Writing the Nation in Early Modern England: The Case of Rhetoric and Poetics

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Introduction

'National feeling' has frequently been associated with the works of George Puttenham, Philip Sidney or Samuel Daniel. It is treated mostly in the sense of an exterior quantity, as some outside force which somehow made the authors eager to contribute to the national project. For example, the modern editors of Puttenham explain the changing attitudes regarding the possibilities of vernacular literature in the following way: "Sooner or later, poets and humanists who were moved by national feeling as well as deeper instincts, rally to the defence of the vernaculars, of their potentialities, and set themselves to provide the means by which these potentialities may be realized"[1] From some point in history onwards, the existence of the nation (or even nationalism[2]) is taken for granted as a fact which is able to trigger the most amazing projects. Although the nation and its literature are presented as abiding in an almost causal relationship, the manner of the connection remains unquestioned. Its nature seems to be self-evident and without need of further explanation.

This conviction has become highly contentious over the past decades. Recent developments in literary and cultural studies have underlined the necessity to investigate into or even deconstruct notions of self-evidence, to expose their constructedness and point to the ideology they serve. History has returned into literary studies not as context against which literature should be read in order to be appreciated 'fully' (the 'life-and-times-of-the-author'-version), but as co-text, as another attempt at interpreting the world which exerts influence on and is in turn influenced by literary texts. The textualization of history has led scholars to conceive of historical categories such as the nation as heavily dependent on diverse complex symbolic and narrative strategies, on texts and, ultimately, on language.

The reciprocal embeddedness of the discourse on nation and the discourses on language and literature within each other is the focus of this essay. It

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is an attempt to read Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* (1580?), William Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) and Samuel Daniel's *Defence of Ryme* (1603)[3] as little pieces in the never quite complete mosaic of the nation. These texts (with the exception maybe of Sidney's) are usually read, if they are read at all, as neither very original nor very important contributions to the history of English rhetoric and literary criticism. Considering their immense indebtedness to classical and Italian authors, this evaluation holds true. However, their importance might lie elsewhere. They can be read as interventions in the emerging discourse of the nation, as attempts to shape the English language, literature and readership so that they all may one day deserve the modifier 'national.'

In 1553, Wilson is tentatively in search for a new public as addressee for his rhetoric, a public which is not yet existent. Fifty years later, Daniel explicitly links what appears to be a purely literary problem with national concerns. The publishing dates, 1553 and 1603, coincide with important dates in the political history of England. In 1553, the Catholic Mary became Queen of England and forced Thomas Wilson amongst many others into exile, where he completed his *Arte*. In 1603, Elizabeth died and her successor, James I, was enthroned. That the works appeared around these dates is not, I would argue, as accidental as it may at first appear.

I shall try to analyze, in this limited field, the mutual effects on one another of language debates and politics in the wider, literary forms and patriotism in the narrower sense. Who speaks on behalf of which nation and on what grounds? How are we to understand a Renaissance writer who explicitly ties the weal and woe of political order in England to the correct usage of a particular mode of versification? How far the conscious construction of national identity can be assumed as a guideline for 16th century authors is difficult to decide. Nonetheless, there is substantial evidence that the concept functions as the discourse which the authors need to imagine in order for their poetical or rhetorical treatises to make sense in their particular historical contexts.

Historical and Theoretical Delineations

The complex process of the emergence of the nation has hitherto been mainly the research area of historians and sociologists. Much has been written about the relationship of the phenomenon to the modernisation, industrialisation and mobilisation of society.[4] In the bulk of these approaches, the historical processes of nation-building are put down to the existence of central structural elements; the phenomena of nationalism and the nation are explained as contingent reactions to changes in the material basis of modern societies. For most of these authors, the modern nation emerges in the late 18th century with a formative period of early modern 'proto-nationalism' to build on.

Benedict Anderson's influential *Imagined Communities* (1983), although in general subscribing to the modernisation theory, emphasizes the nation before the nation-state. For the individual at the end of the feudal age, he argues, modernisation meant the break-down of traditional structures and ties (of the transcontinental sodality of Christendom, of the belief in God-given worldly hierarchies, of a concept of time without differentiation between cosmology and history). The gap needed to be filled and a new form of imagined community, the nation, promised to satisfy that need. Anderson emphasizes the difference between the modern nation-state and the early modern concept of the nation which is not bound to a specific form of political organisation.

Similar to the biography of an individual, the integrity of the imagined community of the nation is dependent on continual stories and histories which conceive of their subject as a chain of connected events. Historical and literary narratives present differing selections of what needs to be collectively remembered by the national community. At the same time, these narratives subliminally contribute to the collective amnesia of those events which threaten to upset the coherence of the national plot.[5] The importance of literature in the narrative of the nation derives from the fact that it takes part in creating versions of a country's past which in turn legitimate the *status quo* of the present and point the way towards future action. The national present is imagined, in an act of inverted teleology, as the logical outcome of a chain of events whose point of origin is lost in time and whose development through time seems to have unwound without alternative finally to arrive in the Here and Now.

It is "textual strategies, metaphoric displacements, subtexts and figurative stratagems" that give meaning to the nation "as it is written" (Bhabha 2). Homi K. Bhabha stresses that the nation is not only a "discipline of social polity" but also "a system of cultural signification." If the nation as a locality of symbolic power is indeed dependent on the act of narration, on texts and on language, the presence of narrative elements makes the homogeneous story of the nation liable to self-deconstruction. Due to their dependence on language, national narratives subvert the homogeneity and totality they strive for in the very act of doing so.

Going along with Anderson's differentiation between the modern nation state and the early modern nation, I refer to nationality in the 16th century as a concept, not a political fact but "the development of an integrative idea providing a focus for collective identity," an idea which is invented in texts of all kinds (Scholz 6). The texts under consideration in this essay tell their own stories, even though they are not literary narratives in the usual sense. Inventing their own traditions, histories and pasts, they reflect and shape the crooked path from a "linguistic inferiority complex" (Assmann 440) to the language patriotism of the 17th century. The tensions between those two extremes have left their marks on many early modern writings:

a. The European intellectual elite only reluctantly takes leave of Latin as its *lingua franca*, while it is often the same people who feel the need to elevate the prestige of their assumedly barbarous vernacular.

b. The widespread fatalistic feeling of eternal cultural inferiority stands in a tension with the struggle for a self-sufficient culture within a national framework. Moreover, the argument for cultural independence goes along with an enthusiastic exclusion of popular traditions.

c. Reformation and the printing-press contribute to an (albeit limited) cultural democratisation. At the same time, influential parts of the intelligentsia attempt to prevent this development by establishing new "thresholds of participation."[6] In poetics, the call for close compliance with the classical authors and strict obedience to poetological rules and laws serves to block the at least potentially facilitated access to the realm of culture.

Even though the signifier is still far from evoking a stable common concept, the nation as a growing political parameter pervades the ideas of some major intellectuals in the 16th century and their texts in turn give meaning to the concept and shape it according to their needs and interests. The debates around language and literature are an important element in the struggle for a new cultural order after the decline of the (theoretically) all-embracing Latinate Christianity of the European Middle Ages, the tensions in this field productive of as well as produced by the insecurities which characterize the search for new sources of collective and individual identity.

"Speaking as it is commonly received:" The fiction of a standard language in Thomas Wilson's Arte of Rhetorique

Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553) is the first complete treatise on the subject in English. That the work was read as a patriotic contribution to the cultural capital of England by Wilson's contemporaries can be deduced from the preliminaries to the text. Robert Hilermy's Latin epistles put the *Arte* into the context of a version of English history in which an abstract notion of freedom (vs. equally abstract notions of slavery and tyranny) is presented as an original trait of Englishness.[7]

The author of the epistles ties the well-being of England directly to the level of its cultural achievements, amongst which Wilson's contribution stands out for having taught the Muses their mother tongue. From now on, "the truth" (*vera*) shall be preached in English and by Englishmen. "Not because you know Greek or Latin are you learned and wise, but for seeing the truth"[8] –and the truth, "golden wisdom" (*aurea sapientia*), is to be sought and found in the hidden meanings of the English language. The emancipation of truth from the classical languages implies the universality of English as the new "language-of-power" (Anderson 39).

Hilermy's comprehension of historical time unites past, present and future in a project the actuality of which is clearly recognized. He draws a line from the venerable glory which through history has been a characteristic of the English people (*Gloria prisca gentis*) via the literary monuments which are being produced in the present, towards the future which will –*si favor adfuerit*– appropriately honour these achievements. The favour is one to be granted by future generations, who have to ensure the continuity of the nation as mnemonic community.

The act of liberation from the hegemony of the ancients goes along with an act of dissociation from an assumedly 'barbarous' past. This is due to the peculiar situation of an age which recognizes the urgency of an autonomous tradition while there is apparently not much there which deserves to be remembered as the nation's cultural heritage. Hilermy's text negotiates the tensions between constancy and contingency in a national narrative which is ideologically dependent on the notion of static, eternal Englishness while at the same time the past is denied in order to present the nation as a "prodigious, living principle" (Bhabha 297).

It is the pedagogic venture of improving the English language in general and the linguistic performance of its speakers in particular which makes Wilson's project so urgent in his own perspective. When he explains its necessity, the split which runs through the *Arte* becomes evident. The reader is told that it is above all necessary to "speake as it is commonly received," that is, without using "ynkehorne termes" (325)[9] and other forms of "outlandish English" ("Frenche Englishe" or "English Italianated"). So to speak that even "the unlearned man" (329) can follow is not difficult because an assumedly unaffected, natural language corresponds directly to reality, it is "proper unto the tongue, wherein wee speake, ... plain for all, ... apt and mete" (332). At the same time, Wilson differentiates between "learned English" and "rude English", "courte talke" and "countrey speach" (329), well knowing that the "plain wordes, such as are usually received" (25) are different in Cornwall and Northumberland, London and Lincoln. Nevertheless, he proposes to use "altogether one maner of language" (329), a standard English idiom which in 1553 is nothing but a *desideratum*.

Wilson's proper English refers not only to a particular idiom which he declares to be correct, but also to a certain social group and its cultural norms. Why should he have to teach laboriously what is seemingly the natural inheritance of any true-born Englishman? The question is not only "what is proper English?" but "who are the proper English?" Wilson himself stood at the beginning of a successful court and state career while he finished his *Arte*. The text can be read as an attempt, in a specific historical situation, to declare as generally (that is nationally) binding the cultural norms of an exclusive social class.

Wilson knows that the natural English he suggests for general use is a fiction. The public he addresses is still in need of education. His theory of an ideal language community serves to imagine a concrete utopia, an age when the na-

tional readership will have learned something which deep down it has always known: proper English.

By means of examples, illustrations and anecdotes, Wilson demonstrates his own conception of the imagined national public and shows that he is in fact addressing the Protestant nation. The prospect of the Catholic Mary on the English throne is a threatening one for a Protestant intellectual writing in the early fifties of the 16th century. While working on the *Arte*, the Protestant nation's triumph is still precarious in Wilson's view. Illustrating synecdoche and metonymy he explains:

> All Englande rejoyseth that pilgrimage is banished, and Idolatrye for ever abolished: *and yet all England is not glad, but the most part.* (348, my emphasis)

And:

> The Pope is banished England, that is to saie, al his superstition, and Hypocrisie, either is, *or should be* gone to the Devill by the Kynges expresse will, and commaundement. (350, my emphasis)

In the following years, Wilson would experience for himself the appropriateness of his doubts. Seven years later (1560), now under Elizabeth's reign, he adds an autobiographical *Prologue to the Reader*, in which he tells the story of his Marian exile, the imprisonment in Rome and his escape from the Catholic inquisition. He connects the personal story with the *Arte* by asking himself if it were not better to prevent further editions of the book because again it could fall into the hands of "malicious folke" who may deliberately misinterpret, "to the utter undoing of their Christian brother", all those parts which deal with "Christ or any good doctrine" (10). In the end he overcomes these inclinations with the argument that his must be the right religion and his flight due to God's intervention:

> GOD be praised, and thankes be given to him onely, that not onely hath delivered me, out of the Lions mouth; but also hath brought Englande, my deare Countrie, out of greate thralldome, and forrein bondage (15).

Mary's reign is marked as "forrein bondage," Catholicism as a great danger to the nation's liberty. Thus Wilson, the *Arte of Rhetorique*, and the Protestant English nation are put into a field of reference against whose background the envisaged readership will understand his work. The quoted passages are reflections upon urgent political problems which concerned the author beyond the need to impart techniques of eloquent speech.

Wilson's illustration for the figure *digressio* where he declares "by the way of a digression, what a noble countrie England is, how great commodities it hath, what trafike here is used, and how much more nede other Realmes have of us, than we have neede of them" (362) is most representative for his strategy.[10]

The *Arte*'s reader is taught that the theme of a digression is not at all deliberate. Wilson's own example for the art of digressing does not mark an exception. The *Arte* fulfils two tasks at once: It serves as a proof of the high standard of English cultural competence, while at the same time it is an instrument for the distribution and homogenisation of that culture. The pedagogy of Wilson's work consists not only in instructing his readership in language matters but also in designating the field which above all others earns the employment of elaborate persuasiveness: the English nation.

"Altering the cannon of the rule:" Towards vernacular autonomy

In the 16th century, accusers as well as defenders of literature in the vernacular were agreed on the lack of cultural prestige of the English language. The 'apologies' or 'defences' of poetry in the vulgar tongue did not differ significantly from the opposition in their evaluation of poetry in English. Thus the defenders were forced to partly adopt the argument of the other side. What they defended was not in the main the existing tradition but the conviction that worthy poetry *could* be written in English.

In *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586),[11] William Webbe confirms that, apart from the most recent past, not a single English work exists which is worth remembering. He lays the blame on a barbarous tradition which even the greatest minds have not yet succeeded in breaking with. It is neither "the rudenes of the Countrey" nor "the *Dialect* of the speeche," but "curios custome," the burden of a tradition "which as it neuer was great freend to any good learning" stands in the way of English literary expertise. Webbe calls for a new generation of scholars who consciously break with tradition in order "to adourne their Countrey and aduauance their style with the highest and most learnedst toppe of true Poetry" (228).

The criteria for differentiating between 'barbarous' and 'true' poetry were based, as Richard Helgerson has shown, on the assumed dialectical opposition of the Classical and the 'Dark' Ages. In Roger Ascham's influential *Schoolmaster* (1570), the difference, from a humanist perspective, is made very clear He points out that "to follow rather the Gothes in Ryming than the Greekes in trew versifiyng were euen to eate ackornes with swyne, when we may freely eate wheate bread emonges men."[12] Having the choice between "the worst" and "the best" (*ibid.*), a decision for or against rhyme would have immediate implications for England's cultural development. The majority of those invovled in literary debates were agreed upon the assumption that the poetical language was in urgent need of re-formation, and for many, the first item on the agenda was the question if one should try to take over classical metres or not.[13] Where was cultural autonomy to be found? In the adaptation of ancient prosodic rules to English poetics? Or in the self-reflexive concentration on one's own potential (whatever that might be)? Three similar questions concerning the matter posed within a range of ten

years illustrate the shift towards a growing national self-confidence. In 1579, Spenser exclaims:

> Why, a God's name, may not we, as else the Greekes, haue the kingdome of oure owne Language ...?[14]

Webbe asks in 1586:

> Cannot we, as well as the Latines did, alter the cannon of the rule according to the quality of our worde ...? (279)

Finally Puttenham (1589):

> Why should not Poesie be a vulgar Art with vs aswell as with the Greeks and Latines?" (21)

For Spenser in 1579, "the kingdome of oure owne language" is still bound to the success with which classical norms were adaptable to his native language. He suggests altering the received pronunciation of English "as in *Carpenter* the middle sillable, being vsed shorte in speache, when it shall be read long in Verse" in order to make English fit for quantitative metres. The aesthetically dubious results of such innovations were "to be wonne with Custome, and rough words must be subdued with Vse."[15]

Webbe also criticizes the tradition of English rhymed poetry, but he stresses as imperative the obedience to "a natural force or quantity" of the language. His compromise still acknowledges the exemplariness of the classics, but by pointing to the historicity of "the Latines" his theory gives room to national self-realisation with the idea of a natural language in mind. Thus he completes his question with the appeal:

> ... and where our words and theyrs wyll agree, there to iumpe with them, where they will not agree, there to establish *a rule of our owne* to be directed by. (279, my emphasis)

Puttenham finally takes the English language as the yardstick for vernacular poetry. No longer is he put into a state of anxiety because "naturall Saxon English" consists mainly of monosyllables and in consequence "could not have the feete which the Greekes and Latines have" (82). He vindicates rhyme claiming that this form was "the first and most ancient Poesie, ... the most universall, ... coming by instinct of nature" (26).

Puttenham does not consider the modification of orthography or accentuation as an option. He may still wonder "how the use of the Greeke and Latine feete might be brought into our vulgar Poesie" but in this case classical metres are to submit to "our owne ydiome" (126) and not vice versa. English poetry is tied to rhyme because the natural qualities of the language must not be neglected. Due to its monosyllabic structure, he argues, English is more natural than the classical languages and therefore occupies a privileged position in the universe of

poetry. Thus Puttenham turns the former linguistic necessity into a national virtue.

If Puttenham and his precursors are primarily concerned with the status of English poetry in comparison with the classics, Sidney transfers the problem into the present. He acknowledges the merits of both poetic principles, "there being in either sweetness and wanting in neither majesty" (73). In fact, English is the only living language he knows which is "fit for both sorts," better suited for poetry than Italian (too many vowels), Dutch (too many consonants), French or Spanish (no words which suit the dactyl). "The English is subject to none of these defects" (73). Emphasising the unique qualities of English as a poetic language, Sidney and Puttenham claim independence from the classics and superiority to the continent at the same time. This linguistic hierarchisation shows that the identity of the cultural nation, as well as that of its political counterpart, is dependent on some foreign Other against which the own notion of collective identity can be formed.

Declaring the vulgar idiom a veritable medium for cultured poetry is one thing, freeing it from the stigma of barbarousness quite another. The nobilitation of vernacular literature is a difficult task which Sidney and Puttenham try to put into effect on a social scale. Both rehabilitate rhyme by pointing to its courtliness, both find in "smally learned courtiers" a better style than in the "professors of learning" (72). The courtier, Sidney's argument runs, naturally follows "that which by practice he findeth fittest to nature" and thus learns in his social surroundings how to hide art artfully, while the professor, "using art to show art, not to hide it" (72), alienates himself from nature. Puttenham, arguing similarly, defines his master-trope *allegory* as "the Courtier or figure of false semblant." Under this category he lists various tropes whose English names indicate social roles. The amalgamation of a specific form of poetry with a specific form of social behaviour contributes to legitimize the new cultural centre.[16]

"If acorns are being consumed at court," Richard Helgerson summarizes the aim of the strategy, "they are by that very fact made courteous and civil" (34). The Humanists' criticism of vernacular literature is now branded as undue insistence on an outdated notion of unsurpassable Classic literature which fails to recognize the changed cultural normativity whose centre is no longer Rome and whose communicative medium has ceased to be Latin. "I loue *Rome* but *London* better, I fauor *Italie* but *England* more, I honor the *Latin*, but I worship the *English*," the pedagogue Richard Mulcaster concisely sums up the historical turn towards a newly established cultural self-confidence.[17]

Alignments with the court were a necessary albeit insufficient prerequisite for cultural nationalisation. Authorising English as a cultural language requires a set of norms and rules which define correct and incorrect usages of the medium. Even if Puttenham's theoretical intention is "to make this art vulgar for all English mens use" (40), he is keen to prevent all Englishmen (let alone women) from free access to high culture. Setting down "the principal rules to be obserued" (40)

in English, he achieves exactly that end. He invents the fiction of a 'sociolinguistic contract' on the one hand,[18] which is binding for the poet whose language must be "naturall, pure, and the most vsuall of all his countrey" (156). On the other hand, poetic diction should be "somewhat out of sight from the common course of ordinary speach and capacitie of the vulgar iudgement" (150). Considering the ideal reader of the *Arte*, the contradiction makes sense. It is the courtier "for whose instruction this travaile is taken", and the courtier's idiom is declared as "the most usuall of all his countrey" (170).

By intentionally confusing the idiom of a small social elite with the 'natural' language of the whole country, Puttenham excludes the vast majority of the population from participation in the cultural nation. The decline of the age-old dichotomy of written Latin versus spoken English had opened up possibilities for more people to gain access to culture. This is a threatening perspective for Puttenham which he counters by drawing an internal *limes*, social and geographical, around the politically correct language and literature. He is very precise about the location of proper English and knows that the margins in particular are dangerous. The versions of English which are liable to pollute the purity of the norm are those spoken "in the marches and frontiers, or in port townes, where straungers haunt for traffike sake, or yet in Vniuersities ... or, finally, in any vplandish village or corner of a Realme." Thus his conclusion:

> [Y]e shall therefore take the vsuall speach of the Court, and that of London and the shires lying about London within lx. myles, and not much aboue. (156f.)

As we have seen, the poets shall look for their diction "somewhat out of sight from the common course of ordinary speach." Puttenham isolates one out of the plurality of actually spoken idioms and elevates it above the others. In a second step, he metonymically reinterprets that version so that one particular form of English appears to represent the whole nation, even if the imagined homogeneity does not correspond to reality. Puttenham frequently mixes up poetical *parole* and national *langue*. Thus while he pretends to speak only about poetics, he actually prescribes rules to be observed by the whole national language community.

"The place we haue thus taken up:" The nation and its verse in Samuel Daniel's Defence of Ryme

With the *Defence of Ryme* (1603), Samuel Daniel enters the versification debate curiously late. The important points had been made years before and even the former defenders of the classical experiment had in practice decided against it. On the most obvious level, the *Defence* is an answer to Thomas Campion's *Observations in the Arte of English Poesie* (1602), in which Campion, from an early humanist perspective, again rehearses the narrative of the vulgar and inartificial rhyme whose existence was a result of cultural decline during the Middle Ages. But as Campion's case appears to have been lost already, why did Daniel see the need to go to such lengths to prove him wrong?

"The General Custom," Daniel starts off, "and use of Ryme in this kingdome have beene so long (as if from Graunt of Nature) held unquestionable" (130). Tradition and the grant of nature occupy central positions in the *Defence* because these categories are the link between a particular form of versification and the English nation. Historical fictionalisation is again a necessary ingredient of the national narrative. The central fiction of Daniel's argument consists in his usage of the key concepts 'custome' and 'nature', "*Custome* that is before all law, *Nature* that is above all Arte" (131). According to the *Defence*, it is from these prehistoric times that rhyme originates and this exactly qualifies the form as traditionally English.

Derek Attridge has pointed out that "not until Daniel's *Defence* is the argument for the natural superiority of vernacular versification carried through without flinching" (27). The decisiveness with which he opts for one side of the former dichotomy is due to the fact that in the *Defence*, the rhyme debate is not only of aesthetic importance but also a matter of national interest and the writer's individual identity within that nation:

> Vpon the great discouery of these new measures [*ie., the English hexameter*], threatning to ouerthrow the whole state of Ryme in this kingdom, I must either stand out to defend, or else be forced to forsake my self, and giue ouer all (130).

Daniel's main interest turns out to be the reinterpretation of what Ascham and his followers had pejoratively branded as Gothic and vulgar. He speaks not only for rhyme as a proper form of poetry but also rehabilitates a whole 'barbarous' tradition by upsetting the established history of the Middle Ages and replacing it with a new version.[19] In his counter-narrative, *nature* is instrumentalized to defend genuinely English qualities against the common notion of the need to replace these traditions with the civility of Greece and Rome. Emphasizing the opinion that brutal force, not civilized superiority, had laid the foundation for Greco-Roman predominance, he is one of the first to turn the Humanists' attacks offensively against them.[20]

> [It is] but a touch of arrogant ignorance, to hold this or that nation Barbarous, these or those times grosse, considering how this manifold creature man, wheresoeuer hee stand in the world, hath always some disposition of worth, intertaines the order of societie, affects that which is most in vse, and is eminent in some one thing or other, that fits his humour and the times (139f.).

In a microhistorical approach *avant la lettre*, Daniel advises his readers not to be mislead by generalisations which can never be precise enough to represent their object accurately, not to "go further, but looke vpon the wonderfull Architecture of this state of England, and see whether they were deformed times, that could giue it such a forme" (145). The nation does not fulfil its *raison d'être* as part of a universal plan. On the contrary, it is born in a change of perspective

that turns England into a self-referential microcosm, "a world within a world, standing alone."[21]

"The best measure of man is taken by his own foote" (143), he explains, and therefore England's "true nature" has to determine the metric system of its poetry. But what is true nature with regard to English poetics? Daniel claims that one merely has to follow the path "which hath euer beene vsed amongst us time out of minde" (150) and "neuer rebell against use" (139). Innovations, "though in the least things, [are] dangerous to a publicke societie" (144). Thus Daniel's passionate appeal:

> In what case were this poor state *of words*, if in like sort another tyrant the nexte yeere should arise and abrogate these lawes and ordaine others cleane contrary according to his humor, and say that they were onely right, the others vniust, what disturbance were there here, to whome should we obey? Were it not farre better to hold vs fast to our old custome, than to stand thus distracted with vncertaine Lawes.... (149, my emphasis)

In view of the recent change of the country's ruler, is Daniel really talking about *words* only? Is it merely English poetry that suffers from uncertain laws, the possibility of tyranny and a potential crisis of authority? Or does he instrumentalize the versification debate for a direct address to the new king, James I, with the national tradition as a value in itself as his strongest argument? Even though his version of England's cultural past is highly fictitious,[22] it suffices to attack in proto-nationalistic terms all those who still defend the poetical superiority of the Classics and, more importantly, who might go about changing the *status quo* of English politics. Innovations in both realms would be "wrong to the honor of the dead, wrong to the fame of the liuing, and wrong to *England*, in seeking to lay reproach vppon her natiue ornaments" (153). Daniel subsumes under the icons of essential Englishness a particular form of versification, the remembrance of which is a categorical imperative for the members of the nation. Moreover, he fashions himself as the keeper of his country's vital interests and as the spokesman for an unspecified *we* which constitutes the nation in the present as well as the past.

> Heere I stand foorth, onelie to make good the place we haue thus taken vp, and to defend the sacred monuments erected therein, which containe the honour of the dead, the fame of the liuing, the glory of peace, and the best power of speach, and wherin so many honorable spirits haue sacrificed to Memorie their dearest passions (155).

At the end of the *Defence*, rhyme as such is no longer of the essence. It serves merely as a crystallisation point around which Daniel draws a picture of England (as historical continuum, as mnemonic community, as culturally homogeneous) which he in turn uses to back up his appeal to the king. The new self-confidence Attridge speaks of did not emerge in a social vacuum. Daniel and his

predecessors self-evidently regarded their texts as political interventions. In fact, aesthetic questions were justifiable only as part of a political discourse.

The unstable meaning of terms like 'tradition,', 'custome' and 'nature' is the site where the national idea is being negotiated in Renaissance poetics. While Webbe held the burden of "curious custome" responsible for the poor state of poetry in England, and Spenser wished to start writing a new tradition right now, Daniel is the first who self-confidently proposes to look at the existing traditions (or what he takes for them) as a guideline for the present. The logic of Daniel's final speech in favour of rhyme needs a national vanishing point. On the surface, the *Defence* is just one more intervention in an abating literary dispute. Daniel's diction and choice of words, however, indicate in what manner the imagined community of the nation may one day become the primary source for many people's collective identities.

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Notes

1. A. Walker and G.D. Willcock, in their Introduction to George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*, p. lxxxv.
2. Vernon Hall's *Renaissance Literary Criticism, A Study of Its Social Content* is a case in point.
3. Thomas Wilson, *The Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), ed. Thomas J. Derrick, London & New York 1982. Philip Sidney, *A Defence of Poetry* (1580?), ed. J.A. Van Dorsten, Oxford 1966. William Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586), in: George G. Smith (ed.), Elizabethan Critical Essays I, Oxford & London 1904, 226-302. George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), ed. Edward Arber, London 1895. Samuel Daniel, *A Defence of Ryme* (1603), in: A. C. Sprague (ed.), *Samuel Daniel, Poems and A Defence of Ryme*, Chicago & London 1930. Page numbers in the text will always refer to these editions.
4. It is impossible to give an even very limited overview of the numerous publications within the range of this essay. Maybe the most influential recent texts are Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1870*, Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* and Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism.*
5. In 1882, Ernest Renan explained that strategic forgetfulness and calculated historical misrepresentations were indispensable factors for the foundation of the nation; see Renan 887-906.
6. The German term "Partizipationsschwellen" was coined by Norbert Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und Psychogenetische Untersuchungen.*
7. There are altogether four Latin verse epistles preceding the *Arte*, two by Hilermy and one each by Nicholas Udall and Walter Haddon (Wilson 2-4).
8. *Non (quia Graeca potes, vel calles verba Latina)/Doctus es, aut sapiens: sed quia vera vides* (my translation).
9. Page numbers in the text after the quotes refer to Thomas Derrick's 1982 edition.

10. Andrew Hadfield has pointed out that "what seems peripheral –the example of England– is really the central concern of the *Arte*" (108).
11. Quotations are from George G. Smith's edition.
12. Roger Ascham, *Of Imitation*, edited in Smith (30).
13. Helgerson has emphasized the importance of the problem for the intellectuals at the time. It was "a project that concerned them deeply just at the moment when their careers were beginning and their most significant works were being written" (26).
14. Edmund Spenser, "Letter to Gabriel Harvey" (1579/80), in Smith (99).
15. Spenser, "Letter", in Smith (99).
16. The influence of Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, which was translated into English by Sir Thomas Hoby in 1561, is conspicuous. Castiglione's *sprezzatura*, the art of hiding one's artificial –ie.courteous– behaviour so well that it appears to be natural, is a notion which informs both Puttenham's *Arte* and Sidney's *Defence*. In the preface, Hoby summarizes the strategy: "Therefore that may bee saide to be a verie arte, that appeareth not to be arte" (Castiglione 46).
17. Richard Mulcaster, in Holzknecht 1c (n. 1, p. 412).
18. "After a speach is fully fashioned to the common vnderstanding, and accepted by consent of a whole countrey or nation, it is called a language, and receaueth none allowed alteration" (Puttenham 156).
19. Cf. Helgerson ch. 1, "Two Versions of Gothic".
20. Greece and Rome "may thanke their sword that made their tongues so famous and universal as they are" (136). His argument resembles that of Phileom Holland who, in his *Preface to Livy* (1601), expresses the wish "to triumph now over the Romans in subduing their literature under the dent of the English pen, in requitall of the conquest sometime over this Island, atchieved by the edge of their sword" (in Holzknecht 36).
21. *Musophilus* (1599), line 541 (Daniel 65-98).
22. Helgerson has shown that rhyme itself had been appropriated by the English only 200 years earlier and that "the form that rhyme most often took, the form of the fourteen-line sonnet that Campion attacks and Daniel practices, was a still more recent acquisition" (39).

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Christian Schmitt
Writing the Nation in Early Modern England: The Case of Rhetoric and Poetics

Το άρθρο επικεντρώνει την προσοχή του σε αγγλικές πραγματείες για τη ρητορική και την ποιητική που χρονολογούνται στον 16ο και στις αρχές του 17ου αιώνα, χρησιμοποιώντας το θεωρητικό πλαίσιο που προσφέρουν οι Benedict Anderson και Homi K. Bhabha (το έθνος ως αφήγηση, ως το φανταστικό και ιστορικά απρόοπτο προσχέδιο της ανθρώπινης κοινωνίας) για να γίνει μια ανάγνωση των πραγματειών των Wilson, Puttenham κ.α. λαμβάνοντας υπόψη τη συνεισφοράς τους στη γραφή της Αγγλίας. Ενώ η έννοια της εθνικότητας συχνά θεωρείται δεδομένη ως σημαντικός παράγοντας στην πρώιμη σύγχρονη γραφή, η φύση και τα πραγματικά αποτελέσματα της επίδρασής της σπάνια αναλύονται. Αναλύεται εδώ πώς ο εθνικός λόγος λειτουργεί και ως βαθύτερη δομή των κειμένων και ως το σημείο εκμηδενίσεως στα κειμένα, ως ο λόγος που οι συγγραφείς πρέπει να φαντάζονται έτσι ώστε οι πραγματείες τους να έχουν κάποιο νόημα μέσα στο συγκεκριμένο ιστορικό τους πλαίσιο. Στα 1553, ο Wilson αναζητά ένα εθνικό κοινό ως παραλήπτη του έργου του *Arte of Rhetorique (Τέχνη της Ρητορικής)*, ένα κοινό που δεν υπάρχει ακόμα. Πενήντα χρόνια αργότερα, ο Daniel, στο *Defence of Ryme (Υπεράσπιση της Ομοιοκαταληξίας)*, σαφώς συνδέει κάτι που φαίνεται να είναι καθαρά λογοτεχνικό πρόβλημα με εθνικούς προβληματισμούς. Εν τω μεταξύ, οι συζητήσεις γύρω από τη γλώσσα και τη λογοτεχνία αποτελούσαν σημαντικό στοιχείο του αγώνα για μια νέα πολιτισμική τάξη μέσα στις εθνικές οριοθετήσεις.