Rights and Rites:
Revolution, Performance, Gender, and Religion in British Novels of the 1790s

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the intersections between gendered and religious identity in British novels of the 1790s that engage in revolutionary ideology and rhetoric. My work engages with two dominant cultural-historical narratives in eighteenth-century scholarship: first, the argument that the provenance of modern identity categories can be traced to the revolutionary period and the concomitant emergence of the rights-bearing individual and the bourgeois public sphere; and second, the secularization narrative that elides religion from a consideration of modern identity. Since religion is often positioned as antithetical to reason and the emancipating ideals of the Enlightenment, religion as a category of identity has been dismissed as suspect, repressive, or always already of the past. The main purposes of my dissertation are to consider how eighteenth-century religious identity can be interpreted as both fluid and performative, and to explore the ways in which gender as a modern identity category has been (both positively and negatively) influenced and constructed by its intersections with religion. This project analyzes four Jacobin novels from the period: Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*, Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story*, Helen Maria Williams' *Julia,* and Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*. My work additionally examines how early feminist discourses were affected, resisted, and constructed by toleration and secularism in the eighteenth century, and how residual constructions of eighteenth-century and Romantic identity inform dominant political and social patterns today.

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Chapter One

Religion, Revolution, and Performance

Religion

In 1662, the Act of Uniformity laid the groundwork for establishing England as a Protestant Anglican state; it simultaneously enacted anti-Catholic laws and both begot and cemented new and preexisting Dissenting denominations. The Act specifically enforced conformity to Anglicanism upon all British citizens who wished to hold public office and established Anglicanism as the state religion, with the *Book of Common Prayer* as its holy text.[1] Afterward, from the time of the Glorious Revolution (1688) until the Toleration Acts of the 1820s, there were levels of religious conformity – enacted through specific religious performances – that could afford different Britons varying degrees of citizenship.

These performances were public and spectacular; after the Act, priests and ministers were required to swear in front of their congregations:

I do here declare my unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything

[1] The Act of Uniformity in 1662 is often grouped with the other Acts in what is called the Clarendon Code. The Corporation Act (1661) banned Dissenters from civil office. The Conventicle Act (1662) forbade Nonconformists from meeting for worship. The Five-Mile Act (1665) forced Nonconformist ministers to live at least five miles outside of their previous parishes and forbade them from visiting them. The Elizabethan Act of Uniformity in 1558 was annexed to the Act of Uniformity in 1662. As such, the 1662 Act likewise reified the connections between the *Book of Common Prayer* and the earlier conflicts between Anglicanism and Catholicism by reminding readers that the *Book* had been used as the national religious text during the reign of Edward VI, "The which was repealed and taken away by an Act of Parliament in the first year of the raign of our late soveraign Lady Queen Mary to the great decay of the due honour of God, and discomfort to the Professors of the truth of Christ's religion" (*The Annotated Book of Common Prayer: Being an Historical, Ritual, and Theological Commentary on the Devotional System of The Church of England*, Ed. John Henry Blunt D.D.. E.P. Dutton and Company, New York, 1889, 85).

> contained in and prescribed in and by The Book of Common Prayer and the Administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, according to the use of the Church of England, together with the Psalter and Psalms of David, pointed as they are to be sung or said in Churches; and the Form and Manner of Making, Ordaining, and Consecrating of Bishops, Priests and Deacons.[2]

Those ministers who failed to take this oath were denied their parish livings and expelled from the Church of England.[3] The performances were likewise nationalistic and confessional: ministers of Anglicanism were forced to recognize the link between Church and state by swearing the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy and declaring the monarch of England to be the true ruler of the Anglican faith. The performances were also personally spiritual in that admittance to the Church of England required a profession of belief in the Trinity and a denial in the belief of transubstantiation. Finally, the religious performances were physical and based in ritual. The performance (and for many Nonconformists who were willing to hide their actual beliefs to attain citizenship, it was

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[2] *The English Parliament: An Act for the Uniformity of Publick Prayers; and Administration of Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies in the Church of England on use of the Book of Common Prayer*, 1 January 1662.

[3] This expulsion, which affected at least one thousand – and perhaps as many as two thousand – English ministers who refused to take the Oath, is known as the "Great Ejection." See William L. Sachs, *The Transformation of Anglicanism: From State Church to Global Communion*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993). Sachs attributes some of the tensions of the Great Ejection to the Dissenting hope for religious toleration in 1660, which was encouraged by Charles II's instatement of the Declaration of Breda – a proclamation that pardoned crimes against the crown during the Interregnum, provided that those who sought pardon recognized Charles II's claim to the throne. The Savoy Conference, a 1661 meeting between Anglican, Presbyterian, and Puritan church leaders and ministers, furthered these debates on Anglican conformity and tolerance. The Declaration of Indulgence (1687) likewise suspended penal laws requiring religious conformity in England. Issued by James II, this last declaration was overturned upon the ascension of William of Orange in 1688. While the policies that led to the Great Ejection were intended to curb the spread of Dissent, they merely exacerbated it.

only a performance) of taking Anglican Communion became not merely a marker of belief, but also a permit into legal and institutional participation.[4] Crucially, these performances were not simply based in doctrinal or individual discernment – they were deeply social and political, and were in many ways recapitulations of political-religious divisions that had existed since before the English Civil War. As William Sachs notes, "the character of the restored Church of England stemmed less from the opinions of clergy than from the influence wielded by politicians."[5] The very name "Nonconformist" is a social and political one – unlike "Catholic" or "Presbyterian," "Nonconformist" is not simply a religious designation, but one that specifically denotes a rejection of the ruling, Anglican political order.

All of these performances of religion reified citizenship for English men throughout the eighteenth century, until secularism and the Acts of Toleration gained sway in the 1790s.[6] As I will demonstrate throughout this project, toleration and

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[4] The Act is explicit in its mandate of The Book of Common Prayer as the ultimate text for the determination of religious rites and rituals: "And it be further enacted by the Authority aforesaid that no Form or Order of Common Prayers, Administration of Sacraments Rites or Ceremonies shall be openly used in any Church Chappell or other publique place of or in any Colledge or Hall…other than what is prescribed and appointed to be used in and by the said Booke," (*Parliamentary Papers*, Volume 14, "An Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer and Service in the Church, and the Administration of the Sacraments," Appendix to Report on Penalties and Disabilities, XIII), 98.

[5] Sachs, *The Transformation of Anglicanism*, 12.

[6] In Chapter Two, I will explain the important distinction between secularization and toleration more fully. Specifically, while secularization is crucial for a more egalitarian democracy that does not favor any one religion, it can eventually become intolerant if it isolates religious adherents. This negative result can most fully be observed in modern Western Islamophobia. Additionally, the novelists in my study do not consider themselves secular, nor do they remove religion from their hopeful visions of revolution.

secularization were inextricably tied to English responses to the French Revolution and ultimately to the rights of previously marginalized groups like women, the lower classes, and Nonconformists. My work takes an intersectional approach to the revolutionary writing that proliferated in England in the 1790s and considers how women writers of the time conceptualized the interactions between gendered and religious identity and represented those interactions via performance. This introduction will briefly survey the history of religion and politics in England from the Glorious Revolution in 1688 until the Acts of Toleration in 1829, with special consideration of the intersections between politics and religion in the 1790s. It will also consider how the French Revolution framed discourse in Britain around gender, religion, and the general rights of citizens. Finally, it will demonstrate how religious identity informed the construction of modern gender categories and how performance theory can help us understand intersections between gender and religion.

As a result of the Anglican preeminence that ensued after the Interregnum, history and intellectualism in eighteenth-century Britain were in many ways written from an Anglican perspective; after the Act of Uniformity of 1662, for instance, Oxford and Cambridge were only accessible to Anglicans.[7] As such, Dissenting religious movements

[7] "Universities and the said Colleges of Westminster, Winchester, and Eaton" are specifically named in the 1662 Act of Uniformity as Anglican institutions. Religious tests were prerequisites for admission at Oxford, and Anglican religious practice was required to earn degrees from most places of higher education. Though Dissenters were excluded from English Universities, they often attended Dissenting Academies in Scotland or the Netherlands. See Daniel White, *Early Romanticism and English Dissent*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Felicity James and Ian Inkster, *Religious Dissent and the Aiken-Barbauld Circle: 1740-1860*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Knud Haakonssen, *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) for more on Dissenting Academies and their role in the construction of British intellectualism in the 1700s.

from the period were often historicized and publicized as schisms from the established Anglican Church in narratives that highlighted the dominance of Anglicanism. Political uprisings (like the Jacobite rebellions of the early eighteenth century) were primarily defined by their resistance to the established British religious system. As Linda Colley has demonstrated, "The Protestant world-view was so ingrained in this culture that it influenced people's thinking irrespective of whether they went to church or not, whether they read the Bible or not, or whether indeed, they were capable of reading anything at all."[8] Even more important for my work is the extent to which *Anglicanism* (not simply Protestantism) linked to British citizenship was the primary marker of identity that distinguished the British elite and ruling classes.

This link between Anglicanism and British citizenship was not only institutionally and legally reified but was also culturally promoted through national public holidays and festivities. Leah Marcus writes that prior to the Interregnum, public festivals (for all, but particularly the lower classes) were often promoted and manipulated by the monarchy in an effort to affect class control, promote pro-monarchial sympathies, and finally to denigrate Puritanism, Dissent, and those who were politically associated with the ideals of these religions. These festivals were used by the monarchy as "escape valves" – temporary and cathartic reversals of normal power hierarchies, whereby class and political tensions could be eased and uprisings prevented. After the Civil War, because many traditional feast days were associated with the religious calendar, Puritans and other Dissenters saw the monarchial promotion of festivity as a promotion of Anglican

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[8] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation; 1707-1837*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 31.

ideology (and also Catholic or even pagan tradition). Most importantly, in the time of James and Charles I, "the fostering of old festival practices became very closely tied to the vexed matter of enforcing religious conformity, and the pastimes were increasingly perceived as extensions of liturgical worship."[9]

Paula Backscheider explains that Charles II's success as a ruler partially depended upon his ability to promote the necessity of the monarchy, and "the best means of mass communication available was public spectacle. Traditional royal ceremonies, existing civic events, and even public displays of the operations of government…were available as hegemonic apparatuses."[10] Importantly, Charles II's attempts to promote pro-monarchial sympathies through public festivity were at once non-Puritanical (in reaction to the austerity of the Interregnum) and non-Catholic (to avoid any suspicion that he was influenced by continental religious ideology). Charles thus attempted to strategically oppose Puritanism with revelry and Catholicism with what can only be described as "Englishness." This attempt can be illustrated by the celebration of May Day (and subsequent creation of other national holidays like "Oak Apple Day") in 1660. During the Interregnum, May Day festivities were banned on account of their simultaneously pagan and Catholic associations. In 1660 however, the celebration of May Day was reinstated in tandem with preparation for Charles' return to his throne. Samuel Pepys records in his diary:

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[9] Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Johnson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 5.

[10] Paula Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 2.

> The welcome news of the Parliament's votes yesterday, which will be remembered for the happiest May-day that hath been many a year to England. The King's letter was read in the House, wherein he submits himself and all things to them, as to an Act of Oblivion to all…Great joy all yesterday at London, and at night more bonfires than ever, and ringing of bells, and drinking of the King's health upon their knees in the streets.[11]

In Pepys' writing we can observe a public performance of celebration – a release of social tension accrued under Cromwell – that prepares all classes for the coming of a new king and a new era. In Pepys' writing, this celebration is marked by nationalistic pride as opposed to religious devotion (on the continent May Day is traditionally celebrated by Catholics as a feast of Mary). The messages here are both clear and subtle: public festivity after the Interregnum would be embraced by the new monarchial regime, but it would not necessarily be religious in nature – at least, this was the narrative that Charles II promoted. As such, throughout the eighteenth century, many public performances of festivals that were *seemingly* secular and merely "British," were actually replete with residual, dominant religious performances and rituals. These "national" post-Interregnum holidays culturally strengthened the connections between monarchial Anglicanism, public participation, and British nationalism that would endure for over a century.

As such, to be an Anglican in eighteenth-century Britain was to be incontrovertibly part of the dominant political and economic (as well as religious and

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[11] Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, Ed. Ernest Rhys (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1906), 45.

cultural) classes.[12] The Anglican novelist Frances Burney, on a visit to Bath in 1780, wrote to her father in disbelief that the furor of the Gordon Riots had escalated to such a high pitch in London that it had even spilled into the country. She describes the violence, arson, and fear that accompanied the riots in Bath and writes, aghast, "Who indeed is thinking in an *alarming* way of *any* Religion?" (176). The answer, of course, was: "many people." However, it was perhaps easiest for Anglicans like Burney to ignore or remain aloof from the inherent politicization of religion in England, as their own religion did not restrict them from citizenship in the ways it restricted Nonconformists. However, like any dominant group in a power system, Anglicans – though they could ignore religious division in their daily lives – had the most to lose in a radical upheaval of religious intolerance, and the fear of this loss is rife in the Revolutionary debates of the 1790s.

For example, Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* – an essential text for my work – is not simply a response to the loss of aristocratic and religious hegemony in France – it is a manifesto of Anglican-Whiggish conservatism that voices the religious and political tensions that had been brewing since the English Civil War. Burke argues:

> The consecration of the state by a state religious establishment is necessary, also, to operate with a wholesome awe upon free citizens, because, in order to secure their freedom, they must enjoy some determinate portion of power…All persons possessing any portion of power ought to be strongly and awfully impressed with

[12] See J.C.D. Clark, who expounds upon the idea that, "Gentlemen, the Church of England, and the Crown commanded an intellectual and social hegemony." *English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 7.

> an idea that they act in trust, and that they are to account for their conduct in that trust to the one great Master, Author, and Founder of society.[13]

In his diatribe, Burke strategically unites two separate arguments: the first is an argument *against* the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, which would allow Dissenters the right to hold public office and possibly lead to a separation of church and state in England (and ultimately reduce the political power of Anglican Whigs like Burke himself), and the second is *for* the inherent "right" of aristocratic and clerical rule, which was being overturned in France (a revolution that all European powers were monitoring warily). In Burke's argument, social order depends upon the moral restrictions of an established church, and upon the rulership of men who have the inherited leisure and education to govern "wisely." John Pocock explains that those who ignore the religious and historical contexts of Burke's writing often mistakenly classify Burke as a Tory, "merely because he was a monarchist, a traditionalist, and a churchman."[14] What these examples demonstrate is the powerful and complex link between religious, political, and class-based identity that privileged Anglicans for the majority of the eighteenth century; this link was a crucial point of debate in the Revolutionary discourse of the 1790s.

Dissenters fit into this debate as the most vocal and persistent detractors of the dominant Anglican ideology. Though there had been nonconforming ministers before the Act of Uniformity in 1662, the Great Ejection solidified the position of Dissent as a subversive political-religious force that would shape the constitution of English society

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[13] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 81.
[14] Ibid., xviii.

for the duration of the long eighteenth century. Over the next hundred years there arose numerous denominations within the category of Dissent – some were entirely new, and some were continuations of pre-Interregnum affiliations; some of these denominations could be considered more mainstream (Presbyterianism, Anabaptism, Socinianism); some were less conventional or even seemed culturally heterodox (Muggletonianism, Quakerism, Methodism); some were specific distinctions within wider denominations (Sublapsarianism, Unitarianism). Despite these differences, Dissenters could be grouped together based on three definitive rules: they were English Christians; they were not Anglican; and they were not Catholic. Additionally, as Daniel White has demonstrated, there was a "broad association of dissent with political dissidence," and as a general rule, Dissenters advocated for "parliamentary reform for a more equal representation" and increased liberties for those suffering under religious intolerance, slavery, colonial oppression or class-based inequity.[15]

These general qualifications for the Dissenting tradition endured throughout the century and coalesced in the 1790s to further unite those who advocated religious toleration in England in response to the events in France. On the fourth of November 1789, Richard Price delivered a sermon entitled *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, which eventually begot Burke's *Reflections* and thus ignited the revolutionary pamphlet wars in England.[16] The *Discourse* was a commemorative sermon, marking the centennial

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[15] White, *Early Romanticism and English Dissent*, 9.

[16] Price was a Unitarian. As such, he faced harsher legal restrictions than Trinitarian Dissenters. In the late eighteenth-century, however, Unitarianism wasn't necessarily considered a specific denomination – sometimes it was simply viewed as a feature of other Dissenting denominations. For instance, though Price was Unitarian, he also ministered at Presbyterian meetings. This example helps demonstrate even further the

anniversary of the Glorious Revolution and especially describing the effects of that revolution on English Dissenters: "It has been usual for the friends of freedom, and more especially Protestant Dissenters, under the title of the Revolution Society, to celebrate with expressions of joy and exultation…By a bloodless victory, the fetters which despotism had been long preparing for us were broken; the rights of the people were asserted, a tyrant expelled."[17] Despite this praise, Price is still notably critical of the state of religious regulation and intolerance in Britain, even one hundred years after the Glorious Revolution: "though the Revolution was a great work, it was by no means a perfect work…you should recollect, that the toleration then obtained was imperfect. It included only those who could declare their faith in the doctrinal articles of the Church of England." [18] Price's critique underscores the ways in which Britain's Enlightened democracy is in fact grounded in the exclusion of a significant amount of its citizens, and how Dissenters responded to that exclusion, as White explains, by "articulat[ing] the virtues of religious division precisely as a means toward political and social unity, or at least harmony."[19]

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fluidity of Dissenting religious identity, and the extent to which individual belief (and the performative profession of that belief) could dictate one's social standing. See White, *Early Romanticism and English Dissent*, 37.

[17] Richard Price, "A Discourse on the Love of Our Country," *Lend me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History*, Ed. William Saffire, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 98.

[18] Ibid., 100.

[19] White, *Early Romanticism and English Dissent*, 7.

The specific religious rites and performances of Dissenters are diverse, due to the sheer number of denominations within the category. However, one central feature can be used to identify almost all Dissenting factions, and that is their comparative emphasis on individual agency. The schism between Anglicanism and Catholicism signified a movement toward increased individual agency and the prerogative of the self: to break with Rome was, for Anglicans, to embrace a form of self-governance in religious ideology. For Dissenters, this sense of individual agency was increased even further, as Dissenters rejected the hierarchy of Anglican clerical officials and certain aspects of the *Book of Common Prayer*. As different denominations and sects privileged and rejected variant aspects of Anglican liturgy, I will not delineate all of their variations here; rather, I will use Presbyterianism as an example of the Dissenting emphasis on individual agency, as Presbyterianism was the religion of the author I analyze in chapter three – Helen Maria Williams.

During the Savoy conference, Presbyterian ministers (most notably Richard Baxter) specifically rejected several aspects of the *Book of Common Prayer*, and these rejections eventually begot foundational features of Dissenting religious performance.[20] Namely, Presbyterians rejected the notions that lay people could not vocally participate in ceremonial prayer, and that ministers could not include extemporized prayers into a service or omit other prayers or parts of ceremony if they felt moved to do so. These rejections underscore the significance of lay people performing religious rites as a community in the Dissenting service, and likewise demonstrate the ways Dissenters value

[20] See Henry Gee and William John Hardy, "Order of the Savoy Conference," *Documents Illustrative of English Church History*, (London: MacMillan, 1896).

individual participation in prayer. The significance of these ruptures would additionally filter into Dissenting education throughout the century – for Presbyterians, all lay people (including women) were encouraged to read and interpret the Bible and contribute in communal worship. The rejection of limited, rigidly prescribed prayers and rites for ministers also demonstrates the Dissenting emphasis on public, spectacular religious expression and spontaneity. In this way, dissenting ministry aligns more readily with what Diane Taylor has called the "repertoire" – the non-archival, unregulated system of transfer by which embodied or ephemeral performances reconstitute or reify cultural practice and identity, which I will explore below.[21]

Additionally, Presbyterians at the Savoy conference critiqued and rejected the rites of Anglicanism that still resembled Catholicism. In particular, they moved toward replacing collects – short, often standardized prayers and responses used in the liturgy – with longer prayers and addresses, and sought the general removal of Catholic ceremonial rites that were residual in Anglican services, especially those that seemed ostentatious or inaccessible to the laity, or that posited a priest or minister as an infallible intercessor with the divine. These latter critiques simultaneously demonstrated the prioritization of individuality by Dissenters and highlighted the ways that Dissenters felt Anglicans were still beholden to hierarchal governance within religious power structures. Reenacted over time, the performances of individual religious discernment and worship, combined with the decreased primacy of ministers, eventually solidified into political ideology – eighteenth-century Dissenters generally categorized themselves as more

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[21] Diane Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

socially progressive than their Anglican brethren, who were still caught up in the ways of the old Church; Dissenters likewise tended to favor equality and transparency in the political realm – for Dissenters, everyone was equal in the eyes of God.[22]

Despite these differences, Dissenters were still Protestant, and thus afforded many more rights and allowances in English public and political life, unlike Catholic Nonconformists. In many ways, the state of Catholicism in eighteenth century Britain can feel paradoxical to a modern reader. What was once a monolithic and hegemonic religion in early modern Europe had become contested in most Enlightened European states by the late eighteenth century and actually suppressed in Britain. Catholicism *still* functions as a hierarchy of male power figures ruling from a foreign conclave, and in the eighteenth century, Catholics living in Britain were always suspect because they submitted to what they believed was a higher power than the monarch: the Pope. Raymond Tumbleson notes, "the object was to identify Papism with alien Irish barbarism, French despotism, and corrupt Roman luxury…The very names 'Papist' and 'Romish' locate that Church as foreign; the universalist assertion implicit in the name 'Catholic' is one Protestant writers never allowed to be legitimate."[23] In other words, modern English Catholics were always "others," even as they lived and worked and functioned in Britain; after the Civil War, the question became: how to deal with these non-British Britons?

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[22] This is not to suggest that Dissenting ministers were completely egalitarian, or that women were afforded total equality in Dissenting practice. This is merely to compare the professed models of Dissenting and Anglican religious leadership.

[23] Raymond D. Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination 1660-1745* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13.

After the Act of Uniformity in 1662, Catholics and other Nonconformists were severely handicapped in their rights as British citizens. Nevertheless, English attitudes about Catholicism during Charles II's and James II's reigns were still characterized by barely-controlled panic: were these monarchs *actually* Catholic? Where did their loyalties truly lie – with the English people? Or with their Popish continental friends? In what ways would their religious sympathies plunge England back into the absolutism that proliferated before the Interregnum? This panic was of course resolved in many ways by the Glorious Revolution, which instated William and Mary as England's definitively Protestant rulers. Shortly after the Glorious Revolution, the Bill of Rights was enacted to establish the authority of Parliament; its enactment simultaneously forced the abdication of James II, excluded Catholics from bearing arms, and forbade any Catholic from the English throne on the grounds that "it hath been found by experience that it is inconsistent with the safety and welfare of this protestant kingdom to be governed by a papist prince."[24] The Toleration Act of 1689 allowed freedom of worship for Protestant Nonconformists who swore the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy, but excluded Catholics on the basis of their belief in transubstantiation. In 1701, the Act of Settlement reified the law that no Roman Catholic or anyone who "shall hold Communion with the See or Church of Rome or shall profess the Popish Religion or shall marry a Papist" would ever sit the throne of England after William and Mary failed to produce any heirs. This last act not only permanently linked the English monarchy with Anglicanism, but also reinforced the ways in which religion in the eighteenth century was considered a

[24] *English Bill of Rights: An Act Declaring the Rights and Liberties of the Subject and Settling the Succession of the Crown*, 1689.

performative identity category. An individual's religious identity – for monarch and commoner alike – was not inborn, but was based upon what that individual *said* it was, or the ways in which that individual *enacted* his or her religious beliefs.

As these Acts legally fortified the supremacy of Anglicanism, "the hatred of Catholicism [lost] its day-to-day political centrality; nonetheless, at moments of crisis, most notably 1715 and 1745, Papism remain[ed] available as the ultimate evil against which the Georges [stood]."[25] In 1766, the Catholic Church recognized George III as the ruler of England and the following decades saw an increase in freedoms afforded to British Catholics. The Quebec Act of 1774 allowed freedom of Catholic worship for British citizens living in the Province of Quebec (what is now Quebec, Ontario, and much of the Great Lakes region of the United States), and additionally allowed practicing Catholics to take public office in the region.[26] By the Papists Act of 1778, Catholics in England were allowed to inherit and purchase land, and practicing Catholic priests were no longer subject to imprisonment. Despite these more tolerant laws, however, British popular opinion was still very much against Catholicism, as is evidenced by the Gordon Riots of 1780, wherein London mobs looted, rioted, and protested against Catholic toleration. In 1782, an additional act allowed the establishment of Catholic schools in England, and in 1791, the Roman Catholic Relief Act allowed British Catholics to

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[25] Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination*, 9.

[26] This Act was intended as a safeguard against insurrection in the Province of Quebec. After the 1763 Treaty of Paris, citizens of the Province of Quebec refused to renounce their Catholicism (which they had freely practiced under French rule). To prevent the Province of Quebec from joining the American Revolutionaries to the south, Britain allowed them these religious freedoms.

practice law and freely worship, allowing that they supported the Protestant succession, did not convene in locked meeting places, and registered with the Clerk of the Peace. The first three decades of the nineteenth century saw increasing tolerance toward Catholics, until finally in 1829 the Roman Catholic Relief Act allowed British Catholics to sit in Parliament.

Despite these increasingly tolerant policies, cultural suspicion around Catholics persisted well into the late eighteenth century. Because of the legal handicaps placed upon them, most of their religious enactments had to be performed in private. This privacy was double-edged: it helped Catholics lay low and avoid overt discrimination from their Protestant neighbors, but it also reinforced English suspicions about Catholic secrecy and confessional behavior; this suspicion was ubiquitously manifest in cultural productions throughout the century. For example, the residual perception of Catholics as frightening "others" can be observed in the proliferation of Gothic novels that began in the 1760s. In these novels, Catholicism functions as a fictionalized evil that endured as an enemy of British culture and rationalism. Recently, critics like Mark Canuel have noted that Catholicism in the English Gothic is in many ways self-critical: "The Gothic presents monastic institutions as fascinating sources of danger, but not because the genre seeks to suppress Catholicism as a set of alien beliefs. Instead… [Gothic novels] frequently identify monasticism as a private and self-enclosed structure of confessional authority, visible in Britain itself, that the Gothic novel participates in dismantling and modifying."[27]

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[27] Mark Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British writing, 1790-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7.

This example represents another paradox of English Catholic performance: on the European continent, Catholicism was uniformly hegemonic, confessional, and controlled by men. In England, because of the illegality of the Catholic Mass and priests, Catholicism was more varyingly practiced – usually in private homes or estates, where laity and women could be more intimately involved in rituals. Interestingly, though the practice of Catholicism in Europe was often associated with isolated monastic life, Catholicism in England had a similar – yet markedly different – communal aspect as a result of recusant bonding: forced out of public life, English Catholics banded together in small, imagined communities.[28] For English Catholics, performances of rites and rituals were often enacted via instruction from a private, local priest or from one's own copy of the Catholic *Catechism*. As Anna Battigelli and Laura Stevens have demonstrated, *Catechism* proliferated secretly throughout the century, and its printed existence demonstrates a thriving underground community of recusant English Catholics: "A key genre of religious instruction and doctrinal inculcation, points to an assertive, if furtive, Catholic presence supported by the printing and distribution of Anglophone texts in what sometimes had been regarded without qualification as the Protestant territory of eighteenth-century England," and, "in the wake of anti-Catholic repression, English Catholicism had become a religion of forbidden books and covert reading habits."[29]

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[28] See Michael Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question: Religion, History and National Identity, 1778-1829* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) on Catholic recusant communities.

[29] Anna Battigelli and Stevens, Laura M., "Eighteenth-Century Women and English Catholicism," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 31.1/2 (Spring/Fall 2012), 7.

Finally, Catholicism in late eighteenth-century Britain was politically paradoxical in that Catholics fit oddly into the debates around toleration that proliferated in the 1790s. While Dissenters and other advocates of toleration criticized the British state as a confessional government that enforced citizens to adhere to Anglicanism against their will, they were still suspicious of Catholic practice and culture (precisely because of its history of confessional authoritarianism). This contradiction was a given in Revolutionary discourse; for instance, though Dissenting radicals sought religious toleration, they still chose to nominally distance themselves from Catholics by calling themselves "Dissenters" (and not simply "Nonconformists"). Granting political and social rights for Catholic citizens was likewise a murky and difficult issue in light of the French Revolutionary debates. While more conservative writers opposed the dismantling of the Church in France, they simultaneously opposed toleration for Catholics living in England. British radicals on the other hand associated the Catholic Church in France with the *ancien regime* and approved of its downfall, even as they promoted Catholic emancipation at home. Canuel has called this model – the discourse that linked secularism with toleration and anti-authoritarian religious structures – "counter-confessional." Canuel notes, "secularization did not emerge as a change in individuals' beliefs, or a change in collective beliefs, but as a shift in the means through which distinct beliefs could be coordinated or organized under the auspices of more capacious and elaborate structures of government."[30] Michael Tomko agrees that the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts marked the "culminating success of a Dissenting discourse that

[30] Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing*, 4.

sought liberalizing reform and increased tolerance through accusing the Anglican Church of playing the 'papal tyrant' towards fellow Protestants."[31] However, Tomko is careful to remind us that it would be reductive to ignore the centuries of ideological and cultural hatred and suspicion toward Catholics in England, even if the English were becoming more "tolerant" of them: "Paradoxically, even as the image of the Inquisition could prompt a more tolerant set of laws, such discourse could also promote an intolerant culture of fear and distrust towards a religious minority."[32]

Revolution

It is impossible to overemphasize the extent to which the French Revolution influenced discourse on religious toleration and general egalitarianism in England, so bound were these issues. Crucially, political discourse in the revolutionary 1790s often linked the upheaval of class structure to changes in the roles (or perceptions of those roles) of women. If monarchies and aristocracies were no longer to subjugate the lower classes, how might this change in governmental hierarchies influence the power structures that existed (and still exist) between genders? Additionally, how might concurrent debates on women's education, reading and writing figure into revolutionary discourse?

In France, as Suzanne Desan writes, "the Revolution constituted an unusual opening for female political activism, cultural expression, and feminist demand;" specifically, new Revolutionary laws made marriage a civil contract and legalized

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[31] Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Questio*n, 7.

[32] Ibid., 7.

accessible divorce for both men and women; additionally, "the abolition of primogeniture mandated equal inheritance for both sons and daughters…and new laws governing paternity allowed single mothers to press charges for paternal support of illegitimate offspring;" and finally, "changes in law granted women the right to testify in court, while educational reforms seemed to promise more attention to primary school education for girls."[33] Unfortunately, however, as the Revolution progressed, women's public involvement was scrutinized and they were increasingly excluded from participation in the National Convention – particularly after the Terror. Symbolically, the feminized representations of Liberty and Justice, proliferated throughout the Revolution, were exaggerated and impossible ideals, and ultimately the Revolution "set patterns limiting the political and public rights of women and reinforcing their essentially domestic role."[34] As Joan B. Landes has likewise concluded, "women failed to achieve political emancipation" and were instead relegated to the domestic sphere in the final years of the eighteenth century.[35] This relegation happened in both France and Britain, and perhaps even more overtly so in the latter nation, as mainstream British politics strongly rejected the progressive ideologies of the French Revolution after 1793.

Despite this apparent defeat, however, it is still necessary to examine the torrent of feminist thought in the early days of the Revolution, and to question whether and how any of these feminist ideals remained residual in nineteenth-century political rhetoric

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[33] Suzanne Desan, *Literate Women and the French Revolution of 1798*, Ed. Catherine R. Montfort (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, Inc., 1994), 21.

[34] Ibid., 20.

[35] Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).

about women. It is my contention that British women's radical feminist writing in the 1790s relies heavily upon religious rhetoric and performance, and it is through religion that women writing *after* the conservative bourgeois turn were able to find agency, despite marginalization. It is additionally important to explore the intersections between religious and gendered identity during this crucial moment in feminist history, as these intersections formed the basis of modern identity categories that still exist today.

Essential for my analysis is a brief summary on the historiography of the French Revolution (most notably the "Marxist turn" of the early to mid-twentieth century, the "revisionist" responses that followed, and the more recent contributions made by scholars who consider the role of gender in the Revolutionary decade) and a consideration of the ways in which eighteenth-century Britons responded to the events in France. The most important tension in this historiography, for my work, lies in the agency that historians afford to (or deny) the bourgeoisie and the marginalized groups (like women and religious minorities) involved in the Revolutionary moment. Peter Davies writes, the "defining feature of the Marxist perspective" was the idea that "economic deprivation had provoked the lower classes into organized revolt."[36] Marx himself wrote about the French Revolution, using it as a referent point for his theories on the "scientific" historical progression of class struggle: "When the French bourgeoisie overthrew the power of the aristocracy, it thereby made it possible for many proletarians to raise themselves above the proletariat, but only insofar as they become bourgeois. Every new class, therefore, achieves its hegemony only on a broader basis than that of the class ruling previously,

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[36] Peter Davies, *The Debate on the French Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 127.

whereas the opposition of the non-ruling class against the new ruling class later develops all the more sharply and profoundly. Both these things determine the fact that the struggle to be waged against this new ruling class, in its turn, aims at a more decided and radical negation of the previous conditions of society than could all previous classes which sought to rule."[37] Marx additionally underscores the role of the bourgeoisie in the toppling of the *ancien regime*, arguing, "The bourgeoisie has at last, since the establishment of Modern Industry and of the world market, conquered for itself, in the modern representative state, exclusive political sway…The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part."[38]

The Marxist history of the French Revolution that followed has generally held that the Revolution was primarily the product of class struggle, with various scholars affording primacy and power to different factions and class relations within the period.[39]

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[37] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers Co., 1970), 66.

[38] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, "Bourgeois and Proletarians*," The Communist Manifesto*, Ed. Gareth Stedman Jones (New York: Penguin Putnam Books, 2002), 221.

[39] Jean Jaurès begins the Marxist conversation by arguing that the Revolution could be attributed to the rise of the bourgeoisie (1901); see *A Socialist History of the French Revolution*, Ed. Mitchel Abidor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2015). Albert Mathiez argues that the Revolution began as a struggle between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy but *became* a struggle between the middle class and the proletariat; Mathiez also lionizes Robespierre and believes the Terror was justified, a notion that many subsequent scholars find problematic; see *The French Revolution*, Trans. Catherine Alison Philips (New York: Russell and Russell, 1922). Georges Lefebvre was one of the first scholars to emphasize "history from below" by highlighting the importance of peasants and the urban population of Paris in the Revolution (1947); see *The Coming of the French Revolution*, Trans. R.R. Palmer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989). Albert Soboul continued Lefebvre's work and specifically examines the tensions between the *sans-culottes* and the bourgeoisie (1965, 1975); see *A Short History of the French Revolution, 1789-1799* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1977). Soboul is most useful for my arguments because he complicates the class tensions that

Georges Lefebvre emphasized that the lower and middling classes revolted, among other reasons, because of the "reduction in the 'purchasing power of the masses.''[40] Albert Soboul is additionally essential for his scholarship on the role of the peasants during the Revolution, arguing that their revolt was one of the Revolution's "most distinctive characteristics," and that in many ways "the feudal mode of production still dominated the countryside" in the years leading up to 1789.[41] Soboul's work is important for thinking about the ways in which eighteenth-century British radical writers often linked Revolutionary sensibility to Christian sympathy for the poor. Soboul argues, "the masses in towns and the countryside were not stirred up to revolt in 1789 by bourgeois intrigues and agitation…Nor did the popular masses rebel because of innate bloodthirstiness …What aroused the masses was hunger."[42] These scholars likewise help us consider the reconstitution of identity politics in the 1790s in that they demonstrate the stark economic contrast between *ancien regime* and post-Revolutionary France. Whatever else the Revolution was, it was a break from preexisting modes of economic production that reverberated ideologically, politically and culturally into the rest of the Western world, and forced an Enlightened consideration of other previously suppressed and ignored identity categories.

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led to Revolution and does not essentialize or homogenize any class groups to the extent of these other scholars.

[40] Peter Davies, *Debate on the French Revolution*, 90-3.

[41] Ibid., 21.

[42] Ibid, 29.

As Davies summarizes, for Marxist scholars, "In essence, the 'Revolution' comprised three 'mini-revolutions': the liberal revolt (1789-91), the illiberal interlude (1792-94), and the reversion to moderation (1794-99)."[43] The first three novelists I analyze – Charlotte Smith, Elizabeth Inchbald, and Helen Maria Williams – are primarily concerned with British responses to the earlier "liberal revolt" and its concomitant ideologies of progression for previously marginalized groups, particularly women and religious nonconformists. My concluding chapter on Ann Radcliffe examines the "reversion to moderation" period that manifested in Britain as intense, reactionary conservatism. Radcliffe's writing ultimately demonstrates that despite this conservative turn, pockets of ideological radicalism still existed in Britain after the Revolution, and often manifested in religious writing by women.

These earlier Marxist historians like Lefebvre and Soboul are nearly all French historians, and study France almost exclusively. My work, conversely, examines England's response to France's revolution and thus relies partially on what historiographers have dubbed the "revisionist" Marxist narrative. Herein lies the primary conflict between Marxist and revisionist scholars of the French Revolution: while Marxists highlighted the inherent class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, and eventually between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, revisionists like Alfred Cobban and Francoise Furet questioned the state of the bourgeoisie in France at the end of the century, interrogating whether the bourgeoisie and aristocracy were not part of a blended upper class, rather than two distinct warring classes: Cobban writes, "The essential point is to decide if the revolution does in fact represent an important stage

[43] Ibid., 5.

in the economic history of France, and whether the direction in which its influence operated was in fact that which is suggested."[44] In this way, the revisionists are essential for my work on the British women writers who responded to the French Revolution, primarily because the revisionist narrative strongly opposes the Marxist emphasis on economic struggle, questioning the fluctuations of France's ruling and commercial classes.

Though my work does not reject the importance of class-based struggle in the Revolutionary debates, or the essential "history-from-below" theses of Lefebvre and Soboul, it is nevertheless crucial to point out, when comparing France and Britain, that France's bourgeoisie was simply not as defined as Britain's in the 1790s (a fact that Lefebvre and Soboul freely admit). By 1789, England's bourgeoisie was already approaching the hegemonic level of political, cultural and economic power it would attain during and after the Industrial era. As such, the bourgeoisie in Britain was already what we can call a "ruling class," and this is a crucial difference for those British writers caught up in the revolutionary debates. For instance, when radicals like Helen Maria Williams compare the spending practices of women in England versus women in France, their critiques often recognize these class-based differences: in Britain, middle class consumption was based on emulation of the aristocracy; in France, consumption was performed primarily *by* the aristocracy. While Britain's commercial revolution was a

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[44] Alfred Cobban, *The Social Interpretation of the French Revolution*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1964), 67. Furet additionally distances his work even further from traditional Marxists by rejecting the social causes of the Revolution and focusing on the political and ideological ones; see Francoise Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

slow and steady one that had been coming on for a century, France's Revolution – which was certainly class-based, but also ideological – was much more starkly delineated. Whether we side with the Marxists who argue that France's bourgeoisie was responsible for the Revolution, or the revisionists who believed the bourgeoisie was not yet defined enough to be considered a primary agent, we can all agree that the economic changes in France were much more extreme and abrupt than they were in England, and that this difference is pivotal for examining the ideological relationships between writers of the two nations.

Thus, while it is possible for a Marxist to champion the revolution in France as the progression of class struggle, the same cannot be said for England at the same historical moment. To champion the bourgeoisie in England as an equalizing political force in the 1790s is to be pro-capitalist, and to favor the (or at least "a") ruling class. Cobban additionally emphasizes that "An estimate of social position must not be based on a single criterion, legal, political or economic, as it often has been in the past, but on a plurality of tests – actual wealth and its nature, sources of income, social status and prestige, origin and direction of social movement of the individual and his family, legal order, political orientation, contemporary esteem, economic function, personal aspirations and grievances, and so on."[45] In this way, the revisionist narrative is additionally more useful for an intersectional analysis of identity during the Revolutionary period, as it does not attempt to essentialize or homogenize economic or social identity.

[45] Cobban, *Social Interpretation of the French Revolution*, 21-2.

More recently, scholarship on the French Revolution has focused on women's role in the events of the 1790s (like Desan and Landes' work above), and that is of course where my own thesis contributes. When considering the conversation between Marxist and revisionist scholars, as well as the relationship between class and gender in Britain and France at the end of the eighteenth century, we need to take special care to examine the distinctions in modes of consumption between bourgeois and aristocratic women in the 1790s, as women have been ubiquitously linked with commercialism and purchasing power throughout scholarship on the eighteenth century.[46] In England in the eighteenth century, upper-middle class women had become a commercial force that was already being viewed negatively by radicals like Williams. In France, conversely, women as agents of consumption were mostly associated with the aristocracy; this difference is essential when examining the ways gendered consumption reifies or reconstitutes identity during the period.

Religious power, like economic power, is another crucial difference in the ways British and French politics functioned in the 1790s. In England, the connections between Church and state had been politically, socially, and culturally undermined and interrogated since the Reformation; in particular, the Anglican Church and its ties with English political and economic hegemony had been contested since the Civil War. Because of the relentless religious tensions during the sixteenth and seventeenth

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[46] For more on the links between femininity, consumerism, and commercialism in eighteenth-century Britain, see Erin Skye Mackie, *Market à la Mode* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Neil McKendrick, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982); and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

centuries, power in eighteenth-century England was not solely the purview of the Anglican aristocracy. Rather, bourgeois and aristocratic Nonconformists and Dissenters in particular formed a vocal political subculture throughout the century. Conversely, though Protestants did live in France (they had been granted freedom of worship since the Edict of Nantes in 1598), France was still predominately a Catholic country, with the clergy serving as the First Estate of the *ancien regime*. Thus, as was the case with class-based power, the upheaval of religious power in France, and the distinctions between religious sects, were much more dramatic than they were in England in the 1790s, and this is an essential point to remember when comparing the two nations, and when considering English responses to France's Revolution.

Performance

All of the writers I analyze are strongly influenced not only by the political climate that accompanied the French Revolution in Britain, but also by their personal religious beliefs. These beliefs often manifest in their novels via *representations* of religious performance (that is, characters that enact rituals, rites, or everyday religious behaviors), *debates* on religion (narratorial or character-based discussion of religious doctrine or ideology, either overtly or symbolically included in the writing), or *writing* that is religiously performative in itself (prayers, psalms, or religious responses embedded in the language of the texts). For instance, Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* includes depictions of characters overtly performing Catholic rites like going to confession, receiving Extreme Unction, and enacting the Sign of the Cross. Charlotte Smith's characters in *Desmond* openly debate the relationship between church and state

while Ann Radcliffe's characters in *The Italian*, on the other hand, are often seemingly Anglican or deistic and placed in Catholic settings, where they must discursively and symbolically navigate their religious and political beliefs despite oppressive dogmatic forces. Finally, Helen Maria Williams often relies upon scripture in her writing, freely interjecting biblical passages into *Julia*'s narrative. As Orianne Smith argues, these "literary speech acts" are inherently political and "can be even greater than the force of verbal speech acts because the printed words on the page – and their potential availability to anyone, anywhere, and at any time, enact the political promise (or threat) of the illocutionary performance by their essential iterability."[47]

Most importantly, all of these writers use their religious beliefs to inform their responses to the events in France, and to propose early feminist ideologies – ideologies that they felt were possible and practicable in the 1790s, when religious and class-based identities and civil rights were called into question by the Revolution. Useful here is Judith Butler's notion of the reconstitution of identity through embodied performances; namely, the widespread social turbulence of the decade allowed a reconsideration of the ways identity was "enacted on a large political scale," as politicians, ministers, and citizens re-imagined the ways identity could allow or prohibit citizenship. The Revolution likewise precipitated a shift in "the more mundane reproduction of gendered identity" that "takes place through the various ways in which bodies are acted in relationship to the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence."[48] This shift

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[47] Orianne Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 31.

[48] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," Theatre Journal, 40:4 (Dec. 1988), 524.

occurred as Britons asked: in what ways would women now engage in public and political life? In what ways would adherents of different religions be allowed to participate in the public sphere? The novelists I analyze use religious belief (and written representations of that belief) to answer both of these questions, discursively linking gender and religion in their writing and "position[ing] the performative at the center of a politics of hegemony, one that offers an unanticipated political future."[49]

Though the period offered space for variation, experimentation, and agency for previously marginalized identity groups, women writing in the 1790s were subject to suspicion and censure at the very least; Dror Wahrman, for example, traces the meaning of the word "amazon" throughout the eighteenth century, claiming that it is only in the 80s and 90s that the word takes on a pejorative sense, when it is used to describe "masculine" women who engage in non-normative gendered behavior outside the domestic sphere.[50] Wahrman argues that the dominance of the bourgeois-capitalist class system greatly contributed to this change in meaning, as identity in the early and mid-eighteenth century was conceived as malleable and "before the self;" but during the economic and political revolutions at the end of the century, "counter-normative figures were now driven underground or forced to come out into the open as explicit, charged, politicized challenges to the whole gender order."[51] Specifically, the "gender panic" that

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[49] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routelage, 1997), 152.

[50] Dror Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

[51] Ibid., 14.

emerged at the end of the century and solidified bourgeois gender categories raised the stakes in experimenting with gender identity (with "experimentation" including participating in the "masculine," literary public sphere).[52] Wahrman calls this earlier, malleable framework of identification the "*ancien regime* of identity," and demonstrates that gender (along with race and class) underwent drastic "shifts from understanding capacious enough to allow for individual deviation from dominant gender norms to more inflexible understandings that rendered such deviations very costly."[53]

Fascinatingly, religion and nationality do not fit into Warhman's paradigm; this is an inconsistency he readily acknowledges, and one that I would like to address more fully. As I have noted above in my descriptions of religion-based laws, religion as a category of identity – perhaps unlike gender, race or class, if we accept Wahrman's thesis – had been *incredibly* structured since long before the eighteenth century; crucially,

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[52] Ibid., 162.

[53] Ibid., 7. Wahrman's work concurs nicely with Desan's and Landes'; all three authors agree that gendered identity solidified and became more restrictive after the Revolution. To name a few essential studies that name the late eighteenth century as a pivotal time in the historical development of gender, race, nationality and sexuality: Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), posits that domestic novels of this time period contributed to the cultural, economic, and psychological rise of the modern individual, and that a new female subjectivity in particular emerged that was able to exercise agency outside of masculine control. Roxanne Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), traces the history of race as a developing and varied category of identity in the eighteenth century, before it became a recognized marker of British identity in the nineteenth. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983), argues that the "convulsions of the French Revolution" became a model for nineteenth-century constructions of national unity (69). Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, (London: Penguin 1990), demonstrates how sexuality as a discursive category of identity proliferated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

however, to change one's religious identity – to convert – was not necessarily taboo immediately before or after the 1790s. Religious adherents in England had been converting since the Reformation. After the French Revolution, as tolerance and secularization became the order of the day, Wahrman notes that within the identity category of religion, "it remained possible to continue to imagine individuals crossing boundaries."[54] As such, if religion was no longer a primary category of difference by which society was organized and power conferred, in what ways is it still necessary to analyze its political ramifications? Here I argue that what we *can* observe is that religion as an identity category in England perhaps lost much of its *obvious* centrality when it lost its regulatory laws as a result of the Toleration Acts. That is, no longer a criterion to legally define or exclude citizens, religion lost its political potency as an identity category. However, this does not mean we can ignore religion in Britain after 1829 – quite the contrary. What this indicates is that after Toleration, the residual intersectional tenets and performances associated with religion (like the primacy of the Christian family, taboos on sexuality, racial and nationalist religious affiliations, to name a few) entered the realm of de-legalized ideology, or a kind of deinstitutionalized "repertoire." Ultimately, religion in England post-1829 can be even more pernicious if it remains unexamined as an intersectional identity category. As Roland Barthes notes, "what disappeared was the theater of persecution, not persecution itself."[55]

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[54] Ibid., 279.

[55] Roland Barthes, "The Last Happy Writer," *Critical Essays* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), 83.

All of the writers I analyze envision the Revolution as a systemic social upheaval that will be carried out via individual performances; the new order for Smith, Inchbald, Williams, and Radcliffe will be defined by a populist reconstitution of both gendered and religious identity categories and a larger reconfiguration of institutional power. Crucially, these women believed in the potential of the French Revolution and saw systemic change as *possible*, and even a necessary consequence of the class-based ruptures happening in France. Because of this, I have found Pierre Bourdieu a useful voice for analyzing the ways in which the commercial realm interacts with the representations of gendered and religious performance in these novels. Most central to this analysis is Bourdieu's conceptions of the "habitus," the embodied and psychological characteristics that are socially and institutionally acquired and constitute an individual's tastes, identities, and status; and "field," the environment(s) through which individual agents move, and in which the habitus is constituted and reconstituted. Though Bourdieu does not openly claim to write performance theory, scholars have found the relationship between habitus and field useful for considering the performative turn.[56] For Bourdieu, the "habitus is formed, but it is also formative;" identity is both historically and culturally contingent, but is likewise generative through individual practices and actions. Crucially, Bourdieu's habitus allows us to explore the reciprocal relationship between objectivism and subjectivism; for Bourdieu, "the representation which individuals and groups inevitably project through their practices and properties is an integral part of social reality. A class is

[56] See especially Lois McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000) and Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs, *Feminism After Bourdieu* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004).

defined as much by its *being-perceived* and by its *being*, by its consumption – which need not be conspicuous to be symbolic – as much as by its position in the relations of production."[57]

Also significant for my analysis is the way Bourdieu prioritizes the economic field in the construction of other fields. Though, as Bourdieu argues, economic and cultural capital cannot always be neatly mapped onto one another, or considered as part of a perfectly reciprocal relationship, economic and cultural power *often* interact reciprocally or mirror one another as their fields interact and change. As Neil McKendrick has shown, England was far readier for a consumer revolution than any other European country in the eighteenth century: "England had experienced more markedly than anywhere else in Europe what has been called 'the compression of the socio-economic spectrum' or 'the narrowing of social distance.'"[58] English consumers by the 1790s were locked in a constant race to improve their rank, and material possessions could of course signify that improvement. Importantly, these performances of rank included rampant conspicuous consumption by the aristocracy, and imitative consumption by the emulating middle class; McKendrick notes: "part of the increased consumption of the eighteenth century was the result not only of new levels of spending in the lower ranks, but also new levels of spending by those in the higher ranks who felt for the first time threatened by the loss of their distinctive badge of identity."[59] Thus, as

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[57] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 2010), 485.

[58] McKendrick, *Birth of a Consumer Society*, 20.

[59] Ibid., 55.

the economic layout of Britain tipped toward the rise of the middle class, and there was a newly increased production and consumption of material goods, the end of the eighteenth century witnessed a change in agents within the field of cultural production. Where before the "taste makers" in England had been the aristocracy, the new "taste makers" were those who had the power of consumption – which could now mean the middle class as well. During the French Revolution, which heightened interactions between the fields of religious belief, politics, and economics, English women – who were powerful consumers – became key players in the reconstitution of those fields in England, and, reciprocally, the agents who moved within them. In many ways, the presence of women in the political and commercial spheres during the Revolution could be described as what Joseph Roach calls "surrogation" – the process by which culture is continually revised via replacements and substitutes to fill vacancies in the social milieu. Specifically, women who entered these spheres as substitutes for men were subject to the "raging paranoia" that, as Roach explains, can beleaguer any surrogate, "all the more powerfully when social or cultural differences exacerbate generational ones."[60]

Religion in eighteenth-century England likewise functioned as a type of surrogation. While modern scholars tend to think of religion as static, uniform, and conventional, the novelists I analyze conceived of religion as an identity that is "constituted, and, hence, capable of being constituted differently."[61] From the

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[60] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3.

[61] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, 40:4 (Dec. 1988), 520.

Reformation until the Toleration Acts of the nineteenth century, the major Christian sects in England – Anglicanism, Dissent, and Catholicism – were locked in an inter-cultural process of revision and "forgotten substitution." Protestantism is always already a contestation, as adherents attempt to define themselves by what they are not – Catholic. Catholics living in England, conversely, were defined by what *they* were not – fully British. Nevertheless, residual elements of Catholic performances are present in the Anglican Mass, just as a Dissenting service is a religious performance that is both constituted by and in the process of rejecting Anglican practice. In eighteenth-century Britain, religious power was surrogated between denominations by continuous legal and ritualistic confirmations and rejections of performance: the cloistered Catholic confessional was replaced by the enforced oaths of the Anglican state, which were in turn replaced by the Dissenting focus on the self and the commitment to individual discernment and the power of the rights-bearing individual. Considering religious identity as imbricated, inter-cultural performances can foster analysis that examines the contestable and fluid nature of religion.

Surrogation, the substitution of one cultural performance with another, or what Diane Taylor calls "transculturation" – "the transformative process undergone by all societies as they come in contact with and acquire foreign cultural material, whether willingly or unwillingly" can likewise describe the epochal processes by which the *ancien regime* was generationally replaced by the revolutionary era, and by which English writers reconfigured their political beliefs in response to events in France.[62] In

[62] Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 10.

their novels, Smith, Inchbald, Williams, and Radcliffe attempt to negotiate the place of women in the political sphere, using religious belief and written performances of religion to guide their radical or moderate revolutionary objectives. In other words, these writers, functioning as agents in the revolutionary era (and, as women, surrogates for male political writers), assert political agency through religion, which they understand to be performative and changeable. In this process, the concept of "orature" – literature that is primarily constituted by verbal and physical performance – can be useful for understanding the relationship between embodied religious performance and written representations of those performances. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o writes, "Performance is the central feature of orature, and this differentiates the concept of orature from that of literature. Performance involves performance and audience, in orature this often being a participatory audience."[63] These novelists did not only perform religious adherence themselves; their knowledge and practice of religious performance infuses their writing and actively solicits radical participation from audiences – particularly female audiences, who newly had a controlling stake in the revolutionary era.

Finally, as women, these novelists often express and profess religious belief via what Taylor has called the "repertoire" – the non-written system of transfer by which embodied performances and repeated (though often unofficial) cultural practices constitute and reify identity and power systems, via performances of sacramental rites, individual discernment and interpretation of biblical passages, extempore enthusiasm, and general rejection of hegemonic or male-centered religious practice or doctrine. The

[63] Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, "Notes Towards a Performance Theory of Orature," *Journal of the Performing Arts*, 12:3 (2007).

most common theme that links these writers is a belief in female agency (despite marginalization), and the use of religious ideology to inform collective action, radicalism, and, ultimately, governance.

Chapter Two

Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*, Gender, and the Anglican State

"I could not help philosophizing on the infinite variety of the modes of thinking among mankind."[64]

The sentence above could be read as the thesis of Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*, which represents the variant "modes of thinking" and responses to the French Revolution that proliferated in England during the liberal revolt of the early 1790s.[65] These responses are often neatly mapped onto the identities of Smith's characters, and as such, Smith demonstrates the ways in which specific identity categories during the revolutionary era were culpable in or abused by the systematic oppression of the *ancien regime*. The late eighteenth century has long been considered a "crucial period in ushering in recognizably modern notions of 'self,'" that saw "the transformation from one identity regime to another," at a remarkable pace.[66] *Desmond* – a radical novel about the ways in which the French Revolution called preexisting political and identity-based hierarchies into question in both France and England – is a perfect specimen for analyzing how identity is implicated in the structures of power that constituted the *ancien regime*, and how it transformed into the modern identity categories we know today.

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[64] Charlotte Smith, *Desmond*, ed. with an introduction by Antje Blank and Janet Todd, (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1997), 112. References are to this edition.

[65] Peter Davies, *The Debate on the French Revolution* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2006).

[66] Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-century England*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2004), p. xiii-xvi.

Many readers have recognized Smith's complex, radical representations of gender, nationality, and class in *Desmond*; however, Smith's depictions of Anglicanism have largely been left out of scholarship on her work.[67] In *Desmond,* Anglicanism represents a faction of the same *ancien regime* that oppresses women and the lower classes in Britain, and should be an essential consideration when analyzing Smith's representations of women and gender in the Revolutionary era. This elision of religion in analysis of eighteenth-century novels and identity reflects a trend in modern scholarship. As Alison Conway and Corrinne Harol have recently posited, postsecular critique has been largely omitted by eighteenth-century scholars; Conway and Harol argue that *literary* critics in particular should reconsider the ways postsecular hypotheses can contribute to our understanding of modernity, as the "secularization thesis was constitutive in the founding of literary studies," and so "literature may reveal most clearly how theological and religious formations interact with secular institutions in Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment England."[68] In particular, religion has often been

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[67] See Alison Conway, "Nationalism, Revolution, and the Female Body," *Women's Studies* 24:5 (1995) 395-409. Conway analyzes *Desmond* to argue that the female body becomes both a "disruptive force" and a locus for domestic and national tension in Jacobin women's writing (396). Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002). Mellor uses *Desmond* to argue that Habermas's model of the male public sphere does not fully incorporate the extent of women's participation in public policy and ideology at the end of the eighteenth century. Fuson Wang, "Cosmopolitanism and the Radical Politics of Exile in Charlotte Smith's Desmond," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 25:1 (Fall 2012), pp. 37-59, has more recently explored how the character Bethel "represents instead a type of ideological agility that requires dialogue and reflection before wholeheartedly endorsing the politically radical script of either the French Revolution or Desmond's Utopian plans" (51).

[68] Alison Conway and Corrinne Harol, "Toward a Postsecular Eighteenth Century," *Literature Compass,* 12:11 (2015), pp. 565-574. Conway and Harol explain how the "postsecular turn" in literary and cultural studies has led to an examination of secularism

excluded in literary criticism that considers the politics of modern identity because of this secular prerogative: since religion is often positioned as antithetical to reason and the emancipating ideals of the Enlightenment, religion as a category of identity has been dismissed as suspect, repressive, or always already of the past.[69] Only lately has postsecular writing offered a "critical mode [that] encourages the defamiliarization of religion, refusing secularism's conceptualization of it as a fixed and transcendent category" – even though this mode of defamiliarization has been practiced for years in conversations around race, gender, and sexuality.[70] Concurrently, emergent studies in

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and a re-historicization of the secularization narrative. Likewise, the "'theological turn' in philosophy has interrogated the secularity of critical methods relied upon by literary scholars" (565-6).

[69] Ibid 565-7. This is not to say that critiques of secularism do not exist. See in particular Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno's classic critique of our reliance on Enlightened (and secular) ideology, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. 1947. Ed Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Sanford University Press, 2007. For more recent considerations of the secularization narrative, see Edward Said, "Secular Criticism." *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983, 1-30; Bruce Robbins, "Is Literature a Secular Concept? Three Earthquakes." *Modern Language Quarterly*: A Journal of Literary History 72.3 (2001): 293-317; J.D. Bailey, ed. *Enlightenment and Secularism: Essays on the Mobilization of Reason*. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013).

[70] Ibid 567. For recent studies on the intersections between eighteenth-century religion and modern identity categories, see in particular: Karen Gevirtz, "Recent Developments in 17th and 18th-Century English Catholic Studies," *Literature Compass* 12/2 (2015), 47-58; Orianne Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief, and the Borders of the Self*. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2012); Mark Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British writing, 1790-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Anna Battigelli and Laura M. Stevens, eds. "Eighteenth-Century Women and English Catholicism," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 31.1/2 (Spring/Fall 2012); David Cressy, and Lori Anne Ferrell. *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook*. Second ed. (London: Routledge, 2002).

intersectional feminism have encouraged a reconsideration of the ways in which gendered power dynamics are contingent, and how interactions between and imbrications of different identity categories can reconfigure our notions of gendered hierarchies.[71]

This chapter proposes that these three modes of thought – the literary and cultural reconsideration of the universality and virtue of secularism; the theoretical model of religious identity as mutable and open to individual resistance and institutional flexibility; and the examination of correspondences between religious and gendered identity – when applied to eighteenth-century literary critique, can help us arrive at a more nuanced vision of the construction of both gendered and religious identity in the modern era. In *Desmond*, both gender and religion are foregrounded by revolution and the political debates surrounding toleration. Throughout the novel, Smith represents institutional Anglicanism as artificial, masculine, and ultimately corrupt; her depictions of religion within the revolutionary debates additionally demonstrate the need to distinguish between secularization and toleration in modern scholarship. Finally, the novel especially asks us to reconsider our conceptions of secularism, and the ways in which women have been disadvantaged by the secularization narrative. As I will argue, to assume that Enlightenment dispels religion entirely is to ignore those pernicious aspects of religion

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[71] Kimberle Williams Crenshaw argues for the importance of intersectionality in feminism to avoid "conflat[ing] or ignor[ing] intragroup differences," as "the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities," in "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review*, Vol. 43, 1993, p. 1242. Leslie McCall notes the difficulty of approaching multiple frameworks of identity at once in "The Complexity of Intersectionality," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30:3, 2005. See also Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins' essential collection on intersectionality, *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1995.

that actually remain residual in our own culture, and to neglect some of the more liberating features of religion that were often implemented privately, by women.[72]

A reconsideration of secularization is not simply an important theoretical move for eighteenth-century studies, but for our own time as well. Modern events have demonstrated that religion is still very much present in our political discourse, and as Judith Butler has recently argued, the point of revisiting our secular lens "is to achieve a complex and comparative understanding of various moral discourses, not only to see why we evaluate (and value) certain norms as we do, but also to evaluate those very modes of evaluation. We do not merely shift from an evaluative position to a descriptive one… but rather seek to show that every description is already committed to an evaluative framework, prior to the question of any explicit or posterior judgment."[73] We can begin

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[72] For deeper considerations on the relegation of women to the private sphere, and contestations of and compliance with that relegation, see Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988; Gary Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution, 1790-1827*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997); Catherine H. Decker, "Women and Public Space in the Novel of the 1790s." *Women, Revolution, and the Novels of the 1790s*. Ed. Linda Lang-Peralta. East Lansing: Michigan State UP, 1999; Adriana Craciun and Kari Lokke, *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*. (Albany: State U of New York, 2001); Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2004; and Ruth H. Bloch, "Inside and Outside the Public Sphere," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 62:1 (Jan., 2005), pp 99-106.

[73] Judith Butler, "The Sensibility of Critique: Response to Asad and Mahmood." *Is Critique Secular?*: *Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*. Ed. Talal Asad. Berkeley, CA: Townsend Center for the Humanities, U of California, 2009, pp. 104-5. Here Butler is primarily concerned with Islamophobia in the twenty-first century; her work reflects a line of inquiry in current postcolonial studies that explores how secularism – like liberty, democracy, and a reliance on the public sphere – functions as an Enlightened ideal that promotes Western paternalism and dominance. See also Bruce Robbins, "Is the Postcolonial Also Postsecular?" *Boundary* 2 40.1 (2013): 245-62; and Anuradha Dingwaney Needham and Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, *The Crisis of Secularism in India*. (Duram: Duke UP, 2007). This trend in postcolonial studies can offer a methodological

this understanding of religion's residual characteristics in our own discursive frameworks by examining religion's interactions with emergent identity categories in the late eighteenth century.[74]

Charlotte Smith: The Reluctant Writer

At its heart, *Desmond* is an explicit rejection of conservative and even moderate responses to the Revolution, and an acute portrayal of how the victims of contemporary power systems – particularly women – were abused by political stagnancy and inefficacy.[75] The five correspondents in the epistolary novel – Desmond, a radical young Englishman; Bethel, his more conservative mentor; Geraldine, the abused, married woman whom Desmond loves; Fanny, Geraldine's sister; and Montfleuri, Desmond's revolutionary French companion – reveal existing attitudes about the Revolution via their

framework for understanding our own biases about Western historical secularism in eighteenth-century studies.

[74] Here I use the terms "residual" and "emergent" as defined by Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) pp. 121-135. Williams argues, "The residual… has been effectively formed in the past but is still active in the cultural process… thus organized religion is predominately residual, but within this there is a significant difference between some practically alternative and oppositional meanings and values…and a larger body of incorporated meanings and values" (122). The "emergent," however, is "substantially alternative or oppositional to" dominant culture (123).

[75] Fuson Wang reads *Desmond* as a nuanced vision of eighteenth-century "cosmopolitanism, hospitality, and ethical obligation" p. 39. Judith Davis Miller, "The Politics of Truth and Deception: Charlotte Smith and the French Revolution." *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*. Ed. Adriana Craciun and Kari Lokke. Albany: State of New York, 2001, pp. 337-64, argues that Smith's writing reveals "a consistent concern with political philosophy" p. 338. Todd and Blank argue that Smith remains steadfastly loyal to her critiques of the British constitution that exist in *Desmond*, even after the violence of the Terror, p. xx.

letters, vignettes, and philosophical debates. The letters begin on 9 June 1790 and span to 6 February 1792, a time period that saw, in France, the abolition of feudalism, the Fête de le Fédération, and Louis XVI's flight from France, his return, and his acceptance of the Constitution; and in England, the Catholic Relief Act of 1791, the Warren Hastings trial, and the publication of Edmund Burke's *The Reflections on the Revolution in France* with its ensuing pamphlet wars. Most of these events are depicted or debated in the novel, and crucially, Smith explicitly refutes what Janet Todd and Antje Blank have dubbed Burke's project of "benevolent domination" in his *Reflections*.[76]

As Nicola Watson argues, *Desmond* likewise converses with Helen Maria Williams' *Letters from France*; in particular, both Smith and Williams highlight the problematic and inextricable links between patriarchal abuse and the emergent capitalist, British state.[77] Williams, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four, was deeply committed to a

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[76] Todd and Blank, p. xxxiv. Margaret Doody, "English Women Novelists and the French Revolution," *La Femme en Angleterre et dans les Colonies Américaines aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: Actes du colloque tenu à Paris les 24 et 25 Octobre 1975* (Lille: L'Universite de Lille III, 1975), likewise calls attention to the explicit care with which Smith strives for temporal verisimilitude in her novel: "the characters' letters are dated, and the author is evidently careful to ensure that people mention events at the time when they would first have heard of them" p. 182. Carrol L. Fry, *Charlotte Smith*, (New York: Twayne, 1996), speculates that Smith "adapted the novel's discussions to events as she wrote it," p. 69. Anne K. Mellor, *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830*. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000), writes, "Charlotte Smith conceived of *Desmond* as a direct response to Edmund Burke's *Reflections*" p. 106. Davis Miller writes, "Smith's concerns parallel those of Godwin, effectively testing the applicability of his abstractions on individual lives," 338.

[77] In her analysis of the novel form, Nicola Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel, 1790-1825, Intercepted Letters, Interrupted Seductions.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), has compared the Revolutionary vignettes in Williams' *Letters from France* and *Julia* to Desmond's excursions to France in the early days of the Revolution, arguing that Williams' "fictions of revolution" are "expanded to full effect" in *Desmond*, p. 36.

reexamination of the ways gender was constitutive of capitalism in Britain and was *reciprocally* defined and oppressed by it. In *Desmond*, however, Smith observes with acuity the *causal* effects of a capitalist system on a gendered society. That is, while Williams' work delineates social systems in both France and Britain in which economic and gendered power transform in *conjunction* and in response to the Revolution, Smith's novel focuses on the links between political and economic spheres and patriarchal power and examines how women are *subjugated* by those links. For Williams, the Revolution represents a hopeful turning point for a society in flux, and power functions as a relationship between personal action and institutional policy and economy; for Smith, power is masculine, irreparably hegemonic, and must be re-imagined in terms entirely different from those proposed even by radical, Enlightened men.

This difference in political belief is hardly surprising: Williams lived in France for the majority of the revolutionary years, occasionally traveling back to England and observing the contrasts between the two political economies. Her time in the 1790s was spent as an unmarried revolutionary pamphleteer and Parisian saloniere. Smith, conversely, spent much of her life trapped in England with a degenerate husband and eleven children to support. Smith married at only fifteen years of age, and would later write, "My father and my Aunt (peace to their ashes!) thought it a prodigious stroke of domestic policy, to sell me like a Southdown sheep…(and they would have done me a greater kindness if they had shot me at once)."[78] Smith additionally described her marriage as "worse than African bondage."[79] Her husband, Benjamin Smith, was abusive,

[78] Letter from Charlotte Smith to Lord George Wyndham Egremont, 4 February 1803.

[79] Ibid.

profligate, and unfaithful; Smith left him in 1787, writing that his temper was "so capricious and often so cruel that my life was not safe."[80] After their separation, she spent the remainder of her life in a legal struggle over the trust left to her and her children by her father-in-law, from which she never actually benefitted. Both Williams and Smith were incarcerated during their lifetimes, but while Williams was imprisoned as a Girondin for her own impassioned political writing in 1793, Smith was imprisoned as an accessory to her husband's debt. In fact, Smith wrote primarily to pay off those debts, and viewed the commercial nature of publishing as part of an economic system of power designed to disenfranchise women entirely. Smith saw her writing not merely as a commodity, but also pictured herself as a "slave of Booksellers."[81] Unlike the other novelists in this project – Williams, Inchbald, and Radcliffe – Smith did not seem to write for her own pleasure, and her writing did not seem to provide her with a sense of freedom or power: Smith's writing depicts the bounds of female existence and works within them, knowing full well that in doing so she is communicating in a language and system of power that is working to oppress her. Smith's life in particular underscores the critical need to observe how eighteenth-century women's material realities affected their writing and political philosophies.[82] While Williams' life demonstrated agency despite

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[80] Letter from Charlotte Smith to Joseph Cooper Walker, 9 October 1793.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Many readers have not only noted the extent to which Smith's writing was influenced by her reality, but additionally how she inserted herself into her own narratives. Blank and Todd note that Smith "exploited this potential of self-representation and self-exoneration…muddling the personal with the political, and the sentimental with the professional, she deliberately blurred all boundaries between the private and the public…

marginalization, Smith's was a continual parade of suffering as a result of her gendered status.[83]

To acknowledge Smith's depressed and sometimes hopeless views of the world is not to say that we cannot examine the revolutionary aspects of Smith's work – quite the contrary. As I will argue, in *Desmond*, the patriarchal Anglican state is depicted as already performing an illusory version of revolution; because Britain believed itself to be progressive, no real progress could be made unless writers like Smith drew attention to the injustices that existed in the current "Enlightened," "modern" system. In her preface to *Desmond*, Smith writes, "but women it is said have no business in politics – Why not? – Have they not? – Have they no interest in the scenes that are acting around them, in which they have fathers, brothers, husbands, sons, or friends engaged?" Some critics have read this preface as a more conservative "ideology of Republican motherhood," wherein women chose to define their political positions in relation to their men and their households.[84] While these critiques are essential and highlight the restrictive

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emphatically she cast herself in the role of the injured wife and devoted mother who sacrificed her entire life and career to the well-being of her large family" (xvii).

[83] It is worth noting that Smith's poetry was very successful, and that the bulk of scholarship on her work has focused on this poetry. She began writing her *Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Essays by Charlotte Smith of Bignor Park, Sussex* while living in the debtor's prison cell she shared with her husband in 1783. The profits from the sonnets secured their release from prison and also secured her with a strong literary reputation. Blank and Todd note, "Although many of the *Elegiac Sonnets* were explicitly autobiographical in their setting and mood, the public was still left in the dark about the specific legal, economic, and emotional causes of the author's misfortunes – so much so that the gallant reviewer of *The Gentleman's Magazine* could state his preference for an imaginary distress, claiming he would have read her 'exquisite effusions' with 'diminished pleasure' could he have 'supposed her sorrows to be real'" (xiii).

[84] For instance, Katherine Binhammer compares *Desmond*'s preface to Mary Wollstonecraft's assertion that rationality, freedom, and citizenship are necessary for the

undercurrents in Jacobin women's writing, they nevertheless focus on the second half of Smith's quotation above. I would like to read this quotation with a focus on the first half, which reads as reactionary and as a progressive step toward inclusion. In this reading, Smith is not merely asking to be included in politics because of her relation to men, but rather because she is already included in politics and has an interest in the "scenes acting around her." In this way I concur with Watson, who writes that "*Desmond* pointedly juxtaposes politics and the sentimental plot, binding its analysis of the tyranny of the *ancien regime* and its supposedly on-the-spot reportage in Paris to a demonstration of domestic tyranny which is clearly identified as an analogous system."[85]

Modern scholars who have studied Smith's *Desmond* have fully canvassed the ways representations of gender, nationality, and class reveal the radical tenors of her work. As Eleanor Wikborg provocatively asks: in *Desmond*, "is revolt a masculine privilege and submission a female virtue?" Wikborg notes the disunity in the novel's genre, tone, and ideology, and argues that these elements deliver an equivocal message about women's agency, with masculinity always coming out victorious in a gendered, power-based binary. Conversely, Diana Bowstead has asserted that the narrative arch of Geraldine is radical in that it elicits sympathy from readers, and that Geraldine's

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crafting of good mothers and wives. "Positing women's political role as a prerequisite to, and extension of, her domestic role was a common route used by women to declare their place in the public world" (25). Binhammer synthesizes arguments that this tactic often re-inscribed women in the private sphere and astutely argues that we should not solely focus on the separation between the public and private spheres. Rather, we should examine how constructions of those spheres (fixed or not) fit into an constituted national and gender identity during the period. Katherine Binhammer, "Revolutionary Domesticity in Charlotte Smith's Desmond," *Women, Revolution, and the Novels of the 1790s,* ed. Linda Lang-Peralta (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1999.

[85] Nicola Watson, *Revolution and the Form of the British Novel,* 36.

character stands "on behalf of all victims of institutionally authorized oppression." While Fuson Wang reads the character of Bethel as evidence of Smith's "more mature cosmopolitanism" that rejects Desmond's "narrowly nationalistic" radicalism, Alison Conway argues, "Smith articulates a feminist theory which participates in, and is informed by, a nationalist rhetoric." Nearly every reader agrees that Smith's representations of the *ancien regime* in France can be dually read as self-critiques of Britain's emergent capitalist system and professed national egalitarianism, both of which were defended by Burkean rhetoric in the revolutionary debates. Anne Mellor has additionally argued that *Desmond* represents Smith's disagreement not only with Burke's conservative, anti-revolutionary rhetoric, but also her "quarrel with *both* radical and conservative apologists for British male privilege and female 'slavery.'"[86] It is this final argument that I take as a baseline for my own analysis, as it allows a deeper examination of the ways that Anglicanism in *Desmond* is represented as specifically complicit in British male privilege.

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[86] Eleanor Wikborg, "Political Discourse versus Sentimental Romance: Ideology and Genre in Charlotte Smith's Desmond (1792)," *English Studie*s 6 (1997), p. 523. Diana Bowstead, "Charlotte Smith's Desmond: the Epistolary Novel as Ideological Argument," *Fetter'd or Free? British Women Novelists, 1670-1815*, eds. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski, (Ohio University Press: Athens, 1986), p. 252. Wang, p. 37. Alison Conway, "Nationalism, Revolution, and the Female Body: Charlotte Smith's Desmond," *Women's Studies*, 1995, vol. 24, p. 398. Mellor, p. 108. See also Blank and Todd, who argue that feminist tenets are present across the range of Smith's novels: "Occasionally she inserts narratives of female desire, where 'fallen' women somehow avoid their conventional punishment, and frequently she includes tales of female discontent and male despotism which deconstruct the redemptive values of the fore-grounded romance and question the legitimacy of male authority in public and domestic life" (xvii). Blank and Todd additionally explain that although Smith was "deeply dismayed at the ferocity of the Jacobin dictatorship, their betrayal of the democratic ideals of the Revolution did not blind her to the defects of the constitution in Britain" (xx).

Unlike writers like Williams or Anna Laetitia Barbauld, whose Dissenting religious identities placed them neatly on the progressive side of the Revolutionary debates, Smith's Anglicanism does not fully jive with our traditional notions of English Jacobin women.[87] This is not to suggest that Smith has not been recognized as a Jacobin writer, but rather to emphasize that her identity as an Anglican – the dominant religious denomination in Britain during her lifetime – is seldom considered when analyzing her work as a radical writer. Smith, however (much like her contemporaries Wordsworth or Coleridge), can be read biographically as a Romantic writer who would both practice and resist established Anglicanism in light of revolutionary ideology.

A modern elision of Smith's religion demonstrates the pervasive presence and power of Anglicanism, both in the eighteenth century and in our own modern scholarship. If a writer is a member of a dominant identity category, that identity generally goes unnoticed as a given and is not read as an exceptional aspect of that writer's background. Smith's work, however, which takes up the cause of the marginalized, does not leave religion out of this cause. Though she was part of the dominant religious identity category, she still knew too well that religious dominance is contingent upon other forms of dominance; specifically, because of the relationship between Anglicanism, British capitalism, and patriarchal power, Smith's personal life was rife with oppression and abuse.[88]

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[87] For more on Jacobin writers, see Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel, 1780-1805* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

[88] There is evidence to indicate that Smith's contemporaries were more interested in her religious beliefs than modern readers have been. Richard Polwhele, the conservative Anglican clergyman responsible for the notorious "Unsex'd Females" poem of 1789, includes Smith in his diatribe against writing women like Wollstonecraft, Williams, and

Current scholars who *have* considered Smith's representations of religion in *Desmond* and her other works have often generalized those representations as revolutionary, nondenominational religiosity. In his analysis of Smith's "The Emigrants," for instance, John M. Anderson argues, "Smith underwent a complex struggle with the established church and defined a position for herself outside orthodoxy. Like Shelley's, Smith's reasons were certainly political, shaped by her support of the ideals of the French Revolution."[89] Similarly, Kari E. Lokke's excellent analysis links Smith's revolutionary ideals with spirituality and argues that Smith "encodes her political ethos in a vision of Romantic transcendence" that reveals an active feminine counter-public sphere.[90] Both of these are valuable because they examine the links between gender, religion and politics, but it is also crucial to investigate Smith's *specific* critiques of the Anglican Church, as these critiques reify the narrative above: Smith's disapproval of the *ancien regime* is not merely a castigation of Catholic France, but also a self-reflexive judgment of patriarchal, Anglican British hegemony.

The Patriarchal Anglican State, Secularism, and Tolerance

Barbauld (among others) who, he believes, have eschewed religion, decorum, and "natural" female virtue for revolutionary and atheistic progression.

[89] John M. Anderson, "'Beachy Head': The Romantic Fragment Poem As Mosaic," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 4, "Forging Connections: Women's Poetry from the Renaissance to Romanticism" (2000), pp. 547-74. Anderson ultimately explores what he calls the "strongly apolitical imagery of an isolated soul finding completely sufficient communion with her God in nature" in his examination of Smith's poem. In particular, he argues that Smith "seeks to distinguish between the praiseworthy moral and emotional essence of religion and the destructiveness that occurs when this essence is corrupted."

[90] Kari Lokke, *Rebellious Hearts: British Women Writers and the French Revolution*, 87.

A significant portion of *Desmond*'s second volume is given over to an overt discussion of the debates surrounding Burke's *Reflections*, which was originally published in November of 1790. Smith situates her characters in the midst of the written conflict, with the first explicit mention of *Reflections* in a letter from Desmond to Bethel on 8 January 1791, in which the former dubs the work "an elaborate treatise in favour of despotism" (154-5). In his next letter to Bethel (dated 10 April), Desmond describes an encounter he has with a Lord Fordingbridge, a young Englishman who is about to ascend to a seat in the House of Lords. Fordingbridge, who "consider[s] himself as a miracle of elegance and erudition, unites the flippant airs of a young man 'of a certain rank' – with the sententious pertness of an attorney's clerk just out of his time," "declaim[s] against the French government" while "pouring forth a warm eulogium on Mr. Burke" (179). Desmond enters a debate with Fordingbridge after the latter claims (echoing Burke) that "there is no cause of complaint in England," and if the poor are poor, "'tis their own faults, and not the fault of the constitution, in which there are no imperfections, and which cannot by any contrivance be made better" (180). Through Fordingbridge's character, Smith unites the twin pillars of British wealth and British law to underscore the extent to which Britain's legal system, far from being progressive, is still inextricably bound to status and birth. Her disapproval of this system is clear: as with most of *Desmond*'s conservative characters, Fordingbridge and the wealthy, political identities he represents are described with a hearty amount of derision.[91] Crucial also is the language

[91] Ibid., Katherine Binhammer, "Revolutionary Domesticity in Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*," additionally calls attention to the links between individual characterization and political sympathy in *Desmond*, arguing Smith "uses the technique of characterization to merge the public and the private: characters who hold offensively conservative and tyrannical political positions also exhibit repulsive personal and sexual

Fordingbridge uses to describe the constitution; this language mirrors Burke's in that it expresses total confidence in things as they are. By anchoring these sentiments in such a vivid character, Smith additionally ties the politics of identity to the revolutionary conversation – for Smith, the current political system in Britain is *only* advantageous to men, like Fordingbridge, with wealth or legal connections.

The conversation then shifts deliberately to include religious language; in doing so, Smith rhetorically links religion with Fordingbridge's argument that "nobody is poor, unless it be by their own fault" (180). Specifically, Fordingbridge asserts that poverty exists because "heaven so decides then, and by no means the fault of governments – it is the lot of humanity, and cannot be changed" (182). Desmond counters this sentiment by lamenting, "we dare to arraign our God for the crimes and follies of man… when the blind selfishness of man distributes what Providence has given; when avarice accumulates, and power usurps, some have superfluities, which contribute nothing to their happiness, others hardly enough to give them a tolerable existence" (182). He continues by directly attacking Fordingbridge's (and Burke's) paranoia about criticizing the inherited laws and practices of Britain's past – "it is a sort of sacrilege to doubt the perfection of the structure [our ancestors] raised," – warning that "if these prejudices are enforced and continued," and if political progression is "execrated as impious," there will eventually be nothing left but those who "escape the ruins" and "continue to meditate on

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behavior," (31). Conway additionally notes, "Smith, like Wollstonecraft, represents the aristocracy as little more than a collective of bodies governed by various appetites satiated at the expense of the masses," (400).

the prodigious advantage of this holy reverence" (183).[92] Notable here is Smith's inclusion of religious imagery; specifically, Desmond paints the conservative British response to the French Revolution as a type of religious mania, even as he evokes providential ideology to defend the equalizing potential of the Revolution.[93] The immediate turn to religion in the conversation connects Fordingbridge's (and Burke's) wealthy, masculine identity to the third pillar of British power that Smith wishes to critique: the Anglican Church. This conversation additionally demonstrates a marked divide between what Smith represents as Desmond's more "authentic" faith – characterized by good works, charity, and an insistence on the equal distribution of wealth – and Fordingbridge's hypocritical reliance on Anglican power to bolster his arguments in favor of the continuation of the *ancien regime*.

Smith's distinction between corporate and personal religious practice in *Desmond* mirrors her real-life approval of Joel Barlow's "Advice to the Privileged Orders" (1792), which she read "with great satisfaction," and which prompted her to write to Barlow: "I really pity the advocates for despotism. They are so terribly mortified at the late events in France, and as they had never any thing to say that had even the semblance of reason and

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[92] Todd and Blank have noted that the metaphorical "ruins" that Desmond evokes here directly address the architectural symbolism Burke uses throughout his *Reflections* to symbolize the structural failures of the National Assembly, p. 426.

[93] Orianne Smith has argued that both conservatives and radicals found the Revolution as a sign of the End Times: "The link for British citizens between the overthrow of the monarchy and the cataclysmic biblical events leading up to the Apocalypse gave these visionaries and their supporters an opportunity to argue for the propriety of their political prophecies during the Last Days," p. 5. For progressives, the Revolution was the harbinger of a new era of Enlightened ideology and culture; for conservatives, the Revolution signified the end of order and stability.

now are evidently on the wrong side of the question in both Theory and Practice, it is really pitiable to hear the childish shifts and miserable evasion to which they are reduced."[94] Of particular note is Barlow's distinction between institutional and personal religious practice, which Smith would have read:

> From that association of ideas, which usually connects the *church* with *religion*, I may run the risque of being misunderstood by some readers, unless I advertise them, that I consider no connection as existing between these two subjects; and that where I speak of church indefinitely, I mean the government of a state, assuming the name of God, to govern by divine authority' or in other words, darkening the consciences of men, in order to oppress them. In the United States of America, there is strictly speaking, no such thing as a Church, and yet in no country are the people more religious. All sorts of religious opinions are entertained there, and yet no heresy among them all. All modes of worship are practiced, and yet there is no apostasy; men frequently change their creed and their worship, and yet there is no apostasy; they have ministers of religion, but no priests. In short, religion is there a personal and not a corporate concern.[95]

Most importantly, Desmond's position in this debate can generate an avenue into the discourse around secularism and Enlightenment. Namely, though Desmond is associated with radical enlightened idealism throughout the novel, he is nevertheless *not* an entirely secular character. His continued use of religious language in political debates and his reliance on Christian morality to dictate his actions (particularly his chaste behavior toward Geraldine) demonstrate that he does not entirely reject the use of religion for rational decision-making, but rather only opposes the current corruption of corporate or institutional religion. As Robbins has argued, "secularism always entails some

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[94] Extract from Charlotte Smith, personal letter to Joel Barlow, 3 November 1792. Charlotte Smith, *Desmond*, ed. Antje Blank and Janet Todd, (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2001), p. 482.

[95] Joel Barlow, "Advice to the Privileged Orders," *The Political Writings of Joel Barlow*, (New York: Mott & Lyon, 1796), p. 35.

preservation as well as some transformation of religious materials," and it is essential to consider this paradoxical relationship between the secular and the religious when examining Desmond's character.[96] The argument could be made that Desmond is in fact only interested in *personal* religious practice – which a secular government would allow – and not the marriage of government and religion. However, Desmond clearly approves of authentic Christian practice in governance, particularly when the Christian belief in anti-materialism is systematically used to battle class-based oppression. Earlier in the novel, observing a conversation between a Doctor of the Anglican Church and a radical bystander, Desmond concurs with the latter when he criticizes the extravagances of high-ranking Catholic priests who took "vows of poverty" and favors instead, the "mortified disciples of a simple and pure religion" (42-3). The radical bystander likewise criticizes wealthy Church members who "expended revenues, not in relieving the indigent, or encouraging the industrious; but in gratifications more worthy the dissolute followers of the meretricious scarlet-clad lady of Babylon" (43). The comparison between a corrupt clergy and the whore of Babylon can be read as both satirical (using religious imagery to mock religious hypocrisy) and earnest (using religious imagery as a sincere critique of religious malpractice). Either reading – satirical or earnest – indicates the presence of religion in radical critiques of the *ancien regime*. Far from secular, Desmond and the radical bystander utilize Christian ideology to promote their own notions of egalitarianism and Enlightenment.[97]

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[96] Robbins, (2013), p. 250.

[97] Although the radical bystander is explicitly talking about Catholic corruption, he is also implicitly making an argument against Anglican corruption as well, since he is talking to a wealthy Doctor of the Anglican Church who is aghast at what has happened to the

To read Desmond's radicalism as completely secular is to follow Burke's assumption that the "political men of letters" who characterize Enlightenment in *Reflections* did indeed constitute a "literary cabal [that] had some years ago formed something like a regular plan for the destruction of the Christian religion."[98] This assumption reveals our own reliance on the secularization narrative, and essentially supports Burke's equation of the Enlightenment with "atheist *philosophes*" (though for the secular modern scholar, this equation is generally seen as positive, rather than negative).[99]

Most importantly, both the *Reflections* and our own secularization narrative do not always distinguish between secularism and tolerance. Burke writes, "We hear these new teachers continually boasting of their spirit of toleration. That those persons should tolerate all opinions, who think none to be of estimation, is a matter of small merit," rhetorically linking those in favor of toleration *and* secularism with atheists.[100] While secularism prescribes a complete removal of the religious in government (and may or may not be atheistic), tolerance rather encourages the freedom of religious expression –

Catholic Church in France. In this instance, Smith implicates both Anglican and Catholic Churches in her criticism.

[98] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), p. 97.

[99] Later in *Desmond*, Smith includes a character that lumps the "damned scoundrels of Presbyterians and non-conformists" with the atheist *philosophes* that frighten Burke (334-5).

[100] Burke, p. 132.

and, in Desmond's case, religious influence.[101] In *Desmond*, Smith's representation of radical tolerance is distinct from total secularization and corresponds most accurately with Barlow's description of the United States above, in which "all modes of worship are practiced," and this universal sense of toleration is not at odds with a government that has no official Church.

As J.G.A Pocock writes, one of Burke's greatest concerns in the *Reflections* is the dismantling of the relationship that existed between the British government and the Anglican Church, primarily because "if civil rights were the same for all men irrespective of religious affiliation, they were the same for all irrespective of other distinctions or criteria." Pocock additionally describes the proposal for enlightened toleration as: "the existence of civil society would have either no religious justification, or *one so unspecific that it could be organized into no institutional communion or church*."[102] Mellor argues that *Desmond* reveals the arbitrary nature of Burke's religious arguments by pointing out that "if Burke acknowledges that one political revolution was necessary, then the constitution was not established by God from all eternity, nor is there any guarantee that future revolutions will not be equally required to protect these rights and freedoms."[103] Both of these arguments reinforce my position that it is *established* religion that *Desmond*

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[101] Fascinatingly, while the short-term effect of eighteenth-century British secularization was to promote toleration for all, and to exclude no one on the basis of religion, the long-term effect has been to exclude citizens who consider religion to be a primary marker of their identities, particularly modern-day Muslims.

[102] Emphasis is my own. J.G.A. Pocock, "Introduction," *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Edmund Burke, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), p. xxvii, xxvi.

[103] Mellor, p. 107.

opposes, and not necessarily the link between governance and God or religion in general. Likewise, both Pocock's and Mellor's readings of Burke allow for a distinction between tolerance and secularism.

Another theoretical difficulty that arises when trying to distinguish between secularism and toleration is that the notion of toleration often degenerates into a general sense of kindness or non-religious humanitarianism. For instance, Wang uses a cosmopolitan framework in his analysis of *Desmond* and argues that Desmond practices a sense of Kantian hospitality, rather than religion.[104] Allison Conway demonstrates how Desmond's benevolence can be read as an embodied sensibility that performs "transnational civic humanism."[105] Both of these arguments are excellent and accurate and reveal nuanced interpretations of the novel's depictions of nationalism. However, these readings simultaneously liken cosmopolitanism (an Enlightened ideal) to secularism by eliding the Christian morality present in Desmond's hospitality, humanism, and sensibility. Judith Butler has recently argued for a more encompassing or flexible methodology when dealing with religious interpretation:

> When we judge, we locate the phenomenon we judge within a given framework, and our judgment requires a stabilization of the phenomenon. But if that stabilization proves impossible, or if the phenomenon…exists precisely at the crossroads of competing, overlapping, interruptive, and divergent moral frameworks, then we need first to ask ourselves why we locate it within the singular framework that we do, and at what expense we rule out the competing or alternative frameworks within which it is figured and circulated.[106]

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[104] Wang, p. 40.

[105] Conway (1995), p. 401.

[106] Butler, p. 98. Though Butler is specifically arguing about the secularist lens used in modern debates over Islam and free speech, her argument is still very applicable to eighteenth-century studies. She likewise argues, "secular terms should not have the

Butler's notion of multiple frameworks for encountering religion can offer a more detailed scholarship when considering eighteenth-century texts. In this instance, rather than considering Desmond as a *secular*, Enlightened figure, it might be more useful to read him as a *tolerant*, Enlightened figure. In particular, it is crucial to make this distinction when examining the revolutionary conversations of the 1790s because it reveals that neither side of the revolutionary debate – Burke's conservatism nor Desmond's Enlightened civic-mindedness – is entirely secular. To continue the elision of religion in modern critique creates a gap in our understanding of the construction of modern identity: namely, if the 1790s serve as a crucial turning point in the development of identity, the presence of religious ideology cannot be neglected in that development.

While Smith writes Desmond the character as both personally religious and tolerant, her representations of corporate Anglicanism in the novel are much less forgiving. In general, institutional religion in *Desmond* is portrayed as an inauthentic series of performances by masculine, wealthy characters. The same Doctor of the Anglican Church mentioned above shortly enters into a conversation with another bystander – a Mr. Sidebottom. The former is described as a gluttonous, expensively dressed, "supercilious," "most orthodox figure" with a "magisterial air;" the latter is a rough, jingoist tradesman (41). These "two worthy champions of British faith and British liberty," continue their conversation on the dissolution of the Catholic Church in France, with the Doctor arguing that it "'twere as reasonable to take my birthright" and Mr.

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power to define the meaning or effect of religious concepts. This is an important argument to make in order to combat a kind of structural injury," p. 105.

Sidebottom essentially advocating a genocide of all Frenchmen in retaliation (46, 42). The two men are then approached by an impoverished Frenchwoman seeking help, and while Sidebottom rejects her outright, the Doctor gives her sixpence and urges her to be gone so as not to disrupt other tourists, and then leaves her, "having thus fulfilled two great duties of his profession, those of giving advice, and giving alms" (48). The exaggerated piggishness of the Doctor in this scene of course demonstrates the hypocrisy of a Church that preaches charity while it hoards extreme wealth. His link between hereditary wealth and organized religion likewise demonstrates Smith's disgust with the relationship between class and Anglicanism in Britain. In addition, the Doctor's cheap performance of philanthropy demonstrates Smith's argument that institutional religion in Britain often does little in the service of women or the poor. Finally, the conversation between the Doctor and Sidebottom specifically reinforces the connection that Smith makes between religion, wealth, power, masculinity, and violence.

A similar scene follows this one, in which Desmond, now in France and staying at the estate of the corrupt Count de Hauteville, converses with the count and a "man of the [Catholic] church" (109). Nearly the exact sentiments are expressed in this scene as in the former, with the Catholic priest, "whose diminished revenues had yet had no effect, either in reducing his figure, or subduing his arrogance," standing in as the Anglican Doctor and the count as a wealthier version of Mr. Sidebottom (109).[107] This scene is often read as a

[107] The conflation between Sidebottom and Count de Hauteville reinforces the necessity of differentiating between Britain's more advanced capitalist society and France's more feudal economic system in the late eighteenth century (I mention this necessity in Chapter One) (23-5). For Smith, Britain's bourgeoisie and France's aristocracy are on a comparable footing in terms of economic power.

"traditional" eighteenth-century British critique of Catholic corruption, which reveals another layer of obfuscation that the secularization narrative imposes upon our understanding of the Revolutionary debate. Namely, because of the dominant Protestant worldview in eighteenth-century British Enlightened thought, Catholicism is often posited as being somehow "less" compatible with secularism than Protestantism.[108] As such, it has often been homogenized or neglected in serious literary study.

Conway and Harol note, "Because religious freedom – overcoming the tyranny of non-Protestant absolutist regimes – is the foundation of politics under secular liberalism, religion differs from other politics of identity – race, class, gender, and nationalism – that have been the focus of critiques of the Enlightenment."[109] Key here is the persistent connection between revolution, freedom, and Protestantism, and this Protestant-secular assumption is hardly surprising. As Linda Colley has argued, in eighteenth-century Britain, Protestants felt their religion was more conducive to free thought, mostly likely as a result of the proliferation of print media and the widespread availability of vernacular religious texts. Additionally, national British holidays often excluded Catholics; non-Anglican Protestants, while disadvantaged, still held more institutional rights than Catholics; Protestantism became a way to achieve nationalist unity against Catholic countries; and essentially, "Protestantism was the foundation that made the invention of Great Britain possible."[110] Thus, the use of a modern secular assumption when reading

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[108] I canvas this academic Protestant prerogative more thoroughly in Chapter Three.

[109] Conway and Harol, p. 566.

[110] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 54. See my synthesis of Leah Marcus', *The Politics of Mirth*, and Paula

these scenes has forced us to neglect the ways Smith in fact *compares* Anglicanism and Catholicism and caused us to focus, rather, on the nationalist and anti-Catholic narratives so often rehearsed when critiquing revolutionary literature. The two scenes – though they critique different denominations – in fact offer the same argument: that there is an inappropriate correlation between institutional religion (whether Anglican or Catholic) and political power and wealth. Though Sidebottom is a member of the emergent British middle class and de Hauteville is a member of the French *ancien regime*, both are culpable in the promotion of subordination and inequality and find their sentiments reflected and reaffirmed by institutional religious figures. In both cases, for Smith, hierarchical, masculine religion is partially responsible for "darkening the consciences of men, in order to oppress them."[111]

Finally, it is notable that only male characters in *Desmond* debate the role of institutional religion. What is more, these debates only occur in spaces that are traditionally associated with men and male public discourse: Desmond observes the Anglican Doctor in a public library; Bethel listens to Desmond's uncle Danby complain about "the damned scoundrels of Presbyterians and non-conformists" in a coffeehouse; and the Count de Hauteville and his priest friend carry on their conversation in the Count's manor, a seat of the *ancien regime* where there are apparently no women

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Backscheider's *Spectacular Politics* in Chapter One for more on the relationship between national holidays, festivities, political power, and Protestantism (5-6).

[111] Barlow, p. 35.

present.[112] Feminist scholarship has opposed Habermas' paradigm of a male-dominated bourgeois public sphere, and in fact "not only did women participate fully in the discursive public sphere, but their opinions had definable impact on the social movements, economic relationships, and state-regulated policies of the day."[113] However, the locations of these scenes are significant in that they reinforce the notion that Smith believed women were largely excluded from the Anglican state, and that institutional Protestantism, far from promoting freedom, was in fact a tool in the continued subjugation of women by the *ancien regime*.

Women, Revolution, and Personal Religion

While *Desmond* continually demonstrates how corporate religion can be both an oppressive institution and a category of identity implicated in the subjugation of women, it additionally demonstrates how personal religion is not harmful, but rather, one of the only limited resources that women have at their disposal in this era of oppression. What is more, Geraldine's personal moral triumphs are rhetorically linked with revolutionary ideology in the novel, suggesting that Smith finds religion not only compatible with revolution, but also necessary for the eventual freeing of women from the Anglican patriarchal state. Ultimately, Geraldine and her French counterpart, Josephine de Boisbelle, are characters that ask us to reconsider our conceptions of secularism and the ways in which women have been disadvantaged by the secularization narrative.

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[112] Davis Miller argues that Smith practices "open concealment" by voicing the novel's most radical views via Desmond, a male character. This supports the notion that Smith felt radical ideals would not be fully embraced if they came from a woman, pp. 341-2.

[113] Mellor, p. 3.

Geraldine is often read as submissive, family-centered, and moralistic to the point of being flat – all problematic characteristics for feminist readers. However, as I have argued, Smith links artificial social performance and institutional Anglicanism with the corruption of the *ancien regime* and the British capitalist state. These links are additionally represented through Geraldine's abusive husband and mother, Verney and Mrs. Waverly, and Geraldine's only form of resistance is through her own private morality. Specifically, Smith's writing recognizes the ways in which women were particularly abused in Britain's newly capitalist system and, as Gayle Rubin writes, part of a "systematic social apparatus which takes up females as raw materials and fashions domesticated women as products."[114] While Desmond's radicalism plays out vocally in public forums, Geraldine's resistance unfolds within the private sphere; her morality functions as a limited rebellion against the profligacy and perversion of her mother and husband – the immoral members of the patriarchal, capitalist, Anglican machine that Smith abhors. Verney, whom Bethel describes as having a "wild, unsettled look," with an "emaciated figure and unhealthy countenance," and "the disgusting appearance of a debauch of liquor not slept off, and clothes not since changed," like Fordingbridge, demonstrates the ways in which the *ancien regime* of patriarchal power is alive and well in Britain, despite the country's capitalist leanings (142). Moreover, Smith overtly represents Verney as a kind of slave owner who specifically views Geraldine as property: in a memorable scene, Verney lumps his "wife and her brats" with "all [his] goods and chattels;" later in the novel, Geraldine laments "that there is no humiliation to which I

[114] Gayle Rubin, "The traffic in women: notes on the 'political economy' of sex," *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, Ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge), p. 158.

had not rather submit, than that of considering myself as his slave" (143, 316).[115] Likewise, Mrs. Waverly, "who generally agrees to the opinion of her acquaintance, if they happen to be rich," "had the art of a Jezebel," in securing Geraldine's marriage to Verney, according to the latter (160, 145). Her religious artificiality is especially underscored: "happiness, in her estimation, consists in being visited by the opulent… of curtsying, at church, to all the best dressed part of the congregation" (313). Mrs. Waverly refuses to recognize the abuse her daughter endures and instead leaves her under the "protection" of her husband, who wishes to sell her into prostitution to a French aristocrat in Paris.[116]

Both Verney and Mrs. Waverly are governed by the performance of social propriety and fashion, rather than actual morality. Geraldine, on the other hand, "affects nothing," exhibits "all virtues," and "her faith…is exemplary" (145, 147). Far from enacting an anti-feminist "romantic valorization of the moral beauty of compliance," Geraldine's solace and form of self-preservation is to retreat from her husband's public immorality into the tranquility of nature, religion, and her duties in the home.[117] As such,

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[115] This line clearly hearkens back to Smith's self-characterization as a slave in her own marriage.

[116] Geraldine also adds explains that her mother totally neglects religion when choosing partners for her children: "I really believe, if the wandering Jew, or the yellow dwarf, or any other fabled being of hideous description, could have been sent on earth to have personified men of eight or ten thousand a year, we should have found it difficult to have escaped being married to them, if they had offered good settlements" (312).

[117] Wikborg, p. 523. An initial reading of Geraldine might suggest that readers are meant to admire and even emulate Geraldine's unwavering obedience and morality. If, however, we consider that Geraldine is trapped in a male kinship system (one that Smith overtly opposes), and, moreover, under the control of two personally immoral characters who represent the Anglican state that Smith has carefully critiqued throughout her novel, then

her private morality functions as a limited rebellion against her oppressors, and Smith characterizes Geraldine's suffering as a religious trial of private Christian motherhood that becomes revolutionary and is eventually rewarded. Geraldine is continually depicted as a "suffering angel" with a "mind so angelic" (137, 176). Additionally, her suffering is often described as resultant of her gendered oppression. Her sister, Fanny, angrily tells Verney, "That she possesses *all* virtues, Sir, must be *her* merit solely, for never woman had so poor encouragement to cherish *any*. – When one considers that she *suffers you*, her *charity* cannot be doubted: her *faith*, in relying upon you, is also exemplary; and one laments that, so connected, she can have nothing to do with *Hope*" (147). Later in the novel, Fanny compares Geraldine to Ophelia, driven mad by her pure devotion to a capricious man: "I tell thee, damned priest, / A ministering angel shall my sister be / When thou liest howling!" (275). Bethel and Desmond likewise describe Geraldine in idolatrous terms: "I feel respect bordering on adoration;" "she, at whose feet the world should be prostrate" (170, 258).

Geraldine's trials are depicted in specifically scriptural language. Fanny compares Geraldine's treatment by Verney to Matthew 7:6, which laments that holy things can be wasted upon the unholy: "That fate repine,/ which threw a pearl before a swine" (158).[118] Geraldine later compares herself to the prodigal son when she hopes (in vain) that her mother will protect her from Verney: "She will not refuse some maternal kindness to her

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Geraldine's authentic personal morality reads as (albeit limited) subversion. Additionally, as I will explain below, she eventually becomes radical later in the novel.

[118] Matthew 7:6. "Give not that which is unholy to the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you."

unfortunate child, whose unhappiness is not of her own creating – and who, though she returns poor and desolate, like the Prodigal in Scripture, has nothing wherewith to reproach herself; nor occasion to say, 'Lo, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight'" (265).[119] Geraldine likewise advises Fanny, who is also abused by their mother, when "smitten on one cheek, to turn the other" (302). Geraldine's more formal Anglican biblical devotion is combined throughout the novel with the "returning tranquility" that she experiences in the sublime face of nature (210). Taking modest lodgings away from her husband in London's suburbs, she finds her strength renewed: "Dreary as the season yet is, I have betaken myself to solitary walks…I find the perfect seclusion, the uninterrupted tranquility I enjoy now, soothing to my spirits" (165). After Verney loses their estate to gambling debts, Geraldine flees with her children to a small house in Wales, where she rejoices: "Are not these woods / More free from peril than the envious court?" (221).[120] In the country, she is repeatedly restored by nature's sublimity, and likens her emotions to the song of a neighboring nightingale: "I could be romantic enough to fancy it the spirit of some solitary and deserted being like myself, that comes sympathetically to hear and sooth my sorrows" (219).[121]

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[119] Luke 15:21. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

[120] This passage is quoted from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, 2:1.

[121] Here, Geraldine shares an intertextual connection with Radcliffe's Ellena and Williams' Julia, who draw strength from sublime nature and contemplation. Geraldine describes the area around her country retreat with great detail, which signifies to the Romantic reader a mind governed by taste and sensibility. One example description (of many) reads: "I have found in the opposite woods one of the most singular and most beautiful spots that I ever saw. It is a little hill, or rather three or four hills that seem piled together, though the inequality of their forms is concealed and adorned by the variety of trees with which they are covered. Many of these are evergreens, such as holly and yew,

While Geraldine remains in England, she consistently looks toward futurity, and this self-sacrificial sense of duty *does* reach a pitch of suffering that can no longer be considered rebellious or particularly feminist. When she is continually visited by the lecherous Duc de Romagnecourt, she refuses Desmond's protection and insists, "I ought patiently to endure this transient evil" (264).[122] Later, when her husband and mother urge her to travel to revolutionary Paris (where she will be at the mercy of Romagnecourt), she consents, lamenting, "Because…it is my duty; and while I fulfill that, I can always appeal to a judge, who will not only acquit, but reward me, if I act up to it. – The more terrible the task, the greater the merit I assume in fulfilling it" (287). However, just as Geraldine's self-sacrifice becomes nearly unbearable, she travels to France and adopts ideals that are both radical and empowered.

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and just where their shade is the darkest, they suddenly recede, and from a stony excavation bursts forth a strong and rapid stream of pure and brilliant water, which pours directly down the precipice, and is lost in the tress that crowd over it. – A few paces higher up, from a bare projection of rock darts forth another current equally limpid; and having made itself a little basin, which it fills, it hastens over the rugged stones, that are thus worn by its course, and, dashing down the hill for some time in a different direction, meets the former stream: they make a considerable brook, and hasten to join the Wye; not, however, till two or three other little wandering currents, that arise still nearer the summit of this rocky eminence, which seems to abound in springs, have found their way to the same course. – Of these unexpected gushes of water, you hear the murmurs often without seeing from whence they arise; so thickly is the wood interwoven over the whole surface of the wild hill. A narrow, and hardly visible path, however, winds around it, quite to its summit, which is less clothed than the rest, and where, on two roots, that the hand of time, rather than the art of man, has twisted into a sort of grotesque, rustic chair, I sit; and, listening to the soothing sounds of the water, as it either steals or rushes beneath, I can see through the boughs great part of the farm-house I inhabit, and nearer, the grey smoke of cottages without wood, curling among the mingled forest. – It is, my dear sister, in this sequestered nook that I am going to wander, and to think of you as the most pleasing contemplation in which I can indulge myself" (221-2).

[122] Timothy 2:24-5. "And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

In France, Geraldine uses her domestic knowledge, religious devotion, and an escape into contemplative nature to come to a greater understanding and appreciation of the macro-revolutionary events unfolding around her. In defense of the relative disorder in the French countryside, she notes, "Even in a private family, a change in its economy or its domestics, disturbs the tranquility of its members for some time. – It must surely happen, to a much greater degree, in a great nation, whose government is suddenly dissolved by the resolution of the people; and which, in taking a new form, has so many jarring interests to conciliate;" she additionally scoffs at the notion that a revolution can take place and then, immediately, "every man sit down under his own vine and his own fig-tree" (308).[123] She also finds renewed vigor in the revolutionary fervor around her, and finds herself drawn to the conflict despite the limitations of propriety imposed upon her by gender: "This excursion into the field of politics…where we, you know, have always been taught that women should never advance a step, may, perhaps, excite your surprise….The truth is, that whenever I am not suffering under any immediate alarm, my mind, possessing more elasticity than I once thought possible, recovers itself enough to look at the objects around me" (311). Ultimately, Geraldine professes herself sympathetic to the revolution; she embraces this new identity in opposition to her husband and compares her newfound radicalism to a conversion experience:

> It is to my sister, to my second self I write, and from her I do not fear such a remark as was made on some French woman of fashion, (whom I cannot now recollect) who being separated from her husband, changed her religion to that (whatever it was) which he did not profess – 'she has done it,' said a wit, 'that she might never meet her husband either in this world or the next' – Thus it might, perhaps, be said, that I determine never to think on any article (even on these, whereon my age and sex might exempt me from thinking at all) like Mr. Verney;

[123] Micah 4:4. "Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken."

> and therefore, as he is, he knows not why, a very furious aristocrat, that I, with no better reason, become a democrat. (312).

She also renews her sense of devotion via the natural sublimity that she experienced in the Welsh countryside when she finds shelter in a French monastery. "A chapel with an arched gateway, leading to it from the garden, and surrounded by paved passages and high cloisters – and it is on some broken steps, that near these ruinous buildings, lead from the lower to the upper garden, I frequently take my pensive seat"…"I have taken up a notion that I do not breathe freely while I am in the house, and…nothing is good but liberty and fresh air" (321, 323-4).

While in France, Geraldine also functions as a voice for the thesis of tolerance that Smith promotes throughout the novel. Upon first arriving near Rouen, she observes a train of Catholics on their way to administer the sacramental ritual of the Last Rites. She is spiritually moved by the Catholic ritual she observes, demonstrating her sense of cosmopolitanism and her understanding of religious community, despite denominational difference: "I ordered… my servants to pull off their hats, while the procession passed, which had in it a solemnity particularly affecting…I involuntarily shed tears, as I apostrophized the departing spirit, to whom these religious men were carrying the sacred wafer" (310).[124] Like Desmond's radicalism, Geraldine's is specifically tolerant, and not secular. She rejoices, "All religion…is not abolished in France – they told me it was

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[124] The difference between consubstantiation and transubstantiation is one of the most contentious divides between Anglicanism and Catholicism. Geraldine's acceptance of this Catholic rite highlights her (and thus, Smith's) compassion toward and tolerance of other religions. The scene in which Geraldine observes the Last Rites procession is strongly reminiscent of Helen Maria Williams' encounter with a funeral train in revolutionary France (see Chapter Four below).

despised and trampled on; and I never enquired, as everybody ought to do…Is this all true?" (310).[125] Because of our modern secular prerogative that, like Burke's *Reflections*, conflates religious behavior and belief with domesticity and conservatism, we have been inclined to read Geraldine's actions as pure, anti-feminist obeisance. However, the examples above clearly demonstrate the ways Geraldine uses private religious devotion to develop a revolutionary sensibility.

Additionally, the character of Josephine de Boisbelle, (who is similarly oppressed by a profligate husband but acts *im*morally), demonstrates the extent to which secular scholarship begets readings of Smith's work that center on nationalism and obscure the feminist messages inherent in her novel.[126] Because Josephine's character is both French and Catholic, she has been doubly "othered" in readings of Desmond and contrasted – rather than compared – with Geraldine. The existence of Josephine de Boisbelle indicates

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[125] Geraldine's eventual conversion to the ideals of the revolution reads as a feminist narrative, but it is worth noting the problems inherent in such a narrative. Specifically, Geraldine functions as a sad reflection of Smith's own republican motherhood – both women could only find respite from oppression by retreating into the private sphere, protecting their children and guided by authentic religious principles. Additionally, as Joan B. Landes has argued, women's active participation in moral domesticity during the revolutionary era merely led to the confinement of women in the private sphere in the nineteenth century, and "A demand for citizenship based primarily on woman's performance of her maternal duty was easily refuted." Joan B. Landes, *Women in the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 138. As such, the retreat of women to the private sphere was part of the making of the masculine bourgeois public sphere. Despite this result, Smith's thesis is still crucial in that it demonstrates an emergent feminist sensibility coupled with republican philosophy.

[126] This argument ultimately corroborates the idea of a "cultural revolution" in women at the end of the eighteenth century. Like Gary Kelly, Nancy Armstrong, Joan Landes, and Anne Mellor, I concur that though women tried to express private rebellion during the 1790s, the nineteenth century saw their conservative re-confinement by the bonds of private domesticity; religion is implicated in this re-confinement.

that Smith creates both characters to demonstrate how women are equally abused in the current social milieu, regardless of their morality or immorality. The most potent example of the dangerous link between patriarchal authority and modern British economic power exists in Desmond himself, and his treatment of Josephine. As he keenly points out to d'Hauteville, "My ancestors, so far as I ever traced them, which is indeed a very little way, were never above the rank of plain country gentlemen; and, I am afraid, towards the middle of the last century, lose even that dignity in a miller and a farmer" (105). Aside from his pedigree, throughout the novel Desmond steadfastly defends the egalitarian efforts of the Revolution and rejects the inhumanity of the *ancien regime*; however, his greatest weakness and only fault in the novel is a result of both his gendered power and his relatively *nouveau riches* economic position. Upon his first visit to France in the novel, Desmond meets Montfleuri's sister, Josephine de Boisbelle, who suffers from an "ill-assorted marriage, which has put her into the power of a man altogether unworthy of her," that renders her incurably miserable: "the embarrassment of his affairs, and the uncertainty of her fate, recur to her in all their force; and she escapes from company, if it be possible, to hide the langour and depressions she cannot conquer" (77). Josephine, like Geraldine, additionally draws strength from natural sublimity, giving "fine sentimental speeches… about the charms of solitude and the beauties of nature" (103). Her mother (just like Geraldine's) gave her away in marriage to an unworthy suitor, and she excites the sympathy of Desmond, along with "a thousand subjects of painful recollection, and fruitless regret" (123). This sympathy, however, is not resolute enough to keep Desmond from impregnating the unfortunate Josephine. When he learns of her pregnancy, Desmond is "despondent" and filled with "inexpressible pain," and

volunteers to put the baby in the care of his beloved Geraldine (175). For Desmond, Josephine functions as a surrogation for Geraldine: "I have once or twice, as Madame de Boisbelle has been walking with me, tried to fancy her Geraldine" (87). As such, Desmond has no trouble using Josephine to satisfy his sexual desire while he waits for Geraldine.

Luckily for Desmond, Montfleuri – who has "from education, habit, and principles, much freer notions than [Desmond has] about women," – decides to forgive his friend and takes his sister to England, where she covertly has her baby in the countryside (103). Montfleuri is careful to explain that Josephine takes all the blame for the pregnancy due to her "unguarded folly" in having sex with a man "whose soul was dedicated to another," and that his decision to forgive Desmond is "rational" (405). Here, Josephine's passion is painted *by a man* as irrational feminine sexuality, whereas Desmond's passion and the betrayal of his "pure" love for Geraldine are hardly mentioned. While Montfleuri, Desmond, and Bethel congratulate themselves on their admirable work in a series of closing letters, Montfleuri also adds that if Josephine remarries after her husband's death, he will be sure to inform her new spouse "what has happened in his absence" (405). As such, Josephine is depicted as the only perpetrator of a sexual violation that will follow her into her next relationship. To complete her tragedy, Josephine is ultimately separated from her daughter (most likely forever) and sent to Italy "under the protection of Monsieur d'Hauteville," who is her only remaining relative, unwelcome in Desmond's English bourgeois family, which is held together by the bounds of Anglican matrimony (405).

Conway astutely argues that Smith's comparison of Geraldine and Josephine is ultimately nationalist – Smith depicts Josephine's sexual transgression as French, whereas Geraldine's purity is framed as English.[127] Conway asserts that Josephine and Geraldine should not be read as a "transnational vision of their mutual oppression" because such a reading neglects Smith's nationalism: "Geraldine becomes completely silent and Josephine disappears, a fact which speaks, somewhat ironically, to the real affinities between the two women and to the costs of valorizing one woman at the expense of another."[128] However, while Smith's nationalistic representation of Josephine is problematic, I would argue that her comparison of the two characters isn't simply based on national identity, but economic and gendered identity as well. That is, Josephine serves not only as a foil for English propriety, but also as a trans-temporal and trans-economic critique of patriarchal power. Both Josephine and Geraldine are placed at the mercy of their families when they (actually or allegedly) commit sexual transgressions, and Smith's project in comparing their fates is to underscore the flaws in both feudal *and* modern, aristocratic *and* capitalist patriarchy. Josephine, married off to a dissipated and profligate husband, is obviously a victim of the patriarchal *ancien regime*. However, although Montfleuri, as a representation of the new democratic order in France, loves his sisters and is "tempered by sound reason" and "one of the steadiest friends to the people," this does not prevent him from exerting his *enduring* patriarchal authority over Josephine, to her detriment (53). Likewise, despite Desmond's middle-class birth and commitment to the ideals of the Revolution, he freely takes advantage of Josephine's situation and

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[127] Conway (1995), pp. 403-5.

[128] Ibid, p. 406.

ultimately abandons her. Desmond acknowledges his own deception of Josephine privately to Bethel: "She believes those emotions arise from extreme sensibility, which are rather excited by the situation of my own heart" (123). Bethel comforts Desmond, however, by flippantly arguing, "As to any engagements you know, such as her having a husband, and so forth, those little impediments, 'make not the heart sore' in France" (88).

Geraldine, conversely, is wrongfully accused of sexual misconduct and banished to France by her social-climbing mother, where she is at the mercy of a husband who wants to sell her into prostitution to repay his gambling debts. Though Geraldine is unwavering in her marital obligations and fidelity, she is only released from oppression by chance – her husband is killed during an aristocratic incursion against the Revolution. As such, *both* women are imprisoned by *both* political-economic systems, regardless of whether they exert their sexuality or restrain it, whether then live in France or England. For Smith, while power remains in the hands of individual men of wealth (wealth acquired either by birth or by trade), rather than in the writ of the law, women will continue to be disadvantaged. Smith's comparison between Josephine and Geraldine again reveals the weaknesses in Burke's "benevolent domination," namely, that such a system relies upon individual discretion and, more often than not, places marginalized individuals in positions of arbitrary insecurity and subordination.

Additionally, our own tendency to read Geraldine's happy ending and Josephine's tragic one as representative of Smith's nationalism stems from our secular prerogative. Because Josephine is Catholic and French, she has been continually read as a contrasting figure to the angelic Geraldine, rather than as Geraldine's Catholic counterpart. To continually view the Anglican state as complicit in or complementary to Enlightened

ideology is to misread Smith's promotion of tolerance and conflate non-Protestant characters and nations with despotism. This view not only causes a misreading of the novel's toleration as general cosmopolitanism or secularism, it also encourages an interpretation of Josephine's story as a conservative, cautionary tale of French sexual impropriety. To neglect the ways that Smith compares – rather than contrasts – Geraldine and Josephine is to ignore her feminist critique of things "as they are."

Only by revisiting our secular scholarly lens can we come to a more complete understanding of identity in the eighteenth century. To continually conflate Enlightenment and radical eighteenth-century politics with atheism forces us to ignore the ways religion has – sometimes positively, sometimes insidiously – had an intersectional influence on other identity categories. Smith's novel demonstrates her distaste for institutional religion and can provide an avenue into the ways revolutionary women writers might have seen explicit connections between institutional Anglicanism and patriarchal power. Additionally, a distinction between our conceptions of tolerance and secularism reveals an undercurrent of religious ideology in revolutionary rhetoric from the period. Finally, an examination of feminine religious practice not only confirms the processes by which women were relegated to the private sphere at the end of the eighteenth century, but also demonstrates how our modern associations between Protestantism and Enlightenment can obscure our readings of early feminist texts.

Chapter Three

Sacrament, Sacramental, and Subversion:

Performances of Catholicism and Gender in Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story*

> 'I am sure your lordship,' said she, 'with all your saintliness, can have no objection to my being present at the masquerade, provided I go as a Nun…. That is a habit…which covers a multitude of faults – and, for that evening, I may have the chance of making a conquest of even you, my lord – nay, I question not, if under that inviting attire, even the pious Mr. Sandford would not ogle me…I am sure…I am only repeating what I have read in books about nuns, and their confessors.'[129]

In the passage above, the heroine of Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* taunts her guardian-turned-lover, a former Catholic priest who is horrified at the notion of his beloved ward attending a masquerade ball. This brief scene encapsulates many of the anxieties about English Catholicism and gender that *A Simple Story* holds: the realities and stereotypes of Catholic religious life, the malleability of religious and gendered identity, and the question of women's engagement in public events are key problems that the novel proposes – problems that have yet to be examined by modern scholars through the lens of religious performativity.

Karen Gevirtz has recently posited that there are two current forms of scholarship that reconsider eighteenth-century English Catholicism. The first is "inward," and this methodology "investigates the nature of English Catholicism and the experience of English Catholics as a group;" the second is an "outward" approach that "consider[s] the relationship of Catholicism and the larger, predominately Protestant, and often hostile

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[129] Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story*, ed. with an introduction by J.M.S. Tompkins (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 152. References are to this edition.

culture."[130] I argue that both of these strategies are important for interpreting Inchbald's English Catholic novel. Similar to Michael Tomko's reading of *A Simple Story*, which examines how Inchbald's characters, engaged in the "ordinary social rituals of everyday life," are representative of a "national reconciliation based on gradually encountering and working through a history of hatred," this essay will explore how Inchbald's depictions of individual gendered and religious performances are in fact expressions and effects of wider contextual anxieties about Catholic emancipation.[131]

In the past, scholars have been too quick to dismiss or downplay Elizabeth Inchbald's Catholicism in light of her radical political sympathies; recently, however, there has been increased interest in how Inchbald's Catholicism influences her writing.[132]

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[130] Karen Gevirtz, "Recent Developments in 17th and 18th-Century English Catholic Studies," *Literature Compass* 12/2 (2015), 47-58. There have been several studies on the intersections between English Catholicism and gender in recent years. See in particular Anna Battigelli and Laura M. Stevens's collected edition "Eighteenth-Century Women and English Catholicism," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 31.1/2 (Spring/Fall 2012), which offers wide-ranging perspectives on eighteenth-century women and Catholic religious identity in literature and culture. See also Ed. John Saward, John Morrill, and Michael Tomko, *Firmly I Believe and Truly: The Spiritual Tradition of Catholic England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), which anthologizes extracts from a diverse collection of English Catholic writers, including women like Inchbald.

[131] Michael Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question: Religion, History and National Identity, 1778-1829* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), p. 72. Here, I also rely on Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1996) for his formulation of cultural performance as both "intercultural and internally self-referential" (4). In my analysis, I consider how Inchbald's work negotiates its own place in the discourse *between* English Catholics and Anglicans in eighteenth-century Britain, while it simultaneously represents religious performance *within* the recusant English Catholic community.

[132] Tomko, *British Romanticism and the Catholic Question*, 72. Tomko also references William McKee, "Elizabeth Inchbald Novelist," (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1935), 103-21, and Paula Byrne, "Written by Venus," *The Times Literary*

Tomko references James Boaden, Inchbald's first biographer, who comments, "the Catholic, however, does not appear to have sensibly mixed in her present pursuits; and on the whole her mind was acquiring, not so much a Protestant, as a free or philosophical character."[133] Likewise, Annibel Jenkins notes that in 1789, Inchbald never recorded going to Mass, and uses this as evidence that "*A Simple Story* is not about the Catholic Church."[134] These biographical depictions of Inchbald's religiosity are a recurring complication – historians and literary critics have often conflated enlightenment and atheism and assumed that religious and revolutionary devotion are mutually exclusive. Significantly, many of Inchbald's contemporary readers and critics were likely aware of her religion. Note the *Monthly Review*'s comment: "It is to be hoped, however, that Mrs. Inchbald will soon be removed from the ALTAR OF NECESSITY; and that, in this liberal age, a generous public will make her change her religion" (435). While literally wishing that Inchbald may meet pecuniary success with her published work, this review is also undoubtedly a tongue-in-cheek reference to Inchbald's countercultural Catholic identity.

This chapter explores how Inchbald's depictions of gender and religion in *A Simple Story*, specifically, of sacraments and sacramentals, demonstrate that Catholic identity is a malleable category, constituted by variant performances and contestations. Inchbald's novel participates in the debates over Catholic relief and toleration that

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Supplement, 20 June 2003, 40, as sources that critique the biographical trend that elides Inchbald's Catholicism.

[133] Ibid., 159.

[134] Annibel Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What: The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 277.

proliferated in the 1780s and 1790s by underscoring the inefficacy of identity-based laws: if an identity is in flux, how can it possibly be used as a basis for control, punishment, or discrimination? *A Simple Story* likewise encapsulates many of the anxieties about English Catholicism and gender that gripped the 1790s. Crucially, many of Inchbald's depictions of Catholicism are contingent upon gender; this intersection between religious and gendered identity reveals the ways that vexed notions of femininity and masculinity often contributed to the discourse around religious toleration or discrimination in the revolutionary 1790s.[135]

Performing Religion in the Time of Revolution

Essential for this reading is an understanding of how both theatrical and theoretical performance paradigms can contribute to our notions of religion- and gender-based identity categories in late eighteenth-century Britain. The extent to which *A Simple Story*'s most important elements are expressed through theatrical or physical performances has been noted since the novel's first publication. In 1791 the *Monthly Review* noted, "The secret charm, that gives grace to the whole is the art with which Mrs. Inchbald has made her work completely dramatic. The business is, in a great measure,

[135] The relationship between gender and religion in Inchbald's work have only recently been considered in modern scholarship. See Geremy Carnes, "'Let Not Religion Be Named Between Us': Catholic Struggle and the Religious Context of Feminism in *A Simple Story*" (Eighteenth-Century Novel 9 (2012) 193-235, who explores the ways in which Inchbald is "doubly effaced" as both a woman and a Catholic in eighteenth-century England, and how this effacement contributes to her nuanced depictions of Catholicism and early feminism in her writing (195). See also Bridget Keegan, "'Bred a Jesuit': *A Simple Story* and Late Eighteenth-Century English Catholic Culture" (Huntington Library Quarterly, 71:4 (2008) 687-706, who argues that Inchbald uses her knowledge of Ignatian spirituality and priesthood to develop her characters and unite the disjointed parts of her plot.

carried on in dialogue. In dialogue the characters unfold themselves. Their motives, their looks, their attitudes, discover the inward temper."[136] This emphasis on embodied theatrical performance in Inchbald's writing gives weight to the subtler performances in *A Simple Story*: the novel is not simply important for its theatricality, but also for its representations of performative Catholic and gendered identity. Specifically, Inchbald uses Catholicism and religious practice to propose radical and feminist ideologies – ideologies that she felt were possible and practicable in the 1790s, when religious and class-based identities and civil rights were called into question by the first and second Catholic Relief Acts, the Gordon Riots, and the French Revolution. Crucial for my analysis is Judith Butler's notion of the reconstitution of identity through embodied performances; namely, the widespread social turbulence of the 1790s allowed a reconsideration of the ways identity was "enacted on a large political scale," as politicians, ministers, and citizens re-imagined the ways identity could allow or prohibit citizenship**.** The Revolution likewise precipitated a shift in "the more mundane

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[136] Ed. Ralph Griffiths, "Mrs. Inchbald's *Simple Story*," *Monthly Review*, January to April 1791. Art. XIV (437). Likewise, the *European Magazine* reviewed, "the scene is continually occupied by those of the dramatis personae for whom alone we are interested: they are never absent from our eyes, or thoughts, and in this respect, a more perfect whole was, perhaps, never exhibited." Review of *A Simple Story*, *European Magazine* 19 (1791), 197. Nora Nachumi, "'Those Simple Signs': The Performance of Emotion in Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 11:3 (April 1999), 317-338, has demonstrated the importance of theatrical gesture in understanding gender-based power structures in the novel. Laura Engel, "Elizabeth Inchbald's Pocket Diaries as Embodied Archives." Lecture, from Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, London (11 May 2015), reveals how Inchbald's personal writing and fiction can function as "embodied archives" of semi-ephemeral performance. See also Orianne Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), who considers the writing of Revolutionary women religious writers as performative speech acts that invoked prophetic traditions.

reproduction of gendered identity" that "takes place through the various ways in which bodies are acted in relationship to the deeply entrenched or sedimented expectations of gendered existence."[137] Simultaneously, Britons asked: in what ways would adherents of different religions be allowed to participate in the public sphere? Inchbald uses religious belief, and written representations of that belief, to answer both of these questions, "position[ing] the performative at the center of a politics of hegemony, one that offers an unanticipated political future."[138] Ultimately, an examination of the social, ritualistic, and physical expressions of Catholicism in *A Simple Story* reveals Inchbald's radical sensibilities and discomfort with the institutional restrictions for Catholics at the end of the century. Inchbald's depictions of sacraments demonstrate a highly nuanced vision of the Catholic recusant community – a community that is systematically and institutionally defined not only by British confessional law, but also by the adherents who subscribe to and resist it.[139] Simultaneously, through her representations of sacrament*als* (described below), Inchbald reveals that Catholicism itself is not an identity that can be neatly archived – it is often constructed by private and culturally-specific performances. As

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[137] Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, 40:4 (Dec. 1988) 519-531.

[138] Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), 152.

[139] Common biographical references on Inchbald's Catholicism are derived from Annibel Jenkins, *I'll Tell You What: The Life of Elizabeth Inchbald* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), Roger Manvell, *Elizabeth Inchbald: England's Principal Woman Dramatis and Independent Woman of Letters in 18th Century London: A Biographical Study* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1987) and Ed. James Boaden, *Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald: Including Her Familiar Correspondence with the Most Distinguished Persons of Her Time* (London: New Burlington Street, 1833).

such, Inchbald's novel posits that both Catholicism and gender cannot and should not be codified or used as a means of recognizing or refusing citizenship.

The sacraments constitute some of the clearest points of differentiation between Catholic and Protestant practice in the eighteenth century, not least because they are described in the *Catholic Catechism* and the *Thirty-Nine Articles* – written texts that constitute what Diane Taylor has dubbed the "archive": documented, denominational "rules" that delineate the parameters of Catholic and Anglican religious identity.[140] While these texts are still used today, in eighteenth-century England the *Articles* and the *Catechism* served as qualifiers for British citizenship; to deny the *Articles* and practice Catholicism during Inchbald's lifetime was to act subversively, and even illegally.[141] The England of Inchbald's childhood operated as a confessional state and rendered Catholicism as an institutionally recognized countercultural identity.[142] This recognition

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[140] Diane Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

[141] Inchbald would have been acutely aware of the Articles and the limitations imposed upon those who did not subscribe to them. For instance, attending Catholic Mass in England, as Inchbald's family did at a private chapel in Sussex, was prohibited until the Catholic Relief Act of 1791. Even after the Act, priests and ministers were required to register with the Clerk of the Peace, and various other prohibitions and regulations surrounding Catholic Mass were enacted to prevent insurrection. See Colin Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, 1714-80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester University Press, 1993). For more on ideological links between English nationalism and Anti-Catholic sentiment, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1701-1837* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1992), and Raymond D. Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination 1660-1745* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[142] For more on the ways English writers simultaneously promoted and opposed the British confessional state, or "the monopoly of the Anglican church, enforced through oaths, tests, and penal laws, over all regions of British civil and political life," in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries, see Mark Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British writing, 1790-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

involved a series of protocols to monitor the spread of Catholicism in England, including census reports, the banning of Catholic schools, and state-recognized marriages.[143] Thus, although English law gradually progressed toward secularism during Inchbald's lifetime, the everyday experiences and performances of English Catholic citizens were subject to regulation and control. *A Simple Story* presents this control as arbitrary by revealing the fluidity of religious adherence: her characters, though devout and even stereotypically masculine or feminine, often resist their nominal religious and gendered identities by deviating from or reversing sacramental ritual and social practice. The sacraments are performative rituals, and sacraments for Anglicans include *only* Baptism and Communion. Inchbald's inclusion of the five additional Catholic sacraments in her novel reinforces the claim that *A Simple Story* is, in fact, a novel that is both implicitly and explicitly about Catholic experience.[144]

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[143] For further details on the census of 1767, see Tomko, 58 and Haydon, 189-92. When Inchbald married in 1772, she and her husband were first married in a Catholic ceremony and where then remarried on the following day by the procedures of the Church of England. Likewise, in *A Simple Story*, Miss Milner and Lord Elmwood are married first by Elmwood's confessor, Sandford, after which "a few days… intervened between this and their legal marriage" (193).

[144] The *Articles* explain: "Those five commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, Confirmation, Penance, Orders, Matrimony and Extreme Unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel, being such as have grown partly of the corrupt following of the Apostles, partly are states of life allowed in the Scriptures, but yet have not like nature of Sacraments with Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, for that they have not any visible sign of ceremony ordained of God." Cressy, David, and Lori Anne Ferrell. *Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook*. Second ed. (London: Routledge, 2002) 76. References to the *Thirty-Nine Articles* are from this source. The *Roman Catechism*, or *Catechism of the Council of Trent* (1566) was a summary of Catholic doctrine that was written primarily for use by priests. By the eighteenth century, with the proliferation of the publishing industry, English Catholic laity (particularly those who were literate, of the upper classes, or had regular contact with personal confessors, as Inchbald did) likely had access to the *Roman Catechism* or would perform its

Sacramentals are also rule-based Catholic performances, but they exist more readily in what Taylor calls the "repertoire"—the embodied actions of a culture that can be transmitted through physical performances or rituals—performances that "form a system of knowing and transmitting knowledge," even though they may occur outside of archivable experience or texts.[145] Sacramentals, unlike sacraments, are often culturally-specific; they "can respond to the needs…and special history of the Christian people of a particular region or time."[146] Additionally, unlike sacraments, which are performed as public ceremonies usually within churches and by religious leaders, sacramentals are performances and objects enacted or owned by members of the clergy and *especially* the laity. These rituals are often private and include: pilgrimages, relics, hymns, Mariolatry, masking (veiling), shrines, rosaries and the adoration of particular saints.[147] Crucially, sacramentals are often quotidian, individual religious performances that can be enacted by *women* in private, domestic spaces away from the patriarchal constructs of the

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sacramental tenets at the instruction of a local priest. References to the *Catechism* in this essay are to the updated *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), which not only delineates the sacraments (as did the *Roman Catechism* of 1566) but is additionally more "accessible" for laypeople or non-Catholics; it is likewise more detailed in its descriptions of sacramentals, rites, and practices of Catholicism that have been performed for the past two millennia (1).

[145] Taylor, 26.

[146] "Sacramentals, 1668." *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 464.

[147] The *Catechism* describes sacramentals as rituals which can "sanctify almost every event of [Catholic] lives," noting that "there is scarcely any proper use of material things which cannot be thus directed toward the sanctification of men and the praise of God." "Sacramentals, 1669." *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 465.

Catholic faith. Thus, the distinction between sacrament and sacramental allows an analysis of the moments in Inchbald's novel that reveal her personal knowledge of Catholic catechism and private—often *female*—Catholic performance.

A Simple Story is not only a Jacobin novel, it is also a narrative about the tremendous tensions that emerge through transculturation, and the ways that performance can express and repress those tensions.[148] In this instance, "transcultural" not only refers to the overlap between recusant Catholics and their Anglican neighbors, but also to a temporal clash between two eras of British history. The first era begins roughly with the Act of Uniformity in 1662 and lasts until the latter half of the eighteenth century, an era in which "an uncompromising Protestantism was the foundation on which [the British] state was explicitly and unapologetically based," according to Linda Colley.[149] This first era also encapsulates what Dror Wahrman calls the "*ancien regime* of identity," a period in which gender underwent drastic "shifts from understanding capacious enough to allow for individual deviation from dominant gender norms to more inflexible understandings that rendered such deviations very costly" (7).[150] *A Simple Story* is written and set

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[148] For the term "Jacobin novel," I rely on Gary Kelly's *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). In particular, Kelly highlights the difficulties Inchbald would have experienced writing political ideology in a popular form: "English Jacobin fables had to be 'arguments,' since they shared a common view of the necessary chain of circumstances in art and life; but this view ran dead against the common pursuit of entertainment, which meant suspense or at least a sense of possibility" (92). *A Simple Story* navigates this tension smoothly – it is a conscientious political inquiry into religious identity, even while it reads tonally as a Gothic novel.

[149] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 18.

[150] Dror Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

between this earlier era and the one that would follow: the unstable revolutionary period, constituted by the tension between relative secularization and vehement intolerance, and the rapid solidification of dominant gendered identity categories.[151] Inchbald's syncretic representations of religious and gendered identities are both a repository for cultural memories of Catholicism *and* an expression of the new ways that religious identity could be performed, in light of toleration and nascent debates over women's rights. This process of "repetition with revision" is what Joseph Roach has called surrogation, which assumes that "the key to understanding how performances worked *within* a culture, recognizing that a fixed and unified culture exists only as a convenient but dangerous fiction, is to illuminate the process of surrogation as it operated *between* the participating cultures."[152]

In *A Simple Story*, Inchbald uses the sacraments to demonstrate that while Catholicism appears to be a stable and archivable identity, constituted by rule-based performances, her characters break these rules as often as they follow them. As such, her

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[151] Tomko describes this period as the "age of Challoner." "Taking its name from the long-serving and influential Bishop Richard Challoner, this designation refers to eighteenth-century English Catholicism's reserved spirituality and quiet consolidation of its early modern legacy" (118). Michael Tomko, "'All the World have heard of the Devil and the Pope': Elizabeth Inchbald's The Mogul Tale and English Catholic Satire," (*Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*) 31:1/2 (2012), 117-136. See also Eamon Duffy, "Richard Challoner, 1691-1781: A Memoir," in *Challoner and his Church: A Catholic Bishop in Georgian England*, ed. Duffy (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1981).

[152] Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1996), 5. Here I also rely on Roach's formulation of cultural performance as both "intercultural and internally self-referential" (4). In my analysis I consider how Inchbald's work negotiates its own place in the discourse *between* English Catholics and Anglicans in eighteenth-century Britain, while it simultaneously represents religious performance *within* the recusant English Catholic.

novel joins the debate over Catholic Relief by exposing the fallacy in thinking of religion as a solidified identity that can be used to discipline citizens and limit their rights. Likewise, sacramentals in *A Simple Story* confirm that Catholicism is an identity that is constructed by private, gendered and culturally specific performances. By examining the repertoire of these religious performances in Inchbald's novel, we can observe how her female characters—even those who subscribe to a patriarchal religion—exercise autonomy and resistance within their hierarchal and restrictive identity categories.

Sacrament, Sacramental, and Gender in A Simple Story

A Simple Story is divided in two – the first half was written in 1779, the second part completed sometime later, in 1790. Since its first publication, readers have attempted to reconcile the two halves of the novel by linking characters and narrative strains, or to critique the apparent *dis*unity of the novel by examining its contradictory themes of women's empowerment.[153] Instead of reading the two parts separately, this analysis assumes that Inchbald's representations of gendered and Catholic performances reveal her radical religious politics and provide cohesion for the novel's disparate halves. The novel's first half uses the five non-Anglican sacraments to represent the fluidity of Catholic identity. For Inchbald, the divide between Catholic and Anglican is, in many ways, performative and even artificial, as adherents resist the archivable aspects of both denominations. The novel's first half also showcases sacramentals to demonstrate how

[153] See Michelle O'Connell, "Miss Milner's Return from the Crypt: Mourning in Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story*," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35:4 (2012), 567-80, for a discussion of scholars who, "to produce a unified reading of the novel, attempt to account for the shift in tone and subject matter by reading the second part as a 'recapitulation' of the first, either celebrating of correcting the errors of Miss Milner in her more properly submissive daughter" (568).

female autonomy can function even within a patriarchal setting. The novel's second half continues this narrative of female empowerment through performances of Mariolatry and the symbolic presence of the pietà.

The most pronounced and consequential sacrament in *A Simple Story* is, of course, Holy Orders – the Catholic rite of priesthood that is constituted, among other things, by lifelong celibacy. The novel begins with a description of Dorriforth, who, "was by education, and the solemn vows of his order, a Roman Catholic priest – but nicely discriminating between the philosophical and the superstitious part of that character, and adopting the former only" (3). Here, Inchbald anticipates her audience's response and immediately dispels any clichéd assumptions her readers might make about Catholic priesthood and irrationality or "superstition," revealing a nuanced view of religious identity in the novel's first sentence. She additionally explains that Dorriforth, despite his vocation, "refused to shelter himself from the temptations of the layman by the walls of the cloister," (3) but rather lives a fairly social existence in London.[154]

Despite this subtle characterization, however, English stereotypes of Catholic priests still lurk on the edges of *A Simple Story* in the form of Dorriforth's forbidden sexuality. As George Haggerty has noted, "as a Catholic priest, he is utterly, even thrillingly taboo," a Gothic father-lover who is dually attractive and repulsive,

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[154] Inchbald's first readers also acknowledged the realism and depth of Dorriforth's character. The *Gentleman's Magazine* noted that Inchbald's "character, the Roman Catholic lord, is perfectly new; and she has conducted him, through a series of surprising and well-contrasted adventures, with a uniformity of character and truth of description that have rarely been surpassed." Review of *A Simple Story*, *Gentleman's Magazine* 69 (1791).

tantalizingly available and yet forbidden.[155] This taboo is the primary vehicle for narrative tension in the novel's first half, and it showcases the ways in which Inchbald imbricates religion and sexuality in her story. While these stereotypes seemingly reinforce negative English perceptions of Catholicism, I argue that, more importantly, they underscore the fluidity of Dorriforth's religious identity. Early in the novel, Miss Milner's suitor, Frederick Lawnley, insists that Dorriforth must be in love with Miss Milner, declaring, "monastic vows, like those of marriage, were made to be broken" (21). Though Miss Woodley, the kindly spinster who lives with the family, is left "trembling with horror at the sacrilegious idea," (20) this scene reminds the reader that Dorriforth is not asexual, despite his vows. Likewise, Caroline Breashears has argued that Dorriforth represents "an ongoing exploration of men's options for negotiating a masculine identity," as he struggles to reconcile his religious sensibility with social performances of manhood (even brutal manhood) like dueling and mentorship.[156] Thus, neither asexual nor sequestered from the public sphere, Dorriforth's priesthood does not annul his masculinity, nor preclude him from desire. *A Simple Story*'s first half represents Holy Orders as a sacrament that can be individually varied: Dorriforth's complex masculinity

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[155] George Haggerty, "Female Abjection in Inchbald's *A Simple Story*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 32:3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 1996), 657. See also Terry Castle here, who notes, "To imagine an eroticization of the guardian/ward bond, in English literature at least, is to diverge abruptly into the realms of pornography and burlesque" (300). Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

[156] Caroline Breashears, "Defining Masculinity in *A Simple Story*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 16:3 (April 2004) 453.

and simmering sexuality offer changeability to his sacramental vows of celibacy and religious seclusion.

The novel's second volume literalizes this changeability when Dorriforth's priesthood is annulled and he inherits an estate and title. His inheritance is significant for considering the ways religion, gender and sexuality are fluidly connected in the novel, and it also carries topical relevance. By the Papists Act of 1778, Catholics were newly permitted to inherit English estates, and Inchbald was highly aware of this legislation, as one of her Catholic characters explains Dorriforth's new position: "But there are no religious vows, from which the great Pontiff of Rome cannot grant a dispensation – those commandments made by the church, the church has always the power to dispense withal; and when it is for the general good of religion, his holiness thinks it incumbent on him, to publish his bull to remit all pains and penalties for their non-observance; and certainly it is for the honour of the catholics, that this earldom should continue in a catholic family" (101). Here, Inchbald overtly demonstrates that even the archivable aspects of religion can be varied and revised. Not only could Dorriforth express sexuality during his priesthood, now, as the layman Lord Elmwood, he can marry and own land. Dorriforth's vocational change expresses the fluidity of Catholic priestly identity, and, in his mutability, Inchbald reveals the institutional tyranny inherent in of British property law by highlighting the arbitrary nature of the Popery Acts of the seventeenth century. Amidst Miss Milner's romantic turmoil, Dorriforth's inheritance poses a rhetorical question for contemporary readers: is it logical to limit inheritance and property rights on grounds of religious identity, especially if that identity fluctuates?

Dorriforth is not the only Catholic priest in *A Simple Story*. Father Sandford, the "rigid monitor and friend" of Dorriforth, who acts as a live-in confessor for the family, inexplicably dislikes Miss Milner and takes it upon himself to be her reformer. Inchbald overtly codes the relationship between Sandford and Miss Milner with confessional language: pride, sin, shame, penance, and redemption all constitute Sandford's characterization and reify his literal and metaphorical significance as the novel's severe arbiter of morality. Through Sandford, Inchbald depicts the persecution inherent in hierarchical systems of power and then participates in a wider discourse around secularization. Ultimately, she uses the English stereotype of the oppressive and manipulative Catholic confessor to represent the tyranny in English religious law. Through Miss Milner's responses to Sandford, Inchbald additionally demonstrates how that tyranny can and *should* be resisted.

In the first half of *A Simple Story*, Sandford acts as the consummate Catholic confessor; his severity and hypocrisy make him a precursor to the cunning fictional monks that would emerge later in the decade.[157] Miss Milner's relationship with Sandford is described as one between a sinner and her judge, and Inchbald frames this Catholic

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[157] Here I refer to the characters Ambrosio and Schedoni in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) and Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian* (1797), respectively. Sandford seemingly has his own conversion experience halfway through *A Simple Story*, and he becomes a more benevolent religious figure in the novel's third and fourth volumes. The *Monthly Review* was impressed by this subtle transformation, noting that Sandford "produce[s him]self gradually in [his] conversation and in [his] actions. Sandford is a remarkable character, and artfully exhibited. There is no hurry to anticipate; he is left fairly to develop himself; at first stern, and unamiable: but in the end it is seen that, however severe, and even sullen, he is to the follies which, he forsees, may lead to vice and fatal error, he feels compassion for the unhappy, and is the friend and comforter of penitential sorrow" 436-7.

confessional language in terms of English sociality. What on the surface seems like a simple clash between Sandford's austerity and Miss Milner's sociability is in fact a much deeper conflict over the control of feminine agency. Upon their meeting, Sandford is "eager to draw upon him her detestation, in the hope he could also make her abominate herself. The mortifications of slight he was expert in," and Sandford, by artfully neglecting Miss Milner and then pointing out her flaws in company, treats her as an "indifferent person" (39-40). Sandford behaves as though Miss Milner is an impenitent sinner, projecting shame upon her until "it humbled Miss Milner in her own opinion…[and] she felt an inward nothingness" (40).

It is clear, however, that Inchbald's sympathy is with Miss Milner – this is not a meek heroine who accepts abjection. Miss Milner "had no idea of the superior, and subordinate state of characters in a foreign seminary – besides, as a woman, she was privileged to say any thing she pleased; and as a beautiful woman, she had a right to expect whatever she pleased to say, should be admired" (39). After enduring several instances of Sandford's cruelty, Miss Milner "had been cured of all her pride, had she not possessed a degree of spirit beyond the generality of her sex" (40). She goes on to combat Sandford's tyranny with wit, and "[throws] in the way of the holy Father as great trials for his patience, as any his order could have substituted in penance" (41). By framing their relationship in terms of confession—a sacrament, in this instance, gone awry in the hypocritical hands of Sandford and appropriated by the vivacious Miss Milner—Inchbald critiques the patriarchal power structures of her own religion, simultaneously exhibiting her own autonomy as a woman Catholic author and championing her female lead.

In the novel's first half, the relationship between Sandford and Miss Milner stands as a metaphor for the relationship between the English confessional state and Catholicism. As Mark Canuel has argued, the Anglican Church in the eighteenth century functioned ideologically as a "natural" part of political governance. At the same time, as a confessional state, Britain enforced numerous artificial religious performances—like oaths of allegiance and enforced church attendance—to ensure that Anglicanism was nationally promoted. Canuel goes on to explain, "how reformers of the late eighteenth century pointed out, first of all, that the supposedly natural authority of the [Anglican] church suppressed the actual diversity of beliefs that existed within Britain's shores." These reformers often used depictions of authoritarian Catholicism in literature as symbols of equally strict British confessional laws.[158]

As such, Sandford's behaviour toward Miss Milner closely resembles the ways British confessional law operated upon non-Anglicans during Inchbald's lifetime. In this relationship, religious denomination is of course muddled – Sandford, the Catholic priest, stands in as the oppressive Anglican British government, while Miss Milner, the free-thinking Protestant, represents religious non-conformity. Miss Milner essentially lives in a confessional household, where a dictatorial patriarch restricts her femininity and behavior, much as English Catholics lived in a confessional nation, their rights limited by British law. This reversal demonstrates the fluidity of religious identity that Inchbald

[158] Canuel, 6.

expresses repeatedly throughout her novel, and simultaneously promotes righteous rebellion through the figure of Miss Milner.[159]

Miss Milner's continual grace and assertiveness under Sandford's persecution are representative of potent female agency in Inchbald's novel. A less obvious heroine, however, is Miss Woodley – the quiet companion who nevertheless remains strong throughout the novel, often while enacting or witnessing Catholic sacramentals. Performances of sacramentals are moments that invert or contest patriarchal rule in *A Simple Story*; as such, Inchbald uses these performances to demonstrate how individual religious adherents (especially women like Miss Woodley) exercise resistance within ostensibly authoritarian religions.[160]

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[159] Significantly, Miss Milner's denomination is due to her gender: "Mr. Milner was a member of the church of Rome, but on his marriage with a lady of Protestant tenets, they mutually agreed their sons should be educated in the religious opinion of their father, and their daughters in that of their mother" (4). While I do not believe Inchbald is attempting to equate Catholicism with masculinity and Anglicanism with femininity here, I do argue that this is further evidence of the ways gender and religion are overtly linked in *A Simple Story*.

[160] Castle argues, "Here the heroine's desires repeatedly triumph over masculine prerogative; familial, religious, and psychic patterns of male domination collapse in the face of her persistent will to liberty…The pattern of rebellion is linked to the struggle for power between men and women: the law is masculine, the will that opposes feminine" (292-4). Much has been made of the feminist potential (or lack thereof) in *A Simple Story*. In addition to Castle, Breashears, Haggerty, and Nachumi, see Mary Anne Schofield, *Masking and Unmasking the Female Mind: Disguising Romances in Feminine Fiction, 1713-1799* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1990); Catherine Craft-Fairchild, *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century Fictions by Women* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993); Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); Jane Baron Nardin, "Priest and Patriarch in Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story*," *Feminist Studies in English Literature* 17 (2009) 131-55; John Morillo, "Editing Eve: Rewriting the Fall in Austen's *Persuasion* and Inchbald's *A Simple Story*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 23 (2010) 195-223.

Shortly after Miss Milner arrives at her new home, the protagonist has her first encounter with Catholicism as she breakfasts with Dorriforth, Miss Woodley and her sister, Mrs. Horton. What begins as flirtatious banter between Miss Milner and Dorriforth ends in discomfort when Miss Milner makes a jibe at Catholicism: "in some respects I am like you Roman Catholics; I don't believe from my own understanding, but from what other people tell me" (16). At this, Dorriforth becomes grave and asks that Miss Milner refrain from "persecuting" him; Miss Woodley says a silent prayer on behalf of Miss Milner's involuntary "sin," and Mrs. Horton, "to prevent the infectious taint of heretical opinions," crosses herself, at which Miss Milner bursts into laughter.

This compact scene demonstrates the complex relations between physical and oral performance, and between gender and power – relations that Inchbald understood only too well. Miss Milner's joke represents one of the primary English stereotypes of Catholics that Inchbald wishes to subvert, even as it functions as a subtle critique of Catholicism itself. As a Catholic, Inchbald is of course aware that Catholics are perfectly capable of thinking for themselves, and yet she uses this scene to also acknowledge that Catholics *can be* governed by austere and often authoritarian strictures. Neither Miss Milner nor Dorriforth (as representatives of Anglicanism and Catholicism, respectively) is cast in an entirely positive light here, and the range of reader response is complex: while Miss Milner's jibe can be read as crass or even malicious, Dorriforth's reaction is severe, and Mrs. Horton seems fussy and overly pious.

Alternatively, Miss Milner's playful rebellion could also be read through a feminist lens, with the heroine functioning "as the embodiment of an exuberant, libertarian impulse toward female freedom and independence" – indeed, as she does

elsewhere in the novel. As Amy Garnai has argued, Dorriforth's patriarchal influence over the house is not simply ideological and spiritual, but pecuniary as well: Mrs. Horton and Miss Woodley not only "regard him with all that respect and reverence which the most religious flock shows to its pastor," but also depend upon the "liberal stipend he allow[s]."[161] As such, Miss Milner's sparring with Dorriforth could be interpreted as a breath of fresh air for the women of the house, if not for her *continued* and *excessive* mockery, which are read as simply insensitive: "she gave way to her humour, and laughed with a liberty so uncontrolled, that in a short time left her in the room with none but the tender-hearted Miss Woodley a witness of her folly" (17).

If we left the scene here, it would read as a simple clash between Anglican and Catholic cultures, with characters rehearsing the familiar jibes about both religions and with neither side being totally right nor wrong. However, Miss *Woodley*'s subsequent reaction complicates this reading much further, as it forces us to consider the relationship between religious performance and rebellion against patriarchal control. While Mrs. Horton offers forgiveness to Miss Milner "with a severity so far different from the idea the words conveyed," Miss Woodley insists she will not forgive Miss Milner. The narrator then continues: "But how unimportant, how weak, how ineffectual are *words* in conversation—looks and manners alone express—for Miss Woodley, with her charitable face and mild accents, saying she would not forgive, implied only forgiveness" (17). In this instance, Inchbald emphasizes the complexity of physical performance by showing the disconnections between her characters' speeches, thoughts and actions. The scene is

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[161] Amy Garnai, *Revolutionary Imaginings in the 1790s: Charlotte Smith, Mary Robinson, Elizabeth Inchbald* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 125, 7.

instigated by a physically performative sacramental, the Sign of the Cross, which only adds bodily theatricality to Mrs. Horton's myopic religiosity. Mrs. Horton subscribes to Dorriforth's power over the household throughout the novel, whatever the situation, and reads as unthinkingly Catholic and submissive. Miss Woodley, however, is both Catholic *and* discerning, considerate *and* freethinking, and embodies a subtle yet powerful resistance to patriarchal authority by befriending Miss Milner in this very scene. Her rebellion continues through the entirety of the novel, as Miss Woodley remains steadfastly loyal to Miss Milner, even after the latter is willfully disobedient, unfaithful to her husband and, ultimately, dead. Through all of this, Miss Woodley functions as the novel's moral center: she is an independent thinker like Miss Milner, without the heroine's caprice or insensitivity; she is likewise as compassionate and feeling as Matilda, without the latter's dogged sense of patriarchal devotion. Miss Woodley even goes so far as to accompany Miss Milner in her most daring venture – the masquerade.

Terry Castle posits that the masquerade "condenses the radical concerns of Inchbald's" novel; the novel, in turn, is "restlessly anti-authoritarian…insistently satiriz[ing] conventionality, self-restriction, physical and psychic inhibition."[162] Castle later notes that Inchbald's anti-authoritarian Jacobinism is "paradoxically combined with [her] Catholic devotionalism," and it is this "paradox," in light of the masquerade scene, that is problematic. Inchbald's masquerade is strongly coded by religious language and cultural history, even as Miss Milner uses the masquerade to transgress gender binaries through carnivalesque reversals. Here, Inchbald asserts through Miss Milner's rebellion

[162] Castle, 292.

that both gendered and religious identities are performative and arbitrary, and, in light of this assertion, Inchbald's dual religiosity and radicalism seems logical, rather than paradoxical.

The eighteenth-century English masquerade was primarily a commercial practice, but it carried the residual features of pagan festivity and Catholic liturgical holiday.[163] *A Simple Story*'s masquerade is especially coded by religious imagery, and functions as an echo of sacramental practice. Inchbald would have been aware of liturgical holidays and their association with festivals and social disruption; likewise, she was aware of public masquerades and their power for contesting identity categories.[164] As such, Inchbald appropriates this vestigial Catholic form of bacchanalia and rebellion and re-envisions it as a scene of radical modern transgression. I refer to gender transgression, of course, but we should not ignore the religious elements of Miss Milner's rebellion either.

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[163] Castle, 1-51. Castle traces the origins of the English masquerade from the European *Carnivale* – the liturgical pre-Lenten Catholic feast – emphasizing, however, that it "inhered most in the ambiguous, hybrid shape of the event itself – its peculiar mixture of Continental and English elements, its simultaneous allusion to foreign and native popular traditions" (12). See also Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), and Paula Backscheider, *Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). Marcus and Backscheider follow the transformation of religious festivals into tools for nationalism and monarchial control: beginning with the Stuarts, English monarchs increasingly reconfigured religious festivals into national holidays and public spectacles to both produce and reaffirm their power.

[164] In 1781, Inchbald attended a masquerade herself, and "as a frolic, she, who had acted Bellario on the public stage, as every other fine woman in the profession had done, probably appeared there in the male habit; for she was outrageously assailed on this subject, and charged with having captivated the affections of sundry witless admirers of her own sex" (Boaden, 140).

When Elmwood forbids Miss Milner from attending the masquerade, she taunts him, insisting that she will attend the ball dressed as a nun, "a habit…which covers a multitude of faults" (152). Miss Milner—subjugated by Lord Elmwood because of her gender—pointedly reminds him of the very ways his own identity is misunderstood and ultimately, a limitation on his rights as a British citizen. This subtle yet potent tactic functions as another rhetorical question, for characters and readers alike: if a Catholic man does not appreciate being misread, mocked and controlled, why should a woman, of any religion? Inchbald rhetorically links religious and gendered subjugation in her novel's most transgressive scene. Earlier, I have contended that an ideological paradigm shift occurred at the end of the eighteenth century, constituted by increased religious intolerance (even during institutional secularization) and an emergent, progressive insistence of women's engagement in the public sphere. The masquerade episode functions as Inchbald's negotiation of this transcultural shift. Here, she demonstrates how older forms of resistance can be utilized for expressing nascent radicalisms: what was once a Catholic sacramental celebration of social disorder is used in her novel as an expression of women's involvement in public life.

Shortly after the masquerade incident, Miss Milner and Lord Elmwood marry, and this sacrament again reinforces the idea that religious performances and identities are mutable, as their marriage occurs on dubious grounds and ends almost as quickly as it begins. Inchbald highlights the limitations imposed upon Catholic rites when Sandford reminds Elmwood that he is "only married by [his] own church and conscience, not by [his] wife's; or by the law of the land" and advises that Elmwood not hesitate to be legally married in the Church of England, "lest in time you disagree, and she yet refuse to

become your legal spouse" (192). This interjection first emphasizes the fact that Catholics are not afforded the same marital rights as Anglicans in Britain, and then underscores the complications of living in a state that does not recognize the identities of all of its inhabitants. As an English Catholic, Elmwood must obey and perform two sets of archivable religious laws, neither of which fully recognize the legality of the other. Sandford's advice also demonstrates the ways gendered power can be contingent upon religion: before their marriage is recognized by the state, Miss Milner can deny their sacramental contract if she chooses. Ultimately, Lord and Lady Elmwood break Catholic, Anglican, and British marital laws when they are separated after Lady Elmwood's infidelity. Like Dorriforth's priesthood, marriage in *A Simple Story* is a lifelong, sacramental vow that is broken nevertheless; with this break, Inchbald demonstrates the arbitrary nature of religious identity and symbolically asks her readers why a fluid religious performance should have any bearing on citizens' rights.

The marriage and separation of Lord and Lady Elmwood is complicated when viewed through a feminist lens. On one hand, Lady Elmwood and her daughter are banished from Lord Elmwood's sight to "the most dreary retreat;" on the other, Lady Elmwood is able to "escape to shelter herself," "never again to return to a habitation where he was the master" (197). Is her isolation harsh and enforced, or does she experience newfound agency away from her husband and in the company of the "still unremitting friendship of Miss Woodley?" (197). Regardless of how we answer these questions, Lady Elmwood's retreat *does* demonstrate the ways women can peacefully perform private religiosity outside of patriarchal, archivable law. Though she has violated her marriage vows, Lady Elmwood's new life is more religious than ever before – "'Thy

will be done' is her continual exclamation" (195) in the home she now shares with her daughter, Miss Woodley, and (on occasion) Sandford. Inchbald likewise demonstrates how religious devotion can still flourish outside the bonds of a heteronormative marriage. Ula Klein's current work on *A Simple Story* explores the possibility of a Sapphic relationship between Lady Elmwood and Miss Woodley.[165] This argument contributes to the notion that Inchbald recognizes religion as constituted by performance, rather than dogmatic regulation: at her most pious time of life, Lady Elmwood is separate from her lawful—lawful in both the religious and statutory senses—husband and involved (at the very least) in a successful homosocial partnership with Miss Woodley.[166]

Immediately after the reader learns of Lady Elmwood's retreat, she undergoes the Catholic sacraments of Confirmation and Extreme Unction almost simultaneously in the third volume of *A Simple Story*. Both sacraments reiterate the notion that religious identity is constituted by variant performances, and both reinforce Inchbald's theme of female autonomy. It is worth noting that the novel never actually indicates whether or not Lady Elmwood has converted to Catholicism. Though she has clearly become pious, appears to be performing Catholic sacraments, and lives in a household full of Catholics, her actual denomination is never confirmed, an elision that only reaffirms Inchbald's theme of denominational fluidity. Lady Elmwood, regardless of her nominal religious

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[165] Ula Klein, "Gender in Its Parts: Eighteenth-Century Female Cross-Dressers, Prosthetic Gender, and Sapphic Possibility," (PhD diss., Stony Brook University 2013) 38.

[166] Here I refer to Eve Sedgwick's configuration of homosocial desire, which allows for erotic ambiguity in female-female and male-male bonds. Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

affiliations, is contrite at her deathbed and has apparently undergone a moral conversion experience. This conversion is significant because, whatever she was in the first half of the novel, for the second half Lady Elmwood is sanctified, and even *beatified* after her death.

The ceremony surrounding Lady Elmwood's death is overtly Catholic, with Sandford as the confessor looking upon the "dying penitent" with "mildness, tenderness, and pity" as he pardons of her sins and bids her to die in peace.[167] Even more noticeable is the visual scene that Inchbald paints of the sick room:

> Lady Elmwood turns to [Matilda] often and attempts an embrace, but her feeble arms forbid, and they fall motionless. – The daughter perceiving those ineffectual efforts, has her whole face convulsed with sorrow; kisses her mother; holds her to her bosom; and hangs upon her neck, as if she wished to cling there, and the grave not part them. (200).

This picture reads like an inverted visual pieta – Lady Elmwood has died for her own sins, and her daughter clutches her in her last moments, unable to save her. Lady Elmwood's conversion could be read as a "revision" in female manners, or a sign that she has finally received "a proper education" at her last gasp, an education that her daughter

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[167] The Catholic prayer of Extreme Unction and Sandford's actual prayer over Lady Elmwood are strikingly similar, which may indicate her conversion to Catholicism. The traditional prayer reads: "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up" (*Catechism*, 421). Similarly, Sandford looks at "the penitent" Lady Elmwood with "mildness, tenderness, and pity." "'In the name of God,' said he to Lady Elmwood, 'that God who suffered for you, and, suffering, knew and pitied all our weaknesses – By him, who has given his word to take compassion on the sinner's tears, I bid you hope for mercy. – By that innocence in which you once lived, be comforted" (200). By highlighting Lady Elmwood's "penitent" attitude and giving Sandford the last moment of dialogue with Lady Elmwood, Inchbald is certainly painting a scene that is highly reminiscent of the Catholic sacrament, whether or not she wishes her readers to believe that Lady Elmwood has converted to Catholicism.

Matilda will attain throughout the rest of the novel. Gary Kelly interprets Matilda's narrative as "atone[ment] for her mother's error," and as Castle has already articulated, to champion the demure Matilda and denigrate Miss Milner for her "lack of moral discipline" (73-4) is an antifeminist reading. To champion Matilda's passivity and insist that Lady Elmwood gets her just rewards certainly *would* be antifeminist, but exploration of sacramental performance can enhance our reading of the novel's second half. Castle argues that carnivalesque transgression becomes interior in the second half of *A Simple Story*. It also becomes performative and religious: Lady Elmwood never fully leaves the novel, but lingers as an audacious ghost, subverting patriarchal authority as a powerful feminine revenant and encouraging Matilda to do so as well.

As with holy orders and marriage, Inchbald demonstrates that the Catholic sacrament of Extreme Unction is subject to revision. Though she dies, Lady Elmwood manages to speak from the grave in a gothic letter to Lord Elmwood**:** "Lord Elmwood…cast your imagination into the grave where I am laying…Behold me, also…My whole frame is motionless – my heart beats no more. – Look at my horrid habitation, too – and ask yourself – whether I am an object of resentment?" (211-2). Lord Elmwood, devastated, cannot bring himself to burn the letter, and it is this letter that ultimately convinces him to take Matilda under his protection. Nachumi has argued, "Lady Elmwood's vivid description of her body creates a physical immediacy that emulates the effect of embodied speech" (335). Indeed, Lady Elmwood has a diminishing effect on Lord Elmwood, who "shrinks" and "looks shocked beyond measure" when he hears of her death" (209). Here and throughout the rest of the story, Lady Elmwood continues to haunt the estate and influence the behavior of its inhabitants.

While previous scholars have read Matilda's part in the story as passive obeisance to the control of a gothic patriarch, her devotions can be read as simultaneously matriarchal.[168] Matilda's unwavering devoutness toward her mother's soul is almost Marian in its sacramental intensity:

> In the bitterness of her grief, she once called upon her mother, and reproached her memory – but the moment she recollected the offence, (which was almost instantaneously) she became all mildness and resignation. 'What have I said?' cried she; 'Dear, dear saint, forgive me, and behold for your sake I will bear all with patience – I will not groan, I will not even sign again – this task I set myself to atone for what I dared to utter.' (244).

Thus, though Matilda constantly yearns for the approval of her father "with a kind of filial piety," she has been raised by the rebellious Lady Elmwood and the ever-loyal Miss Woodley, to whom "the violation of oaths, persons, or things consecrated to Heaven, was… if not the most enormous, the most horrid of crimes" (73). Additionally, as the mere mention of Lady Elmwood is taboo in Elmwood's patriarchal house, Matilda's sacramental devotion to her mother can be read as an expression of feminine resistance.

This sacred mother imagery surfaces elsewhere, most notably in what could be considered the gothic-emotional climax of the novel: the moment in which Matilda and Elmwood are reunited for the first time. Believing that her father has left the estate, Matilda unwittingly stumbles across him as she wanders the house:

> She gave a scream of terror – put out her trembling hands to catch the balustrades on the stairs for support – missed them – and fell motionless into her father's arms. He caught her, as by that impulse he would have

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[168] See Haggerty, who argues that, in particular, Matilda's relationship with her father indicates that in Inchbald's work, "abjection [is] implicit in the position of the female in a patriarchal culture," and that "Lady Matilda offers no resistance at all" (656, 665). For more on the relationship between Inchbald's characters and their devotion to others and to the Commandments, see also Lance Wilcox, "Idols and Idolaters in *A Simple Story*," *The Age of Johnson* 17 (2006), 298.

> caught any other person falling for want of aid. – Yet when he found her in his arms, he still held her there – gazed on her attentively – and once pressed her to his bosom. At length, trying to escape the snare into which he had been led, he was going to leave her on the spot where she fell, when her eyes opened and she uttered, 'Save me.' – Her voice unmanned him. His long-restrained tears now burst forth – and seeing her relapsing into the swoon again, he cried out eagerly to recall her. – Her name did not however come to his recollection – nor any name but this – 'Miss Milner – Dear Miss Milner.' (273-4).

This visually stunning scene is religiously evocative and represents a marked disruption in Elmwood's patriarchal power.[169] Again, the reader is reminded of Inchbald's career as a dramatist as Matilda and Elmwood freeze for nearly the length of a page in a prolonged tableau vivant: neither characters nor narrative move as the reader is drawn into this emotive spectacle, wherein Matilda's very presence is an act of defiance. Crucially, the two figures evoke another pietà that, this time, is inverted by gender – instead of a grief-stricken Mary holding a son she could not save, Elmwood cradles the body of the daughter he has neglected of his own volition.[170] While Matilda's fainting body keeps

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[169] Haggerty reads this scene as erotic: the collapsing swoon of an abject daughter who is forever desperate for her father's patriarchal love (664). Nachumi's reading, which complements my own, interprets the faint as a reminder of Lady Elmwood's body – Matilda is an embodied copy of Lady Elmwood's death, and it forces him to feel remorse for his actions. "The heroines' bodies, then, and the sympathetic reactions they invoke in Lord Elmwood, help reawaken Elmwood's capacity to love" (335). For more on female characters who passively resist patriarchal figures in gothic fiction, see Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to the Brontës* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998). Hoeveler asserts, the "female gothic represented women who ostensibly appear to be conforming to their acceptable roles within the patriarchy but who actually subvert the father's power at every possible occasion and then retreat into studied postures of conformity whenever they risk exposure to public censure" (6).

[170] As Nachumi has argued, physicality is "integral to the performance of social agency" in *A Simple Story*, and "the protagonists' gestures create a sense of physical and emotional immediacy designed to elicit a sympathetic response from other characters in the novel and from the reader, 331.

Elmwood from "escaping," Lady Elmwood, acting again as the sacramental saint, infiltrates the pietà with her presence and overwhelms Elmwood until he is "unmanned" and can only shed tears and say her name. In this moment, which is redolent with Marian imagery, Elmwood's patriarchal power is undermined by his daughter's body and his wife's ghost. Elmwood eventually leaves Matilda, "agitated with shame, with pity, with anger, with paternal tenderness," and again Inchbald demonstrates the ways religious performance can be constituted by femininity, and consequently can weaken masculine power.

Considering performance—both theatrical and theoretical—while interrogating religious identity can offer multiform new perspectives on the revolutionary 1790s, and on the ways religious identity interacts with gender during the period**.** It can also dispel a widely made scholarly assumption: namely, that religious identities are not and cannot be in flux, that they are always already institutionally and dogmatically constituted and rarely enacted by individual performances. Under this assumption, resistance to hegemonic religious structures often equates to a denial of that identity entirely: one is either religious or non-religious, Catholic or anti-Catholic; a person cannot both self-identify as a religious person and be a discerning and rational individual. However, this type of analysis concentrates solely on the public faces of religion and neglects religious, individual, everyday experiences – experiences that women, especially, would have lived. It is in many ways a secular analytic assumption – one that generalizes a historical, religious "other" as a uniform identity. As with any other type of identity politics, however, it is important to remember that religious identity, like gendered, sexual, racial and national identity, is contingent, socially constructed, and accessible to re-

signification. To naturalize any religious identity as a unitary category is to neglect the individual performances and resistances that can be enacted within that religion – to privilege the nominal instead of the actual.

Chapter Four

Dissenting Religious Citizenship in Helen Maria Williams' *Julia* and *Letters from France*

"A little town about two leagues from Montauban, called Negre-Peliffe, where the inhabitants, on the day of the Federation, displayed a liberality of sentiment which reflects honour, not only on themselves, but on the age in which we live. The national guard of this little town and its environs, were assembled to take the national oath. Half of the inhabitants being Protestants, and the other half Catholics, the Curé and the Protestant minister ascended together on the altar, which had been erected by the citizens, and administered the oath to their respective parishioners at the same moment; after a while, Catholics and Protestants joined in singing Te Deum. Surely religious worship was never performed more truly in the spirit of the Divine Author of Christianity, whose great precept is that of universal love! Surely the incense of praise was never more likely to ascend to Heaven, than when the Catholics and Protestants of Negre-Peliffe offered it together! This amiable community, when their devotions were finished, walked in procession to a spot where fireworks had been prepared; and, it being considered as a mark of honour to light the fireworks, the office was reserved for Mons. Le Curé, who, however, insisted on the participation of the Protestant Minister in this distinction; upon which the minister received a waxed taper from the Curé, and with him led the procession. The fire-works represented two trees: one, twisted and distorted, was emblematical of aristocracy, and was soon entirely consumed; when a tall, straight plant, figurative of patriotism, appeared to rise from the ashes of the former, and continued to burn with undiminished splendour.

When we look back on the ignorance, the superstition, the barbarous persecutions of Gothic times, is it not something to be thankful for, that we exist at this Enlightened period, when such evils are no more; when particular tenants of religious belief are no longer imputed as crimes; when the human mind has made as many important discoveries in morality as in science, and liberality of sentiment is cultivated with as much success as arts and learning; when, in short, (and you are not one of those who will suspect that I am not all the while a good English woman) when one can witness an event so sublime as the French Revolution?"[171]

Introduction

In 1790 Helen Maria Williams traveled with her sister to Paris, and for the next six years she published an eight-volume series of letters documenting her time spent in

[171] Helen Maria Williams, *Letters from France*, Ed. Janet M. Todd (New York: Delmar Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1975) 63-5. References are to this edition.

France during the first half of the Revolutionary decade. The quotation above underscores the extent to which Williams' work is not simply entertaining travel writing. Rather, Williams' work – the *Letters from France*, and as I will demonstrate, her novel *Julia* as well – engages in the French Revolutionary debates and Britain's relationship to them, particularly the ways in which religious toleration and equality for women would be established by the Revolution and would be reciprocally essential for constituting the Revolution itself. Specifically, Williams saw toleration as a building block of radical egalitarianism and believed that Dissenting principles could help create a new, post-Revolutionary regime wherein men and women achieved equality through conscientious religious sensibility and practice. This chapter will demonstrate how Presbyterian Dissent informs Williams' radicalism – namely, the *Letters* and *Julia* reveal that she joins her fellow Dissenting radicals in their use of effusive sensibility to advocate political ideology, and in their promotion of religious toleration. Crucially, Williams' belief in Dissenting individualism, agency, and egalitarianism additionally helps her affirm the power of individual, feminine subjectivity in her writing.

While Elizabeth Inchbald and Ann Radcliffe promote radicalism through their representations of performative religious rituals, and while Charlotte Smith warns her readers about the pernicious relationship between institutional Anglicanism, the *ancien regime*, and inauthentic religious performance, Williams' depictions of religious performance (and the ways religious performance can positively constitute the new world order) are much more quotidian. For Williams, using religious citizenship and what she calls "active benevolence" to inform political practice is about daily actions by average individuals and also effusive and emotive performances by communities (like the dual

Catholic-Protestant celebration above) that, repeated, become sedimented and systemic. My close reading of *Julia* and the *Letters* will examine how Williams additionally uses her writing and Dissenting background to outline how women will contribute to the Revolution: namely, through feminine leadership and charity, anti-materialism, sorority, knowledge in scripture, and women's literacy and education, a new type of religious citizenship will be born. The true tension in Williams' work is not between male and female, Britain and France, Dissenter and Anglican; the real tension is between the *ancien regime* and the new world order that she believed the French Revolution would bring. For Williams and many other writers during the 1790s, the Revolution signified a break with the status quo in eschatological proportions. In Williams' writing, the "end times" are a joyful harbinger for the new world order, an egalitarian and "Enlightened period, when such evils are no more."[172]

Helen Maria Williams: Sensibility, Dissent, and Performance

Helen Maria Williams was born in 1761 to a Dissenting Presbyterian family. As her father, Charles Williams, died when she was very young, Williams and her sister were raised primarily by their mother. Deeply influenced by her mother's Scottish Presbyterianism, Williams' religion had a powerful effect on her writing; later in life she described her own religious upbringing as having "all the severity of dissenting principles."[173] Also influential during her youth was the Reverend Dr. Andrew Kippis, a

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[172] Ibid., 65.

[173] Helen Maria Williams, *Letters on the Events Which Have Passed in France Since the Restoration in 1815*. Ed. Janet M. Todd (New York: Delmar Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1975), p. 194 See also Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams in the Age of Revolution* (London: Associated University Press, 2002). Kennedy notes that Mrs. Williams' piety was "legendary in the family," and a relative of the Williams family

Dissenting Whig minister who was an intimate friend of the Williams family and acted as Helen Maria Williams' father figure, religious mentor and, later, her literary mentor as well.[174] Kippis introduced Williams to the London social world and throughout the 1780s, Williams moved comfortably in literary, political, and artistic circles that included William Godwin, Elizabeth Montagu, Joseph and Thomas Wharton, Samuel Johnson, Charlotte Burney (sister of Frances), William Wordsworth, Robert Burns, and Anna Seward.[175] During this time, she steadily published several successful poems: "Edwin and Eltruda" (1782), "An Ode on the Peace" (1783), "Peru" (1784), "Poems" (1786), and "A Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating the Slave Trade" (1788), earning herself, as Deborah Kennedy notes, a "respectable position as a young poet," who had a "willingness to deal with the ills of the world through the medium of the sympathetic heart, for which she became known."[176] This early work showcases Williams' politics of

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would later write that she led her family with "Scottish Presbyterian piety – fervent, grave, deep" (23).

[174] When Kippis died, Williams wrote about him in elegy: "My earliest teacher, and my latest guide. / First, in the house of pray'r, his voice impressed / Celestial precepts on my infant breast; / 'The hope that rests above,' my childhood taught, / And lifted first to God my ductile thought," Kennedy, 23.

[175] Although Williams was educated by Kippis and though she associated with various Rational Dissenters like Wollstonecraft and Godwin, she never attended a Dissenting academy herself. The reason I have chosen to analyze Williams, with her particular brand of emotive Presbyterianism, is because her depictions of religious practice fit more readily into the private, feminine "repertoire" of religious expression performed by the other authors in this study. It is worth noting that not all Rational Dissenters would have utilized sentimentality and effusive performance in their writing and religious practices. For more on Dissenting academies in eighteenth-century Britain and the rigor of their academic practice, see Gregory Claeys, "Virtuous Commerce and Free Theology: Political Economy and the Dissenting Academies 1750-1800," *History of Political Thought* 20 (Spring 1999).

[176] Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution*, 27, 26.

sensibility and her dedication to both pacifism and social reform, in particular her commitment to abolition and her hatred of imperialism.

In 1790, when she was twenty-nine years old, Williams published her first and only novel, *Julia*. *Julia* is the tale of a beautiful young country heiress who is orphaned early in life and goes to London to live with her beloved cousin Charlotte. When Julia discovers that Charlotte's husband, Frederick Seymour, is in love with her, she must resist his advances (which become increasingly aggressive and desperate throughout the novel) and protect her cousin from the knowledge of Seymour's emotional infidelity. Ultimately, female virtue and sisterhood prevail, as Julia successfully evades the attentions of Seymour, who dies. The novel ends with the two cousins living together peacefully, "admired, respected, and beloved," with Seymour remaining only as a memory of "unconquered weakness."[177] Interspersed throughout the novel are various poems – written by Williams – that highlight the social and political beliefs of both author and main character, most notably a prophetic dream-poem entitled, "The Bastille: A Vision."[178] Early reviews of *Julia* were almost entirely favorable, praising the novel for its simplicity, morality, and its instructive narrative. The *European Magazine*'s review

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[177] Helen Maria Williams, *Julia*, Ed. Natasha Duquette (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2010), p. 158. References are to this edition.

[178] The poem, which is inserted near the end of the novel, is fictitiously written by a former prisoner of the Bastille who foresees the prison's downfall: "Now, favour'd mortal, now behold! / To soothe thy captive state, / I ope the book of fate, / Mark what its registers unfold! / Where this dark pile in chaos lies, / With nature's execrations hurl'd, / Shall Freedom's sacred temple rise, / And charm an emulating world!" (151). Notably, Freedom is represented as a new religious order, rising from the rubble of the *ancien regime*.

corroborates common opinion of the work when it insists that the novel speaks to readers "whose uncorrupted hearts are capable of tasting with delight the simplicity of nature, the modesty of virtue."[179] Fellow radical Mary Wollstonecraft likewise praised *Julia*, though she found its heroine to be perhaps too perfect, and too lacking in real human passion to be fully instructive: "Julia's principles are so fixed that nothing can tempt her to act wrong; and as she appears like a rock, against which the waves vainly beat, no anxiety is felt for her safety."[180]

Williams' journey to France in 1790 would be pivotal for her development as a radical thinker and writer. As is evidenced in her poetry, personal letters, and *Julia*, Williams already considered herself a pro-revolutionary (though she abhorred the concomitant violence of war) before she left for her trip to the continent; her experiences in France, however, solidified and enhanced her radicalism. Her *Letters* detail her arrival on the day of the Festival of the Federation, her unbridled enthusiasm for the early days of the Revolution, her eventual siding with the Girondins in 1792, and her continued loyalty to France and the ideals of the Revolution, even after the horrific events of the

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[179] *European Magazine*, 17 (June 1790): 435.

[180] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Analytical Review*, 7 (May 1790): 97-100. Many feminist critics have subsequently disagreed with Wollstonecraft and fully embraced the agency of Julia's character. For instance, Eleanor Ty writes, "Julia…can be seen as acting from a sense of self-preservation in the light of Williams's objections to patriarchy and its possible abuses. In not allowing her heroine to let herself be won over by the name of the Father, Williams reveals her ambivalent feelings about the androcentric bias of her society. The novel can also be viewed as Williams's resistance to traditional expectations of woman, later defined in the novels and conduct books of conservatives such as West and More, which the author may have found restrictive and too prescriptive." Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); 75-6.

Terror and her own temporary imprisonment in 1793. After her incarceration, she fled to Switzerland briefly, but in 1794 Williams returned to Paris and composed her final volume of the *Letters from France*, which details events until the establishment of the Constitution in 1795 and describes "scenes which have passed in the prisons of Paris."[181]

Though both *Julia* and the *Letters* were initially well received, the tide of popularity eventually turned against Williams in Britain. This was not necessarily due to an increased radicalism in Williams' writing – her politics, passions, and pacifism remain fairly constant throughout the letters – but rather to an increasing conservatism and an escalating paranoia about insurrection in Britain.[182] Unfortunately, as with many women who enter the public sphere, Williams' personal life was slanderously used as "evidence" of her political and moral corruption. During her stay in Switzerland, Williams traveled with her fellow radical expatriate John Hurford Stone, who eventually divorced his wife in 1794. When Williams returned to Paris, Stone moved in with the Williams family. This move was either the continuation of a lifelong friendship or the beginning of a committed partnership between the two that may or may not have resulted in marriage.[183]

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[181] Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Politics of France, from the Twenty-eighth of July 1794, to the Establishment of the Constitution in 1795, and of the Scenes Which Have Passed in the Prisons of Paris* (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1796).

[182] See my work on Ann Radcliffe's publishing after the Terror in Chapter Five. To say that the British popular attitude toward the French Revolution was reactionary is an understatement. See also John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), which argues that even "imaginable" offenses against the king and state became treasonous in the latter part of the 1790s.

[183] Janet Todd notes that Williams referred to Stone as her "husband" among friends, and their relationship was "certainly a deep friendship, a literary collaboration, and possibly in later years a marriage." Janet Todd, *Letters from France: Introduction*, p. 6. Deborah

Though Williams never married anyone else and remained faithful to Stone (either platonically or romantically) until his death, this aspect of her personal life merely exacerbated the vitriol against her in Britain. Williams' fidelity toward Stone, as Janet Todd notes, "make[s] the constant references in England to her licentiousness and profligacy an ironic commentary on the fears and obsessions of the age."[184]

Essential for any reading of *Julia* or the *Letters from France* is an understanding of the terms "sensibility" and "enthusiasm," and the ways those terms have functioned both in the eighteenth-century literary and Dissenting traditions and in modern literary criticism. In the latter half of the 1790s, *Julia* and the *Letters from France* were dubbed too "effusive" or "enthusiastic" in their radicalism. As I will demonstrate, both of these classifications reify common late eighteenth-century beliefs about emotion in political writing and need to be reconsidered or removed in order to fully appreciate the radical potential of Williams' work, and to free her writing from residual prejudice against both women writers and Dissenters. Critics and scholars have long recognized that *Julia* is a "novel of sensibility," and this generic categorization mutes the political efficacy of her work by relegating it to what became in the 1790s an ineffectual "female" genre.[185]

Kennedy believes there is no real evidence to prove that their marriage was official. Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution*, pp. 126-7. For my argument, Williams' legal marriage status matters less than the discrimination and notoriety she faced for her sexuality.

[184] Ibid., Todd, p. 6.

[185] Unfortunately, some modern scholars have followed this trend, labeling Williams as "naïve in her enthusiasms, with her sensibility often obtrusively on display," and "more emotional than reasoned." Chris Jones, "Helen Maria Williams and Radical Sensibility," *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* (Vol. 12:1, 1989), p. 5. Though Jones certainly recognizes the revolutionary potential of Williams' writing, the above descriptions reify the supposed connections between femininity and excessive emotion and thus cannot be

Likewise, readings that posit that the *Letters* are too "enthusiastic" or hyperbolic partake in a dominant Anglican narrative that characterized Dissenters as fanatical, irrational, or merely representative of extreme, marginal religious belief.[186] In actuality, Williams' work participates in an established genre of religious-political writing that had been perpetuated by Dissenting male writers for over a century: by expressing her revolutionary ideology in an effusive style, she joins the ranks of Richard Price and her own mentor, Reverend Andrew Kippis, who routinely invoked rhetorical sensibility and effusive religious language in political pamphlets, sermons, and public addresses to associations like the Revolutionary Society.[187] More importantly, Williams' work posits

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ignored in a feminist reading of Williams. In *Julia*, we can observe Williams resisting the narrative that equates emotion with femininity and reason with masculinity. For instance, Seymour, who reads as a Werther-like "man of feeling," represents emotion for Williams, while Julia remains the voice of feminine reason throughout the novel. Additionally, Seymour's excessive emotion is represented negatively throughout the novel, demonstrating that Williams knew the limits of effective sensibility. Another crucial reason to include Williams in our political histories of the 1790s is that *she believed herself* to be an active participant in the Revolutionary debates. Her accounts in the *Letters* are more authentic in their first-hand descriptions than the writing of many of her English contemporaries who never visited the continent. Finally, it is important to remember that we seldom exclude male writers on the basis of their passion, nor do we shy away from analyzing them because their style is effusive (Edmund Burke is of course a prime example here).

[186] Misty Anderson has shown how British attitudes toward Methodism, for instance, reveal imaginative cultural patterns and constructions that frame eighteenth-century Methodists as both fascinating and dangerously extreme "others," run away with their religious enthusiasm and fervor. Misty G. Anderson, *Imagining Methodism in Eighteenth-century Britain: Enthusiasm, Belief, and the Borders of the Self* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 2012.

[187] See Richard Price's *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, for instance, which insists that the Revolution is a harbinger of what Price envisioned as a millennialist new order, and states, "If you love your country, you cannot be zealous enough in promoting the cause of liberty in it." Price's Dissenting speech incited the Revolutionary controversy in Britain in 1789, in part because of its effusive and emotive style.

that sensibility and enthusiasm governed by Dissenting feminine reason can be useful tools for social progression.

As Todd has argued, the popularity of sentimental writing experienced a sharp decline in the 1790s, as both conservatives and radicals sought to categorize their opponents as excessively emotive and irrational in the pamphlet wars of the decade.[188] Regrettably, many writers (both men and women) who contributed to this decline simultaneously associated sensibility with femininity in their attacks. For instance, Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Man* criticizes Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* by taunting, "Even the Ladies, Sir, may repeat your sprightly sallies, and retail in theatrical attitudes many of your pathetic exclamations. Sensibility is the *manie* of the day…[and] all your pretty flights arise from your pampered sensibility."[189] She additionally argues for the benefits of the restraint of feeling: "truly sublime is the character that acts from principle, and governs the inferior springs of activity without slackening their vigour, whose feelings give vital heat to his resolves, but never hurry him into the feverish eccentricities."[190] Claudia Johnson likewise traces the decline of sensibility to Burke's *Reflections*, arguing that his "irrational" and "passionate celebration" of Marie Antoinette and the *ancien regime* "inaugurated the unsettling and

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[188] See Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London and New York: Meuthen, 1986).

[189] Mary Wollstonecraft, "Vindication of the Rights of Men, in a Letter to the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, Occasioned by his Reflections on the Revolution in France," *Revolutions in Romantic Literature: An Anthology of Print Culture, 1780-1832,* Ed. Paul Keen (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004), p. 204.

[190] Ibid., 204.

highly politicized phase of sentimentality" that followed shortly thereafter.[191] Even Burke's supporters felt his writing was "overheated and embarrassing," and Johnson reminds us that Burke is "not so much lamenting the fall of Marie Antoinette as he is the fall of sentimentalized manhood, the kind of manhood inclined to venerate her."[192] Additionally, both conservatives and radicals paired attacks on sentimentalism with nationalist rhetoric, framing sentimentality in writing as a "French" extravagance to be contrasted with stolid British rationalism. Linda Colley has demonstrated that throughout the eighteenth century, anti-Gallicism was a popular strategy for gaining the sympathies of other Britons: "men and women came to define themselves as Britons…because circumstances impressed them with the belief that they were different from those beyond their shores, and in particular different from their prime enemy, the French."[193] This nationalist self-identification that Colley describes functioned in tandem with the continued dominance of Anglicanism in England, and the persistent rejection of both Dissenting and Nonconformist religious practice. Colley continues, "An uncompromising Protestantism was the foundation on which their state was explicitly and unapologetically

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191 Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 3.

192 Ibid., 4. Todd additionally writes that conservatives during the period "worked to bind sensibility to radicalism." Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*, p. 130. See also Marilyn Butler, who has argued that sentimentalism encouraged insurrections against established power. Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Backgrounds, 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) p. 103.

193 Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 17. Additionally, while her fellow radicals like Wollstonecraft criticized the fashions and fripperies of French women, Williams venerates the French throughout her *Letters*, as I will explore below.

based."[194] As such, to label sentimentalism as "French" was a damning epithet in both nationalist and religious terms, as well as a negatively gendered association.

Despite these tensions, Williams "found sensibility compatible with her Dissenting commitment to reform," and embraced the style in both *Julia* and the *Letters*.[195] Recently, feminist critics have reclaimed the power of the sensibility in Williams' work by highlighting the feminine agency inherent in her writing and ideologies. Natasha Duquette writes, "Julia represents an active form of sensibility attuned to the aesthetic appeal of natural landscapes, receptive to the textual force of sublime poetry, and responsive to the extremes of human suffering."[196] Orianne Smith likewise differentiates between male and female sensibility, promoting the activism of the latter: "Williams counters the valorization of excessive and unrestrained male sensibility…with a model of female sensibility that derives its strength and resilience from placing the good of the community above the satisfaction of individual needs and desires."[197]

To these arguments, I would add that Williams' representations and uses of sensibility in *Julia* and the *Letters* are laden with emotive linguistic performances that comply with the oral and written tradition carried out by Price, Kippis, and other

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[194] Ibid., p. 18.

[195] Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution*, p 36.

[196] Duquette, Introduction to *Julia*, p. xv.

[197] Orianne Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 108. Smith ultimately argues that Williams was able to realize her radical vision more fully in the *Letters* than in *Julia*, due to the genre of the novel and the limits of sensibility in fiction.

eighteenth-century Dissenters. For instance, Williams' writing is often characterized by vocal expressions of happiness for God's will being carried out through revolutionary action:

> Must I be told that my mind is perverted, that I am become dead to all sensations of sympathy, because I do not weep with those who have lost a part of their superfluities, rather than *rejoice that the oppressed are protected*, that the wronged are redressed, that the captive is set at liberty, and that the poor have bread? Did the Universal Parent of the human race implant the feelings of pity in the heart, that they should be confined to the artificial wants of vanity, the ideal deprivations of greatness; that they should be fixed beneath the dome of a palace, or locked within the gate of the chateau; without extending *one commiserating sigh to the wretched hamlet*, as its famished inhabitants, though not ennobled by man, did not bear, at least, *the ensigns of nobility stamped on our nature by God*?[198]

In *Julia*, these vocal expressions are also manifest as direct quotations from psalms and scriptures, which I will explore more fully below, tying her effusions to Dissenting sensibility. In addition, Williams also frequently expresses her emotion for instances of the communal and participatory enthusiasm associated with Dissent:

> Events of the most astonishing and marvelous are here the occurrences of the day, and every newspaper is filled with articles of intelligence that will form a new era in the history of mankind. The sentiments of the people also are elevated far above the pitch of common life. All the motives which most powerfully stimulate the mind in its ordinary state seem repressed in consideration of the public good, and every selfish interest is sacrificed with fond alacrity at the altar of the country.[199]

Finally, her Dissenting belief in charity and effusive social compassion is often expressed in her writing's "heroic zeal for the happiness of others."[200]

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[198] Helen Maria Williams, *Letters from France*, pp. 218-9.

[199] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[200] Ibid., p. 5.

As such, the sensibility expressed in *Julia* and the *Letters* can be read as a specific type of Dissenting performance. In the Presbyterian tradition, enthusiasm, particularly in the practices of psalm singing and reading, makes Presbyterianism a physically, vocally, and artistically performative faith. This practice had both positive and negative effects for Presbyterians living in eighteenth-century Britain. On one hand, enthusiastic performance fosters a sense of community and sociability via artistic and religious expression; on the other, enthusiasm could subject practitioners to negative stereotyping from Anglican observers who would seek to marginalize them. Orianne Smith reminds us of the complications of written political performance in marginalized groups: if an audience does not reciprocate a performance, the performance fails; thus, preexisting hierarchies are often reified when audiences fail to recognize the intentions of marginalized performers. In the 1790s, such was the case for radical writers of Dissenting sensibility like Williams. After the Terror, "the terms of reciprocity were renegotiated by those affiliated with the dominant community: Anglican pro-government writers… set out to deny the illocutionary rights of other, less powerful members of the community, including Radical Dissenters and revolutionary sympathizers."[201] Williams' work was thus suspect by her contemporaries not only because of her gender and French sympathies, but also because of her affiliation with and use of the Dissenting tradition of sensibility.

Many English writers in the Romantic era, like those in the Civil War era that preceded it by a century, saw the political unrest and revolutionary events of the 1790s as

[201] Smith, *Romantic Women Writers*, p. 25.

biblical, eschatological signs. Some – like Williams – framed these events in what Orianne Smith dubs "progressive millennialism;" that is, they believed "the kingdom of God would come gradually as the result of Christian, human instrumentalities."[202] Anti-revolutionary writers like Burke conversely framed the revolutionary moment in much more negative, cataclysmic terms – these writers Smith dubs "catastrophic millenarianists," and they viewed the Revolution as a harbinger of impending doom.[203] In both *Julia* and the *Letters from France*, Williams colors the Revolution as a sign and celebration of impending renewal.[204] Crucially, Williams characterizes this renewal as

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[202] Orianne Smith, *Romantic Women Writer*s, p. 11. See also J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism: 1780-1850* (London: Routledge Revivals, 1979). Harrison makes a similar distinction between "premillennialists," who believed in a sudden, catastrophic end times, and "postmillennialists," who anticipated a steady, progressive, human-centered eschatology.

[203] Ibid., p. 11. Smith generalizes, "with very few exceptions, this choice reflected a sharp division between the Nonconformist community and members of the Established Church that centered on the religious and political implications of contract theory." This is varied, of course, but it is important to note this division has less to do with denominational difference and more to do with extrinsic power structures: as members of the dominant culture, Anglicans would logically feel more trepidation about impending changes to the status quo.

[204] The sustained use of eschatological biblical language in Dissenting political rhetoric during the period certainly isn't unique to Williams – in fact, it is ubiquitous. Richard Price, for instance, writes how pleased he is to have seen the French Revolution in his lifetime: "I could almost say, *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation*," and in the same paragraph rejoices that "the dominion of priests [gives] way to the dominion of reason and conscience." Richard Price, "A Discourse on the Love of Our Country," *Lend me Your Ears: Great Speeches in History*, Ed. William Saffire, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 98. Price's fervor could of course be interpreted as anti-Catholicism and a rhetorical attempt to equate rationality with Protestantism – many readers have been quick to interpret this kind of writing as such. Kennedy, for instance, writes that Williams "had little patience for Catholicism…and was especially critical of convents, monasteries, and the rule of celibacy." Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams*, p. 61. Kennedy is selective in her illustrations of Williams' views on Catholicism, however, as I will explain below.

both a utopian break from the old systems of power in the *ancien regime,* and a surrogation – a repetition with revision – of her own Dissenting religious tolerance.[205] In essence, Williams' writing promotes what I will call "religious citizenship" – a practice that unites the values of the French Revolution – *liberte, egalite, fraternite* – with the values of Dissent: sensibility and enthusiasm, tolerance, charity, equality, sorority, women's education, and the questioning of authority. In my close reading below, I demonstrate how women form an essential part of religious citizenry in Williams' new regime.

Williams' work also participates in the Dissenting tradition because of its emphasis on religion and tolerance as constitutive features of the new world order; an important aspect of her tolerance is its denominationalism.[206] Daniel White's work on Dissent emphasizes the distinction between sectarianism and denominationalism; the

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[205] Here I refer to Joseph Roach's theory of "surrogation," the process by which culture is continually revised via replacements and substitutes to fill vacancies in the social milieu. I canvas this idea more fully in Chapter One. Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York City: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 3.

[206] As I have explained in Chapter One, Britain in the eighteenth century, as Colley has written, was a "pluralist yet aggressively Protestant polity," and one that afforded or prohibited rights of citizenry even within the bounds of Protestantism. Colley, *Britons*, p. 19. Since the Toleration Act of 1689, Dissenters were allowed the freedom of worship, and unlike Catholics, Unitarians, atheists, and non-Christians, could found their own schools, bear arms, vote (if they met property requirements), and build and worship inside their own churches, provided they swore the Oaths of Allegiance and Supremacy. They could likewise be employed in some government offices if they conformed "at least occasionally to Anglican worship," Ibid., p. 19. Conversely, Dissenters were prohibited from sitting in Parliament, had to register their public meetings, and, like Catholics, were banned from meeting in private (this last measure was meant as a safeguard from insurrection). Since the Reformation, politics and religion in England were inextricably linked; since the Civil War, Dissent in particular was culturally and legally bound to the politics of toleration.

latter, he argues, is characterized (among other things) by "inclusive membership without the imposition of traditional prerequisites, breadth and tolerance…unstressed doctrinal positions…and acceptance of the values of secular society and the state."[207] White's work ultimately demonstrates the ways in which late-eighteenth-century Dissenting divisions were more denominational than sectarian; this fostered a sense of "openness" that allowed religious thinkers to "shape and reshape their aesthetic, political, and moral values through encounters with the range of theologies, habits, and manners accompanying the various communities of English nonconformity."[208] This denominational acceptance certainly influences Williams's novel, for although Williams certainly self-identifies as a Dissenting Presbyterian, religious practice in *Julia* is – on the surface – generally Christian and does not *insist upon* the practice of any particular type of Protestantism.

Moreover, in Williams's *Letters*, her religious philosophy reads even more progressive or "open" than the prevailing Dissenting denominational approach. The *Letters* reveal that unlike other popular Dissenting writers of her time such as Godwin and Barbauld, Williams is less interested in reshaping the values of her denomination than in encouraging open acceptance of all Protestant and even Catholic religious practices, as is evidenced in the opening passage at the beginning of this chapter. In this

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[207] For White's more detailed description of the differences between sectarianism and denominationalism, see *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (2006) (6-16). White relies strongly on Bryan Wilson's *Patterns of Sectarianism* (1967), which in turn revisits Peter L. Berger's "The Sociological Study of Sectarianism" (1954). Berger, Wilson, and White all emphasize the stricter nature of sectarianism versus the more open or fluid practices and ideologies of denominationalism.

[208] Ibid., p. 7.

scene and shortly thereafter, Williams attends Catholic Mass with her friends, praises the "affecting" ceremonies of the Mass (including the "elevation of the Host," which signifies transubstantiation – one of the least-Protestant features of Catholicism, and arguably the most controversial Catholic rite in England), and observes that Catholic funereal rites are beautiful and emotive: "the heart that can delude itself with the belief that his prayers may avail anything to the departed object of its affections, must find consolation in thus uniting a tribute of tenderness, with the performance of a religious duty."[209] Most importantly, her tolerance is nearly always accompanied by her revolutionary fervor, as it is in the celebration at Negre-Peliffe.

Presbyterians like Williams additionally engaged in several religious practices that accentuated their association with ideologies of tolerance and the subversion of authority. For instance, Dissenters generally did not conform to the fixed styles of worship that can be seen in both the Catholic and Anglican faiths. Eighteenth-century Presbyterians espoused the "regulative principle" to guide their worship; this principle emphasizes adherence to the scriptures, but offers a measure of individual interpretation and variation in religious practice: as long as the practice does not contradict the scriptures or seem extraneous to scriptural teachings, it is permissible. Williams'

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[209] Helen Maria Williams, *Letters from France*, p. 113. Williams' writing is replete with similar views on religious toleration. Her epic poem, "Peru," is not only a critique of colonialism, but also one that frames Christian missionaries as the villains against heroic Incan priests. Likewise, her *Letters* are repeatedly unrestrained in their praise of Henry IV of France ("I love to be put in mind of Henry the Fourth"), the famously tolerant sixteenth-century monarch who issued the Edict of Nantes and thus gained significant religious freedoms for Protestants in France (103). At other moments, her toleration is playful. Delighted by celebrating her friend's name day on the feast of St. Augustin, Williams jokes, "Indeed I am persuaded that Luther and Calvin, if they had been of our party, would have reconciled their minds to these charming rites of superstition (201).

Dissenting erudition in the scriptures is evidenced repeatedly throughout *Julia*. Protestantism in general affords more agency to individual religious adherents than Catholicism, and this agency is extended even further in Presbyterianism, which has promoted individual reading, education, and the interpretation of the Bible since its inception.

All of these features – sensibility and enthusiasm, tolerance, knowledge of scripture, the subversion of authority and the agency of the individual – are performances that will be essential to remember while analyzing Williams' work. Both *Julia* and the *Letters from France* are informed by Williams' active Presbyterianism, which centrally promotes the ideal that the individual is both responsible for and can revolutionize the collective or communal experience. Also essential is the notion that Dissent and Presbyterianism espouse and promote the ideals of individual *agency*; this concept will be crucial when analyzing the ways performativity functions in religious and gendered representations in Williams' writing. Both *Julia* and the *Letters* foster a general religious citizenship that encourages equality and individual responsibility in order to inform public welfare and state governance. Pierre Bourdieu is useful for observing Williams' representations of religious citizenship through performance because of his emphasis on the agency of the subject. For Bourdieu, the subject's habitus can impact the fields in which it circulates by performing or rejecting the unspoken "rules" of that field – that is, the subject has the agency to make systemic or institutional change.[210] This is different from theories of performance that question the power of individual subjects' agency.

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[210] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 2010).

Judith Butler, for instance, argues the subject is constructed by a series of performances that, repeated, become naturalized. "Indeed," she asks, "is there a subject who pre-exists its encounter with the field, or is the subject itself formed as an embodied being precisely through its participation in the social game within the confines of the social field?"[211] While performances *are* constitutive for Butler, the subject nevertheless only *conforms* to pre-existing identity categories and practices and thus lacks much of the agency that Bourdieu apportions to the habitus. Revolutionaries like Williams must necessarily believe in the power of individual agents coming together to change collective experience. Additionally, because Williams' writing is filtered through a radical Presbyterian lens (which, as I have written above, promotes performances of enthusiastic sociability, tolerance, and transgressive individuality), we cannot underestimate the primacy of individual agency in her political ideals.

In another way, Butler's sense of performativity *is* essential for considering Williams' writing. Namely, Butler's theories privilege the effective power of marginalized groups who perform identity transgressively (like early feminists, Dissenters, and even those who supported religious toleration in the 1790s) and thus subvert hierarchical power systems by revealing their artificiality. Overall, performances of religious citizenship in Williams' writing promote a Dissenting and subjectivist conception of religious citizenship that is not only devoid of sectarian or denominational specificity, but is also inclusive of all genders. In *Julia* and her *Letters*, Williams uses her Dissenting lens to champion feminine leadership, charity and anti-materialism, sorority,

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[211] Judith Butler, "Performativity's Social Magic," *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, Ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pg. 119.

knowledge of scripture, and women's literacy and education. Through these Dissenting practices, she feels change can be enacted via individual performances of religious citizenship. The tension in *Julia* and the *Letters* is between new and old ways of life and governance, specifically between the promised equality of the coming republic and the older, divisive modes of social organization that had theretofore separated genders and religions.

Julia *and Religious Citizenship:*

In *Julia*, Williams fictionalizes many of the revolutionary Dissenting sentiments that she expresses throughout her *Letters from France*. In this section, I will use the *Letters* to inform my reading of the novel. Throughout the *Letters*, Williams expresses more fear over the potential "return of intolerance" than any one particular religious sect, and this fear of intolerance could likewise apply to the Anglican state in Britain. With the overthrow of the *ancien regime* in France – which of course included the denunciation of the Catholic Church's power – secularism and religious toleration became a dominant part of the political rhetoric at the end of the eighteenth century, as British writers and politicians examined and questioned the "natural" dominance of Anglicanism. As Mark Canuel writes, although Anglicanism had seemed like an essential and inherent part of Britain's social system, the confessional state actually enforced many artificial performances (oaths of allegiance, religious censuses, enforced worship) to promote its supremacy. Canuel's work demonstrates "how reformers of the late eighteenth century pointed out, first of all, that the supposedly natural authority of the church suppressed the

actual diversity of beliefs that existed within Britain's shores."[212] Essentially, a tolerant secularism became the logical political step toward exposing the artificial nature of Anglicanism's dominance in Britain, and became one of the most prevalent ideological standpoints of the Revolutionary years.[213]

Fascinatingly, Williams' plan for religious citizenship is widely inclusive of non-Protestants, and even non-Christians.[214] As such, her writing *appears* secular in its

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212 Mark Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British writing, 1790-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 6.

213 While this spirit of toleration could apply to both Catholics and Dissenters (when it was applied at all), it is important to remember the differences between the two religions, and to emphasize that not all secularists or adherents of toleration were actually tolerant of both – far from it. As I explain in Chapter One, any non-Anglican living in Britain in the eighteenth century was considered a Nonconformist, but Dissenters were *Protestant* non-Anglicans, which afforded them cultural and social (as well as legal) allowances that Catholics could not enjoy. The civil rights afforded to Dissenters necessarily granted them a certain amount of public visibility in their religious performances and practices that was denied to recusant Catholics. As such, Dissenters on the whole were not as socially marginalized as Catholics and formed a more active part of the dominant cultural milieu. Dissenters specifically chose to distance themselves from other Nonconformists by calling themselves Dissenters. Culturally, some eighteenth-century Anglicans could understand and even respect this gesture, as their own Protestantism historically indicated their dissent from Catholicism. Thus, while "Nonconformist" was a compulsory identity in an Anglican confessional state, "Dissenter" as a moniker was both enforced and self-proclaimed: a mixture of suppression, defiance, and pride in both legal and cultural terms.

214 This is evident not only in the ways she embraces Catholic practice in the *Letter*s, but also in her anti-colonialist sentiments expressed in "Peru," the *Letters*, and throughout *Julia*. This paper does not have space to fully canvass the ways Williams represents tolerance of non-Christian religions, but it is worth noting that Williams makes specific links between colonialism, capitalism, and the absence of Christian sympathy in her work. For example, when visiting Orleans, Williams and her companions visit a sugar refinery, the "principle article of commerce" in the city. While observing the refining process, Williams is struck with horror when considering that the sugar is figuratively "stained with the blood of Africans" (33). Her following lamentation is peppered with the language of trade: "The long train of calamities which are the portion of that unhappy race, crowded in sad succession upon my mind, and I observed, with a degree of horror which I could not repress, the process of a luxury obtained for the inhabitants of one part of the globe, by the wrongs, the agonies, the despair of the inhabitants of another

tolerance and inclusivity, but is actually much less secular in its promotion of Dissenting religious principles.[215] Is it essential to recognize, however, that Williams' promotion of religious citizenship differs greatly from the type of established religion that Burke advocates in his *Reflections,* and that while one of her characters in *Julia* functions as a potential foil to Enlightened thinkers who would eschew religion after the Revolution, more than one of her characters also serve as foils to the type of confessional state that Burke and other conservative Anglican writers and politicians hoped to preserve.

Burke infamously writes, "We know, and what is better, we feel inwardly, that religion is the basis of civil society and the source of all good and of all comfort" (79). Williams agrees with this sentiment in her depiction of Mr. Seymour (the elder brother of Frederick Seymour), who abuses his lovely and dependent relation, Mrs. Meynell, by forcing her into a disadvantageous marriage with a poor, uneducated man to "get her more into his clutches" "for his own vile ends" (109). Through her depictions of Mr. Seymour as an Enlightened, cosmopolitan figure ("Mr. Seymour…was possessed of considerable talents, and great taste for literature, was brilliant in conversation… he had a perfect knowledge of the world") who has nonetheless descended into depravity, Williams demonstrates the inefficacy of tolerant sensibility when separated from religion: "In a mind where the principles of religion and integrity are firmly established, sensibility

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part….Why, in the public discussions in France and in England, on the Slave Trade, are the possibilities of gain and loss calculated with such nice precision? Why are crimes and injustice, desolation and death, treated in a style so very mercantile that humanity listens in despair to their deliberations (32-3).

[215] See my work in Chapter Two, where I make distinctions between tolerance and secularism in Charlotte Smith's *Desmond.*

is not merely the ally of weakness, or the slave of guilt, but serves to give a stronger impulse to virtue" (22, 63).

Williams also utilizes biblical passages to illustrate Mr. Seymour's villainy: "Mr. Seymour…was conscious of having entirely reversed that passage of scripture, which declares 'that no man liveth to himself,' for he had lived to himself only" (135).[216] On the surface, this description highlights Seymour's selfishness, but this passage actually reads as a complex indictment upon those who would, in turn, judge Mr. Seymour. The passage (which would have been known to erudite Dissenting readers) continues, "You then, why do you judge your brother and sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat."[217] Williams is also careful to explain, "Mr. Seymour possessed strong feelings, and his heart was capable of tenderness; but ambition, and long commerce with the world, had almost entirely blunted his sensibility" (22). By first resisting a blanket condemnation of irreligious behavior, and then demonstrating that Mr. Seymour's villainy is learned and not innate, Williams distinguishes her notions of religious practice from Burke's opinion that, "We know, and it is our pride to know, that man is by his constitution a religious animal; that atheism is against, not only our reason, but our instinct" (80). Williams conversely demonstrates that atheism or a life lived without religious principle can actually be reasonable and instinctual, and religious citizenship requires an active and continually renewed

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[216] Romans 14:7.

[217] Romans 14:10. The overarching thesis of this scriptural passage is to warn against judging others by your own perceived notions of religion. In using this passage in her work, Williams demonstrates that she recognizes the hypocrisy latent in religious critiques, and as such acknowledges her own faults in prescribing religious citizenship.

commitment to belief and religious performance. In creating this religious meta-commentary around Mr. Seymour's character, Williams adds nuance to Burke's more simplistic conceptualization of belief, which conflates religion with humanity and atheism with depravity, and demonstrates that sensibility and religion are performed and enacted, not natural.

It is dually significant that Mr. Seymour, who additionally serves as an emblem of the power afforded men by the hegemony of the *ancien regime*, is primarily guilty of abuses toward women (that is, to both Mrs. Meynell and his wife, to whom is he unfaithful). As such, Williams demonstrates how power without active religious sensibility (such as the power dynamic that exists between the Anglican confessional state and masculinity in the late eighteenth century) has specifically functioned to *dis*empower women. What is more, individual female friendship is represented as the antidote to corruption and old vice when Julia intercedes on Mrs. Meynell's behalf: "what gave [Mr. Seymour] far greater vexation was, the progress of [Julia's] friendship for Mrs. Meynell; for he saw that at the very moment when he was ready to seize upon his prey, Julia's friendship would rescue her form his grasp" (120). Williams' project for active, individual religious citizenship stands in opposition to Burke's hope for a continued, enforced state religion.[218]

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[218] Burke writes, "The consecration of the state by a state religious establishment is necessary, also, to operate with a wholesome awe upon free citizens, because, in order to secure their freedom, they must enjoy some determinate portion of power. To them, therefore, a religion connected with the state, and with their duty toward it, becomes even more necessary than in such society where the people, by the terms of their subjection, are confined to private sentiments and the management of their own family concerns." Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), p. 81.

Early in the novel, Julia's grandfather serves as another overt representation of the *ancien regime*, symbolizing both the regime's shortcomings and – notably – its vestigial goodness. Though Julia's grandfather dies, alluding to the death of the old order, his life and passing are documented in one of the most poignant chapters of the novel, which is designed to elicit sympathy from the reader. This positive portrayal of the old order separates Williams from contemporary Dissenting authors because it underscores her belief in a type of utopian inclusivity: in *Julia*, even the old aristocracy has ideals and practices – specifically religious ones – that will be welcome in the new republic.[219] Additionally, Julia functions as a surrogation for her grandfather – as she assumes the role as the new ruler of her family, she retains her grandfather's religious sensibility.

The grandfather, who originally lost his country manor due to his profligate wife's spending, comes to stay with Julia and her father; the three live an idyllic life, initially outside of London, and later, when Julia's uncle buys the property back for the family, at the old family manor. As "heir to an estate which had descended to him through a long line of ancestors," Julia's grandfather feels a "local attachment" to the manor that is enhanced by his "family pride" (25). As such, Williams characterizes Julia's grandfather as a country squire, tied to his land and power by familial right, and reminiscent of characters like Fielding's Squire Allworthy; he is also a commercially dependent aristocratic gentleman, wealthy from the earned income of his son. Julia's grandfather responds to two other noteworthy figures in the writing of the 1790s: the real-life Baron du Fosse and Edmund Burke's romanticized version of the "aristocratic

[219] It is also worth noting that it is easier to sentimentalize an old regime after that regime is part of the past.

gentleman" in his *Reflections*.[220] The function of the aristocratic gentleman was a crucial point of debate in the political discourse of the 1790s in particular, and was closely tied to the vexed question of religious toleration that accompanied the revolutionary years.

The first figure, the Baron du Fosse, was the father of one of Williams' acquaintances, Augustin Francois Thomas du Fosse. During her first trip to France, Williams, who was quite close to the young du Fosse's wife, stayed with the du Fosse family. The Baron figures prominently in the first volume of Williams' *Letters*: "Formed by nature for the support of the ancient government of France, he maintained his aristocratic rights with unrelenting severity, ruled his feudal tenures with a rod of iron,

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[220] Williams became acquainted with Madame du Fosse in 1785 when the latter was living in exile in London; the Baron du Fosse died in 1787; in 1789, the du Fosses invited Williams to stay with them in Paris. Williams would have been acquainted with the story of the du Fosses before she published *Julia* in 1790, especially considering the fact that she met Madame du Fosse while the Baron was still persecuting the latter. Thus, his figure at the very least was present in Williams' mind as she wrote her novel. Burke's *Reflections* and *Julia* were both published in 1790. The first volume of the *Letters* were published in 1790 also. Williams Godwin would additionally critique the aristocratic gentleman with his character Falkland in *Caleb Williams* (1794). Falkland is almost a direct riposte to Burke's fantasy. *Caleb Williams* recounts the tale of a servant who, upon discovering his master – Falkland – is a murderer, flees Falkland's estate and is relentlessly pursued by both Falkland and the law. Godwin's novel demonstrates how the late eighteenth-century system of tyranny serves to both oppress the lower classes (shown through the title character Caleb Williams, who is imprisoned, beaten, and unjustly tried throughout the novel) and also villainize those in power, as demonstrated by Falkland, the aristocratic gentleman who begins as a reasonable and generous figure, but ultimately becomes relentlessly destructive, bent on punishing Williams for discovering his secrets. *Caleb Williams* eventually illustrates Godwin's view that Enlightenment – along with its proponents, as Falkland originally is – cannot function without an overthrow of the current systems of power and wealth. In particular, the novel is a harsh critique of the ways economic power and rank influence England's judicial system in favor of the wealthy and titled. Equally significant is the first part of the novel's title, *Things as They Are*. Although it was published in 1794, this title clearly indicates that Godwin's belief that the Revolution's goals are far from attained. William Godwin, *Things as They Are, or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*, Ed. Pamela Clemit (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009).

and considered the lower order of people as a set of beings whose existence was tolerated merely for the use of the nobility."[221] In the *Letters* Williams documents the terrible history of the du Fosses, wherein the young du Fosse married a woman the Baron did not approve of and was subsequently banished and imprisoned by his father. Williams is unequivocally sympathetic toward her friends throughout this narrative, and disgusted by what she calls the "iron hand of despotism."[222]

Julia's grandfather also serves as a foil for Burke's aristocratic gentleman, who functions as a central actor in both the bygone "age of chivalry" and the present – in his *Reflections*, the aristocratic gentleman is threatened by the machinations of the French Revolution. As a benevolent subject-ruler who respects the hereditary right of the monarch and simultaneously acts as a kindly patriarch for his tenants, Burke's aristocratic gentleman was an essential part of a system of "pleasing illusions which made power gentle and obedience liberal, which harmonized the different shades of life, and which, by a bland assimilation, incorporated into politics the sentiments which beautify and soften private society."[223] In essence, this ideology reads as a world of trickle-down kindness based on the individual whims of a few men of power, and on a collective deference for traditional hierarchies.

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[221] Helen Maria Williams, *Letters from France*, p. 124. See also Eleanor Ty, who notes that Williams, in her description of her friend du Fosse's imprisonment, matches the tone in Burke's dramatic rendering of Marie Antoinette's fall from grace. Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pg. 74.

[222] Ibid., p. 191.

[223] Edmund Burke, *Reflections*, p. 67.

The *Reflections* serves as a prime example of this religious and political tension, as Burke uses the aristocratic gentleman to represent all that is good about the current Anglican Whig-aristocratic political system. Crucially, since the Test Act, Nonconformists were barred from participation in British government; thus, the "ideal" aristocrat was necessarily Anglican, as only Anglicans had the political clout to effectively govern and serve their dependents. J.G.A. Pocock reminds us, "Whatever the facts about the role of patronage in eighteenth-century government, there can be no doubt that the Whig regime was aristocratic to the bone, or that the aristocrat was expected to dispense favour, interest and influence in return for the deference of his inferiors."[224] The French Revolution, for both conservatives and radicals, served as a sign that the current Anglican-aristocratic system was under threat. Removing the Church's governmental power in France meant that the same could be done in England, and a separate church and state in England would necessarily mean religious toleration and a loss of Parliamentary power for Anglican aristocratic Whigs. In the literature of the period, this struggle is often represented as an older model of hierarchical power versus a newer, republican, democratic power – the relative strengths and weaknesses of each model that

[224] J.G.A. Pocock, Introduction to *Reflections*, p. xix. Pocock emphasizes how difficult it is to project our own twenty-first century conceptions of "liberal" and "conservative" upon the rhetorical debates of the 1790s. For instance, although we usually associate the Whig party with progression and the anti-monarchy, these associated ideals did not fully solidify until after the eighteenth century. Likewise, conservatives like Burke often believed they were being progressive: "The patronage [the aristocratic gentlemen] dispensed was that of a state structure which had been growing since the later middle ages, and had been burgeoning since the growth of trade and commerce had begun enabling the state to diversify its activities. Whig Britain was consciously post-feudal; its cardinal belief was in the natural harmony between landed and commercial wealth; and we shall never understand the *ancien regime*, whether in France or in England, if we do not realize that it believed itself to be modern, and even progressive" (xix-xx).

are showcased are of course dependent upon the political leanings of the author. Ultimately, Burke's writing champions the aristocratic gentleman as a sign of the functionality of the current system, which privileged the rising middle and aristocratic Anglican classes.[225]

Williams' aristocratic gentleman, though seemingly conservative at first glance, actually represents Williams' sense of hopeful radicalism and is emblematic of her proposed ideals of inclusive religious citizenship. Initially, Julia's grandfather bears a stronger resemblance to Burke's version of the benevolent aristocratic gentleman than to the Baron du Fosse. Williams' narrator expounds upon the grandfather's impeccable character, highlighting his "infinite benevolence and sweetness of disposition"; likewise, Williams emphasizes the grandfather's nationalism by describing his "gratifying recollection[s] of having served his king and country" (25). At first reading the character appears to conform to one of the central ideals of Burke's conservatism, namely, that the aristocratic gentleman is both a reliable leader and a lasting tribute to patriarchal deference: "people will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors;" "what we improve we are never wholly new; in what we retain we are never wholly obsolete."[226] From this description, it would seem that Williams supports the

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225 Godwin would alternatively resist this rosy-colored version of the aristocracy, as it symbolized the oppression of Non-conformists, Dissenters, and the lower classes. The differences between the portrayal of aristocratic gentlemen in Williams' and Godwin's novels can be attributed to the novels' publication dates. While Williams published *Julia* less than a year after the upheavals of 1789, Godwin released *Caleb Williams* in 1794, when British politics had taken a reactionary conservative turn away from the French Revolution. Thus, while Williams' writing depicts Julia's grandfather kindly, foreseeing hopeful outcomes of the revolution, Godwin's novel laments that the revolution has not brought significant systemic change to England, and things are still "as they are."

[226] Edmund Burke, *Reflections*, p. 29.

championing of the aristocratic gentleman in *Reflections*; however, this reading fails to account for her unrelenting portrayal of the Baron du Fosse in her *Letters*. Her uncomplicated and hyperbolic portrayal of the Baron, which she composed less than a year after *Julia*, demonstrates that Williams was very unsympathetic toward the abuses of old tyranny: "if it were the great purpose of life to be hated, perhaps no person every attained that end more completely than the Baron du Fosse."[227] So convincing is Williams' representation of the wicked du Fosse that the *Monthly Review* noted, "If anything were wanting to increase our detestation of tyrannical government, that purpose would have been effectually answered by this little history of the private distress and unnatural cruelty, which these virtuous and innocent victims endured."[228]

Though Julia's grandfather and the Baron du Fosse seem diametrically opposed, they share one commonality: they are both on their way out, and their exits are celebrated

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[227] Helen Maria Williams, *Letters from France*, p. 124. Ty corroborates this reading, representing Williams as uncompromising against the patriarchal aristocratic gentleman: "Her point is that aristocratic lineage, the dignity of the title of 'father,' and the sense of paternal duty do not guarantee kindness, generosity, or even humane behavior towards those who are powerless." Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries*, p. 75.

[228] *The Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, Article XIII. Ralph Griffiths and G.E. Griffiths, (3:429), 1790. Additionally, Orianne Smith accounts for the dissonance between Julia's grandfather and the Baron du Fosse by arguing that Williams was limited by the form of the novel and the context in which it was written: because *Julia* uses the traditionally masculine convention of subjective realism, and because Julia lives in a stolidly conservative British setting, Williams could not completely convey her radical politics in *Julia* in the same ways that she could in her *Letters from France*. To this point I would argue that actually radicalism *does* exist in *Julia* – even in Williams' depiction of Julia's grandfather – and that radicalism is explicitly confirmed in the *Letters*. Rather than reading a break between the two works, or political inefficacy in *Julia* and successful radicalism in the *Letters*, we should consider *Julia* and the *Letters* as a continuation of the same successful project that values revolution and religious citizenship.

by Williams' writing. Near the end of Williams' account of the du Fosse family, she notes how much their story resembles a romance, and joyfully asks, "Does not the old Baron die exactly in the right place; at the very page one would choose? Or, if I sometimes wish that he had lived a little longer, it is only from the desire of retribution, which, in cases of injustice and oppression, it is so natural to feel."[229] The Baron is perhaps why Williams chose to be more overt with her politics, and is certainly why she changed genres in 1790: "I am glad you think that a friend's having been persecuted, imprisoned, maimed, and almost murdered, under the ancient government of France, is a good excuse for loving the revolution. What, indeed, but friendship, could have led my attention from the annals of imagination to the records of politics, from the poetry to the prose of human life?"[230] The newfound political transparency of the *Letters* and her hatred of the Baron du Fosse should not be read as a contradiction to her characterization of Julia's grandfather, but rather as a confirmation if it. The Baron du Fosse and Julia's grandfather represent extremes of the same political figure – the aristocratic gentleman – a figure that, for Williams, is no longer a welcome part of modern republicanism and is happily part of a soon-to-be bygone era. To be blunt, Julia's aristocratic gentleman grandfather – though positively portrayed – dies. While Williams expresses an almost vindictive glee at du Fosse's death, a similar, more peaceful joy likewise accompanies the demise of Julia's kindly grandfather. Both figures represent Williams' position that a functioning republic cannot depend on the whims of benevolent patriarchs: Burke's

[229] Helen Maria Williams, *Letters from France*, p. 193.

[230] Ibid., p. 195.

Anglican aristocratic gentleman is too dependent upon individual morality and is not subject to social or systemic obligations or laws.[231]

Julia's grandfather dies nearly in the same chapter in which he is introduced, and his passing is depicted as sad but beautiful and crucial for the development of Julia's character. Williams is deliberate in her description of Julia's grandfather as "the old man," or the "patriarch of old" (25, 30). He "practiced that profuse hospitality which was the fashion of the last century," was fond of singing "his old songs," and "had much of the old-fashioned politeness;" even his house and furniture "appeared to have been made for the use of the antediluvian ages" (25, 31). This emphasis on Julia's grandfather's age is excessive and underscores the idea that this character is emblematic of a former era in its decline. Burke laments this decline, complaining that the "pleasing illusions" of chivalry "are to be dissolved by this conquering empire of light and reason. All the decent drapery of life is to be rudely torn off."[232] In contrast, Williams describes Julia's grandfather's departure favorably: "a venerable old man sinking thus gently into the arms of death, supported by filial affection, and animated by religious hope, excites a serious yet not unpleasing sensation" (26). His death and funeral are likewise framed in language that reinforce his ancestral connection to his estate and the power it confers; he "expressed his satisfaction at the thoughts of being buried in the tomb of his fathers: so true it is, that 'even from the tomb the voice of nature cries, even in our ashes live their wanted fires!'" and his funeral is attended "by a long procession of his tenants, who hung

[231] We cannot neglect nationality here – Williams' kindness toward Julia's grandfather and her critiques of the Baron du Fosse could be the result of her own national prejudices.

[232] Edmund Burke, *Reflections,* p. 67.

over his grave as if unwilling to leave it; while the old recounted to the young, all they remembered of his childhood and his youth"(33). [233]

Significantly, Williams also explains that before his death, Julia's grandfather's "chief source of happiness was drawn from religion," and this characteristic is an essential part of Williams' novel for two reasons: first, it helps us further differentiate between Williams' and Burke's visions of the *ancien regime*; and second, it introduces Williams' hopeful conception of religious citizenship, as Julia inherits her grandfather's religious practices and then uses them to inform her actions throughout the rest of the novel.[234] In the *Reflections*, Burke rhetorically pairs Anglicanism with the Whiggish *ancien regime* and associates France's revolution with the rise of atheism, insisting that man would only turn to atheism "in a moment of riot, and in a drunken delirium from the hot spirit drawn out of the alembic of hell, which in France is now so furiously

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[233] The peaceful passing of Julia's grandfather may also suggest that Williams is hopeful for a peaceful revolution in France. This hope for peace is elaborated upon in her *Letters*: "As we came out of La Maison de Ville, we were shewn, immediately opposite, the far-famed *lanterne,* at which, for want of a gallows, the first victims of popular fury were sacrificed. I own that the sight of *la lanterne* chilled the blood within my veins. At that moment, for the first time, I lamented the revolution; and, forgetting the imprudence, or the guilt, of those unfortunate men, could only reflect with horror on the dreadful expiation they had made. I painted in my imagination the agonies of their families and friends; nor could I for a considerable time chase their gloomy images from my thoughts. It is forever to be regretted, that so dark a shade of ferocious revenge was thrown across the glories of the revolution" (81).

[234] Upon the death of Julia's grandfather, the narrator observes, "nor could those who witnessed the pious resignation of his last moments avoid wishing 'to die the death of the righteous, and that their latter end might be like his!'" In her notes on the edition, Duquette writes that this line is in reference to the actual death of Rev. James Hervey, an eighteenth-century Calvinist thinker who possibly associated with Williams' mentor Kippis (165).

boiling."[235] Immediately after describing these threats, Burke then insists that Britain's only hope is to "resolve to keep an established church, an established monarchy, an established aristocracy, and an established democracy, each in the degree it exists, and in no greater."[236] For Burke, the death of the *ancien regime* signifies not only the death of the aristocratic gentleman and all he can offer society, but also the loss of the Parliamentary power the Anglican aristocratic gentleman holds. To defend this power, Burke uses the *Reflections* to rhetorically equate a *tolerant* state with an *atheist* state and frighten his readership into upholding the status quo.

For Williams and other Dissenters, a separation of church and state in France (far from being alarming), could actually herald the possibility of religious toleration for Dissenters in England. For Williams, the French Revolution did not prohibit or kill religion; rather, it merely rendered the state more flexible and tolerant in its qualifications for citizenship. For Williams, only the supremacy of the Anglican Church was threatened by the Revolution; religion itself is a vital part of the new world order she envisions in her writing. In *Julia*, the *ancien regime* is pleasantly ushered away by a "cheering" ray of light "which cometh from above," rather than by the "'conquering'" light of reason" (26). Julia's grandfather passes peacefully as the younger generation looks on, faithfully clinging to the best inheritance he has left behind: religious devotion and practice.

The moments in the novel that include Julia's grandfather (besides those spent detailing his age and class status) are taken up in demonstrations of his influence on

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[235] Edmund Burke, *Reflections*, p. 80.

[236] Ibid., p. 80.

Julia's religious beliefs. This influence is primarily manifested in a distinctly Protestant devotion to private reading of the Bible: Julia "read[s] for an hour to her grandfather the old family bible, with a long exposition; of which he liked to hear a portion every evening" (25). Likewise, Williams showcases Julia's grandfather's sense of enthusiasm, describing how he "sometimes assent[ed] to an affecting passage by the lifting up of his hands, and a movement of his lips in a short ejaculation" (25). Williams also uses these moments in the novel to directly insert scripture into her narrative: "Julia had indeed no lesson of humanity left untaught by her grandfather… He had often pointed out to his granddaughter that passage in scripture – 'Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God!'"(40).[237] Additionally, Julia's grandfather instills in Julia an appreciation of nature and the arts, cultivating both her love of the outdoors and her passion for poetry. These practices would of course eventually become associated with the sublime and with the naturalist religiosity of the Romantic era. Thus, even while Williams highlights the decline of the aristocracy as the dominant social class, she still privileges the residual religious influence of the old order.

This influence is a crucial step in the construction of Julia's character as a model for Williams' religious citizenship. Importantly, Julia, as a member of the new revolutionary generation, takes her grandfather's religious teachings a step further in that she *expands* his notions of charity. Whilst Julia's grandfather – in the tradition of the aristocratic gentleman – is "visited every Saturday morning by a set of pensioners" to whom he gives alms, Julia *actively* seeks out people (and animals) she can assist

[237] Luke 12:6-7. The passage continues, "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are numbered. Do not be afraid, for you are worth more than many sparrows."

throughout the novel, and with religious enthusiasm, "she bestowed her alms with that gentleness and sympathy, by which the value of her donations was increased, and her pity was almost as dear to the poor as her charity" (35).[238] As such, Julia's grandfather again represents the older ideal of charity and benevolence: he serves his community "with the welcome of the ancient times," and, "this benevolent old man felt charity less a duty than a pleasure" (25, 26). Here, though Williams undoubtedly means to showcase Julia's grandfather's enjoyment from his humanitarianism, the line can be read with a second interpretation as well: in the new regime, charity will be a duty for everyone, not simply the prerogative of the wealthy, or the "pleasure" of men of leisure.

Williams' representation of the aristocratic gentleman is Dissenting, radical, and systemic. For the wicked aristocratic gentleman like the Baron du Fosse**,** "the overthrow of the ancient government would have been a sufficient punishment to him for all his cruelty…the idea of liberty being extended to the lower ranks, while…tyranny was of deprived of its privileges, he would have found insupportable."[239] For Burke, tyranny is not the goal of his politics, but he *does* believe that aristocratic virtue is sufficient to suppress tyrannical behavior. Williams prefers a more progressive social model that

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[238] There are several moments in *Julia* wherein the characters rescue birds, insects, and dogs, and this promotion of animal welfare is ubiquitous in Williams' other work. Kennedy notes of "Edwin and Eltruda" that, "Eltruda's charity extends to the life of other creatures, not only to human beings. While some people would regard an interest in animal welfare as a ludicrous extension of the ethos of sensibility, it is in keeping with Williams' humane beliefs and was a concern of hers for all of her life, though it would be some time before the protection of animals became a topic of public debate." Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams and the Age of Revolution*, p. 25.

[239] Helen Maria Williams, *Letters from France*, p. 193.

values individual virtue but also relies on the laws and safeguards of a just and tolerant state; she uses her Dissenting knowledge to provide a model for such a state in Julia.

Shortly after Julia's grandfather dies, her father dies as well, leaving Julia the heiress of considerable fortune. Throughout the rest of the novel, Julia comes to represent a millennialist, feminine form of Dissenting leadership that will herald the new age: "But, while Julia's heart throbbed with indignation at the oppressor, and melted with compassion for the oppressed, she fancied she saw the arm of indignant Heaven tearing the veil by which iniquity was concealed, and making manifest the sufferings of innocence. And, while she hoped to act as the agent of Providence, in protecting afflicted virtue, she exulted in the strengthened conviction, that evil, like a baleful meteor, has its appointed course, and then must set in darkness" (110). In this passage, which describes Julia's intercession on Mrs. Meynell's behalf, Williams envisions the revolution as a systemic social upheaval that will be carried out via individual performances; the new order for Williams will be defined by a reconstitution of both identity categories and institutional power. Julia as an "agent of Providence" is often narrated in Pentecostal language; the passage above is especially reminiscent of Acts 10:38, which reads, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed."[240] Likewise, in the chapter following the death of Julia's grandfather, Julia comes across an affecting scene: at Whitsun, a bird, about to be eaten by a cat, is rescued by a servant girl. Julia writes a brief poem about this incident: "But Molly's pity fell like showers / That feed the plants and wake the flowers: /

[240] Acts 10:38.

Heroic Molly dauntless flew, / And, scorning all his claws could do, / Snatch'd from Grimalkin's teeth his prey, / And bore him in her breast away" (28). This vignette, which seems like a mere detour into the novel's excessive sensibility, actually underscores the connections between feminine and Dissenting agency that Williams promotes. Notably, Whitsun, the celebration of Pentecost, marks the biblical moment when the apostles were visited by the Holy Spirit after Easter and thus began their proselytizing ventures.[241] That Molly, a female servant, is depicted as "heroic" in her sensibility and active charity on Whitsun, is emblematic of the wider, millennialist changes that Williams advocates. Julia in particular functions as a revised, self-improved version of Burke's aristocratic gentleman (who, indeed, did not feel the need to improve at all) – a female, progressive descendent of her benevolent grandfather who takes her charity even further by deriving a "conscious pleasure [from] having done *more than even duty* required" (37). This is contrasted directly with Julia's distant relative, Mrs. Melbourne, who represents the old order and "gave some alms to the poor, because she thought a little charity was requisite to secure a good place in heaven; but she found no duty more difficult," and insists, "One cannot help pitying the unfortunate…and yet there is not one in a thousand who is not so in consequence of imprudence" (5).[242]

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[241] This holiday is especially significant in the Presbyterian tradition, as it is a celebration of charity, outreach, and the spreading of the Gospel through language, psalm and scripture. In all Christian traditions, Pentecost can be read as a people's holiday, with evangelical power spreading *outward* from the disciples, in addition to power coming *downward* from heaven.

[242] This last quotation is laden with a middle-class snobbery about work ethic and the possibility of financial stability, should one merely exercise "prudence." While Ty argues that *Julia*'s drama is one that plays out amongst aristocrats, I would like to make a distinction here – Williams is careful to characterize the class of Julia and her acquaintances ambiguously, and the reader can seldom tell whether these characters are

In *Julia*, the wider themes of the French Revolution play out on the microcosmic, individual and feminine domestic stages where Julia and Charlotte can exercise their agency. The revolution in *Julia* is resultantly represented as a collective effort of individual performances, that, repeated, become sedimented. For instance, Julia and Charlotte's actions toward the servant class and the poor are often framed by revolutionary language. In a description of how Charlotte manages her home, Williams writes, "The human heart revolts against oppression, and is soothed by gentleness, as the wave of the ocean rises in proportion to the violence of the winds, and sinks with the breeze into mildness and charity" (72). Julia and Charlotte are continually compared to Frederick Seymour, whose self-centered masculine effusion is derided as toxic and despotic: "the region of passion is a land of despotism, where reason exercises but a mock jurisdiction; and is continually forced to submit to an arbitrary tyrant, who, rejecting her fixed and temperate laws, is guided only by the dangerous impulse of his own violent, and uncontrollable wishes" (93).[243] Throughout the novel, Williams is also

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from the landed aristocracy or have more recently acquired their wealth. Julia's status, for instance, is vague. Her grandfather lost his manor but reacquired it through the earned wealth of Julia's uncle, a man engaged in trade in the East Indies. When Julia becomes an heiress after the deaths of her father and grandfather, she is thus both "old" and "new" money. Williams draws specific attention to the *newness* of Julia's wealth: "Julia rejoiced in the possession of fortune, because she could now indulge the feelings of compassion" (35) As such, Williams further emphasizes the social responsibilities of those who have been made newly wealthy, as she simultaneously disparages the ways that the current British middle class emulates aristocratic spending; with their newfound power, the middling classes must now take on the duties that would have traditionally fallen to the aristocratic gentleman.

[243] Frederick Seymour's masculine sensibility is often described as "enthusiastic," but also as a weakness. "The ardent, enthusiastic spirit of this young man was *susceptible* of the strongest and most lasting impressions" (115). Emphasis is my own.

deliberate in her conversations with widely-known Revolutionary debates. For instance, in her defense of Mrs. Meynell to a snobbish relation who scoffs at the former's shabby appearance, Julia insists, "I am sure [Mrs. Meynell] must long ago have discovered your partiality for fine plumage" (117). This sally is an overt homage to Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man,* in which he criticizes Burke for sympathizing with the French monarchy and the wealthier portion of the middle class, famously arguing that Burke "pities the plumage, but forgets the dying bird."[244] (206).

While some readers have viewed Julia as a virtuous mirror of Werther, Julia's true narrative arch has very little to do with her involvement in the Charlotte-Frederick Seymour love triangle, and much more to do with her growth from a dependent daughter to capable woman who uses religion to better the circumstances of every unfortunate person she meets: "She was no longer subject to the pain of flying from distress, which she was unable to relieve: she remembered how often her eyes, wet with tears, had been lifted up to heaven, and implored that she might one day have the power of comforting the afflicted!" (35). Unlike the many of the female characters in *Julia*, whose aggressive consumptive practices have effectively solidified the middle class at the expense of the

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[244] Thomas Paine, "The Rights of Man: Being an Answer to Mr. Burke's Attack on the French Revolution," *Revolutions in Romantic Literature: An Anthology of Print Culture, 1780-1832*, ed. Paul Keen (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004), p. 206. Women were active participants in Dissenting Presbyterian communities, and were often essential players in the social networks of the late eighteenth century. These networks questioned the status quo in government, culture and religion. See also Daniel White, *Early Romanticism and English Dissent*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Felicity James and Ian Inkster, *Religious Dissent and the Aiken-Barbauld Circle: 1740-1860*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Knud Haakonssen, *Enlightenment and Religion: Rational Dissent in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), for more on women in Dissenting Presbyterian communities.

poor, religious citizens like Julia, Charlotte, and Mrs. Meynell resist these fashionable performances of class in favor of charity to affect the system progressively. Rather than spending her money on herself, the novel is replete with instances of Julia's charity:

> Benevolence was the ruling passion of Julia's soul. To sacrifice her own gratifications to those of others, to alleviate distress, and to diffuse happiness, were the most delightful occupations of her mind: and she had felt the same ardor of beneficence in her former confined circumstances, though it could not produce the same effects as in her present state of affluence. Charity resembles the Spring, whose benign influence, in a scanty soil, can only wake a few scattered blossoms; but in a more favourable situation, spreads a profusion of beauty, and rejoices the heart of nature… While pure genuine philanthropy flows like those unseen dews which are only marked in their benign effects, spreading new charms over creation (141, 38).

What is more, this charity is often relayed in scriptural language that expresses the *continued renewal of benignity.* The passages above are reminiscent of one from the Book of Lamentations, which reads, "the favors of the Lord are not exhausted, His mercies are not spent. They are renewed each morning, so great is His faithfulness."[245]

Female charity does not only function as a Dissenting principle in *Julia*, but also as a mechanism of resistance from male oppression. On the eve of the wedding between Charlotte and Seymour, Julia is left alone with the latter and again must resist his predatory advances. To do so, she "described, with enthusiasm, Charlotte's active benevolence" to distract Seymour from his overtures (78). Time and again, the novel encourages a feminist rejection of marriage for the betterment of community. For instance, while Julia rejects an offer of marriage from the dashing character Mr. F– , she

[245] Lamentations 3:22-4. This passage is also reminiscent of Exodus 14:4-15, in which Moses' people are continually replenished with manna from Heaven in the desert: "I will rain down bread from heaven… when the dew evaporated…" there was "the bread which the Lord has given you to eat."

remains his compassionate companion and sole comfort at the death of his brother (who dies in an anti-war vignette about the American Revolution) (81). Likewise, before Charlotte's wedding, she and Julia stumble upon an impoverished family whom they quickly take under their protection and offer a home on their grounds: "The happiness of this poor family was amply shared by their kind benefactors. Charlotte was so busy in furnishing their cottage, and providing for their wants, that she almost forgot the absence of her lover; and Julia assisted, with delighted assiduity, in these offices of charity' (75). The thesis is clear: the pursuit of a husband is far less important for the new order than social justice, an ideal that Williams herself practiced.

Another aspect of the novel's Dissenting feminism is its emphasis on women's education; Presbyterians, like many other Dissenters, engaged in communal debate and socialization. Williams' mentor, the Reverend Kippis, was a member of several Whig organizations in London that included notable revolutionaries like Joseph Priestly, Richard Price, and Benjamin Franklin. As Kennedy notes, Kippis' "connections as a respectable Presbyterian minister and man of letters enabled Williams to establish a place for herself in London's literary and Whig circles."[246] (24). Crucially, women were active participants in Dissenting Presbyterian communities, and were often essential players in the social networks of the late eighteenth century – networks that questioned the status quo in government, culture and religion. In *Julia*, Williams joins Wollstonecraft in her anger that woman are primarily trained to be consumer-driven, their educations focusing on the fripperies of life rather than on important matters. Julia herself is educated by her

[246] Deborah Kennedy, *Helen Maria Williams in the Age of Revolution*, p. 24.

father, and "she derived greater advantages from his instructions than she could have received from the most expensive education" (3). She is subsequently disgusted with the relegation of women to the subjects of "complexion, features, age, person, voice, and manners of a young lady who had the week before made a great marriage," while the men of her acquaintance are allowed to converse on the "politics of the day," and laments that "understanding was of no current value at a card-assembly" (18, 23). In one of her acts of charity, Julia undertakes the education of several cottager children in her neighborhood, particularly a girl named Peggy; the seven-year-old daughter of a cottager acts as Julia's "rosy-cheeked pupil" whom she teaches to read (particularly hymns and psalms) (41).

The final feminist Dissenting ideal that *Julia* promotes is sorority. The women of the novel at various times hope to retreat from public life to escape their miseries: in several instances, Julia threatens Frederick Seymour that she will leave her uncle's house and go into hiding if he continues his pursuit of her. She also fantasizes about joining a convent where she could find peace and removal from her ills ("Peace! The sacred sister of the cell") (67). Likewise, when Charlotte first hears of her husband's infidelity, she "spent the day in solitude, which her unhappy reflections rendered miserable," and Mrs. Meynell hides from her acquaintances throughout most of the novel. Ultimately, however, the narrative encourages the women to seek solace in one another and to use their combined strength to better the circumstances of others. Their sense of sorority is frequently described as "enthusiastic," and both Julia and Charlotte are at pains to please one another, often at the expense of their own standing as marriageable objects: "Charlotte, who delighted to display the merits of Julia, and wished her beloved friend to be a favorite of her husband, was at pains… to give him the most amiable picture of

Julia… with all the enthusiasm of affection," and "The affectionate Charlotte had long made Julia's happiness necessary to her own. Her heart was attuned to joy; but when she fancied Julia's was not in unison, the strings of pleasure in her own bosom refused to vibrate" (42, 57). Julia, "felt too that Charlotte's friendship claimed every sacrifice in her power," and calls Charlotte her "first, [her] beloved friend" (65, 148). For Williams, this sense of sorority is a necessary feature of the new revolutionary regime.

The novel additionally leaves room for a Sapphic connection between Julia, Charlotte, and Mrs. Meynell: "Charlotte gazed at [Julia] with as sincere a delight as if she had not been handsomer than herself" (51). Julia is immediately attracted to Mrs. Meynell and "She determined to get acquainted with Mrs. Meynell, and felt a generous impatience to soften her misfortunes, by administering all the comfort which her unhappy situation would admit" (109). Mrs. Meynell responds in kind, asserting, "To find an asylum beneath your roof, to enjoy your society, is to me, of all plans, the most soothing." (139). The climax of *Julia* happens not at Frederick Seymour's death, but at Charlotte's realization that Julia has been blameless in her husband's emotional infidelity. Julia (who had taken ill for the few pages in which her friendship with Charlotte was weakened, is revived by Charlotte's returned kindness. The most notable scriptural passage in the novel comes from the book of Ruth: "Whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God shall be my God; where thou diest I will die, and there I will be buried. The Lord to so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me," wherein Ruth decides to live with her mother-in-law, Naomi, rather than pursue a new husband when her own husband has died

(84).[247] This passage reads as a foreshadowing of the novel's end, in which Julia "refused many honorable offers of marriage" and instead resides with Charlotte and Mrs. Meynell, finding "consolation in the duties of religion, the exercise of benevolence, and the society of persons of understanding and merit" (157).

Of the four novels in this study, Julia offers the strongest vision of women's empowerment, with the main female characters surviving the book victoriously as their male counterparts die on the pages, their memories simply vestiges of a bygone "age of chivalry." Both the *Letters from France* and *Julia*, laden with performances of religious vocal expression, communal and participatory enthusiasm, and depictions of charity and effusive social compassion, participate in a millenialist discourse of sensibility that advocated a new world order and viewed revolution as a necessary step toward the dismantling of intolerance and inequality. Most importantly, through the Dissenting practices of feminine leadership and charity, anti-materialism, knowledge in scripture, women's literacy and education, and sorority, *Julia* promotes a revolutionary, collective social movement that individual women have the power to enact.

[247] Ruth 1:1-22.

Chapter Five

Self-Examination and Femininity in Radcliffe's *The Italian*: Religious Performance After Terror

A young gallant attends Mass in a Catholic country; there he meets and instantly falls in love with a pious and beautiful young woman whose virtue is jealously guarded by her maiden aunt. Unfortunately, evil forces are at work that would conspire to keep the lovers apart, and the young lady soon finds herself orphaned, destitute, and at the mercy of a villainous monk. In a novel replete with dungeons, torture, vain abbesses and threatening banditti, the hero must rescue his lady from the clutches of those who would steal her innocence. To those who have never read Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*, this synopsis may nevertheless seem familiar, as it is also the plot of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*. Indeed, it is almost impossible to read Radcliffe's 1797 novel as anything but a riposte to Lewis's, which was published only a year before.[248]

A crucial difference between the two novels, however, is revealed in their portrayals of interactions between religion, governance, gender and sexuality. Namely, while Lewis's work overtly plays on Gothic gender tropes to elicit titillating and sensational responses from his readers, Radcliffe's novel subtly engages with feminist and radical discourse of the early 1790s, constructing familiar stereotypes of Catholicism

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[248] See Sydny M. Conger, "Sensibility Restored: Radcliffe's Answer to Lewis's *The Monk*" Graham, Kenneth W., ed. *Gothic Fictions: Prohibition/Transgression*. New York: AMS Press, 1989. pp.113-150, for a detailed analysis of Radcliffe's response to Lewis. Additionally, it is worth noting that Lewis' *Monk*, like many other Gothic novels after 1794, contains a multitude of allusions and references to Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*.

and ultimately subverting those stereotypes to promote a narrative that is decidedly revolutionary.[249] In this chapter I will explore *The Italian*'s broader contributions to the discourse around the solidification of gendered and religious identity at the end of the eighteenth century, and analyze how Radcliffe's work functions as a coda to the radical ideology presented in Charlotte Smith's *Desmond*, Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story*, and Helen Maria Williams's *Julia*.

Writing After the Terror

When Edmund Burke wrote in 1790 that the new regime in France was "founded on principles of anarchy," led by the "swinish multitude" and a middle class driven by "sinister ambition and a lust of meretricious glory," his writing was received as melodramatic by most progressive thinkers in Britain, who lauded the efforts of the continental revolutionaries.[250] In 1793, however, the Reign of Terror brought to pass (and even exceeded) the imagined horrors that conservative pundits of the Revolutionary debates had described as the inevitable consequences of liberty and equality. These imaginings, only months before, had seemed histrionic to radical British supporters of the

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[249] This comparison is not meant to suggest that *The Monk* is a sterile or nonrevolutionary novel, but rather to distinguish between Lewis's and Radcliffe's use of Catholic stereotypes. As George Haggerty has demonstrated in *Queer Gothic*, the sensationalism of Lewis's novel often contests the patriarchy and "defies the attempt of society to control desire," and such contestation is inevitably political (12). Likewise, the riot scene in the third volume of *The Monk* has been read as representative of the Gordon riots and the French Revolution; see Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution, 1798-1820* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 218.

[250] Edmund Burke, "A Letter from Edmund Burke to a Member of the National Assembly; In Answer to Some Objections to His Book on French Affairs," (Dublin: William Porter, 1791), 17. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. J.G.A. Pocock, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), p. 69. Ibid., 36.

Revolution, and yet, as news of the carnage reached Britain's shores, intellectuals and writers were forced to reconcile their revolutionary hopes with the bloodshed of the Terror.

In the latter half of the 1790s, many English Jacobin writers would maintain their beliefs in revolutionary ideology even while publicly denouncing the violence of Robespierre and the mob. For instance, in 1795, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote:

> The rapid changes, the violent, the base, and nefarious assassinations, which have clouded the vivid prospect that began to spread a ray of joy and gladness over the gloomy horizon of oppression, cannot fail to chill the sympathizing bosom, and palsy intellectual vigour. To sketch these vicissitudes is a task so arduous and melancholy, that, with a heart trembling to the touches of nature, it becomes necessary to guard against the erroneous inferences of sensibility; and reason beaming on the grand theatre of political changes, can prove the only sure guide to direct us to a favourable or just conclusion.[251]

Apart from writers' personal beliefs in anti-violence, the political climate in Britain after the Terror became so restrictively conservative that many former English Jacobins were hesitant to publish overtly incendiary or progressive writing. From 1793-1794, Britain's public eye was turned upon the "treason trials," in which several prominent British radicals and their associates, who hoped for parliamentary reform, were accused and tried for sedition. Quickly thereafter, the Seditious Meetings Act of 1795 – which forbad meeting in large groups for the purpose of dissenting against the laws or institutions of the British state – and the Treason Act of 1795 – which made treasonous to, "within the realm or without compass, imagine, invent, devise or intend death or destruction, or any

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[251] Mary Wollstonecraft, "An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution and the Effect it Has Produced in Europe" from *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*, (London: J. Johnson, 1795). See also William Godwin's revisions to *Political Justice* in 1796, which stressed his opposition to violence and mass uprisings; Peter Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

bodily harm tending to death or destruction, maim or wounding, imprisonment or restraint, of the person of our same sovereign Lord the King," – were likewise enacted.[252] To say that the British popular attitude toward the French Revolution was reactionary is an understatement. As Gregory Claeys writes, "France had become like a neighboring house on fire: we do not reason as to the causes, but extinguish the menace before the conflagration engulfs us as well."[253] When Radcliffe published *The Italian* in 1797, such was the political climate surrounding her work. If one considers her gender, and the fact that women writers have always already been suspect in the public sphere, it is hardly any wonder that her Romantic version of monastic hegemony would read as less conspicuous than Lewis's.

As many biographers and scholars have lamented, much of Ann Radcliffe's personal life remains shrouded in mystery; to see her described as "private" or even "reclusive" is commonplace and to be expected from biographers – these illustrations help reinforce Radcliffe's aura as the "great enchantress" of Gothic literature. However, although Radcliffe led a fairly solitary life – especially when compared to some of her contemporaries like Smith, Inchbald, and Williams – we can make a few biographical claims with certainty, and these scant details can help us analyze the political and social elements of her novels. More important for my reading than Radcliffe's personal biography are the representations of political, gendered, and religious performances available for interpretation in Radcliffe's writing. In the turbulent latter half of the 1790s,

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[252] "Seditious Meetings Act," (1795), 36 George III, c. 8. "Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act," (1795) 36 George III, c. 7.

[253] Gregory Claeys, *The French Revolution Debate in Britain: The Origins of Modern Politics*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 13.

these representations were necessarily subject to scrutiny and any writer at the time must have been writing with the looming fears of sedition, treason, or, at the very least, public defamation. Additionally, as Orianne Smith has argued, "during the Romantic era, an ongoing and persistent faith in the mystical powers of language heightened the perceived threat of the pernicious influence of revolutionary rhetoric disseminated through works of literature," and this was perhaps even more true for literature that actually engaged with mystical and religious themes – themes that had already been politicized by the Revolution.[254] As such, it is crucial to remember that Radcliffe, like all British writers after 1793, was writing with target on her back.

Radcliffe and the Anti-Catholic Debates

Ann Radcliffe was never held captive in a Parisian prison, nor did she work as an actress on the London stage. She did not publish heart-rending abolitionist poetry or engage in lively pamphlet wars with Edmund Burke. For the most part, Radcliffe lived a quiet life: she avoided the limelight cast upon her by her popular works; she was a great enthusiast of art and poetry; she enjoyed the pleasures of nature and traveling, and by all accounts, was happily married to Oxford graduate and journalist William Radcliffe, with whom she spent the majority of her adult life. On these details there is little dispute; as to the social and political sensibilities in her novels and personal life, however, speculation abounds. Many modern scholars have agreed with her earliest biographer, T. N. Talfourd, who writes: "She only, of all writers of romance, who have awed and affected the public

[254] Orianne Smith, *Romantic Women Writers, Revolution, and Prophecy: Rebellious Daughters, 1786-1826* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 29.

mind, by hints of things unseen, has employed enchantments purely innocent; has forborne to raise one questionable throb, or call forth a momentary blush. This is the great test not only of moral feeling, but of intellectual power; and in this will be found her highest praise."[255] From this contemporary assessment, and from her novels themselves, we can assert that Radcliffe's creative work did not cross the bounds of sexual "propriety," which indicates she was at the very least reluctant to be publicly associated with salacious fiction.[256] However, Talfourd's critique does little to answer: in what ways were her novels transgressive? How political was Ann Radcliffe? Did she engage with contemporary Jacobin writers? Was she concerned with the shocking political events of the decade in which she published? In what ways did she participate in the anti-Catholic narratives so common in English Gothic fiction? In this chapter, I will argue that while Radcliffe's relative aesthetic prudishness (relative to contemporary works like Lewis's *The Monk*, that is) seems to suggest a cautious mind, it is not an indication of her political and social sensibilities, which are often varied and complicated by her

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[255] Thomas Noon Talfourd, "Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe," preface to *Gaston de Blondeville, or The Court of Henry III; St. Alban's Abbey; Posthumous Works; Memoir*, ed. Henry Colburn, 4 vols. (1826; Nineteenth Century Collections Online, 2015), 132.

[256] It is worth noting that Radcliffe was not demonized in Richard Polwhele's notorious "Unsex'd Females." Richard Polwhele, "The Unsex'd Females: A Poem, Addressed to the Author of The Pursuits of Literature" (London: Cadell and Davies, 1798). William Stafford writes, "Ann Radcliffe's novels received long and enthusiastic reviews in the *Monthly Review* and the *British Critic*; she was judged to be the queen of the Gothic romance, and the reviewers, like Polwhele, referred to her as a 'genius.' The *British Critic* thought that *The Mysteries of Udolpho* 'inculcates the purest morality.' Her own politics – or at least her husband's – were mildly progressive, but are barely evident in her romances." William Stafford, *English feminists and their opponents in the 1790s: Unsex'd and Proper Females*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 2002, pg. 31.

representations of religion and gender.[257] Here, I work against scholars like David Durant, who argues, "for Mrs. Radcliffe, the true gothic terrors were not the black veils and spooky passages for which she is famous, but the winds of change, dissolution, and chaos which they represented." Durant contrasts the "safe, hierarchical, reasonable, loving world of the family with a chaotic, irrational, and perverse world of the isolated" in Radcliffe's novels to assert that she was a "staunch foe" of Romantic and revolutionary ideology.[258] Durant's analysis, however, conflates gendered caution with political conservatism, and underscores the vital importance of considering an author's gender when analyzing his or her work. Simply because Radcliffe avoids lewdness and ends her novels in marriage (either to escape public notoriety or out of a sense of her own decorum), it does *not* indicate she is opposed to the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Conversely, different biographical scholarship has classified Radcliffe as a closeted Dissenter. For instance, in his biography on Radcliffe, Rictor Norton takes great pains to hint that she may have been a Unitarian, using passages from her novels and association with some of her more overtly radical distant relatives as proof of this claim. To call Radcliffe a Unitarian is to label her as decidedly counterculture, and not only in

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[257] See Andrew Warren, who writes, "Radcliffe is very much aware of her function as an author, not only as the active and quasi-masculine 'initiator of a discourse (the English Gothic novel), but also as a woman observed and scrutinized because of this authority" (522). Andrew Warren, "Designing and Undrawing Veils: Anxiety and Authorship in Radcliffe's '*The Italian*,'" *The Eighteenth Century,* Vol. 54, No. 4 (Winter 2013), pp. 521-544.

[258] David Durant, "Ann Radcliffe and the Conservative Gothic," *Studies in English Literature (1500-1900),* Vol. 22, No. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 1982), pg. 520.

religious terms. Edmund Burke's "Speech on the Petition of the Unitarians" reveals the popular suspicion that the Unitarian "designs against the church [were] concurrent with a design to subvert the state."[259] Norton's claim also disregards Talfourd's memoir, which relies on interviews with her husband William and extracts from her journals and explains that Radcliffe "was educated in the principles of the Church of England; and through life, unless prevented by serious indispositions, regularly attended its services. Her piety, though cheerful, was deep and sincere."[260] Norton argues, "there is no suggestion in Ann Radcliffe's novels or journals that she believed in the Trinity, or in the Thirty-Nine Articles or in the value of atonement."[261] Here it is necessary to emphasize that individuals rarely need to identify themselves as being part of a dominant culture, and as there is no evidence *against* her participation in the Anglican community, we cannot assume Radcliffe was anything other than Talfourd claims. However, Norton's assumption demonstrates the importance of understanding religion as a performed and contingent identity. Though Radcliffe was almost certainly Anglican, like Charlotte Smith, she may have been critical of her denomination's institutional power and influenced by non-religious subcultural ideologies: while religion and politics in the late eighteenth century are inextricably linked, they are not always neatly correlative. Moreover, even if she were a Dissenter, this does not mean we can interpret her novels as universally tolerant. Dissenters (though often politically radical and progressive), as I

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[259] Edmund Burke, "Speech on Unitarians' Petition for Relief," 11 May 1792.

[260] Talfourd, "Memoir of the Life and Writings of Mrs. Radcliffe," pg. 105.

[261] Rictor Norton, *Mistress of Udolpho: The Life of Ann Radcliffe* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1999), pg. 19.

have explained in Chapter Four, were not necessarily sympathetic toward their fellow Catholic Nonconformists. In fact, their adoption of a different name for their nonconformity indicates they were eager to be disassociated with their Popish neighbors. As Tumbleson writes, "Both Anglicans and Dissenters sought to delegitimize each other by asserting their rivals 'similarity to Catholicism, with the result that 'true religion,' true Protestantism, tended to equal the faith of the person doing the defining."[262] Thus, while we cannot strictly pin down Radcliffe's religious identity, we can assume that identity was flexible, performative, and open to resignification.

As I have written in Chapter Three, the period in which Radcliffe wrote – and indeed, the entire eighteenth century – saw a continual ideological battle between toleration and suspicion over the position of Catholicism in England.[263] As such, Radcliffe's novel is certainly influenced by this atmosphere and her identity as an Anglican writing about Catholicism is not to be neglected. On one hand, as Tumbleson posits, anti-Catholicism was an essential building block of the British nation, and acted as "the mechanism of cultural reproduction necessary to mobilize autonomous subjects in

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[262] Raymond D. Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination 1660-1745* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10. See also Montague Summers, *The Gothic Quest: A History of the Gothic Novel* (London: Mill Press, 1938); Summers argues that Radcliffe is only ignorant of Catholicism, but isn't necessarily intentionally anti-Catholic.

[263] See Maria Purves: *The Gothic and Catholicism: Religion, Cultural Exchange and the Popular Novel, 1785-1829* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Purves argues that "the increased religious toleration of the 1790s supported a more friendly view of Catholicism in the Gothic novel." See also Hoeveler, who argues, "recognizing that an 'either/or' explanation will not suffice; in fact a 'both/and' method is the more accurate way of accounting for the presence of toleration and hostility" *Gothic Feminism*, p. 139

the service of the centralized state; it supplied the other, the enemy."[264] The Gordon Riots of 1780 serve as an obvious proof of this: in response to the Papists Act of 1778, thousands of British citizens took to the streets in protest, looting and burning Catholic churches and homes in their wake.[265] In the midst of the uproar, the *General Evening Post* attempted to rationalize the events by asserting that the rioters were "stimulated by zeal for the Protestant religion, which they were taught to believe was in danger."[266] The *Post* then cites the Duke of Richmond, who believed that the rioters were *truly* upset by the Quebec Act,[267] and that the Papists Act "merely gave toleration in matters of conscience to the Roman Catholics, and was, in fact, an innocent, nay a laudable measure; but there was an essential difference between religious *toleration* and the *establishment* of a religion."[268] As I discuss in Chapter Two, this commentary reveals the non-secular nature of "toleration" in the period, and the Duke of Richmond's ideas are paradigmatic of a ubiquitous tension that emerges throughout the century: an absolute

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[264] Tumbleson, *Catholicism in the English Protestant Imagination*, 15. See also Colley's chapter, "Protestants;" Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 11-54.

[265] The Papists Act of 1778 (18 George III, c. 60). This Act lifted the threat of arrest and imprisonment for Catholic priests, abolished the punishment of prison for keeping Catholic schools, and allowed Catholics to inherit and purchase land in Britain.

[266] *General Evening Post*, June 2, 1780, "Proceedings in the Lords relating to the Riots," *The Parliamentary History of England, from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803*, (London: T.C. Hansard, Fleet-Street), p. 677.

[267] The Quebec Act of 1774, (14 George III c. 83). The Quebec Act guaranteed citizens, among other items, the freedom to practice Catholicism in the Province of Quebec.

[268] Ibid., *General Evening Post*, 677.

fear for the Protestant religion (which seemed threatened by the presence of Catholicism), coupled with the notion that Catholics ought to be afforded basic civil rights.[269]

Before the Terror, even in the midst of this cultural turmoil, sympathizers were able to see the Acts, the riots, and the culture of suspicion around Catholicism from various political perspectives. This is evidenced through the letters of Frances Burney, who was in Bath during the riots and provides a detailed commentary on the events:

> All the stage Coaches that come into Bath from London are chalked over with *No Popery*… Bath, indeed, ought to be held sacred as a sanctuary for Invalides… to our utter amazement and consternation, the new Roman Catholic Chapel in this Town was set on Fire at about 9 o'clock, - it is now Burning with a fury that is dreadful, - and the House of the Priest belonging to it is in Flames also! – the poor persecuted man himself has I believe escaped with *Life*, though pelted, followed, and very ill used.[270]

Additionally, Catholic sympathizers and other pacifists had cause to fear for their safety. As Burney writes in the aftermath of the riots, "most people among those who are able to appear as Witnesses are so fearful of incurring the future resentment of the mob, that Evidence is very difficult to be obtained, even where guilt is undoubted: by this means Numbers are Daily discharged who had offended all Laws, though they can be punished by none."[271] Paradoxically, while the effort to relieve Catholics at the end of the century often placed Papists and their sympathizers in even more danger, after the Terror, the promotion of

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[269] By "non-secular," I would like to clarify that those critiquing or promoting institutional religious persecution in eighteenth-century Britain were often religious themselves, and would also like to consciously avoid conflating the terms "tolerant" and "secular."

[270] Frances Burney, *Journals and Letters of Frances Burney*, ed. Peter Sabor, (London: Penguin Classics, 2001), 163-4.

[271] Frances Burney, *Journals and Letters*, 165.

religious tolerance for Catholics was sometimes also linked with anti-Jacobinism. For instance, Burke urged for Catholic Emancipation in 1795, when he insisted that a divided Christianity would strengthen the Jacobin agenda: "The Catholics form the great body of the lower ranks of your community, and no small part of those classes of the middling that come nearest to them. You know that the seduction of that part of mankind from the principles of religion, morality, subordination, and social order is the great object of the Jacobins."[272] Thus, though we cannot biographically categorize Radcliffe as a radical Dissenter or conservative Anglican, what we *can* work with are her novels, which reveal an author who was able to create dynamic characters that exhibit multiform facets of religious and gendered identities at a time when these identities were highly controversial. In light of the political turmoil illustrated above, her use of Catholic characters in a Catholic country cannot be taken lightly.

As scholars like Claudia Johnson and Robert Miles have noted, a crucial difference between *The Italian* and Radcliffe's other novels is that it is set in the present (1764, to be exact). As such, this novel has a sense of immediacy; for instance, Miles finds progressive sentiment in *The Italian*, particularly in Radcliffe's representations of

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[272] Edmund Burke, "A Letter to William Smith, Esq.," *The Works and Correspondence of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke, A New Edition in Eight Volumes* (London: Francis and John Rivington, 1852), 44. As I have explained in Chapter One, this removal also makes an analysis of *The Italian* difficult because of the ways religion, nationalism and revolution are inextricably and confusedly tangled in the 1790s. For instance, thinkers from both conservative and radical parties promoted and rejected Catholic Emancipation at various points, and for very different reasons. For radicals, emancipation could mean toleration (both for British citizens and French émigrés during the revolution) or, conversely, the promotion of a corrupt hegemonic Church. For conservatives, emancipation could unite all Christians, whose beliefs were allegedly threatened by atheist *philosophes*, or it could grant freedoms to Britain's oldest and most dangerous enemy.

religion and sensibility, and her frequent engagement in discourse about "rights."[273] Radcliffe's treatment of Catholicism in revolutionary terms – especially in *The Italian* – is not a nascent topic of discussion amongst her critics. Radcliffe overtly participates in a centuries-old discourse between English authors who attempt to reconcile their nation's dark, popish past with its "new" Protestant rationalist identity. More importantly, however, scholars in the past decade have read Radcliffe's portrayal of Catholicism not as a jibe at continental backwardness, but as a metaphorical critique of civil society at home in Britain. For instance, Mark Canuel places *The Italian* with other Gothic novels intent upon promoting ideals of toleration and secularization. In this interpretation, Radcliffe and other Gothicists "present monastic institutions as fascinating sources of danger, but not because the genre seeks to suppress Catholicism as a set of alien beliefs. Instead… [Gothic novels] frequently identify monasticism as a private and self-enclosed structure of confessional authority, visible in Britain itself, that the Gothic novel participates in dismantling and modifying."[274] Catholicism, Canuel explains, served authors of the period as a ready metaphor for Britain's Anglican state; in this reading, Catholicism, which demands full confessions to a hierarchy of priests for salvation, is likened to Britain, which required its citizens to subscribe to Anglicanism in order to attain full rights within the country. Radcliffe maintains a metaphorical distance from

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[273] See Claudia Johnson, "Losing the Mother in the Judge: *The Italian*," *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender, and Sentimentality in the 1790s*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) pp. 117-137; and Robert Miles, "Radcliffe's Politics – *The Italian*," *Ann Radcliffe: The Great Enchantress*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 149-173.

[274] Mark Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British writing, 1790-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7.

this thesis for both political and gendered reasons. As John Barrell has argued, figurative or "imaginative" treason became punishable in Britain after the execution of Louis XVI, and though Radcliffe's work is not as overtly incendiary as other novels of the time, it certainly critiques those "unaccustomed to have their power opposed."[275] Moreover, as scholars like Diane Hoeveler and Susan Greenfield have demonstrated, Catholicism offered an imaginative space for eighteenth-century British writers to re-conceptualize gender roles, calling particular attention to Radcliffe's "attraction to the notion of all-female communities that were possible for women through the church."[276] As a female writer engaging in early feminist ideology, the reclusive Radcliffe may have wanted to avoid obvious political polemics in her writing. It is no wonder, then, that a woman writer in 1797 who wished to write radical or politically contentious novels would attempt to "establish a safely removed context in which to represent civil disorder without coming too close to home and to give a shape to anxieties that are felt precisely because civil disorder already is too close to home."[277] Additionally, it is important to remember that Radcliffe's popular, lucrative novel was written for an audience who already harbored specific expectations about the Gothic genre; as such, any sensationalist or hyperbolic

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[275] John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death: Figurative Treason, Fantasies of Regicide, 1793-1796* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian*, Ed. Frederick Garber, Introduction and Notes by E.J. Clery, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 68. References are to this edition.

[276] Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism: The Professionalization of Gender from Charlotte Smith to The Brontës*, (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 53. See also Susan C. Greenfield, "Veiled Desire: Mother-Daughter Love and Sexual Imagery in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*," *The Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (Spring 1992), pp. 73-89.

[277] Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, 124.

portions of her work must be read within this context.[278] Previous critics have recognized these limitations, but in the past, Radcliffe's representations of Catholicism have largely been read as expressions of denominational or national difference; by and large, these readings analyze religion on a macro scale, neglecting the probability that Radcliffe (along with most other writers of her day) would have seen nuance in religious identity based on individual performances and doctrinal rites.[279]

Throughout this analysis, I will examine Radcliffe's depiction of Catholic stereotypes, namely, her illustrations of confessional society and corporeal punishment. While these portrayals are initially alarming – even horrific – and strongly resemble the Catholic Church as it appears in other Gothic novels (like Lewis's *The Monk*), Radcliffe eventually destabilizes these portrayals for a nuanced view of Catholicism. Ultimately, I will agree with Mark Canuel and demonstrate that Radcliffe does not use Gothic tropes to denigrate any specific religious identity, but rather to critique corrupt hegemonic systems and passive adherence to those systems. More importantly, Radcliffe promotes several revolutionary strains in her writing that echo or elaborate upon the theses presented by Smith, Inchbald, and Williams earlier in the decade. In *The Italian* Radcliffe posits, like Smith, that individual religious practice, when divorced from institutional power structures, can be ultimately beneficial. Likewise, Radcliffe's representations of

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[278] See Robert Miles, "The 1790s: the Effulgence of Gothic," *Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction,* Ed. Jerrold E. Hogle, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Miles analyzes the sales of Gothic fiction in the 1790s and uses specific generic tropes to categorize the Gothic during this decade.

[279] See Judith Wilt, *Ghosts of the Gothic: Austen, Eliot and Lawrence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 32. Wilt focuses on the Protestantism of Radcliffe's novel.

sacraments and sacramental resemble Inchbald's representations of religious identity in flux. Finally, Radcliffe's depictions of performative and emotive use of religion to garner enthusiasm and sentimentality resemble Williams's presentations of religion in *Julia* and her *Letters from France*. Ultimately, an examination of the ways her characters engage in sacraments and sacramental religious rites reveals that Radcliffe, like Smith, Inchbald, and Williams, champions individual and feminine religious performances as modes of resistance from hegemonic and hierarchal power structures. In *The Italian*, as I will argue, these types of resistance are ultimately posited as models of governance.

In conjunction, I will explore how Radcliffe presents the sacraments as ceremonies of enforced, confessional religion that can nevertheless be used as modes of revolutionary action if one isolates different performances within these rites. Finally, this section will analyze how Radcliffe uses sacramentals in *The Italian* to create an "authentic" backdrop for her characters – one that is similar to settings found in eighteenth-century travel literature – and to present a sympathetic view of Italian (and Catholic) culture. Moreover, these sacramentals demonstrate that Radcliffe distinguishes between class-based forms of religious identity and ultimately advocates, like Charlotte Smith, that individual and feminine religious performances can be used to inform public governance.

Reading Religion and Gender in The Italian

Perhaps the most obvious stereotypical Catholic element in *The Italian* is the novel's titular character, the confessor Schedoni. Schedoni, as Canuel has argued, represents the evils of confessional society, most obviously when he exerts unconditional

power over the Marchesa di Vivaldi.[280] This power emanates from his position within a hierarchical religious system, and Johnson reads the corruption of this system "as a normal practice sponsored by states in such advanced stages of moral decay that they can scarcely recognize much less recoil from their own inhumanity."[281] Both Canuel and Johnson interpret Schedoni's hypocritical villainy as a critique of concurrent political-religious systems in both Britain and France: the Church is at the beck and call of the aristocracy (or government), which is in turn seduced and manipulated by the Church. Johnson additionally argues that Radcliffe eventually "defends authority and validates its efficacy," which renders the novel's original, progressive agenda as "pointless."[282] However, both of these interpretations neglect that gender functions as crucial element in the relationship between Schedoni and the Marchesa; namely, Radcliffe posits private, feminine self-examination as a remedy for corrupt governance. For Radcliffe, elements of religious performance may be used to inform leadership; crucially, these performances are coded by gender and as such, the novel does not simply critique *or* champion old systems of power – it ultimately *revises* them, and insists that gendered religious performance should influence that revision.[283]

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[280] Mark Canuel, *Religion, Toleration, and British Writing*, pp. 55-85.

[281] Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, p. 123.
[282] Ibid., p. 123.

[283] As I discuss in Chapter Two, Radcliffe's representations of liberating feminine religious practice are similar to those depicted in Smith's *Desmond,* wherein institutional systems of "benevolent domination" are gendered as masculine.

The scene in which Schedoni convinces the Marchesa that Ellena must be murdered best illustrates these arguments.[284] After the Marchesa learns that Vivaldi has absconded with Ellena, she seeks a conference with her confessor. Radcliffe names the exchange between the two an "examination," but this is not the examination of conscience that takes place before a successful confession; rather, the Marchesa calls upon Schedoni to determine whether something can be done to separate Vivaldi and Ellena. This scene is first a critique of the unholy alliance between a corrupt church and a dissipated aristocracy; as the Marchesa's servant notes, "Well! The rich have this comfort, however, that, let them be ever so guilty, they can buy themselves innocent again, in the twinkling of a ducat" (166). Additionally, an analysis of the gendered language in this passage reveals an underlying revolutionary tone, as the Marchesa oscillates between the paths of good (coded as feminine) and evil (coded as masculine). During the moments when the Marchesa allows herself to be governed by the monk, Schedoni perversely praises her obeisance as evidence that the Marchesa possesses a "man's spirit" (168). Conversely, when the Marchesa hesitates and examines the course of action she is about to take, she muses, "some woman's weakness still lingers at my heart" (169). Schedoni's patriarchal influence ultimately seduces the Marchesa, and what follows is a gross corruption of justice based upon the characters' twisted logic. The Marchesa decides that Ellena must be killed, complaining, "the woman who obtrudes

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[284] For more on the confessional in *The Italian*, see John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1990). See also Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, p. 104.

herself upon a family, to dishonour it…deserves a punishment nearly equal to that of a state criminal, since she injures those who best support the state" (168).

Here, Radcliffe engages with revolutionary discourse by not only critiquing the misuse of religion in government, but also offering a glimpse at an alternative to outdated systems of hegemonic power. In this scene, Radcliffe's thesis is clear: if the Marchesa had chosen to utilize her *feminine* moral rationality – rationality gained via the private religious performance of self-examination – she might have resisted Schedoni's corrupting influence and thus revised the power structure that exists between them. Instead, the Marchesa remains under the influence of Schedoni's *masculine* power, and her sense of justice is perverted. Throughout the novel, Radcliffe expands upon this theme of revision as she repeatedly presents elements of religious performance (particularly the self-examination associated with the confessional) as modes of resistance and renewal. These performances are usually gendered, and are often associated with actors or actions that subvert traditional authority.

Confession, perhaps the most discussed sacrament in scholarship around *The Italian*, is one of these performances. *The Italian* famously begins with an extended frame narrative in which an English traveler, visiting Naples in 1764, comes upon an exquisite church that he and his companions tour, guided by a friendly friar. Within the church, the traveler notices a "singular" cloaked individual lurking around the aisles and learns that this mysterious person is in fact an assassin seeking sanctuary. When the assassin disappears into a confessional, the friar is suddenly reminded of an extraordinary confession that took place there in recent years, and offers to regale the English traveler with tale surrounding this confession. This tale, of course, is *The Italian*. As I have

explained above, the frame narrative helps Radcliffe maintain her public image by distancing herself from the contents of her book; it also renders the political facets of her novel less overt by dislocating them from Britain. Both of these points are essential for understanding Radcliffe's treatment of Catholicism in her work: because of the intensely conservative climate in the late 1790s, this frame narrative cleverly obfuscates Radcliffe's political leanings. Additionally, the confessional introduced in the frame serves as a primary leitmotif for the rest of the novel; namely, the relationship between church and state, and perhaps more significantly, between private religious devotion and public action is not uniform and neat in *The Italian*. Rather, religious performances in the novel are utilized for both good and evil, and are not contingent upon the identities (gendered, class-based, national, or religious) of those who enact them. With her representations of religious devotion, Radcliffe dismantles binary narratives that would pit religious identification against atheism or even Anglicanism against Catholicism, and insists that religious identity is in flux. In *The Italian*, even while the performances of religious rituals can be dangerous weapons for manipulation and hegemony, they can additionally be effective tools for governance.

In the frame and throughout the novel, Radcliffe dissects the ritual of confession and differentiates between the various elements of performance that constitute it; in so doing, *The Italian* demonstrates the utility of the sacrament – even while explaining how it can be corrupted. Specifically, the novel's opening scene initially critiques the ritual by demonstrating how the church undermines state authority by forgiving penitent criminals. The English traveler marvels that the confessed assassin has found sanctuary in the church, and is even fed and supported by local parishioners. The friar humorously

responds, "If we were to shew no mercy to such unfortunate persons, assassinations are so frequent, that our cities would be half depopulated" (2-3). Immediately after, however, Radcliffe subverts audience expectations by hinting that the confessional can in fact be used as means of exacting justice: the friar explains, "the faith of the priest is never broken, except by an especial command from an higher power; and the circumstances must even then be very extraordinary to justify such a departure from the law" (4). Later in the novel, the reader learns that the confessional has been used as evidence to convict Schedoni, and is thus a vehicle for just legal practice.

Examination and self-examination reveal Radcliffe's progressive, revisionary model of governance in *The Italian,* but it is additionally important to explore the ways in which religious performances can uncover the non-radical tenors in her work. For instance, an analysis of Catholic corporeal punishment (particularly punishment of the delinquent female body) and "terror" in *The Italian* reveals the limits of Radcliffe's radical sensibilities, and the extent to which her writing is influenced by Britain's conservative turn in the 1790s. In an infamous speech to the National Convention in 1794, Robespierre claimed that "terror" was a necessary aspect of effective government, "without which virtue is impotent. Terror is nothing but a prompt, severe, inflexible justice."[285] Likewise, Radcliffe asserts in her "On the Supernatural in Poetry," that terror "expands the soul and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life."[286] However, Radcliffe is careful to insist that *true* terror, which is useful for experiencing sublimity, is

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[285] Maximilien Robespierre, "Speech to the National Convention," 5 February 1794.

[286] Ann Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," *New Monthly Magazine,* Vol. 16, No. 1 (1826), 150.

often "obscure" and anticipatory – the subject achieves a sublime elevation of feeling through the *fear* of something terrible, rather than the actual interaction with a fearful object or scenario. Conversely, "horror" for Radcliffe is constituted by a direct confrontation with violence, death or the grotesque that "contracts, freezes, and annihilates" imaginative faculties and renders them useless.[287] Thus, Radcliffe's definition of "terror" is markedly different from Robespierre's, and the mass public executions of the Reign of Terror more closely align with what Radcliffe would call "horror."[288] This variance is evident in her depiction of the San Stefano convent, where corporeal punishment is coded as horrific – a disciplinary religious performance that renders the convent's governing body dysfunctional. As Radcliffe critiques horrific bodily punishment, she concurs with many of her progressive contemporaries, who approved of revolution but were repulsed by the violence of the Terror. This more moderate version of republicanism is typical of writers in the latter half of the 1790s – while *The Italian* supports a revolutionary movement overall, it specifically denies the necessity of excess violence.[289]

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[287] Ibid., 150.

[288] For a comprehensive study on the use of torture in eighteenth-century Europe, see John H. Langbein, *Torture and the Law of Proof*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977); and Edward Peters, *Torture*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

[289] For instance, in his *Prelude*, Wordsworth metaphorically describes the uncontrollable end of the Reign of Terror, which became "as a Child…having a toy, a wind-mill, though the air / Do itself blow fresh, and makes the vane / spin in his eyesight, he is not content, / But with the play-thing at arm's length he sets / His front against the blast, and runs amain, / To make it whirl the faster" (ll. 337-345). William Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth: The Major Works – Including the Prelude*, (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008).

On the eve of Ellena's escape from San Stefano, her friend (and later, mother) Sister Olivia warns Ellena of a subterranean cell where sisters "as have been guilty of any heinous offence" have been committed in the past. Olivia explains, "this condemnation admits of no reprieve; the unfortunate captive is left to languish in chains and darkness, receiving only an allowance of bread and water just sufficient to prolong her sufferings, till nature, at length, sinking under their intolerable pressure, obtains refuge in death" (126). This prison is reminiscent of the cell wherein *The Monk*'s Agnes is detained and tormented by her stereotypical religious captors; however, in *The Italian* the cell is primarily imaginary: neither the reader nor any of the characters actually see this hidden torture chamber. By creating an imagined or assumed – rather than actual – prison space, Radcliffe codes corporeal punishment in the abbey San Stefano as terrific; that is, the monastic violence in *The Italian* never materializes, though it is nearly always anticipated and feared. In this instance, Ellena's impending incarceration galvanizes her dormant agency and encourages her to quit the convent. Here, Radcliffe applies her own aesthetic theory to her representation of corporeal punishment in order to resist the notion that violence is terrific – rather than horrific. While the terror associated with unrealized fear can beget the criticism of power and even insurrection, actualized violence and the horror associated with it are anathema to a functioning society. Thus, in *The Italian* the Catholic performance of corporeal punishment – so often neglected or read as merely stereotypical – reveals that Radcliffe's revolutionary narrative is fundamentally contingent upon restraint.

Marriage is perhaps the most obvious sacrament to explore when considering intersections between religious and gendered identity in *The Italian*, not least because

marriage in the novel further reveals Radcliffe's radical thesis.[290] Ellena's fraught marital status in *The Italian* illustrates the ways that Radcliffe's work participates in earlier debates over the social roles of women and the efficacy of women's education in the eighteenth century, debates that were enflamed by the revolutionary and reactionary events of the 1790s, and later suppressed by conservatives. As Hoeveler explains, "Radcliffe's later novels actually fictionalize the major claims presented by Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), for if Wollstonecraft condemns the inadequate educations women receive, Radcliffe demonstrates the disastrous effects of such training on her gothic anti-heroines."[291] One such demonstration is Ellena, who continues a literary trope that Hoeveler dubs "gothic feminism," that is, a type of passive, "professionally feminine" resistance to patriarchal rule by which gothic heroines simultaneously fulfill their domestic roles even as they rebel against them.[292] Similarly, Johnson argues that although the novel "fantasizes idylls of feminine sentimentality only as temporary interruptions in the ideologically mandated

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[290] Holy Orders, which serves as Ellena's alternative to marriage, is of course another sacrament that Radcliffe addresses in *The Italian*, but this topic has been canvassed so thoroughly that there is little more to say about it in this analysis. For more on the image of the veil in *The Italian*, see Elizabeth P. Broadwell's "The Veil Image in Ann Radcliffe's The Italian," *South Atlantic Bulletin*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Nov., 1975), pp. 76-87. For mother-daughter relationships as resistance to heteronormativity in *The Italian*, see Susan C. Greenfield, "Veiled Desire: Mother-Daughter Love and Sexual Imagery in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*," *The Eighteenth Century*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (Spring 1992), pp. 73-89. For all-female gothic communities, see Brenda Tooley, "Gothic Utopia: Heretical Sanctuary in Ann Radcliffe's *The Italian*," *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (200), pp. 42-56.

[291] Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 2.

[292] Ibid., 15.

love plot," the violent history of the Church and the oppression of women that still simmer at the end of the novel "threaten the world of masculine law."[293] Both of these readings suggest a passive or conservative feminism in Radcliffe's work, but I would contend that Radcliffe's emphasis on the powers of religious self-examination demonstrate that she advocates – actively and radically – for patriarchal resistance and female empowerment.

In the *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft laments that females are denied rational educations and political privileges, and thus "have their attention naturally drawn from the interest of the whole community to that of the minute parts, though the private duty of any member of society must be very imperfectly performed when not connected with the general good."[294] (243). This barring from enlightened pursuits and public life subjects women to a "perpetual childhood," wherein they may only strive, through vanity and frivolous posturing, to attain marriage and the "protection of man" (243). Correspondingly, the major dramatic tensions and movements of *The Italian* center on Ellena's marital status. Our heroine is continually secluded or cloistered away from men – first in the Villa Altieri and then in a series of convents – as her beloved Vivaldi relentlessly pursues her and urges her to marry against all social propriety. The height of the novel's suspense occurs when, powerlessly childlike in her orphaned state, Ellena is nearly murdered by Schedoni, who, when he suddenly believes himself to be her father,

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[293] Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings*, 136.

[294] Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman; with strictures on political and moral subjects,* (Boston: Thomas and Andrews, 1792).

decides to marry her off after all in order to capitalize on male kinship bonds and secure his own fortune.

This sense of desperation and inescapability that suffuses Ellena's marital peregrinations indicates that Radcliffe concurs with Wollstonecraft's views on marriage: distracted from all else, women are disengaged from public life and unable to better society, or their lot in it. Yet, Radcliffe's novel still posits that marriage is a sacred event. The betrothal of Ellena and Vivaldi is laden with religious language; Signora Bianchi's dying wish is for the couple to be married, and this wish in fact replaces the sacramental ceremony of Extreme Unction, as the old guardian dies "before her confessor could administer" the sacrament (44). Throughout the novel, Ellena is ruled by the "sacredness of the promise," and "consider[s] herself as indissolubly bound to wed him as if it had been given at the altar;" these continual reminders about the sanctity of marriage render the story epithalamic (180). Here, I would like to suggest that though Radcliffe's representations of marriage are conservative, they are compatible with Wollstonecraft's: both authors prescribe *voluntary* companionate marriage as beneficial for society.

The primary difference between Radcliffe's and Wollstonecraft's radicalisms lies in the ways they (respectively) promote or disparage the connections between femininity and religious practice. Wollstonecraft asserts that "women subjected by ignorance to their sensations, and only taught to look for happiness in love, refine on sensual feelings, and adopt metaphysical notions respecting that passion, which leads them shamefully to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements they plump into actual vice" (243). Conversely, Radcliffe's novel insists that as women are *only* afforded limited rights within the private sphere, they must make use of imaginative

and "metaphysical" self-examination for betterment, which Ellena does through her religious devotion to nature and the sublime. Time after time, Radcliffe's heroine uses her devotion to nature as a type of sacramental performance that helps her escape the hegemonic power systems (both marital and confessional) that oppress her:

> To Ellena, whose mind was capable of being highly elevated, or sweetly soothed, By scenes of nature, the discovery of this little turret was an important circumstance. Hither she could come, and her soul, refreshed by the views it afforded, would acquire strength to bear her, with equanimity, thro' the persecutions that might await her. Here, gazing upon the stupendous imagery around her, looking, as it were, beyond the awful veil which obscures the features of the Deity, and conceals Him from the eyes of his creatures, dwelling as with a present God in the midst of his sublime works; with a mind thus elevated, how insignificant would appear to her the transactions, and the sufferings of this world! (90-1).[295]

Both Radcliffe and Wollstonecraft concur that the "most perfect education" is to "enable the individual to attain such habits of virtue as will render it independent;" in *The Italian*, this means that Ellena must gain agency via religious self-examination (both in the formal Catholic sense, and via Romantic contemplation of sublime nature), so that she may contend with patriarchal and monastic oppression throughout the novel and later revise the power structures that will exist within her marriage to Vivaldi (244). Self-

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[295] See Katarina Gephardt, "Hybrid Gardens: Travel and the Nationalization of Taste in Ann Radcliffe's Continental Landscapes," *European Romantic Review* (February 2010) 12:1, pp. 3-28; Benjamin A. Brabon, "Surveying Ann Radcliffe's Gothic Landscapes," *Literature Compass*, 2006 July; 3 (4), pp. 840-5; Soňa Nováková, "The Pleasures of the Eye: Landscapes of Otherness in Ann Radcliffe's The Italian," *Group de Recherches Anglo-Americaines de Tours* 28 (2005), pp. 123-139 for more recent scholarship on Radcliffe's use of landscape description in her novels. See also Lynne Epstein, "Mrs. Radcliffe's Landscapes: The Influence of Three Landscape Painters on Her Nature Descriptions," *Hartford Studies in Literature* 1(1969), pp. 107-20; Raymond D. Havens, "Ann Radcliffe's Nature Descriptions," *Modern Language Notes* 66 (1951), pp. 251-55; and Charles C. Murrah, "Mrs. Radcliffe's Landscapes: The Eye and the Fancy," *University of Windsor Review* 18 (1984), pp. 7-23, for more on the relationship between Radcliffe's work and contemporary visual artists.

examination is the ritual that the Marchesa unfortunately rejects, and so stays under the power of Schedoni, the patriarchy and the church. Crucially, because the Marchesa only performs the act of confession artificially – that is, without the requisite self-examination essential for actual absolution – she remains under the power of male authority. Ellena, conversely, performs self-examination so authentically that she attains a new level of feminine agency, uninhibited by any masculine power.

In all of these instances, Radcliffe's representations of self-examination might simply be read as the promotion of *via media* Anglican performance – a syncretic blending of dissenting individualism and Catholic purgation. However, the overtly Catholic imagery that pervades the novel's second and third volumes suggests that Radcliffe means to do more than transpose her own religiosity upon a fictionally popish setting. As I have explained above, by subverting popular stereotypes of Catholicism and illustrating specific elements of performance within the sacraments of confession and marriage, Radcliffe isolates and privileges Catholic religious rituals and rites that can be coded as "feminine." In the latter half of the novel, Radcliffe ultimately prescribes these performances as necessary for the revision and reconstruction of social power systems after revolution. As such, *The Italian* does not function as a critique of Catholicism or Italian culture, but rather of hegemony and even masculinity.

The novel's climax is strategically set in conjunction with the Catholic liturgical calendar, as Vivaldi's imprisonment, eventual release and marriage to Ellena coincide with the Lenten season and the Easter holiday. Here, Radcliffe leads her characters through the purgatorial rituals of carnival and lent, whereby the marital, judicial, and religious social structures of the novel are ultimately renewed and revised. Since the

Interregnum, English monarchs had used liturgical festivals as temporary and cathartic reversals of normal power hierarchies, whereby class and political tensions could be eased and uprisings prevented. However, because these traditional feast days were associated with the Catholic calendar, dissenters saw the monarchial promotion of festivity as a promotion of Anglican ideology and, thus, Catholic tradition. As Leah Marcus writes, "the fostering of old festival practices became very closely tied to the vexed matter of enforcing religious conformity, and the pastimes were increasingly perceived as extensions of liturgical worship."[296] Throughout the eighteenth century then, festivals in Britain were more and more frequently disassociated with religious practice and linked with commercial and secular ventures. As Terry Castle has noted, by the 1790s, carnivals, festivals and masquerades in literature are ubiquitously presented as separate from religious practice.[297] It is therefore significant that Radcliffe not only represents carnival in her novel, but additionally frames it as a specifically *Catholic* practice. In her positive portrayals of carnival and misrule, Radcliffe promotes those religious aspects of European religious culture that had since become residual in Britain. Thus, her depictions of religion in the novel's last two volumes are not anti-Catholic, but rather, like the masquerade scene in *A Simple Story*, they demonstrate the revolutionary efficacy of festival practices, which have been culturally forgotten or cast off in the face of Protestant enlightenment.[298] Significantly, these vestigial festival holidays also served

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[296] Leah Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, 5.

[297] Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnivalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986).

[298] See Jakub Lipski, "The Masquerade in Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* and *The Italian*," *Women's Writing: The Elizabethan to Victorian Period* (22:3, 2015), pp.

as opportunities for misrule, and (as in *A Simple Story*) as possible sites of gender fluidity and also feminine agency, religious practice, and public interaction.

As Vivaldi and Paolo are taken to the Inquisition, they pass through the Roman carnival celebrations, which Radcliffe describes with the same amount of detail she might afford a particularly jagged mountain face: "The Corso, through which they were obliged to pass, was crowded with gay carriages and masks, with processions of musicians, monks, and mountebanks, was lighted up with innumerable flambeaux, and resounded with the heterogeneous rattling of wheels, the music of serenaders, and the jokes and laughter of the revelers, as they sportively threw about their sugar-plumbs…" (194). Radcliffe goes on at some length, describing the gay scene with its "splendid crowd," "masks of all descriptions," and images of saints, which "contrast cruelly" with Vivaldi's emotions and, more importantly, with the looming fortress of the Inquisition and its "walls, of immense height…strengthened by numerable massy bulwarks, exhibited neither window or grate, but a vast and dreary blank; a small round tower only, perched here and there upon the summit, breaking their monotony" (196). This contrast highlights the ways that Radcliffe overtly privileges non-hierarchical religious performance. The sacramental bacchanalia of carnival with its gendered and class-based reversals is lovely when compared with the stark – and resolutely male – hierarchies of the Inquisition.

Crucially, as the rest of society outside the Inquisition confesses, fasts and self-examines during lent, the tribunals *within* the Inquisition perform similar rites until, as

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331-342. Lipski argues that Radcliffe depicts "quasi-masquerade" scenes that serve as "plot catalysts' and moments of "fantasy utopia" in Radcliffe's fiction.

Johnson has written, "the Inquisition in *The Italian* changes from a theater of horror into a theater of justice," ultimately proving Vivaldi's innocence and condemning Schedoni for his various crimes (133). Many scholars read this reversal as shocking, as it seems to reify the very institutions that Radcliffe has criticized for the first half of *The Italian*.[299] However, I would counter that the Inquisition's transformation is *gradual* (the trials constitute roughly a third of the novel), and not absolute: the Inquisition is initially painted as dark, mysterious, and hypocritical, and many of these illustrations remain, even after Vivaldi's release. Additionally, Radcliffe is careful to always leave the machinations of the Inquisition in the realm of "terror," as she does in her representations of corporeal punishment within the San Stefano convent. During his stint in prison, Vivaldi "conjectures," "believes," and "thinks he perceives" the signs of torture again and again in the dungeons, and his inquisitors bring him "within hearing of those doleful sounds, for the purpose of impressing upon his mind the horrors of the punishment, with which he was threatened, and of inducing him to confess without incurring them" (306). The reader, then, is continually confronted with the *potential* for torture that may or may not have been real, once the Inquisition proves itself a court for justice.

When Vivaldi is first brought before his judges he exclaims, "How…is the tribunal at once the Prosecutor, Witness, and Judge! What can private malice wish for more, than such a court of justice, at which to arraign its enemy? The stiletto of the Assassin is not so sure, or so fatal to innocence" (206). Later, however, the Inquisition

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[299] For specific scholarship on Radcliffe's representations of the Inquisition. John Thompson, "Ann Radcliffe's use of Philippus van Limborch's The History of the Inquisition," *English Language Notes*, 18 (September 1980); and Mark H. Hennelly, Jr. "The Slow Torture of Delay': Reading *The Italian*," *Studies in the Humanities* 14 (1987), 1-17.

performs a self-examination of its own minister: Schedoni, a "faithful servant of the Roman interest" is ferreted out and the tribunal is able to purge its own iniquities (206). Here Radcliffe demonstrates her distaste for secrecy as she argues that justice and trials, along with ministers of power, should be open to public scrutiny. Again however, her representation of the Inquisition champions individual performative elements of the confessional – while judiciary secrecy is corrupt, self-examination can be used as a tool for justice. Vivaldi's trial is a successful version of the "trial" that Schedoni and the Marchesa hold for Ellena in the novel's first volume. In both cases, individual and private self-examination is presented as useful for the sake of the public good; correspondingly, the regulation of the public eye can keep private systems of power from corruption. The type of judiciary system Radcliffe advocates is thus based on reciprocal – rather than hierarchical – power.

As such, the Inquisition's "sudden" efficacy does not read as particularly sudden at all. Radcliffe's novel does not advocate for a completely radical upheaval or destruction of preexisting governments, but rather, argues for the revision of the patriarchal and monastic hierarchal powers that already exist. This revision, according to Radcliffe, is possible through private religious performance – the kind of performance that women engage in throughout the entirety of *The Italian*. This thesis is of course problematic because of its potential to glorify the relegation of women to the private sphere.[300] As I have explained above, however, Radcliffe promotes a reciprocal

[300] Hoeveler has fully dissected this dangerous potential in her work on the female gothic, and describes the passive-aggressive potential of female writers and characters who "covertly wanted to believe that they could challenge or in some way passively subvert their newly inscribed and institutionalized 'spaces,' while maintaining their identities and roles as the wives and mothers of the bourgeoisie." Diane Long Hoeveler, *Gothic Feminism*, 7.

relationship between private feminine religious performance and public governance (which has heretofore been coded as male, both in the novel and in patriarchal eighteenth-century Britain), a relationship she demonstrates through the success of the convent Santa Maria del Pieta.

As Vivaldi is held captive in the Inquisition, Ellena finds asylum in the convent Santa Maria del Pieta, a successful and peaceful all-female society where she is able to gain introspection and – even more importantly – agency. Here, Ellena is able to find a delicate balance between the strictures of Holy Orders ("she regularly partook of the various occupations of the nuns") and the sacramental religious freedom she might find with the occasional visit to the surrounding nature of the convent where, "relieved from all the ceremonial restraints of the society, her very thoughts seemed more at liberty" (369). Afforded this safety and continual opportunity for self-examination, Ellena gains the determination to lament that she did not break off her engagement with Vivaldi sooner, and to wish that she had not so easily submitted herself to the machinations of his family: "Why did I not enforce it myself!" (368). Her stay in the convent is constituted by continual syncretic performances of Romantic contemplation and Catholic ritual that afford Ellena the agency she has been building toward throughout the novel.

The Italian ends happily: Vivaldi is released from prison at the end of Lent, a moment that is strongly redolent of a resurrection, as he emerges from his underground trial at Easter time. He and Ellena are married as the rest of Naples celebrates rebirth and renewal during the Easter holiday. After her period of self-reflection in the Sant Maria del Pianto, Ellena willingly leaves the convent and marries Vivaldi on her own terms.

Significantly, Radcliffe contrasts the two moments in the novel when Ellena has been presented at the altar – first against her will, and now happily and with her consent. "As Ellena advanced through the church, she recollected, when on a former occasion she had met Vivaldi at the altar, and, the scenes of San Sebastian rising to her memory, the happy character of those, which her present situation opposed to them, drew tears of joy and gratitude to her eyes" (411). Her first experience at the altar was "desolate" and enforced, but through private, feminine self-reflection, she ultimately gains the autonomy to accept or reject Vivaldi at her own will. Vivaldi has likewise undergone a transformation or even "confirmation" of sorts – he is no longer the brash and brazen youth who would abduct a novice from a convent, but is now a muted version of his earlier self. Left in silent contemplation within the Inquisition, utterly unmanned and powerless, and yet "conscious of his own innocence," he is subjected to the types of feminine self-examination that are ultimately to his benefit: "his passions, thus restrained, seemed to become virtues, and to display themselves in the energy of his courage and his fortitude. His soul became stern and vigorous in despair, and his manner and countenance assumed a calm dignity" (198). Upon his reunion with Ellena after the Lenten season Vivaldi is described as "wan" and subdued, and submits himself to Olivia's judgment when he asks for Ellena's hand in marriage (this time, much less persistently).

The ending of *The Italian* is made happier because the Neapolitan society has been revised and renewed – at Vivaldi and Ellena's wedding reception, the classes are conspicuously blended as all of the remaining characters gather to celebrate a companionate marriage of equals: "But this entertainment was not given to persons of distinction only, for both Vivaldi and Ellena had wished that all the tenants of the domain

should partake of it, and share the abundant happiness which themselves possessed; so that the grounds, which were extensive enough to accommodate each rank, were relinquished to a general gaiety" (413). The wedding reception savors of the carnival spirit that was depicted earlier in the novel, and Radcliffe uses this reception to reiterate her main thesis, namely that elements of religious devotion (usually those that are coded as "feminine") can beget revolution, which is useful and necessary for the renewal of old systems of power. The final chapters of *The Italian* confirm this message persistently, perhaps most obviously when Paolo, described as the "master of the revels" declares: "We had to go through purgatory before we could reach paradise" (413).

Conclusion

The Bygone Age of Chivalry

"But the age of chivalry is gone… Never, never more, shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exulted freedom…"

When Edmund Burke lamented the downfall of Marie Antoinette in his *Reflections*, he did so in specifically gendered terms: the revolutionary era marked a turning point in the ways that women were to be identified and granted or denied rights of citizenship. Like "Dissent" and "Nonconformity," "woman" as a category of identity in the 1790s gained traction in the political conversations of the day, and this project has sought to explore that traction, its development, and its ramifications. While this dissertation has considered how notions of femininity were changing as a result of revolutionary fervor, masculinity is an identity that is yet to be explored in conjunction with religious performance. In what ways did the revolution constitute a break or transformation in the construction of masculine identity? How can the intersections of performed masculinity and performed religion yield a greater understanding of our modern understandings of gender?

The novelists in this study, by and large, conceptualize masculine religious practice as hierarchical and hegemonic; masculine religion is ultimately unsuccessful unless the male characters adopt the more "authentic," private religious practices of the female characters. This in turn brings up the question of authenticity: can religious behavior be "authentic" if it is being performed for an audience? Does religious authenticity only appear in the absence of social power? In *Julia*, the histrionic and public

sensibility exhibited by Fredrick Seymour is seen as a type of self-indulgent mania, whereas the quiet sensibility of Julia and Charlotte is represented as effective and charitable. In *Desmond*, the loud boastings of the Doctor of the Anglican Church are cheap in comparison to Geraldine's self-sacrificial Christian motherhood. In *A Simple Story*, the kind priest Dorriforth becomes the vicious tyrant Lord Elmwood when he is granted land, and thus, a greater share of public power. Finally, in *The Italian*, Vivaldi is headstrong and violent until he is isolated in prison and learns how to utilize private feminine self-examination. A consideration of pulpits and public, performative, masculine religious expression would serve as a fruitful area of further inquiry in conjunction with this study, which has examined the functions of private and performative, feminine religious expression.

This project also takes as a given that in Britain during the long eighteenth century, gendered identity transformed from a capacious and mutable means of self-identification to an inflexible system for categorizing, codifying, and controlling individuals based on performances that were both compulsory and illusory. To this assumption, I would like to acknowledge that no cultural narrative is fully saturated into any society. Earlier in the period we can observe instances wherein gender is a calcified and prohibitive category, and the end of the eighteenth century certainly saw moments of resistance from gender conformity. Nell Gwynn, performing breeches roles in the Restoration, both tested the limits of gender on stage and simultaneously served as an object of the male gaze.[301] In earlier fiction, Fantomina and Roxana, who can change

[301] See Jacqueline Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists 1642-1737*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

their identities as easily as they can change clothing, are nevertheless punished for their transgressions.[302] Conversely, in the 1790s, Mary Wollstonecraft was publicly excoriated for her untraditional lifestyle, yet she is still considered a founder of feminism. Lady Delacour from Edgeworth's *Belinda,* despite her foibles and unorthodox femininity, is still read as more compelling than the dull and domestic Lady Percival.[303] These examples demonstrate the limits of any defined narrative of the construction of gendered identity, and the limits of assuming that cultural perceptions of gender fully solidified over the course of the eighteenth century in Britain. However, as Wahrman argues, it is worth examining "the specific historical circumstances that can account for [the] emergence, development, and ultimate naturalization of the self, of gender as a supposed universal."[304] In addition, it is important to ask: in what ways was the gendered self being defined in conjunction with religious identity at this revolutionary moment in history, and how do definitions of gender from this period still remain active in our own time?

It is notable that the novelists in this study all prescribe feminine bonding, sisterhood, and all-female communities as remedies to the social restrictions imposed upon them by gender. Ellena finds strength and clarity in the convent where she lives with her mother; the two women develop a bond based on mutual affection and

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[302] Daniel Defoe, *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics), 2008 (originally published in 1724). Eliza Haywood, "Fantomina; Or, Love in a Maze," *Fantomina and Other Works* (Ontario: Broadview Press), 2004 (originally published in 1725).

[303] Maria Edgeworth, *Belinda* (Ontario: Pandora Press) 1986 (originally published in 1801).

[304] Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self*, p. xii.

attraction. Miss Milner reforms, not as a result of her marriage to Dorriforth, but when she lives alone with Miss Woodley and her daughter, Matilda. Geraldine's closest companion is her sister Fanny, and her sympathy toward Josephine creates a space for the latter's child in her home. Julia, Charlotte, and Mrs. Meynell live together in feminine peace and charity, never tempted into marriage with other men after the deaths of Frederick Seymour and Mr. Meynell make the latter two widows.[305] A future project might consider the ways homosocial female relationships both conform to and resist religious ideology in the literature of the period. In short, there is more work to be done examining the construction of femininity and masculinity at this crucial turning point in history.

Race is also conspicuously missing from this study, especially a consideration of the ways race and the discourse around slavery intersected with religious belief in the revolutionary era. Interestingly, women writers who were on opposite sides of the French Revolutionary debate would often be on the same side of the abolitionist debate if they used religious rhetoric to support their arguments. Additionally, abolitionists often framed their religious arguments against slavery in the same ways they would have framed their arguments for or against revolution. Hannah More, for instance, a conservative Christian writer opposed to the revolution because she believed it took women away from their families, writes in her abolitionist "Slavery: A Poem," "Whene'er to Afric's shores I turn my eyes… I see the dire victim torn from social life; /

[305] It seems especially important that this all-female homosocial model reads as less acceptable in some of the domestic novels of early nineteenth century. Austen's work in particular comes to mind, with both Charlotte Lucas and Miss Bates reading as tragic figures in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*.

The shrieking baby, the agonizing wife!" Radical Dissenter Anna Laetitia Barbauld, on the other hand, frames the slave trade as a sin that will be punished by social justice and heaven with "vengeance yet to come."[306] Some of the most robust modern scholarly work in postsecular studies has considered race and the imposition of Western secularism on non-secular or differently secular cultures. Postcolonial scholarship has long recognized that Western secularism does not always promote freedom and autonomy, and that secularization can be just as normative and restrictive as religious oppression.

In broader terms, religion in eighteenth-century studies has been largely neglected, as I have argued in Chapters One and Two. This neglect is partially due to the important New Historicist and materialist methods used by scholars in our field. When we focus our energies on the physical, humanistic remains of past societies, we prioritize those remains over the metaphysical ideologies that persisted in the eighteenth century. We also see secularism as a positive feature of the Enlightenment that is necessary for modern democracy – as such, it is understandable that we would be hesitant to critique its tenets too severely. However, the binary opposition between reason and religious belief begets a type of secular paternalism which can seriously limit our scholarship. This paternalism can cause presentism, which can foster a sense of superiority over past cultures and identities that were non-secular. It can also cause a homogenization of religion as an identity, not allowing for variations and contestations that occur as religious adherents conform to and resist their identities.

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[306] Williams additionally wrote sentimental abolitionist poetry, and Smith wrote *The Wanderings of Warwick* (1794), which contains an invective against the slave trade.

Although religion is certainly represented in other literary forms of the era like poetry and theatre, this project has only considered religion as it is represented in a selected group of novels. This limitation was made in the interest of space, but also because the novel as a form lends itself to realistic representations of religious performance. The verisimilitude found in Julia's use of psalms, Lady Elmwood's Last Rites ceremony, Vivaldi's travels through the Roman Carnival, and Geraldine's private devotion would be difficult to find in the poetry of the era (or any era), which relies much more heavily on symbolic, rather than literal and historical religious expression. The novel, as Ian Watt has argued, is additionally the form that most readily hosts depictions of private spaces – an essential consideration when examining how the repertoire of feminine religious performances function in revolutionary discourse. A consideration of other forms of writing and art, especially the theatre and visual arts, would yield a richer understanding of the ways religious and gendered performances intersected in the late eighteenth century in response to the revolutionary debates. A few avenues of further inquiry that could be explored include: in what ways would mass audiences in the public theatre (as opposed to private, novel-reading audiences in the home) respond similarly or differently to representations of denominational transculturation? How can the theatre offer a different repertoire of feminine religious performance in this era? How might the censorship of revolutionary themes like religious tolerance and women's rights vary in print culture versus theatrical production in the 1790s? How might female playwrights and actresses perform and cultivate different public personas than female novelists? In what ways could props be especially evocative religious symbols? How were portraits (particularly of women) constitutive in creating ideals of gender in the revolutionary era?

Specifically, how might portraiture be staged to evoke consummate Christian motherhood or boldly public, political femininity?

Finally, this project considers the ways Smith, Inchbald, Williams, and Radcliffe envision gendered and religious revolution as part of wider, radical shifts in cultural and economic ideology. In Chapter One, I briefly synthesize the Marxist historiographical narrative of the French Revolution, which interprets the events of the 1790s as an economic struggle between an emergent middle class and a corrupt aristocracy. I also reference the Marxist revisionist narrative posited by Alfred Cobban and Francoise Furet, which counters the original Marxist hypothesis and speculates that the Revolution was not wholly precipitated by economics, but by political and historical movements that had been developing for the duration of the eighteenth century.

The writers in my study conform to and resist these narratives in varied ways. One of the tenets of the revisionist argument is that France's middle class was too underdeveloped to form a solid base for revolution, and the four novelists in this project correspondingly represent France in these terms. In *Desmond* in particular, both Desmond and Geraldine are struck by the class disparity that they encounter on the road to Paris, with the Count de Hauteville's estate functioning as emblematic of the harsh divide between the aristocracy and the poor: the Count reigns over his declining, feudal estate as "a petty tyrant among slaves" (92). In Williams' *Letters*, likewise, there is a stark contrast between the new "temple of Freedom" erected by the revolutionaries and the "old gloomy Gothic fabric which they have laid in ruins" (68).

Despite these revisionist depictions, all of the novelists in this project nevertheless envision the early years of the Revolution as an explosive, unprecedented moment of

potential for women and religious minorities to enter the public sphere. Williams describes the Fete de la Federation in the millennialist terms she utilizes in *Julia*:

> The most sublime spectacle, which, perhaps, was ever represented on the theatre of this earth… I promised to send you a description of the Federation; but it is not to be described! One must have been present, to form any judgment of a scene, the sublimity of which depended much less on its external magnificence than on the effect it produced on the minds of the spectators. "The people, sure the people were the sight!" I may tell you of pavilions, of triumphal arches, of altars on which incense was burnt, of two hundred thousand men walking in procession; but how am I to give you an adequate idea of the behavior of the spectators? How am I to pain the impetuous feelings of that immense, that exulting multitude? Half a million of people assembled at a spectacle, which furnished every image that can elevate the mind of man; which connected the enthusiasm of moral sentiment with the solemn pomp of religious ceremonies; which addressed itself at once to the imagination, the understanding, and the heard. (2-6).

As such, the Revolution functions as a unique imaginative moment for populist uprising. Additionally, the novelists in this study use the revolutionary fervor from France to inform their own proto-Marxist visions for Britain. For instance, Williams continually paints Britain as a corrupt capitalist society in both *Julia* and the *Letters*: "I cannot but suspect, that, while the fair and honourable traders of our commercial country act with the most liberal spirit in their ordinary dealings with other nations, they wish to make a monopoly of liberty, and are angry that France should claim a share of that precious property" (69). In Inchbald's novel, Catholics are portrayed not only as culturally and politically oppressed, but economically as well. The turning point of the novel rests on the fact that Dorriforth is granted the right to inherit property via the Papists Act of 1778, and so relinquishes his vows as a priest to become Lord Elmwood. As such, his subsequent marriage to Miss Milner and the romantic narrative of the novel depends upon the question of granting property to hitherto unpropertied Catholic citizens – and granting it suddenly. For Smith, Britain in *Desmond* is represented as performing an

illusory version of the progressive society that France was trying to achieve. As I have argued in Chapter Two, Smith equates the English bourgeoisie with the feudal characters Desmond encounters in France. For Smith, Britain's commercial-industrial society was in need of revision just as much as France's stagnant feudal system. Finally, Radcliffe's paradise in the ending of the Italian features a classless society celebrating in a Neapolitan garden that is conspicuously in "the style of… England, and of the present day" (412). Thus, although the Marxist and revisionist historiographies of the past two hundred years are at odds, the novelists in this project concur with the revisionist rendering of France's feudal economic status, even while they hope for a Marxist overthrow of corrupt commercialism in Britain.

The four novelists in this study all considered the 1790s as a time of populist change that could be brought about by individual action. The spirit of toleration and democracy that proliferated from the Glorious Revolution in 1688 to the overthrow of the *ancien regime* one hundred years later promised an opening for both religious toleration and women's advancement. Considering religious identity as a dominant and performative identity in this period can give us greater insight into the ways religious adherents in the late eighteenth century imagined their own religious identities – as malleable, contestable, and compulsory. It also allows a deeper understanding of the ways these religious adherents rejected and promoted toleration and secularization varyingly, and the ways they used religion, toleration, and secularization to inform their hopes for Enlightenment. This study also offers a glimpse into a crucial moment in the historical development of modern gendered identity. The revolutionary years allowed a period of explosive emergent feminism and ultimately, this project does not only offer

methods for examining gender in the eighteenth century, but in our own time as well. Some questions that remain for exploration include: how are our modern conceptions of gender still affected by residual religious ideologies (particularly male, hegemonic forms of Christianity)? In what ways does the hegemony of modern Western patriarchy depend upon a belief in Enlightened secularism? How does secularism mandate a model of citizenship that excludes religious adherents? How do the patriarchy and secularism operate in conjunction as normative and restrictive systems of power? Perhaps most importantly, how can modern feminists disentangle or more fully consider the complex relationship between gender and religion to work toward a more egalitarian future?

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