

Introduction

While decrying the “bloody *Tenent of Persecution* for cause of *Conscience*,” Roger Williams, arguably having ignited the debate in the 1640s, delineated the outer limits of toleration in protesting, “I have desired to labour in *Europe*, in *America*, with *English*, with *Barbarians*, yea, and also I have longed after some trading with the *Jewes* themselves . . . yet . . . I cannot see but that the first and present great *Designe* of the *Lord Jesus* is to destroy the *Papacy*.” In Williams’s prophecy of the unfolding of the “great *Designe*,” culminating in the apocalyptic destruction of the antichrist, the “*wild, yet wise Americans*,” the European Jews, and even Catholics (as distinct from Roman Catholics or Papists) are designated as marginally tolerable.¹ When the “great *Designe*” mutated thereafter into the failed Western Design – an assertion of English sovereignty in Spanish-occupied America – Oliver Cromwell interjected his declaration of war against Spain with comparisons between English colonialists and Spanish conquistadores and with several protestations on the persecuted Amerindians’ right to liberty. The terms of toleration and accommodation served a vital function in the public discourse on international relations and on England’s “moral exceptionalism” and national sovereignty.²

The conjunctions of nationhood and toleration in an era when liberty became an animating feature of English identity formation present a compelling subject for critical inquiry. This book demonstrates how evidence from the polemical and imaginative literature intersects with imaginative and extraliterary representations of Protestant nationhood and cultural, religious, and ethnic difference. Building on the influential concepts of the imagined community (Benedict Anderson) and the Janus-faced nation (Tom Nairn), Homi Bhabha, Richard Helgerson, Claire McEachern, Adrian Hastings, David J. Baker, Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin, Andrew Hadfield, Willy Maley, Andrew Escobedo, Patrick Schwyzer, Paul Stevens, David Loewenstein, Raymond Tumbleson, and Rachel Trubowitz studied the forms of the discursively constructed nation and demonstrated

the significance of imaginative writings for interpreting the early nation.³ Given the metaphorical, discursive, and polemical nature of nationhood, literary analysis in fact emerges as a key methodology for examining the imagined community of the nation. While interrogating developmental narratives of nationhood, this book focuses on John Milton's mimetically produced nation, the religious character of which lent it a dimension extending beyond its state identity and enabled its transformation into an abstract entity independent of an institutional affiliation. For Elie Kedourie and, decades later, for Krishan Kumar, Ernest Gellner, E. J. Hobsbawm, Colin Kidd, and Anthony Giddens, the England of Milton's time is not yet nationalist because it lacks horizontal ties that "ris[e] above the ties of class, region and religion."⁴ Indeed, Benedict Anderson, in his seminal *Imagined Communities*, had described the nation as the product of a "deep horizontal comradeship."⁵ Milton, however, imagines the nation in terms of its embrace of such values as Christian liberty and tolerance, which transcend state power. At a time when state policy and secularized discourses of reason increasingly came to the fore, Milton's interventions in controversies over nationhood, civil and ecclesiastical politics, and the terms of toleration remained couched in the language of religion and liberty of conscience. While not presuming to offer a full treatment of Milton's articulations of Protestant nationhood and toleration in all their manifestations, *Milton, Toleration, and Nationhood* seeks to illustrate how a study of these conjoined subjects enriches appreciation of Milton's works, broadens understanding of the role of literature in the conceptualizing of early nationhood, and opens up possibilities for further scholarship in this field.

Milton's powerful engagements with key debates on nationhood and toleration have a considerable literary, cultural, and philosophical significance. His poetry and prose are central to this investigation because they were produced in a period when English nationalist consciousness – with its relationship to questions of rights, accommodation, integration, and certainly exclusivism – was heightened. Theologian and cultural historian of nationalism, Adrian Hastings, who extends nationhood as far back as ancient Israel, situates England's "greatest intensity" of nationalist experience in the early modern era and notably in Milton's lifetime.⁶ Literary critics and historians continue to feature Milton's writings in the most influential studies on seventeenth-century Britain's literary, political, and religious history and identity.⁷ Examinations of the Miltonic oeuvre in terms of Protestant nationhood and toleration provide an important complement to and extension of scholarship on Puritan radicalism, liberalism,

a largely secularized republicanism, and imperialism, through which Milton's identity as a nationalist has generally been interpreted.⁸ Because Milton was fully immersed in the historical moment in which nationalism became entangled with ideas and policies on toleration, a book highlighting this involvement should be a salient contribution to Milton studies and to literature on the early modern nation and pre-Lockean toleration.

This project seeks to advance knowledge about these concepts as categories of analysis in literature, cultural history, and nationalism studies. Although they locate nationhood in later centuries, historians and cultural theorists of the nation, beginning with Benedict Anderson, usefully underscore the invention of the nation and its ascribed significance rather than its natural or organic identity. Because the members of a national community are unknown to each other, nations are best understood as intellectual and cultural creations, forged or invented largely in and through language. According to this theory, nations are sustained in the minds of their citizens and of the international community. Anderson underscored the role of print culture, in such forms as literature, maps, and surveys, in inciting individuals to imagine themselves as part of a nation, the composition, coordinates, and identity of which remained provisional. In conjunction with Anderson's hypothesis, cultural historians and theorists, including Linda Colley, Anthony Smith, Ernest Gellner, and E. J. Hobsbawm, described the nation as the product of various kinds of communication, relations, and social and cultural exchanges that enabled the conception of "a national community where previously there had been only unrelated groups or individuals."⁹ The constructivist nature of nationhood and its status as artefact are central to an understanding of early modern writings on the nation at large.

In the acclaimed *Forms of Nationhood*, Richard Helgerson explained that his work involved various kinds of boundary (and border) crossing, and that only one-third of his book engages with texts "that normally belong to [his] home discipline of literary history."¹⁰ The other chapters take into their purview writings traditionally associated with the province of history – legal and cartographic tracts, for example. The present study demonstrates that the subjects of "nation" and "toleration" summon, preoccupy, and test the abilities of Milton the polemicist, the social critic, and the apologist as much as they inspire the poet. Thanks largely to the New Historicism and cultural poetics, of which Helgerson was among the pioneers, the category of literature has been expanded to accommodate poetry and prose in the widest range of canonical and popular forms. Accordingly, one can more readily argue for the literary value of

Milton's entire oeuvre and also of the writings with which he was in conversation. Indeed, the number of his interlocutors that set the stage for, and shared the stage with, Milton in his contributions to debates on toleration and nationhood was enormous. In this book alone, the cast of national and international figures ranges from the philosophers and statesmen of antiquity through to the church fathers and such key figures of the early modern era as Edmund Spenser, David Paraeus, Samuel Purchas, Hugo Grotius, Thomas Edwards, Robert Baillie, Katherine Chidley, John Goodwin, Hubert Languet, John Temple, Roger Williams, Thomas May, William Prynne, Andrew Marvell, Samuel Morland, John Lilburne, Thomas Fuller, James Harrington, Oliver Cromwell, Marchamont Nedham, Henry Spelman, Henry Vane the Younger, Peter Heylyn, Sir Robert Filmer, Gilbert Burnet, and John Locke.

Throughout the centuries, Milton's own prose and polemics in particular have fallen in and out of favour with critics, largely depending on their own literary tastes and politics. Long after the Whigs revived the revolutionary Milton and the Romantics reawakened him following the Neoclassicists' efforts to suppress the political identity of the classical poet,¹¹ mid-twentieth-century critics elevated the status of Milton's prose in reaction to the New Critics' concentration on the aesthetical value of the verse. Don M. Wolfe produced the first annotated edition of Milton's prose in the collaborative *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, published in 1953–82.¹² A. S. P. Woodhouse's *Puritanism and Liberty* helped prepare the way for that project by locating Milton as a *revolutionary* prose writer within a seventeenth-century political, intellectual, and religious climate of liberal Puritanism.¹³ His colleague and former student, Arthur Barker, thereafter raised the prose to the status of the poetry to give the former its rightful due.¹⁴ "Historicist Critics," including especially Woodhouse, Barker, William Haller, Merritt Y. Hughes, and Arnold Williams, determined that Milton's writings at large needed to be put alongside Milton's extra-aesthetic experiences and alongside research on his life, thought, and intentions.¹⁵

A little more than two decades later, Keith Stavelly commended Northrop Frye for giving Milton's prose the "high aesthetic praise" that the achievements of the left hand justly deserved, and he proceeded in his study on *The Politics of Milton's Prose Style* to demonstrate that the polemicist's writings are "a medium of imaginative expression," the scrutiny of which will generously reward the literary critic.¹⁶ The contributors to Michael Lieb and John T. Shawcross's volume, *Achievements of the Left Hand: Essays on the Prose of John Milton*, which Stavelly acknowledges,

Introduction

5

made that case equally persuasively in the previous year.¹⁷ A decade and a half later, David Loewenstein and James Grantham Turner's *Politics, Poetics, and Hermeneutics in Milton's Prose* would reiterate and develop the thesis of the literary merits of Milton's prose and of the interrelationships of verse and prose, literature and politics. In his chapter on "The Poetics of Engagement," Turner even discovered a surprising number of examples of Milton dismantling and reversing the conceptual hierarchy of poetry and prose.¹⁸

Most recently, in a direct challenge to the approaches of Barbara Lewalski and David Loewenstein – who, like most Miltonists of the current generation, align the poetry and prose – Annabel Patterson showed that Milton made a concerted effort to separate the two modes of expression.¹⁹ It is true that Milton characterizes the job of the polemicist as inferior to the work of the poet in the autobiographical digression of *The Reason of Church-Government* (CPW 1:808). This prose tract proceeds to describe the poet and his art as a divinely ordained medium of civil and spiritual regeneration that "inbreed[s] and cherish[es] in a great people the seeds of virtue and public civility" (CPW 1:816). Despite such assertions, however, Milton behaves in the *Reason of Church-Government* as though he would rather be writing in the "cool element" of prose, Gordon Campbell and Thomas N. Corns perceive.²⁰ His subjects in the treatise, including the nature of ecclesiastical polity, the tyranny of bishops, and the accommodation of sectaries, are central to his writing of the English nation and his championing of toleration, which calls forth the polemicist. Yet Milton's anti-prelatical tracts generally and his mid-career prose at large exhibit aesthetic and literary value in their heavy reliance on classical oratorical and rhetorical forms, figures, and tropes.²¹ In *Defensio Secunda* (1654), Milton congratulates himself, in the ancient Roman tradition, for the erection of an immortal "monument that will not soon pass away, to those deeds that were illustrious, that were glorious, that were almost beyond any praise" (CPW 4:685). The poet-polemicist lays the philosophical epic foundation for the ideal nation he imagines into being and for the heroic representatives thereof he celebrates and immortalizes in the art of prose. The point of this meditation on mediums is to justify the relatively equal attention given to Milton's verse and prose in a book intended for the literary reader first and foremost and the historian and political theorist secondarily.

To demonstrate the interaction between verse and prose expression within and outside of Milton's oeuvre, I have incorporated some poetic analyses in all the chapters despite the concentration on Milton's prose

treatises in the first four. In Chapter 1, for example, which studies Milton's literary ecclesiology, observations on *Lycidas* (comp. 1637) are interpolated. As announced in the addition to its prose headnote in the poem's second printing, *Lycidas*'s new occasional or topical relevance complements and completes the work undertaken by the polemicist in the 1641–42 anti-prelatical treatises. Chapter 2, which deals with discourses on reductionism and civilizing conquests in Ireland, concludes with remarks on Milton's "On the late Massacre in Piedmont," a sonnet that reproduces the shared imagery of testimonies of the massacre of Waldensians on the French-Italian border in 1655. Popular accounts of the atrocity, with which the sonnet is in dialogue, are largely derived from a collection of depositions assembled by Jean Baptiste Stoupe, the Swiss minister and acquaintance of Milton. In the later chapters of *Milton, Toleration, and Nationhood*, which examine at length all the major poems, the mutually enriching nature of verse and prose is more apparent. Chapter 5, for example, shows that Samuel Purchas's *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625) proved authoritative for Milton and informed his prose and poetry, as evidenced in his work of travel literature, *A Brief History of Moscovia*, and in the epics, which in turn also derive various geographical place names from the *Moscovia*. The final chapter in *Milton, Toleration, and Nationhood* develops a conversation between Milton's divorce tracts and his most controversial poem in terms of the question of mixed marriages, whereby the representations of international relations and of cultural, gender, and religious difference take on new historical and literary significance.

Nation and Toleration as Categories of Analysis

What is early modern nationhood? The term "nation" itself was a multi-lingual construct. Derived from the Middle English "nacioun," "nation" enters the English language by way of the Middle French term "nation," originating from the Latin *natio* meaning birth, race, and nation (from *natus*, the past participle of *nasci*, meaning to be born). In the early modern era, Thomas Thomas's Latin-English dictionary defines *natio* as "A nation, a cuntry, a people having their beginning in the cuntry where they dwell: also a sort of companie, a people."²² The terms "realm," "kingdom," "country," and "commonwealth" still appeared with greater frequency than "nation," the significance of which nevertheless continued to develop throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the same time, the concept and the term belied any single definition in

early modern discourse. The nation assumed a corporate identity based on crown, church, or land; it was conceptualized as a public space and a geographical and historical entity whose boundaries were constantly redrawn; its connotations included empire, public sphere, kingdom, commonwealth, republic, and nation-state. It remained a discursive construct that also generated new discourses.²³ A cognate of nation, “nationhood” is the condition of “being a nation; national independence or autonomy; national, ethnic, or cultural identity.”²⁴ The first example in the Oxford English Dictionary used to illustrate the definition is taken from a mid-nineteenth-century Irish ballad in which “freedom” and “nationhood” are juxtaposed.²⁵ As this book shows, however, the concept of nationhood predates the coining of the term; literature and cultural history regularly embarrass the Oxford English Dictionary.

Historical and literary evidence in this book reveals that from the early seventeenth century on, “nation” came to refer to a politically autonomous community and notably to a people with a claim to liberty. The institution of political and legal systems, the emergence of cultures of dissent, the expansion of a mercantile class, the formation and documentation of a collective historical memory reliant on symbols and myths, and the enlargement of a public sphere through the spread of various literacies and print technologies are among the numerous factors that informed the discourse, lineaments, and category of the nation. While acknowledging the impact of these developments, *Milton, Toleration, and Nationhood* foregrounds the resonant and contested issue of early modern toleration as represented especially in literary and imaginative writings.

The complex and expansive history of toleration in Europe, notably in England, has traditionally been charted in historical, religious, intellectual, and political terms. Resisting models of religious opposition and complicating both anachronistic Whig readings of a liberal English nation and the revisionist history of English intolerance, social and cultural historians have studied the politics and practices of tolerance in European religious rituals, architectural spaces, church structures, and the coexistence of diverse ethnic, religious, and cultural communities.²⁶ To such investigations of social, cultural, and religious mediation, *Milton, Toleration, and Nationhood* adds literary evidence, which likewise redefines the conditions and conjunctions of nationhood and toleration.²⁷

What is early modern toleration? Conventionally understood as the temporary forbearance of difference or the accommodation (often reluctantly) of “beliefs . . . deemed to be conscionably held,” toleration became a pivotal and decisive development in Europe.²⁸ Certainly toleration was

a contentious and divisive issue in the early modern era, one not synonymous with contemporary notions of liberalism, even though it assumed, often controversially and to varying degrees, some of the forms associated with the concept today, including principled resistance to religious persecution, divergence of belief and a plurality of churches, humanitarian sensibility, and respect for conscience. The exercise of conscience itself was understood in terms of the freedom to adhere to God's laws above all other laws; on that basis, "liberty and authority [were not] antithetical," liberty of conscience having little to do with individualism or self-sufficiency – a marked difference from Western concepts thereof today.²⁹ Appeals to conscience could fragment societies, as anti-tolerationists, who constituted the majority, regularly complained. In Milton's day, the term was often used derisively and the practice of toleration was judged as an inducement to libertinism and atheism. "There hath been much these dayes bygone concerning a general *Toleration*, and liberty of Conscience," James Hay announces in a 1655 appeal for the enforcement of religious conformity in the name of national order and political stability. "[B]y granting too large a *Toleration*, you dishonour God, and disorder the State."³⁰

An advocate of liberty of conscience, Oliver Cromwell in 1648 urged religious unity as a means of consolidating a pluralistic society: "I profess to thee [Colonel Robert "Robin" Hammond] I desire from my heart, I have prayed for it, I have waited for the day to see union and right understanding between the godly people (Scots, English, Jews, Gentiles, Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, and all)."³¹ Cromwell's promotion of the Protestant League in 1654–55 anticipated his plea for "brotherly consent and harmony"³² among warring Protestant parties. The realization of such a vision also required the management of any threats to liberty of conscience or religious union, not infrequently achieved through subjugation, reduction, or conquest. Marked by the entanglement of notions of toleration and intolerance, the Interregnum government's mission to advance English nationhood and its interests gave rise to a culture of nonconformity, anti-popery in the European theatre, the proposed readmission of the Jews in 1655, relative press freedom, hostility to English Levellers and Quakers, ruthless military campaigns against the Irish, and the considerably less popular war against the Spanish. The early conception of tolerationism within the context of Protestant unity, supremacy, and the advancement of the Reformation helps explain how the tolerationist Milton could in good conscience reconcile anti-Catholic hostility with the doctrine and discipline of the true religion.

While querying reports on the coexistence and the mutual toleration of European Protestants and Catholics, Richard Perrinchief distinguished between forbearance and toleration in observing that “whence it is evident, that the one beareth indeed with the other, but neither gives Toleration to other.”³³ The difference Perrinchief discerned is one akin to that between negative toleration – resistance to constraints or persecution and reluctant accommodation – and positive toleration, or an embrace of alterity or heterodoxy. Jurist Hugo Grotius had earlier described the difference between complete and incomplete toleration in his work of international law, *De Juri Belli ac Pacis*: “[P]ermission which is accorded by a law ... is either complete, which authorizes the doing of something with the fullest possible liberty, or incomplete, which only grants freedom from punishment among men, with the right of non-interference by another.”³⁴ Milton’s own oeuvre reveals how his thinking about and his treatment of toleration were subject to historical contingencies of various kinds and shifted from positive to negative, on which both then frequently settled. The literary evidence in this book thus regularly dismantles the Whiggish history and theory of toleration, and within that, the theory that Milton was the voice of liberty.³⁵ Certainly in his optimism about the liberty-loving nation, Milton sees toleration empathetically as an embrace of Christian principles of liberty. In confronting the backsliding, persecutory tendencies of a nation that betrayed its exceptionalism, Milton, however, condemns policies on and instances of intolerance without consistently raising toleration to a positive value. His later works oppose a religious settlement and are founded largely on a negatively formulated toleration. The narrative presented here, one that resists a teleological construction, is designed to illuminate the ways that Milton’s varying positions on the practices, violations, and poetics of toleration subtend his writing of a nation, whose elect status is correspondingly also interrogated.

Elect Nationhood?

In the history of early nationhood, peculiar status was originally less a nation-specific designation than a distinction reserved for a people bound by a common religion. England’s elect status developed before the early modern era, in a rivalry with France, whose identity was established through its papal legitimization of monarchical authority. The effort to emulate France’s dominant status involved the cultivation of a royal mystique and a “political theology” prominently featuring a providential narrative.³⁶ Interpreted in relation to an international Reformation movement, an evolving English

nationhood was distinguished by a resistance to the universal acclaims of Roman Catholicism.³⁷ In an expression of political autonomy, Henry VIII in the Tudor revolution renounced the foreign jurisdiction of the Holy Roman Empire and was declared “Supreme Head of the Church of England” by the first Act of Supremacy in 1534.³⁸ After Henry’s death, Humanist and diplomat, Sir Thomas Smith announced the transference of elect status through the succession of divinely ordained British monarchs. At a time when the kingdom was assailed by foreign foes as well as shaken sorely within, Smith judged that England was “a chosen Realme,” blessed by the transmission of divine favour to “the late King of most famous memorie, Henrie the Eight, *and* now more amply . . . [to] his most swete sonne, the Kings *Majestie*, that now reigneth.”³⁹ The consolidation of England’s national identity occurred in conjunction with the Reformation and then with Protestantism, and by 1565, unifying compulsions led to the formation of a national church, liturgy, and theology.⁴⁰ Still, even by Shakespeare’s time, only a minority subscribed to Protestant nationalism.⁴¹ Among the most influential English writers of the day, John Foxe, whom Milton would claim for England as the “Author of our Church History,” remained more an internationalist than a nationalist.⁴² Not until the 1580s is it appropriate to speak of a *Protestant* Reformation, represented by new religious beliefs and conversions to the faith, although, even so, the number of “informed godly Protestants” remained relatively small. Christopher Haigh, who offers a revisionist history of the Reformation, including a critique of the early modern advancement of religious radicalism, thus distinguishes between a Protestant nation and a nation of Protestants.⁴³

In her seminal work on the subject, Linda Gregerson sees the assertion of theological independence in the Henrician era as decisive in England’s coming of age as a nation.⁴⁴ The event, however, is double-edged, because the construction of a national identity involved pitting unifying measures against separatist origins that would also eventually splinter. First aligned with monarchical authority, as Sir Thomas Smith protests, the concept of English nationhood would come to reflect a reformed relationship. Connecting the nation with the idea of an elect people of God offered leverage to critics and opponents of the monarchy. Even so, contemporary scholarship on the nation tends to chart an evolutionary march toward nationalism through John Foxe to John Aylmer, to the Golden Speech of Elizabeth I, and eventually to Milton’s “chauvinist rhetoric.”⁴⁵ Protestant internationalism and English nationalism in conjunction with the universal and exclusive designations of election readily ran together. Indeed, nationhood was relational, mercurial, internally fractured, and compatible