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Introduction

Donna B. Hamilton and Richard Strier

In Blake's Jerusalem, the "Great Voice of the Atlantic" terrifies Albion with a series of questions, including "What is a Church? and what / Is a Theater? are they Two & not One? can they Exist Separate? / Are not Religion and Politics the Same?"¹ Albion is not up to dealing with these questions, but students of English history and literature must be. The relationship between the church and the theater in post-Reformation England is indeed a vexed one, and Blake is being deliberately provocative in equating them, but the equation between religion and politics is less paradoxical. Blake's provocative question seems merely accurate for the period from the dissolution of the monasteries to the Glorious Revolution. This volume explores ways in which policies, lives, sermons, histories, and literary works all reflect and enact the connections between religion and politics in this period. We purposely include essays on canonical authors (Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, Marvell, Dryden), on neglected genres (histories, sermons), on individual lives (Edward Sackville, fourth Earl of Dorset; women readers of Herbert's *Temple*), and on specific politico-religious controversies (the execution of Charles I; the legitimation of the Duke of Monmouth). We mean to cut across boundaries between fields (history, church history, literary criticism) and between literary and non-literary texts. We also mean to cut across boundaries between traditional periods. Building on the new interest in religion in Restoration politics, we are taking the time-span between the closing years of the reign of Henry VIII and the reign of the Protestant invaders, William and Mary, as a single unit rather than treating the Restoration period as a separate unit that shares its interests primarily with the next century.

Admittedly, some of the transgressions that we are committing have become almost normal. Literary critics and historians are working together more closely, and have been doing so since the mid-1980s. This is partly what the New Historicism has meant, but partly too a result of

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the growing practice in all academic fields of working across the boundaries of previously demarcated disciplines. As we see it, traditional period divisions for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England have not been regularly enough challenged, particularly in literary studies. And there is also much evidence that the great efflorescence in historicized literary studies of the early modern period in England has not been very mindful of religious issues; indeed some of these studies have tended to drive a wedge between scholars who emphasize religious issues and scholars who emphasize political ones. This volume aims to eliminate this wedge and to put the near identity of religion and politics squarely at the center of our sense of post-Reformation England.

While literary scholars have been inclined to historicize literary texts in a context that often excludes religion, historians have moved religion to the front and center stage. By and large, the revisionists, who have argued that ideological consensus, not conflict, better describes English politics from the late 1590s through the early decades of the seventeenth century have also paid attention to consensus in religion, emphasizing the Calvinism and anti-papery that godly English Protestants had in common with each other.² More recently, however, attention has turned to religion's role in the ideological conflicts of the period.³ By way of essays on a range of events and practices, our volume features relationships between religious discourses and other discourses as they are reconfigured over time.

Receiving persistent scrutiny in this volume are anti-Catholic attitudes and their implications in the public and private lives of English citizens. An instrument through which individual Protestants sought to establish a suitable Protestant identity, anti-Catholic rhetoric also became a central element in public debates over the grounds upon which governments could or could not tolerate diversity within Protestantism. As such, it dominated political discourse through the Restoration period.⁴ In a seminal essay that anticipates the interests of many of the studies that follow, Annabel Patterson focuses on the sixteenth-century project of rewriting pre-Reformation English history for a reforming Protestant England, a project that became one means by which an English Protestant identity was crafted. In their various revisions of Sir John Oldcastle's activities and reassessments of his threat to English order and stability, early historians from Bale to Holinshed exemplified the presence of religious diversity in early Reformation England even as their writings became an avenue through which the possibility of religious toleration was explored.

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Following this study are several essays that take account of the local situations in which various efforts to fashion an acceptable English Protestant identity were accomplished. Andrew Hadfield, reading the ambivalence toward violence in *The Faerie Queene* in the context of Spenser's Irish experience, targets a Protestant attitude toward power that is taken up in other essays in this volume. The violence that Spenser represented was a manifestation of the desire of the English Protestant to subdue, once and for all, Ireland and its papists; yet the propensity of English Protestants to authorize godly force against nonconformity also worried dissenting English Protestants through the 1680s. In studies by Lori Anne Ferrell and Richard Strier, the local conditions under consideration are the pressures within the Jacobean English church to conform in the use of ceremonies. Interrogating the recent emphasis on consensus in ecclesiastical politics under James I, Ferrell explains how attention to ceremonies highlighted the ongoing disagreements over the definition of Protestantism in this period, while blurring for some religious groups the accepted distinctions between Protestant and Catholic identities. Aligning Donne with the "ceremonialists" discussed by Ferrell, Strier locates in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1623) an illustration of private devotion as public polemic. Informed by a denial that private experience was central to Protestant devotion, Donne's book is seen to be as thoroughly political as it is devotional.

If historians have downplayed the religious tensions in the Jacobean period, they have been increasingly mindful of the role of religious conflict in national politics later in the seventeenth century.⁵ With essays that reexamine contemporary understandings of the obstacles to political consensus in the aftermath of the Civil War and at the time of the Exclusion Crisis, our volume advances the project of describing the religious element in these crises. Attending to contemporary defenses of the regicide, prior to and including Milton's, Laura McKnight examines the problems created by *Eikon Basilike*, with its image of the king as a hero of conscience and as a saintly Protestant martyr. Gary D. Hamilton focuses on the political rhetoric utilized in the dismantling of episcopacy and on issues of Protestant identity inherent in mid-century anticlericalism, a central element in Marvell's politics. Exploring anticlericalism in the Exclusion Crisis, Mark Goldie turns his attention to William Lawrence's attacks on the marriage laws, examining the role of these attacks in countering the objections to the Protestant Monmouth's claim to the throne. But as Gary S. De Krey points out, the crisis of 1679–1682 encompassed more than the effort to assure the presence of a godly

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prince; it also involved a call for reformation within the church itself. Describing the catholic threat as existing within the English church as well as outside of it, and identifying that threat with the use of coercive authority, dissenters asserted that a Protestant church that persecuted Protestants was a contradiction in terms.

In the course of exploring connections between religion and politics in the early modern period, several essays challenge the categories and labels that are frequently used to articulate these issues. Offering a model of Christianity that emphasizes its profound ambivalence about power, Debora K. Shuger's essay on Shakespeare and the church fathers prompts speculation on how a religious institution that authorized godly force to achieve conformity also possessed resources that might challenge or undermine that force. If that perspective complicates the use of such labels as "conservative" or "radical" to define the nature of that institution, so much the better. Shuger's essay allows us to acknowledge an orthodoxy and church structure that accommodated, more often than it excluded, the differences among its parishioners. What this essay prompts us to consider by one means, David L. Smith's essay achieves by another. Examining the relationship of religion and politics in the life of Edward Sackville, fourth earl of Dorset, Smith focuses on Dorset's routine toleration of people with various views about religion and proposes that we think of Dorset's identity as a "conformist" as "an attitude rather than a creed." Smith's implied model of the English church as a place where people could come together with a variety of private beliefs is strikingly compatible with Helen Wilcox's understanding of how readily seventeenth-century women writers, giving voice to their own religious and political views, utilized George Herbert's *Temple*. Just as Wilcox calls attention to the inadequacy of defining *The Temple* as a male-generated text when being used by women for their devotional purposes, so Steven Pincus explores the inadequacy of the usual labelings when describing Thomas Shadwell's dramatic works. Redefining how these plays relate to Restoration politics, Pincus revitalizes the "Trimmer" label and invests it with new possibilities for description.

In other ways, too, essays in this volume speak to one another as they describe ways in which the discourses that constitute religious controversies and resolutions intersect with political and literary events. Among the continuities of concern in this volume are: the problem of the uses of history (Patterson, Hamilton, Goldie); recurring references to concepts such as the "beauty of holiness" and the need for mediation that defined the controversies concerning worship and power in the

church (Ferrell, Strier, Hamilton); and recurring efforts to assess the conservative and radical implications of “true” religion (Hadfield, Shuger, Smith, McKnight, De Krey). As central as the similarity of concerns, however, is the diversity of approaches our authors bring to their pursuit of these concerns. Given the complexities of the relationships we address, a collaborative effort such as this one may be the only practical means of both remapping specific discursive areas and charting the relationships between discourses over a long chronological span. We hope to have provided a picture of post-Reformation England that is both various and coherent. We hope too that these essays will prompt further investigations into the period from Bale to Shadwell that will be as uninhibited by labels and preconceptions as the contributors to this volume have been.

NOTES

- 1 *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York, 1965), p. 205.
- 2 See Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559–1625* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); and Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640* (Oxford, 1987). For a critique of the idea of “Calvinist consensus” with regard to interpreting the Civil War, see Julian Davies, *The Caroline Captivity of the Church: Charles I and the Remoulding of Anglicanism* (Oxford, 1992), ch. 3.
- 3 See for example, Richard Cust and Ann Hughes, “Introduction: after Revisionism,” in *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion 1603–1642*, ed. Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (London, 1989), pp. 1–46; and Johann Sommerville, “Ideology, Property and the Constitution,” in *Conflict in Early Stuart England*, pp. 47–71.
- 4 On the importance of the continuing Catholic presence in post-Reformation England, see Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993). On ideological uses of anti-papal rhetoric, see Peter Lake, “Anti-popery: The Structure of a Prejudice,” in *Conflict in Early Stuart England*, pp. 72–106; on Restoration anti-popery, see Jonathan Scott, “England’s Troubles: Exhuming the Popish Plot,” in *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England*, ed. Tim Harris, Paul Seaward, and Mark Goldie (Oxford, 1990), pp. 107–31.
- 5 See, for example, John Morrill, “The Religious Context of the English Civil War,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 34 (1984), 155–78; and Tim Harris, “Introduction: Revising the Restoration,” in *The Politics of Religion in Restoration England*, pp. 1–28.

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CHAPTER ONE

*Sir John Oldcastle as symbol of
Reformation historiography**Annabel Patterson*

In 1544 John Bale, whose efforts on behalf of the survival and transmission of English historical records are themselves legendary, attempted to rewrite one of the legends of the “proto-reformation” of the early fifteenth century. He published a revisionary account of the 1413 examination for heresy of Sir John Oldcastle, the Lollard knight, the first definitive event of the reign of Henry V; of the armed rebellion that Oldcastle may or may not have led in 1414; and of his eventual execution, burned hanging in chains, in December 1417.¹ In the preface to this work Bale introduced an appeal for a new English historiography:

I wold wyshe some learned Englyshe man . . . to set forth the inglish chronicles in their right shappe, as certain other landes hath done afore them al affections set a part. I can not think a more necessarye thing to be laboured to the honour of God, bewty of the realme, erudicion of the people and commodite of other landes, nexte the sacred scripturs of the bible, than that worke wold be. (A5v)

John Bale himself wrote from exile during Henry VIII’s reign, and in explicit continuance of the work of Tyndale, who seems to have been responsible for the publication of a little *Boke of thorpe or Oldecastelle*, published in 1530, and condemned by Archbishop Warham and John Stokesley, bishop of London, in 1531.² Bale describes his own historiographical method in the *Brefe Chronycle* (itself proscribed in 1546)³ as follows:

I remembre that xiiii yeares ago the true servaunt of God Willyam Tindale put into the press a certain brefe examination of the sayd lorde Cobham . . . written in the tyme of the sayd lordes trouble by a certain frinde of his & so reserved in copenes unto this our age. But sens that tyme I have founde it in theyr owne writings (which were than his uttre ennemyes) in a moche more ample fourme than there. Speciallye in the great processe which Thomas Arundell the Archbisshop of Caunterbury made than against him written by hys owne notaryes and clerkes, tokened also with his owne signe & seale . . . Besides all this Thomas Walden, being in those daies the kinges confessoure, and present at hys exami-

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nation, condemncion & excreacion, regestred it amonge other Processes more in hys boke called Fasciculus zizaniorum wiclevii⁴. . . Only such reasons have I added therunto as the aforementioned Thomas Walden proponed to him in the tyme of the examinacion . . . as with the maner of hys Godlye departing out of his frayle lyfe, which I found in other writings and chronicles. (A3v-4r)

Bale's own work as a historian would scarcely seem to merit the standard of disinterestedness ("al affections set a part") he proposed for the sixteenth century, and his own historiographical achievement has been more accurately described by Margaret Aston. Aston observes that Bale, more than any other English reformer, deserves the credit of having grasped, as early as 1544, that "the exile of the Papacy from England meant the ending of a whole historical tradition" and the opportunity for a new one; and he also perceived that the new historiographical project "involved more than the piecemeal editing of heretical literature":

It meant taking over enemy territory, and using enemy ammunition. Official records, works compiled by the authorities to condemn and eradicate heresy, were to be used as they had never been used before; for an anti-Catholic purpose.⁵

Thus somehow Bale acquired possession of the famous documentary history, the *Fasciculi Zizaniorum*, which contained, among other things, the text of Archbishop Arundel's "Magnus Processus" against Oldcastle; and the Lollard knight's "uttre enemies," as Bale himself described them, were enrolled in his defence, long after they relinquished control over the archives that described their attempts to destroy him.

It is much to my point that Bale saw the reconstruction of English historiography as a Reformation project, parallel to the dissemination of the Scriptures in English. Both were essential to the educational mission that began with Wycliffe and continued as an underground movement through the fifteenth century and into the sixteenth: a mission in which literacy and the accessibility of books were crucial, and spiritual and political consciousness-raising were to go hand in hand. In this program, the story of Sir John Oldcastle was to assume a privileged position, as one of those cultural icons in which are epitomized a society's conflicting and shifting values. Its best-known representation appeared at the very end of the sixteenth century, in what seem to have been rival plays reflecting the legend's elasticity. This is not the place to rehearse the mystery of how Shakespeare's unhistorical "Sir John Oldcastle" of his *Henry IV, Part I* became the still more unhistorical Sir John Falstaff, nor to reargue the vexed question of why Shakespeare was thought to have

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insulted Oldcastle's memory.⁶ But the counter-play, *The First Part of Sir John Old-Castle*, collaboratively produced by Michael Drayton, Richard Hathway, Anthony Munday and Robert Wilson in 1599, was explicitly engaged in the historiographical and ideological duel which is here my primary interest.

The Oldcastle story constituted from the beginning an unstable component of Henry V's own legend, of his reputation as the most successful incarnation of English nationalism, supported by an aggressive military foreign policy, of which Agincourt, of course, was the symbol and sanction. The story of Sir John Oldcastle, however, spoke to the other side of Henry's character, his strategic alliance with Archbishop Arundel, and hence his acceptance of the principle of religious persecution. One of the first applications of the terrible statute *De heretico comburendo*, the anti-Lollard statute of 1401 introduced at the urging of Archbishop Courtenay, which initiated in England the penalty of burning heretics at the stake,⁷ gave Henry, as heir apparent, an opportunity for a dramatic public demonstration of his own orthodoxy, in the 1410 conflagration of John Badby, a Lollard tailor.⁸ And when after his coronation Henry received complaints from Arundel that Oldcastle had been supporting unorthodox preaching and was in possession of at least one heretical book, Henry agreed (after attempts at personal persuasion had failed) to hand over his old friend and companion in arms to the ecclesiastical authorities, and may even have personally ordered his arrest. It was after Oldcastle's formal examination and condemnation that his supporters were themselves arrested and executed, on the grounds that they had raised an armed insurrection against church and state. The question that Bale and his successors in the Protestant tradition wished to bring to the attention of later readers was whether Oldcastle and his followers were guilty as charged; whether they were, to put it sharply, vicious traitors or unjustly martyred religious reformers.

The earliest chroniclers of the Oldcastle story were scarcely themselves disinterested. They include Walsingham, who as a monk was an inveterate enemy of the Lollards; Titus Livius de Frulovisiis, whose *Vita Henrici Quinti* was written in the context of his patronage by Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, Henry's younger brother; and the anonymous cleric who wrote the *Gesta Henrici Quinti* as explicit propaganda for use at home and abroad; domestically to justify Henry's second campaign in France and the need for additional taxes to support it; in Europe to fortify Henry's negotiating position in the Council of Constance. In the next generation of historians the Oldcastle story passed to Polydore Vergil, to

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Fabian, and to the anonymous translator of Titus Livius, who produced what is known as *The First English Life of Henry V*, in order to apply its lessons to the times of Henry VIII.⁹ For all of these writers Oldcastle is a demon whose appearance at the beginning of the reign has to be exorcised before the miracle of Agincourt can take place. The story as told by the *First English Life* is typical:

In the first year of this most excellent Kings raigne . . . fortun'd a marvelous insurrection of heretiks; of which superstitious sect two knights were principall chieftaines, of whome the one was Sr. John Oldcastell When the newes thereof was first brought to the Kinge . . . and that he was informed that they were assembled in a field near London . . . called Ficket field, immediatlie . . . he assembled his people, with whome he sent his Brother, the Duke of Clarence, against those scelerate and misbeleevinge rebellions, whome almost without resistance he vanquished, and tooke part of them, and put the remnant to flight. And those that were taken the Kinge caused to be put to execucion after their deserts. Amongst whome the aforesaid Lord Cobham was taken and dampned by the Church, was put into the Tower, from whence he escaped by breakinge of the prison, and fledd into Wales . . . *Thus the first victorie of that noble King after his Coronacion was against these cursed superstitious heretiques for Christ and the defence of the Church of God, in the defence and supportacion of our Catholique faith.*¹⁰

In this opening manifesto, the sections in italics were either additions to or expansions of Titus Livius by the Henrician writer, whose work has been dated quite precisely as having been compiled in the context of Henry VIII's treaty with France in 1513, which the historian chose to interpret as the "reconciliation of the same French King and his confederates unto our ghostly mother of the Church of Rome."¹¹ Along with its bias, this account perpetuates the mistake of transposing Oldcastle's condemnation by the ecclesiastical authorities and subsequent imprisonment and escape from *before* the confrontation in St. Giles' or Ficket's Field to its aftermath. Not trivially, possible cause is therefore made into legitimate consequence.

Margaret Aston, in reassessing Henry's confrontation with Lollardy, raised a central historiographical question about "Oldcastle's rebellion," as to whether we can trust the fifteenth-century sources: not only the early chroniclers, but also the official documents recording the indictments against Sir Roger Acton and his colleagues. We know something about the Lollard program for reform from their own documents; but, as Aston points out: "when argument was translated into action and issued in rebellion, the evidence for Lollard deeds and intentions comes almost completely from the other, and hostile side." Aston adds a note to the effect that the *Coram Rege* Rolls and the Ancient Indictments are the main

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sources for the events of 1414, and that on other occasions, such as after the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, it has been shown that such indictments might lie. "When it comes to determining the aims and intentions of the Lollard rebels," she warns, "one is usually not in a position to verify the facts."¹² Aston does not, however, ultimately question whether a Lollard armed rebellion of any significant scale occurred in 1414, precisely that which Bale and consequently John Foxe subjected to interrogation.

It is worth looking more closely at this historiographical dilemma. As Aston admits:

None of the bills written "in his favour" which were advertised and circulated by Sir John Oldcastle and his accomplices seems to have survived, but the judicial proceedings taken after the revolt provide the names of persons who wrote and distributed them (such as Thomas Ile of Braybrooke), as well as indications of the aims of the rebels, which, *presumably*, they contained.

The objectives there attributed to the Lollards were "wholly to annul the royal estate as well as the estate and office of prelates and religious orders in England, and to kill the king, his brothers . . . the prelates and other magnates of the kingdom, and to turn men of religion . . . to secular occupations: totally to despoil cathedrals and other churches and religious houses of their relics and other ecclesiastical goods, and to level them completely to the ground." Oldcastle himself was to be appointed regent. And, Aston concluded, "*as is well known*, the adherents to these plans proposed to meet together, from various parts of England, to the number of 20 thousand men," at St. Giles' Fields, on 10 January 1414.¹³ Between "presumably," which retains a shadow of the suspicion raised earlier that even official indictments may lie, and the summative phrase, "as is well known," lies a gap of credibility which, given the nature of the sources (and Walsingham's figure of twenty thousand persons has long been recognized as at least an exaggeration) it is no longer possible to close.¹⁴

It is not my purpose here to attempt to erase "Oldcastle's rebellion" from the record, although there do seem to be grounds for doubt: not only about Walsingham's figures but also about Oldcastle's presence at Ficket's Field and hence about his direct responsibility for what happened there. More important still is the question that would subsequently be raised by Foxe, as to whether what happened there was really an armed rebellion, a more peaceful demonstration, or merely a clandestine religious meeting whose motives and scale had been gravely distorted. There is some evidence that the Lollards had more in mind than purging the medieval church of decadent beliefs and practices. The first of the twelve articles of the manifesto nailed to the door of Westminster