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exclusion, 1590-1829**

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ENGAGING NUNS:
EXILED ENGLISH CONVENTS AND THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION, 1590-1829

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the communities of English women religious founded after the Reformation on the other side of the Channel from a new perspective. In echoes of contemporary Protestant propaganda, debates about nuns remain too often framed by a discourse around themes such as passivity or the idea of forced vocations. The mere fact that women religious played a role in such propaganda suggests, however, that they also figured in debates about identity and political order. These were, moreover, debates in which nuns themselves could engage. Excluded from the secular world in their cloisters they may have been, but they were nonetheless actors both spiritually and as contributors to the wider Catholic imaginary of post-Reformation England. This is here traced through the succession of crises, from the English Civil War to the Jacobite risings, in which these exiled communities of women religious contributed to Catholic images of their Protestant-dominated homeland and significantly supported the Stuart cause. After 1750, however, with the decline of Jacobitism, the exiled convents played their part in turn in reconfiguring English Protestant images of the Catholic threat, a process that paved the way for the return of most of these communities in flight from the Jacobins of the French Revolution. This thesis thus not only demonstrates that nuns were politically active and engaged, but also contributed to the reshaping of England as an imagined space, both in going into exile in the first place, and in the way they negotiated a new *modus vivendi* in Britain in the years preceding Catholic Emancipation in 1829.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Tracing Nuns
An Introduction

In 1753 Lady Lucy Talbot, daughter of the Earl of Shrewsbury, professed at the English Conceptionists convent in Paris.¹ Her clothing ceremony began with the celebration of mass when the ‘curtain was drawn in beside the iron grate which divided the chapel’.² As the curtain was withdrawn it revealed ‘all the nuns in their prayer stalls, habited and veiled each holding a burning wax taper’.³ In the middle of the choir knelt Talbot, ‘a large burning wax taper before her’.⁴ The preacher began his sermon exhorting her to renounce her worldly inclinations in favour of the solitary recluse life. He spoke of the three strict vows which she must keep; ‘chastity, poverty and obedience’.⁵ Then, the grand vicar, assisted by three of the clergy, came close to the grate and asked Talbot what she requested. Having advanced from the middle of the choir she ‘made three low remonstrances with the taper in her hand and answered that she came to make her vows and desired to be admitted among the holy sisterhood as a professed nun’.⁶ She was presented with a crucifix and ring, a veil and habit, and a chaplet of flowers which was put on her head. At the end of the ceremony Talbot prostrated herself flat on the earth in the middle of the choir and all the nuns each holding a burning wax taper took hold of a black velvet pall which they laid over her whilst chanting the funeral service.

This narrative brings to the fore many of the images that have come to be associated with nuns: poverty and renunciation, passivity and obedience, and withdrawal from the world.

¹*The Diary of the Blue Nuns or the Order of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady at Paris, 1658-1810*, ed. J. Gillow and R. Trappes-Lomax (London, CRS 8, 1910), p. 110.

² Anon., *A Tour Through France and Flanders* (London, 1754), p. 53.

³ Ibid, p. 54.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Talbot is veiled in white, an emblem of innocence, and an allusion, alongside the ring and flowers she is given, to her status as a bride of Christ. The tapers point to the perfect light she is going to receive in her new life whilst the sermon emphasises the typical characteristics of the 'ideal nun'. The ritualised burial scene serves as a symbolic reminder that in this new life Talbot is dead to the world. It is these aspects of conventual life that have dominated historiographical discourse for several centuries. The enforced cloistering of women, often considered the result of economic deprivation on the part of Catholic families, has been a key theme of work on Women Religious. This has contributed to the dismissal of nuns from mainstream accounts of religion and Church history leading them to become, in the words of the nineteenth-century historian, John Murphy, a 'Terra Incognita'.⁷

However, the fact that we can construct such a detailed narrative of this event more than two hundred years after its occurrence renders problematic the notion of convents as an unknown land. Convent documents, profession records, obituaries, annals and account books provide us with details of Talbot's profession ceremony and family background.⁸ Yet, they also offer a glimpse into a less circumscribed understanding of convent communities. Talbot's dowry amounted to £5000 and was used to establish a charity to 'make up incomplete dowries (for new nuns) or pay the whole sum'.⁹ This information shows that families could give generous dowries for their daughters and that monasticism did not always take place for economic reasons. We also learn of Talbot's career progression: she rose from portress to novice mistress and eventually to school mistress.¹⁰ This suggests that there were opportunities for

⁷ J. N. Murphy, *Terra Incognita: or, the convents of the United Kingdom* (London, N.P., 1873). See also, S. O'Brien, 'Terra Incognita: The Nuns in Nineteenth-Century England', *Past and Present*, No. 121 (Nov. 1998), pp. 110-140.

⁸ We learn, for instance, that she was professed on 6 October 1754 aged 21 and died in Paris in 1787 at the age of 54. Her father was George Talbot, thirteenth earl of Shrewsbury and her mother was Mary Fitzwilliam of Dublin, Ireland. The Conceptionists', or Blue Nuns, records have been published as *The Diary of the Blue Nuns*.

⁹ *The Diary of the Blue Nuns*, p. 217.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 218.

personal advancement and public interaction within the cloistered convent. If we expand our search beyond the institutional sources held by convent communities an even more complex picture begins to emerge. We learn details of Talbot's clothing because a description of it by a Protestant guest at the ceremony was published in 1754.¹¹ We know of the existence of sermons, such as that read to Talbot, because they were printed on the continent, circulated among Catholics in England, and now appear in the papers of prominent Catholic families held in local record offices.¹² It seems, therefore, that nuns were not 'dead to the world' but often interacted with it: they could have a public presence and significance beyond the cloister.

I have entitled this chapter 'Tracing Nuns' for several reasons. Firstly, because exploring the history of the English convents in exile involves a process of 'tracing', of following a trail of evidence through a diverse range of sources from obituary notices through to newspaper commentary and ephemera. Secondly, because this process of integrating diverse 'traces' of material moves away from a continuing tendency within historiography to treat sources as the 'origin' of historical enquiry. In recent years, for instance, a wealth of research on women religious has taken a particular set of source material, such as a collection of obituary notices from the English convents in exile or a series of convent annals, as its starting point, its source or 'origin'. This has resulted in a succession of interesting contributions to the field that will be discussed in section one of this chapter. However, this thesis aims to depart from the focus on a specific set of 'source' material and instead uses a series of questions about the relationship between the exiled English cloisters and the British state as the starting point for integrating a diverse range of source material. Thirdly, the title 'traces' seems particularly apt

¹¹ Anon., *A Tour Through France and Flanders*, (London, 1754).

¹² See, for instance, the Weld correspondence, Dorset Record Office, Dorset and the Coghlan papers in Lancashire Record Office.

in view of Derrida's concept of Trace and the sense of the diachronic process it alludes to.¹³ Of course, Derrida would not have used the word 'trace' in quite the same way as this thesis. Yet, like Derrida, this thesis aims to move way from a simplistic notion of diametrically opposed opposites. Instead, it considers moments of contested dialogue between 'Protestant' Britain and the 'Catholic' imaginary constructed by the cloisters.

This introductory chapter therefore aims to set out the historiography of Women Religious in both a British and European context in order to chart the territory previously covered by historians and to show the original contribution to knowledge provided by this thesis. Section one examines the historiography of women religious from the nineteenth century to the present day and argues that this thesis fills a gap in the historiography by focusing on the political context of the exiled English cloisters. Section two considers some reasons for the dismissal of the English convents in exile from political accounts of British history in the long-eighteenth century and argues for the importance of rectifying this. Finally, section three introduces some of the source material for this thesis and argues that it is only through an expansion of the source material usually selected by scholars of women religious that moments of interaction between the exiled institutions and the British state can be detected.

I: Literature Review: Tracing the historiography of nuns

Historical scholarship tracing the history of the English convents during their time in exile began in earnest in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This was partly a result of the need for Catholic historians to respond to a new wave of anti-Catholic rhetoric which

¹³ Derrida argued that binary opposites always expose a 'trace'. In other words, he suggests that the relationship between opposing words or concepts is always a dialogic one whereby both terms necessitate the existence of their alternative. So, for the purpose of this thesis, Protestant and Catholic might seem like polar opposites but in fact these identities are framed in response to, and therefore necessitate, each other. See, J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G.C. Spivak, (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1997).

flourished in the wake of a new intake of nuns from the continent in the period after 1870. As this thesis will demonstrate, anti-monastic rhetoric had been on the wane in Britain since 1760 and English convents had returned to Britain from exile in France and Flanders by 1800 and successfully re-settled. In 1870, however, more nuns arrived into Britain as a result of the Franco-Prussian war and Bismark's *Kulturkampf*. This, combined with a growth of Catholic convents in the 1860s, sparked new fears about female monasticism.¹⁴ These fears reached their zenith in the famous case of Mr Newdegate and his attempts to impose inspections on all convent communities in Britain.¹⁵ Newdegate alleged that Catholic convents in Britain frequently 'locked up nuns' and gained public support for his campaign in the late nineteenth century.¹⁶ It is not surprising therefore that Catholic historians hoped that by writing accounts of the history of the English cloisters they might 'remove the lingering prejudices which still exist against them in the minds of our separated brethren'.¹⁷ In addition, Catholic historians hoped to account for that 'extraordinary revival of religious life of which the Church has been witness since the beginning of the nineteenth century'.¹⁸ By so doing they revised the linearity of Protestant 'Whig' historians, who sought the foundations of British liberty in the Reformation, in favour of a cyclical view of progress in which the glories of medieval nunneries were destroyed by the Reformation but revived again by a nineteenth-century 'Second Spring'.¹⁹ British historians explained this revival in terms of Catholicism's unique ability to adapt to changed circumstances. The nineteenth century saw the foundation of an

¹⁴ The growth, according to Francesca Steele, consisted of more than ninety congregations of six or seven thousand nuns.

¹⁵ W. R. Arnstein, *Protestant versus Catholic in mid-Victorian England: Mr Newdegate and the Nuns* (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1982).

¹⁶ P. Gallwey, *The Committee on Convents: The Nun's Choice, Newgate or Newdegate. A Letter to a barrister*. (London, 1870), p. 2.

¹⁷ F. Steele, *The Convents of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, Sands and Co., 1901), xvi.

¹⁸ In this they followed the example set by European historians who also sought to explain the nineteenth-century Catholic revival. See, for instance, J. M. Heimbucher, *Die Orden Und Kongregationen Der Katholischen Kirche* (1896) and E. Keller, *Les Congrégations Religieuses en France* (Paris, 1880).

¹⁹ The Second Spring refers to a moment of Catholic revivalism inspired by Cardinal Newman in the nineteenth century.

increasing number of un-cloistered, teaching-orientated and simple- vowed convents which were more 'in keeping with an age favourable to the contemplative life (which prospered) in olden times when faith was stronger than it is now and the world less restless'.²⁰

As the restless world climaxed in the horrors of the First World War the need for stability rendered 'scientific' certainty the epitome of historical enquiry and impacted on the way historians wrote about English convents in the early twentieth century. This period saw the publication of Eileen Power's magisterial *Medieval English Nunneries*, a work which was very much of its time in seeking to apply 'scientific' standards of enquiry to the social history of English convents in the medieval period.²¹ Indeed, Geoffrey Coulton's preface to the work noted that the 'times of storm and stress' had created a 'craving for clearer facts'.²² There was to be 'no essential distinction between truth-seeking in history and truth-seeking in chemistry' since by 'choosing problems of equal importance to those of the scientists and treating them with equal accuracy' historians could achieve a similar status.²³ Of course, to twenty-first century historians this belief in a 'past' that is easily accessible if only the rigours of scientific enquiry are applied seems hopelessly naïve. Nonetheless, Church historians set out in the early twentieth century to prove that nuns were 'a problem' worthy of 'scientific' exploration. For the Reverend Peter Guilday, who wrote the first detailed work on the exiled English convents in 1912, 'historical justice demand(ed) new light' be shed on the history of English convents.²⁴ Guilday seemed to view his historical research as a pursuit of 'truth' that would, by revising the dominance of Protestant narratives and critiquing Protestant viewpoints, ensure that 'justice' was done and the cloisters would assume, in his view, their rightful place in the historiography. Thus Guilday's work aimed to 'claim...for the exile the

²⁰ Steele, *The Convents of Great Britain*, xv.

²¹ E. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1922).

²² G. G. Coulton, 'General Preface' in *ibid.* v.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ P. Guilday, *The English Catholic Refugees on the Continent* (London, Longmans, 1914), xv-xxiii.

same praise which has been given the Huguenot' and thereby revise the Protestant perspective.²⁵ Indeed, there were Lord Acton-like echoes in Guilday's dispensation of justice: Elizabeth I was no 'ordinary usurper, she was a tyrant of the worst type', her reign was an 'odious and murderous persecution' but 'being of a far greater intellectual order than those of the continental Protestant exiles', English Catholics and their convents had survived.²⁶ Guilday regretted that the world was 'not yet advanced enough in the publication of and the knowledge of documents... (to) promote impartiality'.²⁷ Nonetheless, scientific rigour was reflected in the fact that 'a beginner's thesis for a doctorate' ran to four hundred and fifty nine pages with twenty two pages of Latin appendices incorporating documents from twenty one European archives written in four languages.²⁸ Similarly, Eileen Power aimed to 'tell all that was worth telling' about medieval nunneries and, by charting the relationship of nuns to society, their economic impact and their role in agriculture, she brought nuns to the forefront of the new social sciences. For historians of the inter-war period it seemed Power had achieved the much sought after certainty. John H. Clapham concluded that 'no one need try again for a generation or two' whilst Edward W. Watson noted that the study 'might even be called exhaustive for further evidence of the kind she uses though it exists is not likely to modify our judgement'.²⁹

Yet, of course, judgements *were* modified in the post war years, not just by 'further evidence', but by new questions being asked. The publication of the 'Decree on the adaptation and renewal of religious life' in 1965 emphasised that renewal meant a 'return to

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid. xxii. Lord Acton believed that the historian had a moral duty to impose judgement on the past. His *Lectures on Modern History* had appeared in an edition by J. N. Figgis in 1906 and were referenced by Guilday in his bibliography.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid. viii.

²⁹ E. W. Watson, 'Review of E. Power, *Medieval English Nunneries*', *The English Historical Review*, vol. 38, no. 151, (July, 1923), pp. 435-7; J. H. Clapham, 'Eileen Power, 1889-1940', *Economian*, New Series, vol. 7., (Nov., 1940), pp. 351-9.

the sources of Christian life, a return to the original spirit of monastic institutes and their adaptation to the changed conditions of the time'.³⁰ Those changed circumstances were reflected in the new climate of Vatican II which, as historians returned to their sources, threw up new questions about individual agency and the strictures of the Church. Historians began to revise their judgement of Eileen Power noting that, although she had brought nuns to the forefront of mainstream economic and social history, she had denied them any real agency. They had as an example Power's chapter on 'The Olde Daunce' which portrayed nuns as essentially powerless when faced with the combined power of Church and State. As Power put it, 'the Church could call in the majesty of the state to help and what was a girl to do?'.³¹ Feminist scholars countered with the examples of those nuns who had refused to leave at the dissolution or ignored the Council of Trent's strictures on enclosure to show that the 'girls' could, and in their view did, at least resist.³² But how successful had this resistance been? Historians split into polarised camps over this question with the example of Mary Ward proving a particularly problematic case study. Mary Ward (1585-1645) founded convents in the seventeenth century which she hoped would model themselves on the Jesuit order and serve as active cloisters. However, the Mary Ward Institutes, as they came to be known, were denied Papal recognition and Ward was temporarily imprisoned in 1631. Despite this she returned to England in 1642 to found teaching colleges for women which later spread to Germany and Eastern Europe. Did the suppression of the Institute represent 'a millennium of ecclesiastical measures seeking to deprive women of any function within the Church' or did its subsequent success prove nuns' ability to effectively resist ecclesiastical strictures?³³

³⁰ S. Redmond, *The Great Love: reflections on the decree of the Second Vatican Council on the adaptation and renewal of religious life* (Dublin, Irish Messenger Office, 1970), p. 3.

³¹ E. Power, *Medieval Nunneries*, p. 446.

³² A. Loades, *Searching for Lost Coins: Explorations in Christianity and Feminism* (London, SPCK, 1987).

³³ J. A. K. McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through two Millennia* (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 167-9.

In reacting against the very notion of historical consensus the epistemological shift we now call 'postmodernism' failed to produce an answer but it did change the nature of the debate. Many will doubt that the theories of Foucault and Derrida can have had any impact on the world of Church historians. However, to use an image borrowed from Eamon Duffy, theory tends to operate like a duck, with its feet under water, moving the analysis along without being seen above the surface, and there can be no doubt that postmodernism's impact on religious history, however unconscious, has been profound. There has been a reaction against the fixed and biologically determined categories of male and female sex towards an understanding of 'gender' as socially constructed, or as an 'aspect of social structure which is socially created and historically specific', which has led historians away from a focus on women's history towards a study of gender history defined as an interrelationship between male and female discourses.³⁴ Moreover, instead of seeing shapes in the past, the cyclical patterns of a 'Second Spring' and the linear narratives of feminist empowerment, there has been an acceptance that it is we as historians who give the past its shape. Thus, rather than seeking certainty in source-led approaches, as Guilday and Power aimed to do, historians have come to deny that artefacts, be they convent annals, correspondence, or statistical accounts, can ever serve as an origin for historical enquiry. Instead, historians have looked to their own outlook and environment and the questions raised by contemporary perceptions as the starting point for historical investigation.

This new-found self-awareness has provoked an understanding that nuns have remained for 'so long hidden from history' because of the 'structural sexism of the discipline' itself. In seeking to 'revise male bias' historians have 'theorized the archive', or returned to the archival deposits they have at their disposal, to consider the ways in which nuns have been

³⁴ R. Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: the archaeology of Religious Women* (London, Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-5.

‘hidden’ or ‘written out’ of archive repositories which were often originally catalogued in the late-nineteenth century.³⁵ If one looks, for instance, at the catalogues of Catholic families found in local record offices one frequently searches in vain for any mention of nuns, despite the prominence of the daughters of gentry families in convents on the continent. However, if one takes a closer look at Catholic family papers one finds correspondence from family members who were nuns, the details of financial transactions between England and the exiled cloisters and receipts for daughters acquiring a convent education abroad, which are not detailed in the archival catalogues. The situation is further complicated by the proscribed nature of female monasticism in England from the sixteenth to the late eighteenth century. Since it was illegal to send daughters abroad to receive a convent education terms such as ‘black mares’ were used to refer to nuns when transporting daughters to the continent to disguise the true nature of the shipment.³⁶ The so called ‘linguistic-turn’ has ensured historians take a more nuanced look at the functionality of language, or the historical specificity of subtle changes in terminology, which enables them to move beyond the convent archive towards an appraisal of nuns’ public presence.

In recent years the historiography of nuns, and the English cloisters in particular, has come to focus on five key themes. The first of these themes owes a clear debt to Eileen Power in seeking to undertake a social history of convents. Historians working on European convents have been at the forefront of these developments. For example, Susan Dinan’s work on the French order of the Daughters of Charity has explored the contribution made by this order to French society through an examination of their role as caretakers of the poor and nurses of the sick.³⁷ So too, Elizabeth Rapley has undertaken a social history of the Devotes and has

³⁵ Ibid. p. 6.

³⁶ See, for instance, Thomas Weld to Mary Weld, June 1795, WWLC/15, Dorset History Centre, Dorset.

³⁷ S. E. Dinan, *Women and Poor Relief in Seventeenth Century France: The Early History of the Daughters of Charity* (London, Ashgate, 2000).

reassessed the role of teaching monasteries in seventeenth century France.³⁸ Historians of the English convents have built on this framework with new work focusing on the role played by English nuns in education, commerce, and the local community from the middle ages onwards. For instance, Julie Kerr's work on convents in medieval England analysed the location of convent buildings, the administration of the cloister, and the convents' contribution to the local community through commercial transactions and the farming of granges.³⁹ Similarly comprehensive social histories of the early modern and modern English convents are harder to find but issues relating to education and recruitment strategies has featured in a number of articles by Caroline Bowden.⁴⁰

The second approach to emerge within the historiography of nuns, while remaining focused on the social history of convents, has tried to apply a prosopographical methodology to its study. These historians have looked to the Digital Humanities, a development which both lends validity to Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's famous prophesy that the 'future historian will be a computer programmer or he will be nothing at all' and revives the modernist agenda of the pursuit for 'scientific' certainty. Thus, large-scale database projects on Women Religious, such as the English Monastic Database (UCL) and the Who were the Nuns? database (QMUL), attempt to get back to scientific values in historical enquiry by documenting the individual biographies of nuns over a long chronological period.⁴¹ This prosopographical approach aims, in Lawrence Stone's words, to 'identify social reality and to describe and

³⁸ E.A. Rapley, *A Social History of the Cloister: Daily Life in the Teaching Monasteries of the Old Regime* (Montreal, McGill-Queen UP, 2001) and *The Devotes: Women and Charity in Seventeenth Century France* (Montreal, McGill-Queens UP, 1993).

³⁹ J. Kerr, *Life in the Medieval Cloister* (London, Continuum Press, 2009). See also, J. Burton and J. Kerr, *The Convents in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2011).

⁴⁰ C. Bowden, 'Women in Educational Spaces' in L. Knoppers ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009); C. Bowden, 'Patronage and Practice: Assessing the Significance of the English Convents as Cultural Centres in Flanders in the Seventeenth century', *English Studies*, vol. 92., no. 5., (August, 2011)., pp. 112-86.

⁴¹ English Monastic Archives, UCL, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/englishmonasticarchives/> and 'Who were the Nuns?', QMUL, <https://wwtn.history.qmul.ac.uk/>

analyse with precision the structure of society' and thus returns historiography to those modernist ideals of 'precision', 'structure' and 'reality'.⁴² This has resulted in the production of some vital resources for historians of women religious. In addition, the foundation of the Unit for Prosopographical research, headed by Katherine Keats-Rohan, at the University of Oxford, has co-operated in the production of family trees for families connected to the exiled cloisters which has aided scholars in their study of networks and the links between the English convents in exile and their families in Britain.⁴³ However, the prosopographical approach has inevitably led to a focus on the institution of the convent and has heralded a more localised approach to the study of women religious.⁴⁴ Historians, most notably Kim Curran and James Kelly, have focused on examining the biographies of individual members of convent communities over a particular geographic area or at a particular period in time.⁴⁵ However, new work is increasingly using Digital Humanities Research to undertake qualitative data analysis, a computer programme which employs approaches previously used for statistical analysis to map changes in language, thereby enabling historians to trace recurring words and concepts in a large number of texts.

This interest in mapping words within texts has led to a third approach in the study of women religious. This approach departs from examining the social history of the convent as an *institution* and turns instead towards a study of the documents, or sources, generated by those institutions. This method has proved popular because convents produced a wide range of documents from annals, chronicling the history of their communities, through to written

⁴² L. Stone, 'Prosopography', *Daedalus*, vol. 100, no. 1. pp. 131-9.

⁴³ <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~prosop/>

⁴⁴ V. Davis, 'Medieval Longevity': The Experience of Members of Religious Orders in Late Medieval England', *Medieval Prosopography*, 19, 1998, pp. 111-124.

⁴⁵ K. Curran, 'Looking for Nuns: A Prosopographical study of Scottish nuns in the later middle ages', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 35, (2005), pp. 28-67; J. E. Kelly, 'Essex Girls Abroad: Family Patronage and the Politicisation of Convent Recruitment in the Seventeenth Century' in C. Bowden and J. E. Kelly, eds. *The English Convents in Exile, 1600-1800: Communities, Culture, and Identities* (London, Routledge, 2013). pp. 33-52.

obituaries which detailed the lives of their late members. The literary scholar Nicky Hallett has been at the forefront of attempts to detail the lives of English nuns using convent sources. For example, in her work *Lives of Spirit* she brought together a range of autobiographical and biographical texts (which she terms 'self-writing') from two English Carmelite communities in seventeenth century and used them to shed light on the daily life of nuns and Carmelite spirituality.⁴⁶ In her next book, Hallett used convent accounts of the exorcism of Margaret Mostyn, a nun at the English Carmelite convent in Lierre in 1651, to explore early modern ideas about witchcraft, aestheticism and demonic possession.⁴⁷ Other historians have built on this approach to analyse a diverse set of convent sources ranging from music to textiles and art.⁴⁸ Such work had proved insightful, not least because it enables historians to capture the 'female voice' so often missing from studies of religion in the early modern period. For example, Anne Winston-Allen, whose work uses convent chronicles to explore nuns' experience of reform in the late middle ages and early modern period, notes that women religious have often been 'absent in the sense of silent, marginal, and walled-off from society'.⁴⁹ The source-based approach has therefore both recaptured a sense of how nuns themselves responded to the events of their time and brought some often inaccessible source material into the public domain.

However, recently historians have begun to consider, not only the sources produced by convents, but the sources housed by them, read by them, and bought by them. This approach builds on the renewed interest in book history which has sought to examine literacy rates,

⁴⁶ N. Hallett, *Lives of Spirit: English Carmelite Self-Writing of the early modern period* (London, Routledge, 2006).

⁴⁷ N. Hallett, *Witchcraft, Exorcism and the Politics of Possession in a seventeenth-century convent: how sister Ursula was bewitched and sister Margaret twice* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007).

⁴⁸ A. B. Yardley, *Performing Piety: Musical Culture in Medieval English Nunneries* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁴⁹ A. Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the middle ages* (Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), p. 19.

modes of readership, and the shift from manuscript to print production. Thus, David Bell's *What Nuns Read?* sought to be a comprehensive survey of the books 'that can be traced with certainty of high possibility to English nunneries' in the middle ages.⁵⁰ So too, Mary Erler explored the reading habits of English nuns in the medieval period and the way that convent books were acquired through benefices, gifts, or purchase.⁵¹ Both works persuasively argued that nuns were more literate and well-read than was previously thought to be the case and that, while they often championed the use of English vernacular, their knowledge of Latin was similar to that of male monastics. The archives of the English convent of Bridgettines at Syon Abbey, an order founded by Henry V in 1415, has been particularly important for this approach because it contains a detailed description of all the books contained in the convent's library. Thus, several works, including Christopher de Hamel's study of Syon Abbey's library, have focused on this convent.⁵² These works have built on the debates engendered by Joan Kelley's seminal text, 'Did women have a renaissance?', to ask questions about the role played by nuns as readers, book-keepers, copyists and translators.⁵³ They have argued that convents like Syon Abbey played a pivotal role in the European book trade and that nuns were key contributors in the process of transition from medieval manuscripts to printed books.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ D. Bell, *What Nuns Read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries* (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, 1995), p. 1; D. Bell, 'What Nuns read: The State of the Question' in J.G. Clark, ed. *The Culture of Medieval English Monasticism* (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2007), pp. 113-133.

⁵¹ M. C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁵² C. De Hammel, *Syon Abbey: the library of the Bridgettine nuns and their peregrinations after the Reformation* (Otley, Roxburghe Club, 1991); E. A. Jones and A. Walsham, eds. *Syon Abbey and its Books: Reading, Writing, and Religion, c. 1400-1700*, Studies in Modern British Religious History, 24, (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2010).

⁵³ J. Kelly, 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?' in R. Bridenthal and C. Koonz, ed. *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

⁵⁴ V. R. Bainbridge, 'Syon Abbey: Women and Learning c. 1415-1600' in E. A. Jones and A. Walsham eds. *Syon Abbey and its Books*, pp. 82-103 and V. R. Bainbridge, 'Women and the Transmission of Religious Culture: benefactresses of the Bridgettine convents c. 1400-1600', *Bridgittania*, 3, (1997), pp. 55-76.

Finally, historians have begun exploring, not just the books read and produced by nuns, but how nuns have themselves been portrayed in early modern print culture. They have thus explored stereotypes of nuns and the way that Protestant discourse sought to represent women religious from the middle ages to the modern period. A leading proponent of this approach has been Frances Dolan whose work demonstrates a close affinity with postmodernist theory.⁵⁵ Dolan seeks to focus on the discourse of anti-Catholicism in Protestant polemic by exploring representations of Catholic women. She does this because ‘we have no recourse outside of representation...no definitive cache of physical evidence that could prove, once and for all, who they were and what they were really up to’.⁵⁶ For this reason Dolan concentrates on *representation* and the gendered nature of anti-Catholicism where epithets like ‘Whore of Babylon’ link together ‘the familiar seduction and corruption of the unruly feminine and the more outlandish threat of foreign’.⁵⁷ Similarly, Alison Shell has focused on the role played by anti-Catholic discourse in shaping the Protestant nation while also assessing the ways Catholics themselves contributed to the English national imaginary.⁵⁸ Her work thus aimed to ‘put Catholic writing back in the mainstream agenda while alerting scholars to the complexities of anti-Catholic prejudice in Protestant imaginative writing’.⁵⁹ Other scholars, notably Kate Chedgzoy and Jenna Lay, have built on this approach by exploring how stereotypes about Catholic women and nuns contributed to sexual imagery often associated with women religious.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ F. E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth Century Print Culture*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1999). See also, F. E. Dolan, ‘Why are nuns funny?’, *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, 70, 4, (2007), pp. 509-585.

⁵⁶ F. E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon*, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 43.

⁵⁸ A. Shell, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558-1660*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁵⁹ Ibid. p. 20.

⁶⁰ K. Chedgzoy, ‘For Virgin Buildings Oft Brought Forth: Fantasies of Convent Sexuality’ in R. De Monte and N. Pohl eds. *Female Communities, 1600-1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000), pp. 85-115; J. Lay, *Beyond the Cloister: Catholic Englishwomen and Early Modern Literary Culture*

All five approaches have proved insightful and have contributed to a revival of interest in the history of nuns. In 1999 Olwen Hufton gave her inaugural lecture on the subject ‘whatever happened to the history of the nun?’.⁶¹ She recalled a pronouncement by Eric Hobsbawm in the 1980s that ‘there could be nothing interesting in the history of the nun’.⁶² Since then, as Hufton notes, nuns have gone from being a *Terra Incognita* to being part of a revived interest in convent communities. Nuns are now more popular than ever and moving out of the confines of academic study to acquire public impact. In 2010, for instance, the Smithsonian launched an exhibit on nuns which gained international publicity. Britain has followed America’s example with both the Victoria and Albert museum and the British museum showcasing relics, needlework and art from the English convents. Moreover, Silvia Evangelista has written a popular history of convent life in Europe and there have been a series of historical novels focusing on the lives of nuns.⁶³ So too, a series of articles and books by Claire Walker have sought to place the English convents in exile in their social and political context.⁶⁴ This thesis began as part of an AHRC project entitled ‘Who were the Nuns?’ which built on Walker’s work by expanding the chronological scope of recent studies to focus on the English convents throughout the entirety of their period in exile (1590-1800) and by making publicly available for the first time a range of sources from the exiled cloisters. However, whilst this thesis has benefitted from the close analysis and transcription of convent texts I undertook for the WWTN project, it has also moved away from the five traditional approaches to the history of women religious to offer a unique interpretation of the exiled English convents. This thesis does not therefore focus on issues relating to the social

(Pennsylvania, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). See also, G. Daichman, *Wayward Nuns in Medieval Literature*, (Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1986).

⁶¹ O. Hufton, ‘Whatever Happened to the History of the Nun?’, Hayes Robinson Lecture Series No. 3, Presented at Royal Holloway, University of London, on 2nd March 1999, (London, Royal Holloway, 2000).

⁶² Ibid. p. 5.

⁶³ S. Evangelista, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life, 1400-1700* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁶⁴ C. Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

history of the exiled cloisters or on convent texts per se since these aspects of the English cloisters have already been explored by members of the WWTN project team. Instead, the thesis seeks to offer a political history of the exiled English convents by situating them closely within the political context of Britain in the long eighteenth-century.

This reflects the situation that, despite the renewed interest in nuns, there remain clear gaps in the historiography which this thesis seeks to redress. Although the five approaches undertaken by recent work on English nunneries have proved important in re-thinking convent culture and the role played by nuns in medieval and early modern Britain there are clear limitations to these studies. In the first instance, as the first three approaches discussed in this introduction demonstrate, such works have tended to focus on the *institutional* aspects of convent life. In other words, they have generally looked at issues relating to convent recruitment, convent education, texts produced by and for the English nuns, and daily life for nuns in the cloisters. By so doing they have tended to focus on the inner-life of the cloister and have missed moments of political engagement where the cloisters were primarily interested in external events. Secondly, where scholars have explored stereotypes of nuns in Protestant print culture, as in the fifth approach to the history of women religious, they have often missed moments where anti-Catholic, or anti-monastic, stereotypes functioned as a direct response to political events. Moreover, although historians have, as in the work of Alison Shell, sought to reconsider the Catholic imaginary, they have not always considered the extent to which this Catholic discourse served to contest and counter Protestant perceptions. Finally, all five approaches have tended to analyse English nunneries over a short chronological time span. As this introduction has demonstrated the medieval period has proved the most popular for historians working on English nuns. This is possibly because religious history has always been central to medieval history and because English convents, like monasteries, were key sites for the production of manuscript sources. Historians working

on women religious in the early modern period have tended to focus on the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century and have not studied the period during which the English convents were in exile in France and Flanders as a whole. Thus, Claire Walker's study, while focusing on the exiled cloisters in the penal period, has centred its analysis on the seventeenth century and by taking a thematic, rather than chronological approach, has not explored the changes arising from different political contexts.

This thesis therefore offers a unique contribution to the historiography of English convents in several ways. In the first instance, it moves away from a focus on the institutional history of English convent communities to focus instead on moments of interaction between the exiled cloisters and the British state. Secondly, rather than considering British Protestant polemic and the Catholic literary imaginary as binary opposites it focuses on moments of contestation between the two and suggests that they existed in a dialogic relationship. Finally, this thesis is unique in examining the exiled English cloisters across a broad chronological period. It begins with an introduction, beginning in medieval England, which explains how the English convents came to be in exile. The main body of the thesis therefore focuses on the rarely covered period of the long-eighteenth century ending when the convents reintegrate back into British society at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It thus spans a timescale that is usually delineated into the separate categories of 'medieval', 'early modern', and 'modern history'. By covering such a broad historical period this thesis aims to chart shifts, or stages, in a process where English convents changed from being 'excluded' institutions to being reintegrated back into Britain in the aftermath of the French Revolution. As such this thesis also contributes to a reassessment of the wider political history of Britain in the long eighteenth century and seeks to trace the importance of English convents to this history.

By so doing this thesis also moves away from an emphasis on sources as objects towards an understanding of the performativity of texts and the reception of those texts at historically-

specific moments. The archival deposits we have at our disposal do not serve as the origin of our historical exploration. Instead, our questioning begins with our own assumptions and the changing historical circumstances which shape our ideals. By looking outside the documents generated by convent communities historians have begun to re-appraise the public and political significance of nuns. The postmodern tendency to re-think binary oppositions which imply an essentialist contradiction, such as public/private, political/domestic, passive/active, has led to a heightened understanding of the permeability of these boundaries

II: Tracing Nuns in the political context of eighteenth-century Britain.

‘Doting nuns sought bulletins on the teething problems of Stuart infants’.⁶⁵

(Eamon Duffy)

Historians of eighteenth-century Britain have generally been dismissive of the history of the English convents in exile. Indeed, as Eamon Duffy’s quotation suggests, English nuns are often viewed as having been merely concerned with the ‘teething problems’ of the children of successive Stuart monarchs. This view is indicative of the work of political historians who have paid little attention to the political role of the exiled cloisters and their support for Jacobitism. The English convents in exile rarely feature in broader accounts of the eighteenth century and when they do they are generally reduced to the occasional footnote. Thus, in the work of John Aveling, Michael Mullett, and Gabriel Glickman, despite their focus on the Catholic community during the eighteenth century, the exiled English convents are mentioned only briefly.⁶⁶ This dismissal has stemmed both from a tendency to see nuns as

⁶⁵ E. Duffy, ‘Englishmen in Vaine’: Roman Catholic Allegiance to George I’, *Studies in Church Studies*, Vol. 18, 1982, pp. 345-365.

⁶⁶ J. C. H Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe: the Catholic recusants in England from reformation to emancipation* (London, Blond and Briggs, 1976); M. Mullett, *The Counter-Reformation and the Catholic Reformation in Early Modern Europe* (London, Methuen, 1984); M. Mullett, ed., *English Catholicism, 1680-1830* (London, Pickering

lacking agency due to their status as religious women and from a concentration of convent sources that often obscure the role played by nuns in political events.

Recent historiography has attempted to reappraise the role played by women in political events. For example, historians working on the 1640s have built on Keith Thomas's early study of female participation in the English Civil War in order to re-think female politicisation during this time.⁶⁷ This has led to interesting research by Alison Plowden on women's experience during the war and the financial repercussions of their involvement and to some preliminary research on female petitioners and women as prophets during the 1640s.⁶⁸ For the events of 1688, research by Lois Schworer has proved influential in demonstrating the important role played by women in the 'Glorious Revolution'.⁶⁹ She has persuasively demonstrated that women as diverse as the Quaker polemicist Jacy Sowle and the playwright Aphra Behn were influential in producing propaganda for both the Stuart and Williamite causes in the aftermath of 1688. Through an analysis of petitioning, and of seditious libel, she has also demonstrated that women from all social classes participated in the events of 1688. Similarly, intellectual historians have worked hard to dispel the myth that women were absent from the sphere of political thought in early modern Europe.⁷⁰ Instead, they have argued that women were active in shaping political ideas and central to the construction of Lockean contract theory after 1688. Moreover, historians working on the French Revolution, have placed women back at the forefront of these events and sparked

and Chatto, 2006); G. Glickman, *The English Catholic Community: Politics, Culture, and Ideology* (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2009).

⁶⁷ K. Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War sects', *Past and Present*, 13, (1958) pp. 42-62.

⁶⁸ A. Plowden, *Women all on Fire: the Women of the English Civil War* (Stroud, Sutton, 1998); P. Higgins, 'The Reaction of Women, with Special Reference to Women Petitioners', in B. Manning, ed., *Politics, Religion, and the English Revolution, 1640-1649* (London, UCL, 1973), pp. 190-217; P. Mack, 'Women as Prophets during the English Civil War', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 8, No. 1, (Spring, 1982), pp. 18-45.

⁶⁹ L. G. Schworer, 'Women and the Glorious Revolution', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, (Summer, 1986), pp. 195-218.

⁷⁰ J. Broad and K. Green, eds., *A History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1400-1700* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009).

continuing debates on how far 1789 contributed to social, economic, and political change for women in France.⁷¹ Thus, female politicisation and the centrality of women to revolutionary upheaval has recently been reappraised.

However, despite this reassessment of the role played by women in political events in the long-eighteenth century, historians have failed to examine the role of the exiled English convents in France and Flanders. This is surprising because the cloisters, as this thesis will demonstrate, had been politically active since their foundation in the late sixteenth century. They were key opponents of the Cromwellian Protectorate during the English Civil War and active Royalists who worked hard to restore Charles II to his throne in 1660. During the 'Glorious Revolution' the English convents became ardent supporters of the Stuart court in exile once more and were fervent Jacobites. Furthermore, the English convents were still in exile in France and Flanders when the French Revolution broke out in 1789 and key witnesses to these events. Indeed, at the onset of the Terror in France many English nuns were imprisoned and narrowly avoided execution (a fate which befell the Carmelite nuns of Compiègne in France). A political study of the English convents in exile therefore will offer insights into the politicisation of women at key moments in European history.

A key reason for the dismissal of the English convents in exile from broader studies of female politicisation stems from the 'enclosed' nature of convent institutions and from the alleged 'conservative' nature of their political thought. It is interesting that most scholarship on the role played by women in political events has focused on supposedly 'radical' women. Thus, most work on women during the French Revolution focuses on those, like Olympe de Gouges, who were generally favourable to the Revolution. Similarly, Schwoerer's work on

⁷¹ O. Hufton, 'Women in Revolution, 1789-1796', *Past and Present*, 53, (1971), pp. 90-108; J. Abrey, 'Feminism and the French Revolution', *American Historical Review*, 80 (1975), pp. 43-62; J. B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988); J. B. Landes, *Visualising the Nation: gender, representation, and nation in eighteenth-century France* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001).

women during the ‘Glorious Revolution’ primarily focuses on those women who supported William III and the events of 1688. It is for this reason that there has, as yet, been no major research on the role of Jacobite women in general.⁷² Since English nuns were favourable to the Restoration, key supporters of King James II, active in opposition to the French Revolution, and generally espoused ‘conservative’ political views, it perhaps not surprising that they have tended to be dismissed by scholars working on the role of women during political revolutions. Moreover, their status as *religious* women, has led to the myth that they were more likely to be politically passive. It is only recently, with the work of scholars like Nancy Bradley-Warren, that scholars have begun to re-think the passivity of religious women to argue that, despite their enclosed nature, nuns often played a public and political role in events.⁷³

A second reason for the dismissal of the English convents in exile from the widespread re-thinking of female politicisation has stemmed from the reluctance of historians of women religious to move away from a focus on the sources produced by convents. As section one suggested, historians working on nuns, and on the exiled English convents in particular, have tended to focus on those sources produced by the institutions themselves. While this has been a fruitful form of enquiry it has tended to lead to multiple works on the social history of the exiled English convents and a lack of work on the political nature of the institutions. Indeed, gaining an insight into the political activities of the exiled cloisters necessitates a move away from institutionally-generated source material. Instead, in order to gain a sense of the political context behind such texts historians have to look beyond the cloister to gain insights from

⁷² The exception to this is Maggie Craig’s *Damn Rebel Bitches* but this is a trade book aimed at the general public rather than an academic monograph. It also largely focuses on Scottish women during the ‘45 rebellion rather than on the wider support of women for Jacobitism from 1688 onwards. See M. Craig, *Damn Rebel Bitches: the women of the ‘45* (Edinburgh, Mainstream, 1997).

⁷³ N. Bradley-Warren, *The Embodied World: female spiritualities, contested orthodoxies and English Religious cultures, 1350-1700*. (Notres Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2010); N. Bradley-Warren, *Women of God and Arms: female spirituality and political conflict* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

correspondence, newspapers, and state legislation. The original contribution of this thesis therefore stems partly from the decision to move away from traditional sources used in the study of women religious. Instead, this thesis uses a diverse range of source material to trace moments of interaction between the English convents in exile and the British state.

III: New 'Traces': Initiating a New Approach to Sources for the Study of Women Religious

'Do not Look inside this Book'

(Notice attached to the Annals of the English Sepulchrines of Liège for the year 1789)

The curious researcher approaching the archives of the English Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at Colchester in Essex for the first time is likely to meet with an ethical dilemma. On entering the convent archives the researcher is confronted with a box containing the community's annals dating from the mid-eighteenth century. A note, handwritten by the nuns and appended to the annals, reads 'do not look inside this book'. On closer inspection it becomes clear that this particular volume of annals relates to the period when the Liège community were experiencing the French Revolution. So, why were the community reluctant to allow access to such a rich and important document? Answering this question requires a consideration of the annals, not from the perspective of the researcher, but from the perspective of the convent community itself. Convent annals serve a didactic purpose for contemporary convent communities. They are not merely *Res Gestae*, or fragments of a former past, but living documents that serve to aid the community in achieving its spiritual goals and providentially-assured destiny. For the abbess of the Sepulchrine community the annals were simply too emotionally traumatic to fulfil this purpose. Indeed, the convent annalist writing this document in 1789 was similarly prone to censoring her own work. The manuscript shows repeated writing out of words, and sometimes entire sentences, so that one

merely catches glimpses of the writer's thought-process and glimmers of a potentially larger narrative.⁷⁴ The research process is therefore as much about the 'silences' of the source material as it is about any sense of historical 'truths'.

Yet, these moments of silence, when records are 'written out' or 'written over', as witnessed at the English Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre archive, provoke additional questions and prompt further enquiries on the part of the researcher. For the purpose of this thesis they prompted new questions about the role of the English convents in exile during the French Revolution. For instance, why did the convent annalist find it so difficult to write about these events? How did the English convents in exile deal with the French Revolutionaries and why did they eventually return to Britain? It is these questions, rather than the sources themselves, that have furthered the writing of this thesis. Sources, therefore, only become 'evidence' when the historian asks certain questions of them. Yet, answering these questions, given the 'silences' of convent sources, requires an expansion of the source material generally used for the study of women religious. In what follows therefore I want to explore some of the additional sources used in this thesis:

Convent sources

This thesis has, of course, used a variety of convent sources as a starting point for its enquiry. Most of the English convents examined in this study have their own annals, or histories, relating to their cloister. The annals were usually written by a variety of scribes and added to over time. It is, therefore, not always possible to trace the author(s) of these annals although occasionally, as in the case of Abbess Neville who wrote the annals for the Benedictine

⁷⁴ For a similar discussion of the silences within texts see J. Derrida, *The Postcard: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1987).

cloister at Ghent, the authors are identified. The annals record key events in the history of the convent communities but are generally focused on the impact of these events on the cloister in question. This study has used a variety of convent annals, including the Registers of the Poor Clares Gravelines and Dominica: Records of the Nuns of the second order. Thanks to the WWTN project most of these sources are now publicly accessible online. Other convent sources used in this thesis include profession registers, such as the Registers of the Benedictine Nuns of Pontoise and the Registers of the Benedictine Nuns of Brussels, which record the clothing and profession ceremonies of new entrants to the convents. In addition, this thesis has used convent accounts, recording dowry payments, and obituary notices which are also contained in convent archives.

Catholic correspondence

One of the main ways of tracing interaction between the exiled English convents and Britain is through an examination of the correspondence between English nuns on the continent and their families or patrons in Britain. Nuns frequently wrote to their families back home in England and as such this correspondence is a useful source for information on political events, especially during the eighteenth century. This thesis uses manuscript correspondence from eighteen local record offices. For example, I have examined the correspondence of Nicholas Blundell from Lancashire Record Office, the Weld family whose correspondence is held by Dorset Record Office, and the Throckmorton family whose correspondence is held by Warwickshire Record Office. In addition, the Jerningham family correspondence at Birmingham University and the Huddleston correspondence at Cambridge Record Office contains a wealth of correspondence from the English convents. The visibility of nuns within Catholic family papers points to the ability of correspondence networks to transcend the

private space of a convent. Nuns wrote to acquire patrons, negotiate funding and gain recruits and thereby exercised a public function beyond the cloister. Moreover, convents permitted visitors to attend clothing and profession ceremonies, such as the one undertaken by Talbot, and to partake in the celebration of mass and musical celebrations. They thereby interacted with the public they aimed to serve.

Additional Manuscript Sources

Other manuscript sources are also useful in shedding light on the political activities of the English convents in exile. For instance, for the period of Jacobite activity from 1688 to 1750, the Stuart papers at the Royal Archives in Windsor contain an array of correspondence between Mary Rose Howard, the abbess of the English Benedictines at Pontoise, and James Francis Edward Stuart (James III). In addition, the Archives Nationales contain records of inventories of the convents taken by French Revolutionaries and petitions by nuns to the National, and later Legislative, assembly. In addition, the Archdiocese Archives in Westminster and Birmingham contain correspondence between the exiled cloisters and the Vicar Apostolics in Britain. A manuscript copy of the diary of Bishop Douglas, the Vicar Apostolic of the London District, is also housed in the Archives of the Archdiocese of Westminster and contains valuable information of the return of the convents to England.

Printed sources

Finally, this thesis has sought to trace anti-Catholicism, and in particular anti-monasticism, through an examination of Protestant print culture. In texts like Thomas Robinson's *The Anatomy of the English Nunnery at Lisbon* (1622) and ballads like *A Neste of Nunnes Egges* we can trace popular stereotypes about nuns and place them in their political context.

Moreover, Catholics often contested these stereotypes through their own vibrant print culture. In works like Richard Verstegan's *The Dialogue of Dying Well* for instance arguments are produced for the political and spiritual importance of the English cloisters in exile. This study has also used a range of newspapers to chart public and press responses to the return of the exiled convents and to shed light on political debates surrounding issues like the veiling of women in the early nineteenth century.

Widening the source base for the study of women religious can thus enable us to better trace the interactions between the exiled institutions and can lead to a greater understanding of their politicised nature. This thesis explores issues of exclusion and engagement between the exiled cloisters and the English/British state in a chronological sequence. Chapter one considers the reasons for the foundation of the English convents in exile and the extent to which they posed a political threat to England in the years 1590 to 1680. Chapter two relates the short but crucial period of key political change from 1678/80 to 1688 when Britain became embroiled in the Popish Plot and briefly became a Catholic monarchy until the 'Glorious Revolution' intervened in 1688. In chapter three the thesis charts the period of Catholic counter-attack when the exiled English convents, working alongside the Stuart court in exile, became ardent Jacobites actively engaged in opposition to the post-1689 British political settlement. The fourth chapter then considers the process of change in the period after 1750 when, in the context of the demise of political Jacobitism, there was increased interaction between the exiled English convents and the British state. Chapter five then examines how far the French Revolution accelerated this process by forcing the English convents to appeal to the British state for their return. Finally, chapter six asks how successful the return and reintegration of English convents into British society proved and considers the extent to which the nature of English convents had changed by the end of the century. In so doing this thesis adds to the important recent work on who were the nuns, or

what they did, by exploring how they engaged politically and spiritually with the world around them.

Chapter 1

Disquieting Nuns

The History of the English Convents in Exile, 1590-1680

IT is a beauteous evening, calm and free,
The holy time is **quiet as a Nun**
Breathless with adoration; the broad sun
Is sinking down in its tranquillity;
(William Wordsworth)⁷⁵

Written towards the end of the period with which this thesis is concerned Wordsworth's poem conjures up an image of nuns as peaceful, devout, and quintessentially English in nature. The nun is used here as a metaphor for a quiet midsummer evening blissfully unaware of the awaiting thunderstorm. Yet, over previous centuries nuns had been considered neither quiet in nature nor English in character. Instead, they were sent into exile and regarded as a 'foreign' and traitorous threat to the state. They were 'disquieting' figures, the source of deep-rooted anxiety and fear on the part of British Protestants and the state. Of course historians have been quick to point out that much of this unease was exaggerated. Stereotypes of nuns were prevalent in early modern discourse and imagery and offered a hyperbolic, falsified, view of nuns that fitted with the prevailing Protestant view of the alleged horrors of the Catholic Church.⁷⁶ However, it is the aim of this thesis to consider the exiled convents as *political* institutions which *did* represent a genuine, albeit sometimes exaggerated, threat to the British state in this period. Although English convents were situated in France and Flanders in exile from their homeland from 1594 until 1795 they were not 'out of sight, out of mind'. Instead, they were often active opponents of both the British monarchy and the established political order throughout their time in exile. It is this political opposition on the

⁷⁵ W. Wordsworth, 'It is a beauteous evening, calm and free', (1802).

⁷⁶ See, for instance, C. Highley, *Catholics Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008) and F. Dolan, 'Why are Nuns Funny?', *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, vol.70, No. 4, (2007), pp. 509-535.

part of exiled convents which largely explains the stereotypes of nuns in the British press and the British state's anxiety towards them.

This thesis aims to chart the stages in a process which led from direct opposition to the British monarchy on the part of the exiled convents to a compromise settlement as English convents were reintegrated back into Britain in the aftermath of the French Revolution. By so doing it sheds light on key constitutional changes, the Declaration of Indulgence and Catholic Emancipation for example, and helps explain the changing nature of anti-Catholicism in Britain. The next chapter (chapter two) examines the period 1680 to 1688 because the impact of the Popish Plot, the short-lived Catholic monarchy, and subsequent Revolution marks a watershed moment in the relationship between the British state and the exiled English convents. However, in order to understand the significance of this change it is necessary to briefly examine the history of the English convents in the years before 1680. This chapter, therefore, aims to provide a brief introductory history of the English convents up to the period of the Popish Plot. By so doing this chapter will explore the origins of key Protestant stereotypes about nuns which we will be examining in more depth in subsequent chapters as they re-emerge in later centuries. In addition, it will explain the impact of the Reformation on English convents and analyse the foundation of the English convents as political institutions existing in exile on the continent. This will enable an understanding of the political and religious ideals which remained central to the convents during their later history. The first section considers the nature and significance of convents in medieval England in order to examine the impact of the Reformation on these institutions. The second section charts the history of the English convents in exile from the first foundation in 1594 to the beginning of the reign of Charles I and explains their importance for the counter-reformation. Finally, the third section, explores the impact of the English civil war on the exiled convents and asks why the Restoration proved so significant for their later history. By examining these three

stages in the early history of the English convents I hope to demonstrate their essentially political nature and links with the British state.

I: Medieval convents and the impact of the Reformation

In medieval England convents were a common sight. From 1270 to 1536, for instance, there were 138 nunneries in England.⁷⁷ From Essex to Winchester convents played a pivotal role in medieval life. They housed the daughters of gentry families and contributed to the economic life of their community through farming local produce. They had close ties to the English monarchy. For example, we know that Aethelstan's daughter became a nun in 1013. Henry V financed several new English abbeys, chief amongst them the Bridgettine convent of Syon House. It was a stipulation of the foundation of Syon Abbey that the nuns would offer daily prayers in thanks for Henry V's acquisition of the French crown thus demonstrating the early links between convents and the English monarchy. Convents also had a role as 'purgatorial institutions', as places whose primary function was to offer prayers for their founders and key benefactors in the hopes of ensuring the latter were spared time in purgatory. In addition, convents, alongside monasteries, had a responsibility to offer hospitality to those in need. This might take the form of offering food, and occasionally lodging, to travellers or it might necessitate assisting the poor through the provisions of alms and doles.⁷⁸ The importance of monastic hospitality can be seen in a tract, attributed to Thomas Gybson, published in 1537 at a time when the dissolution of monastic houses was underway. The tract argues for the importance of monastic hospitality and laments the dissolution stating that the 'experience

⁷⁷ This statistic excludes the Gilbertine Order comprised of both brothers and sisters.

⁷⁸ F. Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1990), pp. 228-33.

which we have had by those houses that already be suppressed showeth plainly unto us that a great hurt and decay is thereby become and hereafter shall come to this your realm and a great impoverishing of many of your poor and obedient subjects for lack of hospitality'.⁷⁹

Since, as this tract suggests, convents were clearly important to medieval society their dissolution under Henry VIII has been widely researched and debated.

However, research on medieval nunneries and the dissolution has brought to the fore the confessionalisation of religious historiography more than any other period in British history. Historians have tended to be divided along confessional lines on their responses to the significance of medieval convents and the reasons for their dissolution. Recent historiography has been hugely influenced by Barbara Harris's work on the dissolution of the English convents.⁸⁰ Harris has claimed that the dissolution of the convents attracted little attention in Henry VIII's England because these institutions were already becoming superfluous. While historians, like Claire Cross, have countered that these arguments merely reflect Protestant assumptions about the merits of Catholicism.⁸¹ In other words, scholars like Harris have perhaps unconsciously taken the ingrained bias of Protestant sources at face value when suggesting that the importance of convents was already on the wane prior to the Reformation. This thesis is not concerned with the specifics of the medieval nunneries but the debate has some bearing on the study of exiled English convents since it accounts for the downplaying of convents as *political* institutions. By focusing on the ways in which convents were 'unfit' for the 'modernising' initiative of the Reformation 'Protestant' historians provided little incentive to study post-Reformation convents. However, in their spirited rebuttal of these

⁷⁹ BL Cotton MS C Leo. E IV, Fols. 214-20. Also printed by L. Stone, 'The Political Programme of Thomas Cromwell', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, XXXIV (1951), p. 12.

⁸⁰ B. J. Harris, 'A New Look at the Reformation: Aristocratic Women and Nunneries, 1450-1540', *Journal of British Studies* vol. 32, No. 2, (April, 1993), pp. 89-113.

⁸¹ C. Cross, 'Monasticism and Society in the diocese of York, 1520-1540', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, XXXVIII (1988), pp. 144-5.

accusations Catholic historians have tended to treat all evidence of impropriety, whether sexual or political, on the part of convent communities as merely a manifestation of Protestant propaganda. Their claim that the counter-reformation began much earlier has led to a downplaying of the extent to which the foundation of distinctly English convents on the continent marks a key turning point in the politicisation of the counter-reformation. Thus, the confessional divide of both 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' historiography has unintentionally obscured the role played by English nuns after the Reformation.

Of course, there is some truth in the assertion that even before the Reformation was fully underway in England attacks on convent communities and the monastic life were common. In 1410 a bill in parliament recommended that convent property be used to create lay baronies and to found educational colleges. In order for the authorities to justify the dissolution of some convent communities, accusations of immorality and financial incompetence were made against the nuns. For instance, in 1497 the Bishop of Ely closed Saint Radegundconvent on charges of impious conduct and financial irregularity and used the money to found Jesus College, Cambridge. In the 1520s Thomas Wolsey accused several nunneries of false observance, dissolved them, and used the proceeds to endow Oxford colleges⁸². However, this does not necessarily imply that convents were becoming 'superfluous'. Indeed, a survey of the sources suggests that many convent communities were themselves at the forefront of early attempts at religious reform. For instance, Katherine Buskeley, the Abbess of Godstow in Oxfordshire, was the recipient of Thomas Cromwell's patronage in the 1530s and her correspondence demonstrates an interest in complying with the aims of the reform movement.⁸³ She acknowledged a clear debt to Cromwell noting that

⁸² F. A. Hibbert, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries*, (London, Pitman, 1910), p. 42.

⁸³ Abbess Katherine Buskeley was the last Abbess of Godstow convent in Oxfordshire. She was promoted to the position of Abbess at the relatively young age of 35 following the resignation of Abbess Margaret Tewkesbury. Buskeley's brother, Sir Richard Buskeley, was a client of Wolsey and Cromwell. See M.C. Erler,

he had ‘of nothing brought me to all that I have by your mere goodness’.⁸⁴ Far from regarding the convents as irrelevant at this point Cromwell entrusted his only son, Gregory, to the care of Margaret Vernon, the Prioress of St Mary’s nunnery in Hertfordshire, who had also expressed a keen interest in reform.⁸⁵ Therefore, as Ethan Shagan has noted, the events we now term ‘the Reformation’ took shape as a ‘piecemeal process’ since no one ‘wholly assented to nor wholly opposed the Reformation’.⁸⁶ Thus, Henry VIII’s divorce from Catherine of Aragon merely exacerbated a process which was already underway, but this process often had a degree of support from the convents themselves.

Nonetheless, although the Reformation was part of a piecemeal process, it still proved a turning point for convent communities in England. The reasons for the reformation have been widely discussed by scholars but the repercussions for monastic communities are less well-known. As many scholars have noted, some European nuns embraced the Reformation seeing the potential for them to play a more active pastoral role in their communities.⁸⁷ Notable examples include Katherine Van Bora, who went on to marry Martin Luther, and Katherine Zell who took the opportunity provided by the Reformation to immerse herself in hospital work and the translation of hymns from Czech into German.⁸⁸ However, the English

Reading and Writing During the Dissolution: Monks, Friars, and Nuns, 1530-1558 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁸⁴ Quoted in J. Brewer et al eds. *Letters and Papers foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII* 22 vols. in 38 (London 1862-1932), XIII (II), p. 758.

⁸⁵ Margaret Vernon was the head of four different convents beginning as prioress of St Mary de Pre in St. Albans and ending at Malling Abbey in 1538. She had a surprisingly close friendship and lasting correspondence with Thomas Cromwell writing more than twenty one letters to him. See M. C Erler, ‘Religious Women after the Dissolution : Continuing Community’ in Matthew Davis and Andrew Prescott eds. *London and the Kingdom: Essays in Honour of Caroline M Barron* (Donnington, Shaun Tyas, 2008) pp. 142-3.

⁸⁶ E.H. Shagan, *Popular Politics in the English Reformation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.7. A.G. Dickens has examined the response of friars to the reformation noting that many embraced radical positions see A. G. Dickens *Thomas Cromwell and the English Reformation* (London, English Universities Press, 1959), p. 136.

⁸⁷ M. Weisner-Hanks, ed., *Convents Confront the Reformation: Catholic and Protestant Nuns in Germany* (Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1996).

⁸⁸ A. Leonard, *Nails in the Wall: Catholic Nuns in Reformation Germany* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Reformation under Henry VIII was distinct since it was neither Lutheran nor initially Protestant in nature. In England attacks on convents and monasteries were motivated by economic considerations since monastic institutions represented virtually undefended sources of wealth. In 1535 parliament declared Henry VIII Supreme Head of the Church in England and Thomas Cromwell began a visitation of all the monasteries and convents in the realm. The visitation formed part of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, a survey of the finances of the Church, and required convent communities to testify before their local commissioners as to their income, their land, and the revenues they received from other sources. This would then be compiled into a full financial statement for each religious institution and sent to the Exchequer in London. The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* was coupled with the *Comperta*, a list of complaints which alleged to provide evidence for the immoral lives of monks and nuns. The *Comperta* noted that thirty-eight nuns had borne children including the Prioress of Littlemore who was accused of bringing up her illegitimate child in the convent. However, even those convents which were noted to be virtuous were listed for dissolution. Charles Wriothesley, a Windsor herald and a member of the King's household, described his visit to the nuns of Sion Abbey noting that on the '25th day of November the House of Sion was suppressed into the King's hands, and the ladies and brethren put out, which was the virtuous house of religion that was in England'.⁸⁹ So too, John Tregonwell observed that on his visit to Godstow Abbey he 'found all things well and in good order' whilst the Catesby convent in Northamptonshire was accounted 'in very perfect order, the prioress a poor, wise, discreet and very religious woman'.⁹⁰ Yet, economic imperatives ultimately over-ruled the good order and functionality of these communities since all three convents were subsequently dissolved.

⁸⁹ C. Wriothesley, 'A Chronicle of England During the Reigns of the Tudors from 1485 to 1559' in W.D. Hamilton, ed., *Camden Society*, I, (Westminster, 1875), p. 109. Wriothesley's aunt had been a choir nun at Syon Abbey which may explain his optimistic assessment of its conduct.

⁹⁰ Brewer, *Letters and Papers*, IX no. 45 pp. 37-38.

Responses from convent communities to these orders and the eventual dissolution of monastic institutions were varied. Some English nuns hoped to reach a compromise between the demands of their faith and the demands of the English monarchy. Thus, the Abbess of Godstow argued that her convent should be exempted from closure since the nuns did ‘not place the Pope’s authority above that of the King nor did they believe in purgatory, pray to images, or praise dead saints’.⁹¹ She avowed her loyalty to the King noting that she had ‘not offended and am and will be most obedient’ and also offered a spirited defence of her convent from any accusation of wrongdoing stating that she had not sequestered ‘one halfpenny of the goods of this monastery, moveable or unmoveable, but have rather increased the same’.⁹² Other nuns colluded in the dispersal of their convent communities by accusing their superiors of wrong-doing. For example, four nuns of Kildalliheen convent in Ireland accused their abbess of dissipating the communal property. Yet more convent communities sought actively to oppose their dispersal and fought hard to oppose Cromwell’s orders. The nuns of St. Mary’s Winchester for instance remained together against state orders for two decades after they were ordered to disperse. Elizabeth Shelley who headed the group of nuns left a chalice to Winchester College in her will but never gave up hope that her convent would be re-founded and argued that the nuns of Nunnaminster ‘shall have it agayne in case it be restored and come up again’.⁹³ The reformer, John Bale, Rector of Bishopstoke in Hampshire noted the opposition of these nuns claiming that ‘the superstitious nuns of Winchester, (are) disobeying both the Bishop and his chancellor concerning their apparel, and

⁹¹ See L.E.C. Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism in Reformation England* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 6 for a discussion of Catholic political arguments expressing loyalty to Kings.

⁹² Quoted in Erler, *Reading and Writing During the Dissolution*, p. 69.

⁹³ Will of Elizabeth Shelley, HRO 1547B/078, Hampshire Record Office. See also J. Greatrex ‘On Ministering to Certayne Devoute and Religiouse Women’ in ‘Bishop Fox and the Benedictine Nuns of Winchester Diocese on the Eve of the Dissolution’ in W. J. Shields and Diane Wood, eds. *Women in the Church, Studies in Church History*, 27 (Oxford, 1990) pp. 223-35.

utterly condemning the preachings that are now'.⁹⁴ Thus, nuns might collude, compromise, or openly resist in the dispersal of their communities.

Nonetheless, attempts to resist the dissolution would ultimately prove in vain and those who wished to remain nuns found themselves faced with exile as the only option. The act of 1536 dissolved monastic institutions with less than two hundred pounds in income leaving only eighteen convents eligible to continue. Those nuns who continued to resist had their goods confiscated and were eventually turned out of their convents without their dowries. The monastic lands were distributed amongst Henry VIII's loyal nobles, lead from the convent roofs and bells were melted down, and other objects were sold to raise revenue. Those nuns who had not resisted change were granted pensions of three pounds from the crown but this did not apply to lay sisters or novices. The six articles of 1539 had declared it a felony to break a vow of chastity so nuns were forbidden from marrying. Subsequently, Edward VI rescinded the act which required nuns to keep their vow of chastity and thereby enabled former nuns to marry. Nevertheless, many former nuns appear to have been reluctant to do so. As a result, some nuns, like those of St. Mary's Winchester, continued to live together in secular housing and reformed themselves as convents when Mary I came to power in the 1550s. Unfortunately for these English nuns Mary I's reign proved short-lived and hostility to the Marian persecutions meant that anti-monasticism became increasingly vitriolic during Elizabeth I's reign. As such, when Elizabeth I acceded to the English throne, many nuns chose to go into exile on the continent and search for appropriate houses of their order abroad to join.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ J. Bale, *An Expostulation or Complaynte Agaynste the Blashemyes of a Franticke Papist of Hampshire* (London, 1551), p. 5.

⁹⁵ For background information on this: D. Knowles, *Bare Ruined Choirs: the Dissolution of the English Monasteries* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1976). Some disposed nuns had journeyed abroad together in the hope of continuing their cloisters. Of particular interest are the Bridgettine nuns of Syon abbey who led a nomadic existence in the Low Countries for 55 years and the Dominican nuns from the suppressed

The number of women prepared to make the journey abroad into exile suggests that female monasticism was far from being an unfashionable and outdated lifestyle. Indeed, the difficulties faced by women who chose to leave England for a life in exile proves their dedication to the pursuit of a monastic lifestyle. The nuns of Syon abbey initially attempted to remain together under their Abbess, Catherine Palmer, venturing first to Antwerp, and when this became unfeasible, to Mechlin. In 1576 their sanctuary in Mechlin was pillaged by Calvinists in the wake of the Spanish sacking of Antwerp and their abbess, Catherine Palmer, died of shock leaving the community without shelter or leadership. Syon Abbey was, however, unusual; most women sought sanctuary in French or Flemish convents as individuals. Thus, by 1590, twenty-three English women had joined the Flemish community of St Ursula's convent in Louvain.⁹⁶ By the beginning of the seventeenth century eight English women had professed as nuns at the Poor Clares of St. Omer and four English women had joined the French nuns at the abbey of Paix in Douai.⁹⁷ English nuns continued to face difficulties after their profession abroad. The nun's language skills were not always adequate. English nuns often blamed a lack of sufficient language skills, which were necessary for effective communication with the local nuns and their confessor, for the sense of spiritual isolation they felt. Thus, Mary Ward, who would later found the English Poor Clare Convent at Gravelines and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, blamed an inability to communicate with her Walloon confessor as a reason for her unhappiness during her time as a lay sister in the Flemish Poor Clares convent at Omer.⁹⁸ In addition, the nature of the

Dartford convent who sought refuge in a Flemish cloister. See J. R. Fletcher, *The Story of the English Bridgettines of Syon Abbey* (South Brent, Syon Abbey, 1933).

⁹⁶ *The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses Regular of the Lateran, at St Monica's in Louvain, 1548-1644*, A. Hamilton, ed., (London, Sands and Co., 1904), vol. 1, pp.1-3.

⁹⁷ P. Guilday, *The English Catholic Refugees on the Continent 1558-1795* (London, Longmans, 1914), pp. 7-10.

⁹⁸ The English Poor Clares at Gravelines were founded in 1608. Mary Ward would later become famous for founding the active and unenclosed Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which, would re-found in Britain during the Restoration. Box 2, U144, archives of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, York.

convents was often very different to those in England. Reports from this period suggest that the English nuns found local customs and diet difficult to adjust to and for those in Flemish convents the diet of 'rye bread and herb porridge' proved indigestible and led to illness amongst the English nuns.⁹⁹

It is testimony to the durability of convent life after the Reformation that, despite the difficulties faced by English nuns, by the beginning of the seventeenth century there were not enough convents abroad to admit the large numbers of English women seeking the religious vocation. Indeed, by 1590 the English nuns attached to the Flemish St Ursula's convent in Louvain argued that vocations were being lost because there were not enough convents to admit the English exiles¹⁰⁰. Thus, as the counter-reformation gained ground and a semi-permanent group of English exiles began to establish themselves on the continent, the need to establish schools and retreats for daughters to match the male colleges at Douai and St. Omer began to take precedence.¹⁰¹ By 1590 therefore English convents were beginning to found institutions of their own on the other side of the channel.

II: The counter-reformation and the founding of the English convents in exile

The primary reason for founding specifically *English* convents in exile was political. In 1570 Pope Pius V published a bull entitled *Regnans in Excelsis* in England which officially excommunicated Elizabeth I from the Catholic church. The bull declared Elizabeth I, the 'pretended Queen of England and servant of crime', to be a heretic and required all Catholic

⁹⁹*The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses*, vol. I, p. 35. The English Augustinians at Louvain were founded in 1609 by English nuns who broke away from the Augustinian convent at St. Ursula's.

¹⁰⁰*The Chronicle of the English Augustinians*, I, p. 63.

¹⁰¹ St. Omer and Douai were founded as boys' colleges in 1590.

subjects to refuse allegiance to her.¹⁰² It thus forced English Catholics into reassessing their relationship with the Catholic Church since they could no longer be loyal to both the Pope, as head of the Universal Catholic Church, and the now excommunicated head of the English monarchy. The bull was an immediate response to the failure of the Northern Rebellion of November 1569. This had sought to remove Elizabeth I from the throne in favour of the Catholic, Mary Queen of Scots. Such conspiracies were bound through lack of resources and support to fail, but many Catholics were seeking longer-term strategic options for the continuation of the Catholic faith in England. Chief amongst these options was to set up English Catholic institutions abroad which would educate future generations of Catholics in the faith and provide a safe-haven for Catholics forced into exile during politically turbulent periods in England. At first these institutions were aimed at men with the setting up of Catholic colleges and monasteries in Douai and Paris. However, Catholics recognised the need for women to fulfil a spiritual role in the revival of Catholicism too and this led them to found the English Benedictine convent in Brussels in 1598. It is significant that the cloister was established in the aftermath of Pope Sixtus V's renewal of the papal bull of excommunication *Regnans in Excelsis* against Elizabeth I at a time when a counter-reformation ideology was gaining ground in Britain.¹⁰³ As the annals of the English Benedictines made clear, the nuns vowed to 'undertake St Benedict his rule and Holy Order; which of all others, had heretofore, most flourished; in that now heretical kingdome confiding

¹⁰²J. Day, *Bullae Papisticae ante biennium contra sereniss. Angliae, Franciae & Hyberniae Reginam Elizabetham & contra inclytum Angliae Regnum promulgatae, refutatio, orthodox aequae Reginae, & vniuersi Regni Angliae defensio*, (London, 1571).

¹⁰³ The initial bull was issued on 25 February 1570 by Pope Pius V. The Bull was temporarily suspended in 1580 but renewed again in 1588 by Sixtus V following the alleged regicide of Mary, Queen of Scots. After this the Counter-Reformation gained ground with the formation of new seminaries for priests and an attempt by some 'recusant' Catholics (those who refused the oath of allegiance) to conspire against Elizabeth in the interests of a Spanish succession. It is in this context of Catholic political opposition that the first convent was founded. For background on this see A. Dures, *English Catholicism, 1558-1642: continuity and change* (Harlow, Longmans, 1986); M. C. Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c. 1550-1640* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006); D. B. Hamilton, *Anthony Munday and the Catholics, c. 1560-1633* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005); A. Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, conformity and confessional polemic in early modern England* (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 1993).

it might happily in future times, be agayne a fit reception for them'.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the new Benedictine convent was founded to educate future Catholics and prepare the ground for the return of England to the Catholic faith.

The new English convent in Brussels was therefore immediately political in nature. This is demonstrated by the fact that initial support for the venture came from Catholic Spain. In this period Catholic Spain was at war with Protestant England and keen to support the exiled English Catholic community as a means of indirectly attacking Elizabeth I. The English Catholic community themselves worked hard to secure diplomatic relations with Spain and win them over to the cause of the English Catholic exiles. It was this intention that lay behind the publication in 1596 of the *Historia Particular*, a pamphlet thought to have been written by the Jesuit controversialist Joseph Creswell as part of an attempt to secure donors for the new Catholic colleges being founded on the continent¹⁰⁵. The book included references to Catholic women and the proposed convent for Benedictine nuns in Brussels and aimed to encourage Spanish support for the new venture. Moreover, William Holt, a Jesuit rector of the English college in Rome and an agent of Philip II in Brussels, was instrumental in the establishment of the new foundation.¹⁰⁶ The clothing ceremony for the first eight postulants took place on 21 November 1599 and was conducted in the presence of the Infanta Isabella, the Archduke Albert, and the Spanish court ensuring that through an allegiance with the Spanish Netherlands the nuns represented themselves as a political threat to Britain.¹⁰⁷ One

¹⁰⁴ *Annals of the English Benedictines of Ghent*, (printed for private circulation, 1894), p. 47.

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Creswell (aka Arthur Creswell) was an English Jesuit controversialist. He studied at Reims and, having been rector at the English college in Rome, he succeeded Robert Persons as vice-prefect for the English Jesuit interests in Spain.

¹⁰⁶ Amongst the early postulants were Mary Percy, the daughter of Thomas Percy, the seventh earl of Northumberland, martyred in York in 1572 and Dorothy and Gertrude Arundell, the daughters of Sir John Arundell who died in prison for his faith. Harleian Ms 4275, fols. 219-2; Hazelmere Ms 1888, 17th century papers concerning the house in Brussels, Downside Abbey.

¹⁰⁷ A. Neville, 'Abbess Neville's Annals of the Five Communities of English Benedictine Nuns in Flanders, 1598-1687', in *Miscellanea V* (London, CRS 6, 1909), p. 2.

anonymous chronicler from the Benedictine cloister noted that the ‘prince and his Infanta...made the exiled sufferers very welcome’ and the cloister received financial aid from the Archduke and alms from the Spanish regiment quartered in the city.¹⁰⁸ Indeed by 1601 Philip III was providing the convent with a monthly pension of 50 crowns taken from the Spanish military funds. Thus, in the early years the exiled convents clearly benefitted from international support and patronage which directly opposed the foreign policy aims of the English monarchy.

The political nature of these early convents is clear from the names of those professed there. Lady Mary Percy, who led the foundation of the English Benedictine convent, came from a family of Catholic martyrs and was supported by the powerful Arundell family. By the beginning of the seventeenth century several more convents exclusively for English women were beginning to appear on the continent with support from notable Catholic families.¹⁰⁹ The early postulants at these convents were connected to families renowned for their opposition to the Elizabethan settlement. For instance, Anne Clitherow professed as an Augustinian nun at the English convent in Louvain in 1598. Anne Clitherow was the daughter of the Catholic martyr Margaret Clitherow, who had been executed in 1586 for harbouring Catholic priests.¹¹⁰ So too, Jane Wiseman professed at the English Augustinians convent in Louvain in 1795. She also came from a renowned recusant family and her mother Jane Vaughan had been imprisoned for her faith. Three of her sisters – Bridget, Anne, and Barbara Wiseman – would go on to become nuns too, although two of them joined the Bridgettine convent in Lisbon. These women provide excellent examples of the ‘matriarchy’ theory of the Catholic counter-reformation. John Bossy has convincingly argued that women were at the forefront

¹⁰⁸ The ‘prince and his infanta’ refers to Archduke Albert and his wife Isabella, rulers of the Spanish Netherlands. Ms, Fragment of Contemporary annals formerly at Clare Abbey Darlington, fols. 4-5.

¹⁰⁹ See Appendix. Table 1.

¹¹⁰ P. Lake and M. Questier, *The Trials of Margaret Clitherow: Persecution, Martyrdom, and the Politics of Stability in Elizabethan England* (London, Continuum, 2011).

of the Catholic counter-reformation because, unlike men, they often evaded the authorities and were responsible for maintaining the Catholic faith in the household.¹¹¹ Margaret Clitherow and Jane Vaughan clearly fit in with these criteria since they, rather than their husbands, were at the forefront of Catholic attacks on the English state. Yet, it is clear that by choosing to enter the cloister their daughters continued this trend. As nuns these women were able to facilitate lay devotion through their teaching, writings, and prayers.

Convent texts sought to document the recusant tradition thereby acting as exemplary texts, which informed future generations of nuns of their ancestor's struggle to preserve the faith and advertised the importance of female monasticism. The memories of the years of persecution were kept alive in obituary notices and convent annals which could be read aloud to the community. Under the notice for the years of the sixteenth century the English Poor Clares annals at Aire noted that Queen Elizabeth enacted 'vilent persecutions against Catholicksforc(ing) all Religious women to settle amongst forreners for want of convents in their own nation'.¹¹² By so doing the annals emphasised the importance of maintaining English cloisters on the continent and encouraged other women to join them in their defence of the true faith. Those nuns who were connected to families with a record for martyrdom, such as the Rookwood, Wiseman, Allen and Garnet families, received special mention in chronicles and obituaries. It is for this reason that Anne Clitherow had a biography of her mother, Margaret Clitherow, dedicated to her.¹¹³ Such memories helped ensure that the English convents remained steadfast in their commitment to keep monasticism for English women alive on the continent.

¹¹¹ J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London, Longman and Tod, 1979).

¹¹² MS Fragment of contemporary annals formerly at Clare Abbey, Darlington, fols. 4-5.

¹¹³ *An abstracte of the life and martirdome of Mistress Margaret Clitherowe who suffered in the year of our Lorde 1586, the 25 of March*, (Mechiline, 1619). For more information on the Clitherow family see P. Lake and M. C. Questier, *The Trials of Margaret Clitherow: Persecution, Martyrdom and the Politics of Sanctity in Elizabethan England* (London, Continuum, 2011).

Covent texts also emphasised the connection of the exiled institutions with the original conversion of England and encouraged prayers for the reconversion of England to Catholicism. In this way the exiled nuns focused their prayers on reconversion and acted as potential tools for this. The Benedictines at Cambrai prayed for the conversion of England during feasts for St. Augustine of Canterbury whilst the English Augustinians sang the litany of the saints for the return of England to Catholic faith on the feasts of St. Gregory the Great and St Thomas of Canterbury. English Carmelite nuns represented Catholics as the true patriots since it was they alone who prayed for the ‘poor distressed country of England’.¹¹⁴ It is for this reason that the English convents were not just part of an international ‘refugee reformation’ but also had a ‘national’ focus.¹¹⁵ The foundation of English convents in exile therefore served as a preliminary step in the eventual return to their homeland and the longed for re-conversion of England.

However, the political threat posed by the exiled convents was not merely symbolic. There is strong evidence that the English nuns in exile were involved in political activity during the early period of their foundations. The nuns were close to Jesuits like Robert Persons and Edmund Campion. Persons and Campion were part of the Jesuit mission to England in 1580-81, an attempt by exiled Jesuits to return to England in order to preach against the Church of England and seek converts for the Catholic cause. The extent to which this mission was

¹¹⁴ N. Hallett, ed., *Lives of Spirit: An Edition of English Carmelite Auto/Biographies of the Early Modern Period* (London, Routledge, 2016), p. 2.

¹¹⁵ The term ‘Refugee Reformation’ was coined by Mark Greengrass who argued that Catholic exiled could not be separated from international issues. This is, of course, to some extent true as we have seen with the convent negotiations with Spain. Nonetheless, the convents primary focus at this time was England’s reconversion and their aim was not to assimilate into European culture but to return to what they saw as their homeland. M. Greengrass, ‘Two sixteenth-century religious minorities and their scribal networks in H. Schilling and I. G. Toth eds. *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe vol. 1 Religious and Cultural exchange in Europe 1400-1700* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 317.

treasonable in nature has been the subject of debate within early modern historiography.¹¹⁶ Campion always claimed that the mission was forbidden to ‘deal in any respect with matters of state or policy of this realm’.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, the 1580s were a politically vulnerable time for Elizabeth’s reign and any mission was likely to be suspected of being in league with Mary Queen of Scots. Two years before Campion’s mission, in 1578, Mary Champney, a nun from the exiled Syon Abbey convent, had been sent back to England to collect alms for the impoverished convent. Person requested that she offer prayers for the ‘speedy conversion of England’ and for ‘God’s chief prisoner you know what good lady I mean’, a clear reference to Mary Queen of Scots.¹¹⁸ Although Champney was too ill to help with the mission herself the task of handing out Campion’s *Challenge to the Privy Council* (known as Campion’s Brag) fell to several nuns including Juliana Harman, Catherine Kingsmill, and Elizabeth Sanders. Sanders helped her brother, Nicholas Sanders, to distribute the tract throughout the English Catholic community and claimed she did so ‘in the hope that our religion and order should come up again’.¹¹⁹ She was arrested, managed to escape, and eventually returned to Rouen in 1587.

Person’s involvement with the Syon nuns did not end after the failed Jesuit mission since he continued to encourage the nuns’ political entanglements. In 1594, when the nuns of Syon Abbey moved to Lisbon in Portugal, Parsons took the opportunity to explain the reasons for their exile and their potential importance to the counter-reformation cause in a brief history of the convent published in Spanish and presented to Philip II. Although the tract was on the

¹¹⁶ See A. Dailey, ‘Making Edmund Campion: Treason, Martyrdom, and the structure of Transcendence’, *Religion and Literature*, vol. 38, no.3, (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 65-85.

¹¹⁷ A. M., *A Breefeanswer made unto two seditious pamphlets, the one printed in French and the other in English, contayning a defence of Edmund Campion, their moste horrid and unnaturall treasons agaynste her maijestie and the realme* (London, 1587).

¹¹⁸ ‘The Life and Good End of Sister Marie’; BL Add.MS 18, 650 fol. 10v.

¹¹⁹ ‘The copy of S. Elizabeth Sanders letters unto your word of her being taken into England’, English College Valladolid Spain Ser. II L 5 No. 12, fol. 1.

surface a brief historical survey its political significance is far greater since its publication came shortly after the defeat of the Spanish Armada by Elizabeth I's troops. Person therefore aimed to demonstrate the English convent's relevance to the wider European struggle of Catholic counter-reformation and to secure Spanish support for the foundation of college and convents in exile. His introduction was diplomatically constructed to appeal to the Spanish monarchy as potential patrons for Syon Abbey. For example, Persons stressed the Lancastrian origins of the convent during the reign of Henry V noting that, since the Spanish monarchy was also descended from the House of Lancashire, the two institutions had a common lineage. He thus suggested that it was almost an act of providence that the nuns had fortuitously arrived on Portugal's shores:

And now, considering the circumstances of these Religious, it certainly seems not to be without a mystery, that by the particular Providence of God they have been brought through so many travels and banishment to the Kingdom of Portugal, there to repose themselves securely within the protection of the descendants of the House of Lancaster, and of the blood royal of their founder, King Henry the Fifth, who was the second King of that house: for the Kings of Portugal descend in a right line from the royal house of Lancaster, Queen Philippa, daughter to John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and sister to Henry IV, King of England, being wife to John the first, King of Portugal, and mother to Don Edward, his son and successor.¹²⁰

The English nuns in exile therefore were, even in the early period of their foundations, involved in crucial political entanglements that posed a threat to English foreign policy.

¹²⁰ 'A preface, written by father Robert Parsons, S.J., to the History of the Wanderings of Syon. From a Manuscript preserved at Syon Abbey, Chudleigh' by Dom Adam Hamilton, OSB in *The Angel of Syon. The Life and Martyrdom of Blessed Richard Reynolds, Bridgettine monk of Syon, martyred at Tyburn, May 4, 1535* (Edinburgh, Sands and Co., 1905), pp. 97-113.

Thus by the time James I acceded to the throne in 1603 the English convents were an established threat on the continent. Of course, it had been a stipulation of James I being allowed to take over the throne of Scotland on the arrest of his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, that he be raised a Protestant but this did not prevent Catholic attempts to gain his patronage for the duration of his reign. Michael Questier and others have written in depth about the attempts by English Catholics to gain prominence in government under James I.¹²¹ Catholic disappointment at the lack of toleration produced during James I's reign fed into recusant opposition to James I's policies. This context helps to explain the production in 1603 of Richard Verstegan's English edition of Peter Lucca's *The Dialogue of Dying Well*. Richard Rowlands (aka Verstegan) was a Catholic convert and publisher who became known for his work on Catholic martyrs and the exiled English Catholic community. In his introduction to this work he offered a powerful argument in favour of 'martyrdom' as a means of dedicated opposition to the British state. However, for Verstegan, martyrdom might be loosely defined and also encompass a young lady's decision to leave the material world and join an enclosed convent in exile away from her family. Thus, Verstegan likened the English nuns' decision to renounce the world to enter an enclosed order in exile for their faith to the early martyrs' decision to renounce the world through death in defiance of the Reformation.¹²² It is no coincidence therefore that Verstegan chose to dedicate the work to Joanne Berkeley, the first abbess of the English Benedictine convent in Brussels, in the hope that through the convent and its new postulants 'divine providence may come to brighten our country with their shining sanctity as your predecessors heretofore have done'.¹²³ The English convents in exile

¹²¹ M. C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England 1580-1625*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996) and M. C. Questier, ed. *Stuart Dynastic Policy and Religious Politics, 1621-1625*. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹²² R. Verstegan, ed. P. Lucca, *The Dialogue of Dying Well* (Translated first into French and now into English), (Antwerp, 1603). p. 19.

¹²³ *The Dialogue of Dying Well*, p. 3.

therefore were clearly deemed vital to the English Catholic cause and opposition to James I's anti-Catholic policies.

Catholic opposition intensified in the climate of penal legislation and anti-Catholic hostility that led to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. The exiled English convents were not directly implicated in the networks surrounding Guy Fawkes and his fellow plotters but their families sometimes were. For instance, the parents of Mary Ward, the future founder of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, had been implicated in the plot and arrested. Indeed, Mary Ward's experiences during this time proved central to the founding of her institute. In 1606, a year after the plot, she founded a new order of Poor Clares at Gravelines specifically for English nuns to aid the Catholic cause in its recovery after the backlash against Fawkes. However, Mary Ward's vision was for a more active missionary effort, more suited to a climate of penal legislation, where women could engage in teaching and missionary work in a similar way to the male Jesuit orders. This led her to found in 1609 the first Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Omer dedicated to furthering the Catholic cause through active missionary activities. Catholic missionary zeal intensified as Catholic factions sought to influence James I over the proposed marriage of his son, the future Charles I, to the Spanish Infanta which, if successful, promised a suspension of the penal laws. This missionary zeal explains both the intensification of the exiled English convents' spiritual activities and the foundation of several new convents in the period 1620 to 1629. For example, in the 1620s the Brussels Benedictines were granted a request to receive the Eucharist more frequently in order to 'more fervently pray for (their) friends in England'.¹²⁴ By 1623 a new Benedictine cloister in Cambrai had been set up by Helen Gertrude More and in 1621 two widows, Lucy Sleford-Davis and Petronilla Kemp-Browne, founded a Franciscan order of English nuns in Brussels.

¹²⁴ 'Abbess Neville's Annals', p. 15.

By 1623, in the wake of these new foundations, the exiled English convents were becoming more actively involved in political negotiations to ensure the future reconversion of Britain to the Catholic faith. For example, the English nuns of Syon Abbey in Lisbon were clearly involved in the diplomatic strategy designed to ensure that the so called ‘Spanish Match’, marriage negotiations with Spain for the proposed marriage of Prince Charles in the 1620s, was successful. In 1623 they petitioned the Infanta Maria, addressing her as the ‘Princess of Wales’, and expressing their hope that she would soon marry Prince Charles: and providing her with a detailed history of their exile:

We know, feel and have experienced for more than seventy years the full hardships of this our exile; of which our many afflictions, sorrows, and tears are true witnesses and, with our injuries, sufferings and dangers on land and at seas, true testimony of how much we have had to suffer; finally the aching loss of our native land, families and mother tongue, as well as our extreme poverty in foreign lands and kingdoms, declare and make evident the burdens and great difficulties we have experienced and carried on our shoulders.¹²⁵

Thus the nuns made clear their sufferings under the Protestant regime of King James I and expressed the hope that the difficulties of their exile would prove short-lived if the marriage negotiations proved successful. The nuns included alongside their petition a detailed history of their institution and their exile presumably in the hope that, should Maria become Queen, the nuns would receive her future patronage.

It is this political context which explains the publication of several Protestant works which directly satirised and stereotyped nuns in the period 1622 to 1625. One such work was Thomas Robinson’s *The Anatomy of the English Nunnery at Lisbon* published in 1622.¹²⁶ On the surface Robinson’s book aimed to examine the first English convent in exile by providing details of the nuns’ daily lives and the convent’s institutional and historic significance.

¹²⁵ A. Hamilton, ed., *The Angel of Syon: the life and martyrdom of the Blessed Richard Reynolds martyred at Tyburn, May 4, 1535. To which is added a sketch of the history of the Bridgettines of Syon, edited from a MS copy at Syon Abbey Chudleigh* (London, Sands and Co., 1905), p. 5.

¹²⁶ T. Robinson, *The Anatomy of the English Nunnery at Lisbon* (London, 1622).

However, the book was in effect a piece of polemical propaganda to serve the interests of Protestant Britain and needs to be located in a political context where British Protestants were increasingly fearful of the links between exiled English convents and the Spanish court. Robinson claimed to have spent several months engaged in helping the confessor of the convent, Father Seth Foster, transcribe monastic texts. It was this direct observation which, Robinson claimed, enabled him to provide his audience with precise details of convent activity. Yet, political concerns and the sense of the convent as a politicised space for counter-reformation are central to Robinson's text. Robinson claims that the English nuns of Syon sheltered one 'Dr Lopus' in the course of the sixteenth century.¹²⁷ Historians have now identified 'Dr Lopus' as the Portuguese Christian convert, Roderigo Lopez, who acted as Royal Physician to Queen Elizabeth I and was executed for high treason in 1594 having been accused of attempting to poison the Queen.¹²⁸ Robinson claims that the nuns were accomplices to the attempted poisoning of Queen Elizabeth I and offered their prayers for the success of his mission. In addition, Robinson alleged that the nuns were recruited by the Jesuits to hide the money that would be used to pay Lopez and to act as a go-between during payment hand-over so that the transactions would be less likely to arouse suspicion. These claims demonstrate the strength of Protestant fears that English nuns were capable of acting as spies against the British state and might be engaged in treasonable activities against the monarchy.

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 4.

¹²⁸ Roderigo Lopez was a Portuguese Christian convert of Jewish ancestry. He was raised a Catholic but accused of secretly practising Judaism by the Portuguese Inquisition and forced to leave the country. Arriving in England in 1559 he joined the Church of England and became House Physician at St Bartholomew's Hospital. In 1581 he was made Physician-in Chief to the Queen but was accused of attempting to poison her in 1594, tried by the state and found guilty. He is alleged to have inspired the character of Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

Despite its polemical nature Robinson's book is also significant in that it marks a key stage in the development of British Protestant stereotypes about nuns. First, Robinson argues that many of the women in the convent have been forced by their parents and confessors into accepting their vocations as nuns.¹²⁹ Here then is an early example of the 'forced vocation' narrative, the idea that nuns are the unwilling victims of parental constraint, that came to form a key part of Protestant anti-Catholic rhetoric. Secondly, Robinson alleged that Father Foster was engaged in inappropriate sexual liaisons with the nuns and that they complied with his demands because of the oath of obedience they had taken to his authority. Or, as Robinson put it, 'I am verily persuaded that not one amongst them will (for fearing of being disobedient) refuse to come to his bed whosoever he commands them'.¹³⁰ In this example the idea of sexual impropriety resulting from enforced sexual restraint and from an irrational compliance to authoritarian structures is key. Finally, Robinson dwelt on the constraining strictures of convent life noting that during his time there he was forbidden from leaving the convent grounds and kept a virtual prisoner to the demands of the convent confessor.¹³¹ In this the notion that the convent is an authoritarian place whose power structures encapsulate, in Protestant eyes, the despotic regimes of Catholic Europe is brought out. Thus, Robinson's text establishes the three key stereotypes of Protestant anti-Catholic discourse: the 'forced vocation' myth, the 'nuns as sexual libertines' motif, and the 'convent as institutionalised despotism' symbol.

These stereotypes reoccurred in another key work of the 1620s, Thomas Middleton's play *A Game at Chess* published, and performed, in 1624.¹³² The play constructs seventeenth century

¹²⁹ Robinson, *The Anatomy*, p. 5.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 6.

¹³¹ Ibid. p. 7.

¹³² T. H. Howard-Hill ed. *The Bridgewater Manuscript of Thomas Middleton's A Game At Chess*, London 1624, (Lampeter, Edwin Mellen, 1995).

politics as an endless, and rather pointless, game of chess between Catholic Spain (ruled by Philip IV) and Protestant Britain (ruled by James I). It dramatizes the, ultimately unsuccessful, struggle over negotiations for the proposed marriage between Infanta Maria and Prince Charles and satirizes the journey made by Prince Charles and the Duke of Buckingham (George Villiers) to Madrid in 1623. The key characters are not named in the play but merely given titles corresponding to chess pieces such as 'Black King', 'White King', 'White King's Pawn' and 'Black Knight's Pawn'. It is however clear here that the white pieces correspond to members of James I's court and the black pieces to members of Philip IV's court. One of the pieces entitled 'The Black Queen's Pawn' sheds light on the satirical representation of nuns in seventeenth-century print culture and the politicised nature of this satire. For the 'Black Queen's Pawn' can most easily be identified as Mary Ward, the founder of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM). The play refers to the Black Queen's pawn as a 'bouncing Jesuitess', a clear reference to the popular portrayal of IBVM nuns as 'Galloping Jesuitesses', and notes that she was 'the chief agent of the Transportation of Ladies' Daughters'.¹³³ The three key stereotypes of Protestant anti-Catholic discourse once again appear here. The 'forced vocation' narrative is subtly present as the White Queen's Pawn is deceived into entering a 'secret vault' where she is tricked into joining the Black court. In addition, the 'sexual libertines' motive features as the Black Queen's Pawn discussed how the confessor ensured that the new nuns were 'soon dispossessed of worldly cares that came into your fingers'.¹³⁴ The Black Queen's Pawn is herself portrayed as sexually experienced': she revels in tricking the Black Bishop's Pawn into entering into sexual relations with her. Finally, the notion of convents, and other Catholic spaces, as a form of institutionalised despotism is central. Thus, the Black Queen's Pawn claims her missionary

¹³³ Ibid. p. 15.

¹³⁴ Ibid. p. 18.

enterprise 'steals your strength away, and fights against you, disarms your soul even in the heat of battle'.¹³⁵

However, the English convents in exile were not mere victims of Protestant satire. Instead, they framed their own responses to Protestant polemicists throughout the course of the seventeenth century. The English convent of Syon Abbey, for example, issued a robust rebuke to Robinson's narrative whereby they defended their convent, their confessor, and their lifestyle and cast doubt on the authority of Robinson's claims.¹³⁶ The nuns argued that they wrote because Robinson's tract was likely to have caused 'grief to their parents and friends whose remedy and comfort they were bound to procure with all possible speed'. They claimed therefore not to be concerned with the Protestant audience for Robinson's tract since 'no satisfaction...will content' Protestants 'that both like and laugh at it as they do....at all true religion'. The nuns countered Robinson's narrative by addressing key claims in his tract. Firstly, they claimed that Robinson had entered the convent under false pretences. Once in the convent he had acted like a wolf in sheep's clothing 'taking hold upon and covering himself with a sheep skin he...craftily framed a certain narration in English rhyme'. Secondly, they claimed that there was nothing new in Robinson's claims, his account merely represented the distorted view of Protestant propagandists since 'our persecutors easily permit men of their own sect to publish infamous lies against' the nuns. They responded to the charges of 'forced vocation' and convent autocracy by claiming that this merely reflected a Protestant view of freedom which conflicted with the view of Catholic monastics or 'those who 'seek not liberty as they do but have holy rules and most worthy superiors'. Finally, they responded to the charge that they are 'odious traitors to the state' by denying claims that 'Dr

¹³⁵ Ibid. p. 19.

¹³⁶ 'Reply to Thomas Robinson from the Nuns of Syon Abbey', BL Add MS, 24 173.

Lopus' (Roderigo Lopez) presided in their convent and by arguing that Queen Elizabeth had agreed to their founding a convent in exile. In the same way Catholic responses to Thomas Middleton's play argued that it merely reflected the 'shamelessness of the English'. The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary noted that the play offered 'remarkable acts of sacrilege and other abominations'. By 1625 therefore debate between the English convents in exile and the British Protestant culture had become increasingly polarised.

The period from the founding of the first English convent in exile, the Brussels Benedictines, in 1594 to the start of Charles I's reign in 1625 marks a period where the English convents in exile emerge as highly politicised institutions. It also marks the beginning of crucial stereotypes about nuns that would shape the reception of Catholic monasticism in Britain for several decades. These stereotypes did not emerge from a vacuum but were a direct response to the politicised nature of convent communities at this time. Since their foundation in 1594 English convents had defined themselves in opposition to the British monarchy. This would change in the following period as the new king, Charles I, who acceded to the throne in 1625 seemed, through his marriage to a devout Catholic, to offer a unique opportunity to change the political system in the nuns' favour.

III: From Civil War to Restoration

Charles I's accession to the throne in 1625 marked another crucial turning point in the history of the English convents. The English convents were initially hopeful of a renewal of religious toleration under Charles I. His wife, Henrietta Maria, was a devout French Catholic and he was vehemently, although mistakenly, accused of Catholicism in the press. In fact, Charles

I's views were markedly different from those espoused by Catholics. He was a devout Anglican but some of the 'Arminian' changes undertaken by Charles I and his leading ministers, Archbishop Laud and Richard Montague, were regarded, in view of the elements of ritual and iconography, as 'Popish' in their nature. Moreover, Charles I, acting on advice from Henrietta Maria, had promoted some Catholics at court. It is for this reason that the English convents in exile and their patrons sought to win over Charles I to their cause. The Poor Clares' translation of the rules of its founder, for instance, was dedicated to King Charles I and prayed that 'he and his heirs might have long reigns'.¹³⁷ The work thus served a political function in print by operating as a petitioning process whereby the nuns expressed their hope for a degree of Catholic toleration from the monarch in exchange for their political loyalty.

King Charles I's reign is also interesting in that it marks a high point in the foundation of the Mary Ward Institute and witnessed the return of sisters of this order to England. Indeed, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary were key beneficiaries of the patronage of Henrietta Maria. In 1631 Pope Urban VIII wrote to Henrietta Maria to show his support for the return of the IBVM nuns to England. By 1645 this had been accomplished with several members of the IBVM helping to found a congregation at Hammersmith and later at York. This might seem surprising given the extent of hostility to Catholicism in Britain at the time, but the Mary Ward Institute succeeded because it was disguised in the form of a house and, since the nuns were regarded by most Catholics as heretical, they were seen as less of a threat by the British state. Their perceived 'heresy' of course stemmed from their more active missionary activities, modelled on those of the Jesuits, and their secular-orientated modes of dress. For

¹³⁷*The Declarations and Ordinances made upon the Rule of Our Holy Mother St Clare*, trans. E. Evilinge, (Rouen, 1926). pp. 14-18.

British Protestants the enclosed orders with their alleged 'secret vaults' and their veils were regarded as more clearly a threat to the state than the missionary activities of the IBVM.

Nonetheless, other convent communities also benefitted from the reign of Charles I. By the end of the 1640s several new English convents had been founded in France and Flanders. For instance, in 1633 Mary Tredway founded the Paris Augustinians with the support of Louis XIII on the understanding that the convent would accept British subjects only. Moreover, the exiled English convents began to actively seek recruits in Britain through the publication of pamphlets aimed at encouraging young women to take up the religious life. One such pamphlet, entitled *The English Nunne* was printed in English and published in Omer in 1641.¹³⁸ The text was published anonymously but it clearly functioned as an early guide for English women considering the cloistered life. It was attributed to Lawrence Anderson, a Catholic controversialist. The libraries of the Benedictines and the Poor Clare convents list copies of the book suggesting that it formed part of their recruitment strategy. Like Verstegan's *The Dialogue of Dying Well* the text was dedicated to Joanna Berkeley, the first abbess of the Brussels Benedictine convent and this served to inspire future generations of Catholic girls to take up a religious vocation in exile.

When civil war broke out in 1642, resulting in the execution of Charles I, the English convents continued to express their loyalty to the Stuart cause. This seems to have been reciprocated by the Royalists in exile. In 1650 the future Charles II visited the Ghent Benedictine convent, met with the abbess, Mary Roper, and requested the nuns' prayers for

¹³⁸ N.N, *The English Nunne: being a treatise, wherein (by way of Dialogue the author endeavoureth to draw young and unmarried Catholike Gentlewomen to imbrace a votary, and religious life. Written by N.N. Heereunto is annexed a short discourse...to the Abbesses and Religious Women of all the Monasteries in the Low-Countreys and France)* {Attributed to Lawrence Anderson}; (St Omer, 1642).

the coming conflict with the republican armies. The annals record that after the meeting he wrote to the Bishop of Ghent stating that 'if God ever restored him to his kingdom this community should ever find the effects of his favour'. This may be exaggeration on the part of the convent scribe but Charles II was nonetheless clearly fond of the cloister and impressed by the nuns. For, as Mary Roper lay dying, the king sent the Royal physician to attend to her. The English convents in exile were able to provide a sanctuary for the new wave of English exiles affected by the civil war so it is perhaps not surprising that King Charles II and the court sought links with them. For their part the exiled English convents were keen to stress to the future King and his courtiers their heritage as *English* institutions and their importance to the English past. The nuns took the opportunity provided by the English civil war and the King's need for support on the continent to emphasise their links with the homeland and the English past in the hope of securing the King's support should he be returned to the English throne. For example, the English Sepulchrines' 1652 publication entitled *A Briefe Relation of the Order and Institute of the English women at Liège* traced the genealogy of their order and claimed that Sepulchrines existed in medieval England.¹³⁹ Furthermore, they claimed that the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene and Martha had all been Sepulchrines thereby signifying the importance of their convent to the faith espoused by the English.¹⁴⁰ In this way they hoped to attract the patronage of the Royal household by demonstrating that their convents, despite having been founded in exile, were an integral part of England's past.

However, the exiled English nuns went much further in their support for the future King Charles II and the Stuart court in exile during the period of the English Civil War and

¹³⁹ S. Hawley, *A Briefe Relation of the Order and Institute of the English women at Liège* (Liège, 1652), pp. 6-16.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 17-20.

Protectorate. At this time the exiled convents became significant supporters of the Stuart cause against Cromwell and served as political agents for the Royalist cause. Mary Knatchbull, abbess of the English Benedictine convent at Ghent, defied Tridentine decrees forbidding convents from engaging in economic activities in order to raise funds for Charles II's campaigns.¹⁴¹ She arranged loans through the Antwerp merchants, in which the convent was used as surety, and sold artificial flowers to the local community.¹⁴² This often involved quite complex financial arrangements and placed the Abbess in an important position with regards to the Royalist accounts. For instance, in order to gain credit for the King's (the future King Charles II) campaigns she persuaded a Dutch merchant to accept a portion of each nun's dowry in lieu of the interest demanded on the loan. Money for the royalist supporters' trips between England and the continent was arranged and sent via the cloister. For example, in November 1659 when the Earl of Bristol planned a diplomatic trip to Madrid on behalf of Charles II he sent three thousand florins via the abbess. Other English convents also offered financial support to the future King: the Bruges Augustinians gave Charles II one thousand florins in 1655 and the Paris Benedictines donated five hundred florins.¹⁴³ In addition, the Royalist exiles relied on the nuns' mail service to communicate with their supporters in England. Mary Knatchbull despatched and received the mail of Charles II's Catholic supporters and thereby played an important role in maintaining an effective information network, which aided the Royalists' espionage activities.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Mary Knatchbull was the daughter of Reginald Knatchbull the younger of Kent. She professed on 8 December 1628 at the age of 18 and died in Ghent on 6 March 1696 at the age of 86. She had a very distinguished career rising from novicemistress to Dean to Portress to Abbess.

¹⁴² For more information on this see C. Walker, 'Prayer, Patronage and Political Conspiracy: English Nuns and the Restoration', *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 43. No. 1. (March 2000), pp. 1-23.

¹⁴³ Hazlemere Ms, VI C3140.

¹⁴⁴ See letters from Abbess Mary Knatchbull to the first Duke of Ormonde in MS Carte, papers of the first Duke of Ormonde, Bodleian, Oxford.

On the restoration of the King in 1660 the English nuns were hopeful of securing gains from Charles II on account of their support during the English civil war. Thus, on the eve of the Restoration Mary Knatchbull wrote to the Marquis of Ormonde that ‘all these fresh hopes from England set us a fresh to our prayers that God would protect and direct his majesty’. As Charles II returned to the throne the exiled English convents looked to the restored Stuart court for patronage since they hoped the Stuarts would permit a degree of toleration in gratitude for their support. It is for this reason that Abbess Mary Knatchbull returned to England in 1661 to petition the Stuart court for money for a new foundation. She received a ‘most kind reception’ and Charles II promised to do ‘all I can to make your condition more easy’.¹⁴⁵ The King initially remained true to his word and as a reward for their efforts in the Civil War Charles II donated 500 gold pistols to the Ghent Benedictines and enabled the foundation of the Benedictine convent at Dunkirk in 1662 with money from the Stuart treasury.¹⁴⁶ In addition, Charles II’s Catholic wife, Catherine of Braganza, became a crucial patron of the convents and had helped to establish an English Dominicans convent in Vilvorde in 1661.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, following a petition to Sir Charles Berkeley, the keeper of the Privy purse, the Ghent Benedictines were able to secure an annual pension of £500 from the king.¹⁴⁸ It seemed therefore that the exiled English institutions would be key beneficiaries of Charles II’s reign.

The optimism occurring as a result of Charles II’s reign explain the foundation of another convent of English Benedictine nuns established in Ypres in 1665. This convent expressly linked itself to the English monarchy at its foundation. For example, the registers of the resolutions of the Great Council of Ypres state that the convent should be permitted to ‘admit

¹⁴⁵ ‘Abbess Neville’s Annals’, p. 42.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. Mary Knatchbull had wanted to call the convent a Royal foundation and the annals are adamant that it eventually received a Royal patent from Charles II but there does not seem to be evidence for this.

¹⁴⁷ *Dominicana*, (CRS, 25), pp. 17-22.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. £500 was paid annually until 1665 when Berkeley died and the pension was not renewed.

four English religious of great house, and recommended by the King of England...on their understanding not to be a burden to the town'.¹⁴⁹ This points both to their close links with the English monarchy and to the nature of their convent as an *English* institution since the King was clearly placed in the position of issuing recommendations for convent entrants and the onus was placed on English nationals to secure funds for the convent. There was also an increased tendency on the part of the exiled convents to take advantage of the perceived penal leniency of Charles II's reign by returning to England to seek funds from relatives and friends. For example, in 1666, in defiance of Tridentine decrees, Justina Petre was allowed to leave the Ghent convent to return to England and seek relief from relatives and friends.¹⁵⁰ By the late seventeenth century therefore the English convents were developing a clear institutional identity that was focused on their nature as English institutions and their links with the British monarchy. By this point they were keen to satisfy their patrons, many of whom remained in England, that they were national institutions worthy of financial aid. In 1670 the 'Blue Nuns' reassured the Duke of Norfolk that they provided a suitable home for 'ladies of quality' by emphasising that 'we are all English'.¹⁵¹ In addition, English books, such as *English Saintes of Kinges and Bishopps*, were copied for the private and communal use of the community suggesting continued attempts to emphasise community links with England's past.¹⁵² By 1670 the exiled English convents were once more hopeful of a full return to England. In 1671 the Duke of York's wife converted to Catholicism followed in 1673 by the Duke of York (the future James II) himself. It now seemed likely that a Catholic monarchy might be restored should the Duke of York accede to the British throne.

¹⁴⁹ *Annals of the Irish Convent at Ypres*, p. 172.

¹⁵⁰ *Annals of the English Benedictines at Ghent*, p. 84.

¹⁵¹ DI Ealing Ms Journal, fol. 20-26.

¹⁵² H. Maine, *English Saintes of Kinges and Bishopps* (London, 1662) listed in MS English Saintes of Kinges and Bishopps, Clare Abbey, Darlington.

An increased inter-dependency between the exiled cloisters and the Stuart court had thus emerged in the aftermath of the Civil War, which promised future gains but awaited a Catholic monarch. Since the Reformation English convents had established distinct national institutions on the continent, which were tied to self-consciously English traditions and memories. Practical factors accounted for some of the motives behind the establishment of uniquely English cloisters. However, political considerations were the primary factor in the drive to create national institutions, which would support the future re-conversion of England. This created a heavily politicised culture which enabled convents to come to the aid of the Stuart court during the Civil War period. At the Restoration nuns made clear gains by situating themselves as *English* institutions. Nonetheless, whilst the British monarchy remained Protestant the exiled nuns' English identity was by necessity framed in opposition. Their justification as English institutions lay in defending traditions, which had been under threat since the Reformation. Their hopes therefore rested on the accession of the Catholic Duke of York to the English throne.

Chapter 2

Reviving Nuns

Exiled English Convents and the Revival of Anti-Nun Polemic, 1680-1688

On 17 November 1680 a procession wound its way through London, out of George's yard, through Aldgate and along Fleet Street before terminating at Temple Bar.¹⁵³ At its head was a man on horseback followed by a bell-ringer who, with a 'dolesome voice', chanted 'remember Justice Godfrey'. A dead body, representing Godfrey, was carried behind the bell-ringer. There followed an effigy of Donna Olympia entitled 'the Popes Mistress by her lust' in front of which stood an effigy of the Antichrist 'arrayed in scarlet robes, furr'd with Ermines, and covered with Gold and Silver-Lace, with a triple Crown, on the front whereof is writ, MYSTERY'.¹⁵⁴ Surrounding Donna Olympia were four nuns, each with an inscription reading '*Curtezans in Ordinary*'. A pamphlet produced to explain proceedings provided a description of the nuns and alleged that for them:

Tis less honourable to be Whores, than to marry, for Pope Gregory himself, that ordained this goodly Vow of Chastity for Priests and Nuns, had some thousands of Infants skulls brought before him, that were fisht out of a pond surrounding these Holy Vestals Monasteries; and many such are recorded to have been found here in England in Times of Popery.¹⁵⁵

When the procession reached Temple bar the effigies were brought before a statue of Queen Elizabeth I 'adorned with a crown of laurel', a representation of the Magna Carta and a shield on which was inscribed 'the Protestant religion'. The effigies received their sentence to be

¹⁵³ Anon., *The Solemn Mock Procession of the POPE, Cardinalls, Jesuits, Fryers &c through the citty of London November the 17th 1680* (London, 1680).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 2

burnt before being led to Smithfield and cast into a giant bonfire. The message was clear: nuns were excluded from the English nation.

The procession formed part of the 17 November festival to celebrate the reign of Elizabeth I and anti-Catholic motives, including negative representations of nuns, formed a key part.

Begun in 1570 in the wake of the Northern Rebellion and Pope Pius V's bull of excommunication, *Regnans in Excelsis*, the festival aimed to engineer a public demonstration of defiance to Rome.¹⁵⁶ It thus forms part of what David Cressy has referred to as a 'politics of calendar', a development dating from the Elizabethan period in which new anniversaries were adopted to commemorate the emergence and stability of the English Protestant regime.¹⁵⁷ The procession's journey points to a 'politics of geography' in which places of cultural and religious significance were passed by in order to reaffirm England's Protestant identity: Temple Bar was the traditional site whereby the city of London expressed loyalty to the monarch whilst Smithfield was renowned as the site where Catholic 'traitors' were burnt. Fire was a central element of the proceedings because of the widespread belief that this was the most appropriate punishment for Catholics.¹⁵⁸ It served to remind Protestant audiences of the 1555 martyr's fire, the planned gunpowder plot of 1605 and the fire of London of 1666, all of which were blamed on the Catholic community.¹⁵⁹ The 17 November festival could therefore serve as a unifying force, utilising anti-Catholic motives, to bind the nation to the ruling dynasty.

¹⁵⁶ See C. Weiner., 'The Beleagured Isle: A study of Elizabethan and Early Jacobean anti-Catholicism', *Past and Present*, no. 51. (May 1971), pp. 27-62.

¹⁵⁷ D. Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989), xii.

¹⁵⁸ See, for instance, *The Burning of the Whore of Babylon*, (London, R.C., 1673); E. Stephens, *A Discourse Concerning the Original of the Powder Plot: Together with a Relation of the Conspiracies against Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1674).

¹⁵⁹ J. Wilson, *A Song or Story for the Lasting Remembrance of divers famous works which God hath done in our time* (London, R. Young, 1680); S. Clarke, *England's Remembrancer, containing a true and full narrative of those two never to be forgotten deliverances* (London, William Taylor, 1679).

However, certain motives within the procession suggest that this was not merely a celebration of the past but a political commentary on contemporary events. There were several notable differences between the festival of 1680 and those of preceding years. The 1680s celebrations were on a larger scale than earlier events with more than eight pageants costing over £2500. They were subsidised by members of the Green Ribbon Club, a Whig political pressure group calling for the Duke of York to be excluded from the succession on account of his Catholicism.¹⁶⁰ When the procession terminated at Temple Bar drinks were given out to the assembled crowd from the Green Ribbon Club headquarters thereby enticing the public to support exclusion. The representation of Justice Godfrey, a recently murdered London magistrate, was another new development as was the representation of the Magna Carta, which was placed on the statue of Elizabeth I.¹⁶¹

These innovations can only be understood in the context of the heightened anti-Catholicism following in the wake of the Popish Plot and subsequent Exclusion Crisis. The 1680s processions took place at a time of mounting political tension and Catholic hostility. Contemporary fears of a Catholic resurgence had surfaced in the face of Charles II's pro-French policy and the Duke of York's conversion to Catholicism in 1673. Charles II had connived at the non-enforcement of penal laws against Catholics in the 1670s and fears of a Catholic threat had mounted as Louis XIV swept through the Low Countries in 1672-3 following the Anglo-French treaty.¹⁶² Moreover, the Declaration of Indulgence of 1672, which allowed Dissenters to worship publicly under a system of licenses and permitted

¹⁶⁰*The Loyal Protestant, and True Domestick Intelligence*, 9 November 1680. See also R. J. Allen, *The Clubs of Augustan London* (Hamden, Archon Books, 1967), p. 21.

¹⁶¹*The Solemn Mock Procession of the Pope, Cardinall, Iesuits, Fryeres, etc through ye Citty of London, Nouember ye 17th 1679* (London, 1679), *London's Defiance to Rome. A Perfect Narrative of the magnificent Procession and Solemn Burning of the Pope* (London, 1678).

¹⁶² Charles II considered a war with the Dutch essential in order to strengthen English commerce and increase the size of her navy. However, the war was not popular among some members of parliament who would later become prominent Whigs who believed that the forces of Protestantism should be united against the Catholic foe. In May Charles II signed the Treaty of Dover in which he promised to convert to Catholicism in exchange for French support.

Catholics to worship in their own homes, provoked fears of an end to Anglican hegemony. In addition, key members of the court, notably Lord Clifford, had converted to Catholicism and refused to take the Test Act in 1673. In 1678 anti-Catholicism reached a peak when Titus Oates revealed a Catholic conspiracy known as the 'Popish plot' to kill the king and massacre thousands of English Protestants.¹⁶³ There was no truth in these allegations but they gained credibility when Justice Godfrey, the magistrate responsible for taking Oates testimony, was found murdered. The plot was kept alive by political groups, like the Green Ribbon club, who sought to use it to mobilise mass public support for exclusion.

When the processional innovations are viewed in this context it becomes clear that in addition to uniting the nation behind the ruling monarch the 17 November procession could also serve as a way of criticising it. The prominence of the Green Ribbon club suggests that the procession reflected a degree of political organisation rather than taking the form of a spontaneous public demonstration. The representations point to a parliamentary critique of Charles II's policies. The Magna Carta, a traditional emblem of political liberty, served to enshrine Elizabeth I as a defender of English liberties against arbitrary government and implied that Charles II's foreign policy, unlike that under Elizabeth I, served the interest of Popery through pro-Catholic rather than anti-Catholic alliances. The representation of Godfrey served to remind Protestant audiences of the Papist threat should James II become king. It fed into fears that a Catholic monarch would be compelled to rule in an arbitrary and despotic manner like Louis XIV of France. An indication that the procession was viewed in this light is provided by subsequent attempts to ban excessive ceremonialism in future processions. The 1681 procession was not on the same scale and the Green Ribbon Club had

¹⁶³ A wealth of pamphlets appeared in the wake of the 'Popish Plot' seeking to explain events. See: B. J, *A Compleat and True Narrative of the Manner of the Discovery of the Popish Plot to His Majesty* (London, 1679); J. Phillips, *Dr Oates Narrative of the Popish Plot Vindicated* (London, 1681); *Account of the Proceedings at the Guild-Hall of the City of London (concerning the plot called the popish plot)* (London, 1679).

a limited role within it. This suggests that the Crown saw the 1680 procession as an oppositional act, which implied criticism of Charles II's Catholicising policies.

This heightened fear of Catholicism explains the prominence of nuns to proceedings. They feature not just in the procession but in a wealth of accompanying pamphlets. But do these images have any political significance? Are they, like the Ermine-covered Anti-Christ and the references to fire, merely another popular symbol of anti-Catholicism, an exotic manifestation of Protestant fears, divorced from any contemporary relevance? Or do they, like the body of Justice Godfrey, serve as politicised indications of contemporary anxieties?

I would like to suggest in this chapter that images of nuns in print culture from the Exclusion crisis to the 'Glorious Revolution' were of political relevance. Admittedly, as the portrayal of nuns within the 17th November procession implies, the nun was often regarded as a figure of fun. Yet, as the political context to this procession suggests, such images frequently reflected political anxieties. Indeed, as the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin has noted, laughter often harbours political overtones and serves a corrosive function.¹⁶⁴ Therefore, far from acting as a safety-valve, or a politically harmless way to express amusement at early modern stereotypes, laughter served to further political protest by de-legitimising authority.¹⁶⁵ My purpose in this chapter is to suggest that the allegedly humorous representation of nuns expressed political hostility and can be explained by the increasing tendency to equate the Stuart regime with the reestablishment of convents. First, I consider the significance of nuns in the wake of the anti-Catholic fears which surrounded the 'Exclusion Crisis'. Secondly, I consider the validity of these anti-nun polemics in view of James II's attempt to revive and re-found convents after his accession to power in 1685. In this section I argue that nuns were central players, using epistolary culture, to present themselves as key supporters of James II.

¹⁶⁴ M. Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World*, translated by H. Iswolsky, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984)

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-28.

Thirdly, I consider the role of the exiled English convents in the events leading to William III's conquest of Britain in 1688. I hope to demonstrate that the exiled convents worked hard to situate themselves as aids to Mary of Modena during her birth and that this was reflected in Protestant satire which portrayed nuns as conspirators in the Warming Pan Myth. The chapter is entitled 'Reviving Nuns' for several reasons. In the first instance, because stereotypes about nuns, which had been constructed in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, were revived at this point and mapped onto political concerns. Secondly, because these political concerns focused on fears that British Catholicism was reviving and that Catholics were infiltrating the British monarchy. Thirdly, because the key political player of this period, James II, sought to revive convents by making them central to his Catholicising mission after 1685. This chapter therefore demonstrates that Protestant fears, manifesting themselves in anti-nun polemic, reflected a sense that convents represented a revived and genuine political threat in the years 1680-1688.

I: Excluding Nuns: Anti-Nun polemic during the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis

From two faire Nunnes, that sweetly sit abroad,
Poorepainefull creatures, with Posterious bare,
They sit in egges, with Diligence and Care,
And for no helpe to them shall wanting bee,
An ancient Frier doth hold their backes you see.
The abbot, and the Pope on both sides watch
To see what these two goodly Creatures Hatch.
And with much Ioy, the businesse is begun,
One Egge brings foorth a Frier, and one a Nunne.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Anon., A Nest of Nunnes Egges, strangely Hatched, with the Descriptions of a worthy Feast for Ioy of the Brood, (London, 1680)

A Neste of Nunnes Egges is typical of bawdry print culture in early modern England. Ballads like this were sold cheaply and aimed to provide the public with titillation. It is for this reason that the use of ballads to understand political controversy has often been dismissed by mainstream historiography. As John Morrill has noted the political content on this verse seems trivial focusing on the ‘distasteful or unpleasant’ at the expense of ‘real constitutional issues’.¹⁶⁷ At first glance the ballad does indeed seem to focus on the distasteful and unpleasant, producing a derisive and eroticised stereotype. The anonymous author utilises scatological humour, dwelling on the image of nuns with their ‘posteriors bare’. Nuns are objectified as ‘the Abbot and the Pope on both sides watch’ and their seeming lack of agency is summed up by the phrase ‘the Friar doth hold their backs you see’. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that literary scholars, most notably Frances Dolan, have argued that although nuns ‘loomed ever larger as a fiction and a fantasy’, they were ‘divorced from any grounding in reality or experience with real nuns’.¹⁶⁸ Images of Women Religious in print culture have generally been thought to render nuns as passive figures of laughter credited with ‘no agency whatsoever’.¹⁶⁹ In view of this historians have frequently dismissed representations of nuns as essentially apolitical: harmless figures divorced from their political context.

However, if we return to a *Neste of Nuns Egges* it becomes clear that there are political overtones to anti-convent polemic. Stereotypes of nuns had a political meaning behind them and nuns were a useful way of discrediting Catholicism as a religious ideology. Indeed, Peter Lake and Michael Questier have been crucial in revising our view of this type of cheap print culture, noting its importance for fuelling religious controversy and shaping confessional

¹⁶⁷ J. Morrill, *The Revolt of the Provinces: Conservatives and Radicals in the English Civil War* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1980), pp. 22-23.

¹⁶⁸ F. Dolan, ‘Why are Nuns Funny?’, *Huntingdon Library Quarterly*, vol. 70. No. 4, (2007), pp. 509-10.

¹⁶⁹ C. Walker, *Gender and Politics in Early Modern Europe: English Convents in France and the Low Countries*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2002), p. 47.

identities.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, Thomas Cogswell has noted that ‘much of this verse has all the delicacy and literary merit of modern graffiti’ but concludes that it was a remarkable vehicle for the dissemination of political attitudes’.¹⁷¹ James Turner has identified the period up to 1688 as a time when the sexually explicit discourse of prostitution, which he refers to as *pornographica*, began to be applied to social institutions and political events with the potential for political subversion.¹⁷² Chapter one noted some early examples of stereotypes against nuns where the notion of nuns as sexual libertines was developed. By the late seventeenth century, in the context of the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis, these stereotypes were being further developed in Protestant polemics. Such emphasis on nuns’ alleged licentiousness and lack of morality enabled a broader critique of Catholicism. The eroticisation of nuns pointed to the inevitable eruption of repression (alleged to be the result of enforced enclosure and celibacy) into licence.¹⁷³ Representations of nuns engaging in sexual relations with their priests were used to show the natural hypocrisy of Catholicism as a religion and made the point that excessive obedience to hierarchy would lead to sin. A nun’s willingness to engage in sexual exploits against her vows, and her priest’s willingness to encourage this, was used to suggest that Catholics could never express true loyalty to the state. Catholicism, tyranny and sexual excess were therefore seen as natural allies.¹⁷⁴ This

¹⁷⁰ P. Lake and M.C. Questier, *The Anti-Christ’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002).

¹⁷¹ T. Cogswell, *The Blessed Revolution: English Politics and the Coming of War* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 325. See also, M. Ingram, ‘Ridings, Rough Music and Mocking Rhymes in Early Modern England’ in B. Reay, ed., *Popular Culture in Seventeenth-century England* (London, Routledge, 1985) and A. Bellany, ‘Raylinge Rhymes and Vaunting Verse’: Libellous Politics in Early Stuart England, 1603-1628’ in K. Sharpe and P. Lake, eds. *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1994). The earliest attempt to take seriously the political content of cheap print culture can be found in C. H. Firth, ‘The Ballad History of the Reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, third series, 2, (London, 1908), pp. 5-40.

¹⁷² J. G. Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics and Literary Culture, 1630-1685* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁷³ F. E. Dolan, ‘Gender and the ‘lost’ spaces of Catholicism’, *Journal of Inter-disciplinary History*, 32. 4, (spring, 2002), pp. 641-5.

¹⁷⁴ R. Weil, ‘Sometimes a sceptre is only a sceptre: Pornography and Politics in Restoration England’ in L. Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity* (New York, Zone Books, 1997), pp. 125-53.

idea was taken up by polemicists to suggest that Catholics should not be given positions of responsibility and to justify penal legislation that excluded them from participation in the political life of the state.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, the idea of nuns 'breeding', seen in the reference to eggs, pointed to the dangers of Catholic proselytising and nuns' eventual desire to convert England to their faith.

However, I would like to go further than this and suggest that the prevalence of nuns in Protestant print culture both enabled Protestant commentators to draw political conclusions about the need to exclude Catholics from the state and reflected genuine anxieties about the growth of female monasticism at the time. Polemic about nuns in the period 1680-1688 reflected concerns about the growing strength of Catholicism in England at that time. In particular, it pointed to Catholicism's revival at court since Charles II's marriage to a Catholic queen, Catherine of Braganza, had increased the power of Catholics at court. The increased dependency between the Stuart court and the exiled convents increased the prominence of nuns in society after Charles II's Restoration, which further heightened Protestant anxieties. Chapter one concluded by demonstrating the increased mutual dependency between the Stuart monarchy and the exiled English cloisters as in gratitude for the nuns' support during the Civil War and period of the Protectorate new convents had been founded with Charles II's support. By the 1670s these connections were developing into more formal links between the Stuarts and the exiled cloisters. For example, in 1675 Charles II's mistress, Barbara Palmer, the Duchess of Cleveland, retreated to the cloister of the Blue Nuns and became one of its principal benefactors. In 1676 she paid for alterations to the convent refectory and gave one thousand pounds to be put towards a new church. Her daughter, who

¹⁷⁵ R. Ballaster, 'The Vices of Old Rome Revived: Representations of female same-sex desire in seventeenth and eighteenth England' in S. Raitt, ed. *Volcanoes and Pear Divers: Essays in Lesbian Sexuality* (London, Routledge, 1995); S. Toulasan, 'Extraordinary Satisfactions: Lesbian Visibility in seventeenth century pornography in England', *Gender and History*, (July, 2003), pp. 50-68.

was alleged to be the illegitimate child of Charles II, was schooled at the convent from 1677.¹⁷⁶ Thus, in a context where members of the Stuart court and the exiled cloisters were mutual beneficiaries of Charles II's reign, female monasticism appeared as a specific threat to British Protestants.

Indeed, the increased prominence of convents had not gone unnoticed by the British public and had heightened fears of a Catholic resurgence aimed at reconverting Britain to the Catholic faith. In the aftermath of Charles II's Restoration nuns were becoming more prominent in public discourses and print culture. For example, a pamphlet entitled *The Manner of Visiting the Discalced Nuns* (1669), had been freely printed and circulated in England and offered details of all the existing English convents in exile alongside details of how to travel to them. Works like this thus openly introduced the public to the exiled cloisters. Moreover, Protestant commentators were by this time aware of the links made between Charles II and the English convents during his period in exile in the 1650s. The publication of Thomas Blount's *The History of his Sacred Majesties most Miraculous Preservation* and Fletcher's *History of the King's Exile* had pointed to the support given to Charles II by the exiled English cloisters thereby making the public aware of these links. The post-Restoration meetings between Abbess Mary Knachtbull and Charles II had led to comments in the press that nuns were 'gadding about'. This sense that exiled Catholic nuns were free to come and go as they liked in England was heightened by Catherine of Braganza's known support for the new foundation of Dominican nuns at Vilvorde and her assent to funding for the Dunkirk convent. Thus, by 1675 the events of the 1650s were becoming more publicly known and British Protestants were better informed about the links between exiled convents and the Stuart Monarchy.

¹⁷⁶*The Diary of the Blue Nuns or the order of the Immaculate Conception of our Lady at Paris, 1658-1810*, ed. J. Gillow and R. Trappes-Lomax (London: CRS 8, 1910).

However, two crucial developments led to an increase in anti-Catholicism and prompted the events we now term the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis. The first was Catherine of Braganza's support for the establishment of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in London. As chapter one noted the IBVM was an active apostolate, initially founded by Mary Ward, which had not received Papal sanction. Mary Ward had been satirised by authors like Thomas Middleton in the 1620s but the IBVM was usually considered less threatening to Protestants because of its unenclosed nature and lack of Papal jurisdiction. It is perhaps for this reason that Braganza deemed it acceptable to agree to the sisters settling in London. Thus, in 1669 the IBVM founded a school disguised within a private house in Hammersmith. However, although the IBVM was disguised and the sisters did not wear clothes that might, in Protestant eyes, mark them out as 'nuns', the school still provoked complaints. It resulted in a Commons Committee Enquiry into the causes of the growth of Popery in Britain and by 1671 had led to a parliamentary appeal for the repression of convents and schools. The second key development centred on the Pope's acceptance of the Duke of York's conversion to Catholicism in 1676. Public knowledge of Anne, the Duke of York's wife's, conversion to Catholicism in 1671 seems to have been widespread and there were rumours that the Duke of York had followed suit when, shortly after his 1673 conversion, he resigned as head of the army. However, Papal confirmation of this lent weight to Protestant fears of a future Catholic monarchy and increased fears of a Catholic conspiracy to reconvert the nation.

This heightened fear explains why the British public were so willing to believe in the conspiracy theory we now know as the 'Popish Plot'. The Popish Plot was a fictitious conspiracy invented by Titus Oates, a former Chaplain in the Royal Navy and a recent convert to Catholicism, which led to a wave of anti-Catholic hysteria in Britain between the years 1678 and 1681.¹⁷⁷ Oates circulated a manuscript alleging that the Catholic Church had

¹⁷⁷ J. P. Kenyon, *The Popish Plot* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984).

sanctioned the assassination of Charles II and accused the Jesuits, many of whom were personally named in the manuscript, of being willing to carry out the assignation.¹⁷⁸ When the King and the Duke of York were informed of the plot a parliamentary investigation was called and Oates appeared before the magistrate Sir Edmund Barry Godfrey before being summoned by the Privy Council. The allegations were not considered credible until Justice Godfrey, a firm supporter of the Protestant cause and the man Oates had given his testimony to, was found dead with his body mutilated on 17 October 1678. At this point parliament declared the ‘damnable and hellish plot contrived and carried out by the Popish recusants’ and Charles II was forced to pass legislation banishing all Catholics from within a radius of twenty miles around London.¹⁷⁹ Oates then accused five Catholic Lords of involvement in the plot and the House of Commons proceeded with impeachment against them. The first Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper, was pivotal in sending the Lords to the Tower of London and also used the opportunity provided by the wave of anti-Catholicism to demand that the Catholic Duke of York be excluded from the succession thereby prompting the exclusion crisis.

With hindsight it is not difficult to see why the British government were keen to use the Popish Plot to their own advantage. It provided a clear opportunity for them to disassociate King Charles II and the court from accusations that they were favourable to Catholics. Public knowledge of the close links between Charles II and the exiled Catholic community, in particular the exiled cloisters, during his time in exile had, as already noted, proved problematic at the Restoration. The Popish Plot enabled parliament to claim that, far from being loyal adherents to the Stuart cause, Catholics were in fact plotting to murder the King.

¹⁷⁸ B. W., *An Additional Discovery of Mr Roger L'Estrange his further discovery of the Popish Plot: wherein Dr T. Oates and the rest of the Kings evidences are vindicated from the aspersions cast upon them in that pamphlet* (London, 1680).

¹⁷⁹ T. Oates, *The Discovery of the Popish Plot: being the several examinations of Titus Oates before the parliament* (London, 1680).

It also enabled them to divert anti-monarchical rhetoric onto the Duke of York, a known Catholic, rather than onto the person of the King himself. It also explains why the exiled Catholic community and the exiled English convents in particular became such a key feature of the testimony surrounding the Popish Plot. The latter clearly provided an opportunity to distance Charles II from claims that he had offered personal patronage to the exiled English cloisters. Instead, English nuns became closely associated with anti-monarchical espionage during the 1680s and the idea of the exiled convents as active arenas for spying became a key feature of legal testimony during the Popish Plot. Indeed, Protestant commentators could now claim that exiled English convents and their Catholic supporters were so disillusioned by the scanty nature of Charles II's promised support for them at his Restoration that they were plotting to kill him.

The published proceedings against Sir Thomas Gascoigne for his alleged part in the Popish Plot demonstrate the popularity of the belief that convents were aligned with Catholics plotting to kill Charles II in 1680.¹⁸⁰ Thomas Gascoigne was one of several Catholic aristocrats arrested during the Popish Plot for 'the design to kill and murder the king, to change the religion and the government'.¹⁸¹ According to the legal testimony of Bolron and Mowbray, two of Gascoigne's former servants, Gascoigne and his fellow conspirators had decided to 'build a nunnery at Dolebank in case their design and plot of killing the King should take effect. And Sir Thomas Gascoigne did conclude that he would give 90L a year for ever for the maintenance of the nunnery'.¹⁸² In other words, the Catholic conspirators planned to build a nunnery at Dolebank in Yorkshire to aid them in converting Britain to Catholicism once the King was dead and had given money to accomplish this. Mr Mowbray

¹⁸⁰ R. Bolron, *An Abstract of the Accusation of Robert Bolron and Lawrence Maybury, servants, against their late master Sir Thomas Gascoigne for high-treason: with his trial and acquittal 11 Feb., 1679-80*. (London, for C.R, 1680).

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* p. 3.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

argued that he had overheard a ‘discourse upon establishing a nunnery at Dolebank in the hope that the plot of killing the King would take effect; the intention was to alter the government and introduce the Romish religion’.¹⁸³ The testimony of Edward Everard, an agent for the English at the French court, alleged that Catholics ‘tended to some sudden design for the subservance of the English government and governour and the setting up of a party here in England’. He added that one of the key conspirators, Lady Anne Gourdon, was ‘living as an ordinary and free person in Nunneries and was then in a convent at Paris’. In addition, Everard claimed to have found correspondence from ‘Father Joseph of the English Benedictines convent in Paris who was their confessor’ which declared that the ‘King of England would be made away with’. Thus, as this testimony makes clear, the exiled cloisters were accused of being central to the Popish Plot.

Of course, the notion of Sir Gascoigne plotting to kill King Charles II can be dismissed as the hyperbolic assertion of his former servants exaggerated by Protestant interests in the context of the wave of anti-Catholic hysteria surrounding Oates’s revelations. Indeed, Thomas Gascoigne was eventually acquitted once the furore surrounding the Popish Plot had died down. Nonetheless, the anxieties that had led to these assertions had their basis in fact. A convent had, as the testimony claimed, been established at Dolebank in Yorkshire. The convent in question was an offshoot of the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary that had been established in Hammersmith in 1669. The convent, although like its Hammersmith counterpart an unenclosed institute, was clearly recruiting sisters in the Yorkshire area and when the Duke of York acceded to the throne it would begin taking on a more public role in society. At Gascoigne’s trial the Lord Chief Justice had asked Bolron for more information about the women intending to become nuns in the new convent. Mr Bolron had answered that ‘Ellen Thwing, Elizabeth Butcher, Mary Houghton and others were nuns’. Additional

¹⁸³ Ibid. p. 4.

research proves that these women were indeed nuns during the period of the Popish Plot. Helen Thwing had attended the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Paris and was eventually asked to join the IBVM at Dolebank in 1678 before being put in charge of a new larger institute, Howarth Manor, in Yorkshire.¹⁸⁴ Her brother, Thomas Thwing, was a Catholic priest executed for his alleged role in the Barmbow Plot, an offshoot of the Popish Plot, in 1678. Elizabeth Butcher was also one of five Mary Ward sisters sent to found the new convent at Dolebank and arrived in England from France in 1677 on the eve of the Popish Plot.¹⁸⁵ Mary Houghton was also connected to the exiled cloisters. She was Helen Thwing's cousin and had professed at the exiled English Benedictine convent at Cambrai in 1641.¹⁸⁶ Thus, although print culture has elements of exaggeration, the fact that we can locate these nuns and their links with England at the time suggests that these anxieties mapped on to genuine concerns about the growth of Catholicism. Indeed, the British state took the plot seriously enough to arrest the Mary Ward sisters in 1680.¹⁸⁷ The nuns were only released when they argued that, since they were not cloistered and lived in a private residence, they could not be considered nuns.

The Popish Plot, and with it anti-nun polemic, abated with the defeat of the exclusion bills in parliament. There was little evidence for a plot and the hysteria surrounding the events of the 1680s could not be maintained in view of the discrepancies in Oates testimony. Charles II ensured that the exclusion bills were defeated by enacting anti-Catholic legislation thereby temporarily discrediting rumours that he harboured Catholic sympathies. From 1678 onwards therefore the laws against Catholics were rigidly enforced: all 'Papists' were forced to depart from within ten miles of London and English Catholics were prevented from attending

¹⁸⁴ Who were the Nuns? (WWTN) database MW155.

¹⁸⁵ WWTN MW031.

¹⁸⁶ WWTN CBO95.

¹⁸⁷ Box 10, fol.3, 'History of the IBVM', 1680, IBVM, York.

Catholic ambassador's chapels. A second Test Act excluding Catholics from both houses of parliament was passed in 1678.¹⁸⁸ In March 1681 the Commissions of the Peace was purged of all Catholics and there was an increased attempt to levy recusant fines. The Rye House plot of 1683, an attempt to assassinate the Duke of York which was supported by Whig radicals, finally discredited the Whig cause and provided Charles II with the opportunity to purge Whigs from the commissions of the peace.

Nonetheless, the Popish Plot and exclusion crisis had demonstrated the extent to which nuns and convents could become a politically charged issue. This issue would come to the fore on Charles II's death as the staunchly Catholic James II sought to revive the fortunes of convents on his accession to the throne in 1685. Despite the short-term success of Charles II and the Tories in defeating the anti-Catholic hysteria of the Popish Plot similar anxieties would be close to the surface as Protestants faced the challenge of a Catholic monarchy closely associated with the exiled cloisters.

II: Reviving Nuns: James II's Catholicising mission and anti-convent polemic

James II's actions in the early years of his reign suggest that fears of a Catholic revival involving convents were not entirely unfounded. The first indication that Charles II's Catholic sympathies had a basis in fact was provided when he converted to Catholicism on his deathbed. Indeed, Bishop Gilbert Burnet would later attribute this conversion to a 'nun's advice in Flanders' suggesting that the period Charles II had spent associating with the exiled cloisters during the Protectorate had been crucial in shaping his faith. Charles II was received into the Catholic faith by John Huddleston, a Benedictine monk, whose sister Maria

¹⁸⁸ The Second Test Act was not repealed until the passing of Catholic Emancipation in 1829.

Huddleston was a nun at the English Benedictine convent in Brussels.¹⁸⁹ The conversion would subsequently serve as a symbolic reminder of a change in religious policy of which the English convents would be key beneficiaries.

On his accession to the throne James II made clear that he intended to offer toleration for Catholics and that he aimed to promote the exiled English convents. The English convents were immediately aware that the new King's reign would be positive for them: on the day of James II's coronation they celebrated by ringing their bells and offering thanks to God for the new King.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, James II's brief reign sought to reshape English national identity by reversing the changes made at the Reformation.¹⁹¹ This was the context behind the *Declaration of Indulgence in 1687* which was widely believed to have sought freedom for Puritans in the hope of furthering the Catholic cause. The act had freed Catholics and Dissenters to occupy public office and ensured 'the execution of all manner of penal laws was immediately suspended'.¹⁹² In addition, to promoting more 'tolerant' legislation James II hoped to convert England to Catholicism. James II opened his own chapel for public worship and opened Catholic schools in London, Lancashire and Oxford. In January 1686 he issued a Royal warrant licensing the printing of Catholic books and thereby increasing the prominence of Catholicism in print. Catholic representation at court increased and the Queen's household contained notable Catholics with strong links to the English convents making the exiled cloisters key beneficiaries of James II's policies. Of course, James II's policies also resulted in strong opposition from the Anglican Church which enacted a campaign against Popery in

¹⁸⁹ John Huddleston (1608-1698) was born at Farington Hall in Lancashire and educated at the Jesuit college of St. Omer. At the Restoration he became chaplain to Catherine of Braganza. On 2 February 1685 he heard Charles II's confession, administered extreme unction and the viaticum and received him into the Catholic faith. At James II's accession he became superintendant of the chapel at Somerset House.

¹⁹⁰ *Annals of the Ghent Benedictines*, pp. 16-19. 'Registers of the Pontoise Benedictines', p. 32.

¹⁹¹ For more information on the consequences of the Reformation for national identity see, A. Hadfield, *Literature, Politics and National Identity: Reformation to Renaissance* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994).

¹⁹² 'Declaration of Indulgence of King James II, April 4, 1687', *English Historical Documents, 1660-1714* ed. A. Browning (London, 1953), pp. 399-400.

its pulpits. It also aroused public fears as the appearance of chapels, schools and monks prompted riots and provoked Protestant unease.

This attempt at 'planting the faith', by introducing mechanisms to revive Catholicism and reconvert the nation, was bound to fail since Catholics were a significant minority in Britain.¹⁹³ In reality James II lacked the resources to coerce his subjects to conversion and there was no likelihood of a mass movement towards Catholicism.¹⁹⁴ Nonetheless, after 1685 a new discourse emerged in Catholic circles which, whilst ultimately aiming at conversion, constructed England as symbolically a Catholic nation once more whether James II's policies proved successful or not. For, at the same time as Protestant discourse was fashioning James II as the 'French Delilah' (in other words an ineffectual French-esque monarch) Catholics were pioneering a 'New England'.¹⁹⁵ Of course, many prominent Catholics remained loyal to France and the Gallican world-view.¹⁹⁶ Nonetheless, for many Catholics, especially in the early years of James II's reign, a 'New England' meant denouncing Louis XIV and distancing English Catholicism from its French counterpart. John Caryll, James II's envoy to the Papal court at Rome, whose sister Mary Caryll was abbess at the English Benedictines convent in Dunkirk, acknowledged his abhorrence for 'the Roman religion as it is practised in

¹⁹³ John Miller has noted that there were only a few hundred priests in England, which was inadequate as a force for converting the nation. There were few converts among the gentry and most of those who did convert reverted to Protestantism after the Revolution. See J. Miller, *Papery and Politics in England, 1660-1688* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 239-249. Most historians now accept that James II did not aim to convert the nation by force. See, for instance, E. Valence, *The Glorious Revolution* (London, Brown, 2006), pp. 55-63; T. Harris, *Politics Under the Later Stuarts: Party Conflict in a Divided Society 1660-1715* (London, Longman, 1993); D. Ogg, *England in the Reigns of James II and William III* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1969); W. A. Speck, *Reluctant Revolutionaries; Englishmen and the Revolution of 1688* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁹⁴ The Catholicising effort was hampered by a lack of suitable priests and the reluctance of some Catholics to become involved for fear of repercussions in the face of a Protestant succession. Moreover, the mission only got under way in 1686 and was faced with widespread antipathy by the Protestant majority. J. Miller, *Papery and Politics in England*, pp. 239-249.

¹⁹⁵ Anon., *The Design of France against Holland and England* (London, 1686), p. 2. J. Caryll 'Ode to a New England' (1685), BL Add. MS 28 225, fol. 114. The Catholic priest John Warner heralded 'an end contrary to all expectation, preordained by God alone from eternity and brought about by the secret workings of his hand'; J. Warner, *History of the Presbyterian Plot* (London, 1685), p. 184.

¹⁹⁶ For more information on Catholic factions see G. Glickman, *The English Catholic Community, 1688-1745* (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2009).

France' and hoped England could be secured from 'the danger of that overgrown power'.¹⁹⁷ Similarly, William Blundell, whose daughters were nuns at the English Poor Clares of Rouen and Gravelines, wrote of the 'Leviathan of France (and) that powerful and jealous Prince'.¹⁹⁸ For many Catholics therefore James II's Catholicising reign provided an opportunity to re-construct England in the Catholic mould but this did not necessarily imply identification with the universal Catholic Church internationally.

It was clear at James II's accession that the exiled English convents would be integral to this revival of an *English* Catholicism. Key members of the Stuart court began to speak of the exiled convents as potential mechanisms for aiding the conversion of England. Richard Talbot, the first Earl of Tyrconnell, James II's viceroy in Ireland, argued that re-founding convents in Britain was essential for 'the good order of this country and the establishment of order'.¹⁹⁹ James II seems to have believed that once British subjects gained access to Catholic education, printed texts and oratory, conversion would inevitably follow without the need for enforced coercion.²⁰⁰ The re-founding of convents in England thus needs to be seen in the context of James II's efforts to break the Anglican monopoly on education, which had led him to erect Catholic chapels and schools and to appoint Catholics to office at the universities

¹⁹⁷ E. B. Hutchinson (alias J. Caryll), 'A Letter in Defence of Catholics', 1685, BL Add Ms 28, 252, fols. 43-56. John Caryll (baptised 1626, died 1711), first Baron Caryll of Duford, was born at West Harding in Sussex. He was a poet, playwright and politician whose poems included *The English Princess* (1666) and *Sir Saloman Single* (1671). He was replaced as papal envoy by Lord Castlemaine in 1687 and became instead secretary to Mary of Modena and a privy councillor. During James II's exile at St Germain he acted as under-secretary of state and following the dismissal of the Earl of Melfort rose to full secretary in 1694.

¹⁹⁸ W. Blundell, July 1685 in M. Blundell, ed., *Cavalier: The Letters of William Blundell to his Friends 1620-1688* (London, 1933), p. 35. Margaret Blundell, Clare Margaret in religion, was professed at the Rouen Poor Clares in 1602 at the age of 18 and died there at the age of 62 in 1706. Clare Blundell, Clare Francis in Religion, was professed at the Rouen Poor Clares in 1676 at the age of 20 and died there in 1714 at the age of 59. Alice Blundell, Louisa Clare in religion, was professed at the Poor Clares of Gravelines in 1665 at the age of 16 and died there in 1720 at the age of 71. Mary Blundell, Mary Bonaventure in religion, was professed at the Gravelines Poor Clares in 1671 at the age of 17 and died there at the age of 35 in 1690. A fourth daughter, Jane Blundell, Agnes of the Holy Ghost in Religion, had died at the Poor Clares in Rouen at the age of 35 in 1676.

¹⁹⁹ Richard Talbot to M. Philpott, 4 March, 1685. BL Add MS 28255, fol. 65.

²⁰⁰ See John Miller's *James II: A Study in Kingship* (Hove, Wayland, 1978).

of Cambridge and Oxford.²⁰¹ The exiled convents' attempts to argue that they were a significant part of English history, which, as chapter one demonstrated, had been a key feature of their annals and early communications, were now being supported by key spokesmen acting on behalf of the Stuart court. Thus, Cardinal Philip Howard, Catherine of Braganza's former Grand Almoner who had been influential in founding the English Dominican convent at Vilvorde, urged the re-founding of convents in England noting that they were 'naturally affected to our nation'.²⁰² James II's Catholicising mission therefore significantly benefited the English convents in the years immediately preceding the 'Glorious Revolution' by making them central to Royal policy.

The exiled English convents clearly recognised their centrality to Royal policy in the period of James II's accession to the throne and worked hard to forge an identity centred on the Stuart court in Britain. Far from being mere pawns to James II's policy the English nuns were active contributors to the shaping of English Catholic identity in this period. Nevertheless, since the convents remained in exile, the shaping of a British monarchy tied to the exiled convents had to be maintained through epistolary networks. It was largely through correspondence between the Stuart monarchy in England and the exiled cloisters on the continent that knowledge of and contact with the Stuart court was maintained during this period.

Recent work on epistolary culture has emphasised the private inward-facing nature of this form of communication. Thus, Rebecca Earle has noted that letters are 'key cultural sites for the construction of the self'.²⁰³ Letter-writing has frequently been considered a particularly

²⁰¹ For some historians the Catholic infiltration of Higher Education was a contributing factor to the 'Glorious Revolution'. See, for instance, S. Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009) pp. 114-20 and H. Trevor-Roper, *From Counter-Reformation to the Glorious Revolution* (London, Secker and Warburg, 1992) pp.59-63.

²⁰² P. Howard to Mary, Duchess of Norfolk, 31 April 1685, Howard of Norfolk MS, Autograph letters, fol. 428.

²⁰³ R. Earle, *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 1999), p. 14.

appropriate form for women because of its allegedly private nature and its public role has therefore been downplayed.²⁰⁴ Yet, correspondence often had a public focus and could act as a means whereby women could participate in key historical events. Thus, as James How has argued, correspondence aided in the creation of ‘epistolary spaces’, spaces of connection which provided permanent links between people and places, whereby women were able to accomplish a variety of ends solely through the persuasiveness of their writing.²⁰⁵ The English convents in exile in the period after 1685 were a perfect example of this more public-orientated epistolary space: for they used correspondence to associate themselves as key supporters of the new King and they utilised a variety of strategies to ensure future monarchical support for their foundations.

The exiled convents were able to use epistolary networks to build on the promises given by the Stuart monarchy during its first period in exile in the 1650s. As chapter one suggested, the exiled convent had initially been hopeful of a returning to Britain following their support for the future Charles II during the English Civil War. Since James II, when Duke of York, alongside Mary of Modena had been a regular visitor to the English convents in exile it now seemed likely that a return might be possible.²⁰⁶ Anne Neville, the chronicler for the English Benedictines convent in Brussels, stated her belief that Mary of Modena would remind James II of his promise that he would invite the Brussels convent to return to England.²⁰⁷ This optimism is reflected in the correspondence of Abbess Mary Caryll, of the English Benedictines convent in Brussels, who urged her brother John Caryll, by now secretary to

²⁰⁴ E. C. Goldsmith, ed. *Writing the female voice: essays on epistolary literature* (London, Pinter, 1989); K. Cherewatuk and U. Wiethaus, *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

²⁰⁵ J. How, *Epistolary Spaces: English Letter Writing from the Foundation of the Post Office to Richardson's Clarissa* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 1988), pp. 3-5. James How has examined the correspondence of Osborne and argued, in contrast to other scholars, that far from writing to reinforce her seclusion she used correspondence as a way to maintain contact with a rapidly changing society.

²⁰⁶ 25 March 1680, Authorisation for the Duchess of Modena to enter the enclosure, Bruges Augustinians, Reg B38, fol. 112 v. Act episcoporum, Bishoppelijk Archief, Bruges.

²⁰⁷ ‘Abbess Neville’s Annals, p. 29.

Mary of Modena, to ‘remember our convent to the Queen’.²⁰⁸ This prompting seems to have met with a measure of success, for in February 1686 John Caryll wrote to Whitehall stating that he was ‘commanded by the Queen to signify her pleasure to you, that you should endeavour to procure a dispatch from ye archbishop of Paris on behalf of the English Benediction nuns’.²⁰⁹ Similarly, Abbess Mary Knatchbull, of the English Benedictines convent at Ghent, wrote to James Butler, the Duke of Ormonde, Charles II’s former Lieutenant in Ireland, in 1685 reminding him of the convents’ significant contribution during the English Civil War.²¹⁰ Once again this seems to have met with a measure of success since James II donated 500 livres to the cloister in 1686.²¹¹ Thus, correspondence from the exiled cloisters to the British monarchy during this period resulted in a degree of practical success. In the event, and given the outbreak of the ‘Glorious Revolution’ within the next few years, neither convent would return at that time to Britain. Instead, the English Benedictine convent of Ypres, was the only cloister to successfully re-found within the realm during the reign of James II.²¹² The decision to re-establish the Benedictine convent in Dublin was clearly part of James II’s Irish policy, which was led by Richard Talbot, the Duke of Tyrconnell, James II’s viceroy in Ireland, and which aimed to strengthen Catholicism’s power there in the hope of ensuring Catholic ascendancy.²¹³ Nevertheless, the nuns were themselves active in appealing for the convent’s return. In 1686 the Benedictines of Pontoise wrote to Frances Talbot,

²⁰⁸ Mary Caryll to John Caryll, 9 December 1685, BL Add MS 28266, fol. 14.

²⁰⁹ John Caryll to Whitehall, 7 February 1686, BL Add MS 28226, fol. 25.

²¹⁰ Mary Knatchbull to James Butler, 9 March 1685, MS Carte, fol. 14, Bodleian, Oxford.

²¹¹ ‘Abbess Neville’s Annals’, p. 30.

²¹² 29 September 1688, Authorisation given to the Abbess of Dunkirk to send two nuns to the foundation in Ireland’, Y 58 P70 v, Acta Episcoporum, Bishoppelijck Archief.

²¹³ J. Miller, ‘The Earl of Tyrconnell and James II’s Irish policy, 1685-1688’, *The Historical Journal*, vol. 20, no. 4 (Dec. 1977), pp. 803-823. James II hoped to leave Catholicism strong enough in Ireland to withstand extermination under his successor (at the time the succession of his Protestant daughter Mary seemed inevitable). Richard Talbot aimed to recover the lost power and wealth of the Old English Catholics. Between 1685 and 1688 the army, civil administration and municipalities in Ireland were purged of Protestants and replaced by Catholics. For more information, see J. G. Simms, *Jacobite Ireland, 1685-1688* (London, Routledge, 1969).

Richard Talbot's wife, urging her to press for the convent's foundation since the 'designe (was) soe much for Gods Glory and goode of Religion.'²¹⁴ The convents were committed to sending those nuns who 'might be of advantage for such work' to help establish the new cloister.²¹⁵ Thus, the Ypres Benedictines insisted on the expedition to Ireland being led by Abbess Mary Butler who came from a significant Irish Catholic family, the hereditary cupbearers in Ireland.²¹⁶ She was joined by Dame Markham who had 'binn severall times chosen pryoresse and many other cheefe offices, and discharged them with zeale and satisfaction to all, was iudge most proper to assist in this great enterprise (sic).'²¹⁷ For Abbess Mary Caryll it was clear that the 'beneficial nature' of the convents would be proved if the Ypres convent was granted permission to return to Ireland.²¹⁸

The success of the nuns' appeals for the importance of re-founding a Benedictine cloister in Ireland is shown by the opening of a new convent at Great Ship Street Dublin in 1687.

Abbess Mary Butler alongside two of her nuns was received by Mary of Modena at Whitehall in 'the great habit of her order, which had not been seen there since the fall of religion'.²¹⁹

She was presented to James II who 'received her most graciously and promising her his royal protection ordered a Royal Patent to be expedited with most ample privileges'.²²⁰ The Royal Patent was a formal recognition of the convent's significance as a Royal institution and stated that 'there shall bee from time to time and att all times hereafter in our citty of Dublin a convent of nuns of the order of St Benedict....our first and chiefe royal monastery of Gratia

²¹⁴ M. Beard to F. Talbot, July 1686, BL Add MS 25266, fol. 39.

²¹⁵ 'Abbess Neville's annals', p. 142.

²¹⁶ Mary Jane Butler, in religion Mary Joseph, was the daughter of Toby Butler of Ireland. She was professed at the Boulogne Benedictines convent in 1656 but joined the Ypres Benedictines as a founder member in 1682. She died at Ypres on 22 December 1723.

²¹⁷ Margaret Markham was the daughter of George Markham of Nottinghamshire. She was born in 1613 and initially entered the Ghent Benedictines in 1638 at the age of 16 but left in 1651 to found the Benedictines in Boulogne. She went to Ireland with the Ypres convent in 1687 and remained with them on their return until 1702. In 1702 she joined the Benedictines at Pontoise where she died in 1717 at the age of 104.

²¹⁸ M. Caryll to J. Caryll, August 1686, BL Add MS 25266, fol. 42.

²¹⁹ 'Abbess Neville's annals', p. 143.

²²⁰ Ibid.

Dei.’ Similarly, The Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary also benefited significantly from James II’s reign since it moved into a new building in the main residential area of York.

Thus, for the first time since their exile, nuns had succeeded in achieving monarchical recognition and their centrality to James II’s Catholicising mission had markedly increased.

However, those convents remaining in France and Flanders were also able to benefit from Stuart patronage by using correspondence to emphasise their utility to the Stuart court. Thus, in letters to Mary of Modena, they highlighted the extent of spiritual patronage they were able to give the new monarch. The Pontoise Benedictines offered ‘masses and prayers’ for James II whilst the Bruges Augustinians declared that they would provide ‘dayly prayers and devotions’.²²¹ This resulted in significant donations from the Queen and James II to the exiled cloisters. In 1686 Mary of Modena gave the Pontoise Benedictines ‘a litle silver and gilt ceboreum’ and in 1687 she donated 300 livres to the Bruges Augustinians.²²² In February 1686 the Pontoise Benedictines recorded that they had ‘receaved from my Lord Castemayn then ambassador from the King of England James the 2nd 550 livres (sic)’.²²³ The use of correspondence to gain patronage therefore tied the exiled cloisters closely to the Stuart cause. Yet, although donations from the British monarchy significantly aided the cloisters during this period, the convents were aware that without a Catholic heir this support would prove short-lived. It is for this reason that the attention of the exiled English convents and the Catholic community more generally, now turned to the question of a Stuart heir.

III: Politicising Nuns: The Warming Pan-Myth, a Catholic heir, and the Glorious Revolution

²²¹Pontoise Benedictines to Mary of Modena, 14 July 1686, fol. 15; Lucy Herbert to Mary of Modena, 17 August 1686, fol. 24, BL Add MS 28, 266.

²²² ‘Registers Pontoise Benedictines’, p. 62.

²²³ Ibid. p. 63.

Mary of Modena was widely considered to be unable to conceive having suffered five miscarriages in the early years of her marriage. If she failed to secure a male heir the throne would inevitably pass to James II's strongly Protestant daughter Mary and her Calvinist husband William of Orange. James II's Protestant subjects were not alone in their belief that James II's Catholic reign would prove a short-term phenomenon.²²⁴ Indeed, many Catholics were wary of offering support to James II's catholicising mission for fear of reprisals at Mary's seemingly inevitable accession, a fact which partly explains Papal reluctance to support James II's cause.²²⁵ The necessity of a Stuart heir therefore was well-understood by the exiled convents. To this end Abbess Mary Knatchbull of the Brussels Benedictine's cloister wrote to Mary of Modena to reassure her of the convent's spiritual aid in support of her pregnancy:

May it please you Maiestys graciously to accept a participation of all the sacrifices offer'd dayly in our Church, our recitall of the Diuine office, mentall and vocall prayers, fastings, mortifications, Regular observances, and all other meritorious actions of our whole lives; for the obtayning a PRINCE of Wales, who after your long and happy Reigns may inherit your Vertues as well as Kingdomes upon earth, whilst both your Maiestys inioy Everlasting Crownes in Heauen.²²⁶

Knatchbull's letter acquires a particular significance in the context of Monmouth's Rebellion of the same year. In July 1685, James Scott, the Duke of Monmouth, Charles II's illegitimate son, rose in rebellion against his uncle James II. Although the significance of Monmouth's rebellion is debatable, he received considerable support from certain areas, most notably Somerset, where there was a strong history of dissent. This explains the exiled convent's sense of triumphalism when Modena's pregnancy was announced and their eagerness to lend

²²⁴ See chapter 1, p. 19.

²²⁵ See J. Miller, *Popery and Politics in England*, pp. 229-249.

²²⁶ 'The Promise of a Prayer for a Prince of Wales, 1685', Archives of St Scholastica's Convent Teignmouth now at St Mary's Convent, Buckfast, Devon.

support to the birth. In 1688 Mary Whigmore, a nun at the English Carmelites convent, wrote to Mary of Modena in the hope that she would accept the convent's spiritual intervention during her pregnancy:²²⁷

The petitions of this community of your majesties humble faithful subjects are incessantly presented to the throne of mercy beseeching the presentation of both of your royal persons with Benediction of the much wished and prayed for gift of heaven, a prince to inherit your crownes and vertues, to which end Madame your singular devotion of the great sacrifice of the glory of God and salvation of soules our seraphique mother St Teresa, will undoubtedly contribute much, whose relique a peece of her flesh I presume to present, beseeching your majesty to wear it in your labour, it working dayly in effect miracles giving happy deliveries and preservation of mother and child in like cases.²²⁸

The choice of Avila, the founder of the Carmelite Order, enabled Whigmore to claim a place for her convent as a significant institution. It also suggested several parallels between Avila and Mary of Modena. Avila's work *On Marriage* had lauded marriage and pregnancy as key virtues and would therefore appeal to Modena's motherly instincts.²²⁹ Moreover, Avila had been influential in instigating reforms against a lax and worldly life and reinvigorating the spiritual life of her community.²³⁰ In this respect she closely resembled James II and Mary of Modena in their plans for a 'moral reformation', which would reverse the fortunes of the Stuart monarchy.²³¹ Whigmore's letter therefore functioned as propaganda for the Stuart court by flattering their aims and sense of moral devotion.

²²⁷ Mary Whigmore to Mary of Modena, 1688, BL, Add. MS 28,225, fols. 276-7, Additional Manuscripts, British Library.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ A. Weber, *Teresa of Avila and the Rhetoric of Femininity* (Princeton, 1999), pp. 245-9. Weber claims that Avila developed a unique 'rhetoric of femininity' calculated to appeal to her female readership.

²³⁰ Teresa of Avila insisted on poverty for her foundations, the foreswearing of titles and dowries and an emphasis on mental rather than vocal prayer. J. Blinkoff, *The Avila of St Teresa: Religious Reform in a Sixteenth-Century City* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1989). See also G. T. W. Ahlgren, *Teresa of Avila and the Politics of Sanctity* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1996) where Avila's reforms are discussed in more depth.

²³¹ James II's reign was characterised by a drive to associate the Stuart monarchy with a reformation of manners. Public outcry at the immorality of Charles II's reign, which had manifested itself in numerous court

However, nuns' correspondence also suggests continued fear in the face of increased Protestant opposition. For English Protestants, especially those Dissenters' who had been loyal to Monmouth's cause, the Queen's pregnancy sparked fears that the Protestant succession was no longer assured. Although, as the Declaration of Indulgence suggested, James II had hoped to defy Anglican hegemony by creating a new political reigning power base founded on a coalition of English Catholics and Protestant Dissenters, there remained significant opposition from dissenters.²³² There were no significant rebellions after Monmouth's failed 1685 insurrection but there remained a general belief that Monmouth had survived and that an imposter had taken his place on the scaffold. This resulted in numerous attempts to impersonate the Duke and ensured that he remained a focus for Protestant Dissent and future rebellions.²³³ This potential threat surfaces in the correspondence of Abbess Mary Caryll. Writing to her brother John Caryll to 'congratulate with you in perticuler that the Queen your majesty draws soe neere her time' she prayed for a successful birth in 'spite of the Divels and all your Protestants presbiterians'.²³⁴ Conjuring up an image of Catholicism at war with Protestant Dissent she nonetheless remained confident that 'her majesty will be

scandals, led James II to stress the pious nature of the Stuart court. Stuart propagandists contrasted the morally virtuous reign of James II with the debauchery of his rivals, in particular the Duke of Monmouth whose numerous affairs and rakish behaviour were well-known.

²³² See chapter 1 p. 9. Most historians agree that James II was offering Dissenter's toleration via a Royal Indulgence in return for political support. He hoped to forge an alliance between the Dissenters and the Crown in parliament and to weaken Protestantism through division thereby ensuring the successful repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts. This is the context behind the Earl of Halifax's *Letter to a Dissenter* (1687) which warned against support for James II's Declaration of Indulgence arguing that Dissenters would be 'hugged now, only that you may be better squeezed at another time'.

²³³ In 1685 Thomas Dangerfield impersonated the Duke of Monmouth. In 1686 Charles Floyd was charged at New Sarum Assize with 'pretending himself to be the Duke of Monmouth and in the same year John Smith was whipped from Newgate to Tynburn for the same offence. There were rumours that the 'Man in the Iron Mask', a prisoner in the Ile Marguerita in France, was Monmouth because the people of Provence were in the habit of calling him 'Maemouth'. Several poems published in 1688 at the outbreak of the 'Glorious Revolution' had Monmouth rather than William III returning triumphantly to English shores to glory in the defeat of James II.

²³⁴ Mary Caryll, the daughter of John Caryll of Harting Sussex and Catherine Petre of Thorndon Essex, was clothed on 9 January 1649 at the Ghent Benedictines convent aged 18. In 1662 she was sent to establish the new Benedictine filiation at Dunkirk. She was abbess at Dunkirk from 1663 to her death in 1712. Mary Caryll to John Caryll, 23 June 1688, BL Add MS 28226, fol. 112.

preserved by the Almighty power, and make us all happy very shortly in a Prince of Wales, this is what in the first place lyes nearest our hearts'.²³⁵

The polarity between Protestant and Catholic hopes heightened when Mary of Modena gave birth to a healthy boy, James Francis Edward, on 27 April 1688. The exiled convents were quick to send their congratulations to the Queen. Abbess Mary Knatchbull expressed her belief that the new son would prove a 'saving guift for the three nations' of England, Scotland, and Ireland whilst Abbess Mary Caryll noted that the birth brought 'shyning light on your sanctite'.²³⁶ However, the birth of a Catholic male heir exacerbated Protestant opposition: for them a Catholic monarchy was no longer a temporary aberration but a long term threat. This explains why the attempt by Protestants to discredit the Royal pregnancy began early, even before the Queen gave birth. To discredit the pregnancy Protestants alleged that the new born baby was not the Prince of Wales at all but an ill-born child who had been smuggled into the Queen's bedchamber in a 'warming-pan' as she pretended to give birth. This belief in the 'pretended prince of Wales; came to be known as 'The Warming-Pan Myth'. Henry Hyde, the earl of Clarendon, had noted as early as 15 January that 'the Queen's great belly is everywhere ridiculed, as if scarce anyone believed it to be true'. Rumours about the illegitimacy of the Queen's pregnancy also featured in the messages Whig politicians sent to the Prince and Princess of Orange. Thomas Osborne the earl of Danby wrote to William III on 29 March that 'many of our ladies say that the queen's great belly seems to grow faster than they have observed their own to do'. Princess Anne herself wrote stating that there was 'much reason to believe it a false belly for methinks if it were not there having been so many stories and jests made about it, she should to convince the world, make either me or some of

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ K. Knatchbull to Mary of Modena, 28 April 1688, BL Add MS 28255; M. Caryll to J. Caryll, 29 April 1688, BL Add MS 28266 fol. 34.

my friends fell the belly'. Thus, at the birth of the new Prince of Wales, Protestant and Catholic opinion divided over the question of legitimacy.

Anti-Catholicism, and anti-nun polemic, was central to the warming-pan myth. Propagandists likened Mary of Modena's in their view 'false' pregnancy to the false pregnancies of the Catholic Queen Mary Tudor, known to Protestants as 'Bloody Mary'. By doing so they emphasised Catholic hypocrisy and provoked fears that a long-term Catholic monarchy might end, as Mary I's reign had done, in 'bloody' reprisals against Protestants. Protestant discourse also ridiculed Mary of Modena's pregnancy by identifying it ironically with the concept of miraculous conception and by so doing drew attention to what they saw as Catholic blasphemies. For example, one Protestant commentator noted that 'some of the Popish party tell a blasphemous invention that the holy ghost was to appear to her and make her conceive'. Nuns became central to the 'warming pan myth' and were used by Protestant commentators to present the birth as a Catholic conspiracy engineered by monks, nuns, and Jesuits. A pamphlet entitled *A History of the Warming Pan* for instance noted that 'nuns joyned with fryars (sic) in a conspiracy to smuggle a sham prince into Mary of Modena's bedchamber'. This view also emerges in cheap print culture. For example, a ballad entitled *A New Song of Lulla By* situated nuns as agents of the Pope with responsibility for planting a Stuart heir with Mary of Modena via a hole in the wall:

In Rome there is a most fearful Rout
And what do you think it is about?
Because the birth of the Babe's come out
The nuns and fryars fret and bawl
And tell the Pope, the heretics all
Does swear it came in at the hole i'th wall
His holiness did stamp and stare
Biting his thumbs and tearing his hair
And said, why did you not take greater care.

Thus, once again, anti-nun polemic came to reflect genuine political anxieties that related to the specific political context of the 1680s.

The success of the propaganda about the Warming Pan Myth in inflaming Protestant fears helps explain the success of Prince of Orange's (the future William III) invasion and the events we now term the 'Glorious Revolution'. The Prince of Orange's declaration, stating his reasons for appearing in Britain, itself used the Warming Pan Myth as a legitimate justification for the events of 1689. The declaration stated that there were 'just and visible grounds of suspicion that the pretended Prince of Wales was not born by the Queen'.

Moreover, the declaration promised to refer to parliament the 'enquiry into the birth of the pretended Prince of Wales and of all things related to it and the right of succession'. The warming-pan myth was therefore effective in justifying William's invasion to the British population. Yet, James II's own actions also furthered the Williamite cause. For James II renewed his assault on the Test and Corporation acts and granted a second Declaration of Indulgence in 1688. These actions could easily be presented by Protestants as an attack on the Anglican Church. It is for this reason that the events of 1688, which led in 1689 to the coronation of King William III, have so often been regarded as a publicly-supported, state-legitimised, moment.

Correspondence and annals from the exiled convents however provide us with a different perspective to that which presents the 'Glorious Revolution' as a relatively quick and bloodless event which acquired widespread public support and met with minimal

resistance.²³⁷ When William III's troops ransacked the Royal Benedictine convent in Dublin

²³⁷ This image was first popularised by Williamite propagandists in the aftermath of William III's coronation. See, for instance, J. S., *An Historical Account of the Memorable Actions of the Most Glorious Monarch William III, King of England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1689); Anon, *An Ode to the Coronation of His Majesty William III* (London, 1689). The term 'Glorious Revolution' was first applied to the events of 1688 by the Whig historian T.B. Macaulay in *A History of England from the Accession of James II* (London, 1848). Recent proponents of the view that 1688 inaugurated a period of toleration and met with popular support are: O. P. Grell, J. Israel and N. Tyacke, eds. *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion In*

the nuns did not present themselves as mere passive victims but as significant agents actively resisting the new regime. For instance, Abbess Mary Butler, who had left the Ypres order and helped to found the new convent in Ireland, tried to ensure that the Williamite army would not take any of the convent goods. The annals recalled that ‘Mary Butler’s first care was to send the young ladies back to their parents. She then saved herself, with the religious and some of the church plate and ornaments in a neighbouring house’.²³⁸ So too, Mary Placida Holmes, a lay sister, ‘had the courage and presence of mind to disguise herself in secular clothes and put herself among the plunderers to save what was most sacred and precious’.²³⁹ Nonetheless, despite their resistance, the nuns were eventually forced, after three years in Britain, to return to the continent and their former cloister at Ypres.

It is not surprising therefore that the exiled English convents represented the ‘Glorious Revolution’ as a second English Civil War. The Benedictines of Paris noted that:

Holy King James II (who) was by the perfidious, undutiful and unnatural baseness of his son-in-law and nephew, the Prince of Orange, dethroned and deprived of the kingdom, that detestable prince joyning with the treacherous defection of the Protestant subjects of England and a malevolent party which were the dregs of Cromwell’s vipers blood (sic).²⁴⁰

A British monarch was once again in exile: James II, like Charles II in the 1650s, was dependent on a court of exiles in France and Flanders many of whom were Catholics. By constructing the ‘Glorious Revolution’ as perfidious, undutiful and base the exiled convents echoed the themes of Jacobite polemic. For Catholic supporters of James II the events of

England (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990); J. Israel, *The Anglo-Dutch Moment; Essays on the Glorious Revolution and its World Impact* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991); S. Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (Yale, Yale University Press, 1991).

²³⁸ ‘Annals of the Benedictine Nuns of Ypres’, p. 54.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Abbess Neville’s *Annals of the Five Communities of English Benedictine Nuns in Flanders*, in *Miscellanea V* (London: CRS 6, 1909), pp. 24-5.

1688 had been foreshadowed by years of immorality. The 'Glorious Revolution' was God's punishment for the years of immoral fanaticism stemming from the Reformation and the Popish Plot. Revolution was itself represented as moral depravity. The undutiful nature of Protestant England had been shown by a willingness on the part of its subjects to break the laws of God and man, by overthrowing the king who ruled by Divine Right. Moreover, by claiming the throne from her own father Mary had subverted the laws of patriarchy. In addition, the events of 1688 seemed to be motivated by greed and self-promotion, which rendered them base. Catholics emphasised that the 'conquest' of England played into the hands of the Dutch who needed English resources to prolong the war with France. In the aftermath of 1688 William III had requisitioned the estates of those thought to be loyal to the Stuart cause. Thus, Maria Oglethorpe, who would be schooled at the English Augustinians during her exile, lamented the loss of her family estate and the misfortune into which 1688 had cast her. During their years in exile Jacobites would contest the very nature of the 'Glorious Revolution' through a discourse based on an oppositional ideology of obedience, charity and renunciation. By so doing, they inaugurated an alternate political world and sense of English identity which ran counter to and contested that of William III's England.

Chapter 3
Engaging Nuns
Exiled English Convents and Political Engagement, 1688-1750

I am amaz'd a country once so bless'd
Who has with saints our calenders so grac'd
Shou'd fall, not only into Heresie,
But from all justice, truth, morality,
For though faith's Mystery's to all be'nt known
Yet common justice, is to every one,
I wonder, when they'd done that barbarous thing,
To overthrow their laws, drive out their King,
How they could look each other in the face,
For each must know the other to be base.²⁴¹

In Jane Barker's poem 'Fidelia in a Convent Garden, the abbess comes to her' written in 1702, the fictional abbess discusses the after-effects of the 'Glorious Revolution'. Born in 1652 in Blatherwycke, Northamptonshire as the only daughter of staunchly Royalist parents, Barker's world was transformed by the 'Glorious Revolution'.²⁴² Baptised into the Church of England in May 1652 Barker converted to Catholicism in 1686 during James II's Catholicising mission, which followed his accession to the throne in 1685, and was received into the faith by the Benedictine monks attached to the Queen's chapel at St James's

²⁴¹ Jane Barker, 'Poems Presented to James III', BL. Add. MS 21621, British Library Additional Manuscripts, British Library, fol. 43, p. 65.

²⁴² For more information on Barker see K. R. King, *Jane Barker, Exile: A Literary career-1675-1725* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000). As the title of this work suggests, King views Barker's period of exile as the formative influence on her work. A different perspective is provided by J. Donovan in *Women and the Rise of the Novel, 1405-1726* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999) where the feminist perspective in Barker's work is to the fore.

Palace.²⁴³ Her father, Thomas Barker, was secretary to the Lord Keeper of the Great Seal of England, and from an early age Barker seems to have been in awe of the Stuart monarchs, producing poetic odes to the Restoration at the age of eight.²⁴⁴ In 1689, following William III's accession to the throne, she went into exile with James II where, in addition to writing poetry, she made a living as an entrepreneurial medical practitioner.²⁴⁵ In 'Fidelia in a Convent Garden' she expresses the view that James II is the true monarch by Divine Right and represents William III's conquest as a 'barbarous thing'. At the exiled Stuart court, based in Louis XIV's palace at St Germain-en-Laye, Barker achieved literary fame with similar politically-inspired verses.²⁴⁶ Her poems glorified the Jacobite cause by de-legitimising William III's regime.²⁴⁷ Indeed, one recent literary scholar considers her the 'unofficial poet laureate of the Stuart court' whose work served as propaganda for the Stuart cause.²⁴⁸

However, far from providing the idealised image of the Stuart court that one might expect from such propaganda, Jane Barker's poems were often ambivalent, reflecting the self-doubt and uncertainty characteristic of the exiled community.²⁴⁹ In 'The Lovers Elesium, or

²⁴³ The Barker family were however, even prior to 1685, connected to Catholics. Barker's maternal grandfather was a leading Catholic whose views may have influenced her.

²⁴⁴ These were later published as J. Barker, *Poetical Recreations Consisting of Original Poems, Songs and Odes* (London, 1688).

²⁴⁵ Barker had been interested in medical remedies in the period before her departure to the Stuart court. In 1685 an advertisement for 'Dr Barker's famous Gout Plaister' priced at five shillings appeared on the final page of *Delightful and Ingenious Novels: being choice and excellent stories of amours tragical and comical* (1685). It was sold by Barker's first publisher Benjamin Clogate and claimed to have the 'power to effect a perfect cure in twelve hours'. Barker returned to London at intervals after 1714 but died in France in 1732.

²⁴⁶ Barker would go on to achieve fame as a novelist with her Galesia trilogy of novels beginning with *Love Intrigues or the History of the Amours of Bosvil and Galesia, as related to Lucretia in St. Germain's Garden* (London, 1713).

²⁴⁷ See, for instance, 'Poems Referring to the Times Since the Kings Accession to the Throne' in which she writes 'My eyes bound down, I heard the people say/The King, the king's for England gone away', BL Add MS 21621, fol. 39.

²⁴⁸ K. R. King, with the assistance of J. Medoff, 'Jane Barker and her life (1652-1732): The Documentary Record,' *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 21, No. 3 (1997), pp. 16-38. There were other poets at the Stuart court including Lord Maitland, Anthony Hamilton and John Caryll.

²⁴⁹ In this respect they differ significantly from the self-righteous optimism which Szechi believes defines Jacobite propaganda. See, D. Szechi, *Jacobitism and Tory Politics, 1710-1714* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1984) and D. Szechi, 'The Jacobite Revolution Settlement, 1689-1696', *English Historical Review* 108 (1993), pp. 610-28.

FoolsParadice' the poem's speaker wanders amongst the ghosts of those who died fighting for James II and talks of a 'mazelike landscape, strew'd with flaming darts,/Knots, chains, devices, verses, bleeding hearts'.²⁵⁰ In this 'thankless banishment' James II and Mary of Modena are depicted having 'nought but pitty to bestow'.²⁵¹ Although recent work, most notably by Edward Corp and Eveline Cruickshanks, has sought to revise earlier notions of an intolerant, despondent and financially bankrupt Stuart court it remains the case that the exiled community at St. Germain were often beset by financial hardship.²⁵² Corp analysed the pensions and salaries of those employed at St. Germain and therefore based his research almost exclusively on those holding key positions at court.²⁵³ However, women, many of whom became widows when their husbands died in battle, children, and elderly relatives often accompanied those employed directly by the Stuart household into exile.²⁵⁴ It was these additional members of the Stuart entourage who suffered the most during the pestilence, plague and famine, which blighted the Stuart court from 1690-1700. In 'The Miseries of St. Germain' Barker captures the despair and uncertainty of these years as the non-combatants at

²⁵⁰ J. Barker, 'The Lover's Elysium, or Fools Paradise' (1700) in C. Shiner Wilson (ed), *The Galesia Trilogy and Selected Manuscript Poems of Jane Barker* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997) II, p. 27.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² E. Corp, *A Court in Exile* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004); E. Cruickshanks, *The Glorious Revolution* (London, Routledge, 2000); D. Szechi, *The Jacobites* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1994). The Whig tradition of British historiography dominant from the 1840s, which has remained influential in assessments of the 'Glorious Revolution' until fairly recently, played up the financial inadequacies of the Stuart court in the belief that this resulted from the reactionary nature of the Stuart monarchy, see A. Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England*, vol. IX, (London, 1846), in which the notion of the court as 'melancholy' was first introduced, and T. B. Macaulay, *History of England*, IV, (London, 1855). Early twentieth-century historiography in the years preceding the First World War firmly established the view of the exiled court as impoverished partly as a result of comparisons between Stuart unpreparedness in the 1715 rising and British unpreparedness in the Boer Wars. See, for instance, A. Shield and A. Lang, *The King over the Water* (London, Longmans, 1907) and M. Haile, *James Francis Edward, the 'Old Chevalier'*, (London, Longmans, 1907).

²⁵³ E. Corp, *A Court in Exile*, pp. 100-109. For Corp, financial impoverishment was not an issue in the period before 1716. James II received 600,000 livres per year from Louis XIV and the combined total salaries for household servants came to 387,000 livres per year. For a good indication of salaries under James III see 'Household of James III, 1709', BL Add MS 2517, MS Egerton.

²⁵⁴ Barker herself did not receive a salary nor a pension from the Stuart court and earned her living selling medical remedies. There has been little work done on women and children at the exiled court although the re-emergence of Court Studies as a fashionable topic has led to more work on the Stuart household: see, E. Corp, 'The Jacobite Court at St-Germain-en-laye' in E. Cruickshanks (ed.), *The Stuart Courts* (Stroud, Sutton, 2000), pp. 240-256.

court, 'poor widows, with their wretched train', struggled with the 'curss' of inadequate resources and news of Jacobite defeats, a situation she describes as 'Hell in epitomy'.²⁵⁵

It is in this context that the figure of the abbess emerges in Barker's poetry. When she discusses the fear and homesickness, which she views as a true reflection of the psychological state of many at court, Barker uses the figure of the nun as a guide whose wisdom eventually reconciles the sufferers to their status as devotees of the Stuart cause. Barker's poems were semi-autobiographical in their nature and she seems to have identified with nuns who had, like her, renounced marriage and motherhood to practice their religion in exile.²⁵⁶ Fidelia, Barker's literary incarnation, approaches the abbess at times when she is conflicted about her status as an exile and her commitment to the Jacobite cause. Thus, when the failure of James II to regain his throne at the Battle of the Boyne, in Barker's poem 'Fidelia and the Abbess out walking', leads Fidelia to doubt God's commitment to the Stuart cause, the abbess provides stoical advice. She orders Fidelia to 'accuse not heaven, heavens always just and good/ although its ways be not always understood/ humbly submit and faithfully attend/ heaven is too great and generous a friend/T'abandon those who on his love depend'.²⁵⁷ The abbess is thus portrayed as an adviser, a model of resilience, and a dedicated supporter of the Jacobite court.

Yet, Barker's experience of nuns was not confined to her imagination. During her period in exile she attended services at the English convents in Paris and sometimes retreated to the English Benedictine convent in nearby Pontoise for periods of contemplation. It was here that

²⁵⁵ J. Barker, 'The Miseries of St Germain (1694)' in *The Galesia Trilogy*, ii, pp. 64-72.

²⁵⁶ Jane Barker never married. Her poetry shows the same confusion of her renunciation of marriage for poetry as it does of her decision to renounce her homeland for political exile. Despite her preference for celibacy and her devotion to the English convents Barker's poems also express concern for forced vocations. In 'The Virgins Paradise: A Dream' she writes: 'And many who in monastery's dyed/ Not for devotion, but their mother's pride', *The Galesia Trilogy*, II, pp. 84-90. For a discussion of the autobiographical nature of Barker's work see, J. Spencer, 'Creating the Woman Writer: The Autobiographical Works of Jane Barker', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol. 2, No. 2, (Autumn, 1983), pp. 165-181.

²⁵⁷ J. Barker, 'Poems Presented to James III', BL Add. MS 21621, fol. 40. P. 62.

she met Lady Lucy Herbert, the fourth daughter of William Herbert, the first Marquis of Powis, and his wife Elizabeth, the younger daughter of Edward Somerset, the second marquis of Worcester, who was spending time at the convent in the hope of becoming a nun.²⁵⁸ The Herberts' were a leading Catholic family and the first Marquis was particularly well respected at the Jacobite court as a result of his arrest and acquittal during the Titus Oates plot in 1680. Like Barker, Lucy had been influenced by the Stuarts' unique devotion to Catholicism, entering the convent at the advice of Henrietta Maria's confessor Lewis Sabrand, and, like Barker, she had literary pretensions, producing *A Day Exercise and Devotion for the Gentlewomen Pensioners* in 1713.²⁵⁹ When Lucy professed at the English Augustinian convent in Bruges in 1694 Barker entered into weekly correspondence with her and occasionally visited her there.²⁶⁰ Their relationship seems to have provided mutual benefits. For Barker, visits to the convent enabled her to experience 'vast raptures' and 'strong ecstasies' whilst Herbert wrote of the 'wond'rous joys' provided by Barker's visits. Barker referred to these visits as a 'home-coming' and it seemed to provide both women with a sense of shared communal belonging.

The purpose of this chapter is to show that Barker's encounter with nuns and the sense of community the convents offered her was not an isolated incident. In fact, the exiled convents served as a focus of unity for the new Jacobite exiles centred around the Stuart court at St Germain. In contrast to the public-orientated construction of the Protestant nation, which as we have suggested, was significantly shaped by print culture, the Catholic national imaginary was a more inward-focused private space. Barker's poems were manuscript and circulated within a closed community comprising the Stuart court. Nonetheless, they helped to foster

²⁵⁸ Bruges annals, p. 142.

²⁵⁹ L. Herbert, *A Day Exercise and Devotion for the for the Gentlewomen Pensioners* (Douai, 1712).

²⁶⁰ Lady Lucy Herbert became Teresa Joseph on her profession. She rose from procuratrix (1692-1709) to prioress (1709-1744) and died in Bruges in 1744 aged 75.

networks of intimate correspondence which moulded the community together. Far from preventing the construction of an imagined community this privately orientated manuscript culture aided in the construction of an alternative Catholic imaginary. I hope to explore why this happened and how this sense of community was shaped. First, I explore the construction of a 'Protestant' England in the wake of the 'Glorious Revolution' and how far anti-nun polemic became central to this construction. Secondly, I examine the interconnections between the convents and the Stuart court in the aftermath of 1688 and consider the extent to which these connections resulted in an oppositional group identity whereby the Protestant construction of England could be contested. Finally, I consider the ways nuns became engaged with the Jacobite cause and the reasons for the demise of conventual links with Jacobitism in the aftermath of 1745. This chapter is entitled Engaging Nuns both because Williamite propagandists frequently engaged with the image of the nun in order to construct the Protestant view of contractual governance after 1688 and because the exiled convents became increasingly politically engaged after 1688 in their support for Jacobitism. This chapter thus argues that both Protestants and Catholics were engaged, albeit in different ways, with the construction of the English national imaginary in the aftermath of the 'Glorious Revolution'.

I: Inventing Nation: Constructing 'Protestant' England in the aftermath of 1688

In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson argued that the nation was 'an imagined political community' socially constructed by those perceiving themselves to belong to it.²⁶¹ Nations are thus based on a mental image of affinity between members, whereby in the

²⁶¹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, Verso, 1983), pp. 1-13.

‘minds of each lives the image of their communion’.²⁶² Of course, Anderson would not have recognised the English convents in their exiled status as comprising a nationalist imagined community. For him nations were limited and sovereign. They had ‘finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations’ and were not subject to a dynastic monarchy. In Anderson’s view nations were the product of modernity when the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained dynastic realm had been challenged and an emerging print-capitalism had enabled a vernacular common discourse to bind the community together. They were thus the products of a secularising, democratic and industrialised society.²⁶³ Anderson’s notion of an ‘imagined community’ has proved a useful point of departure for early modern scholars who have applied the concept to discussions of national identity rather than nation-formation.²⁶⁴ This has resulted in a wealth of works on early modern discourses of the nation most of which have depicted England as a Protestant construct.²⁶⁵

In the aftermath of 1688 those loyal to the new Williamite settlement worked hard to construct Britain as an exclusively ‘Protestant’ nation once more. As chapters one and two have shown there was already a strong history of this national construct providing the framework for an anti-Catholic rhetoric depicting Catholics as non-English and a potential

²⁶² Ibid. p. 12.

²⁶³ Other modernist interpretations of the nation include K. Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003),

²⁶⁴ Some scholars, such as Adrian Hastings, have argued that a sense of national identity predates nationalism and exists in medieval and early modern England: A. Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 35-9. Medieval scholars have used these approaches to discuss medieval discourses of the nation. See, for instance, K. Lavezzo (ed.), *Imagining a Medieval English Nation* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2004). See also A. D. Smith, “Set in the Silver Sea”: English National Identity and European Integration”, *Nations and Nationalism* 12 (3) 2006, pp. 441-2.

²⁶⁵ J. Gregory, ‘The Making of a Protestant Nation: ‘Success’ and ‘Failure’ in England’s Long Reformation’, in N. Tyacke (ed.) *England’s Long Reformation 1500-1800* (London, UCL Press, 1998); T. Claydon and I McBride, ‘The Trials of a Chosen People: Recent Interpretations of Protestantism and National Identity in Britain and Ireland’, in T. Claydon and I McBride (eds.), *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c. 1650-c.1850* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998); R. Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1992); C. McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590-1612* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996).

threat to the state. However, in 1688 the British state was in an increasingly fragile position since a small group of Whig politicians had in effect dethroned the 'legitimate' monarch and needed to legitimise this coup to gain public support. It is for this reason that the newly installed William III embarked upon a propaganda campaign to win over the British public to the Williamite regime. Indeed, in many ways the ground for the Duke of Orange's takeover had already been prepared before the events of 1688. As early as 1687, in an act designed to undermine James II, Whig propagandists opposed to a Catholic monarchy had already begun printing Gaspar Fagel's letter from the Duke of Orange opposing the repeal of the Test Acts. This propaganda campaign reached a zenith in the early stages of the events of 1688 with tracts, prints, and medals featuring the Duke of Orange appearing at key points in the revolution. The *Declaration of Reasons*, where the future William III explained his reasons for appearing in Britain, appeared in twenty-one editions in four languages in 1688.²⁶⁶

Historians have been quick to point out the success of William III's propaganda campaign in justifying the 'Glorious Revolution' and its significance in this respect has been the subject of much discussion. However, they have been slow to acknowledge the extent to which this propaganda campaign was aimed at women and frequently placed women at the centre of political culture in the aftermath of 1688. The reasons for this are clear. In the early days of 1688 political commentators expected the throne to pass directly to James II's daughter Mary II. When this option was refused by both William III and Mary II propagandists were at pains to point out that William held the throne jointly with his wife. Propagandists were also aware that if Mary II died childless the throne would pass directly to another female monarch, James II's second daughter, the future Queen Anne. They were therefore keen to prepare the ground for future female succession in order to prevent attacks from the rival Jacobite claimant to the

²⁶⁶ It appeared in English, Dutch, German and French and was printed at Amsterdam, Edinburgh, The Hague, Hamburg and London.

throne. It is for this reason that a wealth of works applauding the merits of female monarchy emerged in the years after 1688. An unprecedented number of biographies of Elizabeth I were also published in the wake of 1688 in attempt to prove that female monarchy, if Protestant, was likely to be successful.²⁶⁷

With female monarchy so much at the forefront of political culture after 1688 William III's propaganda machine was very keen to appeal to women. William III's attempt to win hearts and minds included propaganda aimed directly at women. In 1689 William's advisers Gaspar Fagel and Gilbert Burnet corresponded on the importance of including the dying speeches of women executed for their support for the Monmouth rebellion during James II's reign. They were printed with the clear message that this alleged 'tyranny' would not happen under William III. A further series of pamphlets sought to persuade women against involvement in the Jacobite cause. Thus, Charles Barcroft's *A Letter to a Lady furnishing her with scriptures*, produced at the beginning of 1689, sought to win women for the Williamite cause by arguing that a 'good Protestant' lady would better serve God by loyally serving the Williamite cause.²⁶⁸ Williamite propagandists used images of female supporters of the 'Glorious Revolution' to 'prove' its legitimacy. Thus, prints of William III landing at Torbay showed women in the crowd extending their arms in greeting while newspaper commentary noted the large numbers of women in the crowd when William III entered London on the eighteenth of December 1688.

For the Williamite regime images of women were also central to propaganda that sought to portray James II's reign negatively. In another direct appeal to women Williamite propagandists satirised those women who chose to remain loyal to James II and his son James

²⁶⁷ Anon, *Queen Elizabeth's Opinion Containing Transubstantiation* (London, 1688); W. Camden, *The History of the most Renowned and Victorious Queen Elizabeth, late Queen of England* (Reprinted, London, 1688)

²⁶⁸ C. Barcroft, *A Letter to a Lady Furnishing her with Scriptures* (London, 1689).

Francis Edward (regarded as the legitimate King James III by Jacobites). Thus, the front cover of the satirical *Jacobites Journal*, under the editorship of Henry Fielding and Mary Cooper, portrayed a *Jacobite* and a female Jacobitess seated on an ass being led by a monk.²⁶⁹ This image is interesting in that it reflects the medieval Skimmington or Charivari. This was a folk custom involving public, community-based, rituals that acted as a form of social coercion. One customary ritual involved a female ‘scold’ - or a woman who was thought to have subverted gendered norms by ‘cuckolding’ or abusing her husband in public - being seated backwards on an ass or donkey to convey a sense that the woman’s actions had turned the natural order upside down and needed to be rectified. The image on the *Jacobites Journal* therefore suggests that female Jacobites are helping to turn the natural order, exemplified by King William III, on its head. The image also suggests that female supporters of James II and the Jacobite cause often acted outside gendered norms of acceptable ‘female behaviour’. In the image, for instance, the Jacobitess is portrayed waving a sword as if ready for battle and in the accompanying editorial Fielding referred to a sisterhood of Jacobitesses, ‘a considerable body of Amazonians in plaid Jackets’.²⁷⁰ In the same way contemporary pamphlets frequently argued that the battle between female supporters of the Williamite regime and female supporters of the exiled Stuart court threatened to turn the world upside down. For example a ballad entitled ‘The Female Duel’ noted:

In Yorkshire late happen’d a desperate fight,
 ’ween a Jacobite Lady and a Williamite,
 Twas fought with such courage no men could no more,
 Nor the like was nere known ‘tween two women before;
 For each met in the field with her sword by her side,
 Resolving the same should their quarrel decide.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ H. Fielding, ed. *The Jacobites Journal*, 1701.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 1.

²⁷¹ *An excellent new song call’d The Female Duel, or the victorious Williamite lady who was challenged to fight a duel by a Jacobite lady. To the tune of If Loves a Sweet Passion.* (London, 1700).

Therefore, for Williamite propagandists, it was necessary to win women over decisively to their cause and those women, like Jane Barker, who chose instead to support the exiled Stuart court were to be regarded as subversive of the natural order and the Protestant nation.

Given the centrality of women to Williamite propaganda in the aftermath of 1688 it is perhaps not surprising that images of nuns were also to the fore in polemics against the Stuart regime. Indeed, in seeking to legitimise the Williamite settlement polemicists used the image of the nun to represent James II's reign negatively. In the aftermath of 1688 the nun was used to offer a critique of despotism and Jacobitism. Political commentators seeking to justify their loyalty to the new King William III used resistance theory to justify the breaking of their vow to James II. To do this, they needed to show that unfailing obedience was a negative thing. Questions about what constituted loyalty, obligation and allegiance were therefore to the fore in the aftermath of 1688. In this context the image of a nun taking an unbreakable vow on entry to a convent was used to interrogate the political consequences of uncritical submission to a sovereign. Commentators equated women taking an unbreakable oath to become nuns to autocratic notions of Divine Right and non-resistance and presented these concepts negatively. For example, the *Commentary on Oaths*, printed in the wake of the coronation of William and Mary to justify the breaking of the peoples' oath to James II, printed an example of a nuns' profession oath to show 'nuns' submission and some consequences thereof'.²⁷² The pamphlet expressed the view that the strictures placed on nuns were so strict and 'despotic' that nuns would either be forced by nature into breaking their vows or would die 'buried alive in monasteries or nunneries', victims of their unbreakable oaths.²⁷³ For Protestants the message was clear: just as nuns, in their eyes, suffered from unbreakable and

²⁷² Anon., *Commentary on Oaths and Oath-Taking* (London, 1689).

²⁷³ Ibid. p. 2.

autocratic vows so too the British people would have suffered from similar vows to the autocratic James II had not the 'Glorious Revolution' been enacted. Thus, in the wake of 1688, when political commentators were keen to show that James II had broken his contract to the people through despotism, they used the image of the suffering nun to show some of the consequences that could follow from non-resistance to an allegedly tyrannical authority.

A wealth of popular ballads and pamphlets produced between 1688 and 1702 (when Queen Anne succeeded to the throne) served to reinforce the idea that nuns were the unwitting victims of their vows and the autocratic structures these vows represented. A ballad entitled 'The Lusty Fryar of Flanders (how a fryar got thirty nuns with child in three weeks)' for instance satirised nuns for being so obedient to their vows that they would rather commit a sexual sin than break them.²⁷⁴ In the ballad the friar - a 'propagating father' - seduces a 'pretty, young, and fair' nun describing her as 'designed for pleasure'. When the nun attempts to spurn his advances, stating 'have I not vowed to live a maid, and to renounce the devil', the friar rebukes her appeal with reference to the obedience necessitated by her vow:

The Sin, my Dear, is Denial
And to Indulge is easie (sic),
Sin on and I'll forgive you all,
My Love, if you'll but please me:
But since you fear to breed young bones,
I'll tell you for their Glory,
The Lady Abbess and the nuns,
Have done the like before you.²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Anon., *The Lusty Fryar of Flanders* (London, 1688).

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Thus, in Protestant minds, nuns acquiesced in sexual promiscuity because they were, in the words of another ballad entitled *A Good Sport for Protestants*, ‘in duty bound, my (the priests) commands to obey’.²⁷⁶

The problematic nature of unthinking obedience to political structures and inviolable oaths reoccurs in several works of fiction in the aftermath of 1688. It is, for instance, central to Aphra Behn’s *The History of the Nun* published in 1689.²⁷⁷ This work needs to be seen in the context of the popularisation of the contract theory of political governance prominent in the aftermath of the 1688 Bill of Rights and the oath to William and Mary. In the novel the main character, Isabella, takes a religious vow and dedicates herself to a convent as a nun at a time when she is too young and inexperienced to make such a commitment. She then struggles to conform to the convent’s strictures, elopes with her future husband, and steals from the convent itself. She later commits bigamy and murders two husbands. Behn’s argument here is that repression, or the harsh strictures of permanent vows and convent authority, inevitably leads to licence and makes libertines of those who try, and fail, to submit to such allegedly despotic designs. Behn uses her protagonist to advance the argument that one should always enter into a reasoned contract similar to the contract between William III and his people.²⁷⁸ Indeed, the narrator of *The History of the Nun* confides that she was once ‘design’d a humble votary in the House of Devotion’ but decided she did not have sufficient ‘obstinacy of mind’ to keep the vow. This serves as an autobiographical reference to Behn’s own interest in convents and her initial commitment to Jacobitism which she withdrew when James II failed (in Behn’s view through his own obstinacy) to make concessions to his people. Behn

²⁷⁶ Anon., *Good Sport for Protestants, in a Most Pleasant Dialogue, between an old Bawdy Priest and a Wanton Young Nun* (London, 1688); Anon., *The Lusty Fryar of Flanders: How in a Nunnery at the City of Gaunt this Fryer Got 30 nuns with Child in 3 Weeks Time and Afterwards Made his Escape* (London, 1689).

²⁷⁷ A. Behn, *The History of the Nun, or the Fair Vow-Breaker* (London, 1689).

²⁷⁸ J. Pearson, ‘The History of *The History of the Nun*’ in H. Hunter, ed., *Re-reading Aphra Behn: History, Theory and Criticism* (Charlottesville, Charlottesville Press, 1993), pp. 234-52. Of course, Behn also had a feminist message to bring across and her work emphasised restricted fields of women’s choice.

uses this to advance an argument for resistance theory and the notion that vow-breaking can be politically and socially acceptable. She thus dedicates the work to the 'fair vow-breaker' Hortense Mantini, the Duchess of Mazarin, who after trying to leave her husband had been forced into a convent run by her husband's aunt. In this work therefore the repressive nature of the convent is used to represent the repressive nature of James II's reign and to advance an argument for a contractual view of Kingship and social obligations.

Historians have tended to conclude that James II and the Jacobite cause had little response to this Williamite propaganda. Thus, Jonathan Israel stated that it was clear 'the Dutch won the propaganda war hands down'.²⁷⁹ However, recently historians have begun to revise this picture by reconsidering the work of Jacobite propagandists in responding to Williamite political theory. Tony Claydon, for instance, has argued against the notion that William III achieved a virtual hegemony of English political thought and has demonstrated instead the effective challenge mounted by Jacobite counter-propaganda.²⁸⁰ In fact, William III's propaganda campaign clearly necessitated a response for those who had remained loyal to James II. James II ordered printers to produce a denunciation of William III's conduct, issued a counter-declaration on sixth of November, and exploited his control over the *London Gazette* to print stories favourable to the Jacobite cause. Indeed, in the aftermath of William III's invasion the *London Gazette* devoted several columns to the printing of Royal statements by James II. Moreover, James II made use of the churches as a means of communication by printing special prayers to be used in the liturgy of every parish. Jacobite propagandists re-printed William III's *Declaration of Reasons* alongside their own commentary on the work arguing that the tract justified traitorous action contrary to both

²⁷⁹ J. Israel, *Anglo-Dutch moment: essays on the Glorious Revolution and its world impact* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 124.

²⁸⁰ T. Claydon, 'William III's Declaration of Reasons and the Glorious Revolution', *The Historical Journal*, vol. 39, No. 1. (March, 1996), pp. 87-108.

Divine and natural law. In addition, Jacobite propagandists claimed that Williamite actions would inevitably result in anarchy and civil war and that this situation would require increased state tyranny from the Williamite regime to control. Thus, as the author of the *Dutch Design Anatomized* noted Williams III and his army would ‘subvert our peace, and if it prevail, our Laws, and leave us none, but at the mercy of an arbitrary sword’.²⁸¹ Jacobite propagandists were therefore capable of responding to Williamite political theory.

However, if, as Claydon claims, historians have not recognised the full range of propaganda employed by James II, then it is not surprising that they have failed to note the centrality of women to it. Female centrality to Jacobite propaganda was in fact immediately apparent. The need to respond to the ‘Warming Pan’ myth-the idea initially supported by William III that James II’s son was not a true heir but had been smuggled into the bedchamber in a warming pan-meant that in the aftermath of 1688 women were called upon to provide evidence that they had witnessed the birth of the Prince of Wales. Many of the women brought forward to testify to the legitimacy of the Stuart birth had close connections to the English convents in exile. For instance, Lady Powis presented evidence to the committee noting that ‘this deponent doth aver this prince to be the same child that was born and she has never been from him but one day since’. Powis’s daughter, Lucy Herbert, was the abbess of the Benedictine convent and Lady Powis would often visit the English cloisters. The second lady to testify in favour of the Stuart heir was Lady Strickland who also gave evidence claiming that the child was the ‘true Catholick heir’. The Stricklands were also key donors to the English convents in exile. So too, Mrs Mary Crane - who was related to Elizabeth Crane, a nun at the English Carmelites cloister in Antwerp - testified that she had ‘seen all that needed to be seen’ and was convinced of the Stuart heir’s legitimacy. The close connections between

²⁸¹ Anon., *The Dutch Design Anatomised* (London, 1688).

those women arguing for the validity of the Stuart heir and the exiled cloisters prefigures the close relationship between convents and the Stuart court during the latter's period of exile.

Like Williamite propagandists, Jacobites engaged in a similar attempt to win over women to their cause and were able to utilise the exiled English cloisters to convince women to join their cause. Indeed, far from ignoring those women who joined their husbands/fathers in exile, the Jacobite cause offered incentives for women to join the court. For instance, Jacobites used the exiled convents as an example of successful English settlement in exile and hoped that the newly exiled Stuart court might follow their example. Mary of Modena also encouraged women to embrace a life of exile by offered financial redress for those women who were prepared to leave Britain and join the Stuart court at St Germain. In addition, Modena ensured that the daughters of exiles received an education at the exiled English convents in France and Flanders and frequently paid their dowry payments. In this way the exiled English cloisters became central to the life of the Stuart court in exile. They became part of what recent scholarship has termed a 'Catholic imagining of the Nation' in which Catholics contested the view of England put forward by Protestants and actively shaped the discourses of nationhood for themselves.²⁸² The next section considers the variety of ways this self-consciously English identity was fashioned, examines the role played by the exiled convents in supporting the Stuart court, and argues that in this way the cloisters became key to contesting the 'Protestant' view of England.

II: Contesting Nations: Exiled English Convents and the construction of an *English* Catholic national imaginary

²⁸² C. Highley, *Catholics Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008).

When madam you were at the altar lay'd
And your whole self to heav'n an offering made
Methought the wanton cupids all did run
Weeping away, crying undone, undone
Fitzjames, the fair Fitzjames is made a nun
Whilst holy angels did about you play
For you made then, in heaven a holy-day
And all the business, angells had to do
Was to rejoice that day and weight on you
It was a moving sight to see a dame
Who justly might all sorts of honour claim
Abandon all and make that humble change
Betwixt the meek blond, and high fontage
So pious and noble was the choice
That France ev'n glory's that it has Pontoise
And that alone, cause Madam you are there
Whose vertues brightens your illustrious sphere
If English Protestants your beauty's saw
They'd add new fury to their furious law
To keep out Popery with just excuse
Cause fair Fitzjames, has made herself recluse²⁸³

In Jane Barker's poem, written to celebrate the profession of Arabella Fitzjames at the English Benedictines convent in Pontoise in 1691, the themes of obedience, renunciation and charity are to the fore. Fitzjames had voluntarily submitted to convent discipline metaphorically laying her 'whole self' at the altar in a 'pious' and 'noble' bid to become a nun. She renounces 'all sorts of honour' to 'make that humble change' and her profession is

²⁸³ Jane Barker, 'Poems Presented to James III', BL Add. MS 21621. Fol. 24.

represented as a charitable act, an ‘offering’ carried out to make Angels rejoice and Protestants protest. As the daughter of James II by his mistress Arabella Churchill, Fitzjames’s profession was of particular significance. It enabled the convents to demonstrate their connection with and commitment to the Stuart court. The Pontoise Benedictine annals noted that Mary of Modena was in attendance and proudly recorded that Fitzjames was ‘daughter to our present sovereign, King James II’.²⁸⁴ The profession therefore stressed the continuation of the Stuart monarchy unbroken since 1603. Moreover, Barker’s emphasis on renunciation echoed Catholic political theorists, whose pamphlets stressed the sacrificial nature of James II’s exile in the context of his failure to defeat William III’s troops at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.²⁸⁵ By focusing on Fitzjames’s obedience to convent discipline Barker invites comparison with James II’s daughters Mary and Anne, who had defied their father and the doctrine of patriarchy to rule Britain following his deposition. In 1703 Barker presented her poem to James III to commemorate his reign thereby ensuring that the exiled convents became ideologically united with the Stuart court.

The profession of Fitzjames therefore helped to link the Pontoise Benedictines to the Stuart court, providing each with a shared identity. This sense of shared identity between the Stuart court and the English convents in the wake of 1688 combined ideological and practical factors to construct an ‘imagined community’ culturally and politically opposed to Williamite England. For Benedict Anderson the defining feature of national identity is a sense of ‘deep horizontal comradeship’, which enables each member to conceive in their mind ‘the image of their communion’.²⁸⁶ Yet, for the exiled convents this notion was reversed as they came to

²⁸⁴ ‘Registers of the Pontoise Benedictines’, p. 45.

²⁸⁵ T. Hunter, *Imagio Regis, or the Sacred Image of His Majesty, in all his Solitudes and Sufferings, written during his Residences in France* (London, 1692) pp. 21-29; T. Fitzherbert, *A Treatise of Policy and Religion* (1695), pp. 82-101. The Battle of the Boyne was fought between James II and William III’s armies on 1 July 1690 on the East Coast of Ireland. William III defeated James II leading to a period of Protestant ascendancy in Ireland.

²⁸⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 224.

emphasise the merits of a mutually beneficial ‘vertical’ relationship whereby patriarchy and Divine Right remained dominant motives. Within this reciprocal relationship the themes of charity, obedience and obedience came to dominate political discourse and public action as the exiled convents and the Stuart court utilised a variety of methods to bind a community which lacked territorial and institutional boundaries.

As the oldest British presence in France and Flanders the exiled convents were a significant point of anchor for the new wave of Jacobite exiles. The Parisian convents were situated in the nearby university quarter, which had taken on an English character by the late seventeenth century. The English Benedictine nuns, for instance, were situated in the Rue du Champ de L’Alouette whilst the English Augustinians were based in the Rue des Fossés Saint Victor. Those Catholic exiles who found themselves ‘abandoned by all’ in the Low Countries were able to seek aid from the English Benedictine convents at Dunkirk and Ghent. The number of English subjects departing for France was significant, with those newly resident at St. Germain estimated at two hundred and twenty families by 1690.²⁸⁷ The hardships faced by this new community of exiles were severe: they had abandoned their estates, were separated from family members, often lacked an adequate knowledge of French and were frequently in need of temporary accommodation.²⁸⁸ The convents were in a strong position to aid the new exiles and represented the help they were able to give as an act of virtuous charity. They were on hand to provide temporary accommodation and provisions for exiled families. In 1689 the family of Sir Richard Bulstrode, James II’s envoy in Brussels, found themselves totally dependent on the charity of the English Augustinians convent.²⁸⁹ It is not

²⁸⁷ ‘List of Englishmen with King James’, CSPD, *William and Mary*, 1690, p. 375.

²⁸⁸ The hardship suffered by the exiles is well documented in Catholic correspondence and diaries. See, for example, Daniel Arthur to Daniel Arthur (his son), 1 August 1690, Browne Ms, fol. 41, Archives of the Archdiocese of Westminster and Richard Fermor to Henry Browne, 16 December 1691, BL, Add. MS 37622, pp. 31-2.

²⁸⁹ R. Bulstrode to Henry Browne, 13 August 1690, BL Add. MS 37622, p. 34.

therefore surprising that Abbess Mary Caryll represented her convent as a ‘family’ a secure network that could aid the exiles in their difficult circumstances. She expressed her hope ‘that our family may propagate religion, and be serviceable to her King and countrymen, as her ancestors have been ‘.²⁹⁰

The familial nature of the relationship between the English convents and the Jacobite exiles was enhanced by close kinship ties between the cloisters and the Stuart court. Thus, Abbess Lucy Herbert’s father, William Herbert, Lord Powis, was appointed Lord Chamberlain at the Stuart court and granted the garter in 1692.²⁹¹ Her mother, Lady Elizabeth Somerset, who had also left England after the ‘Glorious Revolution’, acted as governess to the young James Francis Edward. John Caryll accompanied the Stuart court into exile and would continue his close correspondence with his sister whilst acting as Master of Requests to Mary of Modena. Catherine Strickland, a nun at the Dunkirk Benedictines convent, was the daughter of Robert Strickland of Yorkshire, the controller of the King’s household and pensions at St. Germain. Elizabeth Dicconson, a nun at the Poor Clares of Aire, was connected to the Stuart court through her brother William Dicconson who acted as controller of the royal household and after 1700 treasurer at St Germain. Thus, many of the new exiles had relatives at the exiled English convents thereby strengthening the links between the nuns and the court at St Germain.

This close contact and sense of collaboration enabled the convents to provide a charitable service to the exiled court by caring for disabled or elderly family members. In the aftermath of 1688 the English convents recruited increasing numbers of ‘White sisters’ from the Stuart court. These were disabled or ill nuns who were deemed incapable of performing the tasks usually assigned to choir or lay nuns. In theory it was against convent rules to admit many of

²⁹⁰ Mary Caryll to John Caryll, November 1706, BL Add MS 28,266, fol. 107.

²⁹¹ He had been an advisor to James II in England before 1689.

these women and profession regulations set high standards of educational attainment and physical fitness for entry.²⁹² However, many families at the Stuart court found themselves caring for elderly relatives or disabled daughters who had been unable to remain in England after 1689. By becoming nuns such women could be taken care of at relatively little expense. Thus, in 1696 Anne Tunstall, the daughter of Francis Tunstall, a Jacobite member of a leading Yorkshire gentry family who had followed James II into exile, was professed at the Augustinians convent in Louvain despite being ‘not sound of mind’.²⁹³ In 1695 the Paris Augustinians took in the severely infirm Mrs Buity, the mother of one of James II’s servants.²⁹⁴ In 1688 the Louvain Augustinians accepted Elizabeth and Catherine Radcliffe, daughters of the Jacobite first Earl of Derwentwater, a leading Jacobite conspirator who became involved in the aborted Jacobite invasion of 1708, despite their being ‘weake in physical capacity’.²⁹⁵ The sisters had to receive dispensations from regular attendance at divine office but they provided the convent with a significant connection to the Royal cause through their sister-in-law Mary Tudor, the daughter of Charles II.²⁹⁶ The English convents emphasised the patriotic duty of this undertaking and the redemptive nature of their care. Mary Clifford, the abbess of the Louvain Augustinians, wrote of the Radcliffe daughters ‘inheriting the earth’ on their death whilst Mary Caryll considered it her convent’s duty to ‘heale those God preserves’.²⁹⁷

In this respect the convents echoed Jacobite propaganda with its emphasis on charity. By highlighting James II’s paternalism and interest in serving the needs of his people Jacobites

²⁹² Book of Monastic Ceremonies’, Hazelmere MS2020, Downside Abbey, Bath; MS Aire Register, p. 68, St Clare’s Abbey Darlington.

²⁹³ *The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses Regular of the Lateran, at St. Monica’s in Louvain*, ed. A. Hamilton, (London, 1904), p. 38.

²⁹⁴ ‘Augustinian Registers’, p. 42.

²⁹⁵ *The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses*, pp. 42-43.

²⁹⁶ Ibid. 42.

²⁹⁷ Mary Clifford to R. Tempest, 17 July 1713, RCBU4/1-14; M. Caryll to J. Caryll, 7 August 1691, BL Add MS 28255 fol. 31.

reversed Williamite claims that James II reign had been absolutist and detrimental to his subjects.²⁹⁸ The first Jacobite pamphlet to appear after the Revolution urged the formation of a 'Healing Convention' to help restore James II and claimed James II was 'ye comfort and profit of the nation'.²⁹⁹ This stress on James II's charitable approach to his subjects was principally shown through the revival of Royal Touch by the Stuart court during its period in exile. This was the practice of curing for the 'Kings Evil' or scrofula, a swelling of the lymph nodes in the neck caused by Tuberculosis, and involved the laying of the King's hands on subjects thought to be suffering from it, thereby serving as a way of declaring a monarch's right to rule to be God-given.³⁰⁰ The practice had increased at the Restoration as a way of connecting Charles II to his subjects and preventing a second Civil War but was not observed by William III since he was unable to claim hereditary succession.³⁰¹ By continuing the ritual of Royal Touch in exile Jacobites emphasised the continuance of Divine Right monarchy and James II's status as the true king of England.

The Royal Touch helped to connect the exiled convents to James II whilst stressing the importance of charity as a natural outcome of Stuart paternalism. James II regularly visited the exiled cloisters to perform the Royal Touch on nuns and members of the exiled community who joined in convent services. This was particularly important after James II's death in 1701 when Jacobites sought to transfer support to James's son Francis Edward thereby confirming his status as James III. Convent annals noted James III's frequent visits to

²⁹⁸ A Person of Honour, *A Free Discourse Wherein the Doctrines which make for Tyranny are Display'd* (London, 1697).

²⁹⁹ *An Humble Remonstrance to the Laws and Commons in the Present Convention Assembled*, (1689), pp. 3-7.

³⁰⁰ M. Bloch, *The Royal Touch: sacred monarchy and scrofula in England and France* (London, Routledge, 1973); F. Barlow, 'The King's Evil', *The English Historical Review*, (Jan. 1950), pp. 3-17.

³⁰¹ The Reformation affected attitudes to the Royal touch. James I was initially sceptical of the benefits of such a practice but was persuaded by popular appeal to continue it. The Royal Touch was occasionally performed by Charles I but could not be performed during the Protectorate. Charles II was especially keen to Touch to emphasise his Divine Right status and thereby prevent a similar fate to his father. Queen Anne, who unlike William III could claim direct hereditary descent, began touching for the King's Evil again on her accession. The practice ended in England at the Hanoverian accession in 1714.

the convent and recorded him curing the nuns and members of the public.³⁰² Thus, the annals of the Paris Augustinians noted that ‘king James III entered our enclosure with his attendants and a crowd of other people rich and poor, who got in with him. Three of those the king touched were of our religious’.³⁰³ In 1704 Sister Elizabeth Theresa Pulcheria, daughter of the third baronet Sir Robert Throckmorton, was touched by James III and allegedly cured of scrofula.³⁰⁴

This emphasis on the Stuarts’ ability to cure was contrasted in Jacobite discourse with the allegedly uncharitable and ‘diseased’ nature of William III’s England. When William III’s wife Queen Mary died of smallpox in 1694 the convents attributed it to her having ‘sinned against the law of nature in not honouring her parents’.³⁰⁵ Moreover, Jacobite propaganda made much of the fact that England’s war with France was being conducted in the interests of Dutch commerce and highlighted the corrupt nature of William III’s financial management. Catholic exiles were keen to stress the de-habilitating effects of William III’s penal legislation against those Catholics who had remained in England. An Act in 1699 for further preventing the Growth of Popery prevented any Catholic over the age of eighteen who had not taken the oaths of supremacy and allegiance from inheriting or purchasing land and offered one hundred pounds to informers for the apprehension of any priest.³⁰⁶ Nicholas Blundell, a Lancastrian landowner, whose daughters were nuns at the English Poor Clares, decried the harsh financial penalties imposed on Catholics after 1688 noting that they were ‘painfull to our purrs’.³⁰⁷

³⁰² ‘The Chronicle of the English Poor Clares at Rouen’, p. 67.

³⁰³ ‘Augustinian Registers’, p. 50.

³⁰⁴ E. Pulcheria to R. Throckmorton, 4 June, 1704, CR 1998, fol. 72, Throckmorton Ms, Warwickshire CRO, Warwick.

³⁰⁵ *The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses*, p. 45.

³⁰⁶ ‘An Act for Further Preventing the Growth of Popery, 1699’, in J. Raithby (ed.), *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. VII, chp. IV, pp. 586-587.

³⁰⁷ N. Blundell, *The Great Diurnall of Nicholas Blundell of Little Crosby, Lancashire*, ed. J. J. Bagley, II, (Chester, 1972), p. 107.

In view of this, exiled Catholics played up their willingness to act as generous patrons to the exiled cloisters and their sense of financial propriety. Lady Kingsland, who had followed her husband Nicholas Barnewall, the third Viscount of Kingsland, to France after he refused to take the oath of allegiance to William III, donated five hundred livres to the Blue Nuns shortly after her arrival in 1691.³⁰⁸ Lady Jersey, the Catholic and Jacobite wife of Edward Villiers, the first earl of Jersey, donated eight hundred livres in 1714.³⁰⁹ Although the existence of convents on the continent enabled members of the Stuart court to have their daughters educated and cared for at relatively little expense many exiles gave generously to the cloisters and provided ample dowries, which went well beyond the amount required. John Martinash, a yeoman of the larder at the Stuart court, gave each of his three daughters a four thousand eight hundred livres dowry and settled two hundred and forty livres per annum with a capital of one thousand eight hundred and forty livres on the Paris Augustinians convent where they were all nuns.³¹⁰ John Ingleton, a servant at St Germain, gave his niece Teresa Carter one hundred livres tournois at her profession at the Paris Augustinians in 1692 ‘with the consent of her superior and as far as the holy vows of poverty and obedience will allow’. When the Earl of Derwentwater, father to the disabled Radcliffe daughters, died in 1696 the Louvain Augustinians were given a generous legacy of four thousand guilders on behalf of the daughters.³¹¹

The exiled convents also benefited financially from the advice of Jacobite patrons who were keen to stress their financial propriety. Wealthy patrons, like Daniel Arthur, an exiled banker working in the service of the Stuart court, and John Caryll, ensured that the convents were placed on a more secure financial footing. Despite being an outlaw from England as a result

³⁰⁸ *The Diary of the ‘Blue Nuns’ or Order of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, at Paris, 1658-1810*, ed. J. Gillow (London, CRS 8, 1910), P. 61.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.* P.74.

³¹⁰ Archives Nationales Paris, minutier central, ET lxvi L62, 22 April 1706.

³¹¹ Priory of St. Monica’s, MSQ2 Fol. 85.

of his arrest for involvement in the Popish Plot, Daniel Arthur, who received a knighthood from James II in 1690, was still able to act as a conduit for the circulation of funds between Britain and the exiled community in France. He had operations in London and Paris and served the financial interests of all the leading Catholic families attached to the Stuart court. His daughter, Margaret Arthur, was a nun at the Pontoise Benedictines and prior to her profession in 1698 he invested the convent funds in the hôtel de ville at Paris, a secure investment.³¹² In addition, the exiled cloisters benefited from the economic wisdom of John Caryll who helped the Poor Clares of Dunkirk to invest their assets wisely placing 5000 livres in the hotel de ville on their behalf in 1699.³¹³

The exiled convents highlighted the benefits accrued to them through obedience and duty to their patrons and the reciprocal advantages arising from it. In 1699 John Caryll interceded when it was proposed that the Dunkirk convent should merge with the Ypres Benedictines in order to help the ailing fortunes of the latter convent. On learning that the Dunkirk nuns were opposed to the merger John Caryll successfully persuaded Mary of Modena to intervene in favour of the convents remaining separate.³¹⁴ In response, Maura Knightly, a nun at Dunkirk, wrote to Caryll stating that ‘after innumerable effects of your kindness and favour this is esteemed the greatest’.³¹⁵ Mary Caryll also expressed gratitude asking ‘what would become of us if we had not so beneficial a friend as you at court’.³¹⁶ To repay Caryll for his patronage the Dunkirk Benedictines sent ‘tobacco and foodstuff’ to him and following an illness in 1699 Mary Caryll sent him herbal remedies and remarked that she believed he owed his life to her spiritual intervention.³¹⁷

³¹² Margaret Arthur was clothed on 6 November 1698 and professed on 9 May 1700 at the age of 18.

³¹³ J. Caryll to M. Caryll, 15 February 1699, BL Add MS 28, 266, fol. 17.

³¹⁴ J. Caryll to M. Caryll, 2 December 1699, BL Add MS 28, 266, fol. 116.

³¹⁵ M. Knightly to J. Caryll, 17 February, 1699, BL Add MS 28, 266, fol. 119.

³¹⁶ M. Caryll to J. Caryll, 25 January 1700, BL Add Ms 28, 266, fol. 120.

³¹⁷ M. Bright to J. Caryll, 24 May 1699, BL Add Ms 28, 266, fol. 115; M. Caryll to J. Caryll, 15 February 1699, BL Add 28, 266, fol. 117.

The image of nuns' devotion to their patrons and confessors could be used by the exiled Catholic community to stress the importance of obedience and patriarchy. Catholics had a duty to obey James II in the same way that nuns were obliged to honour their duty to their patrons. In 1695 John Caryll wrote to Mary Caryll arguing that the 'duty we owe our prince is indispensable; so that what they command (in things not unlawful) we must take to be the will of God'.³¹⁸ The exiled convents were often recipients of Stuart paternalism. Thus, Mary of Modena remained an important patron to the exiled cloisters often intervening on their behalf. When the Bishop of Ghent made objections to the profession of Margaret Arthur to the Ghent Benedictines the intervention of the Queen ensured that she was professed.³¹⁹ In return the nuns expressed their obedience to her by dedicating prayers and TeDeums to the Queen.³²⁰

It is not therefore surprising that the image of devout and obedient nuns sacrificing marriage and worldly possessions to embrace a life 'dead to the world' became an important symbol for Jacobite exiles. Jacobites presented their years at St Germain within a providentialist narrative of trial and redemption, which dwelt on the notion of 'spiritual exile'.³²¹ Within this redemptive narrative nuns became a prominent symbol. In 1691 Edward Scarisbricke, a Jesuit and committed Jacobite, dedicated a life of Lady Warner, a nun from the Gravelines Poor Clares, to Mary of Modena.³²² Lady Warner, of Parnham Suffolk, was the daughter of a Protestant family. Following her marriage she converted to Catholicism and alongside her daughters, Catherine and Elizabeth, became a nun.³²³ Scarisbricke likened the trial of Warner

³¹⁸ J. Caryll to M. Caryll, 1 March 1698, BL Add MS 28 226 fol. 6.

³¹⁹ M. Caryll to J. Caryll, 8 November 1706, BL Add MS 28 266, fol. 124.

³²⁰ *The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses*, p. 27; *The Diary of the 'Blue Nuns'*, p. 16.

³²¹ T. Hunter, *Imagio Regis*, p. 42.

³²² E. Scarisbricke, *The Life of Lady Warner of Parham in Suffolk, in religion call'd Sister Clare of Jesus* (London, 1691).

³²³ Lady Warner is listed in the convent annals by her maiden name of Trevor Hanmer. In 1664 she entered the English Sepulchrines at Liege but left in 1666 to join the Poor Clares at Gravelines. She was professed at Gravelines on 1 November 1667 and died there in 1670 at the age of 34. Her daughters, Catherine and Susan Warner, were professed at the Benedictines of Dunkirk in 1660 and remained alive when the biography was

in her attempt to become a nun to the trial endured by the Stuarts in exile. He believed Warner had gained her reward in heaven for sacrificing her marriage and Protestant faith for her vocation and he expressed the hope that James II too would be rewarded for sacrificing monarchy in the interests of the Catholic faith.³²⁴ Warner had spared her daughters from the sin of remaining Protestants, freeing them from a life of heresy and worldly torment. In the same way James II had spared the Prince of Wales by smuggling him out of England and bringing him up as a Catholic at the Stuart court. For Scarisbricke this echoed the escape of the baby Jesus from Egypt when Joseph had been told to ‘rise and take the child and its mother to your country, for they are dead who sought to claim the child’.³²⁵

The English convents were therefore often represented as safe havens, which inspired exiles at the Stuart court to renounce worldly cares and embrace a religious life. They became a focal point for worship and community identity among exiles, even including some non-Catholics such as High Anglican non-jurors, who refused to swear the oath of allegiance to William III. For instance, in 1694 the Earl of Perth attended compline in the Bruges English Augustinians chapel and was ‘afterwards entertained at the grate with fruits and sweetmeats’ by Lucy Herbert and Catherine Anne Howard, the daughter of the Duke of Norfolk.³²⁶ When he visited the English Franciscan cloisters he was treated to ‘an entertainment of musick, a hymn and a motette (although it was not a day of prayer) with the organ, violes and violines’.³²⁷ In 1695 he partly attributed his conversion to the sense of devotion the nuns had inspired in him.³²⁸ Elizabeth Martinash, a nurse to James II’s daughter Louisa Maria Teresa

written. Her sister-in-law Elizabeth Warner, Mary Clare in religion, joined the Liege Sepulchrines at the same time and left with her to profess at Gravelines on the same day. She died at the Gravelines convent in 1681.

³²⁴ E. Scarisbricke, *The Life of Lady Warner*, p. 34.

³²⁵ Ibid. p. 39.

³²⁶ *Letters from James Earl of Perth to his sister the Countess of Errol*, ed. W. Jordan (London Camden Society, 23, 1845), p. 43.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid. p. 49.

Stuart, brought her daughters on regular visits to the English Augustinians convent in Paris where they were encouraged to embrace a religious life.³²⁹ Her daughter, Barbara Martinash, was brought to the convent as a pensioner in 1699 and had returned to the court in 1700 to take leave of Princess Louisa and Mary of Modena before her profession in 1701. Her sister Mary was professed five years earlier receiving her veil from Mary Stafford, Princess Louisa's governess, whose husband John Howard-Stafford was commissioner of James II's household. Mary Stafford's own daughters, Louisa and Beatrix, were born at the Stuart court and received their education at the English Conceptionists convent in Paris. In such settings they were inculcated into an imagined community in exile, the vision of which was sustained by the convents themselves.

This imagined community of an alternative England had already been constructed by the convents in exile before the arrival of the émigré Stuart court. They provided a ready-made community around which that court could coalesce and a sense of identity that was appropriated by the Jacobites to express their own values and their differences from the Protestant England they had left behind. They also provided the private correspondence networks through which that identity was articulated. Indeed, the arrival of the court changed the dynamics of that identity; instead of being essentially oppositional it now had a central focus in allegiance to a king who ruled by divine right. The imagined community fostered by the convents was after 1688 thus one defined not just by Catholicism but also by the political cause of Jacobitism. This politicisation of that imagined community would, in the coming years, create circumstances in which those whose identities were thus formed would prove, as Anderson says, 'willingly to die for such limited imaginings' as Catholics joined, with the support of the English convents, in the rebellions of 1715 and 1745.³³⁰

³²⁹*The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses*, p. 74.

³³⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities* p.224.

III: Engaging Nuns: Exiled English Convents and the demise of the Jacobite cause

In 1716 Winfrid Maxwell, the countess of Nithsdale, arrived at the English Augustinian convent in Bruges and took refuge with her sister, Abbess Lucy Herbert. Winfrid Maxwell was fleeing the British authorities having engineered the escape of her husband, William Maxwell, the fifth Earl of Nithsdale, from the Tower of London where he had been imprisoned for complicity in the failed Jacobite rebellion of 1715. William Maxwell was part of the group of conspirators known as the 'Five Jacobite Lords' and he was due to be executed for treason on the twenty fourth of February 1716. However, William Maxwell's fate took an unusual turn when his wife Winfrid concocted an ingenious plan to save his life by rescuing him from the Tower. Winfrid's account of this daring rescue reads like a Jacobite version of *A Tale of Two Cities*. She recalls riding to London in hazardous conditions and, on arrival at the Tower, establishing friendly relations with her husband's gaolers by giving them drink money.³³¹ She then worked at ensuring the gaolers would be less vigilant by acquiring an upbeat disposition and leading them to believe that her husband would soon be released from the Tower.³³² Having convinced the gaolers of this she then enlisted the support of her maid, Mrs Evans, her maid's friend, Mrs Morgan, and her landlady, Mrs Mills. She realised that if these women were to come and go very quickly and very frequently from the Tower the gaolers would soon become confused. Thus, Winifrid brought Mrs Evans into her husband's cell, then asked for Mrs Mills, then pretended her maid had not arrived and sent out Mrs Evans again in a rush. In her account she related how:

³³¹ Winfred Maxwell, *A Genuine Account of the Escape of Lord Nithsdale, printed from the original letter, written by the Countess of Nithsdale for her sister, Lady Lucy Herbert, Abbess of the Augustine Nuns of Bruges* (Durham, 1816), p. 8.

³³² Ibid. p. 9.

I took Mrs Mills who came in with her handkerchief before her eyes. I made her do it, that he might go out in the same manner; and her eyebrows being a little upon the yellow, and his very thick and black, I had provided a paint of that colour to dye his, and to hide a very long beard that had not time to be shaved, white paint to cover it with, and the rest of his face, and red for the cheeks.³³³

Eventually, Winfrid dressed her husband in women's clothes and smuggled him out of the cell and past the gaolers disguised as the grieving Mrs Mills. She then escaped into France and joined her sister at the English Augustinian convent.

Winfrid Maxwell's story has gone down in history as one of the most memorable escapades of the Jacobite campaign. However, the role of the English Augustinian convent in offering sanctuary and support has been less well documented. In fact, we know so much about Winfrid's escapades because her sister, Lucy Hebert, insisted that she write an account of them.³³⁴ Lucy Herbert argued that by writing such an account her sister could influence future generations of women and persuade them to embrace the Jacobite cause. Indeed, she insisted that she would use Winfrid's account as an instructive, exemplary, text that could be read aloud to her community of nuns in the hope of demonstrating to them the validity of the Jacobite cause.³³⁵ Moreover, Lucy Herbert was in regular touch with her sister throughout the latter's ordeal and, on learning of the daring escapade, immediately offered her convent as a sanctuary where Winfrid could be housed in safety.³³⁶ Thereafter, Winfrid Herbert joined with her sister Lucy in telling the nuns about the importance of Jacobitism and entreating their prayers for the success of Jacobite ventures.

³³³ Ibid. p. 10.

³³⁴ Ibid. p. 1.

³³⁵ Lady Lucy Hebert to Winfred Maxell, 7 July 1716, AAW 14/5/17, Archives of the Archdiocese of Westminster.

³³⁶ Lady Lucy to Winfred Herbert, Various Correspondence, Box 7, fols. 11-18, English Augustinian convent, Bruges.

The period of Jacobite activism from the Jacobite insurrection of 1715 to the 1745 rebellion therefore marked a high point of convent engagement with the Jacobite cause. In contrast to earlier rebellions, 1715 was a pivotal moment for Jacobitism because it seemed likely they would win more support for their cause in Britain. Queen Anne's reign from 1701 to 1714 had reassured Tories and High Anglicans because, being the daughter of James II, she was regarded as having a legitimate claim to the throne. Anne had also preserved many of the traditions associated with the Stuart monarchy such as touching for scrofula which enabled her to claim a degree of continuity with her father's reign. In addition, she was a staunch Anglican which helped ensure potential Jacobites from the High Anglican Tory cause remained loyal to her. However, when Queen Anne died childless in 1714 the throne passed to her second cousin, George I, of the House of Hanover, a descendant of the Stuarts through his maternal grandmother, Elizabeth, a daughter of James I. Unlike Queen Anne, George I was unpopular in Britain. Indeed, his coronation in October prompted rioting in more than twenty towns in Britain. With the Whigs winning an over-whelming majority in 1714 and George I remaining distrustful of the Tories many people moved towards a latent support for Jacobitism. Moreover, the Whigs passed the Septennial Act in 1715, thereby extending the duration of parliament for seven years and with it their own dominance, a move which led disgruntled Tories to offer support to the Jacobite cause. The mood of militant Jacobitism after 1715 therefore was partly a result of changing political circumstances in Britain.

This more militant mood was reflected in the support given by the exiled cloisters to the Stuart cause during and in the immediate aftermath of the 1715 rebellion. King James II had died in 1701 but his legacy lived on at the exiled English convents as they devoted themselves to the preservation of his memory. In 1701 the Paris Augustinians received money from Mary of Modena to pray for her deceased husband and they performed a mass

for the late James II each month after that.³³⁷ Their prioress, Ann Tyldesley, obtained a ‘small peece of our deceased Holy King’s right arm’ which she took pains to personally embalm before placing it in a lead casket for exposition in the convent church.³³⁸ The nuns recited the *De Profundis* each day for James II’s soul and held regular services in their church for him.³³⁹ From 1701 to 1718 the church of their convent was adorned in black with a large picture of the James II placed over the altar.³⁴⁰ Other cloisters followed suit with the English Benedictines of Ypres offering weekly prayers and devotions to the memory of James II. The Ypres Abbess, Margaret Xavier, as late as 1737 was continuing to extol the virtues of the late James II. She explained that his memory continued to engage the community’s ‘hearts and sincere affections in the most strict and peculiar manner’.³⁴¹ The death of King James II therefore did not prevent the exiled cloisters from identifying with the Stuart cause and instead the cloisters transferred their loyalty to the King’s son, James III (James Francis Edward).

The exiled cloisters’ support for the Stuart cause therefore became, after 1701, centred on the figure of James III. The links between the exiled convents and the Stuart court were partially severed in 1712 when James III moved the court from St Germain to the Papal states. This meant that the exiled cloisters were no longer at the heart of the Jacobite community since that community largely followed James III to Italy. However, it is illustrative of the important role played by Jacobitism in the devotional life of the exiled English convents that they continued to correspond closely with James III. For example, the English Augustinians at Paris celebrated James III’s birthday annually with a range of religious festivities. On the eve

³³⁷HMC 15TH Report, Stuart MS, Vol. 1, p. 46.

³³⁸ ‘Diurnall of the English Canonesses’, Vol. 1, fol., 72. Archives of the Archdiocese of Westminster.

³³⁹ Ibid. fol. 73.

³⁴⁰ Ibid. fol. 74.

³⁴¹ Margaret Xavier Arthur to James Edgar, 13 March 1737, (RA) 194-153 (M), Stuart Papers, Royal Archives, Windsor.

of the 1715 rising they instituted a Forty Hours Devotion for the success of the Jacobite troops in their campaign and when it failed they were quick to offer masses in support of the dead.³⁴² Moreover, in 1724 the Abbess of the English Benedictines at Ghent, Abbess Mary Knachtbull, wrote to James III to assure him that ‘the hearts and tongues of all this family are always active in importuning Heaven to preserve, increase, and prosper yours’.³⁴³ She informed him that the convent would make a tribute of ‘masses, communions, beads, acts of penance, and many dayly publick and private devotions’ in his honour.³⁴⁴ The exiled English convents thus ensured they remained central to the Jacobite cause even after the removal of the Stuart court from St Germaine.

After the failure of the 1715 rebellion the spiritual support given by the exiled cloisters to the Stuart court began to translate into active espionage for the Jacobite cause. One nun in particular was central to this more militant activity. This was Mary Rose Howard, the abbess of the English Benedictine convent at Pontoise. The Howards were a powerful Catholic family with a history of martyrdom. Mary Rose Howard’s father, Colonel Bernard Howard, held the position of Master of the House under James II before being imprisoned in the Tower for complicity in the failed 1696 attempt to assassinate William III. In 1716 Mary Rose Howard began to be involved with espionage activities for the Stuart court and became central to the transmission of post between Jacobites on the continent and those in Britain. The correspondence network in this case functioned in a similar way to Mary Knatchbull’s famous network during the period of the English Civil Wars. Mary Rose Howard worked closely with James III and his ministers to ensure that secret correspondence detailing Jacobite insurrection plans made it to Britain without being discovered. She often used the

³⁴² ‘Diurnall of the English Canonesses’, Vol. 1, Fols., 145-6.

³⁴³ This Mary Knachtbull was the niece of the famous Abbess Mary Knachtbull who had helped the future Charles II during his time in exile in the 1650s. Abbess Mary Knachtbull to James Francis Edward, 4 March 1724, RA 72/150 (M), Stuart Papers.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

pseudonym 'Mrs Brown' in her correspondence and was advised to write directly to a man called Philip Brown to maintain the pretence that she was his wife. In 1728 James III wrote to Mary Rose Howard advising that the mail should 'pass thro' your hands' and be sent 'under a cover to you'.³⁴⁵ He recommended 'your usual secrecy and prudence in the management of this correspondence'.³⁴⁶ Mary Rose Howard seems to have been largely successful in her efforts to aid the Jacobite cause by smuggling Jacobite correspondence to Britain. Indeed, she remained in close contact with James III and offered support to Charles Edward Stuart in 1745. Thus, nuns could place themselves directly at the disposal of the Stuart court after 1715.

Nevertheless, even before the failure of the Jacobite army in the insurrection of 1745, the support given by the exiled convents to the Stuart court was beginning to wane. In part this resulted from the death of Mary of Modena in 1718. Her funeral resulted in the English nuns of Syon abbey expressing 'profound respect, affection, and esteem for her royal and august person, never to be forgotten by the daughters of Syon'.³⁴⁷ In return Mary of Modena left each of the exiled cloisters three hundred livres and asked them to pray for her soul.³⁴⁸

However, Modena's death meant that, with James III now in Italy, the main link between the exiled convents in France and Flanders and the Stuart court in exile was severed. Moreover, Modena had been an important patron to the cloisters and had helped them financially with frequent donations. In addition, she had paid the dowries for many of the new recruits to the cloisters coming from the Stuart court. Her death left the convents financially vulnerable and without the decisive support of leading member of the Stuart court. Visits from members of the Stuart court also became less frequent and although the exiled convents asked for pictures

³⁴⁵ James Francis Edward to Mary Rose Howard, 11 September 1728, RA 120/46 (M), Stuart Papers.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ 'Diurnall of the English Canoneeses', Fols. 252, 254.

³⁴⁸ Ibid. Fol. 254.

of the young Charles Edward Stuart after his birth in 1720 and sent gifts in return correspondence dwindled by 1730.³⁴⁹

The failure of the Jacobites to launch a successful invasion of Britain in 1745 meant that conventual support for the Stuart court declined by 1750. With James III's failure to mount successful insurrections in 1719 and 1722 attention passed to his son, Charles Edward Stuart, the young pretender. James III had managed to win back French support by 1744 and Charles Edward built on this to convince the French to support a rising in 1745. However, although Charles Edward Stuart has gone down in history as a romantic figure he was far less popular with Catholics and with the English convents in particular. Charles Edward Stuart, as his later conversion to Anglicanism indicated, was much less devout, rarely visited the cloisters, and was known to have many mistresses. Thus, although most of the exiled cloisters undertook the Forty Hours Devotion for the success of the 1745 rebellion, at its failure mentions of Charles Edward Stuart disappear from the annals. By 1750 therefore the English convents were no longer intricately connected with the Stuart court and they would begin to develop a new identity, more closely tied to Protestant Britain, in the coming years. The next chapter considers these changes and the more public-orientated nature of the English convents after 1750.

³⁴⁹ Mary Rose Howard to James Edgar, 23 January 1737, 167/172 (M), Stuart Papers.

Chapter 4

Encountering Nuns

Exiled English Convent and British Travellers, 1750-1789

‘A Nun’s dress is a very becoming one’ wrote Cornelius Cayley in 1772.³⁵⁰ Similarly, Philip Thicknesse, witnessing the clothing ceremony at the English Augustinian convent in Paris, observed that the nun’s dress was ‘quite white, and no ways unbecoming...(it) did not render her in my eyes, a whit less proper for the affections of the world’.³⁵¹ This tendency to objectify nuns, by focusing on the mysterious and sexualised aspects of conventual life, was a key feature of eighteenth-century culture.³⁵² Novels, poems and polemic dwelt on the theme of the forced vocation, culminating in the dramatic portrayals of immured nuns in the gothic novels of the 1790s.³⁵³ The convent was portrayed as inherently despotic, its unnatural hierarchy and silent culture directly opposed the sociability which, in enlightenment-thought, defined a civilised society. This despotic climate was one aspect of a supposed culture of tyranny and constraint, that rendered nuns either innocent and victimised or complicit and immoral. Historians have noted that these stereotypes were remarkably similar to those applied to the Orient and have thus extended the cultural theorist Edward Said’s notion of ‘otherness’ to apply, not merely to Oriental cultures, but to those aspects of European culture deemed exotic.³⁵⁴ In so doing, they have challenged the notion that travel-writing was an exact record of social experience and initiated a more nuanced understanding of textual convention and authorial experience. For historians of eighteenth-century Britain this has led

³⁵⁰ Cornelius Cayley, *A Tour Through Holland, Flanders and Part of France in the year 1772* (Leeds, 1773), p. 56.

³⁵¹ Philip Thicknesse, *Useful Hints to Those who make the tour of France in a Series of Letters Written from that Kingdom* (London, 1768), p. 48.

³⁵² See, for instance, Anon., *The Cloisters Laid Open* (London, 1770).

³⁵³ For example: Matthew Lewis, *The Monk* (London, 1790); Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (London, 1794).

³⁵⁴ Edward W. Said argued that Western depictions of Eastern culture were framed around a discourse of Western supremacy which frequently patronised and misrepresented the East. See E. W. Said, *Orientalism* (London, Barnes and Noble, 1978). Chloe Chard, *Pleasure and Guilt on the Grand Tour* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1998).

to an examination of the construction of anti-Catholicism within travel literature and its use as an ideology around which the Protestant nation could unite.³⁵⁵ Thus, Jeremy Black has noted that anti-Catholicism remained the ‘prime ideological stance in Britain’ and has claimed that encounters with Catholicism by British travellers in France ‘excited fear or unease....and, at times, humour or ridicule’.³⁵⁶ Likewise, Bryan Dolan and Christopher Hibbert have seen encounters with continental convents culminating in negative descriptions of rituals, relics and enclosed space.³⁵⁷

However, there are problems with this interpretation, especially with regard to the exiled English convents in the late eighteenth century. Firstly, convents are portrayed as peripheral and passive: there is little sense of interaction with British travellers and no consideration of a shared culture. Secondly, there is limited analysis of the ‘public sphere’: notions of audience and issues affecting textual production are not discussed. Thirdly, both Protestantism and anti-Catholicism are defined monolithically: all travellers are identified as uniformly Protestant while anti-monasticism is seen as merely another strand of anti-Catholicism. A more recent approach has employed the term ‘transculturation’ to refer to the process whereby travel-writing results, not in the imposition of one culture over another, but in a process of cultural exchange.³⁵⁸ As previous chapters of this thesis have demonstrated, during the period 1680 to 1750 encounters with nuns were largely negative. Linda Colley has argued that these negative stereotypes began to break down by the close of the eighteenth-century.³⁵⁹ She regards the French Revolution as marking a significant turning point in British responses

³⁵⁵ Jeremy Black, *The Grand Tour in the Eighteenth Century* (Stroud, Sutton, 1992). This argument builds on that put forward by Linda Colley, *Britons Forging the Nation, 1702-1837* (London, Pimlico, 1994)

³⁵⁶ Jeremy Black, *France and the Grand Tour* (Stroud, Sutton, 2003), pp. 159-163.

³⁵⁷ Brian Dolan, *Ladies of the Grand Tour* (London, Harper Collins 2001), pp. 169-70; Christopher Hibbert, *The Grand Tour* (London, Thames Methuen, 1989), pp. 121-32.

³⁵⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London, Routledge, 1992); Karin M. Morin and Jeanne K. Gueske, ‘Strategies of Representation, Relationship and Resistance: British Women Travellers and Mormon Plural Wives’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88 (1998), pp. 436-462.

³⁵⁹ Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*, pp. 152-9.

to Catholicism as Christianity united behind the secular threat epitomised by Revolutionary France. However, in this chapter I argue that this process of Protestant compromise with Catholicism began earlier with the changed politico-religious circumstances which followed the failure of Jacobitism as a political force. There were several reasons for this change. Firstly, anti-Catholicism in Britain declined, or at least changed in nature, in the period after 1750 which enabled the growth of interaction between British Protestants and the English convents in exile. As chapter three argued, this process was sparked by the decline of political Catholicism following the demise of Jacobitism in the aftermath of the battle of Culloden. With *political* Catholicism a spent force, the British state was more likely to seek compromise with British Catholics. Secondly, in the period after 1750, convents became increasingly outward-facing and interaction with Protestant travellers significantly increased. The reason for this shift towards more public-orientated institutions was largely a result of financial imperatives as the English convents in exile found themselves increasingly devoid of funds. Yet, this more outward-facing role for the English convents sparked a period of increased interaction with British travellers which in turn impacted on portrayals of nuns in travel literature.

In this chapter I want to explore this sense of a cultural interaction to focus on travel literature's status as a contested text which, far from promoting stereotypical images of nuns and convents, could challenge perceived opinion. By so doing, I hope to show that English convents' status as exiled institutions created a potentially productive environment for cultural interchange in the period after 1750. Furthermore, by examining the way convent representations were shaped by professional considerations, I aim to show that travel literature resulted in a more complex portrayal than previous historiography has acknowledged. This more nuanced understanding will, I hope, render problematic any attempt to define national identity in this period exclusively in terms of anti-Catholicism, not

least because travel writers' own reactions to female monasticism were never uniform.

Section one traces the changing nature of anti-Catholicism in Britain after 1750 and considers some reasons for this shift. In section two the role of the English convents in encouraging this interaction is considered and their reasons for doing so explored. Finally, the chapter ends by exploring the perception of English nuns in the texts of several key Protestant travel writers in order to assess how far stereotypes of nuns had changed by the end of this period. The chapter is entitled 'Encountering Nuns' because it charts the increased encounters between British Protestants and the exiled cloisters and argues that the exiled convents themselves were pivotal in encouraging this cultural exchange.

I: The changing nature of anti-Catholicism in Britain

British Protestant encounters with Catholic nuns in the period 1680 to 1750 had been, as previous chapters have shown, largely negative. Chapter two of this thesis demonstrated that British Protestants had deliberately constructed a narrative of national identity that aimed to exclude Catholics, especially monastics, from the British state. Chapter three argued that the English convents in exile had used the period from the onset of the 'Glorious Revolution' in 1688 to the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellions in 1746 to construct an alternative discourse of national identity. This alternative discourse was tied to an alternative ideology, Catholic, Royalist, and centred on the Stuart court in exile, which represented a significant opposition to the British state. Moreover, as chapter three demonstrated, this ideology was translated into political action in the form of the English convents' support for the Jacobite rebellions in 1715 and 1745. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that anti-Catholicism, and especially anti-monasticism, was a key feature of Protestant travel narratives in the period before 1750. Indeed, in chapter one the origins of key anti-Catholic and anti-nun stereotypes were traced to

a travel account by Thomas Robinson entitled *The Anatomy of the English Nunnery at Lisbon* which purported to be a 'true' account of his visit there, yet clearly mapped on to a political context where Catholicism represented a specific threat. Since the English convents in exile represented a clear political threat in the period before 1750 therefore opposition to female monasticism was bound to be vehement.

However, the period from 1750 to the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 marks a distinct shift in Protestant perceptions of the English convents in exile. This period witnessed a rise in the number of Protestant travellers, admittedly an elite section of the British populace, visiting the English convents in exile. These travellers did not merely visit the convents but published their accounts of these visits in British newspapers and travel books thereby reaching a wider audience and contributing to a wider shift in cultural values. These accounts contrast markedly with earlier depictions of convents in travel literature. Far from producing stereotypical, heavily sexualised, images of nuns these accounts offer a more nuanced portrayal and frequently seek to understand nuns on their own terms. In addition, this period marked an increase in general encounters between exiled nuns and British visitors. Increasing numbers of Protestants after 1750 sent their children abroad to be educated for a short period of time at the English convents in exile.³⁶⁰ Of course, there was nothing especially new in this. The children of British Protestants had been educated at the English convents in exile since the sixteenth century. However, in contrast to previous centuries, this tuition was no longer taking place clandestinely. Instead, visits by Protestant parents to

³⁶⁰ Covent records frequently place a letter 'P' after the name of children educated at the convents who have Protestant parents. Thus, in the records of the English Benedictine Abbey at Ghent there are 9 students listed for the year 1751 and 12 listed for the year 1761 with the letters P next to their surnames. See Oulton Abbey, Stone, MS L. 40, Registers of The English Benedictine Monastery at Ghent, fols. 5-6.

schools run by the convents increased and there were public exchanges on the merits of a convent education.³⁶¹

Interestingly the period after 1750 also witnessed a growth in images of nuns appearing in Britain. These take the form of ‘nun’ dolls, small paintings of nuns, and nun figurines. Of course, convent communities, including the English convents in exile, had always produced small nun dolls dressed in the habits of their respective orders. These dolls usually served a didactic purpose. For instance, they were used to teach young novices about convent dress codes and the history of the order. However, Elizabeth Kuhns has recently suggested that production of nun dolls increased during the course of the late eighteenth century as the English convents in exile sought to enforce dress conformity at a time when many nuns were adding individualised extras, like fur and ribbons, to the convent’s traditional habits.³⁶²

Convent regulations frequently alluded to the use of nun dolls as an aid to ensuring all members of the community conformed to the ‘correct’ code of dress. For example, the English Augustinians in Paris argued that the dolls must be kept so that ‘nothing in the habit is changed’.³⁶³ Furthermore, nun dolls were usually sent home to the families of daughters who had professed as nuns as a way of retaining connections with the homeland and the nun’s family. This practice seems to have increased in the course of the eighteenth century as convent correspondence frequently records the dolls being sent out to families in Britain. For example, in 1768 Sister Placida Brindle of the English Benedictine convent in Brussels recalled that after her profession ceremony ‘Betty Simeon (the Abbess) has sent mother a little nun which paid us a visit before it set out and I suppose you have seen the little one Sister Agnes sent her father, then you will see which dress you think best’.³⁶⁴ Perhaps more

³⁶¹ See, for instance, the Huddleston exchange with the Protestant White family in Huddleston Ms 488/C1/FR20: E, Cambridgeshire Record Office, Cambridge.

³⁶² E. Kuhns, *The Habit: History of the Clothing of Catholic Nuns* (New York, Doubleday, 2003), pp. 85-7.

³⁶³ Registers of the English Augustinian Nuns in Paris, p. 17.

³⁶⁴ Placida Brindle to N. Brindle, 17 July 1768, BL Add Ms 4712.

importantly for the purpose of this chapter, it became commonplace in the course of the eighteenth century to have these objects on public display rather than hidden. For example, the famous Scarisbricke nun, which had previously been hidden in a vault since its return to Britain in 1716, was recorded as being on public display by 1760.³⁶⁵ Furthermore, Wedgwood pottery began to produce small nun figurines from the 1750s onwards. Indeed, a quick search through the Old Bailey records of stolen goods in the eighteenth century reveals several items, including a cigarette holder and a decorated mirror, with images of nuns on them, suggesting that these images were becoming much more widespread by the late eighteenth century.³⁶⁶ While these objects might still appear to be ‘othering’ nuns, in the sense that nuns are represented as exotic objects of fascination for the Protestant owners of these objects, they nonetheless helped to ensure that a less ‘demonised’ image of nuns became a staple of British culture.

The waning of *political* Catholicism in the period after 1750 partly accounts for a more nuanced and more public image of nuns in British culture in the late eighteenth century. Admittedly, historians have tended to be divided over when the origins of the long process of Catholic Emancipation, that would eventually culminate in the 1829 act, began. For some, most notably Jonathan Israel and John Bossy, the process was already evident with the 1689 act of toleration.³⁶⁷ Placing the ‘Glorious Revolution’ within a European context Bossy and Israel demonstrated that William III was dependent on the support of Catholic countries as allies in the war with France and intended from the outset to build on James II’s policies with

³⁶⁵ The Scarisbricke nun was made in 1680 for Mary Scarisbricke, a nun at the English Carmelite convent in Liege. In 1715 it was given to Mary’s brother, James Swarbricke, to comfort him during the Jacobite rebellion. When, in 1716, James Swarbricke was executed for complicity in the failed 1715 Jacobite rising the doll returned to the Swarbricke family home of Swarbricke Hall near Preston in Lancashire. It was recorded as being on public display there in 1760. Swarbricke Ms, QDP/3/5/78, Lancashire Archives, Preston.

³⁶⁶ See John Thomas, Theft, 4 April 1762, OBRO, and Tom Adams, Theft, 9 August 1768, OBRO.

³⁶⁷ O.P. Grell, J. I. Israel and N. Tyacke, eds., *From Persecution to Toleration* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 370-372; J. Bossy, ‘Catholic Lancashire in the Eighteenth Century’ in J. Bossy and P. Jupp, eds., *Essays Presented to Michael Roberts* (Belfast, Blackstaff, 1976), pp. 54-59.

regards to religious toleration.³⁶⁸ For these historians, the 1689 Toleration Act had already destroyed Anglican hegemony proving the first statutory limitation on the exclusive control exercised by the established church in the post-Reformation period. Thus, as the Anglican Bishop, Gilbert Burnet, noted ‘the Papists have enjoyed the effects of the toleration tho they were not comprehended within the law that was made for it’.³⁶⁹ There is, of course, some truth to this narrative but it tends to present the history of religious toleration in Britain in Whiggish terms, as an inevitable teleological progress towards Catholic Emancipation. By so doing, it fails to account for the penal legislation imposed by Queen Anne, notably the 1701 Act of Settlement and the 1703 Act to Prevent the Further Growth of Popery, which, as chapter three demonstrated, led to increased political radicalism on the part of the exiled Catholic community. Historians seeking to revise such Whiggish assessments of the period have noted that after 1688 Britain moved towards a fiscal-military state that defined Britain in exclusively Protestant terms. Thus, the war against France led to higher rates of taxation specifically aimed at Catholics and annual military acts defined the army as a national defence system against Popery. It is for this reason that Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie likened William III and his legacy to Louis XIV arguing that the enforced exiling of the Stuart court and its Catholic subjects should be placed in the same context as Louis XIV’s persecution of the Huguenots.³⁷⁰ The decline of anti-Catholicism therefore needs to be located in the political context following the demise of Jacobitism.

The decline of Jacobitism as an ideological and military threat following the destruction of Jacobite forces at the Battle of Culloden helps explain why Catholicism, and with it female monasticism, became more acceptable after 1750. As chapter three demonstrated, the

³⁶⁸ J. Bossy, ‘English Catholics after 1688’ in P. Grell, J. Israel, and N. Tyacke, eds. *From Persecution to Toleration*, pp. 320-341.

³⁶⁹ G. Burnet, *History of His Own Time*, ed. T. Stackhouse (London, 1906), p. 182.

³⁷⁰ E. Le Roy Ladurie and B. Cottret, *Terre d’exil: L’Angleterre et sesrefugies, 16e-17e siecles* (Paris, 1985), pp. 7-52.

Jacobite forces of Charles Edward Stuart had been decisively defeated by the loyalist troops of the Duke of Cumberland in 1746. Of course, Charles Edward Stuart continued to plan an assault on Britain after this date, but following French naval defeats at Lagos and Quiberon Bay he was forced to abandon plans for an invasion. Moreover, his decision to convert to Anglicanism in 1750 lost him Catholic support and meant that Jacobitism was no longer synonymous with political Catholicism. After this date expressions of loyalty to Jacobitism were mainly symbolic as Charles Edward Stuart lacked the international support necessary to mount a successful campaign. When, on the fourteenth of January 1766, James Francis Edward, the Catholic son of the deposed James II, died the Papacy chose to officially acknowledge the Hanoverian regime. This meant that British Catholics were no longer forced to choose between loyalty to the British state and loyalty to the Papacy and were more likely to be regarded as faithful subjects. A wave of successive Catholic relief acts therefore followed the Papal announcement of loyalty to Hanover. In 1773 the Quebec Act guaranteed the free practice of the Catholic faith and laid the ground for Catholic relief in Britain. There followed the 1778 Relief Act which enabled Catholics to inherit and purchase land and join the army in exchange for professing an oath abjuring the Stuarts' claim to the throne and the Pope's temporal authority. Of course, the reduction of official discrimination against Catholics precipitated the Gordon Riots, a series of anti-Catholic protests across London resulting in damage to Catholic property and mob violence, but it also alleviated some of the penalties on the Catholic community and paved the way for Catholic Emancipation. This helps explain why anti-Catholic rhetoric and anti-nun imagery became less central to the construction of the British state after 1750.

A decline in anti-monasticism, and anti-Catholicism more generally, in Britain also took place as a result of religious and cultural shifts. The late eighteenth century witnessed a growth in the discourse of religious toleration and created a climate where 'toleration' was

deemed a desirable trait. Of course, as the Gordon Riots demonstrate, in reality late eighteenth-century society was far from tolerant. Political debates continued to abound in references to the inseparability of the 'Established Church and State' and Catholic Emancipation was not achieved until 1829. It should therefore be recognised that the 'discourse' of toleration did not always map on to the reality of Catholic experiences in the late eighteenth century. Nonetheless, the period witnessed a growth in the number of a pamphlets professing religious toleration as an ideal.³⁷¹

Alongside an interest in religious toleration, eighteenth-century discourse began to be shaped by more professional considerations. Travel-writers' relationship with their public was mediated by reviewers and patrons and governed by notions of what was appropriate within a professional context. The professionalization of travel writing during the eighteenth century increased the need to distinguish the 'writer by trade' from popularisers of cheap print media.³⁷² This distinction was harder to delineate at a time when the boundaries between travel literature were increasingly blurred: Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* used a fictional narrator for a purportedly factual account while Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, satirised travel writer's fictional tendencies. So too, the popularity of the epistolary model of travel writing, once the domain of philosophical reflection, led to the proliferation of printed 'letters home' in the press. Thicknesse stressed that when 'sailors or soldiers, men bred to arms and not to letters, publish their travels of remarks upon other nations, the readers may find entertainment by laughing at their folly' but from professionals 'every propriety (was) expected, every absurdity ...glaring'.³⁷³ Despite the anonymity of A.R,

³⁷¹ Anon., *A Treatise on Religious Toleration*, (London, 1764).

³⁷²³⁷² Philip Thicknesse, *Useful Hints to Those who make the tour of France in a Series of Letters Written from that Kingdom* (London, 1768), p. 19.

³⁷³ Ibid. 12.

he did not wish to repeat the ‘sameness, or folly’ found ‘in every common journalist’ and distinguished his account from ‘those who write their travels at home’.³⁷⁴

As these authors suggest, distinguishing the professional account from that of popular print culture meant ensuring that certain standards were maintained. It necessitated ‘purity of style, delicacy of sentiment and sterling judgement’ for ‘the public (would be) gulled and imposed upon if they do not meet with TRUTH’.³⁷⁵ Anthony Shaw, despite his political incentive, aimed to be ‘generally pretty near the Truth’ since this was ‘graceful and commendable in the Mouth of a Traveller’.³⁷⁶ The establishment of the *Monthly Review* in 1749 and its rival the *Critical Review* in 1756 helped shape and define professional practice and set the standards for the establishment of an author’s reputation. Authors of conduct manuals urged travel writers to promote ‘national manners’ and ‘responsible ecumenism’. In his 1778 work *On the Manner of Writing Voyages and Travels* Vicesimus Knox stated that writers should ‘interest the mind as much as a novel (but) instead of rendering it effeminate and debauched make it instructively inquisitive’.³⁷⁷ Travel writers were widely criticised for producing accounts, which seemed overly intolerant. Thus, Tobias Smollett and Henry Fielding were both condemned by the *Critical Review* for unduly intolerant judgements and inappropriate subject matter. The cultivation of a ‘tolerant’ position was thus essential for professional credibility. Writers were aware that their audience was not exclusively Protestant: travel literature was reviewed by European journals and purchased by British Catholics. The characterisation of Catholicism as a ‘persecuting disposition, which is so unchristian and offensive’ would only be convincing if Protestantism was proved the opposite and writers could only

³⁷⁴ A.R., *Letters to a Lady*, 17-19.

³⁷⁵ Thicknesse, *Useful Hints*, 18-22.

³⁷⁶ Shaw, *Letters to a Nobleman*, xiv.

³⁷⁷ Vicesimus Knox, *On the Manner of Writing Voyages and Travels* (London, 1778), 432-38.

‘abominate(the Catholics’) uncharitable disposition towards all dissenters’ if their own approach proved more ecumenical.³⁷⁸

This process of interchange partly resulted from issues of readership and reception. In the first instance, travel writers aimed to ensure that their accounts were useful. There were travellers who ‘for want of knowing the time of seeing the nuns...seldom see above one or two’ so offering a ‘full and circumstantial account of them (the convents) could not fail to prove agreeable’.³⁷⁹ Thus, authors advised that they had only to choose ‘the times specified in this work, (and) they would be sure of having an opportunity of gratifying their curiosity’.³⁸⁰ Shaw assured his readers that ‘a Traveller need only take this Book in his Hand without any other Guide’.³⁸¹ Travel literature had, therefore, to offer detailed account of convents, which often required ‘long residence in the country’ and ‘repeated opportunities of considering attentively’.³⁸² Secondly, travel literature ought to be novel and entertaining since ‘mere description was tedious’.³⁸³ It was this consideration that led the author of *A Tour* to list the ‘most minute ceremonies’ in the hope of rendering his account original.³⁸⁴ Thirdly, travel accounts had to reveal something of the author’s character and personal experience, setting down in them ‘all that happens to *me or mine*’.³⁸⁵ This necessitated some degree of personal engagement with convent communities leading Thicknesse to remark that ‘like as at a play, I found myself often deeply interested for the parties’.³⁸⁶ Thus, if a notion of the ‘public’ conditioned what *should* be included it also imposed constraints on what *could*.

³⁷⁸ Thicknesse, *Useful Hints*, 122; Shaw, *Letters to a Nobleman*, 229.

³⁷⁹ Anon, *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders*,. xvii.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Shaw, *Letters to a Nobleman*, xviii.

³⁸² Anon, *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders*, 5; Thicknesse, *Useful Hints*, 17.

³⁸³ A.R, *Letters to a Lady*, 4.

³⁸⁴ Anon, *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders*, 16.

³⁸⁵ Ibid. 9-10.

³⁸⁶ Thicknesse, *Useful Hints*, 125.

At the same time as British culture was extolling the virtues of toleration the English convents in exile were increasingly moving towards a more public-orientated conventual culture that encouraged non-Catholic visitors and sought to 'market' convents as ideal places for tourist visits. Thus, the convents were not merely recipients of changing British attitudes but themselves facilitators of this change. As the English convents moved away from strict enclosure and an identity forged in opposition to the British state they began to encourage a cultural interchange where British travellers were the key beneficiaries. The next section considers the reasons for this shift towards a process of transculturation on the part of the exiled English convents.

II: Encouraging Cultural Interaction: The commercialisation of exiled English convents

Financial necessity led to the exiled English convents becoming increasingly public-orientated in the period after 1750. Chapter three has already examined the support given by the exiled cloisters to the Jacobite cause and has noted that much of this support was financial. Thus, the convents frequently provided financial donations to support the Jacobite insurrections which significantly depleted convent funds. Moreover, as chapter three demonstrated, the convents had agreed to educate the children of members of the Stuart court for free and had provided free accommodation and meals for the Stuart exiles. Abbess Neville, of the English Benedictine cloister in Brussels, referred to this when she recalled that 'we had to take them and prayed to God that we might be successful but we had not the means to take in so many as we had'.³⁸⁷ Furthermore, female members of the exiled Stuart court who chose to become nuns were often accepted without dowries even when, in the case of disabled Radcliffe sisters, they were unable to contribute fully to the community and

³⁸⁷ Abbess Neville's Accounts of the Community, Downside Ms, fols. 1-5.

required additional care that added to the convent's annual costs. Thus, the English convents' support for Jacobitism was having a severe effect on their finances by 1750.

The exiled English cloisters were also suffering financially in the mid-eighteenth century as a result of low recruitment figures and difficulty in getting dowry and other annual payments paid to the cloisters by families in Britain. This is perhaps in part the result of a decline in religious zeal on the part of British Catholics by the end of the eighteenth century. Indeed, historians working on the late eighteenth century have generally regarded it as a period of decline during which Catholics were not active politically and did little to restore the faith.³⁸⁸

No longer subject to persecution, British Catholics settled into a life of local, rather than national, politics and landowning. Two families with strong links to the exiled convents will serve to illuminate this trend. First, the Howard family, Viscounts of Stafford, who had been significant benefactors of the Augustinians in Paris and the Poor Clares of Rouen, sending seven children to the convents in the course of the seventeenth century.³⁸⁹ The first Viscount Stafford was a leading Catholic Royalist who accompanied Charles II into exile and whose grandfather, Philip Howard, had been imprisoned for his Catholic faith under Elizabeth I.³⁹⁰ However, the second Viscount, despite his initial support for James II, successfully sought and obtained a pardon in 1690 to recover his estates and became a loyal Williamite.

Thereafter the Howard's support for the exiled cloisters declined and their names disappear from convent accounts by the mid-eighteenth century. Secondly, the Blundell family of Lancashire who sent fifteen daughters to profess as nuns at the exiled cloisters between 1640 and 1714.³⁹¹ William Blundell became known as the 'cavalier' for his strong Royalist

³⁸⁸ See, for instance, J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London, 1975), p. 316.

³⁸⁹ Augustinian Profession Book, Ms, Oulton Abbey, Stone. The Howard papers are held by the Norfolk Record Office. Howard Family Papers, HOW.

³⁹⁰ P. Holmes, 'Howard, William, Viscount Stafford', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

³⁹¹ The Blundell daughters entered the Poor Clares of Rouen, the Poor Clares of Gravelines, the Poor Clares of Dunkirk and the Paris Augustinians.

commitments and, alongside his wife, suffered repeated imprisonment for his faith.³⁹²

However, his son, Nicholas Blundell, renounced exile to become a prominent landowner under the Hanoverians and support from the family for the exiled convents declined as the family benefited from the Catholic relief acts after 1778 and devoted their efforts to landowning.³⁹³ Thus increased Catholic-conformism, where prominent recusant families increasingly chose to 'conform' to the British state and lost their interest in retaining links with the exiled cloisters, severely affected convent recruitment.

Financial necessity thus explains why the exiled English convents took on an increasingly public role after 1750. In this period previously strictly enclosed convent orders sought, as a result of financial imperatives, to begin schools. By founding schools attached to the cloisters the English convents in exile would be ensured of a regular income from students paying to be educated abroad. They also ensured a new wave of potential recruits as some school students were guaranteed to stay on to take permanent vows as nuns at the cloister. Thus, in 1754 the English Augustinian convent in Paris began a school to educate both English girls and those local to Paris.³⁹⁴ So too, the English Benedictine convent at Dunkirk began a school situated next to the cloister in 1761 and hoped to 'educate local girls and those coming over from England in the basics of English grammar, literature, and history'.³⁹⁵ The convents became increasingly adept at marketing their institutions to appeal to both Catholic and Protestant families in Britain. For example, an advertisement from 1771, published in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, noted that the school attached to the English Augustinian convent in

³⁹² W. Blundell, *Cavalier: Letters of William Blundell to his friends, 1620-1698*, ed. M. Blundell, (London, 1933). See also, G. Baker, 'William Blundell and late Seventeenth-Century Catholicism', *Northern History*, XLV, 2 September, 2008. The Blundell papers are held by Lancashire Record Office, DDB1.

³⁹³ N. Blundell, *Diary and Letterbook, 1702-1728*, ed. M. Blundell (Liverpool, 1952).

³⁹⁴ Augustinian Canonesses of Paris Ms, 'Authorisation for a school', Archives of the Archdiocese of Westminster, London (AAW), fols. 161-2.

³⁹⁵ Notes and Obituaries of the English Convent at Dunkirk, p. 140.

Paris would prove of ‘benefit for the learning of the French language’.³⁹⁶ Thus, convents which in the course of the seventeenth century had been devoted exclusively to politico-religious aims and the reconversion of England became more utilitarian in their aims by the mid-eighteenth century.

The exiled English convents combined their interest in education with other commercial pursuits designed to increase income in the period after 1750. To generate additional income, the cloisters came increasingly to undertake additional activities aimed at producing commodities that could readily be sold to passing travellers. One key source of income-generation involved beer-brewing and the sale of alcohol to tourists visiting the cloisters. The Poor Clares of Rouen built a Brewhouse attached to the cloister in 1773 and recorded selling ale to the local community and to visitors throughout the late eighteenth century. In this period nun dolls began to be more widely produced and sold by the cloisters. They moved away from being merely objects for devotional and didactic purposes, or items produced for the families of nuns, and became instead a means of producing additional revenue for the convents. Thus, the Liège Sepulchrines recorded the sale of forty-one nun dolls between the years 1759 and 1761.³⁹⁷ Additional items were also sold to passing tourists by the exiled English convents. For instance, nuns were often employed in making watches and textile goods which were then sold to visitors. Indeed, one of their main sources of revenue came from making paper flowers. Paper flowers were much in vogue throughout eighteenth-century Europe and often bought as decorative items. The English convents had initially used paper flowers to decorate reliquaries and religious statues but began making them for commercial benefit by 1760. Making paper-flowers was deemed so important for income generation that they were the first items saved by the English Carmelite convent in Antwerp

³⁹⁶ ‘Notes and Advertisements’, *Gentleman’s Magazine*, 7 June 1771.

³⁹⁷ Records of the English Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at Liege, p. 117.

when the French Revolution broke out in 1789.³⁹⁸ The English convents had, therefore, increasingly moved towards a more public-orientated commercial culture by the mid-eighteenth century.

This more commercialised culture helped to create conditions for cultural interchange between Protestant travellers and Catholic nuns after 1750. Since the exiled English convents were keen to sell their wares, thereby raising money for the cloisters, Protestant travellers were openly encouraged to visit. Frances Huddleston, a nun at the Bruges Augustinian cloister, recalled waiting near the entrance to the convent to welcome travellers as they arrived to visit.³⁹⁹ The convents even arranged to put on mock profession and clothing ceremonies so tourists could get a sense of the religious ceremonies undertaken by the convents. For example, the English Sepulchrines of Liege arranged to put on a mock clothing ceremony in July 1776 for ‘all our many visitors’.⁴⁰⁰ They recorded the scene as ‘the nuns got up in their finery and performed it all as tho’ it were a real clotheing (sic)’.⁴⁰¹ In addition to witnessing clothing and profession ceremonies visitors were also invited, for a small fee, to join the nuns for musical recitals in the cloister. There were therefore more opportunities for Protestant travellers to engage with the exiled English convents after 1750, albeit on the convents’ own terms. It is not therefore surprising that accounts by Protestant travellers detailing their visits to the cloisters became more nuanced than the stereotyped view of the ‘forced vocation’ so typical of earlier narratives. The next section examines the accounts of several well-known Protestant travel-writers in order to consider changing responses to female monasticism in the period after 1750.

³⁹⁸ English Refugees, BL Add Ms 13, 000. fol. 20.

³⁹⁹ Francis Huddleston to E. Fortesque, 13 March 1752, Huddleston Ms, Cambridge Record Office, Cambridge.

⁴⁰⁰ ‘Correspondence of the Liege Sepulchrines’, MS 14/2/56, AAW, Archives of the Archdiocese of Westminster.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

III: British Travellers and Transculturation

The travel writers discussed in depth in this section all shared a British identity, professed a Protestant faith, and wrote for a public audience. Philip Thicknesse was a professional travel writer and well-known within political and literary circles. Despite marrying into a Catholic family and later sending his daughters to be educated in convents he decried the ‘wickedness of their (the Catholic) clergy, the ignorant and idolatrous behaviour in which they encourage the common laity; (and) the use and abuse of auricular confession’.⁴⁰² His work was, in part, a response to ‘the outcry we are so continually making in England against the increase of popery’ and he aimed to show the ‘superstition, the ignorance, the great number of holidays, and the poverty in consequence’.⁴⁰³ George Edward Ayscough was a soldier with literary aspirations. The son of Francis Ayscough, the dean of Bristol and preceptor to Prince George, he hoped to reveal the ‘superstitious idolatry of Roman Catholicism’.⁴⁰⁴ The Methodist preacher, Cornelius Cayley, was a popular author of both religious and literary tracts. A clerk in the Prince of Wales’s treasury until 1752 he aimed to extend the ‘olive branch of peace’ to Roman Catholicism but remained opposed to idolatry.⁴⁰⁵ Sacheverell Stephens was more polemical in tone: considering monastic institutions to have no ‘foundation either in religion or Christianity’ he asserted that Catholics were ‘enemies to the mild religion and government of their native country’.⁴⁰⁶ The legal writer, Joseph Shaw, was also politically motivated, travelling in order to assess the state of France and Holland during the interval of peace that followed the treaty of Ryswick. He made no attempt to hide his pro-Dutch sentiment and

⁴⁰²Thicknesse, *Useful Hints*, Letter VII, p. 73.

⁴⁰³ Ibid. Letter VIII, 95.

⁴⁰⁴ George Edward Ayscough, *Letters from an Officer in the Guards to his Friend in England: Containing some Accounts of France and Italy* (London, 1778), pp. 5-10.

⁴⁰⁵ Cayley, *A Tour*, p. 13.

⁴⁰⁶Sacheverell Stevens, *Miscellaneous Remarks made on the Spot in a Late Seven Years Tour through France, Italy, Germany and Holland* (London, 1756), p. 6.

considered Catholicism ‘manifestly destructive both to the Increase of Trade, and of mankind it self’.⁴⁰⁷ The anonymous author of *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders* also presented himself as a loyal Protestant by decrying the ‘fabulous history of Romish-miracles’ while the author of *Letters to a Lady* wrote to ‘be of service to (his) country’.⁴⁰⁸

Yet, despite professing anti-Catholicism throughout their work they offer a remarkably sympathetic portrayal of convents. Where one might expect to find discussions of the forced-vocation a more complex view emerges. Thicknesse initially expressed horror at the ‘funeral-like’ rituals associated with the clothing ceremony but on a return visit to the nuns he ‘‘found them with their garlands still upon their heads, and by their vivacity and conversation, they seemed perfectly happy’.⁴⁰⁹ They seemed ‘as merry as *Greeks*, and (he) could scarcely believe they were the same grave, demure-looking damsels (he) had seen the night before’.⁴¹⁰ Travel writers provide detailed accounts of the stages potential recruits had to go through before joining a convent thereby rendering problematic any notion that internment was sudden or forced. The author of *Letters to a Lady* noted that it would take ‘six months’ before ‘every votary thus initiated may claim the second habit...and one year after this second period, (before) she may make a profession of her vows, which is called the year of probation of noviceship...(yet)... even at this time she may recede, as her inclination calls her’.⁴¹¹ It helped that many writers had personal knowledge of nuns returning to England: they could tell that the ‘charming young lady who left the convent and came to England in 1756....Bab D---n (was) now the amiable consort of Mr T....y of Lancs’.⁴¹² Cayley knew schoolgirls who

⁴⁰⁷ Joseph Shaw, *Letters to a Nobleman from a Gentleman Travelling thro’ Holland, Flanders and France* (London, 1709), xiii.

⁴⁰⁸ Anon, *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders* (London, 1768), 6-9. A. R., *Letters to a Lady From France* (London, 1772). pp. 44-48.

⁴⁰⁹ Thicknesse, *Useful Hints*, p. 52.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ A. R., *Letters to a Lady*, p. 21.

⁴¹² Anon, *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders*, pp. 12-16.

would 'return home again after some years, unless they chuse to become nuns' while Thicknesse told of a nun '(who) left the pension at the age of seventeen, returned to England to her family and friends for four or five years, and then to Rouen, as the only place she could find happiness in!'.⁴¹³

Thus, far from being the victims of parental authority, nuns are portrayed as willing accomplices to their fate. During a profession ceremony at the English Benedictines Ayscough noted that the nun 'performed the ceremony with great cheerfulness, when she quitted the habit of the world, the ornaments of which she flings from her with the greatest disdain'.⁴¹⁴ Cayley found he 'had an opportunity of seeing (what I did not expect) a number of healthful looking contented faces mixed with a great solemnity'.⁴¹⁵ Since nuns are shown to be cheerful on profession and in general free to leave, the notion of the convent as a centre of despotic constraint is challenged in these accounts. Instead, an image of nuns as sociable and engaged emerges. A.R found that the nuns' conversation was 'sprightly, witty, and entertaining and not full of that solemnity and gravity which their dull retreat prepares the visitor to expect'.⁴¹⁶ Sacheverell Stephens recorded conversing with a nun for 'almost two hours' and remembered this 'as one of the most agreeable of (his) whole life'.⁴¹⁷ Nuns are even shown to be engaged in conventual politics and active in the process of voting for new recruits:

The nuns are seated at their proper seats, but not near the table, where they remain about a quarter of an hour in profound silence, in order to deliberate maturely whether they have any partiality for, or dislike to, the young lady, more than she deserves. When the time above mentioned is expired, the superior rises from her seat, and, going to the box, puts in a pea or bean: the nuns in their turns follow her example.

⁴¹³ Cayley, *A Tour*, 22; Thicknesse, *Useful Hints*, xxix.

⁴¹⁴ Ayscough, *Letters from an Officer*, p. 39.

⁴¹⁵ Cayley, *A Tour*, p. 29.

⁴¹⁶ A. R., *Letters to a Lady*, p. 125.

⁴¹⁷ Stevens, *Miscellaneous Remarks*, pp. 17-19.

This method of electing by ballot prevents the possibility of a discovery who are the young novices friends or enemies.⁴¹⁸

This image of convents as to some extent democratic and accountable to their inhabitants runs counter to the notion of nuns as the oppressed victims of tyrannical structures.

Admittedly, travel writers do not deny that life for English nuns was one of austerity and hardship. The English Poor Clares ‘rise at midnight to prayer, sleep in their coffins, and eat but one meal a day, and then only one thing such as eggs, salt fish, salad, rice, and sometimes, by way of regale, potatoes!!’ and the voices of the English Benedictines in Paris were ‘so attenuated by fasting and mortification, they sounded like that of Lungs in the Alchymist’.⁴¹⁹ Yet, this aspect of constraint is marked out for approval rather than censure. Thicknesse noted that British society was ‘apt to take a malicious delight in setting forth the dissolute manners and vices which we find therein, without thinking how grievously we offend, and justly too, those members who are truly good’.⁴²⁰ Instead, he argued that convents ‘produce many instances of shining virtues; there are few which do not contain some noble minds’ and challenged even ‘the most established deist to see and converse with the English poor *Clares* at *Rouen*, and be insensible of their merit or without respecting them for their piety, and the hardships they endure throughout life’.⁴²¹ The more austere convents are frequently marked out for preference. Cayley preferred the harsh simplicity of the Poor Clares to the ‘richer sort’ of Benedictine and Augustinian convent in Dunkirk which were not ‘of the rigorous order that some are’.⁴²² He pointed out that ‘worldly vanities creep into some of these places too much, and to the sorrow of many pious Roman Catholicks, who are really

⁴¹⁸ Anon, *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders*, pp. 32-39.

⁴¹⁹ Thicknesse, *Useful Hints*, 118; Anon, *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders*, p. 38.

⁴²⁰ Ibid. p. 121.

⁴²¹ Ibid. pp. 122-128.

⁴²² Cayley, *A Tour*, pp. 51-54.

crucified to the world with its lusts'.⁴²³ Similarly, Stevens noted that 'affability accompanied poverty, as pride did riches'.⁴²⁴ One even detects a note of pride in Ayscough's remark that 'wherever the English have convents they are distinguished' although 'it is a reputation I should never wish them to acquire'.⁴²⁵

Travel writing was not then simply a medium for the reproduction of popular stereotypes but a means of contesting them. Ayscough's acceptance of exiled convents as *English* institutions suggests that a shared national identity helped shape this portrayal. A.R. noted that 'convents are places I do not much frequent' but nonetheless paid a visit to the Poor Clares of Rouen since 'this being composed entirely of English, it was a compliment due to the nuns'.⁴²⁶ Since exiled convents still saw themselves as British nationals they limited recruitment to English-born subjects and maintained communication with friends and family in England. They were thus easily identifiable as 'fellow countrywomen', many of whom were the daughters of well-known gentry families, and this encouraged a more considered approach to their portrayal than encounters with the anonymous nuns of continental convents.⁴²⁷ Stereotypes emerge more frequently with regard to native French or Flemish convents than English ones. Thus, the French Ursulines are described as 'ugly, with dirty petticoats and solemn expressions' and the Montgaris nuns as 'ugly (and) possessed with a zealous piety'.⁴²⁸ However, nuns at English convents are clearly identified as 'Miss Canning, a former august beauty about London' or 'one of the daughters of the late Marquis of Powis'.⁴²⁹ The writer of *A Tour* acknowledged that he knew a friend who 'resided in the Dominicans convent twelve years'

⁴²³ Ibid. p. 54.

⁴²⁴ Stevens, *Miscellaneous Remarks*, p. 321.

⁴²⁵ Ayscough, *Letters from an Officer*, p. 212.

⁴²⁶ A.R., *Letters to a Lady*, p. 109.

⁴²⁷ Ibid. p. 110.

⁴²⁸ Anon, *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders*, pp. 32-33; Stevens, *Miscellaneous Remarks*, p. 318.

⁴²⁹ Shaw, *Letters to a Nobleman*, vii, p. 75; Anon, *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders*, p. 102.

and was thus 'perfectly acquainted with all their ceremonies, times of prayer, and all the different regulations of the convent'.⁴³⁰

The ability of travel writers to identify the members of English convents suggests that they did not remain merely *observed* institutions but were central to the process of exchange and encounter. Since convents benefited financially from tourism they were keen to encourage British travellers. The Abbess of the English Benedictines at Ghent wrote frequently to Protestant families detailing convenient times for them to visit and convents sold souvenirs to passing tourists.⁴³¹ Travel writers assert that one could purchase 'boxes of dressed figures representing all the different religious orders of the Romish church', 'purses, flowers and embroidered shoes' and 'many curiosities'.⁴³² Readers are even warned that convents could take advantage of the unsuspecting traveller. Ayscough noted that 'by these religious damsels (one) may be finely gulled and cheated (purchasing) at a much higher price than in the shops at Paris' and ...recorded that they 'publicly, as in a shop, offered all sorts of Poppets and Babies to be sold...at an unreasonable price'.⁴³³ Travel writers were dependent on Catholic initiatives for access to relics and details of ceremonies. The author of *A Tour* recorded that he had been aided in his endeavours by 'some learned and worthy ecclesiastics of the Roman-Catholic persuasion' who were 'very complaisant and obliging in giving satisfactory answers to strangers of a different persuasion'.⁴³⁴ It was only through the help of a Catholic friend that he was able to supply information on the vows taken at convent ceremonies since 'they (were) kept quite secret, and no body permitted to have a copy'.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁰ Anon, *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders*, p. 21.

⁴³¹ Winchester, Hampshire Record Office, MS Banbury, 1M44/110/81, Letter 'William Knollis to Mary Knollis, 20-23 January 1794'.

⁴³² Ayscough, *Letters from an Officer*, p. 9; Thicknesse, *Useful Hints*, p. 49.

⁴³³ Ayscough, *Letters from an Officer*, p. 9.

⁴³⁴ Anon, *A Tour Through Part of France and Flanders*, p. 7.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 21.

Therefore, travel-writing was less an aggressive assertion of a clearly defined belief than a process whereby the nature of Protestantism itself was defined and shaped. For many, travel literature had never quite lost its association with pilgrimage and acted as a personal exploration of faith. The Methodist preacher Cornelius Cayley may have been a little unusual in referring to himself as ‘a Christian Catholic and a Protestant’ but it is important to emphasise that within Protestantism there existed a wide spectrum of belief.⁴³⁶ Defining their attitude to female monasticism offered a means for travel writers to assess this belief and reflect on standards within their own faith. Throughout the eighteenth century the merit of female monasticism was much debated within British society. Nostalgic laments from Bishop Gilbert Burnet and Samuel Wesley conflicted with the vitriolic rebukes of pamphlet culture. Cayley’s admiration for nuns’ clothing resulted from his criticism of the ‘foolish fantastic dresses of the modern taste’.⁴³⁷ A.R. took a positive view of conventual life because it contrasted with the ‘dissolute manners of our time’.⁴³⁸ Travel writers reached both positive and negative conclusions as a result of their encounters with exiled convents. Sacheverell Stevens thought it ‘worthy the consideration of the legislature to prevent, as much as possible, the sending our young people, of both sexes, into foreign parts to receive their education’.⁴³⁹ Yet, Thicknesse felt it ‘all conspired to operate very strongly upon (him) in their favour, though not in favour of their way of thinking’.⁴⁴⁰

The same contradictory attitudes to female monasticism would resurface when exiled convents attempted to re-found in Britain in the aftermath of the French Revolution.

However, the notion that the unity of Christianity in response to the secular threat initiated a tolerant approach to monastic institutions is more problematic when we consider the process

⁴³⁶ Cayley, *A Tour*, pp. 1-10.

⁴³⁷ Ibid. pp. 99-100.

⁴³⁸ A.R., *Letters to a Lady*, pp. 71-73.

⁴³⁹ Stevens, *Miscellaneous Remarks*, p. 11.

⁴⁴⁰ Thicknesse, *Useful Hints*, pp. 161-2.

of interaction and sympathetic portrayals resulting from eighteenth-century travel literature. Far from being peripheral, exiled convents were key centres of interaction for British tourists: writers were able to identify individual nuns and the process of recording ceremonies and conversations necessitated reciprocal involvement. This partly explains why an image of nuns as sociable and engaged, vastly different from the victimised nun of popular culture, emerges in the period after 1750. However, issues of readership and professional credibility also shaped representations. The need to ensure accounts were both novel and useful led authors to attempt more detailed and accurate descriptions. Moreover, a degree of toleration became an authorial obligation as writer's sought to defend Protestantism's ecumenical tenets. Yet, anti-Catholicism clearly surfaced in the travel-literature discussed in this chapter. The fact that this did not result in the negative portrayal of convents suggest that authors were able to distinguish between alternate aspects of Catholicism. The complexity of representations thus challenges the idea that anti-Catholicism was a uniform ideology capable of uniting the British nation. In fact, the increasingly public-orientated nature of English convents in the late eighteenth century and the links forged with Britain during this time would come to the aid of the exiled English cloisters as they were plunged into the turmoil of the French Revolution.

Chapter 5
Resisting Nuns
Exiled English Convents and the French Revolution, 1789-1795

On 17 December 1789, Jean Baptiste-Treilhard, a former provincial intendant and the principal spokesperson for the Ecclesiastical Committee, stood up to speak to the National Assembly on the problem of nuns. He noted that ‘the weakness of their sex makes them even more interesting. They are worthy in effect of all your protection and your hearts [should] not be cold and insensible’.⁴⁴¹ However, three years later, in December 1792, the English Sepulchrines of Liège recorded the scene as French troops entered their convent:

We lived in continual alarms and fears. We had frequent assurances of their protection and that we should not be molested, yet we were frequently threatened.... They began to seize the effects of the convent, the Church plate etc...the chief part of which we had concealed in a little Garrett in the old school.⁴⁴²

These accounts appear strikingly different. In the first, Treilhard presents the Revolution as protective towards nuns and implies that it was not implicitly anti-religious in its aims. In the second, Revolutionaries are portrayed provoking fear among convent communities and their anti-clerical intent is made clear.

This chapter aims to contextualise these two descriptions and asks what, if anything, accounts for the change in revolutionary climate. Was it a simple matter of timing? France in 1789 was obviously very different to France in 1792: a Constituent National Assembly with clerical representation had been replaced by the Jacobin dominated Convention; escalating inflation and the need to procure funds for the, by then inevitable, war brought economic issues to the

⁴⁴¹ Dossiers Ecclesiastiques, 1789-1790, Archives Nationales, Paris, Series S4619, 2.

⁴⁴² ‘Annals of the English Sepulchrines of Liege, 1630-1795’, Downside Abbey, Bath, n.412, p. 115.

fore; internal factions and the fear of counter-revolution made national citizenship a divisive yet essential issue. On the other hand, was it a case of practical policies failing to reflect rhetoric? Treilhard constructs an image of nuns as passive and vulnerable yet attempts to treat nuns sympathetically would clearly fail if they proved active in resistance. Moreover, how should we view this potential resistance and what does it tell us about female agency? In contrast to Treilhard's rhetoric of passivity, the nuns in the Sepulchrine description are presented as agents resisting Revolutionary demands by concealing Church plate.

Historiography on the French Revolution has been divided on two major issues, which has some bearing on my assessment of these portrayals. The first concerns the origins and aims of the Revolution and the extent to which an anti-clerical agenda was inherent from the start. The dominance of a Marxist paradigm within French historiography has led to a stress on the secularisation agenda as integral to the Revolutionary settlement.⁴⁴³ Revisionist historians have done little to challenge this assumption: thus Norman Hampson's stress on the essentially atheistic tendencies of French Enlightenment *philosophes* has found support from historians like Andrew Forrest, whose focus centres on the ideological origins of the Revolution.⁴⁴⁴ So too, church historians, most notably John McManners, have demonstrated that, even in the early months of 1789, the National Assembly had taken some steps to limit

⁴⁴³ This is due to the enduring influence of Ernst Labrousse, George Rude and Albert Soboul on French historiography. See, for instance, E. Labrousse, *Economique et Sociale de la France* (Paris, 1970); A. Soboul, *Understanding the French Revolution*, (London, Merlin, 1988); A. Soboul, *The Sans-Culottes, the Popular Movement and Revolutionary Government, 1793-1794* (London, Doubleday, 1989); J. Friguglietti, ed., *George Rude: A Bibliography of his Political and Historical Writing* (London, Longmans, 2002). An early challenge to the Marxist school came from Alfred Cobban, see *Historians and the Causes of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1958) and *A Social Interpretation of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1964). Nonetheless, the Marxist argument endures in the work of, for instance, Colin Jones. See, *Charity and Bien Faisance: the Treatment of the Poor in the Montpellier Region, 1740-1815* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982) and *The Longman Companion to the French Revolution* (London, Longman, 1988).

⁴⁴⁴ N. Hampson, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution*, (London, Historical Association, 1968); E. Shagan, *Citizens and Cannibals: The French Revolution, the Struggle for Modernity, and the Origins of Ideological Terror* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001); A. Forrest, 'Ideology and Politics in the French Revolution', *Historical Journal*, vol. 39, no. 3, (1996), pp. 807-812.

church power through the elimination of church privilege, the confiscation of church property, and the abolition of monasticism.⁴⁴⁵ Additionally, Lynn Hunt has argued for the emergence of a new political class in the early stages of the Revolution seeking to break with the past and create a unique Revolutionary culture.⁴⁴⁶ However, historians are now beginning to reassess French attitudes to Catholicism during the Revolution and the Revolution's impact on the Catholic Church. Recent accounts, including work by Dale Van Kley and Nigel Aston, have noted that criticism of the old regime often came from within the Catholic Church: revolutionary rhetoric could be appropriated by Catholic reformists and used to critique the financial status of the lower clergy.⁴⁴⁷ Indeed many Catholics initially lent the revolutionaries their support. Thus, on this reading, Catholicism is rendered to some extent complicit in the French Revolution.

The second issue involves our understanding of agency and the potential impact of the Revolution on women. The Marxian stress on the universal applicability of the Revolution has led historians, most notably Joan Landes, to emphasize the potential for increased public-participation it seemingly initiated. Drawing on the Habermasian concept of the 'public sphere' they have pointed to the political awakening of previously excluded groups.⁴⁴⁸ Working within this framework, feminist scholars, such as Hannah Glout, have viewed the period as a precursor to modern feminism whereby women became increasingly politicised

⁴⁴⁵ J. McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth Century France* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998); R. Gibson, *A Social History of French Catholicism, 1789-1914* (London, Routledge, 1989).

⁴⁴⁶ L. Hunt, *Politics, Culture and Class in the French Revolution*, (California, University of California Press, 1984). Lynn Hunt has also offered an important re-assessment of both the Marxist and Revisionist paradigms: L. Hunt, 'French History in the last twenty years: the rise and fall of the Annales paradigm', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 21, no.2, (April, 1986), pp. 201-224.

⁴⁴⁷ N. Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000); D. Van Kley, *The Religious Origins of the French Revolution from Calvin to the Civil Constitution, 1560-1791* (Yale, Yale University Press, 1996); R. J. Dean, *L'Abbe Gregoire et l'Eglise Constitutionnelle Après la Terreur*, (Sorbonne, SUP, 2008).

⁴⁴⁸ J. B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988); A. K. Smart, *Citoyennes: Women and the Ideal of Citizenship in Eighteenth Century France* (New Market, Haven, 2011); L. Dicaprio, *The Origins of the Welfare State: Women, Work and the French Revolution* (Chesham, University Of Illinois Press, 2007).

following the breakdown of traditional structures.⁴⁴⁹ More recently, a new wave of feminist historians have sought to revise this view by pointing to the continued exclusion of women from the public realm and the limited applicability of universalistic values.⁴⁵⁰ Attitudes towards gender and sexuality have been well documented by Lynn Hunt and Paul Hoffman, who have analysed the extent to which revolutionary political culture remained self-consciously masculinist. For them, Jacobin ideology, inspired by the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, introduced new forms of sexism to exclude women from the 'public sphere'.⁴⁵¹

Missing from an assessment of both issues has been any understanding of changing attitudes to Women Religious within Revolutionary France. Although there has been some recent work on the French religious communities, which has added to our understanding of anti-clericalism, a similar account of the English convents in exile has not been forthcoming.⁴⁵²

This can partly be explained by the paucity of documents relating to the religious communities during this time. After 1793, when communities were imprisoned, convent annals ceased to be written and convent documents were regularly appropriated by civil

⁴⁴⁹ R. B. Rose, *Women and the French Revolution: The Political Activity of Parisian Women* (Hobart, University of Tasmania, 1994); R. B. Rose, 'Feminism, Women and the French Revolution', *Historical Reflections*, vol. 21, no. 1, (1995), p. 187; L. Beckstrad, *Deviant Women of the French Revolution and the Rise of Feminism* (London, Routledge, 2009); S. E. Roessler, *Out of the Shadows: Women and Politics in the French Revolution, 1789-95* (New York, P. Lang, 1998); H. Glout, 'Exceptional Women: Rights, Liberty and Deviance in the French Revolution', *Feminist Collections*, vol. 30, 3, 2003, pp. 6-12.

⁴⁵⁰ O. Hufton, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1992); S. E. Melzer, ed., *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1992); M. Yalom, *Blood Sisters: The French Revolution in Women's Memory* (London, Pandora, 1995); C. Proctor, *Women, Equality and the French Revolution* (London, Greenwood Press, 1990).

⁴⁵¹ Bill Doyle has recently added to the controversy surrounding female emancipation in this period by suggesting that the Girondins, who were perceived to be 'moderates' during the Terror, did the most to advance womens' rights. W. Doyle, *Aristocracy and its Enemies in the Age of Revolution* (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

⁴⁵² E. Rapley and R. Rapley, 'An image of Religious Women in the *ancien regime*: the etats des religieuses of 1790-1791', *French History*, 11/4 (1997) pp. 12-28.; G. Betros, 'Liberty, Citizenship and the Suppression of Female Religious Communities in France, 1789-90' *Women's History Review*, 18/2, pp. 221-314. (2009); E. Rapley, 'PieusesContre-Revolutionnaires': The Experience of the Ursulines of Northern France, 1789-1792', *French History*, 2/4 (1988), pp. 453-73; M. Choudhury, *Convents and Nuns in Eighteenth-Century French Politics and Culture* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2004).

authorities searching for signs of anti-revolutionary sentiment.⁴⁵³ Exiled English convents are particularly interesting because their sense of national identity and status as British subjects meant that when the Revolution broke out they would be differentiated, to some extent, from French convents.⁴⁵⁴ The Revolution's stress on national citizenship and the war with England from 1793 would clearly come into conflict with any notion of sympathy for English nuns.

The revolutionary response to convent communities therefore repays further study. Anti-monasticism was a distinct aspect of anti-clericalism: many anti-Catholic officials would remain, like Treilhard, sympathetic to the plight of nuns; many Catholic reformers would express anti-monastic sentiments; debates on monastic institutions would therefore prove divisive. Early in 1789, the National Assembly attempted to legislate against monastic establishments but, as Treilhard's comments suggest, monastic institutions with female inhabitants were perceived more sympathetically than their male counterparts and it was less clear that they would suffer in the wake of Revolution. However, sympathy for nuns would change as convents varied in their response to Revolutionary decrees. As revolutionary interference in nuns' lives increased, Women Religious became more vocal in their denunciation of revolutionary decrees and entered the 'public sphere' as an oppositionist group. Yet, in their examination of the participative nature of the Revolution historians, notably Joan Landes and Timothy Tackett, have left out the role of oppositionist groups, of which Women Religious formed a key part.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵³ The English Augustinians annals clearly show the disruption of revolution. Underneath the June 1793 entry the annalist has written 'From this time nothing was written down on account of the Revolution, and the frequent visits that were made for papers, everything of consequence was hidden'. The Archives Nationales in Paris contain serie S4619, S4617, S4618 and ANH5 detailing convent records appropriated by the state.

⁴⁵⁴ J. G. Alger, *Englishmen in the French Revolution* (London, 1889).

⁴⁵⁵ J. B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1988); T. Tackett, *Becoming a Revolutionary: The Deputies of the French National Assembly and the Emergence of a Revolutionary Culture, 1789-1790* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996).

This chapter therefore examines the changing response to nuns, and more specifically English nuns, during the French Revolution. Firstly, I consider the extent to which anti-monasticism was inherent from the start by exploring cultural perceptions of nuns at the outset of the Revolution and the anti-monastic discourse prevailing in national debates. Secondly, I examine the extent to which this anti-monarchical discourse manifested itself in policies towards nuns. I examine the English conventual response to anti-clerical policies in order to assess how far nuns were agents rather than passive victims in the process. Finally, I examine the reasons for the exiled convents' return to England after 1795 by assessing how far the Revolution affected conventual identity and changed the convents' relationship with the British state. I argue that the Revolution, by increasing intervention into the lives of convent communities, necessitated nuns' involvement in the 'public sphere'. Through a process of negotiation with the revolutionary authorities, English nuns became increasingly politicised and active within the public arena as petitioners and commentators. Moreover, as war with Britain led to their portrayal as counter-revolutionaries, they became increasingly dependent on Britain for support.

I: Constructing Nations: Revolutionary rhetoric and Women Religious

Treillard's portrayal of nuns at the start of this chapter is perhaps less surprising when we consider that the portrayal of nuns as passive victims had a long history in France. Revolutionary discourse abounded in references to 'forced vocation' literature where nuns were forced into convents against their will by dominant parents, their lives usually ending tragically through suicide or wounds sustained at the hands of tyrannical confessors. One might think of the tyrannical Father Lawrence in Jacques Marie Boutet de Monvel's *Le Victimes Cloitrées* forcing Eugenie into the convent where she would meet her tragic death; or

the ill-fated Suzanne, desperately imploring the Marquis de Croismare to save her from her forced vocation, in Diderot's hugely popular *La Religieuse*.⁴⁵⁶ Between 1791 and 1794 there were 229 showings of 'forced vocation' plays in Paris, the most famous being Louis-Picard's *Le Visité*, all of which ended with the victorious Revolutionary army liberating convent inhabitants from their cloistered fate.⁴⁵⁷ The image of Revolutionaries as liberators would thus become a popular one throughout France with analogies made between convents and prisons.⁴⁵⁸ Thus, in Fortin de Melleville's *Le Te Deum des Religieux et des Religieuses*, a chorus of monks and nuns are portrayed singing gratitude to the fathers of the nation for the regaining of their liberty.⁴⁵⁹ In this discourse, therefore, nuns are perceived as victims worthy of sympathy.

Yet sympathy did not extend to all inhabitants of convents. Indeed, convents as institutions were portrayed as places of vice and laziness. There was a hierarchical element to representations of nuns in revolutionary culture, which distinguished between representatives of the first order- such as abbesses- and their 'inferior' subordinates. Unlike victimised nuns, abbesses were portrayed as the negative embodiment of nobility and power and shown to wield their authority despotically. For Madame Genlis, in her *Discours Pour la Suppression des Couvents*, an abbess was a 'kind of queen who lives with ostentation...governing her sisters and her equals despotically'.⁴⁶⁰ She likened convents to royal courts seeing them as vice-ridden environments which were demonstrative of the 'abuse of authority'. So too, the anonymous author of *L'adresse aux Religieuses* (1790) targeted mother superiors who, unlike abbesses, were elected and held power for a temporary period, stating that 'simple nuns will

⁴⁵⁶ J. M. Boutet de Monvel, *Le Victimes Cloitrées*, (Paris, 1789); D. Diderot, *La Religieuse* (Paris, 1796). The novel was written prior to the outbreak of Revolution in 1780 but denied publication until 1796.

⁴⁵⁷ L. Picard, *Le Visité* (Paris, 1790).

⁴⁵⁸ The association between convents and prisons was exacerbated by the prison reform movement in C18th France.

⁴⁵⁹ F. De Melleville, *Le Te Deum des Religieux et des Religieuses* (Paris, 1790).

⁴⁶⁰ Comtesse de S.F. Genlis, *Discours pour la suppression des couvents* (Paris, 1791), p. 10-13.

lack something truly necessary, while the officers and superiors will have it in abundance. These privations...were the fruit of the superiors' caprice'.⁴⁶¹ In 1791, Jean-Paul Marat in *L'ami du Peuple*, detailing a case where a nun had come to him in despair after attempting to free herself from the power of her local abbess, distinguished between the potential patriotism of ordinary nuns and the counter-revolutionary tendencies of their superiors.⁴⁶² Such distinctions could be used in debates to stress the extent to which the hierarchical nature of convents proved destructive of individual freedom.

These ambiguous cultural representations of nuns found their way into National Assembly debates on the status of Women Religious within Revolutionary France. Between 1789 and 1790 the Ecclesiastical Committee, which had a mixture of clerical and lay membership, initiated a series of debates on the government's policy towards nuns. The debates focused on two key issues. The first concerned the concept of liberty. Should Revolutionaries see themselves as the liberators of religious women imprisoned within convent walls or was their attempt to do so destructive of the liberty of individual nuns? Central to this debate was the boundary between the secular and ecclesiastical spheres and the question of whether the National Assembly had the right to dissolve monastic vows. In a published letter of 1789 addressed to all nuns in France, the Bishop of Toulon, Elléon de Castellane-Mazangues, argued that no secular assembly had the right to interfere with vows made to God.⁴⁶³ Urging them to remain in their cloister, he stated that by denying their vows they would be committing apostasy. They would thus incur the penalty of 'excommunication from the true church' which would prove worse than 'exclusion from society on account of [their]

⁴⁶¹ Anon, *L'adresse aux religieuses* (Paris, 1790), p. 2.

⁴⁶² *L'ami du Peuple*, (15 August, 1791), p. 3. The *Friend of the People* was usually published daily during the Revolution. In September 1792 Marat started a new journal entitled *Journal de la République Française*.

⁴⁶³ Elléon de Castellane-Mozangues was Bishop of Toulon from 1786 to 1801. E. de Castellane-Mozangues, *Adresse aux religieuses* (1789), Archives Nationales, Serie E, E472.

remaining'.⁴⁶⁴ So too, Jean Crestin, from the Territorial Committee, defended the right of nuns to remain in convents by drawing on the notion of natural rights and the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*. Addressing the Legislative Assembly on 31 July 1792, he declared that 'natural rights do not permit you to force from asylums these beings who find a happiness in it that all the revolutionaries of the state would not know how to procure for them'.⁴⁶⁵ For Crestin, as for others, the government had a right to protect individual liberty and not to decide what that liberty meant.

However, for some, the convent by its very nature conflicted with any notion of liberty. Its hierarchical structure appeared as an artificial construct of the Old Regime and seemed to have little place in a new society supposedly based on the laws of nature. Thus Creuze de la Touche, also addressing the legislative assembly in 1792, stated that 'monastic institutions in and of themselves favour despotism, servitude and aristocracy'.⁴⁶⁶ For Louis-Marie Prudhomme, editor of the *Les Révolutions de Paris*, nuns could only become socially useful once they were liberated from the convent structure.⁴⁶⁷ In 1791 he addressed all nuns in Paris, declaring that 'it is time to make yourself available to the nation, and to pay it through your cares the tribute of utility'.⁴⁶⁸

The extent to which convents could prove socially and nationally useful became the second key issue in debates on nuns in the years 1789-1792.⁴⁶⁹ Commentators questioned whether convents could, through their educative and caring work, become beneficial to the nation or

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid. P2.

⁴⁶⁵ Archives Nationales, Series E, E415:15 31 July 1792.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid, E415:16 31 July 1792.

⁴⁶⁷ Louis-Marie Prudhomme (1752-1830) achieved fame as a journalist and published *Les Révolutions de Paris* from July 1789 to February 1794. Suspected of Royalist tendencies, he was at times imprisoned but continued to work as a publisher for much of the Revolution.

⁴⁶⁸ *Les Révolutions de Paris*, 9 September 1791.

⁴⁶⁹ In France simple vowed women religious, known as *fillesseculieres* or *congreganistes*, taught and nursed outside the cloister and were therefore seen as more socially useful than their solemn-vowed equivalents whose lives were dedicated to prayer within the cloister walls.

whether they were inevitably a drain on national resources. Philippe Samary, the representative from Carcassonne, speaking to the National Assembly in 1789, argued that nuns served the nation as instructive examples because of the services they offered as educators and caretakers of the poor and sick, the ‘occupations and useful talents of the profession’.⁴⁷⁰ In addition, he pointed out that ‘unmarried nuns enable[d] brothers and sisters to marry because of increased dowries’.⁴⁷¹ In 1791, the Abbé de Montesquiou appealed to the pragmatism of the government by asking:

Will you gain a lot by selling the establishments of female communities? No, without a doubt, for if there are some that are rich, there are also some that are very poor...in selling their possessions...too great a number will diminish in value and price.⁴⁷²

Yet for other participants in debates, convents served merely to deplete the resources of the French nation. In the first instance, they took money from French society, which could be better used to serve the state. English convents, like their French counterparts, had benefactors and patrons from within the French nation who helped to finance them. In the second instance, they seemed to deplete the population. The monastic state was viewed as alien to France since the natural vocation for French women was considered to be marriage and motherhood. In 1792, the *Journal Universel* argued that monastic celibacy depleted national resources and manpower and urged monks and nuns to marry.⁴⁷³ There were even religious arguments advanced for the view that convents ran counter to nature. In 1789, Groubentall de Limiere argued that celibacy violated sacred trust: since procreation was mandated by God and nature, ‘if nature does not make anything useless, to what purpose does

⁴⁷⁰Samary would later publish his views in a book entitled *Reclamation en faveur des orders religieux* (Paris, 1791). Archives Nationales, Serie E, 241: 7, August 1789.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Archives Nationales, Serie E, 352: 15, May 1791.

⁴⁷³*Journal Universel*, October 1792, p. 4.

the creative germ and the generative facility in a monk or nuns serve?'.⁴⁷⁴ English convents were not immune to these arguments since, by educating French children, they could be seen encouraging them to enter monastic life.

Revolutionary rhetoric on the status of women religious was therefore highly ambivalent and not exclusively anti-clerical in tone. Many opposed convents on the grounds that they were essentially illiberal institutions and were draining France of resources. Yet it was possible to offer a defence of convents on the grounds of public utility and the belief that measures taken against them would prove impractical. This ambivalence would manifest itself in the Revolutionary government's policies towards women religious in the years 1789-1795. However, the response of English convents to such intervention could potentially act as a counterpoise to their portrayal as passive victims since, if they proved active in resistance, this discourse would be threatened.

II: Revolutionary Policy and Resistance to Nuns

That the Revolution was not initially anti-clerical in intent is shown by the response of revolutionaries to the English convents in the aftermath of the storming of the Bastille. The Bastille was situated next to the convent of the Blue Nuns and they were witness to the attack. However, the expected anti-clericalism did not materialise. Instead, the revolutionaries attributed their success to God's intervention. The Blue Nuns convent recorded how the 'soldiers ascribed their success to the divine assistance provided them by these good nuns and went at night to thank them'.⁴⁷⁵ In fact the convents considered themselves in 'much greater security than we would have expected in such a sudden change' because the city now

⁴⁷⁴Groubentall de Limière, *Adresse aux religieuses*, (Paris, 1789). P. 6.

⁴⁷⁵ 'Correspondence relating to France, including many letters from the English Nuns at Paris', Mary Bernard to unknown recipient, 15 July 1789, British Library, AddMs 30002, fol. 17.

ascribed 'their preservation to the prayers of religious and pious souls'.⁴⁷⁶ It appeared that English convents were now 'held in more honour and esteem than had ever been publicly showed to religious houses'.⁴⁷⁷

Nonetheless, in the initial stages of the Revolution officials aimed to appropriate the Church's wealth and control its organisation. On 28 October 1789, the National Assembly suppressed solemn monastic vows and forbade the admission of new entrants. By 13 November 1789, all superiors of religious establishments were obliged to give a written declaration of their personal property and income.⁴⁷⁸ Since this involved local officials visiting the convents in person, it clearly resulted in increased interference in the lives of Women Religious. Yet it did not prove immediately hostile to them. Article 3 of the decree concerning the suppression of orders of solemn vows exempted female convents from being closed down and, although the National Assembly sought to abolish religious dress, this was not immediately carried out. Between 1789 and 1792, convents were allowed to continue electing superiors provided that a municipal officer was presiding.

Although tensions emerged as the revolution began to impact increasingly on the lives of the nuns, Revolutionary authorities demonstrated a degree of respect towards women religious and sought to maintain order. Abbess Mary Clare Bond described the scene when soldiers arrived at the English Benedictines convent in Paris and asked them to ring a Te Deum noting that 'the officers and soldiers-as many as could enter into the church-joined with them in a military manner their Drums beating and their swords held up'.⁴⁷⁹ However, far from condoning this behaviour, revolutionary authorities deemed it a crime since 'it is made a death for any guard or soldier to enter our apartments with any kind of arms or to ask them

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Archives de la Ville, Dunkirk, Fonds Ancien, C435, 'Declaration des Biens Meubles et immeubles'

⁴⁷⁹ Mary Bond to unknown recipient, 16 July 1789, Add. MS 30002, fol. 21.

for any money or provisions.⁴⁸⁰ Indeed, when soldiers did this at the English Augustinians convent on August 8 1789 they were sent to court at Ville de Grace for ‘frightening the nuns’.⁴⁸¹

However, official protection for nuns proved short-lived as financial imperatives necessitated the appropriation of convent funds. In October the court of Versailles was removed to the Louvre, coinciding with a more extreme policy towards convents. Abbess Mary Clare Bond noted the ‘distress of bread and money this kingdom is reduced to by ill managers and evil hearts’ and stated that this had necessitated that ‘all who have any revenue are obliged to contribute largely to the National Debt, church plate and all unnecessary ornaments are desired to be sent to make money’.⁴⁸² By 1790 Abbess Teresa Joseph Johnson, who took over as Abbess of the Paris Benedictines from Mary Clare Bond, was clear that ‘public affairs are in the most critical situation’.⁴⁸³

Thus the suppression of French solemn-vowed convents in February 1790 would seem to have been undertaken for primarily economic, rather than ideological, reasons. Significantly, although Revolutionaries visited to appropriate their wealth, English convents were exempted from closure.⁴⁸⁴ Moreover, in return for Church property, revolutionaries were willing to grant each nun a pension. Indeed, Abbess Teresa Joseph Johnson, echoing Groubenthall’s view that it would be impractical to suppress convents, expressed optimism that ‘we shall not be molested as we are so poor they can gain nothing by us but on the contrary if they take all we have and give us pensions as promised they will be the losers. Tis thought in general only

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁸¹ Mary Bond to unknown recipient relating news of Augustinians, 23 July 1789, BL Add MS 30002, fol. 22.

⁴⁸² Mary Bond to unknown recipient, 2 October 1789, BL Add MS 30002, fol. 26.

⁴⁸³ Teresa Joseph Johnson to unknown recipient, February 1790, BL Add MS 30003, fol. 32. Teresa Johnson’s names prior to profession was Mary Ann Johnson.

⁴⁸⁴ ‘Declaration des Biens Meubles et immeubles’, 1 February 1790, Fonds ancien, C435, Archives de la Ville, Dunkirk. ‘Declaration of Goods and Revenues by the English Benedictines, 24 Feb 1790’, Biens des établissements religieux supprimés, Series S, S4616, Archives Nationales.

the rich convents will suffer'.⁴⁸⁵ It seems, therefore, that a process of compromise was still possible at this stage and that Revolutionaries were not directly hostile to nuns. Indeed, the Paris Augustinians recalled that at the first visit in January 1790 the Revolutionaries 'behaved with much respect, wishing all prosperity to the nuns and giving assurance of their protection'.⁴⁸⁶

However, it would soon become clear that the portrayal of nuns as victims requiring protection would prove problematic at times when nuns demonstrated resistance to the enforcement of government policy. On the second visit of revolutionary officials to the Augustinians convent the nuns were asked to give Church plate as a gift but 'returned an answer no'.⁴⁸⁷ The revolutionaries then pleaded with the nuns to leave the convent and, 'being once again met with a negative', were forced to retire.⁴⁸⁸ Clearly diplomatic approaches failed to reach the desired ends when nuns proved resistant. Indeed, an early indication of the tension between the rhetorical construction of nuns and their actual position came in March 1790 when a decree was passed requiring all nuns to submit to an interrogation so officials could verify their intention of remaining or quitting their convents.⁴⁸⁹ This was followed in April 1790 by a decree placing convent property under inventory.⁴⁹⁰ This meant that nuns were, for the first time, in a position to counter the claim by 'forced vocation' literature that they were imprisoned in convents against their will. In response to the first decree, the Blue Nuns of Paris stated that 'we choose to devote our lives to God' and resisted attempts by Revolutionaries to free them from the convent.⁴⁹¹ In

⁴⁸⁵ Teresa Joseph Johnson to unknown recipient, 2 February 1790, Add. MS 3002, fol. 34.

⁴⁸⁶ Annals of the Paris Augustinians, p12.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 19.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ 13 March 1790, 'Procès verbal visite au couvent et denombrement des religieuses', C435, Fonds ancien, Archives de la Ville, Dunkirk.

⁴⁹⁰ 8 April 1790, 'Déclaration des biens meubles et immeubles', C435, Fonds ancien, Archives de la Ville, Dunkirk; 2 March 1790, 'Blue Nuns Inventory', S4616, serie s, ancien regime, Archives Nationales.

⁴⁹¹ 13 March 1790, état des 28 membres de la communauté par l'abbesse, C437, Archives de la Ville.

response to the second, the convents presented public petitions expressing the hope that their property would be preserved.⁴⁹² Of course, there were several explanations put forward in the French press as to why nuns did not immediately leave their convents and instead presented petitions in their defence of their community. An anonymous letter written to the National Assembly deputies blamed the fanaticism of ‘those odious agents of clerical despotism, priests and monks’ and argued that there were ‘still weapons of fanaticism which serve themselves by inspiring in these spirits [nuns], often too feeble and too credulous a defiance injurious to the Nation and to our wise legislators’.⁴⁹³ Yet, by choosing to stay and signing that they remained of their own free will, nuns publicly defended their position as cloistered women and resisted revolutionary rhetoric.

English nuns’ resistance to revolutionary decrees increased with the passing on 12 July 1790 of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, which placed the Catholic Church in France under state control. Historians have often regarded this as marking a shift towards anti-clerical policies in France. However, it was the oath of 27 November 1790, which required all members of the secular clergy to swear an oath to the civil constitution thereby making them in effect civil servants, which forced Women Religious into a position of resistance to the French regime. Since the Pope had not sanctioned the Civil Constitution, many clergy felt unable to take the oath. In this respect it essentially created two churches in France, one expressing loyalty to the Revolution, and the other to Rome. Clergy taking the oath would be referred to as ‘constitutional clergy’ while those refusing were termed ‘non-jurors’ or ‘refractory priests’. In this situation English convents, alongside their French counterparts, were placed in the position of counter-revolutionaries through their support for refractory

⁴⁹² 14 April 1790, ‘état des biens et rentes’, C437, Archives de la Ville; nd, ‘petition of the Blue Nuns’, S4618, serie s, ancien regime, *Archives Nationales*.

⁴⁹³ 19 April 1790, *Journal Universel*, S4617, Serie S, Archives Nationales.

priests.⁴⁹⁴ From this point on English nuns were forced into asserting their opposition to the constitutional clergy and their support for the refractory priests. As Mother Clare Conyers of the Poor Claires from Aire noted in January 1791, the oath was ‘contrary to God, Conscience, and Religion and what no good Christian neither can nor will take, tho there is already some priests has [sic] taken it’.⁴⁹⁵ The Paris Augustinians recorded that the ‘chief difficulty we had at that time was on account of the oath, as there was a constituted curate at our parish, and they were for some time very active in attempting to drane [sic] off to their party’.⁴⁹⁶ This tension was exacerbated from 11 April 1791 when the non-juror churches were closed down and English nuns were expected to support the constitutional priests who had their powers from the French state. The English confessors were forcibly sent to the English male monastic houses since Revolutionaries considered them a negative influence on the nuns. The English Benedictines relate being forced into a position of opposition on account of the oath: the ‘first thing that they came to us to require was that we should ring our bell for the installation of the intruded bishop of Paris...we refused to do it and the official threatened us’.⁴⁹⁷ Shortly after that incident a revolutionary official returned with a printed paper, which he required the Prioress to sign. The paper:

required that we should not let any priest say mass in our church for us but only one who had his faculties from the intruder, and this we absolutely refused, telling them that we could not nor would not acknowledge any other but our own church bishop who had been sent away.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁴ Those who refused the oath went into exile. During the period 1793-1800 over 5000 exiled clergy resided in England. See, Dom A. Bellenger, *The French Exiled Clergy in the British Isles after 1789* (Bath, 1989) and K. Carpenter and P. Mansel, *The French Emigres in Europe and the Struggle against Revolution, 1789-1814*. (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1999).

⁴⁹⁵ Mother Clare Conyers to Isaac Young of Kingerby, 3 January 1791.

⁴⁹⁶ Annals of the Paris Augustinians, p. 15.

⁴⁹⁷ The new constitutional Archbishop was John Baptiste-Joseph Gobel (1727-94) who was consecrated archbishop on 27 March 1791 and guillotined in 1794 for opposition to Robespierre’s Cult of the Supreme Being.

⁴⁹⁸ 15 January 1791, S4167, serie S, AN.

From this point on, as the latter description indicates, conventual support for refractory priests could not be ignored and, like male monastics, they would be regarded as opponents of the Revolution.

This gulf between women religious and the Revolution would be further exacerbated by the increasingly radicalised atmosphere in the New Legislative Assembly.⁴⁹⁹ There were several reasons for this. Firstly, there were only twenty clergy in the Legislative Assembly, all of whom had taken the oath, which meant the position of the Catholic Church was under-represented. Secondly, with the King's attempted flight in June 1791, there was an increased need to be seen expressing loyalty to the Revolutionary nation and a growing suspicion of enemies within. It was easy to suspect English convents of pro-monarchical, and therefore counter-revolutionary tendencies since, like French convents, they frequently expressed Royalist sentiments. The accounts of the Augustinian Benedictines and Liège Sepulchrines show that they regularly prayed for the maintenance of the French monarchy and sang mass for Louis XIV's anniversary.⁵⁰⁰ Thirdly, from 1792 onwards the assembly became increasingly concerned with procuring funds for the likely wars with countries allied against France. In February 1792, the Legislative Assembly demanded the suppression of all monastic houses in order to pay the national debt, stating that 'these little congregations of superstitious women are very expensive, very indecent, and very dangerous'.⁵⁰¹

Revolutionary policy from August 1792 therefore reflected the increasingly anti-monarchical and nationalistic rhetoric of the assembly. There were renewed attempts to arrest suspected enemies of the Revolution and all inhabitants of convents were required to take the new

⁴⁹⁹ The Legislative Assembly ruled from October 1791 to September 1792 when it was succeeded by the Convention.

⁵⁰⁰ 'Annals of the English Augustinians', p. 7.

⁵⁰¹ February 1792 'Mise en Liberte', S4618.

Liberty-Equality oath declaring, 'I swear to be faithful to the nation, to maintain with all my power Liberty, Equality, the security of persons and property, and to die, if need be, for the execution of the law'.⁵⁰² While French nuns could at this stage claim the universal applicability of the term 'citizen', acknowledging the authority of the Revolutionary regime in petitions but using it to claim the patriotic duty of officials to uphold a nun's individual right to remain in a convent, English convents, being denied national citizenship, did not have that option. From 1792, therefore, English convent annals show an increased fear for their situation. Nuns no longer expressed the confidence witnessed during the early stages of the Revolution when they felt assured of protection. Nor did they feel able to benefit from the ambiguity of Revolutionary decrees. Instead, they began to 'dread for our lives for we are not in surety and really do not know whether we shall escape some general massacre.'⁵⁰³

With compromise no longer possible, English convents increasingly positioned themselves as counter-revolutionaries. By the end of September 1792, the new Convention had abolished the monarchy, decreed a Republic, and declared a Revolution against all kings. In January 1793, King Louis XVI was executed and English convents made clear their counter-revolutionary stance by expressing regret for the passing of the monarchy. The Poor Clares of Aire offered a *Te Deum* and the Augustinians recorded in their annals that 'this day the communitys [sic] mass was said for King Lewis the 16th who was executed the day before'. Moreover, with the Convention's declaration of war on Britain and Holland, on 1 February 1793, and the Legislative Assembly's decision to seize British subjects and goods, the position of English convents within French society became problematic since their status as British subjects ran counter to French patriotism and the claims of the war.

⁵⁰² 'Mise en Liberte', S4618, *Archives Nationales*.

⁵⁰³ Teresa Joseph Johnson to unknown recipient, February 1792, fol. 71, AddMS3002, British Library.

The war led to an emphasis on republicanism and patriotic zeal and resulted in increased anti-clericalism on the part of the Revolutionary government. Lady Mary Augusta Douglass, of the Hoogstraeten convent, recorded how, on 17 February 1793, the first Sunday of Lent, Revolutionaries ‘planted the tree of Liberty by the town house with great joy. We were obliged to ring our bells and they made the magistrates of the town dance around the tree’. There were attempts to ban religious services and ‘dreadful defamations in churches during the Holy Mass’. The Paris Benedictines recall being ‘ordered to take off our habit, and put on secular [clothes], it being a mark of slavery, and unbecoming that time of liberty’.⁵⁰⁴ By the end of 1793, the Republican calendar had been adopted and Catholic Churches closed down reinforcing the anti-clerical agenda. It seems that the secularised notion of ‘The Year of Liberty’, combined with the demands of war, had resulted in a need to suppress convents in the national interest.

Nevertheless, there were clear discrepancies in the response of revolutionary officials to revolutionary dictates. It was clear that the excesses of the Legislative assembly did not command widespread support. Anti-clericalism from within the wider population appears to have been mixed. The Blue Nuns noted in 1793 that ‘our church would at that time have been shut again but the lower class of people in the neighbourhood would not suffer it’.⁵⁰⁵ Yet when officials entered the English Augustinian convent in Paris, in February 1793, to force them to change into secular clothes, the annals recall that ‘some of the more moderate sort told us that they had no orders to force us to change our dress but that they could not answer for the mob’.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰⁴ *Annals of the English Benedictines of Ghent* (1894), pp. 20-24.

⁵⁰⁵ *Diary of the Blue Nuns*, XVI.

⁵⁰⁶ *Annals of the English Augustinians in Paris*, p. 32.

This discrepancy helps explain why it was practical necessity rather than anti-clerical policy which led to the imprisonment of English nuns in 1793. On 27 August 1793, the French Fleet at Toulon was surrendered to the British, leading to hostility to British exiles in France and significant repercussions for the convents. Between September and October 1793, Revolutionary officials began imprisoning English nuns within their convents. The Paris Augustinians convent in the rue Fossés-St-Victor became a prison holding the Benedictines and the Augustinians.⁵⁰⁷ The Paris Augustinians related how:

a decree was passed to imprison all the subjects of the king of Great Britain, in consequence of which the next day, the convent was surrounded by guards. The motive of the decree was, the English having taken Toulon, and made the commissaries of the National Convention prisoners, we were to be hostages for their safety.

On 14 October 1793, the Blue Nuns convent in the rue de Charenton in the Faubourg St Antoine near the Bastille also became a prison, housing the nuns and forty English women who had been living in Paris.⁵⁰⁸ The Blue Nuns recorded that ‘sentinals [sic] were placed at all our doors within the community...a list was taken of our names, ages &c [and] the national seal was put upon all our doors and the high pensioners were ordered to quit’.⁵⁰⁹ The Cambrai Benedictines were imprisoned within their own convent, alongside 80 men and women, at Rue de Champ de L’Alouette from 3 October 1793 and a gaoler arrived the next month to guard them. They were transported to the Chateau de Vincennes prison nine miles away before being relocated to the Austin nuns’ convent. English convents in Flanders were also affected. The Ghent Benedictines noted the first visit by Revolutionary officials in

⁵⁰⁷L’Abbe F.M.Th. Cedoz, *Un Couvent De Religieuses Anglaises A Paris De 1634 A’ 1884* (Londres, 1891), pp. 246-7. The Paris Augustinians were imprisoned from 7 November 1794 to March 1795 while the Conceptionists were imprisoned from 14 November 1794 to March 1795.

⁵⁰⁸ There were 18 nuns in the convent at the time.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

October 1793 when ‘a band of armed men with their leader demanded entrance’. On a second visit, they searched for priests and arms and ‘no corner of the house, garden nor any outbuilding was left without being thoroughly searched. They searched our cell for papers and letters, and when they found any they put seals upon them’. By the end of October all English nuns were imprisoned within their convents and subject to continued visits by Revolutionaries.

Nevertheless, it is significant that imprisonment did not preclude a process of compromise and resistance. The response of gaolers to the nuns was often ambiguous with some keepers appearing more anti-clerical than others. For instance, the first keeper given to the Paris Benedictines ‘show[ed] his powers in form’ but was willing to accept bribes whereas the keeper at the Vincennes prison allowed them to keep their breviaries in order to say the divine office.⁵¹⁰ The Paris Benedictines noted that ‘after the coming of the keeper with the first prisoners we still continued our quire duties and had mass as usual but only a short one as none could assist at it but ourselves’.⁵¹¹ So, too, the Paris Augustinians recorded that the ‘religious being in this situation monitored from the third of October continued all their religious exercises as usual’.⁵¹² Convents attempted to continue the observance of religious celebrations and on the feast of St Teresa ‘the nuns asked to gather among themselves tea enough to have a dish altogether [and] also make a little recreation on that day as they had used to do’.⁵¹³ In an attempt to prevent Revolutionaries from selling convent property, they made ‘the best table linen into petticoats’ and hid crucifixes under their clothes. When sympathetic French women came to visit the prisoners, nuns smuggled out convent property and correspondence.

⁵¹⁰ Annals of the Ghent Benedictines, p. 112.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Annals of the Paris Augustinians, p. 12.

⁵¹³ Ibid.

The extent to which nuns were able to maintain religious observance and the aid given to them by sympathetic revolutionary officials helps explain why secularisation never succeeded in France. Indeed, Robespierre's Deist-orientated 'Cult of the Supreme Being', although intended to replace Christianity, was never successful in its aims. Robespierre's fall on 27 July 1794 initiated another change of policy by Revolutionary officials. The English Nuns still remained prisoners but, as the annals of the Poor Clares record, 'after the death of Robespierre, they began to find a great difference in their treatment, and were permitted to receive intelligence of their friends'.⁵¹⁴

Of course, Robespierre's fall did not end anti-clericalism in France. On 21 February 1795, a decree was passed proclaiming the official separation of church and state. Yet, in reality, the attempt to create a secular state worked to the advantage of nuns since it reinforced the notion of liberty of conscience, ensuring that nuns were, in theory, allowed to worship freely. After this date the gaolers were withdrawn from English convents and English nuns were set free. It is clear, therefore, that policy towards nuns changed in the period 1789-1795 and that, far from being passive victims, nuns, by formulating strategies of resistance, were key contributors to the process.

III: Negotiating Identity: Convent identity and negotiations with Britain

Despite their newly gained political and religious freedom, only one English convent, the English Augustinians of Paris, remained in France after 1795. The other English convents successfully negotiated with the British government for a return to England. The decision to return to England requires explanation since Napoleonic France was less openly hostile to Catholicism than the French Republic had been. Indeed, recent scholarship has opposed the

⁵¹⁴ BL Add Ms 13000, fol. 2.

view that Napoleon failed to halt the process of de-Christianisation initiated by the French Revolution.⁵¹⁵ Instead, Jacques Boudon has argued that Napoleon's religious policies contributed to the 'hausmannisation religieuse', a late nineteenth century religious revival, in Paris.⁵¹⁶ Moreover, Ruth Harris has noted that the Catholic Church under Napoleon became increasingly concerned to demonstrate the continued presence of God in the world, culminating in the famous cult of Lourdes in 1858.⁵¹⁷ In fact, Napoleonic France oversaw the redrawing of parish boundaries, an aggressive church building programme, and the revival of monasticism.⁵¹⁸ The English Augustinians in Paris successfully negotiated with Napoleon to retain their convent and by 1808 were once again wearing their habits and taking French boarders.⁵¹⁹ Why, then, did exiled convents choose to return to England?

In the first instance, there were practical reasons why so many exiled English convents chose to return to England in 1795. The first of these was political. Robespierre's fall resulted in a period of instability under the Directory and the return of political order under Napoleon was hard to predict. English nuns were in a precarious position since their convents had been taken over by the French state. This meant that they had few resources at their disposal, were not assured of a home, and were increasingly dependent on French charity. Political factors were exacerbated by the economic situation in France which left them little alternative but to seek further charity from relatives in England. Convent property had been requisitioned by Revolutionaries and by 1799 much of this would be sold off to fund the war. The French government would remain hostile to convent education, making it difficult to recruit

⁵¹⁵ D. Van Kley, 'Introduction', in *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe*, ed. D. Van Kley (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), pp. 1-45.

⁵¹⁶ J. Boudon, *Paris: Religieuse sous le Second Empire* (Paris, 2001); S. Curtis, *Civilising Habits: Women Missionaries and the Revival of the French Empire* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵¹⁷ R. Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London, Allen Lane, 1999).

⁵¹⁸ T. Kselman, *Miracles and Prophecies in Nineteenth Century France* (New Brunswick, 1983); S. Curtis, *Educating the Faithful: Religion, Schooling and Society in Nineteenth-Century France* (Northern Illinois, Illinois University Press, 2000).

⁵¹⁹ 'Annals of the English Augustinians', p. 20.

schoolchildren from within France.⁵²⁰ The war with England prevented recruitment, of either schoolchildren or new novices, from the homeland and these were both a vital source of income and the only means of continuing as an 'English' house abroad. Furthermore, continued inflation and the scarcity of provisions within France made existence as a community difficult to maintain. An anonymous nun from the English Benedictine convent typifies this view, writing that 'we shall be turned out of our house next week with so little. I have neither parents nor friends here. When I have bought my cloth-not being allowed to go out in our dress-I shall hardly have sufficient for a months board and lodging.....in short.....there is nothing but religion'.⁵²¹ A return to England was therefore regarded by the exiled English as practically advantageous.

However, ideological reasons, which reflected the effects of the Revolution and the changing nature of convent identity, also have a role in explaining why the exiled convents chose to return to England. English convents in the period after 1795 were very different institutions to those which had existed prior to the French Revolution. Their experience of the French Revolution, although largely negative, had fundamentally changed their outlook and identity. As early as 1789 the deteriorating situation in France had necessitated a more utilitarian stance on the part of English convents. Indeed, the Sepulchrines of Liège noted that had the Revolution not taken place when it did 'in three days a National Bankruptcy would have taken place, instead of which it is made a high Treason to say that such a thing will happen.'⁵²² The encroaching bankruptcy of the French state in the months prior to the outbreak of Revolution, and the accompanying famine, led to English convents being

⁵²⁰ The English convents had been forbidden from recruiting French schoolchildren in 1792 and this legislation had not been officially repealed. 10 May 1792, lettre de l'abbesse Elizabeth Foster a'la municipalité avertissant qu'il n'y a plus de pensionnaires francaises, C435, Fonds Anciens, Archives de la Ville, Dunkirk.

⁵²¹ January 1794, fol. 46, Add. MS 3002, British Library.

⁵²² March 1789, 'correspondence from the exiled English convents', fol. 12. Add MS 30002.

overwhelmed with demands for charity. In January 1789, Mary Bond related that the convent:

[s]ent yesterday to fetch a mother of seven small children fearing how bashfulness should hinder her asking for help as often as she wanted it. She had a child at her breast and being asked if she had eaten anything that day she fell a crying and said she had taken up a piece of bread but before she could get it into her mouth the children for hunger tore it from her lips. It shall make your heart ache.⁵²³

Thus the gravity of the economic situation led nuns to become increasingly involved in the local community.

Exiled English convents' interaction with the 'public sphere' was reinforced by the Revolution's intervention into the lives of nuns. As we have seen, the enforcement of Revolutionary policy regarding the confiscation of convent goods and the requirement that nuns state their intention to remain in their convents led to public resistance by English nuns. This forced them into a process of public petitioning and increased their interaction with government officials. In January 1790, Abbess Teresa Joseph Johnson noted that 'we have just signed an address to be presented to the National Assembly in favour of the English houses. We have to make a declaration of all we have which must be done before 1st March'.⁵²⁴ By the end of 1792 all the English houses had presented petitions to the National Assembly and completed the verbal process of stating their desire to remain nuns. Moreover, the imprisonment of nuns' confessors after 1791 meant that nuns were increasingly placed in the position of decision-makers and no longer tied to the dictates of their confessors. Thus, when France placed the convents' goods under inventory in 1790, it was the nuns themselves who wrote to the authorities to defend their property. Mary Clifford, the abbess of the English

⁵²³ 'Correspondence relating to France, including many letters from the English nuns at Paris', Abbess Mary Clare Bond to unknown recipient, June 1789, BL Add MS 30002 fol. 4.

⁵²⁴ Abbess Teresa Joseph Johnson to unknown recipient, January 1790, BL Add MS 30002, fol. 29

Augustinians, recorded that the convent 'presented a petition to the assembly as the other English houses all did about the same time which was to chiefly to represent, that our effect, as British property, we trusted should be preserved'.⁵²⁵

The Revolution therefore exacerbated the process, begun in 1750, whereby exiled English convents increased their ties with Britain. A process which had been merely advantageous in the period 1750-1789 became a necessity in the aftermath of the French Revolution. As Mary Clifford's defence of her convent as British property suggests, since many of their items were held in British bank accounts, nuns were forced by the circumstances of the French Revolution to refigure their identity as British subjects. English nuns made an appeal to their benefactors in England, thereby strengthening connections with their homeland and preparing the ground for their future return. On one level, they appealed to the history of English Protestants sending their children to be educated at the exiled convents. Thus the Brussels Carmelites, writing in 1792, believed 'a house of our order would not be rejected in England. By using of the prudence that might be required....I think it might not meet with so much difficulty as the English send their children into our houses abroad I should think they could have no objection to people under their own eye [sic]'.⁵²⁶ The Augustinians of Bruges provided their patrons, the Welds of Lulworth, with a history of their institution in the hope it would influence public opinion in Britain to intervene on their behalf. The ability to exchange correspondence, following Robespierre's fall, enabled English convents to renew negotiations with their patrons and the British government for a return to England. Most convents presented petitions to the British state declaring themselves to be 'British-born subjects'. They also corresponded with the Vicars Apostolic in England asking for advice, arguing that they were 'determined to use our best efforts to be admitted to England'. Thus,

⁵²⁵ Mary Clifford to unknown recipient, June 1790, BL Add MS 30002, fol. 24.

⁵²⁶ Author and recipient unknown, August 1792, BL Ad Ms 30002, fol. 34.

in 1792 the Brussels Carmelites wrote to Bishop Douglass, the Vicar Apostolic of the London District, asking ‘the liberty of begging your charity and that of your generous friends of an annual pension if you are kind enough’.⁵²⁷

However, it seems that religious reasons for a return to England outweighed the practical advantages. After 1795 exiled nuns viewed England as providentially designed to become their home once more. Throughout the Revolution, nuns had read events in providential terms and detected the hand of God in the events as they unfolded. Thus the speed with which the storming of the Bastille was accomplished was not due to God’s favour to the revolutionaries but to his preservation of the nuns. The Blue Nuns recorded that:

[t]he taking of the Bastille in two hours is looked upon as an evidence mark of the divine protection, for had it lasted ten hours we should have been blocked up with canon and armies all round us and starve, die by the sword, or surrender was all the choice [sic], and the latter the city and its guards was determined never to do.⁵²⁸

When the situation became increasingly precarious for English convents, they urged their congregation to trust in God. Thus in June 1790 Teresa Johnson urged her fellow nuns to ‘trust in the mercies of God and be resigned to all [that] his divine providence permits to befall us in life and death.’⁵²⁹ English nuns were reassured by changes within British society and interpreted them as a sign that God was preparing England for their return. The 1791 Toleration Act seemed to suggest that anti-Catholicism was on the wane in England and, in contrast to France where the situation still seemed precarious, England seemed to offer a stable society for future foundations. Exiled convents argued that Britain had reaped the rewards of French evil. Thus the Ghent Benedictines noted that ‘Almighty God who knows

⁵²⁷ Brussels Carmelites to Bishop Douglass, August 1792, BL Ad Ms 30002, fol. 35.

⁵²⁸ July 1789, BL Add Ms 30001, fol. 16.

⁵²⁹ Abbess Teresa Joseph Johnson to unknown recipient, June 1790, BL Ad Ms 30002, fol. 22.

how to bring good out of evil was designing England to reap his great benefit from the errors of other nations'.⁵³⁰ Furthermore, exiled convents increasingly came to view the French Revolution in terms of cyclical history. They began to compare the events of 1789 with those of 1640 and 1688 in England. To do this, they noted that some Catholics had intended the destruction of Charles I in 1640 and some had taken the oath to William III in 1689. The English convents could therefore, as the Bruges Augustinians put it, 'see plainly the finger of God in the results of the French Revolution' and regarded it as God's vengeance on the sins of the Catholic community and a judgement on the lack of unity caused by Jansenist and Cisalpine factions within the Catholic Church. Lady Ursula Stafford of the Bruges Augustinians, looking back on the period of French Revolution in 1796, noted that 'it had been part of God's plan and a trial'.⁵³¹ The trial had been intended to purge the Catholic community, thereby resulting in spiritual renewal.

The English convents attributed their successful re-founding on British soil after 1795 to this process of spiritual renewal. Their belief in the future success of English convents now back on British soil helps explain why they did not choose to return to France despite eight hundred and eighty new French female congregations being founded under the first Empire. Instead, the English convents began a process of reintegration back into English society where they would encounter opinions which ranged from sympathy and support to hostility and proscriptions. Attitudes to convents and their inhabitants changed repeatedly during the French Revolution, from initially sympathetic representations, to their portrayal as counter-revolutionaries. Yet nuns should not be seen as passive victims of the process but as active participants in a rapidly changing revolutionary situation. Throughout the Revolution, nuns had resisted by opposing the authorities and situating themselves as counter-revolutionaries.

⁵³⁰ *Annals of the Ghent Benedictines*,

⁵³¹ Ursula Stafford to Lady Jerminham, 16 June 1796, JER 142, Jerminham correspondence, University of Birmingham.

By so doing they engaged with the 'public sphere' and took part in a process of Catholic renewal that would manifest itself in the founding of new convents in Britain in the period after 1795.

Chapter Six
Returning Nuns
The Return of Convents to Britain, 1794-1829

In 1794, William Knollis, the eighth Earl of Banbury, fighting the French in Flanders, visited the English convent at Ghent for the first time. Banbury was a Protestant and, at first, hostile to the notion of convents and suspicious of what he might find there. His initial entry seemed to confirm his prejudices since, finding himself 'before a large grate of stone... which (he) own(ed) gave a shock to (his) nerves', he expressed horror at the 'many bars' that blocked his way.⁵³² He 'perambulated the whole of the edifice' and was 'shown their very cells' until he found himself 'in the gloomy passages with a candle' where 'by that one light the church rooms and different sacred mementos indeed appeared awful and striking, the habit contributing to it'.⁵³³ However, on meeting the Abbess, Margaret Arden, he noted that the 'reception was worthy (of) imitation, a hand extended with the most benign countenance at once removed from (his) mind the idea of a nunnery'.⁵³⁴ Her 'conversation was lively and cheerful and very likely to produce striking affects on a young mind for that kind of life' and he was 'obliged to acknowledge' that so much 'heartfelt cheerfulness predominated' among the nuns.⁵³⁵ He was soon a frequent visitor and noted that Arden was a politically astute woman: she asked for English newspapers, discussed the 1791 Toleration Act, and offered thanks to 'sweet England, and sweet King George'.⁵³⁶ However, Banbury remained suspicious of Catholicism-that 'superstitious religion' of 'knee-bending and idolatry'- and

⁵³² William R. Knollis (Wallingford) to Mary Knollis, 19-20 January 1794. Hampshire Record Office, Winchester, 1M44/110/8a,b

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ William Knollis to Mary Knollis, 20-23 January 1794, 1M44/110/81

⁵³⁵ Ibid.

⁵³⁶ William Knollis to Amelia Knollis, 9 February 1794. 1M44/110/129b.

refused to give his consent to his niece's profession as a nun.⁵³⁷ In this, his correspondence is indicative of Protestant attitudes to convents at the beginning of the nineteenth century and reflects the complexities of an Anglican regime frequently at odds with female monasticism. Banbury's visits coincided with the French occupation of Ghent and he was soon witness to the dispersal of the community and their return to England where such issues would resurface in the midst of convent reintegration.⁵³⁸

However, this process of repatriation, the issues and tensions which surfaced at crucial points, and which potentially shed light on key aspects of the politics of religion in the long eighteenth century, has rarely featured in historiography. In the work of John Bossy, John Aveling and Michael Mullett they receive only a passing mention; for Bernard Ward they form part of an ambitious, if outdated, narrative but are never a key focus within it; in accounts of nineteenth century convents they are a causal factor for future foundations, but never subject to analysis themselves.⁵³⁹ Yet, eighteen convents returned to England from France and Flanders: the Benedictine communities of Brussels, Ghent, Cambrai, Paris and Dunkirk; the Carmelites of Lierre, Antwerp and Hoogstraten; the Franciscans of Nieuport; the Augustinians of Bruges and Louvain; the Dominicans of Brussels; the Sepulchrines of Liege; the Conceptionists of Paris and the four Poor Clare convents of Rouen, Aire, Dunkirk, and Gravelines.⁵⁴⁰ Their members came from significant Catholic families, most notably the

⁵³⁷ William Knollis to Mary Knollis, 12 February 1794. 1M44/110/83; William Knollis to Mary Knollis, 2 March 1794. 1M44/110/90.

⁵³⁸ William Knollis to Mary Knollis, 1M44/110/116, 3 June 1794 and William Knollis to Mary Knollis 1M44/110/124, 4 July 1794. In the latter Banbury describes the evacuation of the convent. The Weld correspondence describes a shell falling on the house shortly after the Nuns departure: A. Oswald to T. Weld, 15 July 1794, Dorset History Centre, Dorchester, D/WLC/C349. See *Annals of the English Benedictines at Ghent* (Oulton, 1842) for the convent's own account of its return.

⁵³⁹ J.C.H. Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe: the Catholic Recusants in England from Reformation to Emancipation* (London, Bond and Briggs, 1976); J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (London, Longman and Todd, 1975); M.A. Mullett, *Catholics in Britain and Ireland, 1558-1829* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1998); B. Ward, *The Eve of Catholic Emancipation*, 3 vols. (London, 1911); B. Walsh, *Roman Catholic Nuns in England and Wales 1800-1937* (Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2002)

⁵⁴⁰ See Appendix, table 2. Many of these convents have annals edited by the Catholic Record Society although these do not, in the main, provide a detailed record of their return to England. See Catholic Record Society,

Petre, Throckmorton, Weld, Canning, Clifford, Howard and Stafford connections.⁵⁴¹ They were well-known within political and social circles and did not remain at the peripheries of society. The return of English convents did not go unnoticed at the time. Their plight featured in press, parliament and pulpit, they were a dominant concern in the correspondence of the four Vicars Apostolic and they were a crucial feature of petitioning between the Catholic Committee and the British Treasury.⁵⁴² The British government were not immune to the issues returning convents posed for Church-State relations: they calculated their numbers, inventoried their belongings and documented their activities.

One reason for the dismissal of returning convents from the historiography lies in the tendency to construct Catholic women as passive and inert. As the introduction to this thesis argued, women religious have often been denied agency by a historiography seeking to stress patriarchal control and gendered limitations. This view predominates to an even greater extent at the end of the eighteenth century where, no longer protected by the enclosed space of a convent, exiled from a continental society, which had been their home for decades, lacking the revenue and economic means of survival, which an active convent community provided, nuns have been portrayed as victims, soon to become the passive beneficiaries of

'Registers of the English Benedictine Nuns of Pontoise', *Miscellanea X*, vol. 17, (London, 1915); Catholic Record Society, *Franciscana*, vol. 24 (London, 1922); Catholic Record Society, *The Diary of the Blue Nuns 1658-1810*, Vol. 8. (London, 1910); Catholic Record Society, 'Registers of the English Benedictine Nuns, Brussels 1598-1856', *Miscellanea IX* (London, 1914). For short general surveys of the convents and their return to England see B. Whelan, *Historic English Convents of Today: the story of the English Convents in France and Flanders in Penal Times* (London, Longmans, 1936), B. Zimmerman, *Carmel in England 1615-1849* (London, Burns and Oates, 1889) and F. M. Steele, *The Convents of Great Britain* (London, Sands and Co., 1902).

⁵⁴¹ Many of these families have extensive correspondence, which show the depth of their interaction with British society. I have drawn on this for parts of this chapter. See The Jerningham Correspondence, JER3-179, University of Birmingham, Birmingham; Throckmorton Papers and Correspondence, CR1998, Warwickshire Record Office, Warwick; The Stafford-Howard Correspondence, DG641, Staffordshire Record Office, Stafford.

⁵⁴² A wealth of material exists in the archives of the Vicars Apostolic, which can be used to trace the interactions between Catholics and British politicians. For this study I have used: Series A,Z, C, Birmingham Archdiocesan Archives, Birmingham; SEC/AAW, Saint Edmund's College Archives, Westminster; XLIV-XLVII, Bishop John Douglass Papers, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, Westminster.

an increasingly tolerant society.⁵⁴³ However, the links that, as chapter four demonstrated, were beginning to be forged with Protestant travellers by the end of the eighteenth century, and which offered convents a crucial means of support, did not vanish on their return to Britain. Exiled English convents were also able to call on support from the British Catholic community. Historians have tended to ignore the complex web of connections integrating exiled convents with the Catholic community in England due, in part, to the politically passive notion of the Catholic gentry posited by John Bossy in *The English Catholic Community*. Bossy both established the idea of a Catholic gentry moving from ‘inertia to inertia’ and gave a structural coherence to the idea of a Catholic *community*.⁵⁴⁴ However, in so doing, he led successive historians to minimise the significant levels of support offered by the Catholic clergy and lay gentry in England and their wider integration within British society. By focusing too rigidly on a sense of community within English Catholicism historians have not adequately addressed its fragmentary nature during this time. In downplaying the role of Catholic factions as contributors to political and theological debate they have missed the wider resonances of this interaction in eighteenth century political discourse and its effects on changing attitudes to convent re-settlement.

The concept of community cohesion and religious unity has a wider significance within eighteenth century historiography. In the first instance, it has led to a stress on anti-Catholicism as an ideology around which a Protestant society could unite. In the second, it has created a tendency to view the secular threat, epitomised by France during the Terror, as a causal factor in the creation of a community of Christian believers united against heresy and

⁵⁴³ J. A. McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millennia* (Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 1996) attributes agency to a later stage in the development of convents with the expansion of educational and pastoral duties in the late nineteenth century; C. Clear, *Nuns in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1987) refers to women religious as the ‘institutionalised embodiment of a rising, self-sacrificing, and essentially subordinate woman’, p. 166; S. O’ Brien, ‘Terra Incognita’: The Nun In Nineteenth-Century England’, *Past and Present*, 121, (1988), pp. 110-40.

⁵⁴⁴ See Bossy, *The English Catholic Community*.

unbelief. The change of emphasis from English to British history has been a key contributor to the first tendency.⁵⁴⁵ The twentieth-century historiographical trend towards discussions of national identity and the discourses associated with it has led historians to emphasise the unifying potential of anti-Catholicism as a national ideology.⁵⁴⁶ Thus, Linda Colley's study of a constructed British identity considered the prominence of Protestantism in eighteenth-century society and its significance as an agent of change.⁵⁴⁷ Jeremy Black has emphasised how anti-Catholicism remained the 'prime ideological stance in eighteenth-century Britain' exciting 'fear or unease'.⁵⁴⁸ However, the notion of Protestantism as a monolithic ideology capable of uniting the British nation has been challenged, most notably by Bryan Young, Jeremy Gregory and Justin Champion, with recent work stressing the fragmentary nature of Protestantism both within established Anglicanism and through its relationship with Protestant Dissent.⁵⁴⁹ In addition, historians have explored the potential for local religious concerns to militate against national considerations.⁵⁵⁰ This scholarship has impacted to some extent on the study of Catholic communities through the work of Colin Haydon whose examination of anti-Catholicism in the eighteenth century has demonstrated its denominational and geographical variations.⁵⁵¹ However, Catholicism itself lacked a monolithic identity and no comparable study of Catholic factions, of which female

⁵⁴⁵ J. G. A. Pocock led the way in revising attitudes to British history in the 1970s. See, for example, J. G. A. Pocock, 'British history: a plea for a new subject', *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 47, 4 (1975), pp. 601-624.

⁵⁴⁶ See, for instance, the wealth of historiographical contributions coming out at the turn of this century. Eg. I. Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of English Identity* (London, Routledge, 1999); P. Mandler, *The English National Character: The History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2006); T. Nairn, *After Britain*, (London, Granta, 2000).

⁵⁴⁷ L. Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707-1837* (London, Pimlico, 2005).

⁵⁴⁸ J. Black, *The British Abroad*, (Stroud, Sutton, 1992) pp. 238-9.

⁵⁴⁹ B. W. Young, *Religion and Enlightenment in Eighteenth Century England: theological debate from Locke to Burke* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998); J. Champion, *Republican Learning: John Toland and the Crisis of Christian Culture, 1696-1722* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003); J. Gregory and J. E. Chamberlain (eds.), *The National Church in Local Perspective: the Church of England and the Regions, 1660-1800* (Woodbridge, Boydell and Brewer, 2000).

⁵⁵⁰ For all these trends see T. Claydon and I. McBride, eds., *Protestantism and National Identity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁵⁵¹ C. Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth Century England, c.1714-80: a Political and Social Study* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1993).

monasticism was a distinct variant, has yet taken place. In addition, there has been little attention to the reality behind the rhetoric: the political context lying behind Catholic factions and its impact on convent communities.

Following in the wake of J.C.D. Clark's positing of England as a confessional state dominated by a State-Church ideology, historians have re-emphasised the importance of religion as a social and political force and have sought to challenge the notion of secularisation as a causal precursor to toleration. A number of recent works have pointed to the clerical context to Enlightenment and have located its adherents from within Low Church latitudinarianism and religious Dissent rather than as an atheistic minority.⁵⁵² In addition, there has been an increased interest in nineteenth-century religious revivalism characterised by the growth of Evangelicalism and the Second Spring.⁵⁵³ Nonetheless, 1789 has still been identified as a significant turning point marking a shift towards greater toleration for religious minorities, which still has teleological dimensions.⁵⁵⁴ Linda Colley has suggested a 'waning' of anti-Catholicism towards 1829 in the wake of sympathy for French *émigrés* and Protestant fears of Christian destruction.⁵⁵⁵ However historians, echoing an earlier historiography dominated by high politics and electoral shifts, have emphasised political expediency as a

⁵⁵² For the theoretical context to these issues see: S. Bruce, 'Secularization: The Orthodox Model' in *Religion and Modernisation: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularisation Thesis*, ed. S. Bruce and R. Wallis, pp. 8-30. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992); J. Cox, 'Master narratives of long-term religious change' in *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000*, ed. H. McLeod, and W. Ustorf, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 201-17; J. Sheehan, 'Enlightenment, Religion, and the Enigma of Secularisation: A Review Essay' *American Historical Review*, 108 (2003) pp. 1061-80. For the 'earlier' historiographical current see: P. Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, Vol. 1, *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York, Norton, 1969); J. I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*. (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001). For the more recent trend see: K. Haakonssen, ed. *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth Century England* ((Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996); J. Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: translation, scholarship, culture* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2005).

⁵⁵³ See, for instance, P. Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: gender and emotion in early Methodism* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008); S. Mumm, *Stolen Daughters, Virgin Mothers: Anglican Sisterhoods in Victorian Britain* (London, Leicester University Press, 1998).

⁵⁵⁴ Compare H Kamen *The Rise of Toleration* (New York, Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1967) with P. Zagorin, *How the Idea of Religious Toleration Came to the West*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁵⁵⁵ Colley, *Britons*, pp. 123-9.

greater motivating factor in the promotion of toleration than a self-consciously latitudinarian ideology.⁵⁵⁶ Thus, Jeremy Black has accounted military recruitment the primary cause behind Catholic Relief Bills and a recognised need to weaken the Established Church's grip on military offices in the interests of military security.⁵⁵⁷ The Catholic component to these narratives has been notably absent: historians have not adequately assessed parliamentary shifts in attitudes to Catholic toleration, nor have they given Catholics any role in these debates. By failing to explore this angle, historians have missed political attempts to control the re-founding of convents in England and the interplay of ideas this gave rise to.

This chapter considers the reintegration of female monastic institutions within British society and, in so doing, reassesses issues of agency, Catholic communal coherence and toleration at the end of the long eighteenth century. Section one of this chapter examines the immediate reception of nuns on their return to England. It considers the response of the public and the press to the return of convents and explores the ambiguity inherent in Protestant sympathy for returning convents. The second section of this chapter examines convent negotiations with the British state for re-settlement. It considers the role of convent patrons in ensuring the success of the nuns' petitions and explores Hanoverian attitudes to the convents. In the third section of this chapter the controversies provoked by the attempts of English nuns to found permanent convent communities are considered. This section focuses on the factions within the Catholic community and their different conceptions of the role of monastic institutions within a Protestant state. It also explores the attitudes of British politicians as they wrestled with the complexities of religious toleration in political context of the nineteenth century. The chapter argues that anti-monasticism was a distinct aspect of anti-Catholicism and eighteenth-

⁵⁵⁶ See U. Henriques, *Religious Toleration in England 1787-1833* (London, Routledge, 1961); G. I. T. Machin, *The Catholic Question in English Politics 1820 to 1830* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁵⁵⁷ J. Black, 'Confessional State or Elect Nation? Religion and Identity in eighteenth-century England' in *Protestantism and National Identity*, pp. 53-75.

century politicians were, in reality, more capable of distinguishing between Catholic factions and interest groups than a monolithic notion of Catholicism suggests. By getting back to the complexities of convent reintegration we challenge the notion of female passivity and Catholic inertia and re-examine the role of convent inhabitants and their patrons in a re-definition of toleration that was never a process but a series of appropriations.

I: Anti-convent rhetoric and the public response to returning convents

As Mary Augusta Douglass, a member of the Hoogstraten community, sailed into Dover in 1794 she recorded how English soldiers questioned the nuns' arrival asking 'where (are) all these French women come from?' She replied 'Pardon me, gentlemen, we are natives of England fleeing from the French and hope to find an asylum amongst you'.⁵⁵⁸ Couched in terms both of resistance and submissive appeal, her response was an affirmation of English identity, a disavowal of French association, and a plea for toleration reflecting a process of reintegration, which always required astute negotiation. The immediate impression gained from chronicle accounts and correspondence suggests that returning convents met with a favourable reception from the public. The Cambrai Benedictines, one of the first English convents to return, recorded that 'a very great crowd waited at the shore on their arrival' and 'gave the community hearty welcome and congratulated with them' conducting them to the 'custom house and the Inn Keeper who gave (them) a room for the night'.⁵⁵⁹ The Carmelites noted that a crowd had gathered to cheer and welcome home the religious and 'many people of various sorts and stations...received (them) with joy and affection'.⁵⁶⁰ However, tensions emerged as convents attempted to re-found. The Sepulchrines of Liège were prevented from

⁵⁵⁸ M.A. Douglass to Bishop J. Douglass, May 1794, AAW/XLV/II.

⁵⁵⁹ 'A Short History of the House from its Foundation', unprinted MS, St Mary's Abbey, Colwich.

⁵⁶⁰ *Monasticon*, p. 97.

renting the property of High Meadows from Lord Gage on account of ‘a Protestant Gentleman who lives in the neighbourhood, who is so much prejudiced against Nuns, that he did not like to live near them’.⁵⁶¹ There were many negative ‘scouts in the papers’ and Bishop Douglass, the Vicar Apostolic of London, recorded that ‘the men of Oxford talk much against the opening and establishing of monasteries in England’.⁵⁶² Such attitudes reflected the fluctuating opinions of eighteenth-century British society and required convents and their patrons to enter into a series of negotiations with the British State.

Thus, if Britain was willing to offer asylum to nuns it was not an unproblematic acceptance. As chapter four demonstrated, British culture at the end of the eighteenth century expressed an ambiguity towards female monasticism, which often ranged from sympathy and romanticism to fear and vilification. Indeed, the nineteenth century saw the theme of the ‘forced vocation’ reoccur in the flowering of the Gothic genre in Britain from 1790-1816. Banbury’s correspondence, with its portrayal of darkened passages and barely penetrable vaults, had clear parallels in literature at the turn of the nineteenth century. Thus, Agnes, in Lewis’ *The Monk* is buried alive in a vault while in *The Black Convent* monastic space is shown to be socially constricting, leading to the destruction of rationality and the creation of a climate of fear.⁵⁶³ Gothic novels were not expressly anti-Catholic: Radcliffe’s Catholic characters are often given heroic qualities.⁵⁶⁴ However, they did function as vehicles for anti-monastic sentiment portraying convent inhabitants as the superstitious remnants of a reactionary age. As an institution the convent is portrayed as outdated and despotic, the hierarchical structure leading inevitably to oppression and its very nature conflicting with the

⁵⁶¹ Catholic Record Society, ‘Records of the English Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre at Liege’ *Miscellanea X*, (London, 1915) p. 132.

⁵⁶² Bishop Douglass, Diary, SEC/6/9/48, Westminster Archdiocesan Archives, Westminster, P. 23.

⁵⁶³ M. Lewis, *The Monk: A Romance* (London, 1790) p. 112-126; Anon, *The Black Convent* (London, 1819) p. 234-8.

⁵⁶⁴ A. Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (London, 1794); A. Radcliffe, *A Sicilian Romance* (London, 1790).

progressive ideals of a liberal society.⁵⁶⁵ For Catholicism to be presented as rational required an admittance that convents belonged to a medieval past. Thus, in Radcliffe, Catholic heroines forgo the enclosed space of the ladies' chapel to offer up prayers to heaven in the open air.⁵⁶⁶ There were clear political overtones to such depictions. Sir Walter Scott, whose nuns are immured to die behind convent walls, was a key adversary in debates against the permanent establishment of monasteries in 1800.⁵⁶⁷ Charles Maturin, whose work depicted convents as arenas of deception and oppression, argued against Catholic emancipation in the 1820s.⁵⁶⁸ For many, the repeal of the penal laws represented a retreat from modernity rather than a staging-post in the progress towards toleration. The portrayal of convents in novels depicted this descent into an uncivilised past.

In part these portrayals reflected Protestant anxiety over the return of the English convents from exile and the growing political prospect of Catholic Emancipation. However, they also resulted from fears over the increasing calls for Protestant nunneries. The idea of a Protestant nunnery was a key aspect of social commentary long before the High Church movement sanctioned deaconesses. A concern for the plight of single middle-class women, in the wake of a growing surplus of women of marriageable age, led social commentators to pursue the idea of all female communities as a vehicle for the education of middle class girls.⁵⁶⁹ Some were willing to argue that the dissolution of the monasteries had produced a negative effect on female education and piety and had left fewer provisions for unmarried women. Thus, the Anglican, Samuel Wesley, had earlier in the eighteenth century lamented the destruction of

⁵⁶⁵ See, for instance, W. Ireland *The Abbess* (London, 1801); A. Lancaster, *The Abbess of Valiteria; or the Sorrows of a Falsehood* (London, 1816); Anon., *The Convent Spectre, or the Unfortunate Daughter* (London, 1808).

⁵⁶⁶ Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, pp. 173-9.

⁵⁶⁷ W. Scott, *Marmion* (London, 1808); *Hansard*, I, VI, P. 925.

⁵⁶⁸ C. R. Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer* (London, 1809).

⁵⁶⁹ B. Hill, 'A Refuge from Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery', *Past and Present*, 117, (November, 1987) p. 116.

monasteries and hoped for ‘some societies founded in their stead but reformed from their errors’.⁵⁷⁰ By the mid-eighteenth century Thomas Amory, the Unitarian, and William Hayley had put forward proposals for Protestant nunneries while Sarah Scott offered a literary ideal of the form this might take in her novel *Millenium Hall*.⁵⁷¹ These ideas were widely discussed at the beginning of the nineteenth century which meant that convents became part of public discourse. However, such discussions also created a growing anxiety from conservative circles intent on regarding female monasticism as an arena for ‘superstition and irrationality’.⁵⁷²

This anxiety reflected a deep-seated uneasiness about the nature of convent communities, which expressed itself in the difficulties convents faced as they attempted to re-settle after 1795. Although, as chapter four demonstrated, nuns were clearly visible in pictures and in print there was little practical contact with them, outside the circles of elite travellers, in wider eighteenth-century society. The oft-quoted remark by Dicconson of Whittrington’s servant who, when asked to deliver some returning nuns from the station, thought they were ‘some new kind of potato from France’ is perhaps exaggerated but it expresses something of the public misconception of nuns in nineteenth century Britain.⁵⁷³ In a political context where Britain was at war with France the idea of nuns as spies, which as previous chapters have shown was often central to anti-nun polemic, resurfaced. Since the English convents had clearly returned to Britain from the ‘enemy’ country of France they were immediately suspected of being secret agents. Indeed, the apparent inaccessibility of convent communities was believed to give nuns the perfect opportunity to harbour French spies. As one anonymous

⁵⁷⁰ S. Wesley, *A Letter Concerning the Religious Societies* (London, 1724) pp. 37-8.

⁵⁷¹ T. Amory, *Memoirs: Containing the Lives of Several Women of Great Britain* (London, 1755) pp. 379-408; W. Hayley, *A Philosophical, Historical and Moral Essay on Old Maids: By a Friends to Sisterhood*, III, (London, 1785) pp. 199-200; S. Scott, *Millenium Hall*, (London, 1762).

⁵⁷² S. Thomas, *An Essay On Protestant Monasteries*, (London, 1782) p. 89.

⁵⁷³ *Annals of the Ghent Benedictines*, p. 29.

commentator writing to the *Morning Chronicle* in 1798 observed, it was doubtful the inhabitants were really nuns at all; they were more likely to be 'French men dressed in nuns' clothing'.⁵⁷⁴ An anonymous landowner writing to a justice of the peace in Lancashire, whose letter was published in the *Morning Chronicle* of 1794, noted that 'receptacles for Nuns and Seminaries for priests, which are now said to be preparing within the country, are alarming innovations'.⁵⁷⁵ Despite considering himself a 'friend to Toleration on extended principles' the landowner viewed the return of convents as a national threat.⁵⁷⁶ His letter was a rallying call to put forward proposals to find the 'least expensive method of defending the Kingdom' and to secure 'measures against the importation of nuns and emigrants'.⁵⁷⁷ Thus, public hostility to nuns was aroused as English convents attempted to re-found in Britain.

However, such instances of public hostility, were not always reflected in the mainstream press. Indeed, in the immediate context of war with revolutionary France British newspapers were more inclined to play up nuns' victimised status as a potent symbol of the impact of Revolutionary Tyranny. Moreover, eighteenth-century newspapers did not merely reflect public opinion but were subject to patronage mechanisms and the dictates of party policies, which meant they were often subject to influence by those favourable to Catholic Emancipation.⁵⁷⁸ For example, the *Gentleman's Magazine*, under the editorship of the printer and antiquarian John Nicholls, acted under the influence of patrons, such as Edmund Burke, who were favourable to Catholic emancipation and keen to present a positive view of female monasticism. The paper serialised *Letters from Paris* during the summer of 1791, which

⁵⁷⁴ *Morning Chronicle*, 14 March 1798.

⁵⁷⁵ *Morning Chronicle*, 22 June 1794.

⁵⁷⁶ 'Letter to William Houghton, JP' DDHO 1562, Lancashire Record Office, Preston.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁸ The extent to which newspapers reflected public opinion or were an attempt to control it has been a dominant feature of the historiography of the period, especially since the English translation of J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (London, 1989). However, the best authority on this subject for the eighteenth century still remains A. Aspinall, *Politics and the Press, c. 1780-1850* (London, Longmans, 1940).

brought to the attention of the public the suffering of the French clergy during the Civil Constitution and noted that French Women Religious had ‘been stripped naked and in public barbarously scourged’.⁵⁷⁹ It also allowed Catholics, most notably Bishop Milner, the Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District, a voice within the public sphere by publishing letters which portrayed the returning English convents in a positive light. So too, the Whig-influenced *Lloyd’s Evening Post* attempted to prove that the French were ‘as a people...brutal beyond comparison’, by stating that ‘the Jacobins daily amuse themselves by going to the female convents, and whipping the nuns in the most indecent manner’.⁵⁸⁰ In a bid to aid recruitment to the war-effort the government were keen to construct an image of the secularising French Revolution as a threat to Christianity. Thus, the *London Chronicle* and *Morning Herald*, under the influence of Lord North and George III, played up the anti-clerical agenda of the Revolutionaries. They did this by demonstrating the negative impact the French Revolution was having on the French Church and by portraying nuns as victims of this agenda. Thus, the *London Chronicle* recorded instances of French anti-clericalism where ‘images of Christ, the sacred vessels were profaned by these impious savages and the religious inhabitants forced, almost naked, to drive the cattle’ and noted that when the French entered Belgian territory they ‘took as hostages two nuns’.⁵⁸¹ The idea of nuns as the victims of French Terror could therefore be a useful tool for the British media in its effort to gain support for the war against France.

The return of the English convents to Britain from their exile in France and Flanders thus elicited a mixed response from the British public and the press. On the one hand public hostility to the return of convents, reflected by letters in the press, suggest that nuns continued to arouse fears. Indeed, these fears sometimes reflect the stereotypes of nuns

⁵⁷⁹*Gentleman’s Magazine*, 16-18 October 1791.

⁵⁸⁰*Lloyds Evening Post*, 7 November, 1794.

⁵⁸¹*London Chronicle*, 22 October 1794.

portrayed in the Gothic novels of the 1790s. In their association of English nuns with espionage and potential plots against the state they hark back to earlier images of nuns which, as previous chapters have shown, were a key feature of pamphlets in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is perhaps not surprising as Britain once again had a clearly defined enemy in the form of the French state and nuns were still to some extent seen as ‘foreign’ immigrants from France to Britain. However, in the mainstream press a different view emerges. Here, nuns are generally portrayed as the victims of the French tyranny and it is clear that Britain hoped to present itself as a nation that, unlike France, was open to religious diversity. The next section examines the political context behind these complex portrayals.

II: Convent negotiations, Catholic supporters, and the return of exiled cloisters to Britain

Returning English convents had initial support from the Hanoverian regime, which, like many newspapers, was keen to present an image of the British monarchy as tolerant and liberty-espousing in contrast to the, in their view, tyrannical French state. Relations between Hanoverian Britain and the English convents in exile had proved complex throughout the eighteenth century. Indeed, with the demise of Jacobitism the English convents in exile had been willing to express a degree of loyalty to the Hanoverian state. Moreover, the Prince of Wales’ (the future George IV) relationship with the Catholic Mrs Fitzherbert initially gave British Catholics the hope of further toleration although it also sparked fears of possible Protestant reprisals.⁵⁸² Edward Jerningham, writing to his niece at the Blue Nuns convent in

⁵⁸² The Prince of Wales had an ongoing relationship with Mrs Fitzherbert and they claimed to have ‘married’ in 1784 although this was not sanctioned by British law. Fitzherbert was the former spouse of Edward Weld, a key donor to the English convent of Augustinians in Bruges, and had herself been educated at a convent in Paris. Their relationship brought the future George IV into increased contact with the Catholic gentry. However, Fitzherbert and George IV separated in 1811 leading to a change of attitude on the part of the Hanoverian regime.

Paris, expressed concern that, should the Prince of Wales seek to officially marry Fitzherbert, politicians would exclude Catholics from public life when faced with another potential Exclusion Crisis.⁵⁸³ Interestingly, both the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York had visited the nuns during their time abroad. Keen to contrast the tolerant attitude of the English nation with the supposed barbarism and immorality of the French, the Duke of York had ‘g(iven) presents to all the English convents’ in exile when fighting the French in Belgium in 1793.⁵⁸⁴ Mary Weld, a nun at the Bruges Augustinians, wrote favourably of this visit noting that George III had ‘said we had a very good house and when he was in our room said we were very well lodged to which I made answer that when we were in our cells we were as happy as queens’.⁵⁸⁵ In a politically- motivated act calculated to present Britain as a tolerant society the French Benedictine convent of Mongaris were persuaded to remain on British soil when they passed through England whilst fleeing from the French Revolution in October 1792.⁵⁸⁶ *The Oracle* wrote a favourable account of this incident recalling how ‘The Prince and Mrs Fitzherbert paid them a very long visit ...over which his Royal Highness set on foot a subscription for their relief, which, in a short time, amounted to upwards of one hundred pounds’.⁵⁸⁷ The Duke of York had also aided the English convents in Flanders in the wake of the French invasion. The Ghent Benedictines relate how, having been ordered to leave their convent by the revolutionary authorities, ‘the Duke of York came hastily to the rescue, and ordered his men to place the military wagons at the disposal of the nuns, and convey the baggage to Antwerp’.⁵⁸⁸ On August 24 1794, when stationed fighting the French in Flanders,

⁵⁸³ Edward Jerningham to Charlotte Jerningham, April 1795, JER83, Birmingham University Archives, Birmingham.

⁵⁸⁴ Mary G.S Weld to Thomas Weld, 6 March 1793, Dorset History Centre, Dorchester, D/WLC/C133.

⁵⁸⁵ Mary G.S. Weld to Thomas Weld, 3 March 1793, D/WLC/C131.

⁵⁸⁶ The Mongaris Nuns were permanently settled at Bodney Hall in Norfolk in 1793 and re-housed at Princethorpe in Warwickshire in 1832. See Sister F. Stapleton OSB, *The History of Princethorpe Priory* (Hinchley, 1930).

⁵⁸⁷ *The Oracle*, 31 October 1792.

⁵⁸⁸ *Annals of the Ghent Benedictines*, p. 79.

the Duke of York had visited the Hoogstraten convent and, assuring them of a safe return to England, had given English passports to ‘all the English convents applying for one’, ensuring that ‘they and their goods might pass without molestation into any part of England they might choose to go’.⁵⁸⁹ Initially therefore the Hanoverian monarchy seemed to offer hope for the successful re-foundation of the English cloisters on British soil.

English convents were keen to play on this positive response from the Hanoverians by deliberately appealing to the liberty and toleration of the British State in their negotiations for a return. In order for convent petitions, which called on the British government and monarchy to allow them to return and re-found, to be effective they had to be produced in a way that contrasted the liberty of the English constitution with the tyranny of the French state. For example, when the Poor Clares of Aire returned they wrote to the government to ‘express the happiness of being now on British ground and under administration which is opposite to that experienced under French tyranny’.⁵⁹⁰ In an attempt to counter the strand of anti-Catholic discourse, which, like Gothic novels, often associated convents with a barbaric and medieval past, convent petitions re-positioned their identity as civilised British subjects by pointing instead to the barbarity of the French enemy.⁵⁹¹ Thus, the Paris Augustinians stated that they were ‘terrified by such unheard of examples of barbarity and injustice, residing in places where this cruel foe threatens invasion-pillage and murder’.⁵⁹² The Poor Clares of Aire played up the secular threat from France and their loyalty to Britain by describing the ‘general devastation of religious and temporal concerns in France’ and stressing that they were ‘his majesty’s subjects in that unhappy country’.⁵⁹³ The convents made clear their victimised status by contrasting British respect for individual property rights with the

⁵⁸⁹ *Monasticon*, p. 88.

⁵⁹⁰ M. Hodgson to J. C. Hippisley, 5 July 1795, RCBU14/132, Lancashire Record Office, Preston.

⁵⁹¹ We have seen examples of this discourse in the Gothic novels discussed earlier.

⁵⁹² *Humble Petition of the English Augustinians*, CR1998/Box86/25.

⁵⁹³ *The Humble Petition of the English Nuns of Aire in Artois*, RCBU14/130.

confiscation of property in France: they were ‘victims to the severest and most cruel decrees ever known, suffering confiscations of property, arrest of their persons, removal from settlements purchased with their own money’.⁵⁹⁴ In so doing, they countered a second strand of anti-Catholic discourse, which had associated Catholicism, as a corporate body under foreign influence, exercising social and economic power, with the destruction of individual property rights and national liberty.⁵⁹⁵ Thus, ‘compelled to starve on a very small portion of bread and water and labouring under many other kinds of distress’ they were grateful to be the ‘beneficiaries of British toleration’.⁵⁹⁶ The English convents were therefore adept at framing their petitions for resettlement around concepts of Britishness deemed acceptable to the British state.

However, an indication that resettlement was more problematic than a linear narrative of acceptance suggests is provided when we take a closer look at the nature of appeals to the British government on the nuns’ return to England. Treasury officials had insisted on an inventory of all moveable goods brought with the convents to England and nuns were required to write stating ‘whether they have an income and what it is’.⁵⁹⁷ *The Humble Petition of his Majesty’s British Subjects the English Nuns Residing in Flanders* stated:

That having been for a great many years past settled in houses purchased by their predecessors, they have also acquired such necessities as are in the common usages of life, amongst which are several articles of church-plate, ornaments of silk and linen, crucifixes, and books and other things which they presume it is contrary to the law of this country to introduce without first obtaining permission from their lordships, notwithstanding the late benevolent extension of favour to Roman Catholics by the British legislature.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹⁴ J.P. Coghlan to J. C. Hippisley, 1794. RCBU14/140.

⁵⁹⁵ For a discussion of this strand of discourse see H. T. Dickinson, *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977).

⁵⁹⁶ J. P. Coghlan to J. C. Hippisley, May 1794, RCBU14/134.

⁵⁹⁷ J. C. Hippisley to J. P. Coghlan, November 1794, RCBU/14/140.

⁵⁹⁸ *The Humble Petition of His Majesty’s British Subjects Residing in Flanders* (London, 1794) D/WLC/R7/8.

There was an ambiguity about the legal status of monastic institutions in England reflected in the 1791 Toleration Act, that ‘benevolent extension of favour’, which had refused to permit habits of their orders or relics ‘save within some place of congregation or assembly for religious worship permitted by this act or in a private house’.⁵⁹⁹ The Act therefore did not officially permit convents and it was not entirely clear that they constituted private houses since legally this only applied to a collective of fewer than five people. Many of the laws regulating worship and passed during the reign of Queen Anne in the first half of the eighteenth century had not been repealed by later legislation and they made subtle distinctions between a Catholic place of worship and a church in the legally defined meaning of the term.⁶⁰⁰ Thus, in order to stress Catholicism’s minority status to that of the Established Church, a chapel was permitted in each Parish but this was not to include a steeple, bell or cross. The Poor Clares of Aire had returned with a ‘harpsichord, books and ornaments for divine service, crucifixes, a large picture, their altarpiece, some small ones and some prints’.⁶⁰¹ In so doing they threatened to de-stabilise legal precedence and presented a conflict of interest with the Established Church.

The close connection between returning nuns and their patrons in Britain helped to overcome these obstacles to the re-founding of English convents in Britain. The Catholic printer, J.P Coghlan, was at the centre of a complex web of negotiations between convent patrons and the British state and his correspondence demonstrates that connections were relatively strong and effective. Coghlan’s two daughters, Elizabeth and Anne, were schooled at the Poor Clares convent in Rouen and he had been an active distributor of correspondence between the exiled

⁵⁹⁹ Quoted in, J. J. Dillon, *A Letter to Edward Jerningham* (London, 1791) pp. 2-5.

⁶⁰⁰ *An Act to Prevent the Further Growth of Popery* (1704); *A Further Act to Prevent the Growth of Popery* (1709).

⁶⁰¹ J. P. Coghlan to T. Long, November 1794, RCBU/14/132.

convents, their families, and the Vicars Apostolic in England during the 1790s, helping to keep continental communities informed of political change.⁶⁰² In the immediate context of the English convents' return to Britain, Coghlan was crucial to ensuring conventual belongings could be successfully brought into England free of customs duty.⁶⁰³ He had provided Charles Long at the Treasury with a list of articles brought by the English convents and had drafted early requests for the aid of nuns in Flanders alongside a list of English men and women under arrest in France.⁶⁰⁴ In addition, he had been central to negotiations with the British diplomat, Sir John Coxe Hippisley, and John King, the Under Secretary of State, regarding the importation of convent belongings and had written to Mr Brooke of the Alien office and the Mayor of Dover to ensure that the nuns were able to proceed to London on disembarkation at Dover.⁶⁰⁵ Of crucial importance were his negotiations with the Arundell and Webb families over where the nuns should be housed on their return.⁶⁰⁶ Acting alongside Mrs Booker of Bond Street, widow of the Catholic book-seller and publisher, Thomas Booker, he had helped house the Brussels Benedictines first at Preston and later at Winchester.⁶⁰⁷ Coghlan's links with the convents did not end on their return for he remained a key aide in their successful re-settlement. Indeed, in 1793 he successfully secured government support for the importation of Catholic Brevaries and Bibles for use in convent services and he ensured death bills were allowed to be printed following the funerals of convent members.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰² See, for instance, RCBU/14/72.

⁶⁰³ J. P. Coghlan to J. C. Hippisley, 17 July 1794, RCBU14/35.

⁶⁰⁴ J. P. Coghlan to C. Long, 6 November 1795, RCBU14/132; J. P. Coghlan to C. Long, 9 November 1795, RCBU14/36.

⁶⁰⁵ J. P. Coghlan to J. C. Hippisley, 4 July, 1795, RCBU14/139; J. P. Coghlan to J. King, 15 July 1795, RCBU14/140; J. P. Coghlan to T. Brooke, 16 July 1795, RCBU14/141.

⁶⁰⁶ *Monasticon X*, p. 15.

⁶⁰⁷ *Bishop Douglass Diary*, p. 31.

⁶⁰⁸ J. P. Coghlan to T. Christopher, 2 May 1793, RCBU14/27; J. P. Coghlan to J. Douglass, 2 June 1794, RCBU/14/38.

Another crucial patron to the exiled English convents as they tried to re-found in Britain was Bishop John Douglass, the Vicar Apostolic of the London District. Douglass was crucial in helping to gain financial relief for convents from the British Treasury. The prime minister, William Pitt the Younger, had initially agreed to ‘allow the Religious of our own country a maintenance...at the rate of £10 per annum each person’ with the first payment issued ‘from the Treasury ...and to be continued by quarterly payments’.⁶⁰⁹ However, the Committee for the Relief of the Refugee Clergy ‘finding the number of the distressed increase upon them partly by the private property of individuals being at length exhausted, and principally by the influx of newcomers from Flanders’ found the money issued from the Treasury inadequate and petitioned for further relief.⁶¹⁰ They were disappointed when, in March 1796, the Committee for the Relief of the Refugee Clergy and Laity resolved to discontinue the distributions made to all the emigrants arriving in England since November 1794.⁶¹¹ As Bishop Douglass recorded in his diary, this would mean ‘more than 700 individuals are deprived of relief among whom are included our religious ladies from Dunkirk, Gravelines, Rouen, and the Benedictines from Paris’.⁶¹² Douglass immediately ‘wrote a letter to Mr Pitt praying for some relief to be granted’ and alongside Bishop Gibson of the Northern District petitioned the government on the Nuns’ behalf.⁶¹³ Douglass worked tirelessly to enlist the support of the powerful Catholic Weld and Arundell families and drew up a petition stating the revenue the convents then possessed and making a case for the need for continued relief.⁶¹⁴ This petition proved successful with Pitt agreeing to extend government Relief to all the English convents.⁶¹⁵

⁶⁰⁹*Bishop Douglass Diary*, p. 29.

⁶¹⁰*Ibid.* p. 30.

⁶¹¹*Committee for the Relief of the Refugee Clergy and Laity*, 8 March 1796.

⁶¹²*Bishop Douglass Diary*, p. 32.

⁶¹³*Ibid.* p. 33.

⁶¹⁴*Committee for the Relief of the Refugee Clergy and Laity*, 12 March 1796.

⁶¹⁵*Bishop Douglass Diary*, p. 33.

In the immediate context of their return therefore the exiled English convents benefitted from support from the British monarchy and their own Catholic networks. Negotiations with the British state required a level of subtlety and the use of men, like Coghlan, who were able to work with politicians to ensure Catholic devotional items could be brought into Britain. They were also able to fall back on the support of the Vicar Apostolic of the London District, John Douglass, when petitioning for further relief from the British government. The Catholic community in Britain however were not necessarily united in their views of how the English cloisters should seek to assimilate into British society.

III: Divisions within the Catholic community and the complexity of convent re-settlement

As the English convents, formerly in exile, began to re-found in Britain tensions within the Catholic community over the role convents should play in British society began to emerge. In the first instance, there were disagreements over the location of convents in Britain which frequently reflected larger arguments over whether convents should be enclosed institutions or more participatory ones. For example, the Catholic lawyer, Charles Butler, who had helped found the Cisalpine Club in Britain in 1792, proposed Canford in Dorset, Hampshire, as a permanent home for the English nuns formerly at Hoogstraten in 1794. He did this mainly because he favoured convent participation in local society and hoped the nuns would be able to convene a school there.⁶¹⁶ However, Bishop Douglass initially refused to sanction the move on the grounds that the nuns would not be able to lead a sufficiently enclosed life in such circumstances.⁶¹⁷ This led to tensions within the community with Mary Augusta, a nun from the Hoogstraten cloister, trying to appease Bishop Douglas and asking ‘what Mr Butler

⁶¹⁶ *Monasticon X*, p. 127.

⁶¹⁷ J. Douglass to C. Butler, 9 November 1794, AAW/XLV/12.

has done that has offended you I know not'.⁶¹⁸ A second issue focused on how far British Catholics should publicly print and publicise Catholic devotional texts for the convent communities. Coghlan's printing of pamphlets regarding the 'miraculous appearances of the Madonnas' for the English convents in 1795 met with hostility from some Catholics since it seemed to needlessly offend Protestant sensibility at a time when convents were struggling to re-found in England.⁶¹⁹ There was some truth to these fears since Protestant clergy, such as Thomas Gorman, of Moorfields church, forbade 'the selling of the pamphlet near Moorfield's Chapel'.⁶²⁰ Coghlan's later attempt, in 1796, to print a pamphlet providing an account of the miraculous cure wrought by the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary on Sister Jean Weardon, a nun from the English Benedictine convent formerly of Ghent, resulted in strong opposition from some members of the Catholic community.⁶²¹ Bishop Douglass noted that although 'many people approve, many disapprove, of the publication' since it seemed to deliberately provoke Protestants at a time when many Catholics sought compromise.⁶²²

Such divisions within the Catholic community were generally based on theological disagreements between the Cisalpines, a liberal movement within Catholicism that sought to limit the Pope's role in temporal affairs, and their more orthodox adversaries. The Cisalpine movement had initially formed a Catholic Committee to argue for further legal concessions in the wake of the 1778 Relief Act and Charles Butler acted as secretary of the Second Catholic Committee during its attempts to advance Catholic Emancipation.⁶²³ They were generally sceptical of miraculous events and sought empirical verification for alleged 'miraculous'

⁶¹⁸ *Monasticon X*, p. 136. A. Douglass to J. Douglass, 11 November 1794, AAW/XLV/14.

⁶¹⁹ RCBU/14/39; *Bishop Douglass Diary*, p. 16.

⁶²⁰ *Bishop Douglass Diary*, p. 17.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.* P. 29.

⁶²² *Ibid.*

⁶²³ The 1778 Relief Act put a formal end to the prosecution of Catholic priests by informers and enabled Catholics who took the new oath denouncing Stuart claims to the throne and denying the temporal authority of the Pope to legally purchase and inherit land.

acts.⁶²⁴ Many, like Butler, had close links with the exiled convents. For example, the leading Cisalpine theologian, Joseph Berrington worked for the Throckmorton family.⁶²⁵ The Throckmortons had close associations with the exiled convents through Sir Francis Throckmorton's daughters, Elizabeth and Catherine, who were nuns at the Augustinians in Paris and the Poor Clares of Rouen. Butler's favouring of a more active role for convents was partly the result of an increasingly radical tendency on the part of Cisalpine movement following the formation of the Cisalpine Club in 1792. From this point on they would repeatedly stress the need for a participatory ecclesiology with the appointment of national bishops by elective agencies within the country and an increased role for lay Catholics.⁶²⁶ Historians have often likened the Cisalpine movement to Gallicanism in France but in reality it offered a specifically Catholic version of Whig constitutional history and placed itself firmly within an English political tradition.⁶²⁷ The Cisalpine movement regarded James II as having been 'bigoted, headstrong and imprudent', often glorified the 1688 settlement, and defended limited, parliamentary, government.⁶²⁸ However, if 1688 was a *good thing* it committed Cisalpines to a contractual theory of government, which conflicted with ecclesiastical hierarchy and created tensions with the orthodox Catholic clergy.

English convents demonstrated an awareness of Catholic factions and attempted through their writing to gain acceptance from the British state. They were often divided in membership between families with a Cisalpine allegiance and those who were firmly orthodox. Thus, Magdalen Gibson, a relation of Bishops Matthew and William Gibson the Vicars Apostolic

⁶²⁴ P. R. Harris, 'The English College Douai, 1750-1794', *Recusant History*, 10 (1969). P. 85.

⁶²⁵ See The Throckmorton Papers, CR1998/CDS folder/53/55, Warwickshire County Record Office, Warwick.

⁶²⁶ See the increasingly radical tendency from the first to the third blue books: Catholic Committee, *First Blue Book* (London, 1789); Catholic Committee, *Second Blue Book* (London, 1791); *Third Blue Book* (London, 1792)

⁶²⁷ See, for instance, E. Duffy, 'Joseph Berrington and the English Catholic Cisalpine Movement, 1772-1803'. PhD dissertation, (Cambridge, 1972); J. L. Altholz, *The Liberal Catholic Movement in England* (Montreal, Montreal University Press, 1962). A more recent attempt at revision has been provided by J. P. Chinnici, *The English Catholic Enlightenment* (Shepherdstown, Patmos Press, 1980).

⁶²⁸ J. Berrington, *The State and Behaviour of English Catholics from the Reformation to the Year 1780 with a View of their Present Numbers, Wealth, Character etc* (London, 1780) pp. 70-82.

of the Northern District, was professed at the Ghent Benedictines on 1 June 1789 into a community, which included the Cisalpine-orientated Throckmorton, Tempest and Bedingfield families.⁶²⁹ Yet, convent annals and family correspondence acted as politically-motivated texts, seeking to portray convents as united and theologically sound. When the Cisalpine movement became increasingly radicalised after 1797, aligning itself with Charles James Fox and expressing pro-French Revolution sentiment, the English convents sought to distance themselves from the movement. Thus, Mary Clifford, of the Sepulchrines convent formerly at Liege, expressed her opposition to the 'Jansenist doctrines of the Cisalpine club' and stated her intention to 'follow God's will in all things'.⁶³⁰ So too, Elizabeth Haggerston, of the Benedictines convent formerly at Cambrai, accounted Cisalpines 'heretics' and urged assistance in following the 'true Catholic faith'.⁶³¹ When, in 1798, the Cisalpine movement were blamed for supporting the United Irishmen in their rebellion against the British state English nuns proved keen to express their absolute loyalty to the British government. Thus, Mary Errington, a nun at the Carmelite convent formerly at Hoogstraten, declared that:

Ireland has a number who adopt the French system and have again lately begun their former cruelty but it was discover'd and subdued before they could accomplish their cruel and horrible designs. It is discovered that the French are the causes of all the disturbances there and had provided the poor ignorant people with armes.⁶³²

From 1798 therefore, as tensions between France and Britain reached a climax in French support for the United Irishman's rebellion, English convents were increasingly keen to defend their *British* identity.

⁶²⁹ *Annals of the Ghent Benedictines*, p. 79. Clare Throckmorton, Mary Anselm Tempest and Benedicta Bedingfield.

⁶³⁰ M. Clifford to J. P. Coghlan, 4 July 1793, RCBU/14/125. Ann Mary Aloysia Austin Clifford, professed 1793, died 1844.

⁶³¹ Elizabeth Haggerston to Sir Carnaby Haggerston, 7 October 1793, ZHG/VII/2, Berwick-upon-Tweed Record Office. Professed 1787 and died 1795.

⁶³² *Monasticon*, 24 August 1803, p. 136.

However, as the English nuns in exile moved into permanent convent residences on British soil, tensions with the British state emerged once more. On their initial return to Britain English nuns had settled in temporary accommodation, often going to the houses of friends and patrons. The community of nuns formerly at Lierre, for example, lived in two separate communities in London whilst the English nuns formerly at Antwerp had lived in the apartment of a secular home in Durham. By 1798 this situation was changing as English nuns purchased property and moved into permanent residences. In October 1798, for instance, Bishop Douglass noted that the ‘Sepulchrine nuns from Liege have purchased a house near Chelmsford as a convent’.⁶³³ So too, by 1800 the Poor Clares formerly of Gravelines had, with the aid of the Marquis of Buckingham, settled into Gosfield Hall in Essex while the Poor Clares formerly of Rouen had gone to Haggerstone, the former seat of Catholic aristocrat, Sir Carnaby Haggerstone, in Northumberland.⁶³⁴ Although religious toleration in Britain could extend to the acceptance of refugee nuns existing in temporary accommodation the permanent establishment of monastic institutions on British soil presented more problems for the British state. It was one thing to accept individual nuns living in houses that were not officially designated as ‘convents’ but it was quite another to accept permanent convent foundations.

This context helps explain the attempt by government ministers to pass the Papists Bill in 1800. Presented by Sir William Mildmay, the Tory MP for Westbury, and known in the popular press as the ‘Nun-Baiting Bill’, the Papists Bill aimed to impose regular government inspections on convent communities.⁶³⁵ The bill brought to the fore issues of how far toleration for Catholics as a religious minority could permit monastic institutions on a permanent footing. The Bill had support from several mainstream politicians, not all of whom

⁶³³ *Bishop Douglass Diary*, October 1798, p. 126.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.* 1795, p. 21-25.

⁶³⁵ *Morning Chronicle*, 24 June, 1800.

were opposed measures of Catholic Relief in general. Indeed, one leading speaker for the Bill, Dudley Ryder, the first Earl of Harrowby and Pitt's protégée, had previously spoken in favour of Catholic Emancipation.⁶³⁶ Ryder argued that he could 'admire toleration as much as any man' but there was a 'point beyond which, for the good of the community, it ought not to be carried' and the re-foundation of convents without restraints simply 'carried toleration too far'.⁶³⁷ Ryder saw a clear difference between tolerating monastic communities on a temporary basis and allowing them to settle permanently for although 'monastic institutions are tolerated from time to time in this country, they would never be made permanent'.⁶³⁸ For Ryder, the inspection of convents should be viewed as a positive measure since it would 'operate as a protection to them' and serve to 'reconcile the minds of the population to their residence in Great Britain'.⁶³⁹ A second key supporter of the Bill, the novelist Sir Walter Scott, would speak in favour of Catholic Emancipation in 1829.⁶⁴⁰ For Scott, at the time however, toleration for convents would prove self-defeating since they were by their nature 'intolerant institutions'.⁶⁴¹ Some were prepared to go further than this by arguing that it was 'incumbent to every genuine friend of Reformed Religion, to check the approaches of Popery in this country to permanent establishment and power' thereby associating Catholicism in its monastic form with Popery.⁶⁴² For the Bishop of Winchester convents were clearly 'contrary to our religion, hostile to our laws and destructive of our property and opulence'.⁶⁴³ Support for the Bill did not, therefore, simply reflect widespread anti-Catholicism but was specifically

⁶³⁶ *Hansard*, I, VII, P. 925.

⁶³⁷ *Parliamentary Intelligence*, 24 June, 1800.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁹ *Morning Herald*, 24 June, 1800.

⁶⁴⁰ *Hansard*, II, V, P. 425.

⁶⁴¹ *Morning Chronicle*, 8 July, 1800.

⁶⁴² *Hansard*, I, VII, P. 926.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*

anti-monastic in intent. Proponents of the bill also revived key anti-monastic stereotype in their portrayal of convents as illiberal.

Opponents of the Bill, however, were keen to portray convents as merely another characteristic of a, by now, harmless Catholic Church. William Windham, the Secretary at War and a close acquaintance of Edmund Burke, Samuel Johnson and Charles James Fox, proved crucial to debates for the opposition. For Windham, who had switched to the Pittites over fears of revolution in 1794, British foreign policy aims necessitated toleration for Catholicism since the secular threat from France was a greater priority. He thus stated that he was 'astonished to see...when the French power was making such rapid advances in Germany and in Italy' people 'alarmed at the smallest progress of Popery'.⁶⁴⁴ He ascribed little power to Catholicism in a political context where 'the work of those atheists, your Voltaires, your Diderots, and your D'Alemberts, had sufficiently...broken the head of that hydra popery, and laid it prostrate at the colossus atheism'.⁶⁴⁵ So too, Benjamin Hobhouse, a Grenvillite Whig with strong reformist tendencies, was prepared to sanction the establishment of convents in England. For Hobhouse loyal Catholics could be easily distinguished and this distinction did not exclude convents. There was, he pointed out, 'a great difference between Papists and those in the country who profess the Roman Catholic Religion' since the 'latter, with few exceptions, have subscribed a renunciation of the temporal supremacy of the Pope'.⁶⁴⁶ It was, he felt, 'tyrannical and oppressive' to enforce 'domiciliary visits of the magistrates' on convents.⁶⁴⁷

Central to debates in parliament was the issue of how far convents represented a collection of individuals and how far they could be regarded as having a wider corporate identity with the

⁶⁴⁴ *Lloyds Evening Post*, 24 June, 1800.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁶ *Hansard*, I, VII, p. 926.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

collective power to threaten Anglican dominance in local affairs. For those seeking to portray convents as merely a collection of individuals, nuns' victimised status was paramount. Thus, the future Whig Prime minister William Grenville, rebuked the tyranny of those seeking to impose sanctions on women who were merely 'living a life...of eccentric ease and fantastic devotion'.⁶⁴⁸ Opponents of the Bill played up nuns' moral attributes stressing their inability to pose a political or social threat. The Bishop of Rochester, Francis Atterbury, noted that 'the nuns were some old, some young ladies of exemplary abhorrence to the gayer pleasures of the world'.⁶⁴⁹ They 'abstained from licentious revelry (and) refused to sally forth at midnight to mingle promiscuously with the crowd of gay and careless visitors to routs'.⁶⁵⁰ However, if convents in contrast were portrayed as societies, they could be represented as a constitutional threat since 'societies must ever be more powerful than individuals, and a Parish Priest could by no means contend with a flourishing convent'.⁶⁵¹ Despite the wealth of propaganda seeking to portray nuns as politically passive, politicians were not unaware that convents had been significant forces within continental society. As the lawyer and politician Thomas Erskine argued on the first reading of the Bill 'all the little towns in France were under the dominion of the convents and 'the same if no check were imposed, would soon be the case in England'.⁶⁵² Thus, 'these corporations if permanently established, would be most formidable and most dangerous'.⁶⁵³

Of course, the main threat to the established Church came from proselytising and it was this that the second part of the Bill hoped to prevent. For Erskine it was 'evident that these persons would exert themselves to the utmost to make proselytes'.⁶⁵⁴ Indeed, he could point

⁶⁴⁸*Morning Chronicle*, 24 June, 1800.

⁶⁴⁹*Parliamentary Intelligence*, 24 June, 1800.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵¹*Morning Chronicle*, 24 June, 1800.

⁶⁵²*Hansard*, I, VII, p. 911.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁴*Morning Chronicle*, 24 June, 1800.

to ‘a long advertisement in a printed book, selling the admirable education which might be obtained at the English convents, and receiving young ladies of every description’ as proof that convents sought to recruit Protestants to their cause.⁶⁵⁵ The issue of conversion had been a significant problem for the British state throughout the eighteenth century and convents’ ability to ‘subvert young children’s minds’ had been a key focus of popular pamphlets.⁶⁵⁶ As the evangelical Anglican Bishop Henry Douglas Ryder pointed out it ‘was a well known and every day’s experience proved the truth of the position, that children adopt implicitly the religious principles of those around them’.⁶⁵⁷ The Bill’s opponents were keen to play down this threat. Benjamin Hobhouse, the Whig MP for Bletchingly in Surrey, stated that he ‘had the authority of the superiors of the houses, at least the most respectable abbesses... for saying that they never admitted any children into the convents, knowing them to belong to Protestant parents’.⁶⁵⁸ Lord Robert Edward Petre, himself a Catholic, concurred with this noting that he had written to both houses of parliament to ‘vouch that the convents did not recruit Protestants’.⁶⁵⁹ Nonetheless, adherents of the bill did have some reason to be alarmed. Convents had primarily sought permanent residences because of the need to start schools. Thus, the Liege Sepulchrines had moved from Holme Hall, Yorkshire to Dean House, Salisbury in 1796 in order to find a house ‘large enough for our community and a school’.⁶⁶⁰ The Ghent Benedictines at Preston noted that ‘once the school was set on foot several families hastened to send their daughters’ with three members of the Protestant Lord

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Eg. Anon., *A list of Monasterys and Nunnerys, belonging to the English Papists in several Popish Countryes beyond the Sea published to informe the people of England of the measures taken by the Papist Party for the Re-establishing of Popery in these nations* (London, 1709); Anon., *An Account of the Seducing of Ann, the daughter of Edward Hatelby, of Ludlow, to the Popish Religion* (London, 1700); Anon., *A Rare Example of a Vertuous Maid in Paris who was by her own mother proved to be put in prison, thinking thereby to propel her to Popery, but she continued to the end (to the tune, O Man in desperation)* (London, 1706)

⁶⁵⁷ *Morning Herald*, 24 June, 1800.

⁶⁵⁸ *Parliamentary Intelligence*, 24 June, 1800.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Catholic Record Society ‘Annals of the Holy Sepulchrines at Liege’ p. 143.

Shrewsbury's family, the Jamesons and the Singletons joining the school'.⁶⁶¹ If the portrayal of nuns as passive beneficiaries was believable when they behaved as private persons dependent on state benefits, it was less obvious once they were permanently established with their own methods of income.

The Papists Bill was eventually lost in the Lords and convents continued free from inspections. However, the debate over the status of convents as either a collection of individuals or a corporation resurfaced during a government attempt to enforce secular dress on convent communities in 1814. Once again, this was largely an attempt to impose a measure of security on the advancement of Catholicism in England resulting from a hardening of attitudes towards Catholicism in the period after 1800. From a government perspective the Papal alliance with Napoleon from 1802 to 1809 had led to fears of another Irish rebellion with French assistance.⁶⁶² Pitt's resignation and the fall of the Talents Ministry in 1807 had demonstrated the Crown's constitutional power in the face of parliamentary attempts to grant Catholic Relief and had ushered in Portland's 'No Popery' ministry with an anti-Catholic majority. If Hanoverian authority had worked in the convents' favour before 1800, the need to stress Protestant Ascendancy in the face of a challenge for parliamentary reform would ultimately work to its disadvantage. For Catholics the failure of the Act of Union to elicit emancipation had created a radicalised Irish lobby led by Daniel O'Connell and supported by some of the Vicars Apostolic, which further alienated parliamentary opinion. A Tory government led by Lord Liverpool was less inclined to permit religious worship free of securities than the earlier Pitt and Addington administrations and it was in a context of parliamentary and Catholic polarisation that ministers wrote to convents to enforce secular dress codes in 1814.

⁶⁶¹ *Annals of the Ghent Benedictines*, p. 87.

⁶⁶² The concordat of 1801 had marked a reconciliation between the Papacy and France.

Hostility to religious dress, in particular the veils worn by nuns, was not new in 1814. The issue of clothing had initially proved problematic, with appearances by nuns in veils prompting riots. For example, the English Carmelites formerly of Hoogstraten had returned to wearing habits on 22 July 1795 noting that ‘we are all in our habits. We put them on as soon as we got them’.⁶⁶³ However, the lay sisters, who ventured outside the enclosure in the performance of domestic tasks, were ‘so frightened that it would cause disturbance among the lower sort of people if they saw them in religious dress that the bishop consented to let them remain in secular’.⁶⁶⁴ During official visits outside the enclosure therefore the choir nuns ‘had all (their) upper dress secular. We had all bonnets’ and a ‘gown of purple and white cotton’.⁶⁶⁵ The Benedictines formerly of Ghent also kept ‘a more secular costume...for outdoor wear as England was as yet far from being ready for the sight of nuns’ veils and habits in the streets’.⁶⁶⁶ In some areas the sight of nuns in veils prompted such hostility that the English nuns formerly of Liège were unable to ‘wear their habits’ at all during their stay in Durham while the community formerly from Antwerp could neither ‘wear the habit nor observe their other religious duties’.⁶⁶⁷ Even during official religious ceremonies convent communities struggled to remain in religious dress in Britain for fear of arousing protests from those outside the community. For example, at the clothing ceremony of two nuns from the Sepulchrine community formerly at Lierre on 9 October 1795 ‘all put on (their) habits for a ceremony, but took them off as soon as it was over, excepting the two Brides who wore them 3 days’. A year later, on 3 February 1796, when Sister Mary Felix Havers was clothed at the same community ‘she did not wear her crown and took off the white veil as soon as the

⁶⁶³ *Monasticon*, p. 114.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p. 100.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p. 130.

⁶⁶⁶ *Annals of the Ghent Benedictines*, p. 78.

⁶⁶⁷ T. Rigby to W. Poynter, 7 May 1804, C2081/a, BAA; *Monasticon* p. 108.

ceremony was over'.⁶⁶⁸ A degree of compromise was therefore always a necessity for English convents as they sought to assimilate back into British society.

Yet, the Catholic community were divided over how far they should seek compromise with the British government over the issue of religious dress. For a progressive Cisalpine like Charles Butler convents had a duty to perform an educative and social function within society and this demand, in a Protestant country, could only be met through secular dress. Visiting the English Carmelites formerly of Hoogstraten at Fryers Place in 1794 he lamented that 'their dress confining them...they were excluded'.⁶⁶⁹ So too, Bishop John Milner, the Vicar Apostolic of the Midland District, had initially envisaged a degree of compromise on the issue of religious dress. Writing to the Papal Advocate in 1809 he had requested exemptions for the English convents under his care on the basis that a Protestant country was not yet prepared for religious dress.⁶⁷⁰ The English convents themselves often supported arguments for secular dress which could lead to tensions with their ecclesiastical superiors. The English Sepulchrines formerly of Liège for instance had initially insisted on remaining in secular dress reasoning that when 'every body was in constant expectation that the French would invade England and that it was probable we should be obliged to separate, it seemed a very unnecessary expense' to purchase habits.⁶⁷¹ When their superior, Bishop Walmsley, the Vicar Apostolic of the Western District, refused to sanction the nuns' proposal to remain in secular dress they sent an appeal to the Papal Nuncio in England, Monsignor Erskine. This took the form of a 'suppliche from the Reverend Mother and community in the form of a letter...drawn up to beg his Excellence would interfere in this business'.⁶⁷² As Bishop John Douglass recalled:

⁶⁶⁸ Catholic Record Society, 'Annals of the Holy Sepulchrines of Liege' P. 137.

⁶⁶⁹ *Monasticon*, p. 109.

⁶⁷⁰ J. Milner, 'petition', C1798/b, BAA.

⁶⁷¹ Catholic Record Society 'Annals of the Holy Sepulchrines of Liege' p. 113.

⁶⁷² *Ibid*.

Bishop Walmesley and Monsignor Erskine are engaged in a paper war. The Liege nuns now settled at Sion house Salisbury have adopted a new dress on their coming to England and B.W has ordered them to put on their habits, as the other religious have done. The nuns refused to obey and apply to Monsignor Erskine to protect them in the wearing of their new assumed dress.⁶⁷³

Erskine's involvement led to debate over the extent of jurisdiction held by ecclesiastical authorities in England. When Erskine wrote to Walmesley to 'set the nuns alone in the wearing of their new dress' the latter refused to submit to his authority.⁶⁷⁴ Walmesley again ordered the nuns to 'quit their new dress and put on their former religious habit' and urged Erskine 'not to obstruct him in doing his duty'.⁶⁷⁵ Such an incident was hugely damaging to the hierarchical nature of established Catholic authority. Walmesley's response was 'couched in strong terms; namely that he was the Pope's agent, and that to disregard his interference was a disregarding of the Pope'.⁶⁷⁶ Thus, even within the Catholic community, divisions arose over the wearing of secular dress as a way to assimilate into British society.

When the 1814 controversy erupted therefore discussions were already well-advanced within the Catholic community and the British government was generally seen to be interfering in matters beyond its jurisdiction. Bishop William Poynter, the Vicar Apostolic of London, took this view and argued that state interference in a religious affair threatened ecclesiastical authority and impinged on the rights of the Catholic Church.⁶⁷⁷ The main arguments against government interference came from the Jesuit preacher and author Peter Gandolph. He stated that:

⁶⁷³ *Bishop Douglass Diary*, P. 65.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁷ W. Poynter to T. Rigby, 17 November 1814, C2080/a, BAA.

It (was) an admitted principle in England, and even of the British constitution, that persons may clothe themselves in any colour they like...without any reproach they run through all the oddities of Eastern and Parisian finery. They likewise carry crosses in their ears and upon their breasts, and have a particular partiality at present for large strings of black beads. All this I simply mention, to convince you how constitutional the principle is, that every lady may suit her own fancy when she dresses herself either home or abroad. Indeed when she remains at home there is no law that requires her to dress at all; as she may sit all day in her night cap and night gown.⁶⁷⁸

It was, therefore, unconstitutional for the British government to attempt to impose constraints on the form of dress worn by Catholic Women Religious.

In his response to the British government Gandolphystressed that under English law convents were merely a collection of individuals and therefore relegated to the private sphere and outside of government control. In England ‘the religious character of the Nun is only written upon and seen in her own heart: whilst her civil character has no existence whatever’.⁶⁷⁹ The English legal system therefore had no way of distinguishing between a nun and a private citizen for ‘where there is no law that obliges the person to stay at home, in a legal point of view she is no Nun, and therefore could not be banished as a Nun’.⁶⁸⁰ Gandolphy, therefore, denied the British State any temporal authority over convents: nuns in England were not ‘distinguished by the law (therefore they)...cannot be punished by the law’.⁶⁸¹ Instead, Gandolphy urged nuns to ‘act in this matter entirely for yourselves’.⁶⁸² If they agreed with the government order and considered ‘some more fashionable cut of dress...more agreeable to your tastes, no objection (could) validly be made to such exchange of attire’.⁶⁸³ However, if they preferred religious dress ‘to any of the gaw-gaws of the day ...no authority in Church or

⁶⁷⁸ P. Gandolphy, *To the Catholic Ladies Living and Boarding in Community*, (7 December 1814,) p. 1.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

⁶⁸² Ibid.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

State' could 'compel (them) to lay it aside'.⁶⁸⁴In urging nuns to decide for themselves Gandolphyeven challenged the view that nuns should be humble and obedient and obey the orders of their superiors. Instead, he argued that although 'meekness and obsequiousness are always commendable in the sex, in this matter it will be necessary for you to shew a little firmness and positiveness'.⁶⁸⁵ He controversially admitted the divided nature of the Catholic community and warned nuns to be 'prepared to bear some persecution from Catholics as well as Protestants'.⁶⁸⁶ They should 'assert the rights of your sex' and by so doing a 'few females (would) effectively defeat (the) unpolite and ungenerous proceeding of your enemies'.⁶⁸⁷The controversy surrounding attempts to impose secular dress on convents therefore raised interesting questions about the status of nuns in British society and brought to the fore divisions within the Catholic community itself.

In the event the argument for the government imposition of secular dress codes on English convent communities was quietly dropped. This was, in part, the result of political change. The years after 1814 witnessed a decrease in anti-Popery with Pope Pius VII's Restoration to Rome in 1815, which had owed much to Wellington's army and Castlereagh's diplomacy, allowed the British government a degree of diplomatic influence on the Papacy. In addition, a new rhetoric of individual conscience came to dominate political discourse. Whig politicians in particular began to argue for liberty of conscience in state affairs and of the irrelevance of religious belief to practical politics. Thus in 1819 the former prime minister, William Grenville, denounced penal codes as 'human legislation, interfering between God and his creatures'.⁶⁸⁸This shift in political discourse would enable most nuns to return to wearing the habit by 1829 and would pave the way to the passing of Catholic Emancipation.

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid. p. 2.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 3.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁸ *Hansard*, II, xx, p. 145.

English convents were also shifting towards more active, unenclosed, activities by 1829 which enabled them to demonstrate an ability to serve their local community and decreased hostility to them. Chapters four and five demonstrated that this shift was already occurring by the end of the eighteenth century. Thus, the English convents had become more outward-facing, and many had founded schools, as a result of financial necessity during their time in exile in the mid-eighteenth century. The impact of the French Revolution, where the English convents had been forced into a public role of petitioning and defending their faith, had also contributed to this trend. However, the economic problems posed by the return of convents to Britain necessitated that convents continue to focus on the economic viability of their institutions by founding schools and focusing on education. The need to purchase new properties on their return to Britain whilst appealing for new recruits from within the local community led several convents to disband or unite with others. For example, the Conceptionists formerly of Paris were unable to re-establish as a community in England while the Poor Clares formerly of Aire and Dunkirk were forced to unite with those formerly of Rouen as a result of declining numbers and economic losses.⁶⁸⁹ The need to secure a regular source of income therefore meant that even those convents previously opposed to undertaking educational activities began to found schools by 1829. The Benedictines formerly of Ghent for instance declared that in a British context ‘any attempt at inclosure was an impossibility’ and opened a school in Preston since a ‘little help to our empty purse was permitted’.⁶⁹⁰ This was despite ‘a day school (being) not suitable for Benedictines... being incompatible with the rules of inclosure’. When the English Sepulchrines’ formerly of Liège founded a school at Essex in 1828 it proved so successful that they were able to turn down an invitation to return to Belgium in 1823 and chose to remain in Britain.

⁶⁸⁹ Catholic Record Society, *The Diary of the Blue Nuns*, Vol. 8. (London, 1910) P. 342; Catholic Record Society, *Miscellanea IX*, 14, PP. 423-35.

⁶⁹⁰ *Annals of the Ghent Benedictines*, P. 87.

Historians working on nineteenth century women religious have tended to attribute the change from enclosed permanent vowed convents to active simple vowed institutions to the influx of women religious fleeing from the new wave of clerical-repression in France in the 1830s.⁶⁹¹ However, as this chapter has demonstrated, the return of convents to Britain in 1795 had already paved the way for these developments. The formerly exiled institutions had worked hard to negotiate with the British state for the re-founding of their institutions on British soil and this had led to a degree of compromise and new debates over the wearing of secular dress and the need for government inspections. The passing of Catholic Emancipation in 1829 did not mark an end to the debate over Catholic toleration nor obviate the need to compromise. Peel's address to parliament on 5 March 1829 sought to prevent 'the extension of communities under monastic or religious vows' and stated that England would 'take precautions against the arrival of monastic communities in the future'.⁶⁹² Anti-Catholicism had not therefore simply disappeared in the wake of the French Revolution, nor is it clear that it had waned. It is, therefore, problematic to regard the French Revolution as a causal factor in the creation of a community of Christian believers since Protestant and Catholic divisions remained central to nineteenth century political culture. This chapter has problematised the notion that an inevitable advancement of toleration in Britain led to the immediate acceptance of monastic communities. Instead, it has shown that anti-Catholicism was multi-faceted: if the need to appear tolerant led certain politicians to support Catholic emancipation it did not prevent anti-monasticism from surfacing in debates and attempted legislation. The English convents themselves were active contributors to the process of assimilating into British society. They contributed to their portrayal as loyal British subjects and were at the centre of debates over the form convent communities in England should take. Yet, Catholic division

⁶⁹¹ Walsh, *Roman Catholic Nuns*, pp. 1-23.

⁶⁹² *Hansard*, xxv, ii, pp. 778-9.

remained integral to disputes over the role of convents in a Protestant State and injected a vital dynamism into parliamentary discussion, which brought the issue of toleration for female monasticism to the forefront of the political debate. By getting back to this complexity we aid our understanding of the process of toleration in Britain and the nature of convent communities in the long eighteenth century.

Staging Nuns

A Conclusion

In 1804 the community of Benedictine nuns, formerly from the English convent in Ghent but now settled in Preston, began preparations for a burial. The burial marked the death of Margaret Scholastica Rimmer, a lay sister at the convent.⁶⁹³ Margaret Rimmer was eighty-four years old when she died and had been born in Formby, Lancashire, a few miles from the site of her burial. However, she had spent much of her life abroad following her clothing ceremony at the exiled English convent of Benedictines in Ghent in 1742. When the Benedictine convent came back to England in 1795, in the aftermath of the French Revolution, Margaret Rimmer had returned with it and continued her lay duties in Preston until the day she died. The convent's preparations for Margaret Rimmer's burial began early and aroused considerable discussion among the community. The nuns were keen to avoid public attention and even considered holding the funeral procession in the early hours of the morning to avoid notice.⁶⁹⁴ There was a precedence for this: when another member of their community had died in 1796 the convent had started their procession at four in the morning to avoid being seen by members of the public. The nuns were concerned that a Catholic funeral procession in a Protestant country might result in negative comments and the indignation of the public. Furthermore, they worried that wearing their habits in public might provoke anger from Protestant spectators and resolved to plan the funeral procession so they might spend 'only a little time in our habits'. The nuns carefully planned the route of the funeral procession to avoid busy areas and when they read the service did so 'quietly, both as befitting the event, and to avoid suspicion'.

⁶⁹³ Who were the Nuns? Database ID GB195.

⁶⁹⁴ *Annals of the Ghent Benedictines*, p. 90.

The burial of Margaret Rimmer was, therefore, very much a staged, or curated, event. This is not surprising since, as the annals recall, Rimmer was ‘the first of those who died in England to be buried in a Catholic graveyard’. Before 1804 nuns from the English convents formerly in exile had been ordered to be buried in Protestant graveyards since public space was also Protestant space. When some of the older nuns began to die after 1795 the English Benedictines, formerly of Ghent, recalled that ‘the most painful circumstance attending these deaths was the necessity of having the body interred in the Protestant graveyard’.⁶⁹⁵ Moreover, until 1800, the annals record that the ‘funeral services at that time could only be performed within doors’.⁶⁹⁶ The funeral of Margaret Rimmer thus also raises interesting questions about stages in the process whereby the English convents became once again accepted in Britain. On the one hand, the story of Margaret Rimmer herself presents a cyclical story of a nun born in England, exiled to the continent, and returning to die a few miles from the site of her birth. Yet, as the cautious burial preparations suggest, the return of convents to Britain in the nineteenth century was far from unproblematic and, as chapter seven suggested, frequently necessitated a degree of compromise from the convents themselves.

This thesis began with a metaphorical burial as Lady Lucy Talbot lay under a black velvet pall to mark her ‘death to the world’ during her profession service at the convent of English Conceptionists in Paris. It ends with a literal burial as Margaret Scholastica Rimmer’s body is buried in a Catholic graveyard in Preston. At Talbot’s profession the English convents were in exile in France and Flanders but by the time of Rimmer’s burial they had returned to Britain and re-founded their institutions. This thesis has explored issues relating to the

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 85.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid. p. 91.

exclusion of female monasticism from Britain and the engagement of English nuns in politics and the public arena. By the time of Rimmer's death, the status of English convents in Britain had clearly shifted from one of exclusion to a degree of public acceptance since they were, for the first time since 1680, permitted Catholic burials on English soil. Yet, as this thesis has also argued, being publicly excluded (at least in Protestant discourse) did not prevent the English convents from engaging both publicly and politically in key events of the long eighteenth-century. I want to conclude this thesis, therefore, by summing up the stages of anti-monasticism, exclusion, and engagement with which this thesis has been concerned.

I: Stages of Anti-Nun Polemic

This thesis has argued that anti-nun polemic in Britain can only be understood in the political context of the relationship of its Catholic subjects with the British crown and state. Women religious were often central to this discourse, not least because their habits ensured that they were visibly Catholic in a way their lay peers were not. This visibility made them obvious targets for anti-Catholic polemics. It also encouraged elaboration of the idea of the despotism of the convent, thus serving on a smaller scale as a signifier of the despotism Protestants saw as being intrinsic to Catholicism as a whole.

Accordingly, the first identifiable stereotypes about nuns emerge in the context of the proposed, but later aborted, Spanish Match for the future King Charles I. Thomas Robinson's *The Anatomy of the English Convent at Lisbon* constructs images of women religious – which had enduring roles in Protestant propaganda about Catholic threats to established social and political order – relating to the 'forced vocation', the sexualised nature of nuns, and the authoritarian constraints of the convent. In the context of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis

in the 1680s these stereotypes re-emerged as important aspects of anti-Catholic print culture. They reflect fears about Charles II's pro-Catholic foreign policy and anxiety about the Duke of York's conversion to Catholicism. With James II's accession to the throne, followed by Mary of Modena's pregnancy, and the realisation that a Catholic monarchy might become a permanent reality, anti-Catholic polemic reached its zenith in the anti-nun images surrounding the Warming Pan Myth. As the successful 1688 Revolution inaugurated a new political settlement Protestant propagandists used the figure of the nun, and a nun's unbreakable vow to a convent, to plead for the importance of a contractual theory of government.

Attitudes towards nuns were therefore very much shaped by the political context. This is confirmed by developments following the failure of Jacobitism in the first half of the eighteenth century. From 1750, with Jacobitism and political Catholicism no longer a threat, the nun was no longer needed as a key character in anti-Catholic lampoons. Anti-nun stereotypes were accordingly also on the wane. Instead, with the growth of the Grand Tour and a new interest in 'toleration' as a religious virtue, Protestant print culture began instead to present a more nuanced view of the English convents on the continent. With Jacobites replaced by Jacobins as bogeymen, this helps to explain the sympathy for the convents during the French Revolution and the way in which English nuns were initially welcomed back to Britain in 1795. Yet, with the growth of the Gothic genre and the reality of convents becoming permanent institutions in Britain, anti-nun stereotypes emerged once more in Protestant polemic against veils and government debates about the need for convent inspections. This was not least as fears of revolution receded and a revived Catholicism instead was seemingly more apparent again on the Continent. This transition was indeed already occurring by the time of the death of Margaret Rimmer. In this context nuns, whether

they liked it or not, found themselves and their images politicised by others throughout the period examined here.

Despite the considerable work which has been done in recent years on the English convents in exile, this aspect of their experience has been a neglected theme. The 'Who Were The Nuns?' project based at Queen Mary University of London from 2009 to 2013, in drawing attention to the exiled convents has been of undoubted importance in catalysing new analyses on the vocations made and challenges faced by the nuns who left their country to serve their faith from the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth century. The resulting database provides a store of information for further research going beyond the essentially prosopographic intentions of the project, of which this thesis is arguably the first fruit. However, that database, though valuable, has its limitations. First, it is almost entirely based on convent records. This is problematic, not least because it leads to a focus on the convents as institutions, rather than on the nuns within them. To fully recapture the lives and experiences of the women who served within them there is a need to cast the net for sources wider. Family archives, for instance, have here proved a valuable resource for exploring one of the themes of the WWTN project; challenging the well-established accusation of forced vocations. As demonstrated in this thesis, this and other tropes of anti-nun polemic became established during this period and continue to have some currency down to the present day. Secondly, then, to understand the development of that polemic and the hostility nuns faced from surrounding English society in the period, a wider variety of sources, including Protestant polemics and Catholic ripostes, in addition to convent records have had to be consulted.

This has enabled this thesis to place the exiled convents within their social and political settings, both in Britain and in France and Flanders. In the process, a challenge is made to the conventional depiction of women religious as passive. This assumption, embedded almost unconsciously in much literature, has long had a distorting effect not only on the histories of women religious, but of women more generally. Yet nuns' agency, both in the pursuit of their vocations and in wider political ambitions, is abundantly demonstrated here.

II: Stages of Engagement

This thesis has shown that the Protestant stereotypes of nuns were actively and consciously contested by the exiled English convents themselves. The English convents in exile were purposely engaged in dispelling myths about their status and identity and instead constructed their own view of the Catholic national imaginary. Furthermore, they deliberately sought to make their own distinct contributions to that rebuttal of Protestant constructions of the nation. This explains why in 1622 the nuns of Syon Abbey offered a robust rebuke to Thomas Robinson's claims about their cloister.

Moreover, Protestant fears had an element of truth to them because, far from being passive figures, English nuns on the Continent sought to contest the political settlement throughout most of their time in exile. Thus, during the English Civil War, the English convents in exile engaged politically against the Cromwellian Protectorate in support of the future Charles II's claim to the throne. At the Restoration in 1660 they tried to make political capital out of this support by petitioning Charles II for their right to re-found cloisters in Britain. When this attempt to return their convents to England failed, the English cloisters placed their hopes in the Catholic Duke of York and his wife Mary of Modena. At first these hopes seemed assured

as the accession of King James II to the throne resulted in the re-founding of the English Benedictine cloister, formerly of Ypres, in Ireland. However, at the onset of the 'Glorious Revolution', with the return of anti-nun polemic and the dismissal of the Ypres nuns from Ireland, the English convents were cast, once more, into a stance of opposition to the British political settlement. At this juncture they became ardent supporters of the Jacobite cause offering aid to the Stuart court in exile and contesting the legitimacy of the Williamite, and later Hanoverian, regime through their own Catholic political imaginary. It was only with the failure of Jacobitism at Culloden, and the need to secure funds for their increasingly bankrupt cloisters, that the English convents in exile began to compromise and re-engage with Hanoverian Britain. This more positive re-engagement stood the cloisters in good stead when the French Revolution necessitated their return to Britain. As the English convents attempted to re-settle in Britain they were forced to compromise with the British state and in so doing became more outward-facing, teaching-orientated, institutions.

III: Stages of Exclusion

This thesis has charted the stages whereby English convents moved from being excluded institutions existing on the continent to being accepted institutions able to re-found in Britain. It has argued that this process mapped onto moments of political engagement. In the periods where the English convents in exile sought to contest the British political settlement they were clearly seen as a political threat and excluded from participation in the British state. However, the decline of Jacobitism and with it *political* Catholicism, meant that the English cloisters were, from 1750 onwards, no longer considered a threat. Instead, in the years after 1789, Protestant Britons replaced a fear of political Catholicism with a fear of the secular threat epitomised by France. However, this did not mean that the re-settlement of English

convents in Britain after 1795 proved unproblematic. Catholicism remained a societal threat to identities and mores. The process of English convents founding permanent institutions on British soil for the first time since the Reformation resulted in a series of political debates about the nature of the public sphere and the acceptability of veiled women in enclosed spaces. Nonetheless, by 1829, when the Catholic Emancipation Act was passed, most of the English cloisters were successfully re-settled in Britain and had moved from a situation of opposition and exclusion to one of compromise and acceptance.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis has offered a new perspective on the English convents in exile. By exploring the political engagement of the exiled English cloisters in the long eighteenth century the thesis has moved beyond the traditional focus of most histories of women religious. Instead of considering the social history of the English convents or analysing convent texts, this thesis has placed the English convents in a broader political context. This perspective has necessitated the use of a diverse range of source materials, from newspapers to Catholic family correspondence, and has used them to trace interactions between the exiled English convents and the British state. Unduly neglected sources have thus been mined to construct a much fuller account than hitherto of the social and political networks of the women religious of the period.

They were not, as their correspondence shows, out of sight and out of mind of their families. Nor were they shipped off to the Continent, willingly or unwillingly, because of the financial circumstances of impoverished Recusants. The prime motive, which only emerges from exploring this correspondence, was an expedient mixture of the spiritual and political. Male

family heads temporised beyond loyalty to their religion and to their economic and political interests in a hostile Protestant environment. They assuaged the demands of the first by sending their daughters out to convents to pray for them and for the conversion of England. Pending the later event, they meanwhile maintained an outward conformity as expected by the authority structures of the realm. Their daughters were out of sight and mind of the latter, but not, as is clear from the letters that they exchanged with home, of their families. Accordingly, these women religious remained conscious of and committed to the political causes, of which the conversion of England was a central one, from which their familial connections hoped to benefit.

In the process, this thesis has engaged with wider historiographical debates about the catholicising mission of James II, the nature of Jacobitism, the impact of the French Revolution on women religious, and the extent of toleration in Britain in the lead up to the passing of Catholic Emancipation. It thus contributes to the reappraisal of the intersection between politics and religion undertaken by historians like Dale Van Kley and Nigel Aston.⁶⁹⁷ The exiled convents have hitherto often been at best merely footnotes in historical analyses of these events, either overlooked completely or, if mentioned, assumed to be merely passive spectators of their fate. As is apparent from, for instance, the role of the Paris Benedictines in the storming of the Bastille, such a representation is entirely misleading and a distortion of both French and British history. This thesis provides a valuable correction to such assumptions, both by demonstrating the agency of the nuns themselves, and by showing how their role shaped wider currents of debate about, for instance, the nature of power, authority and identity in the British state.

⁶⁹⁷ D. Van. Kley, *Religion and Politics in Enlightenment Europe* (Notre Dame, Notre Dame Press, 2001); N. Aston, *Religion and Revolution in France, 1780-1804* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000).

This thesis also makes clear that the English convents in exile were often key players in the political events of the long eighteenth century and, as such, offers a unique perspective on the political debates of this period. By demonstrating that nuns were often central to the political events of their time the thesis has suggested that gender historians need to re-think their assessment of the agency of women religious. As noted in the introduction, historians, notably Plowden and Landes, have been keen to stress the important role played by women in the English and French Revolutions.⁶⁹⁸ Yet, Catholic nuns have been dismissed from these narratives because they are frequently assumed to lack agency as a result of the enclosed nature of their convents communities and their 'conservative' beliefs. This thesis has shown that Catholic women religious were in fact active in the public sphere as petitioners, spies, and propagandists. In addition, this thesis has moved beyond the 'confessional' focus of much historiography in order to show the importance of examining *both* Catholic and Protestant sources. As such, it draws on work by Lake and Questier in demonstrating the contested nature of politico-religious texts which need to be located in the context of a dialogue with their adversaries.⁶⁹⁹ In this respect, this thesis uses a case study of the English convents in exile as a way of drawing attention to the interrelationship between politics and religion.

There are also clear contemporary resonances to many of the debates surrounding the nature of the exiled English cloisters that would repay further study. For example, the key stereotypes about nuns which this thesis has examined continue to recur in twenty-first

⁶⁹⁸ A. Plowden, *Women all on Fire: the Women of the English Civil War* (Stroud, Sutton, 1988); J. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the French Revolution* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1981)

⁶⁹⁹ P. Lake and M. C. Questier, *The Anti-Christ's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists, and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2002).

century popular culture.⁷⁰⁰ Furthermore, debates about the supposed ‘repressive’ nature of veiling, which appeared during the French Revolution and resurfaced on the convents’ return to Britain, have clear contemporary parallels in the Burkini debates in France and Islamophobic rhetoric surrounding concerns about the headscarf in Britain. There are also parallels in the hostility shown to nuns in the past and Muslim women now over their supposed refusal to conform to societal norms of sexual behaviour. Additionally, then as now, there is a tendency to attempt to explain away this threatening nonconformity by denying the women themselves involved agency, attributing it instead to the nefarious politicized intentions of males within their faith communities. Societal anxieties about the existential threat posed by veiled women – not least because of their visible withdrawal from society in their mode of dress – clearly played a part in political polemic and debates about identity throughout the period examined here and, albeit in a somewhat different context, continue to resonate today. All the more reason then through this thesis to recover their voices, not just in the cloister, but in the public sphere in which, contrary to past assumptions, nuns clearly operated.

⁷⁰⁰ See, for instance, the Nunsplotation genre popularised in the 1970s.

Appendices

Table 1: Convent Foundations and Locations

Order	Location	Date Founded
Bridgettine	Lisbon	1594
Benedictine	Brussels	1598
Poor Clare	St Omer/Gravelines	*1608/1609
Augustinian	Louvain	1609
Carmelite	Antwerp	1619
Franciscan, Third Order Regular	Brussels/Nieuport/Bruges	1621/1637/1662
Benedictine	Cambrai	1623
Benedictine	Ghent	1624
Augustinian	Bruges	1629
Poor Clare	Aire	1629
Augustinian	Paris	1634
Sepulchrine	Liège	1642
Poor Clare	Rouen	1644
Carmelite	Lierre	1648
Benedictine	Paris	1650
Poor Clare	Dunkirk	1652
Benedictine	Boulogne/Pontoise	1652/1658
Conceptionists (Blue Nuns)	Paris	1658
Dominican	Vilvorde/Brussels	1661/1669
Benedictine	Dunkirk	1662
Benedictine	Ypres	1665
Carmelite	Hoogstraeten	1678

*Where several dates and places are shown this indicates initial foundation and subsequent relocation.

Table 2: Dates for the return of the English convents from exile and subsequent locations

Convent	Return to England	Locations
Poor Clares, Gravelines	May 1795	Gosford Park Essex (1795)/Darlington (1857)
Poor Clares, Rouen	July 1795	Hagerston Castle, Northublerand (1795)/Scorton Hall, Yorkshire (1807)/Darlington (1857)

Sepulchrines, Liège	August 1794	Wiltshire (1794)/New Hall, Chelmsford (1798)
Franciscans, Brussels	August 1794	Winchester (1794)/Taunton, Somerset (c.1800)
Conceptionists, Paris	January 1800	Norwich (1800). Dispersed 1806
Poor Clares, Aire	Disbanded during Revolution	No Return
Carmelites, Antwerp	June 1794	Lanherne, Cornwall (c.1795)
Carmelites, Hoogstraten	c.1794	Canford, Dorset (c1794)/Normandy (1825-30)/Chichester (1830)
Carmelites, Lierre	July 1794	Durham (1804)/Darlington (1830)
Dominicans, Brussels	c. 1794	Hartpury Court, Gloucester.
Benedictines, Pontoise	Disbanded 1786 due to debts	No return
Benedictines, Ypres	Remained in Ypres until the destruction of the convent under enemy fire in 1914	Kylemore, Ireland (1914)
Bridgettine's Lisbon	Remained in Lisbon until 1861	Devon (1861). Closed 2011.
Benedictines, Cambrai	May 1795	Woolton, Lancs. (1795)/Stanbrook Abbey, Worcestershire (1839)
Benedictines, Dunkirk	May 1795	London (former house of IBVM, 1795)/Teignmouth, Devon (1863)
Benedictines, Ghent	c. 1795	Preston, Lancs. (1795)/Caverswall Castle, Staffordshire (1811)/Oulton, Staffs.
Benedictines, Paris	July, 1795	Colwich, Staffordshire

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