

Conversations with a Lady: Women and the Religious Debate in Caroline Print Culture

Catherine COUSSENS*

Abstract

Women's participation in the print culture associated with the Caroline court is often discussed as a special category of literary history, isolated from the specific contexts of Charles I's policies and the ongoing religious conflicts disrupting Europe. Charles I's reign saw a gradual movement towards absolutism, demonstrated by his decision to rule without Parliament between 1629 and 1640, vigorous censorship of religious and political criticism, and embrace of the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. His controversial commitment to Arminianism**, and continued penalisation of Roman Catholics also ensured that some communities remained alienated from the court. Rather than examining women writers as a separate group, it is fruitful to analyse their role within the wider print culture generated in this atmosphere. While the increasingly feminocentric court enabled some women to transgress conservative norms concerning gender to construct themselves as authors, the court was far from being a homogeneous community. Male and female-authored texts tend to demonstrate their authors' primary commitment to specific religious and political communities, and willingness to negotiate with the dominant discourses of the court in order to promote them. Nevertheless, women as authors or addressees of printed texts debating religious allegiance became an increasingly conspicuous aspect of Caroline literature. The genre I describe as "conversations with a lady" included both court propaganda and attempts to intervene in the discourses of the court. The prayer book compiled for women by Bishop John Cosin (1627), for example, was commissioned by the king as part of his drive to reconcile an increasingly Calvinist English community to Arminian Protestantism, but initiated by Protestant women at Queen Henrietta Maria's court wishing to assert their religious identity against the ostentatious Catholicism of the queen's French entourage. While Puritan authors responded by conflating anti-feminist and anti-Catholic critiques of the court, two examples of printed texts by women addressing the court attempt to mediate between the dominant royalist ethos and disparate religious groups. The first, a set of poetic meditations (1634), by Alice Sutcliffe, can be read as a response to the prayer book project and an attempt to mediate between the courtly centre and Puritan impulses.

* Dr., Çankaya University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature, cathycoussens@yahoo.co.uk

** Arminianism was originally a branch of protestantism named after the Dutch theologian, Jacob Arminius.

The second, a translation by Susan DuVerger of the Roman Catholic religious romances by Bishop Jean-Paul Camus (1639), represents an attempt to disseminate popular Catholic literature amongst a Protestant English audience. Printed addresses to, and discussions with, prominent women before and during the civil wars and Interregnum also construct women as disinterested judges, mediators and commentators on religious matters. Women's visibility in court culture meant that they increasingly became the authors, commissioners and addressees of religious texts in the Caroline period, while gender, as a means of avoiding censorship and resisting politicisation, became a powerful weapon in the religious debate.

Keywords: Caroline court, print, women, Anglicanism, Puritan, Roman Catholic

Öz

Caroline sarayıyla bağdaştırılan kadınların yayıncılığa katılımları, genellikle Charles I'in politikaları ve Avrupa'yı etkileyen dini çatışmalardan bağımsız, özel bir edebiyat tarihi kategorisinde incelenir. Charles I'in krallığı döneminde, 1629-1640 yılları arasında ülkeyi Parlamentosuz yönetme, dini ve politik eleştirilerin sansür edilmesi ve İlahi Hak Teorisi ilkesinin benimsenmesi gibi olaylarda görüldüğü gibi, mutlakiyete doğru bir kayma görülür. Kral'ın Arminian Anglikanizm'i kabullenme çelişkisi ve Roman Katolik'lerin cezalandırılmaya devam edilmesi bazı toplulukların saraya yabancılaştığını kanıtlar. Kadınları ayrı bir grupta incelemek yerine bu atmosferin yarattığı daha geniş kapsamlı basın kültürü içindeki rolleri açısından incelemek daha yararlı olacaktır. Gittikçe kadın merkezli olmaya başlayan saray, bazı kadınların geleneksel değerleri aşırıp yazar olmalarına imkan sağladıysa da, saray homojen bir topluluktan oluşmuyordu. Kadın ve erkek yazarlı tüm metinler yazarlarının belli bir dini ve siyasi topluluğa temel adanmışlıklarını ve ilerlemek için sarayın temel baskın söylemlerine uyma isteklerini yansıtmaya eğilimindeydi. Yine de, dini uzlaşmayı dile getiren yazılı metinlerin yazarları ya da okuyucuları olarak kadınlar gittikçe Caroline edebiyatının göze çarpan öğeleri olmuşlardır. "Bir hanımla söyleşiler" diye tanımlayacağımız edebi tür hem saray propagandası hem de saray söylemine dahil olma girişimlerini kapsar. Kral'ın John Cosin'e (1627) bir kadın için dua kitabı bastırması, onun Protestan İngiliz cemaatinin Arminianizm ile barıştırması çabasının bir uzantısıdır, ancak bu kraliçenin Fransız maiyetinin gösterişli Roman Katolizm'ine karşı Protestan kadınlar tarafından Henrietta Maria'nın sarayında tanıtılmıştır. Puritan yazarlar saraya anti-feminist ve anti-katolik eleştirileriyle veryansın ederken, iki kadın tarafından saraya hitaben yazılan iki metin baskın kralcı düşünceyle farklı dini gruplar arasında arabuluculuk yapmayı hedefler. İlk olarak, Protestan Alice Sutcliffe'in yazdığı, şiirsel düşünceler serisi (1634) dua kitabı projesi'ne bir yanıt ve saray çevresi ile Puritan duyarlılık arasında arabuluculuk yapma girişimi olarak ele alınabilir. İkincisi ise Susan DuVerger'in, Fransız reform karşıtı yazar Jean Paul Camus'un (1639) Roman Katolik dini romanslarının çevirisidir ve popüler Katolik edebiyatı Protestan İngiliz okurlar arasında yayma girişimidir. İç Savaş dönemi ve öncesinde önemli kadınlarla ve önemli kadınlara hitaben basılan metinler de kadınlara dini konularda tarafsız yargılama, arabuluculuk ve yorumcu rollerini yükler. Saray kültüründe kadınların görünmesi, onların Caroline döneminde giderek saraya hitap eden politik-dini metinlerin yazarları, sorumluları ve hatipleri oldukları anlamına gelmekteydi, sansür ve siyasileşmeden kaçınmanın bir yolu olarak cinsiyet önemli bir dini tartışma silahı olarak kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Caroline dönemi yayıncılık, kadın, Anglikanizm, Puritan, Roman Katolik

Abbreviations: *DNB: Dictionary of National Biography* (Ed. Stephen and Lee)

CSPV: Calendar of State Papers Venetian (Ed. Hinds)

Critical attention to women's performances within the shifting matrices of allegiance that shaped early modern England has produced rewarding readings of their literary activities. However, there is still work to be done in interrogating the categories through which we define such work and assess its cultural relevance. As Elizabeth Clarke has suggested, having recovered early women writers and cultural actors from the margins of literary history, critics must now examine the specific contexts and communities that produced their works. In particular, rather than attempting to "appropriat[e] those texts to serve the interests of a belated and beleaguered feminism" (Clarke, 2000, p. 7), the critic of early modern women's literary history must attend carefully to the subtle and complex relationships between gender, text and society. This paper will explore aspects of women's participation in the print culture associated with the court during the reign of King Charles I. Rather than considering female-authored or commissioned texts as isolated examples of artistic pioneering - representing embryonic stages in the development of a proto-professional literary role for women-¹ I will suggest that many of these texts can be read as manifestations of, and negotiations with, the king's policies and their impact on the community immediately prior to and during the 'Personal Rule': the period between 1629 and 1640 during which Charles ruled without reference to Parliament (Sharpe, 1992; Reeve, 2003, p. 1). As I will show, women's involvement in the public, literary world was brought about by both the strategic efforts of the court to communicate with the general public and women's own efforts to negotiate with the ideology of monarchic absolutism to protect and promote their own communities' interests. Women's literary voices, and men's engagement with them, functioned to mediate between the court and the wider community and to disrupt the king's absolutist agenda by promoting the interests of alienated or sceptical groups. The result, however, was a marked increase in women's conspicuousness in print culture, a trend reflected throughout the seventeenth century.

The doctrine of 'patriarchalism', as propounded by Sir Robert Filmer in *Patriarcha, Or the Natural Power of Kings* (written and circulated in 1638, but not published until 1680), reflected the Stuart kings' paternalistic political vision by promoting the ideal of male sovereign government within the state and the private family. Charles I's domestic policies were aimed at imposing uniform social, religious and moral practices upon the English people from the court downwards: the ordinances drawn up for the management of the royal households, for example, expressed the king's wish that the code of conduct designed to mould the court into an "image of virtue" would "from thence...spread with more order through all parts of our kingdoms" (Sharpe, 1987, pp. 247-48).

The king's efforts to control his subjects reflect his movement towards a form of monarchic absolutism parallel to that developing in France (Reeve, 2003, p. 20, 34).² This doctrine was based in part upon the political theory of Jean Bodin, which stressed the need for a single, unassailable authority to maintain peace and order after the devastating

¹ Walker (1996, pp. 146-69), for example cites Mary Fage's *Fames Roule* (London, 1634), a printed poetic celebration of Charles I's court, as an indication of women's gradual movement into professional, public authorship.

² For other discussions of the Stuart kings' attitudes towards absolutism, see Burgess (1996) and Sommerville (1999).

religious wars in France (Bodin, *Six Livres de la Republique*, 1576; *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, 1606). The defences of royal power published by King James VI of Scotland, later James I of England, at the end of the sixteenth century also insisted that reigning kings were answerable only to God (King James I, *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, 1598; *Basilikon Doron*, 1599).

Like his father, Charles I embraced Divine Right theory. During the parliamentary sessions of 1627-29, a marked conflict developed between the king and those members of Parliament seeking to establish a constitutional monarchy and defend the traditional rule of law (Reeve, 2003, p. 20). Charles I's unpopular religious and political policies helped to draw the battle lines between the monarchy and its opponents, particularly those urging further reform of the English Church and England's commitment to defending Protestantism in Europe (Reeve, 2003, p. 20). Radical Protestants had been labelled 'Puritans' and perceived as a challenge to the monarchy since the Elizabethan period (Adams, 1973, 2002). In the early seventeenth century, however, they had become more assertive in their hostility to the monarchy (Reeve, 2003, p. 76). Historians continue to debate the degree to which the court became polarised from the Protestant 'country' during the Stuart era, as well as the precise distinctions between radical Presbyterians, Calvinists, crypto-Catholics and Anglican Protestants, all of whom were represented at both James and Charles's courts, but it is clear that contemporaries perceived a deepening opposition between those outside the court with puritan tendencies and Anglican, Catholic and crypto-Catholic court insiders (Smuts, 1987, pp. 218-20; Tyacke, 2001; Sharpe, 1992).

Charles I was determined to control and excise voices he considered detrimental to his authority. The two prerogative courts responsible for the censorship of printed material during his reign were the Star Chamber and the High Commission; these acted on the king's behalf to license or censor texts considered subversive or seditious, and punish offending authors (Potter, 1994, p. xiii). Charles I's vigilance over literary publication demonstrates his awareness of the persuasive power of print. By 1637 the Star Chamber had decreed that all published texts should be authorised by a court censor (*A decree of Starre-Chamber, concerning printing*, 1637). 1637 also saw the famous libel trial in the Star Chamber of William Prynne, John Bastwick and Henry Burton, who were brutally punished for criticising the Anglican episcopacy (Prynne, 1637; Laud, 1637; Aughterson, 1998, p. 56).³ A recent study of Charles's censorship policies reveals that censored texts were normally either spiritually controversial (arguing for or against Catholicism, promoting anti-Arminian doctrines such as Calvinism, or condemning Anglican episcopacy), political (publicising Parliament's grievances against the king or condemning the court), or topical, since the king outlawed 'corrantos', or news-books reporting domestic and foreign news (Auchter, 2009).

Conversely, by licensing certain texts the court functioned as an effective propaganda machine to promote the monarchy's beliefs and aims, idealising the role of the Stuart

³ Prynne had already been punished by the Star Chamber in 1633 for his treatise against stage acting, *Histriomastix* (1632), which had been interpreted as a deliberate attack on Queen Henrietta Maria's enthusiasm for masques (Prynne, 1632; Saunders, 1999, p. 30).

monarchy by printing the king's publications and declarations to the public, or publishing court masques and other literary or dramatic celebrations of the court.⁴

Critics have noted the increasingly feminocentric atmosphere of the Caroline court (Smuts, 1987, pp. 194-96; Corns, 2007, pp. 168-69), as well as women's conspicuousness in the Counter-Reformation movement on the Continent (Collins, 1996; Veevers, 1989). However, they have been less alert to women's presence in the Anglican and Protestant literature associated with the court, particularly texts negotiating with the dominant ethos of the court in order to assert the value of specific religious perspectives. Male authors' deliberate use of feminine personae in staging religious debate in print has also not been sufficiently attended to. The genre I will describe as 'conversations with a lady' became a significant aspect of religious print culture during the Caroline and civil war periods.

The publication in February 1627 of a prayer book, *A Collection of Private Devotions*, by the Anglican minister, Dr. John Cosin, directly implicated women in the controversy surrounding the king's religious policies. The Arminian Anglican theology propounded by Cosin and other conspicuous monarchist divines, including Richard Montague and William Laud (whom the king appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633), represented a branch of high Anglicanism unacceptable to those embracing Calvinism (Tyacke, 2001, pp. 144-46; Smuts, 1987, p. 220). The Arminians emphasised set liturgy, decorum and the sanctity of ecclesiastical spaces within a rigidly hierarchical church order. In 1619 Laud and Cosin had collaborated with James I in revising the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* along Arminian lines for use in Scotland, a move strongly resisted by Presbyterian ministers there (Cosin, 1869, p. 93).

Calvinist opponents of Arminianism accused the king and his ministers of reversing the progress achieved by the Reformation and plotting to bring the English Church under the tyranny of Rome (Tyacke, 2001, pp. 143-44). In June 1626 Charles I issued a proclamation against "publishing or maintaining any new inventions or opinions" apart from those enshrined in the Anglican Church in a deliberate attempt to outlaw his religious opponents (Cosin, 1869, p. 93).

Cosin deliberately positions his prayer book within the circle of the king's authority, so that worship of God is bound up with reverence for the king. The 'Antiphona' (hymn or psalm), for example, emphasises the monarch's sacred role as God's anointed (Cosin, 1627, pp. 35-36). An angry response by William Prynne (*A Briefe Survey and Censure of Mr Cozens His Couzening Devotions*, 1627) explicitly connects the Arminian project with fawning monarchism, claiming that Cosin "shows himselfe to be a flatterer and a royalist", an accusation which overtly politicises the ideological gulf between the monarchy and its opponents fifteen years before the outbreak of civil war (Cosin, 1869, p. 130).⁵

⁴ Charles I's proclamations and declarations were routinely printed (Petrie, 1968). Lenton's *Great Britains's Beauties, Or, The Female Glory* (1638) is a typical example of a printed celebration of the queen and her ladies' theatrical performances. For discussions of the literary impact of the royal masques, see Veevers, 1989, pp. 1-13; Smuts, 1987, pp. 145-57; Saunders, pp. 30-42.

⁵ Cosin's papers contain a detailed account of Prynne's accusations and his own responses (Cosin, 1869, pp. 128-36).

Arminians claimed that their ecclesiastical agenda was essentially compatible with the reformed religion: Cosin deliberately emphasises the continuity between the Tudor and Stuart reigns, arguing that his prayer book was modelled on the Protestant prayer books printed under Elizabeth I's authority in 1560 and 1573 (Cosin, 1627, sig. A5r). Prynne, however, condemns Cosin for his deliberate promotion of "Popish" practices such as confession and absolution via a priest, insistence on Christ's bodily presence in the sacrament, and the inclusion of prayers for the dead (Prynne, 1627, sigs. A1-A2). Addressing his text to the Protestant "heroes" in the House of Commons, he urges them to:

...vindicate the cause, and Doctrines of our Church, against those cozening treacherous and rebellious Sons (if Sons) of hers, who have betrayed her with a kiss and wounded her with one hand, while they seemingly embrace her with the other. (Prynne, 1627, sigs. A1-A2)

A major focus of puritan fears was the household of Queen Henrietta Maria, who was passionately devoted to the Roman Catholic religion.⁶ Her marriage to Charles I had begun badly in 1626, when the king ousted many members of her French retinue from the court (Petrie, pp. 40-45). Once the king and queen were reconciled, however, Charles deliberately emphasised the queen's prerogative alongside his own (Fisher, 1993, p. 324).

Cosin's prayer book promotes reverence for Henrietta Maria at a point when Puritans were beginning to dread her influence on the English Crown. In 'Prayers for the Queene' God is asked to "pour down the Riches of thine abundant goodnesse upon the head of thine handmaid; our most gracious Q. Marie" (Cosin, 1627, pp. 48-49). In the early years of the reign, the issue of offering prayers for the queen became intensely political. On 12 May 1625 Montague informed Cosin that he had arranged for Henrietta Maria to be included in Protestant prayers for the new king, despite the fact that some ministers deliberately planned to exclude her (Cosin, 1627, pp. 68-69).

Prynne's critique of Cosin's text is deliberately gendered. While he does not allude directly to the queen, he implicitly associates Cosin's book with her court, insisting that the illustration on the front cover (depicting a tabernacle or temple with two female figures kneeling on either side of a burning heart bearing the legend: "The Sacrifice of a contrite heart") deliberately advertises its connections to "Ladies Psalters", or Roman Catholic prayer books designed for women's private use (Prynne, 1627, p. 39).

Moreover, in combining references to an untrustworthy Catholic community of "English Jesuitesses...Friers, M[o]nkes, and Nunnes, which lurke among us...those unprofessed Roman Proselites, and Converts (who swarme so thicke of late in every corner)" with an unstable female readership based within the court, Prynne conflates anti-Catholic discourse, which tended to present Roman Catholics as inherently secretive, untrustworthy and irrational, with popular perceptions of court ladies (Prynne, 1627, pp.

⁶ For detailed discussions of contemporary Protestant fears concerning Roman Catholic influence at Queen Henrietta Maria's court, see Hibbard (1983) and Veevers (1993).

39-40).⁷ As Alison Shell has pointed out, in anti-Catholic propaganda “binary oppositions between good and evil mapped all too easily onto those between man and woman” (Shell, 2006, p. 1). Prynne mocks the idea of a genuinely devout, upper-class female congregation:

...the Devotions of most Ladyes, and Gentlewomen, (whose whole employment is but to be idle, at least, to Prank, and Dress themselves, and to pass away their lives in Dancing, Carding, Chatting, Gazing, and in Visits, as if they had no God to serve, nor Soules to save:) are now so Sloathfull, Drowsie, and Bed-ridden; that their Vespers would be almost quite runne out, before they would be fitted, and attired for their Morning-Song. (Prynne, 1627, pp. 39-40)

However, Prynne attacks the prayer book not for being a ‘women’s text’ as such, but because, more sinisterly, it *masquerades* as a text designed for court ladies’ private use, while covertly aiming to seduce the Protestant English public into Catholicism:

...this close and secret scattering of these Popish Devotions, is ten times more dangerous and infectious, then the open publishing of them to the world at first: because it finds the least opposition, and so (perhaps) seduceth many before it be discovered. (Prynne, 1627, p. 93)

Prynne’s preoccupation with the number of copies printed demonstrates his fears that the text had a much wider and more damaging agenda than nourishing Catholic tendencies at court and flattering the king. He stresses the book’s “wonderful circulation”, claiming that while two hundred and fifty copies were printed in the first edition, the second reached one thousand, which could hardly be a “legacy or new-year’s gift for a friend” (Prynne, 1627, p. 94).⁸

Ironically, rather than representing a covert attempt to disseminate Roman Catholic doctrine amongst the Protestant community, the book represented Protestant women courtiers’ desire to define a visible spiritual identity within the court as a counterbalance to the more extravagantly devout Roman Catholic Frenchwomen there. During the Interregnum, Cosin told the diarist, John Evelyn, that the king had commissioned the book in response to a specific request by the queen’s female attendants:

...since the Queen coming over to England, with a great train of French ladys, they were often upbraiding our English ladys of the Court, that, having so much leisure trifled away their time in the antichambers among the young gallants, without having something to divert themselves of more devotion; whereas the Ro[man] Catholic ladys had their Hours and Breviarys, which entertained them in religious exercise. Our Protestant ladys, scandalized at

⁷ For a discussion of anti-Catholic propaganda during the period, see Marotti, 2005.

⁸ Cosin claimed that Prynne greatly exaggerated these numbers (Cosin, 1869, p. xx).

this reproach, it was complained of to the King. Whereupon his Majesty called Bishop White to him, and asked his thought of it, and whether there might not be found some forme of prayers amongst the ancient liturgys proper on this occasion, so that the Court ladys might at least appear as devout as the new come-over French. (John Evelyn, 12 October 1651, qtd in Cosin, 1869, pp. 284-85)

The moving force behind this initiative was Susanna Feilding, Countess of Denbigh and sister of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, the favourite of both King James and King Charles (*DNB*: 18.290). Charles I's rearrangement of the queen's household in 1626, and placement of Buckingham's female relatives in key positions there, had significantly enhanced the family's status: Susanna Feilding was promoted to First Lady of the Bedchamber and Mistress of the Robes, and her daughters also held office (*DNB*: 18. 290). Susanna Feilding had worked hard to mediate between the king, the queen and Buckingham during the troubled early stages of the marriage and after Buckingham's assassination in 1628 had achieved a close friendship with the queen (Lockyer, 1981, p. 63; 116). Commenting in 1637 on the favour shown to Susanna Feilding's inept son, Basil, the Venetian ambassador reported: "I find that he is the son of the late Duke of Buckingham's sister, the whole of whose race enjoys his Majesty's favour absolutely" (*CSPV* 19: 207).

Susanna Feilding's association with the Laudian faction was originally fostered by Buckingham's attempts in the early 1620s to mediate between Calvinists and Arminians in a series of religious debates at his home, York House (Tyacke, 2001, p. 144). At the time, both Montague and Cosin reported their social encounters with Buckingham's female relatives as events of importance.⁹

As a public relations exercise, the prayer book project focuses attention on the women of the queen's household as vehicles of royal authority: in commissioning the book the king was attempting to integrate the queen's household into his homogenising agenda by balancing national and religious factions there.¹⁰ However, the prayer book also represents an attempt on the part of the Protestant women surrounding the queen to distance themselves from accusations of Roman Catholicism and counter perceptions of Arminianism as innovative and damaging. It seems likely that Susanna Feilding was continuing the work initiated by her brother, by liaising between Arminians (who were most likely to support royal, absolutist authority) and the Protestant country at large. In this sense it demonstrates women's active potential to mediate between the court and potentially alienated groups within and outside it, as well as male authors' awareness of the potency of women's presence in religious propaganda. Prynne's gendered response

⁹ For example, on 29 July 1625 Montague wrote to Buckingham to ask for his support, citing his friendship with Susanna Feilding: "...you have been pleased to tie me unto your excellent, not onely self, but also most honourable sister, in that bond of obligation, as never was poor scholar to such worthies" (Cosin, 1869, p. 295).

¹⁰ A similar impulse can be seen in the king's masque, *Luminalia* (1638), by William Davenant, which deliberately emphasised the harmony between French and English members of the court (Findlay, 2006, pp.110-45).

also reveals his awareness of the court's function as a propaganda machine and the king's willingness to deploy women's cultural authority to feed it.

Alice Sutcliffe's text, *Meditations of Man's Mortalitie or, A Way to True Blessedness* (1633/1634), reveals a similar mediating impulse while it overtly draws attention to the issue of female authorship and identity at the Caroline court. Sutcliffe's connections to both the king and the queen's households were deep-rooted. Her book advertises her status as wife of a courtier, "John Sutcliffe Esquire, Groome of his Majesties most Honourable Privy Chamber" (Sutcliffe, 1634, title page). John Sutcliffe had also held a position at James I's court (Cullen, 1996, pp. ix-xi). Alice Sutcliffe's book was published by a company of printers later licensed by the king under the censorship act of 1637, and was jointly dedicated to Susanna Feilding and Feilding's sister-in-law, Katherine Villiers, Buckingham's widow (Cullen, 1996, p. x). The dedicatory acrostic verses emphasise Sutcliffe's material dependence on these women and desire for their patronage: "it being, I know not usual for a Woman to do such things...I run to your selves for refuge" (Sutcliffe, 1634, sigs. A4v-A5r). Sutcliffe emphasises her close and affectionate relationship with the family, telling Susanna Feilding: "[Y]ou have been more than a Mother to me" (sigs. A5v-A6r).¹¹

Sutcliffe's association with the Villiers women connects her to both Laudian and crypto-Catholic spiritual territories at court, while her personal, familial circumstances connect her to the puritan opponents of the monarchy. In 1635 Katherine Villiers would enrage Charles I by publicising her conversion to Catholicism (Lockyer, 1981, pp. 461-62), while Susanna Feilding, as we have seen, allied herself with the Laudian Anglican project from the early 1620s. Alice Sutcliffe was also connected to puritan opponents of Arminianism: John Sutcliffe was the nephew of Dr. Matthew Sutcliffe, Dean of Exeter, a chaplain to James I but a key opponent of the Arminians. According to Cullen, since Matthew Sutcliffe founded "an anti-Catholic polemical college at Chelsea", he would have found himself increasingly marginalized in the 1630s. (Cullen, 1996, p. ix).

Alice Sutcliffe presents her work as an essentially didactic enterprise: "not altogether Pleasing; but my aim is, that it may prove Profitable" (1634, sig. A5 r-v). As Lori Humphrey Newcomb has said, during the Renaissance period, Horace's praise of literature combining profit and pleasure had gradually evolved into a gendered polarisation between themes of pleasure and love, conventionally associated with women, and serious themes such as war and politics, conventionally associated with men (Newcomb, 2006, p. 121). Sutcliffe's choice of words suggests a deliberate attempt to distance herself from the feminised genre of romance. Instead, her verses explore the serious themes of mankind's essential sinfulness and ultimate mortality, facts only redeemed by God's mercy. Her insistent condemnation of worldly vice echoes the tone of puritan attacks on the court: the long poem on Christ's salvation of mankind warns of the "sweet delights" which mankind has to resist: lust, drunkenness, vanity, pride and idleness (Sutcliffe, 1634, pp. 153-55).

¹¹ Cullen notes Ruth Hughey's suggestion that since Buckingham had an elderly servant in 1627 called John Sutcliffe, Alice Sutcliffe may have been his daughter-in-law; in this case Katherine Villiers may have been responsible for arranging her marriage (Hughey, 1934, pp. 156-64, cited in Cullen, 1996, p. x).

Thomas May's dedicatory verse also emphasises the serious moral lesson contained in the text, which should be seen as a "mirror" within which the reader apprehends his or her own human frailty (May, prefatory verse in Sutcliffe, 1634, unpaginated). The theme and title of her text also strongly recalls the printed verse-devotions by the Calvinist poet, Rachel Speght, published in 1621 (Speght, 1621, *Mortalities Memorandum*).

Sutcliffe's focus on Eve's culpability and the weakness of women, however, deliberately counters the anti-feminist thrust of puritan authors like Prynne by advising that men and women are equally fallen:

'Twas Pride, made Eve
desire still to excel...
...
A female sinne,
it counted was to be,
But now Hermaphrodite,
proved is she. (Sutcliffe, pp. 160-61)

Sutcliffe's presentation of Queen Henrietta Maria's household as a site of feminine virtue recalls Aemilia Lanyer's published book of verse addressed to the women of the Jacobean court (*Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, 1611). However, during the Caroline reign the issue of the religious and political affiliation of women at court had become increasingly politicised. Sutcliffe's text deliberately fuses together the separate religious interests of the queen's circle, countering perceptions of court circles as alienated from the outside world to imagine a morally and spiritually cohesive community. In her dedications to the Villiers women, Sutcliffe reinforces the connection between women at court and private Protestant devotions, a connection promoted by Cosin's notorious prayer book. She tells her dedicatees that as they are "Twinnes in Virtues...so I have joynd You in my Devotions" (Sutcliffe, 1634, sig. A4v). However, while Cosin had deployed monarchic discourse for a conspicuously Laudian agenda, emphasising the connection between the king's prerogative and the adherence to fixed forms of prayer, Sutcliffe deliberately presents her own interpretation and commentary on the Scriptures, claiming the right to author and express her own "devotions". This impulse surely links her to 'puritan' elements at the king's court.

Sutcliffe's desire to mediate between different interpretations of Protestantism is also demonstrated by the range of poets chosen to donate commendatory poems. Ben Jonson had been especially favoured during the reign of James I, composing most of the Jacobean court masques. Francis Lenton was known as the 'Queen's Poet' (serving Henrietta Maria's household), while the puritan tendencies of Thomas May and George Wither would find expression in the civil wars, when both writers would support Parliament against the king (the commendatory verses by these authors are presented in the unpaginated prefatory section of Sutcliffe's text).

Like Cosin's prayer book, Sutcliffe's text represents a bridge between the charmed circle of the court and the Protestant public, whose perceptions of court ladies (as Prynne's text demonstrates) could be negative. While it can be associated with courtly royalist literature, however, as a site of religious discussion, composed by a woman with puritan leanings and a relative of an assertive anti-Laudian, it also undermines the hegemonic discourse promoted by the king.

Susan DuVerger's publication in 1639 of a translation of the religious romance stories by the Roman Catholic bishop, Jean-Paul Camus (*Admirable Events*, London, 1639), expresses a very different political and religious position from that advocated by Alice Sutcliffe, or indeed the Arminians, associating her instead with the Roman Catholic Counter-Reformation movement on the Continent.¹² Like Sutcliffe, however, DuVerger explores the possibilities of print culture to air her own religious perspective, while deliberately situating herself within monarchic, courtly discourse. By dedicating her project to Queen Henrietta Maria, she indicates her desire that the queen become the instrument of a mutually beneficial mediation between the monarchy and the Roman Catholic population in England, as Henrietta Maria had promised the Pope on her marriage.¹³

While prose romances by authors such as Robert Greene, Thomas Lodge and Philip Sidney had become enormously popular in England during the Elizabethan period, the increase of literacy and print publication in the seventeenth century created a growing market for simple, abbreviated versions of well-known narratives. This appears to have created an opening for women writers: in 1640 an eighteen-year-old Protestant, Judith Man, published an English "epitome", or simplified version, of the famous political romance, *The Argenis*, by the French Roman Catholic John Barclay (Man, 1621). A decade later, during the Interregnum, the royalist Anna Weamys published a short sequel to Philip Sidney's Protestant romance, *The Arcadia* (Weamys, 1651).

The 'religious romance' developed by Jean-Paul Camus and Francois de Sales was deliberately accessible, consisting of short, simple moral tales, rather than the long and complex narratives typical of the romance genre. The religious romance combined some of the established conventions of romance with spiritual moralising and broadly realistic situations. As Jane Collins has said, while court masques and continental religious art reached a limited and exclusive audience, the translation of popular continental romance into English represented one way in which Catholics could extend their influence into mainstream English culture, undermining Protestant perceptions of Roman Catholic

¹² Camus's *Admirable Events* was originally published in two volumes as *Les Evenements Singuliers* (Lyons, 1628). Paul Salzman describes DuVerger's text as an amalgamation of several of Camus's works: *Les Evenements Singuliers ou Histoires diverses* (1628), *Varietes Historiques* (1631), *Spectacles D'horreur* (1630) and *Relations Morales* (1631) (Salzman, 1985, p. 357). DuVerger's translation was bound with a translation of Camus's *Certain Moral Relations*, initialled 'T.B.'; but her address to the reader implies that she has translated both texts (Collins, 1996, pp. ix-xi; DuVerger sig. A4v).

¹³ When Pope Urban VIII wrote to Henrietta Maria in 1624 with the dispensation for her marriage to Prince Charles, he expressed the hope that she would become the "guardian angel" of the English Catholics (White, 2006, p. 31).

culture as foreign and unintelligible by reconciling its interests with those of a general, non-Catholic readership (Collins 1996, p. xi).

Throughout the early seventeenth century Roman Catholics in England had defended themselves against legal suppression by maintaining contact with Catholic missions and families abroad; many literary texts passed privately between England and the Continent, frequently addressed to women patrons and readers. Women were also responsible for maintaining Roman Catholic networks, since they were less likely than men to have their correspondence intercepted (Burke, 1996, pp. 107-53).

In the 1630s, however, continental Counter-Reformation literature began to be translated and published more openly in England, possibly due to Henrietta Maria's influence (Collins, 1996, pp. ix-xi). As I have said, those who feared the incursion of Catholicism into England often focused upon proselytisers and converts close to the monarchy. According to the Venetian ambassador in England, Roman Catholics did enjoy an increased level of tolerance at court between 1636 and 1637:

Catholics are no longer hated or persecuted with the old severity. The public services in the Queen's chapel are most freely frequented by very great numbers. (May 1637, *CSPV* 19 217)

However, this situation was reversed after the highly publicised conversion of Anne Blount, Countess of Newport, in the autumn of 1637, which drew attention to the activities of Roman Catholics at court. Contemporary commentators accused the queen's charismatic papal agent, George Con, of deliberately targeting women, who were regarded as intellectually and morally vulnerable. As the Venetian ambassador reported:

The king and [the countess's] husband are bitterly displeased. The pope's agent is accused of having persuaded her...If [England] is to be brought to obedience to the Roman pontiff let them dispute with bishops and convince the divines, not try to profit by the simplicity of women, over whose weak minds the last impressions are always the strongest. (*CSPV*: 19 319)

At the end of that year, Charles I and Laud decreed against those caught attending mass in either the queen's chapel or those of the foreign ambassadors (*CSPV*: 19 324). By the end of the 1630s, then, Charles I was openly seen to penalise Roman Catholics at court.

As has been pointed out above, puritan critics tended to feminise Catholics. Similarly, they typically referred to women converts as "'collapsed ladies'...suggestively equat[ing] religious apostasy with sexual yielding" (Shell, 2006, p. 1).

However, male Catholic authors marginalized from the court could exploit women's conspicuousness within the recusant community in a positive way, opposing Charles's official court policy by rehearsing religious debate via 'female' literary voices. During his temporary residence in France the English courtier, Sir Kenelm Digby, published *A Conference with a Lady about the Choice of Religion* (1638). As well as working for

the monarchy, Digby was a philosopher, author, amateur scientist and descendant of Sir Everard Digby, one of the conspirators in the Roman Catholic “gunpowder plot” against James I and his government in 1605 (Boscobel, 1896, pp. 220-33). Digby published his book partly in order to defend his personal conversion to Roman Catholicism after the death of his crypto-Catholic wife, Venetia Stanley, in 1636, and partly because he wished to ally himself with French Catholic intellectual liberalism on the continent (Rubin and Huston, 1991, pp. 3-4). After his conversion, Digby dedicated himself to the service of Queen Henrietta Maria and other Roman Catholics in England (Rubin and Huston, 1991, p. 3). The dedicatee of Digby’s text was Lady Purbeck, Frances Coke Villiers, daughter of the famous jurist Sir Edward Coke. Digby had supported her cause after she fled to France to avoid her forced marriage to Buckingham’s brother (Rubin and Huston, 1991, p. 4). Charles I was responsible for arranging the marriage, and in working both to protect Frances Coke Villiers and convert her to Catholicism, Digby was directly opposing the king’s authority (Rubin and Huston, 1991, p. 4).

Digby’s text also foregrounds the central role played by women in the recusant literature aimed at forging connections with the moderate Protestant community. In framing religious propaganda as private conversation with a female correspondent, Digby de-politicises his text while presenting his conversion as rational, humane and non-threatening.

DuVerger’s text represents a similar impulse. However, her decision to translate Camus’s works may also be attributed to the primacy his stories give to female experience and self-expression: while Camus and de Sales ostensibly uphold traditional social and gender roles in their works, they consistently emphasise women’s cultural importance as readers, patrons and writers. The potential conflict between a didactic male authorial tradition, aiming to proselytise for the old, deeply hierarchical, religion while teaching women how to live their lives under masculine authority, and the popular feminocentric Marian tradition, which exalted the mythic status of the Virgin Mary and deliberately appealed to women’s worldly agency through their presence in the courts of Europe, created an unstable genre within which women’s role was negotiable.

DuVerger’s selection of Camus’s stories consists of twelve tales intended to provide examples of the ways in which worldly love and virtue may forge connections between the individual and God, followed by seventeen cautionary tales. She opens her book with a translation of Camus’s introductory epistle, which is both aimed at, and deliberately distanced from, women. In claiming that his stories are to be read as “truth”, to be distinguished from those “tales...more befitting an old wife that would bring a childe to sleepe then a person protesting learning” (DuVerger, 1639, sig. A1 r-v) Camus implicitly feminises the genre of fantastic fiction:

Truly we are not men, but by reason, and when this light of our soule is out of its Eclipticke line, and strayed from its way, we fall into bottomlesse pits of absurdities. (DuVerger, 1639, sigs. A1 r-v; A3).

The stories deliberately engage with women’s position in the world, exalting prescribed virtues for women, like chastity and self-restraint, within an overall commitment to

patriarchy, since heroines are usually forced to submit to the higher authority of God, king, husband or father. The story entitled 'Evil Counsel Punished' expresses a conventionally anti-feminist doctrine:

It is no new thing to assert that the counsels of women...are dangerous. In the first creation of the world the first of all men failed by the counsel of his wife, and we who are his children daily pay the interest of this bad counsel, by which we may say that sin first came into the world. (DuVerger, 1639, p. 108)

However, Camus's stories also depict an essentially secular world in which women deploy transgressive and innovative strategies to assert their own agency. Two stories engage with the classical figure of the Amazon, who is able to escape the rigid confines of gender by becoming a she-warrior. In the religious romance the Amazon is intended to function as a kind of supernatural miracle rather than a proto-feminist rebel, as the heroine's spiritual virtue is translated into a physical strength capable of overturning the laws of nature. In 'The Amazon' (DuVerger, 1639, pp. 330-349), the narrator states that the heroine's military exploits transcend the limits of his own narrative ability:

...she learned in a short time to shoot with a piece, to fence, to ride a horse, in brief, she had a dexterity in all this far above my reports, and there were none but took her to be the completest gentleman that was in the troup... (DuVerger, 1639, p. 346)

However, the heroine's success in appropriating masculine skills is attributed to her selfless loyalty to her chosen man: the revelation of her sex at the end of a bloody siege, therefore, demonstrates that "love raiseth the courage of the weakest sex" (DuVerger, 1639, p. 349).

In the other Amazonian story, 'The Generous Poverty' (DuVerger, 1639, pp. 1-26), the heroine, Rosana, falls in love with her social superior, transforms herself into a boy, and styles herself as his page. However, unlike Shakespeare's Viola, Rosana finds that this compensatory agenda gains its own momentum, since her desire to become a successful warrior far outweighs her desire to win a man. On eventually receiving an offer of marriage from a social equal, Rosana accepts, but refuses to abandon her male persona:

The...condition is, that thou take me not as a house Dove, to employ myself in spinning, sowing, and keeping the chimney corner, thou knowest that I have been bred in another manner, and according to that, I desire that thou permit me to exercise myself in arms, and hunting, and such like recreations, and if thy courage do call thee at any time forth to war...that thou then make me partaker of thy labours, and thy hazards, and also of thy laurels, and palms. On these conditions I am ready to obey, and to follow thee in life or death. (DuVerger, 1639, p. 20)

When Rosana's husband attempts to enforce her retirement into domesticity, she rebels by going to war in male disguise and saving the life of her former master and first love. While her love for her social superior is expressed in terms of a typically feminine impulse of self-sacrifice, her subsequent wrangle with her husband suggests an earthy 'battle for the breeches' reminiscent of popular comic lore. Social hierarchy, therefore, is presented as an immutable law, while gender roles are treated more fluidly.

The fact that the typical romance theme of female rebelliousness is incompletely contained by Camus's didactic religious agenda reflects the importance of women in romance and in the Counter-Reformation movement as a whole. Just as Camus's stories both display and contain transgressive female behaviour, DuVerger insists that her own incursion into a space traditionally occupied by men is both enabled and contained by her subjection to male literary authority: "nothing of mine own conception was fit to adventure upon so high a theatre." In attributing the agency behind her work to royal power (in this case, Queen Henrietta Maria), "whose influence quickeneth, gives motion and being to all civill industries, sending their lives to equall centre" (DuVerger, 1639, sig. A3v), DuVerger represents herself as a mediator between the material and its creator, and subsequently between the magnetic force of monarchy and its humble subject. She therefore appears to erase her own role in the text. In the same way, the religious romance was intended to demonstrate the mysterious efficiency of divine power: its ability to convey eternal truths through simple, mortal means. In the context of Caroline court culture, however, DuVerger's dedication to the Roman Catholic queen functions to undermine Charles I's absolutist agenda by stressing his wife's primary allegiance to the Roman Catholic Church, and deliberately connecting the English court to the Catholic courts on the continent.

Admirable Events was published as the crisis concerning the king's imposition of Laud's prayer book in Scotland was deepening. Once the lines were drawn between the emergent Royalist and Parliamentary parties, the printed Catholic literature of the 1630s was cited as proof of a conspiracy between the monarchy and the Pope to undermine Parliament and the reformed church. However, before the civil wars, such texts worked to undermine the notion of courtly homogeneity, disrupting the hegemonic discourse promoted by Charles I, and mediating between the Protestant reading public and the Catholic community.

As civil war became increasingly likely, literary constructions of women at court formed an intrinsic aspect of printed religious propaganda. Despite her unpopularity with some sections of the population, in 1641 Henrietta Maria was perceived as a means by which marginalized groups might obtain access to the king, in ostensibly royalist texts upholding obedience to the king while subtly suggesting that he moderate his power. In 1641, Sir John Suckling, a courtier and soldier who saw himself as increasingly marginalized amongst the king's supporters, published an open letter to the queen's closest male attendant, Sir Henry Jermyn, recommending that she take action to reconcile the king with his people:

...how becoming a work for the sweetness and softness of her sex is composing of differences and uniting hearts: and how proper for a Queen, reconciling King and People. (Thompson, 1910, pp. 322-25; Manning, 1973, pp. 51-52)

Suckling's text was followed by a poem by William Davenant on the same theme, subsequently presented to the queen by Suckling and Jermyn (Manning, 1973, pp. 52-5). Davenant suggests that Henrietta Maria may "new-form the Crown", not by compromising its power (since she herself is an aspect of this), but by re-casting it until she has "wrought it to a yieldingness/That shows it fine but makes it not weigh less" (Manning, 1973, pp. 52-54). Both texts suggest that the queen may receive and respond to advice that the king will not normally allow, while remaining within a pre-established cultural frame of reference, associated with the virtuous wife whose purity and selflessness qualify her to act as intercessor (Manning, 1973, p. 54). Henrietta Maria is identified with the interests of the English Protestant community. Attempts to configure the queen in print as a loving English wife and mother, erasing her foreignness and Catholicism, represented a strategic aspect of mediating propaganda between 1639 and 1642.

During the civil wars anti-feminist propaganda functioned to disparage both sides in the conflict: the queen was particularly maligned in print culture (White, 2006, pp. 91-122). At the same time, the deferential literary fashion of 'conversations with a lady' as a means of debating religion in public continued, particularly at the royalist court in exile after Charles I's defeat and execution in 1649. Cosin's collected works from this period include a 'Letter from a Roman Catholic to a Lady of the English Communion' with his response, and his own 'Letter to the Countess of Peterborough concerning agreements and differences in the chief points of religion betwixt the Church of Rome and the Church of England' (Cosin, 1853, vol 4). It is likely that Cosin was responding to the pressures exerted on Protestant women at Queen Henrietta Maria's court in France to convert to Catholicism. The heir to the throne, Prince Charles, resisted his mother's attempts to persuade him to convert throughout the 1650s (White, 2006, p. 192). A Roman Catholic poet and member of the court, Richard Crashaw, dedicated his collection of verses, *Carmen Deo Nostro* (Paris, 1652) to Susanna Feilding; the poem 'To the Noblest and Best of Ladies, Persuading her to Resolution in Religion' (1652), later published in England as *A Letter from Mr Crashaw to the Countess of Denbigh* (1653), represented this (ultimately successful) agenda.

To conclude, while women's involvement in the religious print culture aimed at, and issued from, the Caroline court appears to demonstrate their growing literary confidence, the nuances surrounding sexual politics stimulated both male and female authors to present women's cultural authority as a site within which religious perspectives could be debated and negotiated in an atmosphere of civilised deference, rather than violent conflict. Women could depict themselves, and be depicted, as depoliticised participants in the religious debate, associated with disinterested judgement and spiritual purity.

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