "very earnestlie, to shewe, what [he] thought of the common goinge of Englishe men into Italie." This was a topic on which Ascham, a committed Protestant and a man of solid moral convictions, had strong opinions, having spent a few days in Venice some years earlier—an experience which left him durable memories of sin. He highly praised "the Italian tonge, which next the Greeke and Latin tonge" he declared to "like and love above all other". But he contrasted the present state of Italy, and especially of Rome, with its respective past:

"tyme was, when Italie and Rome, have bene, to the great good of us that now live, the best breeders and bringers up, of the worthiest men, not onlie for wise speakinge, but also for well doing, in all civil affaires, that ever was in the worlde. But now, that tyme is gone, and though the place remayne, yet the olde and present maners, do differ as farre, as blacke and white, as vertue and vice [...] Italie now, is not that Italie, that it was wont to be" (23 r-v).

Ascham's argument for rejecting contemporary Italy was twofold. On the one hand, he stressed the moral corruption and religious incredulity of *Inglesi italianati*—those English gentlemen who, having spent some time in Italy, had absorbed its attitudes and behaviour. On the other, he complained about the recent tide of English translations of Italian books. According to Ascham, they were "sold in every shop in London, commended by honest titles the soner to corrupt honest maners, dedicated over boldlie to vertuous and honorable personages, the easielier to begile simple and honest wittes" (26 r-v). Ascham did not hesitate to urge "those, who have authoritie" to act to prevent the publication of further Italian translations, pointing to the fact that more of them had been "set out in Printe within these selve [same] monethes, than have bene sene in England many score years before."⁵

Ascham died in 1568. Two works published in 1566 and 1567 more or less fit his description. One is William Painter's *The Palace of Pleasure*, dedicated to Ambrose Earl of Warwicke and Sir George Howard: a two-volume selection taken from Boccaccio, Bandello, Livy and other modern and classical authors, which acquainted Elizabethan readers with such "pleasaunt Histories and Nouelles" as those of Coriolanus, Timon of Athens, The Duchess of Amalfi, Romeo and Juliet and The Two Gentlemen of Venice. The other is *The Historie of Ariodanto and Jenevra*, from Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. The latter brings me to my current topic, the debate on rhyme.

3. "Rude beggarly ryming" Ascham wrote, had been "brought first into Italie by Gothes and Hunnes, where all good verses and all good learning to, were destroyed by them: and after caryed into France and Germanie: and at last receyved into England by men of excellent wit in deede, but of small learning, and less judgment in that behalfe" (60 r).

This "attack on rhyme" has been regarded by C. S. Lewis as "important only in so far as it was

mischievous".⁶ But a closer view suggests a less dismissive judgement. True, Ascham regarded ryming as a barbarous, not to say beastly, feature:

"To follow rather the Gothes in ryming than the Greekes in trew versifying" he wrote "were even to eate ackornes with swyne, when we may freely eate wheate bread emonges men" (60 r).

Today, this emotionally charged comparison may sound surprising. But, as Ernst Gombrich once aptly recalled,

"the derivation of the word classical itself throws an amusing light on the social history of taste. For an *auctor classicus* is really a tax paying author. Only people of standing belonged to one of the tax paying classes in Roman society, and it was such people rather than 'proletarians' who spoke and wrote a type of educated language which the aspiring author was advised by the Roman Grammarian Aulus Gellius to emulate. In that sense the classic was really the 'classy'."⁷

In the same spirit Ascham opposed "the worthie Poetes in Athens and Rome, [who] were more carefull to satisfie the judgement of one learned, than rashe in pleasing the humor of a rude multitude" to "the shoppes in London [...] full of lewd and rude rymes" (60v). His rejection of "beggarly, barbarous ryming" was part of a conscious effort to make England a truly civilized country, able to take the place of Italy as the worthiest heir to the Greek and Roman legacy, without falling into Italy's moral and religious corruption. In a revealing passage Ascham abandoned for once his customary reverence towards the Latin tradition and taxed Cicero for a comment on Britain he once made in a letter to Atticus. "There is not one scruple of silver in that whole isle," Cicero had written, "or any that knoweth either learnyng or letter" (*Ad Atticum*, IV, 17). Ascham bluntly replied:

"But now master Cicero, blessed the God, and his sonne Jesus Christ, whom you never knew [...] it may trewly be sayd, that for silver, there is more cumlie plate, in one city of England, than is in foure of the proudest cities in all Italie, and take Rome for one of them."

Something similar, he went on, could be said about learning:

"And for learnyng, beside the knowledge of all learned tongs and liberall sciences, even your owne bookes Cicero, be as well read, and your excellent eloquence is as well liked and loved, and as trewlie folowed in England at this day, as it is now, or ever was, sence your owne tyme in any place of Italie [...]. And a litle to brag with you, Cicero, where you your selfe, by your leave, halted in some point of learnyng in your owne tong, many in England at this day go streight up, both in trewe skill, and right doing therein" (62r-v).

According to Ascham, England would have overcome Italy both in its display of luxury and in its love of Greek and Latin. At this date—1568—such a remark betrayed a remarkable amount of wishful thinking on both counts. Ascham's further allusion to English scholars having gone beyond Cicero's learning was presumably a deliberate exaggeration. But Ascham's ambivalent

attitude towards Italy can be detected in his warm praise of the metrical experiments displayed by Felice Figliucci of Siena in his *De la filosofia morale libri dieci, sopra li dieci libri de l'Ethica d'Aristotile* :

“Writyng upon Aristotles Ethickes so excellentlie in Italian, as never did yet anyone in my opinion either in Greke or Latin, amongst other thynges doth most earnestlie invey against the rude ryming of verses in that tong: and when soever he expresseth Aristotles preceptes, with any exemple, out of Homer or Euripides, he translateth them, not after the Rhymes of Petrarke, but into such kinde of perfite verse, which like feete and quantitie of sillabes, as he found them before in the Greke tonge: exhorting earnestlie all the Italian nation, to leave of their rude barbariousness in ryming, and folow diligentlie the excellent Greke and Latin examples in trew versifying.”

According to Ascham, those Englishmen who “never went farder than the schole of Petrarcke and Ariostus abroad, or els of Chaucer at home...” (61 v) should have taken Figliucci as a model instead.⁸

4. Ascham’s passionate argument against rhyme, in favour of quantitative verse, raised a considerable debate and a few dissenting voices. Among the latter was Sir Philip Sidney, who in his *Apology for Poetry* noticed, in a rather dismissive tone, that “there beeing in eyther [that is, rhyme and quantitative verse] sweetness, and wanting in neither maiestie. Truly the English, before any other vulgar language, is fit for both sorts”. But in stressing the reverence due to poetry “in all nations to this day”, including Turkey and Ireland, Sidney remarked that even

“among the most barbarous and simple Indians where no writing is, yet have their poets, who make and sing songs, which they call Areytos, both of theyr ancestors deedes and praises of their gods: a sufficient probabilitie that if ever learning come among them, it must be by having theyr bard dull wits softned and sharpened with the sweete delights of poetrie”⁹.

This passage points at a significant, although insufficiently recognized side of the English debate on rhyme. I will try to clarify the implications of Sidney’s remark by focusing on the word aréytos.

As has been noticed, the earliest account of aréytos in any European language occurs in Oviedo’s *Historia general de las Indias*. Notwithstanding their lack of writing, the Indians—Oviedo noticed —“kept memory of things past” through songs called aréytos, based on their chiefs’ or caciques’ lives, which were accompanied by dances. Oviedo called aréytos “a sort of history,” comparing them to the dances performed by the Etruscans on their visit to Rome, as described by Livy (VII, 2), and to Spanish and Italian vernacular songs based on historical events.¹⁰ These parallels remind us of the obvious, that is, that sixteenth century Europeans approached the New World through a conceptual framework rooted in their own societies, as well as in Greek and Roman antiquity. But the long-term effects of this encounter on both the European present and the European perception of the past is a rewarding topic of reflection.¹¹ The word I am talking about

—*aréytos*—ultimately suggested the redefinition of a time-honoured mode of conceptualizing history. In the introduction to his translation of Plutarch (one of the books that changed Europe for ever) Jacques Amyot emphasized the antiquity and nobility of history, informing his readers that barbarous and illiterate populations from the West Indies were able to recall events eight hundred years old thanks to songs they had learned by heart in childhood¹². A few years later Sebastian Fox Morzillo, the Spanish polymath, described a Mexican manuscript—the so-called Codex Mendoza, a gift to Emperor Charles the Fifth—which was decorated with images Morzillo compared to hieroglyphics. Though to him this was not writing, he grudgingly admitted that such an unwritten record of the past could be labelled “history” (*quam appellare historiam, licet non scriptam, possumus*)¹³.

Neither Amyot nor Fox Morzillo mentioned *aréytos*. Sidney may have come across the French translation of Oviedo's book, published in Paris in 1557: *L'histoire naturelle et generale des Indes, isles et terre ferme de la grand mer Oceane*.¹⁴ But a more likely source is, I would argue, François Bauduin's *De institutione historiae universae et eius cum iurisprudencia coniunctione* (“The Institution of Universal History and Its Conjunction with Jurisprudence”), a treatise based on a series of lectures delivered by Bauduin, a famous law professor from Arras, at the University of Heidelberg. Bauduin's *De institutione*, first published in 1561, was included in *Artis historicae penus*, a two-volume anthology of writings on the art of history, published in Basel in 1579.¹⁵ In October 1580 Sidney sent to his brother Robert a letter dealing with the writing of history, which had presumably been inspired by the recent publication of the Basel anthology. Sidney compared the historian to a poet, and more generally to “a discourser, which name we give to whosoever speaks ‘*non simpliciter de facto, sed de qualitatibus et circumstantiis facti*’” (not merely about a fact, but about its features and circumstances”).¹⁶ Bauduin had used the same words in order to make the opposite point: historians had to go beyond the mere description of a fact and its circumstances (*factum aliquod... cum suis circumstantiis*), although they had to avoid the exaggerations of the “new rhetoricians,” as well as the freedom of invention allowed to poets and artists—an echo of a famous line by Horace.¹⁷ But although Sidney did not agree with Bauduin's approach to history, the latter's treatise must have caught his attention.

Bauduin, originally a Catholic, had converted to Calvinism and become Calvin's secretary; later he returned to Catholicism and tried to act as a mediator between the two religions. His *De institutione*, dedicated to Antoine, king of Navarre, was written on the eve of the conference Catholics and Calvinists held at Poissy in September of 1561. Bauduin himself played an important role at Poissy, which made him the presumable target of a virulent pamphlet written by Calvin immediately after: *Response à un cauteleux et rusé moyenneur* (“Response to a cautious and shrewd mediator”).¹⁸ In his *De institutione* Bauduin addressed issues having inflammatory religious implications, such as the superiority of primary over secondary witnesses, in a broad comparative perspective. A similar topic examined in his treatise was the reliability of orally transmitted stories in a time and place without history. Bauduin started from the most ancient stage of Roman history, where, as one learns from Cicero's *Brutus*, banquet songs or *carmina*, already lost in Cicero's time, were sung to praise the deeds of famous men. Bauduin compared

this passage with Tacitus, *Germania*, 2, 3 (“*Celebrant carminibus antiquis, quod unum apud illos memoriae et annalium genus est...*”; “Their ancient hymns - the only style of record or history which they possess...”) and *Annales*, 2, 88, 4 (“*Caniturque adhuc barbaras apud gentis, Graecorum annalibus ignotus, quis sua tantum mirantur*”; “and to this day [Arminius] is sung in tribal lays, though he is an unknown being to the Greek historians, who admire only the history of Greece”). But what happened with ancient Germans, Bauduin went on, must have happened with other populations as well. He mentioned the passage in which Eginhardus describes Charlemagne transcribing and memorizing *barbara et antiquissima carmina*, “barbarous and very ancient songs telling of the deeds of former kings and martial exploits”. Then he added: “I will recite another, and not less noble example” (*Recitabo alterum non minus nobile exemplum*), and told of the transmission of the past among newly discovered Indian populations, based either on series of drawings something like Egyptian hieroglyphics, or on songs (*cantiones*) sung to accompany dances. These mixed songs with dancing (*choros*) are called *aréytos* - the word picked up by Sidney¹⁹.

I came across the passage from Bauduin in a footnote to Arnaldo Momigliano’s splendid paper “Perizonius, Niebuhr and the Character of Early Roman Tradition,” which analyzes how the discovery of a past transmitted orally by American Indians changed the perception of Roman history, giving rise to the so called “Ballad theory”.²⁰ But even Momigliano failed to appreciate fully Bauduin’s remarks. What is so striking about them is both their broad comparative approach and their emphatically non-Eurocentric attitude. Having declared that American Indian songs provide a “not less noble” example than ancient Roman *carmina*, Bauduin commented: “*Nam et fas est et ab hoste doceri*” (Ovid, *Met.* 4, 428), “Learning is always legitimate, even from our enemies”. But this translation of Ovid’s line is misleading, since it inevitably misses the contiguity of *hostis*, “enemy,” and *hospes*, “guest.” Bauduin, a profound scholar of Roman law, was well aware that the old meaning of *hostis* was “alien”, such as for instance in the *Twelve Tables* passage *Adversus hostem aeterna auctoritas esto*, “a property claim against an alien will never be abolished.”²¹ Having established that songs were used the world over to convey memories through time, Bauduin suggested a moral and political lesson:

“Shall we be so degenerate as to refuse to hear the poem of our national history? And yet, in order to understand it we have to preserve the recollections of those who are usually labelled barbarians. Are we French, British, German, Spanish or Italian? If we want to speak about ourselves we must not ignore the history of Franks, of Angles, of Saxons, of Goths, of Lombards. And since we have often fought Saracens and Turks, we must know Saracenic and Turkish history as well.”²²

These striking words seem to anticipate the scholarly program of eighteenth-century antiquarians like Muratori, not to speak of the (often much more parochial) political and intellectual agenda of European nationalisms.²³ In fact, for a long time French historians of law had been focusing on what we call the “Middle Ages.” But Bauduin reshaped this approach in a broad cosmopolitan perspective, which embraced both barbarians and enemies, in so far as both of them were

hostes, “alien.” The defense of rhyme that emerged in England in the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth century shared some of these assumptions.

5. In his reflections on the oral transmission of the past Bauduin implicitly undermined common assumptions about the hierarchical role of the classical tradition. The anonymous treatise *The Arte of English Poesie* (London 1589), ascribed to George Puttenham, narrowed Bauduin’s argument, transforming it into an attack on Greek and Latin verse. Puttenham’s vivid words deserve to be quoted in full:

“It appeareth that our vulgar running Poesie was common to all the nations of the world besides, whom the Latines and Greekes in speciall called barbarous. So as it was notwithstanding the first and most ancient Poesie, and the most universall, which two points do otherwise give to all humane inventions and affaires no small credit. This is proved by certificate of marchants and travellers, who by late navigations have surveyed the whole world, and discovered large countries and strange people wild and savage, affirming that the American, the Perusine and the very Canniball, do sing and also say, their highest and holiest matters in certaine riming versicles and not in prose, which proves also that our maner of vulgar Poesie is more ancient than the artificiall of the Greeks and Latines, ours comming by instinct of nature, which was before Art or observation, and used with the savage and uncivill, who were before all science or civilitie, even as the naked by prioritie of time is before the clothed, and the ignorant before the learned. The naturall Poesie therefore, being aided and amended by Art, and not utterly altered or obscured, but some signe left of it (as the Greekes and Latines have left none) is no lesse to be allowed and commended then theirs”²⁴.

Bauduin and Sidney had spoken of, respectively, *cantiones* and songs—not of rhyme. Neither of them had mentioned what became the cornerstone of Puttenham’s argument, the opposition between nature and art. In fact, *The Arte of English Poesie* posited two sets of values: the first included that which is ancient, natural, barbarous (or savage), universal, naked, ignorant; the second, that which is recent, artificial, civil, particular, clothed, learned. The evidence about Puttenham’s life is scarce, but he appears to have spent some time at the court of France.²⁵ Was Puttenham familiar with Montaigne’s *Essays*, first published in 1580? An affirmative answer to this question is more than likely, since both *The Arte of English Poesie* and Montaigne’s essay “On Cannibals” assign the word “barbarous”, a crucial term in both texts, three different meanings: relative, negative and positive.²⁶

In the first place, “barbarous” is, according to Puttenham, a purely relative concept, being a derogatory word born of ethnic pride:

“This terme grew by the great pride of the Greekes and Latines, when they were dominatours of the world, reckoning no language so sweete and civill as their owne, and that all nations beside them selves were rude and uncivill, which they called barbarous [...] The Italian at this day by like arrogance calleth the Frenchman, Spaniard, Dutch, English, and all other breed behither their montaines *Appennines*,

Tramontani, as who would say barbarous".²⁷

This relativizing attitude did not prevent Puttenham from also using "barbarous" as a synonym of rude, rough, clumsy. In a digression on the history of rhyme—the earliest of its kind, as has already been noticed²⁸—Puttenham followed Ascham's suggestion, ascribing the corruption of "the Poesie metricall of the Grecians and Latines" to "the barbarous conquerers invading them with innumerable swarmes of strange nations." But, presumably inspired by Bauduin's interest in those "barbarous and very ancient songs" mentioned by Eginhardus in his life of Charlemagne, Puttenham devoted a chapter of his work to a discussion of rhymed poetry written "in the times of Charlemaine and many yeares after him." Predictably, Puttenham spoke of "excessive authoritie of Popes," "barbarous rudeness of the times," "idle invention of Monasticall men," and of a "fabulous age." A "large poem to the honour of Carolus Calvus, every word beginning with C," written by Hugobald the Monk, was—Puttenham commented—"no small piece of cunning, though in truth it were but a phantasticall device, and to no purpose at all more then to make them harmonick to the rude eares of those barbarous ages." But in the chapter's final paragraph Puttenham provided a reason for dwelling on such clumsy literary products:

"Thus you may see the humours and appetites of men, how divers and chaungeable they be in liking new fashions, though many times worse than the old, and not only in the manner of their life and use of their garments, but also in their learning and arts and specially of their languages."²⁹

For a long time garments, learning, arts and languages had been regarded as topics pertaining to antiquarians, not to historians. Even the link between rhyme and "humours and appetites", suggested by Puttenham, was not a novelty: in his *Scholemaster*, for instance, Roger Ascham had opposed the "lewd and rude rymes" which filled up London shops with "the worthie Poetes in Athens and Rome [who] were more carefull to satisfie the judgement of one learned, than rashe in pleasing the humor of a rude multitude"³⁰. But Puttenham subverted the traditional hierarchy through his antiquarian curiosity, transforming rhymes, which used to be dismissed as barbarous, into a legitimate research topic.³¹ Fifty years later Jean Chapelain, the French poet and critic, argued for the historical relevance of a medieval romance like *Lancelot* in terms which unfolded some of the implications of Puttenham's remark: "Physicians analyze their patients' corrupted humours on the basis of their dreams: in the same way, we can analyze the customs and manners of the past on the basis of the phantasies described in their writings"³². Both social history and *histoire des mentalités* would ultimately emerge from this sort of antiquarian research.

But "barbarous" had for Puttenham, and for Montaigne as well, a third, positive meaning. Rhyme, being "uncivill" (that is, barbarous) and universal, is "naturall."³³ But even "naturall Poesie," according to Puttenham, had to be "aided and amended by Art, and not utterly altered or obscured, but some signe left of it (as the Greekes and Latines have left none)." In the last section of *The Arte of English Poesie* Puttenham clarified this compromise by rephrasing his opposition between nature and art, starting from his opening argument: that the poet is, etymologically, a

maker. Being a maker, Puttenham concluded, he is comparable to a carpenter, a painter, a carver, a gardener—but only to a certain extent:

“But for that in our maker or Poet, which restes onely in devise and issues from an excellent sharpe and quick invention, holpen [*helped*] by a cleare and bright phantasie and imagination, he is not as the painter to counterfaite the naturall by the like effects and not the same, nor as the gardener aiding nature to worke both the same and the like, nor as the carpenter to worke effects utterly unlike, but even as nature her selfe working by her owne peculiar vertue and proper instinct and not by example and meditation or exercise as all other artificers do, is then most admired when he is most naturall and least artificiall”.³⁴

The artist as a creator: in emphasizing the Neo-Platonic roots of this notion M. H. Abrams quoted a few parallel passages by Sidney and Puttenham.³⁵ One might also recall that in 1585 Giordano Bruno had published in London his *De gli heroici furori* (“The Heroic Enthusiasts”), with a dedication to Philip Sidney.³⁶ The Neo-Platonic elements in Puttenham’s *Arte of English Poesie* are clear enough, but I wonder whether in praising poetry “as nature her selfe” Puttenham was not also echoing Castiglione’s *sprezzatura*—that is, spontaneity recovered through art, and beyond art. This would explain why Puttenham, after a chapter entitled “What it is that generally makes our speach well pleasing and commendable, and of that which the Latines call Decorum,” went on to discuss courtly behaviour in a chapter entitled “Of decencie in behaviour which also belongs to the consideration of the Poet or maker.”³⁷

6. “This brutish Poetry [...] I mean this tinkerly verse which we call rhyme”, wrote William Webbe in his *Discourse of English Poetry*, published in 1586. These words ought to be kept in mind in order to catch the polemical edge to Puttenham’s concern for social and stylistic *decorum*, his eagerness to make rhyme—notwithstanding his stress on its natural, barbarous, wild features—a respectable, even courtly device. Samuel Daniel, in his *Defence of Ryme* (1603), developed these apparent contradictions in a new direction³⁸.

The year before, Thomas Campion had published his *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, arguing that classical meters fitted the English tongue better than the “vulgar and unarteficiall custome of ryming”³⁹. Daniel addressed Campion’s technical arguments only in the final section of his *Defence of Ryme*; the bulk of his answer focused on larger issues. Daniel started by bluntly reversing the superiority of art over nature posited by Campion. “Custome that is before all law, nature that is above all arte, “ wrote Daniel. Then he unfolded the implications of these uncompromising words:

“All our understandings are not to be built by the square of *Greece* and *Italie*. We are the children of nature as well as they [...] All their Poesie, all their Philosophie is nothing, unlesse we bring the discerning light of conceipt with us to apply it to use. It is not bookes, but onely that great booke of the world, and the all overspreading grace of heaven that makes men truly iudiciall...”⁴⁰

The next paragraph of Daniel's text included a nearly literal quotation from Montaigne's essay "On Cannibals".⁴¹ Although Montaigne's name was not mentioned, no contemporary reader was likely to have missed the echo of his powerful voice in the passage. The first English translation of Montaigne's *Essais* was published in 1603, the same year Daniel's pamphlet appeared. Daniel had been involved in this project, both directly and indirectly, through the translator, John Florio, who was his brother-in-law and close friend. Daniel dedicated to Florio a long poem on Montaigne, praising him, among other things, for having "made such bolde sallies out upon/ Custome, the mightie tyrant of the earth, / In whose *Seraglio* of subiection / We all seem bred-up, from our tender birth..."⁴²

Florio's Montaigne was Shakespeare's Montaigne. The utopian commonwealth described in *The Tempest*, II, 1 ("no kind of traffic / would I admit; no name of magistrates...") was inspired by Florio's translation of the essay "On cannibals."⁴³ Were Montaigne's essays on primitivism unusually appealing to English readers? In Italy, for instance, where Montaigne's *Essais* had been translated in 1590, the impact of those reflections was minimal.⁴⁴ This divergence, albeit far from unpredictable, might tell us something about the English reception of Montaigne.

In commenting upon the Italian translation of Montaigne, Carlo Dionisotti called it "a decisive turning point," insofar as it showed that "a new era had begun in the history of the literary relationship between Italy and France [...] Italy was at last becoming aware of the existence and predominance of a new system based on continental Europe."⁴⁵ The English translation of Montaigne, which also came from an Italian intellectual environment, adds a twist to this conclusion. John Florio, the translator, was, like his father, a Protestant exile from Italy. In his introductory address, Florio recalled that some people regarded translations as "the subversion of Universities"; he then quoted his "olde fellow Nolano" who had said and publicly taught that "from translation all Science had its of-spring", since the Greeks had drawn all their science from the Egyptians, who had taken it from the "Hebrews or Chaldees." "Nolano" was of course Giordano Bruno of Nola, who had been burned in Rome as a heretic three years earlier. John Florio, one of the characters of Bruno's dialogue *La cena de le Ceneri*, evoked his dead friend with words which fit the image of the Hermetic magus which Frances Yates captured for us.⁴⁶ But intellectual subordination to France, demonstrated in Dionisotti's mind by in the Italian translation of Montaigne, is clearly absent in the English translation. I would say even the opposite. Montaigne, who may seem today the epitome of literary Frenchness, played a relevant role in the self-assertion of an English identity against "a new system based on continental Europe," centered on France.

This English reading of Montaigne is present in Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* and, even more explicitly, in Daniel's *Defence of Ryme*. The rejection of the traditional emphasis on the Greek and Roman legacy, the stress on barbarous artifacts like rhyme, led Daniel to question—in a genuine Montaignesque spirit—European superiority as a whole:

"Will not experience confute us, if wee shoulde say the state of *China*, which never heard of Anapestiques, Trochies, and Tribracques, were grosse, barbarous, und uncivile?"

But then Daniel struck a note which is definitely absent from Montaigne, the vindication of what we call the Middle Ages:

“The *Gothes, Vandales and Longobards*, whose comming downe like an inundation overwhelmed, as they say, all the glory of learning of Europe, have yet left us still their lawes and customes, as the originalls of most of the provincially constitutions of Christendome.”

Daniel raised doubts vis-à-vis the then current idea that Latin had been revived by Reuclin, Erasmus and More. Long before them Petrarch had written excellent Latin verse and prose, although what gave him glory and renown in his own country had been his vernacular poetry. Daniel mentioned an impressive list of Italian humanists who had followed in Petrarch's footsteps. Then he added:

“And yet long before all these, and likewise with these, was not our Nation behind in her portion of spirite and worthinesse, but cuncurrent with the best of all this lettered worlde”.

Daniel quotes Bede, Walter Map, Bracton, Bacon, Ockham “and an infinite catalogue of excellent men, most of them living about foure hundred yeares since, and have left behinde them monuments of the most profound iudgement and learning in all sciences. So that it is but the cloudws gathered about our owne iudgment that makes us thinke all other ages wrapt up in mists, and the great distance betwixt us, that causes us to imagine men so farre off, to be so little in respect of our selves...”

Daniel's antiquarian piety included obscure names, like Aldelmus Durotelmus, praised as “ the best poet of his times”, who flourished in the year 739. Occasionally Daniel's vindication of the Middle Ages took him outside England:

“Erasmus, Rewcline and More brought no more wisdome into the world with all their new revived wordes then we finde was before, it bred nor a profunder Divine than saint *Thomas*, a greater Lawyer than *Bartolus*, a more accute Logician than *Scotus*.”.

But then he switched again to his major concern:

“Let us go no further, but looke upon the wonderfull Architecture of this state of England, and see whether they were deformed times, that could give it such a forme [...]”.

There is no need to go on, since Daniel's text is well known - by far the best known in the whole debate on rhyme. Daniel's vindication of those “deformed times”—the Middle Ages—has impressed all interpreters because of its sheer originality⁴⁷. But Daniel's attitude becomes less surprising if reinserted in the context I have suggested. “Shall we be so degenerate as to refuse to hear the poem of our national history?” François Bauduin had written in his *De institutione historiae universae*. “And yet, in order to understand it” he went on “we have to preserve the recollection of those who are usually labelled barbarians. Are we French, British, German, Spanish or Italian? If we want to speak about ourselves we must not ignore the history of Franks,

of Angles, of Saxons, of Goths, of Lombards.” In his *Defense of ryme* Daniel revived, from a specific English angle, the program sketched by Bauduin.

7. At the beginning of this century Daniel's *Defence of Ryme* was regarded as an anticipation of Romanticism.⁴⁸ We can easily guess the source of such an anachronistic evaluation: Daniel was anti-classic, therefore he could be regarded as modern. “Modern” is of course a slippery word, but in this case one can be more specific. The *querelle des anciens et des modernes* did not start in France, it started in England, triggered by the debate on rhyme. One of the themes in this debate was precisely the relationship between England and the Continent—between England and France, as well as, on a more symbolic level, between England and Italy. The rejection of quantitative verse based on Greek and Latin models in favour of rhymes led to a declaration of intellectual independence from the continent. “Barbarous” became a positive word, a sign of pride.

And then, Fernand Braudel once wrote, England became an island⁴⁹. Ironically, the historian who associated his name with *longue durée* was referring to a typical *événement*, albeit one with a symbolic value: the French conquest of Calais. What one might call the insularisation of England was, however, a process, not an event: a long process, involving a self-reflection which took place on many levels. As I have tried to show, the defence of rhyme played a minor, but distinctive role in it.

This is a chapter from *No Island is an Island: Four Glimpses at English Literature in a World Perspective* (Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

¹ *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by H. House, completed by G. Storey. London, 1959, p. 84 ("an essay written for the Master of Balliol (?) 1865").

² *Language*, XLII (1966), pp. 399-429 (=R. Jakobson, *Poetica e poesia*, a cura di R. Picchio. Torino, 1985, pp. 256-300).

³ Most recently by R. Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood, The Elizabethan Writing of England*. Chicago, 1992, pp. 25-40. See also G. G. Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*. Oxford, 1904, 2 vols. F. Zschech, *Die Kritik des Reims in England*. Berlin, 1917 (Berliner Beiträge zur germanischen und romanischen Philologie, Heft 50., Germ. Abteilung Nr. 37) basically depends on Smith. On a general level, see G. Agamben's insightful *La fine del poema*. Macerata, 1995.

⁴ Arber reprints, n. 23, p. 144 sg. (e 147 sui suoi precursori). See also L. V. Ryan, Roger Ascham. Stanford, 1963 (as well as Ryan's edition of *The Schoolmaster*. Ithaca, 19670; T. M. Greene, "Roger Ascham: the Perfect End of Shooting", *English Literary History*, XXXVI (1969), pp. 609-625.

⁵ For a comprehensive list see M. A. Scott, *Elizabethan Translations from the Italian*. New York, 1916 (still very useful).

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*. Oxford, 1954, p. 281.

⁷ E. H. Gombrich, *The Ideas of Progress and Their Impact on Art*. New York, 1971, p. 10, quoting Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, XIX, 8, 15; E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Age*. New York and Evanston, 1953, pp. 247-72.

⁸ Here is an example of Figliucci's verse translation from Hesiodus: "Chi per se stesso ben discorrendo risolve / Il meglio, a' gli altri va sempre com'ottimo innanzi / Buono amico è quegli, ch'obedisce a i saggi ricordi. / Ma chi né intende per sé, né intende per altri, / Ben ch'oda, o pensi, del tutto disutile parmi" (F. Figliucci, *De la filosofia morale libri dieci, sopra li dieci libri de l'Ethica d'Aristotile*. Roma, 1551, p. 18.)

⁹ G. G. Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, I, p. 153.

¹⁰ G. Fernandez Oviedo, *Historia general y natural de las Indias*, ed. J. Perez de Tudela Bueso, I, Madrid 1959, I. V, ch. 1, pp. 112-116; see also José de Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, ed. by B. G. Beddall. Valencia 1977, I. VI, ch. 28, p. 447 (both mentioned by Smith, Smith, *Elizabethan Critical Essays* I, 384.)

¹¹ A. Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts*. Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1992.

¹² J. Amyot, *Les vies des hommes illustres Grecs et Romains, comparees l'une avec l'autre par Plutarque de Chaeronee, translatees de Grec en François, à Paris, de l'imprimerie de Michel de Vascosan, M. D. LIIII* (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris: a copy on vellum, owned by Mlle de La Vallière): "Aux lecteurs": "Je veux donques laisser à part l'excellence et la dignité de la chose en soy [l'histoire], veu que non seulement elle est plus ancienne que toute autre espèce d'escripture qui onques ait esté au monde, mais aussi qu'elle a eu cours entre les hommes, avant que l'usage des lettres mesmes y fust, pource que lors les vivans laissoient à leurs successeurs la mémoire des choses passées, en chansons qu'ils faisoient apprendre par coeur de main à main à leurs enfans, ainsi que lon a pu voir de nostre temps par l'exemple de barbares habitans es terres neufves Occidentales, qui sans conserve d'aucunes lettres avoyent la cognoissance des choses advenues bien huit cent ans auparavant."

¹³ S. Fox Morzillo, *De historiae institutione. Dialogus*. Antverpiae, 1557, pp. 11r-12 r. (The relevance of this passage has been pointed to me many years ago by my former student Alessandro Taverna.)

¹⁴ à Paris, de l'imprimerie de Michel de Vascosan, demeurant rue Saint Jacques, 1557. The translator put only his initials, C. D. A.

¹⁵ [J. Wolf], *Artis historicae penus*, I. Basileae, 1579, I, pp. (the first volume of this influential anthology included Fox Morzillo, *De historiae institutione*). See D. R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship. Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance*. New York and London, 1970, pp. 116-148; M. Turchetti, *Concordia o tolleranza? François Bauduin (1520-1573) e i "moyenneurs"*. Genève, 1984.)

¹⁶ Ph. Sidney, *Correspondence*, ed. A. Feuillerat. Cambridge, 1923 (?), pp. 130-133, especially p. 131.

¹⁷ [J. Wolf], *Artis historicae penus*, I. Basileae, 1579, p. 665: "Posteaquam historia factum aliquod descriperit cum suis circumstantiis, etsi eam liberali custodia septam, vellem cingeret omnium literarum eruditus quidam chorus: tamen rhetores novos ad id, quod recitatum erit, exaggerandum non invitabo. Nam amplificationes atque excursions ociosorum hominum, qui, ut poeta et fictores, quidlibet audendi atque fingendi potestatem sibi arrogant, non minus quam ineptas allegorias ineptorum concionatorum, praecidendas esse sentio". On Horace's dictum see A. Chastel, "Le Dictum Horatii quidlibet audendi potestas et les artistes (XIIIe-XVIe siècles)", in *Fables formes figures*, I. Paris, 1978, pp. 363-76.

¹⁸ M. Turchetti, *Concordia*, pp. 209-210 and passim.

¹⁹ [J. Wolf], *Artis historicae penus*..., pp. 648-649: "et quod Germanis (ut de aliis nunc non loquar) olim accidit, multis populis accidisse. Corn. Tacitus ait: veteres Germani ignorasse quidem secreta litterarum, sed antiquis carminibus usos esse, fuisseque hoc unum apud eos memoriae et annalium genus. Unde et lib. I loquens de Arminio: Canitur (inquit) adhuc barbaras adhuc gentes, Graecorum annalibus ignotas. Quid igitur tandem? Eginhardus, bonus profecto eius rei, quam dicere nunc volo, testis, de suo Carlo Magno: Barbara (inquit) et antiquissima carmina, quibus veterum regum actus et bellica caneantur, scripsit memoriaeque mandavit. Recitabo alterum non minus nobile exemplum. In novis, hoc est, nuper repertis Indiae Occidentalis insulis, tam dicuntur esse homines illiterati, et literarum tamen, tanquam Deorum cultores, ut cum audirent nostros ibi Christianos alioqui absentes, sic inter sese per epistolas colloqui, ut alter alterum intelligat, epistolas illas clausas adorant, in quibus dicebant inclusum esse aliquem divinum internuntium genium. Illi (inquam) tam illiterati homines multorum saeculorum historiam suae gentis memoriamque conservarunt partim quibusdam temere effectis symbolis, ut Aegyptii notis Hieroglyphicis, partim suis cantionibus, quas alii alios docent, et in suis choraeis cantillant, quales choros vocant areytos".

²⁰ A. Momigliano, "Perizonius, Niebuhr and the Character of Early Roman Tradition", *Journal of Roman Studies* (1957)=*Secondo contributo agli studi classici*. Roma 1984, pp. 69-87. On p. 70 Momigliano ascribes to Justus Lipsius the combination of Tacitus and Eginhardus, which in fact had been already suggested by Bauduin.

²¹ E. Benveniste, *Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes*. Paris, 1969 (=Il vocabolario delle istituzioni indoeuropee. Torino, 1976, tr. M. Liborio, I, pp. 64-75, particularly p. 68).

²² [J. Wolf], *Artis historicae penus*..., I, p. 623: "Et nos erimus tam degeneres, ut ne audire quidem velimus patriae historiae carmen? Caeterum id intelligere non possumus, nisi et eorum, qui barbari dicuntur, memoriam teneamus. Si Galli, vel Britanni, vel Germani, vel Hispani, vel Itali sumus, ut de nostris loqui possimus, necesse est nos Francorum, Anglorum, Saxonum, Gothorum, Langobardorum historiam non ignorare. Cumque nostri cum Saracenis et Turcis saepe congressi sint, ne nescire quidem licet Saracenicam et Turcicam".

²³ D. R. Kelley, *Foundations of Modern Historical Scholarship. Language, Law, and History in the French Renaissance*. New York and London, 1970; N. Edelman, *Attitudes of Seventeenth-Century France toward the Middle Ages*. New York, 1946.

²⁴ [G. Puttenham], *The Art of English Poesie*. London, 1589, reprint, Menston 1968, I, I, ch. V, p. 7.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 251.

²⁶ C. Ginzburg, "Montaigne, Cannibals and Grottoes", *History and Anthropology*, 6 (1993), pp. 125-155, especially pp. 146-148.

²⁷ G. Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesie*, pp. 209-210. See D. Hay, "Italy and Barbarian Europe" in E. F. Jacob (ed.), *Italian Renaissance Studies. A Tribute to the late Cecilia M. Ady*. London, 1960, pp. 48-68.

²⁸ E. Norden, *Kunstprose: La prosa d'arte antica*, tr. B. Heinemann Campana. Roma, 1988, II, pp. 815 n. 2, 876 n.; the whole appendix on the history of rhyme is fundamental. See also L.A. Muratori, *Antiquitates Italicae*, III, Mediolani 1740, diss. XL: "De rhythmica veterum poesi et origine Italicae poeseos", coll. 683-712: "the first systematic account" (Norden, *Kunstprose*, p. 815 n. 1).

²⁹ [G. Puttenham], *The Art of English Poesie*, p. 11.

³⁰ R. Ascham, *The Scholemaster*, p. 60v.

³¹ See my paper "Montaigne, Cannibals and Grottoes". But see already Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, tr. D. W. Robertson jr. Indianapolis-New York, 1958, p. 91: "Sicut enim talaris et manicatas tunicas habere apud Romanos veteres flagitium erat, nunc autem honesto loco natis, cum tunicati sunt, non eas habere flagitium est". See also P. Ayrault, *Discours de la nature, variété et mutation des loix*, in F. Grimaudet, *Paraphrase du droit de retraict lignager, recueillie des coutumes de France...*, à Paris 1567: "Les hommes vivent en tous païs, mais non pas de la mesme viande et nourriture: aussi n'a il lieu, ou ilz ne soyent regiz et policez par loix, constitutions et coustumes, mais non pas semblables et pareilles loix ou coustumes."

³² Cfr. J. Chapelain, *Opuscules* cit. p. 222. See also J. B. Fischer von Erlach, *Entwurf einer historischen Architectur in Abbildung unterschiedener berühmten Gebäude des Altertums und fremder Völker* (1721), intr.: "Les dessinateurs y verront, que les goûts des nations ne difèrent pas moins dans l'architecture, que dans la manière de s'habiller ou d'apréter les viandes, et en les comparant les unes aux autres, ils pouront en faire un choix judicieux. Enfin ils y reconnoîtront qu'à la verité l'usage peut autoriser certaines bisarreries dans l'art de bâtir, comme sont les ornements à jour du Gothique, les voûtes d'ogives en tiers point, les tours d'Eglise, les ornements et les toits à l'Indienne, où la diversité des opinions est aussi peu sujete à la dispute, que celle des goûts." See my essay "Style as Inclusion, Style as Exclusion" in C. A. Jones and P. Galison (eds.), *Picturing Science, Producing Art*. London, 1998, pp. 27-54, especially p. 32.

³³ See the harsh comment of the editor of *Documents Illustrating Elizabethan Poetry*, by Sir Philip Sidney, George Puttenham, William Webbe, ed. by L. Magnus. London 1906, p. 128 n. 7: "The argument in this chapter is not convincing. If rhyme is merely a savage device for mnemonic convenience in the absence of writing, comparable to the convenience of nakedness versus clothes, the defence of rhyme falls to the ground. Superior antiquity is not necessarily a superior art."

³⁴ [G. Puttenham], *The Art of English Poesie*, p. 257.

³⁵ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp, Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*. Oxford, 1953 (1974), pp. 273-274.

³⁶ F. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. Chicago, 1964, pp. 275-290.

³⁷ [G. Puttenham], *The Art of English Poesie*, pp. 218-249.

³⁸ S. A. Tannenbaum, *Samuel Daniel, a Concise Bibliography*. New York, 1942; M. MacKisack, "Samuel Daniel as Historian", *The Review of English Studies*, XXIII (1947), pp. 226-243; C. Seronsy, *Samuel Daniel*. New York 1967; P. Spriet, *Samuel Daniel (1563-16129). Sa vie—son oeuvre*, 1968; J. L. Harner, *Samuel Daniel and Michael Drayton, a Reference Guide*. Boston Mass., 1980.

³⁹ See W. R. Davis (ed.), *The Works of Thomas Campion*. London, 1969, pp. 287-317; G. Saintsbury, *A History of English Criticism*. Edinburgh-London, 1911, repr. 1962, pp. 39 ff., 70 ff.; E. Lowbury, T. Salter, A. Young, *Thomas Campion. Poet, Composer, Physician*. London, 1970, especially pp. 76-89; W. R. Davis, *Thomas Campion*. Boston, 1987, pp. 104-113.

⁴⁰ S. Daniel, *A Panegyrike with a Defence of Ryme* [1603]. Menston, 1969, c. G6v. On the "book of nature" see E. Curtius, *European Literature*, pp. 319-26.

⁴¹ S. Daniel, *A Panegyrike*, "The Grecians held all other nations barbarous but themselves, yet Pirrhus when he saw the well ordered marching of the Romanes, which made them se their presumptuous error, could say it was no barbarous maner of proceeding": see J. I. M. Stewart, "Montaigne's *Essays* and *A Defence of Ryme*", *Review of English Studies*, IX (1933), pp. 311-12. The relevance of this passage has been missed by recent interpreters: in R. Helgerson's account of the Elizabethan debate on rhyme (*Forms of Nationhood. The Elizabethan Writing of England*. Chicago, 1992, pp. 25-40) Montaigne is not mentioned. See on the contrary Spriet, *Samuel Daniel*.

⁴² M. de Montaigne, *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses... The First Booke*. London, 1603.

⁴³ Cfr> J. Feit, *Shakspeare and Montaigne. An Endeavour to Explain the Tendency of Hamlet from Allusions to Contemporary Works*. London, 1884, pp. 61 -62.

⁴⁴ R. Romeo, *Le scoperte americane nella coscienza italiana del Cinquecento*. Napoli, 1971.

⁴⁵ C. Dionisotti, *Europe in Sixteenth-Century Italian Literature*. Oxford, 1971 (The Tylorian Lecture delivered February 1971), pp. 18-19.

⁴⁶ See F. A. Yates, *John Florio*. Cambridge, 1934, p. 89. On Florio's translation see also F. O. Matthiessen, *Translation: An Elizabethan Art*. Cambridge, 1931, pp. 103-168.

⁴⁷ S. Daniel, *Poems and a Defence of Ryme*, ed. by A. C. Sprague. Chicago and London, 1930, repr. 1972, p. xxxv, recalls a passage from Daniel's *History* (iv, 213 on the "stately structures" erected in the twelfth century by Roger, Bishop of Sarum, "of whose magnificence and spacious minde' they were 'memorialls left in notes of stone."

⁴⁸ G. Saintsbury, *A History of English Criticism*. Edinburgh-London, 1911, repr. 1962, pp. 39 ff., 70 ff.

⁴⁹ F. Braudel, *Civilisation matérielle, économie et capitalisme, XVe-XVIIIe siècles*, t. 3: *Les Temps du monde*. Paris, 1979, p. 302.