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Donne's Catholicism and the Innovation of the Modern Nation State

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Two of the most powerful accounts of the influence of Donne's Catholicism on his life and work are those of John Carey in 1981 and Dennis Flynn more recently in 1995.[1] For both scholars growing up Catholic in a Protestant state is the defining experience of the poet's life. For Carey, Donne is an apostate, a man who betrayed his upbringing and the very real sufferings of his recusant family for the sake of ambition. Carey begins his influential work with a series of uncompromising assertions: "The first thing to remember about Donne is that he was a Catholic; the second, that he betrayed his Faith" (15); "the two vital factors in his career" were "his desertion of the Roman Catholic Church and his ambition" (14). What Carey means by ambition is, in fact, quite complex, but over and again, the force of his argument is diminished by his emphasis on Donne's egotism and aggressive careerism and by his own weakness for caricature. Throughout Carey's book, Donne appears calculating, cadging, soliciting, touching up, generally prostituting his talent: "he was not very particular about the path he took to success, or about the character of those he received assistance from" (88). For Flynn, what moves Donne appears at first to be understood in equally personal terms. For Flynn, the key is not apostasy and ambition but their antitheses—continuity and honor. In something of a *tour de force*, he demonstrates how the 1591 portrait of Donne at the age of 18—the portrait whose original may have been a miniature by Nicholas

[1]John Carey, *John Donne: Life, Mind and Art* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981); and Dennis Flynn, *John Donne and the Ancient Catholic Nobility* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995).

Hilliard—gestures towards the poet's identity as an aristocratic Catholic cavalier or swordsman. The Welsh coat of arms and the subject's hand on the hilt of his sword, the plain black doublet and huge cruciform ear ring, the constant gaze and Spanish motto, *Antes muerto que mudado*—"Sooner dead than changed"—all suggest Donne's deliberate emulation of a particular type—"the gentleman volunteer or captain, often Welsh or Catholic, or both" (4).[2] "For such aristocratic swordsmen," Flynn explains, "the religious and political differences over which the nation warred and was transformed often seemed secondary to 'honor,' a dim sense of ancestral tradition, clans, and princes symbolized in the forms of heraldry. These men seemed oblivious to the fact such vestiges of feudalism were doomed by the innovation of the nation state" (4). For Flynn, then, to the extent that Donne is moved by this sense of honor, however displaced by quotidian circumstance, Donne remains in some substantial sense a Catholic. Donne's link to the ancient Catholic nobility of England, to such families as the Howards, Percys, and Stanleys, he argues, "was a matter of honor that remained a presence throughout his life, part of his family's Catholic heritage" (5).

The most interesting difference between Carey and Flynn is not the obvious one, the central opposition between self-serving ambition and self-sacrificing honor, but the very different degrees to which they openly or explicitly understand the personal in terms of the political, the private in terms of the public. Carey's emphasis on Donne's ambition implies a much stronger sense than Flynn's account does that individual or personal motivation may be understood independently of a society's larger processes of agency; for Flynn's patient historicization of Donne's honor insists that the poet's motivation has to be understood within the larger context of the early modern crisis of aristocracy. This difference is best explained as an effect of evolving critical practice. Carey is writing before what we

[2]The idealism of the motto is predictably ironized by Carey: "It is a quotation from Montemayor's *Diana*, representing the words Diana wrote in the sand when pledging her love to Sirenus, and the lines that follow call its dependability into question ... (Look what love ordains. It makes you believe things said by women and written in the sand.) The motto's firmness dissolves. We're no longer sure what to make of it; and Donne stares out enigmatically from his portrait, watching us flounder" (167-68).

might call the social or political turn in literary studies; Flynn long after it has become normal science. This social or political turn of the early eighties is routinely associated with the triumph of poststructuralism, but twenty years on this seems inaccurate. New historicism, for instance, now seems much more like a symptom than a cause of the political turn in criticism, and indeed, as the case of Paul de Man demonstrates, this turn had a devastating effect on the fortunes of deconstruction. What was once viewed as the principal instrument of political criticism now appears to have been its most spectacular victim. As a result, there now seems something irredeemably self-indulgent or mannerist about Derrida musing brilliantly on the word *apartheid* while the enormity of the horror unfolding on the streets of Soweto cried out for historically specific analysis,[3] or Jean-Francois Lyotard passing off *The Postmodern Condition* as a "Report on Knowledge" for the Quebec government when, on his own later admission, he knew nothing about education in Canada or science and technology in general.[4] The social or political turn is important in this case, then, not because it implies a postmodern approach to Donne, but because it suggests how Carey's sense of Donne's personal ambition may be re-stated and its social complexity recuperated. To some extent, of course, this is what Arthur Marotti was doing when he placed Carey's ambitious Donne in the context of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century literary manuscript production and transmission: Marotti's achievement was that he was able to show how so much of what appeared to be egotism or personal

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[3]Cf. the critique of Jacques Derrida, "Racism's Last Word," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 290-99, by Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon, "No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida's "Le Dernier Mot du Racisme," *Critical Inquiry* 13(1986): 140-54. See also Rosemary Jolly, "Rehearsals of Liberation: Contemporary Postcolonial Discourse and the New South Africa," *PMLA* 110 (1995): 17-29.

[4]Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979; rpt. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984). As Lyotard admitted in a 1987 interview, the book's value as a contribution to knowledge is limited: "I made up stories, I referred to a quantity of books I'd never read, apparently it impressed people, it's all a bit of parody . . . It's simply the worst of my books, they're almost all bad, but that one's the worst" (qtd. in Perry Anderson, *The Origins of Postmodernity* [London: Verso, 1998], p. 26).

expression in Donne was in fact social invention.[5] What I want to do in this paper is suggest something of the extent to which those acts of social invention might be related to the innovation of the modern nation state. To be specific, I want to suggest that when the views of Carey and Flynn are refracted through our increasingly revised understanding of the nation, their perceptions may not appear to be so violently antithetical after all. In order to do this it is necessary to say something briefly about the recent rise of the nation as a subject of literary study and the somewhat belated apprehension of its positives.

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Those positives and growing up Catholic in a Protestant state come close to home. Growing up Catholic in the Wales of the 1950s was, however, not exactly dangerous. The intense hostility to 19th-century Catholic immigration from southern Ireland had long since subsided and Cardiff was not Belfast. There were, however, both material circumstances, like separate schools, and innumerable other, odd reminders that argued difference: my parents' memories of job discrimination before the war, the defiant singing of "Faith of our Fathers . . . we will be true to thee till death," wincing at the way Protestants added the power and glory clause to the "Our Father," waiting up till midnight on Fridays to eat bacon sandwiches, refusing to burn a guy on our bonfire on November 5th, then rushing over to the Protestant Evanses to see their guy go up in a great whoosh of flames, taking enormous pride in the celebrity of Catholic novelists like Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene, compiling lists of great British Catholic writers in which we seemed to do quite well up to 1536. Growing up Catholic in post-war Britain provided one with an identity only marginally at odds with mainstream culture and not at all with

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[5]Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1986): "Both the general and the specific milieus of the verse determined Donne's choice of literary forms, modes, conventions, and idioms, his decisions to observe and / or subvert decorum . . . his adoption of styles of address and of self-representation, and his exploitation, within the constraints they imposed, of contextual resources . . . . Donne's poems were products less of the study than of a series of social relationships spread over a number of years" (23-24).

the state. The Catholic schools we went to were funded by the state, the doctors who treated us were paid by the National Health Service, the fuel that heated our council houses was provided at controlled rates by the National Coal Board, and most important, our ambitions and aspirations for advancement were encouraged by the 1944 National Education Act. These material advantages were understood as an integral part of Britain's national story, a partial realization of the dream of the New Jerusalem after the war. The great British historian, A. J. P. Taylor, caught the mood of those days:

> Imperial greatness was on the way out; the welfare state was on the way in. The British empire declined; the condition of the people improved. Few now sang "Land of Hope and Glory." Few even sang "England Arise." England had risen all the same.[6]

This was a story we heard everywhere, on the radio, in the movies, newspapers, and books; most important, it was a story which it was impossible to believe was not ours. It was a story that made sense of our lives; it took my family's hardships and wartime sufferings and gave them a purpose. The coronation of the Queen in 1953 and the advent of the New Elizabethan Age was a public fantasy in which we took enormous pleasure, and none of its allusions to the triumph of Protestantism did anything to inhibit our sense of belonging. Nothing crystallized the relative insignificance of growing up Catholic in mainland Britain more powerfully than my service as an Army officer in Ulster in the mid-seventies. Pleading with an angry Catholic crowd on the Ormeau Road, "Look," I insisted, "I'm a Catholic just like you." The response was immediate. "No, you're not—you're a fucking soldier." They were right, of course. My identity as a Catholic paled before my sense of being a soldier, an officer, British, and, however naive it may now seem, determined to keep the peace. To understand how a working-class Catholic might feel this way, it is necessary to understand something of the enabling power of the nation—a power,

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[6]A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (1965; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 727. On Taylor's magisterial closing paragraph, see David Cannadine, *History in Our Time* (1998; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), pp. 286-87.

it needs to be said, that had clearly never been fully available to the Catholics of Northern Ireland. And that enabling power brings us to the importance of Benedict Anderson.

From the end of the war to the early eighties there is surprisingly little written on nations and nationalism in the social sciences and almost nothing in literary studies. John Hall, in a recent collection of essays called *The State of the Nation*, puts it this way, "generalized intellectual attention turned to nationalism only in the 1980s—interestingly and puzzlingly slightly before the break-up of the last Eurasian empire [the Soviet Union] made nationalism a central topic of concern."[7] In the early eighties, the field, such as it was, was dominated by the modernization theory of Ernest Gellner.[8] At the heart of Gellner's suggestive theory is the argument that nationalism was a function of modern industrial societies' need for their populations to be homogenous, that is, uniform in education, direct in communication, and flexible in work skills—"Every man a clerk" (*Thought and Change* 160). This insight was made much more potent by the emphases that Benedict Anderson introduced in his 1983 book *Imagined Communities*.[9] There the advent of Gellner's homogeneity is moved back to the sixteenth century and understood not so much as something imposed from above as imagined from within. The key is not industrialization but print capitalism and the community that becomes the nation is perceived as imagining, representing, effectively *writing itself* through the medium of print. This emphasis on communities writing themselves, on nations being "conceived in language, not blood" (145), opened the field to literary critics and explains the titles of such important works as Richard Helgerson's

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[7]John A. Hall, ed. *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1998), p. 1.

[8]See Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1964), esp. pp. 147-78, and *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983). For the relation between the theories of Gellner and Benedict Anderson, see Charles Taylor's "Nationalism and Modernity," in Hall, pp. 191-218. See also, E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990) and Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1992).

[9]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983; revised ed. London: Verso, 1991).

Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England (1992) or more recently David Norbrook's *Writing the English Republic* (1999).[10] But, as Helgerson and Norbrook were well aware, what makes Anderson's theory so persuasive is not simply the idea that nations write themselves, but that print enables the nation's individual members *to imagine each other directly* as opposed *to knowing of each other indirectly* through some mediating institution or social formation. The bonds of community shift from the local or institutional to the national. As an example of what he means, Anderson directs our attention to our own contemporary practice of reading the morning newspaper: "The significance of this mass ceremony is paradoxical," he says, for, on the one hand, "it is performed in silent privacy," while on the other, "each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated by thousands of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose [individual] identity he has not the slightest notion" (35). Gellner's functional homogeneity is thus transformed into a much more vital conception of direct access, a conception that since it involves writing as much as reading, valorizes individual agency in innumerable acts of communal imagining. To the extent that print in the early modern period produces this effect of direct access, to the extent that it comes to constitute "a public sphere," a forum for the discussion of public issues in which no one is necessarily privileged by their membership of an institutional elite, it both democratizes and, despite recurring fears of a descent into Babel, reinforces the community's sense of national identity.[11] As traditional corporate communities are replaced by modern nation states, the constituent

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[10]Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992); and David Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999).

[11]On the public sphere, see Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989). For the influence of Habermas in 17th-century literary studies, see such works as Sharon Achinstein, *Milton and the Revolutionary Reader* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994); Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England 1640-1660* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1994); and Norbrook, *Writing the English Republic*.

members of those polities cease to be tied by the old hierarchical bonds of estate, family, religion and become citizens, abstract individuals, bound together directly in simultaneous acts of imagining, imagining each other and the national story that articulates who they are over time. It is this extraordinary sense of a continuity that valorizes individual agency that ultimately explains the enabling power of the modern nation. In Anderson, for the first time since the trauma of the world wars, we had a theory of nationalism that did not either mystify national feeling or simply dismiss it as some kind of disease or state-induced mass hysteria—we had a theory that suggested there might be something considerably more substantial to *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* than Wilfrid Owen's old lie. In his opening account of cenotaphs and our reverence for the war dead, Anderson comes close to explaining how national feeling might rival religious feeling. Like religion itself, the modern nation to the extent that it incorporates individual agency into a communal narrative is able to transform "fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning" (11), to take everyday life and the arbitrariness of death and give them a purpose. For Anderson, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are "early modern" precisely because they witness the point at which religion begins to lose its monopoly in producing this sense of continuity.[12] My argument is that this is immediately relevant, though not in any

[12]The desire of scholars like Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997) or Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature and National Identity 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) to contest the "modernizing" theories of Gellner and Anderson and locate the emergence of English national identity in the thirteenth century seems to miss the point. What is at issue is not the emergence of some general awareness among the literate or "clerks" of being ethnically English, but the innovation of a state in which Englishness or Britishness pervades all aspects of life and becomes the overriding criterion for communal identity—to quote Gellner above, "every man a clerk." To the extent that every man or woman becomes a "clerk" the new national state comes to define itself in terms of the liberty or direct access that facilitates the most powerful form of individualism. For an overview of this debate, see Bernard O'Leary, "Ernest Gellner's Diagnoses of Nationalism," in Hall, pp. 40-88.

simple way, to the case of Donne's Catholicism—to understand this, we might begin by comparing Donne with Milton.

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Both Donne and Milton were born in London's Bread Street and grew up in the city that would, within ten years of Donne's death, precipitate the English revolution. Donne's father was an ironmonger; Milton's a scrivener. Their poetry is full of the sights and sounds of bourgeois London. While Milton's middle-class orientation is seamless, Donne's is complicated by his Catholic upbringing and, as Dennis Flynn has argued, by his mother's family's connections to Catholic families, in Donne's words, "of farre larger extent and greater branches."[13] As one might expect, no one articulates the enabling effects of the shift from traditional corporate community to nation more forcefully than the middle-class Londoner Milton. In Milton, there is a remarkable consonance between religious feeling and national feeling—even after the experience of defeat they are not easily separable. The same is not true of Donne. Indeed, what makes Donne so interesting is precisely the conflictedness of his relation to the political and cultural consequences of the emergence of the modern nation state. Consider the differences between Milton's 1644 *Areopagitica* and Donne's 1610 *Pseudo-Martyr*.

In *Areopagitica*, Milton emphasizes both the direct access and individual agency made possible through the medium of print. He imagines himself as a private citizen directly addressing the Parliament in whom the sovereignty of the nation rests. The English nation is most true to itself, he argues, when it fosters and protects the solitary Abdiel-like voice of the private citizen: while it is impossible "that no grievance should arise in the Commonwealth," he says, "the utmost bound of civil liberty [is] attained" when the state lends a sympathetic ear and the complaints of the private orator "are

[13]John Donne, *Pseudo-Martyr*, ed. Anthony Raspa (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's Univ. Press, 1993), p. 8.

freely heard, deeply considered, and speedily reformed."[14] He is confident that as he writes his speech acts are being heard and replicated simultaneously throughout the imagined community by thousands of his countrymen. And that they are speaks eloquently to the credit of a government that understands the principle of direct access:

> that then the people [he explains], or the greater part, more than at other times, wholly taken up with the study of highest and most important matters to be reformed, should be disputing, reasoning, reading, inventing, discoursing, even to a rarity and admiration, things not before discoursed or written of, argues . . . a singular goodwill, contentedness, and confidence [on their part] in your prudent foresight and safe government, Lords and Commons (744).

He rejects the notion that the individualism this public debate encourages is an indication of weakness. In the end, he says, we "shall laugh . . . at those malicious applauders of our differences" (744). For, the truth is that in our differences, our sects and schisms, we are become a nation of prophets—we *are* "united into continuity" (744). In his emphasis on the way the nation enables individual agency Milton creates England in the image of his own desire for agency. The England of *Areopagitica* is clearly a projection of John Milton, Englishman, as he feels himself free to write his pamphlet—"a nation not slow and dull, but of quick, ingenious, and piercing spirit, acute to invent, subtle and sinewy to discourse, not beneath the reach of any point the highest that human capacity can soar to" (742). In *Areopagitica*, we hear the unmistakable voice of modernity.[15]

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[14]John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis: Odyssey, 1957), p. 718. Milton's poetry and prose is quoted from this edition.

[15]On Milton's nationalism, see Lawrence Lipking, "The Genius of the Shore: Lycidas, Adamastor, and the Poetics of Nationalism," *PMLA* 111 (1996): 205-21, and Paul Stevens, "Milton's Janus-Faced Nationalism: Subject, Soliloquy, and the Modern Nation State," *JEGP* 100 (2001): 247-68, and "Milton's 'Renunciation' of Cromwell: The Problem of Raleigh's *Cabinet-Council*," *Modern Philology* 98 (2001): 363-92.

Like *Areopagitica*, *Pseudo-Martyr* is a public speech act by a private person. It has an immediate political purpose in seeking to restore the health of the commonwealth. While Milton wrote his pamphlet, as he says later on in 1654, "to deliver the press from the restraints with which it was encumbered"(*Second Defense* 831) and so allow the national community to realize itself, Donne writes his book-length polemic to deliver Catholics from the restraints of the Papacy and so allow them to enter fully into the life of the same national community. As he says of Catholics in *Satyre II*, "their state," that is, their condition or state within a state, "Is [now] poor, disarmed . . . not worth hate" (9-10).[16] He writes specifically to persuade his former co-religionists that Catholics may take the Oath of Allegiance to their Protestant king without compromising the substance of their faith. There, with their common concern for the health of the commonwealth, the similarities between the two works would seem to end. There is none of Milton's overt idealization of print, direct access or individual agency in *Pseudo-Martyr*, and most important, Donne writes for the king not for himself. Donne is acutely aware of this and in addressing the sovereign source of power in the state, he expresses considerable ambivalence about the leveling effects of print:

> Of my boldnesse in this addresse [he says], I most humbly beseech your Majestie, to admit this excuse, that having observed, how much your Majestie had vouchsafed to descend into a conversation with your Subjects, by way of your Bookes, I also conceiv'd an ambition, of ascending to your presence, by the same way (4).

The purpose of this bold ambition, Donne immediately makes clear, is not the "free and open encounter" of *Areopagitica* (746), but the wisdom of Solomon. Donne hopes that by ascending to the king's presence, he may participate in

> their happinesse, of whome, that saying of the Queene of *Sheba*, may be usurp'd: Happie are thy men, and happie

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[16]Donne's poetry is quoted from John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. M. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971).

> those thy Servants, which stand before thee alwayes, and heare thy wisedome (4).

This is the kind of flattery that Carey routinely ridicules. But its function as a speech act is extremely complex. Donne knows that the king's own print defense of the Oath of Allegiance, the *Triplici Nodo* of 1607, has been derided and cleverly satirized by Jesuits like Robert Persons; he also knows that William Barlow's recent defense of the king has been a disaster—a "Book full of falsifications in words, and in sense," Donne says to Sir Henry Goodyer, a book that relinquishes or deserts the king "in many points of defence."[17] He knows that he has to defend the king without "relinquishing" him or humiliating him by usurping his authority. The dedication is then not so much a gratuitous act of flattery as a carefully crafted gesture of what Lynne Magnusson would call positive, then negative politeness. It assumes alliance only to deny any presumption of equality.[18] To the extent that a reader and writer as experienced as King James would have understood this, to the extent that he and Donne inhabited a world that would have appreciated and encouraged the care of this rhetorical maneuver, the dedication is precisely what I mean by an act of social invention. The disquieting effects not only of the subject allying himself with but of overdoing the sovereign in print are allayed, pre-empted, and to some extent at least contained in a sophisticated trope of deference.

The trope has two parts to it. First, the reference to Solomon invokes the central theme of the Bible's wisdom literature—that knowledge proceeds hierarchically downwards from father to son, king

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[17]John Donne, *Selected Prose*, chosen by Evelyn Simpson, ed. Helen Gardner and Timothy Healy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), p. 137.

[18]Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), esp. pp. 19-27: "While positive politeness asserts or suggests identification between participants, negative politeness puts distance between participants through strategies of conveying the speaker's efforts to avoid assumptions about the hearer's condition or volition, to avoid coercion, to communicate the wish not to impinge, or to impersonalize the threat. Positive politeness is basically a rhetoric of identification. Negative politeness is basically a rhetoric of dissociation" (21).

to subject, God to men: as Yahweh admonishes the upstart Job, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2), or as Wisdom explains to the readers of Solomon's proverbs: "My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee .... Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God" (Proverbs 2:1-5). Second, the reference alludes directly to 1 Kings 10 where the Queen of Sheba acknowledges that reports have consistently underrated the king's wisdom—"the half was not told me," she says (1 Kings 10:7). Most significant in the context of Donne's politeness strategy is the use of the term "usurp'd"—the implication being that the only monarch who will be overdone, subverted, or usurped in this text is Sheba. The locution is, however, double-edged. It functions like a classical *recusatio*: Donne is explicitly, politely denying an ability or potency that is not only self-evident but *actually* required. What soon becomes apparent in the text of *Pseudo-Martyr* is the presence of an individual every bit as aware of and anxious to exploit his talent as Milton. And in this what we witness, I want to argue, is not something as simple as Carey's time-serving ambition, but an indication of the individualism driving English middle-class culture towards the nationalism we eventually see in Milton.

For all its distrust of direct access, its deference to the king and ambivalence about print, *Pseudo-Martyr* is a nationalist text—the centerpiece of its argument is the independence of England, that the Papacy has no temporal jurisdiction over the nation. Though it is difficult to imagine Milton even in the persona of the speaker in Donne's *Elegie IV* dismissing England as an island in which we are imprisoned and "Where cattle only, and diverse dogs are bred" (47-48), for Donne in *Pseudo-Martyr* England is a rock. It is the island of England not the "sea" of Peter that is the true rock, the rock on which Christ will build his church, the liberating ground of our being: "the Rocke was here," says Donne to his Jesuit adversaries, "and all the stormes and tempests proceeded from you, when from you came the thunders and lightnings of Excommunications" (25). The critical point is that the Papacy has no temporal jurisdiction over England as Sir Edward Coke and the nation's rock-like laws make clear. By persuading Catholics that it has, by turning this "venemous doctrine" into a "matter of faith" (19), Donne argues, it has precipitated a series

of false martyrdoms. It has made England a spiritual shambles of Catholic souls by corrupt doctrines and a temporal shambles "of your bodies, by selling you for nothing, and thrusting you upon the Civill sword, which is a sinne to sheath, when the Law commaunds to draw it, in so dangerous cases of polluting the Land" (18). What provokes the telltale Leviticus rhetoric of early modern English nationalism is over-obedience.[19] The problem with Papists, as Donne explains to his friend Goodyer five years later, is that they are "over-obedient" (April 1615; *Selected Prose* 146).

It is true that in an earlier letter to Goodyer Donne had conceded that both sides in the dispute over the Oath of Allegiance had a case: "I think truly there is a perplexity (as farre as I see yet) and both sides may be in justice, and innocence" (1609; *Selected Prose* 136). But the sincerity of Donne's argument against the Catholic side in *Pseudo-Martyr* can be gauged by the degree to which it is self-reflexive. England's liberation from the temporal jurisdiction of the Papacy allegorizes his own liberation from over-obedience. In order to free himself from the Roman religion, he says, he had

> to wrastle both against the examples and against the reasons, by which some hold was taken; and some anticipations early layde upon my conscience, both by Persons who by nature had a power and superiority over my will, and others who by their learning and good life, seem'd to me justly to claime an interest for the guiding, and rectifying of mine understanding in these matters (13).

Having broken this hold, over and again he ridicules the over-obedience of "dull cloistered Monkes," of novices who at the bidding of St. Francis "set plants, with head downward," of priests who in order to escape the attention of the women who tempt them anoint themselves with their own excrement, of Jesuits who by their absolute

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[19]On the nationalist function of Leviticus rhetoric, see Paul Stevens, "'Leviticus Thinking' and the Rhetoric of Early Modern Colonialism," *Criticism* 35 (1993): 441-61, "Milton and the New World: Custom, Relativism, and the Discipline of Shame," in *Milton and the Imperial Vision*, ed. Balachandra Rajan and Elizabeth Sauer (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 90-111, and "Milton's Janus-Faced Nationalism," esp. pp. 259-64.

obedience to the Pope make themselves enemies to the stability of any secular state. According to Carey, all this merely betrays the arrogance of an intellectual, but such an appeal to personal temperament here seems facile. In his rejection of over-obedience as it obstructs both his own and England's prosperity, Donne anticipates Milton's antipathy to custom as it obstructs both his own and England's national self-realization. Over-obedience would condemn us to servitude just as custom would "cry down the industry of free reasoning" and sew up "the womb of teeming truth" (*The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* [1644 ed.] 697). The most compelling evidence of this political continuity is in Donne's 1609 letter to Goodyer, where he stumbles on the republican direction of his own reasoning—that there is not much difference between opposing the supremacy of Popes and arguing against the prerogative of kings: since kings are "the onely judges of their prerogative," he wonders, "why may not Roman bishops . . . be good witnesses of their own supremacie?" (*Selected Prose* 136). Exactly, Milton might have said, the grounds for the authority of kings are as unstable as are those for the supremacy of Popes.

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Let me now return more directly to Carey and Flynn. If we emphasize the political and cultural complexity of what Carey means by ambition, if we re-state it as the social energy of an individual agency both facilitated by and facilitating the emergence of the nation state, then the venal, self-serving Donne turns into the much more persuasive outline of a modern Donne. There is a degree to which Carey knows this—his own documentation of Donne's intellectual acuity, self-confidence, and sheer industry suggests that Donne's ambition is something more significant than the personal characteristic he claims it is. Carey's Donne appears everywhere urging work. In sermon after sermon, he despises "idle and unprofitable persons; persons of no use to the Church, or to the State."[20] He extols the Virginia colony because it "shall sweep your

[20]30 April 1626; *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1953-62), VII:149.

streets, and wash your dores, from idle persons, and the children of idle persons, and imploy them" (13 November 1622, IV:272). In his 1990 Oxford Standard Authors edition of Donne, Carey subtitles two such passages as these "Get a Job"—the allusion is to one of Margaret Thatcher's cabinet ministers, Norman Tebbit, whose advice to the unemployed was "Get on your bike and get a job."[21] The allusion contemptuously but accurately identifies a continuity between Donne's ambition and the work ethic which in the early modern period is epitomized in the Parable of the Talents and its relation to individual vocation: "every man should embrace a Calling, and walk therein" says Donne, "they who do not so, pervert Gods order" (30 April 1626, VII:149). What is derogated in Carey is idealized in Donne. "God never meant less than labor to any man" (29 February 1628; VIII:176), he says, and in *Satyre III*, he makes it clear that it is not obedience or custom but unmediated individual labor that will find truth:

> On a huge hill,
> Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
> Reach her, about must, and about must go;
> And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so;
> Yet strive so . . . . (79-83)

This extraordinary emphasis on individual effort leads to moments of profound impatience with hierarchy and mediation. As he explains to Goodyer, the problem with Catholicism is not only over-obedience but, with considerable irony for the careful author of *Pseudo-Martyr*, too little direct access: he imagines the Catholic church as a huge bureaucratic legal system—

> the *Roman* profession . . . carries heaven farther from us, by making us pass so many Courts, and Offices of Saints in this life, in all our petitions, and lying in so painfull prison in the

[21] *John Donne*, ed. John Carey, the Oxford Authors (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), pp. 313, 385. Tebbit's contempt for the underprivileged and disadvantaged was not restricted to the lower classes: he felt it no mystery that the Prince of Wales was "so sympathetic towards the unemployed," he once said, since "he is by way of being one of them himself" (qtd. in Cannadine 40).

> next, during the pleasure, not of him to whom we go, and who must be our judge, but of them from whom we come, who know not our case" (April 1615; *Selected Prose* 147).

There are then substantial intellectual, cultural, and indeed religious reasons why Donne ceased to be a Catholic—and sometimes finds himself speaking warmly and unironically of the "England to whom we owe what we be and have" (*The Storm* 9).

If we turn from Carey and emphasize what Flynn means by honor, however, we see in Donne something of all that stands in the way of the modern nation. We see the strength of the old corporate community in the hierarchical ties that bind the individual to estate, family, religion. We see these ties not as they are caricatured in images of over-obedience or custom but as they are honored in images of power and continuity. From this perspective, Donne is perfectly sincere in his desire not to embarrass the king in print. He understands the meaning of fealty and the force of the Bible's authoritarian Wisdom literature: invoking the Book of Proverbs he admonishes his audience at Lincoln's Inn in 1621, "So also do we sin against the Father, the roote of power, in conceiving amisse of the power of the Civil Magistrate: Whether where God is pleased to represent his unity, in one Person, in a King; or to express it in a plurality of persons, in divers Governours" (Trinity Term, 1621; III:290). In a wonderful paradox, he understands his filial duty and the need to honor his Catholic mother even while he preaches against the tyranny of the Roman church. Indeed, even while he rejects Catholicism, he suspects that the old church "seems to exhale, and refine our wills from earthly [Dregs] and Lees, more than the Reformed, and so seems to bring us nearer heaven" (April 1615; *Selected Prose* 147). Most important, his sense that different social stations or estates need to be honored leads him to despise the desire of ordinary people for direct access and the individualism it breeds. Puritans are "inobedient" and the sects so admired by Milton in *Areopagitica* are dismissed by Donne as "gangrened limbs," precisely because in their individualism they do not constitute a true community; they cannot be united into continuity: "all is singular [with them]," he says, "all is *meum* and *tuum*, my spirit and thy spirit, my opinion and thy opinion, my God and thy God; [there is] no such

apprehension, no such worship of God, as the whole Church hath evermore been acquainted withall, and contented with" (30 April 1620; III:88). There are then substantial reasons why Donne can never quite be a nationalist like Milton and continues to think warmly of the old religion.

What I am trying to suggest is not simply that Donne is conflicted, Janus-faced, divided and distinguished, but something more specific. What I am trying to suggest is that once we re-state Carey's ambition in less personal terms, both he and Flynn are right. Their arguments about Donne's Catholicism glance at two different aspects of the same phenomenon. Donne is caught at a point where the cultural changes that produced the modern nation state drive him in contradictory directions. It is a testimony to his extraordinary intelligence, to his genius, that his writings register those contradictory pulls so clearly and so arrestingly. Because of his Catholic background the old ties have an immediacy that they quite simply don't have for Milton. At the same time, because of his class background and his consciousness of that talent which is death to hide Donne seeks out a local situation in his own life where the direct access and individual agency Milton would associate with the newly awakened nation might be fully realized. And that seems to be what he found at St. Paul's. "To be a *King*," Donne says in his 1622 sermon to the Virginia Company, "signifies *Libertie* and *independency*, and *Supremacie*, to be under no man, and to be a *King* signifies *Abundance* and *Omnisufficiencie*, to neede no man" (13 November 1622; IV:269). For the Milton of the 1640s this is the state the nation promises every citizen; for the Donne of the 1620s this the state he realizes when he preaches God's word to the assembled estates of the nation as Dean of St. Paul's—to Commons, Lords, and King—directly and fully aware of the profit his talent will return.[22]

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[22]This paper was first delivered as a plenary address to the 14th John Donne Society Conference at Gulfport, Mississippi on 15th February 2001. I am grateful for the many helpful responses I received on that occasion.