

The Persistence of Catholicism:  
How Eighteenth-Century English Writers Imagined a Minority Religious Community

by

Jeremy R. Carnes

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Lincoln B. Faller, Chair  
Professor David J. Hancock  
Professor Clement C. Hawes  
Professor David L. Porter  
Assistant Professor Sean R. Silver

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## Table of Contents

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgements.....   | ii  |
| Abstract.....   | v   |
| Introduction.....   | 1   |
| Part One: John Dryden, Catholicism, and the Limits of the Restoration Stage             |     |
| Prologue to Part One.....   | 24  |
| Chapter One: Staging Tolerance in <i>Tyrannick Love</i> .....                           | 28  |
| Chapter Two: Persecution and Conversion in <i>Don Sebastian</i> .....                   | 70  |
| Part Two: The Protestant Novel and the Unrepresentable English Catholic                 |     |
| Prologue to Part Two .....  | 123 |
| Chapter Three: <i>Roxana</i> and England's Catholic Captivity.....                      | 126 |
| Chapter Four: Samuel Richardson and the Limits of Tolerance.....                        | 168 |
| Part Three: Catholic Literature and a Feminine Religious Community                      |     |
| Prologue to Part Three .....  | 211 |
| Chapter Five: Alexander Pope and Catholic Division.....                                 | 214 |
| Chapter Six: Intersections of Catholic and Female Identity in <i>A Simple Story</i> ... | 265 |
| Coda.....   | 321 |
| Bibliography .....  | 332 |

## Abstract

This dissertation studies the engagement of five major eighteenth-century English writers with their nation's minority Catholic community. Though at the margins of English civil and social life, English Catholics continued to attract converts and remained politically and culturally important throughout the century. Anxieties about the place of Catholics in England suffuse the literature of the period, but they have been obscured by misleading narratives of the rise of a secular, tolerant modernity. This dissertation closely considers plays, novels, and poems whose concerns about English Catholicism have been mostly overlooked, and it investigates the political, cultural, and deeply personal work these texts perform.

A central feature of that work is a refiguring of practices of the representation of Catholics and Catholicism. Even hostile writers recognize that the portrayal of Catholics must move beyond the simplistic demonization of traditional imagery. Playing with generic and formal boundaries, or turning to emerging techniques for portraying interior experience, these writers attempt to reimagine Catholics and England's relationship with them.

The first two chapters study John Dryden's sympathetic portrayals of Catholics in plays written before and after his conversion. The pursuit of Catholic toleration informs his influential experimentation with Restoration heroic drama in *Tyrannick Love*, while the dramatic form of his masterpiece, *Don Sebastian*, models the closeting of English

Catholicism following the Glorious Revolution. Another pair of chapters compares novels whose explorations of human psychology work through anxieties over the vulnerability of Protestant identity. Daniel Defoe's protean heroine in *Roxana* and Samuel Richardson's immutable hero in *Sir Charles Grandison* variously represent their authors' efforts to educate readers on how to resist seduction by the Catholic world. A final pair of chapters examines Alexander Pope's proto-Gothic poems, *Eloisa to Abelard* and *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*, and Elizabeth Inchbald's proto-Jacobin novel, *A Simple Story*. Exploring the feminization and victimization of their community, their works anticipate two genres very much concerned with the portrayal of oppression.

This dissertation seeks to enrich our understanding of eighteenth-century literature by recovering the imaginative work English writers performed as they explored their nation's troubled relationship with its Catholic community.

## Introduction

In 1685, John Gother, a Catholic priest, published a polemic titled *A Papist Misrepresented, and Represented: Or, A Twofold Character of Popery*. His stated goal is to compare the “*Calumnies and Scandals*” under which the Catholic Church stands accused by Protestants, with the actual “*Faith and Doctrin* of that Church.” While he devotes far more space to vindication than to slander, the Papist Misrepresented is inevitably the more compelling figure. Gother sums him up as “a perverse, malicious sort of Creature, *Superstitious, Idolatrous, Atheistical, Cruel, Bloody-minded, Barbarous, Treacherous*, and so *Prophane*, and every way *Unhumane*, that ’tis in some manner doubted whether he be a *Man*, or no.” Indeed, Gother reveals how intimately familiar he is with the nature of this devilish being. He informs us,

I ... have describ’d him exactly according to the Apprehension I had of a *Papist*, fram’d by me when I was a *Protestant*; with the addition only of some few Points, which have been violently charged against me, by some intimate Friends of late, to shew the unreasonableness of my Choice, after the quitting that Communion.<sup>1</sup>

Gother was raised a Presbyterian before converting to Catholicism as an adult. The Papist Misrepresented had been living in his imagination long before the Papist Represented took up residence there. And given the venom with which Gother describes this monster, it appears that even after his conversion, the Papist Misrepresented continues to haunt him.

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<sup>1</sup> John Gother, *A Papist Misrepresented, and Represented: Or, A Twofold Character of Popery* (London, 1685), 10, 111, 11.



The fact that this figure pervaded English culture indicates the immensity of the challenges confronting Catholic converts. Not only did converts have to submit to legal penalties that effectively revoked their status as English subjects, but they were also faced with the conceptual and emotional obstacles generated by prejudices that their culture constantly reinforced. And then, of course, there were the social obstacles to conversion, of having to confront “intimate friends” who were still very much in the grip of their anti-Catholic prejudices.

Indeed, Gother’s friends are faced with a severe psychological struggle of their own. They have to watch a fellow countryman and coreligionist, and a man of obviously strong mental faculties, transform into one of these “*Unhumane*” creatures. Of course, they did not actually believe that his conversion made him into a monster in a literal sense, that he would now start assassinating Protestants and plotting treason; however negatively a minority group may be viewed, people almost always make exceptions for individuals whom they know.<sup>2</sup> But Gother’s conversion truly did make him a monster insofar as it made him unclassifiable. Gother exaggerates when he writes of a Papist, “’tis in some manner doubted whether he be a *Man*, or no.” But he would be perfectly accurate if, applying the statement to himself, he amended it to, “’tis in some manner doubted whether he be an *Englishman*, or no.”

The reactions of Gother’s friends (and of polemicists, parliaments, and mobs throughout the long eighteenth century) to English Catholicism may strike modern eyes

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<sup>2</sup> Colin Haydon provides evidence that such personal exceptions for individual, local Catholics were widely granted in England throughout the eighteenth century. See *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c. 1714-80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 11-13. Such readiness to make exceptions for individuals should not be perceived as a contradiction to this dissertation’s view that English Catholicism posed a deep conceptual problem in the eighteenth century; in fact, it is further evidence for this claim. Protestants were generally tolerant of English Catholic *people*, but the *idea* of the English Catholic, the English Catholic in the *abstract*, was an affront to Protestant conceptual frameworks, and thus elicited anxious and hostile responses.

as out of all proportion to the threat which that small community could realistically pose to Protestant hegemony.<sup>3</sup> But this is because we often fail to understand just how fundamental Protestantism was to English identity. If there was one fact about their nation that the ever-wrangling factions of English High Churchmen, Low Churchmen, Presbyterians, Puritans, Quakers, deists, and other minor religious sects agreed upon, it was that England was a Protestant nation. Catholicism, conversely, was inherently “un-English,” an alien system of beliefs led by a foreign power in Rome. In converting to Catholicism, Gother had not simply removed himself from the Presbyterian communion, but from any popularly accepted concept of what it meant to be an Englishman. Gother’s friends call his conversion unreasonable, and we should take that word quite literally. His transformation defies the conceptual categories which made reason possible and allowed Protestant Englishmen to make sense of their world. Reconciling this Englishman whom they knew so well with the utterly alien creature that inhabited the Protestant imagination would have been difficult to do without changing their assumptions about that creature, or about what it meant to be an Englishman. Whether one was Protestant or Catholic, this conflict was inherent to any serious consideration of what it meant to be an English Catholic in Gother’s time, and for the better part of a century afterward.

We do not know whether Gother’s friends were willing to question their assumptions about Englishness and Catholicism (it seems unlikely). But some of the most admired literature of the long eighteenth century does. Such literature is the subject of this dissertation. Recent work by historians has radically changed our understanding of Catholicism in this century, and of Protestant attitudes toward it. Far from being a period of stagnation on the one hand, and growing secularism on the other, it was a time in

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<sup>3</sup> Catholics never amounted to more than two percent of the population throughout this period.

which the Catholic community was dynamically evolving, even growing, and in which anti-Catholic prejudice remained strong. The inevitable confrontations between this community and this prejudice were not ignored by writers any more than they were ignored by statesmen. This dissertation looks at Protestant and Catholic writers' engagements with the difficult conceptual work of making sense of the English Catholic community. These writers accepted that a Catholic minority was a permanent part of the English social landscape, and that England needed to find new ways of understanding its relationship to it. This required reimagining English Catholics, and the efforts of these writers to do so had important consequences for the development of English literature.

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The popular equation of Englishness and Protestantism is obvious to any student of the eighteenth century. The inseparability of these national and religious identities had been a commonly expressed belief since the reign of Elizabeth I, but the 1689 Bill of Rights and the 1701 Act of Settlement went further by barring Catholics from the English throne. The bond between nation and religion was thus etched into the kingdom's constitution—so firmly, in fact, that the prohibition remains in effect to this day.<sup>4</sup> Linda Colley has influentially argued that this conflation of national and religious categories was the cornerstone to defining a British identity in the eighteenth century. She writes,

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<sup>4</sup> In 2011, the nations of the British Commonwealth for which the British monarch is head of state agreed to change the succession rules to allow the eldest royal child, regardless of gender, to inherit the throne, and to allow the monarch to marry a Catholic without forfeiting the crown. The monarch him- or herself, however, must still be Protestant.

“[T]o the questions: Who were the British, and did they even exist? Protestantism could supply a potent and effective answer, perhaps the only satisfactory answer possible.”<sup>5</sup>

But this answer could never be as satisfying as those Britons wished it to be, not as long as Catholic communities continued to exist in the nation. Even among the English, who had less need than the “British” to defend the reality of their nationality, the existence of these communities violated fundamental beliefs which Protestants held about the nature of their world. English Catholics were oxymoronic, a paradox; they subverted conceptual boundaries, they violated categories of identity. They were less a theological than an epistemological problem.

While historians and scholars of literature have written countless studies of England’s relationship with the Catholic world, most, like Colley, have either focused on foreign Catholicism or have made little distinction between foreign and domestic Catholicism. A few scholars, however, have argued that failing to make such distinctions may lead to a skewed perception of the conceptual issues at stake in this relationship.

Frances E. Dolan, for instance, has challenged Colley on this point. She writes,

Linda Colley tries to resolve the paradox of Catholic English subjects, ... by engaging in the same strategy that Protestant polemicists used; she estranges Catholics.... Yet Catholics were such troubling figures precisely because they represented the foreign or strange from inside geographical and conceptual boundaries of Englishness.<sup>6</sup>

Repeated bouts of national panic over the “growth of Popery” in England gave the lie to Protestants’ insistence that all Catholicism was foreign. Fueling Protestants’ fears was the knowledge that Protestants could and did convert to Catholicism. Making matters worse

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<sup>5</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 53.

<sup>6</sup> Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 43.

was the fact that domestic Catholicism was resistant to the most common strategies Protestants used to understand and oppose foreign Catholicism. When Catholicism was perceived as an alien religion, racist, nationalist, and colonialist conceptual frameworks could be deployed to clarify the division between Protestant and Catholic, self and other, sameness and difference. Counter-intuitively, alienating Catholics made them *easier* to comprehend, and thus *less* disturbing (if also more justifiably discriminated against).<sup>7</sup> But these conceptual frameworks for understanding alien figures could never adequately distinguish between an English Protestant and an English Catholic. Among the English, difference had to be comprehended through religion alone, and a person's religion was not always knowable. Thus, the figure of the "crypto-Papist," the covert Catholic, was particularly terrifying—both because the crypto-Papist could secretly infect the country with Catholicism, and because the indistinguishability of the crypto-Papist raised unsettling truths about how similar Catholic and Protestant English people truly were. The propensity of Protestants to willfully ignore their nation's Catholic community on the one hand, and to wax hysterical about it on the other, testifies to the anxiety which English Catholics created for their Protestant neighbors.

Of course, Protestant hostility presented challenges to Catholics' concepts of religion and nation as well. Identifying themselves as English was difficult when the vast majority of Englishmen feared and despised them. Many Catholics in European exile chose to embrace cosmopolitan identities, as did a number of those who remained in England. Thus in 1716 we find Alexander Pope declaring himself a "Citizen of the World," and insisting, "I can never think that Place my Country, where I can't call a foot

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<sup>7</sup> Dolan also perceives these effects of alienation: "Associating Catholics with the foreign, the strange, and the black helped to make them less disturbing, and to mark them out as more acceptable targets of aggression" (*Whores of Babylon*, 42).

of paternal Earth my owne.”<sup>8</sup> Of course, even exiles were not assured of finding a sense of belonging in Catholic Europe. English Catholics tended to support theologies that minimized the role of the Pope, and these often met with cold reception in their host countries. As one historian notes, “The interrogation placed upon recusants for being insufficiently ‘English’ in their native kingdom was more than matched in force and intensity by the claim that they had become less than truly Catholic when they moved among their co-religionists abroad.”<sup>9</sup>

Further compromising Catholic identity was the community’s constant need to defend itself from Protestant attempts to characterize it by means of that bogeyman, the Papist Misrepresented. In an effort to create a public image of their religion more palatable to Protestants, some Catholics distanced themselves from the most controversial aspects of their church’s doctrines and traditions, and censured its abuses of clerical authority. But in doing so, they ran the risk of appearing to distance themselves from the church itself. Again we find Pope (who was quite critical of his church’s history of superstitions and failings) expressing the nature of the English Catholic conundrum: “I find it an unfortunate thing to be bred a *Papist* here, where one is obnoxious to four parts in five as being so too much, and to the fifth part as being so too little.”<sup>10</sup> If English Catholics did not view themselves as a contradiction in terms as Protestants did, they nevertheless struggled with the conflicts which their national and religious identities inevitably produced within a predominantly English Protestant culture.

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 344, 384.

<sup>9</sup> Gabriel Glickman, *The English Catholic Community, 1688-1745: Politics, Culture and Ideology* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2009), 15.

<sup>10</sup> Pope, *Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, 209.

This identity crisis was productive of more than vitriol on the one side and a sense of alienation on the other, however. If the unclassifiable nature of English Catholicism often fueled hysterical polemics, it sometimes inspired thoughtful reflection and innovative literature. These unconventional literary engagements with English Catholicism are the subject of the following chapters. This dissertation performs a series of case studies of texts by prominent authors of the long eighteenth-century. Each text chosen for study responds to a specific historical moment and addresses a distinct set of concerns which stem from the unique challenges to conceptual categories, cultural assumptions, or social structures posed by English Catholicism. Some of the texts studied are by Protestants (Dissenting and Church of England), others by Catholics, but they are all preoccupied with solving or circumventing these challenges. They are linked by their interest in finding new approaches to thinking about and representing an English religious minority that had traditionally been placed outside the limits of Englishness.

A focus on unorthodox responses to English Catholicism distinguishes this dissertation from others of its kind. As we have observed, both Protestants and Catholics had reasons (albeit very different ones) to obsess over the ubiquitous figure of the Papist Misrepresented. Scholars interested in the role of English Catholicism after the Reformation have obsessed over him, too. Volumes have been written about this menacing “bugbear,” as Raymond D. Tumbleson refers to him in his study of the role of Catholicism in English culture.<sup>11</sup> This dissertation will also have much to say about anti-Catholic figures, but in contrast to the work of Tumbleson and many other scholars, it is less interested in the Papist Misrepresented than in Gother’s more mundane creation: the

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<sup>11</sup> Raymond D. Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination: Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1660-1745* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

Papist Represented. Or, more accurately, it is interested in attempts throughout this period to represent Catholics in new and (especially) more realistic ways, either in defiance of entrenched anti-Catholic ideology, or to shore up points of weakness in that ideology. The Catholic texts examined in this dissertation are, of course, deeply invested in convincing their audiences of Catholics' humanity, and in working out a new relationship between Catholics and English society. But the Protestant texts studied here, while all anti-Catholic to one degree or another, also treat Catholics as human beings. Even when addressing concerns about Protestant conversion to Catholicism, none of these texts is simplistically reactionary, nor relies solely on traditional strategies for disparaging or alienating English Catholics. The writers of these texts all conclude (for a variety of reasons) that traditional representations of the English Catholic community are either unsustainable, undesirable, or both. They work to modify anti-Catholic discourse through an imaginative engagement with English Catholicism and the rest of the Catholic world.

This dissertation is also distinguished from related studies by its focus on texts by major authors of the period, most of which have achieved canonical status. Of course, my arguments often refer to polemic and literary ephemera (such as the Gother text quoted above), and I acknowledge with gratitude my dependence on a number of scholars who have studied the discourse of anti-Catholicism primarily through non-literary materials and manuscripts (and whose work is discussed below). But at the heart of each of my chapters is a sustained, historicized reading of one or two literary texts. This approach demonstrates that the dilemmas posed by English Catholicism were not confined to religious controversy or political pamphlets, but suffused cultural production throughout



the period. While the past few decades have seen eighteenth-century studies become increasingly aware of the religious interest of the period's literature, there is still much work to be done in recovering this interest in texts where the canonization process has rendered it nearly invisible. This problem is particularly acute for texts taking an unorthodox position on English Catholicism, as the sensitivity of the subject required writers to be highly circumspect in addressing it.

In demonstrating the significant role that anxiety over English Catholicism played in eighteenth-century literature, this dissertation does not merely flesh out an already-understood narrative of the period's literary history. Aspects of this narrative are, I contend, misunderstood due to the lack of attention that has been paid to this anxiety. In their efforts to engage with a religious community which violated boundaries—geographical, cultural, even (in some eyes) temporal—the authors studied in the following chapters violate literary boundaries. These chapters show that working through the social and conceptual challenges posed by English Catholicism leads to literary innovations. John Dryden consciously experiments with late seventeenth-century drama as he seeks a means of presenting Catholics sympathetically to the public in a manner it will accept. Daniel Defoe's radically ambiguous *Roxana* and Samuel Richardson's monumental *Sir Charles Grandison* are both deeply concerned with England's relationship with the Catholic world (perhaps more concerned than either author is fully aware of). Alexander Pope's proto-Gothic poetry and Elizabeth Inchbald's proto-Jacobin novel appear ahead of their time because their authors experienced the authoritarian oppression which characterizes Gothic and Jacobin texts earlier than most of their Protestant countrymen did. Several of these texts are also regarded by scholars as major

advances in the portrayal of interior experience and psychological conflict. I suggest that it is not coincidence that explorations of religious identity—which, ultimately, may only be distinguished through a person's thoughts and beliefs—lead to an interest in interiority.

In performing these readings, I help to fill a yawning historical gap in studies of English Catholicism in literature. While recent years have seen a surge of interest within English literary studies on the topic of religion, interest in Catholicism has been concentrated in the early modern period. The Restoration and Romantic Periods increasingly receive attention as well, but the eighteenth century proper remains quite understudied in this regard. In part, this oversight has been due to a lack of historical work on eighteenth-century Catholicism. However, new work by historians has helped to alleviate this problem. These historians have revealed an English Catholic community which was not the atavistic, stagnant, or regressive entity that past scholarship has often assumed it to be. Rather, it was an active, adaptive community, one which participated in the development of modernity over the course of the eighteenth century. This dissertation argues that our understanding of this period and its literature will benefit from an increased awareness of the pervasiveness of concern over this beleaguered but tenacious community.

### **Reevaluations of Eighteenth-Century Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism**

According to the traditional narrative, the eighteenth century was a period of decline within the English Catholic community. Utterly expelled from political life, English Catholics withdrew into their enclaves in the countryside, submitting quietly to

the economic penalties and other nuisances that recusancy entailed. Most of them anticipated the eventual triumphant return of the deposed Stuart dynasty, but as the Jacobite cause met with failure after failure, Catholic numbers dwindled. Fortunately, their Protestant countrymen were growing increasingly tolerant of other religions, so they were usually allowed to live in peace. As such tolerance would suggest, Protestant England was slowly moving into secular modernity. But the Catholic community was left behind, lost in its traditions and in its dependence on a conservative and insular Catholic squirearchy. The religion was only saved from extinction because of increasing Irish immigration and the gradual repeal of penal laws in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Such was the picture of eighteenth-century Catholicism painted by Protestants and, later, by secular academics with Whiggish assumptions about Catholics and about the period. Colin Haydon's study on the subject of anti-Catholicism in the eighteenth-century notes that even as late as the 1980s,

Georgian anti-Catholicism was not much researched: it did not seem worth investigating, since it seemed at odds with the general views then held of Georgian England. In an age which had found political stability, were religious issues likely to be seriously divisive?<sup>12</sup>

Until the last decades of the twentieth century, historians generally answered "no" to this question. They explained the eighteenth century's occasional persecutions of, and riots over, Catholicism as matters of politics or of social protest over economic conditions, rather than as displays of actual religious fervor.<sup>13</sup>

Another reason the Whiggish portrait of the Catholic community stood for so long is that it was not strongly contested by Catholic historians, who were embarrassed by

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<sup>12</sup> Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

their eighteenth-century forebears. The glorious Age of Martyrs had ended with the Glorious Revolution. Catholics' subsequent submission to Protestant domination struck their Victorian descendants as a sign of weak devotion and weak spirits. It did not help that eighteenth-century Catholics widely disavowed ultramontanist (belief in a strong and broad papal authority). Victorian Catholicism was dominated by ultramontanists, and its scholars accepted a historiography that "subordinated history to orthodoxy."<sup>14</sup> Unsurprisingly, the histories they wrote of the eighteenth-century were not flattering.

Their unflattering vision of the community persists, particularly in the work of eighteenth-century scholars who do not focus on religious contexts. It is, however, a deeply flawed vision, and quite simply wrong in certain respects. While each chapter of this dissertation considers the relevant historical context of the texts it studies, a brief discussion of the new picture of eighteenth-century Catholicism which has emerged from revisionist historical accounts will help illustrate the need for a similarly revisionist account of the period's literary history.

First, the idea that eighteenth-century Protestant culture had secularized or grown tolerant of Catholicism has been thoroughly debunked. Colin Haydon has demonstrated that "for the majority of our period, anti-Catholicism could be seen as the chief ideological commitment of the nation, a set of generally held attitudes, not the obsession of 'ultra-Protestants.'"<sup>15</sup> The intensity and political impact of anti-Catholic feeling in the Restoration, which has been studied extensively,<sup>16</sup> did not vanish with James II's

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<sup>14</sup> Joseph P. Chinnici, *The English Catholic Enlightenment: John Lingard and the Cisalpine Movement, 1780-1850* (Shepherdstown: The Patmos Press, 1980), vii.

<sup>15</sup> Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> The classic study on this subject is John Miller's *Popery & Politics in England, 1660-1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), but historical scholarship now abounds with research on seventeenth-century anti-Catholicism.

deposition. If an equilibrium was generally maintained between Protestants and Catholics, the ferocity with which Catholics were attacked when anything upset that equilibrium indicates that fear and animosity remained just below the surface of this society. As Haydon observes, “the eighteenth century constituted a bridge, not a hiatus, between the better-researched ‘No Popery’ troubles of the Stuart and Victorian eras.”<sup>17</sup> The idea that this was an age of growing tolerance is a view that Whigs promoted of themselves, but looking at the evolution of “tolerant” legislation in the period, political calculation appears as a motivation rather more often than do enlightened attitudes toward religious difference.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the very concept of liberty in England, at least in its early stages, developed in opposition to “Popery.” As Clement Fatovic has argued,

Arbitrary government, superstition, ignorance, corruption, exorbitance, foreign domination, and other ideas tied to Catholicism found their direct counterparts in the rule of law, knowledge, education, virtue, simplicity, free government, and other ideas that came to be associated with liberty.<sup>19</sup>

Later historians were reluctant to acknowledge anti-Catholicism in the Age of Enlightenment because to do so would entail acknowledging the bigoted underpinnings of so many concepts central to the modern liberal state.<sup>20</sup>

Recognizing the strength of Hanoverian anti-Catholicism is important to reorienting perceptions of eighteenth-century Catholicism. But even more important are the investigations that have changed our understanding of the Catholic community itself.

John Bossy made the first major contribution to this revisionist project with his 1975

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<sup>17</sup> Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-19.

<sup>19</sup> Clement Fatovic, “The Anti-Catholic Roots of Liberal and Republican Conceptions of Freedom in English Political Thought,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66, no. 1 (2005): 40.

<sup>20</sup> Tumbleson makes this argument as well, in grandiose terms: “What is anti-Catholicism? It is the ghost in the machine, the endless, neurotic repetition by self-consciously rational modernity of the primal scene in which it slew the premodern as embodied in the archetypal institution, arational and universal, of medieval Europe” (*Catholicism, English Protestant Imagination*, 13).

study, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850*. Bossy demonstrates that from 1700 to 1770, the community actually saw modest growth, increasing from roughly 60,000 communicants in 1700 to about 80,000 by 1770, mostly through converts from the middle and lower classes, particularly in cities. Aristocratic authority over the community had peaked in the mid-seventeenth century, a period in which the church still maintained its “traditionalist” values. In contrast, Bossy writes, “the community which began to grow from somewhere about the close of the seventeenth century was a ‘modernist’ one, in the sense that it shared the essential secular values of the society it lived in. ... Catholics had become reconciled to their environment.”<sup>21</sup> Bossy finds a reasonably confident, well-adapted Catholic community in the eighteenth century, one which had found the means to quietly and peacefully maintain itself.

Bossy’s intervention changed the landscape of English Catholic studies, but his work still supported several aspects of the traditional view of a degenerating community. He agreed with earlier historians that the Catholic nobility had completely withdrawn from public affairs, unable to come to any sort of rapprochement with the Hanoverian government due to their fierce but foolish Jacobite loyalty. Lacking any opportunity to usefully serve their nation, the nobility stagnated, hampering the community’s recovery from the disasters of the Glorious Revolution. The inaccuracy of these perceptions has only recently been exposed by Gabriel Glickman in his study, *The English Catholic Community, 1688-1745*. Glickman demonstrates that earlier historians like Bossy perceived a lifeless nobility because they were looking in the wrong places. Delving into

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<sup>21</sup> Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), 284. See also Bossy’s summary of his findings on the English Catholic community from 1600 to 1770 (*ibid.*, 278-92), and his arguments on the community’s growth (*ibid.*, 182-94). For further details on the success of Catholic conversions in the eighteenth century, see Eamon Duffy, “‘Poor Protestant Flies’: Conversions to Catholicism in Early Eighteenth-Century England,” *Studies in Church History* 15 (1978): 289-304.

family histories and correspondences, he shows that the nobility was politically engaged and tenaciously guarded their community's interests. It was predominantly but not uniformly Jacobite, and even many of those who did remain loyal to the Stuarts were, at times, ready to make peace with the Protestant government, if it could be had without violation of conscience.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Catholics who remained loyal to the Stuarts did so not because the dynasty shared their religion, but because their community had practiced a fierce royalism for most of the seventeenth century, in order to prove their merit and fidelity as English subjects. Glickman suggests that “[t]hey had invested too much intellectual capital in the English royalist tradition to abandon it....”<sup>23</sup> By the time they realized that they had attached themselves to a lost cause, it was too late to gain the trust of the Hanoverians.

Whereas Bossy consciously limited his study to recusants who remained within English shores, Glickman insists that “no accurate picture of the community can be formed without considering the expatriate zone of English Catholicism: the diaspora that stretched from France and the Low Countries, across Italy and the Iberian Peninsula.”<sup>24</sup> The international community he brings to light had close ties to governments throughout Europe, a fact which proved both a diplomatic boon to the isolated community back in England, and a point of contention, as the power struggles between European nations introduced factional wrangling among English Catholics.<sup>25</sup> In short, the image of the Catholic community which emerges from Glickman's work is that of a dynamic, living

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<sup>22</sup> See Glickman, *The English Catholic Community*, 1-12.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

body, one that was constantly adapting to changing circumstances, both in England and in Europe.

Joseph P. Chinnici has similarly demonstrated the intellectual vitality of the community's clergy and scholars. While Protestant narratives portrayed the Catholic Church as an enemy to science and Enlightenment ideals, Chinnici sums up the findings of modern scholarship when he writes, "The fact that there was a positive Catholic response to the Enlightenment and that this response pervaded every major European country can no longer be doubted."<sup>26</sup> These Catholic proponents of the Enlightenment studied and accepted English scientific luminaries such as Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton and promoted liberal political and religious principles.<sup>27</sup> While they were a minority (as were their Protestant counterparts), they had a powerful effect on shaping the character of Catholicism in the eighteenth century, particularly in England. Generally speaking, "[t]hey accepted political secularization, religious liberty, and a contractual theory of both civil and ecclesiastical government."<sup>28</sup> In England these Enlightenment Catholics became known as Cisalpines. Literally meaning "this side of the Alps," the term refers to their anti-ultramontane rejection of control by a religious authority living on the other side of that mountain range. The Cisalpine denial of strong papal authority and their liberal political principles (from which Catholics stood to benefit after the waning of the Jacobite cause) made this school of thought quite popular within the community. Thus, in the last decades of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth, "the mental climate of English Catholicism belonged to the Cisalpines."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Chinnici, *The English Catholic Enlightenment*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, ix.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.



If English liberalism was, in part, a product of anti-Catholicism, by the mid-eighteenth century it had become a Catholic cause as well.

The religious community described by these historians bears little resemblance to the “inert, defensively-minded and intellectually negligible” group that scholars believed it to be only a generation ago.<sup>30</sup> But much of the historical work that has shed new light on English Catholicism is quite recent, and older work has not always diffused into the field of literary studies. Particularly in eighteenth-century studies, research on English Catholicism and anti-Catholicism remains a relatively unexplored sub-field. However, exciting work by scholars of the seventeenth century suggests directions that eighteenth-century studies might take.

The scholar whose work has had the most influence on the design and goals of this dissertation is Frances E. Dolan. Her book, *Whores of Babylon*, has already been referenced more than once in this introduction. Dolan’s study, like this dissertation, identifies the central problem posed by English Catholicism as one of conceptualizing identity and difference.<sup>31</sup> To study this fundamental problem of indistinguishability and conceptual category failure, Dolan focuses on the association of Catholics with another group of people who suffered from confused representation in early modern discourse: women. Dolan demonstrates that in Protestant discourse, Catholics

were persistently linked to women: similar yet different, familiar yet threatening, a subordinated group who yet dominated the culture’s

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<sup>30</sup> J. R. Jones, *The Revolution of 1688 in England* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1972), 80.

<sup>31</sup> Dolan writes that the threat presented by Catholics “was precisely that they could not be readily separated out. Both laws and polemic struggled to identify and vilify Catholics. But neither succeeded in drawing an indisputable or uncrossable line between Catholics and everyone else. ... Undermining Englishness and Protestantism by not being different enough, English Catholics unsettled the nation’s relation to its own past and, with their allegiances divided between England’s sovereign and Rome’s pope, blurred the distinction between the English and foreigners, loyal subjects and traitors, us and them. It was in the tension between the foreign and the familiar, the different and the same, that the particular threat of Catholicism lay” (*Whores of Babylon*, 5).

imagination, oppressively restricted at the level of prescription yet maneuvering to achieve some influence and autonomy in practice, talked about yet talking back.<sup>32</sup>

Dolan does not look solely at misogynistic and anti-Catholic discourse, but also studies English Catholic literature and culture. Interestingly, she finds that some apologetics embraced the association of Catholicism and femininity, treating that relationship (particularly through the Holy Virgin) as one of the religion's strengths. Her discussion of the gendering of Catholicism becomes particularly important in Chapter Six of this dissertation, but her insights into the nature of the anxieties produced by English Catholicism can be felt in every chapter.

Two other books also embark on projects related to this dissertation's, and in their richness of readings demonstrate the fertile ground that Catholic studies holds for continued literary research. Alison Shell's *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination* is an essential study of early modern Catholic discourse and literature.<sup>33</sup> Shell sifts an intimidating amount of archival material to produce a sketch of a distinctly Catholic literary tradition between 1558 and 1660. Some of this literature saw publication, while the rest circulated in manuscript and shaped educations in the English Colleges in Europe. This material alone would be invaluable, but Shell, like Dolan (and like this dissertation), also examines Protestant literature, exposing the anti-Catholic implications of the dramatic works of the supposedly secular Renaissance stage. Chapters Two and Five of this dissertation are deeply influenced by her insights. Raymond D. Tumbleson's *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination* begins where Shell's ends, at the Restoration. He focuses on anti-Catholicism's influence over the politics and

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>33</sup> Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

literature of the last decades of the seventeenth century, and his final chapter extends his investigations as far as the 1745 Jacobite Rising. While he does not study the Catholic community or Catholic literature directly (except as it pertains to his study of Protestant perceptions of it), he provides valuable context for investigating the place of Catholicism in literature and culture in the period through his readings of obscure texts and ephemera, within which he situates more well-known works.

While there are few literary studies aside from Tumbleson's that focus on Catholic issues across multiple decades of the eighteenth century,<sup>34</sup> there are, of course, many scholars who have written insightful chapters and articles on the period's Catholic authors and literary contexts. This dissertation builds on these scholars' work, adding to our understanding of Catholic and anti-Catholic texts and demonstrating their connection to a broader confrontation with the anxieties produced by the collision between Englishness and Catholicism. The claims which it makes should be viewed as a contribution to the much greater project of reinterpreting eighteenth-century literature from a perspective afforded by the studies such as those referenced above: one which recognizes the vitality of Catholicism in the eighteenth century, and the strength of anti-Catholic resistance to it.

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<sup>34</sup> A recent study not to be overlooked is Michael Tomko's *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question: Religion, History and National Identity, 1778-1829* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). It focuses on the Romantic Period, but Tomko informs the study with eighteenth-century Catholic history and culture.

This dissertation is divided into three parts, each containing two related chapters. Part One studies two plays by Dryden, one written before and one after his conversion to Catholicism. These plays—*Tyrannick Love* and *Don Sebastian*—have little in common, save for their pleas for tolerance for Catholics. The former is a heroic play that responds to fears that the English royal family was becoming too Catholic in the late 1660s. It seeks toleration for religious dissent not for the dissenters' sakes, but for the sake of established authority, which was undermined by religious unrest and anti-Catholic attacks. The latter is a tragedy, written in the year following the Glorious Revolution. The traumas experienced by the Catholic community in that year are felt within the play, conveyed by Dryden through brilliant allusive strategies and stagecraft. Both plays test the early modern theater's capacity to stage English Catholicism and the political and social crises it created. The former is ultimately an aesthetic failure, however, its themes and action too muddled by the deep compromises Dryden must make to convey his fantasy of a world in which religious difference does not produce political division. *Don Sebastian*, in contrast, succeeds brilliantly because it embraces the horror and identity confusion that English Catholicism produced, and accepts that the only possible solution to such turmoil, at least for the time, is for English Catholicism to step off the public stage.

Part Two examines three Protestant novels: Defoe's *Roxana* and Richardson's *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison*. Defoe's novel was written at a time when England had finally achieved a relatively sustainable peace with the Catholic world. This peace endangered England in a new way, however, as it made the Catholic world more inviting, especially to young, impressionable men eager to make their fortunes abroad. The novel's

frighteningly protean heroine suggests the concerns about religious and national identity which this latest threat to the kingdom produced. Roxana is an Anglicized French Huguenot who admits to an attraction to Catholicism—and who betrays a deeper attraction than she admits to. Defoe's portrayal of Roxana's identity crisis gives expression to his growing fear that concepts of nation and religion are not sufficiently stable to supply English subjects with a secure identity, leaving them vulnerable to Catholic conversion. The confident Englishness of Richardson's novels appears, at first glance, to offer a stark contrast. His novels respond to the 1745 Jacobite Rising not with blind fear or hostility, but with a desire for rapprochement with the Catholic world, to which he bears goodwill and exhibits more than a little condescension. Yet his seeming certainty of the nature of English identity is belied by his refusal to directly discuss English Catholics or to enter into the psychology Catholic communicants. Richardson is prepared to tolerate, but not to talk about this community, which does not fit within the framework of English identity he espouses.

In Part Three, we turn to works by Catholics: Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* and *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*, and Inchbald's influential novel, *A Simple Story*. Pope's atypically gloomy, romantic poems were written in the wake of the 1715 Jacobite Rising, as anti-Catholic laws were threatening his coreligionists with economic ruin. The distress and internal conflict of the trapped, powerless women at the center of each of these poems give expression to the condition of the Catholic community, itself internally divided over whether to submit to the crowned King of England, George I, or to remain loyal to the Catholic Stuart Pretender. The poems suggest that the community's inability to reconcile its national and religious loyalties may result in its self-destruction.

Inchbald's novel also explores its author's conflicting identities, but she separates those identities into two characters: a (Protestant) woman and a Catholic (man). The hero and heroine love each other but their insecurities goad them into a perpetual domestic war in which each tyrannizes over the other. Inchbald thus highlights the mutual vulnerabilities of women and Catholics and indicates that their interests are closely aligned, as both seek to be recognized as full English subjects. These authors' efforts to explore their community's victimization place them on the vanguard of two literary genres that respond to oppressive social conditions: respectively, the Gothic and the Jacobin novel.

## Part One

### John Dryden, Catholicism, and the Limits of the Restoration Stage

#### Prologue to Part One

John Dryden may be the individual most responsible for visually representing Catholics to the moneyed London public in the late seventeenth century. As an admirer of Continental drama and romance, as a promoter of English imperial expansion after the model of the Spanish and Portuguese, and, later, as a Catholic himself, Dryden featured major Catholic characters in about a third of his plays. These representations of Catholics are far from consistent, however, even prior to his conversion. *The Indian Emperour* portrays Spanish Catholics committing the worst of imperial atrocities, while *The Conquest of Granada* portrays them as admirable, generically “Christian” heroes. *The Assignation, or Love in a Nunnery* capitalizes upon titillating tales of the violation of chastity in Catholic religious orders, while *The Rival Ladies* uses the Catholic world as little more than a romantic backdrop to its comedic action. *The Spanish Fryar*’s anti-monastic humor appealed to a London rattled by reports of Popish plots, while the anti-Catholicism of *The Duke of Guise*’s subject matter actually veils an attack on the Duke of Monmouth and his zealous Protestant supporters. Each of these plays presents its Catholic characters in whatever light its story requires.

Yet these plays are at least united in disapproving of Catholicism, either explicitly drawing upon anti-Catholic tropes and rhetoric or implicitly treating Catholicism as a feature of romance rather than as a real religion. Two of Dryden's plays, however, question or challenge his countrymen's prevailing anti-Catholic attitudes: *Tyrannick Love; or, The Royal Martyr* (1669) and *Don Sebastian, King of Portugal* (1689). Written twenty years apart, on either side of Dryden's religious transformation from Protestant to Catholic, and on either side of England's political and cultural transformation following the Glorious Revolution, these radically different plays nevertheless offer sympathetic portrayals of the English Catholic community.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars have written entire books on the impact of Dryden's religious transformation on his poetry, particularly his two great apologetic poems, the Church of England *Religio Laici* (1682) and the Catholic *Hind and the Panther* (1687).<sup>2</sup> But his plays remain largely unstudied in this context.<sup>3</sup> While not suited to philosophical contemplation, Restoration drama was useful for exploring the interaction of competing interests in a society—not only because it portrayed social interactions, but because the

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<sup>1</sup> Dryden's religious history is complex and full of uncertainties. He was born a Puritan, joined the Church of England upon Charles II's restoration, and converted to Catholicism under the Catholic James II. His personal religious history is further complicated by the deist opinions that many scholars perceive in his writings, especially those from early in his career. Most Dryden scholars today seem to accept his Catholic conversion as sincere (as I do), but some excellent Dryden scholars have their doubts. For instance, Steven N. Zwicker, whose work on Dryden is some of the finest of the past thirty years, views his Catholic conversion as primarily if not entirely a political decision. See "Composing a Literary Life: Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden*, ed. Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10-11. For speculation on Dryden's reasons for his Catholic conversion, and what he stood to lose by it, see Winn, *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 412-16.

<sup>2</sup> See Phillip Harth, *Contexts of Dryden's Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and Sanford Budick, *Dryden and the Abyss of Light: A Study of "Religio Laici" and "The Hind and the Panther"* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, some studies of Dryden's religious thought deliberately ignore them. Harth, for instance, chooses to disregard Dryden's dramatic works in his study of the poet's religious thought, on the grounds that the religious ideas expressed in them exist only for "the part they play in revealing character or in supplying the motivation of dramatic action" (*Contexts of Dryden's Thought*, vii). Dryden's poems certainly deserve the greatest attention in this study, but his dramatic works contain more religious thought than Harth gives them credit for.



theater space was itself a site for the mixing of people of diverse backgrounds and opinions. Offering positive representations of English Catholics to this heterogeneous (yet overwhelmingly anti-Catholic) audience required careful positioning, subtle argumentation, and experimentation with Restoration dramatic forms.

In the case of *Tyrannick Love*, these experiments result in a heroic play that seems uncomfortable with the heroic mode. While Dryden's heroic plays always contain contradictions, exploring the limitations of heroic codes even as they ultimately reaffirm their value, *Tyrannick Love* strains the genre to the breaking point.<sup>4</sup> Its tolerationist agenda—unique among Dryden's heroic plays—confuses its treatment of heroic virtue and absolutist monarchy. Promoting tolerance and the acceptance of difference with a dramatic genre designed to overwhelm and homogenize its audience results in an uneasy relationship between form and content. Indeed, the primary goal of the play's tolerationist agenda is not to improve the condition of religious minorities, but to shore up support for England's political and religious establishment. Ultimately, the play's incongruities are too much. It is widely regarded as a failure.

Dryden's post-conversion, post-revolution experiment with dramatic form in *Don Sebastian* is far more successful—not because he limits the play to the capacities of its form, but because he intentionally exceeds them. In *Tyrannick Love*, the suitability of the stage for addressing conflicts arising from religious difference is never questioned, despite the strain which this use places upon the heroic mode of the play. Catholics are a public problem; the public stage is therefore an appropriate place to explore that problem. *Don Sebastian* not only rejects the heroic mode, but signals its distrust of the stage itself.

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<sup>4</sup> For more on Dryden's testing of heroic codes, see Derek Hughes, *English Drama, 1660-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 46-47; and Hughes, "Heroic Drama and Tragicomedy," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 209-10.

The play is far too long to be staged uncut, and Dryden's prefatory comments on its unstageable nature suggest that he designed it to be best appreciated in a closet reading. Moreover, the play complements its anti-theatrical form with action characterized by motifs of thwarted surveillance, obscurity, and mystery.

Thus the closet, not the stage, is marked as the best place to offer representations of English Catholics and their state of crisis, where they might be studied by reflective readers rather than displayed before unthinking spectators.<sup>5</sup> The stage was an effective space for marginalizing or demonizing Catholics—Dryden had often used it for that purpose himself—but it was not an effective arena for reimagining this religious minority in positive terms. By seeking refuge in the closet, Dryden signals the turn inward which would characterize the Catholic community for the next century, as it was forced to return its religious practices to private chapels and closet devotions.

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<sup>5</sup> Elaine McGirr characterizes the reception of an eighteenth-century novel and a seventeenth-century heroic play as a contrast between “thoughtful reflection” and “group hypnosis.” *Heroic Mode and Political Crisis, 1660-1745* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 24.

## Chapter One

### Staging Tolerance in *Tyrannick Love*

Written and performed in 1669, *Tyrannick Love; or, the Royal Martyr*, had a successful initial run on the London stage. Later audiences and critics have been less enthusiastic. The play was only occasionally revived in the following four decades before disappearing from the repertory completely. Indeed, it may be the least admired of Dryden's heroic dramas. It has been criticized as a poorly plotted and hastily written propaganda piece, and it stars a villain whose bombast threatens to slip into self-parody.<sup>1</sup> The play's artistic shortcomings, however, are not the result of authorial laziness but of outsized ambitions. Maximillian Novak, editor of *Tyrannick Love* for the California edition of Dryden's works, calls the play "largely experimental" and "Dryden's most explorative work" in the heroic genre, even as he admits that "the play does not hold together."<sup>2</sup> Ostensibly, this experimentation develops out of an effort to offer the audience "*patterns of piety*"—in other words, to treat religion on the relatively secular

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<sup>1</sup> James Anderson Winn, for instance, pans the play for its compressed plot and uninspired poetry, which he blames on Dryden's "impatience" and "hasty composition." *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 206-207. In later reflections, Dryden himself seems to concur with criticisms of the play, claiming of some of Maximin's lines, "I knew they were bad enough to please, even when I writ them," and recommending they be consigned to the flames. John Dryden, *The Spanish Fryar, or, The Double Discovery*, in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. H. T. Swedenberg Jr., et al., 19 vols. (Los Angeles and Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1956-), 16:100. (Hereafter, all citations of Dryden's works are from this edition.) For a discussion of the play's theatrical history, see Maximillian Novak, commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, in *Works*, 10:380, 386.

<sup>2</sup> Novak, commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, 10:398-99.

and very immoral Restoration stage.<sup>3</sup> Yet even this goal does not suggest the full extent of the play's ambitions. *Tyrannick Love* addresses Restoration England's most fundamental political and social problem: religious difference. In great part, the play's interest to its original audience must be credited to Dryden's decision to address an issue that, by 1669, had reached a point of crisis.

Londoners would have anticipated the play's interest in this issue the moment they learned that it portrayed the martyrdom of St. Catharine of Alexandria. The (probably fictitious) fourth-century saint, martyred by a pagan Roman emperor, had enjoyed enormous popularity in medieval England and was the subject of a great deal of religious pageantry. But her popularity became a liability during the Reformation. The excessive adoration she enjoyed lent support to Protestant claims about Catholic corruption, idolatry, and femininity,<sup>4</sup> and celebrations in her honor were suppressed. However, her legend gained new currency in England when Charles II married the Portuguese Catholic princess, Catherine of Braganza. As the queen's namesake, St. Catharine was the subject of several celebrations in the 1660s, and a portrait of the queen as St. Catharine painted in 1664 was widely distributed as an engraving.<sup>5</sup> In staging this play, then, Dryden revived a reviled Catholic practice of hagiographic pageantry,

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<sup>3</sup> Dryden, *Works*, 10:109. The play is one of only five written during the Restoration on a clearly "religious" subject (including Dryden's *State of Innocence*, a stage adaptation of *Paradise Lost*), and it may be the only one of them to actually be performed. See Novak, commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, 10:385n27.

<sup>4</sup> Protestantism's misogynistic attacks on Catholicism are described in Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 36-37, and are examined in greater detail in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

<sup>5</sup> Paulina Kewes offers further details about the celebrations, the painting, and other public representations associating the queen with her saintly namesake. Kewes believes that Dryden successfully avoids St. Catharine's Catholic associations in his presentation of her; my arguments suggest her portrayal is more complicated than this. "Dryden's Theatre and the Passions of Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden*, ed. Steven Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 138. For more details on Catherine's public association with the saint, see Edward Corp, "Catherine of Braganza and Cultural Politics," in *Queenship in Britain, 1660-1837: Royal Patronage, Court Culture and Dynastic Politics*, ed. Clarissa Campbell Orr (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 60-62.

flattered the Catholic queen, and dramatized the oppression of a religious minority by a powerful religious establishment.<sup>6</sup> It was, to put it simply, a provocative act.

But while provocative, it was not subversive, at least not of the monarchy. In early 1669, the English royal family, which had always been too sympathetic to Catholics for the predominantly Protestant nation's taste, appeared to be on the verge of strengthening its ties to Catholicism. Rumors (of varying degrees of truth) circulated of the Catholic queen's pregnancy, of the conversion of the king's brother, the Duke of York (the future James II), and of the crypto-papism of the king himself. As the royal family appeared to become more Catholic, religious intolerance grew as a threat to the monarchy. Dryden took the excuse of the queen's pregnancy to write a play that argues in favor of religious tolerance as the best way to keep peace in England—and to keep the royal family safe from its subjects.

The play's very title reveals the latter concern. Stuart propaganda frequently portrayed Charles I, father to Charles II and his brother, as a "Royal Martyr" for his beheading at the hands of radical Protestants during the Civil War. And of course, the play's heroic mode inevitably linked it to the Stuarts. Indeed, one scholar has observed that the creation of the heroic play genre "was almost an act of state," and its subsequent popularity was directly tied to the popularity of the Stuart court.<sup>7</sup> Elaine McGirr argues

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<sup>6</sup> John Cox notes that as the Church of England grew more centrist in the late Elizabethan period, hagiographic plays of saints rejected during the Reformation began to appear on the London stage. Such plays upset more radical Protestants. Cox also notes that one of Dryden's minor sources for the play, *The Virgin Martyr* by Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger, carries suggestions of Massinger's possible "Catholic inclinations" and "has affinities with the Baroque idealism of the Counter Reformation *tragedia sacra* on the continent." Dryden was by no means the inventor of this covertly pro-Catholic dramaturgy. See *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350-1642*, ebrary ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 132-36, 171.

<sup>7</sup> Susan J. Owen, *Perspectives on Restoration Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 16. For discussions of the heroic play as an evolving genre, see Robert Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 192-99; and Derek Hughes,

that the heroic mode “dramatized the end of civil war and the restoration of art and authority.” Furthermore, the mode’s “absolutist ideology and baroque obfuscation” served the Stuarts by quelling dissent and uniting the English population under their authority after the republican experiment of the Interregnum. Such absolutist ideology and baroque obfuscation are found in abundance in *Tyrannick Love*.<sup>8</sup>

And yet, *Tyrannick Love* fits awkwardly into most descriptions of the heroic play. In his sweeping study of late seventeenth-century drama, Robert D. Hume only admits the play into the ranks of the heroic on what amounts to a technicality.<sup>9</sup> The central figure of the tyrant, Maximin, places the play in an uneasy relationship with absolutist ideology. The inconsistency of its religious and political allusions threatens to render it incoherent as a propaganda device favorable to the Stuarts.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as we shall see, the nature of the play’s influence on subsequent dramatists suggests that some members of its audience found it to contain powerful *anti-monarchical* implications. These problems proceed from the difficulty Dryden has in reconciling a genre designed “to captivate its audience, to awe it into passivity, and to subject it to a heroic reading of history and celebration of monarchy” with a political agenda that rejects homogeneity and the imposition of

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“Heroic Drama and Tragicomedy,” in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 195-210. The heroic play flourished in the 1660s while the Restoration court was still admired and its conflicts still appeared resolvable but it mutated into something darker in the 1670s as optimism faded, virtually disappearing after the crises of the late 1670s. *Tyrannick Love* is situated on the cusp of the genre’s shift from light to dark. Indeed, it helped to shift the genre into its dark mode, a matter we shall discuss at greater length at the end of this chapter.

<sup>8</sup> Elaine McGirr, *Heroic Mode and Political Crisis, 1660-1745* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 13, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Hume is prepared to disqualify villain-centered plays as heroic, but makes an exception for plays like *Tyrannick Love* in which “a character of virtue figures prominently in contrast” (*The Development of English Drama*, 193). Novak similarly notes that *Tyrannick Love* demonstrates the difficulty of establishing “any monolithic concept of the heroic play” (Commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, 10:383).

<sup>10</sup> Kewes notes that similarities between the tyrant Maximin and Charles II endangers the play’s royalist politics, as does the unification of Rome under elected monarchs in the play’s denouement (“Passions of Politics,” 138). Both of these issues are examined in greater detail below.

religious belief.<sup>11</sup> While the play does its best to argue for toleration on absolutist grounds, its manifest weaknesses reveal that toleration and the heroic mode do not mix well.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the tense state of religious affairs in England in the years leading up to *Tyrannick Love*'s composition, particularly with regard to the public's fear that it might soon have a Catholic monarch. A brief summary of the play's plot and some observations on Dryden's modifications to his source material demonstrate that the play departs from the heroic's usual celebration of conformity. Instead, it suggests that unity may be maintained amidst religious diversity. Then, looking deeper into the play's language and action, we find that Dryden draws upon the Roman setting to promote a form of piety that focuses on civil rather than religious obedience. Emptied of any connection to a specific religion, piety becomes a virtue that may unite disparate religious factions in obedience to their monarch. A comparison of the play's pious characters further illuminates its strategies for promoting unity-in-diversity. Importantly, these characters differ in religious opinions and level of devotion, but they are all presented as admirable figures. Through the sympathetic treatment of these characters' struggles (and their suggestive associations with England's dissenting religious groups) the play argues for the toleration of dissent.

However, in turning to the play's villain, Maximin, we find that Dryden undercuts much of this sympathy. Maximin's tyrannical qualities associate him with the Pope and with the Cromwellian regime, inevitably reinforcing the negative perceptions of Catholics and Dissenters which the play's treatment of the pious characters sought to soften. This chapter concludes with some reflections on this and other inconsistencies in

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<sup>11</sup> McGirr, *Heroic Mode and Political Crisis*, 17.

the play, and gives particular attention to how the heroic play genre and its conventions ultimately work against Dryden's tolerationist agenda.

### ***Tyrannick Love and the Threat of Catholic Monarchy***

The religious crisis that unfolded in England between 1666 and 1669 often lacked the visibility of the later Popish Plot scare and Exclusion Crisis (1678-1682), yet it was an equally unstable period for the Restoration religious settlement. The comprehension of Presbyterians into the Church of England, a general toleration of all Trinitarian Christians, or the conversion of the monarch to Catholicism were all possibilities given serious consideration by Charles II or Parliament in these years.

By the late 1660s, widespread dissatisfaction with the nation's religious settlement and disenchantment with the monarchy had damaged the precarious national unity ushered in by Charles's restoration. Catholics were disappointed that their service to Charles in his exile had not been rewarded by the relaxation of laws against them. Dissenters, or Nonconformists (Protestants who had refused to practice their religion according to the terms of the 1662 Act of Uniformity) were embittered by the laws which limited the exercise of their religion and excluded them from positions in government. Members of the Church of England were suspicious of a king who frequently sought to diminish their unique privileges. A spark was all that was needed to turn this dissatisfaction into civil upheaval, and England got far more than a spark when the Great Fire of London burned most of the city to the ground in September of 1666.

The city was still burning when rumors spread that the fire was the opening salvo in a Catholic attempt to conquer the country. Protestants began arming themselves



against an army of Catholics that did not exist. Charles tried to blame the fire on God's judgment on the sins of the whole nation, but Parliament insisted on holding inquiries into possible conspiracies. It was a foregone conclusion that their report (printed several times in 1667) would lay the blame on Catholics. Led by Parliament, the normally fractious Protestant sects united in their anti-Catholic fervor. Unfortunately for Charles, who had been trying to forge such unity for years, the anti-Catholic rhetoric of this coalition often had a seditious, anti-monarchical undercurrent. Indeed, some believed that the Duke of York (who was already widely suspected of being Catholic) had helped start the fire. Even Charles did not escape whispers of secret Papism and complicity in the arson.<sup>12</sup>

Nevertheless, Charles attempted to turn this newfound unity among Protestants to his favor. He proposed a bill of comprehension that would make Presbyterians a part of the Church of England and offer toleration to most Dissenters. For a time, this plan appeared to have a chance of success.<sup>13</sup> Yet as with all other attempts to break the Church of England's monopoly on religious authority, Parliament eventually turned against it. In early 1668, Parliament not only defeated the bill, but also compelled Charles to renew the enforcement of the Act of Uniformity.

Angered and disappointed at the Church of England's stubbornness and the monarchy's submission to Parliament, in Easter Week of 1668 thousands of Dissenting Londoners took to the streets, rioting for several days. These days of lawlessness are

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<sup>12</sup> For details on the anti-Catholicism generated by the Great Fire, see Walter George Bell, *The Great Fire of London in 1666* (London: John Lane, 1920), 41-42, 196-209; and Michael McKeon, *Politics and Poetry in Restoration England: The Case of Dryden's "Annus Mirabilis"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 132-47. Michael McKeon has suggested that the unity displayed by the various Protestant sects against the Catholics was effectively an attempt by Parliament to create the national unity that the king's Restoration and Second Dutch War had failed to produce.

<sup>13</sup> McKeon, *Politics and Poetry*, 143-46.

known as the Bawdy-House Riots because the rioters took out much of their frustration on the city's brothels. There is evidence that both the old republican cause and Dissenting religious fervor joined in fueling the violence. At court, it was feared that revolution was at hand, especially when reports began to circulate of rioters seeking the supposedly Catholic Duke of York and threatening to tear down the greatest bawdy-house of all: Whitehall. Although the royal family had championed toleration, their failure to produce results and their Catholic sympathies made them targets of the mob's animosity.<sup>14</sup>

These riots may have convinced Charles that he had made a mistake in attempting to appease Protestant sectarians. Otherwise it is difficult to explain the dramatic shift in his religious policy that had taken place by January 1669, when in a private meeting, Charles informed his Catholic and crypto-Catholic counselors, the earl of Arlington, Lord Arundell, and Sir Thomas Clifford, that he planned to embrace Catholicism. Clifford and Arlington were charged with negotiating a treaty with Louis XIV in which France would provide funds for England to wage another war with the Dutch, and in return, Charles would publicly declare his Catholic faith.<sup>15</sup>

Some historians believe that the Treaty of Dover must have been a mere ruse to extract war funds from Louis XIV. Certainly if Charles's declared intention was genuine, he did not hold it for very long. He made no preparations for the discontent and panic his

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<sup>14</sup> Tim Harris argues that the riots were primarily the result of Dissenters' disappointment over the failed toleration act. Melissa M. Mowry takes issue with Harris's focus on religion and suggests instead that the riots and the pamphlet war that followed them represent a confrontation between royalists and republicans. Of course, while these historians disagree about the central crux of the riots, Dissenters and republicans were so closely linked (especially in the eyes of the monarchy) that the riots must have been perceived as associated with both groups. See Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II: Propaganda and Politics from the Restoration until the Exclusion Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 82-91; and Mowry, *The Bawdy Politic in Stuart England, 1660-1714: Political Pornography and Prostitution* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 55-66.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Seaward, "Charles II (1630–1685)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/article/5144> (accessed January 20, 2012).

conversion would have produced, and his conversion became less central to the negotiations with France as they continued into the next year.<sup>16</sup> However, even if Charles's offer was insincere, this episode illustrates the instability of England's religious settlement in early 1669, and the Stuarts' increasing solidarity with the Catholic world.

The English public, as we have noted, was acutely aware of this growing solidarity. Protestants had never fully trusted Charles and his brother, who were the sons of the uncompromising Catholic, Henrietta Maria of France, and had been residents of Catholic Europe during their exile. Charles's marriage to Catherine of Braganza did not help matters. The queen's Catholic entourage and private chapels facilitated Catholic conversions at court, and the public feared her influence on her husband—and on any children she might have. Nevertheless, her pregnancy in 1669 would have struck more Englishmen with relief than alarm, as the current heirs to the throne were the Duke of York and his infant son, Edgar (who would die in 1671). While York's religious history is murky, he likely determined to convert to Catholicism in 1668, and the public had suspected his crypto-papism long before then. With each year that passed in which Catherine failed to produce an heir, he appeared increasingly likely to become the next King of England. The existence of an adult, non-lineal heir to the throne is potentially destabilizing in any monarchy, and the not-very-well-kept secret of York's Catholicism only made matters worse.

In sum, after more than a century of Protestant rule, there were suddenly several credible scenarios in which England might find itself with a Catholic monarch. Charles might convert; Catherine might produce an heir and find little resistance from her sympathetic husband in secretly educating him as a Catholic; and York or his son would

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

take the throne if no other heir should appear. As the anti-Catholic passions ignited by the Fire of London had amply demonstrated, rebellion was a real possibility should any of these scenarios occur.

Such was the state of religious politics in England when Dryden began to pen *Tyrannick Love* in early 1669. At the very least, Dryden knew the rumors about the royal family which had placed it, and England's religious settlement, in jeopardy. And it is not unthinkable that he may have known some of the truth behind the rumors. He was made privy to at least two secret Catholic conversions in the royal family during his years in its service as poet laureate and royal historiographer: those of Anne Hyde (York's first wife) in 1670, and Charles, who converted on his deathbed in 1685.<sup>17</sup> James Winn has suggested that the crypto-Catholics Arlington and Clifford (both of whom Dryden was on good terms with at this time) may have hinted to Dryden that a play celebrating the Catholic queen would be very welcome at this time.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever degree of knowledge Dryden had of the royal family's religious state, it was sufficient to inspire him to write a play that urges toleration of religious dissenters—even if that dissenter is the monarch. As Michael McKeon has noted, Dryden had already signaled his misgivings about the concept of unity-in-uniformity in *Annus Mirabilis*, the 1667 poem that had earned him the poet laureateship.<sup>19</sup> *Tyrannick Love* goes much further, however, by dramatizing the creation of a civil society that finds unity in spite of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, 201-202. Winn does not believe Dryden would have been told of the king's conversion plans, however.

<sup>19</sup> *Annus Mirabilis* was written in response to the Fire of London and the Second Dutch War. The poem is clearly concerned about the fractures in England's unity these events had exposed. McKeon argues that the poem abandons uniformity as a workable model of unity, promoting instead a model which "involves the abolition of division by subsuming group interests under that of the court." Dryden believes diversity can exist in a united kingdom, but it requires universal submission to "court ideology" (McKeon, *Politics and Poetry*, 146).

religious diversity. His play brings together Christians and pagans and allows each character (even the villain) to justify his or her actions and point of view.<sup>20</sup> By portraying the perplexities and catastrophes that factionalism produces, the play suggests that an empire only creates unnecessary difficulties in attempting to achieve religious uniformity.

The play's plot is a much embellished and altered version of St. Catharine's legend. Dominating the play is the villain, the emperor Maximin. He is a usurper who gained control of the empire by marrying the previous emperor's sister, Berenice, and then assassinating him. When the play opens, he is laying siege to Aquileia in Italy, where the Senate has chosen two new emperors to replace him. The central conflict is between Maximin and St. Catharine, who is brought to Aquileia as a captive princess. Maximin persecutes Christians, but when the beautiful St. Catharine starts converting soldiers and philosophers at his court, he is torn between his need to execute her and his desire to marry her. She despises all of his advances, however, seeking only her martyr's crown.

Meanwhile, several other characters are caught in conflicts between the duty they owe to their sovereign and their love for someone threatened by his tyranny. After his son is killed in battle, Maximin adopts the captain of the Praetorian Guard, Porphyrius, as his heir, intending to marry him to his daughter, Valeria. This is doubly painful to Porphyrius, who despises Maximin and is in love with the tyrant's wife, Berenice. Berenice returns Porphyrius's love but refuses to violate her conjugal vow, even when Maximin seeks a divorce from her. Valeria also loves Porphyrius and she is stung when

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<sup>20</sup> Anne T. Barbeau writes that Dryden always allows his characters to justify their actions and points of view: "Whether he be a villain, a fool, or a hero, each character in Dryden's plays is endowed with logic, acumen, and the apt words with which to express his particular attitude toward man and the state." *The Intellectual Design of John Dryden's Heroic Plays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 5.

he rejects her. Nevertheless, she attempts to protect him from Maximin's wrath.

Placidius, a Praetorian Guard in love with Valeria, is jealous of Porphyrius's successes and begins to poison Maximin against him. Yet even the snaky Placidius demonstrates flawed heroism, his faithfulness to Valeria forcing him to take actions against his own interests.

Both Berenice and Porphyrius refuse to accept Maximin's plans for them, and St. Catharine converts them to Christianity. They are all sentenced to death, but the emperor offers to let them live if St. Catharine will agree to marry him. She refuses the offer and goes triumphantly to her martyrdom. Yet (in a significant alteration of the saint's legend) Berenice and Porphyrius are spared when Maximin's soldiers rise against him. In the chaotic final moments of the play, Valeria kills herself in protest of her father's abuses, prompting Maximin to blaspheme the gods. Avenging Valeria, Placidius attacks Maximin, and they kill each other. Romans are again united under the Senate's chosen emperors, and Porphyrius and Berenice prepare to leave public life so that they may live and worship together in peace and privacy.

The play's interest in the problem of religious difference is apparent not only in the circumstances of the plot, but also in the changes Dryden makes to the setting of St. Catharine's legend. Tradition places St. Catharine's martyrdom in fourth century Alexandria, but Dryden sets his play in Aquileia in 238 CE. In his preface, Dryden claims these changes are due to an error; he mistook the early third century Maximin I for Maximin II, who was "the Contemporary of Constantine the Great" and one of the more plausible candidates for the emperor of the St. Catharine legends.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps Dryden made

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<sup>21</sup> Dryden claims that he takes this mistake from "*a French Play, called the Martyrdom of S. Catharine*," but claims that his plot owes nothing to this play (*Works*, 10:111-12). Novak points out that Dryden's claim

an honest mistake, but it is more likely that he preferred to set the play in Italy in 238 CE, known in histories of Rome as the Year of the Six Emperors. As the name suggests, it was one the most chaotic periods in Roman history. By introducing religious conflict into the period's dynastic disputes, Dryden associates the problem of religious intolerance with civil war.

More importantly, however, the change of setting makes *Tyrannick Love* unique among Dryden's heroic plays by dramatizing the formation of a unified but religiously heterogeneous society. Dryden once claimed that the moral of *The Conquest of Granada* is that "*Union preserves a Common-wealth, and discord destroys it.*"<sup>22</sup> This moral would apply equally well to his entire body of heroic plays. But in most of these plays, unity is equated with religious uniformity and is achieved at the point of a sword. By the conclusion of *The Conquest of Granada*, every Moor has been converted, expelled, or killed. Had *Tyrannick Love* been set in the age of Constantine, its conclusion would have been little different. The Christian triumph over pagan Rome would have been only a few years off as the final curtain fell.<sup>23</sup> Setting the play a hundred years before the conversion of the Roman Empire makes the play a depiction of the triumph of *toleration* rather than of the triumph of religious uniformity.

That Dryden wrote the implicitly intolerant *Conquest of Granada* immediately after *Tyrannick Love* suggests that he did not long entertain toleration as an ideal—if indeed he was ever truly committed to it. Perhaps as it became clear that Charles was in

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to have borrowed nothing else from this play is untrue, which further calls into doubt his assertion that the adoption of this "mistake" was a mere accident. See Novak, commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, 10:390-91, 401-2n110:7.

<sup>22</sup> Dryden, *Troilus and Cressida*, 13:234.

<sup>23</sup> In the earliest legends of St. Catharine, her persecutor is Maxentius, the Emperor whom Constantine defeated in battle after seeing a burning cross in the sky, leading him to convert the Roman Empire to Christianity. For details on the uncertain identification of St. Catharine's persecutor, see Christine Walsh, *The Cult of St Katherine of Alexandria in Early Medieval Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 7n2.

no hurry to convert, experimentation with a concept of unity that does not require religious uniformity no longer seemed urgent. Nevertheless, Dryden's experiment remains intrinsically interesting as an early literary argument for toleration—even if (as we shall see) the play argues that tolerating religious dissenters is a means of protecting the state religion's monopoly on power.

### A Tolerant Piety

Dryden informs us in the preface to *Tyrannick Love* that he wrote the play to teach “*the Precepts and Examples of Piety*.”<sup>24</sup> However, a few lines further on, he makes a slight but key alteration to this stated purpose. Defending the stage from those who consider it inherently irreligious and immoral, he writes, “*I only maintain, against the Enemies of the Stage, that patterns of piety, decently represented, and equally removed from the extremes of Superstition and Prophaneness, may be of excellent use to second the Precepts of our Religion*.”<sup>25</sup> Although he has just asserted that a play can teach both precepts *and* examples of piety, here Dryden indicates that this play will only concern itself with the “*patterns*,” or examples. Dryden will only teach his audience proper religious behavior; he will leave it to the clergy to teach the precepts.

Of course, different clergies will teach different precepts, but one of Dryden's objectives is to demonstrate that these differences are irrelevant. He aims to convince a deeply sectarian audience that piety has no connection to any specific religion's precepts,

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<sup>24</sup> *Works*, 10:109. The theme of “piety” would have been obvious even in the stage production. *Piety* and variations of the word appear eleven times in the play, far more than in any other of Dryden's plays save his much later (and similarly religion-themed) play, *Don Sebastian*. I include in my count each instance of *piety*, *impiety*, *pious*, and *impious* in the play dialogue (words in stage directions and attached prose materials were not counted toward the total). These words appear twelve times in *Don Sebastian*. In contrast, the two parts of *The Conquest of Granada* only use these words five times combined. Even *All for Love*, with its similarly Roman setting, only uses these words twice.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*



nor is the virtue confined to religious matters. Piety means showing a proper respect for *all* authorities, not just religious authority. And the examples of piety found in the play primarily focus on obedience to *civil* authority.

The play's lack of interest in promoting any specific sect's doctrines becomes clear as soon as St. Catharine is introduced into the action. She immediately debates Apollonius (Maximin's head priest) over the relative merits of the Christian and pagan religions. Presumably, Dryden could have celebrated some broadly accepted Christian doctrines in this debate without giving offense. Yet the debaters agree to limit their argument to the question of which religion provides superior "precepts of Morality" for its adherents.<sup>26</sup> These precepts never stray from the subject of virtue, and it quickly becomes clear that the virtues of Apollonius's pagan religion differ not a whit from St. Catharine's. The saint only wins the debate because Christianity demands purity of thought as well as purity of action from its adherents—a level of virtue which, of course, has no observable effect in the world. Nevertheless, after fifty-two lines of debate, Apollonius declares he has been overthrown and must embrace the Christian religion, despite the fact that neither debater has so much as mentioned Christ, or even God.<sup>27</sup>

The focus on morality and virtue in the debate supports the notion that piety is not about what one believes, but about how one behaves. Indeed, as the setting of the play might suggest, Dryden's conception of piety is essentially Roman in nature. In the "Dedication of the *Aeneis*," written late in his life, Dryden describes Roman piety at

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<sup>26</sup> *Tyrannick Love; or, the Royal Martyr*, 10:133, line 184 (hereafter cited in text by act, scene, and line of this edition).

<sup>27</sup> Hughes claims that while Dryden was "obviously" Christian late in his life, in the 1660s and 1670s he was likely a deist, pointing to the fact that his religious plays from this period, *Tyrannick Love* and *The State of Innocence* (1674), contain no references to Christianity ("Heroic Drama and Tragicomedy," 200). Hughes may well be right, but Dryden may also have found deist thought to be a means of drawing together England's religious sects.

length. *Piety*, he writes, “in *Latin* is more full than it can possibly be express in any Modern Language; for there it comprehends not only Devotion to the Gods, but Filial Love and tender Affection to Relations of all sorts.” He further asserts that “a thorough Virtue both begins and ends in Piety,” and that “Piety alone comprehends the whole Duty of Man towards the Gods; towards his Country, and towards his Relations.”<sup>28</sup> Roman piety was thus a unifying force. Indeed, the occasional Christian and Jewish persecutions notwithstanding, Romans were generally tolerant of others’ ideas about God, a fact that no doubt contributed to their success in incorporating new territories and peoples. Dryden might well propose Roman piety as a model for the kind of piety England needed if it were to stand as a great empire in opposition to the Dutch and the French—or if it were to stand at all.

The play’s focus on behavior over doctrine explains a peculiarity of the temptation episode of the play’s spectacular fourth act. A magician in service to Placidius summons aerial spirits to arouse earthly desires in St. Catharine while she sleeps. The spirits sing and dance, characters enter and exit via ropes and trapdoors, and supernatural beings deliver some of the play’s best poetry. The episode closes when St. Catharine’s guardian angel, Amariel, descends “*with a flaming sword*” and chastises the spirits. They “*crawl off the Stage amazedly*” as St. Catharine sleeps on, unharmed (s.d. 4.1.148+). As an entertainment, the scene is a triumph, but Dryden’s inclusion of these elemental creatures in a hagiographic play is puzzling. Hagiography already has a legion of traditional tempters: Satan and his fellow devils.

This peculiarity makes sense when we acknowledge that this “religious” play is less concerned with disobedience to God than with disobedience to civil authority. Unlike

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<sup>28</sup> *Dedication of the Æneis*, 5:286, 288.

devils, these aerial spirits are “[n]ot in their Natures simply good or ill; / But most subservient to bad Spirits will” (4.1.17-18). Only the influence of the black magician and the mischievous spirit, Damilcar, moves the spirits to prey on the saint. Unlike devils, they do not require extermination, merely firm government. Amariel addresses the spirits less like an angel than like a supervisor, reminding them at length of “the task assign’d [them] here below,” of controlling the world’s meteorological phenomena (4.1.163-70). In contrast to the undutiful and mercurial spirits, Amariel arrives from the “Empire of Eternal day, / Where waiting minds for Heav’ns Commision stay.” He only intervenes because “A darted Mandate came / From that great will which moves this mighty Frame” (4.1.149-50, 151-52). He is the very model of the dutiful subject: utterly passive when without orders and fervently zealous when acting on them.

Novak suggests that this episode represents “the combat between religion and human folly rather than a combat between good and evil,”<sup>29</sup> but I believe it would be better characterized as a combat between submissive dutifulness and rebellious undutifulness—or, more simply, between piety and impiety. Dryden has altered the supernatural elements of the hagiographic tradition to promote *civil* obedience and encourage the audience to focus on “the task assign’d [them] here below” rather than on theological disputes over the details of the hereafter.

Of course, if the confrontation between Amariel and the aerial spirits is an allegory for the proper exercise of piety, it is a dishonestly simple one. There can be no conflict between civil piety and religious piety for the spirits, because God is their master in both cases. The human characters of the play face greater difficulties as they struggle to behave piously to their cruel emperor while also behaving piously to God, their

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<sup>29</sup> Novak, Commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, 10:397.

countrymen, and others who have a legitimate claim to their loyalties. If this tension sounds similar to Dryden's usual heroic tension between the duties of honor and the demands of love, this is not coincidence. Dryden does not really add a new element to his heroic play by introducing piety to it; rather, he maps pious struggle onto the conventional heroic play conflict between honor and love. Given the earthly, civil character of Dryden's piety, honor *is* piety. And while love for a woman is not the same thing as pious adoration of God, St. Catharine clearly recognizes an association between the two when she declares, "Love, like that pow'r which I adore, is one" (4.1.365). In fact, Dryden's heroes always love women whom they regard as celestial or divine (Porphyrius calls Berenice, not Catharine, his "sweet Saint" [5.1.480]), and who act as consciences for them. These external, female consciences insist upon them performing their duties to the state (Berenice twice prevents Porphyrius from killing Maximin). Thus the worthiness of heroic love is demonstrated by service to the state, just as (Dryden encourages us to believe) religious piety is best demonstrated through civil piety. The Restoration convention of the struggle between heroic virtues was readily adaptable as an allegory for the agonizing imperative to reconcile private religious interests with conflicting state interests. Indeed, this allegory is implicit in earlier Restoration plays; Dryden merely renders it explicit in an effort to recuperate piety as a monarchy-friendly concept, as he had already done with heroic virtues.

Obviously the fact that honor and civil piety are always favored over love and religious piety benefits England's civil authority, the king. Less obvious is that the tolerationist agenda implicit in this civil piety is also at least as much about protecting the king from his subjects as it is about protecting subjects from their king. The first

character in the play to voice fears of intolerance is not one of the persecuted Christians, but the tyrant Maximin, who delivers a short but powerful speech on his terror of religious zealotry:

The silly crowd, by factious Teachers brought  
 To think that Faith untrue their youth was taught,  
 Run on in new Opinions blindly bold;  
 Neglect, contemn, and then assault the old.  
 Th' infectious madness seizes every part,  
 And from the head distils upon the heart.  
 And first they think their Princes faith not true,  
 And then proceed to offer him a new;  
 Which if refus'd, all duty from 'em cast,  
 To their new Faith they make new Kings at last.  
 (2.1.143-52)

For a brief moment, Maximin morphs into Charles I, the “Royal Martyr,” executed by subjects led into rampant impiety by intolerant zeal. Like the aerial spirits who neglect their meteorological duties to indulge their whims, factious subjects violate the natural order and infect the body politic when they attempt to dictate religious opinions to their monarch. Importantly, this speech—one of the better-written ones in the play—appears early, before Maximin has demonstrated the full extent of his depravity. Dryden allows his tyrannical monarch a moment to plead for toleration from his subjects before inverting this dynamic for the remainder of the play.

Given the Stuarts’ Catholic sympathies noted above, the value of Dryden’s tolerant piety for his most illustrious audience members is clear. Of course, Dryden needed to make this model of piety appeal to the general audience, too. And while the portrayal of the persecuted Christians courts Catholics and Dissenters, we shall now see that their actions and even some of their dialogue argue that tolerance will protect the established church, too.

### Unity Through Piety

St. Catharine, Berenice, and Valeria are the celestial female characters of *Tyrannick Love*. Indeed, they represent another of the play's unique qualities: it is the only one of Dryden's heroic plays that contains no villainous female character. The reason for this peculiarity has already been suggested: this play correlates these objects of heroic love with the divine object of religious piety. Another factor, of course, is that Dryden did not wish to encourage popular speculation that Catherine of Braganza was an insidious influence on her husband's religious opinions. Each of these female characters reflects the Catholic queen in some way. St. Catharine is her saintly namesake. Berenice reflects the queen biographically, as a childless empress whose husband has a roving eye, yet remains dutifully obedient to him.<sup>30</sup> Valeria, as a young princess, passionate and headstrong in her love for a man who does not love her in return, is a vision of the queen seen through a highly romantic lens. These women have distinct temperaments, different objects of devotion, and different approaches to balancing that devotion with the imperative to act piously, yet they are all exemplary figures. Through its portrayal of them, the play intimates that piety does not require uniformity of belief.

Although she bears the Catholic queen's name, St. Catharine is occasionally associated with the Church of England. This association begins to develop with her very first words in the play, which place her in a middle position between two extremes. Brought before Maximin on the charge of preaching her outlawed religion to his philosophers and soldiers, she insists on the reasonableness of her actions:

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<sup>30</sup> It is curious that Dryden chose to have a barren princess in his play celebrating the queen's pregnancy. Perhaps he wished to remind his audience that a queen consort had more value than simply the production of heirs.

*Max.* Fair foe of Heav'n, whence comes this haughty pride,  
 Or is it Frenzy does your mind misguide  
 To scorn our Worship, and new Gods to find?  
*S. Cath.* Nor pride nor frenzy, but a settled mind,  
 Enlightned from above, my way does mark.  
*Max.* Though Heav'n be clear, the way to it is dark.  
*S. Cath.* But where our Reason with our Faith does go,  
 We're both above enlightned, and below.

(2.1.163-70)

St. Catharine claims that faith and reason have allowed her to avoid the pitfalls of pride and frenzy, which in the religious rhetoric of the day are no doubt meant to suggest, respectively, Catholicism and Dissenting groups. The Church of England prided itself on the reasonableness of its faith, as opposed to its irrational and uncompromising opponents. St. Catharine's association with the Church of England is also apparent in her subsequent debate with Apollonius. Bruce King demonstrates that St. Catharine's arguments draw on a sermon titled *The Excellency of the Christian Religion* by John Tillotson, a major Church of England apologist.<sup>31</sup> Given that Dryden's plea for toleration is directed at a predominantly Church of England audience, it makes sense that he would give a Church of England gloss to the words of the central religious figure in the play.

Yet we should not allow this gloss to overshadow the universalism of her figure. As noted above, the debate with Apollonius presents no doctrines that are specific to the Church of England. Dryden's choice of Tillotson's tract, *The Excellency of the Christian Religion*, as the basis for the debate is quite strategic. The tract's primary argument is for the superiority of Christianity over the religions and philosophies of *heathens*, not of the superiority of the Church of England over other Christian sects. King himself notes that Tillotson's claims "are based upon the practical, ethical side of Christianity, rather than

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<sup>31</sup> See King, "Dryden, Tillotson, and *Tyrannic Love*," *Review of English Studies* 16, no. 64 (1965): 364-77. See also Charles E. Ward, who detects "more than a tinge of the Anglican" in St. Catharine's words. *The Life of John Dryden* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 74-77.

its mysteries.”<sup>32</sup> Such practical arguments would have found approval among virtually all Christians. The sermon is therefore fitting not only within the context of the play (St. Catharine *is* arguing about the superiority of her religion with heathens) but also suits Dryden’s broader goal of encouraging tolerance. St. Catharine’s dialogue may be borrowed from a Church of England apologist, but she says nothing that would offend any other Christian, including the Catholic queen who bears her name. Between the saint’s connection with the Catholic queen, her Dissenting zeal for preaching her “new” religion, and her parroting of a Church of England divine, Dryden’s grants his heroine universal appeal.

As the highest exemplar of Christian piety in the play, St. Catharine is utterly devoted to the principle of non-resistance (which the Church of England’s clergy claimed to embrace). She offers a lesson in how a truly pious subject behaves to authority—which is to defer completely to monarchical power in all matters except conscience. This includes submitting to punishment when disobeying on grounds of conscience. Indeed, she does not simply accept martyrdom; she is eager for it. “My joyful Sentence you defer too long” (2.1.261), she complains when Maximin dithers between killing and courting her.

It is precisely because of her extreme exemplarity, however, that St. Catharine is not a very useful example of piety. Fearlessness in the face of death is uncommon in anyone who is not a saint. Furthermore, her passivity does not entirely eliminate the danger she presents by her uncompromising defiance. Our sympathy for her is

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<sup>32</sup> King, “Dryden, Tillotson, and *Tyrannic Love*,” 365. William Empson points out that salvation in the play seems to have no dependence upon the Incarnation. Catharine wins her debate “without any mention of the crucifixion, or the atonement, or even the name of Jesus Christ” (“A Deist Tract by Dryden,” *Essays in Criticism* 25, no. 1 [1975]: 78-79). This is salvation free from any mysteries (which tended to be points of contention between religious sects).



particularly tested when she starts allowing other people to die rather than make the smallest concession to earthly interests. She refuses to save Berenice's life by running away from Maximin (who only wants to kill Berenice so he can marry St. Catharine) because doing so would make her *appear* to have a lack of faith in her eternal reward. She admits to feeling conflicted (caught "Betwixt my pity and my piety" [4.1.510]), but she concludes that the mere appearance of cowardice is a worse crime than allowing her fellow Christian to die. Shortly after this temptation, she has the opportunity to save her mother's life, and again refuses. In fact, she is horrified that her mother would even ask her to beg Maximin for mercy:

It cannot be———  
 That she who taught my Childhood Piety,  
 Should bid my riper age my Faith deny:  
 That she who bid my hopes this Crown pursue,  
 Should snatch it from me when 'tis just in view.  
 (5.1.196-200)

When her mother breaks into hysterics upon the sight of Maximin's wheel of torture, St. Catharine's response is to kiss her and say, "Thus my last duty to you let me pay" (5.1.280).

St. Catharine is to piety what *The Conquest of Granada's* Almanzor is to courage: the virtue's perfect exemplar. In both cases, their perfection makes them almost monstrous.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, she is even less capable of living within Roman society than

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<sup>33</sup> Derek Hughes remarks on "the chilling detachment of St Catharine from the fears and frailties of those who must die if she is to gain the martyr's crown which is her one, obsessive, ambition." *English Drama, 1660-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 50. Empson likewise comments on her ambition: "It is driven home that the greed of the heroine for a heavenly crown is precisely like the greed of other characters for an earthly one; fair enough, I daresay, but very near the edge of satire on the ideals which are being praised. This of course is a frequent result of Dryden's heroic technique, delighting in extremes; but it does not usually create so much strain as it does here" ("A Deist Tract," 78). Empson is right about the strain in St. Catharine's portrayal, but Dryden, I argue, *wants* her to undermine herself as an example of piety. Her resistance is noble and (more importantly) nonviolent, but it is still dangerous to the state and to her coreligionists.

Almanzor is of living within Granadine society. In the end, Almanzor recognizes the authority of a father and a sovereign. St. Catharine's respect for earthly authorities is expressed only by her unwillingness to actively attack them. Even had she not been killed, it is difficult to imagine how she could have taken part in the restoration of civil society which takes place at the end of the play. A person who sets the slightest religious duty ahead of the most compelling earthly duties cannot function in human society, and it is hard to imagine that the very secular-minded Dryden would truly wish to encourage his audience to make the attempt. St. Catharine is less an exemplary pious subject than an exemplary pious rebel. If you must rebel, Dryden suggests, here is how you do it: by dying submissively.

St. Catharine is not the only virtuous heroine who is excluded from the peace at the play's end. Maximin's pagan daughter, Valeria, also dies in the final act, motivated not by religion, but by passion. Yet within her pagan moral code, she is as pious as St. Catharine, and as devoted to Porphyrius as the saint is to God. When Porphyrius rejects her hand in marriage, she sacrifices herself to Maximin's rage in order spare Porphyrius from it, "[d]ying for Love's, fulfilling Honour's Laws; / A secret Martyr" (4.1.311-12)—and, we might add, yet another "Royal Martyr." The mirroring of these two royal martyrs is intriguing but difficult to interpret. While one royal martyr is executed by Maximin after refusing to save her friends and mother, the other commits suicide after failing to convince Maximin not to execute the man she loves. Does the unchristian tragedy of Valeria's suicide illustrate the superiority of St. Catharine's Christian triumph? Or does it instead suggest that St. Catharine's suicidal tendencies make her little different from the uncompromising pagan? At the end of the play, Porphyrius treats Valeria's sacrifice

religiously, promising to fast for her one day in seven the rest of his life; St. Catharine, on the other hand, is not mentioned by any of the survivors. Furthermore, it is Valeria's martyrdom, not St. Catharine's, which moves Placidius to assassinate Maximin, and thus creates the conditions necessary for Providence to punish the tyrant. Given the taste for romance among Dryden's audience, it seems likely that many would have found Valeria's desperate humanity more sympathetic than St. Catharine's unhelpful holiness. Rather than suggesting pagan damnation, Valeria's behavior may encourage sympathy for her Roman pagan religion—to which many Protestants believed Roman Catholicism bore a strong resemblance. At the very least, Valeria's mirroring of St. Catharine reflects the play's use of heroic love as a metaphor for religious faith and presents the audience with an example of piety that is obedient and faithful even though unchristian.

While these two women promote piety and even tolerance (St. Catharine does not seem particularly bothered to be surrounded by pagans), their refusal to compromise with authority does not serve the agenda of the poet laureate or his king—or, for that matter, of Catholics or Dissenters, who were not keen on dying. The play offers a more practical example in Berenice, and in Porphyrius, whose piety is of a like nature to his lover's.<sup>34</sup> Both have human weaknesses and seek excuses to satisfy their desires and consciences at the expense of strict piety. Berenice, in spite of having secretly converted to Christianity, would happily take advantage of divorce if Maximin were to seek it. She only refuses when he demands that she be the one to initiate it. This she cannot do; she is “[t]y’d to that Honour, which all Women owe, / Though not to their Husbands person, yet their vow” (3.1.296-97). It is only her own sense of honor, not a pious duty to Christian

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<sup>34</sup> Barbeau similarly notes that theirs is “a more easily attainable virtue” than St. Catharine's (*Intellectual Design*, 100).

morality, which prevents her from divorcing him. Meanwhile, Porphyrius's piety is severely tested when he contemplates assassinating the tyrant. He tries to claim that assassination is heaven's will, insisting that his act of civil impiety is necessitated by religious piety. Berenice charges him with using the name of religion to disguise impious action. "Heav'n ne'r sent those who fight for private ends" (2.1.47), she chastises him.

Coupled with their more human piety is a more human theory of the nature of faith. Porphyrius, like St. Catharine, attempts to justify religious dissent to Maximin, but his justification for dissent is strikingly different from hers. Whereas St. Catharine insists that reason and faith together may guide a person to religious truth, Porphyrius claims that religious difference exists because faith precedes and overrules reason:

If, for Religion you our lives will take;  
 You do not the offenders find, but make.  
 All Faiths are to their own believers just;  
 For none believe, because they will, but must.  
 Faith is a force from which there's no defence;  
 Because the Reason it does first convince.  
 And Reason Conscience into fetters brings;  
 And Conscience is without the pow'r of Kings.  
 (4.1.599-606)

For Porphyrius, faith is not an act of will, but behaves more like a passion, occurring spontaneously, and defying reason because it is necessarily prior to it. Indeed, Maximin has described the nature of love as similarly beyond the control of will or reason: "The cause of Love can never be assign'd; / 'Tis in no face, but in the Lover's mind" (3.1.122-23); "'Tis lawless, and will love, and where it list: / And that's no sin which no man can resist" (4.1.376-77). Likewise, if Christians cannot resist their faith, nor reason themselves back into their monarch's religion, then their heresy is no crime.

Porphyrius thus insists that intolerance is an artificial imposition (“You do not the offenders find, but make”) on an unintentional and unavoidable diversity of religious beliefs. To persecute people for having different faiths is as arbitrary and cruel as it would be to persecute people for not all loving the same woman. Yet Maximin is unmoved. He responds with the common defense of the Church of England status quo, that giving free reign to other people’s misguided consciences sets the stage for a rebellion. Porphyrius’s rebuttal suggests that liberty of conscience is not incompatible with the status quo:

[Conscience’s] Empire, therefore, Sir, should bounded be;  
 And but in acts of its Religion, free:  
 Those who ask Civil pow’r and Conscience too,  
 Their Monarch to his own destruction woo.  
 With needful Arms let him secure his peace;  
 Then, that wild beast he safely may release.

(4.1.611-16)

Porphyrius supports toleration of religious exercise, but he also supports the exclusion of religious dissenters from public office. Those who oppose the state religion must sacrifice state power if they wish to worship according to their consciences. Porphyrius thus would not oppose the Test Acts, like England’s Oath of Supremacy, which required all servants of the state to deny the deposing power of the Pope. The play does not object to one church having a monopoly on power in a kingdom, merely to its having a monopoly on conscience.

Moreover, the disasters of the final act indicate that toleration is not simply compatible with the existence of a state church, but is actually in the state church’s best interests. Maximin’s intolerance for all dissent and resistance transforms his most valuable allies into enemies and finally inspires his soldiers to mutiny against him. “For

*Rome and Liberty the Souldiers cry,*” (5.1.608), as they realize at last what Maximin’s actions will destroy if left unchecked. The state is nearly destroyed, and a religious dissident (Porphyrius) is nearly crowned emperor, because Maximin left his subjects no recourse but through arms. If St. Catharine is the ideal rebel, Porphyrius is a more realistic one. Pious or not, he takes up arms when pushed too far.

Yet even when Porphyrius finally determines to rebel, his piety requires him to sabotage himself by announcing his intention to Maximin: “I am your Foe,” he says; “I cannot trusted be, nor you betray’ d” (4.1.650, 652). Maximin, of course, arrests him immediately. Later, when he escapes and returns to kill Maximin, it is Berenice’s turn to show her civil and conjugal piety. She calls out a warning to her husband—even as she stands on the scaffold awaiting execution. This level of civil piety is, of course, incredible, but the passion and suffering of these two characters prevent them from seeming inhuman or insane like St. Catharine or Valeria. And unlike those single-minded characters, Porphyrius and Berenice have to balance numerous claims placed on them: by Maximin as benefactor or husband, by the empire as its protector or its empress, by the soldiers, by their coreligionists, by each other, and by the demands of their own pride. They live in the world, not above it.

If St. Catharine represents the perfect rational Christian and Valeria represents the perfect romantic heroine, Berenice and Porphyrius represent a kind of compromise between the two: a romantic, sensual Christianity not far removed from their original paganism and trusting more to passion than to reason. Such sensual, unreasoning, almost-pagan Christianity would strike the audience as suggestive of Catholicism. And Berenice is, of course, the only surviving avatar of Catherine of Braganza, and the character with

the most in common with her. Indeed, the play favors these characters as its best, or at least, most imitable examples of piety by making them the only major characters to live through the play. The queen, we may assume, was pleased, both by the flattery and by the charitable treatment of the characters who most seem to share her religion.

Indeed, toleration appears to be the means by which the torn fabric of the state will be mended in the play's denouement. "Sheathe all your Swords, and cease your enmity," Porphyrius says to the soldiers, "They are not Foes, but *Romans* whom you see" (5.1.639-40). Soldiers and rebels, Christians and pagans are now again denominated under a single word: Romans. The final line of the play, in which Porphyrius promises to "Joy for [Berenice's] life, and mourn for *Valeria's* Death" (5.1.676), similarly unites the Christian and pagan in his heart. Imperial identity has overcome religious sectarianism.

Yet if the importance of religious difference is diminished under civil toleration, it does not disappear. To help bring peace to the empire, Porphyrius and Berenice must make the sacrifice of power that Porphyrius has insisted is required of anyone who refuses to accept the state religion. When the soldiers attempt to declare Porphyrius emperor he declines the honor:

Too much, my Country-men, your Love you show,  
That you have thought me worthy to be so.  
But, to requite that Love, I must take care  
Not to ingage you in a Civil War.  
Two Emperours at *Rome* the Senate chose,  
And whom they chuse no *Roman* should oppose.  
In Peace or War, let Monarchs hope or fear;  
All my ambition shall be bounded here.  
(5.1.657-64)

Berenice voices her agreement: "Of glorious troubles I will take no part, / And in no Empire reign, but of your heart" (5.1.669-70). Had they accepted the purple, they may

have been able to do much for their fellow Christians, not to mention for themselves, but instead they show their love for their countrymen by avoiding civil war. These two pious survivors are examples of how religious dissenters ought to live if granted toleration: gratefully and in retirement from public affairs. Conversely, the privileges of the existing political and religious establishment are fully preserved. To the members of the Church of England in the audience, this was undoubtedly the play's strongest argument.

*Tyrannick Love* is not so conservative as to pretend that the lives of those outside of the established church are easy or fair. It recognizes the sacrifices and hardships they face in order to worship according to their consciences, and its presentation of multiple examples of piety seems to be a serious attempt at generating sympathy for religious dissenters. Nevertheless, its advocacy for these groups is quite limited. It does not attempt to argue that they should *not* face sacrifices and hardships; it merely seeks to allow them their freedom of worship as the reward for those sacrifices. The play ultimately seeks to shore up a fragile Church of England establishment, not to raze and replace it.

Before moving on, we must note one other way in which the play celebrates triumph over division in this closing scene. Government is restored under "Two Emperours," elected by the Senate. Not only is this co-emperorship historically accurate, but it extends to the political realm the theme of unity-in-diversity which has developed in the religious realm. Emperor and emperor reign together, executive and legislative bodies stand in accord. At the time Dryden wrote this play, Parliament and Charles were at odds over religious policy and the fallout over the Second Dutch War. At the same time, fears were growing that the Duke of York's status as Charles's presumptive heir would create rival courts in England. McGirr notes that dual kingship became a major



theme in Restoration drama for this very reason.<sup>35</sup> Rome's political consolidation in the play's final moments should therefore be understood as a fantasy that would have had particular appeal to the English audience.

Of course, given England's recent experiences with Parliamentary rule, the submission to leaders chosen by a republican legislature could strike a far different note. Moreover, the failure to restore order under a benevolent (and implicitly absolute) monarch denies a heroic play its *raison d'être*. Indeed, we shall now examine how the play's portrayal of its hero-villain subverts the heroic mode's ideological purpose—and also complicates its tolerationist agenda.

### **A Fractured Emperor**

Maximin is not the only tyrant in Dryden's heroic plays to be led about by his passions, but none of Dryden's other tyrants has such mercurial passions. Maximin's uncontrolled will leaps from one extreme to another in an instant. "To tame Philosophers teach constancy" (1.1.234), he cries; he has no use for it. His variability is given its clearest expression in his love for St. Catharine, which is matched only by his hate for her ("Wild with my rage, more wild with my desire" [3.1.102]). This inner conflict receives darkly comic demonstration when he orders her execution and then kills the man who carries out the order. Even his name, which looks like a portmanteau of *maximus* and *minimus*, suggests a man divided between two extremes. Dryden's heroic plays always depict the dissolution of a state from within, but usually the state is torn apart by multiple

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<sup>35</sup> McGirr, *Heroic Mode and Political Crisis*, 39-40. In his 1671 dedication of *The Conquest of Granada* to the Duke of York, Dryden almost treats him as a co-ruler with Charles. The king is the "commanding part" of the monarchy and the warlike duke is the "executive" (*Works*, 11:6). Clearly the duke's existence was a source of anxiety that Dryden felt compelled to address frequently.

warring factions. In *Tyrannick Love*, Maximin is sufficiently self-divided to tear the state apart all by himself.

Maximin's self-division is no doubt meant to demonstrate that impiety leads to faction and disunion, in contrast to piety's power to unite. Yet whereas Dryden presents piety as a universal virtue unconnected with any particular religious faith, the extremes of behavior between which the impious Maximin vacillates are suggestive of the England's religious "extremes" (Catholicism and Protestant Dissent), as viewed negatively from a Church of England "center." Maximin's status as a tyrant ruling an empire based in Rome would be sufficient to associate him with the Pope (*tyranny* and *empire* inevitably had Popish connotations in seventeenth-century England), but Maximin's Pope-like attributes do not end there. He is both the ultimate temporal and spiritual authority in the Roman Empire, heading a powerful hierarchy of priests who, as he puts it, "gain by Heav'n" (2.1.180). His willingness to torture obstinate Christians is evocative of the Inquisition, and his repeated claims to be on par with (or even superior to) the gods is an exaggeration of the papacy's claims to hold the keys to heaven. His Roman paganism would be considered a precursor to Catholicism's veneration of saints. At the same time, Maximin is guilty of many of the crimes with which Restoration writers typically loaded Cromwell and his fellow sectarian republicans.<sup>36</sup> He is a low-born man ("A *Thracian* Shepherd" [1.1.280]) who becomes a regicide and a usurper. His treatment of the gods is profane, and in his final moments, his blasphemy against the gods approaches an atheistic rejection of them—the last inevitable step for a man who has rejected all earthly order

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<sup>36</sup> Dryden's allusion to Cromwell with this character was clear to his contemporaries. One of his literary enemies attacked him by quoting his elegy on Cromwell's death, *Heroique Stanza's*, as proof of his approval of "our English *Maximin*." Richard Leigh, *The Censure of the Rota*, in *Dryden: The Critical Heritage*, ed. James Kinsley and Helen Kinsley (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971), 60.

and authority. Dryden's villain seems to be simultaneously a Catholic tyrant and a Dissenting rebel, a Pope and a Cromwell, a man-god and a worldly atheist.

That these opposites should be contained within one man makes sense—at least to members of the Church of England. Despite standing at opposite ends of Christianity's theological spectrum, Catholics and Dissenters were often equated with each other by Church of England polemicists because “Non-conformists, like Catholics, endanger order by placing religious above civil authority.”<sup>37</sup> And the most extreme members of these groups—the Pope and his cardinals and the supposed atheists among the Dissenters—rejected or usurped God's religious authority in addition to rejecting civil authority. Dryden's portrayal of Maximin reinforces these associations. Before the play begins, Maximin has assassinated the previous emperor and usurped the civil authority. In the final moments of the play, he attempts to usurp the authority of the gods as well.

As he commits this ultimate impiety, Maximin's Catholic and Dissenting associations reach their peak. A few hours after losing his son in battle, and mere minutes after ordering the execution of his beloved St. Catharine, Maximin is treated to the spectacle of his daughter committing suicide when he orders the execution of *her* beloved Porphyrius. This series of losses sparks Maximin to utter a long rant against the gods. He begins by accusing them of ingratitude:

What had the Gods to do with me or mine?  
Did I molest your Heav'n?———  
Why should you then make *Maximin* your Foe,  
Who paid you Tribute, which he need not do?  
Your Altars I with smoke of Gums did crown:  
For which you lean'd your hungry nostrils down,

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<sup>37</sup> Raymond D. Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination: Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1660-1745* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7.

All daily gaping for my Incense there,  
 More than your Sun could draw you in a year.  
 (5.1.583-90)

Between his very corporeal conception of the gods and the ritualistic form of his worship, Maximin's paganism suggests the corrupted, basely physical rites of the Catholic Church.<sup>38</sup> However, as he goes on, his profanation of his relationship with the gods increasingly associates him with the Dissenters. At first, he calls his sacrifices of gums and incense "tribute," an offering to placate a more powerful military force. Yet as the passage goes on, the gods begin to seem very dependent upon these sacrifices, "hungry" and "gaping" for sustenance. Maximin suggests that the gods need him more than he needs them. This impious thought changes their relationship from one of subordination to one of competition among equals:

And you for this these Plagues on me have sent;  
 But by the Gods, (by *Maximin*, I meant)  
 Henceforth I and my World  
 Hostility with you and yours declare:  
 Look to it, Gods; for you th' Aggressors are.  
 Keep you your Rain and Sun-shine in your Skies,  
 And I'll keep back my flame and Sacrifice.  
 Your Trade of Heav'n shall soon be at a stand,  
 And all your Goods lie dead upon your hand.  
 (5.1.591-99)

Maximin declares the tributary relationship over; he has begun a war with the gods. But there is nothing noble or heroic about this war. When Maximin's son is slain on Aquileia's battlements, he braves the enemy arrows "like *Capaneus* defying *Jove*" (1.1.246). However foolish the son may have been, he died like a soldier. But when Maximin truly does defy *Jove*, he is no *Capaneus*. His declaration of war does not herald a physical encounter; it introduces the insipidity and banality of economic warfare. The

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<sup>38</sup> We will discuss Protestant and Catholic argument over the physicality of Catholic devotional practices in greater detail in Chapter Two.

relationship is no longer based on tribute between lords, but on trade between merchants. Maximin shall withhold his goods and services from the gods, and refuse to purchase theirs. The “dead” shall not be gods or heroes, but rather “Goods” that will lie unpaid for. The moment Maximin reaches his boldest and most heroic (if also diabolic) pitch, Dryden deflates his tyrant into a petty businessman.

Even Maximin’s trade war with heaven has an inevitably anti-Catholic dimension. He declares that he holds a monopoly on the trade between earth and heaven, and can stop traffic between the two at will. Protestant polemicists sometimes characterized the Catholic Church’s claim to be the intermediary for communication between heaven and earth in similar terms. Such is the position adopted in an anonymous 1682 poem praising Dryden’s *Religio Laici*, which attacks “*Peter’s* Heirs” for claiming sole power over the interpretation of scriptures:

The onely free enriching Port God made  
What shamefull Monopoly did invade?  
One Factious Company ingross’d the Trade.<sup>39</sup>

At the same time, however, Maximin’s trade war recalls Dryden’s attack on the Dutch shipping monopoly in *Annus Mirabilis*:

Trade, which like blood should circularly flow,  
Stop’d in their Channels, found its freedom lost:  
Thither the wealth of all the world did go,  
And seem’d but shipwrack’d on so base a Coast.<sup>40</sup>

As the Dutch stopped the blood-like circulation of trade, Maximin will asphyxiate the gods by ceasing to traffic in their exotic eastern incenses (products also associated in

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<sup>39</sup> “Verses on *Religio Laici*,” in *Dryden: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Kinsley and Kinsley, 138-39.

<sup>40</sup> *Annus Mirabilis*, 1:59-60, lines 5-8.

*Annus Mirabilis* with Dutch monopoly in the Far East).<sup>41</sup> In England, the Dutch were strongly likened to Cromwell's regime, as a nation run by republican merchants. Also like Cromwell, they were despised by the Church of England for having rebelled against their monarchy.<sup>42</sup> By transforming Maximin into an atheistical merchant in his final moments, the play bolsters Charles's pro-French, anti-Dutch foreign policy even as it attacks Cromwell and his heirs, the Dissenters.<sup>43</sup>

This Popish, Cromwellian rant is followed quickly by Maximin's death. Scholars have often commented disapprovingly on the ridiculousness of Maximin's death scene, in which he and Placidius kill each other. In the course of thirty-odd lines, we are treated to the spectacle of Maximin stabbing at the air to attack the gods, and then collapsing down to sit on Placidius's corpse, only for that corpse to reveal itself to be less than perfectly dead.<sup>44</sup> However, this ridiculousness is certainly intentional. For his impious desire to set himself above the gods, Maximin ends his life as a debased self-parody. The once-heroic Maximin dies in a bloody episode of slapstick comedy.

Maximin's Catholic and Dissenting attributes should not be understood as simply contradicting the tolerationist agenda of the rest of the play. What Dryden seeks through Maximin's portrayal is to show that the Church of England's intolerant policies are both

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<sup>41</sup> Dryden writes that the Dutch monopolize "precious Dew," "Idumæan Balm," and Ceilon's "Spicy Forrests" (ibid., lines 10-12). Indeed, the Dutch had been so successful in driving other nations out of the East Indian trade that "The Sun but seem'd the Lab'rer of their Year" (ibid., line 13). Maximin, at least, admits the sun belongs to the gods when he claims to offer them more incense "than your Sun could draw you in a year."

<sup>42</sup> For Church of England arguments for the ungodliness of the Dutch rebellion, and rebellion in general, see Steven C. A. Pincus, *Protestantism and Patriotism: Ideologies and the Making of English Foreign Policy, 1650-1668* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 265.

<sup>43</sup> In the run up to the Third Dutch War, Dryden would build an entire play around England's conflict with the Dutch mercantile empire: *Amboyna, or the Cruelties of the Dutch to the English Merchants*.

<sup>44</sup> The absurdity of this scene has received a fair amount of discussion in regards to the self-parodic aspects of Dryden's drama. For a brief summary of the criticism, see Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, 576n22. Novak notes that the stage direction showing Maximin stabbing upward was removed after the first edition, "probably because such a gesture . . . might appear absurd and excessive on the stage" (commentary on *Tyrannick Love*, 10:431n603+). Indeed it would, but then again, the whole episode is absurd.

cruel and self-destructive. By dressing intolerance in Catholic and Dissenting robes, he shames the Church of England by exposing it to be more like its intolerant, theocratic enemies than it would care to admit. And the self-destructiveness of intolerance argues for the necessity of toleration to preserve the church.

That said, it must be admitted that Maximin's portrayal would reinforce the public's fears of the very people for whom Dryden seeks toleration. Even in a play honoring the Catholic queen and supporting toleration for English Catholics, he still alienates and vilifies Catholicism through his anti-Catholic tyrant. Worse, the play stokes fears of absolutist kingship—the very thing Dryden is most dedicated to defending. The popish-ness of the tyrant recalls the powerful association between popery and tyranny in the Protestant imagination, which then threatens to undermine the play's effort to support the monarchy at a time when it was strengthening its ties to Catholicism. Maximin's portrayal exposes a deep contradiction at the heart of this experimental tolerationist heroic play. *Tyrannick Love* attacks religious absolutism in order to protect political absolutism, and ultimately these two thrusts undermine each other. And the biggest loser is the monarch.

### **Ambiguities and Limitations**

Maximin's suggestively Catholic tyranny does not preclude the possibility that Catholics determined to view *Tyrannick Love* as covertly approving of their religion could certainly do so. The play's allusions are sufficiently ambiguous to invite a wide range of readings, muddled as many of them are. To an extent at least, this muddle is probably intentional. The confused links between characters and England's religious

groups prevent Dryden from appearing to say anything too dangerous, while also subtly implying that differences between England's sects are negligible. And most of Maximin's anti-Catholic qualities could be dismissed as mere anti-clericalism—a prejudice not confined to Protestants by any means. Even most Catholic monarchs did not like the Pope's broad claims of authority.

Moreover, a Catholic might find what the play portrays less important than what it does not portray: the disintegration of the “peace” achieved at the play's end. In the Year of the Six Emperors, Maximin was not the last emperor to fall. The two emperors who represent Rome's hope for unity in the play's final moments would not survive the year.<sup>45</sup> The settlement at the end of the play is therefore merely a truce; the state is still in crisis, and will not fully stabilize until (in the Christian tradition) Constantine unites it with a new state religion. Even after moving St. Catharine's martyrdom up by almost a century, the play's historical context still points toward the necessary triumph of the persecuted. Granted, the average playgoer would know nothing about this moment in Roman history, but among well-educated members of the audience (such as the queen or Dryden's powerful crypto-Catholic friends) these historical circumstances might be a subject of discussion when reflecting upon the play.

That said, the anti-Catholic rhetoric and tacit endorsements of Church of England “moderation” throughout the play suggest the limits of both Dryden's tolerationist agenda and the Restoration heroic play's capacity to promote toleration and represent English Catholics as fellow countrymen. *Tyrannick Love* offers no very convincing evidence that Dryden was anything but firmly embedded in Protestant England's anti-Catholic

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<sup>45</sup> For a brief history of this turbulent year, see Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. David Womersley (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 1:197-207.



imagination. Those olive branches which he holds out to Catholics can be sufficiently explained by his desire to attain a stable religious settlement and to protect the royal family. His belief in authority and order and, conversely, his antipathy for the chaos of republicanism and sectarianism perhaps made him more appreciative of Catholicism's impressive hierarchy than most Englishmen, but we should not mistake appreciation for approbation. England already had its own orderly religious hierarchy in its established church. *Tyrannick Love* is interested in protecting that establishment; if doing so means being charitable to marginalized religious groups, so much the better.

If Dryden is to be believed, *Tyrannick Love* gained the approval of “*the most discerning Prince in the World.*”<sup>46</sup> It is certain that the public approved of it, granting it a successful first run, which is indication enough that it was perceived as pro-Church of England. Of course, many playgoers would understand that the play is critical of the Church of England's hardline position against other religions. But as we have observed, the upheavals of recent years had caused even many members of the church to question the wisdom of that position. Furthermore, the play clearly indicates that toleration will help preserve the Church of England's prerogatives, and it places the most of the burden of a peaceful religious settlement on dissenting groups. Catholics and Dissenters are tasked with exercising the self-control necessary to compromise with the state, sacrificing their political power for liberty of conscience.

Moreover, the play's case for a new, tolerant religious policy is, to a great extent, subverted by its absolutist medium. Dryden is in denial when he insists in the play's prologue that he will not “impose upon [his audience] what he writes for Wit,” but will

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<sup>46</sup> *Works*, 10:111.

leave their “censures free” to judge of his play’s merits themselves.<sup>47</sup> Later in his career, he will admit that the stage inhibits the free exercise of judgment—aesthetic or otherwise:

In a Play-house every thing contributes to impose upon the Judgment; the Lights, the Scenes, the Habits, and, above all, the Grace of Action, which is commonly the best where there is the most need of it, surprize the Audience, and cast a mist upon their Understandings; not unlike the cunning of a Juggler, who is always staring us in the face, and overwhelming us with gibberish, onely that he may gain the opportunity of making the cleaner conveyance of his Trick.<sup>48</sup>

This passage was written at the height of the Exclusion Crisis—a time when Dryden was particularly sensitive to the power the stage wielded over the public’s politics and imaginations. He knew full well that the heroic play (which he had helped to theorize and establish as a genre) was a tool for indoctrinating the audience and suppressing dissent, not for promoting toleration, that the genre was designed to homogenize the audience, not to convince it to accept diversity. Amariel’s quelling of the aerial spirits’ riot—the most spectacular, visually and aurally impressive episode of the play—may attempt to support toleration by prizing good behavior over correct belief, but its adherence to the heroic model of power and authority imposing order on chaos works against the grain of its intent. In *Tyrannick Love*, Dryden attempts to impose tolerance on the English people, as his royal masters repeatedly attempted to do with bills and acts. He has about as much success as they did.

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<sup>47</sup> *Works*, 10:114, lines 8-9. While the prologue is ostensibly about literary judgment, it makes sense to read it in a religious context as well, given the play’s themes. Its first eleven lines comment on the importance of free exercise of judgment, express impatience with critical nitpicking (“And malice in all Criticks rains so high, / That for small Errors, they whole Plays decry”), and raise concerns about the frenzy and malignity of critics (“to see this fondness, and that spite / You’d think that none but Mad-men judge or write”) (ibid., lines 3-4, 5-6). Such observations are as applicable to religious polemics as to literary criticism. Indeed, Alexander Pope makes the link explicit in a couplet in his *Essay on Criticism*: “(Thus Wit, like Faith, by each Man is apply’d / To one small Sect, and All are damn’d beside.)” A study of allusions to religious controversy in eighteenth-century literary criticism could prove very interesting. See Pope, *Essay on Criticism*, in *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt, vol. 1, *Pastoral Poetry and An Essay on Criticism*, ed. E. Audra and Aubrey Williams (London: Methuen & Co., 1961), 285, lines 396-97 and note.

<sup>48</sup> *Works*, 14:100. The comment appears in the dedication of *The Spanish Fryar*.

The most disastrous result of this failure is the impact of Dryden's tyrant-hero, Maximin, on subsequent Restoration drama. For much of the 1670s, *Tyrannick Love* and its evil hero were more heavily imitated by other Restoration playwrights than the aesthetically superior *Conquest of Granada*. The success of plays with a strong "horror element" such as Nathaniel Lee's *The Tragedy of Nero* (1674), Elkanah Settle's *The Conquest of China* (1675), and Aphra Behn's *Abdelazar* (1676) makes clear the public's fascination with the figure of the tyrannical ruler.<sup>49</sup> This taste for disturbing representations of bad kings likely indicates the growing distrust of Charles and York that would lead to the Exclusion Crisis. Dryden must have regretted that his tyrant became the model for working through fears of the Stuarts and absolutism on the stage. He wrote the play to protect the English royal family from anti-Catholic attacks, but his anti-Catholic portrayal of a tyrant ended up harming the royal family even further.

Eventually he would come to regret not just the tyrant, but the heroic play itself. In the preface to *Don Sebastian*, Dryden claims that one reason he left the stage for seven years is that "*Love and Honour (the mistaken Topicks of Tragedy) were quite worn out.*"<sup>50</sup> The vogue for plays on the love-and-honor heroic model had indeed long since passed, but more interesting is his parenthetical remark, which denigrates the plays which had made him famous. Now a religious man who has been thrust outside of the political and religious establishments, he passes judgment against the absolutist heroic play, which could so easily be employed to justify the suppression of dissent. *Don Sebastian* makes plentiful use of many of the heroic play's love-and-honor conventions which Dryden had

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<sup>49</sup> Hume, *The Development of English Drama*, 284-85. Jessica Munns also notes that "Dryden helped to set the new trend for plays centred on extravagantly bad rulers with *Tyrannick Love*." "Images of Monarchy on the Restoration Stage," in *A Companion to Restoration Drama*, ed. Susan J. Owen (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 113.

<sup>50</sup> *Don Sebastian, King of Portugal*, 15:65.

helped to establish, but it does so only to expose them as the idols or tools of irreligious men.

## Chapter Two

Persecution and Conversion in *Don Sebastian*

Dryden's prologue to his 1689 play, *Don Sebastian, King of Portugal*, insists that "a Play's of no Religion." The audience, therefore, should not fault the play simply because the author has adopted the religion of the "Papists."<sup>1</sup> Dryden's insistence on the lack of a religious interest in the play can hardly be taken seriously, however, when the same prologue refers to the burdens of the anti-Catholic penal laws that have driven Dryden back to writing for the stage. Indeed, in the original prologue (rejected for the stage but restored for publication the following year), the speaker is even more blunt about Dryden's religious predicament, asking, "Is all this Crowd barely to see the play, / Or is't the Poets Execution day?"<sup>2</sup>

The speaker is not being hyperbolic. Dryden was technically guilty of a capital crime, as conversion to Catholicism was an act of high treason. Several Catholic converts were imprisoned on that charge in the wake of the 1688 revolution.<sup>3</sup> Since the Glorious

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<sup>1</sup> John Dryden, *Don Sebastian, King of Portugal*, in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. H. T. Swedenberg Jr., et al., 19 vols. (Los Angeles and Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1956-), 15:74, lines 16, 41 (hereafter cited in text by act, scene, and line of this edition). (Hereafter, all citations of Dryden's works are from this edition.)

<sup>2</sup> *Works* 15:75, lines 5-6. Dryden did not write the original prologue. For more on this prologue's political subversiveness, see Earl Miner, commentary on *Don Sebastian*, in *Works*, by John Dryden, 15:420-423. Miner similarly suggests that Dryden's open reference to his religion in the prologue is either a "piece of daring, or of foolhardiness" (ibid., 406).

<sup>3</sup> Miner notes that during the revolution, "men were being arrested for high treason only on the suspicion of adhering to that religion" (ibid., 406). Anne Barbeau Gardiner cites the case of James Cecil, Earl of Salisbury, whose home was burned down in the riots of the Revolution, and who was charged with treason for converting to Catholicism. He spent two years in the Tower of London with his wife. See "John Dryden's *Love Triumphant* and English Hostility to Foreigners 1688-1693," *Clio* 18, no. 2 (1989): 154.

Revolution (which had taken place almost exactly a year prior to the play's initial performance) the condition of Catholics was as bad as it had been in living memory, and, in many instances, worse. Catholics were no longer even second-class subjects; when the Act of Toleration, passed in May 1689, allowed all Trinitarian Dissenters freedom of worship, Catholics were left virtually alone in a *third* class. They were forced to cease the public celebrations James II had allowed and resume performing their illegal devotions in secrecy. Double taxes, the confiscation of arms and horses worth more than five pounds, and the banishment of many Catholics from living within ten miles of London strained the community's resources.<sup>4</sup>

Violence was also a real possibility. The public's growing anti-Catholic fervor broke out into physical violence in November and December. During those months, rioters ransacked Catholic homes and places of worships. One passage of *Don Sebastian* has long been recognized as a reference to these riots,<sup>5</sup> and it gives a better sense of the terror Catholics lived in at this time than any mere listing of places and names could do. A low-born opportunistic rabble-rouser, Mustafa, speaks these lines late in the play to remind the mob of their past triumphant riots against heretics:

Do you remember the glorious Rapines and Robberies you have committed? Your breaking open and gutting of Houses, your rummaging of Cellars, your demolishing of Christian Temples, and bearing off in triumph the superstitious Plate and Pictures, the Ornaments of their wicked Altars, when all rich Moveables were sentenc'd for idolatrous, and all that was idolatrous was seiz'd? (4.3.124-30)

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<sup>4</sup> Dryden's long residence in London saved him from banishment, but he did move into a smaller house in another part of the city at some point after Easter 1687. James Anderson Winn suggests that he may have moved during the troubled winter of 1688-89, either taking a less expensive house in order to reduce the pain of double taxes, or hiding for fear of violence. For further details about Dryden's life during this period of violence and uncertainty, see Winn, *John Dryden and His World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 433-37.

<sup>5</sup> The allusion was first noted by John Robert Moore in "Political Allusions in Dryden's Later Plays," *PMLA* 73, no. 1 (1958): 40-41.

Here Dryden puts on full display the opportunistic logic lying behind the charges of superstition and idolatry that the rioters made against the Catholic religion. Staging this scene only a year after the riots alluded to in these lines, Dryden clearly indicates his play's religion.

Yet in spite of such boldness in the face of fierce oppression, most scholars seem to take Dryden's insistence that a play's of no religion at face value. Readings of the play's allusions to its historical context have focused on the struggle for the crown and antagonism between Whigs and Tories, often noting Catholic concerns only when they intrude upon secular affairs (such as the London riots). And readings that ascribe a religious dimension to the play treat this dimension as generically "Christian," rather than as specifically Catholic.

The primary goal of this chapter is to restore a crucial dimension of the play that would have unavoidably colored the audience's experience of it: its engagement with political and religious rhetoric associated (positively or negatively) with Catholicism. Now, in bringing this aspect of the play to attention, I do not wish to diminish the play's loyalist Tory politics, nor to discount the work of scholars who have helped to restore *that* dimension to readings of the play. Indeed, my own work depends heavily on the groundwork laid by Howard Erskine-Hill, Steven N. Zwicker, and many others.<sup>6</sup>

However, I do push against readings that "read through" the play's depictions of Christian converts, Muslim renegades, and manipulative Muftis in search of Tory and

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<sup>6</sup> The readings of the play by Steven N. Zwicker and Howard Erskine-Hill are the most attentive to the nuance and complexity of Dryden's political allusions. See Zwicker, *Lines of Authority: Politics and English Literary Culture, 1649-1689* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 173-99; and Erskine-Hill, *Poetry and the Realm of Politics: Shakespeare to Dryden* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 216-51. For other invaluable analyses of the play's relationship to the Glorious Revolution, see David Bywaters, "Dryden and the Revolution of 1688: Political Parallel in *Don Sebastian*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85, no. 3 (1986): 346-65; and Moore, "Political Allusions," 36-42.

Whig allusions while ignoring the obvious religious implications of these figures. Too many readings of the play's political dimension, I suggest, have missed the forest for the trees. Similarly, I do not often contradict readings of the play's religious dimension which treat it as generically "Christian";<sup>7</sup> rather, I demonstrate that there are aspects of the play's religious dimension that have escaped scholars' notice because they have not examined the play within a specifically Catholic context.

Some of *Don Sebastian's* engagements with anti-Catholic rhetoric confront problems of religious violence and persecution—subjects we have seen addressed already in *Tyrannick Love*, however facilely. At other times, the play uses language and images associated with Catholicism to delve into concerns left unexplored by that earlier work: religious suffering and joy, the pangs and trials of conversion, and the devastating effects of sin and shame. The play's engagement with such language is, by necessity, often quite subtle; indeed, the play thematizes mystery, disguise, and secrecy, invoking these concepts most strongly when it is most directly engaged with Catholic religious experience. And Dryden's thematization of secrecy is not solely rhetorical. His primary strategy for introducing a Catholic interest into this play is a formal one: he makes the play too long to stage. *Don Sebastian*, I argue, is as much a closet drama as a stage drama.

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<sup>7</sup> Of the readings which focus on the "Christian" elements of the text, perhaps the most interesting is Derek Hughes's, which reads the play as a religious rejection of Dryden's own earlier enthusiasm for heroic literature, couched in language clearly evocative of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the Fall of Man. See "Dryden's 'Don Sebastian' and the Literature of Heroism," *Yearbook of English Studies* 12 (1982): 72-90. For other readings of the play's religious character, see Bruce King, "Don Sebastian: Dryden's Moral Fable," *Sewanee Review* 70, no. 4 (1962): 651-70; John Clyde Loftis, *The Spanish Plays of Neoclassical England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 232-48; and Geraldo U. de Sousa, "Portugal, North Africa, and Dryden's *Don Sebastian*," *Clio* 37, no. 3 (2008): 339-63. The last two give more weight to Dryden's Catholicism, but ultimately make few claims about the text that depend on the specific conditions of the English Catholic community or doctrines unique to their religion.



Decades of work have gone into disentangling *Don Sebastian*'s convoluted political allusions, and its religious allusions are, if anything, even knottier.<sup>8</sup> This chapter should be considered as merely one of the first sorties of what must be a long engagement with Dryden's strategies of clandestine disclosure and brazen concealment of the play's Catholic interest.

The first section of the chapter will focus on how *Don Sebastian* stages the persecution of English Catholicism through an engagement with the hysterical anti-Catholic rhetoric that had frenzied the kingdom. By means of the play's motifs of slavery and monstrosity, Dryden works to expose such rhetoric as absurd, to portray Catholics as an oppressed and misrepresented group, and to suggest that some accusations against Catholics might be better applied to Protestant politicians and ecclesiastics. Then, turning to concerns of a less political nature, the chapter explores the theme of conversion that runs through the play. Understanding Dryden's treatment of conversion helps us to make sense of one of the play's most persistently puzzling elements: the discovery of incest between the primary protagonists in the final scene. This discovery, I argue, is a dramatization of the experience of converting to Catholicism in a violently anti-Catholic kingdom—an experience characterized by horror and mental agony. But this involuntary act of incest is treated with mercy by the playwright, in what amounts to a plea for Protestants to treat Catholics with mercy for their involuntary heresy. The chapter concludes with some speculations on the purpose of the play's extraordinary length, which rendered it unstageable without major cuts. The text of *Don Sebastian* we read today is, effectively, a closet drama. This formal closeting is reflected within the play by

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<sup>8</sup> Zwicker, who disentangles the play's convoluted political allusions, characterizes the play well, noting its "unsteady system of analogies and parallels, proximities and disparities, that defeats any simple allegorical arrangement" (*Lines of Authority*, 186).

an obsession with disguises, veils, obscurity, and enclosed spaces. At a time when Catholics were once again in the process of returning their religion to closets and private chapels, Dryden's choice to write a play that could only be fully appreciated in the closet signals his commitment to his new religion.

### **Slaves and Monsters**

*Don Sebastian* opens with a scene set in a slave market. Near the end of the scene, Antonio, a Spanish nobleman recently captured by the Moors, is put up for sale by the low-born Mustafa. Antonio resents this undignified treatment, but when he makes the mistake of calling Mustafa a "Dog" (1.1.507), Mustafa decides to show Antonio who here is the beast. Declaring, "I'll make you know your Rider," he orders Antonio down on all fours. Antonio protests, "Thou wilt not make a Horse of me?" (1.1.509-11), but in fact, that is precisely what Mustafa proceeds to do. A little whipping, it turns out, is all it takes to break even a nobleman. By the time the buyers arrive, Antonio is quite ready to obey when Mustafa orders, "To your paces, Villain, amble, trot, and gallop" (1.1.526). Accepting his lot, "*Antonio follows at the end of the Bridle on his hands and feet, and does all his Postures*" (s.d. 1.1.528+). His degradation is not yet complete, however. A potential buyer asks to see Antonio stripped to check him for diseases and lameness, and although Mustafa spares him this, he does invite the buyer to feel Antonio's body for weaknesses, promising that he will be found to be "the best piece of Man's flesh in the Market." Mustafa and the buyer use horse terminology to refer to Antonio as they haggle over his life. As if all this were not insulting enough to the nobleman, Mustafa comments on Antonio's breeding, bestializing his mother and impugning her honor. "[H]is Dam

may be a Spanish Gennet,” Mustafa declares, “but a true Barb by the Sire, or I have no skill in Horse-flesh” (1.1.547-48). Antonio’s humiliation only comes to an end when the Mufti enters and, asserting a prior claim to the slave, takes possession of him.

From this description, it might not be obvious that this scene is meant to be comic. Indeed, Antonio’s willingness to be a good sport about his treatment is the only thing that prevents this episode from becoming quite dark. The dehumanizing effect of slavery is on full display as this Spanish nobleman transforms from “Man’s flesh” into “Horse-flesh” in the space of a few lines. We have no reason to believe, however, that Dryden was particularly interested in actual slavery. Another dehumanizing tradition had far more relevance to Dryden and to his audience: England’s anti-Catholic laws.

The play’s prologue, we have noted, refers to anti-Catholic legislation. Specifically, it refers to the double taxes Catholics had to pay and, more memorably, to the law barring Catholics from owning a horse worth more than five pounds.<sup>9</sup> After asking the audience not to “*stretch the Laws*” against the author any further than they already have, the speaker concludes,

*Horses, by Papists are not to be ridden;  
But sure the Muses Horse was ne’er forbidden:  
For in no Rate-Book, it was ever found  
That Pegasus was valued at Five-pound:  
Fine him [the Poet] to daily Drudging and Inditing;  
And let him pay his Taxes out, in Writing.<sup>10</sup>*

Dryden, like Antonio, attempts to play his persecution for laughs, even as he begs the audience to be generous enough to allow him this means of keeping himself out of debt. His clever lines about riding the muses’ horse could not yet be far from the audience’s

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<sup>9</sup> For some comments on the burden these laws presented, see Miner, commentary on *Don Sebastian*, 419-420n41-46, 420n45, 420n46.

<sup>10</sup> *Works* 15:74, lines 40, 41-46.

minds when at the conclusion of the first scene, a Spanish cavalier finds himself not just horseless but a horse himself. While Anti-Catholic laws did not actually transform Catholics into beasts of burden, they did burden them with unfair taxes and, in some instances, with being their own means of transportation. With jokes and slapstick, Dryden's prologue and opening scene associate the Protestant penal laws with Moorish slavery.

The image of the bridled Antonio walking on all fours is the play's most striking example of the two primary motifs through which it explores Catholic oppression: slavery and monstrosity. But before we start making general observations about the play's portrayal of English Catholicism, it may be necessary to review the plot of this sadly under-read play.

The story is based (very loosely) on the circumstances surrounding a famous sixteenth-century battle in North Africa.<sup>11</sup> The battle was between Portugal, led on a religious and imperial crusade by its king, Don Sebastian, and the Moors of Barbary, led by the Emperor Muley-Moluch. The clash took place near the city of Alcazar in the kingdom of Morocco. Historically, both monarchs perished in the battle. Dryden allows Muley-Moluch and Sebastian to survive, the latter rounded up with other Portuguese to be sold as slaves.

The play opens in Alcazar's marketplace immediately after this battle. After an episode in which the emperor's treacherous favorite, Benducar, trades verbal barbs with Dorax (a misanthropic Portuguese renegade), Muley-Moluch arrives to look at the

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<sup>11</sup> As Dryden acknowledges in the preface, he also relied on a romance based on these events, *Dom Sebastien Roy de Portugal: Nouvelle Historique* (1680), or its English translation (1683), for much of the play's plotting. In particular, this romance introduced the play's heroine, Almeida. See Miner, commentary on *Don Sebastian*, 15:386-387.

recently captured Portuguese. He discovers Don Sebastian among the captives, along with Sebastian's old advisor, Don Alvarez; the young amorous spark, Don Antonio; and the Moorish princess, Almeyda, whose father and brother (Barbary's rightful rulers) were killed by Muley-Moluch. Alvarez and Antonio remain enslaved, but the emperor promises to free Sebastian, impressed by his noble spirit.

Muley-Moluch, of course, falls in love with Almeyda, but she considers the advances of her family's murderer unnatural. Furthermore, she and Sebastian have long loved each other, and soon marry in secret. When this marriage and Almeyda's Christian conversion are discovered, the enraged emperor determines to kill Sebastian and force Almeyda into his bed. Meanwhile, Benducar and a hypocritical Mufti set in motion plans to raise a mob to topple the emperor. While these political intrigues develop, Antonio serves as a slave in the Mufti's garden. Johayma, the Mufti's wife, attempts to seduce him, but he is attracted to the Mufti's daughter, Morayma. She wants to convert, and they make plans to run away together. The trials produced by this love triangle account for most of the play's comic plot.

Benducar and the Mufti succeed in killing Muley-Moluch, but Antonio manages to turn the mob against them. Portuguese slaves and Moorish troops (joined into a single force by Sebastian and Dorax) restore order to the wild crowd and lead Benducar off to be executed. Dorax then reveals to Sebastian the secret that he has long since revealed to the audience in his numerous asides: he is actually Alonzo, a Portuguese lord who served Sebastian until the king gave the hand of his beloved to a rival. That insult drove him to turn renegade, and now he demands justice. However, as they prepare to duel, Dorax learns that his rival has died in Sebastian's service, and he is struck with shame at his

betrayal of his lord. King and subject reconcile, and it seems that events have arrived at a happy conclusion.

But one act still remains, and there have been hints throughout the play that Providence does not look favorably upon Sebastian and Almeyda's marriage. The genre of the play takes a sharp turn from the heroic to the tragic when Alvarez (who has only now been freed) informs Sebastian and Almeyda that they are siblings, the product of an adulterous affair between Sebastian's father and Almeyda's mother. Horrified at their act of incest, Sebastian and Almeyda refuse to return to their thrones, lest they pollute them. Still in love, they agree to separate and go into religious retirement. The play concludes with the assertion that Sebastian and Almeyda are justly punished for the sin of their parents.

The slavery motif is obvious even in summarizing the play. Monstrosity, as we shall see, appears in the descriptions of such "unnatural" creatures as renegades, tyrants, and, most glaringly, incestuous siblings. Neither motif has received much comment from scholars, who have largely treated both as functions of the plot or its African setting.<sup>12</sup> Yet neither slavery nor monstrosity was part of Sebastian's historical fate; he simply died. Dryden chose to make the king a slave, and he chose to render him a monster through incest.<sup>13</sup> These additions to Sebastian's tale allow Dryden to stage religious oppression and respond to the revolution's anti-Catholic rhetoric.

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<sup>12</sup> An exception is Nabil Matar, who has suggested that Dryden's association of Africa with slavery and monstrosity make him a participant in the formation of what would become modern racial stereotypes. Dryden, in Matar's reading, attacks the Moors in response to his own treatment by Protestants. See *Britain and Barbary, 1589-1689* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 168-70. While it is certainly true that Dryden reinforces negative African stereotypes, I think Dryden's use of these motifs is about more than finding a common enemy with Protestants.

<sup>13</sup> Determining to go into exile after discovering his incest, Sebastian labels himself a monster: "Affrick has desarts wide enough to hold / Millions of Monsters, and I am, sure, the greatest" (5.1.550-51).

Slavery and monstrosity were significant motifs in Restoration political and religious discourse, and they were not treated as metaphors, but as real and present dangers. These were the terms in which the threats of Popery and tyranny were understood. Slavery and monstrosity appear frequently in attacks on Catholicism (almost universally called “Popery”) in pamphlet literature, sermons, and other writings in the seventeenth century, and particularly during the Glorious Revolution.<sup>14</sup>

As the popular refrain of “Popery and slavery” suggests, Catholicism and political tyranny were technically two different things, but were endlessly associated with each other. While this association was as old as the Reformation, it received new currency from James II’s close relationship with the absolutist and Catholic King Louis XIV. Many writers made no effort to separate Catholicism from absolutism, or deliberately conflated them. Whether in speeches given in Parliament, sermons spoken from Church of England pulpits, or poems written on affairs of state,<sup>15</sup> popery and slavery were associated so often that they became more or less synonymous, the political and religious concerns indistinguishable, at least in casual parlance. Indeed, modern scholarship has suggested that the assumed relationship between Catholicism and both slavery and tyranny was one of the central forces in forming modern conceptions of liberty in

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<sup>14</sup> The digital archive, Early English Books Online, records eleven unique works published between 1688 and 1690 with the word “slavery” in the title. None of these works concern slavery in English colonies. Their topic is the threat of slavery posed to England by Catholicism and tyranny, and its lucky deliverance from this evil by William III. This survey of titles took place on April 17, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> See, by way of example, the following: Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Speech of a Noble Peer of this Realm, made in the Reign of King Charles II. An. 1681. Most humbly presented to the blessed Instrument of England’s Deliverance from Popery and Slavery, King William* (given at Parliament in 1681, reprinted in 1689); Lewis Atterbury, *Babylons Downfall, Or, England’s Happy Deliverance from Popery, and Slavery* (preached at Milton in 1689, printed 1691), and *The Muses Farewel to Popery and Slavery, or, A Collection of Miscellany Poems, Satyrs, Songs, &c. Made by the most Eminent Wits of the Nation, as the Shams, Intreaques, and Plots of Priests and Jesuits gave occasion* (printed in 1689 and repeatedly over the next decade, under various titles).

England.<sup>16</sup> Of course, if Catholicism and slavery were conflated in this way, most of western Europe, from Portugal to Spain, France to Italy, had to be in a state of slavery. If we take the rhetoric of the publications in this period at face value (and a great deal of it should be), it would seem that many English Protestants actually believed this to be the case.

As a prominent Catholic and supporter of James, Dryden was personally attacked in print as one of James's "Slaves,"<sup>17</sup> and as a monster as well. Thomas Shadwell, the Protestant poet Dryden famously satirized in *Mac Flecknoe* and who would replace Dryden as poet laureate under William, attacked him in such terms for his alleged crypto-Catholicism as early as 1683. The allusions in Dryden's play, *The Duke of Guise*, to the danger posed to James by the Protestant Duke of Monmouth spurred Shadwell to author a pamphlet against play and author. He writes,

That some *Papists* should think the Assassination of the Duke of *Monmouth* a good thing, I do not so much wonder, but that any who call themselves *Protestants* should herd with such Monsters, and join in the Cry, as it is said they do, and even some who he rais'd, who owe it to him that they eat now, who would, in the height of his Power, have out-fawned his Dogs, this is most monstrous.<sup>18</sup>

Dryden, who had dedicated *Tyrannick Love* to Monmouth in happier days, is the ungrateful monstrous dog to which Shadwell refers.

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<sup>16</sup> Concerning the development of the concept of liberty in the seventeenth century, Clement Fatovic comments, "Popery and liberty were mutually constitutive categories .... It is no accident that the most rabid anti-Catholics were also the staunchest defenders of liberty. For many political thinkers who championed the cause of liberty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, popery was paradigmatic of unfreedom itself. The frequent association of popery with 'tyranny' and 'arbitrary government' made Catholicism in religion and politics virtually synonymous with 'servility,' 'slavery,' and 'subjection,' which were intimately intertwined. Notable republican and liberal writers, most of whom were Dissenters and non-conformists, often elucidated the meaning of English liberty in contradistinction to Catholic practices and principles." "The Anti-Catholic Roots of Liberal and Republican Conceptions of Freedom in English Political Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66, no. 1 (2005): 40.

<sup>17</sup> "A Heroick Scene," *Poems on Affairs of State, the Second Part. Written During the Reign of K. James the II. Against Popery and Slavery and His Arbitrary Proceedings* (London, 1697), 151.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Shadwell, *Some Reflections Upon the Pretended Parallel in the Play Called "The Duke of Guise"* (London, 1683), 22.



Shadwell only increased his attacks on Catholics after the revolution. In a poem thanking William III for saving England from “*Papal Tyranny*,” he claims that Catholic priests insinuated themselves into James’s trust, and thereby “Turn’d Kings to Tyrants, and to Slaves, the free.”<sup>19</sup> Then with its government and ancient constitution destroyed, England found itself swarmed by Italian and Irish monsters:

Monsters of Roman and Hybernian Race,  
With Phangs and Claws infect the wasted place:  
With one of *Brittish* kind, who swallow’d more  
Than any other Bloody Beast of Pow’r.<sup>20</sup>

The monster “of *Brittish* kind” refers to Edward Petre, the radical English Catholic ecclesiastic who held the most sway over James II. Even the English could become monsters when they embraced a monstrous religion.

At a time when poems like Shadwell’s were popular, Dryden chose to portray slavery on the English stage—and it must have been quite clear to the audience that the “slavery” of the Catholic world was incomparable with that which existed in North Africa. Steven Zwicker and Bridget Orr have suggested that Dryden might have chosen to portray slavery as a means of undermining Whig claims that Jacobite autocracy was tantamount to slavery.<sup>21</sup> I would add that it also undermines the same claims about Papal tyranny, exposing the absurdity of the rhetoric of “Catholic slavery.”

And it does so by portraying enslaved Catholics. English Catholics, of course, were no more slaves than French Catholics, but they had been denied the same liberties as their fellow countrymen for over a century and were even more oppressed since James

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<sup>19</sup> Shadwell, “A Congratulatory Poem on his Highness the Prince of *Orange*, his coming into *England*,” *Poems on Affairs of State*, 215.

<sup>20</sup> Shadwell, “A Congratulatory Poem,” 216.

<sup>21</sup> See Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660-1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 169; and Zwicker, *Lines of Authority*, 191-92.

had fled England. Catholics had far more reason to call themselves English slaves than Protestants did. Dryden would write in the dedication to his next play, *Amphitryon*, that “so long as I enjoy my Liberty, which is the Birth-right of an English Man, the rest shall never go near my Heart.”<sup>22</sup> The assertion can only be read ironically; as a Catholic, Dryden’s liberty was extremely circumscribed.

The struggle of the Portuguese characters to regain their liberty suggests an effort on Dryden’s part to reclaim the rhetoric of liberty from the Whigs to serve the Jacobite and Catholic causes. Indeed, Sebastian, whom all of the commentators on the play acknowledge exhibits characteristics of an idealized version of James II, is the play’s greatest advocate for liberty. When the Emperor promises him any gift he wishes, Sebastian asks for one thing: “My Liberty: / For were ev’n Paradise it self my Prison, / Still I shou’d long to leap the Chrystal walls” (2.1.367-69). James, of course, had attempted to portray himself as the champion of liberty by extending freedom of worship to all Christians.

As in anti-Catholic rhetoric, the play’s monstrosity motif is closely allied to that of slavery, but Antonio’s debasement suggests that Catholics are only “monsters” insofar as their persecutors have dehumanized them, as anti-Catholic laws or poetry like Shadwell’s attempted to do. Muley-Moluch attempts to do the same to Sebastian when he finds him defiant to his will, declaring, “I’ll show thee for a Monster through my *Affrick*” (1.1.370). Indeed, the play suggests that mistreating a human being creates two monsters: the dehumanized subject, and the inhumane tyrant. Almeyda makes the latter point clear when she asks Muley-Moluch to kill her rather than court her:

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<sup>22</sup> *Amphitryon; or, The Two Sosia’s*, 15:224.

Name Death again, for that thou canst pronounce  
 With horrid grace, becoming of a Tyrant.  
 Love is for human hearts, and not for thine,  
 Where the brute Beast extinguishes the Man.  
 (2.1.414-17)

On the bestiality of tyrants, then, Dryden agrees with the Protestant Whigs. He just disagrees about who the tyrant is, and who the slave.

Indeed, the play suggests that English Protestants are not only brutish tyrants, but are more brutish and tyrannical than even Muslim Moors. As a slave of the Moors, Sebastian is allowed a priest of his own, “whose free access / Not ev’n the barb’rous Victors have refus’d” (2.1.625-26). This is not a mere invention of Dryden’s; the Moors frequently allowed their Christian slaves to be ministered to by clergymen, who were sent to North Africa for that purpose.<sup>23</sup> But in England, it was treason to be a priest and a capital offence to harbor one. Celebrating or hearing a Catholic mass, even in private, was punishable by fine.<sup>24</sup> In this instance, at least, the conditions under which Christian slaves labored in Barbary were less severe than the conditions under which English Protestants held their fellow Catholic subjects. The Whigs are “barb’rous Victors” indeed.

There is one further type of monster in the play which the audience would have immediately associated with their country’s religious turmoil and which we must consider before concluding our investigation of these motifs: the renegade. As Nabil Matar has shown, the Muslim renegade was an especially disturbing monster in the seventeenth-century imagination, because he looked just like any other person.

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<sup>23</sup> E. M. G. Routh, *Tangier: England’s Lost Atlantic Outpost, 1661-1684* (London: John Murray, 1912), 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> For details about penal legislation, see John Miller, *Popery & Politics in England 1660-1688*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 52-56.

Renegades were evidence that any normal person could transform into a monster, without outward signs of such a transformation.<sup>25</sup> Of course, England already had a native version of just such a monster: the crypto-Catholic. Indeed, Catholic converts were frequently labeled renegades.

*Don Sebastian's* renegade, Dorax, is defined by his turncoat status. Others often address him—and he sometimes refers to himself—simply as “Renegade.” He dominates every scene in which he appears, a simultaneously heroic and monstrous figure. This lends his character a volatility that is much more complex and interesting than the capriciousness of Dryden’s tyrannical emperors like Maximin and Muley-Moluch. Not merely swinging from the highest pitch of love to the furthest depth of hate from moment to moment, Dorax’s hatred and insulted honor are always on his mind, in conflict with his knowledge of his own crimes. He utters some of the vilest lines Dryden ever wrote, yet, like Milton’s Satan (upon whom he is clearly modeled), he fascinates us, and even gains our sympathy.

I believe that this complex characterization is the consequence of Dorax’s equally complex allusiveness. Most criticism has focused on Dorax’s political betrayal of Sebastian and assumes that Dorax is an allusion to those who transferred their loyalty to William after the Revolution. I believe these scholars have been too quick to read politics into a character whose religion is of equal, if not greater, concern. This renegade would be just as suggestive of the Catholics who (re)converted to Protestantism when James

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<sup>25</sup> Matar’s study of the renegade figure, “The Renegade in English Seventeenth-Century Imagination,” *Studies in English Literature* 33, no. 3 (1993): 489-505, is useful for understanding the nature and uses of the renegade during this period. However, I take issue with Matar’s characterization of the renegade as clearly distinct from the papist in the English imagination. Matar claims that the Islamic renegade looks just like anyone else, unlike the “contorted Papist” (ibid., 490). The most frightening papists were hidden papists, who could dwell among their Protestant neighbors, plotting and scheming with no one the wiser. The renegade and the papist were overlapping categories of monster.

was expelled from England.<sup>26</sup> Like those converts, Dorax embraces Islam out of sheer opportunism (Christianity “would oblige [him] to forgiveness” (2.1.238), while Islam allows him to pursue his revenge on Sebastian).

This reading would suggest that, as with the labels of tyrant and monster, Dryden attempts to turn the accusation of “renegade” back against Protestants. Yet, while he no doubt enjoyed the opportunity of returning the charge of renegade to his enemies, I do not think this interpretation fully accounts for the complexity of Dorax’s portrayal. His numerous asides in the first act establish a rapport between him and the audience that palliates the revulsion which his coarsely misogynistic and elitist lines inspire. He is too likeable in spite of his deep flaws, too noble in spite of his treachery, and too central to the play’s heroic action to be read as a mere figure for political and religious turncoats. Of course, Dryden might well wish to avoid being too hard on such turncoats, whose predicament he could sympathize with (and whose assistance he might need in coming years). But Dryden’s treatment of Dorax goes beyond sympathy to a kind of identification between character and author.

Dryden had some reason to identify with his renegade; his Catholic conversion had made this label, like that of monster and slave, a favorite of his enemies. In a poem called “The Laureat,” an anonymous poet associates Dryden’s seemingly opportunistic conversion with that of a renegade:

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<sup>26</sup> Orr acknowledges Dorax’s religious repudiation, and suggests that, more than just being a Williamite figure, his conflicted nature reveals other possible modes of life than the Christian and European (*Empire on the English Stage*, 168). Matar suggests (rather unconvincingly) that Dryden might be using Dorax to allude to those English Protestants who, especially after the Popish Plot scare, looked to the Turks as the their hope for protection from the Pope (“The Renegade in English Seventeenth-Century Imagination,” 500). J. Douglas Canfield’s reading of the play, focused as it is on kingship, considers the implications of Dorax’s religious betrayal primarily in relation to Dryden’s royalism. See “Royalism’s Last Dramatic Stand: English Political Tragedy, 1679-89,” *Studies in Philology* 82, no. 2 (1985): 260-61.

Gold is thy God, for a Substantial summ,  
 Thou to the *Turk*, woul'dst run away from *Rome*,  
 And Sing his Holy Expedition against Christendom.<sup>27</sup>

Another farcical poem makes “Johnny” Dryden say, “Like a true Renegado still I maul /  
 The party I forsook with utmost gall.”<sup>28</sup> Perhaps most wounding was an attack on Dryden  
 upon the publication of *The Hind and the Panther*:

Thou mercenary renegade, thou slave,  
 Thou ever changing, still to be a knave:  
 What sect, what error wilt thou next disgrace?  
 Thou are so lewd, so scandalously base,  
 That antichristian Popery may be  
 Asham'd of such a proselite as thee.<sup>29</sup>

To many Protestants, the conversion of the poet laureate, who had argued so eloquently  
 on behalf of the Church of England in *Religio Laici*, was a betrayal on par with “turning  
 Turk.”

Hugh MacCallum is the only critic to have commented at any length on the  
 similarities to be found between Dryden and his renegado Portuguese, but once noticed,  
 they are difficult to ignore.<sup>30</sup> Like Dryden, Dorax despises clerical demagoguery. He  
 attempts to warn Muley-Moluch not to trust his clerical advisor, the Mufti, as Dryden  
 warned James about his radical ecclesiastic adviser, Petre, in *The Hind and the Panther*.  
 Dorax is also (rather ironically) the play's most outspoken proponent of royal prerogative  
 and civil obedience. It is he who disperses the mobile after the Emperor has been

<sup>27</sup> “The Laureat,” in *Muses Farewel to Popery and Slavery*, 30.

<sup>28</sup> “A Heroick Scene,” 147.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Sackville, “To Mr. Bays,” *Poems* (1979) (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992;  
<http://name.umdl.umich.edu/SackCPoems>; first published in 1979 by Garland Publishing as *The Poems of  
 Charles Sackville: Sixth Earl of Dorset*, ed. Brice Harris), 18. The attribution of this poem to Sackville has  
 been disputed.

<sup>30</sup> Noting their common traits and interests, Hugh MacCallum states that Dorax's “bitter experience as a  
 renegade also leads us back to the career of the poet.” “‘A Track of Glory’: Dryden's *Don Sebastian* and  
 the Tragedy of Heroic Leadership,” *Restoration* 19, no. 1 (1995): 51. Winn also mentions that Dryden  
 refers to Montaigne's essay on human inconsistency in the play's preface to defend Dorax's volatility, an  
 essay that he had applied to himself in the past (*John Dryden and His World*, 439).

overthrown, in terms that suggest that mutiny is another means of creating monsters. He addresses the rioters as,

Ye mungrill work of Heaven, with humane shapes,  
Not to be damn'd, or sav'd, but breath, and perish,  
That have but just enough of sence, to know  
The masters voice, when rated, to depart.

(4.3.355-58)

These lines suggest another similarity between author and character: both are wicked satirists. Indeed, at his first appearance in the play, Dorax misanthropically declares that “all mankind is cause enough for Satyr” (1.1.75). The author of *Absalom and Achitophel* and *The Medall* might well have agreed. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, Dorax’s unusual number of asides and soliloquies in the first and third acts often make him seem more like a commentator on the play than a character within it—almost like a narrator, albeit an unreliable one.

I am not suggesting that Dorax is an author surrogate, nor even that Dryden intentionally drew the parallels between himself and the character. But it appears that, consciously or otherwise, Dryden found this renegade to be a useful figure for exploring his own “renegade” history of religious growth and change—and perhaps for expiating some of his own sins. For instance, Dorax’s satires cease after he reconciles with Sebastian and Catholicism. His misanthropy seems to have been a product of self-loathing and perverted perception caused by his unnatural rejection of nation and religion. Dryden, too, has abandoned satire since his conversion (or perhaps more accurately, since the revolution). At least this is the claim of the speaker of the prologue, who tells us that in the future the poet “*wou’d sheath his cutting Satyr.*”<sup>31</sup> Nor is this the only literary tradition that Dryden signals he is rejecting. As we noted at the conclusion

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<sup>31</sup> *Works*, 15:74, line 33.

of the previous chapter, in the preface he writes of his disillusionment with “*Love and Honour (the mistaken Topicks of Tragedy)*.”<sup>32</sup> Basing a play on love and honor now seems to be, at the very least, a literary sin, and perhaps something worse. Derek Hughes has argued that *Don Sebastian* criticizes heroic literature and heroic values as corrupted by the Fall of Man, a perspective owing to Dryden’s new religiosity.<sup>33</sup> It is therefore intriguing that Dorax, the character most obsessed with his “injur’d honour, and [his] ravish’d love” (1.1.245-46), ultimately realizes that this obsession has turned him into a traitor and an infidel, overwhelming him with shame. Again, this change of heart comes during his reconciliation to king and church.

In his biography of Dryden, Winn suggests that in creating Dorax, Dryden “channeled the tension between loyalty and self-interest that many Englishmen felt during and after the Revolution.”<sup>34</sup> This is a technically accurate but misleadingly secularized description of the tensions and anxieties that inspired the character. Dorax’s internal struggle is at least as religious as it is political—as were the internal struggles of many, if not most, Englishmen during the Revolution. Dryden may believe that he settled on the right choice (James and Catholicism), but his own experience with wavering, indecision, and the “shame of change,” as he calls it in *The Hind and the Panther*,<sup>35</sup> seem to have left him readier to identify with renegades than to condemn them. The play does not so much accuse Protestants and Williamites of being renegades as it suggests that the self-divided renegade is a fit figure for the spirit of the English nation in 1689.

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<sup>32</sup> *Works*, 15:65.

<sup>33</sup> Hughes, “‘Don Sebastian’ and the Literature of Heroism,” 72-90.

<sup>34</sup> Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, 439.

<sup>35</sup> *The Hind and the Panther*, 3:173, part 3, line 402 (hereafter cited by part and line of this edition).



This brief sketch of Dryden's staging of Catholic suffering and engagement with Revolution rhetoric has, I hope, demonstrated that Dryden sought to reclaim much of that rhetoric in defense of Catholics and to expose as nonsensical some of the most vicious attacks on his religious community. But even as we have examined this engagement with public discourse we have already begun to stray into more personal matters relating to Dryden's expression of his own experiences as a recent Catholic convert. We will now give these more personal, more explicitly religious concerns our full attention.

### **Mystery and Conversion**

Near the beginning of the play's final scene, Antonio and Morayma are joyfully reunited after losing each other during the previous night's riots. They begin discussing their impending marriage and the latter's impending conversion to Christianity, and soon their lighthearted natures lead them to jesting about the unfaithfulness of lovers—and, it is suggested, the unfaithfulness of the Christian “faithful.” Morayma claims that in Antonio's country, churches mainly serve as places for men and women to rendezvous for affairs. Antonio affirms this is true, and adds,

I hear the Protestants an't much reform'd in that point neither; for their Sectaries call their Churches by the naturall name of Meeting-houses. Therefore I warn thee in good time, not more of devotion than needs must, good future Spowse; and allways in a veile; for those eyes of thine are damn'd enemies to mortification.

To which Morayma replies,

The best thing I have heard of Christendom, is that we women are allow'd the priviledge of having Souls; and I assure you, I shall make bold to bestow mine, upon some Lover, when ever you begin to go astray, and, if I find no Convenience in a Church, a private Chamber will serve the turn.  
(5.1.102-12)

Intriguingly, this brief exchange emphasizes secrecy of worship. Morayma is to go veiled to church; she will make a secret of where she bestows her soul; and if the public church does not “serve her turn,” she will find a “private Chamber” for her devotions. In a play written by an English Catholic, these are suggestive terms. Of course, within the context of the scene, all of this is a matter of jest; Antonio and Morayma are using the language of religion to discuss sexual affairs. But as we shall see, this is not the first time they have done so; in fact, the play has consistently associated courtship and marriage with religious choice, particularly in the development of Antonio and Morayma’s relationship. Furthermore, it is telling that Antonio chooses this moment to refer to the Protestant-Catholic divide within Christianity. He and Morayma are both aware that Portugal’s church is not the only church in Christendom. Morayma is not simply becoming a “Christian” as the converted Moors do in *The Conquest of Granada*; she is becoming a Catholic.

Antonio and Morayma’s mutual teasing about the latter’s conversion is the calm before the storm that will rage through the rest of the final scene. Here the truth about Sebastian and Almeyda’s histories will be revealed, their incestuous marriage discovered, and their futures as religious ascetics determined upon. Yet in spite of the radical difference in tone, the lovers’ banter is critically related to these tragic events. Dryden sets up the play’s tragic turn with references to Christian division, conversion, and secret worship because those are the concerns that inform his heroes’ tragic fate.

Scholars have long found the heroes’ incest to be one of *Don Sebastian*’s most confounding features. This plot point is Dryden’s most significant addition to Sebastian’s story (incest does not appear in any of his sources for the play), and therefore seems to

demand interpretation. Yet political readings of the play have had little success in identifying an intelligible allusion hidden behind it. At least one scholar has simply dismissed it as a convention of the Restoration stage,<sup>36</sup> but the idea that Dryden would sacrifice the complex design and signification of his play to a mere convention is hardly plausible. To date, the most satisfactory interpretation is Howard Erskine-Hill's. He suggests "that the theme of unknowing incest works as a metaphor for the inexplicable defeat of truth and right within a providential vision of history."<sup>37</sup> This reading, at least, benefits from wedding Dryden's political and religious visions, and offers a reasonable application of the incest theme to the great public questions of Dryden's day.

I suggest that there is a more personal interpretation of the dynamics of this intensely emotional scene, which nevertheless also has important implications to great public questions. Sebastian and Almeyda's discovery of their act of incest is a dramatization of the experience of converting to a prohibited religion.

Now, to forestall certain objections, I wish to be clear that I am not claiming that the scene allegorizes a conversion to Catholicism, nor that it argues in favor of the Catholic religion. I am claiming that it dramatizes the experiences of emotional trauma and spiritual uncertainty that a Catholic convert could be expected to undergo in late Restoration England. The scene shows the heroes experiencing pain, horror, and shame due to their reluctant acceptance of a previously unperceived truth about their state of sin,

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<sup>36</sup> Bywaters, who tries to find a consistent parallel between Sebastian and James II, waves away the act of incest as a mere necessity of the tragic plot ("Dryden and the Revolution," 355). Zwicker is also rather dismissive, suggesting that incest's lack of application to either James or William helps Dryden to pass his play off as nonpolitical (*Lines of Authority*, 186). Gardiner argues that Dryden thematizes incest in his late works to suggest the unnaturalness of William III's kingship ("John Dryden's *Love Triumphant*," 164). This theory, however, does not apply to *Don Sebastian*, which does not associate Sebastian with William. MacCallum, whose reading is less interested in political allusion, suggests that incest is related to the prideful stoicism and excessive self-sufficiency criticized in the rest of the play ("A Track of Glory," 47).

<sup>37</sup> Erskine-Hill, *Poetry and the Realm of Politics*, 249.

the recognition of which alters their understanding of their relationship with God, demands a radical reorientation of their beliefs, and separates them from their families, friends, and even their nations. Moreover, the characters themselves dwell on the religious implications of the discovery. Sebastian declares his intention to “live alone to Heav’n: and dye to her [Almeyda]” (5.1.545), and both determine to spend the rest of their lives attempting to “expiate” their sin and do “pennance” (5.1.514, 676). Damnation and salvation are precisely what is at stake as these characters come to grips with Alvarez’s revelation.

Furthermore, the play’s design has been pointing the audience toward this final act of conversion. Antonio and Morayma’s discussion of the latter’s conversion is only the most recent clue to what is actually at stake in this scene. Conversion is one of *Don Sebastian*’s central themes, each act of the play portraying at least one character revealing, performing, or announcing their intention to perform, a religious conversion.<sup>38</sup> In the first act, we learn of Dorax’s renegade status. In the second, Almeyda reveals that she is a Christian convert. Morayma announces her intention to run away with Antonio, marry him, and convert to his religion in the third, and in the fourth, the heroic action climaxes with Dorax’s re-conversion to Christianity. The final act then concludes this design with a portrayal of the psychological crisis conversion entails, standing in stark contrast to the comic and romantic portrayals of the conversions of Morayma and Dorax.

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<sup>38</sup> To my knowledge, no one has directly identified the centrality of conversion to the play’s design. However, Miner has commented on the play’s unusual number of revelations, under which rubric he includes the revelations of conversion. He considers these revelations related to “the fundamental concern of the play: man’s attempt to discover his place in the scheme of things, amid countless uncertainties, by rising to a vision of a world possessed of moral order” (commentary on *Don Sebastian*, 15:403). His interpretation of this “revelation” theme is not inconsistent with my own reading.

Of course, even though I am not suggesting that the play creates an allegorical relationship between incest and conversion, Dryden's choice of veil for his dramatization of the conversion experience may still seem unlikely. The necessity of thoroughly disguising any religious objectives in the play is not a satisfactory explanation for such a seemingly inappropriate allusive strategy. But as the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, the discovery of incest is in fact a highly appropriate veil, one which captures the complexity of the Catholic converts' situation and which carries resonances of Catholic theology.

To begin, we must look more closely at the clear portrayals of conversion in *Don Sebastian*. And this entails turning once again to Antonio's slave market transformation. (In *Don Sebastian*, the most explicit references to dangerous political and religious subjects appear in the comic plot.)<sup>39</sup> When Antonio submits to Mustafa's whipping, he tells his new master, "I obey thee chearfully," and then adds, "I see the Doctrine of Non-Resistance is never practis'd thoroughly but when a Man can't help himself" (1.1.520-22). Antonio links his compromised state to that of the Church of England, which betrayed its doctrine of non-resistance to the monarch when James II's pro-Catholic policies seemed to threaten its existence. One's principles, Antonio realizes, are easily discarded when one is threatened. He makes this point ever clearer later in the play. When the Mufti's libidinous wife, Johayma, threatens to accuse Antonio of rape if he does not return her sexual advances, he feigns desire for her. This behavior, in turn, upsets Morayma. "[W]as that like a Cavalier of honour?" she asks (possibly suggesting a

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<sup>39</sup> In his preface, Dryden boasts of how well he entwined the high and low plots, even at comedy's expense. He writes that he could have made the low plot "a better course of Comedy, I mean a more diverting," but instead designed it so as to be "of a piece, and more depending, on the serious part of the design" (*Works*, 15:72).

pun between “Cavalier” and Antonio’s recent experiences as an actual “horseman”). But Antonio is unabashed about his willingness to compromise for his life. He tells Morayma that his behavior is “[n]ot very heroick; but self preservation is a point above Honour and Religion too. ———*Antonio* was a Rogue I must confess; but you must give me leave to love him” (3.2.233-35). Survival trumps all other considerations—including religion.

If Antonio’s readiness to compromise his principles is, on one level, an attack on the disloyalty of the Church of England in 1688, on another it expresses concern about the possibility that he may compromise his *religion* as well, as many fearful and uncommitted Catholic converts did in 1689.<sup>40</sup> As we noted above, the physical humor in the slave market scene alludes to the oppressive penal laws, which Protestants hoped would harass Catholics into conformity with the Church of England (and which, in a few cases, succeeded in doing so). The peril Antonio stands in is given clear demonstration once the Mufti brings his new slave home. Suspecting Antonio of designs upon his wife, the Mufti threatens him with a pruning knife. Antonio responds, “Thank you for that; but I am in no such hast [*sic*] to be made a Musulman” (2.2.65-66). One violent blow, it seems, might transform this Christian into an infidel.

The conflation of castration with conversion highlights two common elements in the play’s treatment of conversion. First, the potential convert’s physical body is made central to the supposedly spiritual or intellectual process of conversion. Second, as in Antonio’s banter with Morayma in the final scene, we see an association between religious choice and sexuality. These associations are strong in both of Dorax’s

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<sup>40</sup> Other scholars have noted this reference to non-resistance for different reasons. Moore reads this line as an attack on Church of England clergy who deserted James (“Political Allusions,” 40), while Bywaters reads it as more directly an attack on disloyal Tories (“Dryden and the Revolution,” 350). In either case, it is assumed that Antonio’s comment is about political rather than religious consistency.

conversions as well. He renounces Christianity when Sebastian gives the hand of his beloved Violante to a rival lover, and he returns to the faith upon learning that Sebastian has been unable to “[e]ffect the Consummation” between Violante and that rival (4.3.643). Sebastian assures Dorax, “[S]he pines for thee, / A Widdow and a Maid” (4.3.644-45). Dorax’s “Circumcision” marks him as a Muslim (4.3.422), while the prospect of piercing a hymen brings him back to Christianity. In fact, every convert and potential convert in the play is partly or wholly motivated to convert by their sexual desire for another character. We assume that Almeyda converts out of love for Sebastian, and the revelation of her conversion is followed shortly by their marriage and sexual consummation. Morayma, meanwhile, sees marriage with Antonio as the path to adopting his faith.

The sexual overtones of Antonio and Morayma’s conversion experiences (for Antonio, too, is a kind of convert, leaving behind his libertine ways for marriage) are stressed by the repetition of the words *flesh* and *blood* in the scenes of their courtship in the Mufti’s garden. At first, these words have purely sexual connotations. An aroused Antonio, mistaking a disguised Johayma for Morayma, refers to her as “a true She-devil of Flesh and Blood” (3.2.23-24). When he realizes his mistake, his attempts to disentangle himself from an affair with her inspire an argument over his virility. “I am true flesh and blood,” Antonio insists, to which the spurned Johayma caustically responds, “Flesh without blood I think thou art” (3.2.112-114). These words then reappear in a later garden scene, but with new, intriguing connotations. Upon catching his daughter Morayma fleeing to Antonio with the family’s casket of jewels, the avaricious Mufti reproaches her. “[T]hou art but my flesh and blood,” he tells her, “but these [the

jewels] are my Life and Soul.” Morayma replies, “Then let me follow my flesh and blood, and keep to your self your Life and Soul” (4.2.178-81). In this confrontation between father and daughter, the phrase “flesh and blood,” while still carrying echoes of its earlier sexual use, now also refers to kinship, and begins to have religious implications as well. Their exchange suggests that the truer “flesh and blood” relationship is not between father and daughter, but between Morayma and her future husband. These words, and the garden setting, recall the transformation of husband and wife into one flesh, derived in the Christian tradition from the story of Eve’s creation out of Adam’s flesh in the Garden of Eden. Morayma sees in Antonio not just a sexual companion, but the guide to her new religious life—the kind of guide that her father, the Mufti, failed to be.

The words *flesh* and *blood* are not limited to Morayma and Antonio’s courtship scenes. *Flesh* appears in *Don Sebastian* nearly three times as often as in any other Dryden play, and *blood* is an unusually common word as well.<sup>41</sup> The play’s language thus reinforces the action’s emphasis on the physicality and sexuality of these characters. Such an emphasis stands in stark contrast with the portrayal of St. Catharine and the other Christian converts in *Tyrannick Love*. In that play, it is St. Catharine’s implacable rationality that makes admiring converts of Apollonius, Porphyrius, and Berenice. And while Maximin threatens violence to their bodies, none of the major characters shows a sign of wavering in their faith. In *Don Sebastian*, love and desire are the keys to Christian

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<sup>41</sup> *Flesh* appears eleven times in *Don Sebastian*, compared to four times each in the two runners-up, *Oedipus* and *The Duke of Guise*. *Blood*, *bloody*, *bleed*, and *bleeding* appear thirty times in this play, including variant spellings, making it one of the (rhetorically) bloodiest of Dryden’s plays. In surveying Dryden’s word usage in his plays, I disregarded prologues, epilogues, stage directions, and attached prose materials.



conversion, while torture carries a real danger of creating renegades. No one in *Don Sebastian* peacefully reasons her solitary way to Enlightenment.

Some may argue that this focus on physicality is a sign that these characters are sinful and degenerate. J. Douglas Canfield, who notes “a parody of religious language” in Antonio and Morayma’s courtship, reads this parody as a sign of the lovers’ debauched nature.<sup>42</sup> To an extent, I would agree; no character in this play is a paragon of Christian piety, and certainly Dorax’s rejection of Christianity warns of what may happen when one fixates on the things of the physical world at the expense of those of the spiritual world. But such flaws and failures in the play’s heroes are precisely why *Don Sebastian* seems a more mature production than Dryden’s earlier effort at staging religion.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, Dryden seems to treat all of his heroes’ passions and desires—even Dorax’s—with sympathetic understanding.

Instead, I would argue that the play’s focus on its heroes’ physicality characterizes conversion as a visceral experience, motivated by human realities and desires, hopes and fears, and not by cold reason (which even *Tyrannick Love* finally admits comes after, not before, faith). A similar contrast is apparent between Dryden’s two poetic religious apologies: the calm, rational, Church of England *Religio Laici* and the emotional and Catholic *Hind and the Panther*. These differences suggest that his own conversion gave him a greater appreciation of the emotional intensity that a conversion experience can produce. It may also suggest that emotional attachments were a

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<sup>42</sup> Canfield, “Royalism’s Last Dramatic Stand,” 258.

<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the play may suggest that the characters get themselves into trouble when they fail to acknowledge how important their bodies are (a mistake a Protestant is more likely to make than a Catholic). Benducar notes upon first seeing Sebastian that he “scorns his brittle Corps, and seems ashamed / He’s not all spirit” (1.1.315-16). Almeyda’s concern about the value of her soul indicates a similar disdain for her physical nature. Their “conversion” at the end of the play forces them to acknowledge that their proud souls reside in very real bodies, and that one cannot be properly cared for without looking after the other.

significant factor in his own conversion. Dryden may have been led to Catholicism by his wife and sons, who appear to have embraced Catholicism before the poet.<sup>44</sup> Certainly it would seem that religious faith is not created through projects of mass indoctrination, but develops out of personal relationships and emotional appeal—or as a fearful response to violence.

Moreover, this new emphasis on physical bodies creates specifically Catholic resonances in the play's portrayal of conversion. Arthur F. Marotti, in his study of early modern religious discourse, notes that Protestants “contrast[ed] the devotional and sacramental practices of the Roman church (which relied on the physical mediation of the spiritual) with the supposedly more spiritual orientation of Protestant text- and language-based religion.”<sup>45</sup> Indeed, Catholics themselves acknowledged the greater physicality of their religion; they simply perceived that physicality as an advantageous tradition rather than a corruption. We can better understand the importance of such physical mediation to Catholicism (and by extension, to Dryden's play) by pausing our examination of the play for a moment to discuss the theological dispute between Catholics and Protestants over the doctrine of transubstantiation—a dispute which, like Morayma's dispute with her father, centered on what the words *flesh* and *blood* refer to.

Transubstantiation—the miraculous process by which bread and wine take on the actual substance of Christ's flesh and blood during the sacrament of the Eucharist—is a doctrine of the Catholic Church. The Church of England and other Protestant sects reject transubstantiation, preferring to understand the sacrament of the Eucharist as a symbol of the sacrifice of Jesus's flesh and blood, rather than as a miraculous recreation of that

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<sup>44</sup> Winn, *John Dryden and His World*, 415-16.

<sup>45</sup> Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 36-37.

sacrifice. In *The Hind and the Panther*, Dryden refers to the existence of the Real Presence of God in the sacrament as “the main question” between Protestants and Catholics,<sup>46</sup> and the quantity of polemic published on the topic in the Restoration could almost make one believe him.

Dryden participated in the transubstantiation dispute as both a Protestant and a Catholic, and his treatment of the doctrine is fairly typical in either case. In *Absalom and Achitophel*, a Protestant Dryden attempts to make transubstantiation appear pagan and ridiculous:

Th’ *Egyptian* Rites the *Jebusites* [Catholics] imbrac’d;  
Where Gods were recommended by their Tast;  
Such savory Deities must needs be good,  
As serv’d at once for Worship and for Food.<sup>47</sup>

For Dryden and other Protestants, transubstantiation represented Catholic superstition, irrationality, and idolatry. That Catholics venerated physical objects during mass, and that their sacrament of communion involved the physical consumption of God, struck Protestants as either amusing or horrifying. Yet only six years later, Dryden found himself arguing against his own satire. In *The Hind and the Panther*, he equates the mystery of Christ’s flesh and blood in the Eucharist with the mystery of Christ’s flesh and blood in the Incarnation:

Can I my reason to my faith compell,  
And shall my sight, and touch, and taste rebell?  
.....  
Could He his god-head veil with flesh and blood  
And not veil these again to be our food?<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> *Hind and the Panther*, 2.28.

<sup>47</sup> Dryden, *Absalom and Achitophel*, 2:9, lines 118-21.

<sup>48</sup> *Hind and the Panther*, 1.85-86, 134-35.

The poem is characteristic of the Catholic position, with its appeal to mystery and God's power to take any form he pleases. Catholics thus perceived Protestants as impious for judging divine revelation by their fallible human senses and reason, and blasphemous for seeming to doubt God's omnipotence. One scholar has suggested that accepting the reality of transubstantiation was a major factor in Dryden's conversion, as it was for many other English converts in this period.<sup>49</sup>

While the repetition of *flesh* and *blood* by Antonio and Morayma most directly refers to their impending marriage and consummation, their language would also evoke the religious discourse on transubstantiation. Indeed, from a Catholic theological perspective, matrimony and the Eucharist are fundamentally connected. All of the Catholic sacraments are linked to the most perfect sacrament, that of the Eucharist, and matrimony enjoys a special connection with it. According to Thomas Aquinas, "Matrimony at least in its signification, touches this sacrament [the Eucharist]; in so far as it signifies the union of Christ with the Church, of which union the Eucharist is a figure."<sup>50</sup>

Dryden certainly was aware of this; he had made use of the connection between the Eucharist and matrimony before. Anne Barbeau Gardiner has argued that the design of the beast fable in *The Hind and the Panther* is drawn from the Old Testament book,

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<sup>49</sup> Gardiner (who has written extensively on the relationship between Dryden's Catholicism and his late works) proposes this theory, based largely on the fact that *The Hind and the Panther* focuses on transubstantiation in its most personal passages (1.128-49, 3.281-97). See "A Witty French Preacher in the English Court, Dryden, and the Great Debate on the Real Presence," *ELH* 65, no. 3 (1998): 595; and *Ancient Faith and Modern Freedom in John Dryden's "The Hind and the Panther"* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 96-110.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Benzinger Bros. ed. (1947) (<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/aquinas/summa/index.htm>), 3.65.3 (hereafter cited by part, question, and article of this edition).

*The Song of Songs, or The Canticle of Canticles*, and the exegetical writings on it.<sup>51</sup>

Although *Canticles* is a love poem and not explicitly religious at all, medieval Christians interpreted it as a prophecy of Christ's marriage to the Church. Gardiner demonstrates that Dryden's account of his own conversion experience in *The Hind and the Panther* parallels his acceptance of "the redeeming Blood" of the Eucharist with his reception "into the bosom of the Bride, the Mystical Body of Christ."<sup>52</sup> Embracing the truth about the figure of Christ's union with the Church (the Eucharist) allows him to embrace the Church as well.

And Dryden was hardly the first poet to disguise the terms of Catholic Eucharistic theology under those of sexual union. John Donne's erotic poetry adopts this strategy repeatedly. As Achsah Guibbory has recently written, "Donne's representation of love as both sexual and spiritual is an erotic reworking of the Catholic understanding that body and soul, material and spiritual are inseparably linked in the world, in devotion, and in the Sacrament."<sup>53</sup> Another Donne scholar, M. Thomas Hester, has brilliantly demonstrated how Donne's erotic lyrics "appropriate the lexicon of the current doctrinal war" over transubstantiation and the real presence in the Eucharist.<sup>54</sup> Dryden thus follows an English religious poetry tradition in appropriating this same lexicon to signal his engagement with Catholic religious experience. Indeed, he may have taken his cue directly from Donne. Donne's religious life had followed a trajectory opposite to

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<sup>51</sup> Gardiner, *Ancient Faith and Modern Freedom*, 3-110. Gardiner's claims about the significance of *Canticles* and these exegetical writings in the poem may be grander than are truly warranted, but she is certainly right to see their influence in the poem.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>53</sup> Achsah Guibbory, "Erotic Poetry," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Donne*, ed. Achsah Guibbory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 144.

<sup>54</sup> M. Thomas Hester, "'this cannot be said': A Preface to the Reader of Donne's Lyrics," *Christianity and Literature* 39, no. 4 (1990): 373. Hester shows that Donne makes his most ingenious use of this lexicon in "The Flea," in which the lovers' "two bloods mingled" in the flea's "living walls of Jet" become a signal for (among other things) Christ's living presence within the Eucharist (*ibid.*, 377-82).

Dryden's—he was a Catholic who converted to Anglicanism—and his poetry's engagement with theological doctrine, which does not clearly favor either the Catholic or Protestant point of view, may have been of great interest to Dryden during his change of faith in the 1680s.

Thus when Morayma tells her father, “Then let me follow my flesh and blood,” she looks forward (consciously or not) to both her marriage and to the sacrament of the Eucharist that she will need to participate in as a condition of that marriage. She will have to accept Christ's flesh and blood before she can enjoy Antonio's. The languages of sexual desire, matrimony and Eucharistic transubstantiation are inextricably entangled in the play's portrayal of conversion.

And now, at last, we may return the problem of incest, the knottiest point of this entanglement. Before their marriage, Sebastian and Almeyda discuss their vows in terms reminiscent of arguments in favor of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Sebastian reminds Almeyda of her promise to wed him and insists that a promise alone is insufficient. He argues, “The tye of Minds are but imperfect Bonds, / Unless the Bodies joyn to seal the Contract” (2.1.543-44). Catholics similarly argued that Protestants cheapened the covenant between God and humanity by denying the incorporation of God's flesh into their bodies, making a mere metaphor of the memorial of God's new covenant with humanity. A contemporary Catholic controversialist, Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, writes of the sacrament,

This very flesh then, eaten by the Faithful, not only renews in us the memory of his immolation, but confirms also to us the reality of it....

Must Christians under pretence of celebrating in the Lords Supper,  
the memory of the Passion of our Saviour, deprive this Pious  
Commemoration of what it has most efficacious and tender in it?<sup>55</sup>

For Bossuet, the physicality of the Catholic sacrament renders it superior to Protestantism's pale, emotionally detached imitation of it. Notably, the sentiments of these two passages seem inverted. Whereas Sebastian speaks of the sexual consummation of marriage in terms of contract, Bossuet writes of the covenant between God and his people in sentimental terms, even calling the proffering and acceptance of Jesus's flesh a "tender" gesture.

In the next act, we receive a description of Sebastian and Almeyda's incestuous marriage from a Moor whose servant has been spying on Sebastian's confessor:

Close wrap'd he [the confessor] bore some secret Instrument  
Of Christian Superstition in his hand:  
My servant follow'd fast, and through a chink,  
Perceiv'd the Royal Captives hand in hand:  
And heard the hooded Father mumbling charms,  
That make those Misbelievers Man and Wife.  
Which done, the Spouses kiss'd with such a fervour,  
And gave such furious earnest of their flames,  
That their eyes sparkled, and their mantling blood  
Flew flushing o'er their faces.

(3.1.36-45)

This scene describes the performance of the Catholic sacrament of matrimony, but the "mantling blood" that covers their faces suggestively recalls the sacrament of the Eucharist, in which God's blood is mantled, or cloaked, by the appearance of wine. This marriage sacrament insinuates a Catholic mass into the play. The allusion is obscure, but the scene thematizes that obscurity. The "[c]lose wrap'd ... secret Instrument," the

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<sup>55</sup> Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *An Exposition of the Doctrine of the Catholic Church in Matters of Controversie*, trans. Henry Joseph Johnston (London, 1685), 25.

“hooded Father” “mumbling charms,” the “mantling blood,” and the point of observation “through a chink” characterize this marriage sacrament in terms of secrecy and veiling.

There are other words and signs associated with these lovers which would have unavoidably Eucharistic connotations for a Restoration audience. For instance, they both undergo multiple acts of veiling in the play. *Veil*, we should recall, is the word Dryden uses in *The Hind and the Panther* to describe how God hides himself from human senses, both in the Incarnation and during transubstantiation.<sup>56</sup> Sebastian and Almeyda both first appear on stage in veils of one sort or another. Sebastian arrives “*in mean habit*,” as a slave, while Almeyda’s face is “*veil’d with a Barnus*,” a type of Moorish veil (s.d.

1.1.238+). When Sebastian reveals himself, Muley-Moluch exclaims,

*Sebastian!* ha! it must be he; no other  
Cou’d represent such suff’ring Majesty:  
I saw him, as he terms himself, a Sun  
Strugling in dark Eclipse, and shooting day  
On either side of the black Orb that veil’d him.  
(1.1.342-46)

Sebastian is an example of “suff’ring Majesty,” a sun in eclipse, a king veiled in mean garb. The allusions to Christ are not subtle. Almeyda, too, is a royal sufferer. When she unveils herself, she demands of the on-looking Moors, “She whom thy *Mufti* tax’d to have no Soul; / Let *Affrick* now be judg” (1.1.441-42). It was commonly believed in seventeenth-century England that Muslims thought women were soulless. Almeyda insists that her body, which the Protestant-coded *Mufti* insists is mere matter, contains an invisible spiritual component, like the transubstantiated Eucharist. Both Sebastian and Almeyda also exit the play with an intention to hide themselves away from the world in religious retreat, which, in Almeyda’s case at least, will involve taking the veil.

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<sup>56</sup> “Could He his god-head veil with flesh and bloud / And not veil these again to be our food?” (*Hind and the Panther*, 1.134-35).



In the play's final scene, Sebastian and Almeyda's marriage is again provided with a sacramental context. Dryden repeatedly uses the word *mystery* to describe their relationship. Like *flesh*, *mystery* and *mysterious* are important words in *Don Sebastian*, appearing as often in this play as in all of Dryden's previous plays combined.<sup>57</sup> A similar increase in Dryden's use of this word in his poetry after his conversion suggests that he is interested in *mystery*'s oldest senses of "a mystical presence or nature," or "a religious truth understood or known only by divine revelation."<sup>58</sup> And yet, when the word appears three times in the last scene, it is used (ostensibly) to comment not on religious affairs, but *sexual* affairs—specifically, the adultery between Don Sebastian's father and Almeyda's mother which has resulted in their children's incestuous marriage. Alvarez, Sebastian's old advisor, makes a belated attempt to convince Sebastian and Almeyda that they are siblings. Pointing out that both of them were told by their parents to always aid each other, he asks them, "can you finde / No mistery, couch'd in this excess of kindness?" (5.1.293-94). He then asks them about the rings that were given to each of them by their parents. Almeyda recalls that when her mother delivered it to her, she said it was "a pledge of Love; / And hid a Mistery of great Importance" (5.1.408-409). Alvarez responds, "Mark me now, / While I disclose that fatall Mistery" (5.1.409-10). He then demonstrates that the rings join together, confirming the adultery of their parents and forcing them to accept the revelation of their incestuous marriage.

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<sup>57</sup> Similarly, *mysterious* appears in *The Hind and the Panther* three times, while *mystery* and *mysterious* only appear three times in all of his earlier poetic works combined. See Guy Montgomery and Lester A. Hubbard, *Concordance to the Poetical Works of John Dryden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).

<sup>58</sup> These definitions are the first and second listed for *mystery* in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

The play offers further associations between the two captive monarchs and the Eucharist,<sup>59</sup> but by now this allusive connection should be clear. Of course, it should *also* be clear that Sebastian has an allusive relationship with Eden's Adam, and with James II. I would no sooner suggest that Sebastian represents a consistent allegory for Christ or the Eucharist than I would suggest that he is an allegory for these other men. No such cohesive system of symbolism exists in *Don Sebastian*. The play's allusions do not amount to anything like a defense of Catholic doctrine or an allegory that might be decoded with the proper key. Rather, these are allusions to a *shared religious discourse*. That discourse associates physicality with Catholic sacrament and belief. The physicality of the play's language thus associates its portrayal of Christianity with Catholicism.

Some in Dryden's audience valued the religious significance of that physicality, believing in the "tenderness" of the gesture of the offering of flesh and blood. Most did not. The play acknowledges this division, and (in another move perhaps inspired by Donne's erotic poetry<sup>60</sup>) uses symbols of secrecy and obscurity to draw a boundary between the two groups. The description of the marriage ceremony, for instance, separates the (mostly Protestant) audience by several removes from the sacrament that takes place. It is related by a treacherous Moor with an interest in painting the scene in a negative light, who in turn was informed of the event by a spy whom the Emperor

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<sup>59</sup> For instance, both Sebastian and Almeyda are, at different points in the story, intended to be made sacrifices. By the drawing of lots, Sebastian was selected to be Muley-Moluch's "sacrifice" to Mahomet in thanks for his victory (1.1.166-68, 332-41). Almeyda later asks the mobile to allow her to "dye your sacrifice," rather than allow Benducar to ravish her (4.3.267).

<sup>60</sup> According to Hester, in Donne's poem, "The Relic," "an outsider or 'spy' from beyond the private borders of the lover's amatory 'engrav[ing]' is allowed to 'break ope[n]' the devotional practice that he does not understand, about which he then informs 'the Bishops, and the King,' which then results in that interpretative community's reading of the lovers as violators of the 'late law'" ("this cannot be said," 376; brackets in the original). The actual circumstances of the short poem differ greatly from this episode in *Don Sebastian* (the space broken into is the lover's grave), but the implications are virtually identical.

accuses of lying.<sup>61</sup> And the spy can only observe the event “through a chink” and likely does not understand the language in which the priest is “mumbling charms.” Protestants prided themselves on their ability to see past material surfaces, discern spiritual signs in the world around them, and pierce the beautiful outer veil of Catholicism to perceive the rotten core beneath it. The Protestant-coded Moors believe they are piercing that veil here, but the language of obscurity in the scene indicates that they are, in fact, almost blind.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, it suggests that what blind them are those perceptions of Catholic rottenness. The ceremony is described in anti-Catholic language (“Superstition,” “charms,” “Misbelievers”), and the sexual fervor of the newlyweds and the friar (who departs the room “with a Holy leer” [3.1.46]), evoke the accusation that Catholics debased their religion with sexual improprieties.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the viewpoint “through a chink” recalls a common feature of trial reports of sexual crimes like sodomy (which were also strongly associated with Catholics in the Protestant imagination).<sup>64</sup> Anti-Catholicism prevents the outside observers from understanding what they are (barely) seeing. Dryden draws a curtain across this scene with Protestants’ own hateful rhetoric, and leaves them on the outside of the marriage hall, on the outside of the mystery of this

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<sup>61</sup> “No, the Slave / That told thee so absurd a story, ly’d” (3.1.21-22).

<sup>62</sup> For discussion of the Protestant mode of perception and unveiling, and of its anti-Catholic associations in Jacobean revenge tragedy, see Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 23-55.

<sup>63</sup> Bywaters also observes that Dryden parodies the Protestant view of Catholicism in this marriage ceremony (“Dryden and the Revolution,” 353).

<sup>64</sup> For details on the Protestant association of Catholicism with sodomy, see Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1982), 19-21; and Alan Stewart, “A Society of Sodomites: Religion and Homosexuality in Renaissance England,” in *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe, 1300-1800*, ed. Laura Gowing, Michael Hunter and Miri Rubin (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 88-109. For an analysis of the presence and function of homosexual implication in *Don Sebastian*, see Sousa, “Portugal, North Africa, *Don Sebastian*,” 339-63.

sacrament, struggling to peek in.<sup>65</sup> To recall Morayma's earlier language, these are devotions paid in a "private Chamber," withheld from the view of an uninitiated, uncomprehending audience.<sup>66</sup>

Of course, the vile description is accurate on at least one count. A sexual crime *does* take place at this wedding: incest. Even Sebastian and Almeyda (who have not yet gone through the revelatory experiences of the final act) do not fully understand what is happening in this room. The mystery is veiled even from the knowledge of its participants.

The marriage ceremony's privacy is typical to the play's portrayal of the discovery of truth and conversion. Antonio first sights his future wife inside the Mufti's walled garden, when "A Grate opens and Morayma ... appears at it" (s.d. 2.2.76+). He calls her "the Mystery of his [the Mufti's] Alcoran, that must be reserv'd from the knowledg of that profane Vulgar. This is his Holyday Devotion" (2.2.78-80). Once again, his jests tell more than he knows. In this private (and religiously suggestive) garden, he has caught a brief glimpse of the "Mystery" (that word again) that will transform him into a faithful lover. In a later scene, when Morayma meets with him to state her intention of converting, they are not merely in the walled garden, but in a further recess of the garden (and of the stage), "*where an Arbour is discover'd*" (s.d. 3.1.0+), cloaked by the dark of

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<sup>65</sup> In the theological disputations over transubstantiation, Hester observes "a frequent quip [made] by Catholic polemicists about the Reformers as mere onlookers to a Supper in which nothing occurs" ("this cannot be said," 376). The Moors in *Don Sebastian* betray a similar lack of mystical perception.

<sup>66</sup> My argument about the use of obscurity, disguise, and closeting in *Don Sebastian* might be usefully compared to readings of *The Hind and the Panther* which dwell on the presence of similar motifs in Dryden's great poetic profession of his faith. See, for instance, Matthew C. Augustine, "Dryden's 'Mysterious Writ' and the Empire of Signs," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2011): 1-22; and Anne Cotterill, "Parenthesis at the Center: The Complex Embrace of *The Hind and the Panther*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30, no. 2 (1996-97): 139-58.

night. The staging of the scene thus partially encloses Morayma's first step toward her new religion.

Indeed, as the play draws closer to the final scene, characters are more often crowded into "reduced spaces" on stage.<sup>67</sup> In the first three acts, all scenes are outdoors, and save for the garden scenes, in relatively open and public places. In contrast, two of the last four scenes are indoors, and a third is another night scene in the garden. The only public scene in the latter half of the play is the raising (and quelling) of the mobile. This is also the scene in which Dorax reconverts, but the play still manages to suggest enclosure as that event nears. Just before Dorax reveals his identity, he and Sebastian dismiss all of the other characters, and then Dorax, too, steps off stage briefly, leaving Sebastian alone. Sebastian then puzzles over the renegade's strange conduct:

Reserv'd behaviour, open Nobleness,  
A long misterious Track of a stern bounty:  
But now the hand of Fate is on the Curtain,  
And draws the Scene to sight.  
(4.3.377-380)

Sebastian thus verbally invokes the discovery of a new scene as the "misterious" renegade Dorax steps back on stage as the Portuguese Alonzo.

Like physicality, then, enclosure and mystery characterize the play's conversions. In 1689 England, both would be associated with Catholicism in a religious context. Thus the final scene, in which a crime of excessive physical union is discovered, and which takes place in "*a Room of State*" (s.d. 5.1.0+), the most exclusive of spaces in the kingdom (yet one of tremendous public import), resonates as yet another scene of Catholic conversion. Dryden's careful deployment of language throughout the play has

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<sup>67</sup> Miner, commentary on *Don Sebastian*, 15:444, note to 4.1 s.d.

made the emotional trauma experienced in this scene comprehensible as a conversion experience.

And it is a terrible experience. This is why the idea that Dryden would use the discovery incest to explore the experience of conversion must initially seem absurd. But here we must remember the conditions—political, social, and cultural—with which a Protestant drawn to Catholicism had to cope. If Dryden’s use of incest to allude to Catholic conversion makes it appear horrifying and criminal, he does so because converting to Catholicism *was* criminal, and converting to that criminal religion would have been a horrifying experience on a number of levels.

Indeed, the experience of conversion holds horrors in any time and place. A convert believes he has spent his whole life in misbelief. Perhaps, like Dryden, he has even disparaged the religion he now considers true. In *The Hind and the Panther*, Dryden speaks with shame of his past misbelief. He laments his “thoughtless youth . . . wing’d with vain desires,” the “false lights” he followed in his manhood, the enticing “sparkles” produced by his own pride. “Such was I,” he writes, and “such by nature still I am.”<sup>68</sup> His struggle to believe correctly and act righteously is a never-ending one.

More pertinent to this investigation, however, are the peculiar horrors of converting to Catholicism in post-Revolution England. Prospective converts had to accept doctrines they were raised to look upon with horror—the cannibalization of Christ in the Eucharist foremost among them. Even Catholic theology admits that the veils of bread and wine are necessary to make the otherwise “horrible” act of “eat[ing] human flesh” tolerable.<sup>69</sup> Thus in the early stages of the conversion process, prospective converts

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<sup>68</sup> *Hind and the Panther*, 1.72-73, 74-75.

<sup>69</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3.75.4.

might, like Sebastian, appear to be “Monsters” in their own eyes (5.1.551). Certainly they must sometimes feel like monsters, living in a country that imagined the Papist as a type of monster, or (to recall John Gother’s summation of the Papist Misrepresented), as “a perverse, malicious sort of Creature, *Superstitious, Idolatrous, Atheistical, Cruel, Bloody-minded, Barbarous, Treacherous*, and so *Prophane*, and every way *Unhumane*, that ’tis in some manner doubted whether he be a *Man*, or no.”<sup>70</sup> Gother’s confrontation with his former Presbyterian friends would also reflect the experience of many converts, who found themselves despised by family and neighbors who believed Catholics were aliens and deviants. We have already noted that Dryden puts Protestant perceptions of Catholics on full display when he allows the Moors describe a Catholic wedding. From the Protestant perspective, peering in at what it does not comprehend, converting to Catholicism might appear akin to an unnatural act like incest.

Indeed, Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies had associated incest—as well as other monstrous crimes like poisoning, rape, and cannibalism—with Catholicism, as Gothic novelists would continue to do in the eighteenth century.<sup>71</sup> *Don Sebastian* gestures toward this history of revenge drama through its allusions to the Shakespearean play most obsessed with flesh and blood: *The Merchant of Venice*. As others have noted, many of the details of Antonio and Morayma’s courtship are lifted from that of Lorenzo and Jessica, Shylock’s daughter.<sup>72</sup> And if Morayma’s cheerful conversion imitates that of Jessica, Sebastian and Almeyda’s experiences have more in common with Shylock’s

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<sup>70</sup> John Gother, *A Papist Misrepresented, and Represented*, 111.

<sup>71</sup> In *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), Frances Dolan notes that the Protestant association of Catholicism with the feminine tied Catholicism to discourses of “‘unnatural’ congress,” monstrosity, and contamination (179-83), all of which play into Sebastian’s fear that to return to the Portugal would be “to show / Triumphant Incest, and pollute the Throne” (*Don Sebastian*, 5.1.537-38). For the anti-Catholic ideology of Renaissance revenge tragedy, see Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, English Literary Imagination*, 23-55.

<sup>72</sup> Miner, commentary on *Don Sebastian*, 15:444n291-308.

traumatic conversion. Indeed, in the logic of the earlier play, Shylock gets off easy; he becomes a Christian. The conversion experience in *Don Sebastian* would be akin to a Christian faced with the prospect of becoming a cannibalistic Jew.<sup>73</sup>

Those like Dryden who had converted under James's reign had the additional concern of being thought a mercenary convert. In *The Hind and the Panther*, Dryden writes that converting required him to sacrifice his reputation and to say "a long farwell to worldly fame."<sup>74</sup> We can see this fear reflected in Sebastian, who nearly takes his own life, believing that if he does not, "the Malicious World will judge the worst" and accuse him of having knowingly committed incest (5.1.493).

And finally, there were the dangers and penalties this choice entailed. Converts were guilty of treason, subject to financially ruinous penal laws, and hounded by anti-Catholic mobs. They were exiled from London or even from the country, in many cases separated from family and friends. And they had only the prospect of civil war to give them any hope for the future. Under such circumstances, we should not wonder that the dominant passion in Dryden's dramatization of the conversion experience is horror. It is the experience of becoming a monster, an unrecognizable, "*Unhumane*" being.

And yet for all its horror and tragedy, Dryden's play does not end in death. In the preface, Dryden writes of Sebastian's journey into exile that

*an involuntary sin deserves not death; from whence it follows, that to divorce himself from the beloved object, to retire into a desert, and deprive himself of a Throne, was the utmost punishment, which a Poet*

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<sup>73</sup> Looking ahead to Gothic writing, it is clear that Horace Walpole's anti-Catholic closet drama, *The Mysterious Mother*, has *Don Sebastian* in mind as it develops its incest plot. Compare again Benducar's description of Sebastian and Almeyda's wedding with the evil priest Benedict's description of the wedding he performed between a brother and sister: "I mumbled o'er the spell that binds them fast." *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story, and, The Mysterious Mother: A Tragedy*, ed. Frederick S. Frank (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2003), 234, line 12.

<sup>74</sup> *Hind and the Panther*, 3.284



*cou'd inflict, as it was also the utmost reparation, which Sebastian cou'd make.*<sup>75</sup>

These lines cannot be read politically. Dryden did not think that James II was making a just reparation to anyone by depriving himself of his throne; James deserved his throne, and Dryden could still hope at this time that he might get it back. But these lines can certainly apply to Catholics—from a Protestant point of view. Dryden argued in *Tyrannick Love* that heresy is not a conscious choice, as belief is not an act of will. And what is not willful cannot be damning. Now a Catholic, he has even more reason to insist that heresy is an “*involuntary sin*.”

This argument for mercy for unwilling sinners is suggested within the play itself. Alvarez and Dorax both affirm that, had they known it was too late to prevent Sebastian and Almeyda's incestuous marriage, they would have left them ignorant of it, and thus, literally, innocent. Alvarez insists,

Though Incest is indeed a deadly Crime,  
You are not guilty, since, unknown 'twas done,  
And, known, had been abhorr'd.  
(5.1.445-47)

Sebastian “cannot chuse but love” (5.1.600), and where there is no act of will, a measure of mercy is necessary. Thus Dryden rejects tragic convention and spares his hero's life. Here, then, we find one more reason—the most important reason—why Dryden chooses to veil conversion under a criminal act: it allows him to model mercy. Catholics had been deprived of a throne and any other form of political power because of their criminal beliefs. Many went into the “*desart*” of exile. This, Dryden's play urges, is the “*utmost punishment*” that Protestants can justly inflict on Catholics.

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<sup>75</sup> *Works*, 15:69.

### Closeting Catholicism

It is difficult to isolate variables when accounting for differences in the portrayal of religious belief in *Tyrannick Love* and *Don Sebastian*, separated as they are by twenty years of changing dramatic practices, several major political upheavals, and an immeasurable disparity in poetic quality and complexity of design. Nevertheless, I believe that there is a relationship between some of these differences and Dryden's change of religion.

One such critical difference between these plays, which my arguments in these chapters have implied but not directly remarked upon, is how the stage itself is used to frame the experience of religious revelation. *Tyrannick Love* is very sparing in its use of stage directions. Only the fourth act's song-and-dance spectacle and Maximin's final moments are carefully described, and the latter episode's directions primarily operate to render Maximin ridiculous. The fourth act's spectacle we might arguably describe as staging religion, and that staging seeks to awe and dominate the characters on the stage and the audience viewing it. It portrays divine revelation in the stage language of the heroic play. Writing in support of the state religion, Dryden seems to see no reason to distinguish between the portrayal of secular and religious authority. Indeed, that is what *Tyrannick Love*'s staging of religious experience emphasizes: authority.

*Don Sebastian* has more stage directions and scene descriptions. Whether they describe Antonio's bestial transformation; the veils, barnuses, and disguises worn by the characters; or the enclosed stage spaces in which their conversions take place, these stage directions have major implications for the portrayal of religious experience in the play. Domination no longer characterizes the relationship between stage and audience, and

when characters like Antonio are dominated on stage, the act is not disguised as the enforcement of order, but exposed as brutality. The experience of religion suggested by this play's staging is typically one of personal search for, and the private discovery of, hidden truths.

This change from external authority to personal discovery is critical (and, interestingly, inverts the stereotypes of Protestant and Catholic modes of belief), but we still have not pinpointed what I consider the most fundamental difference in how these two plays utilize stage space to frame religious experiences. This difference is between using the stage to frame religious experience and *not using it*. The clarity of the stage directions in *Don Sebastian* is necessary because the play is meant to be experienced as a *text*. The play, in other words, is more closet drama than stage drama.

This claim is founded on *Don Sebastian*'s performance history—which is almost nonexistent. Yes, a play called *Don Sebastian* had a successful first run and was staged frequently for much of the eighteenth century, but that is not the play which we read today. Our play has only been staged once. Dryden opens the preface by noting this fact:

*Whether it happen'd through a long disuse of Writing, that I forgot the usual compass of a Play; or that by crowding it, with Characters and Incidents, I put a necessity upon my self of lengthning the main Action, I know not; but the first days Audience sufficiently convinc'd me of my error; and that the Poem was insupportably too long.*

After this first night, the play was only acted with “[a]bove twelve hundred lines” cut from it—almost a third of its total length. The missing lines did not reappear until it was printed the following year, at which time Dryden “restor'd it” to its original state.<sup>76</sup> Save for the lucky members of that first night's audience, no one experienced more than two thirds of *Don Sebastian* as a stage performance.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 15:65-66.

We cannot take seriously Dryden's excuses for writing an "*insupportably*" long play. He was far too experienced a playwright to make such fundamental mistakes in the pacing and design of *any* play, let alone the play that was to serve as his reentry into public life after the Revolution. He must have known that he was writing something "*swoln into too large a bulk for the representation of the Stage,*"<sup>77</sup> and therefore he must have been satisfied that the play would only be fully experienced away from the stage.

Further comments in the preface lend credence to this theory. Dryden claims that changes in theater culture and public tastes had not only "*wean'd [him] from the Stage, but had also given [him] a loathing of it,*" thus accounting for his seven years' absence from it. It is a rather strong statement of disenchantment with the stage, coming from a playwright. Then, to justify the restoration of the cut verses to the printed play, Dryden observes that "*there is a vast difference betwixt a publick entertainment on the Theatre, and a private reading in the Closet.*" Slow and thoughtful readers may prefer the experience of the closet reading to the stage production, as they may "*find out those beauties of propriety, in thought and writing, which escap'd him in the tumult and hurry of representing.*" Indeed, Dryden seems to urge the reader to such careful closet readings, claiming "*there may be some secret Beauties in the decorum of parts, and uniformity of design, which my puny judges will not easily find out,*" and that there is a moral "*couch'd under every one of the principal Parts and Characters, which a judicious Critick will observe.*"<sup>78</sup> Private readings, secret beauties, couched morals—Dryden essentially declares that a closet reading of the play will be a different, superior experience to a viewing of a public performance of it.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 15:66

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 15:66-67, 71.

Designing the play for the closet improves its ability to engage with English Catholic concerns. First of all, the closeting and obscuring of religious experience that are thematized in the play are now also a formal quality. Dryden draws a curtain of privacy across the entire play, creating a boundary between “*publick entertainment*” and “*private reading*,” between “*Theatre*” and “*Closet*,” between “*puny judges*” and the “*judicious Critick*,” between, in short, the vulgar and the initiated. And for the initiated, the search for secret beauties and couched morals will inevitably give them what they are looking for: signs that Dryden is speaking for and commiserating with their community. Obscure allusions too subtle to get a play banned may still work for readers who expect them and (more importantly) believe they already know what meaning to assign to them.

A further effect of this division is to celebrate the closet as a remaining space of safety for Catholic thought, communication, and even entertainment. If the stage belongs to the monarch and the Church of England (as it does in *Tyrannick Love*) then the closet is the refuge of Jacobites and Catholics. If that sounds like a rather lonely or inhospitable refuge, we should bear in mind that closets were not the same spaces in the seventeenth century that we understand them to be today. They were not necessarily perceived as places of solitude. Closets were often used for meeting with family and friends or for doing work with the help of assistants or secretaries. Alan Stewart, a scholar who has attempted an “epistemology of the early modern closet,” argues that this room should be read “as a politically crucial transactive space,” rather than as the symbolic location of the “secret subject.”<sup>79</sup> Closets were spaces where exclusive groups of people gathered and where ideas were shared. A closet community was not an oxymoron.

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<sup>79</sup> Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 163

Indeed, we might read the play as a whole as imitating the closeting which all prominent Catholics were compelled to undergo with the re-enforcement of the Test Acts. Again, the nature of the early modern closet made “closeting” in this period a very different kind of process than what it means today. Stewart suggests that, although the closet was “constructed as a place of utter privacy, of total withdrawal from the public sphere of the household,” entering the closet was “a very *public* gesture of withdrawal, a very public sign of privacy.”<sup>80</sup> Whatever refuge or privacy the closet provided, the act of entering it was public and had social significance. And such was the act required of Catholics by the Tests; they were forced to demonstrate their unfitness for public life by publicly refusing to take them. Dryden characterizes his first post-Revolution literary effort as a similarly public withdrawal, opening the play with a blunt discussion of his Catholicism in the prologue, while the Catholic interest of the rest of the play slips into recesses of allusion and implication.<sup>81</sup> In designing the play in this way, Dryden demonstrates his obedience to the state, and more importantly, his commitment to his community, following it back to its old home in private chapels and closet shrines. Catholicism steps on stage only so that it may step off.<sup>82</sup>

I wish to make clear that I am not arguing that Dryden “rejects” the stage in *Don Sebastian*, nor that his preference for the closet is related solely to his new religious

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 168, italics in the original. Stewart acknowledges that he builds upon Patricia Fumerton’s study of secret spaces in the Elizabethan period in *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). Fumerton argues that the Elizabethan subject “lived in public view but always withheld for itself a ‘secret’ room, cabinet, case, or other recess locked away (in full view) in one corner of the house.” Since even such “secret” spaces were “in full view,” Elizabethans perceived “private experience as inescapably public” (ibid., 69).

<sup>81</sup> Notably, Dryden dedicates the play to Philip Sidney, Earl of Leicester, because he retired from public affairs after Charles II’s restoration. Zwicker has argued that this dedication provides Dryden with a means for thinking about his and James II’s forced retirements from politics (*Lines of Authority*, 183-85).

<sup>82</sup> Dryden thus imitates his own *Tyrannick Love* heroes, Porphyrius and Berenice, who sacrifice public life so that they may practice their heretical religion. Catholic Dryden proves that he can be an obedient subject by bowing to Church of England Dryden’s authority.

status. Either claim would be too strong. While Dryden certainly has lost interest in the simplistic binaries and dominating stagecraft which he popularized in the 1660s, he had been moving away from them since the mid-1670s. And his growing appreciation for the closet cannot be ascribed entirely to his conversion or to William's conquest. The 1681 dedication to the *The Spanish Fryar*, which Dryden (to his later chagrin) described as a "Protestant Play," already ranks the closet above the stage. In it, he claims that the "false Beauties of the Stage are no more lasting than a Rainbow," and that he therefore considers a good closet reading "the more lasting and the nobler Design" at which to aim as a playwright. The preference for the closet and the disgust for the stage expressed in *Don Sebastian's* preface differ in degree, but not in kind.<sup>83</sup> Furthermore, Dryden would go on to write three more stage plays and an opera, including the dangerously political *Cleomenes*. He clearly believed that some sort of staging of dissent was possible.

That said, both *The Spanish Fryar* and *Cleomenes* were short enough to stage in full. With *Don Sebastian*, Dryden seems to have found the stage insufficient for his purposes, or even an obstacle to them. If he still has one foot on the stage, the other has crossed the threshold of the closet. And this move is hardly surprising, given his situation. As a form, the closet drama was obviously much more amenable to the expression of dissent. Elaine McGirr observes that the downfall of the heroic play and its absolutist ideology was paralleled by the rise of a type of "closet-drama" which "replaced public viewing with private reading, which encouraged thoughtful reflection rather than

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<sup>83</sup> Dedication to *The Spanish Fryar; or, The Double Discovery*, 16:103, 100, 102. This is also the preface in which Dryden notes the dazzling and dominating effects of the stage, as quoted in Chapter One. It is worth noting that by 1681, Dryden was becoming more serious about his Church of England faith; if his dissatisfaction with the stage is not directly related to his Catholicism, it may still be related to his growing religiosity.

group hypnosis.”<sup>84</sup> Dryden had been one of the London stage’s chief hypnotists, but now he needed to make people actually think about the cruelty of their new government’s policies and to reflect on the humanity of the seemingly monstrous English Catholic. And reflection was best done in the closet.

Of course, the “closet-drama” McGirr refers to is actually the novel, and she makes these remarks in a discussion of eighteenth-century Whig resistance to the perceived Jacobitism of the heroic play, and to the Catholicism associated with it. Protestant authors like Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson would use the novel for precisely this purpose, exposing the heroic mode’s immorality and associating it with unnatural or tyrannical behavior.<sup>85</sup> But in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, panegyrists were celebrating William III in the heroic mode. It would make sense for Dryden to adopt an oppositional form, and the novel was not yet an acceptable option.

Instead he turned to closet drama, a form which, for the past century, had allowed another disenfranchised group—women—to engage in political and cultural discourses. Marta Straznicky argues that we should view early modern women’s closet drama “as part of a larger cultural matrix in which closed spaces, select interpretative communities, and political dissent are aligned,” and as a form which “focuses the tensions and points of contact between public and private realms in a way that simultaneously involves retreat and engagement in public culture.”<sup>86</sup> Dryden positions *Don Sebastian* within that same matrix, and uses the play to perform a similarly engaged retreat from Williamite Protestant England.

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<sup>84</sup> Elaine McGirr, *Heroic Mode and Political Crisis, 1660-1745* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 24.

<sup>85</sup> McGirr discusses Richardson’s resistance to the heroic mode in his novels (*ibid.*, 205-211).

<sup>86</sup> Marta Straznicky, *Privacy, Playreading, and Women’s Closet Drama, 1550-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4, 3.



It is even possible that he was conscious that in doing so, he was adopting a “feminine” literary and political strategy. Social emasculation was central to the English Catholic experience (Antonio’s threatened castration and questioned virility gesture toward this effect), and as we shall see in the works of Alexander Pope and Elizabeth Inchbald, Catholics would often draw parallels between their social condition and that of women.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, Elizabeth Inchbald would follow closely in Dryden’s footsteps almost exactly a century later, as a dramatist who turned to that other “closet-drama” form associated with female expression—the novel—to relate English Catholic experience.

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<sup>87</sup> The emasculating effects of the penal laws will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters Five and Six of this dissertation.

## Part Two

### The Protestant Novel and the Unrepresentable English Catholic

#### Prologue to Part Two

We now turn to two Protestant novelists whose works, while strikingly different in form and content, share the fundamental belief that Englishness and Protestantism are inseparable, if not synonymous. Defending this belief inevitably leads Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson into confrontations with English Catholicism. The resulting fractures, silences, and displacements testify to the strain such confrontations place on the conceptual frameworks by which they understand national and religious identity.

In most of Defoe and Richardson's novels, serious concerns about English Catholicism are treated with circumspection. Such determined evasiveness characterized Protestant England's relationship with its Catholic community for most of the eighteenth century. English Catholics strove to be unobtrusive, and most Protestants likewise strove to avoid noticing them.<sup>1</sup> Even in the novels which feature Defoe and Richardson's most

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<sup>1</sup> Even the aggressively anti-Catholic Defoe expresses satisfaction at this state of tacit tolerance. In relating his travels through the British countryside in *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, he appears undismayed when he encounters Catholics in rural towns and villages. For instance, he remarks that the English town of Durham is "full of Roman Catholicks, who live peaceably and disturb no Body, and no Body them; for we being there on a Holiday, saw them going as publickly to Mass as the Dissenters did on other Days to their Meeting-house." *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain*, 3 vols. (London, 1724-1727), 3:189. Defoe, himself a Dissenter, implies that he approves of the ability of the practitioners of both of these officially proscribed religions to worship without giving or receiving offense. Indeed, Defoe's perceptions of Catholicism and the Catholic world deserve more study than they have received. Although Paula R. Backscheider, author of the authoritative Defoe biography, *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), is correct to claim that Defoe was "never totally rational" on the

sustained confrontations with national anxieties about English Catholicism (respectively, *Roxana* and *Sir Charles Grandison*), these writers refuse to portray the very thing about which they are so intensely preoccupied. No English Catholics actually appear in either novel.<sup>2</sup>

This is a meaningful absence, and signals more than just a sense of decorum. Defoe, at least, clearly had no qualms about portraying English Catholic characters. His four most famous novels all feature protagonists who dabble in Catholicism. Moll Flanders celebrates mass with rural English Catholics; Colonel Jack marries a Catholic and joins the Old Pretender's army; Roxana often pretends to be Catholic and desires to go to confession; and Robinson Crusoe lives as a Catholic in Brazil. Yes, Robinson Crusoe—the quintessential Englishman, the most recognizable and enduring literary character of the eighteenth century—spends much of his life as a Catholic convert.<sup>3</sup>

Of course, in most of these novels, English Catholicism is not treated with much seriousness. The exception is *Roxana*, in which the heroine claims to be a committed Protestant even as she reveals an attraction to Catholic sacrament that runs deeper than even she realizes. When Defoe breaks off Roxana's history, she is racked by guilt and uncertain of her identity, yet still refuses to acknowledge her interest in Catholicism.

This compelling portrayal of an impressionable Protestant mind undergoing a slow conversion stands in stark contrast to the impregnable Protestantism of Richardson's

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subject of threats from the Catholic world (78), his views on real, living Catholics, as opposed to Catholicism in the abstract, were not as simplistic or reactionary as I believe many scholars assume them to be.

<sup>2</sup> The presence of Mr. Bagenhall in *Sir Charles Grandison* might seem to invalidate this claim, but as we shall discuss in Chapter Four, Bagenhall is not actually Catholic; libertines have no religion.

<sup>3</sup> *Moll Flanders*, ed. G. A. Starr (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 142; *The History and Remarkable Life of the Truly Honourable Col. Jacque* (London, 1722), 339-40; *Roxana*, ed. David Blewett (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 104-105; and *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1994), 206-207.

hero, Sir Charles. While *Sir Charles Grandison* acknowledges the existence of English Catholics several times, it always does so obliquely. Richardson's caginess should not be perceived as a lack of interest, however. English Catholics simply do not fit into the England he constructs in his novel, and he seems to believe that the problems they present may be sufficiently dealt with by portraying interactions between English Protestants and foreign Catholics. Yet even these interactions fail to treat the Catholic religion as a serious alternative for Englishmen. The English Protestants display an unrealistic confidence in their religious and cultural superiority, while the Italian Catholics come across as intellectually vacuous and psychologically flat.

As the observations above suggest, both writers rely on the novel form's capacity to portray interior experience to educate their readers in resistance to Catholic seduction. Roxana's narrative monologue allows readers to identify the signs of her growing attraction to Catholicism, even as the heroine fails to heed them, while the psychological immaturity of *Sir Charles Grandison*'s Italians encourages the belief that Catholicism is a similarly primitive religion. Furthermore, the novel form allows Defoe and Richardson to explore their concerns about English Catholicism in unprecedented depth—even as they avoid any direct representation of it. It may seem illogical to argue that Defoe's Roxana (who is not Catholic and arguably not English) and Richardson's Italians (who are obviously not English) are important innovations in the representation of English Catholics. But the concerns driving both authors are clearly domestic, and it is precisely the displacement of their fears that emboldens these authors to work through them—and even to treat the source of their fears with some sympathy.

## Chapter Three

*Roxana* and England's Catholic Captivity

In the preface to Daniel Defoe's *Roxana* (1724), the "Relator" of the narrative offers an apology. Should readers find Roxana's history less diverting or instructive than they expected, the Relator takes the blame upon himself, for, "*it must be from the Defect of his Performance; dressing up the Story in worse Cloaths than the Lady, whose Words he speaks, prepared it for the World.*"<sup>1</sup> Even before the novel properly begins, the reader's attention is directed to the way in which clothes "prepare" a person for interpretation by the world. And as the novel progresses, we are treated to many examples of this "Lady" donning and doffing outfits in order to control others' interpretations of her—and indeed, to alter her interpretation of herself. The most famous instance of such a transformation comes when the Lady outfits herself in a Turkish dress for a masquerade. This act inspires her admiring guests to name her Roxana—a name which adheres to her for the rest of the novel. She is truly graced with a new identity in this scene. Or, as it turns out, cursed with one.

As Dror Wahrman has demonstrated in his compelling study, *The Making of the Modern Self*, identity in eighteenth-century England was established through group affiliations and social performance, rather than through than any sense of a deep, interior self. Clothes were, therefore, important "anchors" for identity in this period, as signals of

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<sup>1</sup> Defoe, *Roxana*, ed. David Blewett (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 35 (hereafter cited parenthetically in the text).

such affiliations. Changing one's clothes entailed a change of identity in a very real sense. It was this understanding of the easy transformation of identity which lent masquerades a cultural power in the eighteenth century which they lacked before and since. Play with certain categories of identity—race, gender, class—at these masquerades was more real than we, with our modern, discrete, interior senses of self, can readily comprehend. Not surprisingly, Wahrman's study uses Roxana's masquerade episode as an example of the potential for identity change in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup>

Defoe explores identity fluidity with all of his novel protagonists, but none of them comes close to rivaling Roxana's versatility of identity. Famously, while defending her decision to be her own master rather than accept a husband, Roxana declares she will be a "*Man-Woman*" (212). On separate occasions she claims both France and England as her "Native Country" (85, 160). She becomes the master of a Turkish slave in Italy, but, in the episode described above, she attains fame by playing the role of a Turkish slave herself. Gender, nationality, social position—Roxana can assume any role within these identity categories.

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<sup>2</sup> For Dror Wahrman's citation of Roxana's masquerade, see *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 161-62. See also his comments on the identity significance of clothing in the eighteenth-century (ibid., 177-79, 207), and on the power of masquerade in the century (ibid., 159). Wahrman's argument about identity before and after the eighteenth century is sweeping, and may only be done justice by a thorough reading of his book. He demonstrates that the "modern Western sense of self," which "presupposes an essential core of selfhood characterized by psychological depth, or interiority," is a relatively recent invention (ibid., xi). It was born out of an English cultural identity crisis in the late 1770s and 1780s, triggered by the American Revolution. During what he calls the "short eighteenth century," which is to say, the decades of the century prior to this crisis, an understanding of identity reigned which was different from both the modern understanding of identity that came afterward, and the early modern understanding that came before. This "*ancien regime*" of identity understood certain categories of identity—gender, race, and politics—to be highly fluid. Other categories, such as religion and nation, Wahrman claims were more stable during the eighteenth century, only to become flexible after the late-century crisis. (He presents less evidence with regard to these categories, however; his comments on them are fairly speculative.) He points to commercialization, imperialism, and the withdrawal of God from everyday life as the enabling factors of the *ancien regime* of identity. Defoe writes his novels during a relatively brief window of history in which the radical identity experimentation of his protagonists was both imaginable and possible. In most of his novels, he seems to enjoy this play of identity. *Roxana* is another matter.

That is, she can until after this masquerade episode. Over the course of the remainder of the novel, she will gradually lose her ability to switch easily between identities. When she tries to escape her old life by passing herself off as a Quaker, circumstances continually conspire to force her back into her Turkish dress, and thus threaten to expose her past life as a whore. The transformative power of masquerade fails, the Lady remains trapped as Roxana, and her history proceeds implacably toward its dark conclusion.

This inability to escape her past is, as most readers realize, related to her increasingly desperate spiritual condition. But modern readers may overlook a particular circumstance of her spiritual crisis that would have been associated with the themes of masquerade and whoredom in the religious and cultural discourses of the early eighteenth century. This circumstance is Roxana's ambiguous relationship to the Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup>

Protestant polemicists and clergymen treated masquerades as, at best, a form of debauchery imported from the depraved Catholic world, or, at worst, an actual attack on England by that world.<sup>4</sup> In a culture in which clothes carried the power to confer identity, it is not surprising that events attended by people dressed as monks and nuns should disturb religious leaders. But there was also something popish about the very essence of disguise. In England, of course, the Catholic Church was forced to disguise itself, but

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<sup>3</sup> I am not the first scholar to suggest that Roxana's perilous spiritual condition reflects her growing similarity to a religious minority. Laura J. Rosenthal argues that Roxana becomes dangerously Jew-like as novel progresses. See *Infamous Commerce: Prostitution in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), chap. 3. Rosenthal makes a fascinating argument, and one which is not, in most respects, irreconcilable with my own. I do, however, think that the novel is more concerned with Roxana's attraction to Catholicism than with her associations with Jewishness.

<sup>4</sup> In the same year that *Roxana* was published, the Bishop of London preached that masquerades were part of a French plot to "enslave" the English. Blaming masquerades on (hostile) influences from the Catholic world was common in the period. For the Bishop of London's full comments, and for more information on the meaning of the masquerade within eighteenth-century culture and literature, see Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), chap. 1.

more broadly, Protestants believed the Catholic Church hid a diabolical agenda behind its rich, ornamented façade. This perception received its most enduring and pervasive expression through the identification of the Catholic Church with the biblical Whore of Babylon.<sup>5</sup>

Roxana's love for masquerade and her chosen profession associate her with the Catholic world, but she has more concrete connections to it. She resides in France and Italy for much of her life, she spends years as a Catholic prince's kept mistress, she disguises herself as a Catholic on multiple occasions, and, worst of all, she expresses an attraction to Catholic religious practices. It is hard to imagine that Defoe's earliest readers passed over her acknowledgement of this attraction without concern. And yet, while this attraction is often observed by scholars, it has rarely been the subject of focused analysis.<sup>6</sup>

One reason for this lack of interest may be that Roxana resists her attraction to Catholicism. She was born a French Huguenot, and she remains adamant about her Protestant religious identity throughout the novel. "[T]ho' I was a Whore, yet I was a Protestant Whore" (105), she declares. This, she insists, is the one aspect of her identity that she is unwilling to compromise.

Yet as this chapter will demonstrate, even as she makes this declaration, she exposes how compromised she already is. Religious identity, the novel reveals, is inextricably entangled with other categories of identity (most explicitly with national

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<sup>5</sup> The Catholic Church's "whoredom" was part of a broader discourse which depicted the church as feminine, and thus irrational, untrustworthy, and disgustingly corporeal. The most thorough study of this discourse is Frances E. Dolan's book, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> One notable reading on this subject is Alison Conway's article, "Defoe's Protestant Whore," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 2 (2002), 215-33. She presents some very compelling arguments, especially about Defoe's engagement with the memory of the Restoration Period. I disagree with one of her central conclusions, however. This disagreement is discussed below.



identity) and other aspects of culture. Where sermons and theological disputes fail to create a convert, mere association with people of another religion and exposure to its culture may succeed. And Roxana spends a great deal of her life exposed to Catholic people and cultures. Yes, she clings to Protestantism as her one rock amid a sea of discarded identities—but one rock may not be enough to maintain a secure grip. When Roxana leaves off her history, she is not a Catholic. But she cannot be called a Protestant anymore, either.

*Roxana* thus treats a subject which increasingly preoccupied Defoe in the early-to-mid 1720s: Protestant conversion to Catholicism. This interest is apparent not only in his novels, with their Catholicism-dabbling protagonists, but also in other writings, including his conduct books, *Religious Courtship* (1722) and *The New Family Instructor* (1727). Both books explore the spiritual dangers of coming into frequent contact with Catholics and the Catholic world. Many of their warnings are reflected in the circumstances and events of Roxana's life—and not to her credit.

*Roxana* is by far the most explorative of these works, however, as scholars have long noted.<sup>7</sup> Among his novels, it is the most anxious about the mutability of identity, and it offers the most compelling portrayal of human psychology.<sup>8</sup> This chapter argues that these explorations and experiments are driven in part by the novel's interest in conversion and religious change. *Roxana* works through Defoe's fear that forces seemingly unrelated to religion can conspire to entrap, besiege, or destabilize religious identity without the

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<sup>7</sup> Acknowledging the significance of the novel in Defoe's oeuvre, James H. Maddox writes, "*Roxana* can appropriately be looked upon as a final statement, a reflection upon the career [of Defoe], for it recapitulates the themes of the earlier novels and ends by exploding their myths" "On Defoe's *Roxana*," *ELH* 51, no. 4 (1984): 682.

<sup>8</sup> David Blewett remarks that *Roxana*'s significance extends from "Defoe's focus upon the *interior* drama of Roxana's moral decay, the psychological turmoil of a woman who willfully chooses the glamorous but immoral life of a courtesan over the honourable but duller life of a married woman." Blewett, introduction to *Roxana*, by Daniel Defoe (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 9.

subject's conscious awareness that anything is amiss. And it suggests that such unconscious perversion of religious principles can be more difficult to recover from than deliberate villainy.

The chapter begins by considering the implications of Roxana's Huguenot religious identity. Although sympathetic to the Huguenots early in the century, by the 1720s Defoe comes to regard them as a prime example of the dampening of Protestant zeal in England. Rather than fixing Roxana's Protestantism, her Huguenot background actually signals the mutability of her religious identity. Recent historical developments have led Defoe to fear for the stability of Protestant identity.

Such mutability, we then observe, is further suggested by Roxana's attraction to Catholicism. In light of the warnings of Defoe's late conduct books, Roxana's experiences while living in France and Italy appear to place her in danger of conversion. These texts argue that, lured by trade and education and confused by Protestant misrepresentations of Catholics, young English people enter the Catholic world unprepared to defend themselves against its religion. In the conduct books, Defoe attempts (with limited success) to correct this problem by offering more honest descriptions of Catholics. In *Roxana*, he offers something more daring: a psychological portrait of a Protestant struggling with thoughts of conversion.

Having established the Roxana's perilous spiritual condition, we widen our gaze to the precarious relationship between the English nation and the Catholic world. Through *Roxana*'s evocation of stories of Mediterranean captivity, Defoe suggests that England is in a state of successful captivity, bound to the Catholic world by the golden chains of trade. The evolution in his perception of the nature of English vulnerability to

the Catholic world is emphasized through a comparison of Roxana's economic captivity with Robinson Crusoe's actual enslavement by Barbary pirates.

Finally, we return to the episode alluded to at the outset of the chapter, Roxana's masquerade. The immoral behavior and foreign fetishes of her noble and royal guests warn that Roxana's captivity endangers the entire kingdom. The aftermath of this episode (Roxana's self-destruction under the haunting presence of her Turkish dress) suggests that Roxana faces a religious identity crisis, one which raises questions about the potential meaninglessness of England's Protestant religious identity.

### **The Huguenots and the Instability of Religious Identity**

In each of Defoe's most strongly crafted novels, the topics of the first pages are vital to understanding the concerns of the novel as a whole. Crusoe's disobedient choice to go to sea against his father's wishes sets up his history's contemplation of sin and redemption. In *Moll Flanders*, the tension between Moll's Newgate birth and her naïve childhood desire to be a "Gentlewoman" inflects her various efforts to achieve financial security.

In *Roxana*'s first sentence, the heroine reveals that she "was brought to *England* by [her] Parents, who fled for their Religion about the Year 1683, when the Protestants were Banish'd from *France* by the Cruelty of their Persecutor" (37). The French, under Louis XIV, had begun the persecutions of the Protestant Huguenots that would culminate in the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. As we shall see, Roxana's origin as a French Protestant refugee is as significant to understanding Defoe's concerns in this novel as Moll's Newgate birth and Crusoe's disobedience are to their histories. These

concerns, as one might guess, relate to religious identity and conflict—but perhaps not in the way one would expect.

The Huguenots figure prominently in Defoe's political pamphlets in the years following the signing of the Treaty of Ryswick by England and France in 1697. These pamphlets attempt to raise English support for the Huguenot cause—not only out of genuine sympathy for their plight, but also because doing so would help England to resist France, whose military might Defoe considered to be the greatest threat emanating from the Catholic world. A typical example of such a pamphlet is *Lex Talionis: or, An Enquiry into the Most Proper Ways to Prevent the Persecution of the Protestants in France*. This pamphlet proposes that Protestant kingdoms threaten to banish their Catholic subjects and give their estates to refugee Huguenots.<sup>9</sup> Making this threat, it suggests, will force Catholic nations like France to relax their persecutions of Protestants.<sup>10</sup> Defoe sees the Huguenots as England's first line of defense against Louis XIV's growing power. Assisting them was therefore a tactic for improving the position of Protestants in the ongoing struggle to save Europe from falling beneath French rule and Popish darkness—a struggle whose uncertain outcome the pamphlet imagines with dread.<sup>11</sup>

If assisting one's allies in the great war of religions does not strike the reader as sufficient reason to come to the Huguenots' aid, Defoe offers others. *Lex Talionis*

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<sup>9</sup> Defoe, *Lex Talionis: or, An Enquiry into the Most Proper Ways to Prevent the Persecution of the Protestants in France* (London, 1698), 19-20.

<sup>10</sup> The circuitous nature of Defoe's proposed strategy is an attempt to circumvent the terms of the Treaty of Ryswick, which prevented William III from directly assisting Louis XIV's Huguenot subjects against him (in return for preventing Louis from supporting the Jacobites against William). By attacking their *own* Catholic subjects, England would not be in violation of the treaty.

<sup>11</sup> Defoe spends several pages of the pamphlet outlining the war which would result should the Catholic nations of Europe form a pan-Catholic alliance. The outcome of this apocalyptic scenario is uncertain, and he contends that the deciding confrontation would be that between England and France (ibid., 3-5). He would imagine this war-to-end-all-wars again at greater length in *The Danger of the Protestant Religion Consider'd, from the Present Prospect of a Religious War in Europe* (London, 1701), 10-19.

presents his oft-repeated argument that England would benefit economically from an influx of French refugees.<sup>12</sup> And simple charity has its place, too. Just because the Huguenots are foreign does not mean they do not deserve assistance. Indeed, Defoe's most famous poem, *The True-Born Englishman*, celebrates England's status as a "Mongrel half-bred Race." The poem was inspired by a desire to defuse English antagonism toward William III and the Dutch immigrants who followed him to England, but Defoe devotes a stanza to performing a similar service for the Huguenots. He declares that the Huguenots' children will come to "[c]all themselves *English*," a status to which they will have as much claim as anyone then living in England.<sup>13</sup>

Given what we have thus far seen of Defoe's early writings on the Huguenots, it would appear that the novel's opening remarks on Roxana's origins set the heroine and her family in a positive light. Through their escape, Roxana (and England) achieve a small triumph over Catholic persecution and French absolutism. Moreover, we learn that Roxana is quick to assimilate (she claims that she "retain'd nothing of the *French*, but the speech" [38]). It seems that she is no longer even foreign. She is one of those Huguenot children who, as *The True-Born Englishman* predicted, will call themselves English. When the Londoners in *Roxana* welcome her and her coreligionists with "Open Arms" and offer them "charitable Assistance" in finding work (38), they act just as Defoe encouraged them to do in the pamphlets he wrote decades earlier.

And yet discordant elements in the picture Roxana paints suggest that the Huguenot refugees are not the heroic Protestant stalwarts that we would expect. Far from being an exemplary community held together by religious fervor, *Roxana's* Huguenots

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<sup>12</sup> Defoe, *Lex Talionis*, 24-25.

<sup>13</sup> Defoe, *The True-Born Englishman. A Satyr*. (London, 1701), 20.

are divided by economic self-interest. Roxana (whose family is wealthy) describes other, less fortunate Huguenots as “poor starving Creatures” who fled to England “on Account of Conscience, *or something else.*” Her father says that these begging refugees “*for any Religion they had, might e’en have stay’d where they were*” (37-38). While Defoe acknowledges in *The True-Born Englishman* that among the Huguenots, “[s]ome for Religion came, and some for Bread,”<sup>14</sup> he never wishes that those who came because of poverty had stayed in France. French poverty was yet another sign of English superiority, and Defoe argues that there are more than enough jobs for the immigrants in England. The disdain in which Roxana’s family holds its less fortunate coreligionists and countrymen seems at odds with Defoe’s robust support.

Furthermore, we have little reason to believe that Roxana and her parents are models of religious zeal. Roxana admits, “I . . . knew little or nothing of what I was brought over hither for.” She is simply happy to be in the “gay City” of London. It is therefore a surprise to learn that she was “about ten Years old” when she fled. Even though she has a good memory (she can recall that before her father came over to England, he sold “*French Brandy, Paper, and other Goods*”), she remembers “little or nothing” about the religious disputes for which she and her family were chased from their country (37, 38). This is hard to understand—unless, of course, her family did not take much care to give her a religious education. Between her father’s lack of sympathy for his fellow refugees and Roxana’s lack of awareness of the religious questions that induced her family’s flight, we may wonder whether she and her family might have stayed in France, for any religion they had.

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Although this picture of a bickering, self-interested community contrasts sharply with the objects of charity which Defoe describes in his early political writings, it is not unique among his fictional works of the 1720s. In *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, the second sequel to Defoe's most popular novel, Crusoe describes a conversation he has with a secret Huguenot in France. The Huguenot claims that the Protestant religion has been all but extinguished in his country, and "that those who run away for their religion out of France left most of it behind them." He challenges Crusoe to inquire in England as to whether the Huguenot immigrants "lived better than other people, or showed anything of religion suitable to a people that suffered persecution for their profession ... for he had heard quite otherwise of them."<sup>15</sup> Crusoe does not follow up on the Huguenot's challenge, but neither does he attempt to rebut his claims.

Ironically, the degeneracy of the Huguenots is to be blamed on the fact that they are no longer being persecuted. A few pages after Crusoe encounters the secret Huguenot, he remarks that Christians traditionally thrive best under persecution. Primitive Christians found that "the fury of their persecutors kept their minds humble, their zeal for religion hot, and their affection for and charity to one another increased as their liberty and their number were lessened." Only after the persecutions ended did Christians "separate communion" and "unchurch one another" over obscure points of doctrine.<sup>16</sup> Defoe laments the end of religious persecutions repeatedly in his late works. In *The Political History of the Devil*, he claims that when Constantine established Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire, the Devil found a new tool for

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<sup>15</sup> Defoe, *Serious Reflections During the Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, ed. George A. Aitken (London, 1899), 141-42.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

destroying Christianity: toleration. The Devil realized “what a Fool he had been to expect to crush Religion by Persecution”; he “rejoyc’d for having discover’d that Liberty and Dominion was the only way to ruin the Church, not Fire and Faggot.” After relating this episode of early church “history,” Defoe digresses upon the state of religion in England. He expresses the hope that the Church of England will, “in Pity and Christian Charity,” take a harder stance against the Dissenters, “who are evidently weaken’d by the late Toleration.”<sup>17</sup> He is certainly half-joking here, but his concern is real. We see it appear again in his 1727 conduct book, *The New Family Instructor*, where a character aphorizes, “Liberty has not always been an Advantage to the Christian Religion.”<sup>18</sup>

Behind Defoe’s negative portrayals of Huguenots in the 1720s is his disappointment at the decline in zeal among his fellow English Dissenters since the 1689 Act of Toleration. The Huguenots came to England for the freedom to practice their religion, but if Crusoe’s Huguenot is to be believed, once they obtained that freedom, they lost interest in exercising it. Defoe fears that something quite similar has happened to the Dissenting community.

Indeed, Defoe had a number of reasons to be disenchanted with the Protestant cause in the early-to-mid 1720s. These concerns might be the subject of their own study, but we may make a few observations and speculations here. First, while Defoe’s concerns with religious change and weakening zeal are apparent since at least 1720, it is all but certain that these concerns would have been amplified in 1722 and 1723. Those were the years in which England was rocked by the exposure of the Atterbury Plot, a conspiracy to replace the Protestant king, George I, with the Catholic pretender, James Francis Edward

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<sup>17</sup> Defoe, *The Political History of the Devil* (London, 1726), 197-98.

<sup>18</sup> Defoe, *The New Family Instructor* (London, 1727), 62-64.



Stuart. While the plot was never in any danger of actually succeeding, Robert Walpole did his utmost to drum up public hysteria over it. Attempts were made to blame Catholics for the plot, but it was an inescapable fact that the chief conspirators were Protestant High-Church Tories.<sup>19</sup> Thus in 1723, when Defoe was presumably working on *Roxana*, the old, easy divisions between Protestant and Catholic, English and foreign, no longer seemed to hold much meaning. I suspect that the radical dissolution of these and other categories of identity in the novel is a reaction to the disorientation produced by this public panic. Defoe had fun with identity play in his previous works, but the Atterbury Plot had shaken basic assumptions about national and religious identity and transformed this fluidity into something deeply unsettling.

Also, at the same time that Protestants were betraying the country to a Catholic king, the Catholic world was becoming dangerously friendly. By 1715, the conclusion of the War of the Spanish Succession and the expulsion of the Pretender from France had produced a relatively stable peace between England and France for the first time in over twenty-five years. The great tyrant, Louis XIV, was dead, and a child sat on the French throne. Gone were the days when the fate of liberty and Protestantism seemed to rest on the outcome of an imminent conflict between England and France. Instead, peace made France and much of the rest of the Catholic world important destinations for trade and travel. As we shall see in the next section, Defoe seems to believe that this peaceful relationship is yet another example of a “toleration” which threatens to undermine Protestantism.

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<sup>19</sup> For the history of the Atterbury Plot, see Eveline Cruickshanks and Howard Erskine-Hill, *The Atterbury Plot* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

Regardless of the cause of Defoe's fears, however, it should be clear that Roxana's Huguenot past should not be perceived as a state of pure, zealous Christianity from which she falls due solely to her personal weaknesses and failures. Rather, by the 1720s, the potential—indeed, almost inevitable—decline of religious zeal was built into the figure of the Huguenot refugee, at least in Defoe's eyes. While the references to the Huguenots in these first pages are a clear sign that religious identity is at stake in the novel, they more particularly signal a concern with the *instability* of Protestant identity.

### **Roxana's Catholic Seduction**

Defoe was clearly concerned about Protestant susceptibility to Catholic conversion in the 1720s. This interest is apparent not just in his novels, with their Catholicism-accommodating protagonists, but also in the attention paid to Catholic conversion in his conduct books from this period, *Religious Courtship* and *The New Family Instructor*. Several of the dialogues in these books involve families dealing with a family member's conversion to Catholicism.

Defoe's concern with Catholic conversion is not present in his earlier *Family Instructor* (published in 1715), which treats Catholicism flippantly.<sup>20</sup> With the War of the Spanish Succession only recently concluded and the Catholic pretender's threatened invasion on its way, conversions *to* Catholicism were, presumably, very uncommon at the time. Within a decade, however, Defoe believed that such conversions had become common enough that there was a market for books on resisting Catholic evangelization—and particularly, for books representing the *middle class* resisting it. Since the

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<sup>20</sup> The book contains almost no mention of Catholicism beyond a few passing insults and some damnation by faint praise. For instance, the book admits that, like Turks, Catholics at least pray regularly. See Defoe, *The Family Instructor in Three Parts* (London, 1715), 185.

seventeenth century, aristocratic conversions to Catholicism had grown rare.

Increasingly, Catholic converts were drawn from the middle and lower classes—the classes for whom Defoe was the self-appointed guardian.<sup>21</sup>

*Roxana*'s presentation of its heroine's flirtation with Catholicism warns of many of the same dangers that Defoe examines more explicitly in these conduct books. Taken together, these texts reveal his perception of the changing nature of the threat that the Catholic world posed to an increasingly powerful and wealthy England. This new threat comes not from an Armada, but rather from the enticements that Europe holds for an English person seeking a fortune, whether that person is an abandoned woman or an ambitious young entrepreneur. The unorthodox representations of Catholic converts and potential converts that appear in these texts not only explore the circumstances that have produced this threat, but also suggest that a fundamental change in how writers represent Catholics to English readers may be necessary to combat it.

Between the pull of lucrative Mediterranean trade and the importance of the Grand Tour in finishing an education, young impressionable Englishmen of the middle class were increasingly drawn into Catholic lands. There, these texts suggest, they found their religion under assault, far from the guidance of their Protestant families and friends. Both *Religious Courtship* and *The New Family Instructor* portray English merchants who, after residing in France and Italy, return to England as Catholics. *Roxana*, too, is a member of the middle class, a merchant both by upbringing and, it would seem, by natural predilection. Her first journey to France as an adult is as the lover of an English merchant. Her travels in Italy are of a more aristocratic nature, as the paramour of a

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<sup>21</sup> For more information on Catholic conversion in the century, see Eamon Duffy, "'Poor Protestant Flies': Conversions to Catholicism in Early Eighteenth-Century England," *Studies in Church History* 15 (1978): 292-93.

German prince, yet she refers to this journey as a “*Grand Tour*” (139), relating her experiences to those of young Englishmen going abroad for the first time. Significantly, Roxana does not care for Florence or Rome, but falls “so in Love with *Italy*, especially with *Naples* and *Venice*,” that she is prepared to make her “Residence there for Life” (140). It was in cosmopolitan trading ports such as these that English tradesmen were seduced by the Catholic Church. (The merchant in *Religious Courtship* converts during his residence in the port of Leghorn, an Italian city sufficiently cosmopolitan to have an English church.)<sup>22</sup> Late in her life, Roxana sets up one of her English sons in this spiritually dangerous Mediterranean trade, settling him in Sicily (245-46). We never learn what effect his life abroad has on him, but if the conduct books are any indication, Roxana may have sacrificed her son’s religion for the sake of his prosperity—much as she does her own.

Each conduct book explores this seduction from a different perspective. The Catholic conversion dialogues in *Religious Courtship* give little attention to the converted merchant. They focus instead on the convert’s Protestant wife. Prior to her marriage, she does not discuss religious matters with her betrothed. She tells her more pious sister that she will join her husband in practicing his religion, whatever it may be. But when, after marrying, she discovers that he is a Catholic, she is shocked into taking her Protestant faith seriously. Unfortunately, she cannot leave him because scripture grants a husband a right to his wife, even if he is a heretic.<sup>23</sup> Her failure to examine her future husband’s

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<sup>22</sup> Defoe, *Religious Courtship* (London, 1722), 184.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

religious principles has led to her becoming, in a very real sense, a captive to this English Catholic convert.<sup>24</sup>

Luckily for her, her husband dies young. In the final dialogue, the widow tells her family about the difficulties she faced as a Protestant living in a Catholic household. Although her husband's "good Breeding" prevented him from exercising force to bring her into his principles, she could not escape his entreaties. Attempting to woo her into his religion, he would buy her expensive gifts, including a diamond cross that he gave her to wear as a necklace. He and his fellow Catholics would bow whenever they saw this "idol" hanging around her neck, effectively transforming the wife into an idol as well.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, his house is filled with idols, Italian "Rarities," and "charming Pictures." While it is clear that he considers these works of art devotional, one of his wife's sisters, unaware of his conversion, makes a telling remark: "I observe, Brother, you Gentlemen that have liv'd in *Italy* are so in love with the Popish Customs, that you are always full of these Church Paintings."<sup>26</sup> A love for Popish customs and art has, in this case, developed into a love of Popery itself. And the husband's effort to shower his wife with gifts indicates his hope that surrounding her with Catholic objects and cultural artifacts will have a similar effect on her. The focus on ornamentation and bribery is obviously anti-Catholic, but beneath the rhetoric lies an honest insight: people are unconsciously affected by the culture which surrounds them, and these effects may lead to radical changes in their conscious behavior and beliefs.

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<sup>24</sup> Raymond D. Tumbleson offers an interesting reading of *Religious Courtship*. Noting that the husband and father of a family is due obedience, Tumbleson suggests that Defoe's "advice in seeking husbands is advice also in choosing kings." Taking a Catholic husband is a disaster on par with the return of the Pretender. See *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination: Nationalism, Religion, and Literature, 1660-1745* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 180-87.

<sup>25</sup> Defoe, *Religious Courtship*, 262-71.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

Despite loving each other, the wife and husband are very unhappy. The endless and idolatrous wooing, in combination with an insuperable barrier to complete marital unity, makes this relationship between man and wife feel more like that between a man and his mistress. Indeed, Defoe's portrayal of this interfaith marriage may have served as a model for the adulterous relationship between Roxana and her wealthy German prince in France. Roxana also loves her prince (who, like the husband in *Religious Courtship*, seems to be a generous and kind man), but his marriage with another, virtuous woman tinges their amours with melancholy and guilt.

Yet if Roxana's affair reflects the marriage in *Religious Courtship*, it is a distorted reflection, one which highlights the absence of the interfaith couple's spiritual agonies from her adulterous relationship. She is unperturbed that her lover of eight years is Catholic. Late in the novel, after the death of his wife, she even tries to marry him. Their religious incompatibility is not mentioned; indeed, at their first meeting, Roxana leads the prince to believe that she is also a Catholic.<sup>27</sup> Only after the prince decides that he cannot marry Roxana in good conscience does Roxana's servant, Amy, mock him for having "gotten among the Priests" (282).<sup>28</sup> Roxana's utter disregard for her potential spouse's Catholicism marks her as in a far worse spiritual condition than even the indifferently religious wife in *Religious Courtship*. And whereas the wife in *Religious Courtship* is terrified that her children will be Papists,<sup>29</sup> Roxana is no more concerned about the

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<sup>27</sup> She tells him that one of her brothers is "an Abbot at —, near Poitiers" (95), implying that she is from a Catholic family.

<sup>28</sup> While Roxana's relationship with the Catholic prince falls apart, by a karmic twist she still finds herself unhappily married to a Catholic. Roxana's first husband, the Brewer, who left her destitute in England, turns up in Paris in Louis XIV's "Gensd'arms" (122). The Brewer could only be in the French army if he were at least outwardly conforming to the Catholic Church. Roxana thus spends the greater part of the novel in an estranged marriage with a Catholic man.

<sup>29</sup> As in Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, the children were to be raised according to a common practice in interfaith marriages of the day. Sons would be educated in the father's religion, and daughters in

religion of her children than she is about her own. We have already noted that she sends one of her Protestant sons to live in Sicily without sparing a thought to his religious preparation for the journey, but she also has a son by the prince, who has him raised as a Catholic. This son, she tells us, grows up to be “an Officer of the Guard *du corps* of France; and afterwards Colonel of a Regiment of Dragoons, in *Italy*” (119). This Huguenot woman proudly boasts that her son becomes a soldier in the service of Catholic monarchs.

In different but complementary ways, both *Religious Courtship* and *Roxana* suggest the dangers of an interfaith relationship, which threatens not only the religion of the Protestant spouse, but virtually guarantees that at least part of the next generation will also be Catholic. And while Defoe’s warnings may strike modern readers as mere alarmism, there is evidence that marriage to a Catholic was the most common reason for conversions to that religion in the eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

Of course, the threat of interfaith marriage is easily avoided by anyone who takes the trouble to do so. There are other dangers that are much harder to avoid, however, especially for Defoe’s beloved merchant class. These dangers are suggested by the husband’s circumstances in *Religious Courtship*, but they are left mostly unexplored until Defoe takes them up again in *The New Family Instructor*.

In this later conduct book, a father (who made his fortune as a merchant in France and Italy) reluctantly allows his son to travel to Italy to finish his education, despite his concern that his son’s Protestant faith is not well grounded.<sup>31</sup> The father’s years in

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the mother’s. When her husband dies, the widow’s father declares his intention to threaten to expose the priest in charge of the boys’ education unless he gives them back (Defoe, *Religious Courtship*, 260-62).

<sup>30</sup> See Duffy, ““Poor Protestant Flies,”” 301.

<sup>31</sup> Defoe, *New Family Instructor*, 15-16, 38.

Europe, we learn, confirmed him in his Protestantism, but he fears that if his son travels to Europe, he will return to England a Catholic. Why should the father believe (correctly, we soon learn) that his son's experience will be so different from his own? The son's lack of interest in theology is the primary cause, but Defoe hints at another reason. The father was a merchant in France at the time of Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes, an event that gave him "suitable Ideas of Popish Cruelty" and "Popish Idolatry." From that time on, "though much Art was used with him by the Priests ... it was all in vain; their Cruelty had given him such an Idea of their Religion, that he could never be prevail'd with, by their Subtilties [*sic*] and fair Means."<sup>32</sup> The father has experienced the reality of Catholic religious persecutions. The son, in contrast, travels at a time when England is at peace with the Catholic world; indeed, he may be too young to remember even the War of the Spanish Succession. He has no actual experience of French persecutions or aggressive expansionism—not even through news reports of current events. And this, it seems, leaves him more vulnerable to conversion. Defoe claims in the book's preface that Popery is gaining considerable ground in England for the first time since the reigns of Charles II and James II,<sup>33</sup> and the differences between the father and son's experiences in Catholic Europe suggest why this might be true. Defoe is concerned by a naïve generation that has come of age in a time of peace and in an increasingly powerful England—a generation which includes Roxana, who, we have seen, has no recollection of the persecution that drove her family from France.<sup>34</sup> As the father intones to his son, "[Y]ou think there's no Danger, and that's the very Essence of Danger."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Although this became an especially prominent concern of Defoe's in the 1720s, he has been considering the perils of Protestant forgetting for many years. His satirical *Reasons against the Succession of the House*



Catholic aggression, then, is a subject of personal experience for *The New Family Instructor*'s father, but for his son it has only been the subject of representation through anti-Catholic caricature. And as the father talks to his son about what he will encounter on his tour, it becomes obvious that these representations have done nothing to prepare the boy to encounter real Catholics. Priests, the father informs him, will go out of their way to be obliging and courteous. Rather than do anything that might appear self-interested, they will be generous with offerings of their own resources to help travelers. Nor is this a fraud or ruse, the father admits. These priests truly are not self-interested—and “therein lies the Snare.” In a sudden outburst of passion, he tells his son that the charity of the priests “breaks in on your Prejudices against them, as a cruel, a bloody, a false and treacherous Generation, which yet you will be sure to find them at last.” The Papist Misrepresented has reappeared. Yet a few moments later the father reverses course, offering another charitable assessment of the priests. “I do not charge them with Evil,” he says, “but the Evil lies in the Effect of it upon you.” The priests, he goes on to say, “are honest Men,” they “believe themselves to be in the right,” and it is only natural that they “endeavour to bring others to be so too.”<sup>36</sup> One can imagine the son being confused by this contradictory messaging—and less so by the anti-Catholic rhetoric than by the more generous comments. Indeed, the son is astonished to learn that Catholics, and even Catholic priests, are often decent people. He confesses, “I thought they had been all

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*of Hanover* (London, 1713) suggests that the reintroduction of Popery by the Pretender might in fact be healthy for England—in the same way that a purgative can be a useful remedy for someone who is ill. A heavy dose of Popery would remind the English of why they should fear it so much. See *Reasons against the Succession*, 21-30.

<sup>35</sup> Defoe, *New Family Instructor*, 39.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21, 23-24, 28, 37.

Cheats and Pick-pockets.”<sup>37</sup> His aversion to Catholicism turns out to be based less in principle than in his acceptance of the anti-Catholic rhetoric he has heard all his life.

The father’s self-contradictions expose the difficulty of representing Catholics to his son in a way that will steel the boy against attempts to convert him. The ultimate futility of his efforts suggests a crisis in the representation of Catholics—one that is specific to the circumstances of middle class English traders in the 1720s. Caricaturing Catholics and their religion—invoking the figure of the Papist Misrepresented—might be a fairly effective means of supporting Protestantism for an audience that remains safely within the confines of Britain’s shores, but such prejudices leave one ill-prepared to journey among real Catholics. Catholic clergy, Defoe clearly understands, have already recognized this problem and are taking advantage of it. In *Religious Courtship*, Defoe writes that when priests seek to make a convert of an English traveler,

the first Method they take . . . is, to let you see that you have been mistaken in your Notions about Popery; that the Difference is not so great as has been suggested to you; that we are all Christians; that we worship the same God, believe the same Creed, expect eternal Life by the Merits of the same Saviour, and the like; and by this Method they bring us at first not to have such frightful Ideas of the Roman Catholick Religion as we had before.<sup>38</sup>

Catholics begin the conversion process by demonstrating the fallaciousness of how they are represented by Protestants. Representation, it seems, is critical to religious stability. In *Religious Courtship*, the minds of potential converts who enter Catholic territories are imposed upon by means of impressive Catholic art; in *The New Family Instructor*, the grossly inaccurate representations of Catholics common in English culture endanger Protestants who step outside the boundaries of that culture.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>38</sup> Defoe, *Religious Courtship*, 272.

It is fitting, then, that Defoe explores the problem of Catholic conversion through a character who has no fixed identity, but rather seems composed of nothing but various levels of representation and disguise. Like the son who converts in *The New Family Instructor*, Roxana is susceptible to Catholic seduction because her Protestantism is little more than nominal, her disdain for Catholicism only superficial. Like the merchant of *Religious Courtship*, she falls in love with the splendor of the Catholic world during her stay in it. These personal and external circumstances combine to produce in her an attraction to the Catholic religion.

The compromised nature of Roxana's Protestantism is never more obvious than when she makes her most uncompromising declaration of it. Not long after her first lover dies, she tells us that the Devil tempts her to go to Catholic confession so as to either be comforted that her whoredom is not a sin, or to be absolved from it "upon the easiest Pennance" (104). But, she writes,

I could not be a Cheat in any thing that was esteem'd Sacred, ... I could not be of one Opinion, and then pretend myself to be of another; ... but, in short, tho' I was a Whore, yet I was a Protestant Whore, and could not act as if I was Popish, upon any Account whatsoever. (104-105)

It is a forceful statement of loyalty, yet it is self-subverting. Given the association of whoredom with Catholicism, by embracing her identity as a "Protestant Whore," she effectively declares herself to be a Protestant Catholic. Even her disparagement of Catholic practices reveals unspoken desires and internal conflict. She suggests that the Catholic Church is the tool of the Devil and trivializes its penances as sham religion, yet even as she does so, she discloses that she finds the thought of penance and absolution comforting. She cannot even explain why it is that she resists the temptation to go to confession. She writes, "I know not what Scruple put me off of it, for I could never bring

myself to like having anything to do with those Priests.” Her anti-clerical prejudices, like the *New Family Instructor*’s son’s prejudices, seem to be *mere* prejudices. Indeed, if there is anything more than prejudice behind this unidentifiable “Scruple,” it is likely fear.

After saying that she will not pretend to religious principles she does not hold, she adds, “[N]or could I go to Confession, who knew nothing of the Manner of it, and should betray myself to the Priest, to be a Hugonot, and then might come into Trouble” (105).

When Roxana says she cannot pretend to be Popish, she is speaking literally. She does not know how. Furthermore, her claim that she refuses to be a cheat in sacred matters is far from straightforward. While she never engages in Catholic practices, by this point in the novel she has already twice claimed to be Catholic in order to obtain her goals.<sup>39</sup> Her rejection of Catholicism appears as hollow and opportunistic as she believes Catholicism to be.

Roxana’s desire for confession and absolution only grows stronger in her uneasy retirement, as she is racked by guilt for her past conduct. She writes,

[A]s I had no Comforter, so I had no Counsellor; it was well, *as I often thought*, that I was not a *Roman-Catholick*; for what a piece of Work shou’d I have made, to have gone to a Priest with such a History as I had to tell him? and what Penance wou’d any *Father-Confessor* have oblig’d me to perform? (310-11)

Roxana has to remind herself often that it is a good thing that she is *not* Catholic, which is a clear indication that she often wishes that she *were* Catholic. And this is the state of spiritual crisis in which she remains when the novel finally breaks off.

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<sup>39</sup> After her first lover, the Jeweler, dies, she pays someone to tell the curate of St. Sulpitius that the Jeweler was a Catholic, as was his “widow” (herself), and that she had sent sixty crowns “for Masses to be said for the Repose of his Soul: Upon all which, *tho’ not one Word of it was true*, he was Buried with all the Ceremonies of the *Roman Church*” (89). Roxana’s compensatory italics do not change the fact that she gave money to the Catholic Church to give this Protestant man a Catholic funeral, or that she claims to be a Catholic herself. Her second assumption of a Catholic identity occurs when she begins her relationship with the prince. See note 27 above.

In her analysis of these same passages, Alison Conway also notes Roxana's implicit desire for Catholic absolution. Conway, however, argues that this "is a fantasy from which Roxana resolutely turns away."<sup>40</sup> I see little resolution in these passages, or elsewhere. In fact, I would suggest Roxana is *incapable* of turning away from Catholicism, because she refuses to acknowledge how near she has drawn to it. Again, like the son in *The New Family Instructor*, with his ignorant ideas about what Catholics are like and confidence that such moral monstrosity could never appeal to him, Roxana cannot see the danger she is in. She dislikes priests only because she has been trained to distrust them; she is contemptuous of the confessional because contempt for it has been drilled into her. But it is precisely this anti-Catholic focus on the signs and symbols of the Catholic religion that has left her ill-equipped to recognize how far she has traveled down the path toward it. She feels she has succeeded in proving her Protestantism by resisting the devil's attempt to lure her to the confessional; the fact that her desire for confession remains does not register for her as a spiritual problem. Yet this privileging of external obedience over internal spiritual condition is a crime which Protestants associated with Catholicism. Roxana is caught in a kind of spiritual limbo, not really Protestant or Catholic, but something unclassifiable—and almost certainly something unstable. While she is in this condition (and we never see her escape it), the future of her religious identity remains very much an open question.

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<sup>40</sup> Conway, "Defoe's Protestant Whore," 222. Conway's argument places much weight on Roxana's evocation of Nell Gwyn (who also famously declared herself a "Protestant Whore") and on the English public's appreciation of Gwyn as an English Protestant alternative to Charles II's French Catholic mistresses. In contrast, I find Roxana's use of Nell Gwyn's line to be less an act of self-definition than an act of prideful self-delusion, one intended to distract herself (and the reader) from the frightening admissions she has just made about her attraction to Catholicism.

*Roxana* and the late conduct books all recognize that Protestant England faces a crisis of Catholic representation. The Catholic of the age of Dryden (and of an earlier Defoe, fearful of religious war) was a monster, a slave, or a tyrant. Now, peace has led to growing traffic and cultural exchange with Europe, making it difficult to represent Catholics as simple enemies. Instead they must be dealt with as human beings who mean well and who think, feel, and act no differently from their Protestant counterparts. The conduct books make an effort to represent Catholics as human, and as the father's erratic leaps between anti-Catholic rhetoric and sympathetic condescension in *The New Family Instructor* suggest, they have only limited success.

Defoe attempts a different but related experiment in *Roxana*: he looks into the mind of a potential Protestant convert to Catholicism. He explores how the mental barriers that safeguard Protestants may decay, not through theological disputes with shrewd priests, but through mere residence in the Catholic world and bedazzlement by the wealth it offers. He imagines the mind of a nominally Protestant woman who is besieged by the brilliant Catholic culture in which she has willingly immersed herself and by the easy redemption she believes its religion offers. And while she cannot see how near she is to opening the gates, the reader can.

### **Roxana and Captivity Narratives**

*Roxana* and the late conduct books suggest that while England's economic ties to Europe have made it wealthy and powerful, the bonds of trade are an insidious means by which the Catholic Church can forge other kinds of bonds. In a manner of speaking, English trade with the Continent is a kind of Atterbury Plot, with Englishmen inviting the

Catholic world inside, one bottle of wine at a time. Yet trade is a necessity, and no one worked harder than Defoe to encourage Englishmen to seek their fortunes abroad.

England is, in effect, captive to the very economic forces that have made it powerful.

In Chapter Two, we examined some of the common rhetoric that associated Catholicism with tyranny and slavery. Defoe wrote more than his fair share of such fear-mongering polemics, particularly in the last years of Queen Anne's reign, when it appeared that the Stuart Pretender might succeed to the throne. "Even let him [the Pretender] come that we may see what Slavery means," Defoe wrote at the time, "and may enquire how the Chains of *French Gallies* hang about us, and how easie Wooden Shoes are to walk in."<sup>41</sup> The Atterbury Plot had recently offered a reminder of the threat presented by the Stuart pretender, and perhaps inspired Defoe to again deploy a slavery motif in *Roxana*. However, while this motif still serves an anti-Catholic agenda, it signifies something quite different in this novel than it does in those crude polemics. Rather than using the threat of slavery to frighten Englishmen about the Catholic world's political or military tyranny, Defoe warns the reader of the threat of *economic* captivity.

Although acting from an antipodal motive, Defoe draws on the same type of literature for his characterization of slavery as Dryden does: Mediterranean captivity narratives. Many stories of captivity in North Africa, some true and some fictional, circulated in the early eighteenth century, and some of these stories told of Europeans who became very wealthy in their slavery. Such economic success came with a price, however; slaves only stood a chance of advancing their fortunes if they embraced Islam.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Defoe, *Reasons against the Succession*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> For studies of the debt the English novel owes to captivity narratives, see Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, "The Problem of Population and the Form of the American Novel," *American Literary History* 20, no. 4 (2008): 667; *ibid.*, *The Imaginary Puritan: Literature, Intellectual Labor, and the Origins*

Perhaps the most famous of these successful captives was Roxana's namesake, Roxolana. She was a sixteenth-century Orthodox Christian girl who, after being abducted and placed in the Ottoman sultan's harem, converted to Islam and manipulated the sultan into making her his wife and queen.<sup>43</sup>

Parallels between Roxana's history and tales of Mediterranean captivity are readily apparent. Though threatened by poverty rather than by raiders or pirates, Roxana is forced into sexual work. She first becomes the mistress of her landlord, to whom she owes enough money that her life and freedom are legally in his hands, although, like a fond master, he uses her kindly. She puts her servant Amy to bed with him as well, effectively creating a small harem for his enjoyment. Her next lover is a wealthy prince who showers her with gifts, but whose public life and reputation force her to remain completely shut up in her apartment for over a year.<sup>44</sup> Engaged in a life that consists of little more than sex and breeding, and possessed of wealth and luxury that she can only enjoy within the confines of her apartment, her condition strongly evokes that of a harem slave. Roxana also exhibits a slave's concern for her liberty. She insists that a wife is, literally, a servant or a slave (187-88), and Amy informs her of the death of her first husband by telling her that she is "now a real Free-Woman" (170). Even after leaving behind her life of vice, she reminds her second husband of what she used to say about "a

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*of Personal Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 196-216; and Joe Snader, "The Oriental Captivity Narrative and Early English Fiction," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 9, no. 3 (1997): 267-98.

<sup>43</sup> Roxolana was a popular figure in the European imagination. In English literature, she most famously appears in William D'Avenant's *The Siege of Rhodes, Part II* (1663), in which she behaves vindictively and despotically, although she ultimately quells her worst instincts and rises above her own caricature. She also indirectly finds her way into an English picaresque, *The English Rogue* (1668). In that story, a prostitute dresses in the outfit of an actress who plays Roxolana in D'Avenant's play in order to fulfill the fantasy of her lover, a fact that suggests the seductive power of this figure for English audiences and readers. See Rosalind Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England, 1662-1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 59-70.

<sup>44</sup> Time is notoriously difficult to keep track of in a Defoe novel, but it appears that Roxana spent about a year and a half in confinement when she began seeing the prince (102-103, 120).



Married State being a Captivity, and the Family being a House of Bondage” (277).

Finally and most obviously, both Roxana and Amy don the clothes of Turkish slaves in the novel.<sup>45</sup>

The suggestion that Roxana is in a state of captivity is, of course, a further indication of her moral and spiritual peril. The gravity of her condition is emphasized by evoking a literary genre associated with religious apostasy. Given that many of her captivity experiences take place in the Catholic world, apostasy in this case suggests her flirtation with Catholicism.

More interesting is what this captivity motif implies about England’s relationship with the Catholic markets in which it buys and sells its goods. In much of the novel, Roxana is powerful, rich, and safe, but she is also caught up in a system of exchange (of her body) that encourages cosmopolitanism and religious indifference. If the young merchants of the conduct books are any indication, 1720s England is in a comparably compromised position. The new, insidious nature of England’s relationship to the Catholic world may be brought into sharper relief by comparing Roxana’s slave-like life in Catholic Europe with Robinson Crusoe’s experiences with enslavement and religious compromise in Africa and Brazil. *Roxana* was published only five years after *Robinson Crusoe*, but the novel takes a radically different position on the threat that intercultural contact may have on a less-than-committed English Protestant (a category in which Crusoe certainly falls), and it points to trade, rather than colonial expansion, as the source of this danger.

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<sup>45</sup> Roxana’s Turkish dress is famous, but readers may forget that Amy appears once dressed as a slave (292).

Early in *Robinson Crusoe*, Barbary pirates take Crusoe captive. He spends two years as a slave in Africa. He writes that during his enslavement, “I meditated nothing but my Escape; and what method I might take to effect it.”<sup>46</sup> While escape was a common ending to the captivity narratives published in England, the speed with which Crusoe rushes through these two years of captivity (they take up maybe a dozen pages of his history) has the unrealistic effect of making his claim seem literally true: the reader does not see him think about anything other than escape. Given Crusoe’s lengthy meditations on his identity and adaptive choices on his island later in the novel, his silence here seems deliberately evasive. What foreign customs is he forced to adopt? How does their adoption affect his sense of identity as an Englishman? Given the opportunities that conversion to Islam held for captives, what thoughts about religion did Crusoe have in Africa? We see Roxana’s Turkish dress; where is Crusoe’s turban? These questions are never answered.

We do learn, however, that Crusoe professes himself a Catholic during the years that he lives in Brazil. Near the end of his history, he surprises the reader with the fact that he “had made no Scruple of being openly of the Religion of the Country, all the while I was among there.”<sup>47</sup> As he does not reconvert until he returns to England, for the greater part of the novel Crusoe is technically an English Catholic. In fact, despite all his soul-searching on the island, when he first makes it home he considers returning to Brazil

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<sup>46</sup> Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1994), 16.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 206-207.

and to Catholicism. Only upon further reflection does he finally choose England and Protestantism.<sup>48</sup>

Yet Crusoe's greater transparency with regard to Brazil does not result in a more serious contemplation of the consequences of such compromise than is offered in his African narrative.<sup>49</sup> By withholding the fact of his conversion to Catholicism until the moment that he discusses his *re*-conversion to Protestantism at the novel's end, he denies the reader the opportunity to question the stability of his religious identity. Crusoe's ready adaptability, which is essential to his success and an aspect of his English character,<sup>50</sup> also holds the frightening potential for radical changes of identity. Yet the design of the novel prevents the most disturbing potential changes—those that would affect his Protestantism and his Englishness—from being subjects of serious contemplation. Despite admitting that he rejects his national and religious heritage for most of his life, Crusoe appears almost immune to foreign impositions on his identity. Catholic conversion and Brazilian naturalization are shrugged off like the Moorish robes we never see him wear. While suggestive of many of Defoe's fears about the mutability

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 218. The revelation of Crusoe's Catholicism is difficult to square with his narration of his time on the island, where he calls his convert, Friday, a Protestant, and fears the Inquisition should he help the Spaniards to escape the island (*ibid.*, 174, 176). Defoe's novels are full of such contradictions.

<sup>49</sup> While many of the things Crusoe does in his travels fall in a morally gray area, Defoe's position on religious conformity was clear. For Defoe there could be no excusing conversion, or even external conformity to a false religion, for the sake of social advancement. Many of Defoe's fellow Dissenters were willing to indulge in "occasional conformity," the practice of taking communion at an Anglican Church in order to hold public office. A study of Defoe's engagement in the controversy over occasional conformity has shown that he considered this practice "a prostitution of religion which would bring Dissent into contempt." See John Flaningam, "The Occasional Conformity Controversy: Ideology and Party Politics, 1697-1711," *Journal of British Studies* 17, no. 1 (1977): 43. Paula Backscheider also claims that Defoe held a consistent stance against occasional conformity. See *Daniel Defoe: His Life* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 85.

<sup>50</sup> Snador identifies adaptability as a primary attribute of Englishness in the characters of William Rufus Chetwood's captivity novels as well ("Oriental Captivity Narrative," 286).

of national and religious identity, *Robinson Crusoe* primarily responds to those fears by eliding, denying, or compensating for them.<sup>51</sup>

*Roxana* dwells on the very fears that *Robinson Crusoe* hides from. Our investigations into the novel have already suggested what a contrast its mutable, slave-like protagonist, with her suspect national and religious identities, makes with *Crusoe*, but it may be further demonstrated by considering *Roxana*'s experience with *literal* slavery.

While in Italy as the kept mistress of the French-ified German prince, *Roxana* acquires a Turkish slave. She is now in a position of ownership of, and mastery over, another human being. Whereas *Crusoe* was a slave in Muslim lands, the tables here have been turned. Yet the little that *Roxana* writes about this relationship suggests that it is the master, not the slave, who is altered and overwritten. *Roxana* tells the reader that from her slave, she "learnt the *Turkish* Language; their Way of Dressing, and Dancing, and some *Turkish*, or rather *Moorish* Songs" (140). Not a word is said about what the slave learned, or whether she took on any European characteristics, modes of dress, or behaviors.<sup>52</sup> Even while in a position of power, *Roxana* is vulnerable to change in the face of intercultural contact, altering her speech, her appearance, and her behavior.

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<sup>51</sup> Defoe's fears suggest that a Saidean model of Orientalism cannot sufficiently explain England's relationship with the East in the early eighteenth century. Many early eighteenth-century captivity narratives, whether true accounts or fictional ones like *Crusoe*'s, are best understood as "compensatory narratives," as described by Robert Markley in *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). *Roxana* is remarkable in that it is *not* compensatory; instead, Defoe gives loose rein to his fears of English insufficiency.

<sup>52</sup> In contrast, *Crusoe*'s world is one in which Englishmen impose their culture and language on other peoples, even when the English are themselves the slaves. *Crusoe*'s African companion, Xury, learns decent English by conversing with *Crusoe* and other English slaves. Charles Gildon, in his contemporary attack on Defoe and *Robinson Crusoe*, points this out as one of the novel's many absurdities; it would have made far more sense, he writes, for *Crusoe* to have learned Arabic. See Gildon, *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Mr. D--- De F--, of London, Hosier* (London, 1719), 13.

Of course, Defoe is not actually worried that the English will adopt Ottoman habits or religion. Roxana acquires this slave while living in Naples, indicating on which side of the Mediterranean the threat of captivity truly lies, and once again suggesting the spiritual dangers posed by Italy's cosmopolitan trading ports. It is not coincidental that in the same paragraph in which Roxana tells us that she learned how to dress, dance, and speak like a Turk, she informs us that she "learnt *Italian*, too," and that she "lov'd the Language" and "read all the *Italian Books*" she could find. She then declares that she is ready to make her "Residence there for Life" (140). By joining Roxana's education in Italian with her education in Turkish, Defoe links the slavishness of these two nationalities and shows her embracing them both simultaneously. Roxana believes that she is the master, both of her Turkish slave and of her identity, even as she unconsciously grows more and more to resemble both a harem and a Popish slave.

*Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* present the reader with two fundamentally different worlds. Crusoe lives in a world where the boundaries between what is English or Protestant and what is not are as clearly defined as geographical boundaries—even if at times he may transgress those boundaries. Whether or not Defoe actually believed such boundaries to be so clear-cut when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*, he apparently found such clarity and stability suited his purposes in telling the story of this imperialist, colonialist Englishman.

His purposes have changed in *Roxana*. This novel's protagonist claims both France and England as her native country. Her Huguenot background reminds us that she was born into a kingdom where two religions were contained within the same set of geographical boundaries. And international contact in this novel is not motivated by the

establishment of boundaries through war, exploration, or colonialism, but by the boundary-defying circulation of trade. Instead of seeing slavery begin in a moment of violent intercultural contact, we see a woman purchased in a business transaction. Instead of a little island world which an English colonist shapes according to his will, we have a vast world full of people of many nationalities—English, French, Italian, German, Dutch, Jewish, Turkish, Armenian, Georgian—mixing bodies and goods (or bodies *as* goods, in the cases of slaves and prostitutes) with little respect to national or religious difference. This is the world of trade—or, at least, this is trade with the Catholic world—and it is a trap. Crusoe can escape his island. There is no escaping trade.

The observation that Defoe often exhibits uneasiness over trade in *Roxana*—even as he continues to express his usual enthusiasm for it—is, of course, hardly original. Studies of luxury and prostitution in the novel have made similar remarks.<sup>53</sup> I would add, however, that another major source of this uneasiness is suggested by the apprehensions Defoe expresses in the conduct books concerning the effects that trade with the Catholic world is having on young Englishmen. These apprehensions help us to understand the novel's use of captivity to characterize trade and international relations.

They also help us to explain the differences between Crusoe and Roxana's experiences of religious conversion and their relative chances of salvation. Crusoe's return to Protestantism is as simple as going home to England, like a slave ransomed

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<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, Laura Brown's *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), chap. 4. Brown argues that in *Roxana*, Defoe places "trade and violence into symptomatically significant proximity," and presents "the commodified woman as scapegoat for mercantile capitalist accumulation" (ibid., 154, 155). Rosenthal argues that Defoe "embraced certain emergent commercial values," but in *Roxana* he "explored the kinds of self-transformation that these values might demand and the ethical collapse they might threaten." Furthermore, Roxana's embrace of those same values as a prostitute makes her story "a much more disturbing tale, not of the immorality of an exoticized other, but of structural contradictions that few can escape" (*Infamous Commerce*, 88).

from his captivity. In his world, England is Protestant, and that is that. There is no such clarity in Roxana's world. Her Protestantism, like England's, is constantly compromised by her willing participation in the international exchanges of persons and wealth that endanger it. Returning to England does nothing to disentangle her from this web; rather, her repatriation contributes to England's further entanglement.

### **Slavish Masters and Masterly Slaves**

When Roxana receives an offer of marriage from a Dutch merchant, she has the opportunity to cease being a kept mistress and become a respectable and legitimate wife. She refuses. Valuing liberty over legitimacy, she instead travels back to England under the guise of a French noblewoman to pursue new conquests—an act which leads to the episode of the novel most explicitly evocative of oriental captivity. This is the famous account of her Turkish dances at masquerades attended by the English court, and of her subsequent affair with the king.

Given the implied equation of Oriental and Popish slavery in the novel, this episode is also the novel's strongest expression of England's vulnerability to the Catholic world. Roxana and her guests all believe themselves to be powerful people, yet the subversive design of this episode (it is among Defoe's most ingeniously crafted) exposes them all as real or potential captives, and thus expands the novel's concerns about the weakness and instability of Protestant identity to encompass the entire English nation.

The claim that Roxana is in a slavish position in this episode may surprise those scholars who have argued that Roxana's ability to perform the East for her own ends

implies her mastery of the Orient.<sup>54</sup> Certainly Roxana would be surprised to learn that this episode is an account of her deepest debasement; *she* believes she is writing of her greatest conquest. When she begins hosting these masquerades, her goal is clear: “[N]othing less than the KING himself was in my Eye” (212). The fact that she gets her king would seem to be a sign of success. Yet within the larger framework of the novel, it is clear that Roxana’s performance of the Turkish harem slave solidifies her status as a slave herself. It is as she is seducing the king with her Turkish dance that the guests call out, “*Roxana! Roxana!*” The moment of her triumph is the moment in which the English court equates her with one of the most famous slaves in history; or, as she puts it with utterly unconscious irony, it is the moment in which she is “Christen’d” with the name of a harem slave who achieved power by converting to Islam (217). Indeed, she, too, declares her apostasy. Prior to the dance, she jestingly insists to her admiring guests that she is a “*Mahometan*” (216). As is often the case with Roxana, her words tell more than she knows.

Roxana achieves her conquest while removing all visible traces of Englishness from herself and making a joke of her religion. As a result, her life mimics Roxolana’s. She becomes a kept mistress of her monarch, who hides her away from the world and even from the reader. “There is a Scene which came in here, which I must cover from humane Eyes or Ears,” she writes; “for three Years and about a Month, *Roxana* liv’d retir’d, having been oblig’d to make an Excursion, in a Manner, and with a Person, which

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<sup>54</sup> Snader claims that the dance represents her “mastery of Oriental costume” (“Oriental Captivity Narrative,” 295), and by extension, of the Orient. Rosenthal similarly suggests that Roxana “does not *become* a Turk but self-consciously *performs* the Turk, fulfilling the Orientalist fantasies of her audience” (*Infamous Commerce*, 74). She thus masters her audience as well as the Orient. I would argue that however self-consciously Roxana performs the Turk, that performance produces unconscious effects on her—an argument which I believe Wahrman’s theory of eighteenth-century identity supports.



Duty, and private Vows, obliges her not to reveal, at least, not yet” (223). The veil of the harem is thus pulled over her, and at the height of her power, she most clearly resembles the sexual captive who is her namesake. The Man-Woman has become a Slave-Sultana, the invisible sexual partner of her monarch. In one of his most elegant strokes, Defoe presents Roxana’s greatest success as an act which erases her out of her own life history.

If Roxana’s position of mastery at the masquerade is exposed as self-delusion, the English noblemen who cheer her dance fare little better. Contradictions in *Roxana*’s timeline leave it unclear if the court that attends these masquerades is that of Charles II or George I. While such contradictions are common in Defoe’s novels, it is possible that in this case the ambiguity is deliberate, allowing Defoe to draw parallels between these two kings and the men of their courts (“as wicked as any-body in Reason cou’d desire them” [213]). Marilyn Westfall has argued that the decadence of Roxana’s masquerade is a sign of a “systemic weakening of Protestantism and the English nation because of vice,”<sup>55</sup> a position often struck in Defoe’s day by reformers in discussions over luxury, effeminization, and sexual deviancy.<sup>56</sup> It is worth noting, however, that these vices were strongly associated in the Protestant imagination with Catholicism.

Furthermore, there are suggestions during this episode and in its aftermath of a sexual vice with particularly strong Catholic associations: sodomy.<sup>57</sup> At Roxana’s second

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<sup>55</sup> Marilyn Westfall, “A Sermon by the ‘Queen of Whores.’” *Studies in English Literature* 41, no. 3 (2001): 493-94.

<sup>56</sup> For Defoe’s opinion on how luxury is affecting English masculinity, see Stephen Gregg’s *Defoe’s Writings and Manliness: Contrary Men* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), chap. 1, especially 25-28.

<sup>57</sup> For more on the relationship between homosexuality and Catholicism in the early modern English Protestant imagination, see Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men’s Press, 1982), 19-21, and Alan Stewart, “A Society of Sodomites: Religion and Homosexuality in Renaissance England,” in *Love, Friendship and Faith in Europe, 1300-1800*, ed. Laura Gowing, Michael Hunter and Miri Rubin (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005), 88-89. Stewart complicates Bray’s argument that sodomites were inseparably linked to Catholics in the Protestant imagination, but his work nevertheless affirms that this association was a familiar one.

masquerade, two slaves appear in attendance on their mistresses. While these slaves are female, their presence is a jab at George I, who was attacked by moral reformers and political enemies for the two Turkish servants he kept for the purpose of (it was said) sodomitical indulgence.<sup>58</sup> Roxana finds herself drawn into this kind of sexual deviancy as well; Maximillian E. Novak and Alison Conway have both pointed out that Roxana's account of her relationship with an English lord (her last lover under her identity as "Roxana") implies that they engaged in anal sex.<sup>59</sup>

That the novel is less concerned by the oriental fetish of the court than its attraction to the Continent is suggested when two other ladies (the mistresses of the two slaves) join Roxana in dancing for the assembly. Their dance is genuine, likely learned from their slaves, and Roxana finds "something wild and Bizarre in it." Roxana's "Turkish" dance is actually French, and because it "had the *French* Behaviour under the *Mahometan* Dress," it "pleas'd much better" (221). The court is fascinated by the Oriental, but it is more attracted to covert Frenchness.

Roxana's embrace of her French identity during this period of her life has further worrisome implications. The king she seduces may be Charles II, infamous for his French mistresses and for his deathbed conversion to Catholicism. Defoe did not think these things unrelated. In one of his anti-Catholic pamphlets, he writes,

Histories are full of Examples of Princes and great Men, that have ruin'd themselves and their Countries in the pursuit of their irregular Amours. ...

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<sup>58</sup> Backscheider, *Daniel Defoe*, 385. References to this pair of Turkish slaves are common in Jacobite writings. One manuscript volume of Jacobite political poetry, for instance, contains poems which claim that George I "Is govern'd by two Turks," that his court is a place "Where Atheists T—ks & Bawds y<sup>e</sup> Th—ne surround," that his indulgence in female whores has "made his two Musselmen jealous," and other similar innuendos. Roxana's Turk-themed masquerade would have reminded many readers (Jacobite or Hanoverian) of such attacks. See "A COLLECTION of Loyal Poems, made in the years 1714, 1715, and 1716," BL Add.MS 29,981, f.39v, 19v, 10r.

<sup>59</sup> See Novak, "The Unmentionable and the Ineffable in Defoe's Fiction," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 15, no. 2 (1982): 85-88; and Conway, "Defoe's Protestant Whore," 225-26.

It is not so long ago as to be forgot, since we had the chief Affairs of State manag'd, and Parliaments dissolv'd, &c. at the beck of *Courtisans*. The Interest of Popery and Tyranny in the late Reigns was chiefly advanc'd as such.<sup>60</sup>

Immorality is one thing, but when the king is involved with a Frenchwoman, the nation's religious establishment is at stake.<sup>61</sup>

Wearing a Turkish dress and dancing a French dance at an Italian masquerade, Roxana appears to be everything the English nation is supposed to fear. Yet to the men of the English court, she is the epitome of desirability. No doubt to the ambitious men of the court, making a conquest of Roxana means making a conquest of the oriental and continental powers which she pretends to represent on the different levels of her disguise. But according to Defoe's version of the history of French royal mistresses in England, the king's conquest of Roxana will make him her subject—and France's.

The gravity of the threat to religion posed by the masquerade is signaled by the presence of the two slaves. The slaves' mistresses wear Armenian and Georgian dress (220), presumably having taken their slaves' clothes, as Roxana took her Turk's dress. The specificity of the slaves' nationalities is significant. In *Serious Reflections*, Crusoe cites Armenia and Georgia as the only Christian nations in Asia.<sup>62</sup> From these territories the Ottomans drew many of their slaves, just as they had abducted Roxolana from nearby Ukraine. These two women are likely Orthodox Christians who were enslaved by Turks and sold to visiting English families who did not mind keeping Christian slaves. As Roxana performs the role of a harem slave, actual Christian slaves may stand in her

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<sup>60</sup> Defoe, *Reasons Humbly Offer'd for a Law to Enact the Castration of Popish Ecclesiastics, as the Best Way to Prevent the Growth of Popery in England* (London, 1700), 21.

<sup>61</sup> Conway has also written that *Roxana* expresses Defoe's fears about the continuing Catholic sympathies of the aristocracy ("Defoe's Protestant Whore," 217).

<sup>62</sup> Defoe, *Serious Reflections*, 208.

apartment, as the King of England looks on, entertained. It is a wickedly subtle suggestion of the path down which Defoe feared England was moving, due to the English court's fetishization of the foreign. Indeed, England's degeneration places all of Christendom in peril.

Roxana, meanwhile, never recovers from her triumph. We noted early in this chapter that after her christening at the masquerade—after her public transformation into a slave and an infidel—she is unable to leave this identity behind. Her attempts to engage in her masquerading age's easy transformations fail in the rest of the novel. Her life as "Roxana" only takes up about a tenth of the novel, yet that is the name that follows her through the rest of her life—as does her Turkish dress, that "anchor" of identity. It haunts her, plaguing her efforts to leave her life of prostitution behind. Even after she marries the Dutch merchant, her husband occasionally requests that she wear it for him, obviously making his wife dress in a slave's clothes throughout their retirement (293). Ultimately, her efforts to deny its significance lead her into tacit collusion in the murder of her own daughter, and into a state of spiritual despair.

The Turkish dress, through its allusion to Roxolana, is a sign of Roxana's opportunistic religious apostasy—the fact that she has "turned Turk." Its ability to haunt her suggests her refusal to do anything about, or even to fully acknowledge, her state of spiritual crisis. It is yet another indication, if another is still needed, that she has little self-knowledge, and little control over her religious identity. Roxana's religious (non)identity has been shaped by the people, objects, and environments which have surrounded her for her entire life, and by the roles which she has played. The Turkish

dress's power over her merely underlines this unconscious, unwilled fashioning which she has been hinting to us throughout her history.

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Defoe recognized—or came to recognize while writing *Roxana*—that English Catholicism in this period is inseparable from a vast web of concerns relating to culture and identity. Discourses of luxury and vice, imperialism, gender, trade, and nationality, all influenced and were in turn influenced by discourses about England's relationship with Catholicism. Disentangling them is impossible, and indeed, if Roxana's experiences are any indication, attempting to disentangle them may be dangerous. If she had a better grasp of the true complexity of the web she is caught in, she might be able to extricate herself from it.<sup>63</sup>

Roxana is a major milestone in the representation of English Catholics precisely because she is not clearly English and adamantly denies being Catholic. Defoe, as the conduct books have shown us, saw a need in the 1720s to abandon traditional representations of English Catholics, at least for a certain (growing) class of readers. But he offers no very useful representation with which to replace them. Instead, he turns to the figure of the potential convert—whose unclassifiable national and religious identities make her, if anything, more frightening than an English Catholic. The fact that this French-born woman with Catholic inclinations believes herself to be an English

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<sup>63</sup> Jesse M. Molesworth has written that in this novel, Defoe is “debunking the Newtonian notion of simple causes leading to simple effects, and exchanging the eighteenth-century fantasy of a story of one's own for the more modern depiction of a web of interconnected and contingent events, all impinging unpredictably on one's fate.” “‘A Dreadful Course of Calamities’: *Roxana's* Ending Reconsidered,” *ELH* 74, no. 2 (2007): 497, 502-504.

Protestant does not lessen the threat she poses to England, but increases it. Englishness and foreignness, and Protestantism and Catholicism are no longer discrete categories, but spectrums of identity, and those spectrums are so broad that some Protestants might as well be Catholics, and some Englishmen might as well be foreigners. Roxana is not a representation of an English Catholic; she represents a breakdown in Defoe's ability to represent English Catholics.

Religious and national partisanship had once helped guarantee that the political, cultural, and ideological division between English Protestant and Catholic Other (or even Catholic Englishman) was, at least, a credible fiction. Defoe's apocalyptic vision in *Roxana* is of a world where that line is not easily drawn, if it may be drawn at all. The novel's hastily written conclusion may be a sign that Defoe could not stand to explore all the implications of such radical indistinguishability between self and other.<sup>64</sup>

Whatever nightmares such uncertainty and confusion may have caused for Defoe, they have contributed to the significance of his novel. Many critics consider *Roxana* Defoe's masterpiece, or at least his most daring, if failed, experiment, due to its protagonist's psychological complexity, its ideological subversiveness, and its endless ambiguities. These advances in Defoe's artistry and thought are related to—and partly driven by—the novel's exploration of the religious instability produced by England's strengthening relationship with the Catholic world.

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<sup>64</sup> In her analysis of *Roxana*, Julie Crane claims that by the end of the novel, Defoe "is defeated, as Roxana herself is defeated, by the complex web he has created." "Defoe's Roxana: The Making and Unmaking of a Heroine," *Modern Language Review* 102, no. 1 (2007): 15.

## Chapter Four

### Samuel Richardson and the Limits of Tolerance

In Samuel Richardson's *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, a masquerade once again suggests the complexities inherent in representing English Catholics. Among the attendees of this fateful masquerade are Harriet Byron, the novel's English heroine and primary narrator, and the rakish Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, whose advances on Harriet have previously been rejected. During the festivities, Sir Hargrave, dressed as Harlequin, approaches Harriet's guardian with a warning. He claims that one of Harriet's other despised suitors is present, disguised by "a broad-brim'd half-slouched hat, with a high flat crown, a short black cloak, a dark lantern in his hand, holding it up to every one's masque; and who, he said, was saluted by everyone as Guido Vaux."<sup>1</sup> Later that night, Harriet vanishes, and the guardian's suspicion immediately falls upon this man dressed as "Guido Vaux"—more commonly known today as Guy Fawkes.

Most readers, however, will be savvy enough to recognize that this Guy Fawkes is a red herring. Indeed, as the night wears on and the frantic guardian uncovers more information, he discovers that he has been tricked. Guy Fawkes had nothing to do with Harriet's disappearance. Harlequin is the villain. Sir Hargrave deviously planted a trail of suggestions in the minds of Harriet's friends to make them look elsewhere for the missing woman, giving him the time he needs to spirit her away.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, ed. Jocelyn Harris, 3 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 1:118 (hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by volume and page number).

The Guy Fawkes costume is the only one at the masquerade described in any detail aside from Harriet's outfit as an Arcadian princess. Critics have noted that the elaborate description of Harriet's sumptuous dress suggests the romantic foolishness and excesses of the wealthy, as well as the dangers of foreign luxuries,<sup>2</sup> but no one seems to have asked why the novel offers a description of this other, far less extravagant costume. We cannot simply say that Sir Hargrave needed someone to cast blame upon; at a masquerade, Sir Hargrave could have no shortage of sinisterly dressed guests to incriminate. Harriet even complains that she was beset by two Lucifers for much of the night (1:150), either of whom would have made convenient scapegoats. Why, then, does Sir Hargrave direct the guardian's attention to the man in the Guy Fawkes costume, who, as far as we know, displays no interest in Harriet at all?

I suggest that Sir Hargrave's choice of decoy demonstrates shrewd insight into his fellow Englishman's deepest fears. He implicates Guy Fawkes instead of Lucifer because he knows that to many English Protestants, the common enemy of all humanity is not nearly as disturbing a figure as the creeping English Catholic who attempted to blow up Parliament. With a few well-placed words, Sir Hargrave sends panicked Protestants chasing after an innocent English Catholic figure. Meanwhile, Harlequin, the stage-type of the immoral, foreign, libertine plotter who "hopped and skipt, and played the fool" for the amusement of the other guests (1:150), dances off to abduct a young woman.

This masquerade identifies a problem related to that which Defoe addresses in *The New Family Instructor* (a text which, along with *Religious Courtship*, Richardson

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Margaret Doody, *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 345-46; and Kathryn Temple, "Printing Like a Post-Colonialist: The Irish Piracy of 'Sir Charles Grandison.'" *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 33, no. 2 (2000): 160.



reprinted).<sup>3</sup> In Defoe's conduct book, it is suggested that unrealistically negative representations of Catholics endanger Protestants by leaving them ill-prepared to respond to a real Catholic threat. In Richardson's novel, an unrealistically negative representation of an English Catholic distracts Protestants from a real threat from an irreligious libertine.

Richard's intervention into the problem of Catholic representation is directly linked to a national crisis. *Sir Charles Grandison* openly responds to the 1745 Rising of the Jacobites and the invasion by the "Young Pretender," Charles Edward Stuart. In doing so, it continues imaginative work begun in *Clarissa*, which was partly composed during and after the 1745 Rising and shows signs of being influenced by the circumstances surrounding that event. As several scholars have demonstrated, both novels contain a number of Pretender-like villains, the most infamous being Robert Lovelace. Sir Hargrave also belongs to this club. After the masquerade, he attempts to forcibly marry Harriet, compelling her to take religious vows against her conscience even as he promises to treat her honorably as a wife. English Protestants had similar fears about being forced into religious vows against their consciences should the Catholic Pretender claim his kingdom.

Yet this pretender to Harriet's hand is no Catholic. He calls on a corrupt Anglican minister to forge this unholy bond—just as the Young Pretender drew most of his elite support from disaffected Protestants. Indeed, in Richardson's eyes, the Pretender was neither Catholic nor Protestant, but an irreligious opportunist like Sir Hargrave. And here we should note a significant *difference* between Defoe and Richardson's concerns about Catholicism. Defoe seeks a better way to represent the Catholic threat to English

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<sup>3</sup> For a study of *Sir Charles Grandison*'s relationship with the conduct book tradition, see Sylvia Kasey Marks, "*Sir Charles Grandison*": *The Compleat Conduct Book* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1986).

Protestantism; Richardson's novels indicate that Catholicism is no longer a significant threat to English Protestantism, at least on a national scale. England now stands in a demonstrably superior position to the Catholic world, and need no longer fear Catholics simply for being Catholics—whether those Catholics are Italian or English.

Defoe wrote at a time of great anxiety, not just over recent events, but over England's stature on the world stage. England had become a major force in European affairs, but older doubts about its inferiority to European empires lingered, as did concerns about the strength of the Protestant religion. Richardson has far greater confidence in England's power and prestige. True, the 1745 Rising was frightening and demonstrated that England was not invulnerable, but by the 1750s the failure of the Jacobite cause was widely acknowledged. *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison* (particularly the latter) attempt to assuage rather than stoke the fears produced by the rebellion. England is too religious, too strong, and too modern to indulge in obsolete fears of skulking English Catholics. The sinister figure of Guy Fawkes—his costume's outdated fashions carefully described—is an anachronism, a mere bogeyman.

As we shall see, Richardson, like many Enlightenment-era thinkers, believes that religious and national identities are the result of education.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Richardson's masquerade, in contrast to Defoe's, does not suggest much fluidity of identity; Harriet does indeed develop as a result of the masquerade, but only because the night's terrors and her subsequent rescue by Sir Charles open her eyes to her own immaturity (an immaturity signaled by her romantic outfit). Harriet's lesson is primarily a moral lesson, and moral lessons are Richardson's focus. But one of *Sir Charles Grandison's* principal

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<sup>4</sup> The relationship between Enlightenment theories of education, human progress, and conceptions of identity are discussed in greater detail below. See also Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 92-104.

moral purposes—promoting religious and national tolerance—requires him to educate his readers on the Catholic world, as well. He portrays that world as primitive and undeveloped—which is, of course, no more accurate than Defoe’s portrayal of it as a hedonistic wonderland. But such a portrayal serves the purpose of promoting a vision of England as powerful and modern, and of making Catholics appear more pitiable than monstrous.

Of course, many of Richardson’s readers were uninterested in pitying or tolerating Catholics, a fact of which they informed him via outraged letters. Indeed, Richardson was forced to backpedal somewhat from the level of toleration he promotes in the novel, printing a halfhearted apology which he distributed for free.<sup>5</sup> I therefore take issue with Jocelyn Harris’s claim that the earliest readers of the novel encountered “little of the exotic, nothing difficult,” and only allusions “to things already known or beliefs already held.”<sup>6</sup> It is one thing to hear a minister speak from the pulpit about the possible salvation of Catholics and the necessity of treating all of humanity with charity. It is another thing to practice such behavior, or to watch one’s friends practice it—which is what the experience of reading this novel must have felt like. It is a sign of Richardson’s belief in this project that he undertook it less than a decade after the 1745 Rising had revived fears of “Popery and Tyranny.”

Yet this is not to say that Richardson endorses anything like religious relativism, or even religious liberty. Principle can only go so far before prejudice digs in its heels. The novel portrays Italian Catholics as good people, but also as intellectually inferior; their religion is, likewise, true religion, but not so true as the Protestant religion. And

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<sup>5</sup> See Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*, 3:485n467, n470.

<sup>6</sup> Jocelyn Harris, introduction to *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, by Samuel Richardson, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), xiv.

English Catholics are not portrayed at all. Indeed, the novel carefully avoids portraying them, and ultimately suggests that they do not really belong in the modern English Protestant world.

The chapter opens with a brief analysis of Richardson's response to the 1745 Rising in *Clarissa*. This response is remarkable not so much for what it contains, as for what is absent, namely, any condemnation of Catholic aggression. Allusions to England's own aggressiveness and the ubiquity of British spies and smugglers in the novel suggest that England is in more danger from itself than from religious crusades. The novel's careful silence on the subject of Catholicism implicitly absolves the religion of guilt for the rebellion. And although the novel's equation of moral decency with insularity seems to cut England off from the Catholic world, its conclusion raises the possibility of cooperation, if not amity, between them.

In stark contrast to *Clarissa*, *Sir Charles Grandison* explores England's relationship with Catholic Europe extensively, rejecting insularity as an ideal. It argues for a more positive, tolerant relationship with the Catholic world. Set during and after the 1745 Rising, it portrays Catholic Italians celebrating the Pretender's invasion of England, but it suggests that the Italians' fervor results from their misunderstanding of the Pretender's intentions and indeed, from misperceptions of Protestants. The novel's primary villains are xenophobia and bigotry, and it portrays its characters gaining the education and experience needed to allow them to overcome these obstacles to peace and unity. Richardson invites his readers to learn tolerance from his characters' examples.

Yet Sir Charles is himself conflicted about tolerance, expressing misgivings about raising his potential daughters by Clementina as Catholics. An analysis of the novel's

circumspect engagement with English Catholicism reveals the limits of Sir Charles's, and Richardson's, religious tolerance. Richardson views Catholicism as a primitive form of Christianity practiced by less developed, less educated nations. English Catholicism, with its mixture of the modern and the primitive, disrupts this model of religious difference, and thus cannot be given a place in the novel. Richardson simply advises English Catholics to be silent and invisible, in return for which Protestants must treat them charitably. His refusal to portray or even openly discuss English Catholics suggests that the most enlightened, benevolent way to represent them is to not represent them at all.

### **Libertinage and Insularity in *Clarissa***

Early in *Clarissa*, the heroine's family attempts to intimidate her into accepting a rich but unpleasant new suitor. Faced with their unexpected severity, Clarissa imagines herself in the place of Mary Queen of Scots during the Rough Wooing. She writes, "And then, as high comparisons where *self* is concerned sooner than low come into young people's heads, . . . this is wooing as the English did for the heiress of Scotland in the time of Edward the Sixth."<sup>7</sup> Clarissa implies that she finds her own fancy vain and childish, yet Richardson here allows his paragon a prideful lapse for the purpose of drawing a parallel between the conflict in his story and an internal British war with religious overtones.

To the book-reading public of 1747, Clarissa's comparison may have called to mind a much more recent "Rough Wooing" by a different Edward: Charles Edward Stuart's invasion of England via Scotland during the 1745 Rising. As *Clarissa* is most

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<sup>7</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 60. (Hereafter all references to *Clarissa* are to this edition unless otherwise stated.)

likely set in the 1730s, this allusion to the trials of Mary, a Stuart ancestor, is as close as the novel can come to referencing the rebellion without anachronism. What makes Clarissa's choice of historical parallel intriguing is its reversal of the conditions of the more recent rebellion. Instead of a Catholic Stuart prince riding down from Scotland to seize Protestant England, a Scottish Catholic Stuart princess is besieged by a belligerent and zealous English Protestant prince. Indeed, in the years following the Rising, Mary Queen of Scots became a Jacobite symbol for more recent Stuart tragedies.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, even in the immediate aftermath of the Rising, Richardson acknowledges that Protestants were as capable of committing atrocities against fellow Britons as Catholics. This again seems to be the point when Lovelace alludes to the misfortunes of Mary later in the novel. He deliberately draws attention to the religious conflict of her age—and just as deliberately indicates that religion had little to do with her final fate. He writes,

Have I used Miss Harlowe as our famous maiden queen, as she was called, used one of her own blood, a sister-queen; who threw herself into her protection from her rebel subjects; and whom she detained prisoner eighteen years, and at last cut off her head? Yet (credited by worse and weaker reigns, a succession four deep) do not honest Protestants pronounce *her* pious too?—And call her particularly *their* queen?<sup>9</sup>

While Lovelace refers to the Stuarts' reigns as "worse and weaker" than Elizabeth I's, he rejects a Protestant, anti-Stuart narrative that would paper over Elizabeth's less admirable qualities. Her treatment of her sister, if partly motivated by a concern for Protestantism, was not in any meaningful sense a religious act. Machiavellian politics knows no religion.

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<sup>8</sup> At least by the 1760s, the tragic life of Mary Queen of Scots had come to symbolize the Stuarts' misfortunes for many disappointed Jacobites, particularly Scottish Jacobites. See Murray Pittock, *James Boswell* (Eastbourne, East Sussex: CPI Antony Rowe, 2007), 22-27.

<sup>9</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa*, 1142.

Questions of where Richardson fell on the political spectrum and what he thought of the Jacobite cause have spawned a considerable body of critical work. There is evidence that, as a young printer, Richardson had sympathy for the Stuart cause. Yet by the time of the 1745 Rising his letters indicate that he was adamantly opposed to a Stuart restoration.<sup>10</sup> Some have interpreted these materials as a sign of Richardson's lifelong commitment to a middle-ground political position (Opposition Whig); others suspect Richardson's opinion of the Stuarts changed over time.<sup>11</sup> What we can say with confidence is that Richardson's feelings about the Stuart cause were complicated. If he could not approve of their attempts at re-conquest, he must have understood why the Stuarts felt they had a right to the English throne, and he must have had sympathy for the many English people who were disenchanted with Hanoverian rule.

However, this is not the place for a review of criticism on the political valences of *Clarissa*.<sup>12</sup> Rather, I wish to highlight one characteristic of Richardson's engagement with the Stuarts and the 1745 Rising that is underemphasized in these studies—a

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<sup>10</sup> Richardson had an important working relationship with the Duke of Wharton, a Jacobite, and risked his reputation in support of him. However, Tom Keymer suggests Richardson may have simply mistaken the duke for the Old Whig that he pretended to be, and notes that Richardson eventually abandoned even his Opposition sympathies and backed the Establishment. *Richardson's "Clarissa" and the Eighteenth-Century Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 170-71. Whatever Richardson's early sympathies may have been, John A. Dussinger presents very strong evidence from Richardson's correspondence that during the primary periods of composition of *Clarissa* and *Sir Charles Grandison*, he was a staunch Hanoverian and feared Jacobite and French aggression. "Clarissa, Jacobitism, and the 'spirit of the university,'" *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 28, no. 1 (1995): 55-65.

<sup>11</sup> Doody and Dussinger's scholarship offer good examples of these opposing positions. Doody sees Tory tendencies in Richardson's work, although she also suggests that in *Clarissa*, "the Whig and the Tory in Richardson himself, as it were, fight it out," as he exposes the best and the worst of both ideologies. Dussinger reads Richardson as more of an Opposition Whig. See Doody, "Samuel Richardson: Fiction and Knowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Eighteenth-Century Novel*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 105-107; and Dussinger, "Masters and Servants: Political Discourse in Richardson's *A Collection of Moral Sentiments*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 5, no. 3 (1993): 239-252.

<sup>12</sup> For analyses of the politics of the novel, see Doody, "Samuel Richardson: Fiction and Knowledge," 90-119; Doody, "Richardson's Politics," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 2, no. 2 (1990): 113-26; Keymer, *Richardson's "Clarissa"*, 157-76; Morris Golden, "Public Context and Imagining Self in *Clarissa*," *Studies in English Literature* 25, no. 3 (1985): 575-98; and Angus Ross, introduction to *Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady*, ed. Angus Ross (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 19-22.

characteristic which the above-quoted references to a victimized Catholic princess draw our attention to. While the novel's many allusions to the living members of the Stuart line attack them for their aggression and absolutism, one thing that *Clarissa* never uses against the Stuarts is their Catholicism.

This silence in the wake of the recent rebellion is worth remarking on. Certainly it stands as a stark contrast to the pamphlets which Defoe wrote when the Stuarts last threatened war in 1715. The title of one of those polemics, *Hanover or Rome*, bluntly lays out the religious consequences of Stuart victory.<sup>13</sup> Richardson is, of course, a less hysterical man writing in a less hysterical age, in a genre not overtly political, but even accounting for these differences, he is oddly quiet. Henry Fielding's novel, *Tom Jones*, was written and published in the same period as *Clarissa*, but it does not avoid the religious implications of the rebellion. Set during the 1745 Rising, its hero briefly joins a band of English soldiers going to fight the Pretender. Jones wishes to show his support for "the glorious Cause of Liberty, and of the Protestant Religion"—or in other words, to show his opposition to Popery and tyranny.<sup>14</sup> *Clarissa* is no less interested in working through anxieties about the Rising than is *Tom Jones*, yet it never presents Catholicism as a threat to English religion or government. The near-total absence of any overtly anti-Catholic rhetoric in *Clarissa* thus gives the impression of being a deliberate omission.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> So too does his recounting of the invasion of Ireland by the Old Pretender's father, the deposed James II, during which Protestants faced "nothing but Fire and Sword, Rapes and Racks." Daniel Defoe, *Hanover or Rome: Shewing the Absolute Necessity of Assisting His Majesty with such a Sufficient Force, as May Totally Extinguish the Hopes of the Pretender's Open and Secret Abettors* (London, 1715), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, ed. Sheridan Baker (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995), 239.

<sup>15</sup> To my knowledge, this enormous novel contains only two overtly anti-Catholic jokes. Both come from Lovelace's pen, raising the likelihood that making such jokes is immoral, or at least impolite. In one, Lovelace alludes to an anecdote about a hypocritical Catholic clergyman who feigned humility until he became Pope (Richardson, *Clarissa*, 863). The other, which was not included in the first edition of the novel, relates the story of one of Lovelace's past lovers, a Parisian girl, who attempted to convert him with the assistance of a priest. Some mockery of the girl's misplaced zeal is evident, but the story presents



Indeed, the novel passes up obvious opportunities to associate Catholicism with Jacobitism and rebellion. This restraint is particularly evident in its portrayal of smugglers. Anna Howe and Lovelace both hire smugglers (the respectable Mrs. Townsend and the devious Patrick McDonald) to further their goals, even while acknowledging the gravity of the crime.<sup>16</sup> The profession of James Harlowe's frightening friend, the Scottish Captain Singleton, is not mentioned, but given his characterization, he cannot be using his vessel for an honest trade. The significance of these smugglers is not as obvious today as would have been in the late 1740s. At that time, the smuggling profession was strongly associated with Jacobitism—and rightly so. Jacobites used (and even, to some extent, created) powerful smuggling rings to move messages, people, and arms around Britain. The government cracked down hard on smuggling in the 1740s, and it was understood that these anti-smuggling acts were, in actuality, anti-Jacobite acts. Even under normal circumstances, smuggling was considered a crime against the king, but in early eighteenth-century England, many smugglers were forthright anti-Hanoverians.<sup>17</sup>

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Lovelace in a far worse light than the credulous Catholics whom he takes advantage of. Richardson, *Clarissa Harlowe; or The History of a Young Lady*, 9 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1902), 7:179.

<sup>16</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa*, 621, 961.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Monod performs an intriguing investigation of the connections between smuggling and Jacobitism in "Dangerous Merchandise: Smuggling, Jacobitism, and Commercial Culture in Southeast England, 1690-1760," *The Journal of British Studies* 30, no. 2 (1991): 150-82. Monod goes as far as to suggest that Jacobite activity turned this formerly unorganized criminal enterprise into the highly organized (and dangerous) gang activity common in the early eighteenth century. Certainly the Hanoverian government did not miss the connection between the two illicit activities. As Monod points out, "The Smuggling Acts of 1698, 1717, 1721, and 1745 were passed amid great anxiety over Jacobite activity in England. Areas noted for Jacobitism were liable to frequent searches by the custom men" (*ibid.*, 153). Furthermore, organized smuggling peaked in the mid-to-late 1740s, and Monod cites cases of smugglers caught carrying out Jacobite errands in 1745 and 1746 (*ibid.*, 167-68, 160). For further information on the magnitude of the threat posed by eighteenth-century smugglers, see Cal Winslow, "Sussex Smugglers," in *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Douglas Hay, et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975), 119-166.

Three smugglers in a novel which almost never leaves British shores is a lot (and we have not even counted Lovelace's many spies and agents). Richardson's inclusion of these characters contributes to his project of working through the fears of surveillance, betrayal, and vulnerability produced by the recent rebellion. But (and here we reach my point) one fear that these characters do not explore is fear of Catholicism. Patrick McDonald is the Irish leader of a smuggling gang; it would make perfect sense for him to be Catholic. But the single sentence on his personal history which we receive is sufficient to allow us to deduce that he is a member of the Protestant Church of Ireland. It seems that Richardson wished to be absolutely clear about this Irishman's religious identity.<sup>18</sup> The Scottish Singleton is another fine Catholic candidate, but his religion is never discussed, nor is Townsend's. Smuggling in this novel, and its inherent Jacobitism, simply does not point us in the direction of Catholicism.

Yet the motif of smuggling *does* point us toward the true threat to England. The abundance of illicit national penetration in the novel is associated with the vulnerability of Clarissa's body. The threat of such violation comes not from fearsome foreign enemies, but from family and friends who ought to protect her, particularly Lovelace. Upon learning that Clarissa has sought out the help of the smuggler Townsend, Lovelace writes, "Mrs. Townsend!—who the devil are you?—Troop away with your contrabands. No smuggling! nor smuggler, but myself! Nor will the choicest of my fair one's favours be long prohibited goods to me!"<sup>19</sup> Lovelace, who has had a number of romantic liaisons on the Continent, delights in transgressing all types of boundaries, national and sexual. Here we find the true threat to England: the libertine.

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<sup>18</sup> We are told that until he was expelled for forgery, he attended Dublin University (Richardson, *Clarissa*, 696). He could not have done so without being a member of the Anglican Church.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 677.

As many scholars have noted, libertinage and irreligion (virtually synonymous terms for Richardson<sup>20</sup>) unite Lovelace with the Young Pretender. The Pretender was known for his dissipated behavior, and of course, the Stuarts had been associated with libertinage since the Restoration. Lovelace expresses his desire to be associated with the Restoration Cavaliers (and, implicitly, with the Stuart dynasty) through his frequent quotation of the period's tragic and heroic plays. Dryden's plays are prominent among them, which, in this context, is not to his credit.<sup>21</sup> Elaine McGirr has argued forcefully that Richardson rejects licentious Restoration heroic drama, the Stuarts, and libertinage all at once through his vilification of Lovelace.<sup>22</sup>

Of course, imperial aggression and absolutism were so strongly associated with Catholicism in the Protestant imagination that the novel inevitably carries anti-Catholic overtones; one could hardly speak English in the eighteenth century without speaking against Catholicism. But this novel suggests "Catholic" qualities are more properly the

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<sup>20</sup> Keymer notes that in *The Apprentice's Vade Mecum*, Richardson uses "libertinism, deism, skepticism, and infidelity as interchangeable terms, alike in their corrosive power" (*Richardson's "Clarissa"*, 164). Even the novel's tragic ending is an attack on irreligion. Richardson rejects the eighteenth-century concept of poetic justice because he considers it "as symptomatic of an age of skepticism and moral laxity." Alex E. Hernandez, "Tragedy and the Economics of Providence in Richardson's *Clarissa*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 22, no. 4 (2010): 603.

<sup>21</sup> Rachel Trickett argues that John Dryden represents the "society of wit, libertinage, and skepticism" of the Restoration that Lovelace is eager to associate himself with. Trickett further claims that Richardson's decision to tar Dryden by placing him so often in Lovelace's mouth "can hardly be attributed to simple anti-Catholic bias." Rather, Richardson assigns Dryden the role "of the laureate of a corrupt society," making him the poet of libertines rather than of Catholics. "Dryden's Part in *Clarissa*," in *Clarissa and Her Readers: New Essays for The "Clarissa" Project*, ed. Carol Houlihan Flynn and Edward Copeland (New York: AMS Press, 1999), 175-177. For more on the influence of Restoration drama on *Clarissa*, see Doody, *A Natural Passion*, 99-127.

<sup>22</sup> McGirr reads *Clarissa* as an attempt to alter public taste, rejecting Stuart theater and promoting the Hanoverian literary form, the novel. She writes, "Lovelace embodies an ideologically and aesthetically corrupt genre; he is a product of the heroic mode that Stuart apologists like John Dryden used to celebrate absolutism and Stuart Restoration. . . . The Georgian establishment reacted to the events of 1745-46 by systematically extirpating every last vestige of Jacobitism. *Clarissa* is a part of that reaction." "Why Lovelace Must Die," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 37, no. 1/2 (2003): 5. While McGirr's reading borders upon allegorical at times in its attempt to portray Lovelace as the embodiment of both the Pretender and Restoration drama, her argument with regard to *Clarissa*'s engagement with Stuart cultural production is compelling.

attributes of libertines, regardless of which particular church service they choose to sleep through. The deliberate evasion of the subject of Catholicism in *Clarissa* seems to acquit, or at least, to forgive the religion, *as* a religion, for its role in the 1745 Rising. Catholics, of course, took part in the rebellion, but Protestants had been leading the Jacobite cause since the time of the Atterbury Plot. Ambitious, irreligious men were responsible for England's late troubles, not Catholicism. To lay blame on Catholics would be unjust, and would allow England's real problem—irreligion—to go unchecked.

One might also argue that if the novel avoids discussing Catholicism, this is simply because Catholicism and the Catholic world barely seem to exist in it. For that matter, there hardly seems to be a world beyond British shores. The Italy of Colonel Morden's residence, the India that makes Uncle Antony's fortune, the American colonies that Clarissa hopes will allow her to vanish out of all knowledge of her family—these places have no substance in the novel. The seeming remoteness of the non-British world is likely an isolationist reaction to the trauma of the Rising. The novel promotes a retreat into British insularity, most clearly in its portrayal of Lovelace's foil, Mr. Hickman, the novel's only uniformly moral young male character. Mr. Hickman has never left Britain except on a single trip to Holland on a "particular affair," and he is characterized as a "*male-virgin*."<sup>23</sup> Lovelace's wanton and aggressive transgressions of sexual and national boundaries are thus contrasted with the "goodness" of personal and national insularity. Under this interpretation, the novel's silence on Catholicism might even be a sign of *excessive* fear, a refusal to look at the monster across the channel.

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<sup>23</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa*, 1092, 802. Richardson approved of chastity in men. He records being laughed at by the playwright, Colley Cibber, for proposing that an exemplary good man would be a virgin. See *Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson*, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 171.

While I certainly agree that the novel's retreat into isolation is related to its recent national trauma, I do not think this fully accounts for its treatment of the Catholic world. First of all, Clarissa, the novel's voice of wisdom, argues against insularity. She writes to Anna, "[I]n my opinion, the world is but one great family; originally it was so; what then is this narrow selfishness that reigns in us, but relationship remembered against relationship forgot?"<sup>24</sup> While Clarissa writes in reference to her family's rapaciousness, she extends her desire for unity to encompass the whole world. If insularity is safe, it appears far from ideal.

Furthermore, the novel concludes on a note that turns its gaze *outward*—and quite specifically, out to the Catholic world. Its last letters are written from France and various territories within the Holy Roman Empire, as Lovelace and Colonel Morden travel around the Continent. In the final letter, written to Lovelace's family by his French servant, De la Tour, we learn that Colonel Morden has slain Lovelace on the outskirts of the Empire's Italian territories. Lovelace is disemboweled and placed in a vault until further instructions may be received from England. Near the end of his letter, De la Tour writes of this temporary internment, "This is a favour that was procured with difficulty; and would have been refused, had he not been an Englishman of rank: a nation with reason respected in every Austrian government—for he had refused ghostly attendance, and the Sacraments in the Catholic way. May his soul be happy, I pray God!"<sup>25</sup>

Lovelace's refusal of the Catholic sacraments is as ambiguous as his decision to direct his dying prayers to the deceased Clarissa rather than to God (itself a rather Catholic act). Does this refusal signify a staunch if (very) faulty Protestantism? Or, does

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<sup>24</sup> Richardson, *Clarissa*, 62.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 1488.

it indicate his lack of interest in commending himself to God, even in his final hours? Given his villainous life, many readers, I suspect, would have had more hope for him if he had accepted the sacrament, even from a priest's hands. Richardson certainly would have.

Of clearer import is De la Tour's aside on the reputation of the English in Austria. Here, at the very end of the novel, the Catholic world interacts with England, and far from being a relationship of animosity, we learn that Austria's Catholic empire is on very good terms with Protestant England, a nation it respects "with reason." Indeed, this respect between nations is so great that it overcomes the divisions of religious difference, as a heretic is allowed internment in a consecrated space. It is significant that Richardson should make room on the last page of his massive novel to gesture toward a positive, accommodating relationship between England and a Catholic empire. This must be an idea that he wanted to leave his readers with, possibly one he felt they needed to hear as they dealt with recent traumas.

It is an idea, moreover, to which he will return in *Sir Charles Grandison*, and expand upon substantially. Writing that novel from a greater distance from the 1745 Rising, and thus, from a place of greater confidence and hopefulness, Richardson breaks his silence on Catholicism and attempts to create (on the page at least) Clarissa's dream of a world united as one family.

### **Overcoming Misrepresentation in *Sir Charles Grandison***

*Sir Charles Grandison* is set after the 1745 Rising, which it may therefore refer to without anachronism. The concerns raised by the rebellion can be sensed in the novel's

major themes, but the rebellion itself also intrudes into the narrative. The context within which this violence makes its appearance signals the novel's primary reaction to it—which is not to vilify, but to educate.

The Rising enters the story during a long section of the novel taken up by letters written by Sir Charles which recount the events of his residence in Italy several years earlier. These letters (and Sir Charles's return to Italy) interrupt a plot which had been moving swiftly toward a marriage between the baronet and Harriet. We now learn that a marriage between these two idealized English Protestants may be thwarted by a previous offer of marriage which Sir Charles made to the daughter of the Porrettas, an Italian family with whom he lived during his time abroad. He describes his relationship with this family just prior to discussing the rebellion.

According to Sir Charles's account, he and the Porrettas become very close in spite of their profound religious differences. The family so admires him that one of its members, a bishop, asks Sir Charles to “initiate him into the knowlege [*sic*] of the English tongue.” They are joined in these language lessons by most of the family. Indeed, the family places a high value on education—which, we are led to assume, explains why they are more ethical and less intolerant than most Italians. Even its ladies, the Marchioness and her beautiful, devoutly Catholic daughter, Clementina, are very well educated for Italian women.

Despite the family's notable Catholic piety, among their primary reading texts are, surprisingly, works by a zealous English Dissenting Protestant. Sir Charles notes, “Our Milton has deservedly a name among them. The friendship that there was between him and a learned nobleman of their country, endeared his memory to them. Milton,

therefore, was a principal author with us” (2:122-23). The learned Italian with whom John Milton was friends is Giovanni Battista Manso, a patron of the Renaissance poet, Tasso. No further remark is made on this friendship across a deep religious divide between two men of letters. But *Sir Charles Grandison*’s frequent allusions to Milton and his poetry make clear that Richardson views the Protestant poet as a model for his own work. Here he points to that poet to justify a major theme of the novel apparent in this passage: that people of genius and education may overcome cultural and religious divides. It is, after all, during these instructions in Milton’s English that the bigoted Catholic paragon, Clementina, falls in love with the Protestant paragon, Sir Charles, and her family comes to value him as a son and a brother.<sup>26</sup>

And Catholics are not the only people in need of education. Even as Sir Charles recounts the circumstances that led Clementina to admire a Protestant, he directs Harriet to accept his description of the Porrettas as proof that Italian Catholics may be good people. He writes, “Dr. Bartlett, madam, can shew you, from my Letters to him, some conversations, which will convince you, that in Italy, as well as in other countries, there are persons of honour, of goodness, of generosity; and who are above reserve, vindictiveness, jealousy, and those other bad passions by which some persons mark indiscriminately a whole nation” (2:123). This rebuke of those who “indiscriminately” represent Italians as immoral almost functions as a statement of the novel’s purpose—or at least, the purpose behind its portrayal of so many Catholic characters.

Only a few paragraphs after this passage on education and misrepresentation, Sir Charles learns that “the troubles, now so happily appeased,” have “broke[n] out in

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<sup>26</sup> The bishop calls Sir Charles his “*fourth* brother,” and the whole family treats him as a relation (2:122).



Scotland.” Suddenly, this harmonious family is thrown into upheaval. His country under attack, Sir Charles is himself verbally besieged. He laments,

Hardly any thing else was talked of, in Italy, but the progress, and supposed certainty of success, of the young invader. I was often obliged to stand the triumphs and exultations of persons of rank and figure; being known to be warm in the interest of my country. I had a good deal of this kind of spirit to contend with, even in this more moderate Italian family; . . . . Every new advice from England revived the disagreeable subject; for the success of the rebels, it was not doubted, would be attended with the restoration of what they called the Catholic religion. (2:124)

Even Clementina does not spare him. She “particularly pleased herself” with taunts that soon “her *heretic tutor* would take refuge in the bosom of his holy mother, the church.”

He writes that she “delighted to say things of this nature in the language I was teaching her, and which, by this time, she spoke very intelligibly” (2:124). There is something particularly cruel about this Catholic woman using the language of Milton to taunt her Protestant tutor with the imminent demise of his religion. Indeed, it seems to connect the girl with the English-speaking Catholic Pretender, whose upbringing took place largely in Italy.<sup>27</sup>

Sir Charles has been educating Clementina in his language, and the ability to communicate is a necessary first step to bridging division. But a common language alone is shown to be insufficient. What she and her family really need is an education in the

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<sup>27</sup> Clementina is one of the more intriguing “Pretender” figures which litter the novel. Charles Edward Stuart’s mistress was a Scotswoman, Clementina Walkinshaw, while his mother was the Polish princess, Maria Clementina Sobieski. Also, both Clementina and the Pretender were raised, in part, at Bologna. Given that until the 1745 Rising, the Pretender had never set foot in Britain, he was, arguably, as much an English-speaking Italian Catholic as Clementina, as were the progeny of some of the Jacobite exiles. Richardson may be slyly suggesting that these second- and third-generation exiles have as little right to concern themselves with English affairs as a sixteen-year-old Bolognese girl. Patricia Carr Bruckmann offers a thoughtful analysis of the allusive context which Clementina della Porretta’s association with Clementina Sobieski would have had for an eighteenth-century reader. She argues that there is no cause to understand the novel as a Jacobite allegory, as she suggests that Doody’s reading of the novel does; rather, Richardson’s allusiveness should simply be read as a means of lending valence to his characters. See “‘Men, Women and Poles’: Samuel Richardson and the Romance of a Stuart Princess,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 27, no. 3 (2003): 31-52.

realities of the Protestant world upon which they so cheerfully wish war, suffering, and persecution of conscience. Clementina in particular lacks the experience to do anything but blindly accept the anti-Protestant, anti-English rhetoric she has been taught by fellow Catholics who would “indiscriminately” malign “a whole nation.” She believes this rhetoric so strongly that her love for the heretic, Sir Charles, drives her temporarily mad. We have finally encountered a character who suffers so much cognitive dissonance on account of misrepresentations of a different religion that she has a mental breakdown.<sup>28</sup>

The passage on the Rising suggests that problems of perception and representation contribute to the Italians’ mistaken approbation of the rebellion. Sir Charles writes that, among the Italians, “it was not doubted” that the Pretender’s success would lead to the Restoration of Catholicism in England, but his phrasing suggests he does not share the general opinion. The Italians clearly do not understand the English if they think they will accept Catholicism, and they clearly do not understand the Pretender if they think he cares about Catholicism. By the time these volumes were published in 1754, the Pretender had been exposed as a mere opportunist in matters of religion in the eyes of both Catholics and Protestants.<sup>29</sup> What the Italians see as a holy war is nothing more than a dynastic dispute. Like Sir Hargrave’s manipulation of deep-seated religious prejudices to further his quite secular (and immoral) goals, the Pretender is simply using religion as a rallying cry.

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<sup>28</sup> Although one might argue that something quite similar happens to Roxana.

<sup>29</sup> Charles Stuart was actually a secret Anglican while Richardson was working on *Sir Charles Grandison*. He had traveled to London and converted in the fall of 1750. He began distancing himself from his Catholic followers, and in late 1753, dismissed all Catholics from his service. The result was that he was despised by Protestants and Catholics alike. See Frank McLynn, *Charles Edward Stuart: A Tragedy in Many Acts* (London: Routledge, 1988), 399, 422-23.

Sir Charles demonstrates his certainty that this is not a religious war by resolving “to leave Italy for a while, and to retire to Vienna, or to some one of the German courts that was less interested than they were in Italy, in the success of the Chevalier’s undertaking” (2:124). Here, as at the end of *Clarissa*, Richardson gestures toward Austria. While Austria and the Empire were ruled by the Catholic Habsburgs, the Habsburgs were supporters of the Hanoverians and a crucial ally of England’s in maintaining the balance of power in Europe.<sup>30</sup> The novel emphasizes the value of this alliance by revealing that the only military campaign Sir Charles has ever taken part in was in the Imperial service, in which his uncle had also served (1:262-63).<sup>31</sup> This Protestant paragon has gone to war under a Catholic prince. He is not another Tom Jones, enamored with the idea of fighting for liberty and Protestantism. Even as Richardson recalls the dark days of the Rising and portrays a frightening Italian world cheering a religious crusade, he reminds his readers that those who would represent Catholic kingdoms “indiscriminately” have as unrealistic a perception of the Catholic world as the Italians have of the Protestant world.

To expose the Chevalier, Charles Edward Stuart, for what he is, Richardson offers by way of contrast his own “Chevalier” (as the Porrettas call Sir Charles). Sir Charles’s

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<sup>30</sup> The Empire feared that a Stuart king would tip the scales in France’s favor. As Richardson was surely aware, English Catholics were divided between pro-Hanoverian and pro-Jacobite camps, and those with pro-Hanoverian tendencies often had ties to the English Catholic diaspora in the Empire. The project to devise a Catholic oath of loyalty to the Hanoverians in the early eighteenth century was pushed by English Catholics with ties to exiles in the Holy Roman Empire, who hoped that binding England into a close diplomatic relationship with the Empire “might provide an alternative route towards toleration.” Gabriel Glickman, *The English Catholic Community, 1688-1745: Politics, Culture and Ideology* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2009), 122. Possessing Catholic allies was not merely good international politics; it also led to better relations with domestic Catholics, which would have been particularly important to maintain during the 1745 Rising. We will look at the Catholic community’s internal divisions at greater length in Chapter Five.

<sup>31</sup> Sir Charles sets a good example for his Catholic countrymen in his choice of service. In 1750, the Duke of Newcastle suggested to his brother, Henry Pelham, that British Catholics be encouraged to enter the service of Maria Theresa of Austria as the best way to prevent them from entering the French service, and thereby coming under the influence of Jacobites (Glickman, *The English Catholic Community*, 150).

allusive relationship to the Pretender has been studied by other scholars, so I will refrain from offering a dull list of connections between the two figures here.<sup>32</sup> After all, the point of these allusions is not to suggest that Sir Charles is similar to the Pretender, but to highlight all of the ways in which he is his *antithesis*. Importantly, this does not mean offering a Protestant crusader to counter the Catholic crusader. As in *Clarissa*, the meaningful distinction is not between Protestant and Catholic, but between religion and irreligion. And brutality is as irreligious in a Protestant as in a Catholic.

This contrast is informed by the works of Milton, which, as we noted, are mentioned shortly before the 1745 Rising's appearance in the narrative. *Paradise Lost* features an aggressive, invasive Satan opposed by a temperate, just Son of God, paralleling the characters of the "young invader" and Sir Charles. Whereas the Pretender takes up arms against his own countrymen, Sir Charles restrains himself from the field of battle since his father has not yet given him permission to return home. Their different characters are again highlighted when Sir Charles returns to Italy to assist the mentally-ill Clementina and her dying brother, bringing with him a skilled surgeon and the advice of as many English physicians as he could consult on her case. Sir Charles's medical mission to Italy, performed by invitation, is a topsy-turvy version of the Pretender's armed invasion of England.

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<sup>32</sup> The best analysis of the relationship between Sir Charles and the Pretender is Doody's. She has argued that Sir Charles is "an example of what 'Bonnie Prince Charlie,' the last Stuart hope, should have been but was not" ("Samuel Richardson: Fiction and Knowledge," 111). While I agree with the spirit of Doody's assessment, I think her phrasing makes Richardson sound like more of a Jacobite than evidence would support. While Sir Charles's *father* certainly had Jacobite sympathies (Sir Thomas Grandison's decision to name all three of his children after the scion of the Stuart family—Caroline, Charlotte, and Sir Charles—can hardly be interpreted any other way), it is clear that the current generation has abandoned this outdated allegiance. Harriet quite explicitly reports that Sir Charles "admires the integrity of heart of his Sovereign, as much as he reveres his royal dignity" (3:268). For more on the associations between *Sir Charles Grandison*'s character names and the names of famous Royalists, see Doody, *A Natural Passion*, 249-50.

Despite what anti-Catholic rhetoric would lead us to expect from a novel in which Catholics are prominent, *Sir Charles Grandison* is far less interested than *Clarissa* is in portraying aggressive sexuality and imperialism. Such aggression belongs to the Pretender's libertinage, not to the good people who populate this novel, whether Protestant or Catholic. The Pretender's aggressiveness demonstrates the wrong way of unifying Christendom. Sir Charles demonstrates the right way of doing so: by conquering hearts instead of nations.<sup>33</sup> Thus, once Sir Hargrave has been disposed of (which is accomplished before the conclusion of the second of seven volumes), the novel's major villains are the obstacles to conquests of the heart: xenophobia and bigotry. And given the nature of these villains, defeating them is only possible through education and experience. Most of the novel's action focuses on characters' accumulation such experience.

From the start, the English characters are caught between conflicting demands of patriotism and cosmopolitanism, Protestant zeal and Christian brotherhood. Sir Charles's mentor, the wise and well-traveled Dr. Bartlett, informs the reader that the primary advantage a "*prudent* youth" may derive from travel is that "[f]rom what he sees of other countries, he learns to prefer his own" (2:325). Even Sir Charles, upon being rejected by Clementina on account of his religion, writes with relief that soon he "will be allowed to consider himself wholly as an Englishman" (2:640). Had he accepted a Catholic wife and a part-time residence in Italy, he felt he could not have considered himself wholly English—a feeling which clearly disturbed him.

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<sup>33</sup> Harriet celebrates Sir Charles by writing of him, "How much more glorious a character is that of *The Friend of Man-kind*, than that of *The Conqueror of Nations!*" (2:70).

Nevertheless, Richardson's departure from *Clarissa's* equation of morality with insularity is quite dramatic. One of the first things we learn about Sir Charles from Harriet is that "a manly sunniness" (Harriet's invented word for *suntan*) tints his skin. This physical mark "shews he has been in warmer climates than England: And so it seems he has; since the Tour of Europe has not contented him. He has visited some parts of Asia, and even of Afric, Egypt particularly" (1:181). And Sir Charles is not the only good man in the novel to travel without harm to his morals; even the foppish Lord G., a character clearly modeled on *Clarissa's* insular Mr. Hickman, has traveled extensively.<sup>34</sup> Sir Charles, like *Clarissa*, considers the world to be one family, but this novel exchanges her domestic phrasing for geographic terms.<sup>35</sup> Sir Charles, says Dr. Bartlett, "considers all nations as joined on the same continent" and "would undertake a journey to Constantinople or Pekin, with as little difficulty as some others would ... to the Land's-end" (2:30). Such imagined union is not the result of Lovelace-like fantasies of conquest and dominance, but of goodwill. Recalling and inverting Lovelace's self-comparisons to Julius Caesar, Dr. Bartlett asserts that Caesar "was not quicker to destroy, than Sir Charles Grandison is to relieve" (1:446). Sir Charles crosses boundaries frequently, but he does not *violate* them.

As a near-perfect human being, Sir Charles is admirably tolerant from the novel's outset. At times, he almost lays aside national and religious distinctions completely.<sup>36</sup> He declares to Clementina's choleric and deeply anti-Protestant eldest brother, "I am proud

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<sup>34</sup> See 1:229.

<sup>35</sup> Even when Harriet expresses such a sentiment, it is noticeably less domestic than *Clarissa's*: "Pity ... that different nations of the world, tho' of different persuasions, did not, more than they do, consider themselves as the creatures of one God, the Sovereign of a thousand worlds!" (3:367).

<sup>36</sup> Doody writes, "Sir Charles is the ideal of his age in his toleration of Roman Catholics, Dissenters, even Jews ..., and in his rejection of boundaries between languages, nations, classes, and creeds" (*A Natural Passion*, 365).

to be thought an Englishman: Yet I think as highly of every worthy man of every nation under the sun, as I do of the worthy men of my own” (2:234). We also learn that he has friends in the Sacred College of Cardinals (2:651), indicating that good and holy men may be found among the leaders of a church criticized by Protestants as corrupt.

Richardson clearly endorses a certain level of patriotic and religious prejudice. What he disapproves of are excessive displays of both and of their consequent damage to peaceful relations between national and religious groups.

In contrast to the worldly Sir Charles, Harriet still has some growing up to do, as evidenced by her imprudent participation in the decadent masquerade early in the novel. While she is already tolerant in principle, those principles are tested when she learns that Sir Charles has a history with a foreign lady (Clementina). This discovery brings latent prejudices to the surface. While love plays the greatest role in this test, xenophobia and bigotry are suggested by her fixation on Clementina’s foreignness. “I wish this ugly word *foreign* were blotted out of my vocabulary; out of my memory, rather,” she complains. “I never, till of late, was so narrow-hearted” (2:110). She wrestles with her “narrow-heartedness” for several volumes, simultaneously demonstrating her principles and the difficulty she has in practicing them.

Of course, Harriet’s token prejudices are hardly worth the conquering. In fact, with the exception of Sir Charles’s Aunt Nell (an unsophisticated and provincial old maid who repeatedly expresses her relief that Sir Charles escapes Europe “without a *papistical* wife” [2:658]), the good Protestant characters are too cultured and well educated to be excessively xenophobic or bigoted. Richardson’s portrayal of xenophobia and bigotry’s defeat must therefore arise from his Italian characters, who are far more prejudiced than

their English counterparts—and none more so than the beautiful bigot, Clementina. Brought up in virtual sequestration and encouraged in zeal by her confessor, Father Marescotti, Clementina is unable to feel much more than pity for heretics, and little even of that. Her acquaintanceship with Sir Charles disorients her, but she is unprepared to change her opinion of Protestants based upon the example of this one man. After all the services he performs for her and her family, she rejects his marriage proposal on the grounds of his damnation: “And shall I bind my Soul to a Soul allied to perdition?” (2:564). She even refers back to the 1745 Rising as a justification for her refusal, declaring that she should not wish to leave “a beloved Country, for a Country but lately hated” (2:565).

Clementina needs experience, which she cannot gain under quarantine in the Porretta mansion. But a mania-induced journey to England at last affords her an opportunity to meet people of a different nation and religion. Almost as soon as she reaches English soil, her understanding of religious difference evolves. When she writes, “Perhaps, we Catholics are looked upon as Heretics here” (3:333), she displays a previously unobtainable perspective and maturity. Then, after meeting with a kind welcome from Sir Charles and her former rival for his affections, Harriet, she is overcome by their generosity. She tells them, “You know I am a zealous Catholic. You know our doctrine of merits. I would have laid down my life to save his soul. But surely God will be merciful to such a man, and no less so to such a woman, as . . . I now have the honour to embrace” (3:361). While Clementina remains firmly Catholic (and even imagines a scenario in which she could atone for her friends’ sinful unbelief) she now disavows one tenet of her faith: its claim to exclusivity of salvation. She still believes



these Protestants to be heretics, yet she also believes God will show them mercy. Their religious differences, she realizes, need not result in antagonism or estrangement. One imagines that should the Pretender gather an army again, she would be more likely to sympathize with a heretic's fears than to revel in them.

Richardson was not, of course, writing an English novel to teach tolerance to Italian Catholics. What Clementina learns by experience, the novel's Protestant readers are invited to learn through her example. Indeed, some of Richardson's readers sent him angry letters, appalled that Sir Charles, with his excessive tolerance for Catholicism, was being held up as a model.<sup>37</sup> A clergyman accused Richardson of being more Catholic than Protestant.<sup>38</sup> Anti-Catholic sentiment was still plenty strong in the 1750s, even among "polite" classes. Richardson was forced to publish a semi-defense, semi-apology for Sir Charles's open-mindedness, and appended an "omission" to the final volume that burnished Sir Charles's patriotic credentials.<sup>39</sup> The inserted passage quotes Sir Charles condemning Continental fashion because it "impoverishes our own honest Countrymen, whilst it carries Wealth and Power to those whose National Religion and Interest are directly opposite to ours!" (3:264). This sentence is worthy of Defoe's pen. It is out of place in a novel that otherwise favors trade, even with "enemy" nations, as a means of strengthening ties with them, as well as of bringing wealth to England.<sup>40</sup> The fact that Richardson found it necessary to append it to his novel is indication enough that his

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<sup>37</sup> For a discussion of these letters, see Frank David Kievitt, "Attitudes toward Roman Catholicism in the Later Eighteenth-Century English Novel" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1975), 71-82.

<sup>38</sup> Marks finds this anecdote in a letter Richardson wrote to Alexis Claude Clairaut (5 July 1753 [British Library C.44.g, facing p. 396, sheet no. 68]). See "*Sir Charles Grandison*," 68n24.

<sup>39</sup> See 3:480-81n263.

<sup>40</sup> Harriet can speak both French and Italian, having been taught by her grandfather, who had "public employments abroad" (1:13). English people involved with the French, Italian, and Turkey trades fill out the cast of minor characters in the novel.

efforts to combat bigotry and xenophobia with positive portrayals of Italian Catholics were sorely needed.

Of course, the fact that he capitulated to these readers suggests that his own tolerant principles had limits, or were somewhat loosely held.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, while the novel demonstrates remarkable civility and an earnest desire to rise above sectarian division, it also demonstrates the limits of Richardson's tolerance. And these limits are especially clear when we look at the novel's treatment of *English* Catholics.

### Sir Charles's Daughters and English Catholicism

While *Sir Charles Grandison* unambiguously seeks common ground with Continental Catholicism and urges the English to make peace with it, the novel's ideas about how best to deal with *English* Catholicism are rather murkier. This uncertainty takes its most concrete form in the marriage negotiations between Sir Charles and the

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<sup>41</sup> Marks argues that *Sir Charles Grandison* supports a rather robust toleration program. She suggests that "Richardson's last work appears to be an attempt to moderate or correct the anti-Catholic sentiment of his time." "Man and God in Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*," in *Man, God, and Nature in the Enlightenment*, ed. Donald C. Mell, Jr., Theodore E. D. Braun and Lucia M. Palmer (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1988), 164. Marks has also written that Richardson, "in a measured and balanced manner evident throughout *Grandison*," brings the issue of religious tolerance (and intolerance) "out in the open" ("*Sir Charles Grandison*," 21). I agree on both counts, but I think Marks overstates her case. As we shall see below, Richardson's tolerance has limits. Other scholars have found different levels of tolerance in the novel. Elizabeth Bergen Brophy remarks that "Richardson's treatment of Roman Catholicism is remarkably tolerant for his time." *Samuel Richardson* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 90. Doody also argues that "imaginatively he is surprisingly ready to sympathize and unwilling to condemn" (*A Natural Passion*, 322), and she offers the intriguing suggestion that Richardson's work as a printer may have induced him to see tolerance and the freedom of ideas as an ideal ("Samuel Richardson: Fiction and Knowledge," 94-95). Tita Chico, however offers a strong argument that *Sir Charles Grandison* is a novel about how individuals fit into a community, as opposed to resisting or escaping a communal identity. As a result, Clementina represents a threat to Sir Charles's national and religious communities, and cannot be incorporated into them. See "Details and Frankness: Affective Relations in 'Sir Charles Grandison,'" *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture* 38 (2009): 45-46, 55. Ewha Chung also reads Richardson's novels as drawing sharp boundaries between what is English and what is not. She claims that Richardson's novels "portray and dictate one familial community in which the 'virtuous English' bond together in opposition to foreign contamination and violence." *Samuel Richardson's New Nation: Paragons of the Domestic Sphere and "Native" Virtue* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1998), 1. Chung's argument needs a great deal of qualification to be supportable, however, and it suffers from inaccuracies about the text and English history.

Porretta family. Sir Charles proposes to raise any daughters that result from the union as Catholics, while the sons will be raised as Protestants, a common arrangement in interfaith marriages. Clementina's eldest brother mockingly challenges Sir Charles over this proposal: "What will the poor daughters have done, Chevalier, . . . that *they* should be left to perdition?" (2:195).

We know that Sir Charles does *not* believe that Catholics are doomed to perdition, yet he does not take this opportunity to reaffirm that belief—perhaps because the comment strikes a little too close to home. Sir Charles's admiration for the worthy of every persuasion provides him with small comfort when his own flesh and blood is at stake. After Clementina rejects his marriage proposals altogether, Sir Charles makes a confession to her. While still insisting that God will save "the sincerely pious of all communions," he writes, "Yet, I own, that had the intended honour been done me, I should have rejoiced that none but sons had blessed our nuptials" (2:616). If Sir Charles truly trusts in God's benevolence to the pious, then this confession reveals his belief that Catholicism is deficient in its capacity to foster piety. He clearly *was* concerned that he might be leaving his daughters to perdition.

Sir Charles is not the only one who grows uncomfortable with Catholicism when it threatens to become English. Readers upset with Sir Charles's tolerance pointed to these marriage proposals as an egregious violation of English and Protestant loyalty.<sup>42</sup> In his published response to these complaints, Richardson admits that only the extraordinary circumstances that Sir Charles finds himself in can excuse his offer to raise some of his

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<sup>42</sup> See 3:485n470.

children as Catholics (3:473).<sup>43</sup> Mirroring the struggles of some of his own characters, Richardson's charitable principles seem to be at war with his religious prejudices. He allows that Catholicism is better for its adherents than no religion at all ("No religion teaches a man evil" [1:266], Sir Charles declares), but that does not make it as beneficial and holy as the Protestant religion. Catholicism may be good enough for Italy, but England is another matter.

The decision by Sir Charles and Clementina not to create little English Catholics together is matched by their author's careful avoidance of representing any English Catholics in the novel. While it tantalizes us with the potential daughters, an irreligious Catholic convert, and a handful of oblique allusions to the English Catholic community, actual English Catholics never step on stage. As in Dryden's appeal for Catholic toleration in *Tyrannick Love*, English Catholics must be displaced onto related figures (Italian Catholics, or English Protestants residing in Italy) before their concerns may be addressed. Indeed, in *Sir Charles Grandison*, Richardson constructs Catholicism as inherently foreign, therefore suggesting that Catholicism's presence in England is the real displacement. English Catholics are foreigners, but not by blood, nor (as was traditional within anti-Catholic discourse) by their loyalty to a foreign religious leader. They are made foreign by their culture; they are a people who have been left behind as their nation has modernized around them, and who have thus become alien to it. Richardson likely was not conscious that he understood English Catholicism in such terms, and he certainly

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<sup>43</sup> It is worth noting, as Marks does, that Sir Charles's proposal to raise his daughters as Catholics received more criticism from readers than from the story's characters. In fact, Richardson once had a zealous Catholic woman proposed to him for a wife ("*Sir Charles Grandison*," 88, 59). It seems the author was at least open to the possibility of interfaith marriage.

never states such a position, but as we shall see, the novel's treatment of religious difference leads to this conclusion.

To begin with, we must observe that Richardson's strategy for improving understanding between England and the Catholic world is not to insist on their equality, but to stress English superiority, thereby morphing its relationship with the Catholic world from one of animosity into one of condescension.<sup>44</sup> This strategy is clear even in Richardson's halfhearted apology for Sir Charles's marriage proposals. Mildly chiding his critics, Richardson asks, "Who that thinks the Porretta family bigotted, must not have allowed *them* to think Mr. Grandison so, had he not made some such sort of concession as he expected them to make?" (3:471). Sir Charles's concession was necessary to demonstrate his superiority to Catholic bigotry. He must compromise, not to admit that he stands on a level with the Catholics, but so that he may continue to look down on them.

The superiority of Protestantism becomes clearer the more we see of Catholicism in the novel. As we have noted, Richardson avoids the most fraught Catholic stereotypes of sexual and imperial aggression. However, while robbed of much of their venom, many of the oldest anti-Catholic stereotypes do appear. Sir Charles catches the good priest, Father Marescotti, spying on him and Clementina (2:577); the haughty, scorned Olivia considers trumping up Inquisitorial charges against Sir Charles to exact her revenge on him (2:651); the Porretta family urges Sir Charles to feign Catholic belief if he marries Clementina (2:530); Lucy questions whether Father Marescotti considers himself to be "bound to observe Faith with Heretics" (3:264); and even Clementina nearly accuses Father Marescotti of supporting the family's plan to keep her out of a convent "against

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<sup>44</sup> This strategy is not, of course, original to Richardson.

the interests of Religion” (3:340). And then there are the irrationality and violent passions of these characters: Olivia’s offer to be Sir Charles’s mistress, followed by her attempt to murder him when he refuses her; Laurana’s torture of Clementina to prevent her from marrying the Count of Belvedere; Clementina’s resulting madness and flight from Italy; the Count of Belvedere’s plan to kill himself if Clementina marries Sir Charles; and Laurana’s suicide. One might argue that many of these actions are more stereotypical of Italians than of Catholics per se, but it is impossible to separate national and religious prejudice in this novel. Indeed, the novel’s sharp separation between the worlds of Protestant England and Catholic Italy identifies each country with its religion, and vice versa. The boundaries that seemed to dissolve in *Roxana* are back, and they are sharper than ever.

Even the Porrettas, admirable as they are, remain far from English ideals of sobriety and rationality, and sometimes seem childishly peevish or perverse. Clementina is at once the family’s most exemplary Catholic and most irrational member, traits that are not unrelated. Sir Charles does not challenge her belief that her rejection of him was favored by “a divine impulse,” but he clearly thinks that “the noble Enthusiast” is carried away by “the heat of her imagination” (2:577).<sup>45</sup> Her steadfast devotion to her faith over her love leads to a mental and emotional regression into helpless childishness and madness which only exacerbates her imagination’s romantic turn. She runs away to England to escape marriage with the Count of Belvedere, an act that even she realizes has a romantic appearance to it (3:342). For a proponent of realism like Richardson, a

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<sup>45</sup> Richardson agrees with Sir Charles. In a letter to Lady Bradshaigh, he directly admits that Harriet’s steady and rational virtue is superior to that of the “spoiled,” “amiable enthusiast,” Clementina. He also writes that “almost every worldly and *unworldly* consideration” favors Sir Charles’s choice of Harriet (*Selected Letters*, 288-89).

romantic imagination is a sign of immaturity and irrationality.<sup>46</sup> But Charlotte's comparison of Clementina and Harriet makes it clear that Clementina's romantic nature is owing to more than just her youth and frail mental state. Charlotte insists that if Sir Charles had married Clementina, Harriet would have been too reasonable to insist on leading a celibate life as Clementina has done: "[N]ever fear but Harriet would have married before my Brother and Clementina had seen the face of their second boy—No *girls* shall he have, for fear they should be Romancers" (3:406). The division of the children by gender recalls the religious division that had been negotiated in the marriage proposals. Charlotte may as well have written "Romanists" for "Romancers"; Richardson's portrayal of Romanists in this novel renders the words interchangeable. Harriet quickly outgrows romance after the masquerade, but by the end of the novel Clementina has taken only a few hesitant steps away from it. Her religion, which encourages irrationality, blind zeal, and romantic heroism, prevents her from doing any more than that.<sup>47</sup> As a religion, Catholicism is simply unfit for mature adults.

Indeed, these Catholic characters give us little evidence that they even have meaningful, fully developed mental lives. Unlike Harriet, Clementina offers few written materials to the reader, and much of what she does offer is written in a less than fully

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<sup>46</sup> *Sir Charles Grandison* stakes out its anti-romantic position early, with its portrayal of the mentally and physically masculine woman, Miss Barnevelt. She has no interest in "milk-sops," and delivers a "romantic speech" in which she demands a martial lover. Harriet's letter registers her strong disapproval (1:62). Albert J. Rivero has written an excellent essay on *Sir Charles Grandison's* antipathy to romance. He demonstrates from Richardson's correspondence that the author considered Clementina inferior to Harriet because of her romantic worldview—and that his readers had a difficult time accepting this judgment of her, precisely because they were caught up in sympathy for her romantic plight. See "Representing Clementina: 'Unnatural' Romance and the Ending of *Sir Charles Grandison*," in *New Essays on Samuel Richardson*, ed. Albert J. Rivero (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 209-25. See also Doody, *A Natural Passion*, 327-32, and Harris, introduction to *Sir Charles Grandison*, xvi-xvii.

<sup>47</sup> Doody has written about the implied immaturity of Clementina and her religion. She writes, "To the Protestant Richardson, the nurture and admonition offered by the Roman Catholic Church undoubtedly appeared weakening to the highest development of character, suppressing or tacitly discouraging individual moral choice." She suggests that Clementina is a portrayal of "a refined but immature personality undergoing a violent crisis in the process of achieving a fuller identity" (*A Natural Passion*, 322, 332).

rational mental state.<sup>48</sup> Despite the large number of Catholic characters in the novel, none of them contributes significantly to the letters which appear within, except as participants in conversations recorded by Sir Charles. This absence leaves the Catholics less developed as characters, which in turn conveys to the reader a sense that they are less developed as intellectual beings than the Protestants who so thoughtfully observe and comment upon them.

These indications of irrationality and intellectual underdevelopment, coupled with the clear religio-political divide between Protestant England and Catholic Italy, point to the source of religious difference in *Sir Charles Grandison*. They suggest Richardson's belief, conscious or not, in Enlightenment concepts of human progress. While stadial theory of civilizational development had not yet codified the terms of such progress, its basic tenets were already in the air by the 1750s, and Richardson's approach to civilization, religion, and education indicates that he has absorbed them. One of these tenets is that civilizations exist on a spectrum from primitive to advanced, and culture—a term encompassing everything from customs to dress to education to religion—is tied to civilizational development.

Whereas older climatic theories posited that human difference was tied to geography, these new theories placed the power of change in human hands. Culture and religion were simply education, and education was a human activity.<sup>49</sup> Richardson's entire literary project suggests his belief in his power to shape his own civilization through moral instruction. Italy's inferior civilization is the product of their nation's

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<sup>48</sup> Brophy similarly notes the barriers which Richardson throw up between us and Clementina's interior life, and suggests we would feel more sympathy for her and the other Catholic characters if we had access to the mental processes that lead them to the choices which they make (*Samuel Richardson*, 90-91).

<sup>49</sup> Race was not yet seen as central to human difference—certainly not as central as religion or culture. See Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 101-104.



deficient learning, which even the Porrettas' unusually good education cannot entirely allow them to escape. Catholicism in *Sir Charles Grandison* is not so much a bad or unholy religion as it is an immature religion, part of the primitive culture of a primitive civilization—primitive, that is, relative to England. The description of Italy which Dr. Bartlett offers Harriet is clear on this point. “Italy in particular is called, The Garden of Europe,” he says, “but it is rather to be valued for what it *was*, and *might be*, than what it *is*.” (2:325). Italy is a garden gone to seed, a land in which the roads swarm with banditti and where the practice of medicine is mired in medieval ignorance.<sup>50</sup> Of course, there are indications that Catholicism is as much a cause as it is an effect of this primitive culture; Italy and Catholicism's poverty of intellectual development are mutually reinforcing.

Treating Catholicism as related to an earlier stage of human progress may appear to be an obvious strategy to modern readers. Certainly the Gothic genre presumes a relationship between Catholicism and primitive levels of civilization. But the Gothic genre did not yet exist (or at least, was not yet recognized as a genre), partly because this understanding of human progress on which it relies was only beginning to proliferate. While Protestants were happy to associate Catholicism with medieval monasticism, they did not necessarily connect religious ignorance with civilizational inferiority. Indeed, well into the eighteenth century, the English feared that parts of the Catholic world were more advanced than theirs.<sup>51</sup> Roxana, as we have seen, does not perceive Italy as a rank

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<sup>50</sup> Temple has similarly written that Richardson portrays the Italians as “‘primitive’ rather than sophisticated and worldly. They are positioned in the historical past of barbaric and unenlightened practices and thus made suitable for incorporation in an English account of international relations” (“Printing Like a Post-Colonialist,” 162).

<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Richardson is effectively rewriting history. Temple astutely notes that Richardson “appropriates cosmopolitanism [from Europe] and remakes it in the context of the middle-class English virtues of tolerance and restraint” (“Printing Like a Post-Colonialist,” 158). For a study of England's worries about its inferiority to *eastern* civilizations, see Robert Markley, *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600-1730* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

garden, but as a splendid country, and its splendor is, no doubt, a factor in the attraction its religion holds for her. Only a few decades earlier, the Catholic world's flourishing civilizations fired English travelers' imaginations and could threaten their opinion of their own nation and religion.

But Richardson's England is too advanced for him to worry about the Catholic world appearing attractive to any person of rationality and sense. Thus, the sole English convert to Catholicism in the novel is a man even more depraved than Roxana. This is James Bagenhall, a friend of Sir Hargrave's and a fellow libertine. When Bagenhall reveals that he is "a Catholic," Sir Charles corrects him ("A *Roman Catholic*") and assures him that he despises no one who lives up to the faith that he professes. Not only would Bagenhall not pass such a test, but we also learn that he converted to Catholicism for the dispensations—that is, for the ability to pay to have his sins forgiven. To this news, Sir Charles responds, "Mr. Bagenhall, I perceive, is rather of the religion of the *Court*, than of that of the *Church*, of Rome" (1:266), which is the politest way he can say that Mr. Bagenhall is of no religion at all. Bagenhall, we understand, is not a convert. An irreligious Protestant and an irreligious Catholic both have the same religion: none. This fact is emphasized by his close friendship with the Protestant Sir Hargrave and the Jewish Merceda. There can be no religious conflict among a community of libertines.

That the novel's sole convert to Catholicism is in fact a man of no religion implies that true conversion to Catholicism is impossible among decent, educated Protestants (and the fact that Bagenhall dies under a cloud of ignominy furthers the point). Conversion in this novel is unidirectional: toward Protestantism. A Catholic like Clementina may question a tenet of her religion, and irreligious Britons may become

Protestant (some of them are even allowed to become Methodists), but no one so much as glances in the opposite direction. Defoe, in *Roxana*, expresses his fears about the threat of English conversion to Catholicism on the Continent. Now, in *Sir Charles Grandison*, there is no concern about the stability of English Protestantism. Catholicism is the unstable category, with its untenable tenets. Clementina and her family rightly fear that a marriage to Sir Charles could result in her conversion.<sup>52</sup> Catholicism is the past, and the world is moving into the future. Some nations are just moving faster than others.

Where, then, does this leave that contradiction in terms, the English Catholic? Like Sir Charles's daughters, it seems English Catholics can never be anything more than hypothetical. The novel alludes to them on a handful of occasions, but almost always obliquely. They simply do not fit well into the narrative of progress the novel embraces. They live in a modern civilization, yet they cling to a primitive form of Christianity. In this respect, Guy Fawkes, with his outdated fashions, *is* a good representation of the English Catholic community. The English Catholic plotter is an anachronism, but then, so are all English Catholics. Richardson avoids introducing them into the novel because they threaten some of the basic premises of his vision of England.

Nevertheless, Richardson does not ignore English Catholics. In fact, he even offers them an exemplary role model: Sir Charles. The hero's life while living abroad reflects English Catholic life in some notable particulars. His description of his condition during these eight years of forced exile (he considers himself "a banished man," and in foreign courts he is treated "as a native" [2:117]) suggests comparisons with the English

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<sup>52</sup> Wahrman notes that 1700s "intermarriage" novels—novels that portray characters of different races and civilizations marrying—often feature conversions. Marriage "allowed for the effective erasure, through religious-cum-cultural education and conversion, of the gulf that had separated the protagonists at the beginning" (*Making of the Modern Self*, 93).

Catholic Jacobites living in Continental exile. And his refusal to yield on the point of religion in the marriage negotiations with the Porrettas, in spite of their generous offers, calls to mind the sacrifices of those English Catholics who remain in England. “New converts,” a bewildered Porretta remarks, “may be zealous; but you old Protestants, Protestants by descent, as I may say, ’tis strange you should be so very stedfast.” Sir Charles makes no reply, writing, “My stedfastness was best expressed; and surely it was sufficiently expressed (the circumstances of the case so interesting) by silence” (2:189). The Italian’s words could be as aptly applied to English *Catholics* by descent, whose refusal to compromise on the point of religion was a perpetual bar to many marriages and fortunes.

If we do see this passage as an allusion to the condition of English Catholics, Sir Charles’s response—silence—seems to be his advice to them on their predicament. It is the advice he follows himself as a traveler in countries that do not share his religion. “Good manners,” he claims, “will make me shew respect to the religion of the country I happen to be in, were it the Mahometan, or even the Pagan; and to venerate the good men of it: But I never will enter into debate upon the subject as a traveler, a sojourner; that is a rule with me” (2:155). Apparently he followed his rule well; his reputation for discretion was sufficient that the Inquisition ignored Olivia’s attempts to accuse him of preaching heresy (2:651).

Silence is likewise the condition of allowing Catholicism to travel into his own household. He offers to host a priest for his wife in England, provided “that he will confine his pious cares to those only who are already of his own persuasion; and that no disputable points may ever be touched upon to servants, tenants, or neighbours, in a

country where a different religion ... is established.” Sir Charles is sorry to have to make the condition, but says by way of apology, “[H]ad I not insisted on it, I should have behaved towards my country in a manner for which I could not answer to my own heart” (2:531). Even if the priest becomes a resident for the rest of his life, he will have to remain as respectfully silent about religion as a traveler.

Sir Charles’s condition for the priest sparks the novel’s one direct acknowledgement of English Catholicism. Upset at how circumscribed Clementina’s confessor must be, the Count della Porretta observes, “Your countrymen, Chevalier, ... complain loudly of persecution from our church: Yet what disqualifications do Catholics lie under in England!” To which Sir Charles responds, again, by refusing to respond. He replies, “A great deal, my Lord, may be said on this subject. I think it sufficient to answer for myself, and my own conduct” (2:531). In this instance, Sir Charles points to his conduct as an example, not of how English Catholics should behave, but of how English Protestants should treat them. And—rather audaciously—his conduct is to break at least one of the penal laws. He has just promised to harbor a Catholic priest in his home. And while the marriage negotiations fail, Father Marescotti eventually does come to stay at Grandison-Hall for a time. The novel, like Sir Charles, chooses to remain silent on the significance of this act. But silence here implies a sharp rebuke of England’s government.<sup>53</sup> In a novel critical of the 1745 Rising, this small act of rebellion is no small matter. He indirectly criticizes his government’s laws which inhibit Catholics’ ability to

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<sup>53</sup> Lois A. Chaber has also noted the powerful implications of this passage. She argues that Sir Charles’s refusal to comment on the penal laws “is not complacency; rather, it constitutes the most radical criticism possible, one which, assuming the inevitable inadequacy of social institutions and the impossibility of meaningful change, judges society from above, not from within.” “‘Sufficient to the Day’: Anxiety in *Sir Charles Grandison*,” in *Passion and Virtue: Essays on the Novels of Samuel Richardson*, ed. David Blewett (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 270.

practice their religion. He also tries to make the lives of English Catholics a little easier in other ways. When he leaves Dr. Bartlett with instructions to distribute alms to “[t]he industrious poor, of *all* persuasions” (2:12), we have every reason to believe that “*all*” truly means all.

Yet Sir Charles is no believer in religious freedom. When discussing the Methodists, he says that he does not approve of religious diversity in a country. But neither does he approve of kings who, rather than attempt to win hearts by being a good example of their religion, instead discourage other religions “by unjustifiable severity” (3:141). Exactly what severities are unjustifiable is another subject on which a great deal might be said but is not.

This is all the advice that Sir Charles can offer about what Protestants should do about English Catholics: be kind to them, but do not talk about them. Likewise, the novel can give little advice to English Catholics, aside from insisting they be silent and unobtrusive. Indeed, the novel effectively suggests that an English Catholic behave as a traveler, even in their home country. Religio-political boundaries have been clearly drawn, and Catholicism is not on the English side of those boundaries. An English Catholic is a Catholic living in exile in England.<sup>54</sup>

As the novel approaches its conclusion, it offers a vision of international and interfaith union, with English and Italians all gathered in friendship at Grandison-Hall, a

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<sup>54</sup> There may be a more sinister side to the implication in the novel that all Catholicism is foreign. Temple argues that Richardson directs attention towards international relations to distract from internal colonialism. She writes that “*Grandison* offers an already achieved transcendent internationalism that trivializes if not erases local difficulties with the British colonies. Indeed, *Grandison*’s internationalism must have been deeply comforting to English readers eager to exoticize, displace, and thus distance the violent past of English oppression and the continuing vexation presented by Irish resistance in the 1750s” (“Printing Like a Post-Colonialist,” 159). Temple raises excellent points. However poorly the novel treats English Catholics, it treats the Irish far worse. Sir Charles is *pointedly* silent about conflict with English Catholics; the Irish simply do not exist at all.

seat meant to suggest an earthly paradise.<sup>55</sup> Harriet writes, “Except at certain devotional hours of retirement, we know not, but that we are all of one faith.” A “true catholic charity” abounds among these people, and “catholic” is emphatically lowercase. Symbolizing this religious harmony, the men of the cloth, Dr. Bartlett and Father Marescotti, have become inseparable friends. Clementina, Harriet believes, “cannot but see, that charitable and great minds, however differing in some even essential articles of religion, might mingle hearts and love each other; and from Sir Charles’s catholicism, that she might have been happy with him, and kept her own faith” (3:410). Richardson imagines Sir Charles as an exemplary practitioner of “catholicism,” a Christianity that reunites Europe, not by invasion, but with respect and friendship. As their parting nears, Sir Charles declares to Harriet and Clementina, “Friendship, dearest creatures, will make at pleasure a safe bridge over the narrow seas; it will cut an easy passage thro’ rocks and mountains, and make England and Italy one country.” He then makes plans to erect a temple to their “triple friendship” in his gardens (3:454-55). The scene borders upon the utopian.

And yet, this near-perfect happiness is only possible because the narrative refused to explore a path that would lead to English Catholicism. Had Sir Charles married Clementina and brought her to England, had he allowed a Catholic priest and Catholic servants to live at Grandison-Hall, had he been forced to watch as his daughters were taught to believe him to be a damned heretic—had these things happened, Grandison-

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<sup>55</sup> Doody remarks that Grandison-Hall is “a true international center,” a place to bring together “friends and relations from Scotland, Wales, or Italy.” She goes on to add that Grandison-Hall “can act as this center of benevolent tolerance because its own values are certain, and because it is under very tight control” (“Samuel Richardson: Fiction and Knowledge,” 112). Doody’s remarks are important to keep in mind, lest we make Richardson out to be more tolerant than he is. As Sir Charles’s conditions to Father Marescotti demonstrate, tolerance is a privilege, which secular authority grants and withdraws at will.

Hall could not have been a paradise. This path not taken leaves an underlying element of discord in this utopia, a niggling doubt unsettling this confident (and overcompensating) picture of English Protestants opening their home to their Catholic brothers and sisters to visit as guests, but not to live as a family. Clementina can now *see* that she could have married Sir Charles, but the fact that the novel limits her to *seeing* suggests that, in fact, such a thing could never truly *be*. The immutable, implacable Protestantism practiced by Sir Charles actively represses an alternate English history, one in which Clementina accepts his proposal and England accepts the Pretender's wooing. Such a thing cannot, or must not, be imagined.

*Sir Charles Grandison* is an exercise in promoting tolerance and goodwill for people of different nations and religions, and argues that such tolerance will make everyone happier. But the terms under which that tolerance is established require the suppression of a community which, by its very existence, violates them. Richardson encourages his readers to treat that community with respect and charity anyway, but he also teaches them not to speak of it. He writes about (or rather, around) the English Catholic condition realistically, acknowledging that their situation is unfortunate and unfair, and he indirectly and discreetly argues against the most negative representations of them. Certainly even his obscure references to them are more generous and honest than Defoe's erratic portrayals of Catholics in his conduct books. Richardson rejects the *Papist Misrepresented*. Any yet, he does not offer a *Papist Represented* in its place, at least, not an English Papist, which was the kind most in need of positive representation. Indeed, Richardson makes it very clear that it is best not to represent English Catholics at



all. In some ways, *Sir Charles Grandison* closets the English Catholic community more securely than many far more hostile texts do.

But there are efforts by English Catholic writers in the eighteenth century to escape this closet. Indeed, one of them, Alexander Pope, is quoted or spoken of admiringly several times in the novel.<sup>56</sup> Much as Milton's genius as a man of letters makes him an acceptable presence in the Porrettas' home in Italy, Pope's stature allows him the right to speak in a novel where English Catholics are otherwise silenced. Dryden, too, receives great praise. His late poem, "Alexander's Feast," which was set to music by Handel, is sung and quoted repeatedly in the novel. Sir Charles, we are told, believes that "it is the noblest composition that ever was produced by man; and is as finely set, as written" (1:239).<sup>57</sup> Given that Dryden's (mostly pre-conversion) heroic and tragic plays were associated with villainy and libertinage in *Clarissa*, the prominence of this post-conversion poem in *Sir Charles Grandison* may be a kind of apology to the former poet laureate, or an acknowledgement of his reform and of the religious integrity of his old age. Whether or not we are meant to see something utopian in the inclusion of these English Catholics' words in this novel, their presence indicates their triumph over the demands of silence placed on their community.

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<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, 1:56.

<sup>57</sup> See 1:477n239.

## Part Three

## Catholic Literature and a Feminine Religious Community

## Prologue to Part Three

It is not coincidence that Defoe and Richardson's explorations of English Catholicism both focus on female characters. These writers are working out of a long tradition which treats the Catholic religion as ignorant, irrational, and carnal, fit only for the weak and sensual minds of women.<sup>1</sup> Two eighteenth-century Catholic writers, Alexander Pope and Elizabeth Inchbald, also portray their religious community as feminine in their writings, but for rather different reasons. Pope and Inchbald recognize that the marginalization of English Catholics feminizes them. When they attempt to give a voice to their community's experiences, they seek sympathy and acknowledgement through the more culturally acceptable figure of the woman in distress. Indeed, both writers explore Catholic oppression in literary forms associated with women.

Pope models his poems *Eloisa to Abelard* and *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* on, respectively, Ovidian heroic epistle and elegy. In the first, Eloisa, a cloistered nun, is pulled between her desire for her husband, Abelard, and the demands of her sacred vows. In the *Elegy*, a Poet grieves over a Lady's suicide, blaming the world for its meanness and indifference to her suffering—and blaming the Lady for her

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<sup>1</sup> See Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious Ideology & Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), chap. 2.

unwillingness to compromise with it. Pope composed them in the aftermath of the 1715 Jacobite Rising, when his religious community was caught between its loyalty to the Catholic Stuart Pretender and the practical imperative to submit to the Protestant king, George I. The theme of self-destruction which runs through these poems, and the feelings of anger, frustration, and despair which accompany it, give expression to the experiences of Catholics during this period of uncertainty.

At the latter end of the century, the politically radical Inchbald explores the injustices practiced against both women and Catholics. To do so, she turns to a form that women had played a crucial role in developing and that had given them a public voice for over a century: the novel. Most critics have focused on Inchbald's questioning of the social institutions that prevented women from developing into mature intellectual beings—including the Catholic Church. But she juxtaposes her female characters' resistance to patriarchal social institutions with her Catholic characters' resistance to contemptuous and feminizing treatment. She suggests that Catholics, too, have developed deformed characters as a result of oppressive social institutions. Her novel portrays these characters' intense emotional and intellectual struggles as their better natures succumb to, or triumph over, their internalization of their culture's strict religious and gender hierarchies.

Pope was Catholic and physically disabled; Inchbald was Catholic and a woman. Both thus lived in the unfortunate condition of being doubly excluded from full participation in public life. They did not simply write from the Catholic margins of English society; they wrote from beyond those margins, from a feminine or feminized perspective. This position sharpened their awareness not just of the injustices of

Protestant hegemony, but also of the ways in which their religious community victimized its own members. Pope is as critical of Catholic intransigence as he is of Protestant persecution; Inchbald treats her Protestant heroine more sympathetically than her Catholic hero. Their experiences gave them insight into abuses of power, and they did not spare their coreligionists when they saw them committing the same abuses for which they held Protestants accountable.

While the social insights of these authors are impressive, the most lasting contributions of their attempts to work through Catholic victimization may be their generic experimentation. Each of these writers was on the vanguard of a literary movement associated with portrayals of abjection in the face of tyranny and injustice. Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* and *Elegy* have been described as proto-Gothic, while Inchbald's *A Simple Story* is considered a key early text in the Jacobin novel movement. That Catholic writers should have broken the trail to both of these genres should hardly come as a surprise. Gothic and Jacobin novels exploded in popularity in the 1790s, as England's police state created writers and readers who needed literature that could help them make sense of their increasingly oppressive society. But Catholics had lived in similarly oppressive conditions for centuries. The following chapters suggest that those conditions played a critical role in the development of two major eighteenth-century literary genres.

## Chapter Five

### Alexander Pope and Catholic Division

In a letter written in the spring of 1717, Alexander Pope makes a rather morbid comment about a forthcoming publication: “I shall very soon print an entire collection of my own madrigals, which I look upon as making my last will and testament, since in it I shall give all I ever intend to give.”<sup>1</sup> We might read this statement as merely a dark joke (of which there are many in Pope’s correspondence), were it not for the fact that the preface to the 1717 *Works of Mr. Alexander Pope* is written in the same spirit. There, Pope questions whether to consider himself, in collecting his works, “as a man building a monument, or burying the dead”; wonders “if this publication be only a more solemn funeral of [his] Remains”; and concludes by suggesting that, if his volume of poetry is soon forgotten, his fellow poets ought to view it as “a *Memento mori*.”<sup>2</sup> There is a level of seriousness in this banter. Pope’s excuse for his poetry’s faults suggests why: “But the true reason these pieces are not more correct, is owing to the consideration how short a time they, and I, have to live.” With his frail body and frequent illnesses, Pope had good reason to fear an early death, and to imply that his poetic genius would be tragically cut off in the prime of his life.

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 396 (hereafter cited in text as *CP* by page number).

<sup>2</sup> Pope, preface to *The Works of Mr. Alexander Pope* (London, 1717), n.p.

Yet for all his obsession with his own death in the *Works*, Pope makes no mention of illness or tragedy. He instead identifies with martyrs and convicts. “The life of a Wit is a warfare upon earth,” he writes, “and the present spirit of the world is such, that to attempt to serve it (any way) one must have the constancy of a martyr, and a resolution to suffer for its sake.” Requesting leniency from critical readers, he asks that his young age “may be made (as it never fails to be in Executions) a case of compassion.”<sup>3</sup> Such analogies are not uncommon in the hyperbole of the prefatory material of the age. Still, given Pope’s preoccupation with his own death, we ought to consider why this sickly poet is drawn to metaphors of violence and persecution.

His correspondence reveals that martyrdom and execution were truly on his mind in the two years leading up to the publication of the *Works*. In a letter of 1716 to his friend, patron, and fellow Catholic, John Caryll, he makes this note about his final departure from his home at Binfield:

I write this from Windsor Forest, [of] which I am come to take my last look and leave of. We here bid our papist-neighbours adieu, much as those who go to be hanged do their fellow-prisoners, who are condemned to follow ’em a few weeks after. (*CP* 336-37, brackets in the original)

Pope is barely exaggerating. He has been chased from his home by Catholic penal legislation, and his “papist-neighbours” may soon lose their homes, too—and perhaps more than their homes. England’s Catholic community was in the midst of its greatest period of crisis since the revolution of 1688.

The Protestant George I of Hanover had succeeded to the English throne in 1714, despite the fact that the Catholic Pretender, James Francis Edward Stuart, was its most direct heir. The 1715 Jacobite Rising attempted to overthrow George I, and failed

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<sup>3</sup> Pope, preface to *Works*, n.p.

disastrously. Not all Jacobites were Catholic, yet Catholics bore the brunt of the backlash for the rebellion. Parliament passed new legislation which threatened to ruin Catholic landowners who did not abjure James Stuart and swear the oaths of supremacy and allegiance. Many English Catholics believed the act was intended to extinguish their community once and for all.

Pope was not an active participant in these political events. Like most Catholics in England, he chose to keep his head down and let events play themselves out. But no thoughtful Englishman (let alone a Catholic one) could avoid thinking about the uncertain future of the kingdom or fail to ponder where his loyalties would lie if pressed into a corner. And as a well-known Catholic whose poor health and aging parents made fleeing England a dubious proposition, the probability of being pressed into a corner was substantial for Pope. In 1716, the danger to both his and his parents' health was exacerbated by the penal legislation which harried them from their Binfield home, and by the bigoted attacks launched against Pope by his literary and political enemies.<sup>4</sup> If the probability of anti-Catholic sentiment manifesting in an actual program of Catholic executions was negligible, the probability that Pope might be hounded to death by legislation was not. His dedication to being a famous wit might very well have meant his martyrdom.

Pope wrote only two major original poems in the years immediately following the uprising, and they make a striking contrast with the rest of his oeuvre. These poems are *Eloisa to Abelard* and *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*. Romantic and emotional, even Gothic to modern eyes (the genre, of course, would not be defined until

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<sup>4</sup> For details about these personal attacks, see Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 299-301

mid-century), they are unlike anything else Pope ever wrote. Most criticism has assumed that their unusual qualities are either the consequence of a painful infatuation with one or more women, or simply the result of excellent poetic craftsmanship. I contend that the intensely emotional nature of these poems link them to the turmoil within the English Catholic community in the wake of the 1715 Rising. In these years, Pope faced the first great Catholic crisis of his adulthood, one which threatened to end his promising but still nascent career as a poet. We should expect these circumstances to have had an influence on his work, and the aberrational characteristics of these poems argue in favor of viewing them as responses to this uniquely unstable period in his life.

Suggestive parallels appear between the affective states of the forlorn lovers who speak in these poems and the anxieties and fears expressed in Pope's letters from the same period. Tortured, yearning, self-doubting and self-debating, these lovers exhibit the powerful emotions and nervous cogitations plaguing Pope and his coreligionists. The confluence of imagery in the poems relating to religion, captivity, exile, and death betrays the preoccupations of the mind that composed them.

Most importantly, the circumstances of the woman at the heart of each poem evoke the Catholic crisis. Eloisa is torn between her marriage vow, in which her heart lies, and her coerced religious vow, which is supposed to supersede the earlier vow. Meanwhile, the Lady whose suicide is lamented in the *Elegy* chooses to die rather than be forced into marriage with a man she does not love. In one poem, the crisis results from a conflict between vows made; in the other, from a vow refused. These poems were written at a time when legislation demanded Catholics swear oaths to a *de facto* Protestant king and abjure a *de jure* Catholic king—a moral quandary exacerbated by the language of the



oaths tendered, as swearing them would amount to apostasy. Complicating the question of oaths even further was the Oath Controversy, a debate which developed within the English Catholic community when a number of Catholic leaders attempted to devise an oath of submission to Hanover that would *not* require apostasy. Pope, Eloisa, and the Lady face similar dilemmas over matters of loyalty and self-preservation. In speaking for these women, Pope also speaks for himself and his religious community.

This chapter begins with a brief account of post-1715 crisis in the Catholic community and how it affected Pope and his family. The history of the Oath Controversy receives particular attention, as this highly consequential dispute is little known outside of historical studies of the Catholic community. We then turn to Pope's correspondence from this period, as well as to some of the new poetry in the *1717 Works*, for insight into Pope's response to the crisis. Between his frequently expressed fears for the future of the Catholic community and his strong intellectual commitment to peace and resignation, it is clear that Pope took the crisis seriously, and probable that he would have supported submission to the Hanoverian regime. Nevertheless, his ties to people with stronger Jacobite sympathies placed him in an awkward position.

With this groundwork established, we turn to *Eloisa to Abelard*. Pope's correspondence reveals that he composed the poem at a time when he was despairing over the Catholic community's future. This chapter's reading of the poem examines how Pope connects the current state of that community to the heroine's emotional struggle over conflicting desires and loyalties. The slipperiness of the poem's allusions to contemporary concerns, combined with its focus on struggle over resolution, prevents it from taking any sides in the political debates of the day. Rather, it simply gives voice to

the agony of indecision and helplessness, while reminding readers that they are not alone in their pain.

Lastly, we examine the *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*'s allusions to Catholic poetic traditions, the Blessed Virgin, and religious and social conflict. These allusions suggest that the Lady's suffering and suicide also channel Pope's emotions over the current crisis. The *Elegy* is a much angrier poem than *Eloisa to Abelard*, and it criticizes the Catholic community as much as it does the community's enemies. The community's self-destructive refusal to make peace with Hanover informs the poem's central theme of suicide and the anger and despair which characterize the verse. The gloom of *Eloisa to Abelard* and the despair of the *Elegy* are not merely aesthetic choices as they often would be in later Gothic texts; they are evidence of real pain and fear at a moment of great uncertainty in Pope's life.

### **Pope, Crisis, and Controversy**

Born into a devout Catholic household, Pope's religious and philosophical opinions evolved constantly throughout his life, often toward universalistic or deistic principles. Untangling what exactly Pope believed, and when, is a complex problem, and one that continues to be discussed. Even so, anyone approaching Pope's work with an eye toward his personal beliefs must give some thought to his self-identification as a Catholic.<sup>5</sup> Pope was perceived by most of the public, as well as by his family and friends,

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<sup>5</sup> William Warburton, the Church of England bishop to whom Pope left the copyright of his works after his death, began a tradition of "Protestantizing" Pope. Some of his contemporaries, meanwhile, viewed him as a freethinking deist. These perceptions of Pope remain important to discussions of his works today, but they now require greater qualification and nuance. Forty years ago, G. Douglas Atkins made a compelling case that it was "improbable" that Pope was a deist in "Pope and Deism: A New Analysis," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1972): 257-78. The following year, Chester Chapin took Atkins's argument even further (although he appears not to have read him), in "Alexander Pope: Erasmian Catholic,"

as a Catholic (if not always a very good one), and he drew a disproportionate number of his close acquaintances from the Catholic community, especially early in his life. Even if these external connections to Catholicism masked heterodox opinions, Pope's life and work cannot be properly contextualized without accounting for his recusancy.

While modern research into the impact of Catholic thought on Pope's works dates at least to Alexander Thornton's 1952 book, *Alexander Pope: Catholic Poet*, studies exploring how political and social disabilities entailed by Pope's recusancy inform his work began in earnest with a 1990 essay by Paul Gabriner.<sup>6</sup> Gabriner's essay reveals how deeply Pope felt the loss of his family home at Binfield, which he was forced to sell out of fear of having the property seized under the terms of penal legislation.<sup>7</sup> In the two decades since this essay was published, a substantial body of criticism has developed which explores the role of the Catholic community and persecution in works ranging from Pope's early successes in *Windsor-Forest* and *The Rape of the Lock*, to his late masterpiece, *The Dunciad*.<sup>8</sup> A study of Pope's religious practices by Thomas Woodman

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*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 6, no. 4 (1973): 411-30. Chapin claims that Pope's practices and opinions fall within the scope of a humanistic, Erasmian conception of Catholicism. He argues that Pope "sincerely believed" he was Catholic, however unorthodox his practice of the religion might have been (*ibid.*, 430). And Chapin follows Francis Beauchesne Thornton in pointing out that eighteenth-century English Catholics lacked a single, orthodox catechism, a fact which allowed them a great deal of latitude in belief and practice. See Chapin, "Alexander Pope: Erasmian Catholic," 420; and Thornton, *Alexander Pope: Catholic Poet* (New York: Pellegrini & Cudahy, 1952), 23. More recently, Howard Erskine-Hill has noted that the supposed Deism of Pope's late work is not very different from some of his early efforts, written when his Catholic identity was, presumably, stronger. Erskine-Hill suggests that Pope's universalism was not a product of deism or atheism, but had "much to do with his experience of sectarian narrowness and upbringing in a persecuted church." "Alexander Pope: The Political Poet in His Time," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15, no. 2 (1981-82): 136.

<sup>6</sup> "The Papist's House, the Papist's Horse: Alexander Pope and the Removal from Binfield," in *Centennial Hauntings: Pope, Byron and Eliot in the Year 88*, ed. C. C. Barfoot and Theo D'Haen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), 13-64.

<sup>7</sup> Thornton also makes a strong (arguably hyperbolic) statement about the effect of legal disabilities on Pope's life (*Alexander Pope: Catholic Poet*, 3-25, especially 5-9), but his reading of Pope concentrates on Catholic religion and thought rather than on society and politics.

<sup>8</sup> Pat Rogers's two book study of *Windsor-Forest* makes clear that poem's concern about the Catholic community living in unofficial exile in the forest. Rogers also asserts that the anti-Williamite subtext of the poem (which marks the former king "above all ... as the author of anti-Catholic legislation") would have

has suggested that Pope saw a continuity between his identities as “Papist” and poet—a continuity based largely in persecution and suffering.<sup>9</sup> More recently, an essay by Peter Davidson revisits and extends the work of earlier critics like Gabriner who have investigated Pope’s Catholic identity.<sup>10</sup> The inclusion in the recent *Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope* of two essays that note the importance of Catholic persecution to Pope’s self-construction as a man and a poet is a strong indication that these ideas have achieved mainstream currency in Pope studies.<sup>11</sup>

The threat posed to Catholics, and to Pope in particular, by penal laws during and after the 1715 Rising has been ably treated by these and other scholars, so I shall only present a brief summary of those circumstances here. In 1714 and 1715, Parliament issued proclamations calling for the enforcement of several old and widely ignored anti-Catholic laws. Among the renewed prohibitions were those against Catholics possessing firearms, owning horses worth more than five pounds, and dwelling within ten miles of

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been perfectly visible to his mostly Tory and disproportionately Catholic coterie. *Pope and the Destiny of the Stuarts: History, Politics, and Mythology in the Age of Queen Anne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 100-101; and *The Symbolic Design of “Windsor-Forest”: Iconography, Pageant, and Prophecy in Pope’s Early Work* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), 160-75. Rogers’s work is both extended and critiqued by Juan Christian Pellicer’s analysis of *Windsor-Forest*, which posits that the near-rape and transformation of Lodona in the poem allegorizes the persecution of nonjurors and their exile to the forest. “Corkscrew or Cathedral?: The Politics of Alexander Pope’s *Windsor-Forest* and the Dynamics of Literary Kind,” *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2008): 469-71. Hester Jones has offered a new analysis of Pope’s religiosity in his poetic oeuvre, with particular attention to *The Dunciad*. Jones is sensitive to how Catholic thought and conditions inform a religious sensibility that is “oblique and pervasively present” in the poetry. “‘Religion blushing veils her sacred fire’: Pope and the Veil of Faith,” in *Literary Milieux: Essays in Text and Context Presented to Howard Erskine-Hill*, ed. David Womersley and Richard McCabe (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 227. Recent criticism on *The Rape of the Lock* will be examined below.

<sup>9</sup> See Thomas Woodman, “Pope: The Papist and the Poet,” *Essays in Criticism* 46, no. 3 (1996): 219-33.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Davidson, “Pope’s Recusancy,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 38, no. 1 (2005): 63-76.

<sup>11</sup> Helen Deutsch argues that Pope turned his disenfranchisement as a Catholic and his physical deformations into poetic advantages, “transform[ing] his marginality into a source of creative self-reflection, self-possession, and self-legitimation.” “Pope, Self, and World,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 14. While Deutsch sees Pope turning his Catholic marginality into poetic authority, Brian Young finds that Pope used this marginality as a source of ideological authority. Young argues that Pope’s Catholicism granted him “a unique role as a protected outsider looking in at a religious and political world direct entry to which was otherwise denied him.” “Pope and Ideology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander Pope*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 124.

London.<sup>12</sup> But by January of 1716, news of an even more draconian law began to circulate, sending tremors through the Catholic community. The rumored law came to be known as the Registration Act, and was passed by Parliament in June 1716. It required Catholics to register their estates, to swear the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, and to make a declaration against transubstantiation (which no Catholic could do in good conscience). Any Catholic failing to do so by the prescribed deadline would forfeit two thirds of his estate to the government, unless the government decided, in lieu of seizure, to levy one hundred thousand pounds from the community. Had this seizure taken place, it would have ruined landowning Catholics. Without the protection and patronage of the Catholic gentry, Catholic ecclesiastics and commoners would also have been in straitened circumstances. Such a severe act was understood by many Catholics as an attempt to rid the country permanently of any sort of functioning Catholic community.<sup>13</sup>

Catholic responses to the Registration Act began while it was still only a rumor. A few members of the gentry chose to avoid the penalty by conforming to the Church of England, a fact which, as Pope notes in one of his letters, created hard feelings within the community.<sup>14</sup> Many other Catholics (the Popes among them) sold their property before the law either robbed them or created a buyer's market that undervalued their estates.

These responses to the act—submission either to the Church of England or to persecution—are well known. But some Catholics adopted a more assertive approach. Catholic leaders, both aristocratic and clerical, pursued a political compromise that would forestall the full execution of the Registration Act and save their community. The primary

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<sup>12</sup> These prohibitions cost Pope a horse gifted to him by John Caryll (*ibid.*, 47-50).

<sup>13</sup> See Donald Lee McAbee Jr., "Papist Peers and Politics: The English Roman Catholic Nobility, 1688-1719" (PhD diss., University of South Carolina, 2010), 312.

<sup>14</sup> Gabriel Glickman, *The English Catholic Community, 1688-1745: Politics, Culture, and Ideology* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2009), 58; and *CP* 335-36.

means they took to this end was to devise an oath of submission to Hanover “that would be acceptable to their consciences, the Papacy, and the English government.”<sup>15</sup> This project was to preoccupy the community for at least four years after the passage of the act. As the oath project has received little attention from literary scholars, I will describe it in some detail here.<sup>16</sup>

Catholic oath projects had been attempted at least four times since the Glorious Revolution, most recently in 1714 in response to George I’s accession.<sup>17</sup> They had always met with failure. These earlier oath projects, however, were primarily undertaken by Catholics acting unilaterally; this time, the Whig ministry was actively involved in working with Catholics to devise and find support for an oath. Indeed, the ministry would soon be more interested in the oath than the Catholics. It encouraged the project with assurances that, if an oath were settled upon, those willing to swear it would be exempt from the penal laws, including the Registration Act.<sup>18</sup>

Initially, the oath project gained a surprising amount of support from members of the Catholic nobility in England and even from the clergy, many of whom believed that Catholics had been reduced to a choice between loyalty to Hanover and the extinction of their religion. The clerical leadership met in the summer of 1716 and approved an oath of submission, pending papal approval.<sup>19</sup> A Vatican objection to part of the oath was the

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<sup>15</sup> McAbee, “Papist Peers and Politics,” 308.

<sup>16</sup> For the fullest account of the Catholic oath project, see McAbee, “Papist Peers and Politics,” 308-69. Gabriel Glickman and Eamon Duffy also offer valuable accounts of the project. See Glickman, *The English Catholic Community*, 129-46 and Duffy, “‘Englishmen in vaine’: Roman Catholic Allegiance to George I,” *Studies in Church History* 18 (1982): 345-65.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to the 1714 project, there was an attempt in 1696 following the Assassination Plot on William III, another after the signing of the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, and yet another in 1706.

<sup>18</sup> McAbee, “Papist Peers and Politics,” 317-21.

<sup>19</sup> Duffy claims that, in fact, the clergy were not enthused about the oath, but the project’s leaders’ rapid success in gaining support among the gentry pressed them into retroactively giving it their approval (“‘Englishmen in vaine,’” 348-49).

project's first major setback. While the Vatican did not oppose submission to Hanover, it would not approve the oath's declaration against the pope's power to absolve oaths to temporal rulers. Without this rejection of the pope's dispensing power, the English government would never accept the oath.<sup>20</sup>

This refusal was a blow to the project, but the oath may still have been salvageable. Supporters of the oath sent an agent to Rome in an attempt to convince the Vatican to grant English Catholics the level of latitude regarding papal power that was tolerated in the French Church, in the hope that this would be sufficient to satisfy the English government.<sup>21</sup> Such diplomacy characterized the entire project, which was as much an international as a national effort. Many of the strongest English proponents of the oath belonged to a pro-Austrian faction (mostly composed of those in exile in the Holy Roman Empire or with ties to exiles there); its fiercest opponent was the Stuart court-in-exile in France. Resentment at foreign interference brewed on both sides. Jacobites considered Austria an interloper, and believed that many of the oath's supporters were more concerned about weakening France (James Stuart's strongest ally) than with assisting English Catholics. Meanwhile, one of the project's early leaders, Bishop John Stonor, accused Stuart supporters of preferring the extinction of the Catholic religion to any sign of compromise with the new regime.<sup>22</sup>

Stonor was right to fear Stuart interference. Once the Jacobite faithful mobilized against the project, support for the oath among English Catholics quickly began to erode. By late 1716, the English clerical leadership that had so quickly embraced the project had

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<sup>20</sup> McAbee, "Papist Peers and Politics," 326-27.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 331-332.

<sup>22</sup> Glickman, *The English Catholic Community*, 132. For details about the diplomatic wrangling that went on throughout Europe over this project, see *ibid.*, 135-42.

turned strongly against it. A personal visit by James Stuart to the pope in the spring of 1717 pushed the Vatican even further away from a conciliatory approach to Hanover. This visit probably ended any realistic possibility of the project's success. Whatever remote possibility remained evaporated by early 1718, James having successfully pressured many of England's most influential Catholic peers to withdraw their support from the project.<sup>23</sup>

Yet the project dragged on for another two years, as the Whig ministry threatened the enforcement of the Registration Act if Catholics did not fall in line.<sup>24</sup> Several prominent Catholics were singled out to be coerced into cooperation by such threats, including Pope's friend, Edward Blount (who had been a major early supporter of the project, and who had supported the 1714 oath project as well).<sup>25</sup> The English government even attempted to engage the Holy Roman Emperor to muster support for the oath, both in England and in the Vatican (illustrating why Sir Charles Grandison thought it so important to maintain strong ties with the Habsburgs).<sup>26</sup> Although it seems that Catholic leaders believed that the government was serious in its threat to enforce the Registration Act, their private letters reveal that they now only pretended to cooperate with the government; in reality, the project's "leaders" were in unanimous opposition to an oath, come what may.<sup>27</sup>

This (private) display of unity may have been born out of a brief flirtation with disastrous division. As factions lined up for and against the oath, the project threatened to

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<sup>23</sup> See McAbee, "Papist Peers and Politics," 322-39.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 341-42, 358-59.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 344; and Duffy, "Englishmen in vaine," 347. It is unclear if any threats were actually made to Blount. However, he did engage in negotiations with the government over the oath as late as 1719-20 (McAbee, "Papist Peers and Politics," 361).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 348-50.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 359-60.



divide the Catholic community, and a worse schism was feared should the oath fail to satisfy all consciences.<sup>28</sup> Some Catholics would swear submission and obtain relief, while others, believing such an oath to be a breach of faith with the rightful king, would remain under the burden of the penal laws, or perhaps face new, violent penalties. Even the oath's supporters acknowledged this potential outcome. Bishop Stonor assured the English government that anyone who would not take the oath deserved whatever punishment the government saw fit to mete out.<sup>29</sup> To a small and persecuted community, complete unity was, perhaps, more important to survival than property. And to adopt a uniform position, it necessarily had to bow to tenderer consciences.

While the project ultimately failed to produce an oath that would reconcile Catholics to the Hanoverian government, it did achieve the goal that originally inspired it: it prevented the Registration Act's provisions for seizing Catholic estates from being enforced. By dragging out negotiations for four years, Catholics outlasted the fierce anti-Catholic zeal spawned by the 1715 Rising.<sup>30</sup>

We have no direct evidence that Pope knew anything about the oath project. Yet given how critical these activities were to the future of the Catholic community in England, it is certain that they would have been the subject of much of Pope's conversation with his influential Catholic and even Protestant Tory friends at this time. What, then, did he think of it?

It is likely that, left to his own devices, he would have supported it. The fact that Pope seems to have refused the original oaths demanded by the Registration Act is

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<sup>28</sup> Glickman, *The English Catholic Community*, 142-44.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 132. Bishop Stonor was not popular with his fellow Catholics.

<sup>30</sup> McAbee raises the possibility that even the initial enthusiasm of Catholic leaders for the oath may have been a bluff intended to delay execution of the act until passions excited by the 1715 Rising died down ("Papist Peers and Politics," 340-41).

irrelevant,<sup>31</sup> since swearing those oaths would have amounted to renouncing Catholicism. When Pope writes to the Blount sisters in August 1715 that certain “Tyrants” would have him swear “impossible” things, he is referring to these oaths (*CP* 311). But the leaders of the oath project were attempting to devise an oath that a man like Pope would not find impossible to swear, at least not for religious reasons.

Political reasons were a different matter, but whatever Pope’s feelings were for the House of Stuart, they were probably not strong enough to overcome the urgent needs of the moment. Scholars have long noted a Jacobite strain in Pope’s work, but it is not consistent.<sup>32</sup> As early as his *Pastorals*, there are signs of an attempt to make peace with the revolution settlement,<sup>33</sup> and in his more mature years, his Jacobitism has more to do with opposition to the narrowness of Whig government than with loyalty to the Stuarts.<sup>34</sup> Pope seems to have honestly abhorred war, particularly civil war. During the peak of the rebellion, he wrote to a friend, “Quiet in the state, which like charity in religion, is too much the perfection and happiness of either, to be broken or violated on any pretense or prospect whatsoever: Fire and sword, and fire and faggot are equally my aversion” (324). There is little in the rest of the correspondence that would contradict these sentiments.

Moreover, it is clear from his letters that Pope considered the situation of Catholics desperate, a fact which would probably trump concerns about royal legitimacy.

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<sup>31</sup> Erskine-Hill has noted that, in spite of the dictates of the penal laws, there is no record of Pope or his father taking the oaths. One potential record of Pope having refused to take the oaths exists, but the identity of the person concerned cannot be verified as the poet with much confidence. See Erskine-Hill, “Pope and Civil Conflict,” in *Enlightened Groves: Essays in Honour of Professor Zenzo Suzuki*, ed. Eiichi & Hiroshi Ozawa and Peter Robinson (Tokyo: Shohakusha, 1996), 97-98.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Erskine-Hill, “Political Poet in His Time,” 141. Steven Stryer has recently suggested that Pope remained loyal to the Stuarts, at least in spirit, due to their favorable treatment of Catholics, but he also notes that Pope did not think very highly of the Stuart kings as governors. See “Allegiance, Sympathy, and History: The Catholics Loyalties of Alexander Pope,” *Religion in the Age of Enlightenment 2* (2010): 103-29.

As early as the summer of 1714, shortly after Queen Anne's death, he comments upon his coreligionists' precarious situation,<sup>35</sup> and his letters of 1715 and the first half of 1716 frequently return to the subject. Some of these letters express anxiety or depression, others a philosophical resignation. Sometimes he attempts to treat these affairs wittily, particularly when writing to the Blount sisters; often these attempts fall flat, or are at best darkly humorous.<sup>36</sup> By 1717, Pope refers to the troubles less frequently, perhaps beginning to hope that matters would not get any worse. Yet even as late as September of that year, he could write to Edward Blount in a vein suggesting that Catholics may still be doomed:

Your endeavours of Service and good Advices to the poor Papists, put me in mind of *Noah's* preaching forty years to those folks that were to be drowned at last. At the worst I heartily wish your Ark may find an *Ararat*, and the Wife and Family, (the hopes of the good Patriarch) land safely after the Deluge .... (424-25)

The "endeavours of Service and good Advices" to which Pope refers are almost certainly Blount's work on and promotion of the oath project, which he was still deeply involved in that year.<sup>37</sup> The Catholic community's growing distaste for the project would have been apparent by this time, and Pope is once again pessimistic about its future.

Yet in spite of his apparent approval of Blount's work on the oath, Pope may still have refused to take it himself. If his father refused the oath, Pope's filial piety would have prevented him from swearing it, regardless of what he thought of it. And how would he feel if he swore the oath, but Caryll (whose sympathies were with the Jacobites)

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<sup>35</sup> See the letter to Caryll dated 16 August 1714 (*CP* 240-42).

<sup>36</sup> It is doubtful the sisters would have found Pope's jokes about joining a regiment to gang-rape them during the coming civil war particularly funny. See the letter dated 23 July 1715 (*CP* 307-309).

<sup>37</sup> The Duke of Norfolk (the leader of the Catholic gentry) tasked Blount in December 1716 with lobbying the Catholic German electors to pressure their fellow elector, George of Hanover, to look favorably on the oath project (Duffy, "Englishmen in vaine," 352).

refused it? He could not have escaped contemplating such scenarios in the years that the oath project was underway.

The changing circumstances of the Catholic community can be seen in the composition history of *The Rape of the Lock*, a poem which was, from its first conception, about and for that community. Caryll urged Pope to write it, concerned at the breach that had developed between the Catholic Petre and Fermor families over the theft of the lock. When he asked Pope “to write a poem to make a jest of it, and laugh them together again,” he was probably less concerned with soothing wounded egos than with healing a community that could ill afford division, even in the tolerant reign of Queen Anne.<sup>38</sup> Howard Erskine-Hill has shown that in the 1712 and 1714 versions of the poem, the comedy of the rape “reveals a Jacobite vision” of English politics, albeit with great subtlety. The 1714 version particularly “seems to endorse Belinda’s resistance” of the violation.<sup>39</sup> However, the thirty-four lines Pope adds to the poem for its inclusion in the 1717 *Works*—comprising Clarissa’s speech—reject resistance, endorsing instead “orthodox Anglican obedience to the higher powers.”<sup>40</sup> We women, Clarissa suggests, will be more admired and better off if instead we “keep good Humour still whate’er we lose?”<sup>41</sup> Thus, after the failed attempt at Stuart restoration, Pope tweaks his masterpiece to support submission—or at least, to appear to support submission. As Clarissa

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Spence, *Anecdotes, Observations and Characters of Books and Men: Collected from the Conversation of Mr. Pope and Other Eminent Persons of His Time by the Reverend Joseph Spence* (London: Centaur Press, 1964), 126-27.

<sup>39</sup> Erskine-Hill, *Poetry of Opposition and Revolution: Dryden to Wordsworth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 83, 84. Erskine-Hill’s readings of the political implications of this evolving poem are found on pages 71-93 in this book, as well as in “Pope and Civil Conflict,” 93-97.

<sup>40</sup> Erskine-Hill, *Poetry of Opposition and Revolution*, 92.

<sup>41</sup> Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, in *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt, vol. 2, *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*, ed. Geoffrey Tillotson, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1962), 201, canto 5, line 30. All references to Pope’s poetry are to this volume unless otherwise noted. Criticism in this volume is hereafter cited as *TE* in text by page number.

collaborated in the original theft of the lock, we could read this endorsement of passivity as propaganda rather than wisdom.

The new lines in *The Rape of the Lock* openly suggest that women lead precarious, dependent lives; more circumspectly, they argue that Catholics lead such lives as well. Women and Catholics, in this respect, have much in common. This observation is implicit in other poetry new to the 1717 *Works*. The “Epistle to Miss Blount, on her Leaving the Town after the Coronation” ostensibly teases Teresa Blount, a young fashionable Catholic lady and a friend of Pope’s, for her dissatisfaction at being forced to leave London for the countryside. Yet a poem written in late 1714 (or possibly later) about a Catholic woman forced to leave London suggests more than mere light-hearted misogyny. Many old penal laws had been enforced by the end of 1714. The next year would see Catholics banned from London and a new Riot Act to break up assemblies.<sup>42</sup> If Teresa Blount had little control over her life as a woman, so did Pope as a Catholic. Like Blount, he was threatened with the prospect of being forced to move “from opera, park, assembly, play, / To morning-walks, and prayers three hours a day.” He, too, might worry that soon would vanish his visions of “sceptres, coronets, and balls, / And leave [him] in lone woods, or empty walls!”<sup>43</sup>

Scholars have noted that Pope, in spite of the ugly strain of misogyny that runs through his work, seems often to have identified with the condition of women, and an old critical tradition censures his verse as “feminine.”<sup>44</sup> While these attacks often allude to

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<sup>42</sup> Gabriner, “The Papist’s House,” 33.

<sup>43</sup> Pope, “Epistle to Miss Blount, on her Leaving the Town after the Coronation,” in *Alexander Pope: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 122-123, lines 13-14, 39-40.

<sup>44</sup> Valerie Rumbold, for instance, explores how Pope’s deformity and Catholicity “barred him from crucial masculine activities.” She suggests that Pope’s emasculated position helped fuel his criticism of patriarchal authority in *Eloisa to Abelard* and the *Elegy*. “Pope and Gender,” *The Cambridge Companion to Alexander*

Pope's physical disabilities, it is probable that they are also informed by his religious background.<sup>45</sup> Pope, we can be sure, had enough observation to see that English Catholic men were "feminized, deliberately emasculated, and deprived of all things which build male elite identity by the [penal] laws."<sup>46</sup> His misogyny is, to an extent, self-loathing, an attempt to deny his own emasculation by attacking the feminine. These circumstances (along with a desire to displace his sense of helplessness) may account for his use of female figures to represent Catholic frustration at oppressive treatment in *The Rape of the Lock* and the "Epistle to Miss Blount." It may explain the presence of two other new poems in the 1717 *Works* that focus on female figures unhappy with their circumstances. In *Eloisa to Abelard* and the *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*, we find more hints of the English Catholic community's crisis. In these poems, however, that crisis is given tragic, rather than humorous, treatment.

### **Eloisa's Conflicting Vows**

As the poem in Pope's oeuvre that most directly presents religious experience in a specifically Catholic context, *Eloisa to Abelard* has long been studied by scholars interested in Pope's Catholic faith. A substantial body of criticism has evaluated the poem in terms of its theological positions, often with an eye to specifically Catholic

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*Pope*, ed. Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 199-200. Steve Clark examines Pope's misogyny in "'Let Blood and Body bear the fault': Pope and Misogyny," *Pope: New Contexts*, ed. David Fairer (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), 81-101. Clark also examines the critical tradition attacking his feminine verse (beginning in Pope's own day) making Pope "victim as well as perpetrator of sexist stereotyping" (ibid., 84).

<sup>45</sup> Francis E. Dolan considers the feminizing impact of the penal laws throughout her book, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), but see especially her discussion of the imaginative construction of male Catholics as an "homme covert" (ibid., 72-85).

<sup>46</sup> Davidson, "Pope's Recusancy," 69.

theology.<sup>47</sup> Other criticism investigates its similarities to a style of poetry whose baroque excesses, sensuality, and mysticism have long associated it with the Catholic Church: metaphysical poetry.<sup>48</sup> While *Eloisa to Abelard* cannot be considered a true metaphysical poem, its sole borrowed line is taken from a metaphysical poet and Catholic convert, Richard Crashaw. Pope openly attributes the line to him, suggesting that he wishes readers to perceive his poem's connection to this tradition.<sup>49</sup> We noted in Chapter Two that Dryden imitates John Donne, one of the highest regarded of the metaphysical poets, in adopting the vocabulary of theological controversy to insinuate hints of Catholic thought into *Don Sebastian*.<sup>50</sup> Pope does not play with theological controversy to the extent that Donne or even Dryden does, but, as the scholar, Rebecca Ferguson also notes,

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<sup>47</sup> Many such readings approach the text from a relatively generic "Christian" perspective, as for instance Robert P. Kalmey does when he demonstrates that the poem possesses a "basic Christian fabric." "Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* and 'Those Celebrated Letters,'" *Philological Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (1968): 165. A few scholars have attempted to demonstrate a specifically Catholic character to *Eloisa to Abelard*'s depiction of religious struggle. Stephen J. Ackerman argues that Eloisa's religious evolution is natural and successful, the result of Pope's "harmonizing of her metamorphosis with Catholic theology, as seen in his references to the workings of the Paraclete." "The Vocation of Pope's Eloisa," *Studies in English Literature* 19, no. 3 (1979): 445. Patricia Bruckmann argues that the poem's engagement with religion has less to do with its theology (which is, however, occasionally influenced by certain Catholic schools of thought) than its depiction of the difficult process by which Eloisa moves from agony to spiritual resignation. "'Religious Hope and Resignation': The Process of 'Eloisa to Abelard,'" *English Studies in Canada* 3, no. 2 (1977): 153-63. More recently, Mary Elizabeth Hotz has suggested that Eloisa's struggles should be historicized within the context of Catholic (and particularly Benedictine) theology. Hotz proposes that answering the question of whether or not Eloisa is redeemed is less important than studying her "ongoing interior struggle," which may allow readers to appreciate the poem's deep spiritual dimensions. "Precious to Grace: Necessary Desolation in Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*," *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 53, no. 3 (2001): 208.

<sup>48</sup> For a reading of the poem as a hybrid of Augustan and metaphysical styles, see Marilyn Francus, "An Augustan's Metaphysical Poem: Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*," *Studies in Philology* 87, no. 4 (1990): 476-91.

<sup>49</sup> Pope, *Eloisa to Abelard*, 337, line 212 and note (hereafter cited in text as *EA* by line number). For more on the poem's indebtedness to Crashaw's poetry and Catholic mysticism, see Robert P. Kalmey, "Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* and some 'pretty conceptions' from Crashaw," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* 241 (1986): 29-40. Patricia Bruckmann provides some excellent information on the mystical religious literature which would have been available to Pope during his youth and young adulthood at Binfield. See "Virgins Visited by Angel Powers: *The Rape of the Lock*, Platonick Love, Sylphs and Some Mysticks," in *The Enduring Legacy: Alexander Pope Tercentenary Essays*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Pat Rogers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 13-20.

<sup>50</sup> For Donne's use of this strategy, see M. Thomas Hester, "'this cannot be said': A Preface to the Reader of Donne's Lyrics," *Christianity and Literature* 39, no. 4 (1990): 365-85.

his fusing of the sexual with the divine signals his (or at least Eloisa's) Catholic sensibilities.<sup>51</sup>

Criticism of *Eloisa to Abelard*, then, while far from unanimous in reading it as a "Catholic" poem, does acknowledge the Catholic qualities of its theological and poetic underpinnings. Thus far, however, no scholar has delved deeply into the question of how Pope's *personal* experiences as a Catholic inform the poem. Maynard Mack, in his authoritative biography of Pope, raises the possibility that the stress of the Catholic crisis may have contributed to the development of this poem and the *Elegy*. But he passes quickly over this possibility in favor of a reading that focuses on the poem's expressions of frustrated erotic desire, as have most readers before and since who seek a connection between Eloisa and her creator.<sup>52</sup> Eloisa, a brilliant and ambitious woman, is forced, against her desires, into a cloistered life away from the man she loves. Pope, a brilliant and ambitious but physically deformed and frail man, is likewise often compelled to dwell alone in the country with his pious parents, forever unable gain the affection of a woman.<sup>53</sup> The poem's final lines justify readers in drawing these parallels. In them, Eloisa declares her affinity with the poet who records her story:

And sure if fate some future Bard shall join  
In sad similitude of griefs to mine,  
Condemn'd whole years in absence to deplore,  
And image charms he must behold no more,  
Such if there be, who loves so long, so well;  
Let him our sad, our tender story tell;

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<sup>51</sup> Rebecca Ferguson writes that "in so far as *Eloisa* expresses the affinity between the earthly and divine in terms of a sublimated but pervasive sensuality, its devotional content seems distinctively to reflect Pope's Catholic sensibilities." *The Unbalanced Mind: Pope and the Rule of Passion* (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1986), 28.

<sup>52</sup> See Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life*, 318-19, 326-31.

<sup>53</sup> For an account of some of the women in Pope's life who have been suspected as influences on both *Eloisa* and the *Unfortunate Lady*, see Rumbold, *Women's Place in Pope's World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 103-109.



The well-sung woes will soothe my pensive ghost;  
 He best can paint 'em, who shall feel 'em most.  
 (EA 359-366)

Pope suggests in a letter to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu that these lines refer to her.<sup>54</sup>

This may be true, but it is also possible that he was simply finding an excuse to flatter her. He had many other things to grieve over at this time, and many friends “whole years in absence to deplore,” as penal legislation drove them from their homes, and even from their country. Indeed, his attribution of a line of the poem to Crashaw does not merely connect his poem to that of a fellow Catholic, but also to a fellow sufferer: Crashaw converted (and died) in exile during the interregnum. A fuller understanding of the human interest of the poem is available if we combine our exploration of its personal dimensions with a consideration of the crisis facing the Catholic community.

Our only information about the composition of *Eloisa to Abelard* is found in a flirtatious letter to Martha Blount. “The Epistle of Eloise grows warm,” Pope writes, “and begins to have some Breathings of the Heart in it, which may make posterity think I was in love” (CP 338). Pope means to imply that Martha is the reason behind these “Breathings of the Heart,” but we have already seen that he implies as much to Lady Mary. It may just as easily be that the passion of the poem is utterly artificial, a demonstration of his mastery of the Ovidian form of the heroic epistle. But reading around this letter in the correspondence provides us with another possible source for the poem’s warmth.

Here we encounter a difficulty. While it seems that Pope wrote this letter to Martha during Holy Week (a fact interesting in itself), it is uncertain in what *year* he

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<sup>54</sup> See the letter of June 1717 (CP 405-407).

wrote it. Both 1716 and 1717 have been proposed.<sup>55</sup> Yet either date, as we shall see, is suggestive.

Suppose we accept the 1716 date. Holy Week that year took place in the last week of March. On 20 March 1716, Pope wrote a letter of a far different character to Caryll. Rumors of the coming Registration Act had been circulating for a couple of months, and the deadline for taking the oaths of allegiance and supremacy had passed on 23 January. This letter is the first Pope had written to his friend since that time, and it opens with a long comment on his and Caryll's resolution to accept their present misfortunes with stoic fortitude. He refuses to profane their "generous voluntary suffering" with the "heroic gallantries" of weak minds. He insists,

Tis enough to do and suffer what we ought; and men should know that the noble power of suffering bravely is as far above that of enterprising greatly, as an unblemished conscience and inflexible resolution are above an accidental flow of spirits or a sudden tide of blood.

But in spite his stoic posturing, Pope's determination to suffer bravely wars with his anger at injustice. He remarks bitterly,

If the whole religious business of mankind, be included in resignation to our Maker, and charity to our fellow creatures; there are now some people, who give us the opportunity of affording as bright an example in practising the one, as themselves haven given an infamous instance of the violation of the other.

His only consolation (if it may be called such) is that "to be ruined thus in the gross, with a whole people, is but like perishing in the general conflagration, where nothing we can value is left behind us" (335).

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<sup>55</sup> Sherburn suggests the 1716 date (*CP* 338n3). Geoffrey Tillotson argues for a 1717 date. See *TE* 311-13.

This last remark leads him to expand his gaze to the rest of their persecuted community. Sadly, that community does not seem to be bearing up well under the present burdens. Pope lists some of its internal dissensions:

[t]he misfortunes of private families, the misunderstandings [of people] whom distresses make suspicious, [and] the coldness of relations whom change of religion may disunite, or the necessities of half-ruined estates render unkind to each other. (336)<sup>56</sup>

Months before the passing of the Registration Act, fissures are already showing in the community.

Pope's reflections move from the abstract to the specific as he considers the affairs of those closest to him. He is, naturally, troubled to "perceive so many anxieties just now springing in those hearts which I have desired a place in, and such clouds of melancholy rising on those faces I have so long looked upon with affection." One of those hearts is Martha Blount's. He refers to her and her sister, who have recently been forced to move from their home at Mapledurham to make way for their brother's new wife. While their troubles are not the result of the penal laws, Pope connects them with those of the rest of the community. "They [the sisters] are beforehand with us in being out of house and home," he writes, and adds that he fears they may already "look upon Mapledurham with such sort of melancholy as we may upon our own seats when we lose them." The certainty of this remark—"when," not "if," Catholics lose their homes—is telling. Indeed, Pope now admits, in a passage quoted earlier in this chapter, that he is taking his last leave of Windsor Forest, and bidding adieu to his Catholic neighbors as "fellow-prisoners" who must follow him to the gallows. Pope's seat is already lost. He

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<sup>56</sup> "[of people]" is bracketed in the original; the other brackets are my own.

concludes the letter by quoting from Virgil's eclogues, "Nos patrium fugimus" (337): we are banished from home.<sup>57</sup>

When Pope writes the Eloisa letter to Martha a week later, he sends it from his friend Lord Burlington's home. He and his family are between residences. He may also, by that time, have received a letter from Edward Blount, offering Pope a home abroad with him in self-imposed exile. Blount evinces pessimism bordering on despair. His proposal that Pope go with him abroad to "where War will not reach us, nor paultry Constables summon us to vestrys" (338), sounds like a plan to retire out of the world completely. These, then, are the kinds of epistles Pope was reading and writing at the time that the "Epistle of Eloise" was growing warm, if the 1716 date is accurate. The letter to Martha indicates that he has been working on the poem for a while, but he was clearly at least making significant revisions to it as the crisis surrounding the coming legislation began to weigh heavily on him and his friends.

If the 1717 date of this letter is correct, it is possible that Pope could have written much or even most of the poem after rumors of the Registration Act began to circulate early the year before. The argument for 1717 rests on a plausible reading of some of Pope's letters that suggests that substantial portions of the poem were not written until after Lady Mary's departure for Turkey in the summer of 1716.<sup>58</sup> The 1717 argument is thus a necessary foundation for the not uncommon claim that Pope's romantic correspondence with Lady Mary was a major influence on the poem. Whatever the validity of this claim, the correspondence with Lady Mary reveals that erotic frustration was hardly Pope's dominant emotion in this era of his life. Several times throughout their

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<sup>57</sup> I take the translation from Pat Rogers. See *Destiny of the Stuarts*, 25.

<sup>58</sup> See Tillotson, *TE* 311-13.

correspondence he states his interest in meeting her in Italy if she should travel that way.<sup>59</sup> The sincerity of his interest in this journey is questionable, and his ability to meet its physical demands more so, yet the frequency with which he returns to the idea suggests that the thought of it, at least, appeals to him. He usually ascribes this longing to travel to his desire to see Lady Mary—but not always. A letter written sometime in late 1716 or early 1717 begins with complaints that she does not send him enough letters: “I no more think I can have too many of your letters than that I could have too many Writings to entitle me to the greatest estate in the world . . . I am angry at every Scrap of paper lost, as at something that interrupts the history of my title . . .” (382). Pope’s editor, George Sherburn, notes that these references to titles and estates were omitted in the published version of the letter, likely because they reflect upon the Registration Act, which had put many Catholic estates and titles in jeopardy.<sup>60</sup> Later in the letter, Pope again calls attention to the current property crisis:

I am glad, Madam, your native Country uses you so well as to justify your regret for it: It is not for me to talk of it with tears in my eyes; I can never think that Place my Country, where I can’t call a foot of paternal Earth my owne. Indeed it may seem some alleviation, that when the wisest thing I can do is to leave my country, that which was most agreable in it should be taken from thence beforehand. (384)

The recent loss of Binfield (which had only belonged to the Popes in the first place by means of a legal fiction) clearly still weighs heavily on Pope (who nevertheless finds a way of turning his complaint into a compliment to Lady Mary). When he suggests visiting her in Italy, he adds that he wishes to see “if [he] liked Italy enough to reside in

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<sup>59</sup> See the letters of October 1716, 10 November 1716, late 1716-17, and 1 September 1718 (*CP* 363, 367, 384, 493). In June 1717, Pope learns that Lady Mary will not be traveling through Italy on her way to Turkey, and claims that without her presence, Italy no longer has any attractions for him (*CP* 389-90). In September 1718 he is once again eager to make the journey, having learned that Lady Mary will return by way of Italy. It is difficult to tell where the flirtatious nonsense begins, and where it ends, if it ends at all.

<sup>60</sup> *CP* 382n3.

it.” He immediately dismisses this possibility, however, writing, “...I believe, I should be as uneasy in a Country where I saw Others persecuted, by the Rogues of my own Religion, as where I was so myself by those of yours.” He then jokes that he might even decide to reside in Turkey, “for who would not rather live a free man among a nation of Slaves, than a Slave among a nation of free men?” (384-85). Such assertions, however unserious, suggest why Pope was particularly vulnerable at this time to flights of fancy that carried him across seas and kingdoms to the side of a friend. He was disenchanted with the land of his birth and felt like an alien within it. To a man facing persecution in his own country, the rest of the world might indeed appear to be a land of liberty.

From 1716 onward, Pope could do little but settle into a kind of exile at Chiswick (a home he disliked) and await the outcome of events being negotiated among men of state.<sup>61</sup> This condition of helplessness and isolation is, I argue, a more substantial link between Pope and Eloisa than shared distress over unrequited love. Even if (as is most likely) Pope began *Eloisa to Abelard* without any thought to the Registration Act or other penal laws, by the later stages of its composition—and possibly quite early in its composition—he could not have failed to see in Eloisa’s crisis something that echoed that of his own, and of his friends. Like Eloisa, Catholics were virtually helpless and divided against themselves. Religious and national loyalties pulled them in conflicting directions, as did personal and community considerations. No matter what choice they made, it would cost them part of their sense of identity. The Catholic crisis caused Eloisa’s crisis

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<sup>61</sup> Jonathan Pritchard’s study of this period in Pope’s life, “Pope at Chiswick,” *Studies in English Literature* 50, no. 3 (2010): 625-44, shows that the poet felt harried, even frantic, during his residency there, as visits with his new neighbors, care for his ailing parents, and work on his *Iliad* translation consumed his time. Pritchard argues that “the discontents of Pope’s life during these years would find occasional-but-insistent expression in his writing” (ibid., 626), although he has little to say about *Eloisa to Abelard* or the *Elegy*.

to come alive for Pope (gave it those “Breathings of the Heart”), transforming it from a mere Ovidian exercise into something deeply felt and experientially true.

Nevertheless, *Eloisa to Abelard* is not a political poem, if we use that term to mean a poem that comments on current politics. While it is true that language hinting at the current political crisis appears in the poem, particularly in early passages, these hints never add up to more than hints. They exist only to encourage a particular, contemporary application of this medieval nun’s experience of suffering.

Perhaps the most telling of these hints are the terms in which Eloisa describes herself and Abelard. Just as *The Rape of the Lock*’s central figure of the ravished maid carries Jacobite undertones, this poem’s “captive maid” and “banish’d lover” are literal uses of figures that exiled English royalists had long used metaphorically (EA 52). Catholics (exiled or not) also used these figures to portray an England torn from her true church.<sup>62</sup> The secrecy of Eloisa’s passion lends itself to a Jacobite reading as well. Like James Stuart, whom Jacobites had to toast circumspectly as the king-over-the-water, Abelard is a “fatal name” which must never “pass these lips in holy silence seal’d” (9, 10). Eloisa may also strike a chord with Jacobite readers when she confesses, “All is not Heav’n’s while *Abelard* has part, / Still rebel nature holds out half my heart” (25-6). Even as Eloisa seeks resignation at the end of the poem, she still claims to have a “rebellious heart” (346).

If such lines tantalize us with their Jacobite suggestions, however, the poem quickly thwarts a Jacobite reading. If any passage of the poem was consciously written to evoke England’s political crisis, it is the verse paragraph that runs from lines 73-98, yet even here, such evocation does not amount to coherent political commentary. True, a

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<sup>62</sup> This use of female figures by Catholics will be considered in more detail in the study of the *Elegy* below.

reader seeking Jacobite allusions could attempt to find in Eloisa's description of the radical purity of her love for Abelard a celebration of Jacobite integrity:

Love, free as air, at sight of human ties,  
Spreads his light wings, and in a moment flies.  
Let wealth, let honour, wait the wedded dame,  
August her deed, and sacred be her fame;  
Before true passion all those views remove,  
Fame, wealth, and honour! what are you to Love?  
(75-80)

Eloisa's passionate dismissal of the paltry ties of matrimony might resonate with the supporters of a kingdom-less king. Let the Whigs enjoy the tainted spoils of their contracted alliance with Hanover; a person of true honor can be loyal to a king without the pomp of state or the legitimacy of possession. But do the lines justify a reading so unfavorable to Hanover and his allies? After all, Eloisa acknowledges the wedded dame's honor and "sacred" fame, admirable qualities which Eloisa has forfeited.

But perhaps Eloisa refers only to earthly honor. We could find justification for this possibility in the next lines, as Eloisa's musings pass from the worldly to the spiritual:

The jealous God, when we profane his fires,  
Those restless passions in revenge inspires;  
And bids them make mistaken mortals groan,  
Who seek in love for ought but love alone.  
(81-84)

The jealous god, Love, demands purity of devotion, not just to the object of that devotion (Abelard) but to Love itself. Given the current concern about the Test Oaths, these lines might also be suggestive to Jacobites, and Catholics in particular. Catholics (and even some Protestants) had accused Parliament of profanation of religious matters when it



made a declaration against transubstantiation a condition of civil employment.<sup>63</sup> Only “mistaken mortals” mix worldly concerns like fame, wealth, and honor with their worship—as the Church of England, wedded to the state, has done. In contrast, the devotion of English Catholics not simply to God, but also to their proscribed religion, proves that, like Love’s true devotees, they worship without earthly consideration.

But this reading only introduces greater difficulties. The jealous god, Love, encourages Eloisa in behavior that the Catholic religion (and Protestant, for that matter) would oppose:

Should at my feet the world’s great master fall,  
Himself, his throne, his world, I’d scorn ’em all:  
Not *Cæsar*’s empress wou’d I deign to prove;  
No, make me mistress to the man I love;  
If there be yet another name more free,  
More fond than mistress, make me that to thee!  
Oh happy state! when souls each other draw,  
When love is liberty, and nature, law[.]

(85-92)

Eloisa would rather be Abelard’s mistress than Caesar’s wife; we can read that assertion easily enough in a Jacobite context, along with the subtle rejection of contractual kingship in Eloisa’s determination to be bound not by marriage law but by the laws of nature. Yet if Eloisa’s declaration of the purity of her attachment to Abelard begins as a sign of unwavering integrity, it now reveals itself as irreligious, self-destructive whoredom. If her love for Abelard is blameless, her willingness to break all bonds to enjoy it is not. The corruption of Eloisa’s desires will only be further emphasized as the poem continues. Eloisa’s libertinage is not a metaphysical disguise for spiritual love. The poem makes clear that she has sexual desire for a physical man, and while it treats her

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<sup>63</sup> See Anne Barbeau Gardiner, *Ancient Faith and Modern Freedom in John Dryden’s “The Hind and the Panther”* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 214-27.

sympathetically, it does not deny the sinfulness of her pursuit of unrestrained love. Furthermore, we should recall that Eloisa is made “captive” by her Catholic vocation. Are we to understand Catholic monasticism as signifying established, and thus compromised, religion, and therefore, in an English context, signifying the Church of England? Such a convoluted reading strains the text past the point of absurdity. If we were to read the poem’s allusions as implying a political argument, we would have to conclude that it is ultimately anti-Jacobite—and perhaps anti-Catholic.

This conclusion would be a mistake. The poem’s political allusions in this passage are slippery and indistinct not to hide a Jacobite agenda, nor to hide an anti-Jacobite agenda. Rather, they exist simply to evoke the political controversies of the day, so that the reader may then reflect upon the *experience* of being trapped within them. This experience is what is explored in the poem. Correspondences between the poem and the current crisis are rough and fleeting, but the experience of yearning, frustration, despair, and agonized indecision establish an emotional, intellectual, and spiritual state that many disenchanted Jacobites, and Catholics especially, would recognize as analogous to their own.

Consider, for instance, the resonance that Abelard’s castration (introduced in the verse paragraph immediately following the one we have just examined) would have for Catholics. Eloisa transitions from celebrating the purity of her love to acknowledging its futility. And yet, she loves on. She sacrifices every earthly thing, and may yet lose her soul, for a man physically incapable of returning her affection. Nothing in this paragraph appears politically suggestive. And yet a sympathetic reader, alerted by the Jacobite language in the preceding paragraph, might here share Eloisa’s horror at the defeat of her

hero—or her disappointment at his impotence. The recent oath project (and the oath projects that preceded it) revealed the Catholic community’s frustration with those powers that demanded so much of them while offering them little protection—the Vatican, their lay and clerical leaders, and especially the Stuart court.

At the same time, the obstacles those projects faced (and their universal failure) revealed the community’s inability to free themselves from their disastrous connection with a defeated king. Eloisa, too, often seeks to escape Abelard’s grip on her passions, only to find herself drawn in again. Worse, even when she prays for release, she wonders if this impulse comes from heaven, or elsewhere: “Assist me, heav’n! but whence arose that pray’r? / Sprung it from piety, or from despair?” (179-80). Eloisa cannot even pray through a whole line before she questions the purity of her motives. Does she seek grace, or merely relief? Surely many Catholics ready to make their peace with Hanover doubted their own reasons for their acquiescence. How many times did they ask themselves if they were submitting to save their religion, or submitting to save their estates? How many of them, like Eloisa, did not know the answer to that question?

Eloisa’s emotional vacillations are dizzying, yet seem to lead nowhere. Her heart can only “hope, despair, resent, regret, / Conceal, disdain—do all things but forget” (199-200). When her own efforts fail, she calls on Abelard to help her renounce him:

Oh come! oh teach me nature to subdue,  
Renounce my love, my life, my self—and you.  
Fill my fond heart with God alone, for he  
Alone can rival, can succeed to thee.

(203-206)

Her request is futile, of course; asking Abelard to teach her how to let go of him stands as much chance of success as appealing to the Stuart court to support the oath to Hanover.

Only after horrifying herself by entertaining the possibility of willing damnation (a spiritual suicide) does she finally find the power to abjure him: “Thy oaths I quit, thy memory resign, / Forget, renounce me, hate whate’er was mine” (293-94). She releases him from his oaths of fidelity, and asks that he renounce her as well. Now, at last, she seems confident that her motives are right, that religion, and religion alone, has led her to break with him.

Yet immediately after coming to this decision, she imagines her own death. Several critics have wondered if she truly succeeds in renouncing Abelard, or if death simply intervenes to bring an otherwise interminable struggle to an end;<sup>64</sup> as Eloisa herself notes, “Death, only death, can break the lasting chain” (173). Death, of course, was precisely the outcome that the Catholic oath project sought to avoid. And indeed, for most of the poem, Eloisa seems an unwilling martyr. When she describes herself and Abelard on the day they took orders as “victims at yon’ altar’s foot,” who “warm in youth, . . . bade the world farewell” (108, 110), she does not so much portray herself as martyred *for* religion as martyred *by* religion—a sentiment that Vatican intransigence might inspire in a community desperate to come to some sort of arrangement with their Protestant government. Such also might be the sentiment of a poet “warm in youth” who would be willing to swear an oath—perhaps even the Test Oaths—but is condemned by his love for his pious parents to suffer persecution beside them.

The specific details of Eloisa’s struggle have, at best, a passing resemblance with that of an early eighteenth-century Catholic. It is internal experience, not external circumstance, which identifies them with each other. And that experience is one of

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<sup>64</sup> See, for instance, C. R. Kropf, “What Really Happens in ‘Eloisa to Abelard?’” *South Atlantic Bulletin* 41, no. 2 (1976): 46; and David B. Morris, “‘The Visionary Maid’: Tragic Passion and Redemptive Sympathy in Pope’s ‘Eloisa to Abelard,’” *Modern Language Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1973): 264.

indecision. A great deal of mid-twentieth-century criticism attempted to determine the outcome of Eloisa's struggle with virtue and passion. C. R. Kropf performed an important intervention in this debate by suggesting that critics' focus on the nature of Eloisa's choice was missing the point. "The poem does not depict Eloisa's choosing between alternatives," he writes; rather, "it depicts her inability to do so and the agony that that inability causes her."<sup>65</sup> *Eloisa to Abelard* is about the pathos of Eloisa's indecision, not about what decision (if any) she eventually makes. It depicts the experience of being caught between mutually exclusive causes, both of which have an emotional appeal and an undeniable legitimacy. For her love of Abelard *is* legitimate; they married prior to their entry into religious orders. While her desire to violate her holy vows is sinful, her desire for Abelard is not. Her struggle is far more complex than a simple dichotomy between sinful earthly desire on the one hand and holy duty on the other.<sup>66</sup>

And while some Jacobites would be able to relate to her, much of Eloisa's experience would speak more directly to Pope's Catholic audience. Like Eloisa, the choices they faced were all inherently religious in nature and carried consequences for the future of their community, not to mention their future in the next life. Swear the Test Oaths to Hanover, or remain faithful to the Catholic religion? Devise and swear an oath of submission (probably in the face of Vatican disapproval) to the Protestant succession, or continue to wait for the return of the rightful Catholic king? Openly declare for the Pretender and fight for the future, or suppress all desire and resign oneself to God's

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<sup>65</sup> "What Really Happens," 43. Morris arrives at a similar conclusion: "Pope seems less preoccupied with Eloisa's salvation or damnation in a life hereafter than with her situation of conflict in this life" ("The Visionary Maid," 264).

<sup>66</sup> Morris notes the similarity between Eloisa's crisis and those of the protagonists of Restoration heroic plays, who wish to be loyal both to their sovereign and their lover, but find that their duties to one conflict with their duties to the other. He argues that the poem may be productively read within the context of dramatic tragedy rather than of heroic epistle. See "The Visionary Maid," 247-71. Pope thus may take a lesson from Dryden in using the love-and-honor convention to explore Catholic self-division.

will—or continue to quietly debate and agonize, perhaps appearing (even to oneself) as simultaneously a fraud in religion and a coward in politics? Behind these questions lie other, more basic questions about the nature of vows and loyalty. Can a new vow supplant an old? Is not a vow to a husband or king as religious and sacred as any other? Is taking an oath that is not heartfelt sacrilege? Is it possible to truly abjure a vow when your loyalty is as strong as ever? What is the point of maintaining a vow to a man who cannot or will not fulfill the role that was expected of him when the vow was made? Is suffering for a pointless vow willing martyrdom or stubborn rejection of reality? These are questions the poem poses, explicitly or implicitly, and they are questions that Catholics desperately needed answers to.

Answers, however, are not forthcoming. Whatever were Pope's opinions on the Catholic crisis, he did not think this poem was the place to offer them. *Eloisa to Abelard* offers readers sympathy, not guidance.

Yet that is not to say that readers could find no solace in the poem's conclusion. Eloisa's embrace of death should not necessarily be perceived as tragedy or escapism. Particularly for a religious community, the thought of an end to earthly conflict could be consoling. Heaven is eternal, and death is unavoidable; when Eloisa can resign herself to these truths, she does not find happiness—but she does find peace. One can imagine that, when their private debates over oaths, duties, and dangers threatened to overwhelm Catholics, a reminder that all such struggles have an end may have been a comfort to them. It may have been a comfort to the author.

Nor should we undervalue that offer of sympathy implicit in the poem, which may be its greatest comfort. The poem does not conclude with the contemplation of death, but

continues on with verses on sympathy and community. Eloisa imagines her and Abelard's resting place becoming a shrine for tragic reflection by future lovers, and her last thought, as we noted above, is for the poet whose "sad similitude of griefs" will give him the insight to tell her story. This, too, may be a reminder to readers that they are not alone in their struggle. David B. Morris captures this aspect of the poem's conclusion well:

[W]hile from Eloisa's final point of view the power of earthly love can seem suddenly insignificant, from Pope's station as poet it appears not only significant but all-important, the single value capable of redeeming the waste which accompanies tragic passion. Short of the absolution for sin which God alone can offer, human sympathy remains the one redemptive gift within the range of mortal giving. ... [I]n times of misfortune and tragedy it [charity] also breaks the potential isolation of suffering, redeeming man from the most dangerous (because most natural) form of solipsism.<sup>67</sup>

Morris posits that Pope is exploring a truth about human nature, but we have already seen that matters of sympathy and charity were more than academic at this time. Consider again that letter of 20 March 1716. Pope does not just note the misfortunes threatening to overwhelm and divide the Catholic community; he also suggests that the best response the community can make to those misfortunes is to exercise greater charity:

Methinks, in our present condition, the more heroic thing we are left capable of doing, is to endeavour to lighten each other's load, and (oppressed as we are) to succour such as are yet more oppressed. If there are too many who cannot be assisted but by what we cannot give, our money, there are yet others who may be relieved by our counsel, by our countenance, and even by our cheerfulness. (*CP* 335-36)

Events of the past couple of years had rattled Catholic unity. The 1715 Rising had highlighted disagreements over political loyalties, exile and relocation had sundered neighbors, and the Oath Controversy now threatened to create a permanent schism in the

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 265.

Catholic community. The final lines of this poem suggest that the shared pain wrought by these upheavals should not be a divisive, but a unifying force. If *The Rape of the Lock* attempts to laugh Catholics together again, *Eloisa to Abelard* tries to draw them together with tears.

### An Unfortunate Community

The absence of any information about the *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady* prior to its appearance in the 1717 *Works* suggests that it was written shortly before the appearance of that volume.<sup>68</sup> This dating, the theme of passionate love, and the transfer of several lines from an early version of *Eloisa to Abelard* to the *Elegy*, all serve to link the two poems. As we shall see, the poems are also connected by their interest in the post-1715 Catholic crisis. The *Elegy*'s treatment of the Lady and her Poet's pain echoes Pope's emotional and philosophical response to the crisis in his correspondence. However, the *Elegy* is even less concerned with particular historical or political circumstances than *Eloisa to Abelard*, even more impressionistic and elusive—and far angrier.

The tale of tragedy and heartbreak related in the eighty-two lines of the *Elegy* has intrigued readers for centuries. Yet it is not what the poem tells us of the Lady's story that has elicited so much fascination and commentary, but what it does *not* tell us. Caryll, the first person known to have commented on the poem, believed that Pope had spoken of the lady before and twice requests in letters that the poet inform him of her identity. Pope

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<sup>68</sup> Tillotson offers plausible evidence that the poem was a late addition to the 1717 *Works*. Also, if we accept his argument that the poem was at least partly inspired by the correspondence with Lady Mary, there is reason to believe it may have been written as late as April 1717. "Lady Mary Wortley Montague and Pope's *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*," *The Review of English Studies* 12, no. 48 (1936): 409-411.



ignores the requests.<sup>69</sup> Much of the early criticism of the poem followed Caryll's lead by attempting to identify the real woman represented by the Lady. As one might expect, these efforts to identify any single woman as the inspiration for the poem had limited success. Recent commentators have assumed that the Lady is primarily, if not entirely, an invention.<sup>70</sup>

Labeling the Lady a fiction does not dispel her mystery, however. To extract a narrative of her history from the poem still requires some guesswork. The most common reading is that the Lady commits suicide when her guardian (an uncle) tries to force her to marry to worldly advantage, while her heart aspires to a purer, but perhaps socially unacceptable, love. The poem itself is the impassioned lament of a Poet who meets the Lady's bloody ghost in a glade one night. It is clear that the Poet had a relationship with the Lady when she was alive, but its nature is also a subject of debate; he loves her, but did she love him?

Like a Catholic in 1717, the Lady seems to suffer due to the irreconcilable demands upon her loyalty. Her guardian insists that she render obedience to a man she considers beneath her, denying her the man she loves. Rather than swear a vow she cannot support in good conscience, she chooses death. But of course, if the obscurity of the Lady's history makes it easy to read Pope's troubles into the poem, it also does not

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<sup>69</sup> See the letters from Caryll to Pope dated 16 July 1717 and 18 August 1717 (*CP* 416-17, 418-19).

<sup>70</sup> Ian Jack provides an excellent summary of over two centuries of speculation on the identity of the Lady. "The Elegy as Exorcism: Pope's 'Verses to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady,'" *Augustan Worlds*, ed. J. C. Hilson, M. M. B. Jones, and J. R. Watson (London: Leicester University Press, 1978), 69-75. Perhaps the most interesting of these efforts is Tillotson's argument that a note to the poem in the 1751 edition of the *Works* directs us to Lady Mary. See Tillotson, "Montague and Pope's Elegy," 401-12. This note, however, may not have been written by Pope. Furthermore, it seems more in keeping with Pope's character and his treatment of this poem in particular that the note was intended to further obfuscate, rather than elucidate, the identity of the Lady. This note could be an attempt to disassociate the poem from its connections with a long-past dispute within the Catholic community and present it to future readers in a purely romantic light.

offer us much firm support for drawing this parallel. A more compelling argument for approaching the poem from a Catholic perspective lies in the poetical lineage and theological resonances of the Lady herself.

We may discern the Lady's literary ancestry in the extensive body of materials Alison Shell surveys in her illuminating study of early modern Catholic poetry.<sup>71</sup> One of Shell's subjects of investigation is the tradition within such poetry of the figure of "Weeping England." This weeping woman—who may mourn England or who may *be* England—was "ubiquitous: in lamentation . . .; in satire; in funeral elegies for public figures; and in the royalist tracts of the Civil Wars."<sup>72</sup> While "Weeping England" appears in the works of poets of all denominations, she was particularly useful to Catholics, because she

demonstrat[ed] the visibility of their Church. It was an easy extension from that to the Blessed Virgin, and the many faces of Mary which weeping England could also connote: mourner at the Cross, especial patron of England, and mother-figure personally beloved of Catholics.<sup>73</sup>

Pope's Lady is a bleeding lover, not a weeping mother, but Bleeding England is also a common figure in exile poetry, particularly in the immediate aftermath of the 1715 Rising.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, English Catholics often thought of their church as wounded, a fact given its most direct expression in the veneration Catholics held for the Madonna

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<sup>71</sup> Alison Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>74</sup> To take just one example, a bleeding Britain appears in the loyalist poem, "On y<sup>e</sup> Report of his Coronation," written during the 1715 Rising upon the occasion of a (false) rumor that James Stuart had been crowned king in Scotland:

Tis done tis done y<sup>e</sup> wond'rous cause succeeds  
and wounded B—n now no longer bleeds.  
U—p't Dominions yeilds to injur'd right  
Our J—s is crown'd & B—ick put to flight.

"A COLLECTION of Loyal Poems, made in the years 1714, 1715, and 1716," BL Add.MS 29,981, f.108.

Vulnerata (the Wounded Lady). Desecrated by English Protestants, this statue of Mary was brought to the English College at Valladolid where masses were held regularly in its honor to atone for England's crimes against it. Shell notes that the Madonna Vulnerata "became to expatriate Catholics an emblem of English Catholicism."<sup>75</sup> Finally, Shell finds that

the interlocking complementarities of Christ and Mary, Christ and His Church, and Christ and the soul could all be co-opted into amatory discourse, and thence ... the condition of English Catholicism could be used as an analogy to the exilic gap between parted friends or lovers.<sup>76</sup>

Pope's *Elegy* is certainly not "Catholic" in the sense of the elegies that Shell describes. It is not a lamentation over a nation lost to heresy. Still, Pope's confessional identity links his poem with a poetic tradition of wounded, betrayed women. And within the poem, the mourning Poet unmistakably associates his Lady with the Virgin Mary. The Poet suggests that, rather than allow her to suffer any further on earth, "(ere nature bade her die) / Fate snatch'd her early to the pitying sky."<sup>77</sup> The most obvious allusion in these lines is to the Assumption of Mary, while still living, into heaven—an article of faith for Catholics.

A skeptic might point out that eighteenth-century Protestant poets also made (careful) use of Marian allusions in their poetry,<sup>78</sup> and that this allusion could just as easily be to Astraea, goddess of Justice, who leaves the degenerate earth at the end of the Iron Age in classical mythology. These arguments are fair, but they serve to explain how Pope is able to get away with an allusion to the most theologically controversial saint in

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<sup>75</sup> Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy, English Literary Imagination*, 201. For more details on the Madonna Vulnerata's history and significance see *ibid.*, 201-207.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>77</sup> Pope, *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*, 364, lines 23-24 (hereafter cited in text as *UL* by line number).

<sup>78</sup> John Sitter, "Marian Musings: Reflections on Blessed Virgins in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2008): 671-86.

the canon. Furthermore, allusions to Astraea cannot be separated from allusions to Mary. Since medieval times, Christians had interpreted Virgil's prediction in his Fourth Eclogue of Astraea's return as a prophecy of Mary's birth. A dual allusion to Mary, the beloved intercessor of Catholics, and Astraea, the goddess of Justice who departed from a degenerate earth, would be appropriate in a poem that questions "if eternal justice rules the ball [earth]" (*UL* 35). Catholics had cause to wonder if justice would rule their fate, if their prayers would be heard and answered.

Other suggestions of the Lady's (Catholic) saintliness appear in the poem. The Poet imagines that "Angels with their silver wings o'ershade / The ground, now sacred by [her] reliques made" (67-68). Catholic adoration of saints' relics was scorned by Protestants, of course, as was their adoration of saints and angels. Even more significant is the Poet's anguished question, "What can atone (oh ever-injur'd shade!) / Thy fate unpity'd, and thy rites unpaid?" (47-48). Pope had reason to couch his lament in such terms. He penned these lines at a time when exiled Catholics held masses to atone for injuries done to an image of Mary that they believe symbolized their wounded church, and at a time when Catholicism in England was threatened with complete extirpation, its rites to be forevermore unpracticed in the kingdom.

The lines which Pope transferred from *Eloisa to Abelard* to the *Elegy* may also gesture toward the devastation of his community:<sup>79</sup>

So peaceful rests, without a stone, a name,  
 What once had beauty, titles, wealth, and fame.  
 How lov'd, how honour'd once, avails thee not,  
 To whom related, or by whom begot;

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<sup>79</sup> For more details about the history of these six transferred lines, see Mack, *Collected in Himself: Essays Critical, Biographical, and Bibliographical on Pope and Some of His Contemporaries* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983), 322-23.

A heap of dust alone remains of thee;  
 'Tis all thou art, and all the proud shall be!  
 (69-74)

The Reformation had already razed and quarried Catholic places of worship into oblivion, confiscated their riches, and broken their authority; now, the last of the community's titles and wealth might be stripped from them. The lines also demonstrate the easy slippage from the Lady to the Catholic Church to Mary, whose "begetting" by Immaculate Conception was a point of theological dispute, as were the implications of her status as mother of God's begotten son, Christ. Mary's devaluation by Protestants had led to the destruction of her images, her status as co-redemptrix with Christ, and her popular adoration.

Now, I must acknowledge here that whatever symbolic meanings Pope's Lady might hold, she is always *also*, indeed *primarily*, just a lady. Caryll believed that the poem was about an actual unfortunate woman, a fact which should have some weight in our own readings of the poem. Yet I suspect the *Elegy* stirred some of its Catholic readers in ways unfelt by its Protestant audience (and just because Caryll focused on the Lady does not mean that he did not detect further valences to the poem's anguish—valences which he would not have dared to note in a letter). The poem's sense of loss and helplessness, its thematic and textual connection to *Eloisa to Abelard*, and its Marian allusions all suggest its Catholic interest. Pope fuels the poignancy of his lament over this (likely fictional) Lady's death by channeling his anger and despair over his church's persecution, through language evocative of that church and its traditions.

The depth of Pope's frustration at the narrow-mindedness and hard-heartedness of the various factions placing demands on his community is forcefully suggested by the

fact that his Marian Lady a suicide. The confrontational nature of the poem is apparent in the Poet's initial question to the Lady's ghost:

Is it, in heav'n, a crime to love too well?  
 To bear too tender, or too firm a heart,  
 To act a Lover's or a *Roman's* part?  
 Is there no bright reversion in the sky,  
 For those who greatly think, or bravely die?  
 (6-10)

The Poet's question is natural to a man acting the part of a lover who has lost to suicide the person for whom he cares most, and who is contemplating suicide himself: is there hope of heaven for those who kill themselves for love or to avoid dishonor? But in 1717, it is also a question natural to a man acting a Roman Catholic's part, and this further meaning is suggested by that oddly legalistic term, "reversion." Penal laws had long denied Catholics reversion of property through inheritance of land. Legal loopholes still made such reversions possible, but Pope had recently lost even this hope, having sold the family home at Binfield out of fear of the Registration Act. A Catholic like Pope might well ask, am I due a reward in heaven for my sacrifices on earth? Or am I (as the implication of committing suicide suggests) merely destroying myself by too tenderly or too firmly maintaining a cause? Pope was not the only one to imagine his submission to persecution in terms of suicide. Bishop Stonor, chief promoter of the oath project, called the nobility "self-murdering" for turning against the project.<sup>80</sup>

Pope's reference to those who "greatly think, or bravely die" also recalls, with difference, the letter to Caryll of 20 March 1716. In the letter, Pope praises the nobleness

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<sup>80</sup> Duffy, "Englishmen in vaine," 361. There may also be a Marian allusion in the line on a "reversion in the sky" for the deceased Lady. Shell notes that in medieval England, the English believed their country to be Mary's dowry (*Catholicism, Controversy, English Literary Imagination*, 200). England had "divorced" itself from the Catholic Church during the Reformation, and in the process, Mary had lost her dowry, which should have reverted to her.

of “suffering bravely” above that of “enterprising greatly” (*CP* 335); here, the Poet’s question betrays a suspicion that both are simply different paths to self-destruction. The question launches what Christopher Gillie (in a particularly insightful reading of the poem) identifies as its theme, “moral heroism at war with moral meanness.” And in this war, the poem finds that “[w]e are all of us guilty.”<sup>81</sup>

“All” includes the Lady. At the center of this poem is the uncomfortable fact of her suicide. Howard Weinbrot has argued powerfully that her suicide damns her, and that by the end of the poem the Poet accepts this fact. The Poet’s veneration of her is an irrational, emotional reaction to her death, which he must work through before he can finally acknowledge her unforgivable guilt.<sup>82</sup> If the Lady’s suicide reflects Pope’s impression of the behavior of the Catholic community, that impression is damning indeed.

However, the Poet’s generous treatment of the Lady has long impelled readers to view her sympathetically, a reaction which should not be lightly dismissed. At the very least, blame does not lie with her alone. Indeed, the first person the Poet appears to blame for her death is God. “Why bade ye else, ye Pow’rs! her soul aspire / Above the vulgar flight of low desire?” (*UL* 11-12), he demands. Notably, God is so impersonal in this poem that he is not even an individual, but plural “Pow’rs.” These powers, the Poet rages, have failed to support the Lady in her attempt to avoid moral meanness. As implied by the later allusion to Astraea, the world seems abandoned by God. However impious such

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<sup>81</sup> Christopher Gillie, “Pope: *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*,” in *Interpretations: Essays on Twelve English Poems*, ed. John Wain, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 79-80.

<sup>82</sup> Howard Weinbrot, “Pope’s ‘Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady,’” *Modern Language Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (1971): 255-67.

a reaction may be, it is not an unnatural one for a person who finds his religious integrity and steadfastness rewarded with crushed hopes and persecutions.

The Poet quickly returns to critiquing the Lady, however, associating her “[a]mbition” with that “of Angels and of Gods” and of “Kings and Heroes” (13-14, 16). Such ambition, though admirable, is a “fault” (14). As when he suggests that there is something either “too tender” or “too firm” in the Lady’s actions, he here implies that her noble intentions were infected or misdirected by something sinful. One wonders if, as he wrote this passage, Pope had in mind a letter he received from Edward Blount shortly after Queen Anne’s death. Exhorting Catholics to peacefully accept the new king, whoever he may be, Blount adds (presciently), “Ambition is a vice that is timely mortify’d in us poor Papists” (*CP* 248). Or perhaps Pope had in mind the sentiments of one his own letters, written the day the Registration Act passed the House of Lords. He claims that when he lays aside his *Iliad* translation, his “thoughts must turn upon . . . the violence, madness and resentment of modern heroes, which are likely to prove (to some people at least) more fatal, than all those qualities in Achilles did to his unfortunate countrymen” (343). The disastrous Battle of Preston had been earlier that same year, and now even peaceful Catholics faced ruin because of the actions of the “heroes” who fought there. Ambition and heroism, however noble in intention, are dangerous qualities in members of a hated minority.

Nevertheless, the Poet finds the Lady superior to most souls which “but peep out once an age, / Dull sullen pris’ners in the body’s cage” (*UL* 17-18). Such souls are like “Eastern Kings” who “close confin’d to their own palace sleep” (21-22). It is to escape the mean, dull souls that the Lady is “perhaps” assumed into the “pitying sky” (23-24)—



that “perhaps” again betraying a fear that she is not as innocent as he would like to her to be. This contrast between the faulty ambitious and the dull might tempt us to see a distinction drawn between resolute Catholics and followers of the state religion, or between the romantic but flawed Stuarts and the prosaic Hanoverians. Yet in the end, such distinctions matter little, as the ambitious are merely more glorious sinners than the dull. The Poet has no need to designate the objects of his wrath. He seems determined to condemn the entire world, an attitude which we may suspect Pope shared in his darker moments.

The poem’s refusal to specify a target is apparent even in the passage which *does* offer a villain: the “false guardian of a charge too good” and “mean deserter of [his] brother’s blood” (29-30). The Poet expects “sudden vengeance” to fall upon this faceless, nameless guardian’s wives and children, on “all the line” (36-37). For what black deed is the guardian’s entire family to be wiped from the earth? The only crime of which the Poet directly accuses them is a callous obstinacy. He imagines passers-by watching the train of hearses at their door, saying:

Lo these were they, whose souls the Furies steel’d,  
 And curs’d with hearts unknowing how to yield.  
 Thus unlamented pass the proud away,  
 The gaze of fools, and pageant of a day!  
 So perish all, whose breast ne’er learn’d to glow  
 For others’ good, or melt at others’ woe.

(41-46)

These lines might stir anger in the breast of any English Catholic—but each person might apply the lines to a different faction. Hanover, Stuart, and the Vatican all expected strict obedience from the Catholic population. Within that population were people favoring each of these factions—as well as those whose strongest loyalties were to the King of

France or the Holy Roman Emperor. Any or all of these powers could be accused of being false guardians of their fellow countrymen or fellow Catholics, of having hearts incapable of melting at others' woe. The vagueness of the guardian's identity prevents anyone from being exonerated.

The next verse paragraph again contains language suggestive of sources of Catholic anger in this period. The Poet laments the absence of any "kind domestic tear" at the Lady's funeral, and her burial by "foreign hands" and "strangers" in a grave not in "sacred earth" (49, 53-54, 61). Foreigners thus take charge of the lady's body but evince no actual concern for it or for her soul. The oath project had recently demonstrated how much the Catholic community was at the mercy of foreigners who used them as pawns in a political game, particularly those foreigners residing at Saint-Germain-en-Laye and in the Vatican. Of course, "foreign" need not lead us outside of England. As Pope wrote in one of his letters to Lady Mary: "It is not for me to talk of [England] with tears in my eyes; I can never think that Place my Country, where I can't call a foot of paternal Earth my owne" (*CP* 384). Outside of their enclaves, Catholics could consider England a foreign nation, just as that nation viewed them as aliens.

More importantly, these lines, which imply that to be buried in a foreign land in unconsecrated earth is an awful, undeserved fate, reflect the normal state of affairs for English Catholic funeral practices. Catholics in exile were, of course, buried by foreign hands, far from family and friends. Meanwhile in England, Catholics were denied consecrated graves, and the ceremonial pageantry and "hallow'd dirge" of a proper public funeral (*UL* 62). Surviving relatives determined to give their loved ones a fitting burial

were forced to violate their consciences by paying their tithes to the Church of England.<sup>83</sup> Thus, “foreign” or unhallowed burial was a fact of life for many English Catholics, and one that might particularly preoccupy a sickly Catholic poet with aging parents.

Indeed, the Poet concludes by contemplating his own approaching death, telling us that he “[s]hall shortly want the gen’rous tear he pays” to the Lady (78). Is he simply reflecting upon the inevitable lot of humanity, or has he decided to follow the Lady down the path of self-destruction that he contemplates at the poem’s outset? The latter is a real possibility, and a truly dark one. The final lines of the poem suggest that the only conclusion that can be expected from a world so fallen is oblivion:

Then from his closing eyes thy form shall part,  
And the last pang shall tear thee from his heart,  
Life’s idle business at one gasp be o’er,  
The Muse forgot, and thou below’d no more!  
(79-82)

The Poet does not offer the traditional bardic suggestion that the poem will serve as a memorial for the lost Lady. She is utterly lost, and he will be, too. The poem seems to end in despair.

But perhaps there is a silver lining even in despair. The expectation of oblivion may also be a hoped-for mercy. The lines are reminiscent of a passage from another of Pope’s letters to Martha Blount, possibly written in the fall of 1715.<sup>84</sup> As he often does, Pope claims to believe he has not long to live. While he has had some success in resigning himself to his fate, an obstacle to his serenity remains:

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<sup>83</sup> Thornton provides details about the lengths Catholics would go to in order to obtain consecrated burials for their loved ones: “Catholics . . . were accustomed to bless a little earth; and, having put this into the coffin with the corpse, they carried the body to the Protestant minister for burial. His co-operation was secured by paying up their tithes. By so doing they technically became members of good standing in the parish. . . . [I]t was tantamount to the denial of their religion” (*Alexander Pope: Catholic Poet*, 20). The poem thus recalls another Catholic dilemma, an oath crisis in miniature that arose every time a member of the community died.

<sup>84</sup> The dating of this letter is highly uncertain. See *CP* 318n2.

But I cannot think without tears of being separated from my friends, when their condition is so doubtful, that they may want even such assistance as mine. Sure it is more merciful to take from us after death all memory of what we lov'd or pursu'd here: for else what a torment would it be to a spirit, still to love those creatures it is quite divided from? Unless we suppose, that in a more exalted life, all that we esteemed in this imperfect state will affect us no more, than what we lov'd in our infancy concerns us now. (*CP* 319)

Here Pope finds the idea of remembering the people he leaves behind after death intolerable, if he leaves them behind in any danger. Recall the similar, if darker, sentiments he records in his letter to Caryll, that it was one of his “alleviating consolations” that “to be ruined thus in the gross, with a whole people, is but like perishing in the general conflagration, where nothing we can value is left behind us” (335). If everything one loves has been destroyed, one need not worry about its fate.

Pope had reason to fear for the future of his friends in the fall of 1715 (Martha was about to be forced out of Mapledurham and anti-Catholic laws were going into effect). He had as much reason, or more, in 1717. It may not be a coincidence that in both the letter to Martha and in the *Elegy*, these reflections begin with concern for a single lady. Despite his praise of charity in the abstract, Pope’s compassion tended to latch onto individuals.

“Poets themselves must fall, like those they sung,” the Poet of the *Elegy* declares, “Deaf the prais’d ear, and mute the tuneful tongue” (*UL* 75-76). While the lines state a basic truth of mortality, they also suggest a poetic truth: a poet cannot exist without a muse or an audience. Pope’s Catholic circle had provided him with both. *The Rape of the Lock* stands as only the most direct evidence of his reliance on this community, both for inspiration and for purpose. Now that community is broken and scattered, perhaps irreparably. The *Elegy* gives expression to the loss felt, and the fear that worse is to come.

Its concluding lines are a stark contrast to the hopeful and consolatory final notes of *Eloisa to Abelard*, where sharing and memorializing suffering serve to alleviate suffering. Writing on Pope's *Elegy* with regard to the evolution of elegiac form, James Thompson has suggested that the poem is caught in between elegy's early modern and modern incarnations. He notes that "[i]n the great seventeenth-century elegies, the source of consolation is almost always communal, as the burden of grief is distributed socially. In Pope's *Elegy*, however, social relations, dependence, and obligation all pointedly fail . . . . The poet heroically offers to shoulder the burden of the community, to mourn in place of an indifferent family and society."<sup>85</sup> The poem's Catholic context suggests why Pope saw the need to experiment in devising a new elegiac form that did not depend on community for the sharing of grief and consolation. The contemplation of the consoling community's destruction is precisely what fuels the passion of Pope's lamentation.

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Pope's morbid preface was written not long after the *Elegy*, and in it he remains obsessed with the idea of a poet's death. As we noted early in this chapter, he expresses doubt as to whether he is "a man building a monument, or burying the dead." We tend to read such doubts suspiciously, and certainly Pope's stance of humility is disingenuous. But our vantage point grants us knowledge of the great masterpieces that would follow this publication. We know that Pope was indeed building a monument, and that the 1717 poems were only its foundation stones.

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<sup>85</sup> James Thompson, "Pope's *Unfortunate Lady* and Elegiac Form," *Rhetorics of Order/Ordering Rhetorics in English Neoclassical Literature*, ed. J. Douglas Canfield and J. Paul Hunter (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 129.

How would we read the 1717 *Works* if Pope had perished within a year or two of preparing it, or been forced into silence, penury, or exile by anti-Catholic pogroms? We would certainly give more weight to his fear that his collection was merely “burying the dead.” We would also be more likely to ascribe the powerful emotion of the letters and poems of 1717 to mounting stress produced by current events than to amorousness. And we would regard these final new poems—poems that dwell on death, loss, and religious ambiguities—as indicative of the personal and national environment in which they were composed.

Scholars often note that these poems seem to anticipate the Gothic aesthetic that would have a huge impact on English literature in the latter half of the eighteenth-century. A fairly typical remark is that they display the “combination of awful beauty, joyful gloom, and pleasing pain” that are characteristic of the Gothic sublime.<sup>86</sup> Such observations fail to grasp the historical reality that informed their composition. Pope wrote decades before the sublime found its great critical champions, and while he undoubtedly desired his poems of woe to please his readers, that woe is not manufactured, certainly not joyfully. These poems are not dispassionate aesthetic experiments, but express the real emotion and stress produced under extreme oppression by state authorities.

It is that experience of oppression which is the true link between these poems and the Gothic of the late eighteenth century. Scholars of the Gothic have recognized that the genre’s explosion in the 1790s was, in part, a reaction against an imperializing British government, a displacement of anxieties triggered by the repressive conditions of a police

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<sup>86</sup> Frederick S. Frank, *The First Gothics: A Critical Guide to the English Gothic Novel* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), xx.

state. Eighty years earlier, Pope lived under similar conditions of threatened violence and enforced silence that had been imposed upon only small, unfortunate communities of English people. In his “Gothic” poems he responds passionately, even rebelliously. When Eloisa, surrounded by the “[r]elentless walls” of the cloister, declares to the weeping statues around her, “I have not yet forgot my self to stone” (*EA* 17, 24), she defies those walls, insisting on the significance of her experience of suffering. When the Lady’s Poet sees her ghost, with its “bleeding bosom gor’d” (*UL* 3), he does not recoil in horror, but lashes out at a heartless world far more frightening than any specter. Both of these speakers demand to be heard against forces that would ignore or silence them.

Thus, insofar as Pope contributed to the development of the Gothic aesthetic, he did so from a place of real pain and persecution, weakness and deprivation, alienation and isolation. It is one of literature’s great ironies that Pope’s passionate complaints about anti-Catholic persecution would inspire later writers of the Gothic who, in working out their own anxieties over state tyranny, displace that tyranny onto England’s ancient foe, Catholicism. Not all of Pope’s heirs turned his experiment in Catholic protest into a tool for oppressing Catholics, however. One of his coreligionists, Elizabeth Inchbald, uses elements of the Gothic style for the same purpose as Pope: to portray the condition of living under unjust, authoritarian rule.

## Chapter Six

### Intersections of Catholic and Female Identity in *A Simple Story*

Elizabeth Inchbald's first biographer, James Boaden, seems embarrassed by his subject's Catholicism. He takes some pains in his *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald* (1833) to paint her as an unenthusiastic Catholic during most of her adult life, citing her spotty participation in Catholic services, her occasional attendance at Protestant churches, and the doubts she expressed about revealed religion. When he describes Inchbald and her husband as "Roman Catholics, who professed the religion of their fathers, without much examination, or very scrupulous adherence to the discipline of their church," he appears to be trying to excuse her Catholicism to his readers.<sup>1</sup> Inchbald could not help her faith, he suggests; it was her father's, after all. But fear not, dear reader: if she had really thought about it, she probably would have abandoned the faith, and she did not actually follow its rules anyway.

Boaden's account of Inchbald's lukewarm devotion to Catholicism has not gone unchallenged. Several scholars have questioned his interpretation of the evidence he presents for these claims.<sup>2</sup> These rebuttals notwithstanding, much criticism of Inchbald's

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<sup>1</sup> James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald: Including Her Familiar Correspondence with the Most Distinguished Persons of Her Time* (London, 1833), 1:32.

<sup>2</sup> William McKee (who did not have access to Inchbald's original manuscripts) argues that Boaden's claim of Inchbald's weak devotion contradicts itself on its own evidence. He points out that Inchbald's church attendance, although not regular, continues throughout most of her life, and that Boaden himself seems to admit this by the end of the memoir. Furthermore, Inchbald's occasional expressions of doubt as cited by Boaden are hardly proof of a rejection of her faith. Edward Tangye Lean points out that Inchbald's support for the French Revolution was complicated by her concern at the treatment of Catholics in France and



work continues to give short shrift to her religion. Annibel Jenkins, author of the most recent and thorough Inchbald biography, has little more to say about Inchbald's Catholicism than Boaden has. Inchbald was a regular participant in Catholic mass in her youth, and she was quite devout in her old age, but for about thirty years in between (a period corresponding almost exactly with that of her writing career), Jenkins considers Inchbald's religious life negligible.<sup>3</sup>

Whether Inchbald in her middle age was a Catholic who sometimes struggled with her faith or was, in fact, a discreet apostate, is a question we cannot answer definitively, nor one that this chapter is particularly interested in. Instead, this chapter takes as its starting point something we *do* know about Inchbald: that she never publicly renounced Catholicism, and that she maintained good relations with her Catholic family in Suffolk and with Catholic friends and clergy all over Britain. Regardless of what Inchbald believed privately, she remained publicly and personally committed to her stigmatized and penalized religious community. Her enduring fidelity to her Catholic identity must have come with both major and minor social costs, experienced daily, which would only have added to the constraints she already faced on account of her sex.

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Napoleon's aggressive relations with the Papacy. Michael Tomko argues that Boaden's text reveals his belief in "an essentialized Catholic 'mind' opposed to natural philosophy, literature, and revolutionary thought," and, therefore, opposed to Inchbald's Jacobin politics. In fact, Inchbald was not alone in being a Catholic Jacobin, and even some of the Catholic leadership in Britain demonstrated sympathy for republicanism (for instance, Alexander Geddes, who is discussed below). See McKee, "Elizabeth Inchbald, Novelist" (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1935), 103-30, esp. 103-21; Lean, *The Napoleonists: A Study in Political Disaffection, 1760-1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 57-58; and Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question: Religion, History and National Identity, 1778-1829* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 59.

<sup>3</sup> Annibel Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What: The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 9, 32, 494. While Jenkins's hefty biography is an important resource for Inchbald scholars, its treatment and analysis of Inchbald's life and works often seems directed at a popular audience more than an academic one. It frequently leaves the scholar wanting more. The truly authoritative Inchbald biography has yet to be written.

Inchbald's concerns about the constraints on women have been the subject of much excellent scholarship, which has helped bring Inchbald deserved recognition as an important dramatist, novelist, and early feminist.<sup>4</sup> However, this scholarship has generally failed to note that Catholics faced constraints very similar to those which confronted women. As we observed in the previous chapter with regard to Pope, penal laws emasculated Catholic men, denying them many of the rights denied to women: the right to own property, to bear arms, to vote, to work in certain professions, or to serve in the military or government.<sup>5</sup> As a Catholic woman with sharp social insight, Inchbald would have been more conscious of the feminized condition of Catholics than most.

This “double effacement”<sup>6</sup> as a woman and a Catholic prepared Inchbald for a singular achievement for which she has not yet received due credit. In a dissertation written in 1975, Frank David Kievitt makes an observation that seems to have gone unnoticed by later Inchbald scholars. Kievitt writes that Inchbald's most famous work, *A Simple Story*, is the first entry in what would become a major tradition in the history of

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<sup>4</sup> Feminist critics debate whether or not the term “feminist” ought to be applied to eighteenth-century women, given that the term itself did not come into use until the late nineteenth century. This is not a trivial debate; there are significant ideological and methodological issues at stake, which Sarah Apetrei summarizes in *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 30-32. I agree with Apetrei's call in favor of adopting the term “feminist” even in early contexts. She bases her position on her definition of a theoretical feminism, whose “principal marks include: a call for women's equal moral, intellectual and spiritual status to be acknowledged; the critique of strategies employed by men to dominate women and keep them in subjection; and the claim that the sexual inequalities that existed in society were constructed by custom and convention and bore no relationship to a state of nature” (ibid., 32).

All of these marks are discernible in the thrust of Inchbald's creative works—as well as in the way she lived her life.

<sup>5</sup> Frances E. Dolan comments on this penal feminization, and the association of Catholicism with the feminine more broadly, in *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); see especially 72-85. We will examine this association in greater detail below.

<sup>6</sup> I take this phrase from Tomko, the only critic I have read whose work on Inchbald focuses on this “double effacement.” “The Catholic Question in British Romantic Literature: National Identity, History, and Religious Politics, 1778-1829” (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2005), 51-52.

the novel: the depiction of “the ordinary lives of members of minority groups.”<sup>7</sup> Today it is well known that Inchbald’s novel is an important milestone in the tradition of English women’s novel writing, which for more than a century had worked to claim value for women’s experiences. But Inchbald was also the first to be inspired by that tradition to use the novel to claim value for the experiences of another silenced group: in this case, England’s beleaguered Catholic minority.

*A Simple Story* was originally two different novels, composed a decade apart (the first from 1777 to 1780, the second from 1789 to 1790) and then combined into a single work for publication in 1791.<sup>8</sup> Several major characters in the novel are Catholics, including the novel’s hero, the priest Dorriforth. Part II does not dwell on the characters’ religious identities (although we shall see that it, too, has a Catholic interest), but the development of Part I’s plot depends as much on its two principal characters’ religious differences as on their gender differences.<sup>9</sup>

Part I tells of the romance between the virtuous but austere Dorriforth and the young and fashionable Miss Milner. When her Catholic father dies, Miss Milner (raised a Protestant by her mother) becomes Dorriforth’s ward. She lives with him and his Catholic household, which includes Dorriforth’s Jesuit friend and mentor, Sandford; their shrewish, ignorant housekeeper, Mrs. Horton; and Mrs. Horton’s kind, old-maid niece,

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<sup>7</sup> Frank David Kievitt, “Attitudes toward Roman Catholicism in the Later Eighteenth-Century English Novel” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1975), 290.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the novel’s composition history, see Jenkins, *I’ll Tell You What*, 32, 52, 60, 273-75. Some scholars question this account of the novel’s history, suggesting that the whole novel was written in the late 1780s, or at least that Part I was so thoroughly revised during this period as to be something almost wholly new. See Anna Lott, introduction to *A Simple Story*, by Elizabeth Inchbald (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2007), 23-27. I favor the split composition theory, while acknowledging that the novel must have been heavily revised when it was linked to Part II.

<sup>9</sup> Inchbald does not divide the novel into a first and second part, only into four volumes. However, for ease of writing, I will refer throughout this chapter to the first two volumes as Part I and the latter two volumes as Part II.

Miss Woodley. Miss Milner frequently comes into conflict with Dorriforth and Sandford, often exacerbating her problems by ridiculing them for their religion and vocation. Tensions rise even further when Miss Milner falls in love with her guardian. She reveals her feelings to Miss Woodley, who is horrified that her friend could view a priest as a sexual being. Miss Woodley convinces Miss Milner to keep her feelings a secret, since Dorriforth's holy vows render her love hopeless. But upon the death of his childless cousin, Lord Elmwood, Dorriforth is released from his vows by the Pope so that he may continue a line of Catholic peers. Soon he discovers his own passion for his ward, and he and Miss Milner become engaged. Each is wholly enraptured by the other, but Miss Milner cannot resist testing Dorriforth's love for her by deliberately disobeying his commands. When Dorriforth can no longer take these humiliations, he breaks the engagement and vows to leave her. This disaster is averted at the last minute by Sandford, who urges them to marry, despite having previously demonstrated a strong aversion to the faulty Miss Milner. Dorriforth and Miss Milner consent, and Part I ends in great joy for the couple (although not without foreshadowing the tragic future in store for them in Part II, in which Miss Milner becomes a fallen woman, and Dorriforth becomes a tyrannical lord). From the introduction of Dorriforth as a priest in the first paragraph, to the legal complications surrounding the Catholic wedding ceremony that takes place in the final pages, Inchbald does not allow the Catholic identity of her characters to slip into the background in the first half of her novel.

We have not encountered anything like the hero-priest, Dorriforth, in this dissertation. He is not an object for mockery or derision like the Catholics which appear in many of Defoe's works (although Miss Milner attempts to make him one). He is not

subtly infantilized like Richardson's Italians. And he is certainly not the servant of Satan or a tyrannical Pope that appeared in attacks on Dryden. An enthusiastic early review of *A Simple Story* praises the originality of Inchbald's Dorriforth, writing that "[h]er principal character, the Roman Catholic lord, is perfectly new."<sup>10</sup> Catholics could be devils, or they could be good, if pitiable, foreigners. But to be English, and a priest, and a sentimental hero—this was something that readers had not seen before. Without disguise or displacement onto other figures, Inchbald attempts to portray English Catholics sympathetically and realistically. Indeed, we shall see that these Catholic characters are actively engaged in an effort to create a positive image of themselves *within* the novel.

Yet among modern critics of *A Simple Story*, Bridget Keegan and Michael Tomko are almost alone in approaching the text with an explicit focus on its Catholic interest.<sup>11</sup> Most other critics pass quickly over this aspect of the text, if they address it at all. Jane Spencer typifies this dismissiveness when she writes in her introduction to the Oxford

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<sup>10</sup> Unsigned review of *A Simple Story*, by Elizabeth Inchbald, *The Gentleman's Magazine* 61 (March 1791): 255.

<sup>11</sup> In "'Bred a Jesuit': *A Simple Story* and Late Eighteenth-Century Catholic Culture," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2008): 687-706, Bridget Keegan reconsiders the novel's much-discussed moral about giving women a proper education in light of its portrayal of Jesuits—a religious order that had helped give English Catholics the education denied them by penal laws. Tomko, in *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question*, argues that the novel may be read as a prototype of the "national tales" that would soon be popular among Irish authors like Maria Edgeworth. In his analysis, Part I of *A Simple Story* develops in accordance to a plot of "national" reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants. However, unlike most later national tales, Inchbald deconstructs her own plot in the second half of her novel, refusing to settle for a simple reconciliation in the symbolic union of marriage. She chooses instead to "confront the hatreds of history and work toward an inclusive community that does not efface marginal communities or suppress historical wounds" (*British Romanticism*, 55-56). Tomko's book, and the dissertation that led to it ("The Catholic Question in British Romantic Literature"), provide the best demonstration of the Catholic interest of the novel to date. His argument for reading the text as a kind of national tale is intriguing, but it occasionally feels strained. He reads the text as an allegory for Anglo-Catholic relations, with Dorriforth and Miss Milner representing their respective religious sects. I do not think that the text can support such a coherent allegorical interpretation. I also question the usefulness of attempting to find thematic unity in a text with such a troubled composition history (although Tomko is far from alone among Inchbald scholars in this endeavor). Another reading of the novel that takes Inchbald's religiousness seriously is Lance Wilcox's "Idols and Idolaters in *A Simple Story*," *Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual* 17 (2006): 297-316. However, his argument about the role of idolatry in the novel focuses on a more generically Christian interest than a specifically Catholic one.

World's Classics edition of *A Simple Story*, "The Catholic interest in the novel is important mainly because it adds the shocking hint of sacrilege to the heroine's desire: that desire and its prohibition are Inchbald's main concerns."<sup>12</sup> Anna Lott's introduction to the more recent Broadview edition of the novel happily offers a more balanced view of its conflicts. She provides a good primer on post-Reformation Catholic history and acknowledges both "Inchbald's personal discomfort with intolerance towards Catholicism" and "her uneasiness with the constrictions inherent in the religion itself." Yet Lott's treatment of the novel's concern about Catholic suffering is brief and rather abstract, while her commentary on the oppression of the heroine by Catholic priests is demonstrated with careful attention to the text.<sup>13</sup> Inchbald's priest hero, Dorriforth, a bold innovation in the representation of Catholics in English literature, is swept aside in favor of the heroine, Miss Milner—who is, of course, a bold innovation in the representation of women in English literature.

Miss Milner may be the most fascinating heroine of the eighteenth-century English novel, largely because she is decidedly *not* a perfect woman. But scholars often seem reluctant to acknowledge just how far from perfect she is. Inchbald frequently portrays Miss Milner laughing at and ridiculing Dorriforth and other Catholic characters while invoking anti-Catholic stereotypes and leveling tired accusations against their religion. This would be perceived as very cruel, bigoted behavior, particularly in a young woman who depends upon these people as her guardians and friends, yet many scholars attempt to excuse it and move on without further comment. For instance, Jo Alyson Parker argues that,

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<sup>12</sup> Jane Spencer, introduction to *A Simple Story*, by Elizabeth Inchbald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), vii.

<sup>13</sup> Lott, introduction to *A Simple Story*, 27-31.

Although we cannot applaud the despotic power that Miss Milner wields, we can appreciate it as a gesture of resistance, one that can only take shape by perversely mirroring the structures of a society wherein the guardians themselves may often reign as despots.<sup>14</sup>

Parker's assessment is accurate as far as it goes, but it leaves out an acknowledgement that Miss Milner has a claim to a kind of authority that Dorriforth does not. Despite being subject to the weaknesses of a woman in a patriarchal society, as a member of the Church of England establishment Miss Milner can still operate the unofficial social mechanisms that marginalized and humiliated Catholics. The Catholic characters certainly understand that her ridicule is an attempt to affirm their social inferiority and to undermine their careful attempts to be respectable English people.

We should not allow our appreciation of Miss Milner's spirited struggle against the unfairness of patriarchal authority to mislead us into seeing only what is admirable in her transgressions while dismissing the pain she causes.<sup>15</sup> Part I of *A Simple Story* is not the story of a marginalized figure constrained by social and legal conventions that deny her full personhood; it is the story of *two* such figures. The clash between Dorriforth and Miss Milner is a clash between petty tyrants, who both struggle for power within their household, knowing that the laws of their kingdom allow them virtually none outside of that household. The view of Miss Milner as a heroine victimized by domineering men must be supplemented by a consideration of Inchbald's satirical treatment of Miss

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<sup>14</sup> Jo Alyson Parker, "Complicating *A Simple Story*: Inchbald's Two Versions of Female Power," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 30, no. 3 (1997): 261. Terry Castle expresses a similar view. She acknowledges that "Inchbald does not sentimentalize this desire" of Miss Milner's to see if Dorriforth will tolerate her disobedience, but then notes that "Miss Milner never loses the reader's sympathy," and suggests that "Inchbald herself seems to understand her heroine's narcissism and how it compensates for a lack of any real power within the fictional world." *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 306-307.

<sup>15</sup> Conversely, critics tend to vilify the Jesuit priest, Sandford, more than he deserves. Jenkins's analysis of the novel offers particularly egregious examples of both these tendencies; she whitewashes Miss Milner's faults while describing Sandford as behaving like "an imp of Satan" (*I'll Tell You What*, 291).

Milner's own victimizing behavior. Doing so does not erase Miss Milner's value as a subversive figure nor negate the legitimacy of her frustrations with an unfair social order. Rather, it adds further depth to Inchbald's exploration of the nature of despotic cultural power in her world, whether Protestant or patriarchal. Indeed, the similarities of these oppressive social regimes only become more obvious in Part II of the novel, when Miss Milner's daughter and her Catholic friends suffer together in Gothic abjection under Dorriforth's tyrannical rule. As they do in Pope's poetry, women's and Catholic's precarious lives become identified with each other in these latter volumes.

This chapter investigates the Catholic interest of *A Simple Story* with the aim of understanding its intersections with the novel's better-studied feminist interest. It begins with a brief consideration of the events and circumstances—both national and personal—that would have affected Inchbald around the time that she first drafted Part I. This period was one of great turmoil, but also great hope, for the English Catholic community and for Inchbald in particular. Her decision to write a novel featuring a Catholic priest as its hero should be understood as developing out of these circumstances. With this context established, we turn to an examination of her portrayal of her Catholic characters. Her realistic characters suggest the inaccuracy of the negative, spectacular Catholic figures common in eighteenth-century media. Moreover, the characters are themselves consciously interested in resisting anti-Catholic stereotypes. Unfortunately, their efforts to shed any likeness to the (highly feminized) popular representations of Catholics create an environment hostile to women, with Miss Milner as its primary victim. These observations lead to an examination of the confrontations between Miss Milner and Dorriforth, with a focus on the heroine's bigoted jokes. Calling attention to the suffering



these jokes produce, Inchbald explores the social pressures that reinforce England's strict hierarchy of religions and sexes. We then consider how the dissolution of Dorriforth and Miss Milner's marriage exposes their continued efforts to take advantage of each other's social weaknesses, before briefly looking at their daughter Matilda's struggle in Part II. Catholic oppression receives decreased emphasis in Part II, but I argue that this change represents an expansion of Inchbald's interest in oppression, not a contraction, and that it may be explained by reference to historical developments which occurred between the composition of the first and second parts. The chapter ends with some thoughts on how an appreciation of the novel's Catholic interest opens up new avenues for exploring Inchbald's work, particularly with regard to Inchbald's feminist and political commitments.

### **Historical and Personal Religious Contexts**

Dorriforth's inheritance of the Elmwood earldom and the subsequent dispensation of his vows halfway through Part I is a key event, not just for the development of the novel's plot, but also for its Catholic interest. It leads to the novel's nearest allusion to the English Catholic community's debilitating economic and legal burdens. Upon Dorriforth's assumption of his title, a minor Catholic character remarks with confidence that the Pope will release him from his vows:

‘Yes,’ answered Mr. Fleetmond, ‘but there are no religious vows, from which the great Pontiff of Rome cannot grant a dispensation—those commandments made by the church, the church has always the power to dispense withal; and when it is for the general good of religion, his holiness thinks it incumbent on him, to publish his bull to remit all pains

and penalties for their non-observance; and certainly it is for the honour of the catholics, that this earldom should continue in a catholic family.<sup>16</sup>

Fleetmond speaks of what this earldom means for Catholics’ “honour,” but their basic economic survival is at stake. Furthermore, often the only place where Catholics could safely celebrate mass was in the private chapel of a Catholic manor house (as Inchbald’s family did at Coldham Hall during her childhood in Suffolk).<sup>17</sup> The dispensation of vows is no trivial matter, and the confidence of Fleetmond’s rambling remark sounds a little like desperate optimism. History would prove his confidence unjustified. An English Catholic bishop found himself the heir of a title in the 1780s, and the Pope refused to release his vows.<sup>18</sup> While this event occurred after the original drafting of Part I, Inchbald allows Fleetmond to continue to speak with certainty of a very doubtful matter in the published novel of 1791. His optimism about the Pope’s deep concern for the survival of Catholicism in England becomes, in retrospect, self-delusion.

Inchbald’s delicacy in this passage demonstrates the extent to which Catholic hopes continued to rest upon convincing Protestants of their loyalty. The great fear of the English government was that the Pope could, at any time, absolve Catholics of their vows of loyalty to the English monarch. Fleetmond presents the Pope’s intervention as an obligation “incumbent on him” rather than as a choice, and insists that the dispensation of a priest’s vows to the church is an internal church matter. Inchbald does all she can to draw attention away from the fact that her plot hinges upon Rome’s interest in engineering a continued succession of English Catholic earls.

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<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story*, ed. J. M. S. Tompkins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 101. (Hereafter, all citations of this novel are by page number from this edition and appear parenthetically in the main text.)

<sup>17</sup> Jenkins, *I’ll Tell You What*, 9.

<sup>18</sup> See J. M. S. Tompkins, explanatory notes to *A Simple Story*, by Elizabeth Inchbald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 343n101.

Such delicacy may indicate why the novel never directly acknowledges the legal constraints on the Catholic community. Although Catholic relief was being debated in Parliament, the resistance with which it was met by the likes of George Gordon's Protestant Association (the organization which sparked the disastrous Gordon Riots) indicates that it was still a dangerous subject to address. A direct display of support for relief would probably have rendered the novel un-publishable, even in 1791, the year in which meaningful relief was finally achieved by Catholics.

Inchbald's avoidance of direct commentary on the penal laws is likely one reason that many critics assume that she (or at least her novel) is not very interested in the Catholic community's troubles. However, Inchbald's criticism of unjust power rarely takes the form of a direct confrontation with her society's official systems of power. Daniel O'Quinn has observed this fact with regard to Inchbald's criticism of government in her plays *The Mogul Tale* and *Such Things Are*. He writes that Inchbald's "gesture toward democracy ... does not take place at the formal level of governance but rather at the level of its guiding principle—that is, the manners and morals of the subjects governed."<sup>19</sup> Rather than dwell on the legal or economic constraints that authoritarian government places on human freedom and happiness, Inchbald focuses on social and cultural constraints. She takes the same approach in exploring the constraints on Catholics in *A Simple Story*. Leaving the political questions of the day to the politicians, Inchbald's novel portrays how *unofficial* social mechanisms and personal interactions between Catholics and Protestants reminded Catholics on a daily basis of their legal and social inferiority.

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<sup>19</sup> Daniel O'Quinn, *Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 161.

Inchbald's decision to write such a new and potentially controversial novel reflects the cautious optimism of the English Catholic community in the period in which Part I was originally drafted (1777-80). The 1770s saw the first major strides in a campaign for Catholic emancipation that would continue for another half century. The Quebec Act of 1774, which allowed for the practice of Catholicism in Britain's recently acquired North American territory, was a significant event in British history. For the first time since James II had been driven from the throne in 1688, Catholicism could be openly practiced within at least one of Britain's domains.<sup>20</sup> Further relief acts were passed for England and Ireland in 1778. While these acts did not extend the freedom to practice their religion to the Catholic communities of those countries, they did remove the most egregious economic penalties against lay Catholics as well as the death penalty for clergy.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps more important than political developments, however, were the personal circumstances of Inchbald's life. The 1770s were also the years of her entry into adulthood. She had run away from her family's farm, married a much older man, and begun a career in the unstable world of the theater. Life was often a struggle. At the same time, however, she was excited by the many new opportunities that were opening up to her.<sup>22</sup> The theater introduced her to a new world: a world in which women could earn a living working professionally in public, and a world full of fellow Catholics. After a

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<sup>20</sup> For the debate over this bill, see William Cobbett, *The Parliamentary History of England: From the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, 36 vols. (London, 1806-20), 18:1357-1400, 18:1402-7. (Citations to this work are by volume and column number.) Unsurprisingly, even when Catholic relief in the Americas was under discussion, there were MPs who feared the act would threaten "all the safe-guards and barriers against the return of Popery and of Popish influence" in Britain (*ibid.*, 18:1404).

<sup>21</sup> For the major effects of these relief acts, see Cobbett, *Parliamentary History of England*, 19:1137-40.

<sup>22</sup> Jenkins's biography is full of details about Inchbald's unhappiness in the face of poverty and marital discord, but we also get a sense of Inchbald's determination to succeed professionally, and of her interest in the new places and people she encountered.

childhood in which she was one of thirty-two members of her Suffolk parish,<sup>23</sup> Inchbald obtained her first steady job as an actress in Scotland, where she became a member of an urban Catholic community in Edinburgh, and met Catholics in cities all over Scotland when doing itinerant performances. She attended Catholic services regularly from 1772 to 1776.<sup>24</sup>

Joining such a diverse body of coreligionists would have required Inchbald to make significant social and conceptual adjustments, but more importantly, it may have occasioned some political adjustments as well. The Scottish Catholic Church wore a relatively politically liberal face at this time. Bishop George Hay, then coadjutor of the church in the Lowlands (and, by 1778, its Vicar Apostolic), was a political moderate who spoke the language of liberalism in the defense of Catholic relief.<sup>25</sup> We know Inchbald met and corresponded with him.<sup>26</sup> The church's other important liberal members included the cousin priests, John and Alexander Geddes. It is unlikely that Inchbald met either of them at this time, but due to the small size of Catholic society she probably knew of them and their work.<sup>27</sup> John Geddes wrote articles against slavery and favorable to

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<sup>23</sup> An attempt by the government to count all of the Catholics in England in 1767 found thirty-two in Inchbald's parish (of which her immediate family accounted for six), and only 512 in all of Suffolk (Tomko, *British Romanticism*, 58-59).

<sup>24</sup> According to Jenkins, the large Catholic population in Scotland made it easy to attend worship (*I'll Tell You What*, 23).

<sup>25</sup> Mark Goldie, "The Scottish Catholic Enlightenment," *The Journal of British Studies* 30, no. 1 (1991): 43-44.

<sup>26</sup> McKee, "Elizabeth Inchbald: Novelist," 106; and Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, 70.

<sup>27</sup> John Geddes was in Spain during Inchbald's first stay in Scotland. However, they almost certainly would have met during her return in 1780. Alexander Geddes's parish was fifty miles from Aberdeen, far from the Edinburgh and Glasgow theaters. It is likely that Inchbald met Alexander Geddes later in London, as they both lived there after 1781 and moved in similar circles. Inchbald became friends with Geddes's patrons, the Catholic Lord and Lady Petre, in 1794, and her good friend Amelia Alderson dined with Geddes on at least one occasion (Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, 20, 324, 363). For details on the Geddes cousins' lives and work, see Goldie, "The Scottish Catholic Enlightenment," 20-62; "Geddes, Alexander (1737-1802)," Gerard Carruthers in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/article/10485> (accessed February 17, 2012); and "Geddes, John (1735-1799)," Matthew Kilburn in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/>

republicanism, and became good friends with some of the most significant figures of the Scottish Enlightenment. Alexander Geddes was even more radical and would eventually throw his support behind the Jacobins and the French Revolution. While we can only speculate on Inchbald's political development at this time, being a part of a Catholic community whose leaders had "fulsomely embraced the cant of enlightened liberality" and "the rhetoric of toleration" may have been important in her own progress toward liberal politics.<sup>28</sup>

From Scotland, she and her husband traveled to Paris. Inchbald seems to have enjoyed seeing the city's churches and convents, exploring, for the first time, a society in which Catholicism was not only practiced openly, but was the nation's established church. Pro-American spirit was running high in France, which would have further endeared the country to Inchbald (assuming she had already begun to form liberal political opinions).<sup>29</sup> Returning to England, she and her husband joined a troupe in Lancashire, one of the few counties in England with a significant Catholic population. She developed friendships with some of the Catholic families in the area that lasted for many years.

A few months after arriving in Lancashire, and roughly half a year after returning from France, Inchbald began to write a novel about a lone Protestant woman in a Catholic household—England's sectarian hierarchy turned upside-down. Given her recent experiences with thriving Catholic communities in Scotland, France, and England, and public awareness that the government had begun to recognize the potential benefits of

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article/10489 (accessed February 17, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Goldie, "The Scottish Catholic Enlightenment," 36. The Catholic intellectual climate in England was also quite liberal in this period. See Joseph P. Chinnici, *The English Catholic Enlightenment: John Lingard and the Cisalpine Movement, 1780-1850* (Shepherdstown: Patmos Press, 1980).

<sup>29</sup> Lean, *The Napoleonists*, 48-49; Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, 28-29.

Catholic relief, it is hardly a stretch to believe that Inchbald could imagine a very different future for English Catholics than she had been accustomed to in her childhood. Indeed, the unreasonable position would be to think that she was insensible to the spirit of change in the air. Even if her biographers are correct that she began to question the tenets of her faith at roughly this time, theological doubts would hardly make her uninterested in the earthly prospects suddenly open to the religious community of which she remained a member (and for many years yet, a semi-regular practitioner). For England's Catholic community, and, likely, for Inchbald in particular, this period was one of hopefulness.

Of course, Catholics had been optimistic before, only to be disappointed, and plenty of reasons remained for them to be doubtful about the prospects of toleration. While beneficial to the wealthy and the clergy, the relief act of 1778 did little to improve conditions for ordinary Catholics like Inchbald. And even this conservative relief program sparked a backlash of such intensity that it that took many Catholic leaders, sanguine about the prospect of true toleration, quite by surprise.<sup>30</sup> By late 1778, protests in the wake of English and Irish relief turned so violent that relief for Scotland—and thus, for many of Inchbald's personal friends—was abandoned entirely.<sup>31</sup> The opposition movement continued to gain steam over the course of the next year and a half, as Inchbald revised and attempted to publish Part I of *A Simple Story*. In June of 1780, the Gordon Riots broke out in London, even as Inchbald debated moving there from York. Theater business called her back to Edinburgh for the summer, where remnants of the Catholic chapel and houses that had been torched in a riot the previous year may still

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<sup>30</sup> Goldie remarks that the backlash was “a brutal shock to Catholics and Moderates alike” (“The Scottish Catholic Enlightenment,” 45).

<sup>31</sup> Riots broke out in Scotland in October 1778 and again in February 1779, effectively killing the possibility of relief. See Robert Kent Donovan, “The Military Origins of the Roman Catholic Relief Programme of 1778,” *The Historical Journal* 28, no. 1 (1985): 95-97.

have been evident.<sup>32</sup> Certainly her Catholic acquaintances would have provided her with firsthand accounts of that terrifying time. In the fall, she finally did move to London, less than four months after the violence against her coreligionists there had ended.

Further dampening hopes for tolerance was the widespread belief that the Quebec Act had only passed for the purpose of arming Canadian Catholics against the misbehaving American colonies. The 1778 Relief Act was also intended to encourage the enlistment of more Catholic troops for use against the American rebels.<sup>33</sup> The ferocity of the Gordon Riots was due, in part, to the discovery of this hidden agenda.<sup>34</sup> Catholic relief was thus primarily a strategy for making British Catholics willing participants in the nation's project of imperial expansion, rather than a result of enlightened tolerance. Inchbald's enthusiasm for relief would have been tempered by the knowledge that protests had ended the prospect of further relief for the immediate future; that Catholic gains in 1778 were minimal (especially for commoners); and that those gains came at the expense of the American colonists' struggle for liberty. These discouragements may have influenced her decision to set the novel aside for a decade.

We should understand Part I of *A Simple Story* as participating in the imaginative ferment of a society that was experiencing movement toward greater legal equality for Catholics as well as violent popular resistance to this movement. Laws were changing, but attitudes and prejudices were slower to evolve. The Papist Misrepresented may have held less power over Protestant imaginations than he once did, but he was still a powerful figure. Until popular perceptions of Catholics changed, little real improvement in

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<sup>32</sup> Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, 59-60, 69-70. Jenkins quotes a harrowing passage from James Boswell's journals about seeing Bishop Hay's house in flames. I have been unable to determine whether the Catholic chapels or houses had been rebuilt between the riots of February 1779 and Inchbald's return in July 1780.

<sup>33</sup> Goldie, "The Scottish Catholic Enlightenment," 36.

<sup>34</sup> Donovan, "Military Origins," 99-100.



Catholic conditions was possible. Inchbald was unavoidably aware of these perceptions, and her defiance of them in her novel suggests a conscious engagement with the problem of Catholic representation.

### **(Un)sensational, (Un)feminine Catholics**

Inchbald was faced with the challenge of resisting bigoted representations of Catholics while doing so in a manner acceptable to her predominantly Protestant English audience. The difficulty of this effort is evident in her initial authorial success, *The Mogul Tale*. This farce, first performed in 1784, features English characters who make jokes about the depravity of Catholic clergy. While the presence of anti-Catholic jokes in this farce would seem to complicate, if not contradict, the claim that Inchbald was concerned about Catholic representation in her work, the bigoted joke-tellers are the true targets of the farce's mockery. Trapped in the palace of the Great Mogul and fearful of these savage, exotic foreigners, two of the English characters disguise themselves as a pope and a nun, and readily adopt all of the sinful traits which they associate with those figures. Anxieties over the Orient thus shift into anxieties over Catholicism, just as they do in Defoe's *Roxana*. But in a twist, the English turn out to be dangerous, immoral buffoons, while the Great Mogul reveals himself to be a just and benevolent ruler. The literary and political targets of the play have been identified in O'Quinn's informative reading of it, but he fails to note that, in making these ridiculers of Catholicism into objects of ridicule themselves, anti-Catholic humor also becomes a target of Inchbald's satire.<sup>35</sup> The jokes about drunken popes and lusty nuns are signs of the wickedness of the

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<sup>35</sup> See O'Quinn, *Staging Governance*, 13-21. O'Quinn notes that the farce is both a mockery of Isaac Bickerstaff's successful drama, *The Sultan; or, A Peep into the Seraglio*, and a subversion of Orientalist

Protestants who utter them, not of the Catholics they ostensibly mock. In this first attempt at subverting anti-Catholic humor, Inchbald relies upon an ironic disjunction between dialogue and theme.

Of course, it is likely that not all, or even most, of Inchbald's audience perceived that her farce is critical of the anti-Catholic buffoonery it displays. Much of her audience certainly enjoyed the bigoted jokes *as* bigoted jokes. In an environment as generally anti-Catholic as an eighteenth-century English theatre, the size of the discursive community that would have been receptive to Inchbald's *anti*-anti-Catholic irony must have been quite small.<sup>36</sup> It probably did not even include all of the Catholic members of the audience. Someone writing under the name of "Father Paul" addressed a venomous epigram to Inchbald in response to the farce:

A rank Papist born and a rank Papist bred,  
By penances humbled, by MY doctrines fed—  
The Pope you burlesque, and to theatres cramm'd:  
Your *farce* has been *saved*—but *you* will be *d*—*d!*<sup>37</sup>

The epigram reads more like it was written by an opportunistic Protestant than by an actual outraged Catholic (would a priest really call a traitor to the Catholic faith a "rank

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fantasies of the East, prompted by the recent defeat of Fox's East India Bill. O'Quinn demonstrates that London audiences would recognize that the English characters in the Mogul's court represent the real-life individuals most responsible for the production of *The Sultan* (its composer, lead actress, and Bickerstaff). Thus, the farce portrays the English architects of an Orientalist fantasy of the East (*The Sultan*) encountering the "real" East. While pretending to be a pope and a nun, two of the English characters display all of the sexual deviance and aggression that their Orientalism projects onto the Eastern Other (which, at least in the person of the Great Mogul, turns out to be benevolent in "reality"). O'Quinn asserts that "the play critiques both the production and consumption of a particular staging of Orientalist fantasy" (ibid., 18). I would add that even as the English characters' Orientalist fantasies are exploded, they produce an anti-Catholic fantasy of deviant popes and nuns, once again projecting their immorality onto an Other—only this time, the Other is not Oriental, but Catholic. The incorrigible play-producers are staging a new play *within* Inchbald's play, and we may assume that their new fantasy is as baseless as their Orientalist fantasy.

<sup>36</sup> The communication of irony depends upon the existence of a receptive community that will understand that there is a meaning that cuts against the literal meaning. I take my understanding of the functioning of irony, and the "discursive communities" upon which it depends, from Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (Taylor & Francis e-Library ed. ebrary, 2005; first published as a print edition in 1994 by Routledge), 85-110.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted in Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs Inchbald*, 1:188.

Papist”?). However, we cannot be sure of the epigram’s authorship—and neither could Inchbald. Regardless of whether this particular epigrammatist was a Catholic, we may assume that many of Inchbald’s co-religionists believed that she owed the launch of her authorial career to an attack on her own religious community.

Father Paul’s response, authentic or not, brings us back to the dilemma Inchbald faced as a Catholic playwright, caught between the desire to resist bigotry and the need to sell tickets to bigots. Inchbald may have had her compromises on this subject in mind when, as she approached retirement, she made her famous claim about the difference between a playwright and a novelist:

The Novelist is a free agent. He lives in a land of liberty, whilst the Dramatic Writer exists but under a despotic government.—Passing over the subjection in which an author of plays is held by the Lord Chamberlain’s office, and the degree of dependence which he has on his actors—he is the very slave of the audience. He must have their tastes and prejudices in view, not to correct, but to humour them.<sup>38</sup>

The anti-Catholic buffoonery of *The Mogul Tale* is Inchbald’s capitulation to the despotic government of the theater—and irony is her attempt, however weak, to correct it.

In the novelist’s “land of liberty,” she adopts different strategies to challenge readers’ expectations about Catholic figures. Two of these strategies are suggested by Terry Castle’s sole significant remark on Catholicism in her touchstone reading of *A Simple Story*.<sup>39</sup> While discussing the contrast between Dorriforth’s “placid household” and Miss Milner’s uninhibited sensibility, Castle comments parenthetically that “[t]he Catholic element [of the novel] is unusual, but Inchbald gives even this a distinctly

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<sup>38</sup> Inchbald, “To the Artist,” in *The Artist; a Collection of Essays Relative to Painting, Poetry, Sculpture, Architecture, the Drama, Discoveries of Science and Various Other Subjects*, vol. 1, ed. Prince Hoare (London, 1807), 14.16. (Citations to this work are by issue number and page number.)

<sup>39</sup> Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, 290-330.

unsensational cast.”<sup>40</sup> Castle has little interest in this “Catholic element,” and this remark functions as a dismissal of it. Yet her observation suggests how the novel’s portrayal of the principal Catholic characters (Dorriforth, Sandford, and Miss Woodley), like its portrayal of Miss Milner, challenges reader expectations.

First, the fact that the only thing about Catholicism’s portrayal in the novel Castle considered worth mentioning is its “unsensational cast” highlights how unusual that unsensational cast is. Readers expect Catholic characters to be exciting and sensational—to be villainous, buffoonish, or, at the very least, passionate like Richardson’s Porrettas—because such characters usually are in the eighteenth century. Inchbald’s Catholic characters’ are singularly realistic, even boring at times—and therefore, paradoxically, rather sensational. Secondly, Castle’s reference to the placidity of Dorriforth’s household suggests another meaning of *sensational*, one which indicates that the household is actively engaged in creating a particular public image for itself. *Sensation* was an important term in eighteenth-century culture and literature. Novels of sentiment, or sensibility, were sensational literature; that is to say, they were intended to affect the sensations of their readers. They generally had heroines (and often heroes) who were likewise possessed of a powerful susceptibility to sensation. While such sensibility was generally perceived as a sign of intrinsic goodness, by the late eighteenth century quickness of feeling was also strongly associated with femininity, in contrast to masculine reason.<sup>41</sup> The discouragement of sensibility in Dorriforth’s household marks it as a masculine environment. This gendering of the Catholic household has powerful

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<sup>40</sup> Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, 301.

<sup>41</sup> I take my understanding of the complicated history of the relationship between gender and sensibility from G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

consequences, both for the Catholic characters' efforts to resist anti-Catholic stigmas, and for their relationship with the highly sensible Miss Milner.

Significantly, the first of these strategies, which challenges common literary representations of Catholics, is not dissimilar from Inchbald's strategy for challenging gender expectations through her portrayal of Miss Milner. In the paragraph following her comment on the novel's "unsensational" Catholicism, Castle notes that the Catholic household cannot understand Miss Milner because she does not match the literary versions of young women they are familiar with from novels of sentiment:

No one knows how to read Miss Milner. Dorriforth certainly cannot, nor can he imagine any way of apprehending their relationship other than as a version of the familiar guardian/ward bond. He comports himself toward her at first as though he too were a character in a novel—the personification of the good paternal guardian. . . . Dorriforth is distressed by those aspects of her character that violate the literary paradigm he knows—her propensity for the frivolous, her inability to commit herself to any serious ties. . . ., her disquieting erotic power. . . . [H]e is repeatedly oppressed by feelings of responsibility for her that he does not yet recognize—and has no way of interpreting—as desire.<sup>42</sup>

Not only is Dorriforth unable to understand Miss Milner, he is unable to understand his own sexual desire for her. He can only interpret women and emotions according to literary paradigms.

But Miss Milner, too, seems surprised to find Dorriforth unlike the Catholic figures she is familiar with from her reading. During her first breakfast in Dorriforth's house, Dorriforth tells her that he had not expected her to look so much like her father. She responds, "Nor did I, Mr. Dorriforth, expect to find you any thing like what you are." (16). She goes on to say that she expected him to be old and plain, but her initial comment suggests that Dorriforth defies a multitude of her preconceptions about Catholic

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<sup>42</sup> Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization*, 301.

priests. If Dorriforth's conception of her is based upon representations of young women he has gleaned from the pages of novels of sensibility, her expectations of him have likewise been conditioned by her reading. Even as she comes to know him better, her interactions with him remain colored by the very sensational (and mostly negative) depictions of Catholics with which she is familiar.

The novel's Protestant characters refer to such negative depictions of Catholics when insulting them, thereby emphasizing how "distinctly unsensational" the Catholic characters are. When Lord Frederick Lawnly, a bigoted Protestant libertine, accuses Dorriforth of preaching "the monastic precepts of hypocrisy" (61), he invokes the figure of the hypocritical or politically-motivated monk. This figure was ubiquitous in English literature; the self-serving Friar Dominic in Dryden's *The Spanish Fryar*, and the traitorous monk who poisons Shakespeare's proto-Protestant King John are just two out of countless examples.<sup>43</sup> But Dorriforth's "monasticism" consists entirely of an austerity which, while arguably unhealthy, is hardly hypocritical. Lord Frederick's insult does his own character more injury than Dorriforth's.

Other sensational images are invoked in the novel, only to be immediately contradicted by their obvious lack of application to the characters they target. Earlier in the novel, Lord Frederick quotes a line from Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*, suggesting that Dorriforth and Miss Milner's relationship resembles the love affair described in that poem. The "sarcastic sneer" with which he makes this comparison indicates that he is thinking less of the futile love between cloistered nun and monk described in the poem than of the sexual affair that preceded it (22). Indeed, part of the popular appeal of Pope's

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<sup>43</sup> Inchbald, in her remarks for Shakespeare's *King John* for *The British Theatre*, makes no comment about this off-stage assassin monk. Remarks for *King John* in *The British Theatre; or, A Collection of Plays*, 25 vols. (London, 1806-9), 1:3-5 (plays individually paginated).

poem no doubt lay in its relationship to pornographic works, such as *Venus in the Cloister*, that cashed in on Protestant interest in tales of lascivious priests and nuns.

Dorriforth, however, simply ignores this insult, his utter indifference indicating that he is free from even the thought of sexual impropriety. (The Protestant Miss Milner, on the other hand, is more disturbed by it, suggesting that she, like Lord Frederick and many other English people, is sexually excited by the idea of Catholic celibacy and its violation.)

Even the narrator is guilty of playing with the readers' sensational expectations. Sandford, a Jesuitical priest, is introduced as a man possessed "of wisdom to direct the conduct of men more powerful, but less ingenious than himself" (39). Inchbald's decision to make Sandford a former Jesuit can only be seen as deliberately provocative, as the Jesuits were the most hated and feared Catholic order in England.<sup>44</sup> Sandford's description plays on her readers' prior literary encounters with manipulative, scheming Jesuits. But again, quite unsensationally, Sandford soon demonstrates that he is only interested in directing the moral conduct of his friends (however intrusive and arrogant his methods might be).

Whereas Miss Milner is a novelty for defying the boundaries usually set for a sentimental heroine, much of the novelty of Inchbald's Catholic characters proceeds from their playing the roles of sentimental figures. With an educated and attractive Catholic priest for a hero and a virtuous and pious Catholic woman, Miss Woodley, as the Protestant heroine's confidant, the novel forces its readers to admire people who happen

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<sup>44</sup> As Keegan writes, "[T]he Jesuits aroused suspicion—and notoriety—first because of their supposed access to privileged places of power, second because of the order's internal power structure, and third because the Jesuits' rigorous intellectual training reputedly made them skilled casuists. The popular stereotype of the intellectually devious, politically shady, and ambitious Jesuit manipulating the aristocracy certainly had strong currency in early modern England" ("Bred a Jesuit," 694-95).

to be Catholic, as they would admire similar figures in other novels. This would have been a disorienting—perhaps *reorienting*—experience for many readers. Even when Inchbald plays with anti-Catholic stereotypes in the self-righteous Sandford and the ignorant Mrs. Horton, the stereotypes do not make the characters alien, but familiar, associating them with self-righteous and ignorant (and Protestant) characters from other sentimental works. Sandford has more in common with *Clarissa*'s pedantic clergyman, Elias Brand, and Mrs. Horton with *Sir Charles Grandison*'s bigoted and rustic Aunt Nell, than either of them has with the Gothic characters of *The Castle of Otranto*.

Of course, the Catholic characters do not always play their sentimental roles any better than Miss Milner does, and here we must consider the second way in which the novel's Catholics are "unsensational." Dorriforth in particular resists his role as a sentimental hero, as a man of feeling, despite that fact that he is naturally suited for the part. The narrator tells us that his features, though plain, "possessed such a gleam of sensibility diffused over each, that many people mistook his face for handsome," and that "on his countenance you beheld the feelings of his heart—saw all its inmost workings—the quick pulses that beat with hope and fear, or the placid ones that were stationary with patient resignation" (8). Yet throughout Part I (and even more so in Part II) he strives to display only those "placid" pulses, to impose a more somber cast on his features than his actual feelings warrant. In short, he strives to hide his sensibility. His body often betrays his feelings (Inchbald's subtlety in portraying body language suggests both the futility and folly of attempting to deny one's interior sensations), but he rarely fails to make an effort to subdue them. Sometimes he carries this self-repression to a frightening degree, as when he disowns a beloved sister and her son because she married against the family's



interests. Dorriforth's case is extreme, but most of the other Catholic characters appear to make a similar effort at self-repression. Sandford tries to maintain a grave façade, although his irritability often renders his attempts at aloofness unsuccessful. Miss Woodley is readier to acknowledge her sensations and to display sympathy for others, but she is still notably tame and dispassionate. And Miss Fenton, the perfect young Catholic woman whom Sandford promotes as a match for Dorriforth, is a caricature of insensibility (one that Inchbald regularly employs to brilliant comic effect).

Due to the association of sensibility with femininity, the efforts of the principal Catholic characters to repress their sensibility hints at the misogyny that underlies their worldview. This misogyny, and the patriarchal tyranny it inspires in Dorriforth and Sandford, have been treated with great insight by other scholars (Castle among them), so I will not directly examine them here. I must note, however, that most scholars have understood the priests' misogyny and patriarchalism as symptoms of their male-dominated culture and religion, and of their repressed sexuality. This understanding overlooks a critical element of Inchbald's Catholic and feminist designs. There is more driving Dorriforth and Sandford's unfeeling treatment of Miss Milner than their fundamental fear of women and sexuality. I contend that the misogyny of the Catholic household should be understood as a reaction against the anti-Catholic rhetoric that humiliated Catholics by gendering them as feminine.

As Frances E. Dolan's study of early modern anti-Catholic discourse has demonstrated, "[i]n constructions of Catholicism, gender is the most fully developed and

consistently, if unevenly, deployed system for remarking difference.”<sup>45</sup> In the Protestant imagination, Catholics

were persistently linked to women. ... [A]nti-Catholic polemic often represents its object as feminine, despite the fact that men dominated the institutional church. In associating Catholicism with traditionally feminine attributes as well as with female agents, anti-Catholic polemic responds, on the one hand, to the perceived importance of women in Catholic theology, iconography, and post-Reformation English practice, and ignores, on the other hand, Catholicism’s patriarchalism.<sup>46</sup>

Such rhetorical feminization of Catholics, like the penal laws that emasculated Catholic men, attacked them by associating them with women, who were similarly despised and feared in England’s patriarchal culture. Along these lines, Arthur F. Marotti argues that in the early modern period, Catholicism, “the religion of the ‘Whore of Babylon,’” was

the target of Protestant misogyny—a masculinized, reform Christianity, which attacked not only the cult of the Virgin but also devotion to female (as well as male) saints, [and] associated women’s ‘carnality’ with some of the alleged corruptions of Catholicism.... Protestant iconoclasm and misogyny shared a basic set of assumptions about the senses, about the place of the body in religious practice, and about the seductive dangers of the feminine. Woman and Catholicism were both feared as intrinsically idolatrous, superstitious, and carnal, if not also physically disgusting.<sup>47</sup>

In the early modern period, misogynistic discourse was not simply anti-woman; it was also anti-Catholic.

If misogynistic attacks were frequently leveled at Catholics, there were two obvious methods Catholics could adopt to resist such attacks. One would be to embrace those aspects of their religion that Protestants attacked as feminine. Certain Catholic apologists, it seems, adopted this approach. Dolan finds that

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<sup>45</sup> Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 6.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious Ideology & Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 36-37.

sometimes pro-Catholic discourses did defend and revere female authority. In a culture that most often construes female power negatively, Catholic apology is one discourse that justifies women's influence as wives and mothers, their authority as queens of heaven or of earth.<sup>48</sup>

One wonders if Inchbald was aware of such apologies for her religion.

Regardless, this is not the method that Dorriforth's household adopts. Instead, they seek to avoid misogynistic attacks by erasing any appearance of feminine sensibility. The placidity of Dorriforth's household is its attempt to present a respectable, which is to say, a masculine, example of Catholic gentility and religiosity. Dorriforth's interest in being a positive representative for his religion is suggested in the first sentence of the novel, where the narrator notes his care to "discriminat[e] between the philosophical and the superstitious part" of the priestly character and to adopt only the former. Furthermore, rather than "shelter himself from the temptations of the layman by the walls of a cloister," he travels to "the centre of London, where he dwelt, in his own prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance" (3). There, he serves as a living rebuttal to Protestant claims that Catholic clergy must be superstitious and incapable of practicing the manly virtues of the ancient Greeks. The household's concern for appearances explains why Mr. Sandford and Dorriforth consider Miss Milner "so dangerous a person" that she must be "given into other hands" as quickly as possible (42). Miss Milner is dangerous because her behavior is so sensational (by every meaning of that word). She threatens to ruin the carefully constructed, carefully maintained example of insensible reason and rigid masculine virtue that Dorriforth has cultivated in his household. By making a spectacle of that household, she threatens to undermine his efforts to set his society's popular representations of Catholics at defiance. Thus, even *within* the world of the novel,

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<sup>48</sup> Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, 9.

Inchbald's characters actively resist Catholic stereotypes and misrepresentations. They are consciously employed in the same project of resistance to bigotry that their author is.

Unfortunately, in their attempt to masculinize their household, they effectively create an environment hostile to the culture of sensibility's model of femininity. To appear so consistently rational, they must devalue the already devalued place of women as the sensible half of humankind. The household's efforts to provide London with a positive representation of Catholicism ends in an embrace of misogyny. And as Marotti's comments about the relationship between misogyny and anti-Catholicism indicate, in an English context misogyny has anti-Catholic implications. On some level, Dorriforth and Sandford's misogyny must also be an expression of hatred for themselves, a hatred for those aspects of their identities as Catholic priests that their immersion in English culture forces them to associate with the feminine, and to therefore despise. Their self-repression of their "feminine" sensibilities is a form of self-violence, one which leads to catastrophic consequences in Part II. *A Simple Story* suggests that for an English Catholic, misogyny is self-destructive.

Of course, Miss Milner remains the most direct victim of their misogyny. Yet she is hardly a blameless one. She regularly invokes the very anti-Catholic stereotypes that Dorriforth and Sandford wish to resist, and she seems to recognize how their hatred of those stereotypes is wrapped up in their misogyny. When Dorriforth calls her and Miss Woodley into a room with him and Sandford and tells Miss Milner that he wishes to interview her in front of a member of her sex, she turns to Sandford and asks if he is "that person of her own sex" who will observe them. Sandford replies "very angrily" at her making light of serious circumstances (55). Irritable as he is, Sandford is never so quickly

brought to a display of anger by Miss Milner as he is here. She has touched a sore spot in suggesting that the Jesuit priest is more woman than man. Indeed, Inchbald has stacked the deck against her Catholic priests by associating them with the Jesuits, the Catholic religious order most strongly associated with deviant sexualities in the Protestant imagination.<sup>49</sup>

Miss Milner's cultural indoctrination with regard to Catholic femininity may suggest why, during her courtship with Dorriforth, she believes she can take "the proud priest, the austere guardian," and transform him into "the veriest slave of love" (138). She thinks Dorriforth's passion for her will overwhelm his reason and render him obedient to her every whimsical desire. To prove it, she repeatedly goads him into emotional displays that make him ashamed of himself while proving her power over him. In essence, she seeks to subdue Dorriforth by feminizing him. Some might call this treatment of Dorriforth just deserts, yet Miss Milner's readiness to equate femininity with subjection works against her own interests. If Dorriforth's misogyny is, ultimately, anti-Catholic, Miss Milner's anti-Catholic bigotry is, ultimately, anti-feminist, and thus equally self-destructive—a problem we shall now explore at length.

### **Anti-Catholic Laughter**

Early in *A Simply Story*, the narrator comments that Miss Milner has a "happy turn for ridicule, in want of other weapons" (41). As it turns out, this weapon is a powerful one, allowing her to maintain her identity in a household that wishes to radically change her. Catherine Craft-Fairchild writes that Miss Milner's laughter

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<sup>49</sup> In his study of early modern homosexuality, Alan Bray notes that "it was the Jesuits above all who came to embody in popular mythology the identification of Popery with homosexuality." *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982), 20.

“becomes her woman’s weapon against oppression,” which she directs at “[a]ny form of masculine constraint or animosity.”<sup>50</sup> However, if Miss Milner aims at patriarchy, the devastating power of her jokes produces a great deal of collateral damage. Catholics, themselves an oppressed community, absorb most of it. And in some cases, Miss Milner’s laughter is certainly not helping a feminist cause. This is apparent when her jealousy leads her to make a joke at the expense of Dorriforth’s<sup>51</sup> first fiancée, the insensible Miss Fenton (notably *not* one of Miss Milner’s patriarchal oppressors). Upset by this attack on his favorite, Sandford warns Miss Milner, “jests are very pernicious things, when delivered with a malignant sneer.—I have known a jest destroy a lady’s reputation—I have known a jest give one person a distaste for another—I have known a jest break off a marriage” (124). Jokes, Sandford implies, are particularly harmful to women. And in attacking Miss Fenton, Miss Milner attacks not just a woman, but a Catholic as well—and thus a person even more marginalized than herself (a fact given concrete demonstration when Miss Fenton is quietly disposed of to a convent after her existence becomes an inconvenience to her and Dorriforth). The mutual weaknesses of women and Catholics to various forms of social control are nowhere clearer in *A Simple Story* than when jokes become the instruments for defining power relations between individuals.

The idea that jokes are instruments of power is not a modern one, of course. A study on eighteenth-century humor by Stuart M. Tave demonstrates that the period’s most widely accepted theory of laughter (interchangeably referred to as ridicule or satire)

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<sup>50</sup> Catherine Craft-Fairchild, *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century Fictions by Women* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 82.

<sup>51</sup> By the time his vow of celibacy has been dispensed with, Dorriforth is referred to in the novel by his new title, Lord Elmwood. However, for simplicity’s sake, I shall refer to him as Dorriforth throughout this chapter; likewise, I will refer to Miss Milner by that name, even after she becomes Lady Elmwood.

held that it was a form of triumph, that the telling of a joke created victors and victims.<sup>52</sup> According to Tave, most eighteenth-century philosophers believed that “the external source of laughter is located, commonly, in ugliness or deformity of body or soul,” and they ascribe the pleasure a person derives from it to maliciousness, a feeling of superiority, or the comfort of knowing oneself to be safe from sharing that deformity.<sup>53</sup>

This triumphalist understanding of laughter is quite apparent even in so-called polite literature, which usually justifies ridicule by asserting its corrective function on society. Inchbald’s stage comedies relied, in part, on such corrective humor, and so too does *A Simple Story*. But as Sandford’s warning suggests, humor can be destructive as well as corrective, and Miss Milner seems little interested in performing corrective work with her jokes. What she intends is to demonstrate her contempt for others, and, by humiliating them, to deny their superiority and establish her own. And her superiority is based on the fact that she, unlike the rest of the household, is not Catholic. As a woman, Miss Milner is mostly excluded from the public sphere in which penal legislation operated, but she is perfectly capable of deploying bigoted jokes to remind her Catholic friends of their inferiority. Indeed, she may even be following conduct book advice in doing so. In *The New Family Instructor*, Defoe recommends laughter as the most effective weapon against Catholicism. That text insists “[t]hat the best Way, ... to fight the Papists, was to laugh at them, to expose them to the Ridicule of the World.”<sup>54</sup> It is a sign of the precarious state of English Catholicism that a young, frivolous woman can place her own guardian in contempt merely by repeating some old, uninventive jokes.

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<sup>52</sup> For further discussion of this conception of laughter, see Stuart M. Tave, *The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 43-67.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>54</sup> Daniel Defoe, *The New Family Instructor* (London, 1727), 15.

These jokes provide Inchbald with a convenient pretext for working through the power relations between Protestants and Catholics—as well as between men and women.

In fairness to Miss Milner, she discovers the power of her laughter innocently, when she unthinkingly makes a bigoted joke during her first breakfast in her new home in the Catholic household (the same breakfast at which she notes that Dorriforth is not “any thing” like what she expected him to be). Miss Milner and Dorriforth, with Mrs. Horton and Miss Woodley present, engage in a playful conversation in which they exchange compliments on each other’s attractiveness. In response to Dorriforth’s teasing question as to whether she really believes that she is not beautiful, Miss Milner jokes, “I should from my own opinion believe so, but in some respects I am like you Roman Catholics; I don’t believe from my own understanding, but from what other people tell me” (16). The playful mood breaks instantly. Dorriforth attempts to put a stop to such talk once and for all. “[M]y dear Miss Milner,” he says,

we will talk upon some other topic, and never resume this again—we differ in opinion, I dare say, on one subject only, and this difference I hope will never extend itself to any other.—Therefore, let not religion be named between us; for as I have resolved never to persecute you, in pity be grateful, and do not persecute me.

Miss Milner is astonished that “any thing so lightly said, should be so seriously received.” Things might still have ended well enough, but Mrs. Horton “made the sign of the cross upon her forehead to prevent the infectious taint of heretical opinions.” Miss Milner cannot help but laugh at this superstitious action. Her laughter drives both Mrs. Horton and Dorriforth from the room (16-17).

Miss Milner clearly thinks that her joke is harmless, that it is just another piece of playful, half-flirtatious banter. She is shocked to discover how sensitive Dorriforth is to



even a playful expression of contempt for his religion. Mockery is one of the few things that Dorriforth finds so intolerable that his stoicism fails in the face of it. The intensity of his reaction and his labeling the joke a persecution suggest that he has had a great deal of experience with such jokes and understands that they are inherently about establishing power, regardless of the intention with which they are uttered. Even a joke made “lightly” is an attack on him and on his religion.

It is also an attack on his authority, and Dorriforth is certainly motivated by a desire to prevent Miss Milner from subverting those prerogatives which he considers his due as a man and her guardian. Yet we should also note (as Michael Tomko has done)<sup>55</sup> that Miss Milner has a similar sense of prerogative, based on her Protestantism. Whatever indulgences Miss Milner may believe are allowed to beauty, it is hard to imagine that, if she were an English Catholic and at breakfast with her new Protestant family for the first time, she would make a joke at the expense of their religion. But as a Protestant, she makes an unconscious assumption that she may mock Catholicism without consequence, and even that Catholics will find her mockery as witty as she does. Ironically, Miss Milner’s joking assertion that she lacks good judgment is confirmed by the thoughtlessness with which she utters this rude joke.

As the novel proceeds, laughter increasingly becomes for Miss Milner an almost undisguised tool for humiliating her Catholic friends and elevating herself. When she and the rest of the household attend a dinner at the castle of Lord Elmwood (Dorriforth’s cousin), a well timed joke gains her a particularly impressive triumph. Sandford’s assiduities to a detested suitor of Miss Milner’s provoke her to announce, in front of the

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<sup>55</sup> Tomko writes that Miss Milner “indulges an unthinking and harmful will to power associated with her Establishment upbringing and social position” (“The Catholic Question,” 77-78).

other guests, that Lord Frederick will soon visit the neighborhood. The revelation that she is privy to a man's plans—especially a man of Lord Frederick's libertine ways and bigoted behavior—shocks her Catholic friends. Sandford insists that if it were up to him, Miss Milner would have no knowledge of the visit. Miss Milner charges that if he could, Sandford would keep her ignorant of everything. "I would," Sandford answers. "From a self-interested motive, Mr. Sandford," Miss Milner responds, "—that I might have a greater respect for you." Miss Milner's attempt at wit recycles the old charge against the Catholic clergy that they keep their flock in superstitious ignorance so that they will be treated with greater veneration for their learning. The response of the assembly is telling: "Some of the persons present laughed—Mrs. Horton coughed—Miss Woodley blushed—Lord Elmwood sneered—Dorriforth frowned—and Miss Fenton, looked just as she did before" (48-49). The Catholic characters (save for the comically insensible Miss Fenton) respond with embarrassment or anger, but the laughter of some of the listeners gives Miss Milner her victory. Here, as a guest in a Catholic peer's house, in the neighborhood which she shares with him, Miss Milner's unoriginal jest reminds all the Catholics present of the contempt in which most of English society holds their religion, to the appreciative laughter of some of their (presumably Protestant) friends and neighbors. Her joke humiliates her Catholic friends, her guardian, and even an English peer.

Despite continually reminding the rest of the household of the inferiority of their religion, it is unlikely that Miss Milner's bigotry is based in religious conviction or strong conscious prejudices. Her own father, whom she loved, was a Catholic, and her schooling, although technically Protestant, was not very religious. Her jokes attack her Catholic friends for sins or qualities she associates with the practice of Catholicism, such

as Mrs. Horton's superstition or Sandford's priestly self-importance, but she does not often target actual tenets of the Catholic religion.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, her admiration for Dorriforth soon induces her to admire his religion as well. The narrator writes of Miss Milner that "the more she respected her guardian's understanding, the less she called in question his religious tenets—in esteeming him, she esteemed all his notions; and among the rest, even venerated those of his religion" (73). This revelation has received surprisingly little comment from critics. I know of no other place in eighteenth-century English fiction where a Protestant woman comes to approve of distinctly Catholic principles, let alone one in which such approbation is described as a positive development, as it seems to be here.<sup>57</sup> Yet Miss Milner's "veneration" of Catholic tenets does not put a stop to her anti-Catholic ridicule. Bigotry, for Miss Milner, is less about theological dispute than about exploiting the cultural privilege of the Church of England establishment.

Although frequently upset by Miss Milner's continued attacks, Dorriforth manages to respond to her with a level of restraint. Only once, in response to the repeated insults of Lord Frederick, does his wounded pride get the better of his self-control. Lord Frederick takes advantage of Dorriforth's "ecclesiastical situation" to treat him "with a

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<sup>56</sup> Religious tenets do not completely escape her attacks, however. Her first joke about Catholics believing what others tell them makes fun of the tenet which grants the clergy authority to interpret scripture for the laity. Another tenet comes under fire when Miss Milner responds to an insult from Sandford comparing her to Lucifer. "'And beauty,' continued Sandford, 'when endowed upon spirits that are evil, is a mark of their greater, their more extreme wickedness.—Lucifer was the most beautiful of all the angels in paradise—' 'How do you know?' said Miss Milner" (117). Miss Milner's question (which Sandford ignores) is not just a bold refusal to blindly accept the doctrines of a religion that makes men the guardians of knowledge; it is also an attack on Catholic theology. The story of Lucifer's fall and transformation into Satan appears nowhere in the Protestant Bible. Even the apocryphal texts do not explicitly connect Lucifer and Satan. The connection was established by the early Christian church fathers. Miss Milner, as a Protestant, believes that the Bible contains the totality of necessary revelation. Her question attacks the Catholic belief that scripture must be supplemented with the church's tradition of interpretation. Of course, many Protestants also believed in the story of Lucifer's fall, so Miss Milner's question calls attention to the fact that Protestants are not as content to limit revelation to the Bible as they generally claimed.

<sup>57</sup> Roxana is *attracted* to Catholic practices, but she never grants them her conscious approbation.

levity” on multiple occasions (58), including an encounter the narrator does not describe but which leaves Dorriforth visibly troubled all day. (Notably, when Dorriforth informs Miss Milner of Lord Frederick’s treatment of him, she declares with warmth that she will see Lord Frederick no more. Her friends’ humiliation is only acceptable if she is the one humiliating them.) The conflict between the two men reaches its breaking point when Lord Frederick further demonstrates his scorn for Dorriforth’s authority by disregarding his and Miss Milner’s attempts to make him desist pursuing her. When Lord Frederick fears that he will be denied access to Miss Milner forever, he begs her “[n]ot to desert him, in compliance to the monastic precepts of hypocrisy.” Then, in complete contempt of her on-looking guardian, he devours her hand in passionate kisses. Dorriforth strikes Lord Frederick and pulls his ward away (61).

Readings of the novel often point to this moment as a sign of Dorriforth’s unconscious desire for Miss Milner and jealousy of Lord Frederick, but Dorriforth has other reasons to despise him. The kisses are immediately preceded by an attack on Catholic monasticism, and Lord Frederick has a history of ridiculing Dorriforth’s religion to his face. Lord Frederick believes that, because of Dorriforth’s status as a Catholic and a priest, he has free rein to treat this fellow gentleman and neighbor as the butt of jokes and to disregard his authority over his ward, even in his presence. Their altercation leads to a duel, the romantic nature of which distracts us from the interfaith violence that it represents. The cause of the duel—Lord Frederick’s contempt and the blow it provoked—would not have existed had Lord Frederick perceived Dorriforth as the social equal that he is. The project of Catholic humiliation almost turns deadly when scorn escalates into violence.

That project also nearly puts an end to Miss Milner and Dorriforth's romance. After Dorriforth becomes the new Lord Elmwood and engages himself to marry Miss Milner, the two lovers, rather than finally making peace, only intensify their attempts to subjugate each other. The final crisis begins to develop when Dorriforth imperiously commands Miss Milner not to attend a masquerade, an entertainment which he considers licentious. Miss Milner has no intention of obeying what she considers to be an unjust command, and she immediately retaliates. The narrator explicitly notes Miss Milner's development of a strategy after Dorriforth issues his command: "[S]he first thought of attacking him with upbraidings; then she thought of soothing him; and at last of laughing at him.—This was the least supportable of all, and yet this she ventured upon" (152). As is apparent in the subsequent conversation, she determines that the best way to show her contempt for his authority is to invoke stereotypes of Catholics more defamatory than any she has yet given voice to:

‘I am sure your lordship,’ said she, ‘with all your saintliness, can have no objection to my being present at the masquerade, provided I go as a Nun.’

He made no reply.

‘That is a habit,’ continued she, ‘which covers a multitude of faults—and, for that evening, I may have the chance of making a conquest of you, my lord—nay, I question not, if under that inviting attire, even the pious Mr. Sandford would not ogle me.’

‘Hush,’—said Miss Woodley.

‘Why hush?’ cried Miss Milner, aloud, although Miss Woodley had spoken in a whisper, ‘I am sure,’ continued she, ‘I am only repeating what I have read in books about nuns, and their confessors.’

‘Your conduct, Miss Milner,’ replied Lord Elmwood [Dorriforth], ‘gives evident proofs what authors you have read; you may spare yourself the trouble of quoting them.’ (152)

Miss Milner's joke, as she sees it, is in her insistence that these pornographic representations of Catholics tell her more about how Catholics think and behave than

does her observation of the words and behavior of the real Catholics sitting right in front of her. The writings of bigots are to be credited over actual personal experience. The Catholics do not get the joke—or rather, they get it all too well, as they have undoubtedly had much experience with Protestants who truly do believe the representations of Catholics in “books about nuns, and their confessors.”

This joke, like Miss Milner’s first joke (that she is similar to a Catholic because she believes what people tell her) and her joke at Lord Elmwood’s house (that Sandford would keep her ignorant so that she would have greater respect for him), is about the slavish submission of personal judgment to external authority. In the first two, Catholics are the ignorant people who trust to the judgment of others. (Miss Milner is, of course, disingenuous when she says that she does not trust her own judgment about her beauty.) But in this last joke, she denies her own experiences with her Catholic friends in favor of the insulting caricatures of other authorities. She becomes the slavish devotee to spurious beliefs, albeit out of self-interest. Miss Milner’s joke thus rebounds upon the Protestant culture that spawned it, exposing that culture’s bigotry and willful ignorance. Inchbald’s effort to work through the problem of Catholic representation results in the implication that anti-Catholic discourse is itself a kind of “popish” superstition that Protestants accept in spite of the evidence of their senses.<sup>58</sup>

If the critique of anti-Catholic discourse suggested by Miss Milner’s final anti-Catholic joke is subtle, the self-destructive nature of the joke is quite clear on a personal

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<sup>58</sup> There is a further way in which this anti-Catholic joke backfires on Protestants. When Miss Milner attends the masquerade, she does not go as a nun. Instead, she dresses as Chastity (Artemis). However, her costume, as it is described in the novel, is that of “a female much less virtuous” (155). Thus, after accusing Catholics of engaging in scandalous sexual impropriety under the cover of clerical chastity, she attends the masquerade in a costume that sexualizes the very idea of chastity. As in *The Mogul Tale*, we find an English Protestant projecting her own deviance onto a Catholic Other.

level. Sandford had warned her that a joke can destroy a lady's reputation, give a person a distaste for another, or break off a marriage. This joke leads to all of these effects—on the joke-teller. Furthermore, it is significant that both of the Catholics in the room—Miss Woodley, the old maid; and Dorriforth, the former priest—are as virginal as Miss Milner. Miss Milner's last and most offensive anti-Catholic attack is also the worst accusation that could be leveled at a woman: that of sexual impropriety. Now, as the moment of rupture between this Protestant woman and Catholic man nears, two oppressive forms of English cultural authority—the patriarchal and the Protestant—reveal how nearly aligned their strategies of dehumanization truly are. Throughout the novel, Miss Milner has suffered under constraints designed to guard her sexual purity, constraints that reveal patriarchy's distrust of women's sexuality. She has struggled to prove to Dorriforth that her spiritedness is not a sign of wantonness, that she is fully capable of governing her sexuality herself. By making her bigoted joke, Miss Milner does not simply countenance and perpetuate the slanders that fuel the continued ostracization of Dorriforth and Miss Woodley from their rightful status in society. She also makes herself complicit in the very sort of cultural despotism that Sandford and Dorriforth participate in when they treat her beauty and sexuality as a threat. Miss Milner's anti-Catholic jesting has had an anti-feminist result.

### **Marriage, Patriarchy, and Bigotry**

Neither hero nor heroine seems to be aware that the methods he or she adopts to humble the other has a detrimental effect on his or her own interests. Each continues to display a stubborn pride and a fear of subjugation. After her disastrous night at the

masquerade, Miss Woodley begs Miss Milner to attempt a reconciliation, but Miss Milner answers, “[t]hat after what had passed between her and Lord Elmwood, *he* must be the first to make a concession, before she herself would condescend to be reconciled” (166). Dorriforth, meanwhile, lets many days pass without making a decision, an indication that he awaits a concession from her. Sandford, who near the end of Part I finally begins to overcome his own prejudices against Miss Milner, faults both of them for their refusal to speak to each other. “I don’t see why one is not as much to be blamed, in that respect, as the other” (185), he declares with characteristic crossness. Nevertheless, both Miss Milner and Dorriforth let several opportunities to reconcile pass, with their foremost feeling on these occasions being a resolute pride.<sup>59</sup> Their simultaneously implacable and vulnerable personalities lead to the ruin of their relationship and their lives—an outcome which seems inevitable even in the blissful moment of their marriage.

Sandford abruptly weds the couple just before their final separation is to take place. Thanks to the solemnity with which he performs the marriage rites, “the idea of jest, or even of lightness, was far from the mind of every one present” (192). Miss Milner, in other words, was in no mind to mock the alien ceremony. Caught by surprise in a moment of intense emotion, the hero and heroine forget to struggle with each other for dominance, to their mutual joy and relief. Yet the inequalities in their relationship are prominently displayed in the ceremony itself, suggesting the inescapable tensions of sexual and religious difference that will be a constant presence in their married lives.

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<sup>59</sup> When she receives Dorriforth’s letter breaking off the engagement, Miss Milner tells Miss Woodley that she will feel a “proper pride—and a proper scorn of this treatment” (176). Later, when Dorriforth catches her weeping, her “first emotion” is “pride, which arose from the humility into which she was plunged” (180).



Sandford convinces Dorriforth to marry Miss Milner by demanding that he either give her up forever, “or this moment constrain her by such ties from offending you, she shall not *dare* to violate.” He thus places an expectation of reform on Miss Milner, whereas Dorriforth asks her to “bear with all [his] infirmities” in marriage (191). Miss Milner is to be constrained and reformed by her vows, but an expectation of altered behavior is not imposed upon Dorriforth. If Miss Milner is allowed the triumph of not having to apologize for her past behavior, she is still placed in the position of modifying her future behavior to suit the desires of her husband, whose property she is to become.

Miss Milner, however, does not speak in this scene. She does not constrain herself by even so much as a private vow of reform. Nor is she constrained by any legal vow of marriage; Catholic marriage ceremonies are not recognized under English law. As soon as the ceremony ends, Sandford reminds the newlyweds (and the reader) of this technicality:

‘But still, my lord,’ cried Sandford, ‘you are only married by your own church and conscience, not by your wife’s; or by the law of the land; and let me advise you not to defer that marriage long, lest in the time you disagree, and she yet refuse to become your legal spouse.’ (192)

Miss Milner, Sandford points out, can legally still choose to leave Dorriforth, in spite of the recently concluded Catholic ceremony. Yet Dorriforth is forever bound to her, by conscience and religion. As a Catholic, he accepts Sandford’s marriage ceremony as a holy sacrament. The future of his line and title, for which he dispensed his vocational vows, is now entirely in the trust of Miss Milner, who has made no vows of obedience to him that bind her by law or by her religion. Despite Sandford’s talk of constraining Miss Milner, this ceremony has constrained no one but Dorriforth. Once again, English law denies Dorriforth his masculine right of property by preventing him from taking

immediate possession of his wife. Even as Miss Milner prepares to enter a contract that is inherently patriarchal, one which will subordinate her to her husband and effectively deny her legal personhood, Inchbald points out that Dorriforth is also not in full control of his destiny, that in England, a valid marriage is not only inherently patriarchal, but inherently Protestant.

Part I of *A Simple Story* concludes with Miss Milner's ominous discovery that the ring with which Dorriforth weds her is a mourning ring. The disaster threatened by this omen is realized in the opening chapters of Part II. Dorriforth and Miss Milner (now Lady Elmwood) have a daughter, Matilda, and for a time their marriage is happy. Then Dorriforth goes to the West Indies for three years to oversee his plantation. His excuses for the continued delay of his return inspire "suspicion and resentment" in Miss Milner. Her pride wounded, she has an affair with the Duke of Avon (formerly Lord Frederick). Dorriforth returns, and Miss Milner flees their home. Dorriforth sends Matilda after her, and vows never to see either of them again. The narrator summarizes these events before rejoining the narrative seventeen years after the wedding ceremony, as Miss Milner dies a sad, lonely death in exile, attended only by Matilda, Miss Woodley, and Sandford (who has grown somewhat gentler, if no less irritable, in his old age).

The narrator admits that she is passing over the details of the failure of Miss Milner and Dorriforth's marriage, claiming that they would not give the reader much enjoyment. Her silence leaves us with few solid details about the thoughts and feelings of the formerly happy couple as their union dissolves. What, exactly, does Miss Milner suspect Dorriforth of doing while abroad that drives her into another man's arms? We are not told, but perhaps she fears that he has finally found his perfect woman on his

plantation: a slave woman. Such a suspicion would offer some excuse for the outrageous cruelty of her response. In having an affair with Lord Frederick, Miss Milner does not merely take Dorriforth's most hated romantic rival and near-assassin into her bed; she also quite literally embraces Protestant bigotry. In transforming Dorriforth into a cuckold, she emasculates him once again—and this time the emasculation is permanent. In Dorriforth's eyes, the loss of her sexual fidelity is “a barrier never to be removed” (197). And might Miss Milner's unfaithfulness have been a final, bigoted joke on Dorriforth? Knowing that Dorriforth was once espoused to the Catholic Church, portrayed in many of those “books about nuns, and their confessors” as the Whore of Babylon, did she imagine that the worst thing she could do to him was to pervert his marriage to her into a marriage with a whore? At the very least, her swift descent into infidelity—into a lack of faith (in her husband), into (marital) apostasy—makes a mockery of Dorriforth's lifelong commitment, against enormous social and legal pressure, to maintain his religious integrity.

Miss Milner's infidelity and, particularly, her choice of partner explain the severity of her punishment (death) in the novel's moral universe. However, Dorriforth's response to his emasculation is, characteristically, a violent overreaction. He transforms from “the pious, the good, the tender Dorriforth” into “a hard-hearted tyrant,” “an example of implacable rigour and injustice” (194-95). Acting a hyper-masculine, utterly insensible (“unsensational”) part, he banishes even his innocent daughter from his house.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The fact that both Miss Milner and her daughter are, in a sense, dethroned and exiled, may suggest the faintest trace of a lingering Jacobitism in this Catholic author's novel. However, Inchbald, distrustful of aristocrats and monarchs, was not likely to have had an overly romantic view of the (now dead) Jacobite cause.

The rapidity with which Miss Milner and Dorriforth resume their cruel behaviors when their marriage turns sour, and the exorbitant lengths to which they take those behaviors, suggests that neither character had ever truly overcome their authoritarian impulses. Their relationship is not destroyed by religious division or by gender division, but by a struggle of wills that exploits those divisions for unjust appropriations of power. They both want liberty and autonomy, but they seek them through destructive means, each attempting to deny liberty and autonomy to the other.

### **Matilda, Revolution, and the Gothic**

After Miss Milner's death, Part II continues with the story of Matilda's efforts to be acknowledged by her father, who permits her back into his home but refuses to see or even speak of her. The conflict between Catholic and female identity does not govern the narrative here as it does in Part I, which makes the latter half of the novel less significant to our investigation. Yet the fact that this conflict is almost absent from this half of the novel is a matter that needs to be accounted for. This may best be done by looking at a major stylistic change in Part II: its Gothic character.

Miss Milner and Dorriforth's mutual destruction is merely the most obvious of the many Gothic qualities which scholars often note in Part II of *A Simple Story*.<sup>61</sup> The sense of isolation and misery of those living at Elmwood Castle and the haunting memory of

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<sup>61</sup> To cite only those critics who appear elsewhere in this chapter, Spencer calls the second part "reminiscent of the Gothic novels so popular in Inchbald's time" (introduction to *A Simple Story*, xix), Keegan notes that the last two volumes "draw on Gothic conventions" ("Bred a Jesuit," 690), and Amy Garnai writes, "While I do not mean to claim that *A Simple Story* should be perceived as a Gothic novel, elements of that genre are central to Matilda's story and its ongoing portrayal of the distribution of power and helplessness." *Revolutionary Imaginings of the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 128. Castle goes a step further; instead of tracing influence back to the Gothic, she suggests instead that the second part prefigures the "starkly supercharged structures of Romantic poetry and fiction" (*Civilization and Masquerade*, 321).

Miss Milner are felt throughout these volumes. Dorriforth's daughter, Matilda, even shares the name of the main heroine of the original Gothic novel, Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*.<sup>62</sup> But it may seem odd that Inchbald transforms her kind hero-priest into something resembling a Gothic hero-villain, given her effort in Part I to offer more realistic and positive representations of Catholics.<sup>63</sup> True, she softens Sandford's character somewhat in compensation, and Dorriforth (who is ultimately redeemed) no longer speaks of his religion. But the reader is not going to forget this man was a priest. Why, then, this dark transformation into a brutish Catholic caricature?

Like the other Gothic elements of Part II, it is a sign of the times. When Inchbald was writing Part II (likely 1789-90), the French Revolution was underway. That event would be productive of much Gothic literature—a genre which was particularly suited to exploring the themes of arbitrary power, domination, and abjection.<sup>64</sup> In France, the revolution was threatening to crush the Catholic Church, but in Britain circumstances were rather the reverse. As the revolution unfolded and radical politics spread, lay and clerical Catholic leaders saw their chance to achieve toleration by taking advantage of conservative hysteria. A new relief bill was passed in 1791, granting English Catholics a level of tolerance almost on par with that granted to Protestant Dissenters.<sup>65</sup> (A bill relieving Scottish Catholics would follow in 1793.) Yet Catholics made these gains at the

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<sup>62</sup> Bridget Keegan also draws this connection (“‘Bred a Jesuit,’” 690). Inchbald had acted in *The Count of Narbonne*, the stage adaptation of *The Castle of Otranto* (Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, 259).

<sup>63</sup> Tomko, too, notes that in the second part of the novel, Lord Elmwood “becomes dominated by the Gothic, Catholic stereotype [...] that part I labored to avoid” (*The Catholic Question*, 90).

<sup>64</sup> Writing of Inchbald's use of the Gothic in *A Simple Story*, Garnai notes that the genre's “amplification of the terms in which female subjugation is enacted” makes it conducive to the portrayal of the ways in which power and desire “reinforce patriarchal control” (*Revolutionary Imaginings of the 1790s*, 128).

<sup>65</sup> It is not coincidence the 1791 is both the year of the Gothic's explosion and the year in which Catholic gained relief. One Gothic theorist has suggested that the “first stage” of the Gothic novel should be dated from the 1770s to 1829, defining it by the campaign for Catholic Emancipation. See Victor Sage, *Horror Fiction in the Protestant Tradition* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 28-29.

expense of others' freedom. Catholic relief had been perverted from an exercise in enlightened religious tolerance to one of political intolerance, from an act in support of individual freedom to one that enabled aristocratic consolidation, from a project furthering the cause of liberty to a bargain by which England would gain Catholic soldiers to help it crush liberty in France.

Under such circumstances, it would have been a trial to be at once a Jacobin and a Catholic (and it was while revising *A Simple Story* that Inchbald's association with William Godwin's radical circle began). A trial, of course, should not be mistaken for an impossibility.<sup>66</sup> While I do not deny that Inchbald may have effectively abandoned her religion in the 1790s, she would not have been the only radical Catholic in London if she did not. The Scottish priest mentioned above, Alexander Geddes, maintained his Jacobin politics and moved in the same social circles as Inchbald during these years. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly the case that Catholic leaders generally became more conservative through the French revolutionary period. Indeed, Geddes's commitment to radical politics led to his suspension from holy orders. Meanwhile, Inchbald's former friend, Bishop Hay, exchanged his liberal rhetoric for loyalist polemic, decrying the "delusions of the rights of man, equality, and license." The former supporter of Enlightenment liberality had joined the "anti-Enlightenment crusade of reactive

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<sup>66</sup> Perhaps no scholar has done more to fix scholars' perception of this impossibility with regard to Inchbald than Gary Kelly. He argues that *A Simple Story* influenced later Jacobin novelists by offering them "a model of psychological self-examination on which they could pattern their own studies of the influence of society and its institutions on the development of individual character." *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 64. His work on Inchbald helped to raise her profile as a major Jacobin novelist, yet his condescending treatment of her weakening radicalism and growing religiosity in her old age implies that she could not be loyal to her Catholic community and to her radical principles simultaneously. While he deserves credit for noting that Dorriforth's worst qualities are as much a part of his education as Miss Milner's, his reading of the novel is clearly predicated on the assumption that it attacks Catholicism. With regard to Dorriforth, for instance, he writes, "The very education of a priest, Mrs. Inchbald implies, renders him unfit to communicate God's mercy to his spiritual wards" (*ibid.*, 91). This claim fails to account for Sandford, who demonstrates himself to be a fit guide for his ward in Part II.

Catholicism.”<sup>67</sup> Whatever the state of Inchbald’s faith in these years, she must have been deeply disappointed in the path taken by the Catholic Church in Britain.

Dorriforth’s transformation, then, reflects a concurrent transformation toward conservatism and authoritarianism within the Catholic aristocracy and clergy. However, as noted above, Part II takes no notice of his religion, and it certainly does not present him suffering for its sake. Likewise, Matilda’s struggle is not, like her mother’s, for female autonomy, but for parental recognition. The novel no longer structures itself around the dual (and dueling) concerns of female and Catholic subjugation. But Inchbald, we can be sure, had not ceased to be interested in her sex’s struggles, nor had she turned her back on her Catholic friends and family. She had simply changed her approach to these concerns. Whereas Part I portrays women and Catholics victimizing each other, Part II conflates the struggles of all disenfranchised people, whether women, Catholics, or the impoverished, and treats them as common victims of authoritarian government. The victims of Dorriforth’s tyranny (Matilda, Miss Woodley, and Sandford) are each members of one or more of these groups, and they suffer together.

But the influence of Inchbald’s Catholic background remains strong in the Gothic half of her novel. Like Pope before her, she draws upon her Catholic experiences of alienation, disenfranchisement, and injustice, and adds to them her similar experiences as a woman and a former indigent. These experiences inform her text with a level of painful reality. The Gothic as a style works through experiences of abjection, and few eighteenth-century authors had more personal experience with abject social identities to work through than Inchbald.

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<sup>67</sup> Carruthers, “Geddes, Alexander (1737-1802)”; and Goldie, “The Scottish Catholic Enlightenment,” 58.

Even in more specific details, the form which oppression takes in the novel shows signs of influence from Inchbald's Catholic background. Matilda, Miss Woodley, and Sandford are permitted to reside in apartments in "some retired part" of Dorriforth's large house (215), forming a tiny, isolated community that lives in fear of his terrible power. Dorriforth, for his part, no longer displays any sense of community obligation to his fellow Catholics; he is as ready to disown Sandford and Miss Woodley as he is his daughter should they violate the laws he sets them, leaving them without resources or protection. And what are those laws? Matilda will be suffered to live in his house for only so long as everyone pretends that she is not there. She may demonstrate her loyalty and obedience to him only by feigning nonexistence. Dorriforth and Sandford may talk *around* her existence so far as is necessary to see that she is taken care of, but they must never talk *about* her. In short, he treats Matilda as Richardson treats English Catholics, only without any of Richardson's mercy or goodwill.

The Gothic qualities of Matilda's life cast a shadow over her half of the novel that is not often found in those pages containing Miss Milner's luminous presence. Yet in spite of (or perhaps because of) the upheavals and betrayals in the campaign for Catholic emancipation and the terrors unfolding in both France and England, Part II is, in one respect, more utopian than Part I. For Matilda and her friends, religious and sexual differences are not divisive. She and her friends are united in a shared experience of pain that renders those divisions irrelevant. The latter half of *A Simple Story* lacks the fiery confrontation between feminism and Catholicism of the first half because these things are no longer in conflict. Whereas Miss Milner and Dorriforth insisted on treating each other as enemies, Matilda, Sandford, and Miss Woodley recognize each other as allies. They



band together in their own little community, and bear up as well they can, under their common fate as powerless Catholics and women.

### **Conclusions, Thoughts, and Speculations**

As I conclude my argument, I must acknowledge that the chasm between the patriarchal dogmas of Dorriforth's Catholicism and the radicalism of Miss Milner's feminist desire for self-determination is a wide one. Inchbald's support for both characters' causes (in real life as well as in the novel) must have produced in her some cognitive dissonance. And I must also acknowledge that at least in the novel, Inchbald lends more support to Miss Milner's cause, for Miss Milner is ultimately the weaker party. Dorriforth's sex grants him far more authority than Miss Milner's Protestantism grants her. It is only an unlikely combination of circumstances—Dorriforth's passionate love for Miss Milner, and the vow he made to her father to live with her without discussing religion with her—that allows her the opportunity to challenge his authority through attacks on his religion. This stalemate was always contingent upon Dorriforth's continuing love and his faithfulness to that vow. As the crisis of Part I and the opening chapters of Part II demonstrate, once Dorriforth determines to break his promises, the illusion of her power breaks.

Yet simply because their positions are not equally weak does not absolve Miss Milner from the bigotry of her attacks, nor the novel's readers from turning a blind eye to it. Readers naturally focus on how Miss Milner's story ends, and her fate is so awful that it diminishes our sympathy for Dorriforth. Looking back at the early pages of the novel, however, it is clear that Inchbald took pains to establish sympathy for her hero before

turning the novel over to her heroine. The first three chapters are narrated largely from the point of view of Dorriforth, who expresses his fears that he is unprepared to govern a young woman (fears, we now know, he was wise to have). And even as the focus shifts to Miss Milner in the fourth chapter, the narrator warns us of the heroine's faulty character and beguiling speech:

From her infancy she had been indulged in all her wishes to the extreme of folly, and habitually started at the unpleasant voice of control—she was beautiful, . . . and thought those moments passed in wasteful idleness during which she was not gaining some new conquest . . . she had acquired also the dangerous character of a wit; but to which she had no real pretensions. . . . Her words were but the words of others . . . but the delivery made them pass for wit, as grace in an ill proportioned figure, will often make it pass for symmetry. (15)

In spite of the warning, most readers (certainly this one) are taken in by that delivery.

Only by looking more closely at her words and at the reactions of the characters around her do we get a sense of just how “ill proportioned” Miss Milner's personality is.

The ease with which we readers allow Miss Milner's plight and charm to distract us from the ugliness of her words may implicate us in a lingering acceptance of anti-Catholic discourse. Indeed, this problem is, I think, more acute for the eighteenth-century scholar than for a casual reader. The texts we spend our days studying are so suffused with explicit and implicit attacks on Catholicism that Miss Milner's anti-Catholic jokes may strike us as mild in comparison, or hardly even register as anti-Catholic at all. (Indeed, the anti-Catholic implications of many of Miss Milner's jokes are not always immediately obvious.) We tend to read through anti-Catholic rhetoric in an effort to discern a text's “real” concerns. This text, however, contains Catholic characters who respond to such rhetoric at face value—a fact that ought to serve as a reminder to us that

*all* anti-Catholic rhetoric in the eighteenth century had a face value, one which would have been especially pointed to Catholic readers like Inchbald.

Even if we do suspect that Inchbald desires us to read through Miss Milner's anti-Catholic rhetoric to the novel's broader concerns about patriarchal tyranny (and I believe that she does desire us to do this), that does not eliminate the problem of the surface bigotry displayed by Miss Milner (who gives us little reason to believe that she shares our broader perspective). Bigotry is Miss Milner's justification for her resistance to external control. Without recourse to common anti-Catholic jokes, would she have been able to pass off her attacks on her guardian or her mockery of clerical authority as wit? If she resists millennia of male aggression against women, she does so largely by attacking a community victimized by centuries of Protestant aggression. This narrow bigotry robs her jokes of much of their subversive potential. As a result, her resistance to patriarchy within the world of *A Simple Story* is not as bold as some critics would suggest.

However, the question remains as to how inevitable this antagonism between feminism and Catholicism actually is. Certainly, there is a real ideological animosity between them in *A Simple Story*, and those tensions deserve a more thorough and nuanced analysis than they have yet received. Yet given the mutual vulnerabilities of women and Catholics suggested by the novel, we should take seriously the possibility that the unity displayed by Matilda's circle in Part II is Inchbald's final word on the relationship Catholicism and feminism *could* have.

Indeed, we should consider the possibility that Inchbald's feminism was largely *inspired* by her Catholic background. Religion's impact on the development of feminist thought is a subject that has become increasingly important to feminist studies. Recent

work by Sarah Apetrei and Barbara Taylor on eighteenth-century feminist writers has helped to demonstrate that religion is not simply “the handmaid (or manservant) of patriarchal dominance” that earlier criticism often assumed it to be.<sup>68</sup> According to Apetrei, “[r]ather than acting as a foil to, or even as an inadvertent platform for, new ideas about women, religion was potentially seminal to the whole intellectual and psychological process of conceiving a feminist critique.”<sup>69</sup> Writing specifically of Inchbald’s contemporary, Mary Wollstonecraft, Taylor claims that religion played a central role in the development of her thought, and that “it is impossible to understand her political hopes, including her hopes for women, outside a theistic framework.”<sup>70</sup>

Apetrei and Taylor primarily examine how early feminist thought was influenced by theology and spirituality, and Inchbald’s feminism merits an examination of its theological and spiritual underpinnings. That has not been the goal of this chapter, which has instead highlighted connections between the social and legal conditions of women and Catholics—connections that were not lost on other feminists of Inchbald’s era. Wollstonecraft herself recognized that women and disenfranchised religious groups shared similar experiences of oppression. While Wollstonecraft’s works betray anti-Catholic prejudices,<sup>71</sup> her respect for certain Dissenting groups and her own unorthodox

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<sup>68</sup> Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion*, 28.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 29. Apetrei’s book studies the religious context of late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century feminists like the devout Church of England communicant, Mary Astell, and female members of “radical” Dissenting religions.

<sup>70</sup> Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3-4. For Taylor’s study of the religious context of Mary Wollstonecraft’s late eighteenth-century feminism, see *ibid.*, 95-142.

<sup>71</sup> For instance, near the conclusion of her *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, Wollstonecraft chastises her addressee (Edmund Burke) for “mourn[ing] the idle tapestry that decorated a gothic pile, and the dronish bell that summoned the fat priest to prayer.” Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, in *The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft*, electronic ed., ed. Janet Todd, Marilyn Butler and assistant editor Emma Rees-Mogg, 7 vols. (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2004; first published as a print edition in 1989 by Pickering & Chatto), 5:58. (Hereafter, all citations of Wollstonecraft’s writings will be by volume and page number of this edition of her *Works*).

religious beliefs placed her on the outside of mainstream religion as well.<sup>72</sup> Near the conclusion of her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (published a year after *A Simple Story*), she draws a connection between the oppression of women and the oppression of Dissenting Protestants in England:

From the tyranny of man, I firmly believe, the greater number of female follies proceed; and the cunning, which I allow makes at present a part of their character, I likewise have repeatedly endeavoured to prove, is produced by oppression.

Were not dissenters, for instance, a class of people, with strict truth, characterized as cunning? And may I not lay some stress on this fact to prove, that when any power but reason curbs the free spirit of man, dissimulation is practised, and the various shifts of art are naturally called forth? Great attention to decorum, which was carried to a degree of scrupulosity, and all that puerile bustle about trifles and consequential solemnity ... shaped their persons as well as their minds in the mould of prim littleness.... I assert, that the same narrow prejudice for their sect, which women have for their families, prevailed in the dissenting part of the community, however worthy in other respects; and also that the same timid prudence, or headstrong efforts, often disgraced the exertions of both. Oppression thus formed many of the features of their character perfectly to coincide with that of the oppressed half of mankind.<sup>73</sup>

Much of this passage could directly describe Miss Milner or Dorriforth, the latter of whom practices a great deal of dissimulation under the cover of an excessive attention to decorum. Wollstonecraft read *A Simple Story* (and did not like the novel, nor its author),<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Wollstonecraft's husband, William Godwin, claimed that his deceased wife's religion was the product of her own thought and diverged considerably from that of any religious institution. However, Wollstonecraft appreciated the cerebral theology of the Rational Dissenters (later known as the Unitarians). See Taylor, *Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*, 95-96, 103.

<sup>73</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, in *Works*, 5:265-66.

<sup>74</sup> For details about the famous feud between these contemporary feminists, see Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What*, 394-406. Assessments of Inchbald and Wollstonecraft's feud usually focus on Inchbald's concern, as a single woman careful of her reputation, about associating with a woman who had born a child out of wedlock. It is worth considering, however, what role religious difference may have played in their distaste for one another. Wollstonecraft's dislike for Catholicism could not have endeared her to Inchbald. It is telling that Wollstonecraft's review of *A Simple Story* does not mention the unusual Catholic element of that novel, or even refer to the priest characters at all. Aside from a few comments praising the novel's prose, Wollstonecraft primarily criticizes it for its failure to sharply contrast the characters of Miss Milner and Matilda, and thus to support a useful moral about the importance of women's education. Moreover, she suggests that the sentimentality of the novel plays into "the libertine reveries of men." Wollstonecraft effectively accuses Inchbald of having written an anti-feminist novel. See *Analytical Review* 10, in *Works*,

but I am not suggesting that this passage was inspired by it. Rather, what Wollstonecraft and Inchbald demonstrate is that late eighteenth-century women, marginalized in society by their sex, could find common cause with a marginalized religious community. For these two women in particular, that common cause may have mattered more than the orthodox tenets of the religious community each identified with.

Inchbald likely recognized this common cause much earlier than Wollstonecraft. The latter was led out of the Church of England communion by her intellectual pursuits, whereas Inchbald had been born into a marginal religious community. In conversations among her coreligionists, Inchbald would have absorbed the arguments for Catholic emancipation at a young age—almost certainly at a younger age than whenever she first began to question her society's patriarchal assumptions. It is quite possible, therefore, that Inchbald's earliest feminist speculations developed out of her interest in the campaign for Catholic emancipation. Admirers of Miss Milner will not find it surprising that, on at least one occasion, Inchbald expressed a desire to be able to vote.<sup>75</sup> We should bear in mind, however, that Inchbald's sex was not the only obstacle preventing her from engaging in public affairs. Even if women (and non-property-owners) had miraculously been granted suffrage during Inchbald's lifetime, she still could not have voted; English Catholics remained disenfranchised into the 1820s.

It might be the case that, in the late 1770s, the idea of women's suffrage and independence was more easily imaginable for a Catholic woman than it would have been

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7:369-70. This accusation, along with Wollstonecraft's implicit disapproval of, or at least lack of interest in, the novel's Catholic elements could not fail to wound the author. A comparison of these women's feminisms informed by their distinct religious backgrounds would be a valuable addition to feminist studies in the period.

<sup>75</sup> Boaden quotes from a letter of Inchbald's, dated to 1806, in which she says that she would vote for Sheridan in the next election if she could (*Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald*, 2:89).

for a Protestant woman. As she saw the old barriers constraining her Catholic identity slowly crumbling under the pressure of modernity's new ideologies, perhaps Inchbald was inspired to imagine the fall of the barriers constraining her female identity. What is certain is that English culture dehumanized Inchbald as both a Catholic and a woman, and she recognized this fact. In future studies of her work, we must do so as well.

## Coda

*A Simple Story* demonstrates that relief acts and tolerationist projects had done little to temper anti-Catholic feeling by the late eighteenth century. My readers may have noted, however, that the previous chapter's discussion of Protestant-Catholic conflict in Inchbald's novel relies on terms not found in earlier chapters, such as "Protestant privilege" and "hierarchy of religions." Such terms would not apply to earlier contexts. For most of the eighteenth century, Protestants were not a privileged class of Englishmen; they defined the limits of Englishness. And while one might argue that the 1689 Toleration Act created a hierarchy of Protestant religions, Catholicism had no place within it.

*A Simple Story* differs from the other texts studied in this dissertation in that the conflict between Englishness and Catholicism is mostly implicit and never generates the level of repression, uncertainty, or confusion which we find in those earlier works. Inchbald appears to take for granted that there is no *inherent* reason why she cannot be Catholic and an English subject at the same time, any more than that there is an inherent reason why she cannot be a woman and a full, autonomous English subject. Of course, a culture of misogyny and anti-Catholicism presents a *practical* barrier to the realization of this dream, and her novel clearly protests these circumstances. But it just as clearly perceives this barrier as constructed, and that it may therefore be dismantled or



overcome. The fundamental conceptual conflict between Englishness and Catholicism has relaxed into a simpler (if still deeply entrenched and hostile) prejudice.

This change, as we might expect, derives in part from the repeal of penal legislation, but that repeal was itself a symptom of a larger cultural shift. The age of revolutions and Romanticism would dramatically change English society and literature, especially with regard to their understanding of identity. As Dror Wahrman demonstrates in *The Making of the Modern Self*, popular conceptions of personal and group identity underwent a major transformation starting in the 1770s and 80s. The result was the modern Western sense of self. This conception of personal identity “presupposes an essential core of selfhood characterized by psychological depth, or interiority, which is the bedrock of unique, expressive individual identity.”<sup>1</sup>

This new understanding of personal identity (or, perhaps more accurately, this new fetishization of one aspect of identity) stands in stark contrast to that which prevailed through most of the eighteenth century. As we observed in our study of *Roxana* in Chapter Three, this earlier identity regime placed greater value on group relationships and social performance than on a sense of a deep, essential self. Altering one’s social performance and relationships would therefore alter one’s identity. Certain categories of identity which would later be perceived as static, such as gender and race, were widely considered mutable at this time. But even under this fluid identity regime, some categories were treated as more or less fixed within individuals, among them nationality and (odd as it may seem) religion.<sup>2</sup> Anything that disturbed or blurred these categories,

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<sup>1</sup> Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), xi.

<sup>2</sup> Wahrman’s book has less to say about nationality and religion than other categories of identity. Those two categories do not follow the trajectory from fluid to fixed that gender and race do in the late eighteenth

then, threatened to unmoor some of the most secure markers of identity available within this conceptual framework. And English Catholics did so through their very existence. But when the center of identity relocated into the individual, the resulting de-emphasis on group relationships relieved some of the pressure on concepts of nationality and religion. Both remained critically important to self-definition, of course, but a neighbor's Catholicism no longer seemed to undermine the integrity of one's own Protestant or English identity. In individualizing humanity, this new concept of personal identity made the concurrence of Englishness and Catholicism in the same person conceivable at last.<sup>3</sup>

A further consequence of this fundamental transformation was an increased focus on interiority in literature. For instance, Wahrman notes that the last decades of the eighteenth century witness the decline of the epistolary novel, which "as a form privileg[es] social performance over expressions of interiority."<sup>4</sup> The intermittent composition of *A Simple Story* took place from 1777 to 1791, almost the exact same period Wahrman points to as that of the transition in conceptions of identity. It seems almost too perfect that this novel, which was originally epistolary, was transformed into its current form shortly before publication.<sup>5</sup> Inchbald's omniscient narrator gives us access to her characters' deepest desires and the internal conflicts of which even they are unaware—or, when she so chooses, she pointedly denies us access to the internal realm,

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century. However, he does offer some speculations based on recent research that they follow a related, *reverse* trajectory: that nationality and religion were treated as fixed in individuals until late in the century, then became fixed on groups and societies rather than individuals (ibid., 278-81). Obviously, conversion always made religious identity fluid, but the transformation of identity entailed by a change of religion is why conversion was such a momentous decision. As Wahrman notes in relation to the debates surrounding the 1753 Jew Bill, religion was more crucial to human difference than race (ibid., 93-96).

<sup>3</sup> Obviously it did very little to reduce *hostility* toward Catholicism. The nineteenth century was as openly hostile to Catholicism as the eighteenth, possibly more so. A study comparing the nature of anti-Catholicism before and after this shift, with a careful consideration of the relationship of anti-Catholicism to personal identity, could be quite interesting.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>5</sup> Annibel Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What: The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2003), 274.

which only makes it seem more significant. Dorriforth's feelings in particular are often off-limits to the reader, effectively made taboo, with all the sense of sacredness which that term implies. Inchbald, as a dramatist and social satirist, was keenly aware of the radical changes that had taken place in culture and literature over her lifetime. Indeed, Wahrman cites her commentary on changing theatrical and entertainment fashions as contemporary evidence of the transformation he studies.<sup>6</sup> As indicated by Gary Kelly's comments on the lasting influence of her proto-Jacobin novel's "model of psychological self-examination," Inchbald was herself in the vanguard of the new identity regime's fixation on individual uniqueness and psychological complexity.<sup>7</sup>

Kelly's comment is especially intriguing because the concept of "psychological self-examination" is not something which many scholars would be quick to associate with eighteenth-century Catholicism. Keeping an account of one's interior experience is supposed to be a Protestant practice, one which, through the pens of writers like Defoe, is transfigured into the early novel. Perhaps this apparent contradiction is why so many of Inchbald's readers (including Kelly), have resisted viewing her as a Catholic. In fact, there is no contradiction; we find here another impression of English Catholicism in need of revision. As an early modern scholar observes, Catholic devotional writing placed a strong emphasis on internal experience:

Officially denied access to church services, books, and priests, Catholics naturally turned inward, contrary to popular canards about Protestant 'interiority' and poetics. . . . The practice of Catholic, like Protestant, meditation entailed strict self-examination and *lectio divina*, the contemplation of biblical passages; it enlisted the imagination and

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<sup>6</sup> See *Making of the Modern Self*, 163.

<sup>7</sup> Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 64.

understanding to move the heart and reform the will, to free the meditant from slavery to sin and to open the soul to the movements of grace.<sup>8</sup>

The idea that Catholics did not value internal experience or record their spiritual progress is a remnant of the anti-Catholic rhetoric that defined them as the blind, thoughtless slaves of their clergy, satisfied that the performance of ritual would secure their salvation.<sup>9</sup>

The “canard” of Protestant interiority suggests the continued hold that misperceptions about Catholics have over our understanding of literary history. I would like to conclude this dissertation with some speculations on how suspending this canard might allow us to perceive a distinctly Catholic influence in the development of expressions of interiority in eighteenth-century literature.

To do so, however, we must first look more closely at Wahrman’s work on the changing nature of identity at the end of the century. Wahrman notes a number of factors which contributed to the destabilization of the former identity regime, including the development of modern commercial society and imperialism.<sup>10</sup> By the late eighteenth

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<sup>8</sup> Robert S. Miola, “Catholic Writings,” *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, ed. M. Hattaway, vol. 1 (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 456. It should come as no surprise that Inchbald kept pocket-book diaries for most of her life. See Jenkins, *I’ll Tell You What*, 5.

<sup>9</sup> J. Paul Hunter’s *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1990), offers an admirably open-minded take on the connection between various religious sects and practices of self-examination and diary writing. Hunter argues that Protestantism placed a previously unknown emphasis on these activities, which is certainly true (*ibid.*, 285-88, 303-23). But he acknowledges that “[t]he tradition of self-examination had also been, of course, an honored one in Catholic thought and practice” and suggests that diaries may have been “almost universal among those who were both devout and literate, whatever their religious persuasion” (*ibid.*, 286, 304). Undoubtedly, English Catholics were affected by the Protestant culture of self-examination, which would only have increased their interest in a devotional technique that their circumstances had already made more than usually important to them. It is also important to note that the assumed link between Protestantism and the novel is the result of historical forgetting. One of the earliest English novelists, Jane Barker, was a devout Catholic, and two more of its early practitioners, Aphra Behn and Penelope Aubin, have often been suspected of crypto-Catholicism. While these authors were not very interested in portraying interiority, they were part of the milieu out of which the early novel developed and made important contributions to practices of literary verisimilitude.

<sup>10</sup> For further details on these “enabling contexts” of identity transformation, see Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 198-217.

century, the old regime had been sufficiently undermined that it only required a strong shock to trigger its collapse. Wahrman argues that this trigger was the American Revolution. The revolution created an identity crisis, as it defied established identity categories for separating English from American, self from other, friend from foe.

Wahrman writes,

In contrast to other wars in recent memory, this one was irreducible to any clearly demarcated map of ‘us’ and ‘them’ based on a stable criterion of difference. Instead, the tension between sameness and difference – resulting, as we shall see, from the lack of clarity about who the Americans were, enemies or brethren – returned inescapably to undermine and destabilize the rhetoric of all sides.<sup>11</sup>

This tension, which “irrepressibly surfaced and resurfaced, self-contradictory and unresolvable,” was a catalyst for the relocation of identity into an interior, individuated self.<sup>12</sup>

My point is probably evident: Wahrman’s description of the identity crisis produced by the American Revolution might as easily be applied to the failure of identity categories *throughout* the eighteenth century when confronted with English Catholicism. Wahrman points to religion as a clear marker of difference which the English attempted to deploy against the Americans, and indeed, English anti-Revolution writers refer to religion in black-and-white terms. But of course, they do so because they choose to ignore the existence of English Catholicism in their midst. Yet this older identity crisis irrepressibly resurfaces (to borrow Wahrman’s words) even in these anti-Revolution polemics. For instance, Wahrman cites one pamphleteer, John Erskine, who blames the revolution “on the pernicious proliferation of popery in England.” Wahrman writes that his pamphlet,

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<sup>11</sup> Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 220.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

leave[s] the reader with the distinct sense that the furtive progress of Catholicism was the real cause of the American crisis. Moreover, not only did Erskine thus shift the line of conflict from the blurred distinctions of an ‘unnatural’ civil war among Britons to the clear and comfortably familiar demarcation between Protestants and Catholics, he also removed the disturbing anxieties of the conflict from the former to the latter. The problem of unknowable or indeterminable identities ... was now projected on the Catholics, whose cunning artifice allowed them to “pass for good Protestants” and send “priests in disguise.”<sup>13</sup>

The demarcation between Protestants and Catholics was familiar, certainly, but hardly comfortable, not when the Catholics were hiding among Protestants—indeed, passing themselves off as Protestants, as Erskine would have it. Wahrman writes that the “disturbing anxieties” and the “problem of unknowable or indeterminable identities” are “now projected on the Catholics”; I believe it would be more accurate to say that they are projected *back* onto the Catholics. This pamphleteer is not trying to eliminate the failure of identity categories, but to quarantine that failure within discourses pertaining to English Catholicism. Protestants had learned to live with the failure of their identity categories with regard to English Catholics, and they had adopted a tolerably effective strategy for circumventing that failure: ignoring them. The only difference between American rebellion and English Catholicism is that America cannot be ignored.<sup>14</sup>

Wahrman offers the above example as but one of many attempts by the English to make sense of the revolution through various schemes of sameness and difference, including race, class, and gender. But this example is unlike the others because it is the result of deliberately secret, covert difference. It does not even attempt to help solve the problem of distinguishing the English from Americans. Rather, it suggests that what must

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 228. Wahrman quotes from John Erskine, *Shall I Go to War with My American Brethren?* (Edinburgh, 1776) 18-19.

<sup>14</sup> Wahrman suggests that Erskine’s pamphlet is but one of many that blames hidden Catholics for starting the rebellion. Some blame Catholics hidden among the English, others blame Catholics hidden among the Americans.

be (and cannot be) distinguished between are English Protestants and English Catholics. Indistinguishable enemies were a problem for the English long before the American Revolution.

In this dissertation, we have encountered many examples of identities dissolving, merging, clashing, or otherwise failing at their job of creating order and meaning, when the relationship between England and Catholicism is at stake. Dryden's *Tyrannick Love* portrays Catholics as fellow countrymen who deserve the Church of England's charity, and as the threat which makes that church necessary. His *Don Sebastian* collapses the difference between hero and monster, man and beast, in order to convey English Catholic experience, even as it attempts to re-establish difference along a division between public and private, ignorance and initiation. He understands that English Catholics had no choice but to obscure themselves, as to be visible was to invite violent erasure of the identity conflict they created by their existence. Pope's *Eloisa* finds herself divided, unable to fully identify as either a nun or a lover, unable to distinguish between Abelard and God; on another level, her struggle suggests the impossibility of reconciling the demands of the Catholic religion with the demands of the English (Protestant) nation. Richardson, representative of an increasingly confident and tolerant eighteenth-century establishment, can still only treat English Catholics by refusing to directly discuss them and the contradiction which they represent. And of course, Defoe's *Roxana* is a nightmare of identity failure that makes anxieties over the American Revolution appear tame in comparison. Inchbald is the exception. She wrote at a time when a new emphasis on interiority in personal identity made group identities such as Englishness and Catholicism less critical to comprehending sameness and difference, and therefore, made

their incompatibility less excruciatingly perplexing. As a result, her work explores Catholic identity (and female identity) without succumbing to any severe identity crisis, and even manages to present a sense of optimism without stooping to Richardson's repressive measures.

All of these authors respond in different ways to this identity failure, but there is a common element to the strategies adopted by the Catholic authors: a "turn inward." Dryden's turn is largely formal, with his adoption of closet drama, although his treatment of conversion in the play also suggests an interest in following religious experience into some of the darker recesses of the mind. Pope's *Eloisa* is utterly isolated in her cell, left with nothing to explore or communicate with but her own conflicted interiority. (The fact that the poem is supposed to be an epistle to Abelard is not easily reconciled with the stream-of-consciousness quality of its contents.) Inchbald, we have noted, helped to teach the novel how to portray characters within the new identity regime which valued interiority. And even the Protestant authors signal their recognition of the significance of interiority when confronting Catholicism: Defoe by obsessing over Roxana's psychology, and Richardson by refusing to enter Clementina's.

I am not suggesting, of course, that English Catholics equated interiority with personal identity earlier than the rest of their nation. They absolutely did not. Recall that the early modern closet was a communal space; Dryden's turn to closet drama therefore establishes his Catholic identity through his connection to those coreligionists who share this imagined private space with him. Pope's apparent need of the epistolary conceit in writing *Eloisa to Abelard* reveals how firmly he believes in the performative, social construction of identity—if his own obsession with self-definition in his epistles to his



friends were not sufficient to demonstrate this to us. Inchbald does depend on interiority in her conception of personal identity, but that merely makes her *of* her time, not before her time. And even she remains deeply interested in questioning the nature of social identity categories. Cut off from their neighbors, nation, church, and king, Catholics lacked many of the social relationships by means of which English people established their identities, but they still had their relationships with family and friends, especially fellow Catholics. In some respects, English Catholics depended more strongly on their religious community for a sense of identity than Protestants did on theirs.

What I would like to suggest, however, is that English Catholics may have had a different relationship with their own interiority than their Protestant contemporaries had. Under an identity regime in which superficial signs like clothes were critical to the construction of identity, Catholics were faced with the task of holding on to their distinct religious identity while appearing and behaving little different from their Protestant neighbors. Ritual and iconography, and the other material artifacts of Catholic practice, must have helped them to distinguish themselves, but the Catholic man of business (Pope, for instance) would not always be surrounded by these things in his travels. Interiority, if it could not establish identity, might still have allowed Catholics to maintain a sense of difference from their Protestant neighbors. It could provide them with a secret sense of alienation which allowed them to maintain an imaginary connection with their community. And in moments of extreme isolation, when anti-Catholic zealotry threatened even their relationships with their coreligionists, they could turn to the chaotic realm of human interiority to work through the resulting loss of identity, as Pope does in his *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*.

These remarks are, as I indicated when I began them, quite speculative. But I believe such speculation is important to challenging our mistaken conceptions about the centrality of Protestant modes of thought to the creation of modernity and to developments in the literature of modernity. We need to consider what alternative histories the inherent anti-Catholicism of the English-speaking world has caused us to overlook. Given that the crisis of identity which created the modern self bears resemblances to the crisis that had been playing out in and around the English Catholic community for centuries, it is likely that we have overlooked a great deal.

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