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978-0-521-88395-5 - Oral Culture and Catholicism in Early Modern England

Alison Shell

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ORAL CULTURE AND CATHOLICISM IN
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Preface

My first book, *Catholicism, Controversy and the English Literary Imagination, 1558–1660* (1999), presented the English and Latin writing of post-Reformation Catholic Englishmen and women as a topic suitable for serious literary-critical consideration in the academic mainstream. While writing it I had moments of feeling like a lone crusader, since I was less aware than I should have been that I was part of a movement: what Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti have identified as the ‘turn to religion’, which has been such a defining feature of early modern literary studies for the last decade or so.¹ In part, this has surely been due to the long-term effects of new historicism; while often characterised by reductive attitudes to religion in its heyday, the movement spread a tolerance of non-canonical writing and an attentiveness to the historical moment which remain essential stimuli to any research that attempts to span literature and history. Researchers who operate from within English departments, as I do, have also been able to draw upon huge recent historical advances in our understanding of the English Reformation, for which we must thank such scholars as John Bossy, Patrick Collinson, Eamon Duffy, Christopher Haigh, Peter Lake, Nicholas Tyacke and Alexandra Walsham. While our preoccupations have often been different from those of historians, this has led to creative cross-fertilisation, and historians have sometimes repaid the compliment by engaging with material more usually the province of literary critics.² It would be shockingly ungrateful to occlude or play down the importance of earlier scholars, particularly easy to do in a field such as post-Reformation Catholic history, where much of the best research has come from outside conventional academic circles, or been inspired by denominational motives. Nevertheless, within the academy, this has been a remarkable decade for the topic. There can be few fields where so much has happened, or where interest has permeated so far down, in so short a time: as this preface goes to press, a reader of early modern Catholic texts intended for undergraduate use is just about to appear from a major academic publisher.³ Always an exciting field of study,

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this is now a fashionable one too; there is, as it were, a Catholic revival going on.

Perhaps this has been most visible in the case of recognisable names. The fact that post-Reformation English Catholicism has become a more popular area of study than I could have dreamed when writing my first book is in large part due to the hypotheses, strongly advanced by some Shakespeare scholars and as strongly denied by others, that Shakespeare's father was an adherent to the old faith, and that Shakespeare himself spent some time in a recusant household in Lancashire in his early years.⁴ While neither contention is especially new, and the vociferous debate to which they have recently given rise is inconclusive, the combat has at least had the effect of drawing attention to the writings of those who, unlike Shakespeare, are proven Catholics.⁵ One major monograph on Robert Southwell, the martyr-poet arguably more responsible than anyone else for disseminating Counter-Reformation literary ideals in England, has recently been published, and another is about to appear as this book goes to press, authored by a scholar who has also co-edited a new paperback edition of his English and Latin verse, designed for the undergraduate market.⁶ Not all Catholic writers were as exemplary representatives of their faith as Southwell, and Donna Hamilton's stimulating work on Anthony Munday sketches a picture of a complex, contradictory individual who wrote as a Catholic even while persecuting Catholics; she impels her successors to look out for similar pragmatic accommodations that Catholics may have made with the times.⁷ The Catholic convert and pioneer woman writer Elizabeth Cary, best known for *The Tragedy of Mariam*, has been another point of entry into the field, representing two minority groups for the price of one.⁸

Those interested in the recovery of submerged testimonies have, almost by definition, to range beyond obvious canonical sources. The academic rediscovery of early modern women's writing has inspired enquiry into literary genres not traditionally the territory of the literary critic, such as letters and household memoranda; the current interest in Catholic writing is having a similar effect, though the types of source are often very different. Peter Davidson's forthcoming work on the international baroque, with its stress on the importance of Latin as an international language and the baroque as a mode especially responsive to cultural assimilation, looks set to expand a number of disciplinary paradigms.⁹ His valorisation of a truly British, thoroughly international literary heritage is one which future scholars of Catholic literature should take to heart; it would be a shame if its rediscovery were to be impaired by too narrow a concentration

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on English-language ‘recusant’ writing. Edmund Campion’s Latin verse history of the early church, recovered and transcribed by Gerard Kilroy in his in-depth study of manuscripts produced by the English Catholic community, is just one example of what non-English-language sources can yield. Given what a byword for eloquence Campion was among his contemporaries, relatively little of his work survives; here as elsewhere in his writing, Kilroy is keenly aware of the special relationship between manuscript sources and the writing of a community who often found it difficult to exploit print.¹⁰ His interest in manuscripts is shared by Arthur Marotti, in a substantial volume which is, as yet, the nearest we have to a survey of post-Reformation English Catholic and anti-Catholic literature.¹¹

The present study too has a concern to expand canonical boundaries, looking at ballads, onomastics and anecdotes alongside more conventionally literary genres, and it makes heavy use of manuscript sources, though less for their own sake than as a means of recovering the overlap between the oral and the literary. Chapter 1 looks at sacrilege narratives: stories which circulated among Catholics and others concerning the terrible fates overtaking individuals who desecrated ruined abbeys, and families who benefited from monastic impropriations. Chapter 2 assesses the afterlife of Catholic liturgical fragments in spells and unofficial religious practice, and comments on how the conceptual gulf that existed between literate commentators and the uneducated could affect definitions of popish idolatry. Drawing largely on ballads and other popular verse, chapters 3 and 4 discuss how the Catholic oral challenge worked in relation to polemical material and the depiction of martyrs and confessors; while the conclusion asks how the English situation prompted reflection on the relationship between oral tradition and religious authority.

Acknowledgements are always a pleasure to write. Arnold Hunt has been the acutest, most knowledgeable critic that any academic could wish for, and the most facilitating of husbands. John Morrill has been a kind mentor of the project, especially in encouraging me to think of my initial unwieldy manuscript as two books rather than one. As my editors at Cambridge University Press, Josie Dixon, then Ray Ryan, were unfailingly efficient, sympathetic and positive, and I must also express my gratitude to Maartje Scheltens, Jo Breeze and Hywel Evans. The two anonymous readers for the Press made several helpful suggestions, and the book, I know, is better as a result; a stringent word-count has prevented me from responding as fully as I would like to their useful suggestions, but in many cases they have given me ideas for future projects. For access to unpublished work,

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helpful advice, the checking of references, and in many cases reading chapters too, I am enormously grateful to Paul Arblaster, James Austen, Kate Bennett, Richard Bimson, Patricia Brückmann, Fr Michael Brydon, Daniela Busse, Peter Davidson, Anne Dillon, Eamon Duffy, Alex Fotheringham, Adam Fox, Tom Freeman, Anne Barbeau Gardiner, Jan Graffius, Helen Hackett, John Harley, Eileen Harris, Stanley Hauerwas, John Hinks, Sarah Hutton, Phebe Jensen, Gerard Kilroy, Jenny McAuley, Thomas McCoog, SJ, Peter Marshall, the late Jeremy Maule, John Milsom, John Newton, Anne Parkinson, Jane Pirie, Diane Purkiss, Michael Questier, Fr Terence Richardson, Andrew Rudd, David Salter, Jason Scott-Warren, Bill Sheils, Judith Smeaton, Diane Spaul, Jane Stevenson, Alexandra Walsham, Nicola Watson, Heather Wolfe and Henry Woudhuysen. Though I have been unable to locate Margaret Sena, I would like to express my deep gratitude to her for sharing with me her excellent transcriptions from William Blundell's 'Great Hodge Podge', which saved me a lot of work. Among archivists, I would especially like to thank Anna Watson at the Lancashire Record Office and Mauro Brunello at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu, Rome; the staff of the British Library and Durham University Library deserve collective commendation, but among the latter, Judith Walton should be singled out.

Many colleagues and ex-colleagues from Durham University, inside and outside the English Department, have had a hand in the book: for reading portions of it, and for providing me with useful leads, I am grateful to Chris Brooks, Robert Carver, Pamela Clemit, Douglas Davies, Alison Forrestal, Mandy Green, Margaret Harvey, John McKinnell, Barbara Ravelhofer, Fiona Robertson and Sarah Wootton. During their respective terms as Heads of Department, Michael O'Neill, David Fuller and Patricia Waugh were tremendously kind and supportive; I must also acknowledge my gratitude to the departmental research committee for several grants towards research trips, and to the university for periods of research leave during which I was able to work on the book. Thanks are due as well to the Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, and its librarian Maggie Powell, for awarding me a fellowship in September 2001, during which most of the work for chapter 1 was undertaken. Various portions of this book were delivered at conferences run by the MLA, BSECS and the Catholic Record Society, at colloquia at Stirling University, Aberdeen University and the University of East Anglia, and at seminars at Durham University, York University and the University of Central England; thanks are due to all my audiences for enabling me to try out ideas, and commenting so usefully. For permission to quote from manuscripts, I am grateful to the Blundell family and the

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County Archivist at Lancashire Record Office; Staffordshire Record Office; Somerset Record Office; the Beinecke Library, Yale University; the Bodleian Library; the British Library; the Folger Shakespeare Library; Hull University Library; Lambeth Palace Library; the National Art Library, London; and the National Library of Wales.

I dedicate this book to Arnold Hunt.

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Note on conventions

In quotations from contemporary texts, i/j and u/v have been normalised, though all other contemporary spelling has been retained; no attempt has been made to represent italics in most cases; and unusual scribal features have been commented on where appropriate.

Punctuation has been omitted before an ellipsis except where its retention is helpful to interpreting the quotation.

Unless otherwise indicated all Bible references have been taken from the King James Bible and all Shakespeare references from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, general editors Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

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ARCR	A. F. Allison and D. M. Rogers, <i>The Contemporary Printed Literature of the English Counter-Reformation between 1558 and 1640. Volume I: Works in Languages Other Than English. Volume II: Works in English</i> (Aldershot: Scolar, 1989–94)
BL	British Library, London
Bod	Bodleian Library, Oxford
Clancy	Thomas H. Clancy, <i>English Catholic Books, 1641–1700: A Bibliography</i> (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996)
CSPD	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Domestic</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
ELH	<i>English Literary History</i>
ELR	<i>English Literary Renaissance</i>
ESTC	<i>English Short-Title Catalogue</i> , online version
Foley	Henry Foley (ed.), <i>Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus</i> , 7 vols. in 8 (London: Burns & Oates, 1875–83)
Frank	Frederick S. Frank, <i>The First Gothics</i> (New York: Garland, 1987)
Guiney	Louise Imogen Guiney, <i>Recusant Poets</i> , vol. I (no vol. II) (London: Sheed & Ward, 1938)
HJ	<i>Historical Journal</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
Milward	Peter Milward, <i>Religious Controversies of the Elizabethan Age</i> (London: Scolar, 1977)
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 3rd edn (online)
P & P	<i>Past and Present</i>
PMLA	<i>Proceedings of the Modern Language Association</i>
PRO	Public Record Office, London
RES	<i>Review of English Studies</i>

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STC

W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson and Katharine F. Pantzer, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475–1640*, 2nd edn, 3 vols. (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976–91)

Wing

Donald Wing, Revd Timothy J. Crist and John J. Morrison, *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America and of English Books Printed in Other Countries, 1641–1700*, 2nd edn, 3 vols. (Baltimore: Modern Language Association of America, 1972–88)