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**‘Harlots and Harlotry’: The Eroticisation of Religious  
and Nationalistic Rhetoric in Early Modern England**

**Catherine Anne Parsons**

**Submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy  
in English Literature**

**University of Sussex**

**September 2010**

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature

I would like to acknowledge the help and support of my supervisor, Dr Margaret Healy in the task of researching this thesis.

Thanks are also due to Dr Paul Quinn, a source of consistent help and advice, and a number of my fellow Doctoral Students at the University of Sussex, notable amongst them Barbara Kennedy and Janis Darvill.

**University of Sussex**

Catherine Anne Parsons

Submitted for the examination for Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature

**‘Harlots and Harlotry’: The Eroticisation of Religious and Nationalistic Rhetoric  
in Early-Modern England****Summary**

This thesis explores gendered embodiment in early-modern England as a ‘semiotic field’ onto which were transcribed anxieties about the contingent nature of individual and national ‘masculine’ identity in an era of social and religious change and flux. I examine how the construction of an emergent ‘Englishness’ is articulated through the employment of eroticised metaphors of religious and national opposition. Anxieties about the threat to English national stability are feminised in order to contain and distance them, where the trope of the ‘worrying feminine’, in the Biblical archetype of the ambitious and sexually promiscuous Whore of Babylon, becomes an ‘over-coded’ entity representing a spectrum of anxieties surrounding internal and external religious threats to the self-constituted identity of English Protestant masculinity. In contrast to this, chaste female virtue in the form of the Bride of Christ is used, frequently in conjunction with the trope of the ‘motherland’, to privilege the righteousness of the Protestant masculine agenda against a perceived lack of proper monarchical rule.

Together with the insights of literary criticism and history, I draw on models from gender and identity theory and cultural theory of the body, to engage with a series of six ‘moments’ from 1530 to 1640. Plays by Bale, Sackville and Norton, Shakespeare, Dekker, Heywood, Middleton, Davenport, Brome, Richards and Quarles are analysed in conjunction with Spenser’s poetry and polemical works by Knox, Aylmer and Stubbes. I explore the ways in which the antithetical tropes are employed and how this reflects, interacts with and works against shifting social and cultural preoccupations. I conclude that the elaborate and over-insistent emphasis upon individual and national masculine supremacy is undermined by the irreconcilable contradictions inherent in its gendered construction. I argue that these disjunctures are nonetheless revealing, since the disentangling and examination of their complexities enables new and productive insights into the cultural climate of the period.

### **Notes on the text and abbreviations**

The Early English Books Online texts cited were all accessed through the University of Sussex Library Website. The Unique Resource Locator for all is identical, apart from the individual EEBO citation number, and for reasons of brevity I have simply cited this number in the footnotes and bibliography. The full address is [http://gateway.proquest.com/ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/openurl?ctx-ver=Z39.88-203&res\\_id=xri:eebo&rft\\_id=xri:eebo:citation](http://gateway.proquest.com/ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/openurl?ctx-ver=Z39.88-203&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation):

All online journal articles cited were accessed through the University of Sussex Library Website. I have cited the database on which they are held, the URL (unique resource locator) or DOI (digital object identifier), with the unique number of each article, and the publisher of the journal. If no URL is given, I have looked at the original article in the file copies held in the University Library or British Library.

All the Shakespeare plays cited, and the dates for them given, are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (London: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd, 1997).

STC refers to the Short Title Catalogue.

Wing refers to the Wing Catalogue.

Where possible I have tried to give the original date of publication for each early-modern document cited, but where it has not been possible to establish this with any degree of certainty, I have cited the date of publication of the text I have used.

I have retained the original spelling and emphases from primary texts as far as possible, including unmodified i/j and u/v spellings, with the exception of the long 's', and have expanded contractions.

Dates are given New Style (i.e. with each year assumed to begin on 1 January rather than 25 March).

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## **Introduction**

‘Myriad discourses echo through the body’.<sup>1</sup>

‘Recurrent tropes are dynamic phenomena, which change meaning over time in a way that reveals “the emotional and volitional dimensions” present in social contexts’.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis explores the ways in which gendered embodiment in post-Reformation England became a ‘semiotic field’ onto which were transposed important and shifting cultural meanings related to the construction of English identity and nationhood. Anxieties about national security and safety in a time of religious and cultural change were transferred onto the site of the ‘worrying feminine’ in order rhetorically to contain and distance them. Traditionally, female ‘embodiment’ was a central trope in mediating political ideas, not least because Law, Justice and Truth were gendered female in Latin. The early-modern era, however, was characterised by the somewhat different use of the female body in the frequent recourse to the ‘overcoded entity’ of the Biblical trope of the Whore of Babylon.<sup>3</sup> A flexible metaphor, it was employed in Reformation England to articulate Protestant antipathy to the Roman Catholic Church; in the mutual ‘mudslinging’ of Elizabethan and Jacobean Protestant factional polemic; in bellicose English patriotic rhetoric; and in the anti-Laudian and anti-monarchical debate of the immediate pre-Civil War period. Later in the 17<sup>th</sup> century it would also figure large in the near-hysteria of the post-Restoration ‘Popish plot’. This was frequently countered, in this era of growing English ‘separateness’ and nationalistic sentiment, by the depiction of both the ‘motherland’ and the English

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (London: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Jacqueline Vanhoutte, ‘Elizabeth I as Stepmother’, in *English Literary Renaissance*, Vol. 39, Issue 2, (May, 2009), pp. 315-335. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6757.2009.01049.x>, accessed 02.03.10. Vanhoutte is citing Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982) p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, Ill.: Indiana University Press, 1976), p. 134.

Protestant Church as a virtuous but vulnerable woman threatened by despoliation and violation. This thesis examines the causes of this greatly increased rhetorical reliance upon these traditionally-based epitomes of femininity and female embodiment in the articulation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anxieties about national religious and cultural change.

The evidence for an emergent English nationalistic sentiment during the Reformation period has been the subject of repeated examination in recent years. Benedict Anderson's location of the origins of 'true' nationalism in nineteenth-century print culture has been countered by those who point, rightly in my opinion, to an earlier genesis for this phenomenon and maintain that the adoption of Protestantism as the national religion under Henry VIII was the catalyst for the creation of a 'national identity'.<sup>4</sup> The increased availability of literature in the vernacular, above all the Protestant emphasis on Biblical translation, led to the growing sense of national separation characterised by what has been described as an 'amalgam of biblical fundamentalism and insular patriotism'.<sup>5</sup> It was this reliance upon the native tongue as a medium for 'writing the nation' through the articulation of the new national religious identity that underpinned the rhetorical construction of national separateness.<sup>6</sup> I shall be arguing, in keeping with the insights of Jacques Derrida, that this rhetorical effort is significant, since it constructs and undermines itself simultaneously. The varying and shifting uses of embodiment in the forms of chaste or promiscuous female bodies and Protestant masculine bodily integrity invite

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<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983, revised edition 2006), p. 83. Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Politics and National Identity: Reformation to Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 17. Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 251.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 164.

<sup>6</sup> Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, p. 1.

a ‘deconstructive’ approach which reveals the ‘subtextual’ psychological and sociological anxieties of a nation in religious and social flux.<sup>7</sup> As I shall demonstrate, this attempted creation of rhetorical order through the effort to fix on the ‘logos’ of the nation as embodied in the ‘Word’ of theologically-influenced texts is therefore doomed to dissipation and dissolution, where the Derridean disjunction of ‘différance’ manifests the authorial unease and impotence which mirrors the uncertainty of the times in which the texts are produced.<sup>8</sup>

A number of influential thinkers have helped shape this project. As mentioned above, I am indebted to the ideas of Derrida on deconstructivist literary critical theory, where I interrogate the early-modern texts I examine according to his insights in order to expose the significant ‘faultlines’ underpinning these works. The historical sociological formulations of Michel Foucault, especially his *History of Sexuality*, have provided me with the context through which to question and examine the early-modern categorisation of sexualities.<sup>9</sup> The feminist-psychological insights of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler and Luce Irigaray have provided a framework for the examination and interrogation of early-modern gender politics.<sup>10</sup> The social anthropologist Mary Douglas and her work on the symbolic relationship between the human body, especially the female body, and society is also central to my thesis, as is

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<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of grammatology*, trs. G. C. Spivak (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Différance”, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd), p. 385. This essay appeared originally in the *Bulletin de la Société française de philosophie*, LXII, No. 3 (July-September, 1968), p. 73-101, reprinted in *Théorie d’ensemble* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, trs. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1998). (First published as *La Volonté du Savoir*, by Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1976.)

<sup>10</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trs. H. M. Parshley (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972), (first published as *Le Deuxième Sexe* by Éditions Gallimard, Paris, 1949). Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Judith Butler, *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993). Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, trs. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985).

the feminist cultural theory of Julia Kristeva and her formulation of 'abjection'.<sup>11</sup> Theorists on the construction of national identity and its relationship to contemporary cultural processes such as print culture, amongst them Benedict Anderson and Richard Helgerson, have also informed my work.

In the area of the construction of early-modern national literary identity I am indebted to Andrew Hadfield's articulation of the influence of texts and textuality upon the formulation of English national identity in the Tudor period. In the area of body theory, the work of Margaret Healy upon the correlation of the body and its diseases as a paradigm for the health of the body politic has been influential, as has that of Jonathan Gil Harris and his 'pathologising' of the early-modern body politic as a space threatened by infection.<sup>12</sup> Suzanne Scholz's examination of the construction of national identity and 'civility' as worked out and constituted through the body of the early-modern 'subject' has also influenced me, as has Frances Dolan's work on the construction of national religiously-inspired political panics in terms of the gendered demonization of Roman Catholic women.<sup>13</sup> Helen Hackett's insights on the metaphorical embodied relationship between Elizabeth I and her realm have informed my examinations of national religious feminine stereotyping, as have those of Claire McEachern on early-modern symbolic nationalistic female embodiment.<sup>14</sup> Writers such as Alexandra Shepard, Elizabeth Foyster, Ian Maclean, Ian Moulton and Mark

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<sup>11</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger; an analysis of concepts of pollution and taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966, 2002). Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay in Abjection*, trs. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). (First published as *Pouvoirs d l'horreur*, Éditions du Seuil, 1980.)

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England: Bodies, Plagues and Politics* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave, 2001). Jonathan Gil Harris, *Foreign bodies and the body politic: discourses of social pathology in early modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>13</sup> Suzanne Scholz, *Body Narratives: Writing the Nation and Fashioning the Subject in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000). Frances Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1995, 1996). Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Breitenberg have helped me to understand the complexities and contradictions inherent in early-modern masculine identity construction and its relationship to the formulation of national identity.<sup>15</sup>

I use the work of these writers, especially in the areas of early-modern national identity, gender politics, the construction of masculinity, and the embodied parallels between the individual and society, as points of departure for my thesis. I examine the cultural climate of post-Reformation England in the context of the use of embodiment, where I investigate the ways in which this trope is repeatedly employed as a resource in the articulation of cultural, religious and political anxieties. Using the insights from feminist theory and cultural histories of the body, I adopt a rigorously historicised and intertextual approach to examine the ways in which masculine gendered pre-eminence based upon the construction of inherent male physical superiority and spiritual self-discipline is repeatedly set against feminine physical and moral inferiority in such a way as to assert masculine hegemony in both an individual and national context. I examine in particular the different ways in which the tropes of embodied religious femininity are juxtaposed against this masculine superiority in order to construct a polemic of national political stability and religious ascendancy set against a threat which is constructed in the rhetorically reductive terms of sexualised feminisation. The period I cover, that of the immediate post-Reformation Henrician period up until the eve of the Civil War - the era of emergent English Protestant nationhood - is rich in texts illustrative of my thesis. I see the elaborate, over-insistent emphasis upon individual and national masculine supremacy and mastery as

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<sup>15</sup> Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England* (Harlow, Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Ltd, 1999). Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). Ian Frederick Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

in fact being undermined by the ultimately irreconcilable contradictions inherent in its gendered construction. It is this very over-reliance upon the unstable ‘signifier’ of the female body that necessitates the shifts of meaning and representation which lead not to clarification, but to ultimate confusion. I also argue that these disjunctures are nonetheless revealing, since the disentangling and examination of their complexities enables new and productive insights into the cultural climate of the period. To contextualise my thesis, I will first examine the early-modern cultural constructions surrounding the body, the nature of ‘woman’, and the contingent nature of masculinity, in the light of contemporary early-modern medical and philosophical discourse, combined with the insights of modern anthropology and psychology.

### **The Body and Society**

The human body has long been used as a prism for the examination of the relationship between the individual and society. A paradigm particularly frequently resorted to in the early modern period, the prevalence of ‘somatic symbolism’ was peculiarly apt in an era in which the main understanding of the body was in terms of Galenic humoral physiology.<sup>16</sup> The perpetually-imperilled human frame, threatened by the imbalance and disorder of the bodily humours resulting from a lapse in self-government, provided an obvious paradigm for the ‘commonwealth’ as a human body writ large, subject to the same worrying influences and fraught with the same anxiety-provoking possibilities of imminent disorder and dissolution. Gail Kern Paster has demonstrated the interdependence of these constructs, where the ‘hierarchy of physiological difference’ implicit in early modern humoral theory can be seen as

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<sup>16</sup> Scholz, *Body Narratives*, p. 106.

‘paralleling and reproducing structures of social difference’.<sup>17</sup> This homologous bodily correspondence therefore came to be used as the focus for widely-varying, at times contradictory, attempts to impose a rhetorical symbolic order on the repeated ideological and social change and upheaval that characterised post-Reformation England.

However, this body so patently in need of policing and explication, the ‘body’ that epitomised universal personhood, was implicitly gendered as masculine. In the male-dominated sphere of the early-modern written and spoken word, the culturally-produced ‘speaking I’ described by Judith Butler was seen by default as male.<sup>18</sup> This ‘phallogocentric’ approach therefore contained within it the innate understanding of masculine rational and intellectual transcendancy.<sup>19</sup> As Butler shows, using Foucault’s notion of the body as the site of the production of ‘discourse’, gender is of itself constructed, where the body becomes interpreted by cultural meanings.<sup>20</sup> In early-modern hierarchical gender construction both Aristotle and Galen were cited to insist upon the male body as ‘stronger’ by virtue of its ‘hotter’ constitution.<sup>21</sup> The association of this physical ‘superiority’ with higher masculine rationality and intellectual capacity was, necessarily, achieved through the binarised opposition to the female body which, being of a ‘colder’ and ‘moister’ disposition, was considered prone to emotional imbalance, lack of self-control and mental instability. As a result,

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<sup>17</sup> Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 14-16, p. 1; Butler, *Bodies that matter*, pp. 3, 35. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trs. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 6-7. (Originally published as *La domination masculine* [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1998].)

<sup>19</sup> The term ‘phallogocentrism’ (the privileging of the masculine in the construction of meaning) is used repeatedly by Butler, but was originally coined by Jacques Derrida. For more on the subject see, amongst others, Elizabeth Grosz, ‘Ontology and Equivocation: Derrida’s Politics of Sexual Difference’, in *Diacritics*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1995), pp. 115-124. The Johns Hopkins University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/465148>, accessed 20.11.09.

<sup>20</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 12. See also Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: I*, especially Part Two, Chapter 1 ‘The Incitement to Discourse’.

<sup>21</sup> Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, pp. 30-32. See also Stephen Orgel, *Impersonations: The performance of gender in Shakespeare’s England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 19-21.

women were seen as endowed with ‘weaker reason, stronger passion and greater inherent vice’.<sup>22</sup> Despite the growing importance of Paracelsan medicine in the early seventeenth century, with its shift of emphasis in bodily understanding, this ‘Galenic’ gender interpretation remained prominent in literary and religious discourse.<sup>23</sup>

### **Internal disjuncture and instability**

This seemingly self-evident bodily construction was in reality anything but monolithic, being, as both Judith Butler and Mark Breitenberg show, undermined from within by its own ‘founding repudiation’.<sup>24</sup> Galenic physiology did not in fact emphasise women’s essential physical difference, holding instead that they were simply an inverted, but ‘lesser’, ‘imperfect’ mirror image of men. All foetuses were thought to be originally female; only those endowed with sufficient strength or ‘heat’ to enable the genitals to protrude externally became male. Women, with their ‘colder’ bodies, were therefore construed as ‘incomplete’ men, as can be readily inferred from the often-cited comparative diagrams which portray female reproductive organs as inverted copies of male ones.<sup>25</sup> Although this assertion has been questioned by those who maintain that male and female bodies were viewed as fundamentally different in this period, I see this ‘one-sex’ model in particular as giving rise to an anxiety-provoking instability; the very ascription of similarity serving to undermine from within the apparent coherence and continuity of the

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<sup>22</sup> Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, p. 22. See also Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘Women on Top’, in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1975), p. 124.

<sup>23</sup> Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, p. 29. See also Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England*, p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 37; Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, p. 31.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, the diagram by Vesalius which shows the female reproductive organs as an inverted penis, in Laqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 82. See also Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, p. 32.

constructed gender system which opposed masculine strength to feminine weakness.<sup>26</sup> It was held to be possible for women to turn into men, and for their genitals to be forced outside the body through undue physical exertion.<sup>27</sup> This unsettling potential was however as nothing, as Stephen Orgel demonstrates, to the concomitant spectre of male reversion to the inferior female state through a failure of proper masculine self-regulation.<sup>28</sup> This fearful and ever-present possibility of the loss of masculinity struck at the root of the construction of male identity, and created the necessity for men to be constantly on the alert for any possible moral backsliding. Spenser's Sir Guyon, the Knight of Temperaunce in *The Faerie Queene*, may be seen as an exemplar of this imperative. He demonstrates the continual need for a man to strive for physical and mental self-mastery and balance, 'measur[ing] out a meane', ever-vigilant in the policing of his passions and schooling himself in the exercise of continence.<sup>29</sup>

It is the need to reassert continually this masculine hegemonic superiority that Mark Breitenberg identifies as producing the state of what he terms 'anxious masculinity', which manifests itself in the consistent attempt to maintain the performance of gendered identities. This is achieved in particular through the figuring of masculinity relative to a specific construction of 'woman' in order to maintain the privileges of the male 'subject', constructing a distanced 'other' by which men

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Scholz, *Body Narratives*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> An instance of this may be found in the travel journal of Michel de Montaigne, where he cites the case of a girl known as 'Marie Germain' who while 'making an effort at jumping' instigated the appearance of 'virile instruments' and was re-christened as a man. See Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Works of Montaigne: Essays, Travel Journal, Letters*, trs. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1948), pp. 869-70. See also Patricia Parker, 'Gender Ideology, Gender Change: The Case of Marie Germain', in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Winter, 1993), pp. 337-364. American Educational Research Association. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343879>, accessed 7.2.10. The case is referred to by Orgel in *Impersonations*, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Orgel, *Impersonations*, p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Edmund Spenser (1590), *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, esp. Canto I, Stanza 58 (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1978), ed. Thomas P. Roche, p. 283. For more on the fear of effeminacy see Ian Frederick Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England*, esp. Ch. 2.

rhetorically validate their own cultural self-worth and superiority.<sup>30</sup> Thus, despite the early-modern Protestant emphasis upon the desirability of ‘companionate marriage’ that has been cited as evidence of the complementarity of the sexes in the spiritual and domestic spheres, the prevalent gender rhetoric remained one of systematised masculine hierarchical superiority by contrast to the inferior female.<sup>31</sup>

### **‘Mala mulier’ – the evil woman**

This idea of ‘woman’ is based upon the ‘contrariety’ described by Stuart Clark; the habit of dualistic binary philosophical construction that was an underpinning of early modern ideology.<sup>32</sup> The traditional opposition of good and evil was particularly evident in gender relations, masculinity seen as ‘positive’ and femininity, by default, as the ‘negative’ other against which masculinity defined its own intrinsic virtue. In this construction of the ‘female’ as the negative inferior of the ‘male’, ideas from classical antiquity were brought into play. Aristotelian dualities characterising the male and female principles as active/passive, form/matter, perfection/imperfection and completion/deprivation were employed, as was the Pythagorean definition of women in terms of negative attributes, aligning them metaphorically with fluid and unbounded concepts such as ‘unlimited’, ‘plurality’, ‘darkness’ and ‘evil’.<sup>33</sup> The precepts of such patristic writers as Tertullian and Chrysostom, who had described women as ‘the door of the devil’, and the ‘mala mulier’ (or ‘evil woman’), were cited. Biblical example was used to emphasise Eve’s fallibility as incurring man’s downfall, banishment from Eden, and subjection to mortality, and 1 Peter 3.7 quoted to show

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<sup>30</sup> Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, p. 6. De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, pp. 16-21.

<sup>31</sup> Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>32</sup> Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons; the Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), esp. Part 1: Language, Chapter 4. See also Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>33</sup> Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, pp. 8, 54.

that all women were ‘the weaker vessel’.<sup>34</sup> Jerome and Aquinas also held that women were morally inferior, prone to vanity, pride and lechery.<sup>35</sup> The monolithic idea of female moral inferiority was therefore firmly culturally entrenched, and may be seen as an underpinning of the growing discrepancy between ‘social realities’ and the notion of ‘woman’ evident in the early-modern era.<sup>36</sup>

It is useful in this context to employ the insights of modern anthropological and psychological feminist theory to examine the ways in which the notion of ‘woman’ is constructed. The idea of the ‘female’ may be seen as undergoing a tortuous interpretive process that constructs it in relation to the formation and maintaining of masculine hegemony, the self-referential nature of which Pierre Bourdieu defines as ‘phallonnarcissism’.<sup>37</sup> Luce Irigaray speaks of woman as ‘the sex which is not one’, of the female constructed by masculinity as the ‘unrepresentable’ other which is used as the rhetorical blank space on to which are projected masculine anxieties and desires in order to bolster up male ‘self-construction’.<sup>38</sup>

Under Judaic law, based on the Biblical Book of Leviticus, woman had traditionally been seen as ‘unclean’, a symbolic threat to the purity of the community, especially at times of menstruation or following childbirth.<sup>39</sup> This metaphorical emphasis upon the female body’s procreational faculties is the particular focus of multivalent misogynistic construction. Julia Kristeva shows how the maternal function renders ‘woman’ as fearful, causing her to be construed not as a ‘life-giver’ but in terms of life’s terrible concomitants, decay and death.<sup>40</sup> The ‘archaic

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, *The Geneva Bible*, 1560 Edition, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers Inc., 2007, facsimile edition).

<sup>35</sup> Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>36</sup> Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, p. 17. See also Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 108.

<sup>40</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 159.

maternal', as Kristeva terms it, this threat to the social 'identity, system or order' posed by 'woman', therefore causes her to be figured as 'abject' or 'other', her threat of 'defilement' construed in terms of bodily filth, the symbolic danger she poses to society demanding purification and containment.<sup>41</sup> Kristeva cites the work of Mary Douglas, who demonstrates how the threat of defilement to a community must be metaphorically distanced, displaced to the boundary or limit of the society.<sup>42</sup> Woman is therefore situated symbolically in that liminal area which constructs her as the externalised opposition to the 'logos' that is the excluding and therefore self-defining male. The marginalisation of this 'filth' has the resultant psychological effect of establishing the 'self and clean' identity of the social group, with its 'phallogocentric' construction of masculine transcendancy.<sup>43</sup> It has the correlative effect of constructing the female as the opposite to the established norm, rendering her, in her carnally-based physicality, as aligned with the 'unholy, disorderly, subhuman and unsightly', as the monstrous 'other'.<sup>44</sup> I see this understanding as underpinning the recourse to the religious symbolism of female embodiment, especially in the frequent evocations of the Whore of Babylon as a sexually-promiscuous and socially-threatening 'other'.

Again, however, this construction is far from unproblematic. Georges Bataille shows how the very notion of 'abjection' is fraught with the 'inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding'.<sup>45</sup> This is complicated by Kristeva's depiction of the ambivalent relation of the excluding male to the

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<sup>41</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, pp. 4, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 121.

<sup>43</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 65.

<sup>44</sup> Rosi Braidotti, 'Mothers, Monsters and Machines', in *Writing on the Body: female embodiment and feminist theory*, eds. Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and Sarah Stanbury (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 64.

<sup>45</sup> Georges Bataille, 'L'Abjection et les formes misérables', in *Essaies de Sociologie, Œuvres complètes*, 2:217ff., cited by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror*, p.64.

‘abjectified’ female. The fearful maternal body from which the male must break free in order to achieve a separate identity is seen in terms of sin and taboo, ambiguous, as both ‘desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject’, serving to eroticise the notion of abjection.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, Lacan maintains that it is only in relation to this maternal body that male identity can be established, the ‘desire’ for the maternal body countermanded only by the fundamental taboo against incest.<sup>47</sup> While the notion of abjection serves to reinforce patriarchal hegemony, it therefore nonetheless co-exists with this problematic reliance upon the reproductive female body as centrally necessary for the perpetuation of the patrilineal system. This understanding is evident in the use of the imagery of the biblical Woman Clothed with the Sun, a woman whose maternal function is central to the narrative of the transference of patriarchal lineage and authority, but who is condemned to suffer in exile to render her worthy of her divine ‘marriage’, and where her embodiment in terms of English Protestantism is subject to shifting and contradictory depictions.

This ambivalent relationship to the female maternal function may therefore be seen as underpinning the preoccupation with, and the paramount importance ascribed to, the safeguarding and surveillance of female sexual chastity in the early-modern era. The subliminal fear of uncontained female sexuality threatening the stability of the patriarchal identity is evident in the numbers of early modern ‘conduct books’ which prescribed normative feminine behaviour. From Juan Vives’ *Institution of a Christian Woman* in the early 1500s to the bitter misogyny of Joseph Swetnam’s 1615 *Arraignment of leevd, idle, froward and vnconstant women* almost a century

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<sup>46</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> See Judith Butler’s analysis of Lacan’s theories in *Gender Trouble*, p. 57. See also Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: a Selection* (London: Routledge, 1981), pp. 215, 223. (Originally published as *Écrits* [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966].)

later, there is a repeated emphasis upon female decorum.<sup>48</sup> As Peter Stallybrass has demonstrated, using Bakhtin's formulation of the 'grotesque body', the female body was seen as 'unfinished' and exceeding 'its own limits'.<sup>49</sup> This anxiety about the latent potential for corporeal transgression translates in early modern texts into the monitoring and restraint of the female body. Women are enjoined to be modest and sparing in their speech, remain safely enclosed within doors, and be soberly and modestly clad – the signs of 'Woman' are the 'enclosed body, the closed mouth, the locked house'.<sup>50</sup> This insistence upon the maintenance of female bodily integrity is illustrated by the use of Mary Douglas's seminal anthropological insight that '[t]he body is a model which may stand for any bounded system'.<sup>51</sup> It is through the female indulgence in forbidden sexual intercourse that the danger to the community is seen as entering, the 'broached' female body construed as a polluted and polluting menace to social wellbeing and order which directly threatens the purity of patrilineal transmission, the gateway through which metaphorical and physical disease enter into the social group.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Juan Luis Vives, *A very fruitfull and pleasant booke called the instruction[n] of a Christen woma[n], made first in Laten, and dedicated to the quenes good grace, by the right famous clerke mayster Lewes Vives, and turned out of Laten into Englysshe by Richard Hyrd* (London, 1531). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/1529. Folger Shakespeare Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 57402341, accessed 23.06.09. Joseph Swetnam, *The arraignment of levvd, idle, froward, and vnconstant women or, the vanitie of them, choose you whether. With a commendation of wise, virtuous and honest women. Pleasant for married men, and hurtfull to none.* (London, 1616). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/1615. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 22582906, accessed 23.06.09. For more on the early-modern depictions of the nature of women, see Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus, *Half Humankind: Contexts and Texts of the Controversy about Women in England, 1540-1640* (Illinois: Illini Books Ltd, 1985).

<sup>49</sup> Mikhail Bahktin, *Rabelais and His World*, trs. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press). Originally published as *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable* (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura, 1965). Cited by Peter Stallybrass in 'Patriarchal Territories: The Body Enclosed', in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, eds Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (London: The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1986), p. 126.

<sup>50</sup> Stallybrass, 'Patriarchal Territories', p. 127.

<sup>51</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 142.

<sup>52</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, pp. 155-6.

### **Masculine honour, male identity**

The ‘constructed’ and contingent nature of early-modern masculine identity formation, and the increased awareness of the relationship of the individual man to the social world of which he formed a part, has been the subject of much examination in recent years. Norbert Elias has famously shown how the early-modern body was subject to the ‘civilising process’ through which a person was enabled to become part of society.<sup>53</sup> In his formulation of ‘self-fashioning’ Stephen Greenblatt, too, demonstrates how the social and cultural changes in the early-modern era gave rise to a new emphasis upon men gaining social status and recognition through the self-conscious manipulation and construction of identity.<sup>54</sup> The component parts of identity were increasingly the subject of social interpretation and scrutiny; a ‘proper’ man must display gentlemanly self-control, dress appropriately, and demonstrate learning. Castiglione’s *The Courtier* (1528) advised on the proper self-presentation for a man wishing to appear ‘civilised’, and prescribed the appropriate dress, conversation and behaviour.<sup>55</sup> Books such as *Keep within Compasse; or, The Worthy Legacy of a Wise Father to his Beloved sonne* (1629) advocated the ‘boundaries of virtuous practice in religion, conversation, diet and apparel’.<sup>56</sup> Breitenberg points to the ‘public and social’ nature of early modern society, demonstrating that the individual was understood as an integral part of the social matrix, not ‘individually contexted but socially’, echoing the correspondence held to exist between the

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<sup>53</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1994, 2000), p. 60.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning; from More to Shakespeare* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 1-9. See also Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, p. 104.

<sup>55</sup> Conte Baldassare Castiglione, *The courtier of Count Baldessar Castilio diuided into foure bookes. Very necessary and profitable for yonge gentilmen and gentilwomen abiding in court, palaice or place, done into English by Thomas Hoby*, (London, 1561). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/4778. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99857182, accessed 12.11.09. A translation of *il libro del Cortegiano* (Venice, 1528).

<sup>56</sup> Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, p. 30.

individual body and the ‘body politic’.<sup>57</sup> Masculine self-governance was therefore seen as a pre-condition for the all-important ability to take part in public life, the significance of the proper preparation and education for such ‘magistracy’ being outlined in Elyot’s *The boke named the governour* (1531).<sup>58</sup> The correlation between this masculine self-governance and the three central social institutions of the early modern period – the family, the state and the church – can be seen particularly clearly in Robert Clever’s *A Godly Forme of Household Government* (1598). This states dogmatically that:

it is impossible for a man to understand to gouern the common wealth, that doth not know to rule his own house, or order his own person; so that he that knoweth not to gouern, deserueth not to raigne.<sup>59</sup>

The most crucial factor in this construction of male selfhood was the achieving and maintenance of honour, a concept which was based to a large extent upon the oppositional category of ‘woman’. The deep interconnection between man and society made it all the more shameful for male honour to be seen as lost or impugned, and the fundamental importance to masculine identity of reputation and the certainty of proper patrilineal transmission can be repeatedly seen in play-texts of the period. However, this honour was a slippery and uncontrollable thing, resting not only on the behaviour of the man in question but also upon the behaviour – particularly the sexual probity - of his womenfolk. Amongst the most notable depictions of this problematic subject are Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1603-4) and *A Winter’s Tale* (1614), where it is significant that both plays revolve around the central role of female chastity in the

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<sup>57</sup> Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, p. 13. See E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1943; London: Pimlico, 1998), p. 101.

<sup>58</sup> Sir Thomas Elyot, *The boke named the gouernour deuised by Thomas Elyot knight* (London, 1531). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/1531. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 22330039, accessed 23.06.09.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Clever, *A Godly Forme of Household Government; for the ordering of private families, according to the direction of God’s Word* (London, 1598), p. 16. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/5385. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99843750, accessed 10.06.09. Cited by Breitenberg in *Anxious Masculinity*, p. 18.

maintenance and display of male honour.<sup>60</sup> The manifest loss of a husband or father's control over the women in his family was a matter of deep social shame, being viewed as a fundamental inversion of the 'natural' order; it was the subject of numerous staunchly-defended court cases for slander, and the occasion of the community-based shaming ritual of the 'skimmington ride'.<sup>61</sup>

Women were therefore seen not only as a threat to the transmission of patrilineal inheritance; they menaced the very bodily basis of masculinity, the carefully balanced self-control which was such a fundamental constituent of male identity. Female sexuality, at once so fearful and seductive, could undermine and destroy male self control, with the succumbing to female 'allurements' involving the abandonment of the stringently-maintained bastions of male rectitude and fortitude. Women were capable of dragging men down to the 'horrors of a debased sexual corporeality'; sexual indulgence could involve metaphorical 'destruction' and 'even castration'.<sup>62</sup> At the very least, inordinate love for or infatuation with women led to the loss of manly reason, of the much-vaunted masculine rational superiority, and the blurring of the hierarchies of gender and social status.<sup>63</sup> For this reason women were seen as aligned with deception and disguise, their use of the meretricious external trappings of cosmetics and rich dress shown as 'engines' to lure unwary men. Men conquered by lust were understood as effeminate, as transgressors of the limits of normal behaviour and aligned with the unnatural or monstrous aspects of feminine excess and moral instability. Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* is cited by Breitenberg – who shows how Burton's theories are solidly based in Galenic physiology – to

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<sup>60</sup> William Shakespeare, *Othello* (1603-4) and *A Winter's Tale* (1614), in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (London: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd, 1997).

<sup>61</sup> Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England*, pp. 9, 104.

<sup>62</sup> Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, p 40.

<sup>63</sup> See Laqueur, *Making Sex*, p. 123. See also Rebecca W. Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 21.

illustrate the fearful results of this effeminisation. According to Burton, these besotted, 'beguiled' men 'trick themselves up', losing their identities, social status and worldly wealth in the process. They

*goe beyond women, men weare harlots colours, and doe not walke, but iet and daunce, hic mulier, hac [sic.] vir, more like Players, Butterflies, Baboones, Apes, Antickes, then men ... in a short space their whole patrimonies are consumed.*<sup>64</sup>

The ever-present threat of this loss of the all-important masculine identity was therefore the subject of sustained anxiety. Breitenberg sees the cultural and political upheaval, including the social and class mobility, which characterised the early modern period, as particularly productive of this unease. He shows how this manifested itself through an increased focus upon female corporeality, in which social disruption and disorder were depicted in terms of transgressive and monstrous female sexuality.<sup>65</sup> The theme of the 'consuming' by women of men's worldly goods and the subversion of male identities and social standing by dangerous female sexuality is repeatedly shown in connection with the construction of women as spreaders of disease. Prostitutes or promiscuous women were seen as the source and promulgators of the sexually-transmitted and virulent scourge of syphilis or the 'pox'.<sup>66</sup> The fearful nature of this disease, which involved bodily disintegration and decay and eventual death, served merely to emphasise the danger which women posed to male wellbeing. The fear that a seductive woman might be concealing the symptoms of syphilis also added to the notion of women as deceitful and the ready adopters of disguise and trickery.

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<sup>64</sup> Robert Burton, *The anatomy of melancholy vvhat it is. VVith all the kindes, causes, symptomes, prognostickes, and seuerall cures of it. In three maine partitions with their seuerall sections, members, and subsections. Philosophically, medicinally, historically, opened and cut vp. By Democritus Iunior. With a satyricall preface, concurring to the following discourse* (Oxford, 1621), p. 571. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/4159. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99857427, accessed 8.11.09. Cited by Breitenberg in *Anxious Masculinity*, p. 55.

<sup>65</sup> Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, p. 21.

<sup>66</sup> Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England*, p. 136.

The habits of homologous thinking prevalent in early modern thought, with the interconnection of the corporeal body and the body politic as directly affecting each other, may therefore be seen as underpinning the frequent reversion in the period to the tropes of fearful and dangerous femininity.<sup>67</sup> The threat to male identity posed by sexually aberrant females is evident not only in the frequent reliance upon the trope of female instability and danger in the domestic sphere; it is also apparent in the bodily-centred rhetoric in which growing English nationalistic and religious anxieties were expressed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The hierarchical gender superiority based on Galenic physiology is still very much to the fore, but it runs in tandem with other bodily understandings, most notably the Paracelsan discourse of the danger of bodily disease as caused by the infiltration by external influences.<sup>68</sup> As Jonathan Gil Harris notes, this particular trope translates in political rhetoric into an increasing awareness of the English nation as set apart from other countries, and needing to maintain its physical separation from the ‘infection’ of ‘strangers’.<sup>69</sup>

### **‘The Bride’ versus ‘The Whore’ – religio-political nationalistic rhetoric**

My thesis, therefore, is that the seemingly oxymoronic sexualisation of religious and nationalistic rhetoric is a significant, and hitherto largely unremarked, aspect of the early-modern construction of ‘Englishness’. It is, however, an area in which the frequent evocation of anxieties about the instability of individual masculine identity both inform and underpin the fears surrounding national religio-political stability. It is particularly appropriate that Gil Harris sees the psychological shift as linked to the

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<sup>67</sup> For more on the anxiety about ‘disorderly’ women, see Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, p. 126. For more on the expression of anxieties about national stability transposed onto the sexually-deviant and worrying female, see Neil Hertz, ‘Medusa’s Head: Male Hysteria under Political Pressure’, in *Representations*, No. 4 (Autumn, 1983). University of California Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928546>, accessed 07.07.09.

<sup>68</sup> Gil Harris, *Foreign bodies and the body politic*, p. 20.

<sup>69</sup> Gil Harris, *Foreign bodies and the body politic*, pp. 20-21.

move away from the international ‘*corpus ecclesiasticum*’ of the Roman Church to ‘national body politics’ following the English Reformation.<sup>70</sup> The religiously-motivated insistence upon English separateness is linked to the contemporary depiction of England, if not as the ‘elect nation’ outlined by William Haller, then certainly as a nation divinely intended as a bastion of Protestantism against the encroaching evils of Papistry.<sup>71</sup> It is this for this reason that I have employed the pejorative oppositional term ‘Papistry’ in the attempt to reflect the mindset of militant English Protestantism rather than the somewhat less fraught ‘Roman Catholicism’. This understanding may likewise be seen in the context of the traditional ‘mobilisation’ of feminisation in the ‘relational articulation’ of national identity highlighted by R. Radhakrishnan. He shows how the traditional use of this ‘inner/outer distinction’ constitutes ‘woman’ as the embodiment of national integrity, as ‘the pure and ahistorical signifier of “interiority”’.<sup>72</sup> In addition, as Debora Shuger shows, the centrality of religion in the early-modern English ‘mindset’ can hardly be overstated, where it was the ‘cultural matrix for explorations of virtually every topic’. This was, as she says, ‘a religious culture, not simply a culture whose members generally were religious’.<sup>73</sup> It would have seemed natural, therefore, to express national and religious differences in the rhetorical effort to assert English Protestant rectitude and spiritual independence from Rome through the resort to the traditional religious tropes of female virtue and vice. The most frequently adverted-to, as I have

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<sup>70</sup> Gil Harris, *Foreign bodies and the body politic*, p. 20.

<sup>71</sup> See William Haller, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation* (London: Cape, 1963), p. 69, and Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530-1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 109 for contrasting views on the subject.

<sup>72</sup> R. Radhakrishnan, ‘Nationalism, Gender, and the Narrative of Identity’, in *Nationalisms & Sexualities*, eds. Andrew Parker, Mary Russo, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 84. For further examples of the ‘gendering’ of an emergent national identity in terms of feminine embodiment see Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies; Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1987), p. 141, and George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), p. 90.

<sup>73</sup> Debora Kuller Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance: Religion, Politics and the Dominant Culture* (Oxford: The University of California Press, 1990), p. 6.

mentioned previously, are those ‘archetypes’ of the Biblical Book of Revelation, the oppositional personifications of the Woman Clothed with the Sun and the Bride of Christ contrasted with the Whore of Babylon. The centrality of the tropes in the ‘English’ imagination may be seen in the Elizabethan Homilies, in particular the homily against ‘perill of idolatrie’, in which the Roman Catholic Church and its ritual and accoutrements were constructed in terms of the trappings of harlotry to ‘entice’ men to ‘spirituall fornication’, and the ‘true’ Protestant Church shown as a ‘chaste matrone’ possessing ‘true naturall beawtie’.<sup>74</sup>

I argue that this ‘writing of the nation’, to use Richard Helgerson’s phrase, the concerted ‘generational project’ of articulating and establishing nascent English national and religious identity, nonetheless displays logical inconsistencies of approach which reflect contemporary social upheavals and uncertainties.<sup>75</sup> Again, the ‘speaking I’ - those men who are producing the nation through the written word - emphasise the national superiority through the implicit use of Galenic bodily structures, masculine hierarchical ascendancy consistently being asserted against a weak, inferior or deviant femininity. English nationality is couched in terms of strong masculinity, the divine destiny of the nation as the bastion of Protestantism paralleled by the depiction of its aristocratic élite (or of those who would be part of that élite) as strong militant Protestants, righteous and manly defenders of their country. In this effort to assert the link between themselves and the nation they claim to represent, however, I see the emphasis upon national masculine superiority as existing in tension with the repeated depiction of the nation and the English Protestant church as

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<sup>74</sup> John Jewel, ‘The iii part of the sermon against perill of idolatrie’, in *The second tome of homilees of such matters as were promised, and intituled in the former part of homilees. Set out by the auctoritie of the Queenes Maiestie: and to be read in euery parishe church agreeably* (London, 1561), p. 147. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/13669, accessed 10.07.10. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99841883. Cited by Hackett in *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 69.

weak and vulnerable women, using embodied imagery to figure them as chaste women threatened with sexual violation. As this thesis will demonstrate, the two tropes of female embodiment are frequently conflated, where it becomes difficult at times to distinguish which aspect of feminine virtue in the religio-political context is intended, but there is a consistent depiction of this womanly virtue as existing in permanent and extreme danger of the loss of bodily integrity, in keeping with the Biblical figure of the Woman Clothed with the Sun. I argue that this emphasis upon female chastity is not an unmediated depiction of female bodily danger, however, but an implicit privileging of those men who are casting themselves, in their martial Protestant virtue, as the patriarchal guardians of this essential national chastity against the encroachments of Papistry, as the divinely-destined saviours of the nation.

I show, too, how this problematic construction of innate national rectitude is also consistently set against the threat posed to the realm by international Papistry, where Roman Catholicism is constructed as the essential and eternal foe against which English Protestantism defines itself. In the attempt to distance this threat, the Biblical Whore of Babylon is repeatedly invoked as the chief embodiment of the fearful anti-religion, 'othered' and 'abjectified' in the attempt to diminish rhetorically the threat of Papistry. However, the representation of the Whore is also fraught with multiple constructions, where she is shown as posing a double-edged danger to English manhood. An ambitious, unnatural and 'tyrannical' self-declared 'Queen', she is a bloodthirsty and merciless warmonger who menaces the embattled realm from her seat in Rome, with numberless forces held in readiness under her command. This trope runs in tandem with the description of her as a wanton harlot threatening to undermine the realm from within by her seductive and deceitful activities. The emphasis upon the Whore as a sexually promiscuous and degenerate woman

underpins the depiction of Papistry as a sexually-transmitted disease, in the association of the luxury and colour of Roman Catholic accoutrements and ritual with the alluring external trappings of a prostitute that serve to lure the unwary male, and the heresy of Papist doctrine seen as the infection by the fatally diseased body concealed beneath. The promiscuous and polluting body of the Whore is paralleled by the depiction of the Roman Catholic clergy as her 'minions', unmanned and rendered effeminate by their unthinking erotic submission to her. Spiritually blinded by her seductive ploys, they have lost their masculine integrity and become hypocritical schemers, who will stop at nothing to gain the victory for their mistress. The depth of their moral debauchery, both spiritual and carnal, is emphasised by their repeated description in terms of the basest sin, sodomy. The greater frequency of depictions of this 'undermining' aspect of the Whore shows the fear of Papist treachery from within the realm as more immediate and ultimately more threatening than the danger from foreign Roman Catholic armies. It is this fear of internal Papist 'sedition' menacing the body politic which is particularly fraught, evidenced repeatedly by the anxieties surrounding secret Papist sympathisers, turncoats and spies operating in concealment. It also underlies the anathematisation of those English Protestants suspected of backsliding or insufficient commitment to the nation and the national religion.

I therefore see the prevalence of this sexualised imagery in a religio-political context as particularly significant. It exemplifies not only the early-modern habit of recourse to 'somatic symbolism' as an explicatory metaphor, but serves to emphasise the profound danger to the body politic, a threat rendered all the more fearful by the psychological immediacy of the trope of 'embodiment'.<sup>76</sup> The depiction of national

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<sup>76</sup> Scholz, *Body Narratives*, p. 106.

danger in terms of either ‘othered’ or ‘contained’ femininity is intended to evoke the proper masculine response by all ‘civilised’ Englishmen, constructing a common identity by the implicit invocation of these men as a ‘band of brothers’ who must come together in the defence of their country.<sup>77</sup> By uniting against their common enemy, they are asserting both their national unity and their masculine identity as sons of the ‘motherland’, exerting themselves in the defence of their national religion, the feminised Protestant church of which they are the guardians and protectors. Those making common cause in this way may have widely differing agendas, where the anxiety over the religious destiny of the nation runs in parallel with those who have the more worldly ambition of influencing the operations of power; or where, indeed, the two concerns may motivate the same person. Nonetheless, this multivalent and fraught construction is simultaneously an assertion and affirmation of idealised English manhood in such a way as to identify it consistently with the emergent nation and with the national Protestant religion. These inconsistent approaches may be seen simply as a rhetorical stratagem, an example of the ‘hesitancies and incoherences’ ‘inherent’ in Renaissance modes of thought, where competing ideas may be brought into play in order to emphasise different aspects of an argument.<sup>78</sup> I would contend, however, that it is more than this. The shifting rhetorical positioning of these members of the clerical or aristocratic would-be élite in connection with or opposition to these female stereotypes evidences both the fundamental uncertainty about the ability to maintain individual masculine identity and integrity, and the concomitant anxiety about the stability and future of the nation, in an era of social upheaval and repeated religio-political shifts and changes.

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<sup>77</sup> See, for example, Jacqueline Vanhoutte, *Strange Communion: Motherland and Masculinity in Tudor Plays, Pamphlets, and Politics* (London: Associated University Presses, 2003), p. 24.

<sup>78</sup> Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, p. 4.

### **‘Moments’ and texts**

In order to examine these shifts and changes I will be looking at a series of specific cultural moments, analysing the ways in which the trope of gendered embodiment is employed in response to the changing religio-political climate in the construction of English Protestant nationalism. Chapter One deals with the later Henrician period, the era immediately following the break with Rome that has been seen as the breeding-ground of nationalistic Protestant sentiment. I look at the work of John Bale, a prominent polemicist in the propaganda effort to establish Protestantism as the ‘natural’ and time-honoured ‘true’ religion of England. I examine Bale’s play *King Johan* (1538) to show how he constructs the oppositional terms of Protestant virtue and Papist vice in terms of gendered and sexualised embodiment, articulating a nascent sense of English religious and national ‘apartness’ in order to ‘naturalise’ England’s new state of independence from the domination of the Roman Catholic Church. In *The Image of Both Churches* (1545), a polemical tract which is ostensibly an exegesis of the Biblical Book of Revelation, I analyse the ways in which Bale’s lengthy description of the fundamental differences between the two religions, articulated again through the terms of sexualised female embodiment, is used to further his construction of essential English Protestant national rectitude and Papist vice.

Chapter Two shows the shifts in the rhetorical negotiation of English Protestant identity in reaction to the accession of a Protestant queen, Elizabeth, following the rule of her Roman Catholic sister, Mary. I examine the ways in which the response to Mary’s attempted reimplementation of Roman Catholicism and the subsequent Elizabethan religious Settlement evoked differing rhetorics of Protestant ‘Englishness’ in the context of these regal female bodies. The use of the hierarchical

structure of gender politics is nonetheless consistently evident, as each queen is both rhetorically diminished, and demonised or flattered accordingly, through the identification of her female body with that of her realm, as an enclosed space in need of the strong protection by right-minded militant Protestant men. John Knox's *First blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women* (1558) is examined in conjunction with John Aylmer's overtly flattering *An Harborowe for Faithful and Trewe Subiectes* (also 1558) to show the differing constructions of a female ruler in the oppositional terms of The Whore of Babylon and The Woman Clothed with the Sun. The rhetorical attempt upon the part of the Protestant élite to assert their place in national affairs is also apparent in Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc* (1561?). In this play I examine how the gendered concept of the 'motherland' is employed both to give further rhetorical force to the construction of paramount martial English Protestant masculine identity and to 'other' and contain the monarch in her maternal identification with her kingdom.

Chapter Three deals with the latter part of Elizabeth's reign, an era in which militant Protestant nationalistic rhetoric shifted to reflect the increased fear of invasion by foreign Papist forces and the anxiety over the lack of a fixed succession. The Protestant religio-political stance is typified by John Stubbes's *Gaping Gulf* (1579), a multivalent text employing the metaphorical marital link between Elizabeth and her kingdom to insist upon national 'insularity' and integrity and to counsel her against actual marriage to the Roman Catholic French duc d'Anjou. The masculine anxieties evoked by Elizabeth's rule are also examined in connection with Book One of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), where Spenser demonstrates a subtextual anxiety about the 'unruly feminine' in the form of female dominance and its threat to the wellbeing of the realm. In connection with this, I consider his construction of a

prescription for the formation of English masculine Protestant identity and its destined role as the guardian of the nation and the national religion. The anti-Papist rhetoric employed by Stubbes, in which all Frenchmen are categorised as effeminate Roman Catholics and a sexualised danger to the chaste integrity of England, is later echoed by Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 1* (1592). I show how national religious affiliations are used to construct a bellicose post-Armada anti-Papist nationalistic rhetoric through the use of embodiment in the depiction of Joan of Arc as an avatar of the Whore of Babylon. I also examine how this overtly patriotic imagery works in the context of the subtextual anxieties in the play over inadequate rule within England itself under a dominant female ruler.

Chapter Four looks at the ways in which the gendered narrative of English Protestant nationalism shifts in response to the accession of James I. In Heywood's *If you know not me you know nobody* (1605) I analyse the depiction of the recently-deceased Elizabeth and her construction as a Foxean proto-martyr under Mary in the rhetorical co-opting of her into the militant Protestant nationalistic cause. Bellicose Protestant nationalism is also scrutinised in *The Whore of Babylon* (1606), where I show how Thomas Dekker again employs the gender-specific depiction of Elizabeth to demonstrate an increasing unease about James's religious policies, interrogating his ambivalent response to the Gunpowder Plot and his perceived failure adequately to appreciate both the foreign and internal Papist menace. The anxiety over James's perceived laxity towards Papistry is equally evident in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (1609), where I examine the ways in which the growing national dissatisfaction with James's perception of himself as an international broker of peace work against the hardening self-image of the militant English Protestant élite of themselves as the destined protectors of the nation and its 'true' religion.

Chapter Five examines the latter half of James's reign, where I explore Thomas Middleton's *The Witch* (1616) to show how the playwright asserts the militant Protestant standpoint that depicts the court under James's 'lax' rule as the locus of feminised and sexualised evil, likening Roman Catholic practices to the abuses of witchcraft. The Protestant nationalistic dissatisfaction with James's pacifist approach towards the Palatine crisis is examined in the context of Dekker and Massinger's *The Virgin Martir* (1620), in which the oppositional religious female stereotypes of virtue and vice are used to show the anxieties over the triumph of Papistry and the danger to the international Protestant cause in connection with the fears over the consequent ill effects upon both English Protestant nationalism and internal stability. The perception of a dual Papist threat to the realm from forces operating both within the kingdom and from abroad is examined further in Middleton's *A Game at Chess* (1624), where the 'chess pieces' are depicted in terms of the conventional construction of sexualised Papist aggression and promiscuity opposed to Protestant virtue and integrity to assert satirically militant Protestant fears over the fate of both the nation and its church.

Chapter Six deals with the reign of Charles I and the growth of religious and political division in England in the period leading up to the Civil War. The militant Protestant agenda is examined in connection with the subtextual urging of the necessity for patriotic men to take up arms against depraved and tyrannical monarchy in Robert Davenport's *King John and Matilda* (c. 1634). In this play, the sexualised moral depravity of the king is set against the threatened virtue of the female epitome of the Protestant religion, Matilda. Tyrannical kingship is also central to Richard Brome's *Queen and Concubine* (1635), where I consider the ways in which the female religious oppositions of Papistry and Protestantism are employed to construct

monarchical depravity and the consequent threat to the wellbeing of the realm, again in the context of monarchical sexual laxity. The sexualised construction of the Papist threat in connection with the anxieties about Henrietta Maria and her involvement in the making of national policy is scrutinised in Nathaneal Richards's play *Messallina* (1637?). I show how the militant masculine Protestant agenda is seen as under threat of moral infection from the rampant female Papist ambition corrupting the body politic. Finally, I look at Francis Quarles's *The Virgin Widow* (1640), to show the widespread dissatisfaction with Charles's failure to safeguard the national religion in the examination of this play by a 'middle-way' Protestant writer, where oppositional sexualised female embodiment is employed to show the monarch as spiritually blind and lacking in the proper care for the true religion and for his realm.

This study of gendered embodiment and the construction of nationhood thus begins with a truly epochal moment – Henry VIII's break with Rome in the 1530s.

## Chapter One

### **‘Lewdness’ and ‘idolatry’: religious stereotyping and John Bale’s construction of the English Protestant identity**

In the post-Reformation propaganda effort promoting Protestantism as the ‘true’ religion of England, no polemicist was more prominent or vociferous than John Bale. Employed by Henry VIII’s chief secretary Thomas Cromwell to convince Henry’s subjects of the ideological rectitude of the ‘new lernynge’, Bale’s work was central in the formulation of the English strand of Protestantism.<sup>1</sup> He was not simply an apologist for the new religion; it was he who gave shape to the growing awareness of ‘Englishness’ as a separate national identity. In his opposition of the quintessential evils of ‘Papisty’ and the abuses of the Church of Rome with the paramount virtue of Protestantism, Bale portrayed the English nation, newly separated from Rome, as the destined home of the ‘true’ religion. This asserted an indissoluble link between Protestantism and Englishness and provided the theologically-based underpinning to English patriotism that was to characterise literature and polemic in the generations to come. Bale can therefore be seen as the ‘catalyst’ for English nationalism, the man who ‘set the wheels of [the] great engine of national self-consciousness in motion’.<sup>2</sup>

The site of England as the traditional home of true Christianity was a central tenet of Reformation English Protestant theology. To emphasise the divinely-ordained rectitude of their cause, theologians maintained that Christianity had been brought to Britain in 63 AD by Joseph of Arimathea.<sup>3</sup> This original ‘true’ faith had held sway until the forced imposition of heretical Roman Papistry by Augustine’s Papal mission

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Whitfield White, ‘Theater and Religious Culture’, in *A New History of Early English Drama*, eds. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 135.

<sup>2</sup> Hadfield, *Literature, politics and national identity*, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Valerie M. Lagorio, ‘The Evolving Legend of St. Joseph of Glastonbury’, in *Speculum*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Apr., 1971), pp. 212-213. Medieval Academy of America. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2854852>, accessed 16.08.10.

to England in 597AD. As Bale wrote, '[t]he Brytains toke the christen faithe at ye very spring or furst going forth of the Gospel, whan the church was most perfit, and moste strengthe of the holy ghost'.<sup>4</sup> The Protestant Reformation was, therefore, seen simply as a return to the unalloyed purity of the original doctrines, and the casting off of the subsequent perversions of Papistry. This 'English' aspect to Protestantism was underpinned by the importance of the work of John Wycliff in Reformation theology. The fourteenth-century Oxford theologian had offered trenchant criticism of the greed, worldliness and idolatry he saw as characterising the Church.<sup>5</sup> This, together with his advocacy of the translation of the Bible into English in order to bring the unmediated word of God to a wider audience, had found little favour with the religious and political authorities of his day, but he did nonetheless attract a 'hardcore' group of followers, known derisively as Lollards.<sup>6</sup> Wycliff's teachings survived underground, and influenced Martin Luther in his attack on the institutionalised abuses of Roman Catholicism and his outlining of the ideological basis for Protestantism.<sup>7</sup>

The spread of Protestantism in England was greatly facilitated by the recent invention of the printing press, which revolutionised the production and dissemination of texts. It was of particular importance in enabling the rapid promulgation of the 1525 Tyndale English translation of the Bible. Published privately on the Continent, the new Bible was circulated stealthily in England in the 1520s and 1530s, and found a ready audience among those who might otherwise have had little or no direct access to the Gospel. In particular it was Lollard groups, especially those in the ports on the east

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<sup>4</sup> John Bale, *The first two partes of the Actes or vnchast examples of the Englysh votaryes* (London, 1551) Vol. I, Sig. C1r. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/12735. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 23436923, accessed 04.05.09.

<sup>5</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2004), p. 35.

<sup>6</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, pp. 127-131. For more on the contribution of Lollardy to Reformation theology, see Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon, 1984), especially Chapter 7.

coast that had easier access to the smuggled texts, who formed the basis for new evangelical communities. Protestantism had therefore already gained a foothold in England prior to Henry's break with Rome in 1534.<sup>8</sup>

This is not to suggest, however, that the implementation of Protestantism as the national religion won universal support from Henry's subjects. The majority of the supporters of the new religion were people further down the social scale or living in the larger cities, notably London. The 'Pilgrimage of Grace', the widespread Northern Rebellion of 1536 which formed a focus of violent protest against the imposition of the 'new' ideology, and in particular the dissolution of the monasteries, showed that Roman Catholicism was by no means a spent force in England.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Paul Whitfield White maintains that the English people in general remained indifferent to reform and 'basically Catholic' during Henry's reign.<sup>10</sup> It was above all the 'landed élite', those who had 'more emotional and financial investment in the old system', who came to be identified with the long-term resistance to Protestantism.<sup>11</sup>

Henry's argument with Rome was motivated more by dynastic than by religious considerations, in his desire to be free to remarry to ensure the royal succession.<sup>12</sup> Under the terms of the 1533 'Act of Restraint of Appeals to Rome' and the 1534 'Act of Royal Supremacy' Henry assumed both spiritual and temporal authority over all his subjects, and replaced the Pope as the head of the English Church, thus effectively declaring England to be a sovereign 'Empire' free from religious allegiance to Rome.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, despite this assumption of supreme religious authority, Henry himself

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<sup>8</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, pp. 203-4.

<sup>9</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 424.

<sup>10</sup> White, 'Theater and Religious Culture', p. 137.

<sup>11</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 204.

<sup>12</sup> Benson Bobrick, *The Making of the English Bible* (London: Orion Books Ltd, 2003), p. 124.

MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 198.

<sup>13</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 199.

remained essentially conservative in religious matters. The progress of the Henrician Reformation was marked not by increasingly liberal religious measures but by repeated countermanding of the initial Protestant innovations implemented early on in the Reformation.<sup>14</sup> This tendency is exemplified by the 1539 Act of Six Articles that effectively made the ‘Church of England Catholic in doctrine, while rejecting obedience to Rome’, and the 1543 edict which restricted access to the previously universally-available Bible to members of higher-status social groups.<sup>15</sup> For ‘radical’ Protestants, these reversals raised the spectre of the loss of all the ideological advances of the English Reformation and the return to the abuses of Romish doctrine.

This anxiety underpins the stringently anti-Papist language and imagery employed by Bale. ‘Papistry’, the pejorative blanket term for Roman Catholicism in all its manifestations, had been identified as the archetypal ideological enemy early on in the course of the English Reformation, as is evident in Richard Morison’s 1535 manuscript, ‘A Discourse touching the Reformation of the Lawes of England’.<sup>16</sup> Tasked by Cromwell with outlining the ‘mission statement’ behind the propaganda campaign, Morison highlighted the importance of establishing ‘the usurped power of the bisshope of Rome, howe he usurped upon kings and princes, howe and wherby he and his adherents wente aboute to distroie this Realme’.<sup>17</sup> Bale uses this awareness of the forces of Roman Catholicism as a particular threat to England as he rails against the institutionalised abuses of Papistry, establishing that religion as the evil binary opposite

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<sup>14</sup> Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 421. See also MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 201.

<sup>15</sup> Bobrick, *The Making of the English Bible*, p. 157. MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 203.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Whitfield White, *Theatre and Reformation: Protestantism, Patronage and Playing in Tudor England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Richard Morison, ‘A discourse touching the reformation of the lawes of England’, Cotton MS, Faustina C, ii, fols. 5-22, British Library. See Sydney Anglo, ‘An Early Tudor Programme for Plays and Other Demonstrations against the Pope’ in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 20, No. 1 / 2 (Jan. – Jun., 1957), pp. 176-179. The Warburg Institute. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/750157>, accessed 30.11.09. Cited by David S. Kastan, in “‘Holy Wurdes” and “Slipper Wit”: John Bale’s *King Johan*’ in *Rethinking the Henrician Era*, ed. Peter C. Herman (Urbana and Chicago, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1994), p. 269.

of the essential virtue of Protestantism. This Papist threat is not a simple one, however; it is fraught with multiple and convoluted implications. The overt nationalistic opposition of virtuous English Protestantism and evil Roman Papistry co-exists with the awareness of the ever-present threat of Papist sedition, ceaselessly working in concealment within the realm itself to undermine the establishment of the true Protestant faith. With Bale, the accusation of ‘Papistry’ therefore becomes a shifting term of opprobrium, employed at times not simply against overt practitioners of Roman Catholicism, but even against those who might be seen as insufficiently committed in their adherence to Protestantism.

This perception of the twin dangers of the overt external threat from the Papist forces based in Rome and the insidious undermining from internal ‘Papist’ agencies forms a persistent and lasting strand in anti-Papist English polemic. Bale’s articulation of this anxiety at such an early point in the Reformation is significant, since it demonstrates that the instability and inconsistency that quickly came to characterise English ideological and religious matters were no gradual development, but were present from Protestantism’s first implementation. He is the first, but by no means the last, to use the fear of seditious and insidious Papistry working in disguise to express indirectly his anxieties about the lax administration of religious policies on the part of those in political authority. In this, Bale employs the tropes of sexualised female religious embodiment that were later to form such a staple of anti-Papist rhetoric, where he shows the female virtue of the English Protestant church set eternally against the flaunting sexual deviancy of the Roman Catholic church, personified by the Whore of Babylon and her adherents.

**King Johan – insidious Papistry, threatened realm**

Bale's *King Johan* (1538/9[?]), has been identified as the first English 'chronicle history' play, depicting as it does the thirteenth-century struggle of King John against the might of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>18</sup> As David Kastan points out, however, this 'aggressively anti-Papal' play is not simply the representation of a long-dead struggle, but a probable reference to the excommunication of Henry VIII by the Pope in 1538 that had raised English fears of an invasion by foreign Papist forces.<sup>19</sup> As such, Bale constructs a sustained depiction of ideal monarchy struggling against the incursions of Papist territorial ambition and greed. It becomes evident that the unalloyed praise of John is actually a sustained attempt to depict ideal kingship through the person of this long-dead king; Bale is providing Henry with a prescriptive template for action, rather than unqualified approbation of his rule. In his construction of John, Bale therefore works against the traditional idea of that king as 'a coward, a bully and a voluptuary' and 'the worst monarch to rule England'.<sup>20</sup> Instead, he appears to be following Tyndale's lead in describing John as the prototypical Protestant martyr. In his *Obedience of a Christen Man*, Tyndale shows John as the victim of posthumous propaganda 'spin' on the part of the Catholic hierarchy, his praiseworthy actions twisted to appear as vices to serve the malevolent and deceitful Papist agenda.<sup>21</sup>

Bale's John is described in a similar light, as a consistently virtuous man and proper monarch. Bale is careful to fashion a man who is the 'complete' ruler, a successful

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<sup>18</sup> Kastan, "'Holy Wurdes" and "Slypper Wit"', p. 269. Peter Happé puts the date of the play's first writing somewhat earlier, at 1533; see his 'Introduction' to *The Complete Plays of John Bale, Volume 1* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 1985), p. 4. However, from the subject matter of the play, I consider Kastan's dating to be the more probable.

<sup>19</sup> Kastan, "'Holy Wurdes" and "Slypper Wit"', p. 270.

<sup>20</sup> Carole Levin, 'A Good Prince: King John and Early Tudor Propaganda', in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Winter, 1980), p. 23. The Sixteenth Century Journal.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2539973>, accessed 25.02.09.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew B. Crichton, 'Kynge Johan and the Ludus de Antichristo As Moralities of the State', in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol 4, No. 2 (Oct., 1973) p. 65. The Sixteenth Century Journal.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2539273>, accessed 13.05.09.

warrior who has led victorious campaigns abroad, and a conscientious, generous and loving ‘father’ to his subjects. The organic bond between the nation and its monarch is highlighted – in the words of Andrew B. Crichton, ‘the collective welfare of the state [i]s embodied in its monarch’s well-being’.<sup>22</sup> In an overt attempt to provide ideological weight to Henry’s declaration of himself as the Supreme Head of the Church of England, Bale emphasises that John holds the throne through God’s ‘high ordynauce’, where ‘[t]he power of princes ys geuyn from God above’ (1342).<sup>23</sup> As the Deity’s direct representative on earth, John therefore owes allegiance to no man, least of all to the ‘Usurpid Powre’ (750) who is the Pope. This depiction may be somewhat anachronistic for a thirteenth-century monarch, but does appear apt as ideological support for a king who had recently made the break with Rome and felt the need, through the propaganda campaign run by his vice-gerent Cromwell, to reinforce the righteousness of his cause to his subjects.

Bale therefore emphasises the position of the king as the one appointed to ‘see mayntayned the true faythe and relygyon’ (1090). He is a latter-day David, a reincarnation of the Old Testament monarch who was the unquestioned theological head of his realm, having authority over all his subjects, including the priests. This divine authority is evident in all the king’s dealings with his subjects. He is the ideal ‘magistrate’, aware of the necessity for ‘trew justice’ (21) for his people, a man whose ‘harte the Lord doth move’, and where ‘God spekyth in [his] lyppes’ when he gives judgement (1342, 1344). As a staunch proto-Protestant, John’s paramount moral guide is the precepts of Scripture. He refuses to grant validity to the Pope’s interdiction, holding that, ‘[t]hat sentence or curse that scriptur doth not direct /In my opynon shall

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<sup>22</sup> Crichton, ‘Kyng Johan and the Ludus de Antichristo as Moralities of the State’, p. 61.

<sup>23</sup> John Bale, *King Johan*, in *The Complete Plays of John Bale Vol. I*, ed. Peter Happé. The text is marked with line numbers which run sequentially from beginning to end of the play, and I have cited these rather than page numbers. All further references are to this edition.

be of non effecte' (1432-1433). He insists that his opponents prove their case 'by scriptur' (1435), and is easily able to best them in theological debate. Bale is therefore implicitly emphasising the centrality of the Protestant tenet of *Sola Scriptura*, of the gospel as 'Godes lawe', 'his word most pure' (1462), the essential source of textual authority. In its unmediated purity, it stands in direct opposition to the evil Roman Catholic practice of 'glosing' or 'interpreting' the Bible, occluding God's 'verytie' (1114) and spreading 'false lernynge' (1466) in order to perpetuate Papist power and riches. Again, this is not simply an uninflected statement of Protestant belief, but a reminder to Henry of his duties as a Protestant monarch.

As a godly king, John wages a lengthy and unrelenting struggle against the Papist abuses being perpetrated in his kingdom. This shows him in Biblical terms as a 'faythfull Moyses' who '[w]ithstode proude Pharaon for hys poore Israel' (1106-1107). His fatherly care for his people is the only reason for his reluctant ultimate submission to the power of the Pope, as he wishes to protect his subjects from the widespread destruction and 'shedyng of Christen blood' (1706-1710) that would ensue from the threatened invasion of the Papist forces massing against England. It is also significant that Bale shows the surrender to the Pope as brought about by the withdrawal of their support of John by Nobyltye, Civyll Order and Clergeye, the representations of the aristocracy, legal and administrative hierarchy and the clergy of his kingdom. This demonstrates Bale's criticism of the failure of those in religious and temporal authority to carry out their divinely-appointed duties. Bale is also employing the trope of 'bad counsel'. This device was used to draw attention to the grievances of subjects while maintaining the fiction of monarchical infallibility, through the depiction of the king as badly advised or purposely misled by his counsellors.

Significantly, it is through the use of female embodiment, in the depiction of the impoverished and necessitous Widowe Engeland, that we see Bale's most sustained, if subtle, critique of inadequate kingship. Engeland is the personification of the nation; formerly a flourishing wife, Engeland's husband 'God hym selfe' (109) has been banished from the land, and she is at the mercy of the rapacious Papist clergy who have taken all her belongings and made her a beggar. She is now so 'chaungyd' (42), so 'wan and pale' (57), that John fails initially to recognise her. Bale's construction of Engeland as the true spouse of God shows her as a type of The Woman Clothed with the Sun from the Biblical Book of Revelation and as an early precursor of Spenser's Una in *The Faerie Queene* – and thus also as the epitome of the English Protestant Church.<sup>24</sup> This conflation of Protestantism and of England itself serves to show the nation as the divinely-destined home of the 'true' religion, establishing the link that was to form an ideological underpinning in the subsequent construction of militant Protestant nationalism.

As the representation of Protestant religious purity and truth, Engeland is aware of the crucial importance of the preaching of the Gospel in order that the people may be rescued from their spiritual blindness, where she repeatedly urges John to 'cawse Godes word to be tawght syncerly' (1586). She displays a consistently clear spiritual insight, properly censorious of the multifarious Papist abuses, and disowning her son Commonalty when he sides with the Papist clergy. This understanding is also the basis for her unswerving loyalty to her rightful monarch throughout all his troubles. The connection between realm and monarch is highlighted by her comforting John on his deathbed and agreeing to bury him after his death, where this assumption by Engeland of a widow's duties towards him serves to emphasise the link between them and

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<sup>24</sup> See Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book 1, 1590 (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1987).

underline John's divinely-sanctioned role as monarch. Moreover, while Engeland's position as the mother of Commonalty (the symbolic personification of the native-born people of the realm) is emphasised, it is made equally clear that she is not the mother of the clergy, who are instead the bastard offspring of Rome. In this, Bale is evidencing once again the early modern English Protestant construction of the nation as the time-honoured home of the true religion, and of Roman Catholicism, with all its multifarious 'abusyons' (1502) as a later, foreign, import. However, the impoverished and vulnerable state of Engeland calls into question the abilities and integrity of those charged with the governance of the realm. In this use of female embodiment Bale is by implication highlighting the prevalent lack of true magistracy, and exhorting these 'governors' to exert themselves to protect the beleaguered state against the depredations of insidious Papistry.

Set against this steadfast female virtue personifying English Protestantism, Bale constructs the Papist forces in terms of sexualised depravity, using the trope of the disordered and debauched body to emphasise the chaotic threat of national moral danger. Although there is no overt representation of The Whore of Babylon in the text, Bale is implicitly representing the entire Papist religion - in its mass alienation from masculine rectitude and its submission to the idolatrous 'carnal' abuses of the Whore - as effeminised, the lewdness and depravity of its adherents being placed on a level with female sexual transgressiveness. The chief Papist characters in *King Johan* display carnivalesque and inversionary actions and speech, with lewd and improper gestures and sexualised innuendo. This behaviour may be seen in the context of Bakhtin's formulation that, in this institutionalised overturning of social norms, 'the material

lower bodily stratum is symbolized by the depraved wom[a]n'.<sup>25</sup> Their sexualised debauchery, the 'openness' of breached male moral and bodily integrity incurred by the addiction to and indulgence in the carnal, emphasises these Papist clerics as the effeminised 'minyons' of the Whore, the avatar of the 'Romysh' (369) church. As the adherents of 'bloody Babulon the grownd and mother of whoredom' (369) – a reference of the imagery of Chapter 17 of the Biblical Book of Revelation – they are infected both with the loss of masculine reason and the moral depravity ensuing from contact with the sexualised heretical doctrine. The clergy are aligned with sodomy and animality in their unnatural, carnal and unmanly behaviour, described as the 'Popes pyggys' (119), and as 'vyle swyne' (71). This underpins their connection to the Whore of Babylon, since they are implicitly seen in terms of the lovers of the mythical witch Circe who, having succumbed to her sexual lures, lost both their masculinity and humanity, and were turned into swine.

The chief Papist character, Sedycyon, is a priest, the epitome of avarice and deviant sexuality. It is significant that he represents more than the undermining of individual bodily integrity. In his deceit, ability to shift his shape at will, and in his moral instability, he is the personification of treason itself as he works to bring about the downfall of both monarch and nation. As a sodomite, he is constructed in terms of completely unnatural behaviour, alienated from good and aligned with evil.<sup>26</sup> This sexualised depravity underscores the depiction of him as the perpetrator of the basest sin against the body politic in his attempt to 'subdewe' (99) proper rule and install his

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<sup>25</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trs. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 392. For more on Bakhtin's hierarchical construction of the lower bodily sphere in terms of the female grotesque, see Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 128. I am indebted in the use of this construction to the work of Brian Gourley, in his unpublished PhD thesis entitled 'Carnavalesque and Grotesque: Transgression in the Writings of John Bale' (Belfast: Queens University, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> The sin of sodomy was held not as a separate category of sexual identity, but as one of a spectrum of 'generalised' 'nonprocreational' sexual vices to which all were theoretically prone; see Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, p. 38, and Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1995), p. 16.

master, the Pope, as the supreme authority in the kingdom. His treacherous nature is linked to his deviant sexuality, where he boasts of his unswerving adherence to the Pope as long as he has a 'hole with in [his] breche' (91). Alan Bray shows how the act of treason in the early modern era was often linked to the sin of sodomy, the one being 'the natural extension of the other', where their unnatural sexual practices served to align sodomites with 'the potential for confusion and disorder'.<sup>27</sup> As a Papist clergyman, Sedycyon is also a catamite, a male prostitute whose treachery is practised for the love of worldly gain. This emphasises the link between the sexual deviancy of Papist clergy and the institutionalised commodification of Papist ritual which is spiritual prostitution.<sup>28</sup> Given Bale's emphasis upon sexually-deviant and sodomitical Papist rapacity, I do not think it would be going too far to interpret this sexualised language as containing a covert evocation of the fear of male rape, in this depiction of the threat to the masculine integrity and proper rule of the nation from the eroticised depredations of Papistry.<sup>29</sup>

The effeminised sexual depravity characterising Sedycyon is also used to depict the other Papist clergy, his co-conspirators, as liars and hypocrites, true members of the 'false Church, the community of Satan'.<sup>30</sup> This is epitomised by Clergeye, as he pretends submission to John while secretly maintaining his allegiance to the Pope. Anxiety-provoking deceit is also seen in the repeated adoption of disguise and false identities by the Papist vices, where their innate deceit and greed is conflated by Bale to show them, too, as male prostitutes and the practitioners of sorcery. Bale combines the

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<sup>27</sup> Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*, pp. 20, 25.

<sup>28</sup> For more on the link between sodomy and Papistry, see Tom Betteridge, 'The place of sodomy in the historical writings of John Bale and John Foxe', in *Sodomy in early modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 12-15.

<sup>29</sup> This is an early example of the linking of Papistry and sodomitical rape, which may be inferred again in Thomas Middleton's *A Game at Chess* (1623); see my Chapter 5.

<sup>30</sup> Leslie Fairfield, *John Bale: Mythmaker for the English Reformation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1976), p. 85.

fatal physical deception of infected and infectious whoredom with the deadly spiritual trickery of witchcraft to emphasise both the clergy's depraved alignment with chaotic femininity and their link to that arch-whore and witch, their mistress the Whore of Babylon. Dissimuyllacon, Sedycon's appropriately-named cousin and co-conspirator, shows how he can 'make Latten to bring this gere to the boxe' (715), an instance of the conflation of magical incantation and sexualised commodification connected to Papist ritual, especially that of the Mass.<sup>31</sup> The excommunication of John is seen as the casting of a spell, with the traditional bell, book and candle appearing as witches' paraphernalia.<sup>32</sup> The sale of pardons, masses for the dead and the display of relics are all shown as deceptive trickery, 'leger demayne' (290), carried out to extort money from the ignorant populace. This dissimulation and corruption in the service of greed is particularly fearful when shown in the context of the Papist abuse of the holy word of Scripture. In their overturning of the sacred central tenet of Protestant belief these wicked men 'supprese the Gospell' (1014), seducing the unwary into eternal damnation for their own worldly gain, as they 'the kingdom of hevyn from man /Do hyde for awantage' (551-552).

The fatal danger emanating from this mixture of depraved greed and deceptive sorcery is seen all too clearly in its terrible effect upon both monarch and kingdom. Sedycyon and Dissimulacyon, through the success of their insidious and ceaseless plotting, pave the way for other Papist vices. Private Wealth, symbolising simony and love of personal gain by the Papist clergy, and Usurpd Power, who symbolises the Pope's illegal assumption of the king's authority, both establish themselves within the kingdom. Significantly, the activities of the Papist traitors are seen in terms of the

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<sup>31</sup> See D. Douglas Waters, *Duessa as Theological Satire* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1970), p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> For the connection between Papist ritual and witchcraft, see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1973, 1991), pp. 661-663.

spread of a deadly disease, originating from the ‘chayer of pestoolens’ (350) which is the Papal throne. This pernicious infection may be understood as a kind of moral infection, the effect on the people of England of the exposure to the ‘carnal’ abuses of Papistry being a corruption of understanding resulting in spiritual blindness leading to eternal damnation. Deprived of proper insight, the people embrace the false religion of Papistry, and abandon their rightful monarch. John is poisoned by a lethal drink administered by a disguised Papist monk, a parallel to the metaphorical poisoning of his country by the heretical doctrine. This fatal draught may also be seen as a subtextual use of the trope of The Whore of Babylon’s deadly cup from Revelation, bringing death to all who drink from it, and emphasising the dire situation in which the realm finds itself.

The kingdom is thus completely undermined, enslaved and forced to wait helplessly under the Papist yoke for her eventual release at the hands of Imperial Majesty some three hundred years later. This is ostensibly a flattering portrait of Henry himself as the prime mover of the English Protestant Reformation, ushering in Verity who is the symbolic representation of the central truth of Scripture. However, as David Bevington reminds us, ‘Bale’s fictional king is ... not simple flattery of Henry but a potential standard for criticism’.<sup>33</sup> There is an ambiguity surrounding the description of the monarch that may be interpreted in terms of an anxiety about the king’s ability and willingness to effect thoroughgoing Protestant reform, and an evocation of his laxity as rendering his country vulnerable to widespread Papist abuse. Bale’s depiction of John’s idealised behaviour as a virtuous king must therefore be set against the fatal moral weakness he displays in allowing his kingdom to be overrun, and the terrible state into which his kingdom has been driven. It is this monarchical lack which may

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<sup>33</sup> David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics: a Critical Approach to Topical Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 102.

finally be understood in the portrayal of Imperial Majestye; it is not Henry's Protestant rectitude that is emphasised, but his failure to fulfil his divinely-destined religious role. The personality traits of Imperial Majestye may be seen as representing not earthly kingship, but the divine attributes of just anger and righteous dispensation, with Bale showing how Henry's failures of 'magistracy' may make it necessary to await instead the direct intervention of the Deity himself.

The abiding impression, therefore, is not one of victorious certainty, but of uncertain anxiety. The very reiteration of the importance of kingship, where Verity emphasises that, 'A kinge is ... a mynster immediate undre God' (2356) can be construed as a reminder to the actual sovereign that he is failing to fulfil God's purpose for his realm. Bale is warning in particular that the nation is weakened by the recent abandoning of religious reforms and the re-adoption of what he sees as Papist abuses. Above all, it is the central truth of God's Holy Word that is being endangered, as 'the prelates do not preache /But persecute those that the Holye Scriptures teache', and 'neuer ponnysh for popery /But the Gospell readers they handle very coarsely' (2540-2543). The threat from insidious Papistry is seen as being very much alive; in the open-ended finale to the play, Sedycyon shows that the Papist threat remains undiminished. He warns gleefully that '[t]he Popes ceremonyes shall drowne the Gospell styll', the 'byshoppes [will] slepe' and 'priestes abroad' will still 'playe the scysmatykes' (2523, 2524, 2527). This fearful potential Papist supremacy in England, rather than the flattery of its ruler, is Bale's true preoccupation. By this depiction of the undermining of the state and its religion from within, Bale is using the trope of embodiment to emphasise his sense of threat to the vulnerable body politic. Paradoxically, he is simultaneously reinforcing the impression of the proximity of the imminent triumph of feminised Papistry through the emphasis upon the chaotic bodily-based degeneracy of

those who are threatening it, and by the complete absence of masculine integrity to guard it. The bleakness of the final situation Bale describes is evidence not of hope, but of something dangerously close to disenchantment.

**The Image of Both Churches: ‘Home Thoughts from Abroad’**

Bale’s lengthy *Image of Both Churches* (1545?), written in his first period of forced exile on the Continent and one of his best-received works during his lifetime, contains his most clear-cut exposition of female religious oppositional embodiment, and has been credited with originating the concept of English literary nationhood.<sup>34</sup> However, as with the previous text, there is a persistent undercurrent of dismay with the internal state of the English nation in relation to this construction of nationality. Bale’s shifting depictions of the sexualised ‘national body’ evoke, not the intended national virtue and strength of purpose, but instead an imminent and potentially fatal national chaos and misrule, caused both by the external threat of Papist forces and, in particular, by internal misgovernment. Vulnerable female virtue in the personification of the English Church is used to invoke the necessity for its protection by an idealised strong and virile English martial Protestant masculinity. This is intended to assert the bond of national identification and unity between the nation and the religion, and as such as is shown as consistently set in opposition to the threatening evils of female vice embodying Papistry. Bale’s depiction is however undercut by his excessive concern over the very imminence of the threat. In his anxiety to emphasise the extremity of the situation, he is paradoxically driven to describe those in civil and religious authority within his homeland in terms not of masculine virile rationality but, in their perceived alignment with the abuses of Papistry, as unmanly and irrational. This seeming

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<sup>34</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, p. 29.

inconsistency nonetheless demonstrates Bale's deep unease, and shows the speed with which anti-Papist imagery became a shifting term of opprobrium, being used to describe shades of adherence of those within the Protestant church as well as those outside it.

Ostensibly a commentary on the Biblical book of Revelation, the *Image*, unlike *King Johan*, is intended to be read rather than watched. As such it contains more graphically-detailed and lengthier rhetorical passages which give depth and colour to Bale's arguments. He makes particular use of the central tropes of female embodiment from Revelation, the virtuous Woman Clothed With The Sun and the Bride of the Lamb and the promiscuous and depraved Whore of Babylon, constructing them correspondingly as essential Protestant rectitude set against Papist evil. He adapts Augustine's doctrine of the two eternally-opposed spiritual cities of Jerusalem and Babylon to show the 'two churches running parallel throughout history, one persecuted but true, the other false but powerful'.<sup>35</sup> In this Bale is building upon the work of Wycliff who, in his exegesis upon Revelation, had described the 'carnal' Roman Catholic Church as the 'false' church, the church of Antichrist and the Babylon of the Apocalypse.<sup>36</sup> He is also following Luther's lead in historicising Revelation and identifying the papacy with the Antichrist.<sup>37</sup> However Bale goes further than Wycliff and Luther in his formalisation of the opposition of religious dispensations. In his construction of essential Protestant righteousness, he conflates the English Church with the English nation as the divinely-destined home of Protestantism, set against and existing in constant threat from the rampaging evil of the Roman Catholic Church.

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<sup>35</sup> Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse* (Oxford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978), p. 55; Bernard Capp, 'The political dimension of apocalyptic thought', in *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance thought and literature*, eds. C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 94.

<sup>36</sup> Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse*, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup> See Bernard McGinn, 'Revelation', in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, eds. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 529, 534.

The religio-political opposition of this work has been identified as early evidence of the trope that was to become an ideological staple of English Protestant literature over the course of the next two hundred years. Bale's interpretation of Revelation is more than simple Biblical exegesis, more even than the extrapolation of 'a prophecy of God's plan for the world'; in this text he originates 'a protestant apocalyptic tradition in England'.<sup>38</sup> The conventional construction of the imminent second coming of Christ that would herald the final battle between good and evil here becomes an assertion of the divinely-destined role of England in spearheading the Protestant fight against the evils of Papistry in preparation for the apocalyptic encounter. In his conflation of the virtues of English Protestantism with the ideally virtuous English nation, Bale therefore articulates a sense of Englishness which provides the 'founding typology of later national imaginings' that was to inform the work of writers such as Spenser and Dekker.<sup>39</sup>

It is perhaps ironic that this work which has been credited with formulating a nascent English identity was written while Bale was in exile, but the geographical distance seems to have lent an added intensity to his anxieties for the wellbeing of England and English Protestantism. Events in the country during the 1540s certainly gave credence to the suspicion of religious recidivism on the part of those in power, as 'schismatic' Protestant splinter groups such as the Anabaptists triggered the increasingly stringent enforcement of adherence to state-prescribed ideological conformity.<sup>40</sup> The 1539 Act of Six Articles rescinded a number of provisions of the 1533 Act that had effectively established the English Reformation, and was followed by the 1543 Act for Advancement of True Religion which forbade the common people to

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<sup>38</sup> Capp, 'The political dimension of apocalyptic thought', p. 93; Paul Christianson, *Reformers and Babylon: English apocalyptic visions from the reformation to the eve of the civil war* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1978), p. 21.

<sup>39</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, p. 106.

read the Bible for themselves.<sup>41</sup> This attack on the centrality of *Sola Scriptura* must have seemed an attack upon the foundations of Protestantism itself and the undoing of the religious advances of the previous decade. Bale had expressed his dissatisfaction with this state of affairs in England in a number of pamphlets, amongst them the self-explanatorily titled *The Epistle Exhortatorye of an Inglyshe Chrystian unto his derely beloued country of Inglande against the pompouse popysh Bishops thereof, as yet the true members of theyr fylthe father the great Antichrist of Rome* (1544).<sup>42</sup> Perhaps even more vehement was the *Yet a course at the Romyshe Foxe* (1543), in which he asked the pointed question,

VWhat is the religion of yowre churche in englande at this daye, but the popes dyrtie leauuynge, the fylthe dregges of hys rotten vessels, and the cancred rust of hys olde worne pitchers.<sup>43</sup>

Bale's expression of dissatisfaction with the state of affairs in his home country is equally apparent in the *Image of Both Churches*, in which he lambasts a number of English clerics by name. However, he goes further than the simple anti-Papist invective of his pamphlets in the assertion of his homeland as the destined location of ideal religious virtue, despite the lurking threat from these insidious domestic 'Papists'. He employs the trope of the contained, objectifiable, locus of the female body in a new way in his assertion of religious opposition so as to bring into play his concerns about the religio-political wellbeing of England. Building upon the traditional use of feminine personifications to symbolise abstract ideological and cultural themes, Bale constructs a sense of national contrarities through the conflation of binarised

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<sup>41</sup> McCullough, *Reformation*, p. 203.

<sup>42</sup> John Bale, *The Epistle Exhortatorye of an Inglyshe Chrystian* (Antwerp: 1544 [?]). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/1291.5. Folger Shakespeare Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 32633080, accessed 01.06.09.

<sup>43</sup> John Bale, *Yet a course at the Romyshe Foxe*, Sig. B1v. (Zurik [i.e. Antwerp]: 1543). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/1309. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99836463, accessed 06.07.09. Cited by Rainer Pineas in 'John Bale's Nondramatic Works of Religious Controversy', in *Studies in the Renaissance*, Vol. 9 (1962), pp. 218-233. University of Chicago Press on behalf of the Renaissance Society of America. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2857117>, accessed 22.06.09.

theological and geographical space in his opposition of English Protestant rectitude and Papist evil. The countermanded virtue and vice of the two churches lends itself particularly well to this use of female embodiment, using the construction of women as defined in terms of their sexual chastity or depravity, and idealised or demonised accordingly. In Bale's stringent insistence upon the (idealised) English Protestant Church as a space of untrammelled virtue, he is also insisting, almost by default, upon the concomitant ideological separateness and intrinsic virtue of the English nation. Both England and Protestantism are conflated, defined and united by what they are *not*, that is, decadent and threatening Roman Catholicism, in the 'interplay of opposition and affiliation'.<sup>44</sup>

However, it is this very usage of female embodiment that, much like the construction of hierarchical masculinity itself, contains within it its own dichotomous disruption. This resort to the female body in the metaphorical drive to assert continual and unchanging verities lies directly at odds with the cultural construction of those bodies as areas of labile penetrability and moral instability.<sup>45</sup> As Clare McEachern points out, it is this dichotomy that creates the anxiety over interpretation and differentiation evident in Bale's telling phrase 'a whore at the first blush seemeth only a woman'.<sup>46</sup> Since both these churches are depicted as female, Bale is driven to an ever-increasing strength of language and imagery in order to distinguish adequately between the two women. In this effort he is forced, somewhat paradoxically, to the repetition of the detail of the women's external appearance and behaviour. The description of the

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<sup>44</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, p. 27.

<sup>45</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, p. 29. See also Claire McEachern, "'A Whore at the First Blush Seemeth Only a Woman": John Bale's *Image of Both Churches* and the terms of religious difference in the early English Reformation', in *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 25, 1995, pp. 245-269. Duke University Press. Copy obtained through British Library online journal article service. <http://www.fordham.edu/mvst/magazinestacks/jmrs.html>.

<sup>46</sup> John Bale, *The Image of Both Churches*, in *Select Works of John Bale*, D.D., ed. Rev. Henry Christmas, M.A., F.R.S., F.S.A. (Cambridge: Printed at The University Press, 1849), p. 496. All further references are to this edition.

Bride of the Lamb displays a telling inconsistency, as Bale insists upon her self-evident physical beauty which nonetheless stems from within and is undecipherable except to the initiated. It is interesting to note this as an early manifestation of the anxiety over ‘seeming and being’ which came to be a central feature of post-Reformation religious polemic, where the difficulty of identifying ‘true’ and heretical doctrine was to intensify with the successive fluctuations in state religious adherence.<sup>47</sup>

This unease over the interpretation of the female body is likewise in evidence in Bale’s detailed description of the Whore of Babylon. The Tyndale translation of the New Testament of 1525, the text which Bale seems to have used, employs vivid and memorable phraseology to describe her, showing the Whore as a richly-clad and worryingly-attractive figure.<sup>48</sup> She is ‘arayed in purple and rose color/and decked with golde/precious stone/and pearles/and [holding] a cuppe of golde in her honde’ (Sig.A.a.a.r.). However, we soon realise that this is meretricious display only, and exists in tandem with a disgusting physical corruption, the result and evidence of her sexual promiscuity. Her glittering cup is ‘ful of abhominacion/and fylthynes/of her fornicacion’ and she bears upon her forehead the legend ‘grete Babylon the mother of whordome/and abhominacions of the erth’ (Sig. A.a.a.r.). She is rampaging, predatory and murderous, the archetypal transgressive female, ‘droncke wyth the bloud off Sayntis and with the bloud of the witnesses of Jesu’ (Sig. A.a.a.v). By contrast with this terrible harpy, Revelation 12 shows a transcendently virtuous female, ‘[a] woman clothed wyth the sunne/and the mone under her feete & upon her head a crowne of xii starres’ (X.x.iii.v.), who is transformed, through her sufferings, into the Bride of the

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<sup>47</sup> See Dolan, “‘Home-Bred Enemies’: Imagining Catholics’, in *Whores of Babylon*, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> William Tyndale, *The new Testament as it was written, and caused to be written, by them which herde yt Whom also oure Saueoure Christ Iesus commaunded that they shulde preach it vnto al creaturs* (Antwerp: 1534). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.) /2825. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99854170, accessed 01.06.09. All further citations in this chapter are from this edition unless specified otherwise.

Lamb who is the 'newe Jerusalem' 'prepared as a bride garnysshed for her husband' (A.a.ā.6.v), Christ.

Bale's interpretation emphasises the sexualised difference between the two females, where the Whore is seen, in her unimpeded dominance, as an archetype of the anxiety-provoking 'woman on top' described by Natalie Zemon Davis.<sup>49</sup> As Davis shows, the spectre of such women, living outside masculine control and bent upon transgressing the socially-prescribed bounds of feminine behaviour, was an often-reverted to, and evidently anxiety-provoking, stereotype in early-modern popular culture. Bale displays an almost obsessive insistence upon the Whore's flagrant promiscuity and harlotry as symbolising the myriad abuses of the Roman Catholic Church, lingering upon the details of her dangerous carnal seductiveness. This reveals the effort both to distance and contain the Papist Church rhetorically, but this attempt is undercut by the highly detailed, almost fetishistic, descriptions Bale employs in a blend of attraction and repulsion. Bale describes the Whore as this 'gorgeous appparelled woman, or glittering church of antichrist' (p. 511) as 'flourishingly decked' not only with precious stones, but 'copes, corporasses, chasubles, tunicles, stoles, fannoms and mires', 'silks, velvets, cloth, gold and silver' (p. 438) arrayed in 'glittering colour' and 'gorgeously appparelled in purple' (p. 497). Again, this luxurious display is specious and deceptive, with 'counterfeit colours' and 'shadows of hypocrisy' (p. 497), 'made of dead things, as gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood' (p. 366).

This shows the Whore in terms of a Papist statue or relic, the object of irrational and idolatrous adoration, its deceptive beauty entailing the unmaning loss of personal integrity in the succumbing to this 'mystery of counterfeit godliness' (p. 497), this 'subtle witchcraft' (p. 592) which Bale sexualises and equates with the utter infidelity

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<sup>49</sup> Zemon Davis, 'Women on Top', p. 124.

of 'avoutery of the spirit' (p. 519). In his play *The Thre Lawes* (1538) Bale had included the figure of Idolatry, the sexually-promiscuous shape-shifting 'witch' who represented the Protestant anxiety over the difficulties of distinguishing between *latria* and *dulia*, 'the physical image and that which it represented'.<sup>50</sup> This anxiety may be seen as an underpinning both in Bale's ornate descriptions of the Whore, and in later texts where the depictions of the meretricious attractions of Papist ritual and religious art betray the masculine anxiety over the seductive but morally-fatal effects of female sexual allure, such as the Elizabethan Homily against the Peril of Idolatry.<sup>51</sup> It is for this reason that Bale emphasises the Whore's deceptive external beauty as co-existing with internal moral and physical corruption. Not only is the Whore depicted in terms of blood-letting and murder, owing the 'fresh scarlet' colour of her gorgeous dress to its immersion in the blood of her innumerable victims (p. 497), but she is shown as riddled with the fatal disease of heresy, 'infecting men's eyes, ears, and understandings' with her 'noyful nocuments' (p. 498).

In this conflation of alluring externality and internal disease and decay Bale is showing the Whore as the origin and disseminator of sexualised infection. As the 'paramour of antichrist' (p. 253), she is the paradigmatic harlot, epitomised as that meretricious commodified female body that was seen as the source of sexually-transmitted disease, particularly of the new and terrifying spectre of the 'pox', or syphilis.<sup>52</sup> The terrible potential inherent in the 'inverted' female body, with the anxiety-provoking depths of its concealed genitalia, is described by Bale in terms of

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<sup>50</sup> John Bale, *A comedye concernynge thre lawes of nature, Moses and Christ*, in Peter Happé, ed., *The complete plays of John Bale, Volume II* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 1986). See also Clifford Davidson, *History, Religion and Violence* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), p. 242.

<sup>51</sup> See 'Introduction', fn. 74.

<sup>52</sup> Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England*, p. 128.

Luce Irigaray's memorable formulation of '*the horror of nothing to see*'.<sup>53</sup> He fulminates against the Whore as the locus of 'a mystery, hidden, dark, obscure' (p. 498) 'the root, the spring, and the fountain of all spiritual fornications', 'from whom hath issued all spiritual whoredom' (p. 501). This imagery is a corollary of the descriptions of her as a 'stinking hold', a 'corrupt cage' (p. 517), the disseminator of 'plagues' (p. 520) and 'pestilent poison' (p. 494). The connection of her body with both the harbouring and transmission of the sexually-transmitted disease that is Papist heresy is emphasised, too, by the description of her golden cup which both bears the 'filth' of her abominations and renders men drunk with the 'wine of her fornication' (p. 458). This is a reiteration of the conflation of diseased female genitalia as fraught with both unmanning, fearful, enticement and the threat of fatal infection. The depiction of the Whore as the archetype of feminine inversion is completed by her characterisation as a 'malicious mother' (p. 260), who 'daily ministereth' (p. 497) poison to her children, showing her cup in the light of a diseased mother's breast, and reinforcing the construction of the Roman Catholic Church as dispensing spiritual death and damnation rather than life to its adherents. In both cases, the use of female bodily imagery serves to render the threat more psychologically immediate and therefore more universally applicable and fearful.

It is useful in this context to consider Sander Gilman's formulation of the social 'demonising' of the eroticised/sexualised deviant. Gilman shows how the 'sexual dimension of human experience' may be used to differentiate between the 'normal' and the 'deviant', and how this is frequently applied in the construction of communal or of national identity to create an 'other' against which the essential rectitude of the

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<sup>53</sup> Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p. 26. Cited by Healy in *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England*, p. 137.

community or nation is asserted.<sup>54</sup> That this ‘othering’ may also be gendered is evident from Julia Kristeva’s model of the ‘abject’ or socially externalised as feminised and symbolically fraught with the weight of sin and debasement, standing as the evil ‘other’ by which masculine righteousness is defined.<sup>55</sup> These two concepts meet in the body of the Whore of Babylon, that sexually-deviant rampaging woman/religion constructed simultaneously as a rhetorically codified, contained, but nonetheless fundamentally fearful and dangerous threat to the English body politic.

This fearful sexualised feminisation of the ‘othered’ Papist religion is being used by Bale to establish by default the righteousness of English Protestantism. This is shown as masculine and virtuous, marked by its moral integrity, bearing within it the integral construct of nascent English national identity as epitomised by those rational English men of Christian valour who are the moral beacon for, and protectors of, the nation. Nonetheless, this construction of English masculine rectitude sits uneasily with Bale’s emphasis upon the conflated English nation and the English national religion in terms of female virtue. The oppositional emphasis upon endangered female integrity may, as previously mentioned, be explained as the reminder to those in power of their God-given role as protectors of the nation and its divinely-destined religion. This may also be seen as the evocation of this martial masculinity as providing a much-desired psychological bulwark against the encroachments of the rampaging feminised excesses of Papistry.

### **Masculine effeminacy – national loss of bodily integrity**

This implicit construction of masculine rectitude in conjunction with vulnerable femininity is at odds, however, with Bale’s subsequent ambivalent depiction of the

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<sup>54</sup> Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 24.

<sup>55</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 149.

Whore's victims. This is articulated in such a way as to imply a mass alignment of English manhood with undesirable effeminacy, a widespread and irrecoverable loss of masculine virtue, on the part of the very men he is urging to take up arms to defend the faith. They are seen as men who, through the unwary lowering of their moral defences, have allowed themselves to become infected with the chaotic irrationality of Papistry, rendered 'wavering-witted', 'slippery and unstedfast', living in 'a most confused chaos or vault of doubtful dotage' (p. 494). They have, in their effeminised moral instability, become like women, 'fantastical, fickle, or foolish' (p. 494). In a signalling of the absolute debasement and categorising of heretics and apostates as 'abject' and feminised, Bale emphasises their metaphorical link to femininity by using the language of abjection, where he employs the Biblical phraseology of Revelation to show their heretical practices as 'afore God but as the cloth stained with menstree' (p. 614).

Moreover, the Whore's unmanning sexually-transmitted infection, disseminated through this 'spiritual fornication', not merely operates on the individual male, but has the potential to infect and undermine entire nations, where the 'mighty kings and potentates of the earth' who have 'committed with this whore most vile filthiness' (p. 518), and 'most shameful whoredom' (p. 494) have thereby been utterly depraved. Fearfully changed by this sexualised contact, they have become 'counterfeit kings', improper rulers abrogating their divinely-appointed duties and responsibilities, and who are now 'fixed to give their whole power, their study and their strength ... to serve wickedness after wickedness in Babylon' (p. 506).

Bale is not – or not only – expressing a generalised fear of the externalised menace of Papistry, threatening the kingdom of England from beyond its borders. Although the fear of foreign invasion by Roman Catholic forces was a very real and ever-present one for much of the later Henrician era – and indeed for most of the next hundred years –

Bale is evincing a more immediate anxiety.<sup>56</sup> He is reiterating what he sees as the greatest danger to the body politic, caused by the nation being divided upon itself, where the divine purpose and self-evident truth of God's reformation are being betrayed by those very men who should be guarding the realm from recidivism. In particular, England is in danger of losing its divinely-destined status as the locus of the true religion. It is instead becoming a place of chaos and inversion where, in a probable reference to Henry's attacks upon Protestant religious freedoms, Bale evokes the unfavourable description of the 'tyrannical' kings of the earth who have 'abused authority and power' (p. 524). He is explicit (and detailed) in his citing of the multifarious abuses which have crept in, and which, in his opinion, are rendering England more like 'Babylon' each day. He cites the names of those men executed under Henry, martyrs for their Protestant faith who should instead have been revered for their ideal masculine virtue and given a central role in implementing the new religion,

men of most excellent wits, most high learning, of most godly conversation, of a most perfect life, fervent, constant, and unmoveable in the times of their deaths. (p. 398)

Ranged against this self-evident rectitude are such recidivists as 'Bonner bishop of London', who is reintroducing 'fantastical fopperies' (p. 428), busily re-implementing such Papist abuses as 'titled bishops', and the 'sale of benefices' and 'spiritual offices, degrees, and authorities, as plenteous as ever was in Rome' (p. 430). By this means, Bale warns, the unwary prelates will 'be found drunken by taking excess of the Babylonish cup' (p. 428), for the 'beast's' 'old rusty rules [are] new burnished, and his old Romish rags new patched' (p. 440). Worse even than this restoration of 'Papist' 'abuses' is the attack upon that cornerstone of Protestant ideology, *Sola Scriptura*,

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<sup>56</sup> The chief fear of invasion in the 1540s was from the French, on whom Henry had declared war in 1543. See Conrad Russell, *The Crisis of Parliaments: English History 1509-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 121.

where the Bible has been amended, losing all the ‘annotations, tables, and prefaces’ (p. 440) which illuminated Scripture for the people. Most fearful of all is the attempt to prohibit the reading of the Bible by the lower orders, to ‘take the scripture clean away’ where ‘they have sought great faults in the translation of it, and thereupon taken them away from the common people’s reading’ (p. 441). In his frustration, Bale accuses the bishops of hypocrisy, of attempting to undo all the theological advances gained and return the kingdom to the fearful irreligion of the Old Church,

Who ever forswore the pope more earnestly than did Stokesley and Sampson, Gardiner and Tunstall ... ? Yet labour they tooth and nail to have Babylon still Babylon, Sodom Sodom. (p. 510)

By rhetorically linking those in religious authority in England with the sexualised excesses of the Roman Catholic Church, Bale is therefore likening them directly to Papist clergy, accusing them of the utter loss of moral and spiritual integrity. Not only have they become effeminised; they have implicitly become panders who are delivering the body politic of England over to the depraved abuses of Papistry for their own gain. Their position at the centre of religious matters, in positions of trust and responsibility, makes their abrogation of their duties and their succumbing to the depraved seductions of Papistry utterly unnatural. This inverted ‘chaotic’ state of affairs, with those at the centre of the Protestant English Church seen as ‘minions’ of the Whore of Babylon, is further evidence of Bale’s resorting to the use of sexualised, body-based language, in the attempt to stress and render more fearful the extremity of the religious danger threatening the realm.

### **Virtuous masculinity triumphant?**

However, in a seemingly inconsistent depiction, Bale counters the description of the terrible danger and vulnerability afflicting the kingdom with the sustained beatific

vision of the millennium which is at hand, when Christ will return to claim his destined spouse, the Bride of the Lamb, the 'true' church. The prevailing Protestant belief that this glorious day was imminent was underpinned by their understanding of the social and religious chaos dividing Europe as the manifestation of the reign of the Antichrist that would precede the 'last days', before Christ's second coming.<sup>57</sup> It was therefore axiomatic, to Bale and his co-religionists, that the more speedily the world descended into irreligious and heretical chaos, the more evident it was that Satan was 'abroad' (p. 562), and the nearer at hand was their deliverance. In the midst of his fearful warnings of the dangers of national moral backsliding Bale, somewhat paradoxically, therefore urges his readers to have faith, and prepare, for 'within a few days' the 'latter end of the world' will come (p. 564).

It is not clear from his lengthy and detailed description of the time of spiritual perfection and union with God which is to come whether Bale envisages the literal end of the world, or whether his metaphorical language describes a golden age of bliss and universal harmony on earth. What is apparent is that, in his attempt to paraphrase John's portrayal of an ineffable state of post-millennial spiritual perfection, Bale is constrained, of necessity, to use the language of human experience to describe something that is indescribable and beyond man's ken, resulting in a telling thematic and semiotic instability and inconsistency. In this he resorts again to the imagery of the immediately knowable, the human body, in his description of the Bride of the Lamb. As the epitome of the Protestant Church which is the binary moral opposite of the Whore of Babylon, this female archetype is shown as the ideal Protestant woman, the virtuous wife. She is described in terms which evoke the early-modern conduct books, as filled 'with love, joy, peace, patience, meekness, long-suffering and other glorious

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<sup>57</sup> Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse*, p. 145.

fruits of the Spirit', a woman whose 'beauty consisteth only in faith' (p. 583). She is properly submissive and dutiful to her glorious spouse, and 'cleaveth to his only word' (p. 583). More importantly, perhaps, she is chastity itself, 'undefiled as the moon, excellent in clearness as the sun' (p. 404).

This construction is, however, subject to a repeated blurring both of identity and gender. In an evocation of idealised national feminine virtue in keeping with the description of Wydow Engeland, the Woman Clothed with the Sun, who has undergone suffering during her exile in the wilderness is, interestingly, identified by Bale as the persecuted members of the true church, in direct contrast to the traditional Roman Catholic interpretation of her as the Virgin Mary.<sup>58</sup> What is perhaps even more interesting is her subsequent transformation into the Bride of the Lamb, now rendered a fit wife for her heavenly spouse. Furthermore, the Bride of the Lamb in turn becomes, through the 'crucible' of her mystical union with her divine spouse Christ, the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, that enclosed locus of spiritual harmony and domestic bliss. Underpinning this is a consistent evocation of female physical and spiritual integrity. The Bride is shown as a 'born-again' virgin through Christ's divine assistance, 'new, in that she hath here by his godly Spirit done off the old man with his filthy works', 'throwing away the body of sin with death and corruption' (p. 583). This final renunciation of carnality is shown as a mystical baptism, where the Bride has been 'cleansed with the fountain of water in the word of life' (p. 583) rendered 'pure, clean, true, stedfast, godly and perfect' (p. 544). Her spiritual integrity is emphasised by the description of the city of Jerusalem as an enclosed space, inhabited by the elect, and the detailed itemisation of the precious materials of which it is constructed, amongst them diamond, sapphire, emerald (p. 608), with gates of pearl and a street of gold (p. 610).

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 14.

These precious stones are no external meretricious display, however - Bale is employing the symbolism of the medieval lapidary tradition to demonstrate that they are in fact a metaphorical representation of the immeasurable inward spiritual wealth of the city, built as it is upon the sufferings and faith of its inhabitants.<sup>59</sup>

Nonetheless, this description of spiritual integrity in terms of female bodily intactness runs counter to a discourse of repeated martial masculinity on the part of the elect who are warriors for Christ, where Bale shows how,

he that hath done on a christian warrior's armour to fight against the devil of these darkneses, and so manfully doth his part that by faith he overcometh him, and hath the full victory over him in Christ; he shall be sure to possess all these things, heaven, earth, the new Jerusalem. (p. 590)

It is significant that these 'mighty soldiers' are those who are prepared to undergo privation and persecution to spread God's holy word, the Gospel. The true martial masculine heroes are the preachers and those who, like Bale, suffer for their faith. Bale shows how '[l]ike perfect men they bridle their bodies to the obedience of the Spirit' (p. 549). This bodily mortification, the denial and overcoming of carnal lusts, is shown as the means to physical purification which in turn is the path to spiritual integrity, in a precursor of Redcrosse's suffering and spiritual rebirth in *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>60</sup> Thus, those men who are being vaunted as the moral template for the national English masculine stereotype, those who are the destined protectors and preservers of the English Protestant church, are those men who are suffering exile or marginalisation by the English religio-political powers. Bale is therefore asserting his essential rectitude, and that of his fellow hardline Protestants, as opposed to the unworthiness of those in office. He is emphasising the urgent necessity for a change in the religious

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<sup>59</sup> For more on the symbolic medieval use of gemstones in Revelation, see Marbod, Bishop of Rennes, *Marbod of Rennes' De Lapidibus*, an 11<sup>th</sup> century text containing a verse description of the stones constituting the New Jerusalem, trs. C. W. King and John M. Riddle (Wiesbaden, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1977).

<sup>60</sup> Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book 1, Canto X, p. 167.

administrative structure in his home country and implicitly urging that the Protestant exiles be allowed to return and given a leading role in religious affairs. Indeed, it is not entirely impossible that he envisages those ‘proto-Papists’ presently in religious power in England as being amongst the opponents of the ‘elect’ in the final apocalyptic battle, and being vanquished by Christ and his followers in that glorious fight.

The logical extension of Bale’s implicit argument would be the advocating of the overthrow of those in religious and political power in England. Unable finally to directly encourage such a course, and perhaps even to imagine it, he is instead driven to concentrate on the ideal perfection which will exist in the post-millennial epoch. Christ will have returned to lead his troops in the final battle, evil will have been vanquished and good will have emerged eternally victorious. There is still, in this ideal society, a hierarchical gendered structure in evidence however, where Bale and his fellow ‘elect’ must of necessity be subordinate to Christ. He is the supreme ruler, the warrior without equal, the victorious leader who wields a ‘rod of iron’ and a ‘sharp sword’ (p. 549), riding at the head of his army in the final battle against evil. As the incarnation of absolute truth and goodness, his blood-stained garments betoken not mass murder and carnal lust, but the ultimate act of kingly love, the mystical sacrifice of himself for the redemption of mankind.

Christ’s supreme and unassailable spiritual ascendancy underpins the depiction of the link between himself and his church as a heavenly marriage, with its inevitable evocation of a gendered hierarchy. The inhabitants of the New Jerusalem have indeed been rendered spiritually worthy for this union through the exercise of manly self-governance, effort and steadfastness. However, through this ‘leaving [of] the flesh behind’ (p. 553) they have, as Christ’s spouse, been paradoxically transformed into ideal femininity, a depiction underpinned by Bale’s insistence that those who retain

their spiritual integrity will remain ‘chaste virgin[s] unto Christ’, their ‘maidenhead of the soul’ intact (p. 454). This emphasis upon the importance of the unbroached female body as an essential precursor to ‘true’ marital union is in part a probable evocation by Bale of the centrality of the state of spiritual ‘chaste marriage’ to the true Protestant life, in stringent opposition to the hypocritical licentiousness which marked Papist ‘sodomitical chastity’.<sup>61</sup> However, what is perhaps more important here is the description of the eternal connubial bliss that will pertain in the new Jerusalem, with the city shown as a fruitful mother whose breasts provide milk for her children (p. 617), and as a perpetual garden which ‘bringeth forth fruits’ (p. 618). In this garden, the central support is Christ himself, the divine husband, the ‘tree of life’ who is the mainstay of the city, and the ‘true vine’ providing the nourishment of spiritual guidance (p. 619). This hierarchical trope of marriage is therefore intended in no way to belittle or demean those who have endured manly struggles to reach the heavenly City, but to emphasise the harmonious bliss of the ineffable union into which they will become subsumed in their ultimate joining with their Creator. Again, it is debatable whether Bale is envisaging a state of idealised post-millennial heavenly joy, or one of harmonious communal love in the establishment of the true faith on earth. However, whatever the case may be, he is absolute that those who will deserve this happiness will be those who have earned it through suffering and fidelity. It is those like him who are gifted with true spiritual insight and fortitude who will form the nucleus of theological rectitude upon which this new era will be founded.

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<sup>61</sup> For the centrality of ‘chaste’ marriage in the ideal Protestant life see, for example, Heinrich Bullinger, *The golde[n] booke of christen matrimonye moost necessary [and] profitable for all the[m], that intend to liue quietly and godlye in the Christen state of holy wedlock newly set forth in English by Theodore Basille* (Thomas Becon), Sigs. Aiiiv-Aiiir. (London, 1542). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/4045.5. Cambridge University Library. Early English Books Online, ebo citation: 99845975, accessed 10.08.10.

It is this insistence upon masculine spiritual fortitude under suffering as deserving of the reunion with God that marks Bale's construction of that masculine fortitude as constituting and providing the only hope, not only for world-wide Protestantism, the importance of which he certainly understood, but more specifically for his own country. His love for his native land, and his anguish at his enforced absence from it in its time of religious upheaval, underpins each of the texts used here. In this effort to depict extreme danger, he uses the conventional cultural metaphors of embodiment as defining tropes for religio-political turmoil. However, it is the heavy reliance upon sexualised imagery, and the abhorrent connotations implicit in its use, which shows a new departure in theological rhetoric. Bale's powerful language underpins the formation of a new English identity – one of national separation, 'interiority' and Protestant rectitude. His writing was to set the tone for those who succeeded him in the depiction of England as the haven of Protestant rectitude and the divinely destined bulwark against the Papist threat, which was to become such a characteristic feature of Elizabethan and Stuart polemical religious and popular literature.

## Chapter Two

### **‘Women on Top’: the sexualised rhetoric of female rule**

The accession of Henry VIII’s daughter Elizabeth in 1558 created renewed hope on the part of militant Protestants for the proper implementation of the ‘true’ religion in England. The new Queen inherited a realm scarred by internal division and the fear of invasion. The reigns of her half-brother Edward and her half-sister Mary had seen repeated unrest and revolt in response to the rapid imposition and overturning of successive religious dispensations.<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth, it was hoped, would preside over the re-establishing of national religious and political stability, bringing an end to the change and upheaval that the nation had endured over the course of the previous decade. In so doing, she would act to quiet the fears of chaos envisaged by the contemporary historian John Hayward, who described how ‘the [i]nvasion of strangers, civil dissention, the doubtful disposition of the succeeding Prince, were cast in every mans conceit as present perills’.<sup>2</sup>

The rejoicing that greeted Elizabeth’s enthronement was nonetheless tempered with an unease surrounding the accession of yet another female monarch in an intensely hierarchical patriarchal society. The fitness of women to bear rule had been a recurrent topic of debate in Mary’s reign. Thomas Becon’s *An humble supplicacion vnto God* (1554), John Ponet’s *Shorte Treatise of Politike Power* (1556) and Christopher Goodman’s *How Superior Powers Ought to be obeyd* (1558) were only a few of the texts asserting either the irredeemable unsuitability of women as ‘governors’ or the

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<sup>1</sup> For a brief account of the events of these reigns, see MacCulloch, *Reformation*, pp. 255-9, and pp. 280-6.

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Hayward, *The Life and reigne of King Edward the Sixth, with the beginning of the reigne of Queene Elizabeth* (London, 1636), Sig. V2v. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/12999. University of Illinois. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99839657, accessed 22.2.10. Cited by Susan Brigden in *New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors 1485-1603* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 11.

insistence upon unswerving obedience to any monarch as appointed by God.<sup>3</sup> This debate continued into Elizabeth's reign, and was conducted against the background of the ongoing dispute surrounding the 'nature of women' and the persistent anxiety over female unruliness.<sup>4</sup> The contradictory representations of women that formed part of the cultural matrix of early modern England are particularly evident as underpinning and emphasis in literary representations of female rule.<sup>5</sup>

In Elizabeth's early reign these anxieties existed in tension with a growing concern about the role of 'magistracy', that all-important early-modern term centering upon the nature of government, social and political authority, and the qualifications for and duties of those who would undertake it. This was of particular significance to the members of the aristocracy and the counsellors surrounding the monarch, who were seen in early-modern moral philosophy as charged with the sacred duty to protect 'the common weal'.<sup>6</sup> The texts of the period examining the rights and wrongs of gynocracy are therefore inflected with the assertion of their own agenda on the part of the

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Becon, *An humble supplicacion vnto God for the restoring of hys holye woorde, vnto the churche of Englande, mooste mete to be sayde in these oure dayes, euen with teares of euery true [and] faythfull English harte* (Strasbourg, 1554). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/1730. Cambridge University Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99845990, accessed 01.02.10; John Ponet, *A shorte treatise of politike pouuer and of the true obedience which subiectes owe to kynges and other ciuile gouernours, with an exhortacion to all true naturall Englishe men, compyled by D. I.P. B. R. VV.* (Strasbourg, 1556). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/20178. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99850264, accessed 01.02.10; Christopher Goodman, *How superior powers ought to be obeyd of their subiects and wherein they may lawfully by Gods Worde be disobeyed and resisted. Wherin also is declared the cause of all this present miserie in England, and the onely way to remedy the same* (Geneva: 1558). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/12020. Yale University Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99839020, accessed 01.02.10. For more on the debate surrounding female rule, please see Paula Louise Scalingi, 'The Scepter or the Distaff: The Question of Female Sovereignty, 1516-1607' in *The Historian* 41:1 (1978: Nov.), p. 59. PhiAlphaTheta. <http://www.phialphatheta.org>, ISSN: 0018-2370, accessed 24.02.10. See also Constance Jordan, 'Woman's Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought' in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3. (Autumn, 1987), pp. 421-451. Renaissance Society of America. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26862518>, accessed 23.11.06.

<sup>4</sup> Zemon Davis, 'Women on Top', p. 124.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the details of this long-running controversy, please see Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womanhood, 1540-1620* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), especially Chapter Three, 'The Elizabethan Controversy', p. 49

<sup>6</sup> A.N. McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 118.

‘Protestant ascendancy’.<sup>7</sup> This privileging on the part of these militant Protestants of their own right to provide ‘counsel’ to the monarch was increasingly articulated in a way that set it against Elizabeth’s own conviction of her right to govern alone and unaided.

An early manifestation of disquiet with female rule can be seen, paradoxically, in the rhetorical reassertion of common national origins and identity apparent in the growing interest in England’s history. Lawrence Stone points to the contemporary fascination with genealogical and heraldic research as members of the aristocracy emphasised their lineage through the examination of their family ancestry.<sup>8</sup> This was paralleled by such texts as John Bale’s *Scriptorium illustrium maioris Brytannie*, re-issued in 1559 with a dedicatory epistle to Elizabeth, which highlighted the country’s long and distinguished past and its great historical figures.<sup>9</sup> The depiction of the importance of common national origins and community is apparent, too, in Sackville and Norton’s play *Gorboduc* (1561) and in John Aylmer’s *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe subiectes* (1558), both of which invoke the trope of England as the motherland.

I see this ‘ontological’ search as running in tandem with the Protestant assertion of England as the long-standing home of the original ‘primitive’ religion, established in the realm in classical times. This underpinned the construction of English selfhood, both individual and communal, in theologically-based terms. Elizabeth herself lost little time upon her accession in reasserting her realm’s symbolic spiritual

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<sup>7</sup> This useful formulation is that of Patrick Collinson, in ‘Puritans, Men of Business and Elizabethan Parliaments’, in *Parliamentary History*, 7 No. 2 (1988), pp. 253-77 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> John Bale, *Scriptorium illustriu[m] maioris Brytannie quam nunc Angliam & Scotiam uocant catologus...* (Basle, 1559). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/1296. Princeton University Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99853766, accessed 01.09.09.

independence from Rome, assuming the title of Supreme Governor of the Church of England under the 1559 Act of Supremacy. This was followed by the formalisation of the tenets of English Protestantism by means of the reissue of the Edwardian Book of Common Prayer in 1559 and the imposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles in 1563.<sup>10</sup> John Jewel's *Apologie of the Church of England* (1562) gave ideological weight to the Elizabethan Settlement, detailing the beliefs and observances underpinning the English Church, and providing the 'essential foundation' for the 'theological position that was later called Anglicanism'.<sup>11</sup>

The Settlement gave a basis for the identification of 'Englishness' with 'Protestantism' that served to underpin the growing understanding of the nation as one set apart and 'chosen', the divinely-destined haven of the Protestant religion. In contemporary sermons and religious tracts England was shown as the 'New Jerusalem', seen anew as the Protestant stronghold and bastion of virtue set against the evils of foreign-based Papistry described by Bale in *King Johan*.<sup>12</sup> This sense of unique English religious and national destiny was given added impetus by John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, first published in 1563.<sup>13</sup> In this Foxe likened the suffering of the

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<sup>10</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 289.

<sup>11</sup> Peter White, *Predestination, policy and polemic; Conflict and consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 69; John Jewel, *An apologie, or aunswer in defence of the Church of England concerninge the state of religion vsed in the same. Newly set forth in Latin, and nowe translated into Englishe* (London, 1562). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/14590. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eeb citation: 99843459, accessed 26.08.09. See also John Craig, 'John Jewel, 1522-71, Bishop of Salisbury' in the *Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14816>, accessed 26.08.09.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the theologically-based construction of early-Elizabethan England as the site of anti-Papist resistance, see Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse*, Chapter 7, esp. pp. 134-5, and Carol Z. Wiener, 'The Beleaguered Isle. A Study of Elizabethan and Early Jacobean Anti-Catholicism', in *Past & Present*, No. 51 (May, 1971), pp. 27-62. The Past & Present Society. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650402>, accessed 19.02.2010. See also Haller's seminal (although subsequently contested) account in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and the Elect Nation*, esp. Chapters III and IV.

<sup>13</sup> John Foxe, *Actes and monuments of these latter and perillous dayes touching matters of the Church, wherein ar comprehended and described the great persecutions [and] horrible troubles, that haue been wrought and practised by the Romishe prelates, speciallye in this realme of England and Scotlande, from the yeare of our Lorde a thousande, vnto the tyme nowe present* (London, 1563). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/11222.

English Protestants under the Marian persecution to the early Christian martyrs, fashioning a sense of militant Protestantism, and providing ‘one of the cornerstones of English Protestant identity’.<sup>14</sup> However, this was not unmediated Protestant triumphalism. If, as Foxe seemed to be saying, it was the suffering under religious persecution that in itself provided proof of the status of being one of God’s chosen, the nation must suffer persecution in its turn to be proved ‘elect’, and its church the ‘true’ one. This understanding of existence under perpetual threat finds expression not in joyous certainty, but instead manifests itself in the persistent strand of pessimism and anti-Papist fear which characterises the construction of English national religious identity and the nationalistic and theological rhetoric of this period.<sup>15</sup>

This anxiety was complicated further by the fact of Elizabeth’s rule. As a female she was a member of that problematic gender routinely linked in early-modern patriarchal thought with mental instability and moral weakness. Mary Tudor’s femininity had been used in conjunction with her adherence to Papistry to show her as an unworthy and tyrannical ruler, a device given added weight by the draconian enforcement of her religious policies which had led to the burning of almost 300 martyrs and gained her the soubriquet of ‘Bloody Mary’.<sup>16</sup> As a Protestant queen, Elizabeth’s gender could not be interpreted by her apologists in a like fashion, but it nonetheless presented a dilemma. The need on their part to depict her as a ‘proper’ monarch, despite her sex, underlies the differing, sometimes even conflicting, depictions of Elizabeth apparent in her early reign.

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Cambridge University Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99848337, accessed 26.02.10. Hereafter referred to as *Acts and Monuments*.

<sup>14</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 285. For more on the influence of *Acts and Monuments* on the development of an English religious national identity, see Patrick Collinson, ‘Truth and Legend: The Veracity of John Foxe’s Book of Martyrs’, in *Elizabethan Essays* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1994), p. 151.

<sup>15</sup> Wiener, ‘The Beleaguered Isle’, p. 28. See also Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse*, p. 131.

<sup>16</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 285. For more on the construction of any woman ruler as a tyrant, see Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants*, pp. 21, 69.

One solution to the problem was to show Elizabeth as rising above her troubling femininity, by constructing her as a 'genderless' godly prince, exceptionally endowed by God with masculine intellect. She was seen as 'God's own elect', the 'providential' monarch divinely chosen to restore Protestantism to a nation that had been struggling under the yoke of Papistry.<sup>17</sup> The translators of the 1560 Geneva Bible reminded her of this destiny in their hope that 'God shulde bring to passe some wonderful worke by your grace to the vniuersal comfort of his Churche'.<sup>18</sup> John Bale, in his early-1560s revised edition of *King Johan*, spoke of her as being 'the lyghte to other princes all' who had 'subdued the Papistes', '[r]estorynge Gods honoure to hys first force and bewtye'.<sup>19</sup> Foxe dedicated the first edition of the *Acts and Monuments* to her, the frontispiece showing Elizabeth enthroned as Constantine, the fourth-century Roman Emperor who established Christianity as the religion of the Empire.<sup>20</sup>

However, this androgynous – and prescriptive – construction of Elizabeth is more often countered in contemporary texts by the use of her femininity to underpin the rhetoric surrounding her religious and political roles. A typical trope was that of Elizabeth as the latter-day exemplar of an Old Testament heroine, 'a new Judith, a new Zerubbabel'.<sup>21</sup> In the tableaux which formed part of her reception by the City of London on the day before her coronation, she was shown not only as presiding over the trampling of Superstition and Ignorance by Pure Religion, but also as Deborah, the

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<sup>17</sup> Capp, 'The political dimension of apocalyptic thought', p. 94.

<sup>18</sup> *The Geneva Bible*, 1560, facsimile edition (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2007), Sig. \*\*\*iii.v. It is in this version of the Bible that the construction of the Protestant Church as the Woman Clothed with the Sun is articulated as the Church 'compassed about with Christ' but 'persecuted of Antichrist'. See marginal gloss 'a' in Revelation XII, Sig. GGg.ii.v.

<sup>19</sup> Bale, *King Johan*, lines 2672, 2684.

<sup>20</sup> Foxe, *Acts and Monuments*, epistle dedicatory. See also Michael S. Pucci, 'Reforming Roman Emperors: John Foxe's Characterization of Constantine in the *Acts and Monuments*', in *John Foxe: An Historical Perspective*, ed. David Loades (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), p. 33. It is interesting to note that this frontispiece was removed in later editions, as Foxe's attitude to Elizabeth changed – see Thomas S. Freeman, 'Providence and Prescription: The Account of Elizabeth in Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"', in Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman, eds., *The Myth of Elizabeth* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse*, p. 128.

Scriptural epitome of virtuous and godly female rule.<sup>22</sup> This initial representation was followed by an increasing recourse to Elizabeth's gender and in particular her sexualised body as an explicatory metaphor, underpinning the justifications of her position both as Supreme Governor of the Church and as ruler of her realm. Her virginal chastity and virtue were used as a paradigm for both the divinely-chosen destiny of England as the 'elect nation', and the impermeable integrity of her realm against foreign threat.<sup>23</sup> However this use of female embodiment in 'gendering' the nation is not univocal, and is characterised by unstable signification and disjuncture in representation. It is significant that the contradictory depictions of female rule and ideal femininity in the texts exist in tension with the assertion of the necessity for masculine patriarchal control. The resultant rhetorical strategies show a contest for the ideological control over the body of the nation which is constructed upon an unstable basis of shifting gender alignment. Virtuous, chaste maternity co-exists with both feminine bodily instability and promiscuity and the evocation of the nation in terms of masculine martial prowess in such a way as to radically disrupt the depiction of national unity, strength and purpose.

### **Knox and Aylmer - female rule, masculinity and nationhood**

This shifting 'gendering' of the nation is evident from the very outset of Elizabeth's reign, and is particularly apparent in the texts which renewed the debate about female rule shortly after her accession. John Knox's outspoken denunciation of gynocracy, his

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<sup>22</sup> Anon, *The Passage of our most drad Soueraigne Lady Quene Elyzabeth through the citie of London to Westminster the daye before her coronacion* (London : 1559), Sig. D4v. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed)/7590. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99836217, accessed 22.08.09. For the attribution of this text to Richard Mulcaster; see, amongst others, William Leahy, 'Propaganda or a Record of Events? Richard Mulcaster's *The Passage of our most drad Soueraigne Lady Quene Elyzabeth through the citie of London to Westminster the daye before her coronacion*.', in *Early Modern Literary Studies* 9.1, May 2003, pp. 1-20. Sheffield Hallam University. <http://purl.oclc.org/emls/09-1/leahmulc.html>, accessed 22.08.09.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 11, and Stallybrass, 'Patriarchal Territories and the Body Enclosed', p. 127.

*First blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women*, appeared in 1558.<sup>24</sup> The timing of the publication of this text was unfortunate; it had actually been intended as an indictment of Mary Tudor and Mary of Guise, the regent in Scotland for her daughter Mary Queen of Scots, and is characterised by a stringently anti-Papist agenda. Mary's untimely death nonetheless resulted in Knox's vitriolic and consistent invective against female rule being interpreted as an attack upon Elizabeth herself, and earned the hapless Knox the new queen's lasting displeasure.<sup>25</sup> John Aylmer lost little time in coming to Elizabeth's defence in his *An Harborowe for Faithful and Trewe Subiectes*, also published in 1558, in which he set out to construct ideal Protestant female rule in opposition to the chaotic Papist-orientated gynocracy evoked by Knox.<sup>26</sup> A comparison of these two texts, different though their agendas may ostensibly be, shows that both are characterised by a sexualised representation of female monarchs. Both women are depicted from a religio-political standpoint, the body of each ruler being metaphorically conflated with her realm and her religion. The female body of Mary is shown in terms of chaotic and unstable Papist sexual transgression, that of Elizabeth as epitomising essential feminine Protestant rectitude and virtuous integrity. However, despite the widely-differing depictions of the two queens, during the course of the texts another common theme gradually emerges; that of the writers' fundamental unease with rule by both these essentially unstable and wayward creatures, and the attempt to contain them, at least rhetorically, through the manipulation of their gender.

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<sup>24</sup> John Knox, *The first blast of the trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women* (Geneva, 1558). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/15070. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99843818, accessed 5.1.07. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>25</sup> For more on Elizabeth's reaction to Knox, see Patricia-Ann Lee, 'A Bodye Politique to Governe: Aylmer, Knox and the Debate on Queenship' in *The Historian*, 52:2 (1990, Feb), pp. 242-261, esp. pp. 257-8. PhiAlphaTheta. <http://dx.doi.org.10.1111/j.1540-6563.1990.tb00780x>, accessed 24.02.10.

<sup>26</sup> John Aylmer, *An Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subiectes, agaynst the late blowne Blaste, concerninge the Government of Wemen, wherein be confuted all such reasons as a straunger of late made in that behalfe, with a breife exhortation to Obedience* (Strasbourg [?], 1559). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/1005. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99836209, accessed 15.01.07. Subsequently referred to as *An Harborowe*. All further references are to this edition.

Knox's invective centres chiefly on Mary's unfitness to reign by virtue of her womanhood and the consequent extreme danger in which this female rule places her realm.<sup>27</sup> He holds that nature makes women, 'weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolishe' and that experience shows them to be 'vnconstant, variable, cruell and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment' (Sig. B2r.). As a daughter of Eve, the 'first transgressor of goddes law' (Sig. C2r.), Mary belongs to that fatally dangerous sex responsible for bringing mankind into 'the bondage of Satan', and is therefore divinely-destined not to bear rule, but to be instead subject to 'the bondage of man' (Sig. B7v.). Knox invokes Timothy 1.2 to remind his reader that it is directly against God's word to 'suffer' 'a woman to ... vsurpe authoritie above man' (Sig. B7r.). The abhorrence of female rule is such that it is 'repugnant to nature, contumelie to God, a thing most contrarious to his reveled will and approved ordinance' (Sig. C3r.). A female monarch is therefore a rebel against God's law, a 'monstre of monstres', and 'this monstriferous empire of women' is the most 'detestable and damnable' of all the 'enormities' that 'abound upon the face of the hole earth' (Sig. A6v.)

This unnatural monstrosity is aligned in Knox's eyes with female sexual depravity, where Mary's Roman Catholic religion is depicted in keeping with the popular understanding of Papistry in terms of sexual transgression, spiritual fornication and idolatry.<sup>28</sup> Knox's friend Anthony Gilby had already shown Mary as a woman 'wanting no will to wickedness', the 'monster of England', an uncontrolled and unwomanly sexual predator who was Archbishop Gardiner's 'mastres'.<sup>29</sup> As the

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<sup>27</sup> Jordan, 'Woman's Rule in Sixteenth-Century British Political Thought', p. 431.

<sup>28</sup> Anne McLaren points to the subsequent construction of the Roman Catholic Mary Queen of Scots along similar lines a decade later, in contrast to Elizabeth's Protestant purity. See 'The Quest for a King: Gender, Marriage, and Succession in Elizabethan England', in *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3, New Directions in Political History (Jul., 2002), pp. 259-290. The University of Chicago Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3070719>, accessed 26.01.10.

<sup>29</sup> Anthony Gilby, *An Admonition to England and Scotland, to Call Them to Repentance*, in John Knox *The appellation of Iohn Knox from the cruell and most iniust sentence pronounced against him by the false bishoppes and clergie of Scotland, with his supplication and exhortation to the nobilitie, estates and*

possessor of a morally unstable transgressive female body, Mary is constructed by Knox, too, as a latter-day incarnation of Circe. Sexual temptation and beguiling heretical doctrine are conflated to show her as rendering men impotent and feeble through the allurements of her ‘carnal’ Papistry, a witch who will stop at nothing to lure these hapless creatures to their inevitable doom. Mary has ‘inordinat appetites’ (Sig. F8r.), and is a sexually voracious female who is also shown, in the language of spiritual fornication, as an ‘idol’ (Sig. F8r.), one of those Papist ‘mommets’ – a conflation of ‘statue’ and ‘doll’ – who allured men into the adulterous apostasy from the true faith and entrapped them into the fatal damnation entailed in heretical worship. This densely-packed imagery of female sexual transgression is a direct echo of Bale’s description of the Whore of Babylon from Revelation. Knox also compares Mary to the Old Testament characters of Jezebel and Athalia, one a notorious whore and deceiver, the other a tyrannous female usurper (Sig. E6r.). He goes even further, not hesitating to personify Mary as the Whore of Babylon herself, speaking of her as sleeping ‘in the bed of her fornication and hoordome’ (Sig. E7r).

It is however in the reference to Mary’s ‘adulterous children’ (Sig. E7r.) that we see the true source of Knox’s anxiety – the fear of the destabilisation and overturning of the commonwealth by this appalling avatar of the Whore installed at its very centre. Knox compares the infection with the heresy of Papist doctrine to that with sexually-transmitted disease, as he reveals his fear that all Mary’s subjects will become infected through the entrapment into spiritual fornication. Mary herself is a conflation of the disease and its promulgator, a ‘Iesabelle’ who is the ‘vttermoste’ of God’s ‘plagues’ (Sig. F2v.), who ‘defiles’ and ‘prophanes’ the throne (Sig. E2r.), a ‘corrupt and venomed fountain’ (Sig. E2r.). This imagery again invokes the Whore of Babylon, and

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*co[m]unaltie of the same realme* (Geneva, 1558), Sigs. I4v, I4r. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/15063. Bodleian Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99842430, accessed 26.01.10.

bears the sexualised subtext of the early-modern understanding of the female body as porous and leaky, the danger posed to others epitomised in its emission of polluting, dangerous, fluids such as menstrual blood.<sup>30</sup> Mary's metaphorical defilement and pollution of the realm evokes the Whore of Babylon's lavishly-decorated golden cup, which may be construed in terms of diseased female genitals containing the tempting but poisonous 'wine of her fornication'. Mary is thus by transference shown as the archetypal abhorrent female, unleashing moral and physical infection upon a vulnerable community.<sup>31</sup> The female-oriented abhorrence of Mary's Papist beliefs is therefore underlined by the connection between female sexual depravity, polluting and dangerous female bodily fluids and the dissemination of disease. This conjunction would have been particularly fearful in a society where the sinful sexual congress between a menstruating prostitute and a leper was popularly held to be the original source of syphilis.<sup>32</sup>

It is useful to examine this language of female abhorrence in connection with Mary Douglas's pioneering work in structural anthropology, particularly her key insight that a 'female body may stand for a bounded system'.<sup>33</sup> The female body thus constructed stands as a direct metaphorical and psychological paradigm for the well-being and structural integrity of a community, and becomes the route through which danger to that community may gain entrance. This is especially relevant when we see Knox's anxiety that Mary's body, that 'porte and gate of the deuil' (Sig. C2r.) is endangering the entire realm through her marriage to a Papist Spaniard, Phillip II, the marital sexual

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<sup>30</sup> See Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 14. See also Margaret Healy, 'Dangerous Blood', in *National healths: gender, sexuality and health in a cross-cultural context*, eds. Michael Worton and Nana Wilson-Tagoe (London: Cavendish Publishing, 2004), p. 86.

<sup>31</sup> Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 68.

<sup>32</sup> See Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England*, p. 133.

<sup>33</sup> Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 142. See also Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 78, for more on the human body as a paradigm for society. I am indebted to Dr. Margaret Healy for pointing out this construction, which she uses as a theoretical underpinning in her work *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England*.

subjection of Mary to her husband rendering the kingdom open to metaphorical penetration by both this foreigner and the religion to which he adheres. Knox gives weight to his argument by reverting to Biblical precept, reminding his readers of the national disaster brought about by women in the Old Testament who, driven by their lustful natures, betrayed their country to ‘straingers’ (Sig. B5r.) This argument that Mary is exposing her entire kingdom to danger by her marriage is a direct echo of John Ponet’s rhetoric in his *Of Politike Power*, where he too speaks of Mary as a ‘traytour’ who is bringing ‘the people under a foreyn power’.<sup>34</sup>

The sexualised correlation between Mary’s religion and her gender is also emphasised by Knox’s depiction of her as an unfit mother, evoking the Whore once more, where the ‘cup of abominations’ of Papist doctrine and ritual may also serve as a paradigm for the diseased maternal breast. By describing Mary’s subjects as her ‘children’ Knox is implicitly showing them as having been infected with the fatal heretical doctrine in the same way as an infant imbibes the infection of syphilis through mother’s milk.<sup>35</sup> The infection with the fatal heresy has had a two-fold effect. Imbued with the inevitable spiritual death of damnation, these ‘adulterous’ children have also been rendered into bastards. Knox is implying that as spiritual ‘orphans’ they have been alienated from their true father, God, and from their inherited and privileged lineage as Protestant Englishmen, and have now become the illegitimate, doomed, children of the Whore and her paramour, the Pope.

### **Effeminacy and gender slippage – inadequate patriarchal control**

However, despite his strongly-worded and sustained depiction of the appalling effects of female rule upon Mary’s realm and upon her subjects, Knox nonetheless appears

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<sup>34</sup> Ponet, *A short treatise of politike povver*, Sig. H1r.

<sup>35</sup> See Healy, *Fictions of Disease*, p. 126.

ambivalent as to its root cause. The depiction of Mary as a sexually rampant Papist harpy wreaking widespread and fundamental destruction is balanced by the depiction of a fearful moral turpitude on the part of the country's masculine political élite. Through their submission to Mary's 'unnatural' rule, and their allowing of her heretical Papist doctrine, they have utterly abrogated their duty of magistracy, failing to provide moral leadership and an example of godly righteousness to the nation they aspire to govern. They have instead demonstrated a fatal lack of masculine self-control, rationality and integrity. Knox implies that it is this lack of integrity, as much as anything, that has rendered them vulnerable to the blandishments of Papistry, and that they have thus allowed themselves to become spiritual fornicators, alienated from their God and fellow countrymen, 'adulterous and bastard officers' (Sig. G4v.) who are unfit to hold public office.

Indeed, this moral inversion and descent from the masculine ideal has actually made these men effeminate, and aligned them with female irrationality and disordered thinking. Knox emphasises his point by example, showing that these unfortunate Englishmen are like the Ancient Greeks unmanned by their Amazon conquerors who underwent 'such a metamorphosis and change' that 'their hartes were changed frome the wisdome, vnderstanding, and courage of men to the foolish fondnes and cowardice of women' (Sig. B3r.). He reverts again to the Bible, invoking St Paul's warnings against masculine spiritual decadence, describing the way in which men who lose their self-control and rectitude must inevitably 'so farre degenerate to the weakness of women', even becoming 'inferior to women' (Sig. D1v). Since they have been thus fatally overwhelmed by the unmanning carnal delights of Papistry, Knox finally shows these men as in peril of the complete loss of their God-given masculine patriarchal

identity, in danger of becoming 'slaves' (Sig. E1r.), who will be 'compelled to bowe their neckes vnder the yoke of Satan' (Sig. D6r.).

Invoking once more the parallel between the individual and the state, Knox shows how the effeminacy with which these men have been contaminated has also infected the nation. Social order and hierarchy have been overturned by this unnatural rule and the lack of masculine magistracy, and the state is now disordered and chaotic. It has become a 'monstre' (Sig. D4v.), which Knox compares to a body where the limbs have lost their proper relationship to each other, out of alignment, with 'no head eminent above the rest' and 'the eyes ... in the hands, the tonge and mouth beneth in the belie, and the eares in the feet' (Sig. D4v.) This 'headless body' of the state, without proper governance, is the site of chaos, the people, 'disordred, liuinge and bounding in all intemperancie, geuen to pride, excesse and vanitie' (Sig. B4r.). This inversion of proper bodily hierarchy, in its inherent monstrosity and overturning of the divine order, therefore shows the body of the state under female rule as a woman, where, as Gail Kern Paster argues, 'woman' in the early-modern era was metaphorically aligned with the Bakhtinian sphere of lower bodily grossness and suspension of proper order, the female body seen as the site of irrationality and uncontrolled sexuality.<sup>36</sup> Should the nation continue in this disordered fashion, without proper rule or rational government, Knox warns that disaster is inevitable; it 'must nedes come to confusion and ruine' (Sig. B4r.).

In his urgency to convince his reader, Knox goes further still and shows this national effeminised chaos and inversion in terms of a fatal and fearful maternity. The realm is depicted as a morally unstable female body both infected with disease and impregnated by its terrible spiritual fornication, preparing for a monstrous birth which

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<sup>36</sup> Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, p. 128.

portends national disaster, a 'citie shedding blood in the midst of her, that her time may approche and which hath made idols against her selfe, that she might be polluted' (Sig. F6r.). Knox again employs the language of abhorrent femininity in his emphasis upon the terrible pass to which the nation has been brought, reminding his readers that 'thou art polluted in the idols which thou hast made' (Sig. D4r.). This is another instance of the prevalent sexualised rhetoric conflating the external meretricious attraction exerted by Papist statues with the 'spiritual fornication' of the apostacy from the true religion and the embracing of the deadly heresy of the false.

Knox ends the text on a note of pessimism; he does not seem to see much hope for England, only imminent and unavoidable national catastrophe. Like ancient Israel, the nation has incurred God's wrath by 'embracing idolatrie ... euen unto the destruction of their common welthe' (Sig. A3r.), and he warns that the 'overthrow of true religion' must lead to the 'assured destruction of England' (Sig. D7v.). Brought low by Papist female rule, its men effeminised and rendered helpless by the spiritual fornication with this fatal heretical doctrine, the chaotic and disordered nation has no hope for redemption, but can only await its inevitable fate.

### **Aylmer's *An Harborowe***

Given the consistently anti-gynocratic bent of Knox's invective, it is understandable that he aroused Elizabeth's anger despite his stringently anti-Papist agenda. It is also easy to see why John Aylmer rushed into print in the attempt to limit the damage done by Knox to the cause of the expatriate Protestant community, exiled under Mary, who hoped for speedy repatriation and advancement under the new queen.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, Aylmer's text betrays a fundamental divergence, the initial praise for Elizabeth's divine

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<sup>37</sup> See Vanhoutte, *Strange Communion*, p. 103. See also Lee, 'A Bodye Politique to Gouverne', p. 246.

destiny as a 'providential' ruler standing in contrast to the implicit construction later in the text of her as a weak woman who is in need of the protection of her counsellors. Aylmer proceeds at first to underpin Elizabeth's right to rule by showing her as a godly monarch through the conventional use of Biblical precedent. He echoes Mulcaster's depiction of her as Deborah, Israel's saviour in a time of extreme national danger, who 'delyuered' the people 'out of thraldome, and set them at libertie' (Sig. D3v.). Elizabeth is likewise compared to the Biblical Judith who, 'indued with gods spirit and heavenly wisdome', saved a city besieged by its enemies and with God's help found a way 'not only to deliuer them but to revenge them', 'not only to saue their pols, but to cut off thenemies' (Sig. E4v.)

Like Knox, Aylmer's rhetoric also centres upon the body of the Queen and upon tropes peculiar to her feminine nature. Elizabeth is presented as the epitome of virtuous and chaste Protestant womanhood, the binary opposite of Mary as the sexually rampant and destructive avatar of the Whore of Babylon. Aylmer lauds Elizabeth's modest demeanour during Mary's reign, reminding his readers of her refusal to flaunt the magnificent jewels left her in her father's will, and of her putting the flamboyantly-dressed women at Mary's court to shame by the plain simplicity of her dress (Sig. N1r.). He speaks of her as a moral paragon, a woman 'endued with that rare learning, that singulare modestie, that heavenly clemencie, that christiane constancie, that loue of religion, that excellent wisdom' (Sig. I2r.). Moreover, as John Foxe was later to do in his *Acts and Monuments*, Aylmer emphasises Elizabeth's sufferings under Mary as a 'lambe' (Sig. O1v.) to construct her as an English Protestant martyr. He reiterates Elizabeth's persecution by Archbishop Gardiner, her imprisonment in the Tower, and the plots by the Marian bishops to have her put to death; or, as Aylmer has it, 'to wash their rochets in her innocent blood' (Sig. N3v.-N4r.). As Thomas Freeman says, this

rhetoric ‘placed the Princess in the company of the saints Gardiner had persecuted, and elevated the political struggle between Elizabeth and Mary into a battle between God and Satan’.<sup>38</sup>

This conflation of the religious and political is also seen in the trope of Elizabeth as symbolic mother to her realm. In the attempt to overcome her troubling femininity, she was conventionally portrayed as semi-divine, her role as Supreme Governor of the Church causing her to be compared to the Woman Clothed with the Sun, the chaste matron from Revelation who is the binary opposite of the Whore of Babylon. The trope of Protestant matronhood was also invoked in the Biblical imagery of Isaiah 49, 23, showing Elizabeth as the ‘nursing mother of the church’.<sup>39</sup> Aylmer emphasises the difference between Elizabeth and Mary as he uses the language of procreation in almost Kristevan terms to demonstrate the change wrought in Elizabeth’s kingdom by the restoration of the true religion; ‘as by a woman came death: so by a woman was broughte fourthe life’ (Sig. I3r.).<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth is England’s Helena, the fifth-century saint credited with the discovery of the true cross, and with the conversion of her son the Emperor Constantine, and hence the entire Roman Empire, to Christianity. Aylmer specifies that it is Elizabeth’s divine destiny to act in her own realm to ‘find out the crosse of Christe hidden in the dungeon of develishe doctrine’ (Sig. C1v.). He counters Knox’s rhetoric of the ‘unnatural’ character of female rule, and shows Elizabeth as organically linked to her realm, as God’s chosen ‘providential’ ruler. She is no unnatural ‘stepdam’ (Sig. B1r.), as Mary was, but a ‘louing Quene and mother to raigne ouer vs’ (Sig. Q3v.). This language of Elizabeth’s destined providential role as monarch was a frequent trope, also employed by both Foxe and Jewel to show that

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<sup>38</sup> Freeman, ‘Providence and Prescription: The Account of Elizabeth in Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs’, p. 31.

<sup>39</sup> Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> For more on the life- and death-bringing potential inherent in the maternal female body, see Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, p. 161.

scripture and history confirmed her as the chosen representative of divine authority whom all Englishmen were duty bound to accept and obey unquestioningly as their ruler.

Elizabeth's 'organic' bodily link with her realm was emphasised by the use of the medieval construction of The King's Two Bodies, in terms of which the monarch was seen as a conjunction of the symbolic embodiment of the body politic and of his own natural body.<sup>41</sup> As Helen Hackett shows, this legal theory was increasingly employed after the Reformation to reinforce the understanding of the sacred nature of kingship.<sup>42</sup> Elizabeth herself spoke of this mystical 'multiple' regal body, stressing in a speech to Parliament that she was 'but one Bodye naturallye Considered though by [God's] permission a Bodye Politique to Governe'.<sup>43</sup> Her relationship to her realm was likewise depicted as 'sacred wedlocke', 'by ceremony of Ring as solemnly signified, as any other mariage'.<sup>44</sup> Despite this construction of a mystical union, however, the earlier part of Elizabeth's reign nonetheless saw the repeated and insistent urging on the part of her counsellors and Parliament for her to take an actual husband.<sup>45</sup> The lack of a named heir to the throne and the destabilising effect this could have on the

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<sup>41</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 193-232.

<sup>42</sup> Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 21. See also Marie Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession*, (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), esp. Ch. 2.

<sup>43</sup> 'Queen Elizabeth's speech to her secretary [Sir W. Cecil] and other her Lords', 20 Nov. 1558, British Library Stowe MS 361, fol. 1. Cited by Allison Heisch in 'Queen Elizabeth I: Parliamentary Rhetoric and the Exercise of Power', in *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn, 1975), p. 33. University of Chicago Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3172965>, accessed 22.02.10.

<sup>44</sup> Anthony Munday, *A watch-woorde to Englande* (London, 1584), Sig. Aiiiir. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/18282. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99848182, accessed 18.08.10. The usual citation is of William Camden's report in his *Annals* (1617) of Elizabeth styling herself as joined 'to an Husband, namely the Kingdom of England', but Helen Hackett shows this to be part of the posthumous fictionalised hagiography surrounding Elizabeth. See *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, pp. 229-30. See also Louis Montrose 'The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text', in *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts*, eds. Patricia Parker and David Quint (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 310, and J. N. King, 'Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen', *Renaissance Quarterly* 43, (1990), p.33. Renaissance Society of America. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2861792>, accessed 03.03.09.

<sup>45</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, p. 2. See also Heisch, 'Queen Elizabeth I: Parliamentary Rhetoric and the Exercise of Power', esp. pp. 33-34, and McLaren, 'The Quest for a King: Gender, Marriage, and Succession in Elizabethan England', esp. p. 261.

commonwealth was an abiding preoccupation. In 1561 William Cecil, Elizabeth's Secretary of State, wrote 'God send our mistress a husband, and by him a son, that we may hope our posterity shall have a masculine succession', and in 1563 Elizabeth's marriage was the topic of repeated debates in Parliament, fervent wishes being expressed by the members of both Houses that it should please her to marry.<sup>46</sup> Aylmer echoes these hopes for Elizabeth's putative forthcoming nuptials. In the conflation of ideas depicting his longing for the national stability which the establishment of a proper royal succession will bring, he uses the organic imagery of nature as he prays God,

to guide hir harte in the choise of hir husbande, and to make hir frutefull,  
and the mother of manye children, that thys Realme maye haue the grafted  
of so goodly a tree, That oure children and posterite maye see hirs occupying  
hir throne, with honour, ioye, & quietnes.

(Sig. 12r.-v.)

However, despite the seemingly inoffensive nature of Aylmer's wishes for the joint prosperity of monarch and realm, this evocation of national blessings is fraught with the implications of their absence. The use of the language of wedlock and motherhood in this context necessarily invokes the construction of Elizabeth, although queen, as the subordinate female in a patriarchal marriage, and asserts a rhetorical supremacy over her. Lawrence Stone shows that the Privy Council during the first thirty years of Elizabeth's reign was composed largely of 'hardline' Protestant peers, and Aylmer's adulatory rhetoric carries the subtextual construction of the attempt to steer her towards a course of action in keeping with the agenda of this 'Protestant ascendancy'.<sup>47</sup> Aylmer's hopes may actually therefore be seen in the light of pre-emptive advice to Elizabeth, uttered on behalf of those men about her who wished to persuade her of the

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<sup>46</sup> Letter from William Cecil to Sir Nicholas Throckmorton, 14 July 1561, British Library Add. MSS 35830, fol. 159v. Cited by McLaren in 'The Quest for a King: Gender, Marriage, and Succession in Elizabethan England', p. 261. See also Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>47</sup> Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy*, p. 338. See also McLaren, 'The Quest for a King: Gender, Marriage, and Succession in Elizabethan England', esp. pp. 263-264.

desirability of marriage, and who were asserting their right to advise her on her choice. The relationship of sovereignty to counsel was a strenuously-debated topic in Elizabeth's early reign, the rhetoric surrounding the sacred nature of kingship increasingly existing in tension with the depiction of England as a 'mixed monarchy'. This privileged the role of 'godly and prophetic counsel' as essential in the government of the realm. In this context, Elizabeth was seen not as the supreme and unquestioned authority, but as a first amongst equals whose duty to accept counsel underpinned her right to rule.<sup>48</sup>

This implicit denigration of the supremacy of Elizabeth's rule is made more obvious in Aylmer's subsequent depiction of her as a 'vvoman weake in nature, feable in bodie, loste in courage, vnskilful in practise' (Sig. B3r.). His overt intention here is to show her as God's providential ruler who will, despite her personal weakness, provide the channel for divine grace. He is also, more pertinently, showing Elizabeth as in fundamental need of the counsel of her advisers. Aylmer emphasises that it is only through the 'mixte rule' (Sig. H3r.) of the Queen and those at her 'elbow' (Sig. H4v.), those 'wise men by study and noble men by birth' (Sig. O3v.), that 'an harmony in the commonwealth' (Sig. O3v.) will be achieved. He stresses the joint nature of such a rule as he privileges the role of Parliament, stating that '[i]t is not she that ruleth, but the lawes' (Sig. H2v.-H3r.). Furthermore, in his urging that Elizabeth's chosen husband should be English-born, free from the taint of 'straungeness', it is probable that Aylmer is proposing Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, one of the dedicatees of *An Harborowe*. Dudley's strong Protestant convictions, military prowess and native-born identity would make him a suitable consort to protect both queen and realm, and would form a

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<sup>48</sup> McLaren, *Political Culture in the reign of Elizabeth I*, p. 136. For more on the rhetorical patriarchal strategies behind the theory of mixed monarchy, see Louis Montrose 'Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary' in *ELH*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Winter, 2002), pp. 907-946. The Johns Hopkins University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30032050>, accessed 10.03.10.

welcome contrast to Mary's 'detested' husband Philip, with his Spanish nationality, adherence to Papistry, and involvement of the realm in costly and disastrous foreign campaigns.<sup>49</sup>

### **'Motherland' and masculinity**

The ambivalence in Aylmer's attitude towards Elizabeth is echoed by his depiction of the motherland. This mystical embodiment of the realm, the 'common mother' from which all Englishmen have sprung, seems initially to be an evocation of the trope of The King's Two Bodies in the context of a female monarch, an emphasis upon Elizabeth's right to rule and her connection to her kingdom. Mother England is strongly supportive of Elizabeth, urging all her 'children' to rally to the Queen's defence, and rhetorically conflating herself with the queen as 'natural mother' as she reminds them that, '[i]f you love me you cannot hate hir' (Sig. R2r.). However, the motherland is depicted primarily in terms of feminine vulnerability, a desirable prize for 'forren enemies' (Sig. C3v.) who 'gape for' this 'paradise' or 'harborowe' (Sig. P2r.). The realm is shown by implication as an undefended female body open to 'rape' by invasion, containing a 'breache for the enemy to inuade us' (Sig. L1r.) and 'agate, to let in thy common enemy' (Sig. Q4f.).

The depiction of feminine embodiment conflating Elizabeth with her realm implicitly shows her as a weak woman in urgent need of strong masculine protection. I would argue that Elizabeth is being invoked here as the Biblical Woman Clothed with

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<sup>49</sup> Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, preface, p.ix. For more on Dudley's repeated attempts to marry Elizabeth, please see Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, esp. pp. 40-73. Dudley's religious alignment at this early period of Elizabeth's reign has been the subject of debate, but it is significant that in 1566 he was spoken of by the Spanish Ambassador de Silva as a 'furious heretic', i.e. one inimical to Roman Catholicism. See Marie Axton, 'Robert Dudley and the Inner Temple Revels', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Sep., 1970), p. 367. Cambridge University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2637880>, accessed 05.03.10. For more on Dudley's hardening Protestant religious adherence and his political manoeuvring in Elizabeth's early reign, please see Richard C. McCoy, 'From the Tower to the Tiltyard: Robert Dudley's Return to Glory', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 2 (Jun., 1984), pp. 425-435. Cambridge University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639183>, accessed 07.03.10.

the Sun in keeping with the prevalent 'Protestant iconography of female rule' which showed her as the epitome of the English church.<sup>50</sup> This theologically-based evocation of feminine vulnerability thus emphasises the need for the assertion of militant masculine Protestantism, for the men of the realm to come to the aid of their monarch and their country, in an 'extraordinary assertion of national virility in defence of a female ruler'.<sup>51</sup> The trope of the motherland is used, not to underpin Elizabeth's rule, but instead to establish common English male nationhood and origin, where the nation's men are seen as a family of brothers, true sons of the land that gave them birth, and the rightful possessors of the common cultural inheritance which comes from having received nourishment from her 'motherly breastes' (Sig. R1v.). As the motherland's children, they are the natural guardians of the realm; it is their duty to unite to 'savegard' (Sig. P4v.) their country, showing 'True English' 'readines, courage and boldnes' (Sig. P4v.). However, in his keenness to assert the primacy of the Protestant elite, Aylmer slips from the equation of Elizabeth with her realm, to identifying the Protestant élite, those men whose cause he is espousing, with the nation and its church. The 'gendered labour of defending England' characterises these members of the English aristocracy as Protestant warriors, where their manly spiritual integrity marks them equally as members of the True Church and proper guardians of the realm.<sup>52</sup>

This alignment of the Protestant élite with the national religion echoes the insistence upon common national history which bears the subtext of the post-Reformation construction of England as the long-standing home of 'true' Christianity, established in the realm in classical times but since perverted from its true course by the subsequent imposition of Roman Papistry. The conflation of Protestantism as the

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<sup>50</sup> Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 70.

<sup>51</sup> McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I*, p. 48.

<sup>52</sup> Vanhoutte, *Strange Communion*, p. 110.

destined religion of England, and of England's men as the destined protectors of that religion, and of the realm itself as possessing a divine destiny, is emphasised in Aylmer's marginal comment in *An Harborowe*. The description of national 'election' as obliging Englishmen to do their destined sacred duty underpins his assertion that 'God is English' (Sig. P4v.).<sup>53</sup> No longer is the realm seen as a weak and vulnerable woman, but cast as a strong Protestant soldier for Christ, masculine, militant and fortified with spiritual integrity, ready to repel would-be aggressors.<sup>54</sup> This has the effect of transferring the responsibility for national safety from a vulnerable female to those strong men who stand ready to defend it; a telling rhetorical assumption of masculine political supremacy.

However, this assertion of masculine rectitude is simultaneously undermined by the fear of its opposite; the dissolution of masculine identity. The correspondence between the nation and its guardians which is seen as operating here is also invoked by Aylmer to show that any neglect of their sacred responsibilities as 'honorable Senators and ...wise counselors' (Sig G3r.), any lapse in personal moral rectitude, must inevitably bring about the loss of both individual and national masculine selfhood. Should these men fail to fulfil their divinely-destined duty of magistracy, to exert themselves to defend the realm, it will be will be fatally weakened and rendered liable to invasion. The 'pocky frenche man and the scuoruy Scot' (Sig. P2r.), those terrible bogey-men who are the bearers of actual and metaphorical spiritual disease, will deprive the Englishmen of the indicators of their patriarchal status, their wealth and social standing. Their 'old golde shalbe carried away into Fraunce' and fathers and sons 'shalt be made gally slaues' (Sig. P2r.). Worse even than this is the threat to the chastity of their

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<sup>53</sup> Patrick Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England; Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1988), p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> For more on the Biblical source for the construction of the masculine and martial 'soldier of Christ', see Ephesians, 6, 13-17 in *The Geneva Bible, a facsimile of the 1560 edition*, p. 91.

womenfolk, whose bodily integrity ensures proper patrilineal inheritance of wealth and identity, as Aylmer warns these men that their daughters and wives will be ‘defiled before thy face miserably’ (Sig. P2r.).

As Knox has done before him, Aylmer expresses anxiety about the fearful gender transformation which will follow any moral lapse on the part of these strong masculine defenders of the realm. Having once succumbed to unmanly weakness, they will descend into effeminacy, becoming as ‘boyes and women, or effeminate persons’, and, furthermore, such women as ‘be of the vvurst sort, fond foolish, wanton, flibbergibbes’ (Sig. G3r.). Although Aylmer takes issue with Knox’s ‘foreign’ Scottish nationality, considering that it renders him unfit to comment on English internal politics, he nonetheless shares with him both the fear about the lack of proper magistracy within the realm, and the ambiguity surrounding the cause of this terrible state of affairs. There is a strong hint that it stems from those men in authority being unable to ‘rule them selves’ (Sig. G4v.), but there is also an indication that Aylmer equates all ‘doltified’ womanliness with the infectious effect of the ‘dregges of the Deuils dung hill’ (Sig. G4v.). This implies that despite Elizabeth’s professed Protestantism, the mere existence of a woman ruler has already rendered the realm prone to the infection of Papist effeminacy and chaos. This female influence at the centre of power may be seen as having infected her counsellors with the same effeminate weakness, morally contaminating them by the ‘unmanning’ effect of too close a contact with a transgressive and uncontrolled female.

This multivalent, at times almost contradictory, rhetoric thus has the effect of construing Elizabeth as ultimately unsuitable to rule, despite Aylmer’s initial almost hagiographic panegyric, since she and the realm both stand in need of strong male protection. In this depiction of feminine weakness at the centre of power, and the

necessity for its containment, Aylmer's urging of the male Protestant élite to gird up their loins for the fight has the simultaneous effect of constructing them as the nation's only hope, but also as standing in grave danger from their own moral weakness as much as from external influences. It is a moot point as to whether the end result is to stir these men to feats of bravery, or to depict them as beyond hope. The final effect is very similar to that of Knox's argument; by evoking the necessity for a strong nationalist masculine defence, Aylmer emphasises instead that the nation stands in danger of imminent destruction, rendered fatally vulnerable by female rule. His contradictory and shifting representations of feminine virtue and weakness, and masculine strength and lack, and their deleterious effect upon the realm itself, show instead his far-reaching anxiety about the possibility of a proper resolution for the safety of the nation and the national religion in unfixed and fluid times, under the rule of a 'wavering' female.

### **'Gorboduc' – militant Protestantism, the 'archaic maternal' and the motherland**

The subtextual militant Protestant anxiety about the destabilising effects of female 'regiment' may be inferred likewise from the depiction of national disorder and the disruption of social stability in Norton and Sackville's *Gorboduc* (1561).<sup>55</sup> Although it does not, for obvious reasons, contain an overt depiction of a female monarch, the play has traditionally been interpreted as a warning to Elizabeth of the fatal effects of headstrong rule and the failure to heed her advisers. David Bevington, for example, sees it as an emphasis upon the importance 'of virtuous parliamentary counsellors' in countermanding 'royal whimsy', and the right of Parliament to discuss matters surrounding the succession and offer advice to the queen, a topic that was a recurrent

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<sup>55</sup> Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton (1561), *Ferrex and Porrex, or Gorboduc*, in *Tudor Plays: An Anthology of Early English Drama*, ed. Edmund Creeth (New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1966), hereafter referred to as *Gorboduc*; Vanhoutte, *Strange Communion*, p. 114.

topic of debate throughout the 1560s.<sup>56</sup> The play has therefore also been interpreted as a plea for the monarch to choose a husband and establish the succession, with Robert Dudley the preferred candidate of the militant Protestant faction, where the depictions of national discord and upheaval in the play may be seen as a warning to the Queen of the ‘dire consequences for England if Elizabeth were to reject’ Dudley’s suit.<sup>57</sup>

Therefore, while maintaining a politic rhetorical distance by situating the action in a remote historical Britain, the play nevertheless echoes the anxieties about contemporary Elizabethan rule and ‘magistracy’ seen in Aylmer and Knox’s writing. The problems afflicting the state are seen as originating directly from the actions of the monarch: the eponymous king, Gorboduc, despite his apparent strength of will and masculine self-assertiveness, is in reality headstrong and foolish. He goes directly against the advice of his wise counsellors, incontinently insisting upon abrogating power and splitting the kingdom between his two sons. In this display of self-will he thus behaves with an irrationality and lack of self-control which mark him both as effeminate and as a tyrant.<sup>58</sup> The authors are careful to emphasise Gorboduc’s abandonment of his divinely-appointed duty as king and the rupture of his kingdom in terms of inversion and the ‘unnatural’, of the division of ‘his land from course of right’ (II.ii.17). This alignment of inadequate government and civil disorder with the unnatural is paralleled by Gorboduc’s failure as family patriarch, the resultant breach of familial ties echoing those of the ruptured bonds of community. His sons themselves are ‘unkind’,

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<sup>56</sup> David Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*; p. 145-6. See also Stephen Alford, *The Early Elizabethan Polity: William Cecil and the British Succession Crisis, 1558-1569* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. pp. 99-103.

<sup>57</sup> Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, p. 55. Henry James and Greg Walker, ‘The Politics of Gorboduc’ in *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 110, No. 45 (Feb., 1995), pp. 109-121. Oxford University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/573377>, accessed 24.07.10. See also Mark Breitenberg, ‘Reading Elizabethan Iconicity: *Gorboduc* and the Semiotics of Reform’, in *English Literary Renaissance*, 18.2, 1988. University of Massachusetts Press. <http://doi.org.10.1111/j.1475.6757.1988.tb.00952.x>. See also Bevington, *Tudor Drama and Politics*, pp. 145-146.

<sup>58</sup> Franco Moretti, *Signs taken for wonders: essays in the sociology of literary forms*, trs. Susan Fischer, David Forgacs, David Miller (London: Verso, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1988) p. 46. See also Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants*, p. 21.

presumably as the result of his failures as a father; ambitious, avaricious and bloodthirsty, where Porrex's murder of his brother Ferrex from motives of greed and ambition unleashes the devastation of a civil war upon the kingdom. In an evocation of the early-modern correspondence held to exist between the individual body and the body politic, both the monarch and his kingdom are seen as unbalanced humoral bodies; Gorboduc's 'noisome humour' which is shown in his irrational behaviour, is paralleled by the 'succeeding heapes of plagues' infecting the 'misguided state' (II.ii.100).

This depiction of the body politic as the site of disorder serves to show it as a chaotic effeminised space, ruled by entropy and inversion. This evokes the link between Elizabeth and her kingdom in a negative fashion, highlighting the terrible potential inherent in uncontrolled, and especially female, government. The alignment of unnatural female behaviour with national chaos is epitomised by Gorboduc's wife, Videna, the mother of his two wicked sons. Beyond the control of her husband, she is a female monster, an undutiful and unloving wife, who is a 'Quene of adamant' with a 'marble brest' (IV.ii.233). Her alienation from the womanly virtues and alignment with the wild and 'uncivil' is emphasised by the depiction of her unnatural motherhood, her sons having drawn milk not from 'womans brest' but from 'the cruell tigers teate' (IV.i.72-73). She is no bringer of harmony, but an ambitious and over-reaching destructive force unleashed upon the realm, the industrious sower of the discord between her sons, the harbourer of an incestuous lust for her older son, and the vengeful murderer of her younger. I do not see Videna as a direct reference to Elizabeth, but in her female dominance she may perhaps be seen as a 'dark double' of the Queen, a terrible warning of the inherent danger in uncontrolled gynocracy. Videna's transgressive and inversionary behaviour opens the way for the unleashing of the Furies

upon the hapless realm. These terrible female wreakers of vengeance descend '[w]ith flames and bloud, and with a brand of fire' (IV.ii.280), to usher in the destructiveness of the civil war. The evocation of these primeval and pagan female entities emphasises the complete overturning of all proper order, the terrible and almost irrecoverable societal inversion of a realm divided upon itself described as 'all the world /Drowned in blood and soncke in crueltie' (IV.ii.169-70).

Infected by the violent and chaotic state of the realm, the king's subjects become irrational and dehumanised, alienated from their true allegiance by the terrible conditions pervading the kingdom, and, 'forgetting trouth and love,/ Contemning quite both law and loyall hart' (V.i.5-6), kill both the king and queen. Such behaviour would probably have seemed to the early-modern mind not merely the parricidal betrayal of the filial relationship between ruler and subject, but a direct denial of God himself in the murder of his ordained ruler. The terrible subsequent fate of the kingdom would therefore have appeared both richly merited and apposite; without an heir of the blood royal to inherit, the land descends into fifty years of chaos, with 'tumults, rebellions, armes and civill warres' (Act V, prologue, line 8).

The emphasis upon the nation as a body politic is emphasised by it as '[d]ismembered thus ... wasted and defaced, spoyled' (VI.ii.231-2), ravaged by war and violence. It is significant, however, that the authors emphasise this body's femininity; like a vulnerable woman's body it is open to the depredations of rebellious Britons and 'gaping' foreigners. The would-be invader, the 'straunger' Fergus, motivated by 'gredie lust' (VI.ii.142), speaks of the land as 'left alone ... uncertayne where to rest', a woman who 'offers herselfe' to those '[t]hat will or dare pursue to beare her crowne.' (V.ii.132-5). The onslaught against this body of the nation, initially seen in terms of metaphorical rape, is also spoken of as matricide, where would-be

rebels are urged to ‘withhold/ The slaying knife from [their] ... owne mothers throate’ (V.ii.150-1). This evocation by Sackville and Norton of the trope of ‘the motherland’ has been interpreted as an echoing of Elizabeth’s own construction of herself as the nation’s mother. As Helen Hackett shows, by using this hierarchical construction of parenthood, and casting her subjects as her children, Elizabeth evoked the ‘natural’ familial bond which placed them in an inferior but loving ‘organic’ relationship to herself.<sup>59</sup> This ‘natural’ bond of motherhood is underpinned, as Jacqueline Vanhoutte points out, by the rhetorical importance given to the idea of ‘kind’ within the play.<sup>60</sup> The depiction of the motherland as the ‘true’ parent emphasises the kinship of her true-born children, and establishes an ideal of social cohesion that countermands the threat of savagery or chaos. ‘[T]he common mother of us all, / Our native land’, as the staunch counsellor Mandud reminds us in the play, ‘contains ... all / That ever is or may be dear to man’ (Vi.ii.98-102). This familial link, and sense of national community, is emphasised by the depiction of Fergus’s pretensions to rule as illegitimate, and the reminder that it is the duty of the motherland’s sons to rally to her defence; they must not allow ‘against the rules of kinde/ [the] mother land to serue a forrreine prince’ (V.ii.178-9).

Yet again, however, this emphasis upon the vulnerable female body of the realm is not simply an evocation of virtuous maternity. As Jacqueline Vanhoutte reminds us, the emphasis upon the brotherhood of true Englishmen is actually the reassertion of ‘the need for male management of the feminized nation’.<sup>61</sup> Running in tandem with the

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<sup>59</sup> Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, pp. 77-78. See also Christine Coch, “‘Mother of my Contrey’: Elizabeth I and Tudor Constructions of Motherhood”, *ELR* 26 (Autumn 1996), pp. 423-50. (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press).

<sup>60</sup> Vanhoutte, *Strange Communion*, p. 123.

<sup>61</sup> Jacqueline Vanhoutte, ‘Community, Authority and the Motherland in Sackville and Norton’s “Gorboduc”’, in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 40. No 2, Tudor and Stuart Drama, (Spring, 2000), p. 235. Johns Hopkins University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1556125>, accessed 16.09.09.

affirmation of the common source of origin as bestowing a national (masculine) identity is an emphasis upon the traditional right to assume magistracy by virtue of inherited patrilineal status. The only proper source of recuperation for the fatally weakened and effeminised nation is seen as being through the assertion of the masculine martial valour of the patriarchal aristocratic élite, who are, by virtue of ‘grafted law, by nature, truth, and faith, / Bound to preserve their country and their king’ (V.ii.178-9). Gorboduc’s unmanly weakness is therefore not - or not only - an evocation of the undesirability of feminine or effeminate rule, but is used to highlight this insistence upon strong masculine magistracy as fundamental in the conduct of government. The use of the word ‘faith’ likewise reinforces the time-honoured link between nation and Protestant religion, where both are seen as equally formative in masculine identity. The importance of good counsellors is again emphasised, in the reminder that the surest hope for the salvation of the nation is through the combination of the authority of a rightful sovereign together with a properly constituted parliament. The interdependence of the two is shown as the ‘lawfull sommons and authoritie’ which will ‘make a Parliament to be of force’ (V.ii.269-270). Again, this emphasis upon the vital nature of proper counsel in the balance of power is the voice of the Elizabethan Protestant élite constructing themselves as ‘the centrifugal forces of the chivalric nation’.<sup>62</sup> They are once more insisting upon their destined role as the essential mainstay of a threatened realm, where it is both their duty and their right to defend the feminised realm and its female ruler by the exercise of their manly talents, notably their martial prowess and their ‘godly’ and ‘prophetic’ counsel. It is indicative, too, that through the use of this language of masculine protection of the realm, those

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<sup>62</sup> Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood*, p. 298.

men concerned are implicitly elevated to a rhetorical dominance and Elizabeth is relegated to an inferior, dependent, position.

The depiction in *Gorboduc* of a common national past as the source of origin and as the time-honoured validation for the transmission of monarchical and civil authority in the realm may also be seen as a reinforcement of the arguments persuading Elizabeth to marry and provide an heir. The emphasis in the text upon the desirability of the ruler of 'Brittain' being native-born is on one level a compliment to Elizabeth and reinforcement of her right to rule. It may more plausibly be construed, however, as a further urging of her to marry an Englishman (presumably Dudley), one who can provide proper protection for her and the kingdom, a native-born man who can father true English children, and not one who will subject the country to another 'forreine thraldome' (V.ii.120).<sup>63</sup> The consequences to both her and the kingdom should she not do so are obliquely evoked in the depiction of the terrible annihilation of the 'ending of Brutus' royal line' (V.ii.242). Elizabeth, who based her own claim to sovereignty upon her descent from the mythical founder of Britain, would have had little trouble in interpreting it as a direct plea to her to lose no time in marrying the right (English) man and producing heirs to carry on the English royal line. The symbolic balance between queen and counsel would thus be enacted in reality, as Elizabeth's two bodies were united in marriage with a representative member of the realm's masculine Protestant aristocracy. The harmony of 'magistracy' would be restored by the production of heirs to ensure the futurity and stability of both nation and national Church, and the worrying phenomenon of female government safely contained by proper masculine control.

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<sup>63</sup> Vanhoutte, 'Community, Authority and the Motherland in Sackville and Norton's "Gorboduc"', p. 230.

Thus, despite their apparent wide differences in genre and theme, all these texts manifest a common theme of the male anxiety about female rule. The anti-Papist rhetoric of ‘monstrous regiment’ which constructs Mary Tudor as a latter-day Whore of Babylon is based to a large extent upon the innate inability of her gender to bear office, characterised as it is by irrationality, lustfulness and instability. This unfavourable construction is seemingly countered directly by Aylmer’s hagiographic representations of Elizabeth as a latter-day Protestant ‘saint’, the epitome of Protestant female virtue and the paradigm for her realm’s territorial integrity. However, Aylmer’s flattering representation is soon undercut by the construction of female (or effeminised) rule as inevitably incurring national chaos, a construction which is also apparent in *Gorboduc*. Nonetheless, it is not the female-oriented disorder which is significant, but the reiterated insistence upon the role of the aristocratic élite as the only possible saviours of the nation through the use of their uniquely masculine attributes of martial prowess and reason. The prevalence of this construction shows a consistent anxiety on the part of these men over a loss of control of the administration of power in a gynocracy. It is this anxiety that underpins the stringent assertion of masculinity in opposition to unruly, disruptive or weak femininity and the emphasis upon origins and the transmission of patrilineal inheritance as conferring a uniquely masculine identity, where both Elizabeth and the motherland’s reproductive faculties are rhetorically subordinated to the agenda of patriarchy. The conflation of masculine aristocratic integrity with Protestantism itself is thus set in rhetorical hierarchical supremacy over inadequate femininity where the conjunction of true religious rectitude and martial masculine prowess comes to epitomise the English national identity. Thus, despite Elizabeth’s own adherence to Protestantism, this reversion to the default understanding of feminine ‘otherness’ has the effect of constructing all female rule in subtextual terms

of Papist alignment in a manner which privileges the masculine Protestant rectitude of those who are asserting their right to 'magistracy'.

### Chapter Three

#### **Virginity, idolatry, pornography: the later reign of Elizabeth I**

The latter part of Elizabeth's reign was marked by a shift in the sexualised rhetoric used to describe her. The efforts by her counsellors (and would-be counsellors) to encourage her to ensure the English Protestant succession by marriage with one of their number gradually changed into the attempt to persuade her to abandon the idea of marriage altogether. Helen Hackett and Susan Doran have demonstrated how, as the queen passed beyond the age of child-bearing in the late 1570s, the iconography surrounding her changed from that of married fecundity to inviolable and perpetual virginity.<sup>1</sup> The constructions of Elizabeth as the 'nursing mother' of the church, the wife of the nation and the mother of her subjects were invoked less and less frequently as the Queen grew old. She was instead increasingly depicted in terms of remote and abstract idealisation, as a semi-divinity. Roy Strong describes this as the 'Cult of Elizabeth', where the Queen was invoked as the latter-day personification of classical goddesses, exemplified by the iconographically-fraught Rainbow Portrait (ca. 1600-1603) which depicts an unnaturally-youthful Elizabeth in mythological terms as the embodiment of aspects of the goddesses Astraea, Diana, Flora and Venus.<sup>2</sup> Helen Hackett shows how the 'cult' also invoked aspects of the

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<sup>1</sup> Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 95; Susan Doran, 'Juno versus Diana: the treatment of Elizabeth I's marriage in plays and entertainments, 1561-1581', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Jun., 1995), p. 257. Cambridge University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2639984>, accessed 26.07.10.

<sup>2</sup> Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Random House, 1977, Pimlico Edition, 1999), pp. 50-52. For a more detailed examination of the portrait, see Daniel Fischlin, 'Political Allegory, Absolutist Ideology, and the "Rainbow Portrait" of Queen Elizabeth I', in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (Spring, 1997), pp. 175-206. Renaissance Society of America. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3039333>, accessed 26.03.10.

pre-Reformation veneration of the Virgin Mary to provide an iconographic underpinning for the semi-divine status of Elizabeth's rule.<sup>3</sup>

The 'metaphoric identification of Elizabeth's intact body with the integrity of the nation state' used in her earlier reign in the attempt to prescribe suitable marriage partners for her was now increasingly employed to insist upon national territorial imperviousness in times of increasing anxiety about the threat of foreign invasion.<sup>4</sup> Pictorial representations such as the Ditchley and Armada portraits (1586 and 1588 respectively) show the Queen in exaggerated terms of stalwart impermeability, dressed in clothing resembling armour, standing guard over her realm.<sup>5</sup> This visual idealisation of Elizabeth is matched by the intensified Petrarchism in the literature of the period seen in Walter Raleigh's poem 'The Ocean to Scinthia' (ca.1590?) and John Davies' *Hymns to Astraea* (1599).<sup>6</sup> In these representations the ageing Queen becomes the moon goddess, the celestial virgin, the eternally-unattainable mistress who is nonetheless the focus of unceasing but perpetually-unfulfilled desire. Elizabeth herself encouraged this 'lyric of distance', which constituted the relationship between queen and courtier as a romantic courtship, as an underpinning of her self-representation as the impregnable 'Virgin Queen' which reinforced her power as monarch, and as part of the strategy through which she attempted to control the factionalism rife at court in the 1590s.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*, p 1; Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*, p. 154, pp. 44-45.

<sup>6</sup> Raleigh's poem survives in only a fragmentary state; see *Poetry of the English renaissance, 1509-1660*, eds. John William Hegel and Hoyt H. Hudson (New York: F. S. Croft and Co, 1940), pp. 140-141. See also *The Complete Poems of Sir John Davies*, ed. Rev. Alexander B. Grosart (London: Chatto & Windus, 1876), p. 130.

<sup>7</sup> Hannah Betts, "'The image of this Queene so quaynt': The Pornographic Blazon 1588-1603", in *Dissing Elizabeth; Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. Julia M. Walker (London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 155. For more on the factionalism of the court, see Eric S. Mallin, 'Emulous Factions and the Collapse of Chivalry: *Troilus and Cressida*', in *Representations*, No. 29 (Winter, 1990), pp. 145-179. University of California Press. <http://jstor.org/stable/2928422>, accessed 01.03.10.

However, these idealistic portrayals are not unremittingly hagiographical; this ‘rhetoric of distancing’ may be understood inversely as evidence of the sublimated anxiety about national wellbeing under the rule of an ageing, childless, and increasingly remote woman. Susan Frye identifies this Petrarchan courtly rhetoric as problematised by the ambiguities inherent in its ‘conflation between sexual and political registers’, where the author’s ostensible neo-Platonic aim of ascension of the ‘cosmic hierarchy’ through ‘the aestheticised contemplation of the female subject’ is in fact the attempt to ‘attract the notice of his peers and the patronage of his betters’.<sup>8</sup> The Petrarchan binary in this ‘masculine self-invention’ may therefore also be construed in terms of the rhetorical diminution of the idealised female and the mastery of the male author employing the trope; as Louis Montrose writes, ‘the Petrarchan lover worships a deity of his own making and under his own control’.<sup>9</sup> Viewed in this light, much of the linguistic and visual ‘blazoning’ of Elizabeth in this period is not merely the sanctioned ‘iconisation’ of her. It may be understood also as a radical disjuncture of real and idealised in a way that commodifies, distances her, and contains her into an abstraction in order to privilege the agenda of the artist or, more plausibly, that of his patron.<sup>10</sup>

What Suzanne Scholz sees as the individual attempt on the part of the exponent of ‘courtly love’ to ‘voice concerns about his personal relationship with the centre

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<sup>8</sup> Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I; The Competition for Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 108. See also Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare on Masculinity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Betts, “‘The image of this Queene so quaynt’”, p. 155. See also Moira P. Baker, “‘The Uncanny Stranger on Display’: The Female Body in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Love Poetry”, in *The South Atlantic Review* 56.2 (1991), pp. 7-25. South Atlantic Modern Language Association. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3199956>, accessed 26.03.10. See Louis Montrose, ‘The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text’, in Parke and Quint (eds.), *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 325.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the assertion of masculine control of the female body through the rhetorical ‘dissection’ of ‘emblazoning’ see Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned* (London: Routledge, 1995), esp. Ch. 7. See also Nancy J. Vickers, ‘Diana Described: Scattered Woman and Scattered Rhyme’, in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Writing and Sexual Difference (Winter, 1981), pp. 265-279. University of Chicago Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343163>, accessed 24.03.10.

of power and his position at court' may also be seen as evidence of a rather larger programme.<sup>11</sup> The rhetorical containment of Elizabeth in the masculine agenda to 'appropriate' her is evidence of the factional anxiety of the 'Protestant ascendancy' described by Patrick Collinson to steer the conduct of national affairs in terms of their 'religiously-flavoured' understanding of English national destiny.<sup>12</sup> The period from 1585 onwards was one of intensified debate surrounding the nature of monarchy and a growing emphasis upon the role of parliament as the 'locus of grace in a godly nation' that led in the 1590s to a growing ideological separation between the crown and the state.<sup>13</sup> In this era of burgeoning debate, of rising nationalism co-existing with growing unease about national security, and of national antipathies aligned with religious affiliation, it would have seemed natural to express bellicose and nationalistic sentiments in theological terms. What is particularly noteworthy in this late-Elizabethan context, however, is not the overt use of female religious opposition, but the ways in which female embodiment is employed in the attempt to subvert the established tropes in order to express subtextual religio-political discontent. In this effort, the ostensibly idealising rhetoric used to persuade the queen towards the desirable course of action increasingly contains seemingly paradoxical depictions of undesirable female domination. There is a blurring of formerly stringently-opposed constructs of difference, with the effect being a subtle critiquing of gynocracy and the rhetorical separation of female ruler and realm through the evocation of feminine monstrosity and the sundering of 'natural' relationships. The ever-present spectre of the lack of an established succession and the undermining of patriarchal rights underpins the ultimate depiction of Elizabeth

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<sup>11</sup> Scholz, *Body Narratives*, p. 109.

<sup>12</sup> For a detailed examination of the religious affiliations of the 'men of business' of Elizabeth's reign, please see Collinson, 'Puritans, Men of Business and Elizabethan Parliaments', pp. 187-211.

<sup>13</sup> See McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I*, pp. 233-4.

as the nation's 'stepmother', the cause of the disruption of patrilineal inheritance and the rupturing of masculine bonds of community and religion.<sup>14</sup> While contemporary texts obviously do not contain any direct expression of dissatisfaction with Elizabeth's rule, these anxieties may be seen in the repeated depictions of wayward, uncontrolled, tyrannical or ambiguous female rule, and in the prevalent portrayals of vaunting and destructive female ambition in pamphlets, books and play-texts.

### **The Gaping Gulf – schism and permeability**

John Stubbes's *Gaping Gulf* (1579) was part of the propaganda campaign greeting Elizabeth's proposed marriage to the duc d'Anjou, appearing the day after Anjou's supposedly secret arrival in England in August of that year.<sup>15</sup> As a Papist Frenchman, Anjou was widely unpopular in England, where the fear was that the alliance with England's long-standing arch-enemy would re-open the door to the religious persecution of Mary Tudor's reign.<sup>16</sup> Stubbes had 'friends among the radical Protestants as well as connections at court', and the radical Protestant agenda may be seen as informing his pamphlet, which is couched in religious terms, with the prevalent binary discourse of English Protestant rectitude and foreign Roman Catholic evil being called into play to emphasise national peril.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Vanhoutte, 'Elizabeth I as Stepmother', pp. 315-335.

<sup>15</sup> John Stubbes, *The Discouerie of a Gaping Gulf vvhewhereinto England is like to be svvallowed by an other French mariage, if the Lord forbid not the banes, by letting her Maiestie see the sin and punishment thereof* (London, 1579). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/23400. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99853130, accessed 01.06.07. All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>16</sup> See Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, pp. 154, 160.

<sup>17</sup> See Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony*, p. 164. For more on the extent to which Stubbes may be seen as the mouthpiece of the 'Protestant ascendancy', see Natalie Mears, 'Counsel, Public Debate, and Queenship: John Stubbs's "The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf", 1579', in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 3 (Sep., 2001), pp. 629-650. Cambridge University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3133577>, accessed 16.03.10.

Characteristically, while Stubbes attempts to construct himself as speaking from a rational and dutiful concern for the Queen's wellbeing, the lengthy text is underpinned by the fear of chaotic danger to both England and Englishmen from an encroaching 'straungeness'. As the very title shows, he fears that England and Protestant English masculine identity, religion and nationhood are at risk of disappearing into an abyss, swallowed by the ravening jaws of foreign Papistry. To counter this threat he evokes a sense of common national purpose in equal fraternity, showing that it is the duty of all true-born Englishmen to awake to this terrible threat to their nation, and to take up arms in defence of their country, their religion, their families and their possessions. In this undertaking they will be given the necessary strength through their common adherence to the true, Protestant, religion (Sig. F1r.). This depiction of the nation's men as united in religious and civic brotherhood is an example of the idea of nationhood as 'deep, horizontal comradeship' described by Benedict Anderson.<sup>18</sup> There is a sense of common purpose in England's divine mission as the nation appointed by God to be the haven of Protestantism, serving to unite Englishmen, and providing an ideological basis upon which to constitute their separate national identity (Sig. B2v.). As Stubbes shows, only through a common assertion of English masculine endeavour can danger and chaos to the commonwealth be thwarted (Sig. F4v.).

It is also significant that this evocation of common identity and purpose is grounded in the rhetoric of female embodiment. Stubbes uses the trope of the motherland, showing how the maternal body of England has nurtured all true Englishmen as 'the childe which she hath born in her owne wombe' (Sig. C2v.), engendering in these men that sense of common purpose which is 'birth bredd and

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<sup>18</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 7.

drawen out from the teates of a mans own mother country' (Sig. C1r). As in *Gorboduc*, this common maternal origin is invoked to emphasise the brotherhood of English men in the face of an encroaching common danger. The motherland, paradoxically, confers a chthonic male strength upon her sons, enhancing their masculinity and readiness to bear arms and constituting them as indisputably in the patriarchal hegemonic ascendant. Stubbes initially describes Elizabeth herself as the country's 'natural mother' (Sig. C8r.), emphasising the divine rightness of the monarchical relationship and showing how the Queen has inspired 'a fearing loue in hyr subiects harts as children beare to there mother' (Sig. F1r.). This co-exists, however, with the subtextual distancing of monarch and subjects, where Stubbes shows how those who support the match are 'vnkind mothers' who 'put ...theyr owne child, the church of England to be noursed of a french enemy' (Sig. B2v.). While not directly accusing Elizabeth, Stubbes shows how the projected marriage must of necessity alienate her from her subjects and their 'true' religion.<sup>19</sup> This distancing is reinforced by Stubbes's subsequent description of Elizabeth as England's 'goodwife' (Sig. A8v.), maintaining the familial relationship, but showing her as a subordinate woman in need of the superior masculine rational abilities of her Protestant counsellors. In a yet further slippage, Stubbes assumes the supreme patriarchal role, as he urges the Queen's advisers to realise their fatherly duty to advise Elizabeth, as they would a daughter, against this 'ill husband' (Sig. E2v.), this foreign Papist intruder who will disrupt proper Protestant masculine hegemony. He prays that the Queen will be made tractable and willing to hear this advice, casting her finally as a wayward woman attempting to evade the control of

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<sup>19</sup> For more on the 'unnatural motherhood' entailed in the match with Anjou, please see Vanhoutte, *Strange Community*, p. 131.

her menfolk – a potential threat to the stability of her family and, by implication, to the wellbeing of the realm (Sig. B7r.).

This series of slippages, and the inconsistency and masculine uncertainty they betray, are still more apparent in Stubbes's repeated conflation of the Queen and the body of her country – that country which, ironically, is composed (in Stubbes's eyes, at least) of Protestant male subjects. Stubbes employs the notion of the Queen's two bodies – her natural physical body and her status as the divinely-ordained present occupier of the permanent role of sovereign – to demonstrate the potential danger to the state from that very body. He demonstrates how this marriage, predicated as it is upon the conjunction of bodies in the marital act, threatens the wellbeing of the Queen's body with the danger of sexually-transmitted disease contracted from the notoriously licentious Anjou, and of the perils of childbirth ensuing upon the sexual act. More importantly, he shows how the spiritual health of Elizabeth's kingdom and her subjects is threatened, where the infection from syphilis is conflated with the spiritual infection to the Protestant state and the Church of England that will ensue from Anjou's presence at the seat of power. This conflation of ideas is expressed in his fears that the ill-assorted match will see 'health ioyning in marriage with ... foule disease' (Sig. A4v.). Through the portal of Elizabeth's physical body – that permeable, labile, female body – will enter the danger both to her person and her realm; an example of Mary Douglas's formulation of the cultural construction of an individual woman's body as the symbolic gateway for communal danger.<sup>20</sup>

Stubbes shows Elizabeth as the 'weaker vessel', a gullible woman who will necessarily become infected with her husband's idolatry and superstition (Sig.

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<sup>20</sup> See 'Introduction', fn. 51.

A7v.). In turn, the whole nation will be corrupted by this contact with Roman Catholicism, where permitting Anjou to celebrate the idolatrous Roman mass in England – that superstitious sorcery ‘mumbled’ ‘in the straunge tongue of Rome’ (Sig. A6v.) - will incur God’s just and terrible wrath. Reverting to the trope of bodily infection, Stubbes speaks of the hapless English nation as inevitably suffering from the multifarious ‘plagues’ consequent upon such an appalling lapse from communal righteousness. He insists that idolatry is the ‘highest treason to God’ (Sig. B1v.), personifying the threat from the superstitious carnal ritual of the mass as that of a sexually promiscuous woman seducing the state (which, in another instance of instability of construction, Stubbes figures here as male) to its ‘dishonour’ (Sig. B1v.). The due consequence is the loss of its essential masculine Protestant rectitude, and the destruction of communal spiritual integrity through the infection from this ‘spiritual fornication’. He resorts to the Old Testament paradigm of ancient Israel as suffering the ultimate retribution at the hands of a justly angry God – the ‘kingdome rent a sunder, and a perpetual translation of ten tvveluethes out of Salomons posterity for ever’ (Sig. B1r.-v.). This evocation of the appalling effects of civil strife reveals the fundamental masculine fear of the long-lasting instability and chaos threatened by uncontrolled femininity. If Elizabeth is not made to see the error of her ways and dissuaded from this marriage, English Protestant masculinity and the state itself are threatened with disintegration, chaos, and the rupture of patrilineal continuity.

I see Stubbes as persuading himself, and seeking to persuade his readers, that the ‘gaping gulf’ which is threatening the nation with annihilation is synonymous with the threatening and engulfing female labia of Elizabeth’s body. While he may not be going so far as to directly accuse Elizabeth of actual whoredom, he is signifying

in no uncertain manner that the threat to the kingdom originates in the sexuality of that very woman to whom he is protesting his fervent loyalty and, slightly incongruously, his ‘tenderiealous’ love (Sig. F4r.). In addition, even while Stubbes is attempting to figure England as a paradisiacal haven, the new Israel (Sig. A4v.), the bastion of English Protestant masculinity and a harbour to Protestant refugees from abroad, he undercuts himself by describing it as ruled by an ‘Eve’ (Sig. A2r.) in the form of Elizabeth.<sup>21</sup> While this is obviously intended as an evocation of the prelapsarian Garden of Eden, it also bears interpretation in the light of the prevalent early modern construction of Eve as the archetype of female moral weakness, the cause of man’s downfall and banishment from that selfsame Edenic state. Thus, on some level, Elizabeth herself is seen as tainted with the female stigma of ‘Grandmother Eve’.

### **Papistry, effeminacy, and ‘straungeness’**

Stubbes constructs the French threat in linked terms of effeminisation. As adherents of the Whore of Babylon, ‘the drunken harlot of Rome’ (Sig. C3v.), Frenchmen have been infected by the depravities of the heretical doctrine of Papistry, living in a realm characterised by evil and chaos, ‘a den of Idolatrye a kingdome of darkenes, confessing Belial and serving Baal’ (Sig. A4v.). Frenchmen are unmanly, preferring gaudy clothing to English armour, ‘newfangled and lusting after Innovations’ (Sig. C6r.). As the ‘instrument of Popery’ (Sig. E7r.) the French are all treacherous, where ‘they doe accompt as fayre virtue all foule lyes, treasons, poisoning, massacres and turning of realms upside down’ (Sig. E7r.). Their King, Henry III, is known to be suffering from syphilis as the result of his debauched

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<sup>21</sup> See Ilona Bell, “‘Sovereaigne Lord of lordly Lady of this land’: Elizabeth, Stubbs and the *Gaping Gulf*”, in *Dissing Elizabeth*, p. 108.

lifestyle (Sig. F1v.) and Anjou is metaphorically linked to his brother as the deceptive locus of moral disease, a 'paynted man' (Sig. D6r.), an unsound vessel. Stubbes's fear seems to be chiefly the contraction of this effeminacy from propinquity to the French. As Elizabeth's husband, Anjou will gain control of the kingdom and, under the rule of this effeminate and morally-unstable Papist, the former stable 'governorship' of England will be swept aside and, instead, the realm will be 'mistressed to' (Sig. D4v.). This effeminate rule will, Stubbes fears, involve the infection of Englishmen by French effeminacy. The indulgence in such French-imported frivolities as dancing will lead to the abandonment of their manly pursuits and entail the loss of their inherited proper English identity; they will 'degenerate from their deceased noble fathers' (Sig. D4r.). This metaphorical loss of patrilineal inherited status will be especially evident from the loss of their native language, as they are forced to speak French and become unable to use their proper mode of self-expression, the manly English tongue of their forebears (Sig. D4r.).

The effeminate danger represented by the French is epitomised in its source, the 'motherpracticer' of France' (Sig. E6v.), the formidable Queen Mother, Catherine de Medici. Depicted as a personification of the Whore of Babylon, Catherine is an unnatural mother to her subjects, the possessor of 'poisoned breasts' (Sig. B3v.), the fatal effects of her rule seen in the infamous St Bartholomew's Eve Massacre of Protestants in 1572. She is 'the devil's whore', a sexually promiscuous practiser of necromancy and witchcraft, and her daughter Marguerite a 'stale' who lured Protestants to Paris for her marriage so that they might be slaughtered (Sig. B5r.). The danger Catherine represents to the realm of England lies in her potential to join forces with her daughter-in-law, Mary Queen of Scots, to place that 'most hidden

and pestilent adversary creature, daughter of the Pope' (Sig. E6v.) on the throne of England.<sup>22</sup>

It is apparent that the initial clear binary oppositions of gendered national rectitude and degeneracy break down in the face of Stubbes's anxiety to warn his compatriots of the peril in which they stand. In what appears as more than a faint echo of Knox's and Aylmer's anxieties in previous decades, Stubbes is here showing how the body of the Queen contains the potential to open the way for the infectious decadence of sexualised Papist idolatry which her marriage will entail. It is all the more anxiety-provoking since Stubbes implies that Elizabeth is behaving like a foolish old woman. The 'Gaping Gulf' which threatens the kingdom, despite Stubbes's earlier professed anxieties surrounding the dangers of childbirth, may be seen as that of the unnatural female lustfulness of a barren and ageing female body, and the Queen as relentless in the pursuit of her carnal satisfaction. Elizabeth is thus being metaphorically aligned with Catherine as a 'hag', the possessor of the witch's postmenopausal body, over-replete with the blood which could no longer be vented through the monthly 'flowers', and which was often used by such women in the 'malevolent nurture' of the suckling of familiars.<sup>23</sup> This perverted marriage will prove Elizabeth to be an unnatural mother to her people, and will result in the monstrous progeny, not of a secured succession, but of a deformed and misgoverned realm, prone to rebellion and unrest. In the terrible potential of this monstrous motherhood, Elizabeth comes to be depicted as a mirror image of that 'motherpracticer' Catherine. The two dominant and autocratic queens are made to

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<sup>22</sup> For more on the Protestant fear of Mary Queen of Scots as a potential Catholic ruler of England, see Anne McLaren, 'Gender, Religion, and Early Modern Nationalism: Elizabeth I, Mary Queen of Scots, and the Genesis of English Anti-Catholicism', in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 107, No. 3 (Jun., 2002), pp. 739-767. University of Chicago Press.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3091084>, accessed 10.01.10.

<sup>23</sup> Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture; Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 55.

bear a fearful symmetry; religious and national differences are ultimately subsumed in Stubbes's overwhelming – if subtextual - anxieties about the fundamental dangers to national security and futurity posed by wayward and tyrannical female rule.

### **The last decades – disillusion and decay**

The ambivalent response to Elizabeth's rule did not recede in the later years of her reign. This period saw instead a growing ideological division in the nation, the burgeoning of 'republican' political thought being typified by the 'political anatomy of England' provided in Sir Thomas Smith's *De Republica Anglorum* (1583).<sup>24</sup> Anti-Papist sentiment was rife; the anxieties over the 'seditious' proselytising of Roman Catholic priests and the Jesuit Edmund Campion's mission in 1580 were echoed by the furore over the trial and execution of Mary Queen of Scots in 1587, and the national panic surrounding the Spanish Armada in 1588.<sup>25</sup> This co-existed with an increasing rift within Protestantism, where the growing radical feeling of the past two decades found an outlet in the anti-establishment Marprelate tracts of the late 1580s and early 1590s. While the quashing of the controversy by the agents of the conservative Archbishop Whitgift caused a temporary setback to the 'Puritan' cause, the groundswell of anti-clericalism did not disappear but continued to form a significant part of ongoing theological debate.<sup>26</sup>

England in the 1580s and early 1590s was also a nation suffering from economic and social unrest. Severe outbreaks of plague and the failure of successive harvests

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<sup>24</sup> Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 20. See also Patrick Collinson, *Elizabethan Essays* (London: Hambledon Press, 1994), Chapter 1.

<sup>25</sup> For an examination of the increasing anti-Papist feeling in 1580s England, see Michael Questier, 'Practical Antipapistry during the reign of Elizabeth I', in *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Oct., 1997), pp. 371-396. University of Chicago Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/175891>, accessed 01.04.10. See also Wiener, 'The Beleaguered Isle', pp. 27-62. See also MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 392.

<sup>26</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, pp. 387-9. See also Conrad Russell, *The Crisis of Parliaments; English History 1509-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 207-209.

caused widespread suffering and death. Resentment at corruption in high places increased, especial targets of opprobrium being the sale of positions of influence and the 'farming' of monopolies.<sup>27</sup> As the 'old guard' of councillors and advisers grew old or died, the factional struggle for influence near the centre of power became more overt, exemplified by the rapid rise (and fall) of the ambitious Essex.<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth herself was considered to be increasingly remote from her subjects, an embittered old woman 'more and more out of sympathy with the times'.<sup>29</sup> The English people were now 'living with the idea of Elizabeth's death', with the absence of a named successor to the ageing Queen raising the looming spectres of a contested throne and civil war.<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth's foreign policy was a particular source of discontent. The perception of English Protestantism as still under threat from the forces of Papistry was exacerbated by rebellion in Ireland, the long-running anti-Spanish revolt in the Netherlands and the campaigns being waged by the Protestant Henry of Navarre in France. Elizabeth's refusal to grant sufficient funds to support these campaigns effectively was viewed by many of her subjects as a failure of her duty to protect the true religion and an abandonment of her role as head of the English Church.<sup>31</sup>

### **The Faerie Queene - internal and external 'female' national threat**

The fraught relationship between Elizabeth and her subjects, particularly those of her male subjects who were constituting themselves as the moral and religious guardians of national wellbeing, is evident in Book One of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*

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<sup>27</sup> Alan G. R. Smith, *The Emergence of a Nation State: The commonwealth of England 1529-1660* (Harlow, Essex: Addison Wesley Longman Limited, 2<sup>nd</sup>.ed. 1997), p. 241.

<sup>28</sup> See Mallin, 'Emulous Factions', pp. 147-9.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, *The Emergence of a Nation State*, p. 239.

<sup>30</sup> Collinson, *Elizabethan Essays*, p. 19.

<sup>31</sup> Smith, *The Emergence of a Nation State*, p. 237-9.

(1590).<sup>32</sup> Louis Montrose shows how Spenser typifies the use of Elizabeth's status as an unmarried woman to make a 'symbolic transfer of domestic gender paradigms to the public domain'.<sup>33</sup> This gendered negotiation of the 'relations of power' did not facilitate only the idealised adulation of the 'Cult of Elizabeth'. Spenser's work echoes that of other writers who wished to 'unfix' royal authority, to 'put into question its absolute claims upon the subjects who produce the forms in which it authorizes itself' and to 'resubject the discourse of royal autocracy to a challenge from within the political nation'.<sup>34</sup> Spenser's project may be seen in the light of a radical criticism of the state of the realm, where he employs multiple female characters to create a 'blazon' of feminine unruliness and dominance working against the ostensible encomiums of Elizabeth as 'Gloriana', the 'scattering' of ascribed aspects of 'femininity' enabling a subtle and detailed interrogation of gynocracy.

Spenser's stated aim in writing *The Faerie Queene* was that of providing a template for masculine 'civility', an early-modern 'self-help manual' to 'fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline'.<sup>35</sup> In the character of Redcrosse, Stephen Greenblatt's formulation of the 'self-fashioning' project of the early-modern male, the insight that 'there were both selves and a sense they could be fashioned', is particularly apposite.<sup>36</sup> A multi-layered personification,

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<sup>32</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche, Jr. (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1978). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>33</sup> Louis Montrose, 'Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary', in *ELH*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Winter, 2002), p. 917. Johns Hopkins University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30032050>, accessed 27.10.09. See also Louis Adrian Montrose, "'Shaping Fantasies": Figurations of Gender and Power in Elizabethan Culture', in *Representations*, No. 2 (Spring, 1983), pp. 61-94. University of California Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928384>, accessed 09.04.10; Betts, 'The Pornographic Blazon 1588-1603', and Vanhoutte, 'Elizabeth I as Stepmother'.

<sup>34</sup> Montrose, 'The Elizabethan Subject and the Spenserian Text', p. 331, and Montrose, 'Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary', p. 918.

<sup>35</sup> Spenser, 'A Letter of the Authors expounding his whole intention in the course of this worke', in *The Faerie Queene*, p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 1. See my Introduction, p. 8.

Redcrosse's most overt characteristic is that of a knight on a quest, engaged in the spiritual journey to gain self-knowledge. His endurance of repeated trials of his fortitude and his falls from grace and eventual recuperation are seen as stages in the acquisition of the corporal and mental balance and self-control that are necessary components of the attributes of proper manhood. As a knight, he is also engaged in the gaining of *virtus*, which will equip him to assume his role in the conduct of public affairs. This 'public' aspect to his behaviour underpins Redcrosse's personification as English masculine virtue, and, more specifically, Protestant English masculine virtue. In the course of his journey his true identity is revealed as that of St George, the patron saint of England. This is no evocation of a superstitious Papist 'idol', but the conflation of the aspects of true militant Christianity that shows Redcrosse embodying England's sacred national destiny as the spearhead of Protestantism.<sup>37</sup> As Clare McEachern demonstrates, this correlation between individual and realm is typical of the discourse of early-modern nationhood, where 'the texts that write' the nation 'collapse the distance between political identities and the contours of the self'.<sup>38</sup>

As the personification of martial English Protestant manhood, Redcrosse is the protector and destined spouse of Una, the chaste and virtuous embodiment of the English Protestant Church. Spenser constructs Una in careful symbolic detail: she is seated, like Christ, on a white ass, leading a white lamb, and upon first appearance is modestly veiled and garbed in simple black and white, the colours of steadfastness and truth. Not only is Una's robe '[a]ll lily white, withoutten spot, or pride' (I.vii.22), her beauty is self-evident, with her 'heavenly lineaments' making

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<sup>37</sup> For more on Spenser's reworking of 'idoltrous remnants of Catholicism' in a Protestant context, see James Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), pp. 86-7.

<sup>38</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, p. 5.

her a ‘celestiall sight’ (I.vii.23). The link between ‘Englishness’ and the Protestant religion is underlined by Spenser characterising Una as being of ‘Royall lynage’ (I.i.5). As the direct descendant of ‘ancient Kings and Queens’ (I.i.5), she epitomises Protestantism as the original Christianity established in England since classical times, emphasising Papistry’s ‘falseness’ as a later decadent offshoot.

Oppositional Papist untruth is embodied by Duessa, described in detail as an avatar of The Whore of Babylon, richly dressed and seated on a showily-caparisoned horse, ‘purpled with gold and pearle of rich assay’, with ‘crownes and owches garnished’ (I.ii.13, 14). Spenser emphasises her promiscuity as a whore who has been showered with gifts in return for her carnal favours; a ‘triple crowne’, a ‘gold and purple pall’ and a ‘beast with a sevenfold head’ (I.vi.16, 17), attributes of the papacy, the gaudy show of Papist ritual, and the beast from the Book of Revelation held to epitomise the multifarious abuses and dangers of the Roman Catholic Church. Her golden cup is the chalice from Revelation which is full of the ‘wine of her fornication’, the tempting contents intoxicating and bewitching all who partake of them, epitomising the seductive but fatally unmaning effects of heretical Papist doctrine.

Spenser was seen as the pre-eminent ‘author of Englishness’ even by his contemporaries, as is evidenced by William Camden’s description of him as ‘*Anglicorum Poetarum nostri seculi facile princeps*’.<sup>39</sup> That *The Faerie Queene* provided a critique of the state of the realm was also readily understood, where ‘Elizabethan judgement ... saw in Faerieland a comprehensive allegorical figuration

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<sup>39</sup> William Camden, *Reges, reginae, nobiles, & alij in ecclesia collegiata B. Petri Westmonasterij sepulti, vsque ad annum reparaatae salutis 1600*, (London, 1600). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/4518. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99843093, accessed 28.04.10. The phrase translates as ‘by far the prince of the English poets of our time’ (my translation).

of England'.<sup>40</sup> His depiction of English manly virtue in the person of Redcrosse, as the protector of English Protestantism in the person of Una, and as the opponent of Duessa, may therefore be seen as Spenser's assertion of English national Protestant integrity in the face of the overwhelming international foreign Papist menace, and of England as the divinely-destined home of the true religion and the spearhead in the struggle against Papistry. The seeming clear-cut religious oppositions between innate Protestant virtue and Papist evil support this point of view, and show Redcrosse's journey towards Christian manhood as a paradigm for the nation's journey towards the knowledge of the true religion.

The preponderance of female representations in the text has also been construed partly as Spenser's hagiographic adulation of Elizabeth, the figure of 'Gloriana' showing her central position in the 'Elizabethan Political Imaginary', to use Louis Montrose's phrase.<sup>41</sup> Elizabeth is seen in the repeated personifications of female virtue in the text, appearing not only as Gloriana but in such characters as Mercilla, Belpheobe and Britomart; in the first Book she is linked repeatedly to Una. Una wears the Queen's symbolic colours, evoking Elizabeth's personification of English Protestantism as the Head of the English Church. Una is shown as the Biblical Woman Clothed with the Sun in her tribulations, and as the Bride of Christ in her eventual betrothal to Redcrosse, both terms applied to Elizabeth.<sup>42</sup> This identification of Elizabeth with Una to epitomise Protestant virtue facilitates the religiously-based nationalistic interpretation of opposition to Duessa as the Biblical Whore of Babylon who is the epitome not only of Papist evil, but the Roman Catholic Church itself. The gendered opposition of female virtue and vice assists, too, in the understanding of Redcrosse's peregrinations as a journey towards

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<sup>40</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, p. 35.

<sup>41</sup> Montrose, 'Spenser and the Elizabethan Political Imaginary', p. 918.

<sup>42</sup> Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 70.

manhood, achieved through the interaction with femininity, in the resistance of sexualised female temptation and the protection of female virtue.

This stringent assertion of female opposites as rhetorical underpinning for the achievement of individual and national self-realisation, where the search for religious truth has been described as ‘the search for the right girl’, may nonetheless be more productively viewed in terms of the fracturing and slippery constructions of the multifarious female bodies that are found throughout the text.<sup>43</sup> The religious imagery that is particularly evident in Book 1 serves not only to underline the connection between English nationalism and the English Protestant church, but to facilitate the interpretation of Spenser’s ideological standpoint as echoing that of the ‘Protestant ascendancy’, those members of the aristocracy and ‘men of business’ who saw the project of English nationalism as linked to the performance of a stringent Protestantism. Spenser’s use of theologically-fraught symbolism may therefore be understood not only as exemplifying the centrality of religion as an explicatory framework in the early-modern mindset, but as an instance of what Patrick Collinson sees as the habitual ‘criticism of the Crown’ given weight by the use of a ‘biblical, prophetic mode of discourse’.<sup>44</sup>

The religious imagery used by Spenser is linked to a concern to inculcate a heightened sceptical awareness on the part of the reader evident in the oppositional depictions of vice and virtue in the text. Much emphasis is placed upon the need to discriminate between ‘true’ and ‘false’ multiple versions of the same character. The power of deceitful Papistry to seduce and befuddle, creating a convincing simulacrum of the ‘real’, is seen as particularly anxiety-provoking. This is most evident in the seductiveness of the ‘sprite’, the conjured-up double of Una used by

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<sup>43</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, p. 35.

<sup>44</sup> Collinson, *Elizabethan Essays*, p. 18.

Archimago to tempt Redcrosse from the path of sexual probity. The repeated emphasis upon the possibility of deception and being led astray is a reflection of the Protestant tenet of *Sola Scriptura*, the central purity of the Biblical text as the only true source of spiritual guidance. This purity is figured in Una's name and in her simple garb and humble demeanour, and is persistently countered by Duessa's flaunting and colourful dress and deceitful behaviour which embody the meretricious but deadly charms of false Papist doctrine. Duessa's essential carnality is emphasised by the revelation that her lower body underneath the luxurious exterior is in reality that of an animal, with a 'foxes taile, with dong all fowly dight' (I.viii.48), her outward attractiveness belied by her true monstrous ugliness.

A significant phenomenon in *The Faerie Queene* is that deceit is depicted as a peculiarly feminine trait. This is signposted by the figure of Errour, embodying the terrible potential inherent in untruth, a monstrous mother whose brood of unnatural children gorge themselves on their dying mother's blood. Moreover, while Archimago is shown as a 'ringmaster' who achieves successive magical illusions, it is Duessa who is the most persistent and anxiety-provoking source of multi-faceted fraudulence. Duessa's deceitfulness hinges upon her sexuality; her seductive carnality brought to bear in conjunction with her use of witchcraft and diabolical artifice. Not only does she adopt the disguise of Fidessa, pretending to a purity and integrity she does not possess, but she uses her promiscuous body to allure and entrap her lovers, concealing her true 'loathly' body with its 'nether parts misshapen, monstrous' (I.ii.40, 41). This emphasis upon Duessa's lower regions

shows her female sexuality as the source of horror, linking her to the whole of womankind in the deceitful possession of this monstrous deformity.<sup>45</sup>

The difficulty of proper discrimination is seen, as with the repeated challenges facing Redcrosse, in terms of the male need for the acquisition and application of the rationality and spiritual insight which were held to be peculiarly desirable masculine traits. The imperative for true discernment is therefore equated with the ability to decipher deceitful femininity. Spenser is employing the conventional rhetoric depicting personified Idolatry, like Duessa, as a seductive female lying in wait for the unwary male, and evoking the terms of ‘spiritual fornication’ and ‘adultery’ used to castigate those straying from the true religious adherence. He is reminding us that religious recidivism was seen as sexual infidelity, the wilful abandonment of the pure spiritual truth of Protestant doctrine for the seduction by the seductive allure of the carnal duplicity of Papistry. In these terms, the ‘Whore’s’ body is figured, like a real-life prostitute, both as the locus of meretricious externality and the source of infectious heresy, seen in terms of the deadly potential of sexually-transmitted disease.

This anxiety over truth and falsity in the terms of corporeality, especially female corporeality, may be seen in the post-Reformation conflict between ‘visual’ and ‘literate’ religion outlined by Brian Cummings.<sup>46</sup> The centrality of the Bible in Protestant thought gave rise to an overwhelming anxiety about the ‘iconicity’ of the text. This was a reaction informed by the perceived empty materiality of the Papist icons, where the gaudy external trappings of worship were seen as idolatry, specious

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<sup>45</sup> For more on the male fear of female genitalia, see Sigmund Freud, *Sexuality and the Psychology of Love* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc, 1963), pp. 202-203. See also Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, p. 26.

<sup>46</sup> Brian Cummings, ‘Iconoclasm and Bibliophobia in the English Reformation, 1521-1558’, in *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England*, eds. Jeremy Dimmock, James Simpson and Nicolette Zeeman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 186.

lures to seduce the unwary. All images held the potential to deceive, and the possibility that the Biblical text itself might be a deceitful material image is evident in Spenser's writing, working against the single purity embodied by Una, and serving to undermine and problematise the very process of unpacking of the layers of theological truth and deceit.<sup>47</sup> As the image of Una is duplicated and supplanted, with Duessa assuming different identities and disguises – including that of 'Fidessa' – the opposing pair lose their initial bodily integrity, and begin to blur into each other, where it becomes progressively more difficult for Redcrosse, and the reader, to distinguish between them. Clare McEachern points to the 'syntactic shiftiness' characterising Spenser's description of the two 'Dames', which 'confounds distinction' and greatly increases the difficulty of the masculine effort at interpretation. As she argues, 'the possibility of different women threatening to become the same woman fuels [the] narrative suspense' of *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>48</sup>

Based upon the difficulties of 'reading' female bodies in an era where these were held to be inherently carnal and morally unstable, the text therefore raises the unsettling possibility of all women ultimately 'being alike'.<sup>49</sup> It is arguable that it is this construction of innate female instability, of 'Woman' as aligned with disorder, which underpins the subtle and multifaceted depictions of female domination and rule in the text. I argue that Spenser, instead of maintaining the stringent opposition between female virtue and vice, is actually inviting us to 'read' his female personifications in terms of correspondence and interchangeability rather than irreconcilable difference. The ineffable 'Gloriana' as untouchable Petrarchan ideal is an unreachable abstraction existing beyond the events in the text. The real

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<sup>47</sup> See John King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, p. 44, p. 39, p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, p. 45.

Elizabeth, the ageing and tyrannical monarch who was the source of multiple male anxieties over the disruption of patriarchal rights and responsibilities, is to be glimpsed not only in the personifications of female virtue, but in those of female vice as well. Una and Duessa's interchangeability facilitates the transference of interpretation from persona to persona, and Duessa's ambition, ruthlessness and duplicity, vices held to characterise all womankind, may be seen as transposed onto the centrally-powerful figure of the monarch herself. In an ironic perversion of the Petrarchan ideal, the remote and perfect focus of 'desire' who is Gloriana/Elizabeth becomes instead the locus of male anxieties about female moral depravity.

The depiction of Lucifera as a 'dark double' of Elizabeth, although subtextual, is evident upon a close reading of the text.<sup>50</sup> Lucifera is described as 'a mayden Queene' (I.iv.8), evoking Elizabeth as 'Virgin Queen'. She is vain of her beauty, and boastful of her ancestry, both attributes of Elizabeth. As a 'usurping' Queen, she is a tyrant, ruling not 'with lawes, but pollicie' (I.iv.12); a possible evocation of those who held that Elizabeth, as a woman, was not a 'godly' ruler.<sup>51</sup> Like Elizabeth, Lucifera reigns alone in unrivalled splendour, arrogant and autocratic. Lucifera is shown as the daughter of Jove (I.iv.11), an echo of the customary portrayals of Elizabeth as Athena and of her father Henry as Jove himself. The identification of the Queen as a classical goddess is foregrounded as Lucifera is compared to Flora and Juno, both frequent complimentary descriptions for Elizabeth herself, and with the mention of 'Argus' eyes (I.iv.17), seemingly an *avant la lettre* evocation of the details of the famous Rainbow Portrait.

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<sup>50</sup> This formulation is that of John King; see *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition*, p. 116.

<sup>51</sup> This may be seen as an ironic echo of Aylmer's rhetoric of 'mixed monarchy'; see *An Harborowe*, (Sig. H2v.-H3r.).

The corruption and worldliness of the court over which Lucifera presides may be construed as Spenser's commentary upon the state of Elizabeth's court and the nation at large.<sup>52</sup> Significantly, Duessa is welcomed at court and treated as an honoured guest, a probable instance of the Protestant anxiety about the dangerous indulgence of proto-Papistry at the highest levels. The display of the court is described as more sumptuous than '*Persia selfe*', (I.iv.7), evoking the decadent luxury of the Orient. The 'noble crew of Lordes and Ladies' (I.iv.7) who inhabit it are decked out in the latest gaudy fashions, trying to outdo each other with their 'curled haire' and 'ruffes' (I.iv.14). Lucifera's 'counsellors' are aspects of the lack of self-discipline of these corrupted courtiers; Gluttony, Idleness, Lechery, Avarice, Envy, Wrath and Sloth. More pertinently, they may be seen as the 'public sphere' aspect of these evils, of the failure of 'counsel' which would have a deleterious effect upon the proper rule of the commonwealth through bad advice to the monarch. This latter aspect is underscored by the depiction of the terrible state of those who emerge from the castle as 'scaped hard, /With baleful beggerie' and like 'loathsome lazars' (I.iv.3). This signifies both the results of the encounter with the morally-debasing and impoverishing corruption of court life, and a paradigm for the disordered and spiritually diseased state of the nation under female rule.<sup>53</sup>

Spenser's particular anxiety is the effect of this gynocracy upon male self-realisation and masculine identity. The palace's aptly-named 'nether regions' contain men who were formerly in positions of power and influence but who have become Lucifera's prisoners through their abandonment to sensual pleasure. This supports both the interpretation of Lucifera as the Whore of Babylon and of her palace as the haunt of worldly corruption. However, the cause of the men's

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<sup>52</sup> King, *Spenser's Poetry and the Reformation Tradition*, p. 117.

<sup>53</sup> For more on the metaphorical links between leprosy, syphilis and Roman Catholicism in the period, see Healy, *Fictions of Disease*, pp. 130, 133.

downfall is significant. They have abandoned their proper duty as 'public' men, becoming enslaved by avarice and sensuality, 'mortgaging their lives to *Couetise*, /Through wastfull Pride, and wanton Riotise' (I.v.46). They have instead spent time in 'Princes courts, or Ladies bowres, /Where they in idle pompe, or wanton play, /Consumed had their goods, and thriftless howres' (I.v.51). The implication is that it is the effeminising effect of this female rule that has served to alienate them from their true purpose and render them into 'wretched thralles' (I.v.51).

This communal loss of masculine strength is echoed by Redcrosse's personal experience in his 'dalliance' with Duessa. Lying by the fountain in the glade, 'careless of his health, and of his fame' (I.vii.7) he drinks of the water, and becomes 'faint and feeble' (I.vii.5). The sexual nature of this encounter is evidenced by his subsequent physical state, where his 'manly forces' begin to 'faile', and 'mightie strong' is 'turn'd to feeble fraile' (I.vii.6), and he falls prisoner to the giant Orgoglio, left to languish in his castle dungeon. Bereft of his purpose and status, his armour 'now idle maisterlesse' (I.vii.19), the 'valiant knight' has 'become a caytiue thrall' (I.vii.19), brought low and unmanned by female sexual enticements. So enfeebled and impotent is he that he cannot effect his own rescue, and must await deliverance by the Christ-like Arthur. This terrible weakness affecting both 'private' and 'public' male 'potency' shows the anxiety over the destructive threat to patriarchal integrity, both individual and national, posed by female dominance and power.<sup>54</sup>

Despite Spenser's detailed description of Redcrosse's journey as a pilgrimage towards the realisation of his Christian manhood, it is significant the final Canto of Book I is characterised by deferral rather than resolution. Having done battle with successive evils, fallen into despair and achieved recuperation through his penance

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<sup>54</sup> See Moulton, *Before Pornography*, p. 100.

in the House of Holiness (Canto X), he has a vision of his final destination, Jerusalem, and is at last betrothed to his beloved Una. This stringent assertion of masculine purpose is undercut by the realisation that Duessa is not vanquished, but continues to be a source of trouble and division, and the marriage of the pair is postponed indefinitely as Redcrosse is forced to resume his quest. The postponement of fulfilment may be seen in the terms of Protestant Biblically-based millennial expectation, but also, I would argue, in terms of the threat to masculine self-realisation in a situation where men in the public sphere were ultimately powerless to act. Spenser's concern is that those men whose sacred duty is the protection of the realm and its destined religion from harm have been prevented from so doing. Subject to the whims of an ageing and increasingly tyrannical female ruler, these men have become effeminised and alienated from their proper inherited patriarchal roles, a situation threatening to both their personal moral standing and the nation's wellbeing.

I therefore suggest that Spenser is, on one level, identifying Elizabeth with the abuses of Papistry. She is neglecting her sacred duty to protect the kingdom, refusing to allow the proper prosecution of the battle against its Papist enemies, and preventing it from fulfilling its divinely-ordained destiny as the spearhead of militant Protestantism. Her miserly care to save money is, again, being construed as the worship of Mammon and an abandonment of the true religion, serving to emphasise her alignment with the evils of Papistry in the dualistic early-modern mindset of her accusers. The gaudy display and corruption of her court, and Elizabeth's own self-presentation in costly dresses and jewels, also help to show her alienation from religious purity, where the ornate pictorial depictions of her later reign may even evoke the possibility of her as an anxiety-provoking icon. This

iconicity is not evident merely in late Elizabethan portraits such as the Sieve Portraits and the Rainbow Portrait. Clare McEachern points to an uncanny similarity in later portraits of Elizabeth and the illustration of the Whore of Babylon in the 1588 edition of Hugh Broughton's *Concent of Scripture*, where both women are shown in luxurious and ornate dresses, wearing crowns and carrying sceptres.<sup>55</sup> It is interesting to note that this latter illustration was omitted from the 1590 edition, arguing a too-ready identification between these two epitomes of female domination.

### **The First Part of Henry the Sixth: female dominance, male impotence**

The anxieties surrounding the threat to national stability and continuity posed by female rule are also reflected in the multifarious depictions of masculine impotence and the disruption of patrilineal identity evident in *The First Part of Henry the Sixth* (1592?).<sup>56</sup> Shakespeare's use of an historical setting for the play is significant, echoing the viewpoint of Thomas Nash who, in *Pierce Penilesse* (1592), evoked the glorious past and martial feats of English warriors such as 'brave Talbot' in order to highlight the effeminacy and lack of true manliness prevalent in late-Elizabethan England.<sup>57</sup> The play is characterised by a fundamental anxiety about the loss and dissolution of masculine identity, both national and individual. It is fraught with depictions of disruption, discontinuity, shifting identities and 'crumbling structures

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<sup>55</sup> Cited by McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, pp. 55, 59. The copperplate engraving by Jodocus Hondius, entitled 'The state of Rome: for crucifying our Lorde' was originally included in Hugh Broughton's *Concent of Scripture* (London, 1588), but the only extant copy has been separated from the text, and is in the art collection in the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery.

<sup>56</sup> William Shakespeare, *The First Part of Henry the Sixth* (hereafter referred to as *I Henry VI*) in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (London and New York: W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 1997). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Nash, *Pierce Penilesse his supplication to the diuell Describing the ouer-spreading of vice, and suppression of vertue* (London, 1592) p. 26. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/ 18371. British Library. Early English Books Online: eebo citation: 99847996. Quoted by Jean Howard, introduction to 'The First Part of Henry the Sixth', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, p. 435.

of authority and stability'.<sup>58</sup> As in the work of Stubbes and Spenser, the text is characterised by the attempted assertion of religio-political binary opposites that blur into uncanny similarities. While Shakespeare's project does initially seem to be the time-honoured depiction of English martial valour against French decadence and effeminacy, these oppositions are soon shown as illusory and the English themselves as equally hampered by moral decline and unmanliness.

In the play, the true foe of the English forces is not the effeminate French, but the fearful Joan la Pucelle, the Amazonian 'holy maid' who is leading the French army to an unprecedented series of victories over the English. Initially, Shakespeare appears to be depicting Joan in un-nuanced terms, as an effective military leader, inspired in her holy mission by a vision of the Virgin Mary, possessed of the spirit of 'deep prophecy' (I.iii.34) and claiming divine support in her crusade against the English. It becomes apparent, however, that Shakespeare is constructing her using conventional anti-Papist imagery, where the ability to accurately 'read' her differs according to the alignment with the spiritual insight inherent in Protestantism or the moral 'blindness' of Papistry. On her first entrance, Joan displays the unnerving ability to identify the French Dauphin who is hiding incognito in a group of his friends. She is represented in shifting terms, described as a 'pucelle' or virgin, a term which may also mean a whore.<sup>59</sup> Her ambiguous sexual status is echoed by her uncertain femininity; she is a 'maid' and yet 'martial' (II.i.22-3). This ambiguity raises the unsettling possibility that her wearing the male accoutrements of armour and leading troops into battle will result in her 'proving

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<sup>58</sup> Brian Walsh, "'Unkind Division': The Double Absence of Performing History in '1 Henry VI'", in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Summer, 2004), p. 126. Cambridge University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3844284>, accessed 10.03.10.

<sup>59</sup> See Gabriele Barnhard Jackson, 'Topical Ideology: Witches, Amazons and Shakespeare's Joan of Arc', in *English Literary Renaissance*, 18 (1988), pp. 40-65. Wiley Blackwell. <http://dx.doi.org.10.1111/j.1475-6757.1988.tb00945.x>, accessed 21.03.10.

masculine' (II.i.24), changing gender through unwomanly exertion in the way memorably depicted by Montaigne in his travel journal.<sup>60</sup>

In this presentation of Joan, Shakespeare is therefore evoking the necessity for correct interpretation based on true Protestant spiritual insight. Joan's 'deep prophecy' may well have recalled, for a Protestant audience, the problematic area of possession by demonic forces rather than divine inspiration.<sup>61</sup> Her citing of the Virgin Mary as inspiration would probably have evoked the notion of idolatry, the worship of man-made images interfering with the proper worship of God that was seen as 'adultery of the spirit'.<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the trope of idolatry is applied to Joan herself, where the Dauphin insists that she will replace St Denis as the patron saint of France (II.i.29) and be praised by processions of 'priests and friars' (II.i.19). This is emphasised by Alençon's promise to place her 'statue in some holy place /And have [her] revered like a blessed saint' (III.vii.14-15). Both these constructs show Joan as a Papist idol, the seductive and alluring but deceptively dangerous object of 'spiritual fornication' possessing the power to unman and infect with the poison of heretical doctrine.

The promiscuous carnality and seduction held to be inherent in Papistry are emphasised by the punning description of Joan as 'holy' (or 'holey') (II.i.50), and her ability to best the Dauphin in a swordfight is spoken of in sexualised *double-entendres* that play upon their relative positions and invite the interpretation of a sexual relationship between them. This inappropriate sexualisation and promiscuous speech shows Joan as a type of the Whore of Babylon. She possesses

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<sup>60</sup> Montaigne, *The Complete Works*, p. 869-70. See my 'Introduction', fn. 25.

<sup>61</sup> Albert Tricomi mentions that the contentious nature of prophesying had forced Elizabeth to issue a proclamation against it. See 'Joan la Pucelle and the Inverted Saints Play in *I Henry VI*' in *Renaissance and Reformation* 25 (2), (2001), (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies), p. 11.

<sup>62</sup> See Jewell, 'The iii. part of the sermon against perill of idolatrie', pp. 148-9.

an undue seductive power over men; the Dauphin Charles tells her that he burns with 'desire' for her (I.iii.87) and the English hero Talbot describes her followers as her 'lustful paramours' (III.v.13). Joan's military prowess depicts her, like the Whore, as an unnaturally ruthless and ambitious woman, and this inversionary behaviour is likewise shown in terms of Papist witchcraft.<sup>63</sup> Her ambiguous speech may be interpreted in terms of the alluring and unmanning sorcery of heretical Papist doctrine.<sup>64</sup> The Dauphin submits to her, promising to be her 'servant' (I.iii.90), by inviting her to 'enchant' him 'with her words' (III.vii.41) and the treacherous Burgundy is likewise won over, saying her persuasions have 'bewitched' him (III.vii.58). Joan's identity as a witch is finally incontestably established as she attempts to summon her familiars using incantations and promising them her soul (V.iii.22, 27). Her subsequent burning at the stake serves, as Leah Marcus illustrates, to highlight the link of Joan with Papist idolatry, evoking the practice in post-Reformation England of burning Papist 'idols' in the symbolic social purification of immolation.<sup>65</sup>

As a nation of Papists, infected with the heretical doctrine and in submission to this monstrous female, the entire French nation is characterised as effeminate. Rendered unmanly and morally weakened, the French are entirely reliant upon the leadership of this 'amazon' for their success in battle over the English. In their 'prostrate thrall' (I.ii.96) to this martial avatar of the Whore of Babylon, they are shown as unthinking and irrational 'minions' of the Whore herself, spiritually blinded by their superstitious allegiance and unable to properly discern her true evil

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<sup>63</sup> Catherine Belsey describes the early-modern categorisation as witches of 'women who were seen as voluble, unwomanly, and possessed of an unauthorized power'. See *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1985), p. 185.

<sup>64</sup> For more on the early-modern Protestant construction of Papistry as 'the nursery of witchcraft', see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, p. 142.

<sup>65</sup> Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, p. 88.

nature. This is seen in the Dauphin's fickle intention of arbitrarily abandoning the long-established patron saint of France for this female newcomer, and in his 'carnally'-nuanced relationship with Joan. It is likewise echoed by Burgundy's repeated treachery, his vacillating allegiances causing him to 'turn and turn again' (III.viii.85). Indeed, the entire nation is seen by extension as aligned with the demonic, a perverted people who 'practise and converse with spirits' (II.i.25), the deceitful users of 'art and baleful sorcery' (II.1.15), 'conjurers and sorcerers' (I.i.26) suspected of bringing about the death of the heroic English Henry V by supernatural means.

### **Potency and impotence**

Despite this depiction of France as the lair of Papistry, the representation of France and England does not demonstrate a clear cut national alignment with virtue and vice, but shows instead a worrying similarity, both realms being the site of chaos and instability. The English army is disorganised, disunited, undermanned and ill-supplied, easily overwhelmed by Joan's unnatural abilities. The lack of common purpose amongst the English military leaders is reflected by the state of England itself. The realm is prey to factions competing for power; 'civil dissension' is rife, a 'viperous worm/ That gnaws the bowels of the commonwealth' (III.i.74-5). Shakespeare shows us the origins, in this factionalism, of the terrible civil strife that would become known as the Wars of the Roses. This dire state of affairs is, as the dying Mortimer tells us, due to the disruption of patriarchal bonds, where the true lineage of English kingship has been broken by successive usurpations and battles for power (II.v.61-92). The corruption, self-serving and greed afflicting the realm is

personified by the Bishop of Winchester, who is scheming to 'sell' the kingdom to the Papacy to gain a cardinal's hat.

The English are redeemed only by the heroism of a few men, most notably Talbot, who is the epitome of English martial masculinity. As a true Englishman, Talbot shows a thoroughly proto-Protestant sensibility, speaking of God as England's 'fortress' (II.i.26), and invoking the aid of 'God and Saint George' (IV.ii.55) as he goes into battle. He is an outstanding warrior, who has '[e]nacted wonders with his sword and lance', sending 'hundreds' 'to hell' where 'none durst stand him' (I.i.122-23). He displays a proper manly 'civility', fully aware of his duties and responsibilities as an English aristocrat and warrior, and of his incorporation into the 'substance, sinews, arms and strength' (II.iii.63) of the body of military brotherhood. As Coppelia Kahn demonstrates, Talbot 'exemplifies England', where his country's honour and his own are bound inextricably together, his courage being both 'family possession and national asset'.<sup>66</sup> A large part of Talbot's identity is constituted by his mutual relationship with his son, John, his 'other life' (IV.vii.1), who is a worthy inheritor of his noble father's 'pure blood' (IV.vi.24). In the heat of battle, facing overwhelming odds, John refuses his father's request that he take flight, since such an action would dishonour his 'mother's womb' (IV.v.35) and show him not to be Talbot's son. Isolated and without reinforcements, John is killed and Talbot dies of a broken heart, realising that the family name has likewise perished. This fearful disruption of masculine identity, futurity and patrilineal inheritance is voiced by Joan. As Talbot's titles and numerous chivalric honours are recited over his body, she attempts to 'unname' him

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<sup>66</sup> Coppelia Kahn, *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (London: University of California Press Ltd, 1981), p. 52.

by the crude reminder to Lucy that '[h]im that thou magnifi'st with all these titles /Stinking and flyblown lies here at our feet' (V.i.75-6).

This sense of futility, disruption and national decadence characterises the closing scenes of the play. There is no outright victory, but a sterile 'effeminate' (V.vi.107) peace, concluded as the outcome of a stalemate. The English have lost a large part of their French territories through 'treason, falsehood, and by treachery' (V.vi.109), and Joan's parting malediction expresses the wish that 'darkness and the gloomy shade of death /Environ' them (V.vi.89-91). With the benefit of hindsight we know that this foretells the chaos that is soon to engulf England, where the betrothal of the young King Henry to the French princess Margaret does not portend marital and national harmony, but the terrifying rift of civil war. Margaret is a further example of disruptive 'bewitching' French femininity, her sexual allure threatening the wellbeing of England. Henry falls prey to the description of her beauty and insists on breaking his existing betrothal so that he may marry her. Suffolk likewise shows himself to be overwhelmed by Margaret's charms, and states his intention of abandoning his allegiance to his king by seducing her after her marriage. This will, he hopes, enable him to 'rule both her, the King, and realm' (VI.vii.108). The play closes on a note of foreboding and imminent national disaster to the realm of England.

### **Unruly females – blurring and correspondences**

This pervasive sense of disorder and instability caused by disruptive femininity shows the play not as the evocation of a long-vanished conflict, but a safely-distanced comment upon the England of the 1590s. The parallels drawn between the two nationalities are more than coincidental. Coppelia Kahn reminds us that

Joan is ‘a composite portrait of all the ways women are dangerous to men’, as a ‘virgin prophetess, mannish amazon and seductive courtesan’.<sup>67</sup> I do not see Joan as a direct representation of Elizabeth, but agree with Leah Marcus that she is a ‘distorted image’ that ‘brings into the open a set of suppressed cultural anxieties’ about the Queen.<sup>68</sup> It is therefore significant that imagery describing Joan repeatedly echoes that used for Elizabeth; the Dauphin speaks of her as ‘Deborah’ (I.iii.84), Venus (I.iv.3), ‘Astraea’s daughter’ (I.viii.4) and ‘Helen, the mother of great Constantine’ (I.iv.121), creating a subtextual correspondence between the two. The slippery and changing nature of Joan’s identity may therefore be seen as opening up a rhetorical space in which to interrogate the similarities between the two women.

The ambiguous nature of these references to female power is particularly evident in the characterisation of Joan as an ‘Amazon’ (I.iii.83). These warrior women were a recurrent trope in the later Elizabethan era, used most notably in the adulatory references to Elizabeth’s appearance on the field at Tilbury in 1588 on horseback and wearing plumed helmet and upper-body armour.<sup>69</sup> The imagery, with its connotations of female physical prowess, was nonetheless equally fraught with negative implications, as can be seen from Walter Raleigh’s *Discoverie of Guiana* (1596). Raleigh speaks of the ‘Amazones’ of South America as a matrilineal society of ‘warlike’ women who killed their man-children and who were ‘cruel and

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<sup>67</sup> Kahn, *Man’s Estate*, p. 55.

<sup>68</sup> Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, p. 26.

<sup>69</sup> Celeste Turner Wright, ‘The Amazons in Elizabethan Literature’, in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (Jul., 1940), p. 429. University of North Carolina Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4172492>, accessed 13.04.10. For more on the repeated references to Elizabeth as an Amazon please see Winfried Schleiner, ‘*Divina virago*: Queen Elizabeth as an Amazon’, in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 75, No. 2 (Spring, 1978), pp.163-180. University of North Carolina Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4173965>, accessed 13.04.10. Significantly, Schleiner notes that these references are more ‘precise’ in the decades following Elizabeth’s death (p. 175), which I take as a reference to the fact that the trope was subject to more diffuse interpretations during her lifetime.

bloodthirsty' in battle, both attributes posing a fundamental threat to the ideological underpinnings of patriarchy.<sup>70</sup> The use of this term to describe Joan opens up the possibility of Elizabeth, as another uniquely powerful and dominant female war-leader, being construed in similar negative terms as a threat to the wellbeing of the commonwealth of England and its patriarchal stakeholders.

The depiction of Joan in terms of idolatry may also be seen as a tangential expression of dissatisfaction with Elizabeth's religious policies, in particular her unwillingness to grant the funds to support the international anti-Papist struggle. The binary thinking which characterised early-modern thought would have facilitated this perceived dereliction of her religious duties as moral backsliding, and tantamount to 'spiritual fornication'. This failure to adequately prosecute the national duty to come to the aid of beleaguered fellow Protestants may therefore be seen by transference as a blot on the national moral escutcheon and a stain on England's reputation. Those of the 'Protestant ascendancy' who wished to carry out their self-imposed role as guardians of national honour would have found it particularly problematic. Their own honour would have been stained by their inability to carry out their sacred duty, prevented from doing so by the Queen's parsimony. Therefore, while again not comparing Elizabeth directly with Joan as The Whore of Babylon, the religiously-coloured depiction of female deviance may be seen as an outlet for masculine Protestant frustration, and as aligning the Queen with Idolatry in her favouring of 'Mammon' over her religious obligations.

These sentiments about Elizabeth's perceived ill-government, working in tandem with the prevalent social and economic unrest, may be construed as underpinning the tropes of alienation and monstrous motherhood evident in the

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<sup>70</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh, *Discouerie of the large, rich, and bevtifvl Empire of Guiana* (London, 1596). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/20634. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99846092, accessed 13.04.10.

play. The two nations are referred to as abandoned or starving children: England described as a desolate land in which the children are nourished not by milk, but by the tears from their mothers' 'moistened eyes' (I.i.49), France likened to a dying child (III.iii.44-47). Malign maternity is repeatedly evoked. Joan is a demonic mother, having fed her familiars with her blood (V.iii.14) and claiming a fictitious – or perhaps actual - pregnancy in the attempt to escape being burned at the stake (V.vi.55).<sup>71</sup> Catherine de Medici, tyrannical Queen Mother and usurper of rule in France, is alluded to through the invocation of the Countess of Auvergne, her mother's name, her two sons Alençon and Anjou being recalled in the persons of the two effeminate French generals.

This unnatural motherhood is likewise implicit in the character of Margaret. She is seen as 'gravid' with the monstrous pregnancy of the civil war, fraught with the female moral weakness that will lead to the adultery with Suffolk that in turn will provide the spark to begin the conflict. As with Stubbes's text, the monstrous maternity identified with the enemy nation becomes internalised into a general denunciation of malevolent gynocracy. It is not only French womanhood that is destructive to English men. All unnatural and dominant women are dangerous, and it is such females within the realm of England itself who are the most threatening. The worries about Elizabeth's reign, about the disorder and disunity afflicting the nation under the increasingly incapable rule of an ageing and mercurial woman, may be seen as a subtext in these evocations of female-based threat, where the chaos rampant in one nation provides a parallel for the other. The dislocation of proper patriarchal continuance in the play has its real-life counterpart in the disruptive and

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<sup>71</sup> For more on 'the witch as malevolent mother', see Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, p. 29.

undermining effect upon English Protestant manhood brought about by the unnatural rule of England's own monstrous mother, Queen Elizabeth.<sup>72</sup>

In these three ostensibly different texts there is a common thread of anxiety surrounding the female-oriented danger threatening the integrity and wellbeing of the realm of England. The lengthy female rule of Elizabeth, despite the attempts to justify and to create a semi-divine persona for her, fostering an almost religious feeling towards her, was nonetheless the cause of multiple anxieties on the part of her subjects. In the words of Julia M. Walker, this opposition to the prevalent Cult of Elizabeth was not isolated, but was 'a constant element of the life, reign and memory of this female ruler'.<sup>73</sup> When the anxiety about the lack of an obvious successor to the ageing queen was joined to the civil unrest and economic downturn of the late 1580s and 1590s, the resulting societal tensions become reflected in the texts of the period. Deciphered in the light of these problems, the seemingly convoluted references, and the reversion to the terms of patriarchal hegemonic control of the worrying feminine, display a consistent anxiety surrounding internal disorder and external threat. This use of female embodiment in such ambivalent terms is, I argue, a manifestation of this masculine unease generated by the rule of a woman, and in particular by a strong-willed unmarried woman without any issue. The 'goodwife' of the nation and Governor of the Church is now construed as a dangerous 'stepmother' who threatens to alienate her subjects from their sacred religious birthright of Protestant Englishness. This growing disillusionment with

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<sup>72</sup> For more on the prevalence of the idea of monstrous pregnancies and births connected to pictorial representations of Elizabeth in the 1590s, see Rob Content, 'Fair is Fowle: Interpreting Anti-Elizabethan Composite Portraiture', in *Dissing Elizabeth*, p. 240-242.

<sup>73</sup> Julia M. Walker, 'Introduction' to *Dissing Elizabeth*, p. 3.

Elizabeth's reign, culminating in the abortive Essex Rebellion of 1601, makes it easier to understand the initial outburst of enthusiasm that would greet the accession of James VI of Scotland as James I of England on her death in 1603.

## Chapter Four

### **The early reign of James: ‘theological kingship’ versus ‘godly Protestantism’**

Although England gained a King on the accession of James I, there was little change in the intensity of the gendered rhetorical struggle for ideological national supremacy. As in Elizabeth’s time, the controversy over the ‘proper’ conduct of policy was the site of tension and competing imagery, expressed through the imagery of national embodiment and divine destiny. James himself employed the metaphors of familial relationships and bodily correspondence to assert his ‘natural’ status as God’s chosen monarch. Those who saw themselves as the guardians of Protestantism and the destined protectors of national wellbeing continued to articulate their advice to the monarch and their prescriptions for the conduct of religio-political affairs through the recourse to the tropes of the ‘motherland’ and Biblical female stereotypes. However, the debate was now characterised by a subtle shift in tone. The contested ‘body’ of the nation became the feminised subject of a competing discourse of ‘ownership’ and hierarchical supremacy between two opposing patriarchal points of view.

James saw his position in relation to his new subjects as one of natural, ‘organic’, superiority, describing himself as the ‘Head’ to the ‘Body’ of his kingdom.<sup>1</sup> He inverted the marital and maternal imagery used for Elizabeth to show himself as ‘the husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawful wife’, and the ‘louing Father’ of his ‘naturall subiects’.<sup>2</sup> As Jonathan Goldberg points out, ‘the mystification of the body that can be found in James’s ... rhetoric becomes explicitly attached to the *arcana*

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<sup>1</sup> James VI and I, ‘Speech to Parliament on a Union with Scotland, 1604’, in *Constitutional Documents of the reign of James I, A.D. 1603-1625*, ed. J. R. Tanner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> James VI and I, ‘Speech to Parliament’, pp. 26-7; James VI and I, *The Trewe Lawe of Free Monarchies*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Edinburgh, 1603), Sig. A4r. STC (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)/14411. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, ebo citation: 99843355, accessed 08.07.10.

*imperii*'.<sup>3</sup> His own personal fecundity, as a married man who was the father of a family, became an integral part of the symbolic presentation of his ability to ensure national stability and the secure transmission of power and authority. This may be seen in the court entertainments of James's early reign, such as Jonson's *Masque of Queens* (1609), in which the King himself is incorporated as the originary and transforming source informing the outcome of the masque.<sup>4</sup> Flatteringly depicted in the character of Perseus, the personification of Heroic Virtue and the parent of Fame, James is metaphorically endowed with the power of giving birth, becoming the epitome of essential virtue who possesses the God-like attribute of parthogenesis, mother and father in one.<sup>5</sup> James had likewise employed the traditional Biblical imagery of Isaiah 49, 23 to refer to himself as the 'louing Nurish-father' to the Church of England.<sup>6</sup> He held firm opinions on the 'divinity' and infallibility of kingship, seeing his role as that of God's lieutenant upon earth, writing in his *Basilikon Doron* that, 'God gives not Kings the style of Gods in vaine, /For on his throne his Scepter do they swey'.<sup>7</sup> This semi-divine status was shown in James's prized project of uniting his two kingdoms, where he styled himself as an emperor, comparing himself to Caesar Augustus, the presider over the *Pax Romana* when ancient Rome was at the peak of its influence.<sup>8</sup> In keeping with this imperial status, he also saw his role in the international political

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, reissued Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1989), p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> Ben Jonson, 'The Masque of Queens', in *Court Masques, Jacobean and Caroline Entertainments 1605-1640*, ed. David Lindley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), lines 393-4.

<sup>5</sup> Jonson, 'The Masque of Queens', line 342.

<sup>6</sup> James VI and I, *Basilikon Doron* (Edinburgh, 1599), p. 51. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/14348. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99836898, accessed 21.01.08. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>7</sup> James VI and I, *Basilikon Doron*, 'Argument'. For more on 'divine kingship' as applied to James, see Debora Kuller Shuger, *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England: The Sacred and the State in Measure for Measure* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave, 2001), esp. pp. 54-62.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Woodbridge, 'Palisading the Elizabethan Body Politic', in *Texas Studies in Language and Literature*, 33 (Fall 1991), pp. 327-54. University of Texas Press.  
<http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.sussex.ac.uk/CN1487061201>, accessed 10.05.10.

sphere not as a warmonger, but as a bringer of peace and mediator in other countries' disputes, his personal motto being '*beati pacifici*'.<sup>9</sup>

As the Supreme Governor of the English Church, James felt it his responsibility to bring about the reconciliation of the theological differences in his realm. The doctrinal variances within Protestantism that had occasioned the Marprelate controversy in the 1590s were still very much apparent. This divergence between *via media* Protestants and fundamentalists (increasingly stigmatised as Puritans) co-existed with the persistent anti-Papistry, where Protestant polemic continued to inveigh strongly against the threat of Roman Catholicism, as typified by Samuel Harsnett's popular *Declaration of egregious Popish Impostures* (1603).<sup>10</sup> James himself adhered to the theological 'middle way', holding that the existing doctrinal dispensation of the English Church was in accord with Biblical precepts and in keeping with the doctrinal purity of the 'primitive' church.<sup>11</sup> He had little sympathy with the excesses of 'Puritanism', which he saw as a challenge to the established order and in particular to his own authority, and had written disparagingly in *Basilikon Doron* of 'rash-headie Preachers, that thinke it their honour to contend with Kings, and perturbe whole kingdomes'.<sup>12</sup>

The growing ideological differences within English Protestantism had been exacerbated by Richard Hooker's *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, a work re-emphasising the importance of the sacraments and 'liturgical prayer at the expense of preaching'.<sup>13</sup> Although the first part was published in 1593, it was only after Hooker's death in 1600 that the full impact of his arguments was realised, raising fierce criticism from those more radical Protestants who held to the primacy of the Scriptures. In the

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Stewart, *The Cradle King: A Life of James VI & I* (London: Pimlico, 2003), pp. 298-9.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of egregious Popish Impostures* (London, 1603), t.p. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/12880. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99856115, accessed 29.12.07.

<sup>11</sup> Stewart, *The Cradle King*, p. 189.

<sup>12</sup> James VI and I, *Basilikon Doron*, Sig. A4v.

<sup>13</sup> MacCulloch, *Reformation*, pp. 506-7.

attempt to curb religious excess and to drive a 'wedge between the moderate and radical wings' of Protestant opinion James convened the Hampton Court conference in 1604.<sup>14</sup> At the conference, the existing theological dispensation was confirmed, innovation prohibited, and the hopes of those who had presented him with the 'Millenary Petition' for thoroughgoing religious reform disappointed. Although the translation of an 'Authorized Version' of the Bible was commissioned - better known as the King James Bible (1611) - the result was a curtailing of 'Puritan' dissension, with many clergy who refused to conform to the rites and ordinances of the Church of England being deprived of their livings. James's espousal of the *via media* extended also to his dealings with Papists, where he refused to 'hunt' or 'persecute' those who kept 'quiet and decently hidden', temporarily suspending the fines for recusancy upon his accession.<sup>15</sup> He did however remain resolute in his dislike of Jesuits – whom he described as 'venomed wasps and firebrands of sedition' - and those who upheld the Pope's right to depose monarchs.<sup>16</sup>

This construction by James of himself as the *Rex Pacificus* was increasingly at odds with the nationalistic sentiments of militant Protestantism. John Watkins points to the emergence of a new 'social order' where, by 1603, the 'commercial classes and lower gentry' had become a 'political and economic force to be reckoned with', and were asserting their right to a say in government.<sup>17</sup> Many of these men were associated with the Puritan movement, and had little sympathy for James's mystical views on absolute

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<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, 'The Ecclesiastical Policy of King James I', in *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, Politics and Religion in the Early Seventeenth Century: New Voices (Apr., 1985), p. 172. University of Chicago Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/175702>, accessed 07.05.10.

<sup>15</sup> See Pauline Croft, *King James* (Basingstoke, Hants.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 162.

<sup>16</sup> W. B. Patterson, 'King James I's Call for an Ecumenical Council', in *Councils and Assemblies: Studies in Church History*, vol. 7, eds. G. J. Cuming and Derek Baker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 268. See also Fincham and Lake, 'The Ecclesiastical Policy of King James I', pp. 185, 183. Croft, *King James*, p. 161.

<sup>17</sup> John Watkins, *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England: Literature, History, Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 40.

monarchy.<sup>18</sup> There was also a growing personal antipathy towards James on the part of his new subjects. As Jenny Wormald shows, his 'spendthrift' habits soon became apparent, as did his over-indulgence in hunting, and his favouritism of the numerous Scottish courtiers who had accompanied him into England, upon whom he showered honours and official sinecures.<sup>19</sup> James's perceived tolerance of Papistry, particularly at court, was also the cause of increasing anxiety. He appointed the crypto-Papists Edward Wotton and the Earl of Northampton to prominent office.<sup>20</sup> Rumours of his wife Anne's conversion to Roman Catholicism were rife; she refused the Communion under Church of England rites at her coronation, sought official positions for English Roman Catholics, and corresponded in friendly terms with the Spanish Infanta.<sup>21</sup> The truce with Spain - one of James's first acts upon his accession - and his proposed betrothal of his son Henry to the Spanish Infanta both served to intensify this anxiety. These approaches were extremely unpopular with his subjects, many of whom saw Spain as the source of the 'black legend', the epitome of Papist evil, a realm in league with that Antichrist the Pope, and a deadly foe of Protestantism.<sup>22</sup>

The perception of James as failing in his sacred duty to prosecute the perpetual battle between Protestant good and Papist evil was, ironically, exacerbated by his reaction to the Gunpowder Plot of November 1605. In his speech to Parliament shortly after the discovery of the Plot, James adopted a conciliatory tone, reassuring his

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<sup>18</sup> For more on the strength of the adherence to 'Puritanism' in London, in particular, see Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 9.

<sup>19</sup> Jenny Wormald, 'James VI and I: Two Kings or One?', in *History*, Vol. 68, Issue 223, 1983, pp. 187-209. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-229x.1983.tb01404.x>, accessed 07.05.10. The dislike of Scottish 'adventurers' was intense enough to inspire the satire against them evident in Chapman, Jonson and Marston's *Eastward Ho* of 1605. See Joseph Quincy Adams "'Eastward Hoe" and Its Satire against the Scots', *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Oct., 1931), pp. 689-701. University of North Carolina Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4172127>.

<sup>20</sup> Watkins, *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England*, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart, *The Cradle King*, p. 182.

<sup>22</sup> Eric J. Griffin, *English Renaissance Drama and the Specter of Spain: Ethnopoetics and Empire* (Philadelphia, Penn.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), esp. pp. 2-3.

audience that he did not hold the majority of his Roman Catholic subjects responsible, and attributing the conspiracy to a small number of fanatics.<sup>23</sup> This failed to convince either the Protestant establishment or the country at large. The apparent providential escape from death of the royal family and the members of the Lords was used to underscore the Protestant view of England as the Elect Nation, under divine protection and the destined haven of the 'true' religion. At the same time, the Plot reinforced the prevalent suspicion of all Papists as potential seditious underminers of national stability and security.<sup>24</sup> An outpouring of anti-Papist vitriol ensued. Pamphlets such as *Times Anotomie* (1606), ostensibly written by a 'souldier', Robert Pricket, described at length the 'Popes pride, Romes treasons and her destruction'.<sup>25</sup> Arthur Dent's *The ruine of Rome* (1607), yet another exegesis upon Revelation, combined the reiteration of the evils of Papistry with the reassurance of its inevitable downfall, and a reassertion of the essential righteousness of Protestantism.<sup>26</sup> The Protestant élite, notable among them Robert Cecil, James's Secretary of State, seized the chance to enforce more stringent anti-Papist measures; the 'Act for the better discovering and repressing of Popish Recusants', including the Oath of Allegiance, was passed in May 1606.<sup>27</sup>

### **The construction of religious opposition in early-Jacobean play-texts**

The centrality of anti-Papistry as a cultural trope, expressed through the use of both chaste female virtue and sexually-promiscuous female evil, is evident in early-Jacobean

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<sup>23</sup> James VI and I, *His Maiesties Speech in this last Session of Parliament* (London, 1605), Sig. C2r. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/14392.5. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99854526, accessed 22.01.08.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Peter Lake, 'Anti-popery: the Structure of a Prejudice', in *Conflict in Early Stuart England; Studies in Religion and Politics 1603-1642*, eds. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1989), pp. 72-106.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Pricket, *Times Anotomie* (London, 1606), t. p. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/20342. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99850459, accessed 21.01.08.

<sup>26</sup> Arthur Dent, *The ruine of Rome* (London, 1607). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/6641. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99845242, accessed 21.01.08.

<sup>27</sup> Stewart, *The Cradle King*, p. 225.

play-texts, where a significant feature is the seemingly anachronistic evocation of the recently-deceased Elizabeth, deployed in the cause of militant Protestantism. The late Queen, who had never been a particularly enthusiastic supporter of the hardline Protestant cause in her lifetime, is made into a figure of essential female Protestant virtue, where the imagery of her early reign constructing her as the epitome of religious rectitude is resurrected.

Thomas Heywood's *If you know not me, You know no bodie* (1605) depicts the tribulations of the young Elizabeth in the reign of her sister Mary.<sup>28</sup> Although the anti-Papist tone is consistent throughout the play, it is understated. It is chiefly articulated against the demonised figure of Stephen Gardiner, the turncoat bishop who had been one of Mary's staunchest supporters in the reinstatement of Roman Catholicism, and who is Elizabeth's chief persecutor. He is shown as the archetypal evil Papist priest, deceiving and lying to procure Elizabeth's death warrant by 'jugling' (Sig. F1v.). Unable or unwilling to display Mary, as a crowned English monarch and Elizabeth's half-sister, in the conventional terms of sexualised misogynistic anti-Papist rhetoric, Heywood is driven to show her as the wavering and gullible tool of Winchester's plotting. Seemingly anachronistically, Mary's Spanish husband Phillip is the epitome of statesman-like masculine rationality, providing a strong manly foil for his wife, serving to show the Queen as the epitome of female moral weakness.

Heywood employs the hagiographical iconography of Foxe's 1563 'Book of Martyrs', using Elizabeth's sufferings and staunch adherence to her faith in the face of persecution to render her into a martyr figure.<sup>29</sup> Living in the hourly expectation of

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas Heywood, *If you know not me, you know no bodie: or, The troubles of Queene Elizabeth* (London, 1605). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.) /13328. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99841834, accessed 06.05.10. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>29</sup> For more on Foxe's identification of Elizabeth as a type of the female Protestant martyr, see Freeman, 'Providence and Prescription: The Account of Elizabeth in Foxe's Book of Martyrs', in *The Myth of*

death, she demonstrates Christian resignation, stating that she will die '[a] Virgine and a Martyr both' and anticipating with joy the time when she will 'sing' 'with heauens King, /One day in quiers of Angels' (Sig. A4v.) Elizabeth's humility is particularly emphasised, underlining her ideological centrality to Protestant English nationalism as the epitome of Christian virtue. Part of Foxe's rhetorical thrust had been the depiction of Reformation-era Protestant sufferers of religious persecution as the spiritual 'heirs' of those of the 'primitive' Church. This underlined the claim of English Protestantism to be a direct spiritual descendant of the doctrinal purity of original Christianity, and gave added moral weight to the self-sacrifice of those Protestants who suffered for their faith. Elizabeth's other-worldliness, her charity to the needy, and her ability to inspire those around her in her own deepest trouble shows Heywood imbuing her with the attributes of Christ himself. This essential goodness exemplifies the *imitatio Christi*, the winning 'of spiritual victory through suffering and thereby overcoming worldly strength through apparent weakness'.<sup>30</sup> This Christ-like aspect of Elizabeth is emphasised by her description of herself as being '*tamquam Ovis*', 'like a sheep, That's to the slaughter led' (Sig. E1r.), comparing her to the Lamb of God himself.

The depiction of Elizabeth as suffering for the sake of truth underlines the identification between her and the Protestant religion that is likewise seen in her steadfast reliance upon her Bible as a guide and source of spiritual nourishment in her imprisonment. The connection is strongly emphasised in the dumb show on Sig. E3v., where angels protect her sleeping body, driving off the Papist 'fryers' who are attempting to kill her, and leaving an open Bible in her hands. Heywood also shows Elizabeth's gracious reception of the Bible given to her by the 'Citty London' (Sig.

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*Elizabeth*. See also Marsha S. Robinson, *Writing the Reformation: Actes and Monuments and the Jacobean History Play* (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), p. 146-150.

<sup>30</sup> John R. Knott, *Discourses Of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563-1698* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 2.

G3v.) on the day before her coronation, where he has her kiss it and speak of it, in language that could equally well apply to her own physical and moral purity, as ‘the Jewell that we still loue best’, a ‘fountaine cleere immaculate’ (Sig. G3v.). She goes on to describe it, like herself, as a prisoner of Papist repression, a ‘booke that hath so long conceald it selfe’, now ‘free’ (Sig. G3v.). The very title of the play implies this link, showing the possession of true insight as necessary for discerning both the essential virtue of Elizabeth as the embodiment of English Protestantism and the unmediated purity of the true Protestant doctrine as embodied in the Gospel. The parallel is further underlined by the centrality of the Bible in the construction of English Protestant nationalism for, as Elizabeth herself shows in her acceptance of the proffered Bible, ‘[w]ho builds on this, dwel’s in a happy state’ (Sig. G3v.).

Elizabeth is repeatedly seen as guarded by divine protection, demonstrating her providential destiny as the ruler of England and protector of English Protestantism. Her servant Gage speaks of her persecutors as those that ‘do kicke against heaven’ (Sig. D1r.), but reminds us that ‘the God that made [her] will protect [her] still’ (Sig. E2v.). Even the evil Winchester realises that his plotting against her will be fruitless, since ‘her life is garded by the hand of heauen’ (Sig. F1v.). The common people display instinctive love for her as a ‘vertuous Princesse’ (Sig. D4v.), pitying her sad lot and showering her with gifts and kindnesses. The hand of the Deity is also evident in the sudden and unexpected deaths of Winchester and Mary, which clear the way for Elizabeth’s accession. This shows both the divinely-ordained destiny of England as the haven of the Protestant religion and the inherent righteousness of English Protestantism that were used as the ideological basis for the nationalistic agenda of the Protestant establishment.

**Dekker – Protestant polemicist or politic panegyrist?**

This centrality of stereotypical female religious virtue in the construction of nationalistic Protestantism is echoed in Thomas Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon* (c.1606) which appeared shortly after the Gunpowder Plot, and which has been described as 'the definitive militant Protestant play'.<sup>31</sup> The nationalistic anti-Papist imagery employed by Dekker is more overt than that used by Heywood, and may reflect the increased anxiety created by the Plot. Dekker's stated aim in writing the play was to show the 'Heroical virtues' of the 'late Queene' set against 'the inueterate malice, Treasons, Machinations, Vnderminings, & continual bloody stratagems, of that Purple whore of Roome' (p. 189). He evokes Elizabeth's Amazonian performance at Tilbury at the time of the Armada to emphasise the Queen as the strong moral focus of the nation's Protestant purpose in a time of fundamental struggle against the overwhelming threat of Papistry. So enduring would this depiction become that it was used by Heywood for the additional scenes provided for the 1633 quarto edition of the second part of *If you know not me, you know no bodie*.<sup>32</sup>

In the *Whore of Babylon*, English Protestant virtue is personified by the chaste Queen, Titania, and the debauched evils of Papistry epitomised by the Empress of Babylon. In keeping with the identification of England (or Fairie Land) as the latter-day manifestation of Old Testament Israel, God's chosen people, Dekker employs

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Dekker (1607), *The Whore of Babylon*, in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker now first collected with illustrative notes and a memoir of the author in four volumes, Volume the second* (London: John Pearson, 1873. Kessinger Publishing's Legacy Reprints, Whitefish, Montana). All further references are to this edition. Since the text is not divided into acts and scenes, I have cited the relevant page numbers. Julia Gasper, *The Dragon and the Dove, the plays of Thomas Dekker* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 62.

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Heywood, *If you know not me, you know no body. The second part* (London, 1633). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/13339. Bodleian Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99839784, accessed 04.05.10. The original date of the second part of the play is uncertain, but is thought to be shortly after the first part, in 1605; see Watkins, *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England*, pp. 36-37, p. 53.

Biblical imagery in his description of the idyllic conditions existing in the realm.<sup>33</sup>

Florimell, a trusted councillor to the Queen, praises her rule, saying:

Our Fairie groues are greene, our temples stand  
Like goodly watch-towers, wafting passengers  
From rockes, t'arrive them in the Holy Land :  
Peace (here) eats fruits, which her own hand hath sown,  
Your lambes with lyons play: about your throne  
The Palme, the Lawrell, and the abundant Vine  
Grow up, and with your roses doe entwine. (p. 270)

The nation is seen here as a maternal body, the enclosed and guarded, but fruitful, home of natural increase, bounty, and womanly virtue. Not only is the beneficent Peace a long-term inhabitant, but she has been joined by Plaine Dealing and her comrade Truth, a 'God-like maide' (p. 270) who has taken up her abode at 'The Signe of the Holy Lambe' (p. 215). The realm is presided over by Titania who, as the representation of Elizabeth, is the ideal ruler. She is possessed of courage, rationality, loving care for her subjects, and tranquil authority and mercy, constituting her as the complete Renaissance prince. Her role as the personification of the Protestant English Church is shown in the repeated allusions to her virtue, where she is described as a 'sacred lady' (p. 267). Although she is the source of her realm's prosperity as its metaphorical mother, her virginity is lauded as the purity which likewise confers a national integrity upon her kingdom. Like Elizabeth, she is described in terms of the moon, the symbol of chastity, and she is steadfast in withstanding the amorous advances of the three kings who come in disguise to 'strike off' her 'maiden-head' (p. 204).

Set against this picture of national prosperity and righteous harmony is the terrible sexualised female threat of the Empress of Babylon. As a counterpart of the Biblical Whore of Babylon, she is a promiscuous, ambitious and ruthless woman, who holds

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<sup>33</sup> For the early-modern identification of England with Israel see, for example, George Webbe, *God's controversie with England* (London, 1609), p. 30. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/25162. Cambridge University Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99835894, accessed 01.02.08.

unquestioned sway over her empire of subservient minions. Like the Whore, she feeds her adherents with 'wine out of a golden bowle' (p. 225). The Empress is dressed in splendid robes of purple and 'scarlet veiles', luxurious and alluring, but deriving their colour from the blood of her victims and concealing her diseased, decayed physical condition. Her debauched promiscuity and 'open', sexually-available, body are shown by her promise to take the first man who 'sings a Dirge tun'de to the death' of Titania as her lover (p. 232). The fatal deception she embodies, the difference between her speciously attractive exterior and diseased and infectious interior, is illustrated by the condition of her 'bawd' (p. 245), Falshood, who is also 'spotted with foule disease' and infected with the 'pox' (p. 241). Like her mistress, Falshood is 'painted', 'gorgious in attire', using 'witching smiles' and 'vnchast language' (p. 241). Her seduction is therefore aligned with the evils of witchcraft, with the use of 'damned' sorcery enabling the preservation of 'the enchanted towers of Babylon' (p. 245).

Unlike the harmonious and beneficial motherhood of Titania, the Empress is a monstrous mother; bearing the golden 'cup of abominations', with the metaphorical 'sophisticated' (p.256), or adulterated, 'wine of her fornication' that is the source of her power (p. 225).<sup>34</sup> The Empress's fatal influence upon her 'children' is seen as an unholy combination of sexual promiscuity and intoxicating witchcraft, where the implication is that she is the dam, incestuous lover, and bewitcher of her offspring. A death-dealing mother, the Empress's 'sacred breasts' (p. 206) described by her besotted and irrational 'children' are in reality the source of 'poyson', from which they 'sucke treason, /Sedition, Herezies confederacies, /The violation of all sacred leagues' (p. 210). The evocation of incest also bears the connotations of the contraction of

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<sup>34</sup> *The Bible, Authorized King James Version*, eds. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 313.

sexually-transmitted disease, showing her children both as unnaturally morally depraved and infected with the deadly affliction of Papist doctrine.

The infectious heresy contracted from the Empress by her ‘minions’ is therefore seen as resulting in the opposite of the harmony and peace prevailing in the home of the true religion under Titania’s rule. It is instead a violent and disruptive danger to the stability and wellbeing of other nations, in particular Faerie Land itself. As the Empress’s ‘natural’ children, Papists are the ruthless practisers of deceit, ceaselessly lying, conspiring, operating in secret and adopting disguise to bring about the downfall of their enemies. This reflects the understanding of Papistry as characterised by deception and secrecy that was particularly prevalent in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot. The published account of the Plot, *A true and perfect relation of the proceedings at the seuerall arraignments of the late most barbarous traitors* (1606) emphasises the ‘history of Catholic subversion, plotting, and (attempted or actual) political assassination’, repeatedly adverting to the secret ‘conspiring’ and ‘wicked and horrible Treasons’ of the plotters (Sig. B2r.).<sup>35</sup> While the armed forces of the Empress are a fearful danger, as can be seen by their terrible effect on the now only ‘half-fairy’ Hollanders, it is this ‘hidden’ aspect of Papistry which is shown as particularly threatening to the inhabitants of Fairie Land. The three kings sent to woo Titania are practised deceivers, using duplicitous language and disguise to achieve their nefarious ends, their intention being ‘in a Doue-like shape [to] rauen upon Doues’, to ‘suck allegiance from the common brest’ and ‘Poyson the Courtier with ambitious drugs’ (p. 210).

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<sup>35</sup> Anon., *A true and perfect relation of the proceedings at the seuerall arraignments of the late most barbarous traitors* (London, 1606). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/11618. Folger Shakespeare Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation:99838600, accessed 06.07.10. Cited by Arthur F. Marotti in *Religious Ideology & Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 133-143, esp. 134.

As the Whore/Empress's 'minions', these plotters are shown as effeminised, infected with the loss of true manliness entailed in the 'adultery' with the heretical religion. In their adoption of disguise they lose both their own identities and their genders; not only will they change 'haire' and 'eie-brows' and 'be shaven', but they will 'be old women, take all shapes, /To escape taking' (p. 232). This fluidity of bodily form makes them more fearful still, where Dekker goes on to describe them in terms of the anxieties evoked by the conspirators in the Gunpowder Plot, as moles, 'Deuils in Vaults' (p. 210) who 'worke vnder ground' to 'vndermine' the 'countrey' (p. 210).<sup>36</sup> Their insidious efforts have already borne fruit in the suborning of men like Campeius, Paridell and Ropus, all Englishmen who have turned against their native country, aligned themselves with the false religion, and plotted to kill Titania herself. Dekker shows the terrible outcome of these Papist conspiracies, should they not be stopped, is the incurring of a 'deluge of Innouation, rough rebellion, factions, /Of massacres, and pale destruction' (p. 233), leading to the eventual complete loss of English identity as the Papists 'swallow the kingdom up' (p. 233).

Against this terrible picture of the utter undoing of the English nation and its true religion by female-oriented Papist evil, Dekker asserts the necessity for, and the recuperative power of, strong militaristic masculine Protestantism. The bond of national martial affiliation and brotherhood that he invokes is at seeming odds with the feminised harmony previously shown as prevalent in the realm. However, it becomes apparent that Dekker is employing the trope of Fairie Land as the motherland, the 'nurce' (p. 224) at whose breast her true sons have imbibed their common identity and

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<sup>36</sup> The term 'devils in vaults' as a reference to Papist treachery and sedition had become a stock image. See Thomas Dekker, *The Double PP.* (London, 1606) STC (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/6498. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 5527. See also Jonathan Gil Harris, 'The smell of Macbeth', in *Shakespeare Quarterly* (58:4), 2007, pp. 465-86. Cambridge University Press. [http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl/openurl?ctx\\_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri.pqil:res\\_ver=0.2res\\_id=xri@lion:rec:abell:R04097114](http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&xri.pqil:res_ver=0.2res_id=xri@lion:rec:abell:R04097114).

purpose. The female virtue is thus seen as serving the agenda of masculine militant Protestantism. In the terrible battle between the 'Fairie' forces and the armies of the Empress, Truth and Plaine-dealing help the troops, arming each soldier with a breast-plate and providing each leader with a staff and shield, to ensure 'sweete victorie' (p. 270). This reference to the metaphorical armour of the divinely-ordained truth of Protestantism is echoed by the depiction of Titania as an Amazon-like warrior, glorying in the hardships of life in a military camp. She insists that the 'martiall life' is so apt for her that she 'could change Courts to campos' and that her presence as 'Captaine' will inspire her troops to fight to 'the last man' (p. 273).

Dekker's militant Protestantism is particularly evident in his depiction of the 'fairie' armies. The righteousness of their endeavour is emphasised in the awareness that they are ultimately led by God, the 'Generall of all armies' (p. 269). Answering the call to fight in this true cause has made each man a 'noble spirit' who 'in his face, /Shewes a Kings daunting looke' (p. 267). The ensuing battle is seen in elemental terms, an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil, in which 'the beating of the drum was thunders noise', the clash of opposing armour striking 'fire, /Which shewd like lightning' or like the flames created by the mythical Cyclops when they 'sweate, /To forge *Ioves* thunder' (p. 268). The invading ships are destroyed by a firestorm started by the Fairie forces, which is compared by the Empress's despairing soldiers to the irresistible output of 'Mount Aetna' (p. 271). The battle is won by the Fairie forces and, having lost most of their troops, there is no option for the Empress's few remaining men but to 'hoise sailes vp' and 'flie', staging an ignominious retreat. (p. 272).

### **An alternative solution?**

Despite their seeming thematic unities, these two overtly militantly Protestant plays are characterised by a number of apparent inconsistencies which open up the texts to the possibilities of alternative, even oppositional, constructions. As with the later Elizabethan texts examined in Chapter 3, these texts are multivalent. They may be interpreted as the eulogising of proper rule, with the evocation of the military ‘glories’ of Elizabeth’s reign being used to flatter James’s ideas of his own monarchical self-importance and to show the unbroken continuity of kingship, thus emphasising James’s hereditary entitlement to the throne.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, it is precisely this evocation of Elizabeth that is the site of instability and competing meanings. Both Elizabeth and James were aware of the importance of controlling potential criticism; during her lifetime Elizabeth had exercised a stringent control over representations and images of her, and James likewise forbade the inappropriate public discussion of subjects that he considered infringed his ‘prerogative’ or concerned ‘mysteries of state’.<sup>38</sup> It therefore seems fitting, if ironic, that Heywood and Dekker’s texts may be seen not as praise of James, but as employing the erstwhile forbidden representation of the former monarch to overcome the limits placed upon the criticism of the new.

The co-opting by the Protestant hardliners of the image of the Queen is used here to constitute her as the stereotypical figurehead of English Protestantism, the blank female space on to which their militaristic agenda is being projected. The very revisiting of England’s former military glories may be seen as implying dissatisfaction with the lacklustre present, and show the playwrights as privileging contemporary oppositional Protestantism in the reiteration of past nationalistic achievements. This rhetorical

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<sup>37</sup> Curtis Perry, *The making of Jacobean culture: James I and the renegotiation of Elizabethan literary practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 156.

<sup>38</sup> Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation*, especially pp. 8-9, Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature*, p. 56.

appropriation of Elizabeth is strongly evident in *If you know not me, you know no bodie*, with its emphasis not only upon correct recognition of the Queen, but upon her passivity and abstract spirituality. Forced to languish in prison, she has no control over her own fate, and must helplessly await her release at the hands of others. Her virtues are not those of self-assertion and practical activity, but the womanly ones of willing self-sacrifice and charity. The play is lacking in the overt militaristic fervour of *The Whore of Babylon*, but Heywood may be seen as asserting the Protestant agenda subtextually throughout the play. He is using the depiction of Elizabeth to symbolise the vulnerable state of the early-Jacobean Church of England, as may be seen in the repeated interchangeable images of imprisonment and persecution between the Queen and the Bible. He thus emphasises the need for the supplying of that which is so significantly lacking in the text, for the exertion of a strong recuperative militant masculinity in protection of this threatened female virtue. This supports Leah Marcus's insight that the image of the late queen 'functioned in Stuart England as a symbol for civic and parliamentary opponents of James'.<sup>39</sup> By implication, the present ruler - James - is failing in his duty to protect Protestantism, and it must fall to those who are prepared to undertake this sacred task in his stead to come forward.<sup>40</sup>

*The Whore of Babylon* contains a similar privileging of militant English Protestantism in the re-enactment of the famous English victory over the Spanish Armada in 1588. In this text, however, the jingoistic eulogising of militaristic national strength and unity of purpose in the mustering and battle scenes sits uneasily alongside the description of the corruption and decadence existing in the heart of the kingdom, its capital city. This may also reference the capital as the site of the King's court which was increasingly seen as the locus of corruption and religious recidivism. Plaine-

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<sup>39</sup> Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, p. 128.

<sup>40</sup> It is significant that in the list of Protestant warriors against Papistry in Dekker's *Double PP*, (Sig. D4v.) the monarch is conspicuous by his absence. I am indebted to Dr Paul Quinn for this reference.

dealing shows how the city's inhabitants are materialistic and worldly, 'knaves and fools' (p. 213) who give themselves over to rapacity, sensual indulgence and moral corruption. She describes the place that should be a stronghold of national rectitude and provide a moral focus for the rest of the nation as an 'Ordinarie' (p. 213), a hostelry where all carnal requirements are catered for, from food and drink to - it is implied - gambling and prostitution. The moral sickness at the nation's heart has infected the rest of the 'body-politic', which Dekker compares to a diseased human body in need of a physician. As he says, there is an urgent need for a 'Surgeon', to let out 'the corruption of a State' (p. 214). This language of national moral decay echoes that of George Webbe in *Gods controversie* (1609) exhorting England to mend its ways, since 'this our body politike, is nothing whole within, but wounds, and swellings, and sores full of corruption'.<sup>41</sup>

While Dekker's depiction of the 'sick' kingdom is brief and conveyed in a light-hearted tone, it does create a fundamental rift with the rhetorical thrust of the remainder of the text. I would argue that it is actually intended as an accurate, if brief, description of the nation under James's rule. By contrast, the militaristic glories of the war effort may be seen as the idealistic urging of the need for action and the wished-for outcome of the proper assertion of militant masculine Protestantism. There is a strong implication that the national disease needs to be addressed by a 'Surgeon' outside the existing power structure. The sense on the part of the Protestant establishment of themselves as held at arm's length from the making and administration of national policy, evident in the literature of the late Elizabethan era, is also seen here. Dekker reminds his audience of the mutual trust that should pertain between those 'wise pilots' and 'firmest pillars' who are the monarch's counsellors and the ruler, and 'how it

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<sup>41</sup> Webbe, *Gods controversie with England*, p. 49.

agrees, /When Princes heads sleepe on their counsels knees' (p. 212). Although this is a possible reference to James's reliance upon Robert Cecil as Secretary of State, coming from Dekker it is more likely to be an emphasis upon the rift between the King and the Protestant establishment. It may be seen, too, as a request for James to give a greater role to those who could bring their own experience and Protestant rigour to the solution of national religio-political problems.

The question may also be raised as to why Dekker is choosing to dwell at such length upon the problematic portrayal of Elizabeth as Amazonian war-leader. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, this metaphor was ambiguous, and could be used either to show Elizabeth as a proper military commander, divinely destined to be at the forefront in a time of extreme national emergency despite her sex, or could evoke the troubling idea of a dangerously assertive and ambitious woman who had stepped out of her natural divinely-ordained sphere. John Watkins offers the possibility that Dekker's 'prophecy' of James as the 'second Phoenix' (p. 234) to come showed the new King as the inheritor of Elizabeth's warlike qualities, but able to provide an even more effective martial leadership by virtue of his masculinity.<sup>42</sup> Curtis Perry, however, points to the gap between the militant nationalistic Protestant programme and that of James's 'pacific, diplomatic style' which makes it unlikely that James would have appreciated any depiction clashing with his idea of himself as a *Rex Pacificus*.<sup>43</sup> This evocation of Elizabeth seems to me, therefore, to be part of a programme of careful rhetorical distancing employed by Dekker in the subtle assertion of an alternative solution to the problems experienced by the Protestant establishment. It is significant that he draws on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.<sup>44</sup> The former contains the description of the transformative power of an alternative system of

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<sup>42</sup> Watkins, *Representing Elizabeth in Stuart England*, p. 54.

<sup>43</sup> Perry, *The making of Jacobean culture*, p. 165.

<sup>44</sup> William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, p. 805.

rule in a sylvan space away from the established hierarchy of the court, the latter contains a lengthy representation of the spiritual and moral transformation resulting from the undertaking of a knightly quest.

The rising dissatisfaction with James's pacifism had led many of the Protestant faction to transfer their hopes to his son Henry as the true inheritor of the 'mantle of Elizabethan Protestant imperialism'.<sup>45</sup> Henry himself encouraged this; he maintained a separate court at which he gathered a strongly Protestant circle, professed a love of all things martial, and stated a manifest preference for a Protestant bride rather than the Roman Catholic ones proposed by James. In 1608 Sir Henry Lee, Elizabeth's former champion at tilt, had presented him with a suit of armour, and 'symbolically with the ceremonial mantle of Elizabethan knighthood'.<sup>46</sup> His investiture as Prince of Wales was celebrated with Samuel Daniel's masque *Tethys' Festival* (1610), in which the transfer of Elizabethan military glory is made explicit by the offering of the sword of Astraea to the Prince.<sup>47</sup> Dekker's play was originally staged by the Prince's Men under Henry's aegis, and Julia Gasper sees the ambiguous trial scene as a reference to the Earl of Essex who, despite his abortive rebellion and execution for treason in 1601, had never entirely lost his lustre as the figurehead of English militant Protestantism.<sup>48</sup>

Dekker may therefore be seen as urging the Prince to take up the sacred cause, neglected after Essex's death, and emphasising Henry's central ideological role as the spearhead of Protestant militancy. The depiction of an Amazonian war-leader may be

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<sup>45</sup> Perry, *The making of Jacobean culture*, p. 166.

<sup>46</sup> Perry, *The making of Jacobean culture*, p. 167.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel Daniel, *The order and solemnitie of the creation of the High and mightie Prince Henrie, eldest sonne to our sacred soueraigne, Prince of VVales, Duke of Cornewall, Earle of Chester, &c. whereunto is annexed the royall maske, presented by the Queene and her ladies, on Wednesday at night following* ([London], 1610). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/13161. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99857431, accessed 15.05.10. Cited by Perry in *The making of Jacobean culture*, p. 166. See also Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth*, pp. 187-191.

<sup>48</sup> Gasper, *The Dragon and the Dove*, p. 90. The Essex rebellion had been the subject of a number of plays in the early years of James's reign, among them Daniel's play *Philotas* (1605). See Gasper, *The Dragon and the Dove*, pp. 44-61.

seen as an appropriate metaphorical double for a Prince who had not yet reached man's estate. The urgent need for a committed militant Protestant leader may likewise be inferred from the final scenes of *The Whore of Babylon*. Despite the memorable and providential victory over the Babylonian forces, the foe is not finally overcome. The invading forces retire having suffered great losses, but the strong implication is that they are doing so to regroup under the undiminished sovereignty of their fearful Empress. The hiatus is only temporary and the threat remains. It is this sense of fearful uncertainty that is a particular argument for Dekker's intention being not praise of the reigning monarch but the expression of his hopes, and the hopes of the Protestant establishment, for an alternative religio-political dispensation. He is looking to the 'rising sun' rather than the present ruler, to a Prince under whom the Protestant militant agenda will be privileged, and its adherents allowed their rightful place in the prosecution of the eternal enemy, Papistry, and in the return of the nation to its former military glory.<sup>49</sup>

### **Female embodiment and English Protestant nationalism in *Cymbeline***

The increasing dissatisfaction with James's rule felt by adherents to the nationalistic Protestant cause found an outlet in the debate over the nature of English national identity resulting from the King's favoured project of the unification of his two kingdoms. He himself considered it a 'natural' progression, citing as evidence the geographical unity of the realms within one island.<sup>50</sup> His opponents viewed the proposed union with the 'alien' Scots as 'tantamount to national extinction', reverting

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<sup>49</sup> Susan E. Krantz, 'Thomas Dekker's Political Commentary in *The Whore of Babylon*', in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 35. No. 2, Tudor and Stuart Drama (Spring 1995), p. 277. John Hopkins University Press. <http://jstor.org/stable/451076>, accessed 22.01.08.

<sup>50</sup> James I, 'Speech at the Opening of the English Parliament, 19 March 1604', in *Constitutional Documents of the Reign of James I*, p. 26.

to the trope of the 'motherland' as the originary source of national identity.<sup>51</sup> One anti-union speaker in Parliament urged 'the name of our Mother England to be kept', for '[s]he hath nursed, bred, brought us up to be men able to serve at home for Justice, abroad for Victories'.<sup>52</sup> Although the proposal for union came to nothing, the particularly Protestant slant of this renewed emphasis on the nature of 'Englishness' may be inferred from the reissuing in 1609 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Foxe's *Actes and monuments* in 1610. The notion of the ever-present Papist threat was underlined by the assassination of Henri IV of France in 1610, stabbed by a Roman Catholic fanatic. This led to the parliamentary proclamations of 1610 and 1611 stringently re-implementing the Oath of Allegiance. James meanwhile attempted to broker a peace in a France rendered unstable by the French king's assassination, giving further credence to the idea of him as pro-Papist, and fuelling depictions of 'the corrupt, Catholic-flirting court of James the peace-maker'.<sup>53</sup>

Against this background of increased anxiety about Papist activity, and about the religious affiliations of the monarch himself, Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline* (c.1610) appeared. The contemporary religio-political debate may be seen as informing Shakespeare's use of the 'narrative patterns legitimated by Jewel, Foxe and Spenser' depicting the eternal battle of the true Protestant English church against the threat of heretical Papistry.<sup>54</sup> This militant Protestant standpoint is highlighted by the reversion to the antithetical religious tropes of female embodiment in order to emphasise the fundamental differences between the two religions. The play has been the subject of

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<sup>51</sup> Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, p. 123.

<sup>52</sup> 'House of Commons Journal, Volume I, 23 April 1604' *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 1: 1547-1629* (London, 1802), pp. 182-3. University of London and History of Parliament Trust. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk>, accessed 19.05.10. Cited by McEachern in *The Poetics of English Nationhood*, p. 141.

<sup>53</sup> Simon Shepherd, *Amazons and Warrior Women: Varieties of Feminism in Seventeenth-Century Drama* (Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1981), p. 128.

<sup>54</sup> Donna B. Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), p. 129.

numerous critical readings, but of particular interest to my thesis is that of Donna Hamilton, who examines the text from a politically-influenced theological standpoint, and Alison Thorne's description of the centrality of metaphors of interpretation in the text.<sup>55</sup> I therefore wish to examine how a historicised approach to *Cymbeline* in the light of early-modern English militant Protestant ideology may elicit insights into the gendered nationalistic dimension of the religio-political tensions of the period.

In this evocation of religious female opposition, the imagery of the Book of Revelation is again foregrounded. Innogen, the epitome of womanly moral integrity, possesses an intense spirituality. She is described repeatedly in religious language; as 'holy', a 'heavenly angel' (II.ii.15), and a 'temple of virtue' (V.vi.220-1), lending weight to the interpretation of her as the embodiment of the Protestant religion and the Church of England.<sup>56</sup> This identification is underlined by the awareness that she is the heir to the kingdom, showing her, like Spenser's Una, as the long-established 'native' religion of the realm, and the personification of the inherited purity of the doctrine of the 'primitive' church. Her body is referred to as the 'walls' of her 'dear honour' (II.ii.60); she is a 'lily' 'whiter than the sheets she lies upon' (II.ii.16). This emphasis upon her physical as well as her moral purity is a direct echo of Revelation, where the virtuous bodily intactness of the Bride of Christ is seen as the metonymic model for the moral virtue of the true church. Innogen's chastity is a central trope throughout the text, her bodily and moral integrity the subject of repeated attack. It is significant that, as the epitome of Protestant womanly virtue, Innogen is no unmarried virgin, but a faithful wife whose contained sexuality is solely the preserve of her husband,

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<sup>55</sup> Alison Thorne, "'To write and read / Be henceforth treacherous': *Cymbeline* and the problem of interpretation", in *Shakespeare's Late Plays: New Readings*, eds. Jennifer Richards and James Knowles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 176-190; Hamilton; *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England*, p. 128-162.

<sup>56</sup> William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, p. 2955-3046. All further references are to this edition.

Posthumus.<sup>57</sup> He speaks of her as ‘chaste as unsunned snow’ (II.v.13), a woman immune to the vagaries of carnal lust and firmly in control of her passions.

The centrality of Innogen as the moral focus of the play may be seen in connection with the repeated emphasis upon the importance of reading and interpretation. Leah Marcus demonstrates that this act is presented as problematic throughout the play, fraught with the possibility of misinterpretation and the consequent falling into error.<sup>58</sup> This is a further reference to the fundamental Protestant doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*, which held that the Bible provided the essential source of earthly spiritual guidance. The emphasis upon the correct reading of the Biblical text is implicitly evoked in the depiction of Innogen. Since the central problems of the play arise from the ability – or lack of it – to ‘read’ her correctly, she may therefore be seen as the epitome not only of English Protestantism, in the light of Spenser’s Una, but as the Holy Gospel itself. In the same way as Elizabeth is subtextually identified with the essential truth of God’s Holy Writ by Heywood, Shakespeare is here depicting Innogen as embodying the moral and physical integrity of English Protestantism, based on the identification with the Holy Gospel. Innogen, as a ‘crystalline glass’, therefore both personifies the doctrinal purity of Protestantism and emphasises England’s sacred destiny as the true home of Protestantism.

A reminder of the need for true insight in the deciphering of Holy Writ is the insight of St Augustine concerning the biblical precept that ‘the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life’, where he shows that the subjection of the intellect ‘to the flesh by a blind adherence to the letter’ brings about the ‘death of the soul’.<sup>59</sup> In this context, it is

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Bullinger, *The golde[n] boke of christen matrimonye*, Sig. Aiiiv.

<sup>58</sup> Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, p. 140.

<sup>59</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, Vol. III, Ch. 5, v. 9, trs. D.W. Robertson (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1958); Corinthians II, 2.6, in *The Bible, Authorized King James Version*. Cited by Linda Gregerson in *The reformation of the subject: Spenser, Milton and the English Protestant epic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 58.

significant that the men in the play who demonstrate the basest and most carnal approach to Innogen are characterised by the spiritual blindness identified with Papistry. This Papist threat is double-edged. The external threat is personified by the insidious Giacomo, whose subversive designs upon Innogen's reputation for chastity show him in terms of the sexualised danger of Papistry. Coming from a 'Romish stew' (I.vi.153), he epitomises the carnal falsity of Rome as the sexually depraved home of the Roman Catholic religion. An insinuating and crafty man, Giacomo's subtle schemes to separate Innogen from her true spouse, Posthumus, are worryingly effective. It is he who lures Posthumus into the foolish bet on Innogen's chastity, where the stake is the symbolic diamond ring given by Innogen to her husband in token of their betrothal, its value, clarity and shape all evoking her sexual and moral integrity. Incapable of discerning Innogen's true spiritual worth, Giacomo's estimation of her value is materialistic, as he speaks of his intention to take 'the treasure of her honour' (II.ii.42-3). In his attack upon her virtue he is described as a 'sacreligious thief' (V.vi.220), using the illicitly-gained knowledge of Innogen's physical characteristics and her stolen bracelet to convince Posthumus of his wife's infidelity, effecting a near-fatal breach between the two.

The Papist threat within the kingdom is personified by the Queen's foolish son, Cloten. Worldly and fleshly-minded, his speech is crude and uncivilised; he swears and uses oaths and sexualised language. His alignment with the false religion is underlined by Innogen's apostrophising of him as 'a profane fellow' (II.iii.119). The descriptions of him as a 'Toad, or Adder, or Spider' (II.ii.90) evokes the construction of Papists as the spreaders of poisonous heresy seen in Dekker's description of a Papist spy in *The Double PP*.<sup>60</sup> He is spoken of in the terms of bodily filth and decay conventionally

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<sup>60</sup> Dekker, *The Double PP*, Sig. C3r.

employed for the abuses of Papistry, as ‘reeking’, smelling ‘like a fool’ (II.i.15), and as a ‘foul expulsion’ (II.ii.57).<sup>61</sup> This language also evokes the tenets of early modern medicine, where ‘putrid exhalations’ were thought to spread disease, providing a metaphorical link to the ‘infection’ of Papist heresy.<sup>62</sup>

Attracted by Innogen’s beauty but unable to discern her true nature, Cloten’s efforts are directed towards the sexual possession of her body. He hatches repeated blundering schemes against her chastity, speaking of her as a marketable commodity who ‘outsells’ those around her (III.v.74). As such, I see Cloten as representing those native-born English Roman Catholics who evoked the anxieties underpinning the repeated applications of the Oath of Allegiance Act. Foolish and short-sighted, spiritually blinded by their allegiance to the materialistic lures of their idolatrous religion, they were nonetheless seen as treacherous and as posing a serious danger to the wellbeing and stability of the English commonwealth and of the English Church.

This deceit and treachery is evident in Cloten’s unnaturally close relationship with his mother, the Queen, as they work together, undermining Cymbeline’s authority, scheming to undo Innogen and to usurp the throne. The ruthless and ambitious Queen may be seen as an avatar of the Whore of Babylon, the epitome of Papist evil. She has no love for her husband Cymbeline, having married him solely in order to gain worldly status, wealth and power. A domineering, scheming and unfeminine woman, ‘hourly coining plots’ (II.i.56) she ‘bears all down with her brain’ (II.i.51). Rather than being the source of motherly nurture, she is a disruptive and unnatural ‘stepdame false’ (I.vi.i) to her stepdaughter Innogen, scheming to usurp power and place Cloten on the throne instead. A ‘crafty devil’, full of ‘malice’ (II.i.49), she hypocritically hides her ill-will towards Innogen behind a mask of feigned maternal devotion while plotting her

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<sup>61</sup> Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England*, p. 144.

<sup>62</sup> Healy, *Fictions of Disease in Early Modern England*, Chapter 1.

murder. In this attempt, she employs ‘strange lingering poisons’ (I.v.34), whose ‘noisome and infectious’ (I.v.26) effects may be construed in terms of the Protestant construction of the deadly poison of heretical Papist doctrine. The costly and richly-decorated box in which the poison is hidden may also be interpreted as a paradigm for the luxurious but deadly golden ‘cup of abominations’ from Revelation carried by the Whore with its intoxicating but lethal contents, serving to highlight the subtextual construction of the connection between the Queen and Papistry.

### **Inadequate rule and masculine identity**

The presence of this monstrous female ensconced at the centre of the court underlines the disruption and instability characterising both it and the realm. This is caused by the inadequacies of the eponymous King Cymbeline as patriarchal ruler. His lack of proper care for his family is paralleled by his lack of kingly authority over his kingdom. The long-ago unjust banishment of his staunchest supporter, the manly warrior Belarius, has entailed the loss of his two sons and heirs, taken into exile by the estranged henchman and thought by Cymbeline to be dead. Blinded by the Queen’s physical attractions, he has been seduced into marrying her, and as a consequence has neglected his daughter Innogen and banished her husband Posthumus on his wife’s deceitful representations. As Maurice Hunt points out, Cymbeline’s mistake ‘involves letting destructive passions, represented by the Queen, overturn his male royal reason, with the result that the kingdom wants the effective functioning of its ordained head’.<sup>63</sup> This abrogation of masculine reason shows him both as unmanly and a tyrannical ruler.

Instead of being a source of strong government and national stability, the court has therefore become the site of inversion, a place of plots and deception, presided over by

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<sup>63</sup> Maurice Hunt, ‘Dismemberment, Corporal Reconstitution, and the Body Politic in “Cymbeline”’, in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 99, No. 4 (Autumn, 2002), p. 411. University of North Carolina Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4174741>, accessed 16.05.10.

a domineering woman. This lack of strong central masculine control has also rendered the nation vulnerable; it is significant that it is the Queen who takes it upon herself to refuse the wonted tribute to Rome, bringing the might of the Roman army down upon the hapless kingdom. Moreover, the realm is not the protected 'fortress' described by the Queen, 'ribbed and paled in/With banks unscaleable and roaring waters' (III.i.19-20). In its disordered state, the unstable and effeminised realm has been rendered vulnerable like a woman's body, open to penetration and rape, as evidenced by the easy access through the port of Milford Haven gained by the invading Roman forces.

The nation's vulnerability is echoed by that of Innogen. Beset by Cloten's unceasing attempts upon her virtue, she is forced to flee the court disguised as a boy in search of her banished husband and protector, Posthumus. Adopting the appropriate name of Fidele, evading the death ordained for her by Posthumus through the pity of his manservant, she finds shelter with Belarius and his two adopted sons. Nonetheless, the danger has pursued her and she mistakenly swallows the draught that plunges her into a death-like sleep. On waking, she finds herself next to a headless corpse that she takes for that of her husband, and is plunged into grief and despair, speaking of herself as 'nothing' without her 'master' (IV.ii.369, 370). This misrecognition on her part may be seen as an example of Calvin's formulation of the church in error, temporarily ignorant of that which is yet to be revealed through God's grace.<sup>64</sup> Innogen's trials may likewise be seen in the light of the Woman Clothed With the Sun from Revelation in her flight into the wilderness.

The 'unkinged' nation and Innogen in her vulnerable state are therefore both seen as in dire need of safeguarding. Shakespeare shows that this must be done through the exertion of proper masculine militant patriotism, acting to restore social order and

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<sup>64</sup> John Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion*, trs. Thomas Norton. (London, 1578), Book 4, Chapter 1, p. 428. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/4418. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, ebo citation: 99842947, accessed 04.04.08. See Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England*, p. 146.

national stability. This path towards the re-establishment of national 'wholeness' is shown in terms of the search for masculine identity, both being achieved through the exertion of martial effort. That this is exerted in relation to a feminised 'other' foregrounds Innogen's symbolic centrality and highlights her position as the source of national integrity and spiritual inspiration. This is emphasised through the chivalric protection Innogen invokes from men of honour who respond to her isolated and endangered condition even though not yet able to recognise her. Belarius and his 'adopted sons' Guiderius and Arviragus, are the first to give her shelter, responding instinctively to her true nature and treating her as an honoured guest. Their care is followed by that of Lucius, the manly and chivalrous Roman general, who befriends her and takes her into his retinue, promising her that he will 'rather father thee than master thee' (IV.iii.397).

Belarius and his 'sons' are shown as the epitome of manly prowess, the boys yearning for the chance to prove their valour. Aware of their 'uncivilised' state, without formal education, Guiderius and Arviragus are nonetheless possessed of innate integrity, piety and masculine virtue inculcated by their closeness to nature, and through their distancing from the moral depravities of the court. The disenfranchised situation of the three has led to the interpretation of them as loyal English Roman Catholics, forced into the margins of society through their inability to swear to the Oath of Allegiance, but I would argue that Shakespeare is in fact depicting the opposite here.<sup>65</sup> Their forced alienation from the centre of national life shows them as the epitome of Protestant English manhood, the protectors of the True Faith, who have been distanced from the corrupt Papist-influenced centre of power. It is significant that it is Guiderius who kills Cloten, bringing to an end the Queen's schemes for usurping

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<sup>65</sup> Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England*, p. 157.

rule, leading to her death and freeing the nation from this female succubus. The status of the trio as destined protectors of the threatened realm, providing the necessary martial strength in times of national extremity, is emphasised by their heroism in withstanding the Roman forces, as they instigate a turning point in the battle by their awe-inspiring valour in the symbolic ‘narrow lane’ (V.v.52).

It is in Posthumus that we are shown the clearest depiction of Protestant English manhood struggling through into self-realisation in the acquisition and assertion of masculine martial virtue. Leah Marcus describes Posthumus as representing the ‘Post Nati’, those Scotsmen born after James had ascended the English throne who were ‘deprived of any recourse at law’ in England.<sup>66</sup> However, I argue that the careful construction of the mutuality of the connection between him and Innogen shows him as a type of Spenser’s Redcrosse Knight, the Christian soldier engaged in a sacred spiritual journey of self-discovery that will culminate in the reunion with his destined spouse. Like the Redcrosse Knight, Posthumus is repeatedly brought low by his succumbing to worldly temptation and carnal influences, but enabled at last through suffering, amendment and God’s grace to assume his destined role as the protector and guardian of the English nation and the true Protestant English Church.

Like Belarius, Arviragus and Guiderius, Posthumus exists in a socially liminal position. Although of undoubtedly patriotic warrior stock – the apt family surname Leonatus was granted to his heroic father, and his two brothers died fighting for their country - he has no living family and no worldly wealth. His solitary state serves to foreground his essential virtue, and privilege his link to Innogen, where the mutuality enjoyed by the pair shows them in the reciprocity of the ideal Protestant marriage. Their love for each other is shown to be based on a true spiritual understanding, one

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<sup>66</sup> Marcus, *Puzzling Shakespeare*, p. 124.

encomiast saying of the pair, '[b]y her election may be truly read / What kind of man he is' (I.i.53-54). Like his wife, Posthumus's moral rectitude is self-evident and unequalled; an admiring courtier doubts that '[s]o fair an outward and such stuff within / Endows a man but he' (I.i.19-24). This balance of inward virtue, proper conduct and external manliness shows Posthumus as the epitome of early-modern masculine *virtus*, the evocation of the ideals of classical Roman manhood – proper humanistic education, correct moral principles and self-discipline - through which a man would be schooled to take his place in public life.

Despite his innate virtue, his banishment from Innogen and his homeland causes Posthumus to fall further and further away from his true self. Through a series of misreadings and failures in understanding, he falls prey to temptation and sin and, surrounded by the carnal enticements of Rome, he enters into the foolish bet with Giacomo. The short-sighted treating of such a sacrosanct subject as Innogen's chastity as a matter suitable for a game of chance undermines the basis of their relationship and shows him as corrupted by the worldly environs of Rome and, by implication, by the unmanly lures of Papistry. This initial lack of insight is the forerunner to the descent into further sin. Rendered irrational by his exile from the spiritual light of his wife, morally poisoned by the infectious immorality of 'drug-damned Italy' (III.iv.15), he believes Giacomo's false assurance of Innogen's infidelity and, blinded by jealous anger, he orders her death.

However, upon his return to his native soil, Posthumus's moral recuperation begins, and he starts to regain his true masculine identity.<sup>67</sup> This renewal of spiritual insight through the reconnection with his native country shows it as his motherland, from which he derives both his social and cultural identity and his destined role as national

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<sup>67</sup> Jodi Mikalachki, 'The Masculine Romance of Roman Britain: Cymbeline and Early Modern English Nationalism', in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995), p. 315. Johns Hopkins University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2871120>, accessed 16.05.10.

protector, and highlights England as the home of the true Protestant religion. Posthumus is now enabled to realise the depth of his error and, driven by regret, he vows to readopt native dress, take up arms in defence of his homeland, and fight the invaders. In battle he performs remarkable feats of bravery, helping to turn the tide of battle in his country's favour. As with Spenser's Redcrosse, his remorse suffered while he lies in prison leads him to the depths of spiritual despair, as he realises the full extent of his unworthiness. As with Redcrosse, it is the reaching of this nadir that marks his readiness for the final stage of his moral recuperation.

The manner of Posthumus's final transformation is significant; brought about through a dream vision, in which the spirits of his family appear to plead his cause to almighty Jupiter, praying that his sufferings may be brought to an end. This reconnection with his familial roots is shown by Jupiter's recognition of him, restoring him to his place in society, and by the prophetic tablet that confirms his destined role as Innogen's husband and protector. Despite this, however, his journey is not yet over. Although reunited with his beloved, he is still unable to recognise her through her boy's clothing since he believes her to be dead. It is she who must reveal herself to him and reassert his masculine superiority to her in the hierarchy of Protestant marriage. She reinforces their relative positions and the nature of their union as protector and protected, as she hangs about his neck, and calls him her 'lord' (V.vi.263). This is the final stage of his recuperation, where Innogen's revelation of herself may be seen in terms of the Calvinist tenet of the revelation of God's grace that is the true instrument of salvation.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> For more on the importance of divine grace in providing spiritual enlightenment, see White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic*, p. 20.

### **Stability restored or kingship questioned?**

However, despite this seemingly straightforward reunification of the sundered spouses, and the restitution of the proper hierarchical order, the depictions of masculine identity and origins in the final act are themselves subject to multifaceted and apparently contradictory constructions that serve, in their turn, to radically interrogate the sources and origins of authority for proper rule. The reassertion of patriarchal bonds and symbolic masculine ascendancy pointed to by Janet Adelman is indeed central to the rhetorical thrust of the final act.<sup>69</sup> However, I would argue that the dynamic is not generalised male psychological anxiety, as Adelman argues, but the unease about the religio-political situation pertaining in early Jacobean England. The worrying power represented by the Queen may indeed be maternal, but it is that of the ‘old religion’, the unnatural motherhood of the Whore of Babylon who represents death to all who suckle from her. Against this threat Protestant female purity and chastity are strenuously asserted in the person of Innogen, who is made to bear the constructions both of national integrity and religious doctrinal purity in an apotropaeic countermanding of the danger. It is in this problematic context that the examinations of national and individual masculine identity and the origins and sources of authority and dominion are seen.

The true significance lies therefore not in the harmonious and uncontested re-establishment of patriarchal rule, but in the differing and contested evocations of the sources of masculine identity. The idea of ‘Romanness’ is a particularly fraught construct, containing as it does both the insidious, deceitful and unmanly Giacomo and the manly and upright Lucius. However, Giacomo may be seen as the representative of early-modern Rome, the decadent and morally infectious source of Papist doctrine, an

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<sup>69</sup> Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 218.

undermining threat to the national integrity and stability of England and her Protestant Church. By contrast, Lucius is the embodiment of the historical Roman Empire as the originary source of Renaissance humanism, the fount of the ideals and precepts of civility and *virtus* that constituted proper masculine identity. Lucius's behaviour is a pattern of true manliness, from his discretion as an ambassador, to his prowess in war, to his merciful care for the necessitous Innogen. Cymbeline himself acknowledges the debt of masculine 'honour' (III.ii.68) he owes to Rome, having been knighted by the Emperor Octavian during his residence there as a young man.

Another important aspect of the references to classical Rome, in particular the Rome of Augustus contemporaneous with the historical Cymbeline, is as the era of the *Pax Romana*, the widespread stable rule that provided the necessary precondition for the birth of Christ and the spread of Christianity. This understanding may be read in the paternal relationship between Lucius and Innogen, emphasising the point of origin for the national religion. As the early-modern historian John Stowe has it, '[w]hen Cesar Augustus the seconde Emperoure, by the will of GOD hadde stablished moste sure peace throughe the Worlde, our redeemer Iesu Christe, verye God and man, was borne'.<sup>70</sup> This seemingly anachronistic construction has been seen as a flattering reflection of James's self-construction as a Roman Emperor, but it may also be seen as an emphasis upon the unbroken ideological continuity with the 'primitive church' claimed by post-Reformation English Protestants, and of Protestantism as the true original faith and Roman Catholicism a later, decadent, offshoot. This evocation of origins is also shown in the use of the name 'Britain' for the nation, rather than England. A possible reference to James's styling of himself as a second Brutus, the mythical founder of Britain, in his project to unite the kingdoms, it may also be

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<sup>70</sup> John Stowe, *The chronicles of England from Brute vnto this present year of Christe, 1580* (London, 1580), p. 35. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/23333. Folger Shakespeare Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99852802, accessed 22.02.08.

construed as a reference to Brutus as the companion of Aeneas and fellow exile from Troy, providing a contemporaneous national founding myth for England with that of Rome.

Moreover, despite the careful detailing of the restoration of Cymbeline's family and the futurity of the throne, there remains a fundamental questioning of his kingship. Although he has taken no part in the battle against the invaders, Cymbeline presides over the final events in the play, dispensing justice and forgiveness. There is however no evidence that the moral blindness that has overshadowed his dealings with Belarius, Innogen and his Queen has been conquered. He expresses regret over his mistaken infatuation with the Queen, but we do not see evidence that he has undergone a moral transformation. While this may serve to show the office of anointed kingship as infallible, it sits uneasily with the memory of his parental and monarchical abilities. Cymbeline claims, in an echo of James's idea of himself as a 'nourish-father', to be the 'mother' (V.vi.370) to the 'rebirth' of his children, but he has had no part in their restoration. His fatherhood has instead been characterised by disruption and discontinuity. This argues a lack of self-knowledge rather than kingly insight, and raises uncomfortable questions as to the future of his rule.

Against Cymbeline's inadequate *virtus* is set the proper masculinity demonstrated by those who are linked to the native soil and to Innogen. Those who exert their masculine prowess and virtue in defence of her or the realm are distanced from the court, acting despite or because of the behaviour of the king, not in unison with him. True patriotic manhood is that displayed by Belarius, Guiderius and Arviragus and, above all, Posthumus. It comes not from kingly birth, but from proper education and values, and above all the love of the true religion and one's country. That the source of national and masculine identity does not originate in the court or with the king is

emphasised by the *deus ex machina* depiction of Jupiter, descending on an eagle. It is he who gives Posthumus the prophetic tablet bearing the prognostications for the nation's future, and he who recognises Posthumus and restores his social identity.

I argue that this portrayal of Jupiter is no flattering representation of James as the King of the Gods, but is instead another manifestation of the operation of divine grace providing spiritual illumination as the only means of salvation. It emphasises Posthumus's importance as the epitome of militant English Protestant manhood and Innogen's protector. The centrality of the pair to future national stability and prosperity may be seen from the oracle, which speaks of their union as a prerequisite for the realm to 'be fortunate and flourish / in peace and plenty' (V.vi.441-442). The accord achieved between Rome and Britain in the closing scene shows the inter-relationship of the classical Roman cultural ideals and 'British' religious and national integrity. However, as we see from Innogen's gentle leaving of Lucius's protection and entering into that of Posthumus, the moral focus for the nation's posterity does not lie in the old Roman ideals, but in the truth of the Protestant religion. The two influences are blended in the making of the English national identity, but the future of the realm lies with the true church safely established in a nation where it will be loved and protected.

The emphasis placed upon the exertion of masculine martial prowess in the protection of the national religion shows Shakespeare's awareness of the need for it in contemporary Jacobean England. The kingly inadequacy of Cymbeline is, it may be argued, a parallel for James's own perceived failures of kingship. The suggestion of an alternative may be seen in Guiderius's killing of Cloten, with the result being interpreted as the freeing of the nation from the baleful court-centred influence of Papistry. This may show Prince Henry once more as the true hope for the future of the nation and its religion. It is also arguable that the character of the Queen may be

construed in the light of Queen Anne's alignment with Papistry, and that of Innogen as Princess Elizabeth, a firm adherent to Protestantism. Even in the frequent references to Milford Haven, the Welsh port through which James's ancestor Henry VII came to claim his throne, we may see something more than a flattering reference to the Tudor and Stuart lineage. As with the historical setting of the play, the remote geographical setting of the true scenes of individual and national transformation and salvation away from the court may be both a reproach and a subtle warning to the monarch. The future wellbeing of the realm does not lie with the inhabitants of the court, but in those currently kept outside the circle of power, but who possess the true manly qualities and adherence to the True Faith necessary to ensure a peaceful and prosperous national future.

These three texts bear a common theme of the Protestant religion and national stability under threat from malign 'Papistry', where the inability or unwillingness of the present ruler to adequately protect the nation and its national religious destiny from the inroads of the false religion may be inferred. Heywood's *If you know not me you know no bodie*, and Dekker's *The Whore of Babylon*, with their seemingly anachronistic harking back to the previous reign of Elizabeth may be seen as actually implying disenchantment with the current ruler. By contrast, Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, with its rhetorically-distanced depiction of kingly inadequacies apparent in the text, nonetheless invites the interpretation of a similar problem in the current religio-political situation. I see all three of these texts therefore as manifestations of the anxiety of the militant Protestant faction to show the king, through tangential means, his failure to carry out his monarchical responsibilities as Head of the English Church. Despite James's idea

of himself as a godly king, the increasing perception of him as an improper ruler on the part of a growing number of his subjects was to be exacerbated by the events of the later years of his reign, where the Howard scandal in the middle of the next decade would be the precursor to the corruption of the Buckingham years and the widely unpopular project of the Spanish Match.

## Chapter Five

### **James's later reign: witchcraft, corruption, Papistry**

In the latter part of James's reign, the King's policies continued to be a focus of grievance on the part of the militant Protestant faction. This was linked to the unhappiness with James's perceived lack of personal moral integrity, his spendthrift indulgence of male favourites not only creating the suspicion of sodomitical practises, but lending weight to the dissatisfaction with the culture of 'political corruption in which everything was perceived to be for sale at the English court'.<sup>1</sup> James's repeated attempts, following Henry's untimely death, to marry his son Charles to the Spanish Infanta, and his permitting of the establishment of a power base at court by Northampton and other members of the proto-Papist Howard clan, were seen by many as evidence of his toleration, or even encouragement, of Papistry. The involvement of Frances Howard in the scandal that broke in the second decade of his reign was therefore seized upon by the opponents of the Howards as a propaganda opportunity, the scandal being portrayed in the terms of contemporary anxieties about the Papist threat, linked to witchcraft, female promiscuity and murder.<sup>2</sup> Frances, at the time Countess of Essex, wished to divorce her husband and marry the King's current favourite, Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset. The divorce hearing included allegations of impotence against Essex, and counter-allegations of witchcraft against Frances herself. James became involved, acting to ensure the granting of the divorce and presiding over the hasty remarriage of Frances to Carr that was marked by lavish court festivities.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 11. For more on the suspicion of James as a 'sodomite' see Peck, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the 'factional' involvement in the scandal, see David Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> Alastair Bellany, *The Politics of Court Scandal in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 47.

Matters did not end there. Shortly thereafter the new Countess of Somerset was accused of murder, implicated in the death of Somerset's friend, Sir Thomas Overbury. Overbury had been opposed to the marriage, and had spoken of Frances openly as a wicked and ambitious woman. His suspicious death soon after his imprisonment in the Tower on trumped-up charges, seemingly with James's collusion, was laid at Frances's door.<sup>4</sup> At their trial, Howard and her friend Anne Turner, who was also implicated, were the target of sustained demonization couched in terms of the unwomanly lust and sexual promiscuity that were seen as natural concomitants of their adherence to the 'demonic' anti-religion, Papistry. Turner was shown as a lustful widow and a practitioner of witchcraft who had consulted the astrologer Simon Forman in order to obtain charms to lure men into her bed. Also suspected of obtaining the poison used to kill Overbury, she was described by Lord Chief Justice Coke as the epitome of 'the seven deadly sins: viz. a whore, bawd, a sorcerer, a witch, a papist, felon, and a murderer, the daughter of the devil Forman'.<sup>5</sup> Frances Howard's family connections were used to underpin the construction of her not simply as a sexually promiscuous, dangerous and ambitious woman, but as a type of the Whore of Babylon, whose ascribed infection with syphilis was linked to the dissemination of the infectious 'burning' of Papist heresy.<sup>6</sup>

The trial occasioned a great number of pamphlets and other literary efforts in which the perceived promiscuity and witchcraft of the women were linked to their alignment

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<sup>4</sup> Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard*, pp. 146-147.

<sup>5</sup> T.B. Howell, ed., *Cobbett's Complete Collection of State Trials, Vol. II* (London: R. Bagshaw, 1809), p. 935. <http://www.archive.org/details/cobbettscomplet00howegoog/>, accessed 11.06.10. Cited by Alastair Bellany in 'Mistress Turner's Deadly Sins: Sartorial Transgression, Court Scandal and Politics in Early Stuart England', in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (1995), p. 185. University of California Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3817820>, accessed 30.09.08.

<sup>6</sup> See Kevin P. Siena, 'Pollution, Promiscuity and the Pox: English Venereology and the Early Modern Medical Discourse on Social and Sexual Danger', in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Apr., 1998), pp. 553-574. University of Texas Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3840410>, accessed 11.06.10.

with Papistry.<sup>7</sup> Amongst these texts was Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*.<sup>8</sup> Although the date of its first production is not known, from textual evidence I would argue for a composition date of 1615-16, based on apparent references to aspects not only of the divorce case from 1613, but also to the subsequent trial for murder. While little critical commentary on the play exists, those critics who have considered it are in general accord in viewing it as dealing with aspects of the Howard case, containing as it does depictions of marital discord, 'disjoined wedlock' (I.ii.172), and the ready resort to witchcraft on the part of courtiers to achieve their ends.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, while there is no one character who could be said to represent Frances Howard or Anne Turner, the Duchess, Florida and Francisca between them exhibit the greed, ambition, lust and ruthlessness attributed to the real-life women. It would seem that Middleton is not setting out to give a journalistic rendering of recent events. He is instead using the anxieties provoked by the two court cases, centering as they did upon female sexual laxity, deceit and evil, linked to the abuses of Papistry at the centre of power, as paradigms for the moral corruption and religious apostasy characterising the Jacobean court milieu. I see the rhetorical distancing necessitated by contemporary censorship and politic expediency as underlying the seeming inconsistency in the depictions of governance, with both the Duke and the Governor representing differing aspects of rule, both desirable masculine strength and self-control, and undesirable tyranny and weakness. Thus no one character bears any overt correspondence to any of

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<sup>7</sup> Women were often seen as particularly prone to the infection with, and dissemination of, Papist heresy. See Arthur F. Marotti, *Religious Ideology and Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early-Modern England* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), esp. Ch 2.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, in *Three Jacobean witchcraft plays*, ed. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 'Epistle', lines 6-7. All further references are to this edition. A. A. Bromham, 'The Date of *The Witch* and the Essex divorce case', in *Notes and Queries*, Vol. 27, April 1980, pp. 149-152. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oxfordjournals.org/doi/10.1093/nq/27.2.149>, accessed 30.09.08. See also Anne Lancashire, 'The Witch: Stage Flop or Political Mistake?' in 'Accompanying the players', *Essays celebrating Thomas Middleton, 1580-1980*, ed. Keith Friedenreich (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1983).

<sup>9</sup> Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard*, p. 97.

the real-life participants in the recent events, but readily identifiable traits of personality are spread between the characters, allowing the reader or spectator to form their own conclusions.

Although the play is named *The Witch* perhaps partly as an evocation of the contemporary fascination with, and anxieties about, witchcraft, it is left unclear as to which woman exactly is intended as the eponymous female practitioner of evil. This might equally be the leader of the coven, Hecate or, metaphorically, one of the depraved female characters from the court. Middleton does give us lengthy descriptions of the behaviour of the coven, using contemporary stereotypes of witchcraft ritual seemingly culled almost verbatim from Reginald Scot's *The discoverie of witchcraft*.<sup>10</sup> However, the very utilisation of this latter text, characterized as it is by an all-pervasive scepticism on the subject, must put into question any intrinsic sincerity of belief in the efficacy of magic on Middleton's part. It is more probable that his true intention is the highlighting of the court as the site of threatening and dangerous female aberrance characterised by the 'witchcraft' of Papistry.<sup>11</sup> What is notable in the play is the inter-relationship of the locations, where the action moves continually between the two milieus. Despite the critical insistence upon the similarity of the witchcraft scenes in this play to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, I would argue that these witches do not originate from another supernatural or hellish dimension, but are an almost routine part of everyday life.<sup>12</sup> While the witches' den is seen as a place of female inversion and ritual, the matter-of-fact recourse to it by characters from the court seeking a solution to

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<sup>10</sup> Reginald Scot, *The discoverie of witchcraft* (London, 1584). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/21864. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99852103, accessed 21.06.10. See also Gareth Roberts, 'A re-examination of the sources of the magical material in Middleton's "The Witch"', in *Notes and Queries*, Vol. 23, May-June 1976, pp. 219-272. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oxfordjournals.org/doi:10.1093/nq/23.5-6.221>, accessed 30.09.08.

<sup>11</sup> See Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, p. 142.

<sup>12</sup> Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, p. 2555. For more on the apparent links between the two plays, see 'Introduction' to *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays*, p. 13.

their marital and sexual problems emphasizes the reciprocal nature of the two sites of activity.

This is not to imply, however, that the witches are not intended to depict moral depravity and evil. Their fearful behaviour is shown in detail. Hecate, the chief witch, gloatingly relates how she slakes her lust upon foolish and inexperienced men, seducing them in the guise of an 'incubus' (I.ii.31), and regularly commits incest with her son Firestone (See Act I, Scene II). Human body parts from a dead unbaptised infant and a murdered 'red-haired wench' (V.ii.55) are used to ensure the efficacy of spells. The witches hold wild Sabbath-like feasts, keep familiars, and fly through the air, in keeping with the ideas of popular demonology.<sup>13</sup> I would argue, however, that this is something more than sensationalist recitation of the details of *maleficium*. A closer examination of the activities of the witches shows them instead in the light of Papist ritual. As I have previously shown in Chapter Three, the construction of the Roman Catholic Church in terms of witchcraft was a popular commonplace in early modern English culture. As Nathan Johnstone demonstrates, the pervasive contemporary belief in demonism and the habit of binary thinking led to the linking of these two seemingly disparate focuses of anxiety so that they became 'fused into a single diabolic threat to society'.<sup>14</sup> The rituals of the church, above all that of the Mass, were seen as 'juggling', the indulgence in deceptive, dangerous, trickery to entice ignorant people, a connection articulated in the play by the foolish Almachildes when he speaks scathingly of the witches as 'tumblers, ... very flat tumblers' (I.ii.195). The charm which the witches give Almachildes also evokes the relics upon which Papists were held to place so much reliance, possessing the ability to deprive the hapless possessor of the power of rational thought (Act II, Scene II). The use by Hecate of a waxen

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<sup>13</sup> Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, esp. Chapter 2.

<sup>14</sup> Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 28. See also Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pp. 332-334.

image to attempt to bring about the death of the Duchess's husband also evokes the reliance of Papists upon 'mommets', objects of idolatry which alienated the worshipper from the Deity. Equally, her obscure incantations evoke the Latin Mass (Act V, Scene 1), another source of deceptive 'witchcraft' that lured the hapless idolater deeper into the meshes of this fatal anti-religion.

This is the evocation of Papistry in terms of wanton female sexuality, the Roman Catholic Church as 'The Whore of Babylon' and the Roman Catholic Mass cast as 'Mistress Missa', a seductive woman luring unwary men to spiritual death through her intoxicating witchcraft. Hecate describes her most effective love spell as being disseminated through 'cup and potion' (I.ii.205), a parallel of the befuddling effects of the Whore of Babylon's 'cup of fornication', in the conventional conflation of the sensual indulgence of carnality and the entrapment by the intoxicating witchcraft of heretical Papist ritual.<sup>15</sup> Dark inversions of the communion service are seen in the banquet Hecate offers Almachildes, and in the feeding of her familiars by Hecate with *semina cum sanguine*, 'barley soaked in infant's blood' (V.ii.43, 42), the life-bearing seed counteracted by the blood that signifies mortality. This last demonstrates her, like the Whore of Babylon, as an unnatural and deadly mother.

The sexual promiscuity permeating the play is underlined by the repeated sly allusions to syphilis in the text. The reference to the sweating tub (I.ii.102) shows Hecate's incestuous son, the aptly-named Firestone, to be infected with the dread disease, as are the farmer and his wife whom Hecate has bewitched, 'a-roasting' (I.ii.51), infected with the 'burning' that characterized syphilis.<sup>16</sup> As with other contemporary texts dealing with the dangers of Papistry, there is a conflation of the fatality inherent in the syphilis contracted from intercourse with promiscuous women

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Waters, *Duessa as Theological Satire*, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup> Johannes Fabricius, *Syphilis in Shakespeare's England* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 1994), p. 263.

with the deadly and contagious effects of the heretical doctrine of that fearful 'anti-religion' that entailed eternal damnation. Indeed, Firestone speaks of the witches' coven as spreading 'mortality', and as 'able to putrefy it, to infect a whole region' (III.iii.16-17), a reference to the increasing use of the metaphor of syphilitic infection as a paradigm not only for infectious Papist dogma, but also for political and societal corruption.<sup>17</sup>

The moral and ideological nature of this infection - as well as the physical - may be seen in its effects upon the court, which is riddled with immorality and corruption. The majority of the inhabitants display some degree of moral failing and inconsistency, from the Governor downwards. His arbitrary insistence upon Isabella's breaking her betrothal to Sebastian and marrying Antonio shows him as lacking both in honour and in patriarchal care for his niece. Antonio himself is innately duplicitous, lying to Isabella to trick her into marrying him and intending to keep his mistress after his marriage. Even Sebastian falls prey to temptation. The erstwhile upright soldier, learning of Isabella's marriage on his return, is infected by the moral contagion prevalent in the court. He descends to consulting the witches to obtain a charm to bring about impotence and ensure that the marriage will not be consummated, in an echo of the circumstances of the Howard scandal.

While the masculine moral degeneracy within the court is readily apparent, it is female promiscuity and deceit that are its chief characteristics. Antonio's young sister Francisca is pregnant as the result of a lust-fuelled casual liaison, prepared to go to extreme lengths - including blackmail - to conceal her condition. The syphilitic courtesan Florida is a seasoned whore, a deceitful 'piece of transformation' (II.i.23) who has 'one and twenty inmates' (I.i.70). As Sebastian warns, reiterating her diseased

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<sup>17</sup> Fabricius, *Syphilis in Shakespeare's England*, p. 155.

condition, 'if she but take you at the door ... once ... it burns mainly' (IV.ii.45). Likewise, he reminds us that 'hell and a whore it seems are partners then /In one ambition' (IV.ii.54-5), an emphasis upon the link between the indulgence in fornication with diseased women and spiritual damnation. The connection between promiscuous female sexuality and Papistry is subtextually emphasised by the portrayal of the Duchess, the woman with the highest social status, who exhibits the deepest female villainy. Prepared to resort to witchcraft and murder to achieve her ambitions, she attempts to lure Almachildes into killing the Duke by both blackmail and the promise of marriage. Having suborned him, she then intends to murder Almachildes and marry the Governor, showing how 'my guiltiness had need of such a master /That with a beck can suppress multitudes /And dim misdeeds with radiance of his glory' (IV.i.49-51). This may be seen as a reference to the behaviour of Frances Howard and her suspected involvement in witchcraft, adultery and murder in order to facilitate her divorce and remarriage, and a possible reflection on James's inappropriate subsequent pardoning of Frances.<sup>18</sup>

These female evil-doers are opposed by the sole figure of Isabella, the archetype of female marital virtue. Despite her reluctance to marry Antonio, she undertakes the duties of a wife conscientiously, praising the institution of marriage. She speaks of Florida, her husband's long-term mistress, as a 'creature that robs wedlock of all comfort' (V.iii.3-4) and rebukes and attempts to bring the pregnant Francisca to repentance. She freely forgives her husband his past sins against her when she learns of his death – poisoned by a servant in another possible echo of the Overbury case (V.i.47). Sebastian speaks of his love for her as 'religion' (IV.ii.96), and exalts her chaste purity, her 'spotless sanctity' (V.iii.21), showing her as a moral compass in the

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<sup>18</sup> Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard*, p. 185.

midst of institutionalised corruption. Isabella's spirituality is also shown in her ability to inspire Sebastian back on to the path of righteousness after his transgression, marking her as the personification of female Protestant virtue.

Nonetheless, Isabella's virtue is unavailing against the endemic corruption of the court. This is, I argue, epitomised by the too-free forgiveness of the Duchess by the Duke. It is possible to construe this action as a gesture of mercy, a fundamental attribute of a good ruler. However, given the gravity of the Duchess's offence, the deadly plot against his life, this action by the Duke is more plausibly interpreted as a moral failing, the inappropriate indulgence of a fundamental transgression of the sacred bond both between husband and wife and ruler and subject. As such, it is more reminiscent of James's abuse of his power in the pardoning of Frances Howard and Somerset.

The ostensibly separate locations of the witches' coven and the court may therefore be seen not in terms of opposition but, I argue, of mutuality. The female-influenced evil and sexual depravity that show the activities of Hecate and her sister practitioners of evil in terms of Papist debauchery are equally operational within the court itself. It is the connection with the evils of witchcraft that has infected the court, but the users of witchcraft within its environs are as depraved as the witches themselves. I therefore see this as the depiction of courtly wickedness as brought about through the indulgence in Papist ritual, and it demonstrates Middleton's support for the radical Protestant faction at court. As Margot Heinemann has shown, Middleton's patron was the Earl of Pembroke, who was opposed to the Howard faction and their pro-Spanish stance.<sup>19</sup> The clear-cut factional opposition Heinemann sees as operating along ideological lines has subsequently been called into question, but I argue that the play demonstrates a

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<sup>19</sup> See Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre*, p. 108.

stringent anti-Papist stance linked to an interrogation of the problems caused by corrupt and inadequate rule.<sup>20</sup> The accusations of witchcraft and murder linked to the court seen in the Howard case have been employed, albeit in cosmetically-altered fashion, to critique both the dangerous corruption at court and the related indulgence of Papistry presided over by James.

### **The Palatinate Problem**

The perception of James as over-indulgent towards Papistry, and failing in his duty to preserve and protect Protestantism both at home and abroad, was exacerbated by the 'Palatinate Problem'. The Protestant Frederick, Elector Palatine, the husband of James's daughter Elizabeth, had been offered the crown of Bohemia in 1619 after the deposing of the previous Roman Catholic incumbent.<sup>21</sup> He accepted the throne despite James's advice to the contrary, but was soon defeated in battle by the Roman Catholic Hapsburg forces, and the Hapsburg Ferdinand II of Austria, the current Holy Roman Emperor, duly installed. A Europe-wide division of nations and principalities along religious lines soon followed, and the conflict which was subsequently to become known as the Thirty Years War broke out.

Mindful of his self-imposed status as *Rex Pacificus*, James refused to go to war in support of his daughter and son-in-law. His pacifism was not appreciated by those of his subjects who saw England's national honour as bound up with its destiny as the protector of the Protestant cause. Public opinion throughout the realm was galvanised, and a flurry of printed texts and speeches in Parliament reiterated the imperative to take up arms in this holy crusade. Archbishop Abbot typified those believing that 'God had

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Albert H. Tricomi, *Anticourt Drama in England, 1603-1642* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1989), p. 141. See also N. W. Bawcutt, 'Was Thomas Middleton a Puritan Dramatist?', *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 94, No. 4 (Oct., 1999), p. 925-939. Modern Humanities Research Association. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3737228>, accessed 10.10.08.

<sup>21</sup> See Croft, *King James*, p. 105, and Stewart, *The Cradle King: a Life of James VI & I*, pp. 306-9.

set up this Prince, His Majesty's Son in Law ... to propagate the gospel and to protect the oppressed', urging that 'all our Spirits be gathered up to animate this business, that the World may take notice that we are awake when God calls'.<sup>22</sup> Amongst those articulating unease at this national spiritual sloth was the playwright Thomas Dekker. As can be seen from *The Whore of Babylon* (Chapter 4), Dekker was a long-standing adherent of the idea of the 'elect nation', England's special destiny in ensuring the eventual triumph of Protestantism. His collaborative effort with Philip Massinger, *The Virgin Martir*, was staged in 1620 in response to the Palatinate crisis.<sup>23</sup>

The play describes the life of St Dorothea, who suffered martyrdom under the Romans and whose story appears in Caxton's *Golden Legend* (1483).<sup>24</sup> Critics have categorised it as a *tragedia sacra*, a straightforward hagiographical account of saintly martyrdom typical of the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation plays popular on the Continent.<sup>25</sup> However, as Julia Gasper argues, such a play would be completely inconsistent with Dekker's other works, his previous output serving to show him as 'an indefatigable Protestant hagiographer'.<sup>26</sup> An interest in the biographies of saints was not limited to Roman Catholicism; the seminal text of Protestant historiography, Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, contains repeated references to the details of saints' lives from early Christianity onwards. These emphasised the claim to doctrinal continuity with the 'primitive church' claimed by Protestantism, and provided an instructive example of

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<sup>22</sup> John Rushworth, *Historical Collections of Private Passages of State, Volume 1* (1721), p. 12. History of Parliament Trust. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=70136>, accessed 8.11.08.

<sup>23</sup> Phillip Massinger and Thomas Dekker, *The Virgin Martir, a Tragedie, as it hath bin divers times publickely Acted with great Applause, By the servants of his Maiesties Revels* (London, 1622). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/17644. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99847685, accessed 21.06.10. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>24</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea sanctorum*, trs. William Caxton (London, 1487), fo. cccxxi, STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/24874. University of Glasgow Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 71305213, accessed 21.06.10. Although Caxton cites his source as Voragine, the story of Dorothea appears only in his 'translation' and not in Voragine's 'original'.

<sup>25</sup> See Louise George Clubb, 'The Virgin Martyr and the Tragedia Sacra' in *Renaissance Drama* VII, ed. S. Schoenbaum (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1964) p. 103.

<sup>26</sup> Gasper, *The Dragon and the Dove; the Plays of Thomas Dekker*, p. 137. See also Julia Gasper, 'The Sources of the Virgin Martyr' in *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 42, No 165 (Feb. 1991), p. 17. Oxford University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/516918>, accessed 03.07.08.

the ideal Christian life, the early saints being shown as the ideological forerunners of those martyrs who had suffered for the True Faith since the Reformation. Indeed, St Dorothea and St Agnes, the details of whose lives seem to have been conflated in *The Virgin Martyr*, appear in *Actes and Monuments* as epitomes of female chastity and spiritual fortitude, Foxe having apparently used the *Golden Legend* as his source.<sup>27</sup>

Julia Gasper illustrates how the play would have been seen at the time of its first staging as a propaganda vehicle persuading those who saw it of the necessity for military intervention in Bohemia.<sup>28</sup> As she shows, the invocation of Roman military might is a reflection of the English Protestant understanding of the Holy Roman Empire as the military arm of the Roman Catholic Church. The mention of Emperor Dioclesian would have evoked the Hapsburgs' habit of styling themselves as Caesars and reminded the audience that Ferdinand was the current Holy Roman Emperor. Unlike the emphasis on classical Roman virtue in *Cymbeline* (Chapter 4), the playwrights are showing the ancient Romans as persecutors of the Christians in order to highlight the contemporary Papist aggression against the Protestant inhabitants of Bohemia, the 'Caesarea' of the play. Bohemia was also, as Gasper shows, long identified with St Dorothea, whose cult had been particularly evident there in medieval times. Its Protestant credentials were evident in the persecution of John Huss, Bohemian contemporary and co-ideologue of Wycliff, who had been martyred for his faith.

The depiction of Bohemia as an endangered Protestant enclave is emphasised by the insistence upon Dorothea's threatened physical chastity. Dekker had previously used this trope both in *The Whore of Babylon* (Chapter 4) and in his pageant *The Seven Deadly Sinnes of London* (1606), comparing besieged towns in the Dutch United

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<sup>27</sup> Gasper, *The Dragon and the Dove*, p. 151.

<sup>28</sup> Gasper, *The Dragon and the Dove*, p. 39, p. 159.

Provinces to virgins threatened with rape.<sup>29</sup> The reiterated attacks by the Romans upon Dorothea's moral and physical integrity, as they attempt to force her to recant her Christian beliefs, may be seen as a reflection of the territorial ambitions of the Spanish-backed Papist forces against Bohemia. Similarly, the manful and indignant refusal by the British slave to rape Dorothea when ordered to do so by the Governor shows the playwrights' espousal of the militant Protestant agenda, urging Englishmen to take up arms in the cause of threatened Protestantism abroad. That the play is a *comoedia apocalyptica*, a use of the imagery of Revelation similar to *The Whore of Babylon*, as Gasper points out, may be seen in this use of female religious embodiment. This is demonstrated both by Dorothea's essential and threatened virtue and by the character of Artemia, Dioclesian's daughter and deputy in Caesarea. An ambitious, ruthless and lustful woman, she insists upon her regal status, ruthlessly eliminating those who oppose her. This shows her as the Whore of Babylon, the epitome of Papist carnality, ambition and greed, who was on occasion described as the Pope's daughter.<sup>30</sup>

As such, I argue that the play contains a sustained depiction of beleaguered Protestantism opposed by the forces of Papist aggression and moral depravity. Dorothea's bodily peril is a paradigm, not only for the threatened Bohemia, but for the Protestant faith itself, enduring repeated trials on its journey towards spiritual fulfilment. Not only her physical purity, but her charity, love for her Bible, and her tireless spreading of the Gospel, show her as the epitome of female Christian virtue. The potentially problematic depiction of her preaching in public does not, as Susannah Brietz Monta shows, mark her as unwomanly, but emphasises her as the instrument of

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Dekker, *The seven deadly sinnes of London*. (London, 1606) STC (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/6522. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99840999, accessed 07.07.10. See Gasper, *The Dragon and the Dove*, pp. 147-161.

<sup>30</sup> For more on the Whore of Babylon as the daughter of the Pope, see Waters, *Duessa as Theological Satire*, p. 6-7.

God, the channel for his grace, for by herself she can ‘no myracles work’ (Sig. 12v.).<sup>31</sup> The character of Angelo underlines Dorothea’s sanctity, as her ‘good spirit’ (Sig. B1v.) he is no Papist ‘guardian angel’, but the evidence of the inspiration marking the operation of God’s grace, her constant source of spiritual support and guidance.<sup>32</sup>

The insistence upon Dorothea’s virginal state has been used to interpret her as an example of Roman Catholic hagiography by those who point to the post-Reformation Protestant privileging of the ideal of married female chastity.<sup>33</sup> It is apparent, however, as Helen Hackett has demonstrated, that this trope of female physical ‘intactness’ still held significant ideological weight in Reformation England, where the much-vaunted virginity of Elizabeth I became a paradigm for the Protestant integrity of her nation in a time of territorial and religious threat.<sup>34</sup> Dekker himself resorted to this imagery in his apocalyptic poem, *Dekker his dreame*, also published in 1620. Dekker relates how, in his dream, he ascends into heaven, where he sees the martyrs, including ‘[v]irgins, whose soules in life from Lust liv’d cleare, / Had Siluer robes, and on their heads did weare / Coronets of Diamonds’.<sup>35</sup> I would argue this emphasis upon her virginity shows Dorothea as the epitome of pure and unpolluted Protestant doctrine, and reinforces the interpretation of her as the Bride of Christ, *virgo intacta* in readiness for her marriage. She is under divine protection, aware that the ‘power supernall on whom waites my soule,/ Is Captain ore my chastity’ (Sig. 11r.) as she remains impervious to

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<sup>31</sup> Susannah Brietz Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 205.

<sup>32</sup> For John Calvin’s dismissive view of guardian angels, see *The Institvtion of Christian Religion*, Book 2, Chapter 9, p. 96.

<sup>33</sup> Jane Hwang Degenhardt, ‘Catholic Martyrdom in Dekker and Massinger’s *The Virgin Martir* and the early modern threat of “Turning Turk”’, in *ELH* 73, 2006, pp. 83-117. Johns Hopkins University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30030004>, accessed 18.10.08.

<sup>34</sup> Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 54.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Dekker, *Dekker his dreame In which, being rapt with a poetickall enthusiasme, the great volumes of heauen and hell to him were opened, in which he read many wonderfull things*, p. 7. (London, 1620) STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/6497. British Library. Early English Books Online, eeb citation: 99840973, accessed 21.06.10. Cited by Brietz Monta in *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England*, p. 206.

the encroachments of would-be ravishers, physically unmarked, and her beauty undiminished by the staves used to beat her.

The relationship between Dorothea and Antoninus is an evocation, albeit a mediated one, of the Spenserian mutuality between Una and the Redcrosse Knight. Like Redcrosse, and Posthumus, Antoninus is a template of ideal masculine behaviour, possessing,

So much of honour, and of all things else,  
Which makes our being excellent, that from his store  
He can lend others, yet much taken from him,  
The want shall be as little as when Seas  
Lend from their bounty to fill vp the poornesse  
Of needy Rivers.

(Sig. E1v.)

However, Antoninus's spiritual journey shows him as epitomising the beleaguered state of Bohemian Protestant manhood. Although still a pagan, he is engaged in the journey towards spiritual enlightenment, as is manifested by his spurning of Artemia's advances and his falling ill through longing for Dorothea. He consistently speaks of her in terms of worship and unblemished virtue, sending her jewels symbolising her intrinsic moral worth, 'in the way of sacrifice .../As to my goddess' (Sig. D1v). In battle he has worn her 'figure' 'in [his] heart ... like a deity' (Sig. C3r). His inability to rape her when urged on by his father marks their relationship as spiritual rather than carnal. Nonetheless, Antoninus is not destined to be united with Dorothea in this world. Converted to Christianity by Dorothea's example of Christian fortitude at her execution and unable to live without her, he falls dead at the foot of the scaffold and goes to his eternal reunion with her in heavenly bliss. This shows both the desperate state of affairs in Bohemia and, by implication, an urging on the part of the playwrights for English men to come to the aid of their fatally threatened brothers abroad.

It is significant that these icons of Protestant virtue are seen in terms of ‘deferred’ fulfilment, with their true triumph occurring only after death, while their persecutors remain firmly in the ascendant on earth. The only hope for the future of the true religion in the mortal realm is the releasing by Theophilus of the Christian prisoners and sending them into exile out of reach of the Romans before he, too, is put to death. It is this triumph of paganism/Papistry that is especially anxiety-provoking, and it is this which underpins the consistent depiction of the pagans in terms of bodily incursion and aggression, referring to the current state of occupied Bohemia. Dioclesian is seen as a conquering emperor, subduing the known world beneath his heel, but it is Artemia who is particularly fearful. When Antoninus refuses her advances, she becomes vengeful and malicious, ‘blazing with fires of hate’ (Sig. E3r.). Indicatively, these advances are seen as ‘poyson /Though drunke in gold’, a ‘painted banquet’ (Sig. C4v.), evoking the Whore of Babylon’s poisoned chalice and the falsity inherent in the Papist Mass. Her unnatural and unwomanly behaviour is also evident in the extreme cruelty she shows to Dorothea, insisting that she be punished so that ‘euen death it selfe’ is ‘weary /In torturing her’ (Sig. E4v.). In the end she triumphs, marrying the Emperor Maximinus, her father’s successor, remaining unopposed and established in her pre-eminence. This terrible female domination shows both the ruthless quest for power and the monstrous moral inversion inherent in the Papist threat.

In keeping with Artemia’s identification with the Whore of Babylon, the playwrights emphasise the undermining effects and morally infectious danger of Papistry in the conventional terms of sexual promiscuity, the ‘whoring after false gods’ and ‘spiritual fornication’ that were rhetorical commonplaces of early-modern Anti-Papist polemic, in particular such homilies as that against ‘Peril of Idolatry’.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Jewel, ‘The iii. part of the sermon against peril of idolatrie’, pp. 148-9..

Dorothea warns Calista that the re-embracing of the pagan religion, with its carnal rituals, will involve the loss of her physical and moral integrity; that it will be 'writ upon your forehead, /This is the common Whoore, the prostitute' (Sig. F4v.). She reminds Calista that Venus was a 'whore', '*Flora* the Foundresse of the publike Stewes, /And has for that her sacrifice' (Sig. F4r.), and that this moral blindness renders their worshippers worse than the corrupt and decadent beings they are worshipping;

Your *Iupiter*, a loose adulterer/  
 Incestuous with his sister, reade but those.  
 That have canoniz'd them, youle find them worse  
 Then in chast language I can speake them to you.  
(Sig. F4r.)

It is this language of promiscuity that I see as the underpinning of a further anxiety on the part of the playwrights – that of the danger of moral infection to England and the English both from the failure to act against the Papist threat, and the toleration of Papistry at the heart of the English realm. It is this particularly carnal aspect to the deadly 'anti-religion' that shows its true insidiousness, the heretical doctrine depicted in terms of a sexually-transmitted disease working unseen to fatally undermine individual and national moral integrity. There is evidence of a dual anxiety; the infection from the corrupt and sexually-profligate centre of power, and its undermining effects upon the society at large. I would argue that the ostensibly comic characters of Hercius and Spungius are intended as examples of particularly English moral depravity, and demonstrate the moral decay afflicting the nation, where the pair are so corrupted by the ceaseless indulgence of their carnal desires that they have become easy prey for the deadly lures of Papistry.

It is significant that Hercius the 'whoremaster' and Spungius the 'drunkard', themselves corrupt and debauched, both complain of the decadence of the city and the great increase in greed and licentiousness following the change to the new religion.

Peter Lake points to a correlation in the Jacobean popular imagination between endemic corruption and Papistry, but I do not see this as a reference to an actual widespread conversion to Roman Catholicism.<sup>37</sup> I would interpret it as the playwrights showing the danger of societal corruption and debauchery through the transmission of Papist-influenced carnality from the court to the city. The proximity of the two is significant, since the court was also seen as a source of syphilis, the lives of leisure enjoyed by courtiers being conducive to promiscuity.<sup>38</sup> The playwrights are therefore showing the Papist-aligned carnality and venality rife at court as infecting the city, where the metaphorical link between the infection from Papist heresy and the contraction of syphilis from a self-indulgent lifestyle have become conflated. The imagery of syphilis is repeatedly used; ‘pox’ is rife, with both whores and their customers ‘scurvy’ and ‘rotten’ (Sig. D2v.). There are references to ‘pimpled, deepe scarletted, rubified, and carbuncled faces’ (Sig. D1v.), the exterior evidence upon the face of the internal workings of the dreaded disease, and to ‘parboiling’, the frequently-reverted-to cure for syphilis.<sup>39</sup>

This physical decay is paralleled by a moral decay, where the abandonment of the moral precepts of Protestantism and embracing of the materialistic carnal indulgence and venality aligned with Papistry have spread throughout the city. As Hercius and Spungius show, matters have come to such a pass that whores now insist on payment before engaging in the act of prostitution, and the streets are full of drunken courtiers, who ‘out-boule’(Sig. D1r.) the seasoned toper Spungius. The buildings hold ‘nothing but drinking roomes, and drabbing chambers, iumbled together’ (Sig. D1r.). In addition, the corruption has now infected not only the city and court, but the realm at

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<sup>37</sup> For more on this link, see Lake, ‘Anti-popery: the Structure of a Prejudice’, p. 89

<sup>38</sup> Fabricius, *Syphilis in Shakespeare’s England*, p. 154.

<sup>39</sup> Fabricius, *Syphilis in Shakespeare’s England*, p. 140.

large, where the true moral values have become inverted, and the kingdom is the site of disruption and disorder;

Old Honor goes on crutches, beggry rides caroched, honest men make feastes,  
knaues sit at tables, cowards are lapt in velvet, souldiers (as wee) in rags,  
Beautie turnes whore, Whore Bawd; and both dye of the poxe: why then when  
all the world stumbles, should thou and I walk vpright?

(Sigs. G4v., H1r.)

The depravity of Hercius and Spungius's lives, given over to drinking, gambling and whoring, is paralleled by their moral decadence and their consistent refusal of godly advice and guidance. Rescued from the gallows through Dorothea's charity, they show no repentance, but spend their time flouting their mistress's instructions, pilfering the alms she sends to the poor, and squandering the stolen money in brothels and alehouses. Their history forms a type of inverted 'pilgrim's progress', showing them as rendered spiritually blind through their indulgence in carnality, and therefore easily duped by the deceptive blandishments of the Romans, eagerly accepting gold from them to betray their mistress. This is despite Angelo's warning to them that they have sold their souls for 'goulden drosse' (Sig. E4v.), an evocation not only of worldly materialism, but also of the meretricious but deadly attractions of Papistry. It therefore comes as no surprise when they fall fatally under the influence of the evil spirit Harpax, who represents the Devil himself, as he promises the indulgence of their every desire in return for their unquestioning obedience (Sig. H2r.). Having committed the ultimate treachery to their mistress as they torture and kill her, the deceit inherent in Papistry is shown in their reward being not the promised worldly wealth, but the gallows and everlasting damnation (Sig. I3v.).

This depiction is, I argue, a further demonstration of unease with the manifest decadence of James's court, which is here shown to have affected the city and, by implication, the entire realm. James's dangerous toleration of Papist activity in his

realm is as much of a threat to national religio-political prosperity as his failure to protect beleaguered Protestantism abroad. It is even arguable that the depiction of Dioclesian may on one level be intended as an ironic representation of James himself, in keeping with his fondness for styling himself as a latter-day Roman emperor.<sup>40</sup> The only hope for the nation lies in the exertion of Englishmen who follow the example set by Theophilus. Originally a fervent persecutor of Christians, he undergoes a conversion through Dorothea's influence, and redeems himself by saving the Christians from the Romans before dying a true Christian death on the gallows (Sig. M1r.). The playwrights are therefore showing that even those most hardened in apostasy may reform and become pillars of the true Church and preservers of the true faith. However, if these Papist-linked abuses are allowed to continue, the current state of Bohemia under the Papist heel is a terrible warning of what may become of England. The failure by true patriotic English men to come to the aid of the International Protestant cause will result in the establishment of Roman Catholicism in England itself. The tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church will rapidly do away with the rights and privileges of freeborn Protestant Englishmen, and England as a Protestant nation will cease to exist.

### **A Game at Chess – the Spanish Match and the Papist threat**

During the course of the next few years, corruption and scandal at court still continued to occupy a central place in the public imagination. This perception was fuelled by the increasingly lavish gifts and titles showered by James upon Carr's successor as favourite, George Villiers, whom he created Duke of Buckingham in 1623.<sup>41</sup> The perceived greed and venality of Buckingham and his family rapidly became a byword, where almost any applicant for important public office found themselves forced to pay

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<sup>40</sup> Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature*, p. 27.

<sup>41</sup> Stewart, *The Cradle King: A Life of James VI & I*, p. 322.

out a large sum in bribery to the Duke or one of his cronies.<sup>42</sup> The conversion of Buckingham's mother and his wife to Roman Catholicism assisted in the construction of the monarch as being in thrall to an upstart favourite, who was in his turn under the sway of an overbearing Papist matriarchy, a frequent subject in pamphlets and libels.<sup>43</sup> English Protestantism was itself experiencing a growing religious factionalism between the emergent 'Arminian' anti-Calvinist theology and those who retained their Calvinist beliefs, but anti-Papist, and particularly anti-Spanish, sentiment remained a national 'bugbear'.<sup>44</sup> This strength of national feeling can be seen by the Petition for the enforcement of existing anti-Papist legislation raised by Parliament in 1621. James viewed this with disfavour and shortly thereafter he dissolved Parliament.<sup>45</sup>

National anti-Spanish sentiment intensified as the Thirty Years War continued and James persisted in his attempt to marry Prince Charles to the Infanta. The King's overtures to the Spanish were particularly unpopular since, as Jerzy Limon points out, the English 'blamed Spain for all the calamities that had befallen Frederick and Elizabeth and also England'.<sup>46</sup> The presence of the long-standing Spanish Ambassador in London, Count Gondomar, had helped to exacerbate the anti-Spanish feeling. His

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<sup>42</sup> Roger Lockyer, *Buckingham; The Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham 1592-1628* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1981), pp. 39-40. See also Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England*, p. 194.

<sup>43</sup> Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>44</sup> For more on the growth of Arminianism in the later years of James's reign, see Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought 1600-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 421, and Peter White, 'The Rise of Arminianism Reconsidered', in *Past & Present*, No. 101 (Nov., 1983), pp. 34-54. Oxford University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/650669>, accessed 08.12.08. For more on the national anti-Spanish feeling see A. A. Bromham and Zara Bruzzi, 'The Changeling' and the Years of Crisis, 1619-1624; *A Hieroglyph of Britain* (London: Printer Publishers Limited, 1990), p. 7. For more on the cross-confessional nature of anti-Papistry in Protestant nationalistic thought, see Alexandra Walsham, "'The Fatall Vesper': Providentialism and Anti-Popery in Late Jacobean London', in *Past & Present*, No. 144 (August, 1994), p. 39. Oxford University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/651143>, accessed 6.11.08.

<sup>45</sup> Stewart, *The Cradle King: A Life of James VI & I*, p. 311. See also Adrian Streeter "'An Old Quarrel Between Us That Will Never Be at an End": Middleton's *Women Beware Women* and late-Jacobean Religious Politics' in *The Review of English Studies*, January 2008. Oxford University Press. <http://doi.10.1093/res/hgm167>, accessed 07.05.10.

<sup>46</sup> Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter: English Drama and Politics 1623/4* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 73.

closeness to James, the suspicion that he was plotting with the King against the Protestant cause, as well as his ceaseless promotion of the Spanish Match, assisted in the formation of the prevalent depiction of him as a subversive ‘Machiavel’ intent upon the reintroduction of Papistry into England.<sup>47</sup>

Despite the popular antipathy to the projected marriage, Charles himself was in favour of it, as became evident when he and Buckingham embarked on a perilous expedition to Spain to woo the Infanta in person.<sup>48</sup> This enterprise was particularly unpopular among the English; the anxiety being that the Prince of Wales would be corrupted by the carnal seductions of Papistry and, when the pair returned to England without having achieved their object, they were greeted with great rejoicing. Celebratory bonfires were lit, church bells tolled, and the pamphleteer Thomas Scott waxed lyrical in his *Vox Dei* over Charles’s safe return; ‘His *Highnesse* returnes ALONE, ô words of comfort ! as choosing rather to dye a *Virgine*, and live an *Angell*, then to be married by *Antichrist*’.<sup>49</sup> Scott was only one of the many writers who helped to build up the linked anti-Spanish and anti-Papist fervour characterising the early 1620s. His two *Vox Populi* pamphlets, which helped to create the idea of Gondomar as the insidious Spanish ‘Machiavel’, were followed by a number of others detailing Spanish treachery, bellicosity and duplicity, notably *The Spaniards perpetvall designes to an vniversall monarchie* (1624).<sup>50</sup> Thomas Robinson published *The anatomy of the English nunnery at Lisbon* in 1622 (a scurrilous ‘exposé’ of his experiences of Papist depravities while a priest in Portugal), and a popular sermon was John Gee’s *Foot out*

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<sup>47</sup> Stewart, *The Cradle King: A Life of James VI & I*, p. 305. See also Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England*, p. 181.

<sup>48</sup> For more on the unpopularity of the Spanish Match in England, see Richard Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life* (Harlow, Essex: Pearson Education Limited, 2007), p. 32.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Scott, *Vox Dei* (London, 1623), p. 70. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/27097a. Harvard University Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 21503630, accessed 21.06.10.

<sup>50</sup> Thomas Scott, *The Spaniards perpetuall designes to an vniuersall monarchie* (London, 1624). Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99852181, accessed 21.06.10. See T. H. Howard-Hill, *Middleton’s “Vulgar Pasquin”: Essays on A Game at Chess* (London: Associated University Presses, 1995), p. 50.

*of the Snare, with a Detection of Sundry Late Practices of the Priests and Jesuits* (1624).<sup>51</sup> These publications linked the anxiety felt about the insidious practices of the Jesuits with the corruption and hypocrisy characterizing Papists, especially Spanish Papists.

One of the more contentious responses to Charles and Buckingham's much-fêted return from Spain was that of Thomas Middleton. He had already shown his alignment with 'Parliamentary opposition to Stuart policy', as Cristina Malcolmson demonstrates, by objecting to the Spanish marriage in 1622 in *The Changeling*.<sup>52</sup> *A Game at Chess* (1624) dealt with similar matters. It was the subject of much contemporary comment and has, in recent years, spawned numerous historiographical and literary analyses of the play itself and the circumstances surrounding its first production, including lengthy debates on why its staging was permitted at all. Annabel Patterson, for example, has called it a remarkable instance of '*noncensorship*'.<sup>53</sup> The play's popularity may be seen in its playing to packed houses in London for nine consecutive days on its first staging, and by the survival of six contemporary manuscript copies and two printed ones.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, it seems to have been eventually suppressed only in response to the outraged protests of the Spanish Ambassador, Gondomar's successor, Don Carlos Coloma.<sup>55</sup>

As its title suggests, the play is constructed in the terms of a chess game, with the opposing sides dressed in black and white, moving on a notional chess board, and with

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Robinson, *The anatomy of the English nunnery at Lisbon in Portugall* (London, 1622). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/21123. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99851212. John Gee, *A Foot out of the Snare* (London, 1624). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/11703. Bodleian Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99852185, accessed 21.06.10.

<sup>52</sup> Cristina Malcolmson, "'As Tame as the Ladies': Politics and Gender in *The Changeling*", in *ELR*, Spring 1990, Vol. 20, No. 2, (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), p. 320.

<sup>53</sup> Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation; The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> T. H. Howard-Hill, 'Introduction' to *A Game at Chess* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> Edward M. Wilson and Olga Turner, 'The Spanish Protest against "A Game at Chess" in *The Modern Language Review*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (Oct., 1949), pp. 476-482. Modern Humanities Research Association. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3716583>, accessed 4.11.08.

the characters named for chess pieces. This formal structure provides a politic rhetorical distancing from the play's subject matter, the controversial representation of international power politics. Simultaneously, the oppositional construction of the chess game works in conjunction with Middleton's use of the 'psychomachia' structure of eternally opposed good and evil to emphasise the essential moral opposition between the two sides, the 'white' side representing the English, the 'black' the Spanish. This underlines the religious alignment of the two countries, England with Protestant virtue, Spain conflated with the evils of Papistry to construct an enemy that is the epitome of underhanded treachery. In addition, the satirical aspect of the play is enhanced by the depiction of a number of the chief pieces as the representations of real-life characters. The White King, White Knight and White Duke may be seen as personifying James, Charles and Buckingham respectively. The Black Knight is a readily-understood depiction of Gondomar, and the Black King of the King of Spain. This both adds to the immediacy of the play and helps to explain the contemporary controversy surrounding its staging.

In this version of the recent dealings between England and Spain, Middleton employs the imagery of religio-political gendered embodiment in the manner of Spenser and Dekker before him. As with the previous writers, this imagery is eroticised, where the two main White female pieces, the White Queen and the White Queen's Pawn, are the consistent target of sexual aggression on the part of Black pieces whose aim is their seduction or rape and consequent moral ruin. Middleton shows these two female characters as inter-related, in keeping with their relative functions on the chess board, and T. H. Howard-Hill sees the Pawn as embodying 'the Truth of the Anglican faith just as her mistress ... represents the institution in which Truth

shelters'.<sup>56</sup> I contend that these personifications are rather more multifaceted, and that they are intended as the interdependent but separate constructions of the Protestant Church in her eternal ideal purity, paralleled by her everyday condition as the True Faith, subject to worldly trials and setbacks on her spiritual journey. I also argue that, in keeping with Middleton's militant Protestantism, both characters are equally constructed in the terms of English Protestant nationalism, conflating the true Church with England as the home of the true religion. The physical integrity of both characters is therefore also intended as a paradigm for English national and political integrity, serving to emphasise the inalienable link between nation and religion.

The White Queen is a remote figure, regal, but taking little active part in the play, the target of the intrigue of highly-placed religious and political Black pieces. So central is she to the conduct of the game that the White Bishop speaks of her as its 'glory' and acknowledges that 'if she were won /The way were open to the master check'.<sup>57</sup> It is unlikely that she would be intended to represent Queen Anne, as proposed by E. C. Morris, as Anne had died some five years previously and had, in any case, been a longstanding convert to Catholicism who refused the Communion under Anglican rites at her coronation.<sup>58</sup> The identification of the White Queen as the Protestant Church is emphasised by the White King. He articulates his relation to her in his capacity as the Head of the English Church and the 'husband' of the nation, as he speaks in Biblical imagery of the imperative to provide a 'safe sanctuary' for her, as the 'rock' upon which this 'dove' nests, praying 'let heaven's blessings /Be mine no longer than I am thy sure one' (IV.v.29-31). Despite this 'sanctuary', her situation is

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<sup>56</sup> Howard-Hill 'Introduction' to *A Game at Chess*, p. 37

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Middleton, *A Game at Chess*, in *Women Beware Women and Other Plays*, ed. Richard Dutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Act IV, Scene V, Lines 26-27. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>58</sup> E. C. Morris, 'The Allegory in Middleton's *A Game at Chess*', in *Englische Studien*, 38, (Leipzig, Germany: O. R. Reisland, 1907), p. 42. <http://www.archive.org/details/englischestudien38leipuoft>, accessed 17.06.10. See Stewart, *The Cradle King: a Life of James VI & I*, pp. 143, 182.

precarious, where the intensity of the Black King's lewd desire for her is articulated by the Fat Bishop;

The Black King's blood burns for thy prostitution  
And nothing but the spring of thy chaste virtue  
Can cool his inflammation; instantly  
He dies upon a pleurisy of luxury  
If he deflower thee not

(IV.v.16-20)

This sexualised language of bodily invasion is another use of the prevalence of the trope figuring ideological or theological threat in terms of the endangered female body. Although this primarily indicates the Spanish Papist wish to bring about the downfall of Protestantism, there is also a nationalistic aspect, where Middleton is conflating the notion of Spain as intending ideological 'rape' with the prevalent construction of English territorial integrity as existing under permanent threat of invasion by the forces of Papistry. This threat of metaphorical rape emphasises the severity of the threat, and the base carnality and ruthlessness of those intending the violation. The immediacy of this menace to the purity of both religious and national 'intactness' is seen in the Queen's lament that, in the face of the Fat Bishop's attempt to abduct her, her 'integrity ... suffers a black eclipse' (IV.v.4, 7). She is saved from being carried off only by the timely entrance of the White King, who rebukes her for ever doubting in his protection, saying, 'Fear? You were never guilty of an injury / To goodness but in that' (IV.v.55-56).

The threat to the White Queen as the body of Protestant religious integrity is paralleled by the character of the White Queen's Pawn, who is also the target of the sexualised machinations of the lower-status functionaries of the Black House. Morris identifies the White Pawn with Elizabeth of Bohemia, but I argue for a more 'public'

construction.<sup>59</sup> In contrast to the depiction of the White Queen as a figure of unbroached and slightly remote integrity, the White Queen's Pawn, as a chess piece more exposed and 'open' than the Queen, is more frequently and more lewdly assailed. This aspect has led to this piece being identified as 'People – or Lady England, or Publike Wele'.<sup>60</sup> I do not see that interpretation as taking into account the peculiarly sexualised aspect of the Black onslaught upon her, which is best understood in the light of the early-modern rhetoric of 'spiritual fornication'. In this context the White Queen's Pawn is shown as a type of Spenser's Una, the English Protestant faith experiencing repeated pitfalls in her efforts to achieve the ideal Christian life. Despite her innate virtue, she is all too prone to fall into error, led astray by her own lack of understanding. This echoes Calvin's teaching of the Church as prone to error on its path towards salvation, since 'it is not yet perfect ... & is not yet come to the marke of holinesse'.<sup>61</sup> It is therefore her very innocence that is the main weapon against her, affecting her ability to discern evil, and which has 'frighted the full meaning' of her attackers' ill intention 'from itself' (I.i.42-3). This depiction of religious fallibility as a woman is likewise Middleton's technique for re-emphasizing the national danger, since this shows the White Queen's Pawn as fraught with female moral weakness and, as the possessor of a physically vulnerable female body, particularly at the mercy of sexual predators.

It is significant that the minor Black pieces, the Black Bishop's Pawn and the Black Queen's pawn, those particularly involved in the attack upon the White Queen's Pawn, are shown as a Jesuit priest and a 'secular Jesuitess' (I.i.40) respectively. The 'Induction' at the beginning of the play depicts Ignatius Loyola, himself a Spaniard and

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<sup>59</sup> Morris, 'The Allegory in Middleton's *A Game at Chesse*', p. 47.

<sup>60</sup> Jane Sherman, 'The Pawns' Allegory in Middleton's *A Game at Chesse*', in *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 29, No. 114 (May, 1978), p. 153. Oxford University Press.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/514600>, accessed 04.11.08.

<sup>61</sup> Calvin, *The Institvtion of Christian Religion*, Book 4, Chapter 1, p. 428.

the founder of the Order, urging on the effort to establish the ‘universal monarchy’, the re-establishment of the worldwide domination of Roman Catholic rule (‘Induction’, lines 11-12). The Jesuits were particular targets of English Protestant vitriol, held to be especially crafty, deceitful and subversive, as can be seen by the repeated proclamations in James’s reign banishing them from England.<sup>62</sup> These characters are therefore intended, I would argue, to epitomise both Papist and Spanish deceit and treachery. So insinuating is the Black Bishop’s Pawn that he almost succeeds in persuading the White Queen’s Pawn to submit to his sexual advances ‘for virtue’s sake’ (I.ii.45), and it is only the extreme lewdness of his behaviour, culminating in the threat of rape, that serves to alert her. The Black Queen’s Pawn is equally or perhaps even more dangerous, personifying the contemporary anxiety about the treachery of ‘recusant’ Roman Catholic women.<sup>63</sup> She uses her innate female deceitfulness and trickery in the attempt to charm and entrap the White Queen’s Pawn into a sham marriage, which would inevitably prove the latter’s undoing. Appropriately, it is the Black Queen’s Pawn’s insatiable female lust that proves her downfall and saves the White Queen’s Pawn. Incapable of remaining loyal to her sworn cause when her self-interest is at stake she insists upon ‘enjoying’ the Black Bishop’s Pawn herself, and causes the final unravelling of the Jesuits’ plot. The conflation of carnality and deceit she embodies shows her as a ‘whore in order, a cockatrice *in voto*’ (V.iii.112), a true adherent of the monstrous, promiscuous Whore of Babylon.

An even more dangerous personification of the threat of Spanish Papistry is the Black Knight. As the representation of the ‘Machiavel’ (III.i.120) Gondomar, he is particularly active in the ‘great monarchical business’ (I.ii.165), scheming continually for the downfall of the White House, overseeing corruption, venality and sedition.

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<sup>62</sup> See T. H. Howard-Hill, *Middleton’s “Vulgar Pasquin”*, p. 107.

<sup>63</sup> For more on the fear of ‘recusant women’ as particularly deceitful, see Marotti, *Religious Ideology & Cultural Fantasy: Catholic and Anti-Catholic Discourses in Early Modern England*, Chapter 2.

Middleton describes the Knight in terms of the abuses ascribed to the former Spanish Ambassador. He is overseeing 'twenty thousand and nine hundred, /Four score and five' plots (III.i.125-126), is involved in largescale corruption and sedition, sells places at the English court, diverts English money to the Black Kingdom, and imports Papist relics into the realm in secret (IV.ii.40-45). Perhaps even more importantly, he has been overseeing the disguising and secreting of Jesuits within English households (IV.ii.53) and surveying the national coastlines and defences to facilitate a Spanish invasion (IV.ii.73). He has helped to gain the freedom from gaol of large numbers of Papists by obtaining the repeal of the anti-Papistry law (IV.ii.75), releasing them to resume their treacherous and undermining behaviour. His body is as corrupt as his soul, where his anal fistula (that 'foul flaw in the bottom' of his 'drum' [IV.ii.7] that identifies him firmly as Gondomar) has not hindered his habitual indulgence in sexual promiscuity, 'toss'd on Venus' seas' (II.i.174), and this blending of physical and moral corruption is underlined by the depiction of his network of spies as including 'nuns' from Whitefriars and Drury Lane (II.i.200, 203), a reference to brothels rather than nunneries.

The link of bodily and moral corruption emphasises both the carnal worldliness and lack of spirituality of Spanish Papistry and shows the insidiousness of the threat it represents. The Black side repeatedly use sexualised wordplay, the 'doubleness' of their language demonstrating the duplicity of their deceitful natures. Not only do they employ the Jesuitical 'equivocation' that allows them to indulge in lies, and the Latin that evokes magical 'incantations', but their language is lewd and bawdy. They talk of 'entrances' (I.i.32), 'vessels' (I.i.33) and making a 'little passage' (I.iii.68), couching their attempts upon the White Queen's Pawn's moral integrity in terms of broached female genitalia. The Black Bishop's Pawn speaks of his 'affection' to the 'rape of devotion'

(II.i.20). The Black Knight's Pawn gleefully anticipates the White Queen's Pawn's imminent undoing, saying he would wager his 'part for a parrot's feather,/ She never returns virtuous.' (I.i.209-210). Her Black House-imposed 'punishment' for her supposed misdeeds is the sentencing to prolonged exposure to 'Aretine's pictures' (II.ii.256) a byword for pornography in the early-modern era, and a probable reference to the carnal entrapment represented by Papist icons.

The fear of Jesuits working in disguise to spread the deadly heresy of Papist doctrine is seen in the Black Bishop's Pawn's attempt to gain complete psychological control of the White Queen's Pawn. This shows him as a 'confessor' figure of the type referred to by John Gee, Jesuit priests who invaded the domestic sphere, insinuating themselves into households with the aim of 'leading captive simple women loaden with sinnes'.<sup>64</sup> This seduction was seen as both physical and spiritual, the indulgence in 'spiritual fornication' co-existing with actual fornication. This sexual promiscuity also holds overtones of the infectious nature of Papist heresy, as is demonstrated in the Black Knight's description of the Black Bishop's Pawn as an 'incendiary' (I.i.247). This shows him as underhanded and extremely dangerous, conflating the anxieties over the subversive activities of the conspirators in the Gunpowder Plot with the metaphorical infection with Papist doctrine that was depicted as the highly-contagious 'fire' and 'burning' of syphilis. This fatal potential is also seen in the Black Knight's Pawn, described by the White Queen's Pawn as suffering from highly infectious 'leprosy' (I.i.226), a term in common use at the time as a euphemism for the ravages of syphilis, which again correlates his physical and moral corruption.

The sexualized moral corruption and the alignment with unnatural sexual practices held to be an especially Papist vice, particularly amongst Papist clergy, may likewise be

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<sup>64</sup> Gee, *A foot out of the snare*, Sig. B2r.

seen in the repeated references to sodomy.<sup>65</sup> There is an allusion to 'Hebrew pens' being used backwards (I.i.301); the Black Knight jests that the fine for sodomy should be placed on the 'backside' of the book containing the list of sins (IV.ii.106), and the venal Fat Bishop answers that 'there's few on's very forward' (IV.ii.107, 108). This theme is echoed in the scene containing a joking sodomitical 'threesome', with the Jestling White Pawn sandwiched between two Black Pawns 'like three flies with one straw through their buttocks' (III.iii.39). This 'turning' of the White Pawn by the Black Pawns - who praise his 'whiteness' and describe him as a 'jennet', or lady's horse - shows them both as effeminate and debauched, 'unmanned' by their indiscriminate abandonment to the pleasures of the flesh which was perceived as an intrinsic part of idolatrous Papist worship. This longstanding perception of Papists, and Papist priests in particular, as the epitome of moral depravity, hypocrisy and greed, indulging in the full spectrum of deviant sexuality, may be seen in Thomas Becon's stinging polemic in which he castigates them as follows:

Yee abominable Whoremasters, yee filthy fornicators, Yee stinking Sodomites, yee deceitfull Deflowrers of mayds, yee devilish defilers of mens wives yee cankred corrupters of widowes, and yee lecherous locusts, may lie with your whores and harlots all night, and the next day after goe to Masse.<sup>66</sup>

Set against the sexualised depravity of the Black side is the strong masculine integrity and assertiveness shown by the White Knight and the White Duke. Identifiable with Charles and Buckingham respectively, these characters reflect the popularity that both enjoyed upon their return to England, where both were imbued with a new zeal for prosecuting war against Spain. This rendered the pair temporary national heroes, and for a while militant Protestant hopes were focussed on Charles in

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<sup>65</sup> Bruce Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 44.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Becon, *The Displaying of the Popish Masse* (London, 1637), pp. 157-158. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/1719. Cambridge University Library. Early English Books Online, ebo citation: 99850295, accessed 21.06.10.

the hope that he would undo the damage to International Protestantism, and to England's sacred destiny, caused by his father's longstanding refusal to go to war.<sup>67</sup> I see this as the viewpoint underlying the construction of the pair in terms of consistently idealised masculinity, as men of action, integrity and God-given spiritual insight. The White Knight is shown as particularly meritorious in his rescue of the White Queen's Pawn from her threatened infamy. His 'fair delivering act' will be recorded, as the White King says, 'in that white book of the defence of virgins, /Where the clear fame of all preserving knights /Are to eternal memory consecrated.' (III.i. 161-164). This shows a probable intention on the part of Middleton to look to the 'rising sun', the next king, urging him to anticipate his future role as King and the Head of the English Church by coming to the rescue of beleaguered English Protestantism.

The unswerving steadfastness of the White Knight and White Duke is detailed in the description of their visit to the Black Court, an obvious reference to Charles and Buckingham's recent visit to Madrid. In a subtle rewriting of history, Middleton shows the pair as demonstrating masterly self-control, courage and spiritual insight. Aware that the invitation to the Black Court is a duplicitous attempt to entrap them, they nevertheless undertake what is depicted as a crusade to unmask the evil of the Black House, where their 'truth of cause and courage' (IV.iv.3) enables them to overcome the 'gins, traps and alluring snares' (IV.iv.5) they encounter. The lures of the Black Court are shown in terms of the exposure to Papist ritual and trickery. Welcomed by the Black Queen, the two men are shown an altar, which the White Knight speaks of in an aside as 'a taste of the old vessel still, the erroneous relish' (V.i.34-35). This echo of the 'resplendent poisons' of Papistry (IV.iv.11) evokes the seductive fatality of Papist doctrine, and emphasises the alignment of the Black House with the Papist excesses of

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<sup>67</sup> See T. H. Howard-Hill, *Middleton's "Vulgar Pasquin"*, p. 83.

the Whore of Babylon and her deadly 'cup of fornications'. The sensual enchantment of Papistry is reinforced by the statues that come alive to dance to a song of welcome, a reference to the magic and idolatry which were the fatal concomitants of Papist entrapment. However, remaining resolutely untouched by this meretricious show, the White Knight and White Duke demonstrate their masculine purpose and insight, as they cunningly proceed to draw in the Black King and Black Knight, inveigling them, by the supposed exhibition of their own vices, into betraying the flagrant dishonesty and venality of the Black House. Their intelligence, daring, and strength of purpose enable them to win the game, gaining checkmate by 'discovery ... the noblest mate of all' (V.iii.161). Thoroughly outwitted, the Black House players, 'all hopes confounded' (V.iii.165), are sent into the 'bag' that represents the mouth of hell.

What is particularly significant, however, is this representation of masculine *virtus* on the part of the White Knight and the White Duke as offset by a lack of manly ability on the part of the other exponents of White manhood. In an echo of the ambivalent description of the King in the last act of *Cymbeline* (see Chapter Four), the White King is presented in terms of inactivity and lack of judgement. Although he emphasises his duty to protect the White Queen and presides over the reinstatement of the vindicated White Queen's Pawn, apostrophising her as the 'beauty of truth and innocence ... that mak'st thy sufferings glorious' (III.i.174-176), this may be seen as empty rhetoric rather than action. He has repeatedly failed to protect the nation and its religion. He has mistakenly delivered the White Queen's Pawn into the hands of the Black House for punishment, and has neglected the White Queen so that she has become vulnerable to the attack of the Fat Bishop. He has also failed to understand that the Fat Bishop is a treacherous turncoat, showering him instead with offices and luxuries. This clouded insight has extended to his Pawn, the piece who should provide his protection, who is

revealed to be another traitor working for the Black House. This blindness to the duplicity and treachery of the Black House extends in particular to his undue indulgence of the Black Knight, where he is easily swayed by the latter's insinuating speech (See II.ii). In addition, it is through his leniency that the Black Knight is allowed to proceed unhampered with his seditious activities aimed at the undermining of the realm and its return to Papist domination. The White King's lack of control is demonstrated in his shocked realisation upon the discovery of his Pawn's treachery that this 'rotten fruit', whose 'rottenness' he has failed to appreciate, is placed very near to him, and is falling 'from the top bough' (III.i.269).

This kingly 'lack' of magistracy at the centre of the realm is echoed in the physical and moral lack seen in the White Bishop's Pawn and the White Jestling Pawn, where the 'unmanning' effect of the contact with Papistry is shown in the sodomitical 'conversion' undergone by the latter. The anxiety over the loss of masculine identity in the Jacobean period has been linked by Frances Dolan to the anxiety over the effeminising effect of Papistry, where the destabilising moral contagion of the anti-religion worked in conjunction with what she describes as the ever-present early modern anxiety about the 'contingent and precarious nature of masculinity' to 'unman' the unhappy apostate.<sup>68</sup> This demasculinisation is particularly strongly depicted in the fearful condition of the White Queen's Pawn, castrated by the Black Knight's Pawn, and deprived of his marital prospects and his futurity, both fundamental underpinnings of early-modern masculine social identity. This literal lack of manhood also implies a lack of future Protestant protectors of the nation, entailing the potential loss of national religious identity and independence. These two characters are, I would argue, suitably-distanced and subtle allusions to James's own suspected sexual proclivities and to the

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<sup>68</sup> Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, p. 49.

impotent condition of Protestant English militant manhood. English men have been prevented by their king from taking up arms in their divinely-appointed role as guardians of the nation and of Protestantism, and their honour and that of England have been stained. Worse even than this, the nation and its religion have been rendered vulnerable to Papist undermining within the realm by the king's indulging of subversive Papist activity, and by his neglect of his sacred duty as Head of the Church. Despite the overcoming of the Black House, the White Queen's Pawn shows that the game may be over but the eternal struggle goes on. Papist forces are still at large; these 'night glow worms' (Epilogue, line 6) are operating in secrecy, still carrying out 'their depraving work' (Epilogue, line 8).

The agenda of those of the militant Protestant persuasion who held it to be their duty to protect both the established English Protestant religion and the nation against Papist onslaught and consequent national disaster may be seen clearly in these three texts. The increasing perception of James as failing to fulfil his divinely-appointed kingly duty, as shown in the repeated depictions of monarchical ineptitude linked to rampant and indulged Papist encroachment, is articulated through the suitably distanced and covert evocation of religious and ideological threat. The anxieties over Papist activity at court in *The Witch*, the fears over the danger to English national religious integrity and national honour in *The Virgin Martir* and the subtle critique of James's failures as ruler in *A Game at Chess*, all bear the same subtext. Chief among James's shortcomings as monarch is his unwillingness to fulfil his divinely appointed role of protector of the English Protestant Church. Should he not now act appropriately, and should he prevent those who also have a duty to protect nation and religion from doing

so, the realm must descend into chaos. The insidious witchcraft of Papistry will reign unchecked, English national honour will be stained, the international Protestant cause will suffer a fatal check, and Spanish ambitions for the ‘universal monarchy’ will lead to England’s eclipse and loss of Protestant identity. The advice contained in these texts was not to be heeded; James died only a year after *A Game at Chess* was staged, and his son and successor Charles would prove to be even less amenable to the Protestant agenda than his father.

## Chapter Six

### **Charles I: Religious Disputes, Papist Conspiracies, Social Schism**

Despite the enthusiasm with which militant Protestants greeted Charles's accession in 1625, the hopes that he would provide the longed-for champion for their cause did not outlast the decade. His reign was instead characterised by a widening ideological gulf, where the cause of militant Protestantism became identified with a more overt anti-monarchicalism in the years leading up to the outbreak of the Civil War. Charles did act quickly to declare war on France and Spain in support of the international Protestant cause, but repeated military expeditions ended in ignominious failure. The cost to the national exchequer and the damage to English patriotic pride resulting from the disastrous raids on Cadiz, Ile de Rhé and La Rochelle, led by the Duke of Buckingham, may be seen as a contributory factor in the increasing acrimony governing the dealings between King and Parliament.<sup>1</sup> In the successive and increasingly short-lived parliaments of Charles's early reign, the King's repeated insistence upon the granting of money to fund the war effort was countered by the House's repeated refusal to comply until their 'grievances' had been addressed by him.<sup>2</sup> The House of Commons in particular was growingly identified with the 'country', the local networks of landed gentry and county magistrates, and with the adherence to staunch Protestantism. This was set against Charles's 'Arminian' religious policies and the perception of the court as the site of 'Papist' corruption and debauchery.<sup>3</sup> Parliament seems to have become less focussed on events in Europe and more inward-looking, intent upon upholding its privilege as the epitome of the 'ancient and undoubted birthright and inheritance of the

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I* (London: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life*, pp. 44-62.

<sup>3</sup> Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England*, pp. 138-9.

subjects of England'.<sup>4</sup> It was this conviction of its role as the moral mouthpiece for the nation that underpinned the House's unsuccessful attempt to impeach the Duke of Buckingham for corruption in 1626.<sup>5</sup> The following year Charles lost patience with Parliament's reluctance to cede him the 'tonnage and poundage' levies traditionally granted to monarchs for life, or the funds to prosecute his wars. He imposed his own 'forced loan', pursuing and imprisoning those who refused to 'lend' him the money, and this was viewed by the House as a fundamental infringement upon its rights.<sup>6</sup> This was the precursor to a number of taxes and impositions levied by Charles without the benefit of Parliament. His subsequent far-reaching taxation policy of 'Thorough', which included the recourse to long-neglected and archaic procedures for collecting fees and fines, created much animosity and was a major factor in the growing perception of him as a tyrannical monarch culminating in the Ship Money controversy in the 1630s.<sup>7</sup>

The antagonistic reaction of Parliament to Charles's behaviour was fuelled by the perception of the monarch as increasingly autocratic, where, as Richard Cust points out, 'tyranny and authoritarianism' were equated in the popular imagination with 'popery'.<sup>8</sup> The linking of these ideas was given colour by Charles's own religious policies. Unhappy with what he perceived as growing 'Puritan' schismaticism, Charles had instead viewed with favour the precepts of the Dutch theologian Jacobus Arminius, who differed radically from Calvinist theology in his denial of predestination and justification by grace. For their part, Calvinists viewed Arminius's teachings as an

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Cust and Ann Hughes, 'Introduction: After Revisionism', in *Conflict in Early Stuart England*, p. 20; Smith, *The Emergence of a Nation State: the commonwealth of England 1529-1660*, p. 273. See also Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life*, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Lockyer, *Buckingham*, p. 322.

<sup>6</sup> Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, pp. 15-23.

<sup>7</sup> See Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, Part III.

<sup>8</sup> Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life*, p. 145.

irreligious denial of God's absolute authority.<sup>9</sup> English Arminianism was distinct from the Dutch version in its emphasis upon a more formal clerical hierarchy and the promotion of sacramentalism.<sup>10</sup> Following the York House theological conference of 1626, Charles proceeded to dismiss so-called 'non-conformist' clergy and replace them with 'Arminians', among them his protégé the polemicist Richard Montagu, author of the contentious anti-Puritan texts *A New Gagg* (1624) and *Appello Caesarem* (1625).<sup>11</sup> Charles also appointed Bishop (eventually Archbishop) Laud, a conservative who believed in the sacramentalist 'beauty of holiness', to begin implementing theological changes, including a promotion of the communion service over the primacy of preaching.<sup>12</sup> To orthodox Calvinists, this renewal of the emphasis upon the maintenance and decoration of churches, the use of vestments and other trappings of 'idolatry' led to the fear that this was an attempt to re-introduce Papistry through underhanded means.<sup>13</sup> An increasing anxiety about national religious integrity became evident, articulated by the Parliamentarian John Pym, who emphasised Calvinism's central role as the ideological underpinning of English Protestantism. As Nicholas Tyacke shows, Pym was adamant that Calvinists were the 'true orthodox loyalists' and Arminianism was 'both heterodox and the means of introducing Roman Catholicism into England'.<sup>14</sup> The recurrence of this rhetoric evidences the centrality of religious anxieties in the growing societal divide characterising the nation in the 1630s, where

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<sup>9</sup> See Nicholas Tyacke, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution', in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, ed. Conrad Russell (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1973), pp. 130, 134.

<sup>10</sup> White, *Predestination, Policy and Polemic*, p. 218.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Montagu, *A gagg for the new Gospell? No: A new gagg for an old goose* (London, 1624). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/18038. University of Illinois. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99848074, accessed 04.07.10; Richard Montagu, *Appello Caesarem* (London, 1625). STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/18030. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99848065, accessed 04.07.10.

<sup>12</sup> Tyacke, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution', p. 130.

<sup>13</sup> Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, p. 301.

<sup>14</sup> Tyacke, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution', p. 134.

the ‘contemporary *perception*’ was, as Kevin Sharpe points out, ‘that much was amiss – in the church as well as the state’.<sup>15</sup>

While the long-standing fear of foreign Roman Catholic military incursions was still a prominent factor in the anti-Papist attitude of the public national imagination, as it had been since the days of the Henrician Reformation, I argue that this fear of ‘Popery by other means’, is a fundamental underpinning of the anti-Roman Catholic rhetoric characterising the literary output of the period.<sup>16</sup> Until his assassination in 1628, anti-Papist rhetoric centred on the Duke of Buckingham, who was portrayed in sexualised terms as a combination of moral and political corruption.<sup>17</sup> Suspected of sodomitical activity with both James and Charles, he was spoken of as a ‘Ganymede’ who held the power to influence the monarch, ‘whose whorish breath hath power to lead /His excellence which way it list’.<sup>18</sup> Libellous verses vilified him as infected with the pox through his many sexual adventures, and simultaneously evoked the conventional link of Papistry with syphilis, where Buckingham’s military defeats abroad were seen as incurred on purpose in order to allow the infection of Papistry into the realm of England, complaining that ‘Guido Fawkes’ himself ‘[c]ould not so have dispersed our state /Nor opened Spain so wide a gate /As hath his graceless grace’.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Tyacke, ‘Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution’; Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinism: the Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Michael Questier, ‘Arminianism, Catholicism and Puritanism in England during the 1630s’ in *The Historical Journal*, No. 491 (2006), Cambridge University Press, <http://jstor.org/stable/4091740>, accessed 09.09.08. Kevin Sharpe, *Remapping Early Modern England: The Culture of Seventeenth-Century Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 347.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Henry Burton, *For God, and the King. The Summe of Two Sermons* (London, 1636), p. 164. STC (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/4142. Cambridge University Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 44920315. William Prynne, *The Popish Royall Favourite* (London, 1643), p. 65. Wing (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/P4039A. Bodleian Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99831965, both accessed 02.02.09.

<sup>17</sup> See Alastair Bellany, “‘Rayling Rymes and Vaunting Verse’: Libellous Politics in Early Stuart England, 1603-1628”, in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, eds. Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (London: The Macmillan Press Limited, 1994), p. 301.

<sup>18</sup> Excerpt from Robert Herrick’s commonplace book, reproduced in facsimile and with transcripts by Norman K. Farmer Jr. in *Texas Quarterly*, 16: 4 (1973), pp. 126-141. Cited by Bellany, in “‘Rayling Rymes and Vaunting Verse’: Libellous Politics in Early Stuart England, 1603-1628”, p. 299.

<sup>19</sup> Bodleian English Poetry MSS c.50, fo. 14r-v. Cited by Bellany, p. 301.

His corruption was linked to that of his mother who, together with his wife, was a recent convert to Roman Catholicism, where the libellists asked, '[c]ould not thy mother's masses, nor her crosses /Nor yet her sorceries prevent these losses?'.<sup>20</sup> In his *The Popish Royall Favourite* (1643), William Prynne would remind his readers that the Duke had been 'swayed wholly by his Jesuited Mother, and Dutchesse, professed Papists, and their Cabinet counsel of Jesuits'.<sup>21</sup> Buckingham was therefore seen as a channel through which the danger of Papistry would be allowed into the realm, his perceived sodomitical activities evidencing the moral weakness that would render him prone to the carnal seductions of Papistry, and conflating the physical and moral corruption he embodied with the disease of female-oriented Papist infection.

These religiously-underpinned anxieties over national stability were evident in the events leading to the lengthy dissolution of Parliament known as the Personal Rule that began in 1629. Parliamentary grievance was expressed in the House's presentation to Charles of the Petition of Rights of 1628, which attempted to persuade the King to grant the principle that no tax should be levied without Parliamentary consent.<sup>22</sup> After some misleading vacillation, Charles eventually refused, and relations between the two sides rapidly worsened. Matters came to a head the following year when a final attempt by Charles to obtain the grant of tonnage and poundage was the subject of a counter-attempt by Puritan members of Parliament to curb the religious changes. The Parliamentarian Francis Rous gave voice to the anxiety as he spoke of the insidious inter-connection of Papistry and Arminianism as posing a dire threat to national religious-political security. He urged his auditors to '[l]ook into the very belly and bowels of this

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<sup>20</sup> Frederick W. Fairholt (ed.), *Poems and Songs Relating to George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham* (London: Percy Society, 1850), pp. 66-67. Cited by Bellany, p. 303.

<sup>21</sup> William Prynne, *The Popish Royall Favourite*. (London, 1643), Sig. G4v. Wing (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed.)/P4039A. Bodleian Library. Early English Books Online, eeb citation: 99831965, accessed 09.03.10. Cited by Dolan in *Whores of Babylon*, p. 97.

<sup>22</sup> Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, pp. 40-41.

Trojan Horse to see if there be not men in it ready to open the Gates to *Romish* Tyranny, and *Spanish* Monarchy, For an *Arminian* is the Spawn of a Papist'.<sup>23</sup> The matter proved so contentious that the debate descended into uproar and, following the bodily holding-down of the Speaker in an attempt to ensure the passing of suitably anti-Arminian legislation, Charles dissolved Parliament.<sup>24</sup>

### **'Popery' at Court**

After Buckingham's death, the expressions of unease over the dangers of Papistry continued to be articulated in the terms of institutionalised corruption at the highest levels. Despite the relative asceticism of Charles's own habits, and his attempt to impose order by bringing a new formality to the daily conduct of protocol, the perception was that he was presiding over a court that was becoming increasingly scandalous and corrupt, beset with sexual promiscuity and luxurious excess. It was thought of as a place rife with sexual intrigue, overly-ostentatious dress and behaviour, and the slavish following of 'newfangled' foreign fashions and ideas and 'effete indulgence'.<sup>25</sup> The suspicion of the court as the haunt of Papistry was given credence by the behaviour of the Queen, Henrietta Maria. A devout Roman Catholic, she had been tasked by her godfather the Pope upon her marriage in 1625 to foster the resurgence of the Papist religion in her new home country.<sup>26</sup> Her large train of French attendants included twelve priests and she was instrumental in introducing French customs and fashions.<sup>27</sup> She practiced her religion openly, with members of the public

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<sup>23</sup> Francis Rous, quoted by John Rushworth in *Historical Collections of private passages of State*, Vol. 1: 1618-1629, p. 645. (London, 1721) <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?comid=70155>, accessed 04.08.10.

<sup>24</sup> See Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>25</sup> P.W. Thomas, 'Two cultures? Court and country under Charles I', in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, p. 175.

<sup>26</sup> Erica Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion: Queen Henrietta Maria and court entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> Veevers, *Images of Love and Religion*, p. 2.

being allowed free access to the masses celebrated in her richly-decorated chapel at Somerset House. In addition, she actively encouraged the conversion to Roman Catholicism by people at court, where such conversions, especially amongst women, rapidly became fashionable. In keeping with the custom at the French court, Henrietta Maria took part (on occasion in masculine dress) in the showy and costly court masques, behaviour which is thought to have inspired William Prynne's unsubtle reference in *Histrion-mastix* (1632) to women who acted in public as 'notorious whores'.<sup>28</sup> This behaviour on the part of the Queen shows how it would have been possible, as Frances Dolan points out, to see her as the conflation of the contemporary anxieties surrounding 'women, theatricality, the foreign and the Catholic', and serves to underpin the increasing portrayals of her in keeping with the Whore of Babylon herself, as I demonstrate later in this chapter.<sup>29</sup>

The royal marriage had had an inauspicious beginning, characterised by mutual antipathy, but a marital reconciliation and a newfound uxoriousness on the part of Charles took place after the assassination of Buckingham in 1628. The anti-Papist rhetoric formerly aimed at Buckingham as the evil influence over the King was now transferred to Henrietta Maria, who became the particular focus of popular anti-Papist feeling. As the wife of the King, she was seen as possessing the potential to lure him from his Protestant faith and to open the door to the abuses of Papistry through her 'curtain lectures' carried out in the sexualised privacy of the royal marital bed.<sup>30</sup> An

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<sup>28</sup> See Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, p. 647. Sharpe points out that the date of 1633 on the title page is incorrect, and that it was actually published late in 1632. William Prynne, *Histrion-mastix: The players scourge, or, actors tragedies, divided into two parts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, 1633), unpaginated Table of Contents at end of text, under 'women actors' (eebo image number 581). STC (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)/20464. Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99850543, accessed 02.02.09. For more on Henrietta Maria's involvement in court theatricals, see Melinda J. Gough, 'Courtly *Comédiantes*: Henrietta Maria and Amateur Women's Stage Plays in France and England', in *Women Players in England, 1500-1660*, eds. Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin (Aldershot, Hants.: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, p. 99.

<sup>30</sup> Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, p. 121.

anonymous tract exemplifies the expressions of anxiety that the King (the 'Sun') might fall under this malign female influence, and that Henrietta Maria (the 'Moon'), 'by her night discourses' would 'encline the King to Popery' and 'under the Royall Curtaines' persuade 'him to advance the Plots of the Catholikes'.<sup>31</sup> William Prynne likewise spoke of her as 'Queen Mary her selfe in the King's own bed and bosome', the 'most powerfull Mediatrix' for English Roman Catholics.<sup>32</sup> Her willingness to intercede with the King on behalf of Papists, her personal devotion to the Virgin Mary, and even her name, all served as additional fuel for those of her enemies who constructed her in terms of Mariolatry. Above all, this anxiety-provoking linking of ambitious female Papist influence and seductive and infectious Papist idolatry was seen as established at the centre of the court, under Royal protection and acting without fear of retribution.<sup>33</sup>

The perception of Charles as under his wife's influence could therefore be used to construe him not merely as effeminate, but as an idolater seduced by the flaunting female carnality of a Papist icon.<sup>34</sup> His toleration of his wife's religion and the perception of the prevalent court sexual debauchery became conflated in the public imagination with the King's overt tolerance of a number of aristocratic proto-Papists at court and among his counsellors. When in the 1630s the new Papal legate George Con gained obvious favour with both the King and Queen, leading to the reports of Charles entertaining a return to Rome, this intensified the suspicions of his alignment with

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<sup>31</sup> Anon., *The Great Eclipse of the Sun, or Charles his Waine Over-Clouded, by the Evill Influences of the Moon* (London, 1644). Wing (2<sup>nd</sup>.ed)/G1688. University of Texas Austin Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 52211839, accessed 17.02.09. Although both Prynne's text and this one date from the First Civil War, Danielle Clarke shows that the anxieties about Henrietta Maria's undue influence over the King were current from the early 1630s onwards. See Danielle Clarke, 'The Iconography of the Blush: Marian Literature of the 1630s', in *Voicing Women: Gender and Sexuality in Early Modern Writing*, eds. Kate Chedzoy, Melanie Hansen and Suzanne Trill (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 111.

<sup>32</sup> Prynne, *The Popish Royall Favourite*, Sig. G4v. Cited by Dolan in *Whores of Babylon*, p.120.

<sup>33</sup> Clarke, 'The Iconography of the Blush', p. 124.

<sup>34</sup> See Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, p. 97.

Papistry.<sup>35</sup> Charles's behaviour did little to lessen this impression. He reportedly held an admiration for 'all things Spanish', dressed after the Spanish style and spent a great deal of money and time building up an extensive collection of Spanish and Italian art, much of which depicted religious subjects in a way abhorrent to Calvinist ideology.<sup>36</sup> Given the traditional English identification of Spain with the abuses of Popery, these actions aided the deepening fears about his true religious allegiance. The controversy over the re-issuing of the *Book of Sports* in 1632 added fuel to the fire. What was probably inspired in part by a well-meaning attempt to enable his subjects to enjoy a brief respite from their working week in the face of increasingly strict Sabbatarian local authorities came to be widely viewed as the irreligious legitimization of licentiousness, a royal incitement to break the fourth commandment.<sup>37</sup>

### **Theatrical and literary tropes of the 1630s – growing anti-monarchialism**

In the absence of Parliament as a forum in which to express discontent, the main outlet for dissent became the written word and the theatre. The output of the 1630s bears clear evidence of the phenomenon described by Martin Butler as the 'Caroline dilemma' - 'men found themselves caught between their reverence for kingly authority, given by God to lead His people, and their perception that Charles was not conforming to type'.<sup>38</sup> Even such self-confessed radicals as William Prynne betray this tension where, in his lengthy 'anti-theatrical' diatribe *Histrion-mastix*, the author is emphatic that he and his fellow 'puritans' are men who '*feare God and honour the King*, though

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<sup>35</sup> See Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life*, pp. 146-7.

<sup>36</sup> See Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life*, p. 145, and Jerry Brotton, *The Sale of the Late King's Goods* (London: Macmillan, 2006), p. 203-4.

<sup>37</sup> See Sharpe, *The Personal Rule of Charles I*, p. 355.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 90.

they oppugne the corruptions, sinnes, profanesse, and Popish and Pelagian errors of the times'.<sup>39</sup>

This dichotomy is clear in contemporary theatrical play-texts. The traditional view of the Caroline theatre has been one of 'cavalier drama', frivolous, showy, shallow and centred upon the Court.<sup>40</sup> However, attention to these dramas in more recent years has detected a strong trend of criticism of the monarch and his policies, not only in the public theatre but in the private plays and even in the masques staged at court.<sup>41</sup> Theatrical productions employed varying subterfuges through which to examine the political and religious problems of the day. One trope frequently employed was the conventional construction of 'bad counsel', which depicted the king, despite having the wellbeing of his people at heart, as being purposely misled by his advisers and churchmen. It was this notion that was partly to blame for the increasingly anti-episcopal rhetoric of the 1630s. The bishops (especially Archbishop Laud) were accused by men such as Prynne of abandoning the precepts of the true Protestant religion and of misleading the King in order to elevate the importance of their own positions. Prynne warned that these 'Popish Prelates' would 'usher in Popery, Superstition and Idolatry', 'contrary to his Majesties Declarations', intending to usurp power for themselves.<sup>42</sup> Such a construction does, of course, entail a subtext of monarchical gullibility, raising questions about a ruler's fitness, and it runs in parallel with the prevalent depiction of inadequate kingship. In the play-texts I shall examine, there is repeated evidence of these tensions in the depictions of 'absolute kings

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<sup>39</sup> Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 87; Prynne, *Histrio-mastix*, p. 826.

<sup>40</sup> Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 5; Kevin Sharpe, *Criticism and Compliment: The politics of literature in the England of Charles I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and Albert Tricomi, *Anticourt Drama in England, 1603-1642* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1989).

<sup>42</sup> William Prynne, 'Newes from Ipswich' ('Ipswich': 1636), t.p., n.p. Wing (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/P4021A. Bodleian Library. Early English Books Online, ebo citation: 99837180, accessed 04.06.10. Cited by Butler in *Theatre and Crisis*, p 89.

tyrannizing over their realms [and] subjects trapped between their loyalty to the crown and their need to speak out', where anxiety over 'bad counsel' and the desire to advise the king may both be seen.<sup>43</sup>

It should be noted, as Tricomi points out, that criticism of the monarchy is more overt later in the 1630s in the face of Charles's increasingly insensitive and unpopular policies, as English society became ideologically polarised.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, I argue that throughout the decade the diplomatic evocation of 'bad counsel' runs in tandem with a strand of thought expressing a more fundamental anti-monarchical stance, often interwoven in the same texts. There is evident anxiety, from the beginning of the 1630s, surrounding the fearful potential results of monarchical laxity, intransigence and weakness, expressed through the invocation of rhetorically distanced societal chaos and inversion. Monarchical rule is repeatedly shown in terms of masculine incapability or, even more fearfully, unchecked and destructive female dominance. It is especially relevant, I argue, that a great number of these texts are couched in terms of religious symbolism and metaphor, with frequent recourse to the high-affect tropes of Protestant religious virtue countered by Papistical female vice and malignancy. The body of the nation is shown as a vulnerable woman, threatened by rape or abandoned by her husband, in such terms as to privilege the agenda of militant Protestantism as the true protectors of religious and national integrity and depict the monarch as the morally-depraved source of national threat. This monarchical lack is shown in the varying terms of sexual submission to a dominant and ambitious woman, or of the failure of masculine self-discipline and rationality, providing a radical, if indirect, interrogation of Charles and his policies.

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<sup>43</sup> Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 23.

<sup>44</sup> Tricomi, *Anticourt Drama*, p. 22.

### **Tyrannical lust, female virtue**

Robert Davenport's *King John and Matilda* (c.1634) exemplifies this subtextual monarchical criticism.<sup>45</sup> The eponymous king is shown as a man utterly given over to bodily lust, epitomising the early-modern understanding of ill-contained carnal passion in a ruler as fatally affecting his ability to rule his realm. As Carole Levin demonstrates, '[u]ncontrolled sexual appetite (and fear around what it represented) became a symbol of lack of control that contaminated all aspects of governance'.<sup>46</sup> It is precisely this abrogation of reason and over-concentration on fleshly matters that constitutes John as the archetypal early-modern tyrant, rendered irrational and effeminate by his submission to his passions.<sup>47</sup> Significantly, this play works against the treatment of the historical character of John by Bale, Foxe and Shakespeare as a Protestant hero and protector of his realm against the Papist threat, and reverts instead to the traditional medieval depiction of him as an absolute tyrant.<sup>48</sup> We see how John's alienation from reason and self control has deprived him of any moral framework, making him ruthless and relentless in the obsessive pursuit of the satisfaction of his carnal desire for Matilda. He repeatedly breaks sacred oaths to both her and the barons, is a habitual liar and deceiver, and emphasises his love of underhanded dealing, delighting in his ability to 'catch craft /With imitation', gloating that 'he that would screw his ends/ To his own aims, must mingle ... /Secret dissemblings 'mongst his venial sinnes' (Sig. D1v.).

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Davenport, *King John and Matilda, a Tragedy* (London, 1655). Wing/D370. Newberry Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 12547435, accessed 01.11.08. Various dates have been attributed to the play, from 1624 to 1638, but I see Martin Butler's attribution of c.1634 as most probable, given the subject-matter of the play. See Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 73.

<sup>46</sup> Carole Levin, "'Lust Being Lord, there is no trust in kings": Passion, King John and the Responsibilities of Kingship', in *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance Drama*, eds. Carole Levin and Karen Robertson (Lampeter, Dyfed, Wales: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 1991), p. 255.

<sup>47</sup> Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance*, p. 21.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Levin, 'A Good Prince: King John and Early Tudor Propaganda', pp. 23-32.

There is a brief evocation of the ‘bad counsel’ trope of criticism outlined by Tricomi and Butler, where Fitzwater, the leader of the barons, attempts to excuse his monarch’s behaviour by attributing it to the greed and corruption of his counsellors. He has been ‘misled’, Fitzwater states, by ‘state mice’ ‘that nibble so upon the Lands impaired freedom’ (Sig. B4r.). This nonetheless appears merely as Fitzwater’s noble-minded unwillingness to see error in his liege-lord, and stands in radical contrast to the actual depravity exhibited by John as he enters into a downward moral spiral. He uses his own wife as an innocent pander in the attempt to subvert Matilda, falsely offers marriage to her, and ends by ordering her murder when he realises that she will never submit to him.

The extremity of John’s unkingly behaviour is such that the natural organic bond between him and his realm is being disrupted. The country itself is effeminised and weakened, a land of ‘poyson’d integrity’ (Sig. E1v.), a nation issuing ‘crying groans’, whose ‘blubbered cheeks /Are stiffe with tears, to see their priviledges [sic.] /Daily impaired’ (Sig. F2r.). The cosmos is out of joint, where ‘strange Comets’, those ill omens, have appeared in the ‘troubled skie’ (Sig. B3r.). This disruption points clearly to the indissoluble link between monarch and kingdom, in that what affects the one adversely must inevitably impact upon the other. The king’s actions are threatening a cataclysm both to his country and to his crown. As Young Bruce warns him, his reputation, that essential component of masculine identity, is in danger of being destroyed. In language reflecting an earthquake or other fundamental upheaval of nature, Young Bruce shows that,

a purple cloud  
Shall shaddow *England*, the whole Land shall reele,  
The Center groans, thy very Crown shall stand  
Trembling upon thy Temples, till it fall  
A Mourner at thy fames black funeral.

(Sig. G1v.)

It is particularly significant that John is repeatedly aligned with the abuses of Papistry, as he cravenly submits his helpless realm to Rome after a six-year interdiction (Sig. D3r.). The links between the surrender to the rapacious Papal demands and the King's effeminate weaknesses of the flesh are emphasised by Fitzwater's articulation of the deleterious effects of this submission upon his subjects. In an echo of the concerns of Parliament surrounding Charles's political and religious policies, the baron complains 'now must we suffer /The Kingdoms ancient Liberties, Land, lives, /And all to run the course that he shall steere' (Sig. D4r.). It is this alignment with the abuses of Papistry, together with the careful delineation of Matilda's murderer as a Roman Catholic priest, that point to the play as a politico-religious allegory, rather than simply the portrayal of unmanly tyrannical rule described by Levin.<sup>49</sup>

This allegory is particularly clearly seen in the depiction of the person of the unswervingly chaste and virtuous Matilda, who has sworn to live and die a virgin, following the poisoning by John of her betrothed, Robert Earl of Huntington. Matilda's resolute virtue marks her as an exemplar of Spenser's Una, the pure and untouched body of the English Protestant church who is destined nonetheless to endure repeated onslaughts upon her chastity. Depicted throughout the text as steadfastly rejecting John's lascivious and hard-pressed advances, she places great importance upon the preservation of her physical integrity. Matilda is described in semi-religious imagery, as a 'Chaste dove' (Sig. B4v.), 'matchless', and a 'pure and unspotted Dove' (Sig. F1r.). She loves truth, linking it symbolically to her own integrity, calling it a 'crown of Christall in an Ivory chest' (Sig. B3v.), where her bodily purity is matched by that of her soul, which is also described as 'Christall' (Sig. D2r.).

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<sup>49</sup> Levin, "'Lust being Lord, there is no trust in kings'", *Passion, King John and the Responsibilities of Kingship*, p. 257.

In an echo of the rhetoric surrounding Shakespeare's Innogen, Matilda is spoken of in terms of the Holy Bible, as a 'Book of goodnesse' (Sig. E4r.), a 'Book of beauty ... a face where vertue /Intelligibly flood[s] to charm the Reader' (Sig. D2r.). She is descended from true patriotic and virtuous English stock, the daughter of the leader of the barons uniting against John's tyranny. In their turn, the barons are seen as justified in their opposition to John, as having divine right on their side, with Matilda's father being described as 'The Marshall of Heavens' Army and the Churches' (Sig. B4r.). This is another evocation of Spenserian militant Protestantism emphasising Matilda's status as the epitome of the true native English Protestant faith. The depiction of Matilda's body as the site of masculine contention, the subject of the King's onslaught and the focus of protection from those attempting to restore national integrity, emphasises her characterisation as the spiritual centre of the nation. Her vulnerable state evokes the endangered state of the Protestant religion and the imperative need for its safeguarding by the forces of militant Protestantism. In the depiction of the monarch as the chief source of threat to national religious integrity, it implies Charles as the unfit protector of the English Church, a man intent instead upon despoiling her purity through the forcible imposition of Papist rituals and beliefs.

This ideological centrality is underscored by the manner of Matilda's death, rendered into a martyr for her faith as she is murdered at John's instigation. Upon her death, her body is spoken of as transmuted into 'perfect Gold' (Sig. I1v.), the metal which, in philosophical alchemy, is known as 'the symbol of immortality'.<sup>50</sup> In an echo of Dorothea in Dekker's *Virgin Martir* Matilda is depicted as reaping her well-deserved heavenly reward, where 'at the end of chastities white race, an Angell /Holds in his hand ... A Crown for Conquerors' (Sig. K1v.). But this victory is not merely personal

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<sup>50</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, trs. Stephen Corrin (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 151.

salvation. Matilda is described as possessing the attributes of ‘Vertues white Virgin, Chastities red Martyr’ (Sig. K1v.). Again, the imagery of philosophical alchemy is recalled, with the colour-specific symbolism of the ‘albedo’ and ‘rubedo’ stages of transmutation emphasising the purification and transformation of Matilda through martyrdom as rendering her into the instrument for reconciliation and healing, her death being the precursor to a new national unity.<sup>51</sup>

The mystic redemptive power granted to Matilda’s body in death may also be seen in terms of the attributes of the virginal female body described by Theodora Jankowski, as a pure locus of integrity possessing both religious and national significance in the early modern era, forming ‘a bond between human society and divine agency’.<sup>52</sup> The King is so moved by the sight of her dead body, carried on stage on a richly decorated hearse, that he is brought to the full realisation of his sins and inspired to repent and amend his ways. His public display of grief and penitence demonstrates his spiritual rebirth, and the re-establishment of national harmony. This sacrificial aspect of the dead virginal female body might be construed in terms of Roman Catholic martyrology, or even the sacrifice of the Roman Catholic Mass. I would argue, however, that Matilda is portrayed as a sacred focus for recuperation, a channel for the operation of divine grace in keeping with the tenets of Protestantism. This emphasises her as the embodiment of the English Protestant religion and the source of national salvation and moral rebirth.

However, despite the importance of Matilda’s death as the transformational instrument of national healing, a tension remains over the circumstances that have created the necessity for it. It is the king himself who has brought matters to this

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<sup>51</sup> For more on the definitions of the ‘albedo’, or ‘purification’ stage of the alchemical process, and the ‘rubedo’ or ‘perfection’ stage, please see Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 4, 174, and John Read, *Prelude to Chemistry: An Outline of Alchemy its literature and relationships* (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd, 1936), p. 115.

<sup>52</sup> Jankowski, *Pure Resistance*, p. 15

extremity through his lustful and irrational behaviour, conducting himself in such a manner as to place his kingdom in dire peril. Despite the evidence of his moral recuperation, the need for blood sacrifice as the only means of national regeneration raises a question over monarchical fitness that remains unanswered within the text. This creates a space, a lacuna filled with anxieties that are emphasised by the inability to express them – anxieties surrounding the fatal danger posed to national and religious integrity by a monarch perceived as intent on pursuing his own tyrannical agenda, uncaring of the wellbeing of his realm.

### **Kingly depravity, female virtue and female debauchery**

The tropes of female vice and virtue as paradigms for national political and religious anxieties are likewise central to Richard Brome's *The Queen and Concubine*, which was, it is thought, staged at the Salisbury Court indoor theatre in 1635 or 1636.<sup>53</sup> Brome's religious allegiance was probably not one of Puritan radicalism – it is known that he honed his craft under the aegis of his master Ben Jonson – but this play nonetheless displays another implicit but far-reaching criticism of decadent and unworthy kingship.<sup>54</sup>

Martin Butler suggests that the play was also put on at court in 1636, describing it as a work typical of those staged in compliment to Henrietta Maria, if not actually instigated by her. He maintains that in its depiction of a wronged but long-suffering queen, whose spirituality and unswerving virtue possess a transformational power, the play 'closely matches the outlook of the queen's courtiers in 1635-36', who saw

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<sup>53</sup> See Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 35. Richard Brome, *The Queen and Concubine*, in *Five new plays* (London, 1659). Wing (2<sup>nd</sup>. ed.)/B4872, Thomason E.1782[5]. British Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99868622, accessed 09.01.09. The text is not divided into scenes and lines, and I have therefore cited the page numbers.

<sup>54</sup> Martin Butler, 'Richard Brome', in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn. Oct. 2007. <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3503>, accessed 04.07.10.

Henrietta Maria as a beneficent influence upon the court and the King.<sup>55</sup> I argue, however, that the play contains a criticism of monarchy differing radically in tone from that of a tolerated court writer, the ‘previledged Scoffer’ described by Annabel Patterson.<sup>56</sup> It does not read as helpful or respectful advice to Charles or a compliment to Henrietta Maria, but as the work of a writer in the ‘public’ sphere who is reacting strongly and unfavourably to court corruption and religious changes. Although Butler does briefly acknowledge the influence of the imagery of the Book of Revelation in the depiction of the two main female characters in the play, he does not pursue the analogy in terms of the fundamental religious and ideological oppositions that were increasingly dividing English society at this time.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, Brome’s resort to the high-affect opposition of female virtue and vice in a religious context shows its probable use, if not in support of a radical Protestant viewpoint, then at least of an anti-Papist one. This makes it unlikely that the play’s agenda supports the staunchly Papist Queen or her courtiers.

Queen Eulalia, unjustly banished from court by her tyrannical and besotted husband so that he may ‘marry’ another woman, is shown as a type of ideal female virtue. Eulalia’s unwavering spirituality, her uncomplaining and consistent submission to her husband’s wishes, the ready perception of her innate, ‘unspotted’ virtue (p. 24) by those encountering her, and her far-reaching love of justice, mercy and forgiveness, all point to her as the ideal Protestant wife and the embodiment of the Protestant English church. This is underlined by the depiction of her as wandering in the wilderness, but gaining her living at last as the teacher and healer of the starving and disease-ridden inhabitants of the country that was her dowry on her marriage. As with Matilda, this aspect of

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<sup>55</sup> Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 42.

<sup>56</sup> Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation; The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 115.

<sup>57</sup> Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 41.

instruction and healing marks her, inspired as she is by a 'Heavenly Flame', with 'Divine Prophetick Fire' (p. 47), as the channel for the operation of divine grace. She is also shown in terms of the spiritual nourishment and redemption that can be gained only through proper knowledge of the Holy Bible, where she shows how '[s]omething I have in Book, to help their knowledge' (p. 76). The identification of Eulalia as the English Protestant Church is emphasised by the description of the country where she dwells as her dowry, a reassertion of the True Faith as long established in the land that is its divinely-destined home.

The binary female opposition at work shows her usurper, Alinda, as a further example of the Whore of Babylon. Alinda is boundlessly ambitious, her sole wish being to gain 'the top of Sovereignty', the 'lofty height of towring Majesty' (pp. 19-20). She is a 'Semiramis' (p. 91), a seductress who uses her female sexuality as the bait to entrap the King, willingly prostituting her body in an unsanctioned sham 'marriage' to gain her ends. Her ruthlessness and cruelty are blatant. She shows how she will 'not regard upon whose Necks [she treads]' (p. 22), unhesitatingly sacrificing those who hinder her ambitions. Notable among her victims is her father Sforza, a courageous and patriotic warrior, who objects to her brazen and shameless behaviour, calling her a 'whore' and a 'harlot' (pp. 14, 15, 29). The radical contrast between the two shows Sforza as a true Englishman, and constructs Alinda as a 'changeling', unnatural and out of sympathy with the realm. This is a probable reference to the perversion of Arminian and Papist innovation in contrast to the long-established 'true' Protestant faith. Alinda's unwomanly cruelty and boundless ambition are shown, too, in her repeated attempts to kill the King's true spouse, Eulalia, and his son and heir, the Prince (p. 63).

Alinda's hold over the King is so profound that she persuades him to make her 'absolute' ruler (p. 66), and to abdicate his power in her favour, where he instead

becomes her 'subject' (p. 97). Again, this is a correlation with the Whore in Revelation, a boundlessly ambitious woman, using her sexual wiles to seduce, fornicate with, and subvert the 'Kings of the Earth', depriving them of their ability to rule, and insisting on her own regal pre-eminence. Significantly, the King's adultery with Alinda is described as 'blasphemy' (p. 41). The presence of subversive and treacherous Papist clergy is emphasised in Alinda's favourite, Flavello, a fawning hypocrite and underhanded schemer, described in the terms of the prevalent early-modern anti-Jesuit imagery of 'monkeys' and 'parrots' (p. 31).<sup>58</sup> The infectious and dangerous nature of Papist doctrine, and the noxious effect of court-centred Papistry upon the nation is also shown, where the influence of the pair upon the kingdom is described as 'poisonous corruption' (p. 106).

As with *King John and Matilda*, this implicit centrality of the pernicious influence of seditious Papistry upon Protestant national rectitude is seen as stemming from the policies and inclinations of the monarch himself. The King, who should be the staunch and steadfast moral centre of his kingdom, has been fundamentally destabilised by his lustful desire for a seductive woman. The callous and besotted casting-off of his virtuous and long-standing wife for this tempting harlot shows him as utterly unmanned, acting in an inconsistent and irrational manner, as he falsely accuses the irreproachably virtuous Eulalia of adultery while committing actual adultery himself. His unjust banishment of his wife, condemned to wander the countryside as a helpless outcast, is paralleled by his unjust imprisonment of his staunch supporter and preserver, Sforza. John is thus constructed as a tyrant, a man who, in the selfish indulgence of his carnal passions, has broken the 'natural' contract between himself and his people, and

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<sup>58</sup> This imagery recalls that of Dekker in *The Double PP*, where the 'Jesuite' is shown in types of varying animality, including an 'ape'. Sig. A3r.

whose behaviour in his 'dotage' must inevitably bring about the 'ruine of the state' (p. 28).

This monarch rendered irrational by lust may be construed as a less-than-subtle reference to Charles, a man fatally seduced by the specious allure of the Papist religion, actively overseeing the reintroduction of heretical and dangerous Popish practices of worship. There is a reference to Henrietta Maria implicit in the very evocation of a 'queen' in terms of Papist tyranny, but the author's true invective is seemingly reserved for the monarch alone. The description of Alinda is most unflattering, and may have been intended to draw attention to the Queen as a Papist who had seduced the King away from his rightful religious allegiance, but it is the symbolic female archetypes of religious opposition that are emphasised here, serving to lay the blame for the national religious apostasy and chaos firmly upon royal moral laxity. Although the King is shown as the spouse of the true Church, he is not portrayed in the same way as Spenser's Redcrosse Knight, who is a man of fundamental good faith subject to transitory errors and weakness. This King is under the absolute and long-term sway of a seductive but fatal woman, rendered effeminate and tyrannical, and fundamentally alienated from his true destiny and duty. His moral degeneracy has had a terrible effect upon his subjects. The starving and disease-ridden inhabitants of Eulalia's native country may be seen as a paradigm for the hapless English themselves, deprived of the spiritual nourishment and healing of true doctrine and exposed to the infection of Papist heresy. Indeed, the nation's men are already seen as '*senex et ineptus*' (p. 59), their masculine potency and ability fearfully undermined by the ill rule of their monarch.

The Arcadian trope of the ideal pastoral existence is also readily apparent in the text, where it is significant that it is only in the countryside, away from the corrupting milieu of the court, that healing and restoration can take place. Under Eulalia's aegis,

the inhabitants of the countryside, once revived by her proper teaching and care, are able to rally to her support, insisting loyally that their 'purses and lives are free' to her (p. 77). This is, I contend, a reflection of the growing division of 'court' and 'country' along ideological and political lines, and shows Brome's anti-monarchical stance. The text contains a clear-cut opposition of the pastoral remoteness as the haven of the 'pure' (p. 48), and of the court as the site, as the fool Andrea says, of 'disease and taint' (p. 48). Implicit in this division, and in the imagery of the text, is the separation of the nation along religious lines, with the country, in the words of Peter Lake, shown as 'uncorrupt, Protestant, patriotic' and the court as the haunt of Papist carnality and corruption.<sup>59</sup> There is even a gentle parody implicit in the depiction of an attempt to set up a bucolic Parliament, showing that the potential for proper government must come from the unsullied milieu of the country, since it can no longer survive in the morally polluted atmosphere of the court.

It is the King's own laxity that is the indirect cause of the eventual restoration of the natural *status quo*. Without any proper masculine control, Alinda descends into madness, raving uncontrollably, with 'distraction in her face' (p. 96), and threatening to cuckold the King if he disobeys her. Alinda is shown as the fearful stereotype of a disordered female, in a tangential reference to the early-modern understanding of the unbalanced female body as being subject to its humours; cold, moist and governed by the phases of the moon.<sup>60</sup> She is described as possessing a 'moonflaw in her brain' (p. 96), her disordered body providing a paradigm for the female-originated chaos that has been allowed to reign unchecked in the realm. Paradoxically, it is the very extremity of Alinda's madness that restores the King to his senses: faced with this unnatural monstrosity, he is enabled to perceive the depth of his 'error' (p. 12). This realisation

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<sup>59</sup> Lake, 'Anti-popery: the Structure of a Prejudice', p. 88.

<sup>60</sup> Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, p. 41.

may be seen in terms of a religious ‘awakening’ as the King puts Alinda aside and renews his vows to his true spouse, Eulalia, now enabled to see her true, ‘heavenly’, character (p. 124).

It is significant that the play shows this alienation from the true religion as rendering the King unfit to rule. He abdicates in favour of his son, who has supported his mother throughout her tribulations, and who is now spoken of as the real ‘Posteritie’ (p. 126), showing the Prince as the true ruler of the kingdom and protector of the English church. The King retires to a monastery to repent and reflect, and Alinda, who is now cured, having also been in a trance of ‘error’, is sent to a Magdalene convent, implicitly characterising her as a reformed whore. The restoration of the kingdom is seen as possible only in the King’s absence, which would seem a none-too-subtle portrayal of Charles himself as unfit to rule, and the country in need of alternative governance.

### **Debauched female Papist tyranny, masculine laxity**

The rift between Charles and his subjects grew wider in the latter half of the 1630s, and was accompanied by an increase in the vehement anti-Papist rhetoric that saw the King as identified with the Papist cause.<sup>61</sup> One significant reason for this intensification of feeling was the heavy-handed imposition of the Arminian-influenced prayer book in Scotland that came to a head in 1637. This ‘Popish’ liturgy provoked furious resistance in the form of the Scottish ‘National Covenant’, resulting in the religiously-influenced struggles that would become known as the Bishops’ Wars.<sup>62</sup> The impression of a looming ‘Popish’ threat was exacerbated by the appointment of the ‘crypto-Papist’ Earl

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<sup>61</sup> Caroline Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1983), p. 10.

<sup>62</sup> Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life*, pp. 264-7. It is indicative that the Scottish Earl of Montrose described the new prayerbook as coming ‘from the bowels of the Whore of Babylon’. See MacCulloch, *Reformation*, p. 520.

of Arundel as the leader of the English army sent against the Scots. Many Protestants in England viewed the plight of their co-religionists in Scotland with sympathy, becoming even further convinced of the King's alignment with Papists and Papistry.<sup>63</sup> Discontent with Charles was articulated openly in the streets, exemplified by a certain Robert Hands, who was prosecuted for saying '[t]hat the King was a traitour and his Crowne was the whor of Babilon'.<sup>64</sup> Those who expressed themselves through the heavily-scrutinised means of print and play-texts, unable to criticise Charles in this overt fashion, were forced to focus anti-Papist sentiment upon the Queen and the court. Unrest in the nation increased, but Henrietta Maria's behaviour appears to have done little to dispel the anxiety. According to contemporary accounts, she was perceived as holding an undue influence over the King, persuading him to unsuitable courses of action.<sup>65</sup> She was seen to be active in the effort to help finance Charles's struggles against the Scots, attempting to gain Papal subsidies on the promise of increased tolerance for English Roman Catholics, and was instrumental in urging the King to raise an Irish army to crush the recalcitrant 'Covenanters', which would involve the transport of 'Papist' troops through England. In addition, she was known to have contacted prominent English Roman Catholics to persuade them to advance funds to her husband, an action which exacerbated the ever-present Protestant fears of Papist subversion and sedition.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot*, p. 99.

<sup>64</sup> Middlesex County Sessions Records, Vol. 3: 1625-67, 11 March 1643 (1888), pp. 85-90. British History Online. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/reportaspx?compid=66035>, accessed 06.07.10. Cited by Dagmar Freist in 'The King's Crowne is the Whore of Babylon: Politics, Gender and Communications in Mid-Seventeenth Century England', in *Gender & History*, Vol. 7, No. 3, Nov. 1995. Blackwell Publishers. <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/119964579/articletext?DOI10.1111/j.1468-0424.1995.tb00036.x>, accessed 06.07.10.

<sup>65</sup> Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot*, p. 108.

<sup>66</sup> Cust, *Charles I: A Political Life*, p. 312.

The fear of the Queen as a sexualised female Papist threat to the realm may, I argue, be readily seen in Nathaneal Richards' *Messallina* (c.1635-7).<sup>67</sup> The work is dedicated to Viscount Rochford, a prominent aristocrat and patron of the arts who was associated with the opposition to the King.<sup>68</sup> The printed text includes a commendatory poem from Robert Davenport, pointing to an association between the two writers, and the possibility of a similar religio-political stance.

The play is set in Ancient Rome, a setting recalling the lair of the Whore of Babylon, the home of the excesses and abuses of the Roman Catholic Church. Dominating the action is the eponymous Messalina, the Empress, a female fraught with the Whore's signifying characteristics as outlined in Chapter 17 of the Book of Revelation. A fearful, rampaging woman, she revels in her exercise of absolute power, ruthlessly seeking the indulgence of her insatiable carnal desires, with the 'plurisie of lust' in her 'veines' (Sig. C4v) showing her as the paradigmatic unbalanced female body, lustful and irrational. Her essential promiscuity and the corruption of the court milieu she inhabits are epitomised in her scandalous bet with the professional prostitute, Calpurnia, as to who will 'entertain' the most men, with Messalina emerging the clear winner. She is sexually dominant, repeatedly dragging hapless men to her bed, torturing those who resist until they submit. Once seduced, her victims are subverted into decadent and depraved creatures who are intoxicated with the pleasures of the flesh, enslaved and submissive.

Messalina is endowed with a more-than-human power, where the idolatry implicit in Papistry is shown in her being flattered as a 'goddess' (Sig. C6r.) and as a queen

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<sup>67</sup> Nathaneal Richards, *The Tragedy of Messallina, The Roman Emperesse* (London, 1640). STC (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)/21091. Bodleian Library. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99851182, accessed 10.10.08. 'Messalina' is spelt with two 'l's on the title page, but with one thereafter. I have therefore standardised with the latter spelling except when quoting the title directly. As the play-text is not divided into scenes and lines, I have cited the page numbers.

<sup>68</sup> As Martin Butler shows, Rochford had visited 'Charles's critic' Sir John Eliot in the Tower in 1629. See Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 193.

above queens, a further direct use of the imagery from Revelation. More fearful than this is the depiction of her as a sorceress, a 'Circe' (Sig. C3r.). She invokes the Furies with incantatory language, praying that she may be filled with the power of enchantment, that the 'Monarch of flames' will, '[f]ill with alluring poison these mine eyes /That I may wit[c]h the mistie soules of men, /And send them tumbling to th'*Acharusian* Fen' (Sig. C3r.). She is therefore not merely a seeker after pleasure but a succubus, a demonic presence actively procuring the damnation of the souls she has subverted, and delighting in their perpetual perdition. Despite the use of the imagery of classical Roman mythology, we are left in little doubt that she is in fact conjuring the Devil himself, as she calls upon the 'great Arck-Ruler of the lowe *Abyesse*' (Sig. C3r.), emphasising the early-modern Protestant construction of the Roman Catholic church as the 'anti-religion', the diametric opposition to the 'true' faith and aligned with Satan and the demonic.<sup>69</sup> This is underlined in the use of the imagery of fire and of burning, Messalina's victims being 'consum'd in thunder, smoake, and fire' (Sig. C3r.). This recalls both the infection with venereal disease from promiscuous sexual activity and that of deadly Papist doctrine, together with the torment of hellfire consequent upon spiritual damnation.

Fearful though this untrammelled female ascendancy is, however, it is Messalina's pernicious effect on the masculine integrity of the nation's menfolk, both physical and spiritual, that is the true focus of authorial anxiety. Essential male virtue, that *virtus* fundamental to the proper masculine governance of both self and state, is the real object of her deadly assault, with the drive to bring about the 'soul's pollution' (Sig. D5v.) being even more important than the undermining of bodily integrity. A sexual encounter with her is shown as the imbibing of a noxious draught, 'that deadly potion

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<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Lake, 'Anti-popery: the Structure of a Prejudice'; Christopher Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England*, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1990); and Robin Clifton 'Fear of Popery', in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, p. 151.

of the soule, /Whose poison quafft, kills body and the soule' (Sig. D5r.), emphasising the two-fold personal extinction that such contact inevitably entails. She has already 'turned' her factotum, the servile and conniving Saufellus, who may be seen as personifying the depraved Roman Catholic clergy, and she goes on to seduce, amongst others, the actor Menester, rendering him a mindless toady, a man literally and metaphorically 'ravish't' (Sig. D4v.).

It is in her utter overthrow and subverting of the virtuous, learned and manly Silius, however, that Messalina achieves her greatest triumph. She initially drugs him into submission with a soporific draught, a further reference to the 'cup of fornication' wielded by the Whore of Babylon, that may be seen as a symbolic metaphor for the female genitals, at once seductive, intoxicating and disease-bearing. Even Silius's education in 'civility', his knowledge of the precepts of the philosophers, cannot save him. He quotes the apposite Senecan maxim that 'Vertue is onely true nobilitie' (Sig. B2r.), but is powerless against Messalina's cunning and overbearing will, and soon falls under her spell. He utterly abrogates his masculine rationality and strength of purpose, and becomes her slave, 'bewicht; charm'd, and enchanted' (Sig. D2v.), rendered helpless by his addiction to the carnal delights she offers. His realisation of this enslavement and yet his powerlessness to act renders his plight even more terrible; he speaks of the manner in which Messalina's 'delicious melting kisse' '[s]ucks dry the sweetnesse of a soule distrest' and 'poysons' his 'blood and braine' (Sig. C4r.). He is fatally infected, 'all Flame, /A scorcht enchanted flame', this submission to pleasure dooming him to double destruction, knowing he will 'burne /To Cinders with delight, debar'd to quench /Fervour with fervour, violent flame with flames' (Sig. C4r.). The complete perversion of this formerly upright and self-controlled man is shown in his speedy and rapid fall into debauchery and depravity. From free indulgence in the

‘prodigal sweets’ (Sig. D4v.) of adultery he descends to the attempted murder of his virtuous, but inconvenient, wife, and thence to bigamy. Finally, he commits the ultimate treachery of the usurpation of the imperial diadem, illegally bestowed upon him by the power-mad and lust-crazed Messalina.

This loss of masculine integrity and agency, and hence the loss of masculine identity, is echoed by the depiction of the other men at court, who have all been emasculated by this depraving female rule. Even those three men who at last rouse themselves to alert the Emperor, the absent Claudius, to the abuses his wife is perpetrating in his name are motivated solely by self-interest, fearing that they may be deprived of their lucrative situation as the Emperor’s favourites. The court is a moral vacuum, a place of self-seeking, corruption and debauchery, where Messalina’s virtuous mother, Lepida, despairing of her daughter’s behaviour, laments,

See how the politic statesman for his ends.  
Sits hammering mischief; and how Toad-like swells  
Bombaste with treasons riches; see ther’s lust  
Brave Madam, lust temptations painted whore  
Divinely worshipt by the bastard brood  
Of knaves and fooles.

(Sig. C8v.)

This institutionalised moral degeneracy is epitomised in the masque held to celebrate the ‘wedding’ of Messalina and Silius. The pair’s relentless ambition and indulgence in illicit sensual pleasures is echoed in the depiction of the courtesans dressed as queens, a paradigm for the sexualised hypocrisy and falsehood characterising the court under Messalina’s rule. The only true resistance to Messalina’s authority is in the persons of Mela and Montanus, two men who live away from the court, another instance of the contemporary court/country divide that saw the court as corrupt and the country as the true source of integrity and virtue. Their manly friendship enables them to mount a brief resistance to Messalina, Montanus proving

able to withstand her attempt at seduction, but even they find it necessary to flee into exile to escape her clutches. Mela speaks of the sapping effect of Messalina's influence, which has served to render him irresolute, wanting 'his will's performance', conflating the language of the loss of spiritual strength with that of male sexual impotence (Sig. D2r.).

Messalina's lust-driven ambition is not aimed solely at masculine physical and moral integrity, however. In a use of the symbolic early-modern significance of the chaste and contained female body as a paradigm for national stability and integrity, she is shown as equally intent upon overturning feminine virtue.<sup>70</sup> Not only does she have the husbands of a number of virtuous Roman matrons killed, so that she may install these women at court and force them to take part in her orgies, but she attempts the ultimate blasphemy in the form of the mass rape of the vestal virgins. These priestesses of Jupiter bear the symbolic weight of national spiritual and religious integrity upon their shoulders. Their unspotted bodies are a central synecdoche for the virtue of the state, where the law ordains immediate death for them in the event of the loss of their virginity. Their concealment and protection by Lepida may be seen as an emphasis upon the link between the Protestant faith and the English Church, both of which have been threatened and driven into seclusion by the ascendancy of 'Papistry'. It is also a reversion to the standard trope of English Protestantism as the 'true' religion. This attempted sexual subversion likewise emphasises Messalina as the Whore of Babylon, intent upon the utter destruction of the ideological foundation and reputation of the English Protestant Church.

The dominance of Messalina as the ambitious and raging female avatar of the Whore of Babylon is balanced by the absence of proper masculine rule. Messalina's

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<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen*, p. 54.

'misrule' has been permitted through the unmanly weakness of her husband, the Emperor Claudius. He is unduly uxorious, a foolish, gullible and superstitious man, 'Drunke with the dregs of overligh beleefe', and 'Scar'd with the Bugges Of Babies' (Sig. E3v.). He has been 'grossely gul'd' (Sig. E3v.), so enslaved by his wife's carnal seductions that he has become complaisant in her cuckolding of him, even acceding to her bigamous 'marriage' with Silius. He is conspicuous by his absence throughout the play, returning only at the end to assert a belated restitution of authority. Even this reassertion of kingly rule is inconclusive, where divine agency, rather than that of Claudius, is necessary to achieve the restoration of proper order. A thunderclap kills the pursuers of the vestal virgins, and Messalina is confronted by the vengeful Furies and the ghosts of those she has killed. Even in her death she manifests an unfitting and unwomanly assertion, committing suicide rather than await execution.

The centrality of this unruly, ambitious and promiscuous femininity is, I argue, an overt conflation of the combined anxieties surrounding the perceived danger to English national religio-political stability from Charles's toleration and encouragement of Papistry both in his religious policies and in his Queen. The play may be seen particularly in terms of those fears surrounding the Queen's theatrical appearances, her political intrigues, her reputed love of luxury and ostentation, and her Papist religion. The depiction of Messalina evokes the Queen's perceived identification with Mariolatry, showing her as an idol fraught with the anxiety-provoking attributes of Papistry - a seductive but meretricious focus of heretical worship, drawing men in through her external attractions, only to entail them in perpetual damnation and the loss of their souls. The anxieties about Henrietta Maria seducing the King and by extension the nation through her sexual wiles are, I suggest, particularly evident here. The depiction of national masculine 'lack of will' functions strongly to suggest both the

monarch and the nation as infected and effeminised, at the mercy of a sexually depraved, ambitious and ruthless queen. Both the lack of assertion on the part of those of the militant Protestant faction and the inability or unwillingness of the King to curb his wife's excesses are being evoked through the multivalent portrayals of masculine moral weakness.

The depiction of Messalina's unwomanly ambition and desire for power are also an overt reflection of Henrietta Maria's growing involvement in the making of policy during the later 1630s. It is for this reason that I consider the date of the play's first staging to be nearer 1638 than 1635, in keeping with Caroline Hibbard's perception of the Queen's influence as noticeably increased after 1637. This lends an additional significance to its appearance in print in 1640, when her unpopularity was becoming particularly evident.<sup>71</sup> The anxiety raised by Henrietta Maria's behaviour is evidenced by the widespread belief that she was the instigator of all Charles's most 'disturbing acts and policies', a feeling articulated particularly clearly in John Pym's description of her in the Parliamentary 'Declaration of Fears and Jealousies' in 1641, as 'a dangerous and ill-affected person [who] hath been admitted to intermeddle with the great affairs of state'.<sup>72</sup> Thus, despite the token depiction of the restoration of the True Faith in the recuperation of Lepida at the end of the play, there is a far greater anxiety evident in the depiction of the ongoing and fundamental damage wrought to both national and personal masculine honour, figured as religious and political integrity. The lacklustre ending of the play creates the sense of impasse – there is no clear restitution of strong masculine rule, no firm programme of national reconciliation mapped out. Again, there

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<sup>71</sup> Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot*, p. 228.

<sup>72</sup> Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot*, p. 222. John Pym, 'Declaration of Fears and Jealousies', in England and Wales Parliament, House of Commons, *An Exact Collection of All Remonstrances, Declarations, Votes ... and Other Remarkable Passages betweene the Kings Most Excellent Majesty and His High Court of Parliament* (London, 1643). Wing/E1533. Thomason Collection. Early English Books Online, eebo citation: 99872180, accessed 15.03.09. Cited by Frances Dolan in *Whores of Babylon*, p. 123.

is an unfulfilled gap, a central ‘lack’ of monarchical leadership. This demonstrates, I argue, an extreme disenchantment with the rule of Charles himself. While the play in no way advocates either rebellion or the deposing of a monarch, its very inability to envisage future prosperity for the nation or its religion under the present ruler is significant in itself.

### **The middle ground, too little too late?**

In contrast to the previous two texts, Francis Quarles’s *The Virgin Widow* may be seen as a plea for religious moderation, an espousal of the theological ‘middle way’.<sup>73</sup> Quarles was a professed Royalist, a man traditionally categorised by literary critics as a ‘Cavalier’ poet, and who was later to support the King during the Civil War.<sup>74</sup> Nonetheless, his text contains an implicit criticism of the religio-political state of the nation that I suggest is evidence of the cross-factional spread of dissatisfaction with Charles and his rule. Quarles was already a noted writer on religious topics, where his *Emblemes* (1635), a volume of devotional and meditative poetry linked to the use of illustrative emblems, had proved immensely popular. However, despite his use of the Jesuit-inspired *Pia desideria* (1624) as the direct inspiration for *Emblemes*, his poetry has traditionally been grouped with that of other writers of Protestant devotional verse such as Donne and Herbert.<sup>75</sup> His religious allegiance seems to have been one of ‘middle-ground’ conformity to the established English Church - equally against the excesses of Papistry and radical Puritanism. Despite his links to what Gordon Haight

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<sup>73</sup> Francis Quarles, *The Virgin Widow: A Comedie* (London, 1649). Wing/Q118. British Library. Early English Books online, eebo citation: 12682495, accessed 09.10.08. Since the text is not divided into scenes and line numbers, I have cited page numbers.

<sup>74</sup> Karl Josef Höltgen, ‘Francis Quarles’, in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, online edn. 2008) <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22945>, accessed 06.02.09.

<sup>75</sup> See Martin Elsky, ‘History, Liturgy and Point of View in Protestant Meditative Poetry’, in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 77, No 1 (Winter, 1980), pp. 67-83. University of North Carolina Press, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27709352>, accessed 05.02.09.

describes as ‘the better class of Puritans’, with strong and long-standing connections to an Essex family who were to become prominent supporters of Parliament in the Civil War, he was typical of those within the English church who believed that the way forward lay in religious unity, holding that the ‘true *Protestant* Religion stands like a *vertue* between two *vices*, *Popery* and *Separatisme*’.<sup>76</sup>

Although his ‘interlude’ did not appear in print until 1649, it is thought to have been staged privately in about 1640. Its comic element has been highlighted – Quarles himself uses the word ‘comédie’ in the title – and Theodora Jankowski maintains its main thrust to be a light-hearted examination of forced marriage in a patriarchal society.<sup>77</sup> While this interpretation is certainly plausible, I agree with Gordon Haight that the play is primarily a religious allegory, a depiction of deep-set unease with the parlous religio-political state of the realm, torn between the dangerous threat of sanctioned Papistry and the divisive harshness of Puritanism.<sup>78</sup>

Quarles employs the oppositional religious tropes of the female sexualised archetypes of virtue and vice, in another reversion to the imagery of Revelation. The pure and unspotted Kettreena, although married for many years to the elderly Pertenax, is nonetheless still a virgin. Her husband is manifestly unworthy of her, being jealous, quarrelsome and miserly. Despite Pertenax’s unfounded and narrow-minded suspicions of her virtue, Kettreena’s essential moral purity is self-evident. Her brother-in-law, Formidon, speaks of her as the epitome of ‘sweet innocence’ and ‘noted virtue’ (pp. 8, 13). Evaldus, the King, describes her ‘full perfection’ (p. 15) and sees her as ‘dove-like’ (p. 70), an evocation of religious imagery. She is merciful and charitable to those

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<sup>76</sup> Francis Quarles, *The Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Francis Quarles*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (London: Chertsey Worthies Library, privately printed by T. & A. Constable, 1880). Vol. 1, p. 53. Cited by Gordon S. Haight in ‘Francis Quarles in the Civil War’, in *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 46 (Apr., 1936), pp. 147-164, p. 150. Oxford University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/510174>, accessed 18.01.09

<sup>77</sup> Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*, p. 169.

<sup>78</sup> Haight, ‘Francis Quarles in the Civil War’, p. 148.

in trouble, beseeching her husband on her knees to release two of his debtors from their debts (p. 27). She is intended as the embodiment of religious virtue, as may be seen from the revelation that she has remained a virgin as the result of a vow of chastity taken after the disappearance of her former betrothed, a 'pilgrim' (p. 16). This memory of this man, who inspired her with a deep affection, has caused her to keep her body as 'spotlesse' as her reputation (p. 17). As the foil to his faultless wife, Pertenax may be seen as an unflattering portrayal of Puritan narrowness and rigidity, and of the inability of those of this persuasion to properly understand or nurture the true Christian religion. This evidences Quarles's belief in the 'middle way' as the solution to the national religious and political troubles.

Set in opposition to Kettreena is Augusta, the King's wife, a proud and jealous woman, mother of his three quarrelling and troublesome sons, and a far greater threat to Kettreena's well-being than Pertenax. Perceiving that her husband's love for her is waning, and that he is drawn towards Kettreena, she plots to have the hapless woman murdered. She sends a hypocritical and dissembling letter and a 'silver cup' (p. 35) of poison, disguised as medicine, to 'restore' Kettreena from an illness into which she has fallen. Both these items evoke the infection and poison of Roman Catholic heresy, referencing its fatal doctrine and the noxious effects of the contents of the Whore of Babylon's tainted golden cup. Significantly, Pertenax is the one killed through his jealous insistence on drinking the deadly draught, and Kettreena escapes death. This reinforces the construction of the deadly effects of Papistry upon the unwary and spiritually blind, and shows Kettreena as guarded by divine providence.

It is significant that Augusta also encourages practitioners of false medicine, granting the mercenary Quack a licence to practise, and gaining the avaricious and worldly Artesio the position of court physician. The appropriately-named Quack's use

of specious medicines and his adoption of disguise reference the contemporary anxiety about the seditious activities of Jesuits and Papist priests infiltrating the kingdom and spreading erroneous Papist doctrine. While Quack's insidious activities are carried out in society at large, Artesio operates within the court. Although he lacks any professional insight – he erroneously diagnoses the urine of both Lady Albion (the nation) and Lady Temple (the church) – he is nonetheless a dangerous man, indulging in deceit and subterfuge to gain his mercenary ends. In this aspect of his character, Artesio may be seen as a comment on the toleration of Papists at court, and a possible reference to the encouragement of foreign Papists such as George Con.

Augusta's domination is depicted in terms of the prevalent anxiety about the sexual license and Papistry held to be rife within the English court. Not only is the court over which she presides a site of inverted morality, vanity and false report where all is 'in extreams, and it ownes nothing good /But what it censures evill' (p. 10), but Quack shows that he has provided medicines to Mistresse Trippitt, one of Augusta's waiting women, to procure an abortion and to cure the pox (p. 20). This deceitful, diseased and promiscuous femininity may be seen as a paradigm for the Papist female-oriented milieu of the English court, and may also be understood as a reflection of the anxieties surrounding Henrietta Maria as the sexualised source of national Papist danger.

Not only is the court the site of feminised Papist infection and moral depravity, but the body politic of the realm is diseased, its 'humours' out of balance, in need of 'sweating, purging and a flux' (p. 20). Quarles shows that this national disorder is caused by the lack of proper monarchical rule. However, in keeping with Quarles's Royalist convictions, it is not the king who is seen as being at fault. He is a generous and fatherly ruler, who is prevented from ruling effectively by the 'bad counsel' of those around him, who are too ineffectual to provide him with the proper guidance. His

two counsellors, Formidon and Comodus, are weak men under the control of their domineering wives, the sisters of Augusta, and the King's three sons by Augusta are quarrelsome, weak and effeminate, in thrall to their mistresses. This effeminate weakness is caused by Augusta's influence, an underlining of the noxious presence of Papistry at the centre of power, and a probable further reference to Henrietta Maria's undesirable agency.

The terrible danger inherent in the indulgence of Papistry and Papist plots may be seen in the denouement of the play. We learn that Artesio is not, as supposed, father to Kettreena, but instead to the evil Augusta, whom he has contrived to place on the throne by deception. The dangerous threat he poses to the very foundations of political and religious stability, together with his relentless greed and carnality, show Artesio as the epitome of seditious Papistry, perpetually lying in wait to undermine the realm. It also reinforces the imagery of Augusta, as his daughter, as the Whore of Babylon. As in *Messallina*, the restoration of national harmony that follows is achieved, not by the King, but by a *deus ex machina* device. The evil Augusta, having blasphemed against the power of the Oracle (a probable reference to the authority of the Holy Bible), is mysteriously struck dead, along with her sons. The crown magically transfers itself to Kettreena's head and this, and the revelation that she was exchanged at birth for Augusta by a suborned nurse, shows her true identity as the 'lawfull Queene' (p. 70), demonstrating her as the epitome of the true established religion, the personification of the English Protestant faith.

The theological significance of Kettreena's paradoxical bodily condition is now apparent, where her physical integrity shows her as religious purity untouched by the attempted appropriation by Puritanism or the deadly threat of Papistry. The King is revealed as her long-lost betrothed, the Pilgrim, and the two can now be united in a

‘Marriage-Royall’ (p. 72). As a virginal bride, Kettreena is properly fitted for her mystical union with her husband, and is both the symbolic vessel for healing grace and national reconciliation and the virtuous woman who will be a true wife and the mother of the royal progeny, ensuring future national and religious harmony and prosperity. This centrality of Protestantism in the formation and maintenance of English national identity and stability is an underlining of Quarles’s religious convictions about the theological ‘middle way’. Nonetheless, the depiction of Kettreena’s initially forlorn and abandoned state, and the long-term ascendancy of Augusta, may be seen as an implicit criticism of Charles’s religious policies, all the more significant from one of Quarles’s Royalist views.

The depiction of depraved, debauched or inept kingship that is the common theme in these texts may be seen as an expression of profound dissatisfaction with Charles and a questioning of his conduct as monarch. The use of the high-affect tropes of religious ideological opposition is particularly significant in this period, since they may be understood as a direct underpinning for the increasingly evident social and political divide. Relations between King and Parliament deteriorated rapidly towards the end of the 1630s, fuelled by successive national anti-Papist scares and an increasing tendency on the part of supporters of Parliament to align the King, Queen and court with the abuses of Papistry. John Pym, the Parliamentarian, typified these sentiments as he openly berated Royal policy in the House, characterising it in terms of ‘popery and tyranny’.<sup>79</sup> The Protestation placed by Parliament before Charles in June 1641 urged the monarch to purge the court of Papists; rumours of ‘Popish plots’ proliferated

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<sup>79</sup> Robin Clifton, ‘Fear of Popery’ in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, p. 151

throughout the country, increasing the profound anxieties about national danger, and giving rise to anti-Papist riots.<sup>80</sup>

I suggest the evidence for this splitting of the nation along ideological lines, and the inevitability of the subsequent outbreak of the Civil War in 1641, is apparent in these play-texts. The expression of anti-Papist sentiments through the use of oppositional sexualised female embodiment on the part of those of a radical Protestant persuasion, a constant trope since the Reformation, came to a head in this period. The depiction of royal sexual depravity in *King John and Matilda*, the unmonarchical tyranny and moral instability in *The Queen and Concubine*, the ravaging sexual promiscuity of *Messallina*, and even the kingly 'blindness' in *The Virgin Widow*, may not appear as a direct and 'photographic' representation of Charles or even Henrietta Maria. In their common themes of sexualised, threatening or threatened female bodies we may, however, read the prevalent anxieties about the danger to the nation's religion and stability on the part of those who were constituting themselves as the guardians of national integrity and prosperity. The adherence to the 'true' religion, once again, is shown as a guarantee of masculine spiritual insight and rectitude and the indulgence of the carnal abuses of Papist depravity as a rhetorically distanced but nonetheless worryingly proximate danger to the realm and its stability. The seemingly straightforward opposition of moral rectitude and vice is nonetheless undermined by the almost irreconcilable problems contained in this formulation. The putative safeguard and source of moral authority under the construction of this patriarchal hegemony, the guarantor of national spiritual rectitude who is the monarch, is simultaneously constituted as the primary moral threat to the wellbeing of his nation. The alignment of the king with the effeminate depravities of Papistry provides a fundamental ideological 'faultline', and

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<sup>80</sup> See Cust. *Charles I: A Political Life*, pp. 283-6.

serves to privilege the agenda of those of the militant Protestant persuasion. Taken together, the texts provide a portrait of a nation approaching an ideological crisis, deeply divided and standing on the brink of the terrible schism of the Civil War.

### Conclusion

The high-affect tropes of female religious embodiment as a paradigm for national religio-political threat and stability continued to be pressed into service during the Civil War and Commonwealth, and following the Restoration of Charles II. Parliamentary Civil War polemic inveighed against perceived theological laxity or pro-monarchical sentiment as evidence of the encroachments of the Whore of Babylon.<sup>1</sup> Charles II's maintenance of a Roman Catholic mistress was seen as evidence of his susceptibility to Papistry, and his lack of sexual continence extrapolated to depict him as a tyrant intent upon the 'rape' of his kingdom.<sup>2</sup> The imagery is particularly evident in the construction of embodied and gendered religious difference in the panic surrounding the 'Popish Plot' of Charles II's later reign, where the anxieties about the insidious threat of Papist sympathisers plotting to undermine the kingdom resulted in a multiplicity of texts fulminating against the 'Whore' and her abuses.<sup>3</sup>

The oppositional rhetorical employment of female embodiment in this context may initially seem to be a simple evocation of the traditional symbolism of 'woman' as an explicatory mechanism, but when these constructions are unpacked it becomes apparent that the tropes are 'over-loaded'. These highly-charged metaphors are employed in the attempt to contain and distance weighty anxieties about the conduct of religio-political

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<sup>1</sup> For the recourse to this imagery in the Parliamentary justification for the Civil War, see Glenn Burgess, 'Was the English Civil War a War of Religion? The Evidence of Political Propaganda', in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 61. No. 2 (1998), p. 173. University of California Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3817797>, accessed 18.2.10.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Marvell's depiction of Charles II as attempting to rape Britannia in *The Last Instructions to a Painter*, line 906, in *The Complete Poems* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1972, reprinted with additional notes 2005), p. 157.

<sup>3</sup> See Dolan, "'The Wretched Subject the Whole Town Talks of': Elizabeth Cellier, Popish Plots, and Print", in *Whores of Babylon*, p. 157.

affairs in an age of cultural and societal change and flux. My research demonstrates how this symbolism was frequently employed by those Protestant English men ‘writing the nation’, in the articulation of opposition to, or unease with, the administration of policy by the monarch, revealing ‘faultlines’ and anxieties reflecting the interplay of power relations in the period. This process reflects the shifting attitudes towards the institution of monarchy outlined by Liah Greenfeld as an integral part of the construction of English Protestant national identity. She shows how the Reformation period in England saw a gradual separation of the idea of the institution of monarchy from that of the nation, and an increasing understanding of the polity as ‘not simply the patrimony of the monarch, but a commonwealth, a community and a collective enterprise of many fundamentally equal participants’.<sup>4</sup> Despite the hyperbolic praise that repeatedly constituted the monarch as the religious focus of the nation, we see the growing self-assertion of a newly articulate literary élite, whose Protestant adherence was central to their conception of themselves as duty-bound to ensure both individual and national religious salvation.

Eamon Duffy describes the pre-Reformation sense of incorporation and continuity between members of the ‘sharing or mystical body of the Church’ as underpinned by the institutionalised practice of the living helping to achieve remission of the sins of those who had died through prayer and masses offered for their souls.<sup>5</sup> The disruption of this lineal ‘family’ connection caused by the Protestant insistence upon the individual achievement of salvation may, I argue, be paralleled by the schism from the Roman Catholic ‘mother’ church experienced by English Protestants. It is significant that the construction of a separate English national identity is carried out through the psychically-

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<sup>4</sup> Liah Greenfeld, *Five Roads to Modernity* (London: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 57.

central tropes of maternity and masculine identity formation. This disruption evokes the Lacanian mother/child dyad, by means of which the male child must achieve separation from its mother in order to achieve ‘civilisation’, and may serve to explain the growth of interest in the examination of religious and national ‘origins’ evident in the period.<sup>6</sup> The ideological centrality of this alternative ontological search is evident in the repeated insistence upon the contemporaneous genesis in the classical era of ancient Rome of the ‘primitive’ religion and ‘Britishness’ seen in the texts.

The prevalence of religious and eroticised metaphors in this construction of English theological righteousness and national integrity may be interpreted in terms of Helen Hackett’s formulation of a society in which religious language would have seemed a natural rhetorical trope, with the ‘extensive dissemination of religious references and resonances through all areas of culture’.<sup>7</sup> The repeated employment of the oppositional tropes of female sexual promiscuity and purity from the Biblical Book of Revelation, as well as the lasting influence of the traditional imagery of Mariolatry in the Reformation, would support this. Hackett writes persuasively of the poetry of Donne as permeated with the blend of the ‘forbidden’ tropes of the erotic and Roman Catholic ideology, and describes how the seeming incongruity serves to fuel the profound strength of the poet’s imagery.<sup>8</sup> I argue that the emphasis upon sexualised bodies and upon aberrant and conforming sexuality in the religio-nationalistic context, is the attempt to construct Protestant masculinity against Papist effeminised ‘deviancy’ as the innately righteous

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<sup>5</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 364.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Sean Homer, *Routledge Critical Thinkers: Jacques Lacan* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 71-78.

<sup>7</sup> Helen Hackett, ‘The Art of Blasphemy? Interfusions of the Erotic and the Sacred in the Poetry of Donne, Barnes, and Constable’, in *Renaissance and Reformation*, XXVIII, 3 (2004), p. 31 (Toronto: Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies). <http://www.bl.uk/I0038165US/7356.865100>, accessed 08.12.09.

destined protector and ensurer of national moral and geographical integrity. However, this use of performative gender construction is problematised, since the assertion of patriarchal control in the ‘engendering’ of national identity is being made where no true control exists. The subtextual awareness of this permeates the texts themselves, where the rhetorical attempt to gain influence over the formulation and implementation of national religio-political policy manifests itself through the use of this sexualised imagery, through which personal and private anxieties about male potency, performance and control are transferred onto the public, national sphere as a mediating paradigm. Those who oppose, or do not adequately support, the agenda of the militant Protestant faction become stigmatised with the attributes of spiritual ‘fornication’, thus constructing the moral supremacy of the writers themselves by opposition.

This underlying awareness informs the seeming incongruities of the sexualised religio-political constructions of power relations in these texts. The struggle for rhetorical control asserts a national ‘separateness’ and integrity that co-exists with the repeated evocation of imminent or actual societal upheaval and chaos. The texts repeatedly shift between the ‘ideal’ and ‘actual’ construction of monarchical rule in such a way as to open a significant gap into which the reader is required to intuit the meaning the author is unable to supply directly. Overtly flattering depictions of the monarch as God’s anointed, divinely-destined as the protector both of realm and national religion, co-exist with the anxiety about actual or imminent danger to national stability and integrity caused by the failure of the monarch to actually carry out this duty to the satisfaction of his or her critics. In the codifying and containment of these anxieties, the metaphors of sexualised bodily integrity, both female and male, are counterbalanced by

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<sup>8</sup> Hackett, ‘The Art of Blasphemy?’, pp. 33-35.

those of sexual ‘adultery’, promiscuity and masculine effeminacy, transferred onto the religio-political dimension.

Kingly inadequacy as the source of national instability is the constant strand around which these constructions of national integrity and threat revolve. John Bale’s *King Johan* shows an ostensibly virtuous king, but leaves us to interpret his failures of magistracy in the fearful effect of his neglect and bad judgement upon the vulnerable female body of his kingdom. Bale’s *Image of Both Churches* uses the eroticised oppositional female figures from Revelation to give a structure to religio-political English separateness and integrity, while constituting the Henrician Protestant exiles as the true moral centre of the nation. Knox’s fulmination against women rulers in *The first blast of the trumpet* employs the Biblical imagery of the Whore of Babylon to construct the Roman Catholic Mary Tudor as a sexualised threat to her realm. She is the introducer of heretical Papist doctrine, figured as a sexually-transmitted disease entailing the emasculation and undermining of the Protestant elite. John Aylmer’s *An Harborowe* contains ambiguous praise of Elizabeth, initially aligning her with the virtuous body of her nation, but sliding into the assertion of patriarchal hegemonic superiority of these Protestant guardians of the nation as destined guardians of both vulnerable nation and Queen. In *Gorboduc* the trope of the motherland is employed, not as a paradigm for maternal female rule, but as the originary source of masculine national identity in need of the filial protection of the nation’s men, subtextually urging them to assume their divine destiny to protect the nation, and implying that Elizabeth should take a husband from one of their number.

This paternalistic approach is seen in Elizabeth’s later reign in John Stubbes’s *Gaping Gulf*, which expresses the anxiety provoked by the prospect of another marriage

with a Papist foreigner. The Queen is warned that her own body will prove the 'gateway' for the infection of the realm with the disease of heretical Papist doctrine, her submission to her husband's marital sexual demands depicted in connection with both his Roman Catholic beliefs and his suspected syphilis. Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, despite its ostensible praise for Elizabeth, displays concealed and inconsistent constructions of female rule in such a way as to subtextually implicate the Queen in the abuses of female tyranny and even Papistry, and privilege the agenda of militant Protestant masculinity in the description of Redcrosse's spiritual journey. The nascent Republican sentiment of the later Elizabethan era may be glimpsed in Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part I*, where the threat from an unnatural and ambitious woman to the wellbeing, continuance and moral integrity of militant Protestant masculinity - albeit from a Frenchwoman - is paralleled by the dire threat to national unity posed by an inadequate ruler.

After her death, Elizabeth's female body becomes co-opted as the rhetorical tool of Protestant nationalism, where Heywood's *If you know not me you know nobody* shows her as the proto-martyr of Foxe's early work, the virtuous and vulnerable embodiment of English Protestantism who is the deserving object of the protection of the Protestant militant elite. In Dekker's *Whore of Babylon* this agenda is asserted as a critique of James's perceived undesirable ideological independence of thought from the militantly nationalistic programme of the Protestant 'ascendancy'. In both of these texts the reign of Elizabeth is evoked to construct an idealised version of England's glorious Protestant past and to subtly demonstrate to the new monarch how far he is falling short of the desired standard. James's laxity as monarch is also a subtextual theme in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. Kingship is radically critiqued in the behaviour of King Cymbeline, whose failure as monarch leads to the neglect and endangerment of his daughter Innogen,

representing English Protestantism, and the alienation and exile of Posthumus, her husband and destined protector.

The Howard scandal of James's later reign, which gave the Protestant anti-Papist faction at court a convenient channel through which to express criticism of James's perceived toleration of Papist abuses, is the basis for Middleton's *The Witch*. The depictions of female-originated danger to masculine wellbeing and sexual and physical integrity may be seen as a covert delineation of the Roman Catholic influences operating at court, seducing and 'bewitching' those at the highest level. The societal Papist-orientated corruption emanating from the court is also shown as possessing a fearful potential to undermine and undo English Protestant militant masculine integrity and purpose in Dekker and Massinger's *Virgin Martir*. The anxiety over the potential damage to national religio-political wellbeing from James's refusal to become embroiled in the Palatine crisis is shown both in the depiction of 'Roman' dominance in 'Caesarea' and in the corrupt and decadent state of London and the nation. Middleton's *Game at Chess*, despite the stringently-maintained opposition of religio-political national virtue and vice, is nonetheless undercut both by a persistent anxiety over the undermining of the realm by the insidious effects of unchecked Papist activity, and by the weak judgement and inconsistencies of policy exhibited by the White King.

Davenport's *King John and Matilda* typifies the increasing anti-monarchialism evident in Charles's reign. The depiction of John as a tyrannical ruler, a lust-crazed despot who cares nothing for the disaster to his realm brought about by his pursuit of the virtuous Matilda, is a warning to Charles of the effects of his perceived alignment with Papistry upon English national religious purity and integrity. This fear is likewise foregrounded in *Queen and Concubine*, in Brome's depiction of a monarch who

abandons his virtuous wife for the lures of a sexually-promiscuous woman. This barely-concealed evocation of monarchical ‘spiritual fornication’ is eloquent upon the fearful implications of this laxity for the masculine rationality and integrity of both monarch and realm. The sexually-voracious and rampant Queen in Richards’s *Messallina*, shown as a type of the Whore of Babylon, may be seen as a representation of fears surrounding Henrietta Maria’s ‘meddling’ in affairs of state, Charles’s indulgence of her Roman Catholic adherence, and his perceived increasing alignment with proto-Papistry in the form of his ‘Arminian’ religious innovations. Quarles’s *Virgin Widow* while not an overtly militantly Protestant play demonstrates, in its use of the high-affect tropes of female personifications of religious difference, the spread of anxieties about Charles’s administration of religio-political affairs even amongst those who were his natural supporters. This highlights the ideological rift and instability characterising the nation in the period immediately preceding the Civil War.

The persistent resort to these tropes of sexualised embodiment throughout the hundred-year-long period from the Henrician Reformation to the Civil War demonstrates them, indeed, as the ‘dynamic phenomena’ cited in the epigraph to my ‘Introduction’ (p. 1) pressed into service in response to a time of social change and religious and political flux. The uncertain and shifting times, and the concomitant anxieties created, may therefore be seen as ‘the emotional and volitional dimensions’ underlying the repeated employment of the metaphors of embodiment and the attempt to assert rhetorical control. Ultimately, however, this attempt is undermined by the tensions and inconsistencies inherent in these constructions, and demonstrates instead its opposite – the Derridean ‘deferral’ that defies the fixing of meaning.

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