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*Milton's Italy: Anglo-Italian Literature, Travel, and  
Connections in Seventeenth-Century England* by Catherine  
Gimelli Martin (review)

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analyses a 2011 production of *The Duchess of Malfi* at The University of Western Australia. The chapter itself is stimulating, and offers insights into the emotional experience of both spectators and performers, as well as the difficulties inherent in identifying and recording these aspects. Unfortunately, none of the other contributions are in conversation with this piece, and I suspect Chinna's work would have more to offer if *Performing Emotions in Early Europe* had incorporated other pieces on contemporary performance or remediation of premodern texts.

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**Martin**, Catherine Gimelli, *Milton's Italy: Anglo-Italian Literature, Travel, and Connections in Seventeenth-Century England* (Routledge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture, 33), New York, Routledge, 2017; hardback; pp. xv, 318; 20 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. £110.00; ISBN 9781138670617.

*Milton's Italy*, by Catherine Gimelli Martin, is a book of ambitious scope; such a vast topic could easily be too much for this slim volume, written by a single author. Indeed, the last significant book on the topic was *Milton in Italy*, a collection of essays by different authors (ed. Mario di Cesare, *Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies*, 1991). Twenty-six years later, in *Milton's Italy*, we have a sole scholar attempting more or less the same task.

Martin aims to address certain misconceptions about Milton and Italy. First of these misconceptions is the idea that Italy was only of real consequence for Milton during his 1638–39 tour; second, that seventeenth-century Italy was somehow a lesser version of its former glory; and third, that Milton despised Catholics.

The last of these three points would seem the most difficult to argue: surely the Puritan author of 'On the Late Massacre in Piedmont' and 'In Quintum Novembris' has no love for the Catholics. In the first three chapters, Martin makes an eloquent case for Milton's universal rather than identity-based ideologies: Milton saw the religious struggle not as Catholic versus Protestant or Italian versus English, but tyranny versus liberty. Milton, like the rest of the northern Protestant tradition, owed much to Italian reformists like Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, and even the anti-papalism of Dante Alighieri. True, Milton saw Rome as the opponent of Christian liberty—but its antithesis was to be found in Florence, not the Protestant North.

Perhaps Martin goes too far in promoting Milton's tolerance for Catholics when she states that 'he did not have any problems with his Catholic convert brother Christopher, to whose family he left some property' (p. 62). We do not know the date of Christopher's conversion, or with certainty whether he even converted at all, but it is likely that Christopher only became a Catholic after his older brother's death, during the reign of James II. For an examination of the evidence concerning Christopher's conversion, readers can refer to *The Arms of the Family: The Significance of John Milton's Relatives and Associates*, by John Shawcross (University Press of Kentucky, 2004).

Martin provides a refreshing account of seventeenth-century Italy, an account that undermines the familiar narrative of European culture migrating northwards and westwards in the late Renaissance. Secular thought still flourished in Counter-Reformation Italy: even Galileo (famously alluded to in *Paradise Lost*), whose imprisonment is symbolic of Catholic hostility to scientific thought, was only an unfortunate victim of political manoeuvring between the Dominicans and the Pope, Martin argues.

In the fourth chapter, Martin embarks on a lengthy discussion of Paolo Sarpi's account of the Council of Trent. As Martin herself writes, 'these technicalities are regrettably tedious, but the resulting differences in outlook are dramatic' (p. 121). Chapter 5 continues discussing the intellectual significance of Italy as the capital of the Republic of Letters, and the influence of Italian Neoplatonic thought on Milton's verse.

Martin concentrates on Milton's 'Italianate' English verse more than the actual Italian-language sonnets. While *Milton's Italy* draws on the work of John Hale, Estelle Haan, and Stella Revard, who have all made excellent studies of Milton's foreign-language writings, unfortunately Martin herself seldom analyses Milton's Italian and Latin poems in their original languages.

In Chapter 6, Martin looks at the way in which Milton elevates Eve, the Lady of *A Mask*, and his own wife to the feminine sublime, becoming *donne angelicate* in the tradition of Dantean and Petrarchan heroines. In this chapter especially, readers will find an original and compelling interpretation of Milton's characters, with comparatively little recourse to prior scholarship.

Chapter 7 deals with more well-trodden territory, the Italian sources of Milton's classical republicanism: Machiavelli, Sarpi, Pico, and Dante's *De Monarchia*. Again, Sarpi stands out, as Milton 'structures his texts around [Sarpi's] fundamental principles' (p. 215) and even borrows Sarpi's imagery. It is of course not a simple matter to distinguish whether inspiring ideas in the Renaissance come directly from the classics or are the product of Italian interpretations. Martin confronts this issue directly in Chapter 8, showing how much *Paradise Lost* owes to Italian innovations on the classical epic. Italian epicists developed celestial battles and transformed the *locus amoenus* into a Christian Paradise.

The final chapter deals with the influence of Italian opera, specifically with regard to *Samson Agonistes*—so often thought of as the most 'Greek' of Milton's works. Building on the work of Frank Prince, Martin performs a close reading of select passages with attention to rhyme patterns and syllable distributions.

Casual readers may be overwhelmed by the continuous torrent of allusions and brief quotations in this volume; sometimes there is not enough contextual information, so that it feels like more of a reference-book than a cover-to-cover read. *Milton's Italy* is nevertheless an indispensable resource for any Miltonist who wishes to know more about the land that the poet himself called 'the lodging place of all *humanitas*'.

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